



## Georgia Department of Veterans Service

Cultivating community connections  
– empowering Georgia’s veterans  
and their families to flourish.

September 2022

### GEORGIA’S SMALL BUSINESS & SUPPLIER DIVERSITY INITIATIVE

Wants to hear from you!

Please complete the survey  
below by  
October 1, 2022.

Your input will help us  
develop recommendations  
on ways to enhance the  
state contracting process,  
making it more accessible  
to Georgia’s small  
businesses.

Have questions?

**Reach out to us!**



supplier.diversity@doas.ga.gov  
www.doas.ga.gov



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Suite 1804  
Atlanta, GA 30334

**Take the survey by scanning the  
QR code below!**



### GDVVS IS HERE TO HELP WITH CAMP LEJEUNE BENEFITS

Signed into law in early August as part of the PACT Act, the Camp Lejeune Justice (CLJ) Act allows veterans, their families, and contractors to file civil lawsuits against the U.S. government for exposure to contaminated water at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune in North Carolina.

The CLJ Act opens a two-year window from August 10, 2022 for anyone who lived, worked, or served at Camp Lejeune for 30 days between 1953-1987 to pursue litigation against the federal government for compensation. Over 5,000 tort claims have been filed since the CLJ Act become law earlier this year.

GDVVS Director of Training and Professional Development Ramona Roper wants to remind veterans of the importance of reading the fine print before filing.

Veterans have probably seen advertisements, whether on TV or over the radio, about legal representation for veterans with presumptive conditions who may qualify for compensation under the CLJ Act. Be wary of companies offering to help file a claim for VA benefits or guaranteeing a disability rating – they may be financially motivated to obtain a portion of your entitlement. Urgent-sounding ads are not a reason to rush to sign an attorney.

Roper stresses the importance of speaking with an accredited veteran service officer and asking all relevant questions before filing their claim, for example, “if a monetary amount is awarded on behalf of your organization, will it affect the VA compensation benefits I currently receive? Does the VA recoup the compensation benefits that I have received, or can I receive BOTH?” The answers to these questions vary, depending on your claim and your current benefits. Settlements through the new law are expected to offset your existing VA benefits, but the details of exactly how are not yet clear.

GDVVS veterans service officers are here to help veterans at no cost to navigate their claims and ensure they get the benefits they are eligible to receive.



### NEW TRACKING SYSTEM FOR VETERAN CONCERNS

Veterans have asked for years for more information about the status of their healthcare claims and help tracking their concerns about the care they receive at VA facilities. The recently signed Patient Advocate Tracking System (PATS Act) increases transparency and accountability at VA facilities for veterans who report concerns they experience with their healthcare services.

This bi-partisan legislation, introduced in the Senate by Senators Ralph Warnock (D-GA) and John Kennedy (R-LA), expands access to the VA’s Patient Advocate Tracking System to veteran users. Complaints will be filed electronically with VA patient advocates, but veterans will be able to view the status, actions, and decisions taken about their concern. Sen. Warnock says this legislation strengthens transparency within VA and improves healthcare for our veterans, “that’s a win-win for Georgia, where one in ten residents is connected to our military.”



## GDVS RECOGNIZES SUICIDE PREVENTION MONTH NEED HELP? DIAL 988 AND PRESS 1

Suicide is a leading cause of death among all ages in the United States. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, veteran suicide-related deaths are increasing at a greater rate than in the general U.S. population and account for about 13.7% of suicides among adults.

GDVS Suicide and Prevention Coordinator Calendra Ferguson has extensive experience in developing programs to address substance abuse and suicide prevention. “With commitment and engagement in our communities, workplaces, and homes, together we can reduce the number of suicides. 22 a day is 22 too many veteran lives to lose,” said Ferguson. “These ratings underscore the urgency of implementing evidence-based prevention strategies to protect both the general population and our nation’s veterans. These strategies, when implemented comprehensively, can make a profound and lasting difference.”

On Wednesday, September 14, the GDVS participated in the Atlanta VA Clinic’s first annual Walk-n-Roll event to raise awareness for suicide prevention and recovery month. “It was a great opportunity for us to provide resources for veterans, connect them with resources and programs, network, and hear survivor stories and get a bit of exercise,” said Ferguson.



### COMMISSARIES READY FOR VETERANS

The Defense Commissary Agency wants to remind veterans with any service-connected disability, Purple Heart recipients, former prisoners of war, and their primary caregivers can access commissaries, exchanges and Morale, Welfare and Recreation activities on U.S. bases.

Shopping on military installations can save veterans and their families money on tax-free purchases of groceries, clothing, household goods, and electronics. Veterans can also shop online at <https://shop.commissaries.com/>.

Veterans do not need to apply for commissary and exchange privileges, but will need to bring their Veteran Health ID Card or a letter from VA along with a passport or driver’s license. Contact the base before visiting for more information on base access policies.

### WREATHS ACROSS AMERICA RETURNS IN DECEMBER



Mark your calendars! The GDVS Wreaths Across America ceremonies will be held on December 17, 2022, in Milledgeville and Glennville.

Every December, we honor the service and memory of Georgia’s departed veterans and their families with public wreath laying ceremonies.

Volunteers are invited to join us at our state

veteran memorial cemeteries in Milledgeville and Glennville to help lay a wreath on the headstone of every interred veteran.

Interested in sponsoring a wreath? You can donate online to [GVMC-Milledgeville](#) or [GVMC-Glennville](#). If you would like to donate a wreath with a different payment option, please contact GVMC-Milledgeville at 478-445-3363 or GVMC-Glennville at 912-654-5398.