


David Whitaker, Esq.  
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Irvin Corley, Jr.  
Executive Policy Manager  
Marcell R. Todd, Jr.  
Director, City Planning  
Commission  
Janese Chapman  
Director, Historic Designation  
Advisory Board

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LaKisha Barclift, Esq.  
Paige Blessman  
M. Rory Bolger, Ph.D., FAICP  
Lisa DiChiera  
Eric Fazzini, AICP  
Willene Green  
Christopher Gulock, AICP  
Derrick Headd  
Marcel Hurt, Esq.

**City of Detroit**  
**CITY COUNCIL**  
LEGISLATIVE POLICY DIVISION  
208 Coleman A. Young Municipal Center  
Detroit, Michigan 48226  
Phone: (313) 224-4946 Fax: (313) 224-4336

Kimani Jeffrey  
Anthony W. L. Johnson  
Phillip Keller, Esq.  
Edward King  
Kelsey Maas  
Jamie Murphy  
Latawn Oden  
Dolores Perales  
Analine Powers, Ph.D.  
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Timarie Szwed  
Theresa Thomas  
Ian Tomashik  
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TO: COUNCIL MEMBERS

FROM: David Whitaker, Director   
Legislative Policy Division Staff

DATE: March 15, 2024

RE: Council Member Mary Waters' request to create a Veterans Department

Council Member Mary Waters requested that the Legislative Policy Division (LPD), provide a report to explore what is necessary to create a Veterans Department for the City of Detroit. This report is our response to this inquiry.

According to the online publication, Military Spot,<sup>1</sup> the Top 5 Challenges Veterans Face Today are:

1. **Unemployment** Many disabled veterans are unable to find solid work once they return home. Plus, veterans who joined the armed forces right after high school often don't have the education that their peers received, which puts them at a hiring disadvantage.
2. **Homelessness** Approximately one third of all homeless Americans are veterans. Veterans with untreated PTSD can develop alcohol and drug addictions, which are high-risk behaviors that can lead to deteriorating mental health and homelessness.
3. **Poor Mental Health** Unfortunately, suicide and depression rates remain high among members of the armed forces. This is in part because of the social stigmas attached to seeking mental health treatment, which leads to high rates of untreated PTSD in returning veterans.
4. **Physical Injuries** Many veterans experience debilitating physical injuries that leave them unable to work. These veterans often make claims to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), but the VA is so backed up that they often can't address an individual's applications for several months, or even years.
5. **Lack of Education** As mentioned above, many veterans joined the armed forces right out of high school, which means they haven't had the opportunity to receive a college education. Issues like drug or alcohol addiction, untreated PTSD, poor mental health and devastating physical injuries often keep veterans from pursuing higher education. Disabled veterans may also worry that they don't have the money to afford a college education.

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<sup>1</sup> [The Top 5 Challenges Veterans Face Today - MilitarySpot.com](https://militaryspot.com/top-5-challenges-veterans-face-today/)

**Need for a Veterans Department**

Given the unique challenges faced by veterans, of unemployment, homelessness, poor mental health, physical injuries, a lack of education and their limited access to resources, exacerbated by these challenges, a City of Detroit Veterans Department may be the instrument to facilitate the needs of Detroit's veteran population.

**Resources Required for A Veterans Department**

The resources required to create a singular Veterans Department of course requires competent staff and funding. Recently, the City created an Office of Disability Affairs, this entity has a staff of five FTE's and is budgeted at \$823,356. Adding the costs associated with a director of the department leads another \$200,000 and would leave a budget of approximately \$1,023,356.

**Possible Alternative as an Agency of a Department**

One alternative to the creation of an independent Veterans Department, could be to adopt the Office of Disability Affairs model which provided a savings by placing it in the established CRIO Department (Civil Rights, Inclusion, & Opportunity Department) as an agency of the department, thereby not requiring a director and its associated cost. The move to place an Office of Veterans Affairs in a department like CRIO lead to a reduced cost of implementing this initiative at \$823,356 as opposed to \$1,023,356 (a 20% savings) or more.

Please let us know if we can be of any further assistance.