

Dear Sir or ma'am,

We are writing to you regarding a serious issue facing the veterans of Massachusetts. In 2012, Sen. Michael F. Rush chaired the commission established by section 19 of chapter 108 of the acts of 2012 to draft legislation for the training, testing and certification of veteran service officers and agents. The intent of this legislation was to ensure that a veteran in any of the 351 cities and towns of Massachusetts would receive the same quality of care regardless of where they lived. The Massachusetts Veteran Service Officers Association had worked years ago with the Department of Veterans Services of the Commonwealth and the Massachusetts Gen. Court to provide funding for annual training, but there was nothing anyone could do to ensure veteran service officers and agents would attend such training. In other words, a community could disregard our goal to train all VSO's and there was nothing the Commonwealth could do about it. This legislation was developed to address this.

It is often spoken by many of us in Massachusetts that our state provides the greatest scope of benefits and services, and care of our veterans and their dependents. It is something that is said with great pride by all of us. However, this statement is still more a goal than it is a reality if we continue to allow low-level of service in some communities and not others. When communities are out of compliance; either due to lack of training and qualifications for the position, or the cities and towns chose to disregard the law, namely the standard of 12,000 person population requirement of a full-time veteran service officer, then that community continues to be underserved. The commission had developed a system within the new law that would encourage city and towns to be in compliance with Mass General law chapter 115 through the reimbursement system of benefits paid out from the community. The law was passed and enacted, and regulations were written and approved 108 CMR 14.00: CERTIFICATION OF VETERANS' AGENTS and states under 14.05: Failure to Comply with Requirements of the Chapter

(1) Reduction in Reimbursement Allowance. Failure of a Veterans' Agent to comply with the requirements of this chapter shall result in a finding that the city or town which employs the Veterans' Agent is not in compliance with the requirements of M.G.L. Ch.115, §3, and shall further result in the reduction of the reimbursement allowance, paid by the Commonwealth under M.G.L. Ch. 115, §6, to 50 per cent.

MVSOA is currently reviewing all 351 cities and towns to determine if the community is providing a full-time veteran service officer or agent in communities greater than 12,000 people. We've determined that at least 13 communities do not meet this standard, but also are still being reimbursed at a rate of 75%. We are also attempting to collect data on those communities that still have not met the standard training and certification aspect of the law. It is very disheartening to us to realize after all the efforts that have been made to serve **ALL VETERANS** in the Commonwealth with a high standard of care regardless of location has not reached fruition.

We respectfully request that all cities and towns that are out of compliance will be informed of the 108 CMR 14.00 and are encouraged to comply. As of yet we have not learned of any city or town that is facing a 50% reimbursement and we asked further that the Massachusetts Department of veterans services implements the law and regulations as passed in the legislation as soon as possible.

Respectfully yours,