

TRACEY BETTS, DIRECTOR, HONOLULU VA REGIONAL OFFICE, DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

STATEMENT OF
TRACEY BETTS
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VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES SENATE
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Chairman Akaka, it is my pleasure to be here today to discuss our efforts to meet the needs of Veterans residing in the Pacific Region. Today I will specifically discuss important benefits and outreach services provided to Veterans living on Maui.

Honolulu Regional Office

The Honolulu Regional Office (RO) serves the Veteran population in Hawaii and the Pacific Region. The Honolulu RO also provides outreach to Veterans residing in the Insular Islands of the Republic of Palau, Federated States of Micronesia, and Republic of the Marshall Islands.

The Honolulu RO administers the following benefits and services:

- Disability Compensation
- Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Assistance
- Home Loan Guaranty, Specially Adapted Housing Grants, and Native American Direct Home Loans
- Outreach for all Veteran and survivor benefits

Our goal is to deliver these benefits and services in a timely, accurate, and compassionate manner. This is accomplished through the administration of comprehensive and diverse benefit programs.

The Honolulu RO is responsible for delivering non-medical VA benefits and services to over 118,000 Veterans and their families. Approximately 19,000 of these Veterans receive disability compensation benefits from the Honolulu RO. In fiscal year 2009, Honolulu provided more than 5,400 Veterans with decisions on their disability claims. The Honolulu RO employees conduct an average of 3,000 telephone interviews and 1,300 personal interviews per month. In addition, the Honolulu RO conducted 171 Transitional Assistance Program (TAP) briefings to approximately 5,000 servicemembers in Hawaii in fiscal year 2009.

Services on Maui

The Maui Vet Center hosts a traveling Veterans Service Representative (VSR) from Honolulu to provide services to Veterans living on Maui. During fiscal year 2009, 132 Veterans personally met with the VSR to file claims and obtain general benefit information.

In October 2009, the Honolulu RO began conducting Decision Review Officer (DRO) hearings on six of the Hawaiian Islands, to include Maui. To date, the Honolulu RO has conducted two DRO hearings on Maui.

The Honolulu RO also has a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) co-located in the Maui Community Based Outpatient Clinic. The VRC provides educational and vocational counseling to servicemembers, Veterans, and eligible dependents. The VRC met with 1,276 Veterans in fiscal year 2009 and is currently working with over 100 Veterans on Maui. The VRC is also a member of the Maui Veterans Association and attends their regular meetings to provide general vocational rehabilitation and educational information.

Veterans residing on Maui can receive assistance with their claims and benefits information through the nationwide toll-free number, which is answered by the Honolulu RO. The Honolulu RO and State Office of Veterans Services on Maui work as partners to ensure the Veterans on Maui receive access to all VA benefits for which they are eligible.

The Native American Direct Loan Program administered by VA is very active on Maui, in part because of the temporary increase in the maximum guaranty amount, as enacted by P.L. 110-389. Another reason for this success is attributable to our ongoing partnership with the Department of Hawaiian Homelands. The Department of Hawaiian Homelands serves as our partner in assisting with loan packaging, appraisals, and construction-related inspections, as well as providing crucial communication links between our staff and the Veterans we serve. A Honolulu RO loan guaranty employee travels to Maui on a regular basis to assist in servicing Maui loans, meet with the Department of Hawaiian Homelands, and conduct appraisals.

I participate on various advisory councils, such as the Advisory Board on Veterans Services chaired by the Director of the State of Hawaii Office of Veterans Services and the VA Pacific Island Healthcare System Advisory Council. Board and Council members are local Veterans and advocates representing their communities from six of the Hawaiian Islands, to include Maui. During these meetings, board and council members express concerns, discuss Veteran issues and receive general information on VA benefits.

Conclusion

The Honolulu RO is and remains committed to providing timely benefits and services to the Veteran population residing on Maui.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony. I greatly appreciate being here today and look forward to answering your questions.