



CALIFORNIA VETERANS ADVOCACY UPDATE

March 2026

Reporting Period: March 1 - March 31, 2026

MONTH IN REVIEW

March was a busy month in Sacramento. Dozens of bills that could help veterans are now moving through the Legislature. These cover tax relief, cemetery upkeep, education benefits, food assistance, housing, and more.

Several bills already have the full backing of all five veteran organizations we represent: the American Legion, AMVETS, CSCVC, MOAA, and VVA. When all five organizations agree, that is a powerful message to legislators.

CalVet, the state agency that serves veterans, is currently going through its budget review. The next few weeks will determine how much funding veterans programs get this year.

WHAT HAPPENED THIS MONTH

Bills Starting to Get Hearings

Many of the veterans bills introduced earlier this year are now eligible for their first hearings in legislative committees. This is when legislators start debating the bills and deciding whether to move them forward. Several of the bills we are tracking reached this stage in March.

SB 892 (Grove) -- Priority Class Registration for Veterans

This bill would let veterans and service members sign up for college classes before the general student population at California public colleges and universities. The bill's author made some changes to strengthen it, and it has been sent to the Senate Education Committee for a hearing.

SCR 110 (Grove) -- Women's Military History Week

This resolution recognizing Women's Military History Week in California passed its committee and is expected to be approved by the full Senate soon. Resolutions like this are an important way for the Legislature to honor the service of women veterans.

BILLS WE ARE TRACKING

TAX RELIEF

SB 1407 (Archuleta) -- No State Income Tax on Military Retirement Pay

This bill would stop California from taxing military retirement pay and survivor benefit payments. California is one of the few states that still fully taxes military retirement income.

AB 2016 (Gonzalez) -- No State Income Tax on Military Retirement Pay

The Assembly version of the military retirement pay tax exemption.

SB 888 (Seyarto) -- Property Tax Relief for Disabled Veterans

Would expand property tax relief for disabled veterans by raising the income limit that determines who qualifies.

AB 2022 (Gonzalez) -- Property Tax Exemption for Disabled Veteran Homeowners

Another bill aimed at helping disabled veteran homeowners with their property taxes.

SCA 4 (Archuleta) -- Veterans Property Tax Relief -- Constitutional Change

Would change the California Constitution to strengthen property tax relief for veterans. Because it is a constitutional amendment, it needs a two-thirds vote in the Legislature and then goes to voters for approval -- a higher bar, but a more permanent fix.

ACA 5 (Schiavo) -- Veterans Property Tax Relief -- Constitutional Change

The Assembly version of the constitutional amendment for veterans property tax relief.

SB 296 (Archuleta) -- Property Tax Exemption for Disabled Veteran Homeowners

This bill has been set aside during budget review because of its potential cost to the state. The author will need to address those concerns to move it forward.

SB 623 (Archuleta) -- Property Tax Relief for Homeowners, Veterans, and Disabled Veterans

A broader bill that addresses property tax exemptions for homeowners and veterans together.

SB 587 (Grayson) -- Tax Credit for Manufacturing

Creates a tax credit for manufacturing businesses.

HELP FOR VETERANS AT THE COUNTY LEVEL

AB 1638 (Ta) -- More Resources for County Veterans Service Officers

County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs) help veterans navigate the benefits system -- filing VA claims, connecting to healthcare, and more. This bill would give them additional resources.

AB 2219 (Schiavo) -- County Veterans Service Officers

A second bill to strengthen county veterans service offices.

AB 264 (Carrillo) -- Veterans Benefits for Dependents

Would let veteran dependents receive both state and federal educational benefits at the same time, instead of having to choose one or the other.

AB 1765 (Alanis) -- Fee Waivers for Disabled Veterans

Would provide fee waivers for disabled veterans on vehicle-related fees.

VETERANS CEMETERIES

SB 1040 (Choi) -- Veterans Cemetery Maintenance Fund

Would create a matching fund to help maintain veterans cemeteries. Keeping these grounds in good condition is a promise we owe to those who served.

EDUCATION

SB 892 (Grove) -- Priority Class Registration for Veterans

Would let veterans and service members register for college classes before the general public at California's public colleges and universities.

AB 2203 (Tangipa) -- Priority Registration for GI Bill Students

Would extend priority registration to veterans and their family members who are using GI Bill benefits.

AB 1346 (DeMaio) -- In-State Tuition for Military Dependents

Would help military dependents keep their in-state tuition status when they re-enroll at California colleges.

AB 2467 (Committee on Education) -- School Enrollment for Military Kids

Military families move frequently, and their kids often face challenges enrolling in new schools. This bill aims to make that process easier.

SB 1188 (Archuleta) -- JROTC for Home School and Private School Students

Would let students in home instruction, independent study, and private schools participate in Junior ROTC programs.

FOOD ASSISTANCE

SB 1201 (McNerney) -- **Food Assistance for Veterans**

Would make it easier for veterans to qualify for CalFresh, California's food assistance program. Food insecurity among veterans is a real problem that often goes unreported.

MENTAL HEALTH AND RESEARCH

AB 2489 (Lowenthal) -- **California Veterans' Right to Try Act**

This bill would allow California to run clinical trials of certain controlled substances -- including psychedelics like psilocybin and MDMA -- specifically for veterans with severe mental health conditions like PTSD, military sexual trauma (MST), traumatic brain injury, and depression. This is a new and growing area of research nationwide, particularly for suicide prevention. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs recently funded its first psychedelic therapy study in over 50 years, and early clinical trials have shown that MDMA-assisted therapy produced lasting symptom relief in 71% of veterans with PTSD at the 12-month mark. California's bill would create a pathway for veterans who have not responded to traditional treatments to access these clinical trials. The bill has been referred to both the Assembly Health Committee and the Assembly Military and Veterans Affairs Committee. To learn more about this research, visit the VA's page on [psychedelic-assisted therapy for PTSD](#).

STATE PARKS

AB 1702 (Johnson) -- **Free or Reduced State Park Admission for Veterans**

Would change state park admission policies to benefit veterans and active military.

SB 893 (Seyarto) -- **State Park Passes for Gold Star Families**

Would provide state park facility passes for Gold Star Family members -- families who have lost a loved one in military service.

VOTING

SB 970 (Cervantes) -- **Voting for Military and Overseas Veterans**

Would update voting procedures to make it easier for deployed service members and veterans living overseas to cast their ballots.

SAFETY

SB 99 (Blakespear) -- **Military Protective Orders**

This bill addresses protective orders for military families dealing with domestic violence. It has already passed the Senate.

HOUSING

AB 2320 (Ta) -- **Converting Buildings into Veteran Housing**

Addresses converting existing buildings into multifamily housing through the Homekey program, which has helped house homeless veterans.

RECOGNITION

SB 1034 (McNerney) -- **Veterans License Plates**

Would create or update a special license plate for veterans.

HONORING OUR VETERANS

ACR 3 (Nguyen) -- **Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces Day**

Would honor the service of veterans of the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces and the Vietnamese American veteran community.

ACR 4 (Nguyen) -- **Republic of Vietnam Month**

Would recognize Republic of Vietnam Month in California.

SCR 110 (Grove) -- **Women's Military History Week**

Expected to pass the full Senate soon.

SCR 113 (Grove) -- **Gold Star Mothers' and Families' Day**

Would recognize Gold Star Mothers' and Families' Day in California.

SCR 121 (Dahle) -- **Purple Heart Community**

Would recognize Purple Heart communities across California.

ACR 126 (Tangipa) -- **Captain Vidar Anderson Memorial Highway**

Would designate a memorial highway honoring Captain Vidar Anderson.

ACR 131 (Tangipa) -- **Buffalo Soldiers Madera County Trailhead**

Would designate a trailhead honoring the Buffalo Soldiers -- African American soldiers who served in the U.S. Army after the Civil War.

ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES THIS MONTH

Committee Testimony

We testified in committee this month on behalf of our client organizations. Showing up in person signals to legislators that the veterans community is organized and engaged.

Rapid Response Team Meetings

The Rapid Response Team has been meeting nearly every Friday in March, and we expect to continue weekly meetings through April before transitioning back to every other week. The RRT has grown to 85 members receiving regular outreach, and participation has been strong.

On March 13, a staffer from Senator Grove's office joined us to present on three pieces of legislation: SCR 110 (Women's Military History Week), SCR 113 (Gold Star Mothers' and Families' Day), and SB 892 (priority registration for veterans at California colleges). Having legislators and their staff present directly to the RRT is exactly the kind of access that makes this team valuable, and we plan to continue bringing legislators into our meetings. On Friday, April 3, we are expecting a member of the Legislature to join us and present their bill to the team.

The RRT is still new -- we have only been meeting for a couple of months -- and we are looking to grow. We want input, collaboration, and veterans from every part of the state at the table. If you are not already part of the Rapid Response Team, now is a great time to join us.

CalVet Budget Hearing – Assembly Budget Subcommittee 5

The Senate Budget Subcommittee 4 hearing on March 24 covered major updates on CalVet facilities. The new Yountville Skilled Nursing Facility, a 240-bed, 317,000 square foot building replacing Holderman Hospital, received its certificate of occupancy. The facility includes 60 memory care beds and 180 skilled nursing beds, at a total cost of \$330 million, with \$209-210 million reimbursable by the VA. There are currently 100 veterans on the skilled nursing waitlist and 73 on the memory care waitlist. Twenty percent of current residents were previously homeless.

The Orange County Veterans Home project is entitled and ready for construction, with budget and spending authority being sought for the first two phases. The existing Eisenhower and Roosevelt buildings at Yountville will be converted to assisted living with single-occupancy rooms to meet modern care standards.

CalVet is also rolling out electronic health records across the veterans home system, with five of eight homes now complete and three remaining. These are the kinds of budget decisions that happen quietly but directly affect the quality of care veterans receive every day.

RAPID RESPONSE TEAM UPDATE

The Rapid Response Team (RRT) is currently meeting weekly, and we will be transitioning back to every other week shortly as the hearing schedule settles into a more predictable rhythm.

What the RRT Does

The Rapid Response Team is our grassroots network of veterans and supporters across California who stay connected to what is happening at the Capitol and build relationships with their local elected officials. RRT members keep their veteran networks informed and up to date, connect with their legislators' district offices, and help make sure the veterans community has a voice in every part of the state. The RRT is what turns Sacramento advocacy into a statewide movement.

How to Get Involved

We are asking every veterans post and hall across the state to designate at least one member to represent them on the Rapid Response Team. A veteran in Redding or Fresno connecting with their own Assembly member carries weight that no Sacramento lobbyist can replicate. The more geographic and organizational diversity we have on the RRT, the more effective we are. [Sign up to join the Rapid Response Team here.](#)

GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY CORNER

The Most Powerful Advocacy Happens in the District

I want to say this plainly: the most effective advocacy we can do does not happen in Sacramento. It happens when a veteran walks into their Assembly member's district office, sits down with a staff member, and says "here is how this bill affects me and my fellow veterans." Legislators hear from lobbyists every day. They hear from their own constituents far less often than you might think. That is why your voice matters so much.

Bear Flag Veterans: Your Grassroots Advocacy Platform

We encourage veterans, military families, friends, and anyone who supports veterans to visit bearflagveterans.com. Bear Flag Veterans lets you send a letter to your legislators on any bill at any point in the process -- you do not have to wait for a floor vote. This is especially important for bills that are heading to Appropriations committees, where good legislation can quietly get shelved if legislators do not hear from their constituents. Find your legislators, pick a bill, and make your voice heard.

Action Item: *Ask your chapter leaders and post commanders to designate an RRT representative and share bearflagveterans.com with their members. A phone call or brief district office visit to express support for a bill we are tracking makes a real impression.*

WHAT TO WATCH IN APRIL

First House Hearing Deadlines

April is when the first-house hearing calendar gets serious. Bills that have not been heard by their policy committees face growing pressure. We expect to see hearings scheduled for several of our tracked bills in April, including the property tax exemption measures, the CVSO funding bills, and the education priority registration bills. Watch your inbox for hearing alerts.

Appropriations -- Where Good Bills Can Quietly Die

Bills with a fiscal impact -- which includes most of our tax and benefits bills -- will be referred to the Assembly or Senate Appropriations Committee after clearing their policy committees. Appropriations has what is sometimes called the "suspense file," where bills with significant costs can be quietly shelved without a public vote. This is where grassroots pressure matters most. If you care about a bill, contact your legislators BEFORE it reaches Appropriations -- and especially contact Appropriations Committee members directly. This is one of the best uses of Bear Flag Veterans: sending letters to Appropriations members to make sure good bills do not die in committee.

If you don't use your voice, someone else will make the decision for you.

This update is prepared by Reeb Government Relations for our clients and partners. For questions, contact [Seth Reeb](#) directly.

Reeb Government Relations: www.water-warrior.com

Bear Flag Veterans: bearflagveterans.com