



THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
OFFICE OF THE VETERAN ADVOCATE
50 BRAINTREE HILL OFFICE PARK, SUITE 108
BRAintree, MA 02184

March 18, 2026

The Honorable Michael J. Rodrigues
24 Beacon St., Room 212
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Aaron M. Michlewitz
24 Beacon St., Room 243
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chair Rodrigues, Chair Michlewitz, and Joint Committee Members,

The Office of the Veteran Advocate (OVA) submits this proposal for \$2.127M in Fiscal Year 2027 (FY27) funding, with a focus on maintaining a minimal operating capacity amid rising costs and uncertain federal funding. This proposal reflects an \$87,000 (4%) increase over the Governor's H2 budget proposal for FY27. The two previous fiscal year allocations (FY25 and FY26) for the OVA were \$2M. This request allows the office to minimally meet the requirements in MGL chapter 115B, section 2 (Enclosure 1).

The FY25 OVA Annual Report highlights important veteran-related information and the OVA's accomplishments during that period. It can be found at <https://www.mass.gov/lists/public-documents>. The FY25 Annual Report does not include the OVA's significant accomplishments over the past eight months of FY26. While there are many activities to detail, a few of these accomplishments include:

- **Veteran Economic Dashboards.** The OVA consolidated multiple public data sets with state and federal veteran benefit data into two dashboards facilitating visualization and understanding of the positive economic impact veterans bring to their local communities. These tools were presented at a legislative briefing on February 11, 2026.
- **Research and Reporting.** The OVA published *Understanding Massachusetts' Veterans Service Officers*, a report consolidating laws, regulations and observations relating to municipal Veterans Service Officers (VSOs) into one comprehensive document. Issuance of this report coincided with the RAND Corporation's release of *Meeting the Needs of Massachusetts Veterans*, a report which called for such an analysis.
- **Local Aid and Coordination.** OVA Liaisons provided aid and coordination with municipal VSOs in 81 cases, ranging from connecting veterans to their municipal VSO to coordinating a high school diploma presentation to a Vietnam Veteran.
- **Justice Involved Veterans.** The OVA initiated a collaborative effort between the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Plymouth County and Hamden County Sheriffs, and an accredited Veteran Services Organization to break barriers preventing incarcerated veteran access to federal benefits and services. This effort improves support to veterans and shifts some Commonwealth expenditures to the federal government.
- **Veteran Safety and Investigations.** The OVA assisted federal agencies with two informational inquiries and initiated 30 investigative cases; 24 cases are closed and six are in progress. Of the 24 closed cases, 16 involved veteran fatalities and eight involved complaints.

The results outlined above, along with other agency initiatives, have increased the OVA's visibility and corresponding demands for assistance from entities at all levels. This increase currently challenges our

capacity to meet the demand promptly. To more constructively manage the demand on OVA and focus resources, the agency completed a strategic plan which begins in FY27 (Enclosure 2.)

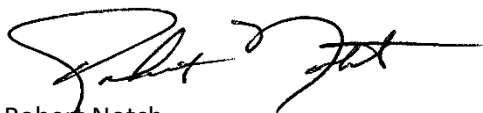
The FY27 H2 Budget (line 0960-1000) proposes a modest 2% increase over FY26 funding for OVA, resulting in a FY27 proposal of \$2.040M -- \$87K less than is needed to support the minimal maintenance increase necessary to meet a near 3% inflation rate for the previous two years, nor does it afford the fiscal flexibility to enable the OVA to meet growing workload demands. While the OVA is leveraging technology, automation, and agency partnerships to reduce costs, a small increase is needed to support personnel, technology and the long-term office lease agreement. Enclosure 3 provides a breakdown of planned expenditures.

The three specific areas mentioned above are a significant portion of the proposed budget increase for FY27. The following subparagraphs provide additional detail in each of these areas.

- Personnel. While current staffing provides a minimum capability to accomplish OVA statutory responsibilities, most full-time personnel manage two or more areas of responsibility (e.g. finance, human resources and office administration roles are assigned to one person). The OVA plans to utilize interns, part-time employees, short-term contracts and VA-funded training programs to meet timelines for special projects and periods of high workload. Personnel costs (staff and special employees) account for 79% of this FY27 budget.
- Technology. The OVA works jointly with the Executive Office of Technology Services and Security (EOTSS) for software and technological support, as well as data infrastructure and support. Between FY25 and FY26, software support costs increased 76% and FY27 increases are not yet published. In FY27, while cost-sharing with EOTSS, the OVA plans to invest in systems and data sharing to improve the Commonwealth's understanding of veterans and measure the effectiveness of benefits and services, as recommended by the 2025 RAND Report mentioned previously. Technology is 10% of this request.
- Office Lease. After personnel and technology, the OVA office lease is the third largest annual expenditure (6% of the FY27 request). The OVA's suburban lease is lower cost per square foot than similar space available in Boston. The facility lease increases 3% per year by contract.

The Office of the Veteran Advocate remains committed to examining systems, supporting municipal VSOs, and advising you and the public about how the Commonwealth may improve its services for veterans and their families. We continue to build relationships with federal and state agencies to best serve the veteran community while implementing actions to reduce and share costs. We welcome the opportunity to advise and assist members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means in reviewing OVA funding needs and the needs of veterans and their families.

Sincerely,



Robert Notch
Veteran Advocate

Enclosures as stated.

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Enclosure 1. OVA responsibilities per MGL chapter 115B, section 2.

There shall be an office of the veteran advocate, which shall be independent of any supervision or control by any executive agency. The office shall:

- (i) ensure that veterans in the care of the commonwealth or receiving services under the supervision of an executive agency in any public or private facility receive humane and dignified treatment at all times, with full respect for the veterans' personal dignity and right to privacy;
- (ii) ensure that veterans in the care of the commonwealth or receiving services under the supervision of an executive agency in any public or private facility receive timely, safe and effective services;
- (iii) aid and coordinate with local veterans service officers to ensure veterans receive all available state and federal benefits;
- (iv) examine, on a system-wide basis, the care and services that executive agencies provide veterans;
- (v) advise the public and those at the highest levels of state government about how the commonwealth may improve its services to and for veterans and their families;
- (vi) develop internal procedures appropriate for the effective performance of the office's duties;
- (vii) act as a liaison to all state agencies providing services to veterans to ensure each veteran receives necessary services and care;
- (viii) assist in developing procedures for the executive agencies to best serve the veteran community;
- (ix) act as a liaison to the United States Department of Veterans Affairs and all other relevant federal agencies to advocate on behalf of the veterans of the commonwealth; and
- (x) investigate incidents where a veteran suffered a fatality, near fatality or serious bodily or emotional injury while receiving services from an executive agency, or circumstances which result in a reasonable belief that an executive agency or a constituent agency failed in its duty to care for a veteran and, as a result, the veteran was at imminent risk of, or suffered serious bodily or emotional injury or death.

Report annually to the governor, the senate president, the speaker of the house of representatives, the senate and the house committees on ways and means, and the joint committee on veterans and federal affairs on the activities of the office, including, but not limited to,

- a. an analysis of the delivery of services to veterans and recommendations for changes in agency procedures which would enable the commonwealth to better provide services to and for veterans and their families and
- b. priorities for implementation of those changes to services.

The report shall be made public on the website of the veteran advocate.

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Enclosure 2. Office of the Veteran Advocate Strategic Priorities

OVA Vision: Every veteran in the Commonwealth receives the highest standard of care, enjoys the full spectrum of available benefits, and is treated with unwavering respect and dignity.

OVA Mission: The Office of the Veteran Advocate (OVA) safeguards the well-being, dignified treatment, rights, and benefits of veterans in the care of, or receiving services from the Commonwealth; ensuring these veterans and their families receive compassionate, timely, and effective services. OVA collaborates to facilitate access to federal and state benefits and conducts thorough investigations to enhance care and services provided to veterans.

Strategic Priorities FY27-31

1. Continue to build OVA's capacity to respond to any critical incident referral, complaint/concern, or request for support relating to any benefit or service to which a Massachusetts veteran is eligible, promote awareness of this capacity, and use the information gathered to identify any trends which can be addressed on a more system-wide basis.
2. Benefits and Services: OVA will focus on (1) building awareness of the federal and state benefits available to veterans and their families; (2) supporting veterans service officers and any state agency seeking to better support veterans to access benefits to which they are eligible; and (3) identifying alternatives to improve the benefits available to Massachusetts' veterans.
3. Housing: OVA will focus on understanding the needs of aging Massachusetts' veterans for safe and attainable housing and researching and advising on successful housing models which address those needs.
4. Employment: OVA will focus on increasing veterans' access to employment, and especially to those positions that both leverage veterans' training and experience while in the military, and which also will support the growth of Massachusetts' economy.
5. Enhance OVA's expertise, reputation, relationships, capacity, and operational infrastructure so that the OVA is relied upon as a trusted advisor, collaborator, and credible information source on issues affecting veterans living in Massachusetts.

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Enclosure 3. Office of the Veteran Advocate FY27 Budget Proposal

	FY26 Request	Explanation
Regular Employee Compensation	\$ 1,569,053	Maintain minimal personnel to meet workload demands
Regular Employee Related Expenses	\$ 20,000	Travel and professional education
Special Employees	\$ 50,000	Paid interns/contractors for data management & research projects
Payroll Tax/Fringe	\$ 38,442	Proportional to employees on staff
Administrative Expenses	\$ 73,870	Office expenses and operational software subscriptions
Facility Operational Expenses	\$ 5,000	Field supplies
Energy Costs and Space Rental	\$ 132,851	Long-term lease (3% increase)
Consultant Services to Departments	\$ 20,000	Consultant work
Operational Services	\$ 1,200	Training and auxiliary services
Equipment Purchase, Lease & Rental	\$ 4,000	Office needs - copier/printer, etc.
Information Technology Non-Payroll Expenses	\$ 213,055	IT hardware & software; EOTSS costs increased 76% between FY25-26; unpublished for FY27
Total	\$ 2,127,471	