



Governor Gavin Newsom
1303 10th Street, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

September 21, 2020

Dear Governor Newsom,

On behalf of the sixty-four thousand members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Department of California, I am writing to share with you the many challenges our organization is facing in the wake of the current COVID-19 restrictions.

As you know, our posts throughout the state have been closed for nearly five months. Since March, five of our 275 posts have closed their doors permanently, and three others are pending closure. We also have several other posts facing financial insolvency due to the closure orders.

Why is having our posts open so important? It is because we offer many services to our veterans and our communities. The VFW Department of California has been around 100 years serving veterans and their communities. Our post homes offer places for PTSD and suicide prevention counseling, we provide space for community food banks, and we offer hall and kitchen rentals to other community organizations. But most importantly, we assist all veterans and answer questions related to Veterans Administration (VA) disability claims. Each post has trained service officers who provide counseling and assistance in filing initial VA claims applications.

Since March, the number of veterans' claims processed through our Service Department has dropped by over 850 claims. The amount of monetary compensation received by veterans and their families has also decreased by \$2.2 million.

There is no doubt that closures are presenting devastating impacts on our ability to provide this vital assistance to veterans, service members, and their families. Keep in mind, the revenues returned (or in this case lost) to veterans through our efforts impact California's economy. Last year (2019) alone, our organization processed over 3,400 claims resulting in \$30 million of compensation and pension benefits.

Unfortunately, many of our posts have halls and possess liquor licenses. These posts are being classified as "bars" and have been required to close their doors. What is not being considered is that many of our posts are not just halls with bars, but rather hubs within our communities providing a wide range of essential programs and services to help veterans of every generation. Our posts provide these services within many of our small communities, without them, many of our veterans must commute to the larger urban centers to receive the care and assistance they deserve, whether this means free, professional help filing, or appealing a VA disability claim, providing a therapeutic place for our veterans, assistance with veterans who are homeless or contemplating suicide.

DEPARTMENT OF CALIFORNIA

Also, our posts generate funds through events, dinners, and the like to help provide scholarships for post-secondary education or emergency financial relief when times get tough. Members provide vital voluntary services to our communities. This includes over 90 thousand hours last year, equating to roughly \$2.8 million in donated time and money. Our posts are here for California's veterans and their communities.

While we understand and commend your efforts to protect Californians, we hope that you will reconsider classifying our post home as "bars" and allow us to open for important veteran-related activities while adhering to COVID-19 precautions. Our motto of "No One Does More For Veterans" is being curtailed by the Pandemic, but also from unnecessary regulations at all levels of government.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John G. Lowe". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

John G. Lowe
State Commander

Cc: Senator Bob Archuleta, Senate Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs Chairman
Assembly Member Jacqui Irwin, Chair of the Veterans Affairs Committee