



Cuyahoga County Council awards funds to vet programs from leftover Veterans Service Commission budget

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on June 13, 2013 at 9:45 AM, updated June 13, 2013 at 9:46 AM

In a break from long-standing tradition, money that isn't spent by the Cuyahoga County Veterans Service Commission to aid local veterans will not go back into the county's general fund.

Instead, Cuyahoga County Council voted Tuesday to disburse \$733,306 left over from the commission's \$7 million 2012 budget, plus \$25,000 from the county's general fund, to several programs in the county that help veterans. These programs include assistance for college tuition, housing, legal aid and veteran-owned businesses.

County council passed an ordinance last year establishing a Veterans' Services Fund to handle money returned to the county by the commission which is funded by a percentage of county property taxes.

County Councilman Dave Greenspan said the objective is to continue the intended purpose of the tax money. "We wanted to make sure that money still goes toward veterans," he said.

Robert Schloendorn, the commission's executive director, applauded the effort. "We're very pleased that they're doing it," he said. "I think it's a good use of the money I can't spend."

He said the commission is limited by state law to aiding only individual veterans, not groups or government programs that help vets. Last year the commission helped 7,865 veterans with financial aid for food, clothing, rent, mortgages, medical care and other hardship costs.

Greenspan said programs chosen by council for this funding were those that had a successful track record in aiding veterans, would spend little or no money on administrative costs, and could directly aid veterans within a year.

He estimated at least 1,200 veterans will benefit from the leftover commission money.

Tony Richison, president of the nonprofit group Veterans of Ohio that assists veterans in filing claims and arguing appeals for government benefits, was not happy with the council action.

"If this agency wants to provide veteran services then they should contract with the Department of Veterans Affairs," he said.

Richison's group was turned down for funding. Greenspan said the organization's request did not satisfy council's

desire to fund programs with minimal administrative costs.

Greenspan said council would invite other programs to apply for funding next year if another surplus is returned by the commission.

Disbursements went to:

- **Cuyahoga Community College's** Veterans Services & Program Office, \$73,300 for tuition and book assistance for student veterans. **Cleveland State University's** Veterans Benefit Office got the same amount for tuition aid for veterans and active service members.

- The **Cleveland/Cuyahoga County Office of Homeless Services** got \$175,000 for its Supportive Services for Veterans Families program to leverage federal grants to assist veterans and their families in maintaining their housing. Additionally, \$47,500 was allocated for veterans moving into permanent supported housing in the county.

- The Louis Stokes Cleveland Veterans Affairs Medical Center's **Community Resource and Referral Center Homeless Program**, \$20,000.

- **Cleveland Municipal Court's** Veterans Treatment Docket, \$104,146.

- The **Cuyahoga County Land Reutilization Corporation**, \$100,000 for a fund to rehab houses for veterans and provide financial counseling.

- The **Legal Aid Society of Cleveland**, \$75,000 to provide legal services to veterans.

- **United Way 211**, \$55,000 for a program to provide reference and referral services to military personnel.

- The **Economic and Community Development Institute**, \$25,000 for funding and technical assistance for veteran-owned and start-up businesses.

- **Cuyahoga County Soldiers and Sailors Monument Commission**, \$10,000 to recruit veterans as monument volunteers, transportation to the monument for veterans hospitalized at the Veterans Affairs facility at Wade Park, and an annual recognition for vets and service members.

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