

17 March 2020

Office of Governor Roy Cooper

20301 Mail Service Center

Raleigh, NC 27699

Subject: COVID-19 Response and Non-profit Veteran Organizations

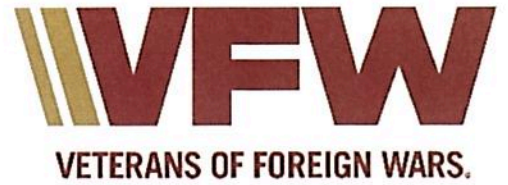
Governor Cooper,

With the outbreak and prevention efforts against COVID-19, the Department of North Carolina Veterans of Foreign Wars has been following suit with all of your executive orders and guidelines. Our Posts have been cancelling Bingo and Hall Rentals as well as finding ways to host meetings electronically (which is quite challenging for some of our older members). Nonetheless, we are weathering the storm just as everyone else and adapting new and creative ways to continue our mission of helping veterans and their families through this pandemic. We have been taking all of the precautions and advice from your State Health Agencies, CDC, and the White House at a significant blow and financial hardships to our local organizations.

The latest Executive Order has mandated that all bars and restaurants be shut down except for those that do takeout for obvious reasons; however, the private, members-only, canteens (bars) at our Posts across the state are the lifeline to financial independence for many of them. The money raised is how they pay their bills, how they fund their relief fund to pay bills of veterans in need, and how they stay an integral part of their local communities. We have already received phone calls from Posts from across the state that if this ban lasts more than 2 weeks, they will be forced to close their doors. We are quite possibly looking at the end of VFW Posts in some communities where they have been a mainstay for over 50 years, some 75. With them goes all of our community outreach programs, our scholarships for the local students, and even more importantly, a place where veterans can come home from war and their time in service and meet with likeminded individuals.

The VFW has supported the communities of our state as well as state agencies for over 100 years. Most notably in recent history, VFW Posts jumped to action with the recent hurricanes by setting up distribution points, getting multiple truckloads of materials and over \$125,000 in cash into our communities to not only help veterans but everyone. We didn't go searching for the news trucks, maybe we should have, but that is the nature of our organization. The eagerness to serve never ends.

To continue that trend, we want to offer up our Posts as possible meeting and distribution sites for either drive thru testing and/or food, water and other materials distribution sites. The VFW has 138 Posts across our



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state with some of them on very large properties ideal for handling cases like this. Not to mention thousands upon thousands of members eager to serve. We encourage your team to reach out to our Department Headquarters and let us know how we can help.

We know that your decision to close all bars and restaurants was a tough one to make and we are truly sorry that it has had to come to this; just know that the VFW stands behind it for the safety of everyone in North Carolina. As we mentioned above though, this is going to create hardships that we don't know if we will be able to bounce back from. Communities all over the state are looking at possibly losing their VFWs and that will be a sad day for not only our veterans but everyone in those communities.

As veterans we are usually last to step up to the plate and ask for help. We want to try and fix everything ourselves but this is something we don't think we will be able to do without your help. Therefore the Department of North Carolina Veterans of Foreign Wars is requesting the following from your office in regards to our Posts:

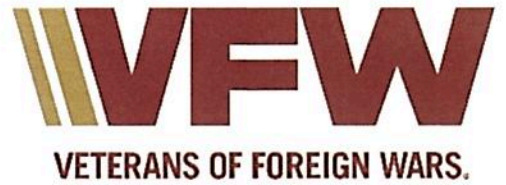
- 1) Does your most recent Executive Order offer an exemption to non-profit veterans' organizations canteens (bars) so long as they remain closed to the public (no guests to be signed in)?

If not then,

- 2) That all ABC permit renewals that are due by April 30th be waived or postponed to a later date to allow our Posts to try and regain loss revenue if they are forced to close.
- 3) That utilities and mortgage payments be waived or postponed until after they are allowed to reopen if forced to close.

If none of that is possible,

- 4) That the State of North Carolina implement a financial grant to help cover lost revenue for non-profit veterans' organizations in order to ensure that they may remain an integral part of their communities once COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted.



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Without these safety nets put into place for our states major veteran non-profits, we are surely going to see a demise in our ability to help our veterans and their families in need. We ask that you please consider these requests with your highest regard. As a non-profit organization, we do not receive the same protections as many businesses across our state receive and the economic impact to us will be something that will be immensely difficult to recover from.

We want to thank you for your time Governor Cooper and we look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Craig Armstrong". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Craig Armstrong
State Commander
NC VFW

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew Zinkievich". The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Andrew Zinkievich
State Adjutant
NC VFW