



SANGAMON COUNTY COUNTY BOARD OFFICE

200 South Ninth Street, Suite 201 • Springfield, IL 62701 • Tel. (217) 753-6650 • Fax (217) 753-6651

Sangamon County Veterans Assistance Commission (VAC) Legal Review – Questions & Answers

Is Sangamon County suing the Veterans Assistance Commission?

No. Sangamon County is not suing the Veterans Assistance Commission. The County has filed a Declaratory Judgment, a legal process that asks the court to clarify how the amended Military Veterans Assistance Act should be interpreted and implemented. This ensures that all parties understand the law and can follow it correctly. The County is covering all reasonable legal costs so both sides can provide the court with the best information available.

What is the County asking the court to decide?

The County is asking for a declaratory judgment to clarify how the law should be implemented. This is a common legal step when two parties interpret a law differently. It is not confrontational but simply a request for judicial guidance to ensure compliance with state law. The County's legal counsel and the Sangamon County State's Attorney's Office believe the County is acting within the law, but a court ruling will provide definitive direction moving forward.

What is unclear about the law?

The amended Military Veterans Assistance Act does not clearly define the financial relationship between the County and the VAC. The VAC believes that the law entitles them to at least 0.02% of the County's equalized assessed value without oversight or justification for their funding requests. If correct, this would be the first instance in Illinois where a local government would be required to hand over taxpayer money without accountability. The County believes taxpayer dollars must be spent transparently and responsibly, with oversight from elected officials.

Doesn't Sangamon County want to help veterans?

Yes! The County has significantly increased VAC funding to ensure veterans receive the services they need. Since 2022, the County has more than doubled the VAC's budget, increasing funding by 26% from 2022 to 2023, by 33% from 2023 to 2024, and by 30% from 2024 to 2025. Additionally, all four staff positions have received raises ranging from 40% to 90%, and three new staff positions have been approved. The County invested over \$30,000 in building out the VAC's current offices 4 years ago and is currently reviewing their request to move to a different space, with a long-term goal of consolidating services at a one-stop-shop Community Services Building with easy parking.

What will happen to veterans' services during this court review?

Veterans' services should not be affected. The VAC is expected to continue operating as usual, providing assistance during regular business hours. The County has ensured that funding and resources remain available to serve veterans throughout this legal process.

Why does the County believe oversight of VAC funding is necessary?

The County is responsible for ensuring taxpayer dollars are spent responsibly. The VAC believes they should receive approximately \$1.2 million in County funding, and we believe oversight by an elected board is necessary to ensure accountability. Issues have arisen, including payroll problems, lack of documentation for leave, unexplained budget requests, and questionable expenditures. Without oversight, these problems could continue unchecked.

Has the County been forced to intervene in VAC management before?

Yes. Previous VAC leadership failed to provide adequate oversight, leading to reductions in public service hours, workplace disruptions, financial misconduct, unauthorized agreements, and unresolved personnel decisions. Without County involvement, these issues would have continued to negatively impact both veterans and taxpayers.

Is the County trying to take control of the VAC?

No. The County fully supports the VAC's mission to serve veterans. The goal of this legal process is not to take over the VAC but to ensure compliance with the law while maintaining fiscal responsibility. The County believes in working collaboratively with the VAC Board to support veterans while also upholding accountability to taxpayers.

Would approving the VAC's requested dollar amount impact other County services?

Yes. The VAC is requesting at least 0.02% of the County's equalized assessed value, regardless of demonstrated need or impact on other departments. Approving this request would reduce funds available for essential services such as public safety, infrastructure, and health programs. The County must balance the needs of all departments while ensuring veterans continue to receive strong support.

Why can't the County and the VAC resolve this without a court ruling?

The County has made multiple efforts to collaborate with the VAC, but fundamental disagreements remain over the interpretation of the law. A court ruling provides a neutral and binding decision, ensuring both parties follow a clear legal framework moving forward.

What happens if the court rules in favor of the VAC?

If the court determines the VAC is entitled to its requested funding without oversight of a publicly elected body, the County will comply with the ruling. The County will adjust its budgeting process accordingly to meet the court's directive while continuing to fulfill its responsibility to taxpayers. However, this would set a precedent requiring taxpayer money to be allocated without oversight, which could impact County budgeting and accountability for public funds.

What happens if the court rules in favor of the County?

If the County prevails in this case, it will continue to support veterans and the Veterans Assistance Commission (VAC). The County has more than doubled the VAC budget in the last three years and provided increases in staff and salaries. This support will continue as needs are demonstrated and requests are made. In addition, the County will ensure that funding requests for the VAC are subject to oversight by a publicly elected body, maintaining transparency and accountability in the management of taxpayer dollars. The County will continue to work with the VAC to provide high-quality services to veterans while upholding the principles of fiscal responsibility and proper oversight.

What happens next?

The court will review the case and issue guidance on how the law should be implemented. In the meantime, the County remains committed to working with the VAC to ensure veterans receive the services they deserve while maintaining financial transparency and accountability.