

Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs
State of Louisiana

JOHN BEL EDWARDS
GOVERNOR



JOEY STRICKLAND
SECRETARY

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RE: January 2020 Military Family Assistance Fund Annual Report

Dear Members:

Please accept this as the Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs January 2020 Military Family Assistance Fund (MFA) Annual Report, required per R.S. 46:121-123, to members of the Louisiana Legislature's Joint Legislative Committee on the Budget.

BACKGROUND

In 2005, the legislature passed R.S. 46:121-123, establishing the Military Family Assistance Fund (MFA) as a state treasury fund, funded solely by donations. The MFA was created to help members of the Louisiana National Guard (LANG) and Military Reserves and their families, providing LANG members one last bus trip home to see family and loved ones just prior to deployments overseas, and to assist with undue financial hardships considered eligible under the statute.

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2016, the legislature passed Act 185 (2016), effective August 1, 2016, opening up the MFA to claims from all Louisiana veterans and their families. Thereafter, the MFA saw a greater number of applications coming in from individual veterans, and under the direction of the MFA Board, the fund became more responsive to the practical needs of our Louisiana veterans eligible for such assistance.

Per the Louisiana Administrative Code, for MFA need-based claims of up to \$1,500, the MFA Administrator can approve or deny payment, provided that the claims and supporting documentation meet statutory requirements. For claims ranging from above \$1,500 through \$2,500, the three-person MFA Fund Committee meets to approve or deny payment. Payment of claims greater than \$2,500 must be approved by the full MFA Board. The MFA Board consists of 11 members designated as provided for in R.S. 46:123 (A)(2)(a). The current MFA Administrator is LDVA Executive Management Officer Holly Talley, available at holly.talley@la.gov.

FY19 MFA FUND ACTIVITY

On July 1, 2018, the MFA Fund balance was \$441,401.91. During the FY19 year (ending June 30, 2019), the MFA Fund received a total of \$104,164.73 in donations to the fund, through license plate renewal donations, state income tax return voluntary donations, and other private donations.

In FY19, the legislature based on historic spending authority numbers, granted the MFA Fund a total of \$115,528 in spending authority from the fund for the year. From July 1, 2018 through June 30, 2019, the MFA Fund disbursed a total of \$120,019.44. Of this amount, \$27,808.91 was awarded to aid in the LANG pre-deployment trips, and a total of \$92,210.53 was awarded to Louisiana veterans and their families who demonstrated eligible undue financial hardships.

The legislature approved only \$115,528 to be spent out of the MFA's total fund balance of more than \$441,000 at the beginning of the fiscal year. In January 2019, the MFA had spent nearly \$67,600 helping veterans in financial hardship. So, the MFA was allowed to spend nearly \$48,000 more during fiscal year (before June 30, 2019). However, out of that, it needed to fund three bus trips home for Louisiana National Guard members who were about to deploy. With only \$48,000 left in spending authority, the MFA Board made the decision to table all need-based applications to be able to fund all three trips.


The MFA Board asked LDVA to make the request to the Joint Legislative Committee on the Budget (JLCB) for another \$60,000 in spending authority for the deployment trips, which would leave the MFA fund some money for the rest of the year for individual veterans' financial assistance applications. The LDVA did so. The Commissioner of Administration approved that request for more spending authority, and submitted it for the JLCB's consideration in December 2018. As of the MFA Board's January 15, 2019 meeting, the BA-7 request had not yet been granted, so at that meeting the MFA Board was not able to consider for funding any further individual need-based applications. The remaining funds that the legislature allowed the MFA Fund to spend were committed to an anticipated three pre-deployment bus trips home for 362 Louisiana National Guard soldiers. Until the BA-7 request to the JLCB was approved, MFA did not consider any applications for funding until additional funding is available to spend. The BA-7 request was not approved until May 2019.

FY20 MFA FUND ACTIVITY TO DATE (through January 1, 2020)

On July 1, 2019, the MFA Fund began the fiscal year with a fund balance of \$425,547.20. From July 1, 2019 through December 31, 2019, the MFA Fund has received a total of \$40,673.75 in donations. Once again, the legislature granted the MFA Fund \$115,528 total budgeted spending authority for the FY20 fiscal year. Of that amount, through January 1, 2020, the MFA Fund disbursed a total of \$28,290.11 in need-based claims to Louisiana veterans and their families. LDVA notes here that in December 2019, LDVA was notified of several upcoming deployments of Louisiana National Guard troops in 2020. The MFA Board will plan and adjust accordingly to support their commitment to LANG.

Should you have any further questions regarding the Military Family Assistance Fund, please do not hesitate to contact our office.

Very Truly Yours,


Joey Strickland, Secretary
Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs