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Policy 950**

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## VETERANS' ASSISTANCE

### .1 PURPOSE

To provide emergency financial assistance to indigent/low income eligible veterans and eligible dependents, in accordance with RCW 73.08 now or as amended.

#### 1.1 Source of Funds

Funding for the Veterans' Relief Fund is provided in accordance with RCW 73.08.080 and applicable County ordinances. The Veterans' Relief Fund is a Special Revenue Fund budgeted and approved by the Clallam County Board of Commissioners (BOCC). The BOCC is responsible for uses and expenditures from the fund and maintains final approval and/or denial authority on all expenditures.

#### 1.2 Policy

Through the administration of said funds, the Clallam County Veterans' Relief Fund intends to provide timely services to eligible veterans and certain dependents. The purpose of this policy is to limit organizational and personal conflict of interest and to provide, to the maximum extent possible, fair, and equal treatment to all applicants requesting assistance through this program. The basis for any assistance request must be an emergency and provide for reasonable, basic, subsistence needs.

#### 1.3 Verbal and/or Physical Abuse Policy

The Clallam County Veterans' Relief Fund has a zero tolerance policy of verbal or other forms of abuse directed towards veterans, the County Employee/Contractor, volunteers, or any other staff. Any form of verbal or physical abuse may be deemed sufficient cause to deny service and the client will be told to leave the office immediately.

If the County Employee/Contractor deems the abuse to be severe, the client may be denied service from the Veterans' Relief Fund for a period of time deemed appropriate by the decision of the County Employee/Contractor for up to 2 years. Anyone appearing to be under the influence of alcohol and/or any other drugs will be denied service while in that status and told to leave the premises. That veteran may return on a different day to seek services. The decision of the County Employee/Contractor with respect to a veteran's impaired status is final. Any veteran who is denied service(s) for a period of more than 60 days pursuant to a decision of the County Employee/Contractor may appeal that decision to the Veterans Association or their designee, and must do so in writing within 14 days of the denial of service(s).

## .2 ELIGIBILITY

### 2.1 Service Requirements

To be eligible for assistance, veterans must, at the time they seek assistance, meet the definition in RCW 73.08.005(5), as now enacted, or as amended. This also includes any current member of the National Guard or Armed Forces Reserves who has been deployed to serve in an armed conflict. There shall be no discrimination against a veteran seeking assistance based on how the veteran obtained veteran status.

### 2.2 Residency

Veterans or families of deceased veterans must have been residents of the state of Washington, for at least 6 consecutive months preceding the date of application for assistance. Applicants must reside in Clallam County at the date of application and provide proof of said residency. Limited Clallam Transit passes (no more than two monthly passes) may be made available for work search and work transportation without meeting the residency requirement.

## .3 REQUIRED DOCUMENTATION

### 3.1 Discharge

Documentation includes DD-214, VA Statement of Service (SOS), or if discharged prior to 1950, a Certificate of Discharge. Staff will assist the veteran in completing a request to receive a certified copy of their DD-214 as necessary. No assistance will be considered without the required documentation.

All veterans will be encouraged to record their original or certified copy of their discharge with the County Auditor's Office.<sup>1</sup> This service is free in accordance with RCW 73.04.030.

Questionable copies of discharge: Any copy of a discharge that appears to have been altered in any way, or is deemed questionable will not be accepted. A certified copy of the document in question must be produced before any assistance will be provided.

### 3.2 Residency

Residency may be documented by a Washington state driver's license, state I.D. card, rent/lease agreement(s), utility bill(s) or other form of verifiable documentation deemed

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<sup>1</sup> However, please note that there may be situations in which this information is available to the public under Washington State's Public Records Act. See, RCW 42.56.440.

acceptable. Documents must prove 6-month residency in the State of Washington and current residency in Clallam County.

### 3.3 Family – Dependents

The definition of family for this policy shall mean the spouse, domestic partner, and dependent children of a living or deceased veteran. Documents must be provided to verify marriage, birth of children or other form of dependency, and death. (Marriage certificate, birth certificate, death certificate, etc.) Children who have reached the age of 18 are not considered dependents unless the dependent is severely disabled and dependent on parents for basic survival needs or currently enrolled full-time in school or an institution of higher education and is under the age of 24 at the time the application for assistance is made. Proof of enrollment is required. For the purposes of a married couple who are both veterans, they each can be considered for the fund based on the eligibility requirements set forth in this policy (i.e. annual limit would be \$3,600 for a married veteran household).

### 3.4 Income Verification

All household income and source(s) must be documented. Acceptable documents may be income tax returns, pay stubs, VA Disability/Pension award letters, Department of Social & Health Services (DSHS) documents, Social Security grant/award letters, Labor and Industry payment letters, unemployment check stubs/award notices, or any other documents deemed necessary.

If an applicant claims they have no income in the recent past or currently have no income, the applicant will be required to show how current rent, utilities, food, and other bills are being paid. Self-employed applicants must bring valid income accounting records, business tax I.D. number, business license, (if applicable), or other documentation deemed acceptable.

### 3.5 Unemployed Veterans – Work Search Requirement

Unemployed veterans, who are able to work and have not been determined by the state and/or federal government to be fully disabled and unemployable, must be registered with the Veteran's Job Service Section at a local WorkSource office. They must show proof of the registration process and if eligible, proof they applied for unemployment compensation.

### 3.6 Indigent Definition

"Indigent" means a person who is defined as such by the County legislative authority using one or more of the following definitions:

- a. Receiving one of the following types of public assistance: Temporary assistance for needy families, general assistance, poverty-related veterans' benefits, food stamps or food stamp benefits transferred electronically, refugee resettlement benefits, Medicaid, or supplemental security income;
- b. Receiving an annual income, after taxes, of up to one hundred fifty percent or less of the current federally established poverty level, or receiving an annual income not exceeding a higher qualifying income established by the county legislative authority; or
- c. Unable to pay reasonable costs for shelter, food, utilities, and transportation because his or her available funds are insufficient.

### 3.7 Income Limits/Guidelines

A person otherwise eligible for assistance from the Veterans' Relief Fund shall not be eligible for assistance until they provide adequate proof (as defined above) to the Veterans Association that their household income for the current year is at or below the 150 percent level of the Federal Poverty Level Income Guidelines established and published by the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS). Said guidelines are adjusted and revised annually.

### 3.8 Rent, Lease Agreement, or Mortgage Payment

Rental or lease agreements must have the landlord, owner, or legal agent of owner's name, address, and telephone number on the document; the rental address, and monthly rent amount. This agreement must be dated and signed by the renter and the landlord or legal agent. Sublet agreements written by or on behalf of a shared roommate will not be eligible for assistance from the fund. Instead, the name of the applicant or sub-tenant seeking assistance must be on the legal agreement between the landlord and the primary renter.

Prior to providing mortgage assistance, ownership of property must be verified and documents must be submitted verifying existence of any loan and/or payment.

### 3.9 Disabled Applicants

If applicant is disabled to the degree that s/he is unable to do any kind of work, appropriate disability documentation is required. A Veteran's Administration, Social Security, DSHS, or Labor and Industry document is acceptable.

## 4 APPLICATION AND ASSISTANCE PROCESS

The County Employee/Contractor will develop and maintain forms necessary for administration of the Veterans' Assistance Program. Form content and format is at the discretion of the County.

#### 4.1 Delegation of Veterans' Assistance Program Tasks

The Veterans' Assistance Program shall be run by a County Employee/Contractor designated by the Board of Clallam County Commissioners. The designee is responsible to determine and document eligibility, approve or deny claims, ensure payment, provide for records of all claims, and provide reports of payments of claims. The County Employee/Contractor is paid from the Veterans' Relief Fund.

Final approval of claims is the responsibility of the County Employee/Contractor and the signature approval of designated members of the Clallam County Veterans Association based upon submission of complete and accurate claims and documentation.

No funds shall be expended to pay a claim or provide assistance to a veteran except through compliance with this section AND the express written approval of said expenditure by the Board of Commissioners.

#### 4.2 Appointment Procedures

All first-time applicants will be pre-screened for basic eligibility by the County Employee/Contractor at the Clallam County Veterans' Center located at 216 South Francis Street, Port Angeles, WA 98362; 360.797.1791. Subsequent applications can be processed remotely. Emergency requests for assistance will be evaluated by the County Employee/Contractor on a case-by-case basis.

#### 4.3 Application for Assistance

Request for assistance is made by completion of a Clallam County Veterans' Relief Fund "Application to apply for relief funds" form. Signature of affirmation and verification of information authorization is mandatory. Refusal to sign will preclude applicant from receiving assistance.

All applications will be evaluated on the merits of the request.

All required documentation must be provided and failure to provide all required documentation will result in the County Employee/Contractor returning it and the related materials to the applicant and closing the file.

#### 4.4 Payment Procedures

The County Employee/Contractor is responsible to ensure that payment is made after all documentation has been received, the applicable approval process has been completed, and the actions listed below have been completed. No warrant will be made payable to the Veteran, spouse, domestic partner, or dependent. Payment will be made directly to

the vendor or service provider listed on the original approval form. The payment process includes the following procedures:

- All documentation is received by the County Employee/Contractor
- County Employee/Contractor receives approval signatures from three members of the Clallam County Veterans Association
- The payment paperwork is submitted to the Clallam County Commissioners' Office for entering into the Clallam County Financial System
- The entered payments are submitted to the Clallam County Auditor's office
- The entered payments are audited for completeness by the Clallam County Auditor's Office
- The entered payments are approved by the Clallam County Commissioners
- The warrants are released to the Commissioners' Office after BOCC approval
- County Employee/Contractor picks up warrants from the Commissioners' Office
- Warrants are mailed from the Clallam County Veterans' Center

#### 4.5 Denial of Assistance

The County Employee/Contractor may deny assistance in accordance with these policies. False information provided by an applicant for assistance or other fraudulent actions taken for the purpose of receiving financial assistance from this program, will be grounds for denial of assistance and may be referred to law enforcement for investigation.

Failure to meet program eligibility requirements, income in excess of the guideline amounts listed in Section 3.7 above, inadequate required documentation, or no clearly definable and/or verifiable emergencies are other valid reasons for denial of service. The County Employee/Contractor will make the determination for the basis of denial of assistance, considering all facts and policies relevant to each request.

##### (1) Divorce – Remarried Spouse or Widow

A divorced spouse of a living or deceased veteran, is ineligible for assistance. A widow(er) of a deceased veteran who has remarried is also ineligible for assistance.

##### (2) Fraud and/or Abuse

If the County Employee/Contractor suspects fraud, criminal intent/activity or abuse of the system by an applicant, the matter may be referred to the Executive Committee of the Clallam County Veterans Association. The Association may, at its discretion, refer the issue to the law enforcement for investigation and possible legal action. If fraud or criminal activity is legally established, the applicant will be prohibited from receiving any future assistance from this fund.

## .5 DENIAL OF SERVICE – APPEAL PROCESS

### 5.1 Complaints or Appeals

If a Veteran feels s/he was treated improperly or denied assistance unfairly, s/he has the right of due process and may appeal the County Employee/Contractor's decision to the Clallam County Veterans Association. All appeals will be heard and adjudicated by the Clallam County Veterans Association.

### 5.2 Non-Appealable Issues

The following circumstances or facts are not appealable:

- a. Less than 6-month residency in Washington state
- b. Not a current resident of Clallam County
- c. Annual limit has been reached
- d. No proof of "legal" Veteran's status as defined in RCW 73.08.005(5).

### 5.3 Appeal Process – Procedures

The applicant must submit, in writing, a dated and signed statement on an appeal form, provided by the County Employee/Contractor describing in detail any alleged or perceived discrimination, improper treatment and/or reasons they feel they were unjustly denied assistance by the County Employee/Contractor. The appeal form may be submitted by mail or in person at the Commissioners' Office. Upon receipt of said appeal, the County Employee/Contractor will contact the President of the Clallam County Veterans Association or another executive committee member, if the aforementioned is unavailable, to notify them of receipt of the appeal. The Clerk the Board of Commissioners will contact the appellant, in a reasonable and timely manner, to arrange an appeal hearing before the Association, with the County Employee/Contractor present, as soon as feasible, but no later than 30 days after receipt of the appeal document. Said written appeal must be filed within 60 days of the date when the alleged or perceived discrimination, improper treatment, or unjust denial occurred.

At the appeal hearing, the appellant may provide oral and/or written testimony in support of their appeal. After the appeal hearing, the Association will consider the written appeal, oral statements by the appellant and all documentation pertinent to said appeal. After taking evidence and considering all facts of the appeal, policies, and applicable laws, the Association will transmit to the appellant their written decision of the appeal within 30 days of the appeal hearing. The decision of the Association regarding the disposition of the appeal will be binding and final regarding Clallam County and the Veterans' Relief Fund Program.

#### 5.4 Further Appeal (Due Process)

Section 5.3 above in no way limits an applicant's constitutional right of due process of law, as described in the Fifth Amendment of the United States Constitution thereof.

### .6 AUTHORIZED USE OF FUNDS

#### 6.1 Assistance Defined

The intent of the original and subsequent legislation regarding the Veterans' Relief Fund, precedent procedures, and interpretations by other counties, actions by the Clallam County Board of Commissioners and a long-standing consensus of the veterans' organizations in this County have defined the use of the Veterans' Relief Fund as an Emergency Assistance Program. Accordingly, each application for assistance will be evaluated by the County Employee/Contractor and designated representatives of the Clallam County Veterans Association in the context of an emergency need.

The Veterans' Relief Fund is intended to be used to provide emergency assistance. It is not intended to be on-going or to provide regular or periodic payments to veterans. It is not intended as a supplemental income source or an annual entitlement. Assistance is generally limited to once every 12 months and any exceptions are at the discretion of the County Employee/Contractor, subject to appeal to the Clallam County Veterans Association.

#### 6.2 Eligible Items/Services for Assistance

Food, shelter, limited emergency medical care, necessary utilities, limited transportation, mental health evaluations to ensure the safety of a veteran, and burial assistance, in accordance with RCW 73.08.070. Other reasonable emergent needs may be considered on a case-by-case basis. These categories of requests are legitimate expenditures of the Relief Fund, are subject to all other rules and regulations listed in this policy, and must be approved by three designated signers of the Clallam County Veterans Association before being sent to the BOCC for approval of the expenditure. The County Employee/Contractor should use prudence and discretion in determining an emergency need and recommend appropriate amounts provided for such relief.

The County Employee/Contractor will not accept "lost or stolen cash," as an emergency to qualify for voucher assistance. Individuals are responsible for the security of their personal funds, just as anyone else would be.

#### 6.3 Maximum Allocation

The maximum financial benefit for emergency assistance for an indigent veteran or family member will not exceed \$1,800 during a 12-month period. Exceptions to these

limits may be made with three signatures from designated members of the Clallam County Veterans Association. This exception is not to exceed 20 percent of the annual limitations outlined above. Burial and cremation services will not be counted against the restrictions in this paragraph.

#### 6.4 Primary Service Location

All warrants are provided to recipients at the Clallam County Veterans' Center, located at 216 South Francis Street, Port Angeles, WA 98362.

#### 6.5 Schedule of Assistance

A schedule of authorized assistance benefits and maximums for each is maintained as Appendix A to this policy. Recommendations for modification will be made to the Clallam County Board of Commissioners who shall have final authority for approval of uses of the fund and maximum benefits.

#### 6.6 Limited Fund Circumstances

Should the County Employee/Contractor determine that available funds will not be sufficient for the expected eligible expenditures in a given calendar year they shall state the amount of the expected deficiency in writing to the Board of Commissioners and shall describe in said writing a proposed triage method for handling future requests. In the absence of additional funding for the Veterans' Assistance Fund being authorized by the Board, the County Employee/Contractor is authorized to triage requests for such funds pursuant to their proposed triage plan; i.e. pro-rating the amount approved as some pre-established percentage of the amount requested, prioritizing those requests relating to the health and safety of an applicant, or prioritizing payments to pay for food, rent, and utilities.

### 7 COUNTY EMPLOYEE/CONTRACTOR POSITION AND DUTIES

#### 7.1 Defined

The County Employee/Contractor shall be the primary program operations manager for the overall daily operation of the Veterans' Relief Fund Program.

#### 7.2 County Employee/Contractor's Decisions and Actions

The County Employee/Contractor shall interpret and apply when appropriate, these Policies and Procedures as liberally as possible when evaluating a veteran's request for assistance. The benefit of doubt may be applied in favor of the veteran, at the County Employee/Contractor's discretion, when circumstances regarding emergent need and eligibility are borderline and/or questionable.

It is the position of the County, that all veterans, who have served our country honorably, deserve to be treated equally, with respect, dignity, compassion, and fairness.

The County Employee/Contractor will use sound judgment and reason in making all decisions regarding applications for assistance from this program and shall consult the Clallam County Veterans Association on any issue which may be deemed questionable regarding policy interpretation.

### 7.3 Relationship with Veterans' Organizations

The County Employee/Contractor will strive to maintain positive working relationships with the representatives of approved Veterans' Organizations Post/Chapter and with members of the Clallam County Veterans Association.

### 7.4 Confidentiality

All documents or records submitted to the Veterans Association by or on behalf of an applicant for relief under this policy shall be subject to possible production to a third party requester pursuant to the Washington State Public Records Act (Ch. 42.56 RCW). Certain exemptions may apply to some of the records or documents an applicant may submit. The County Employee/Contractor shall require that all staff, and/or designated representatives working with Veteran's Relief recipients, sign a confidentiality agreement preventing release of protected information.

The agreement shall notify all persons signing the confidentiality agreement that, for the protection of applicants and recipients, they are prohibited from disclosing the identity, contents of any records/files, papers and communications, except for purposes directly connected with the administration of the Veterans' Relief Program.

The Employee/Contractor must take steps to ensure confidentiality of information contained in individual files. Failure to do so may result in immediate termination of the contract or any other remedies available to the County.

## APPENDIX A – SCHEDULE OF ASSISTANCE

RELIEF CATEGORIES for applications are detailed below. All requests are classified into one of the following categories: food, rent, utilities, medical, burial, and miscellaneous. These applications will be accepted only on an emergent basis.

### FOOD

1. There is no limit to the number of times an applicant can receive assistance for food (unless the annual limit has been reached); however, the intent of the assistance is to be used on an emergent basis.
2. Assistance is to be used for necessities only. No alcohol, tobacco products, gift cards, or gambling products may be purchased. Sundries may be purchased but should be for necessary items like paper products and toiletries. When picking up the gift card the veteran will be required to sign that the purchases will be in accordance with the policy and the receipt reflecting said purchases will be provided to the County Employee/Contractor to be placed in the veterans file. Purchases of prohibited or questionable items or failure to produce receipts for goods purchased will be documented in the veteran's record and will be considered grounds for termination of assistance.
3. Proper identification must be presented to the vendor at the time of the purchase. No cash, coupon, or credit of any type is to be given.
4. Food vouchers shall be issued as follows:

Single veteran	\$150
Spouse of deceased veteran	\$150
Single veteran with children	\$150+\$100 for each non-emancipated, dependent
Married veteran	\$250+\$100 for each non-emancipated, dependent
Spouse of deceased veteran w/children	\$150+\$100 for each non-emancipated, dependent
Surviving children of deceased veteran	\$100 for each non-emancipated, dependent
5. The County Employee/Contractor will maintain a list of grocery vendors who accept warrants from the County and the veteran will be given a choice of any of the grocers on the list.

### RENT

1. Rental payments are used to assist a veteran to remain in a domicile or to provide temporary shelter. Rent assistance is usually given only once a year but in an emergency situation, may be granted more than once.
2. Veteran must be listed on a rental agreement with the property owner, property management firm, or leaseholder.
3. Rent will not be paid to relatives of the applicant.
4. Veteran must show proof of imminent danger of eviction including but not limited to an eviction notice, or landlord statement verifying that the tenant is behind in rent payments.
5. Rent assistance depends upon the circumstances of the applicant and is determined by the County Employee/Contractor.
6. Use of assistance for rental deposits, such as damage and security, is not allowed because there is no accountability for returning the deposit when the veteran vacates the premises.

### UTILITIES

1. Utility assistance is granted for electricity, water, and bottled gas such as propane, fuel oil, and firewood. Assistance for electricity, water, and bottled gas is only paid to avoid a shut-off and requires a delinquency notice. The delinquency notice must be dated less than 30 days from the date the veteran requests assistance for that utility. As provided in section 3.6 (c) of this policy if the veteran is unable to pay reasonable costs for utilities because his/her available funds are insufficient the request may be considered without the required delinquency notice. It is the responsibility of the County Employee/Contractor to contact the utility company and verify the amount of assistance required preventing a shut-off after a completed application is received.
2. Telephones are not considered a necessity and do not qualify except when a medical necessity exists, in which case, assistance with local telephone costs can be considered.
3. Use of assistance for utility deposits is not allowed. This is not allowed because there is no accountability when a veteran vacates premises.

### MEDICAL/MENTAL HEALTH ASSISTANCE

1. Medical assistance may be granted to aid qualified applicants for the purchase of medical necessities on an emergency basis.
2. Assistance may be provided for:
  - Prescriptions
  - Overdue medical/dental bills (billed within the last 12 months)
  - Eye glasses, denture repair, other medical appliances, as approved
  - Mental health evaluations to ensure the safety or stability of the veteran

### BURIAL

Up to \$800 (but not less than \$300 as mandated by RCW 73.08.070) may be paid to the indigent spouse, dependent children, family member or friend who pays for burial expenses of an indigent veteran, his/her spouse, or child. This allowance is to assist with burial expenses and requires a copy of the death certificate and internment or cremation billings. If the person requesting assistance has applied and/or received reimbursement from the Veterans Administration (VA) for funeral costs, that amount will be deducted prior to the assistance being considered.

Before this authorization is allowed, the County Employee/Contractor will connect the indigent veteran, his/her spouse, or dependent with a local veteran's service organization in order to establish qualification for VA burial benefits.

### MISCELLANEOUS

Miscellaneous assistance includes travel, clothing, and tools under the following circumstances:

- a. Travel expenses are allowed for unusual medical purposes. Assistance is granted either by purchase of a ticket for public transportation or by providing a gift card to purchase adequate amounts of fuel to perform travel.
- b. Purchase of clothing and/or tools necessary for a veteran to become or remain employed. This benefit is not extended to non-veteran spouses and/or dependents

- c. Clallam County Transit bus passes for job search and/or transportation to and from employment.