

**Subject: Request to Reject CSTF Changes to the San Francisco Veterans Affairs Commission
(Proposed “Veterans’ Affairs Council” Amendments)**

**Honorable Supervisor [Last Name]
San Francisco Board of Supervisors
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place
San Francisco, CA 94102**

Dear Supervisor [Last Name],

On behalf of the San Francisco Veterans Affairs Commission (VAC), we are requesting your assistance in protecting the VAC from structural changes proposed by the City’s Commission Streamlining Task Force (CSTF), particularly the proposal to rename the “Veterans Affairs Commission” as the “Veterans’ Affairs Council,” alongside related governance changes that reduce stability and diminish the Commission’s standing.

As we understand it, the City Attorney’s Office is tasked with drafting legislation by April 1, 2026 based on CSTF recommendations, after which the legislation will be reviewed by the Board of Supervisors and could take effect on an accelerated timeline unless the Board rejects or amends it. These changes are significant and will be felt by veterans in real time.

The VAC has served San Francisco veterans for decades as a public, accountable forum that elevates veteran issues to City leadership. While we acknowledge the CSTF is not recommending elimination of the body, the recommended changes would weaken how effectively we can advocate for veterans, especially when time-sensitive needs require direct, consistent access to decision-makers.

Below is a concise summary of the key proposals affecting the VAC, the Task Force's rationale, and why we believe these changes would harm veterans.

Key CSTF Proposals, Rationale, and Our Concerns

1) Rename the “Veterans Affairs Commission” to the “Veterans’ Affairs Council”

CSTF rationale (as stated): Align naming conventions so advisory bodies are not referred to as “commissions,” and standardize structures citywide.

Why this harms veterans:

- Reduced voice in practice: A “council” label can be treated as more informal and easier to de-prioritize—especially when combined with other changes (like sunset/term limits) that make the body feel temporary.
- Continuity matters in veteran services: Veteran needs do not operate on short cycles. A name change is not cosmetic in this context—it alters how seriously the City and the public perceive the platform that carries veteran concerns.
- Removing the Commission will separate the layer of government, removing this layer concentrate all decision making power in the Mayor’s Office with only the councils advise to an opinion. The council becomes a “rubber stamp” place where complaints go to die because the council has no power to fix the problems raised by the public.
- Advisory committees are often deemed “cost neutral”, meaning the City may stop providing a dedicated clerk or a budget for outreach. This forces volunteers to do all the administrative work, which often leads to the body becoming inactive or ineffective.
- Transitioning to a council would reverse a 30 year precedent set by Ordinance 33-94, which officially upgraded the body from council to the VAC in 1994 to grant it formal

standing and oversight role it has held ever since. Furthermore, downgrading this hard won status suggests that the specialized work and unique needs of veterans are no longer being taken seriously by San Francisco leadership.

- Reverting to a "council" would strip away the legal standing established by Ordinance 33-94 (which upgraded the body to a Commission in 1994), essentially silencing the veteran community's voice by removing the mandatory legislative review and departmental accountability required to ensure the City actually delivers on its promises to those who served.

2) Reduce term length (4 years → 3 years) and 3) Add term limits (e.g., 4-term maximum)

CSTF rationale: Standardize advisory-body terms and increase turnover.

Why this harms veterans:

- Veteran issues are long-horizon (housing stability pipelines, benefits access, discharge upgrades, care coordination). Shorter terms and rigid term limits increase churn, weaken institutional memory, and slow multi-year follow-through.
- The VAC is a volunteer body built on lived experience and trust networks. Forced turnover can remove the very commissioners who carry the strongest connections to hard-to-reach veterans and service providers.

4) Add a “sunset” provision (re-authorization requirement)

CSTF rationale: Require periodic reauthorization to confirm continued relevance.

Why this harms veterans:

- A sunset creates structural uncertainty that discourages long-term planning, partnerships, and recruitment.

- Veteran needs are not temporary; housing, healthcare access, and benefits navigation are ongoing public responsibilities.
- Even the perception that the body may expire undermines trust—particularly for veterans who already feel repeatedly de-prioritized.

5) Remove the requirement that two seats be held by women veterans

CSTF rationale (as stated): Remove gender-specific seat qualifications and rely on broader City diversity goals.

Why this harms veterans:

- Inclusion and diversity need structural safeguards. Without designated seats, representation predictably reverts to a majority-male composition—especially in spaces historically dominated by men.
- This is not symbolic: women veterans often bring distinct lived-experience issues (including MST-related needs, caregiving burdens, healthcare access barriers) that can be diluted without guaranteed representation.
- Removing women-designated seats raises a serious equity/anti-discrimination concern due to foreseeable disparate impact on women veterans’ participation and visibility.

6) Remove the VAC’s reporting requirement (or remove it from Code) and 7) Remove provisions regarding meetings/rules/regulations

CSTF rationale: Streamline or remove sections viewed as duplicative or unnecessary; reporting may be “ill-suited.”

Why this harms veterans:

- The answer to inconsistent posting is not eliminating accountability—it is ensuring reports are consistently produced, archived, and easy to find.
- Predictable meeting structure and clear procedural authority are what keep public advisory bodies functional, accessible, and accountable. Removing guardrails invites ambiguity and weakens transparency.

Operational Reality: “Streamlining” Without Support Delays Veteran Outcomes

Even today, the VAC operates with minimal resources and depends on agency channels for basic administrative support. We receive no meaningful funding (beyond items as basic as business cards), and routine administrative requests can take months to complete through existing processes.

Shifting veteran advocacy further into layered administrative routing increases the risk of delay, dilution, and miscommunication—especially when urgent issues need direct attention. For veterans facing immediate needs (housing instability, benefits interruptions, healthcare barriers), even “administrative” delays can translate into real harm.

What We Are Asking From You

We respectfully request that you and your office:

1. Reject the proposed renaming of the San Francisco Veterans Affairs Commission to a “Veterans’ Affairs Council.”
2. Reject or substantially amend governance changes that reduce continuity and stability (shortened terms, rigid term limits, sunset), unless there is a veteran-specific justification supported by outcomes data.

3. Preserve women-veteran designated seats as a concrete inclusion and diversity safeguard and to avoid foreseeable disparate impact on women veterans' representation.
4. Preserve transparency and accountability by maintaining reporting and meeting structure requirements—and fix any operational gaps through support, not removal.

Thank you so much for taking the time to read this, and thank you to your team for setting time aside to meet with us. We welcome the opportunity to discuss practical, veteran-centered improvements that strengthen—not reduce—the City's ability to hear and act on veteran needs.

Respectfully,

San Francisco Veterans Affairs Commission

City and County of San Francisco