May 10 Incarcerated Veteran Hearing, Roberto Herrera Opening Statement

In 2014, CDCR and CalVet and the USDVA formulated interagency agreements that provide for our departments and veteran service organization to have greater access to veterans incarcerated in our state Prisons. Through this effort policies have been developed to assist veteran inmates in pursing benefits and services they may have earned through their military service.

To enhance outreach to incarcerated veterans, CalVet has maintained a goal to develop an outreach model that will educate all incarcerated veterans on the benefits and services available to them, while creating a best practice delivery apparatus that could be replicated by all California prisons and jails.

Along with regularly scheduled visits to “Veteran Support Groups” in prison, and collaborating with CDCRs Community Resource Managers, CalVet continues to work on providing benefits information to each CDCR facility through their institution’s libraries, direct physical mail systems to each inmate that has been identified as a veteran.

I want to highlight that CalVet continually explores ways to streamline the identification of, and outreach to, all veterans who are justice involved at both the state and local level. Given the existence of provisions within the Penal Code that allow for the diversion options like Veterans Treatment Courts for veterans suffering from invisible wounds of war, the importance for swift confirmation of veteran status cannot be overstated.

Although CDCR has taken the lead on system wide identification by working closely with USDVA, efforts as efficient and reliable as CDCR’s are only occurring in 4 of California’s 58 county jail systems. Given that within CDCR facilities, 60% of veteran inmates never self- identified, the USDVA, CalVet, County Veteran Service Officers, Sheriffs and the county courts, must continue to work together to ensure that veterans, who are awaiting arraignment, and those who have been convicted, are identified early and efficiently, in order to allow for the possible use of veteran specific diversion offered through statute.