

# Livingston County Democratic Executive Committee

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## For Immediate Release

### **Dems: County Cheating Veterans Out of Millage Services, Suggested Uber Instead**

More than two years after voters approved a millage to pay for more services for veterans, much of the money remains unspent and few programs promised during the millage campaign have been started, County records show.

In one case, a County official suggested veterans call Uber for rides to medical appointments instead of having the county buy a new van and hire another driver to provide the service that was promised during the millage campaign.

The millage authorized in August 2016 brought in \$1,035,190 during 2017 for Livingston County Veterans' Services, but the agency spent only \$430,792 that year, just 41.5 percent of what taxpayers shelled out. This year the millage brought in \$1,018,000, but the agency plans to spend less than \$501,000 this year, based on budget reports dated Sept. 10.

“Clearly, the county has failed to live up to the promises made to veterans when they asked voters to approve the millage,” said Judy Daubenmier, party chair.

“Backers of the millage promised they would spend the money on more services for veterans – more benefit counselors, more mental health services, more outreach – but none of that has materialized.

“County Commissioners have failed to oversee implementation of the millage, and have allowed the Veterans Services Committee, whose members they appoint, to stymie attempts to implement more programs.

“Veterans deserve to receive the services that we taxpayers thought we were paying for, but right now the County is cheating them. Democrats will see to it that veterans get the services

they deserve – and that we are paying for – by immediately replacing the members of the current veterans committee. Democratic county commissioners would not be asleep at the switch in overseeing the agency like the current commissioners clearly are.”

Daubenmier said one Veterans Committee member actually misled county commissioners about the balance in the Veterans Services’ account. At the Sept. 4 County Commission meeting, Veterans’ Committee Chair Hansel Keene told County Commissioners that the agency will have a balance of just \$80,000 at the end of the year when in fact it is projected to be more like \$1 million. County Commissioners should have known that the \$80,000 figure was inaccurate since the commission has not approved any new programs.

Information on the Veterans’ Services website shows that during the campaign for the millage, supporters, including Keene, promised it would pay to:

- “Increase the number of Benefit Counselors from 3 full time counselors to 4 full time counselors.
- “Increase the number of Drivers from 1 part time staff to 2 part time staff.
- “Provide funding for the addition of a Court Coordinator for the Veterans Treatment Court.
- “Substantially increase outreach to Livingston County Veterans including education of what benefits are available and helping veterans access benefits earned by their service.
- “Provide funding for the creation and assistance of mental health services.
- “Update IT infrastructure.
- “Assist veterans with job placement and resume services.
- “Expand transportation services with the potential purchase of an additional van.”

The van and a part-time driver have been added, but overall the agency has actually reduced staff and the Veterans' Services Committee has resisted implementing the other programs. For example, in April, staff proposed spending \$37,000 to expand mental health services for veterans through a contract with Livingston County Community Mental Health, according to the Committee's minutes. As of early September, it still had not been implemented and committee members were asking that bids be taken from private providers who wouldn't provide the 24-hour service available through CMH.

In May the Veterans Services Committee denied a staff request to replace two counselors who left. The motion failed on a 2-3 vote. The counselors would have made staff available for late hours and weekend events. The committee agreed to replace only one of the two counselors who left.

A full-time court coordinator for the Veterans' Treatment Court was finally approved on Sept. 4 by the County Commission – but that was over the objections of committee members – including Keene and Bruce Hundley.

The other members of the committee are Jim Wallace, Kevin Nagle, and Joe Riker, community liaison for 8<sup>th</sup> District Congressman Mike Bishop.

Committee members also resisted expanding transportation services for veterans, as promised in the campaign for the millage. Minutes of the Nov.16, 2017, meeting say that instead of providing more transportation services for veterans, Keene suggested that the office encourage veterans to use other means of transportation such as LETS, the VA Shuttle, and Uber. "Hansel Keene made light of expanding medical services being offered in Livingston County that may be utilized by some Veterans in the future," the minutes said.

Uber service was not available in the county at the time of the meeting.

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