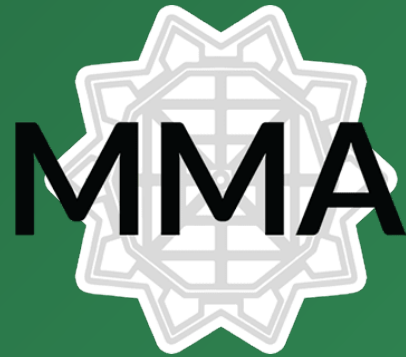


Office of the Veteran Advocate (OVA):

What Municipalities Need to Know



www.mass.gov/OVA





TODAY'S AGENDA

Introduction to the OVA:
Veteran Advocate Bob Notch

Veteran Services in Massachusetts:
Anthony Langone, OVA Communications

Veteran Services at the Local Level:
Eric Segundo, Ludlow Veterans Services Director

OVA Resources for your Municipality:
Anthony Langone, OVA Communications

Closing Remarks and Questions



Introduction to the OVA: Veteran Advocate

(Ret.) Colonel
BOB NOTCH

The Commonwealth's First
Veteran Advocate





Introduction to the OVA: Our Mission and Vision

OUR MISSION:

The Office of the Veteran Advocate (OVA) is dedicated to safeguarding the well-being and upholding the rights of veterans under the care of the Commonwealth. OVA ensures veterans and their families receive compassionate, timely, and effective services while advocating for their rights, benefits, and dignified treatment. We strive to foster collaboration among state agencies, facilitate access to federal and state benefits, and conduct thorough investigations to enhance the quality of care provided to veterans.



OVA Seal



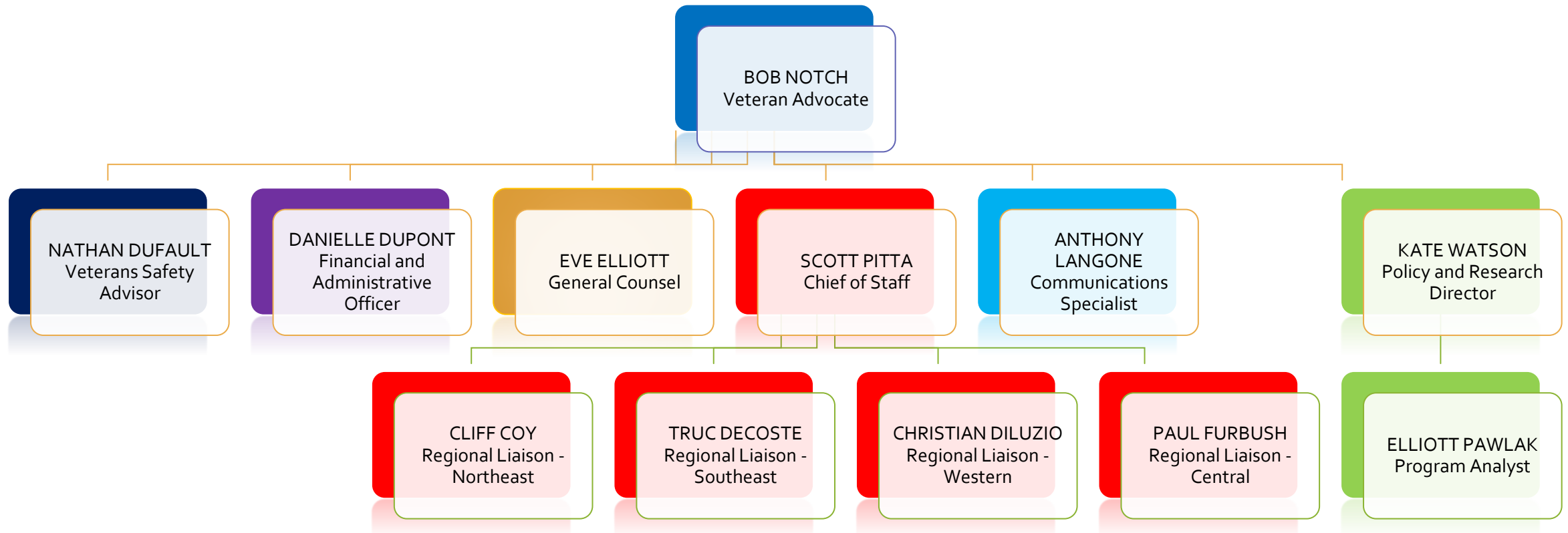
OVA Logo

OUR VISION:

Every veteran in the Commonwealth receives the highest standard of care, enjoys the full spectrum of available benefits, and is treated with unwavering respect and dignity.



Introduction to the OVA: Our Structure





Introduction to the OVA: Logo Meaning

The shield with star and color scheme are reflections of the state seal, unique to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

The shield is also a symbol of protection, representing the OVA goal of protecting veterans and their families.

The gold star also represents care of the surviving family members of those lost during their service or from injuries resulting from their service



These words represent the core values of providing dignity and respect to veterans and their families.

The two upper corners represent the commissioned corps of USPHS and NOAA. Combined with the Armed Services they are Uniformed Services.

The six chevrons represent the branches of the Armed Services – Army, Marine Corps, Navy, Air Force, Space Force and Coast Guard.

The bottom point of the shield represents the families that are foundation of strength and support for our military members and veterans.



Next Up: Veteran Services in Massachusetts

- **REMINDER:** We will be leaving some time at the end to answer them as they are added to the Q&A function at the bottom of your Zoom screen.
- Elliott from our team will be monitoring the chat and the Q&A function for any questions you add throughout the presentation. Additionally, he will be providing some links throughout the presentation.
- We will be briefly covering our website later in the presentation, but as you listen in, please feel free to scan our QR code or visit www.mass.gov/OVA.





Veteran Services in Massachusetts: Mapping the System

VETERAN SERVICES AT THE STATE LEVEL:

- To date, our team has identified **over 200 references to veterans** in Massachusetts General Law (MGL), showing how large the system is.
- While the Executive Office of Veterans Services (EOVS) is the primary benefits and services provider (i.e., *Chapter 115, annuity program*) and tasked with administering training/certification standards for local agents, there are many Executive Offices and departments that administer veteran services programs or benefits.
- Our role as an independent state office is overarching, as we:
 - Review and document the system as a whole
 - Identify gaps in the system and where it is failing,
 - File reports and create recommended policy changes for improved services, and
 - Ensure that veterans in the care of the Commonwealth are treated with dignity, and that our veterans receive all their entitled benefits and services.



Veteran Services in Massachusetts: Federal Agencies

LIAISE WITH FEDERAL AGENCIES:

- Through our federal liaison role, the OVA is tasked with building relationships and coordinating with federal agencies, such as the Department of Defense, the U.S. Department of Labor, and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.
- This also includes the Veterans Benefits Administration, Vet Centers, VA Healthcare Systems, the Massachusetts National Cemetery at Bourne, and the many active, reserve, and National Guard components in Massachusetts.
- While our office serves this liaison role and is familiar with the many federal programs, our staff **does not** complete state, VA, or other federal benefit claims on behalf of veterans and their loved ones but can aid and coordinate.



Veteran Services in Massachusetts: Our Veteran Population

FACTS ON THE COMMONWEALTH'S VETERANS:

- Today, roughly **255,345** veterans call Massachusetts home, making up **3.7%** of our population.
- Based on U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) modeling, the Massachusetts veteran population is **decreasing** by 8,000 veterans per year.
- **Less than 5%** of veterans in Massachusetts are receiving Chapter 115 financial safety net or annuity payments, which are both submitted at the local level.
- In **FY2024**, Massachusetts veterans filed:
 - 35,897 property tax exemptions;
 - 19,394 annuity applications;
 - 4,765 (approx.) Chapter 115 cases (*less than 2% of the MA veteran population*).



Veterans Services in Massachusetts: Districts

VETERANS SERVICES DISTRICTS:

- There are currently **33** Veteran Services Districts in the Commonwealth, with these districts comprising **179 municipalities** (*roughly 51%*).
- These are formed when two or more adjoining towns, or two or more municipalities (*with only one being a city*), vote to create a district to provide veterans' services.
- When communities elect to join a District, they opt to pool resources into a single Veterans Services Department, with District staff serving all veterans and their dependents in the communities that make up one.
- If your community is part of a District, joining one, or if you would like to understand more about them and how they are approved, please connect with our team.



Veterans Services in Massachusetts: Local Veterans Services Agents

LOCAL VETERANS SERVICES AGENTS:

- As a best practice, the OVA firmly believes in the value of each community having a dedicated, local veteran services agent who can provide support and resources directly to their veterans and loved ones within their municipality.
- For the 139 municipalities that individually employ Veterans Services Agents, not all are full-time employees or have support staff on site.
- Additionally, there are 11 identified groups in Massachusetts that are utilizing an adjacent community's veteran services department to assist their veterans.
- With resources spread thin, we remain available to your municipality in our role to assist, aid, and coordinate.



Veterans Services in Massachusetts: Local Veterans Services Agents

GENERAL DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

- The definition of "veterans' benefits and services officer" includes full-time and part-time veterans' agents, directors of veterans' services, county veterans' agents, and the Boston veterans' services commissioner.
- Veterans Services in Massachusetts is designed to be administered locally. By law, Veterans' agents are required to:
 - **Attend mandatory training** for state certification 6 months following their local appointment and annually afterwards;
 - **Maintain confidentiality** while **assisting in completing financial benefit applications** for veterans, widows, and dependents;
 - In each city (except Boston), **serve as the burial agent**;
 - **Investigate claims** to ensure benefits are properly dispersed, and **more**.



Veterans Services in Massachusetts: Local Veterans Services Agents

GENERAL DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES (cont.):

- The statute is broad, with these being only a few examples of their duties.
- While they are agents of the Commonwealth in facilitating state programs and services, veteran services agents and their staff are municipal employees.
- Veteran services agents are the “Swiss army knives” of their community, as they can also do what their municipalities need of them by providing additional support services for their veterans and families.
- Our next speaker does these duties and more for his western Massachusetts community and is the perfect person to speak with our group today on what veteran services looks like at the local level.



Veteran Services at the Local Level: Eric Segundo

Director of Veterans Services
ERIC SEGUNDO

Town of Ludlow





Veteran Services at the Local Level: Eric Segundo

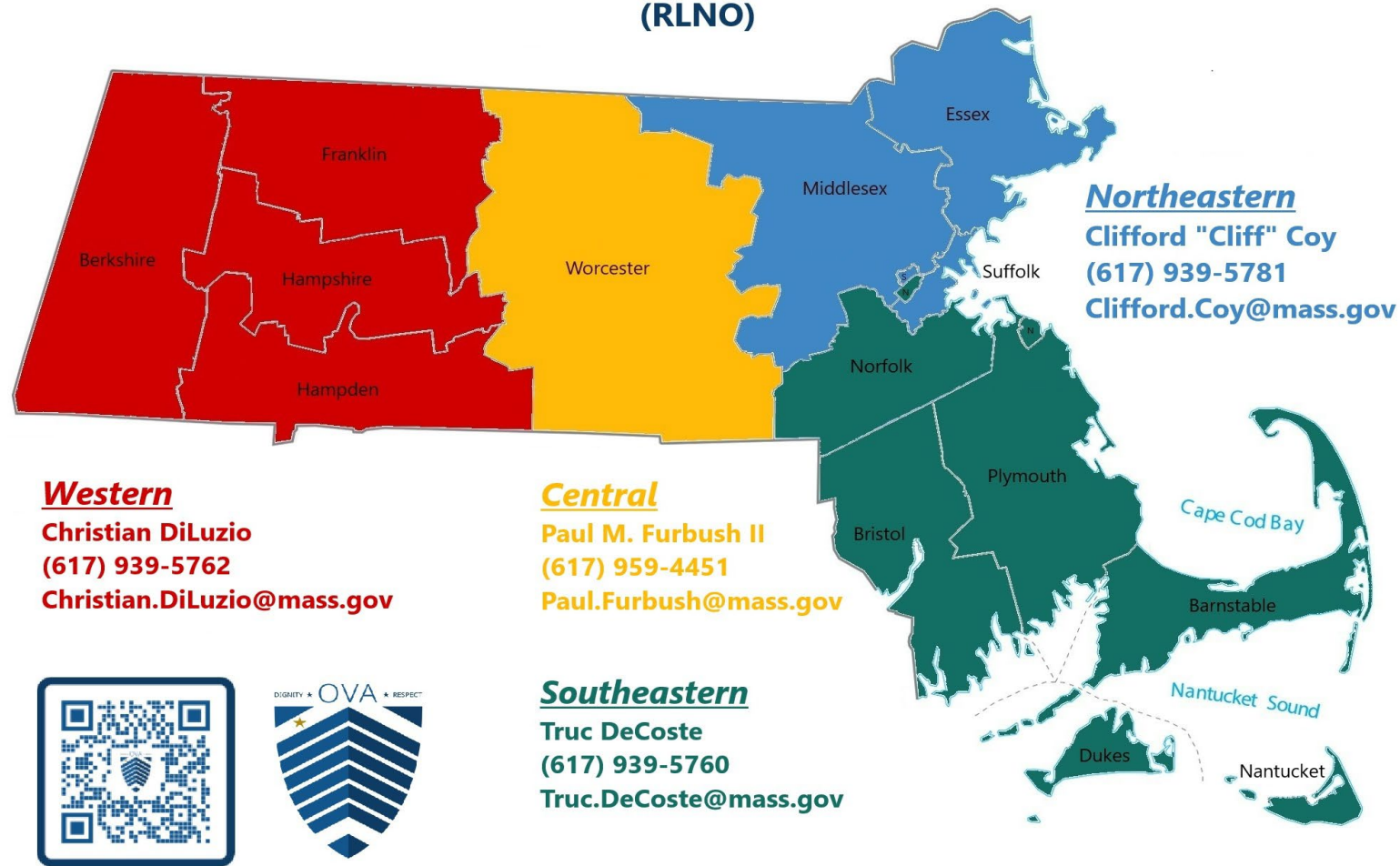


<https://ludlowveterans.us>



OVA Resources for your Municipality: Regional Liaisons

Regional Liaison Officers (RLNO)





OVA Resources for your Municipality: Regional Liaisons

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Our 4 regional liaisons serve as a critical bridge between the OVA and municipalities, primarily through a community's veteran services agent.
- Our liaisons are available as a dedicated state-government point of contact and as a resource for the communities within their areas of responsibility.
- Per statute, our staff can be called upon to liaise with state and federal agencies when a municipality needs assistance, ensuring veterans and their dependents receive the necessary services and benefits they are entitled to.



OVA Resources for your Municipality: Regional Liaisons

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES (cont.):

- For communities looking for more data on their veteran populations, our liaisons can work with and provide localized data sheets to help visualize and understand this information.
- This Value of a Veteran (VoV) data can assist agents and their municipalities in:
 - visualizing their local veteran populations
 - understand the economic value veterans bring to their community, and
 - drive policy decisions (i.e., additional local options through the HERO Act)



OVA Resources for your Municipality: Regional Liaisons



Northeast Region
CLIFF COY

Clifford.Coy@mass.gov



Western Region
CHRISTIAN DILUZIO

Christian.DiLuzio@mass.gov



Southeast Region
TRUC DECOSTE

Truc.DeCoste@mass.gov



Central Region
PAUL FURBUSH

Paul.Furbush@mass.gov

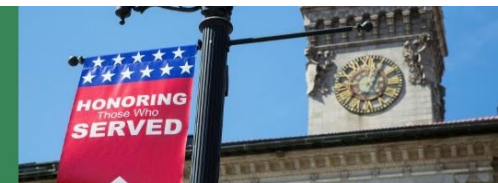


OVA Resources for your Municipality: Our website

 www.mass.gov/OVA

Office of the Veteran Advocate

(OVA)

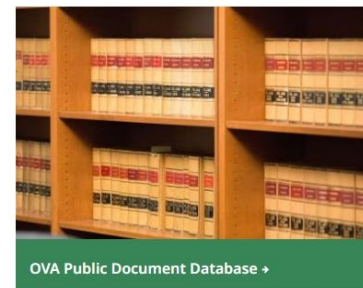


The Office of the Veteran Advocate is an independent state agency tasked with ensuring veterans under the care of the Commonwealth receive dignified treatment and access to all available benefits and services. The OVA works collaboratively with its partners, providing policy recommendations and investigative oversight.

Office of the Veteran Advocate Links



About the OVA +



OVA Public Document Database +



Military, Veteran and Family Resources +



About the OVA +



OVA Databank +



Progress Establishing the OVA +



OVA Resources for your Municipality: Our website

About the OVA

The Office of the Veteran Advocate's foundational elements.



The first of its kind in the nation, the Office of the Veteran Advocate is an independent state office that was established following the appointment of the Commonwealth's first Veteran Advocate, retired Colonel Bob Notch, in November 2023.

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- ✓ [Mission](#)
- ✓ [Core Values](#)
- ✓ [Our Logo](#)
- ✓ [The Team](#)
- ✓ [Statutory Responsibilities](#)
- ✓ [OVA Regulations](#)
- ✓ [Contact](#)



OVA Resources for your Municipality: Our website

Public Document Database

A transparent, public database listing all official Reports, Investigations, Comments, and Written Testimony from the Office of the Veteran Advocate.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- ✓ [Annual Reports](#)
- ✓ [Investigative Reports](#)
- ✓ [Regulations governing the OVA](#)
- ✓ [Regulatory Comments](#)
- ✓ [Written Testimony](#)
- ✓ [Contact](#)



OVA Resources for your Municipality: Our website

Military, Veteran and Family Resources

Links to helpful local, state, and federal resources. Sharing of these resources does not signify endorsement by the Office of the Veteran Advocate.



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- ✓ Local Veteran Resources
- ✓ State Agencies Serving Veterans
- ✓ Federal Agencies Serving Veterans
- ✓ Contact



OVA Resources for your Municipality: Our website

Progress Establishing OVA

A glimpse of the Office of the Veteran Advocate's progress.



Codified in [Massachusetts General Laws, Chapter 144 of the Acts of 2022](#), the Office of the Veteran Advocate was established following the appointment of retired Colonel Bob Notch as the Commonwealth's first Veteran Advocate in November 2023.

The OVA's deliberate plan is to establish a firm foundation while providing value to state, local and federal agencies serving the Commonwealth's veteran community.

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- ✓ [Facilities](#)
- ✓ [Training and Education](#)
- ✓ [Contact](#)



OVA Resources for your Municipality: Our website

OVA Databank

Provided by the Office of Veteran Advocate (OVA), an independent state agency.



The Office of the Veteran Advocate analyzes and distributes public studies and generates data visualization tools related to the veteran population. All analytics utilized by the OVA are sourced from official state and federal agencies, along with private sector organizations.

Visualization tools

[Government Resources Map →](#)

Veteran-Related Studies and Reports

[Massachusetts Studies and Reports →](#)

[National Studies and Reports →](#)



OVA Resources for your Municipality: Our website

View government resources within a given radius of a selected municipality to include Veteran Affairs' hospitals, municipal Veteran Service Offices, and MassHire Career Centers.

OVA
OFFICE OF THE
VETERAN ADVOCATE

Government Resources Map

Category: All

Distance (mi): 30

Federal

Worcester

Worcester VA Clinic
Worcester VA Clinic
403 Belmont Street, 1st Floor, Worcester, Massachusetts 01...
(508) 856-0104
N/A



OVA Resources for your Municipality: How to connect with us

Office of the Veteran Advocate

Connect with the OVA!



www.mass.gov/OVA



OVA@mass.gov



Massachusetts Office of the Veteran Advocate



Massachusetts Office of the Veteran Advocate

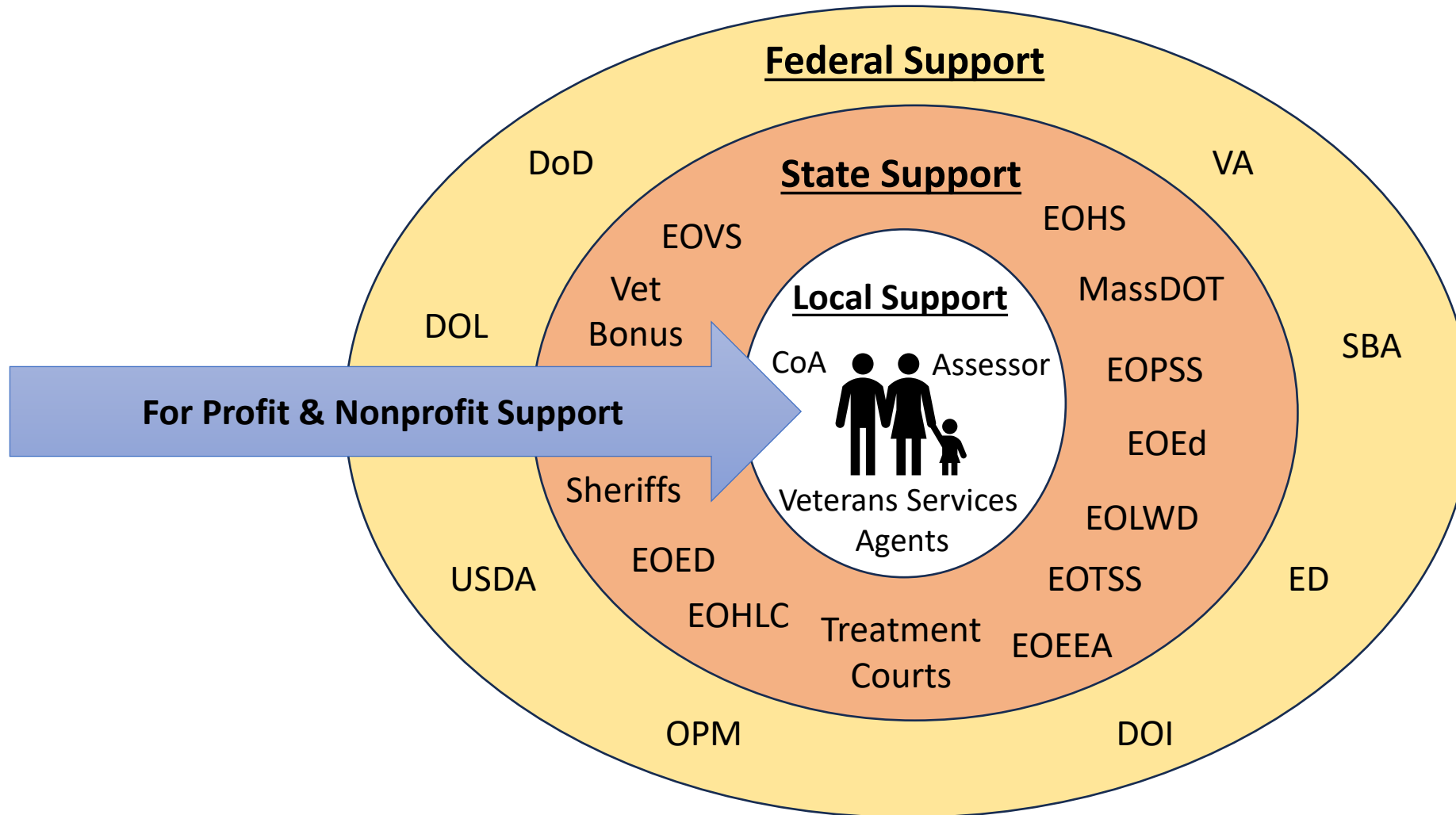


[@Mass_OVA](https://twitter.com/Mass_OVA)





Closing Remarks and Questions: Our Focus and What's Upcoming





Closing Remarks and Questions: FAQ's and Questions

QUESTIONS:

- Addressing some of the frequently asked questions our team has been hearing as we continue to build relationships throughout the Commonwealth.
- Answer some of the questions raised in the webinar Q&A.
 - For any we do not get to during today's webinar, we will answer them in MMA's follow up email to all attendees today.

**Thank you all for
attending!**



OVA@mass.gov

www.mass.gov/OVA

