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CONTACT INFORMATION: To help you obtain information about claims or other needs. **Note: When viewing this handout online, click on any link to view its associated webpage.**

- **VETERANS CRISIS LINE:** Veterans and loved ones can call (800) 273-8255 24/7 and then press 1 with total anonymity to speak to a professional counselor. A Houston Vet Center counselor, [James Bailey](#), is available in Michael Harbaugh's office on Thursdays for veterans and their families. Call Michael's office at (979) 532-1311 for an appointment to see James Bailey.
- **Michael Harbaugh** Wharton County Veterans Service Officer, 1017 N. Alabama Road, Wharton, TX 77488; (979) 532-1311; mike.harbaugh@co.wharton.tx.us; **OFFICE HOURS:** M, TUES, THUR (Wharton), 8:00a.m.-11:30 & 12:00 noon-4:30 p.m.; FRI (Wharton), 8:00a.m.-11:30 noon by appointment only & 12:00 noon-4:30 p.m. (Administrative time); On WED (El Campo library), 9:30 a.m.-4:00 p.m. **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:** Dwight Winkler is at the Wharton office on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 8:00 am till 4:30 pm and lunch from 11:30 till 12:00 pm. **Applications are being accepted for the part-time position.**
- **Vanessa Hicks-Callaway**, ([Congressman Blake Farenthold's Veteran Advocate](#)), (361) 894-6446, Vanessa.Hicks-Callaway@mail.house.gov. **NOTE:** Vanessa Hicks-Callaway will work with you on any other government agency.
- **Matt Minor**, ([Texas State Representative Phil Stephenson's Veteran Advocate](#)), (281) 232-7900, Matt.Minor@house.state.tx.us
- **VA COMPLAINT HOTLINE:** New VA complaint hotline number is (855) 948-2311. Be courteous and be able to answer WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, and WHY about "wrong doing at the VA." [WHITE HOUSE VA HOTLINE!!!](#)
- **NEW VA PHONE NUMBER TO CALL 1-844-698-2311:** This new national toll-free number is a go to source for Veterans and their families who do not know what number to call at the VA. It is identified at the VA as [myVA311](#).
- **Texas Veterans Commission (TVC):** To check on a claim when the TVC is your representative for the claim you have submitted call (713) 383-2756, prompt 1.

1. **WHARTON COUNTY VETERAN SERVICE OFFICER (WCVSO):** The WCVSO is employed by Wharton County and is supervised by the Wharton County Commissioner's Court. The Commissioner's Court is made up of county Judge Phillip Spennath and four Commissioners: Chris King, Richard Zahn, Doug Mathews and Steven Goetsch. **Note: The WCVSO is NOT affiliated with the VA!** The WCVSO is affiliated with the [Texas Veteran Commission \(TVC\)](#) which is one of 38 organizations in Texas that can represent Veterans or family members in the claims process or other processes where the WCVSO helps Veterans and family members obtain benefits and services.

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2. **FREE LEGAL AID:** There is free legal aid at the Wharton County Library one day a month. It is the first Thursday of the month. Please call (979) 849-6464 for additional information. The next few dates are June 7, July 5, August 2, and September 6, 2018.

3. **PAYMENT DATES 2018:** VA compensation benefits are paid one month in arrears. This means that benefits for a particular month are paid the first business day of the next month. When the first business day of the month falls on a non-business day or a holiday, VA benefits will be distributed on the last business day prior to the first of the month.

- May 2018 will be paid on June 1, 2018
- June 2018 will be paid on June 29, 2018
- July 2018 will be paid on August 1, 2018
- August 2018 will be paid on August 31, 2018
- September 2018 will be paid on October 1, 2018
- October 2018 will be paid November 1, 2018
- November 2018 will be paid November 30, 2018
- December 2018 will be paid December 31, 2018

4. **NEW MEDICARE CARD RECEIPT:** The Chapter was informed in June 2017 that new Medicare cards would be arriving in April, 2018. Medicare has said it has started mailing the cards. There are three ways to find out when you should expect your new Medicare card in the mail:

- Check out the map on Medicare.gov/New Card. Check the status of card mailings in Texas. Once card mailings begin in Texas, it will take a month or more to finish.
- Keep an eye on your email. An email update will be sent when new Medicare cards start mailing in Texas.
- Go to MyMedicare.gov to see if your new card has mailed. If you do not have an account you can sign up to the free secure way to access information.

5. **VETERANS CAN HELP:** When the VA decides a claim, or a family member receives a grave marker, or any other decision is reached by the VA, the WCVSO does not receive notification from the VA. The only way the WCVSO finds out about the decision is by communication from the Veteran or family member. The WCVSO has always encouraged the Veteran or family member to let him review the decision. If it is a positive decision, then the WCVSO can inform the Veteran or family member of possible additional benefits. If it is a negative decision, then the WCVSO can possibly appeal the decision or recommend some other type of action. Please bring your VA letter to the WCVSO for a review and possible further action.

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6. **NOTICE OF APPRAISED VALUE 2018:** If you own property, you should have received a 2018 Notice of Appraised Value by now AND your appraised value increased or decreased by more than \$1000 from 2017. If you did not receive a Notice, you should contact your County Central Appraisal District to request a copy. For more information on how to appeal your value, go to the VVA 1069 web site, and click on the "Chapter 1069 VSO." Scroll down to Dwight Winkler's Meeting Handouts and go to May 10, 2017 for the information titled "Appraisal Notice 2017." [CTRL-Click here to view the handout.](#)

7. **DWIGHT'S FINAL HANDOUT:** *For the past almost five years, I have had the pleasure and honor to impart some brief information to the Chapter on benefits and services. I hope that I have been able to give you some information that can help you right now or sometime in the future. The VA is evolving, I feel positively, and will continue to evolve. The direction that the VA is moving is for more and more technology to be presented for Veterans and family members to access and thus less labor intensive processes are being used and less money will be needed to provide the benefits and services. In my opinion, the two main obstacles to benefits and services are politics and the availability of enough money to fund programs. The WCVSO office has also evolved over the past five years. When I began in August 2013 being paid for 16 hours a week, to now having a full time WCVSO and a part-time VSO at 16 hours a week as well as a VA counselor that comes in one day a week on Thursdays. The facilities in 2013 consisted of a 10' by 10' room with a computer and one printer and four old non-lockable non-fireproof file cabinets. Now the facilities consist of three rooms that total to over 600 square feet, three computers and three printers of which two are able to send faxes. One laptop and one printer are used in El Campo on Wednesdays. The office now has three fireproof lockable file cabinets with a fourth will be requested for 2019. The progress in benefits and services is evident by, in my opinion, the more positive response and feeling that Veterans and family members express about the office. Another indicator is that the annual Fiscal Year (FY) VA Expenditures for Wharton County have increased from \$13 million in FY 2013 to almost \$18 million in FY 2016 while the number of Veterans has decreased from 2500 to 2000. It has been my privilege and honor to be a part of the most viable and fun military organization in Wharton County these past five years.*

Thank you and THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE!