



Veterans' Services

# FY26 Budget Hearing

*City Council Ways and Means, Thursday, May 22, 2025 10:00am*



- **Robert Santiago**, Commissioner Veterans Services
  - **Bella Giambusso**, Director of Operations
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To facilitate full and equal participation in all aspects of life by veterans in Boston. We **recognize, advocate** and **engage** with veterans and their families, by connecting them with the services and resources they've earned.

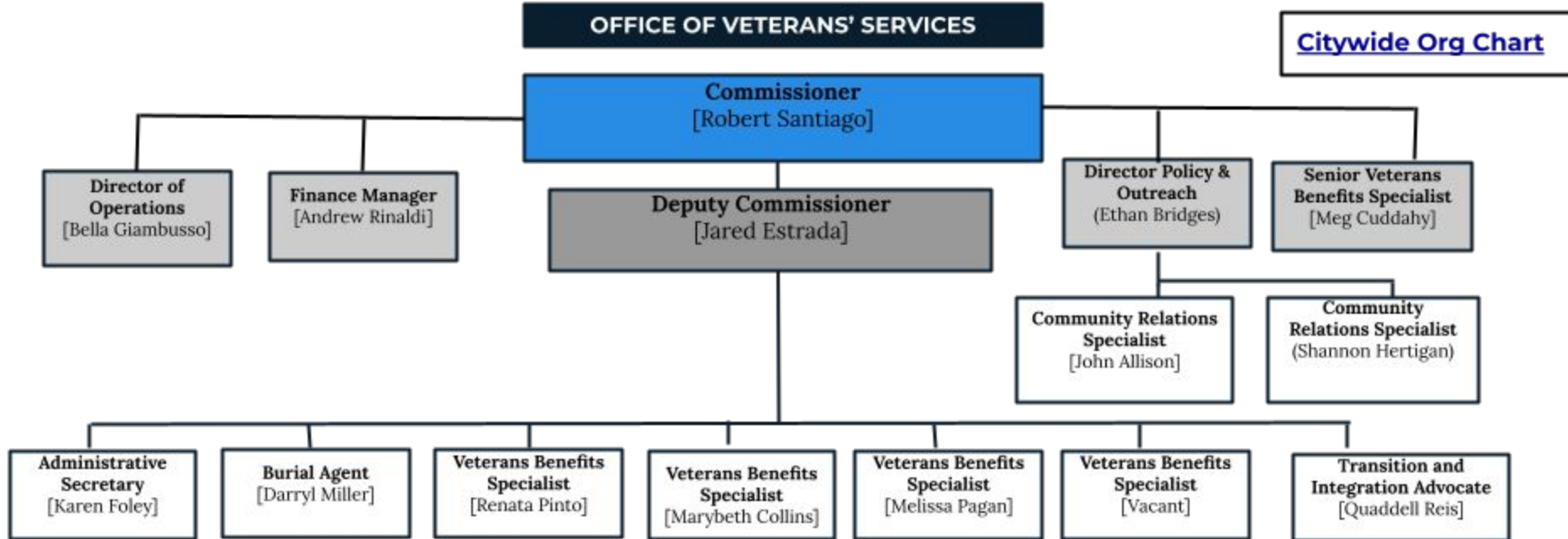
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Continue to find innovative ways of empowering veterans and military family members of Boston to live healthy and thriving lives.

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# Who we are



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# Programs



Is Massachusetts General Law that provides financial assistance for qualifying low-income veterans. Benefits may be one-time or ongoing, based on need. Each town or city in Massachusetts is required to provide a Veterans Service Officer (VSO), as well as a Burial Agent and Graves Officer, to support the needs of the local veterans within their town/city limits.

*90 days of Active Duty, OR  
180 days Active Duty during  
“peacetime”.*

*A widow or widower of a  
veteran is eligible for the  
same benefits as their  
veteran spouse.*

*What a veteran needs or family member to enroll*

- 200% National Poverty Level
- Cash Asset Limits
- DD214
- Proof of Residency
- Proof of Income

# Programs and Services

## Overview



- **Bridge the Gap Program** - Allows Veterans' Services to enhance and expand the office's reach and serve all veterans and their families in Boston. This will create a pathway for opportunities and a better quality of life. This plan allows for an expansion of assistance based on a needs basis and not financial status.
- **Grants Program** - The Mayor's Office of Veterans' Services exists to find innovative ways to support veterans, servicemembers, and their families to live healthy & thriving lives. In recognition of this mission, the office will award grants to organizations that support the veteran community of Boston. Funds will be used to implement projects and programs that support the well-being of the veteran and military community and their families of Boston.

### **In FY25 our Mini-Grant Program received;**

- 43 Applicants
  - Total request - \$428,000
  - Awarded - in process
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# Programs and Services

## Overview- Continued



- **Welcome Home Bonus** - You must have been 6 months domicile in Massachusetts immediately prior to entry into the Armed Forces or prior to activation for Reserve and National Guard personnel. Your discharge must be under honorable conditions (if applying as a Discharged Service Member)
  - **Dept. of Veteran Affairs Compensation and Pension** - Assist veterans in obtaining Federal Veterans Affairs Benefits.
    - VA Services Non-Service Pension
    - VA Aid and Attendance
    - VA Disability Compensation
    - VA Healthcare
  - **Annuity Veteran Benefits** - Is given in recognition of the service of our distinguished 100% service-connected disabled veterans and to the parents of distinguished veterans (Gold Star Parents) and the unmarried Widow/er (Gold Star Wives or Husbands) of distinguished veterans who gave their lives in the service of their country during wartime.
  - **Boston Bullpen Project** - is a non-profit organization that assists any individual with crisis intervention. They have won multiple awards for their non-profit work and have over 50 partners, some which are nationally recognized.
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# Programs and Services

## Overview- Continued



- **Graves Data Program** - measure success by the number of Hero Squares and veterans graves that are imputed into this new data program on a weekly basis.
  - **Memorial Day Flag Planting Program** - The City of Boston's Veterans Services works with local posts and organizations to decorate more than 58,000 graves and 1,300 Hero Squares in Boston.
  - **Hero Squares Program** - Hero Squares in the City of Boston named for service members killed in action. The gold star on each sign represents the ultimate sacrifice that was given and is designated only for those killed in action.
  - **Hero Banner Program** - The Hometown Military Hero Banner Program, established by the Boston Office of Veterans Services (OVS), honors and recognizes local military service members and veterans by displaying commemorative banners throughout the city. This program aims to celebrate the sacrifices and dedication of Boston residents who have served or are serving in the United States Armed Forces.
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HARVEY MILK  
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# Hero Square Program





# Hero Square Program

## ***What is a Hero Square?***

- Military members of the United States Armed Forces who have made the ultimate sacrifice while serving our country and who were residents of Boston at the time of their service are eligible to be honored with a Hero Square.
- These gold star signs serve as a heartfelt tribute to their bravery and sacrifice and recognizes the family.

## ***Applying for a Hero Square?***

- The City of Boston invites families, friends, and community members to apply for a Hero Square to honor these brave individuals.

## ***To initiate the process, please submit:***

- Proposal intake [form](#) or this [link](#) on our website, any available military records to include pictures, new articles, etc,
- Contact information to the Office of Veterans' Services.





# Hero Square Program

## Process



[Intake form](#) is reviewed and approved by the Commissioner

- Request sent for City Council Resolution,
- Request sent to Transportation who will inspect the location, create, and install the Hero Square in the requested neighborhood. They also install biography plaque.
- Gather information and create database for the Servicemember for their dedicated [link](#) on the Veterans' Services website.
- Approximately three weeks to complete.

### **Once installed:**

- Coordinate with the family to establish dedication ceremony date.
- If available an Honor Guard will present colors.
- Veteran Organizations, city officials, and local community are invited to attend.



# Hero Square Program

## *Facts and Figures*



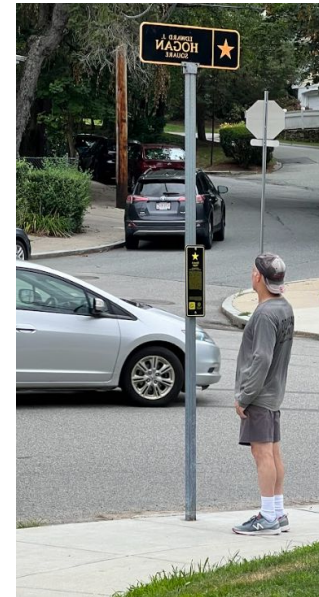
- ★ Over 1300 Hero Squares City of Boston
- ★ Over 200 Biographie Plaques
- ★ Bio Plaques are created by outside vendor
- ★ Office of Veterans Services purchases of more than 1300 wreaths
- ★ 23 organizations such as VFW/AL Posts, JROTC Cadets, and others decorate each Square in the city
- ★ Wreaths are decorated twice a year, May and November
- ★ Squares are located in every Boston neighborhood, usually close to where the service member lived



# A Bio Plaque

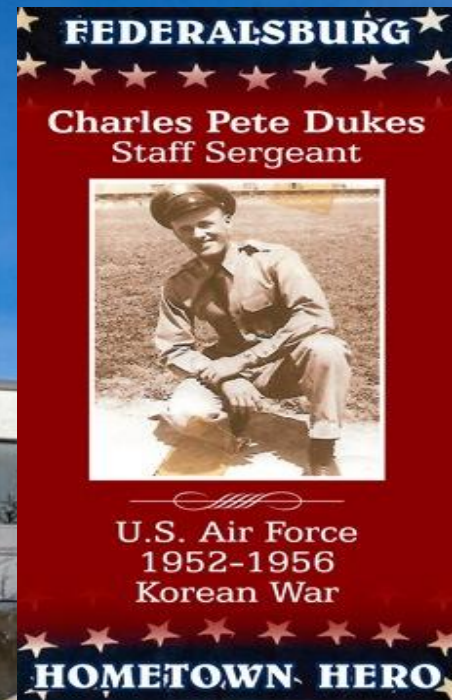
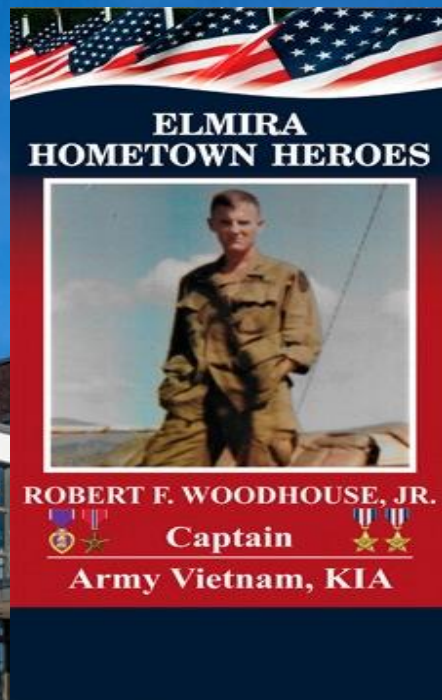
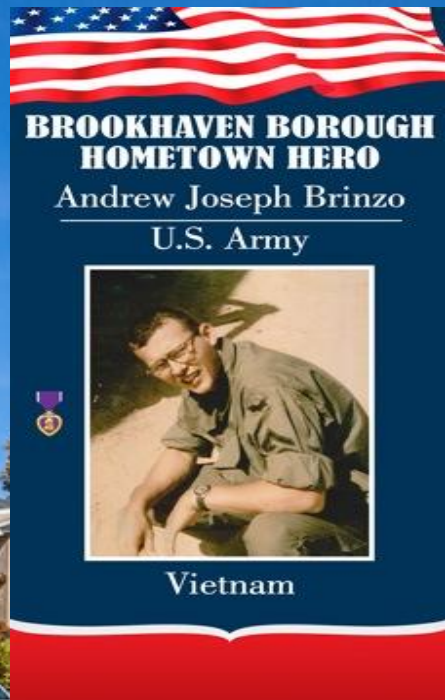


- ★ A biography plaque is a story of the military service and commemorates the sacrifices made by the service member named on the Hero Square.
- ★ Bio plaques give additional information about the service member, encouraging residents to learn more about them and making the squares more impactful.
- ★ Family members can provide us with information of their loved one. Some research normally is required to gather the information for the biography plaque. Bio Plaques are ordered through a vendor and installed by BTD.
- ★ To view the additional information, a QR code is placed on each Bio plaque that takes mobile users to our [website](#) with the documented stories, pictures, or memorabilia.



A resident reads Edward J. Hogan's bio-plaque





# Hero Banner Program



# Hero Banner Program

***Boston's Hometown Hero Banners Program plans to give tribute to recognize and honor those serving or who have served in the United States Armed Forces.***

The Hometown Military Hero Banner Program, established by the Boston Office of Veterans Services (OVS), honors and recognizes local military service members and veterans by displaying commemorative banners throughout the city. This program aims to celebrate the sacrifices and dedication of Boston residents who have served or are serving in the United States Armed Forces.

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# Hero Banner Program

*To qualify for a banner, an individual must meet one of the following criteria:*

- Active Duty Service Members – Currently serving in any branch of the U.S. Armed Forces.
- Veterans – "Veteran," any person whose military service meets the criteria outlined in MGL Ch. 4, Section 7 Clause Forty-third of Section 7, Chapter 4 of Massachusetts law—including certain non-wartime service or campaign medal qualifications—provided their service was credited to Massachusetts or they have resided in the Commonwealth for at least one day.
- Fallen Service Members – Those who have died in service to the nation.

**Residency Requirement:**

- The honoree must be a current or former resident of Boston.
- If the individual is deceased, a family member residing in
- Boston may apply on their behalf.





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# Events & Observances

# OVS Major Observances

**Memorial Month** – A solemn occasion to honor and commemorate those who gave their lives in service and those who have since passed away.

- Graves Decoration
- Hero Square wreaths
- Wreaths at various Memorials
- Various memorial services throughout the City



**Veterans Month** – Recognition, Honoring and Celebration of service to country.

- The Mayor's Veterans Brunch
- Boston Veterans Parade
- City Hall Festival
- Various events throughout the City





# Annual Events

- Veterans and Military Flag Celebrations
- African American Veterans Appreciation Brunch
- Women Veterans Roundtable
- Veterans Welcome Home Brunch
- Gold Star Wives Appreciation Brunch
- PTSD Awareness
- LGBTQ+ Veterans Event
- Gold Star Mothers Appreciation Brunch
- POW/MIA Recognition Ceremony
- Greater Boston Stand Down
- JROTC Scholarship and Awards Program
- Boston Veterans Parade
- Veterans and Military Appreciation Night
- Army/Navy Flag Football Game
- Pearl Harbor Day Commemoration Ceremony



# Upcoming Events

- Memorial Day Flag Decoration and Wreath Laying and supporting Memorial Day events
- Hero Square Dedication Gen. Joseph Warren
- Hero Square Dedication Thomas M Roddy
- Hero Square Dedication William A Roddy
- PTSD Awareness Golf Tournament
- LGBTQ+ WEBINAR
- JROTC Scholarships and Award program
- Veterans Appreciation Cruise / Duck Boat tour
- Gold Star Mothers and Families Brunch
- POW/MIA Recognition Ceremony/ Greater Boston Stand Down
- Boston Veterans Parade
- Veterans and Military Appreciation Night
- Army/ Navy Football Game
- Pearl Harbor Day Ceremony



# Other Standing Observances

- African American Veterans - February
- Women Veterans - March
- Medal of Honor Recognition Day - March
- Vietnam Veterans Day - March
- Gold Star Spouses Day - April
- Beirut Barracks Bombings - April
- Silver Star Banner Day - May
- Military Spouse Appreciation Day - May
- Children of Fallen Patriots Day - May
- Armed Forces Day - May
- D-Day - Allied invasion in Normandy - June
- Flag Day - June
- Army Birthday - June
- National PTSD Awareness day - June



# Other Standing Observances

- Independence Day - **July**
- Korean War Veterans Armistice Day - **July**
- Coast Guard Birthday - **August**
- Purple Heart Day - **August**
- Patriot Day - **September**
- POW/MIA - **September**
- Air Force Birthday - **September**
- Gold Star Mother's and Family Day - **September**
- Navy Birthday - **October**
- Marine Corps Birthday - **November**
- Veterans Day - **November**
- Pearl Harbor Day - **December**
- National Guard Birthday - **December**
- Spaceforce Birthday- **December**
- National Wreaths Across America Day - **December**
- Hero Square dedications and re-dedications - **Various**





**[www.boston.gov/veterans](http://www.boston.gov/veterans)**

***One Stop Shop, For All Things Veterans.***

- Veterans Crisis Hotline
- Apply for Chapter 115
- Apply for VA Compensation and Pension
- Food intake form for veterans experiencing food insecurities
- Sign up for volunteer opportunities
- Resources for Women and LGBTQ+ Veterans
- Latest news such as the PACT Act and MA Hero Act
- Upcoming events
- Hero Square Dedications and Database
- Contact and location information



# Thank you



*Veterans' Services*