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FLORIDA VETERAN HEALTH  
**HEROES**

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**NOVEMBER 2021**

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# MISSION

To protect, promote, and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county and community efforts.

# VISION

To be the healthiest state in the nation.

# VALUES

## INNOVATION

We search for creative solutions and manage resources wisely.

## COLLABORATION

We use teamwork to achieve common goals and solve problems.

## ACCOUNTABILITY

We perform with integrity and respect.

## RESPONSIVENESS

We achieve our mission by serving our customers and engaging our partners.

## EXCELLENCE

We promote quality outcomes through learning and continuous performance improvement.



## A TRIBUTE FROM THE FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

The Florida Department of Health (Department) is committed to serving members and veterans of the United States Armed Forces and their families. The Department is proud that over 1.5 million veterans call Florida home, and our continued goal is to make Florida the most veteran-friendly state in the nation.

Military veterans and their families face many challenges. The Department is committed to supporting our military veterans by offering several licensure support services to qualified military families. One service the Department offers is the Florida Veterans Application for Licensure Online Response (VALOR) process, which provides expedited licensing for honorably discharged veterans and their spouses seeking licensure in all health care professions. Veterans and spouses who apply through the VALOR process receive a waiver of most licensing fees.

The Department offers additional armed forces licensure support, including opportunities for physicians to receive a temporary certificate to practice in areas of critical need, renewal exemptions for active duty service members holding a health care license in Florida, and temporary licensure for spouses of active duty service members who possess a valid license in another state, the District of Columbia, or any possession or territory of the United States. Through these programs, we are creating a veteran-friendly regulatory environment that encourages veterans and their spouses to choose Florida for their health care practice after their discharge from active duty.

**We are thankful for all who serve the people  
of Florida and the United States.**

# INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT THE UNITED STATES ARMED SERVICES



## ARMY

Founded by the Second Continental Congress in 1775, the U.S. Army is the oldest and largest U.S. military service branch. Initially formed to protect the independence of the first 13 colonies under the leadership of then Congressional delegate George Washington, the U.S. Army has evolved and grown from a small militia into the world's premier fighting force.

Twenty-four former United States Presidents have served in the Army or state militias (the modern-day National Guard), including Andrew Jackson, William Henry Harrison, Zachary Taylor, Franklin Pierce, and Dwight D. Eisenhower. Theodore Roosevelt received the Medal of Honor for his famous charge up San Juan Hill and was an Army Colonel.



## NAVY

As the maritime service branch of the United States Armed Forces, the mission of the Navy is to maintain, train, and equip combat-ready naval forces capable of winning wars, deterring aggression, and maintaining freedom of the seas. From an original fleet of six frigates, the various U.S. Navy commands now patrol the globe protecting the American homeland and keeping the arteries of commerce open across the world's oceans.

Presidents John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, and Jimmy Carter all served in the Navy or Naval Reserves. During World War II, George H. W. Bush, a Naval airman, received the Distinguished Flying Cross after his plane was shot down during an attack on a Japanese installation on the island of Chichi Jima. Anchors away!



## AIR FORCE

For over a century, the U.S. Air Force has defended this country in the air, space, and cyberspace. Initially formed as a part of the U.S. Army in 1907, the U.S. Air Force was established as a separate branch of the U.S. Armed Forces on September 18, 1947. With strategic commands across the globe, the U.S. Air Force pursues a mission of global vigilance, global reach, and global power.

In 1947, then-Air Force Capt. Chuck Yeager broke the sound barrier in his Bell X-1 rocket-powered aircraft, opening the door for decades of aviation innovation and exploration, eventually leading to outer space and the landing of a man on the moon.

# INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT THE UNITED STATES ARMED SERVICES



## MARINE CORPS

Trained to improvise, adapt, and overcome all obstacles in all situations, members of the U.S. Marine Corps form the maritime land force branch of the United States Armed Forces. Originally founded on November 10, 1775, as the Continental Marines, the Marine Corps serves as the tip-of-the-spear in rapid deployment operations.

On February 20, 1962, Colonel Glenn piloted the Mercury-Atlas 6 "Friendship 7" spacecraft on the first manned orbital mission of the United States. Launched from Cape Canaveral (later re-named Cape Kennedy), Florida, Glenn's "Friendship 7" completed a successful three-orbit mission around the earth. Semper Fidelis!



## COAST GUARD

The United States Coast Guard is a unique branch of the military responsible for an array of maritime duties, from ensuring safe and lawful commerce to performing rescue missions in severe conditions. Now part of the Department of Homeland Security, the Coast Guard was founded on August 4, 1790, as the United States Revenue-Marine.

Notable "Coasties" include Alex Haley, the acclaimed Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Roots*, astronaut Bruce Melnick who spent 188 days in space over the course of four missions, and golfing legend Arnold Palmer who served as a yeoman in the Coast Guard from 1951-53.



## SPACE FORCE

The U.S. Space Force (USSF) is the military's newest service branch (the first new branch of the armed services in 73 years), with advanced defensive operations on land, in the air, and in orbit. The Space Force maintains the U.S. military's competitive edge in space with specialized training and enhances its capabilities through the acquisition and development of next-generation space-based systems.

The establishment of the USSF resulted from widespread recognition that space was a national security imperative. When combined with the growing threat posed by near-peer competitors in space, it became clear there was a need for a military service focused solely on pursuing superiority in the space domain.

# OUR HEROES



## Christopher Cole, PA-C



Christopher Cole is a Physician Assistant, with Sacred Heart Medical Group/Ascension, in Crestview, Florida. He is the epitome of a Veteran Health Hero. Mr. Cole has been working on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic as the sole Physician Assistant in charge of

a walk-in clinic that averages over 4,000 patients annually. His military and medical training has made him an expert in his field, working collaboratively with physicians to triage, diagnostically work up, and refer urgent patients for proper treatment.

Mr. Cole enlisted in the United States Army in 1992. He initially worked in the Behavioral Science field, working with concussion patients as well as psychological testing. In 1998, he entered the Interservice Physician Assistant Program (IPAP) at the University of Nebraska. He used the IPAP to earn a Master of Science Degree in Physician Assistant Studies. He has also received an Expert Field Medical Badge.

Mr. Cole has used his training for many years working in Special Operations assignments around the world. Some of these assignments have taken him to dangerous places. He has even earned a Bronze Star for Valor for his work in the field. He also has over two years of experience serving as an Officer-In-Charge of a busy, remotely located emergency-urgent care facility that supported thousands of United States Army Ranger Students.

Mr. Cole truly enjoyed teaching and mentoring Special Forces Combat Medics. He is incredibly proud that many of the soldiers he taught have continued their education in Physician Assistant or Medical Schools. Mr. Cole continues to teach Physician Assistant and Nurse Practitioner students from his clinic. He is genuinely passionate about health care, and he feels that his *"giving back"* to the community will encourage many young students to share his love for service.

When Mr. Cole is not working in his clinic, he enjoys spending time outdoors in Northwest Florida. He especially enjoys fishing in the Gulf of Mexico and surrounding waterways. Thank you, Mr. Cole, for all you do! 🇺🇸



# OUR HEROES



## Capt. Jason Comerford, DC



Dr. Comerford is a licensed Chiropractic Physician and owner of Sports Chiropractic Health and Rehab. He is a member of the Florida Chiropractic Association, the Florida Chiropractic Society, and the Vice-Chair of the Board of Chiropractic Medicine. He earned

his bachelor's degree in Psychology from the University of Central Florida and his Doctor of Chiropractic Medicine from Palmer College of Chiropractic.

Dr. Comerford served in the United States Army for 25 years, where he served as a company commander and combat medic. He has a vast amount of training in the Army, such as being an Air Assault Soldier, an expert marksman, and a combat instructor.

In his last assignment in Puerto Rico, he was in charge of emergency medical care and earned several medals, such as the Army Commendation Medal, Achievement Medal, Service Ribbon, Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, and the Air Assault Badge. Of all his accomplishments, Dr. Comerford is most proud that in leading three commands, he has never lost a soldier.

Currently Dr. Comerford is a Veteran's Affairs provider for Chiropractic Care and Rehabilitation.

Dr. Comerford lives on the East Coast of Florida with his three children and wife, who has also served in the military.

Thank you for your continuing service! 



# OUR HEROES



## Capt. Wildyana Lafond, RHMCI, RMFTI



Wildyana Lafond began her Army career in August 2007, as a Human Intelligence Collector, at Fort Lewis, in Washington. In her time at Fort Lewis, she conducted interrogations and debriefings of foreign and domestic clients.

During this posting, Ms. Lafond also conducted research, composed, edited, and reviewed intelligence reports, working her way to supervise the intelligence report writing team.

Ms. Lafond has also served in the Army Reserve, in Tampa, Florida, at the United States Central Command, as an All-Source Intelligence Analyst. In this role, she conducted analytical research and pattern activities to generate threat activities and developed threat analysis by linking multiple intelligence assets in support of targeting operations.

Ms. Lafond is currently a Registered Mental Health Counseling Intern and a Registered Marriage and Family Therapist Intern. She works as a Care Transition Counselor at the James A. Haley Veterans Hospital in Tampa. She specializes in providing individual counseling to veterans with various mental health diagnoses.

During her time at the James A. Haley Veterans Hospital, she has also had the opportunity to work in the Tampa VA Domiciliary. She provided individual and group counseling to homeless veterans in a residential setting.

Ms. Lafond has previously worked as a Family Support Specialist at Gulf Coast Jewish Family and Community Services, teaching parents budgeting skills, daily life skills, organization, and community resource knowledge. She has also worked with the Crisis Center of Tampa Bay as a Suicide Prevention Specialist. In this position, she assisted telephone callers with community resources and suicide prevention.

Ms. Lafond credits her extensive training and practical experience gained in the Army for her successes today. Thank you for your service and dedication! 🇺🇸





# OUR HEROES



## Christine Mueller, DNP, RN, PCCN-K



At the urging of a local recruiter, Ms. Christine Mueller joined the U.S. Army at age 18 and started her path in nursing. She quickly fell in love with the nursing profession. During her time in the Army, Ms. Mueller was an Emergency Room Nurse at Fitzsimons

Army Medical Center in Colorado. After her time in Colorado, she also served as a nurse at Fort Hood in Texas.

Following her service in the Army, Ms. Mueller continued her nursing career as a Cardiac Surgical Nurse, eventually becoming the Nursing Clinical Manager at Memorial Regional Hospital in Hollywood, Florida.

While still devoted to the nursing profession, Ms. Mueller felt she could give back more as a teacher. While working, she earned both a Master of Science in Nursing Education and a Doctorate in Nursing Practice. She became a Professor at Keiser University and is currently the Nursing Program Director, which only took three years to achieve. Ms. Mueller is also a board member for the Florida Board of Nursing, holding the Nurse Educator seat.

The United States Military is the Mueller family business. Ms. Mueller met her husband, also a nurse and Veteran, when she was in the Army. Her daughters are also considering a career in military service. In her spare time, Ms. Mueller enjoys playing the clarinet, singing and is an avid reader.

Thank you, Ms. Mueller, for your military service and your passion for nursing education. 🇺🇸



# LAWS SUPPORTING MILITARY MEMBERS, VETERANS, AND THEIR FAMILIES

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## HEALTH CARE LICENSING SUPPORT SERVICES

The Florida Department of Health is committed to honoring veterans, active duty service members, and families. We are sensitive to the challenge military families face when required to relocate, and we are proud to offer a seamless process that eliminates any financial burden.

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### **Florida Veterans Application for Licensure Online Response System (VALOR)**

If you are a military veteran or the spouse of an active duty service member seeking licensure in a health care profession in Florida, you are eligible for expedited licensure processing. To qualify:

- You must apply for the license either six months before or after your or your spouse's honorable discharge from the United States Armed Forces.
- There is no application fee, licensure fee, or unlicensed activity fee for veterans and spouses of active duty service members who qualify for this license type.

### **Military Veteran Fee Waiver**

If you are a military veteran, you may be eligible for a waiver of all health care professions' initial application and licensure fees. To qualify:

- Your application must be submitted within 60 months of discharge from any United States Armed Forces branches.
- The initial license fee, application fee, and unlicensed activity fee will be waived for veterans returning from active duty service. This waiver does not include examination fees.

### **Temporary Certificate to Practice in an Area of Critical Need**

Active duty service members and military veterans who served at least ten years in the United States Armed Forces may be eligible for a temporary certificate to practice in an area of critical need.

- This certificate limits you to practicing in designated areas of critical need, and it is only available to physicians who have an active, unencumbered license in another jurisdiction of the United States.
- There is no application fee for physicians seeking this certificate. This certificate is limited to physicians who will not receive compensation for their service.

## **Military Platform – Temporary Certificate for Active Duty Military Health Care Practitioners**

Persons serving on active duty in the US Armed Forces and serving in the United States Public Health Service may be eligible for licensure under the Military Platform. The Military Platform is a military training agreement with a non-military health care provider that allows active-duty health care practitioners the opportunity to treat patients admitted to non-military facilities while also allowing them to develop and maintain the technical skills necessary to meet present and future health care needs of the US Armed Forces. To qualify:

- Applicants must be active duty service members and hold a valid license as a health care professional in another state, the District of Columbia, and/or any possession or territory of the United States.
- The license is valid for six months but is renewable with proof of continuing military orders for active duty assignment and evidence of continuation as a military platform participant.

## **Initial Licensure Fee Waiver for Military Spouses**

If you are the spouse of a military veteran, you may be eligible for a waiver of the initial application and licensure fees for most health care professions. To qualify:

- Your application must be submitted within 60 months after your spouse's honorable discharge from any branch of the United States Armed Forces.
- The initial license fee, initial application fee, and initial unlicensed activity fee will be waived for you, provided you apply for licensure within 60 months after your spouse is discharged from any branch of the United States Armed Forces.
- This waiver does not include examination fees.

## **Temporary License for Military Spouses**

As the spouse of an active duty member of the US Armed Forces, you may be eligible to receive a temporary license to practice your health care profession in Florida. The purpose of the temporary license is to allow you the opportunity to work in your respective profession while your spouse is assigned to a duty station in Florida. To qualify:

- Your spouse must be on active duty and assigned to a duty station in Florida. In addition, you must hold a valid license as a health care professional in another state, the District of Columbia, and/or any United States territory or possession.
- The license is valid for one year.

Please Note: If you desire to practice beyond the expiration of the temporary license, you should begin the regular licensing application process as soon as possible.

To apply for a license or learn more about licensing options for veterans, active-duty military members, and their families, visit <http://flhealthsource.gov/valor>.

# LICENSURE RENEWAL PROVISIONS

You may be able to keep your license in good standing and be exempted from certain license renewal provisions if you meet the following criteria:

- You are an active duty member of the US Armed Forces of the United States
- You hold a Florida health care practitioner license in good standing with your profession's administrative board or the Department at the time of your enlistment
- You are entitled to practice or engage in your profession prior to joining the US Armed Forces

If you meet these criteria, your license will be kept in good standing without your having to register, pay renewal fees, or perform any other license maintenance act. This provision remains in effect through the duration of your active duty service and for six months after discharge, provided you are not actively engaged in your licensed profession in the private sector for profit.

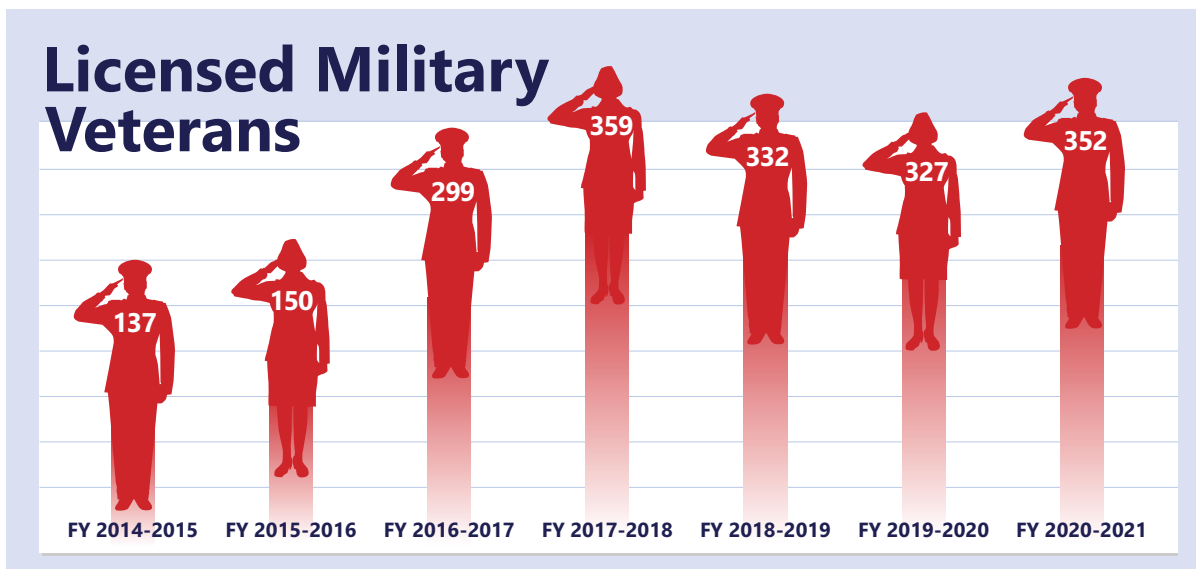
Spouses of members of the Armed Forces of the United States who hold a Florida health care practitioner license in good standing may also be exempted from license renewal provisions, but only in cases of absence from the state because of their spouses' active duty assignment.

## TO OUR MILITARY AND VETERAN COMMUNITY

The Division of Medical Quality Assurance (MQA) seeks to create a veteran-friendly regulatory environment to encourage military service members to choose Florida for their health care practice after active duty. A fee waiver program began in Fiscal Year (FY) 2013-14 to ease most of the financial burden of applying for licensure, and participation has steadily grown.

During the FY 2020-21, 352 military veterans and spouses were licensed through VALOR, a 7.65 percent increase from the FY 2019-20.

VALOR expedites the licensure process and is designed to issue licenses for all qualified initial applicants within one day. MQA is committed to helping ease the transition of military health professionals into civilian life and seeks to encourage them to practice in Florida by making the licensure process one that reflects our gratitude for their service.





## MILITARY AND VETERAN RESOURCES

The Department is pleased to provide the following information on resources for military members, veterans, and their families.

### **Employment/Business:**

#### **Employ Florida Vets**

<https://veteran.employflorida.com/>

#### **Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve**

[www.esgr.mil](http://www.esgr.mil)

#### **Florida State Veterans' Homes Recruitment**

<http://floridavets.org/were-looking-for-you/>  
<http://floridavets.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Were-looking-for-you-tri-fold-brochure.pdf>

#### **Florida Veterans' Business Assistance**

[www.fptac.org](http://www.fptac.org)  
<http://www.floridasbdc.com/>

### **Benefits:**

#### **Florida Veterans' Benefits Guide**

<http://www.bluetoad.com/publication?i=371864>

#### **eBenefits: Gateway to Benefit Information**

<https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits-portal/ebenefits.portal>

#### **Post-9/11 GI Bill and Veteran Education Benefits**

[www.gibill.va.gov](http://www.gibill.va.gov)

#### **Florida Military-Friendly Guide**

<https://www.enterpriseflorida.com/wp-content/uploads/2017-Military-Friendly-Guide.pdf>

### **Veterans' Resources:**

#### **Florida Attorney General's Consumer Protection Military and Veterans Assistance Program (MVAP)**

[www.myfloridalegal.com/MVAP](http://www.myfloridalegal.com/MVAP)

#### **Florida Department of Financial Services -- Financial Frontlines Program**

<http://www.myfloridacfo.com/YMM/FinancialFrontlines/>

#### **Florida Department of Financial Services -- Small Business Program**

<http://www.myfloridacfo.com/YMM/smallBusiness/Default.aspx>

#### **Locate Military Records**

<http://www.archives.gov/veterans/>  
[www.consumerfinance.gov/servicemembers](http://www.consumerfinance.gov/servicemembers)

## Women Veterans:

### Homeless Women Veterans

[http://www.va.gov/homeless/for\\_women\\_veterans.asp](http://www.va.gov/homeless/for_women_veterans.asp)

### VA Center for Women Veterans

<http://www.va.gov/womenvet/>

### VA Hotline on Health Care and Benefits for Women Veterans

[1-855-VA-WOMEN \(1-855-829-6636\)](tel:1-855-VA-WOMEN)

### Women Veterans Health Care

<http://www.womenshealth.va.gov/>

## Agencies, Departments, and Organizations:

### Florida Department of Veterans' Affairs (FDVA)

<http://floridavets.org>

### U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)

[www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)

### Florida Department of Military Affairs

<http://dma.myflorida.com/>

### Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services – Operation Outdoor Freedom

[www.operationoutdoorfreedom.com](http://www.operationoutdoorfreedom.com)

### Florida Defense Alliance

<http://www.floridadefense.org/>

### Florida Defense Support Task Force

<http://www.enterpriseflorida.com/fdstf>

### Florida Veterans Foundation

<https://helpfivets.org>

### Veterans Florida

<http://www.veteransflorida.org/>

### Consumer Financial Protection Bureau Office of Service Members' Affairs

[www.consumerfinance.gov/servicemembers](http://www.consumerfinance.gov/servicemembers)

## General Information:

### MyFlorida.com

<http://www.myflorida.com/>

### Returning Service Members

<http://www.oefoif.va.gov/>

### Florida Military License Plates

<http://www.flhsmv.gov/specialtytags/miltags.html>



# 2022-MILITARY HOLIDAY CALENDAR

## JANUARY

- New Year's Day - 1<sup>st</sup>
- Martin Luther King Jr's Birthday - 17<sup>th</sup>

## FEBRUARY

- Black History Month
- Four Chaplains day - 3<sup>rd</sup>
- USO Birthday - 4<sup>th</sup>
- National Salute to Veteran Patients-  
(Week of February 14<sup>th</sup>)
- Coast Guard Reserve Birthday - 19<sup>th</sup>
- President's Day - 21<sup>st</sup>

## MARCH

- Women's History Month
- Navy Reserve Birthday - 3<sup>rd</sup>
- Seabee Birthday - 5<sup>th</sup>
- K-9 Veterans Day - 13<sup>th</sup>
- American Legion Birthday - 15<sup>th</sup>
- Rosie the Riveter Day - 21<sup>st</sup>
- Medal of Honor Day - 25<sup>th</sup>
- National Vietnam War Veterans Day - 29<sup>th</sup>

## APRIL

- Month of the Military Child
- Military Saves Month
- Gold Star Spouses Day - 5<sup>th</sup>
- National Former POW Recognition Day - 9<sup>th</sup>
- Air Force Reserve Birthday - 14<sup>th</sup>
- Army Reserve Birthday - 23<sup>rd</sup>
- National Military Brats Day - 30<sup>th</sup>

## MAY

- Month of the Military Caregiver
- National Military Appreciation Month
- Public Service Recognition Week (PSRW) -  
(First full week in May)
- Silver Star Service Banner Day - 1<sup>st</sup>
- Military Spouse Appreciation Day - 6<sup>th</sup>
- National Nurses Week - 6-12<sup>th</sup>
- VE Day - 8<sup>th</sup>
- Armed Forces Day - 21<sup>st</sup>
- Memorial Day - 30<sup>th</sup>

## JUNE

- D-Day - 6<sup>th</sup>
- Women Veterans Day - 12<sup>th</sup>
- Army Birthday - 14<sup>th</sup>
- Flag Day - 14<sup>th</sup>
- Coast Guard Auxiliary Birthday - 23<sup>rd</sup>

## JULY

- Independence Day - 4<sup>th</sup>
- National Hire a Veteran Day - 25<sup>th</sup>
- National Korean War  
Veterans Armistice Day - 27<sup>th</sup>

## AUGUST

- Air Force Day - 1<sup>st</sup>
- Coast Guard Day - 4<sup>th</sup>
- Purple Heart Day - 7<sup>th</sup>
- Marine Corps Reserve Birthday - 29<sup>th</sup>

## SEPTEMBER

- National Suicide Prevention Month
- V-J Day - 2<sup>nd</sup>
- Labor Day - 5<sup>th</sup>
- Patriot Day - 11<sup>th</sup>
- National POW/MIA Recognition Day - 16<sup>th</sup>
- Air Force (USAF) Day - 18<sup>th</sup>
- National Air Guard Birthday - 18<sup>th</sup>

## OCTOBER

- Breast Cancer Awareness Month
- Columbus Day- 10<sup>th</sup>
- Navy (USN) Birthday - 13<sup>th</sup>

## NOVEMBER

- National Veterans and Military Family Month
- Warrior Care Month
- National Family Caregivers Month
- Marine Corps Day/Birthday - 10<sup>th</sup>
- Veterans Day - 11<sup>th</sup>
- Armistice/Remembrance Day - 11<sup>th</sup>

## DECEMBER

- Civil Air Patrol (USAF Auxiliary) Birthday - 1<sup>st</sup>
- National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day - 7<sup>th</sup>
- US National Guard Birthday - 13<sup>th</sup>

An American flag with a blue field of white stars and red and white stripes, waving and partially obscured by a gold-colored curved banner.

**We are very proud of our VALOR program,**  
which expedites licensing for military veterans  
and spouses of active duty service members.

The Department also waives initial licensing and application fees for military veterans and their spouses who apply for a health care professional license within 60 months of an honorable discharge. These initiatives help ensure the transition from military service into the workforce is as smooth as possible and reflects our appreciation.





