



COUNTY OF SONOMA

575 ADMINISTRATION
DRIVE, ROOM 102A
SANTA ROSA, CA 95403

SUMMARY REPORT

Agenda Date: 7/14/2026

To: Board of Supervisors

Department or Agency Name: Human Services

Staff Name and Phone Number: Angela Struckmann, 707-565-5800; Mark Orlando, 707-565-5900

Vote Requirement: Majority

Supervisorial District: Countywide

Recommended Action:

Approve the appointment of Brian McKeown as the new Veterans' Remains Officer for a two-year term beginning July 14, 2026, and ending July 31, 2028.

Executive Summary:

The Human Services Department requests that the Board approve the appointment of Brian McKeown to serve as the new Veterans' Remains Officer for a two-year term beginning July 14, 2026, and ending July 31, 2028.

Assembly Bill 1644, signed into law on August 27, 2010, amended California Military and Veterans Code Sections 940-950 and formalized the requirement for each county Board of Supervisors to designate a Veterans' Remains Organization. The proposed action ensures continued compliance with state law and maintains the County's commitment to providing respectful and authorized handling of unclaimed veterans' remains.

Discussion:

In compliance with Assembly Bill (AB) 1644 - Section 942 of the Military and Veterans Code, each county in California is required to have a Veterans' Remains Organization (VRO), ensuring that all unclaimed remains of veterans (formerly only indigent veterans) and veterans' dependents can be identified and designated to a VRO for proper burial. AB 1644 reads as follows:

"The board of supervisors of each county shall designate a veteran of the United States military or a member of a Veterans' Remains Organization (VRO) as defined in Section 951, and who shall cause to be decently interred the body of any veteran or spouse or the eligible dependent of a veteran as defined by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs for compensation purposes who dies in the county. This section shall apply to all indigent, abandoned, or unclaimed veterans and dependents of veterans, including those deceased veterans and dependents of veterans without having sufficient means to defray the expenses of burial, other than moneys paid or due and payable by the United States, pursuant to the World War adjusted compensation act."

Under Section 950 of the Military and Veterans Code, the person appointed shall receive no compensation for any duties they may perform in compliance with this article.

In compliance with AB 1644, Sonoma County has a Veterans' Remains Officer and has been recognized as a

model program. Ron Collier was the past appointee and served in the role since 2012 until his term expired in early 2026, choosing not to seek reappointment at that time.

Per AB 1644 and the Missing in America Project, a volunteer veterans' remains position is required to ensure that the remains of indigent/unclaimed veterans are properly interred in a national or state veterans cemetery.

Mr. Collier's accomplishments while serving as the Veterans' Remains Officer are exceptional and include:

- Over 1000 hours of volunteer time spent serving in the role
- Review of over 800 decedent records retained at local cemeteries and funeral homes
- Collaboration with the Sheriff/Coroner, County Recorder, Vital Statistics and the Public Administrator to provide 267 Veterans and 5 dependents with a final resting place in a national veteran cemetery.

Additionally, Mr. Collier is exceptionally proud of his collaborative effort to identify 17 veterans buried in a local "potter's grave" and provide proper gravestones and military honors ceremonies for these veterans.

In identifying a new Veterans' Remains Officer, there is no formal application process for the position. While searching for a replacement, Veterans Service Officer, Mark Orlando, interviewed Brian McKeown, who was identified as someone interested in the position.

Mr. McKeown is a U.S. Army combat veteran and community leader based in Santa Rosa, California, with a deep commitment to public service and veteran advocacy. He served as an Infantry Team Leader in the United States Army, including assignments with the 10th Mountain Division and 5th Special Forces Group, with deployments to Kosovo and two combat tours in Iraq. He later continued his service as a Readiness Training Non-Commissioned Officer in the California Army National Guard, further strengthening his expertise in leadership, training, and decision-making in high pressure environments.

Following his military service, Mr. McKeown transitioned into operations and nonprofit leadership, dedicating his efforts to supporting veterans at both the local and state levels. He has held leadership roles across multiple organizations, including serving as President and a founding member of the local nonprofit, Keeping Veterans Local. He also served as Mentor Coordinator for the Sonoma County Veterans Court, Vice President of the California Veterans Benefit Fund, and as Commander of local American Veterans and Veterans of Foreign Wars posts in Santa Rosa.

Currently, Mr. McKeown serves as Chairman of the Santa Rosa VA Patient Advisory Board, where he works closely with healthcare leadership to enhance the quality of care and overall experience for veterans. He is actively pursuing his college degree, continuing his commitment to personal and professional growth.

With a background spanning military service, public service, and community engagement, Mr. McKeown is dedicated to strengthening support systems for veterans and building meaningful, lasting connections within his community.

If appointed, Mr. McKeown will receive training from the national director of the "Missing in America Project,"

Agenda Date: 7/14/2026

a qualified VRO, and become a member of the organization. Mr. McKeown will work in collaboration with the Veterans Service Officer, Public Administrator, and Sheriff/Coroner to ensure the unclaimed remains of deceased Sonoma County veterans are properly interred with military honors in a national cemetery.

Mr. McKeown has agreed to be considered for appointment for this two-year term and is recommended for the position by Mark Orlando, Veterans Service Officer.

Prior Board Actions:

Ron Collier was first appointed on January 20, 2012, and has been reappointed every two years up to his current term which expired in early 2026.

FISCAL SUMMARY

Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:

Not Applicable

Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):

Not Applicable

Attachments:

None

Related Items "On File" with the Clerk of the Board:

None