

# Veteran outreach centers in Pennsylvania closing, including Harrisburg site

By [The Associated Press](#)

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Five Pennsylvania centers that help predominantly older veterans in rural areas apply for disability compensation, pensions and health care will close Jan. 1 after nearly 29 years, a state labor spokesman says.

The decision to close all five [Governor's Veterans Outreach and Assistance Center](#) offices was difficult, but necessary given the economy, said Department of Labor and Industry spokesman Troy Thompson. The federally funded program has offices in Boyertown, Erie, Greensburg, Harrisburg and West Pittston and a \$900,000 annual budget.

Thompson said Thursday it duplicated services provided by other agencies, and funding will be redirected to the state's [CareerLink program](#). CareerLink helps job seekers polish resumes and interview skills, apply for financial aid and find academic and job opportunities.

Brian Morris, director of Erie's office, which serves northwestern Pennsylvania, expressed disappointment with the decision. He acknowledged the program duplicates services, but said client numbers demonstrate a need. "Are there more than one accountant in a city? Are there more than one lawyer?" said Morris, 54, an Army veteran who has worked for the program for 24 years.

The Erie office has served about 400 to 600 new clients yearly, about 90 percent of whom are elderly or infirm, he said. Staffers make monthly travels to counties to visit them.

He also disputed the state department's assertion that the program is a referral program that links vets with other service agencies. "Referral is maybe 5 to 10 percent of what we do," he said. "We literally fill out the paperwork." Jim Kroboth, an operations specialist for the Harrisburg office, said going to veterans was a key feature. "We actually sit down with the client, go over the application forms, fill out the applications for them and obtain all the other supporting documents that they need to support the claim," he said. "We monitor the claim from the very beginning to the very end."