



Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services

MEETING MINUTES

FEB 7, 2024, 1:00–2:54 p.m.

NCTC Classroom, Bldg. 8-63, Fort Indiantown Gap

COUNCIL MEMBERS/DESIGNEES IN ATTENDANCE

BG (PA) Maureen H. Weigl, Chairwoman, Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans Affairs	Marc Ferraro, DMVA
Micah Snead, Member at Large	Laurel Harry, Dept. of Corrections
Toshua Jarrett, Member at Large	Tina Kotsalos, Dept. of Banking & Securities
Col (R) Ward Adams, Member at Large	Cheryl Cook, Dept. of Agriculture
Danielle Pierre, Dept. of Health	Kory Auch, Office of Administration
Emily Butler, Dept. of Education	Terrell Martin, DCED
Kevin Atkinson, Dept. of Aging	Kara Templeton, PennDOT
Dan Kuba, Dept. of L&I	Donna Tilley Hess, Dept. of Human Services
Jeffrey Wallace, State Civil Service Commission	Erica Nocho, Dept. of Drug & Alcohol Programs
Tom Edwards, Fish & Boat Commission	Nick Taylor, State Veterans Commission

COUNCIL MEMBERS/DESIGNEES NOT IN ATTENDANCE

Karl Blischke/Jamie Dunlap, PA Council on the Arts	Akbar Hossain/Steve D'Ettorre, Governor's Policy Office
Cindy Dunn/John Hallas, Dept. of Conservation/Nat Resources	James "Woody" Hogan, PWVC

OTHERS PRESENT

Andrew Barnes, DHS	Michael Pipe, Governor's Office
Bill Reed, YWCA of Greater Harrisburg	Tom Cherry, DMVA
Bill Cress, VISN 4	Ryan Erdman, Red Cross
Janette Krolczyk, DMVA	John Noll, DMVA
Tiffany Cleary, DMVA	Taylor Dippery, DMVA
Jen Snyder, DMVA	Angela Watson, DMVA
Patricia Clark, PDA	Elizabeth Cooper, L&I
Norm Marden, OAG	Meg Snead
Billy Lanham, DOL VETS	Keisha Kerr, VISN 4
Jeffrey Wallitsch, DMVA	Ralph Roach, L&I
Michael Carrington, DOC	James Rowland, DHS
Brendan Auman, DCED	Kristi Brawley, PSU
Troy Edwards, DOC	Alanna Caffas, Veterans Health Foundation
Tom Snedden, PDA-PACE	Dan Gruver, DMVA
Crystal Houser, L&I	Leora Appleby, DCED
Justin Schillaci, Fish & Boat	Fred Nardei, VA Pittsburgh
Tammy Ferguson	Matthew Connell, DMVA
Amy Friel Capretto, VISN 4	Zack Portser, DMVA
Ed Cherry, DMVA	Melissa Baxter, DOH

Marilyn Kelly-Cavotta, DMVA	Tara Loew, L&I
Jolene Richardson, 193 SOW	Coren Jagnow, DMVA
Ally Murr, American Legion	Dan Lynch, PA Chiefs of Police Association
Celeste Brucklacher, DOC	Ryan Dysinger, DCNR
Angela Eder, Penn Waver	Tom Applebach, CDVA – Lehigh County
Kathy Silvia, Military Women’s Memorial	Jarrold Kuzmitsky, DMVA
Michael Belcher, DMVA	Chelsea Ellsworth, DMVA
Maria Tagliaferri, DMVA	Lisa Kaye, CDVA- Monroe County
Joann Tresco, Dystech Systems Technology	Jennifer Spitler, DMVA
Jennifer Hagaman, DMVA	Samantha Cossman, DMVA
Joel Mutschler, DMVA	Chris Clark, DMVA
Lana Evans, DMVA	

<p>CALL TO ORDER, INTRODUCTIONS, AND OPENING REMARKS</p>	<p>The Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services (GAC-VS) was called to order at 1:00 p.m.</p> <p>Ms. Janette Krolczyk welcomed everyone joining the hybrid meeting and asked that everyone sign in or send an email to have their attendance counted. She led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance and Moment of Silence.</p> <p>Mr. Ferraro shared his appreciation for everyone joining the meeting, as the state budget cycle is busy for commonwealth agencies. He also explained that DMVA is ready to assist any agency regarding veteran support.</p>
<p>APPROVAL OF NOV 1, 2023, MINUTES</p>	<p>No questions or corrections occurred on the draft minutes. Ms. Donna Hess motioned to approve the minutes, which Mr. Nick Taylor seconded, and all unanimously approved.</p>
<p>YEAR IN REVIEW</p>	<p>Ms. Krolczyk provided a short list of successes accomplished during 2023. After outlining the purpose of the Council, she shared some victories coming from collaborative efforts and headquarters initiatives.</p>
<p>ADVOCATE OF THE QUARTER</p>	<p>Ms. Margo Coleman, DMVA employee and former Chair of the Aging Committee, was recognized as the quarter's veteran advocate for her passion and care of the elderly veteran population.</p>
<p>GUEST SPEAKER VETERANS' TRUST FUND</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr. John Noll addressed the audience and shared how the PA Veterans Trust Fund supports our veteran population through the Veterans Temporary Assistance (VTA) and Grants programs. ▪ Mr. Noll shared the number of veterans assisted in 2023 with VTA funding that prevented worse-case scenarios and applauded the PA Department of Transportation for their collaboration in allowing individuals to donate to the VTF through their motor registration process. These donations provide the most significant contribution to the fund annually.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ms. Kathy Silvia asked about the demographic data regarding the veterans served by the VTA funds last year and about collaborative ideas moving forward. ➤ Mr. Micah Snead asked about the impact of the VTA payments and where the money typically goes to assist recipients. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mr. Noll explained that a recently launched initiative captures details such as county of residence. County Directors of Veterans Affairs confirmed in the audience that VTA payments commonly go towards rent/mortgage. ➤ Mr. Ferraro explained that since fewer donations are coming in, that impacts the amount of money granted to those needing the VTA or competitive grant programs.
<p style="text-align: center;">HOMELESS COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr. Brendan Auman introduced Mr. Jim Rowland as the new co-chair of the committee before briefly covering the committee goals. ▪ The federal VA surpassed its goal of housing 38,000 veterans, with a total of 122%. VISN 4 just missed the goal of having no more than 5% of veterans returning to homelessness, coming in at 5.2%. Of those who returned to homelessness, no less than 90% needed rehousing, and this was successful, with a final rate of 98%. The goal for engaging with unsheltered veterans was 964 for VISN 4, which they surpassed with 1,508 veterans or 156%. ▪ Tunnels to Towers Project is slated to be on 8.5 acres of Harrisburg waterfront property and will include apartments, comfort homes, and a comprehensive supportive service center for veterans. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ms. Hess asked a question regarding the floodplain for this construction project. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mr. Bill Reed confirmed that the location for this project should not be at risk as it is in the 300-year floodplain, so if flooding occurs for this community, the city of Harrisburg would also be flooded. ▪ Mr. Auman commented that the committee wishes to connect with Mr. Rick Hamp, the VA SAMHSA lead for Pennsylvania, on ways to support the veteran suicide awareness programs in motion. ▪ BG (PA) Weigl will invite various connections to an event, viewing a facility outside of Philadelphia called Silver Care.
<p style="text-align: center;">HEALTH PROMOTIONS COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ms. Erica Nocho briefed on a new goal regarding educating others about programs to assist veterans with behavioral and social determinants of health. ▪ Media posts covering various topics and a learning session are coming together. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ms. Lisa Kaye asked where to access the learning session with the named recovery center. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ms. Krolczyk explained that she will share information through the GAC-VS distro lists once the virtual event is finalized. ➤ Ms. Hess shared that UPMC recently presented at a PA CARES meeting regarding integrating veterans services within a health

	<p>system framework, and she will provide Ms. Nocho with the connection.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ms. Nocho explained that high turnover rates hinder veteran-related knowledge and support, and constant communication on resources remains a challenge. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ BG (PA) Weigl asked where to find the social media post information. ➤ Ms. Krolczyk explained that the DMVA communications team will work with sister agency digital directors to share the posts within the Commonwealth agencies once finalized.
<p>EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ms. Crystal Houser greeted the audience and introduced Mr. Kory Auch to present an update on Veterans’ Preference Hiring in PA. ▪ Mr. Auch explained that the percentage of working-aged veterans is decreasing, so veteran hiring is anticipated to decrease. The pool of candidates continues to get smaller, and the median age of the veteran population rests at 65. ▪ Mr. Auch explained that as a hiring authority, the Commonwealth had made progress with increasing the desire to hire veterans over the past 6+ years. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The conversation evolved to depict existing challenges with communication permissions regarding veteran contact lists that some entities or partners possess. Subsequently, DMVA has difficulty reaching large numbers of commonwealth veterans regarding benefits, services, and other information. ▪ Mr. Auch also explained the examples of the Dept. of Corrections and the State Police actively recruiting young members of the National Guard who would not yet qualify for Veterans’ Preference. ▪ Ms. Houser shared how the Disabled Veteran Outreach Program Specialists (DVOPs) and Local Veteran Employment Representatives (LVERs) assist veterans with significant barriers to employment. Last year, over 35,000 veterans were served by these veterans serving veterans through the PA CareerLink® locations. ▪ Ms. Tara Loew explained that a never-ending goal of the Apprenticeship and Training Office (ATO) is to build new-sector apprenticeships, reaching beyond the building trades and manufacturing while serving traditionally underrepresented populations. ▪ Ms. Loew shared how the ATO team will strategically grow sector programs to address the teacher shortage by building a "paraprofessional to certified teacher" template with an accompanying grant. Ms. Loew explained that this pathway would be an excellent option for Pennsylvania's veterans. ▪ Commonwealth employment registered apprenticeships is another area under discussion through the Dept. of Labor and Industry and other agencies. ▪ Mr. Ralph Roach covered an overview of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR). He explained the number of veterans served through their programming over the past three years, with upward trends.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr. Roach said that OVR has 39 veteran representatives who contact other veteran resources across the Commonwealth to assist veterans accessing OVR. These counselors assist one-on-one in creating program plans for the individuals they serve.
<p style="text-align: center;">WOMEN VETERANS COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ms. Elizabeth Cooper provided an overview of committee goals. She explained Ms. Marilyn Kelly-Cavotta would take over as committee chair within the next few months, as she had taken a new position as the Special Advisor for Women and Minority Veterans with DMVA. ▪ Ms. Cooper urged women veterans, or those serving them, to participate in the PA Women Veteran Magazine, compiled by the Women Veterans' Alliance. ▪ Digital Literacy classes are to be scheduled at the Delaware Valley Veterans Home with assistance from AARP. ▪ A live presentation of ritual storytelling occurred on January 30th at the SCI Muncy Veterans Service Unit. The eight-week session began on February 6th, and Ms. Ally Murr will oversee the sessions with the small group of VSU women. ▪ Sharing awareness and resources for those affected by Military Sexual Trauma (MST) remains a consistent effort of the committee. Connecting with county commissioners was discussed as an avenue to share information and spread awareness. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ms. Samantha Cossman asked if the Veterans Homes collected stories from the female veteran residents. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ All six homes will feature women veterans in the PA Women Veterans Magazine. ○ For example, BG (PA) Weigl also mentioned that female veterans can write a collective article about their service and transition to correctional officers.
<p style="text-align: center;">JUDICIARY COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr. Michael Carrington explained the committee goals have remained unchanged except for expanding veteran services to field supervision. The possibility of pilot programs, including veteran caseloads beginning with incarceration and continuing through reentry, exists. ▪ After the regional Veteran Treatment Court (VTC) begins work in March 2024, about half of all PA counties will have VTC access. ▪ Additional veteran service organizations are being processed at multiple SCI locations around the Commonwealth. ▪ Rather than creating a new Veterans Service Unit, the Dept. of Corrections will expand the unit at SCI Mercer, hopefully doubling the population by the end of the year. ▪ Mr. Carrington is hopeful that proposed legislation touching on veterans with PTSD and TBI will help justice-involved veterans at the time of sentencing or through additional treatment options or programs. ▪ Mr. Carrington shared progress working with shelters regarding locations not wanting to accept previously incarcerated individuals. Through resources and supports afforded veterans within the VSUs, shelters have been more understanding and taking of incarcerated veterans reentering society. Mr. Carrington offered his time regarding locations that may be

	<p>resistant, as he would personally provide these contacts with a VSU tour to show how the incarcerated veteran population gets prepared to reenter and bridge this gap.</p>
<p>GOOD OF THE ORDER / CLOSING REMARKS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr. Ferraro introduced Coren Jagnow, the new Diversity, Equity, Belonging, and Inclusion (DEBI) officer for DMVA. ▪ Mr. Snead complimented the GAC-VS 10-year report and appreciated BG (PA) Weigl's comments on the last page, referencing homelessness crossing multiple committees as a complex challenge. He shared a call to action for the Governor's Office to create an Interagency Council on Homelessness. He also shared that veteran homelessness and suicide have both increased, and these require collaborative efforts to counteract. ▪ Mr. Snead also shared weblinks regarding housing and homelessness efforts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> https://www.csh.org/csh-solutions/policy-and-advocacy/pa-interagency-council-end-homelessness/ https://nashp.org/coordinating-state-and-local-resources-state-interagency-councils-on-homelessness/ https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-12-07/high-costs-for-housing-and-care-cloud-retirement-for-us-older-adults ▪ BG (PA) Weigl shared that MG Schindler, adjutant general for Pennsylvania, approved a plan to host a veteran conference for stakeholders this Fall. Members of the GAC-VS will be invited, among others, to hear speakers and engage with workgroups. ▪ BG (PA) Weigl also mentioned starting a veteran employer recognition pathway to honor companies dedicated to hiring veterans within Pennsylvania. ▪ Ms. Krolczyk reminded all participants to check the following resources: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ DMVA website for the approved meeting materials. (www.dmva.pa.gov) ➤ GAC-VS webpage, where individuals can find the 10-year anniversary report. (GAC-VS Report 2023.pdf (pa.gov)) ➤ Veterans Registry is where service members, veterans, family members, and caregivers can sign up for the DMVA Digest. (www.register.dmva.pa.gov).
	<p>Next Meeting:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">May 1st, 2024, 1:00–3:00 p.m.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Dept. of Corrections HQ, 1920 Technology Parkway, Mechanicsburg</p>
<p>ADJOURNMENT</p>	<p>The meeting adjourned at 2:54 p.m.</p>

NEW ACTION ITEMS

#	ACTION	STATUS
1	Mr. Noll will connect with Ms. Silvia and Mr. Snead on data associated with Veterans Temporary Assistance payments from 2023.	Complete
2	Brig Gen (PA) Weigl will connect with various stakeholders on a site visit to Silver Care.	Complete

3	Ms. Krolczyk will connect Secretary Harry of the DOC and Ms. Loew regarding registered apprenticeships.	Complete
4	Ms. Donna Hess will provide contact information on UPMC veteran-specific system integration speakers to Ms. Erica Nocho.	Complete

OLD ACTION ITEMS

#	ACTION	STATUS
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