

**PENNSYLVANIA STATE VETERANS' COMMISSION MEETING**

**Heinz Field**

**100 Art Rooney Avenue**

**Pittsburgh, PA 15212**

**Friday, December 6, 2013 – 1:00 pm**

The State Veterans' Commission (SVC) meeting was called to order by Chairman Brenner. The meeting was opened with an invocation and the recital of the Pledge of Allegiance.

**Remarks by The Adjutant General - MG Wesley E. Craig:**

MG Craig briefed the Commission members on the following topics:

- Pennsylvania National Guard current unit mobilizations and total deployments
- Future Unit Mobilizations
- Overview report on the PA Veterans' Trust Fund Monthly Revenue and Expenditures
- Act 66 Claims / Values Report
- Outreach Engagements

**VISN 4 Report – Ms. Carla Sivek, Deputy Network Director, VISN 4:**

Ms. Sivek briefed the Commission on the following information:

- **VISN 4 Leadership Changes**
  - Mr. Gary Devansky is the Acting Director of VISN 4.
  - Mr. Daniel Hendee is the Director of the Philadelphia VA Medical Center
  - Dr. Enrique Guttin is serving as Acting Director, Wilmington VAMC.
  - Mr. Jeffrey Beiler is serving as Acting Director, Wilkes-Barre VAMC.
- **Telehealth – Virtual Care Programs**
  - VISN 4 is ranked 4th nationally for number of patients enrolled in virtual care programs
  - Seven facilities launched clinical video telehealth to home services. Specialties provided through this program include behavioral health, rehab medicine, and spinal cord injury
  - VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System (VAPHS) developed a Behavioral Health Hub in order to provide expanded mental health services to Veterans across the network.
  - VISN 4 entered into an agreement with Edinboro University and WYOTTECH Vocational School to provide virtual care to over 1,000 Veteran students enrolled at the two schools.

- **Mental Health**
  - Launched a Gun Lock Campaign to provide up to 4 free gun locks to Veterans with upcoming appointments. The intent is to provide all Veterans served by the network the opportunity to request locks, with the hope that this will increase the safety of Veterans and their families.
  - Implementing at least one Behavioral Health Interdisciplinary Program (BHIP) Team at each center to assure ongoing access and continuity of care. The overarching goal is to build interdisciplinary teams who will consistently provide the majority of mental health care for a panel of assigned Veterans.
  
- **Homelessness**
  - VISN 4 is working to identify and close remaining gaps in resources to homeless Veterans.
  - In FY13, VISN 4 served 14% more homeless Veterans than in FY12.
  - The HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program combines Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) rental assistance for homeless Veterans with case management and clinical services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). VA provides these services for participating VA Medical Centers (VAMCs) and community-based outreach clinics. VISN 4 has more than 2,000 HUD-VASH vouchers available. Approximately 80% of them are in use.
  
- **Benefits Claims**
  - VISN 4 collaborates with the Veterans Benefit Administration (VBA) and the Department of Defense (DOD) to help reduce claims backlog by focusing on older claims requiring compensation and pension (C&P) examinations and assuring enough providers are available to complete exams quickly.
  - VISN 4 facilities received 16,708 older claims as of November 4, 2013, and have completed 94% or 15,700 of them.
  - VISN 4 provides on-site C&P Exams at three VBA Regional Offices (Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and Wilmington).
  - Across the network average processing time was maintained at 23 days.
  
- **FY13/14 Budget & NRM Construction**
  - The FY13 budget for VISN 4 was 2.46 billion through September 2013.
  - In FY13 VISN 4 invested over \$140 million in capital improvement projects at the ten facilities and an additional \$82 million in new or replacement equipment.
  - The FY14 budget for FY14 is comparable to last year, with less construction planned

**Review and Approval of October 2013 Meeting Minutes:**

The Commission members reviewed the October 2013 Meeting Minutes. President Neil Appleby made a motion, seconded by Commander Colt Coleman, to approve the October 4, 2013 minutes; the motion carried.

## **OLD BUSINESS:**

### **Office of Policy and Legislative Affairs Update by Mr. Dusty Durand:**

Mr. Durand briefed the Commission on current and proposed legislative priorities as follows:

- **Current Legislative Priorities:**
  - Amputee Paralyzed Veteran Pension
  - Educational Assistance Program (EAP)
  - Military Physician Incentive Program
  - Military Family Relief Assistance - Needs further analysis to clarify some language
  
- **Proposed Legislative Priorities**
  - Motorcycle License Plate
  - Volunteer Behavioral Health
  - Sell/Convey - Hunt/Pine Grove Armories
  - Youth Challenge Program
  
- **Current Legislation of Interest**
  - Education/PA Residency to Military/Veterans
  - Priority Registration for Current Military Service Personnel and Veterans
  - Developing Opportunities in Veterans' Education – DOVE Program
  - Providing for Transfer & Articulation Oversight Committee
  - Local Earned Income Tax for Active Duty Pay
  - Veterans Lottery Game

### **Homes Update by Mr. Andrew Ruscavage:**

Mr. Ruscavage provided the following update.

- The total State Veterans' Homes Occupancy is 89 %.
- The rate for Nursing Care / Dementia Occupancy is 93%.
- Occupancy Rates for Personal Care/Domiciliary beds is 76 %.
- The licensure status in each of the homes was current and in compliance with all legal standards.
- Mr. Ruscavage also announced that Commission members were invited to attend any of the Holiday functions at any of the Veterans' Homes.

### **Emergency Assistance Program – 101 by Mr. Brian Natali:**

Chairman Brenner asked Mr. Natali to provide the Commission with basic briefings on all of the Veterans programs provided under the auspices of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, Office of Veterans Affairs. Mr. Natali stated that he will brief the commission on a different program at each future meeting until all of the programs have been presented.

Mr. Natali then proceeded to brief the Commission on the Emergency Assistance Program, highlighted as follows:

- The Emergency Assistance Program is rooted in Title 51, Chapter 85 of the PA Consolidated Statutes.
- The purpose of the program is to provide temporary financial relief to Veterans, their unmarried surviving spouses and surviving dependants in the event of a financial emergency in need of assistance to provide the necessities of life.
- Outline of Eligibility Requirements
- Outline of Payment Allowances
- Program Statistics

### **Review and Approval of Program Reports by Mr. Brian Natali:**

Mr. Natali presented the following reports to the Commission:

The report for the **Veterans' Emergency Assistance Program** was reviewed. Designee for Commandant, Paul Hastings made a motion, seconded by Designee for Commander Michael Murphy to accept the report as presented. Motion carried.

The report for the **Blind Pension Program** was presented. President Neil Appleby made a motion, seconded by President Tim Cleveland, to accept the report as presented. Motion carried.

The report for the **Paralyzed Pension Program** was reviewed. President Tim Cleveland made a motion, seconded by Member-At-Large Jeannine Botta Guth, to accept the report as presented. Motion carried.

The report for the **Educational Gratuity Program** was reviewed. State Commander Russell Canevari made a motion, seconded by Commander Stanley Rolnik, to accept the report as presented. Motion carried.

The report for the **Disabled Veterans' Real Estate Tax Exemption Program** was reviewed, and the Requests for Waiver to the five acre rule presented. Chairman John Brenner declared the standing motion for the five acre rule. President Tim Cleveland made a motion, seconded by State Commander Russell Canevari to accept the report as presented. The motion carried.

The report for the **Persian Gulf Veterans' Benefit Program** was reviewed. All denied / ineligible applicants were presented to the Commission in their packet. In order to conserve paper a report of all approved applicants was made available through Chairman Brenner for review by Commission Members if desired. Designee for President Robert Cudworth made a motion, seconded by President Tim Cleveland to accept the report as presented. The motion carried.

Requests for exemption from the Five Acre Rule were presented. President Tim Cleveland moved for the standing motion of "no exemption" to be upheld. The motion was seconded by Commander Samuel Blow. The motion carried.

A request for reconsideration of a previous denial of the 5 acre rule was presented to the Commission. President Neil Appleby made a motion to deny the request for reconsideration. This motion was seconded by Commander Colt Coleman. The motion carried.

The report for the Persian Gulf Veterans' Benefit Program was reviewed. Designee for Commander Michael Murphy made a motion to approve the report as presented. The motion was seconded by State Commander Russell Canevari. The motion carried.

The report for the **Military Family Relief Assistance Program** was reviewed. Member-At-Large Jeannine Botta Guth motioned for approval, the motion was seconded by President Tim Cleveland. The motion carried.

The report for **ACT 66 County Offices Report** was reviewed.

### **NEW BUSINESS:**

#### **Pennsylvania War Veterans Council Items (PWVC):**

Mr. Paul Hastings provided a report of the PA War Veterans Council meeting. He informed the Commission that Mr. Robert Gray was appointed as the new Chairman of the PAWVC Legislative Committee. Mr. Hastings also reported that there was a discussion regarding writing letters in support of legislation. Mr. Hastings discussed the desire to see the Global War on Terror Bonus Program moving forward before November.

#### **Hall of Fame Recommendations:**

Hall of Fame packets presented by the Delaware Valley Veterans Home for Edward Benfold, Michael J. Crescenz, John McVeigh and Vincent Malatesta were approved by the Commission.

#### **Veterans Multi Service Center & Education Center Presentation - Mr. Tim Meserve:**

Mr. Tim Meserve gave a briefing regarding the mission and goals of the Veterans Multi Service Center – highlights included:

- **Mission** – To provide services, programs, opportunity and advancement to Veterans of the U.S. military and their families. Headquartered in Philadelphia the organization has recorded over 17,000 homeless Veteran client visits annually
- **Services** include immediate need care, assessment analysis, case management, claims assistance, legal assistance, educational presentations regarding daily living, substance abuse, PTSD, relationships, financial planning and job development/placement
- **Mary E. Walker House** – Funded through VA Grant and Per Diem Program – is a 30 bed transitional facility for homeless female Veterans – 60% of residents have been diagnosed as suffering from military sexual trauma
- **Landing Zone II** – A 95 male bed transitional residence providing housing and a structured supportive environment for homeless male Veterans

- **Supportive Services for Veterans Families Program (SSVF)** - Providing supportive services to very low income Veterans and their families currently experiencing homelessness or are at risk of losing their home. Services include case management, housing counseling, legal support, credit repair, financial planning, and time-limited, temporary financial assistance. Services provided in Philadelphia, Chester, Montgomery and Delaware Counties.
- **Veterans Home Project Supportive Housing** – Provides subsidized housing to 10 honorably discharged homeless Veterans with special needs and a 30% below median income level. The population consists of Veterans who are chronically homeless, physically or mentally disabled or have chronic abuse histories
- **Freedoms Gate Shelter Plus Care Program** – Provides tenant based rental assistance to 30 homeless Veterans with special needs and a 30% below median income level. Services include case management, medical/mental health evaluations, substance abuse need, employability, and achievable service plans.
- **Employment Training** – Courses include
  - Nurse Aide Training
  - Certificate for Apartment Maintenance Training
  - Computer Mini Courses
  - Comp TIA A+ Certification Course
  - ServSafe Food Safety Management Certification Training
  - OSHA Forklift Certification Training
- **Magnum Computer Partnership** – The goal of this partnership is to leverage the in-house computer training with hands on working experience.
- **Camouflage Rhino Thrift Store** – Threefold Mission:
  - Provide space and opportunity to collect items for homeless Veterans
  - Provide temporary jobs for Veterans while they seek long term employment
  - Create a self-sustaining business model for the organization
  - Also enables the organization to provide moving assistance with discounted prices for Veterans
- **Philly Vets Home 2015** – A community-wide effort to end homelessness among Veterans in Philadelphia by December 2015. The Campaign is driven by an unprecedented collaboration between the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development, Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, 2 City offices, the Housing Authority, and 4 non-profit organizations committed to ensuring the success of the mission.
  - Housing 225 Veterans experiencing homelessness in the first 100-days of the initiative and maintaining this rate through December 2015
  - Implementing a coordinated entry process for finding, assessing, and referring homeless Veterans for permanent housing
  - Using best practices of housing Veterans to create a comprehensive approach to ending homelessness among Veterans and ensuring those who need a home most urgently are the top priority
  - Establishment of a Boot Camp Program
  - Using previously homeless Veterans to serve as “Navigators” to help other homeless Veterans navigate through the system

- **How the Commission Can Help:**
  - Donations - One Time Donation or On-going Donation
  - Navigators (Hire veterans)
  - Emergency Shelter/Apartments
  - Job Training
  - Furniture
  - Support PA Boot Camp
  - Replicate our success statewide

**MILITARY TRIBUTE BANNER PROGRAM – Mr. Harry Munson:**

The Military Tribute Banner Program salutes military service members past and present by displaying a 24” x 36” tribute banner depicting a local service member (past or present) to be exhibited in the community between Memorial Day and Veterans Day. The program began in Castle Shannon, PA and has grown substantially into neighboring communities, in parks and along highways. Route 88 displayed 16.7 miles of continuous military banners on telephone poles this past year. Supported by the local community, and the local American Legions and VFW Posts, this program represents a source of pride, and is a wonderful reminder of our Veterans and their sacrifice.

The purpose of appearing before the Commission was to make more Veterans’ organizations aware of the program and to enlist their help in establishing similar programs via their local organizations in communities throughout the Commonwealth. The ultimate goal is to have every community in the Commonwealth participate in this tribute to Pennsylvania service men and women of all branches and announce to the nation that Pennsylvania Honors her Heroes and Supports Her Veterans.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS / GOOD OF THE ORDER:**

- BG Beck announced that Korean War Books were available and being distributed to Veteran’s organizations on a first come, first serve request basis
- Pamphlets and Flyers regarding the Veterans Trust Fund were distributed to Commission Members
- BG Beck passed out Veterans pins to each Committee member
- BG Beck updated the Commission on the status of the Military Drivers License Program

**TIME AND LOCATION OF NEXT MEETING:**

Friday, February 7, 2013, at 10:00 am  
 Arrowheads / Community Club  
 Building 9-65, Fort Indiantown Gap  
 Annville, PA 17003

**ADJOURNMENT:** Chairman Brenner adjourned the meeting at 2:45 pm.

**The following members of the Commission were present:**

MG Wesley E. Craig, The Adjutant General  
 BG Jerry G. Beck, Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans Affairs  
 John Brenner, Chairman, State Veterans Commission  
 Gerald Hawk, Vice-Chairman, State Veterans Commission

Jeannine Botta Guth, Member at Large  
Michael Murphy, Designee for Commander, American Legion  
Neil Appleby, President, Blinded Veterans Association  
Colt Coleman, Commander, AMVETS  
Samuel Blow, Jr. Commander, Disabled American Veterans  
Jim White, Adjutant, Disabled American Veterans  
Harry H. Clark, Jr., Designee for Commander, Military Order of the Purple Heart  
Stanley Rolnik, Commander, Jewish War Veterans  
Paul Hastings, Designee for Commandant, Marine Corps League  
Tim Cleveland, President, State Association of County Directors of Veterans Affairs, Inc.  
Robert Cudworth, Designee for President, Military Officers Association of America  
Thomas W. Haberkorn, President, Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc.  
Chris Fidler, Director, Keystone Paralyzed Veterans of America  
Russell R. Canevari, State Commander, Veterans of Foreign War  
John B. Getz, Jr., State Adjutant, Veterans of Foreign War

**The following members of the Commission were absent:**

Donald McMaster, Commander, Catholic War Veterans  
Harold Gennaria, Commissioner, EMERITUS  
Michael Iacavzzi, Italian American War Veterans  
Dominic DiFrancesco, Member at Large  
William Cleveland, Commander, American Legion  
Kit Watson, Adjutant, American Legion  
William Harris, President Military Officers Association  
Michael Mescavage, Commander, Military Order of the Purple Heart  
Charles Jackson, Adjutant, Military Order of the Purple Heart

**Others present:**

BG Carrelli - DAG-Air  
MAJ McCormick - Aide-De-Camp  
CSM Gundrum - DMVA-JFHQ  
Andrew Ruscavage - DMVA- VA  
Edward Beck - DMVA- VA  
Brian Natali - DMVA-VA  
Dusty Durand – DMVA-LLO  
Cherry, Tom - DMVA-PAO  
Kenney, Sue - DMVA-VA  
Sivek, Carla – Deputy Network Director, VISN 4  
Ficerai, Chico – DMVA Pittsburgh Field Office  
Busovicki, Michael – DMVA Pittsburgh Field Office  
Hofmeister, John – VAPHS VHA  
Wagner, Elizabeth – VAPHS VHA  
Marshall, Carol – Guest  
Saccone, Rick – Veterans Affairs Commission  
Harris, Sean – PA House VA & EP  
Warholo, Michael – CSRC

Baumgarten, Don – CSRC  
Culbertson, Steve – Impact Vets – Phila  
Mesner, Tim – VMSC  
Cress, William – VISN 4  
Adams, Rich – DMVA – SWVC  
Owens, Tim - DMVA Pittsburgh Field Office  
Hawk, Rose – Guest  
Baker, Jerry – South Hills Veterans Honor Guard - SHVHG  
Munson, Harry – Military Tribute Banner Program  
Munson, Tami – Military Tribute Banner Program  
Nomile, John – American Legion, Post 760  
Crowley, Shannon – South Hills Veterans Honor Guard - SHVHG  
Nock, Edward - South Hills Veterans Honor Guard - SHVHG  
Robinson, Edward - South Hills Veterans Honor Guard – SHVHG  
Rolnik, Lana – Guest  
Corfield, Lee – VVA  
Godgins, Larry – VVA  
Gordon, Bruce – Veterans of Foreign Wars  
Brown, Chris – Veterans of Foreign Wars  
Charnesky, Carl – VFW Post 6664  
Albright, Jim – VFW Post 6664  
Allen, Brian – VFW Post 6664  
Guerra, Victor – Pa Air National Guard  
Lomax, Gareth – Corporate Medical LLC  
DeSanti, Carmen – DAV  
Trimble, Gray – Pa Air National Guard

The minutes of this meeting are respectfully submitted by the undersigned.

Jerry G. Beck, Jr.  
BG, USA, Retired  
Deputy Adjutant General  
for Veterans' Affairs