



Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services

MEETING MINUTES

May 11, 2022 1:00-3:12 PM

Dept. of Agriculture, 2301 N. Cameron Street, Harrisburg

COUNCIL MEMBERS/DESIGNEES IN ATTENDANCE

BG (PA) Maureen H. Weigl, Chairwoman, Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans Affairs	Marc Ferraro, DMVA
Tammy Ferguson, Dept. of Corrections	Kory Auch, Office of Administration
Denise Verchimak, Dept. of Education	Jake Derrick, Governor's Policy Office
Dan Kuba, Dept. of Labor & Industry	Terrell Martin, DCED
Kevin Atkinson, Dept. of Aging	Kurt Myers, PennDOT
Micah Snead, Member at Large	Toshua Jarrett, Member at Large
Meg Snead, Dept. of Human Services	Cheryl Cook, Dept. of Agriculture
Col (R) Ward Adams, Member at Large	Jeff Geibel, Dept. of Drug & Alcohol Programs

COUNCIL MEMBERS/DESIGNEES NOT IN ATTENDANCE

Nick Taylor, State Veterans Commission	Keara Klinepeter/Judy Mahoney- Dept. of Health
Jeffrey Wallace, State Civil Service Commission	Jamie Dunlap, PA Council on the Arts
Christine Kotsalos, Dept. of Banking & Securities	John Hallas, DCNR
Tim Schaeffer/Tom Burrell, Fish & Boat Comm.	James "Woody" Hogan, PWVC

OTHERS PRESENT

Ana Arcs, DHS	Brendan Auman, DCED
Margo Coleman, DMVA	Joshua Scheinberg, Dept. of Agriculture
Angela Lowry, AOPC	Ralph Roach, L&I
Nick Haller, VISN 4	Michael Carrington, Dept. of Corrections
Jillian Rodgers	Janette Krolczyk, DMVA
Greg Fry, DMVA	Tiffany Cleary, DMVA
Joan Nissley, DMVA	John Schwartz, Center for Combatting Elder Financial Abuse
Bill Reed, YWCA	Leora Appleby, DCED
Elizabeth Cooper, DVOP Franklin/Adams Co	Kristi Brawley, PSU
Donna Tilley Hess, DHS, OMHSAS	Nicholas "Chip" Gilliland, DMVA
Jonathan Bowman, DHS, OLTL	Erin Walters, PDA
Laura Maggiorini, VMC	Chris Grill, Geisinger
Crystal Houser, L&I	Erica Nocho, DDAP
Lana Evans	Brian Natali, DMVA
Kathy Silvia, Military Women's Memorial	Troy Edwards, DOC
Seth Benge, DMVA, PPL	Samantha Cossman, DMVA
Craig Swineford, DMVA	Norm Marden, Office of Attorney General
Jen Hagaman, CDVA Clinton County	Fred Nardei, Pittsburgh VA
Kristi Brawley, PSU	Erica Moore, DMVA
Cam Richardson	Chelsea Ellsworth, DMVA
Elizabeth McCloud, PHEAA	Dan Dudkiewicz, DMVA

Angel McLaughlin, YWCA	Jennifer Spitler, DMVA
Hayley Miller, VLP of Western PA	Joel Mutschler, DMVA
Jillian Rodgers	Sam Estrada, DMVA
Bill Cress, VISN 4	James Stafford, DMVA
Lisa Grayson, PA Bar Association	Danny Osten, CDVA Cumberland County
Sierra Bilous, DHS, OMHSAS	Tom Applebach, CDVA Lehigh County

<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 PM.</p> <p>Ms. Janette Krolczyk welcomed everyone for joining the hybrid meeting and asked everyone to 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>Seated members or designees at the table introduced themselves, followed by opening remarks from The Adjutant General's Designee, Mr. Ferraro. Mr. Ferraro explained that MG Schindler expressed his appreciation for all the work in progress relating to the commonwealth's veteran population. They look forward to new initiatives and strategies to assist this population as a new fiscal year is about to begin.</p> <p>BG (PA), and Chairwoman, Maureen Weigl addressed the Council and expressed her excitement about working with all members on veterans' issues. General Weigl mentioned that she has consistently traveled around the commonwealth to meet with agencies and organizations represented on the Council and beyond who are engaging with veterans and running outstanding programs to assist veterans. The upcoming Tele-Town Hall focusing on aging was referenced, as it was scheduled for May 18th.</p> <p>General Weigl also highlighted the two things that set Pennsylvania apart from most other states: our PA VETConnect program and our GAC-VS. General DMVA updates included COVID instances in some of the veteran homes and the staffing concerns as there are not enough nurses and other staff to care for additional residents yet, causing long waiting lists for the facilities.</p>
<p>APPROVAL OF FEBRUARY 2, 2022 MINUTES</p>	<p>No questions or corrections were noted on the draft minutes. Ms. Cheryl Cook made a motion to approve the minutes, which Mr. Kory Auch seconded and unanimously approved.</p>
<p>AGING COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ms. Margo Coleman shared the main committee goals of increasing awareness of services and supports and safeguarding aging veterans from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and self-harm. ▪ Ms. Coleman explained that the committee mantra is "knowledge is power," so resources identified to assist older veterans will be shared widely in any way possible. One resource was the Adult Protective Service Toolkit, generated by DHS.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ms. Coleman also shared connections with Tech Owl: Assistive Technology Act program and Papa Pals are being established. The annual Pension Poaching Awareness Campaign will deploy in June for the second year.
<p style="text-align: center;">HOMELESS COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr. Brendan Auman thanked Mr. Micah Snead for his willingness to help lead the committee as a Co-Chair. ▪ Committee goals and initiatives focused on training and information sharing of available programs and coordination with the Aging, Judiciary, and Women Veterans Committees. ▪ Mr. Auman provided background on the Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG), the HOME-ARP, and the Community Services Block Grants (CSBG). DCED’s allocation plan for the HOME-ARP grant should be completed by the end of May and submitted to HUD for approval. ▪ The Point-in-Time Counts done annually are never a complete picture of homelessness but a guide to help those assisting with this challenge. ▪ General challenges remain consistent regarding lack of shelter capacity, affordable housing availability, and the challenges within the CoCs Coordinated Entry System for all veterans. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Kathy Silvia asked what would qualify a veteran for the grants mentioned and would they be available to men and women. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mr. Auman explained that, especially for the Emergency Solutions Grant, funds are available to men and women who qualify for HUD's definition of homelessness, which is divided into a few categories. ➤ Mr. Kory Auch asked if any other homeless data existed beyond the PIT count data referenced. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mr. Auman explained that HUD has previous years’ data to show trends. ○ Brig. Gen. (PA) Weigl also explained that OVA generated a white paper on this topic, and she would share it with him for awareness. ○ Mr. Snead also shared the importance of understanding the geographic coverage gaps of a PIT count, especially for large CoCs. ➤ Mr. Jake Derrick stated that directing funds into specific areas may be challenging and technical assistance may be needed. ➤ Mr. Snead added that challenges exist in knowing how to apply for and expend these grant dollars, and many groups do not have the qualifications to engage in this process. He stated that if the commonwealth took on the grantee's role, they could find sub-recipients in areas where there are coverage gaps. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mr. Auman shared that the DCED team is available to assist in any way and that there are regional grantees who can take on sub-recipients at that level to help with this challenge.

**EDUCATION,
EMPLOYMENT,
WORKFORCE
DEVELOPMENT
COMMITTEE**

- Ms. Crystal Houser shared that her Director (Dan Kuba) is now the L&I designee set to represent the Secretary on the GAC-VS. She is very excited by the additional leadership support.
- Ms. Denise Verchimak updated the group on the GI Bill. She explained that her division works with about 400 active facilities at any given time, although there are 685 facilities in Pennsylvania. Only 12 people work in this division, so this small group works very hard to ensure beneficiaries can obtain their educational benefits.
- Ms. Verchimak also explained that the risk-based surveys would begin later this year, and that means facilities will have follow-ups after they have been approved to ensure proper implementation of the GI Bill benefits. Training for this shift will occur before the survey process becomes effective in October.
- Challenges revolve around the implementation of the new legislation.
 - Mr. Snead asked if there was a budget request for more staff for this division.
 - Ms. Verchimak explained that although her division is within the Dept. of Education, this team is funded through the VA. There was no request for any type of increase to her division to her knowledge.
- Ms. Elizabeth McCloud briefed on the EAP and the MFEP programs. DMVA receives the appropriation to fund these programs. However, PHEAA works closely together to administer the programs on behalf of the commonwealth. These two entities have worked together to generate an online application process.
- The PA State Grant Program is the flagship needs-based program administered by PHEAA since the 1960s. Students can apply using the FAFSA form. For the most recently completed award year, about 1,500 veterans received grants through this program.
- The PA-TIP usually assists students attending business or technical schools in specific fields, including the recent addition of Health professions, which are now the most popular programs of study. Approximately 50 veterans received awards for the most recently completed award year.
 - Brig. Gen. (PA) Weigl asked if the PA-TIP and the GI Bill could be used together. She also explained that many students had plans to attend Syracuse University through conversations with students at the Valley Forge Military College because there would be no cost for those cadets. There is room to brainstorm how to keep these students in PA moving forward.
 - Ms. McCloud wanted to verify the answer regarding the possible concurrent use of PA-TIP and the GI Bill and would be in touch.
 - Mr. Snead asked if the SSVF providers were aware of the PA-TIP and programs that would assist individuals who are receiving rental assistance and would therefore have the most significant number of barriers to thriving in PA.

- Mr. Bill Reed explained that the SSFV providers work closely with the HVRP program under the Dept. of Labor that works explicitly with homeless veterans. The HVRP providers work directly with the CareerLink locations and would be aware of these state programs.
- Brig. Gen. (PA) Weigl also asked how the communication functioned regarding the GI Bill.
 - Ms. Verchimak explained that a letter is mailed to individuals separating from the military on behalf of the governor. The communication includes information on how to use the GI Bill.
- Mr. Auch asked if any schools have raised concerns over the federal requirements of programs.
 - Ms. Verchimak explained that she does hear about many institutions that cannot keep up with the federal requirements and approval process to participate in the GI Bill program or enough students to make the process worthwhile to continue.
 - Ms. McCloud also mentioned that there had been a 25% drop in the number of students applying for financial aid for the past few years.
 - Mr. Dan Kuba also mentioned that L&I put together a statement of work discussing the FAFSA application to ensure all PA CareerLink staff were familiar with that process. Mr. Kuba heard that PA was eligible for \$12 billion in FAFSA funding each year, but PA was only pulling in about \$3-4 billion.
- Brig. Gen. (PA) Weigl also mentioned that the EAP was a great program, and it would be great to model an EAP program for nurses where their schooling can be paid for with the understanding that they owe the state a certain number of years of service. Creative solutions must be considered as obtaining nursing staff is very difficult.
 - Mr. Osten also commented that programs are needed to help bridge LPNs to RNs.
- Mr. Dan Osten asked if the decline in FAFSA applications could be related to new graduates going into trades, apprenticeships, or CDL programs.
 - Ms. McCloud stated that where PHEAA saw the most significant decline in applications is students who had applied to participate in post-secondary educational institutions in a previous year but are not renewing their applications. Students are leaving their academic programs and not completing a degree. In these cases, the statistics show that students are highly unlikely to drop out and ever return for completion later.
 - Ms. Lisa Grayson commented on the number of college students taking mental health breaks in their education

	<p>due to the trauma of isolation incurred from COVID lockdowns during the height of the pandemic.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Mr. Kuba stated that L&I put out a grant during the pandemic around "near completers," as many individuals who experienced layoffs did have some college experience. About \$5 million was targeted to Philadelphia, Lehigh Valley, and the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton region for individuals to use the time to finish a degree, diploma, or certificate. However, it proved to be a struggle to get individuals back into the school environment.
<p>WOMEN VETERANS COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ms. Elizabeth Cooper explained her new role as the Committee Chair and briefed on some of the current goals. She mentioned that a sub-grant of the HVRP program is the HFVWWF (Homeless Female Veterans and Veterans With Families) program. This sub-grant needs to be applied for separately but offers job training, counseling, placement services, job readiness, literacy and skills training, and childcare. This program is used to expedite the reintegration of homeless women veterans and homeless veterans with children into the labor force. ▪ Ms. Cooper knows Ms. Bruchlacker from SCI Muncy (the women's prison), who serves as the Veteran Service Unit manager. Ms. Bruchlacker has been instrumental in the Victory Garden established at this VSU. ▪ The SCI Muncy VSU programming offers trauma-informed care, core curriculum, seeking safety, weekly reentry programming, health and wellness, PTSD, and MST programming. The majority of all programming is also peer-facilitated. ▪ Ms. Bruchlacker will also undergo training through the Women Veterans Network (WoVeN) to provide specialized counseling to her unit veterans. This training can be completed in a 6-week or 8-week scheduled course and is entirely free. ▪ Ms. Cooper shared two "anchors" from the Anchors of Hope statistics from a VA suicide prevention training. Anchor 3 explained the decrease in the adjusted suicide rate for veterans from 2018 to 2019, which was 7%. Anchor 4 stated a nearly 13% one-year unadjusted rate decrease for women veterans, representing the largest rate decrease for women veterans in 17 years. ▪ The committee will draft a letter to the women veterans honored by the PA Commission for Women. The goal will be to engage with women veterans interested in undertaking the WoVeN training to become peer support leaders. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Brig. Gen. (PA) Weigl asked how intense the WoVeN training is and if it was offered online. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ms. Cooper explained that the 6-week course would include sessions twice a week, and the 8-week course would include one session a week. The sessions are 1.5 hours each, and the group meets virtually or in person, depending on the interest.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ms. Cooper explained that WoVeN is a wonderful resource as it caters specifically to women veterans. The committee hopes to have at least one woman veteran trained through the WoVeN program in each county as a long-term goal.
<p style="text-align: center;">JUDICIARY COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr. Michael Carrington briefed on the current committee goals and added that it would be a great benefit to have an established Social Worker at each of the VSUs in the future. DOC leadership will strategize how this could be solidified moving forward. ▪ The DOC is planning a Veteran Employee Symposium that will complement the PA State Employee Military Service Recognition Campaign to ensure that the veteran employees have access to resources to meet their needs. ▪ A new classification tool will be tested at the DOC later this year and include veteran-specific questions. ▪ Mr. Carrington complimented Mr. Troy Edwards on his work on creating uniform guidelines and procedures across all five Veteran Service Unit facilities. ▪ As one of the DOC challenges remains pandemic restrictions, Mr. Carrington discussed trying to get the capability of live-streaming speakers or experts that visit so all veterans can benefit from the resources available. ▪ The committee is slowly learning about the Criminal Justice Advisory Boards (CJABs) and how conversations can occur with critical individuals when referencing the expansion of veteran courts or other diversionary programs. ▪ Mr. Carrington expressed the DOC challenges with the agency apprenticeship program, utilizing the GI Bill. What once worked seamlessly has become more challenging. SCI training coordinators would benefit from any assistance in making the process as smooth as possible. ▪ Mr. Carrington highlighted the challenges of hard-to-place reentrants who do not have a conditional plan. He used an example of an offender who may be a model inmate but could not be released on parole as there may not be a conditional plan for where that individual would live. However, once an individual spends one day homeless, that individual would qualify for many different benefits and supports. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Mr. Auman explained that HUD is currently looking into changing the definition of homelessness, specifically referencing incarcerated individuals. More information may be available later this year. ➤ Mr. Snead stated that CSG might be able to help think about funding sources. https://csgjusticecenter.org/states/pennsylvania/ ▪ Mr. Carrington explained the value that Mr. Edwards brings to the DOC, so he was recognized as the Veteran of the Quarter. Brig. Gen. (PA) Weigl was very impressed with how Mr. Edwards is involved with his veteran population at SCI Dallas and his contributions to standardizing the VSUs. She also mentioned the importance of individuals like Mr.

	<p>Edwards believing in the veteran members sentenced to life. Those individuals serve as mentors to the veterans who will be released. They are integral to the success of the programs within the VSUs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr. Edwards expressed his absolute passion for serving veteran inmates and employees. He mentioned that veteran suicide is one crucial area that needs attention, among all the others that he tackles with pride. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ms. Verchimak asked how Mr. Edwards could double the veteran population at the Dallas VSU during this past quarter. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mr. Edwards explained that showing up every day, being consistent, and allowing inmate resources to return to the facilities regularly proves to the inmates that the staff cares about their futures and reentry processes.
<p>GUEST SPEAKER</p> <p>JOHN SCHWARTZ CENTER FOR COMBATING ELDER FINANCIAL ABUSE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr. John Schwartz, President and Founder of the Center for Combatting Elder Financial Abuse, addressed how he is committed to helping protect the older veterans in PA. After retiring from the FBI, Mr. Schwartz established his 501(c)(3) organization, where he continues to research efforts on combatting elder financial abuse. ▪ The Center studies the most and least successful predators, and Mr. Schwartz provided an example of each during his presentation. ▪ Mr. Schwartz is now working with West Chester University. A senior Criminology student will be conducting a practicum with the Center this summer by studying various cases of elder financial abuse. Identifying patterns is integral to determining when a criminal may strike, which is a beneficial opportunity. ▪ A local example from Lebanon, PA, showcased a couple that owned a UPS store identified a possible scam on an older man. The woman took it upon herself to contact the older man's grandson to ensure that no wrongdoing was underway and identified that the grandfather was about to be scammed by sending \$12,000 to an unidentified individual. The couple from the article explained that this type of scam is unfortunately common. ▪ Mr. Schwartz highlighted the Education tab on his website, where articles specifically apply to protecting veterans from pension poachers. His organization's website is: www.endefa.org.
<p>GUEST SPEAKER</p> <p>SETH BENGE DMVA POLICY OFFICE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr. Bengé explained the draft Executive Order that will be proposed through the Governor's Policy Office. The purpose of the EO would be to assist in attaining data on Service Members, Veterans, and their Families (SMVF) from the agencies listed on the GAC-VS to generate a report every two years. Mr. Bengé also explained that legislators might ask about the number of veterans specific policies or changes will affect or the cost that may be associated with policies affecting the veterans in particular instances. In certain cases, DMVA may not have an awareness of accurate numbers that would assist in appropriate decision-making instances.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr. Bengé explained the full proposal and explained that state agency Council members would be provided with a draft to review and provide feedback.
NEW BUSINESS/ GOOD OF THE ORDER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mr. Jake Derrick referenced some items in the budget proposal that would assist veterans and thanked everyone for their efforts on this Council. Ms. Krolczyk reminded all participants to check the DMVA website (www.dmva.pa.gov), where the approved meeting minutes and full slide deck will be available. Ms. Krolczyk also reminded all service members, veterans, family members, and caregivers to sign up for the Veterans Registry (www.register.dmva.pa.gov). Individuals can opt-in to the DMVA digest, the weekly publication filled with beneficial information.
	<p>Next Meeting: August 10, 2022 1:00-3:00PM NCTC Classroom, Bldg. 8-63, Fort Indiantown Gap</p>
ADJOURNMENT	The meeting adjourned at 3:12 PM.

NEW ACTION ITEMS

#	ACTION	STATUS
1	Janette Krolczyk to share the press release regarding PA VETConnect winning the Abraham Lincoln Pillar of Excellence Award in the June GAC-VS monthly blast.	Completed
2	Brig. Gen. (PA) Weigl to share the white paper on homelessness with Kory Auch.	Completed
3	Janette Krolczyk to connect Brig. Gen. (PA) Weigl and Elizabeth McCloud from PHEAA.	Completed
4	Janette Krolczyk to share the WoVeN resource link in the June GAC-VS monthly blast.	Completed
5	Janette Krolczyk to send the draft EO to the state agencies of the GAC-VS for review and feedback.	Completed

OLD ACTION ITEMS

#	ACTION	STATUS
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