

Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services
Governor's Residence
2035 North Front Street
Harrisburg, PA 17102
November 13, 2017
MEETING MINUTES

1. **Call to Order:** Maj. Gen. (Ret) Eric Weller, Chairman, called the Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans' Services to order at 3:03PM.

- Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance led by Belinda Albright.

2. **Introductions:** The following Council Members, Representatives, designees and others were present:

Maj. Gen. (Ret) Eric Weller, Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans' Affairs - Chairman
Mr. Ed Burris, State Veterans' Commission - Co-Chairman
Maj. Gen. Anthony Carrelli, The Adjutant General Pennsylvania National Guard
COL Ward Adams - Member at Large
Ms. Crystal Petery-Sherman - DMVA, Office of Veterans' Affairs
Ms. Janette Krolczyk - DMVA, Office of Veterans' Affairs
Mr. Brian Natali - DMVA, Office of Veterans' Affairs
Mr. Rick Hamp - DMVA, Office of Veterans' Affairs
Dr. Donald Danser - Lebanon VA Medical Center
Ms. Tawny Mummah - Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs
Ms. Jodi Skiles - Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs
Ms. Samantha Cossman - Department of Aging
Mr. Cory Bender - DMVA, Office of Veterans' Affairs
Mr. Chris Kemmerer - Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
Mr. James Fearn - Department of Aging, Office of Long Term Living
Mr. Eric Felty - DMVA, Information Technology
Mr. Tim Irvin - DMVA, Information Technology
Ms. Dee McPherson - DMVA, Office of Administration
Mr. Kit Watson - American Legion
Mr. Leo Dunn - PA Board of Probation and Parole
Mr. Richard Podguski - PA Board of Probation and Parole
Ms. Christine Hawk - Department of Education
Ms. Donna Hess - Department of Human Services, Office of Mental Health Substance Abuse Svs.
Mr. Robert Rounce - Department of Health
Ms. Shirley Moore Smeal - Department of Corrections
Mr. Ryan Yoder - Department of Corrections
Mr. Michael Woody - Job Advocate
Ms. Shallyn Harmon - Job Advocate
Ms. Lisa Kaye - Monroe County Director of Veterans' Affairs
Mr. Thomas Applebach - Lehigh County Director of Veterans' Affairs
Ms. Jodi Zucco - Office of Attorney General
Ms. Constance Snavelly - State Veterans' Commission
Mr. Korvin Auch - Office of Administration
Ms. Belinda Albright - Northumberland County of Veterans' Affairs
Lt. Rose Brandberg - PA Army National Guard
Mr. Mark Todero - PA Army National Guard

Dr. Angela Keen - VA VISN4
Mr. Steven Wolf - Department of Labor and Industry
Mr. Ruben Pachay - Department of Labor and Industry
Ms. Sandra Patterson - Office of Administration, Health and Human Services Delivery Center
Sister Nancy DeCesare, PhD - Chestnut Hill College
Mr. Jerry Oleksiak - Department of Labor and Industry
Ms. Cheryl Cook - Department of Agriculture
Mr. Scott Sheely - Department of Agriculture
Mr. Marcus Brown - PA Office of Homeland Security
Mr. Dusty Durand - DMVA, Policy and Legislative Affairs
Mr. Joel Mutschler - DMVA, Policy and Legislative Affairs
Ms. Karen Herrling - Department of Human Services
Maj. Jerry Smith - PA National Guard
Ms. Tara Breitsprecher - Department of Human Services
Ms. Sherry Peters - Department of Human Services, Office of Mental Health Substance Abuse Svcs.
Mr. Carl Feldman - Department of Human Services, Policy
Mr. Frederick Nardei, Jr. - U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs
Mr. Noe Ortega - Department of Education
Ms. Teresa Miller - Department of Human Services
Ms. Joan Nissley - DMVA, Office of Public Affairs
Ms. Callie McKeon - Governor's Policy Office

3. **Old Business:**

- **Review and Approval of August 16, 2017 Meeting Minutes**
- **Committee Updates:**

➤ **Aging Committee:** Ms. Samantha Cossman, Co-chair briefed the Committee on their focus area of expanding the PA Link initiatives for aging Veterans. In September 2017, PA Link held one of their monthly webinars where there were approximately 90 participants from a multitude of community providers (i.e. Area Agencies on Aging, healthcare and disability providers). In October, members of the Aging Network educated the accredited Veteran Service Officers (VSOs) at their yearly training conference on the APPRISE Program and provided the Benefits and Rights for Older Pennsylvanians handbook to all attendees of the conference. For Veterans Day, the PA Link sent out a Veterans Day message to 6,300 email contact which explained how to get in touch with the County Directors for Veterans' Affairs and the importance of working with an accredited VSO.

In the effort to further expand PA Link initiatives, the Committee is looking to create a template which could be used across the Commonwealth to expand opportunities for aging Veterans, their families and caregivers. How can any Pennsylvania state department or program, that is not a traditional Veteran program, connect to the state Veterans' Homes and any Veteran Service Organization? The example she provided is how Chris Kemmerer with the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Bureau of State Parks has provided information on state parks to the American Legion, the Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs, the transition assistance advisors, family assistance centers so that they can be put into publications. The idea is to raise awareness of what the parks offer while increasing Veteran attendance at events and also increase Veteran volunteer base at the state parks. While the example given relates to state parks, any agency or department could be interchanged for what they have to offer and how they can get that information out. The Committee would appreciate feedback on any publications in print or electronic that could be added to the list for distribution of information which would be valuable to Veterans.

The Aging Committee has partnered with the Health and Behavioral Service Committee to tackle the homelessness issue; they have had teleconferences and been able to get connected with various subject matter experts to tackle Veteran homelessness.

- **Education, Employment and Workforce Development Committee:** Mr. Ruben Pachay, Chair presented that the committee took a look at what each department has to offer and how they can link those services and programs to shared customers. The Department of Labor & Industry has 58 PA Career Link offices in the Commonwealth each having 300 staff members that are mandated to provide a priority of services to Veterans. The Department of Military and Veteran Affairs Resource Guide was distributed to those Career Link offices so that they have an idea of what is available to Veterans. The Committee is hoping to plan an expo as one of their future endeavors.

Questions/Comments: Mr. Ed Burris asked what the plan is for the Veterans in rural areas, who will no longer have access to those PA Career Link offices because they are closing. Mr. Pachay pointed out that the state does not own those offices so although it is not a state decision to close those offices, Labor and Industry is working with the local partners to ensure satellite offices are set up so that Veterans and dislocated employees receive what is offered. They work with local libraries, local career and technology centers, and possibly Department of Transportation licensing centers to maintain a presence in those rural areas.

Ms. Donna Hess asked if Veterans are able to use their GI for apprenticeship programs. Mr. Pachay answered that they can in fact use their GI bill and in addition workforce funds can be leveraged in the Veterans' training. Ms. Christine Hawk also commented that Department of Education is the approving agency who approve the programs that Vets can use their GI Bill benefits while in an apprenticeship or on the job training. Mr. Scott Sheely added that many new apprenticeships are competency based where they can receive credit for previous competencies; for example a four year apprenticeship can become a two year apprenticeship because of past experience which can save them money. Mr. Pachay referenced the military translator on the Job Gateway site of Labor and Industry which matches up the transferrable skills to civilian workforce.

- **Health and Behavioral Service Committee:** Mr. Rick Hamp, Chair informed the council that the Aging and the Health and Behavioral Services Committees held a joint meeting at which they came to the determination to focus on the issue of housing/homelessness. Next steps for this initiative is to solidify key stakeholder/subject matter experts' involvement, develop the vision, goals, and identifying community and non-governmental partners.

Mr. Hamp provided updates on the 4 Veteran Centric Fairweather Lodges in the state to include the impending new lodge in Lackawanna County. The Lebanon County Lodge just opened and is ready to house veterans there.

Mr. Rick Hamp also updated that the funding for 4 Mental Health First Aid classes funded by OMHSAS and have been expended by November; these classes are still in high demand and Lehigh County recognized the value of them and funded a class on 23 October which trained 40 people. The Veterans Resource Coalition of Lackawanna County has stepped up to

sponsor Applied Suicide Intervention Training (ASIST) classes which is the next level of Mental Health First Aid classes.

Questions/Comments: None at this time

- **Women Veteran Committee:** Ms. Jodi Zucco, Chair provided a reiteration of the committee mission: to identify the issues of unique concern to Pennsylvania's 60,000 women veterans. Once they identify the issues, they will take a look at the shortfalls in the services that may exist and make proposals to create programs to address them. The primary impediment of accomplishing initiatives has been getting feedback on what the unique needs of Pennsylvania women veterans actually are. To overcome this challenge the Committee has come up with three courses of action to include a questionnaire, town hall meetings, and supplementing both of those with academic research. The questionnaire and town hall meetings would be most illuminating on the issues that Commonwealth female veterans face due to the research not being PA specific and the findings being inconsistent and vague. At this point the questionnaire is undergoing edits and they hope to have the questions and concerns with recommended edits resolved so that there will be more to report in the near future. The town hall meetings would be a forum for information sharing (i.e. benefits and services that are available) but also information gathering to help them get an idea on what the unique needs of PA female veterans actually are. These meetings are in the planning phases but the Committee is looking to team up with DMVA to host the first one in Central PA in the next couple months.

Questions/Comments: Mr. Ed Burris asked if the Women's Committee is considering dividing the state up geographically to hold the town hall meetings. Ms. Zucco answered that the committee does acknowledge the concerns that the more rural areas be reached. The committee would like to start off with a meeting in the Carlisle area as a test pilot of the meetings then try to plan meetings regionally.

- **Judiciary Committee:** Mr. Ryan Yoder, Chair gave an overview of what the Judiciary Committee has been working on. The committee attended the Veteran Court Conference at Widener Law hosted by the Lieutenant Governor's Task Force. They discussed the key factors that often hinder veterans: Post-Traumatic Stress (PTS), mental health issues, substance abuse, and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and how they are helping veteran court participants through these types of issues. The Judiciary Committee also had the opportunity to brief the Pennsylvania Prison Wardens' Association about the Veteran Services Units (VSUs) in the State Correctional Facilities. This has opened up communication among Mr. Yoder and several county prisons. He has been able to meet with officials from Adams and York County Prisons on how the State Correctional Facilities have their VSUs set up so that veterans in the county prisons can benefit from similar programs.

Questions/Comments: Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Weller commented on the success of the VSUs and how the recidivism rates are significantly lower than that of the general population inmates. Mr. Yoder asked Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Weller to describe how he felt during his visit to the VSU in Houtzdale. Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Weller mentioned that he was shocked to see females being able to walk freely and safely throughout the unit, how inquisitive and disciplined the inmates were, and how clean the facility is.

- **Office of Administration/Information Technology Committee:** Ms. Sandra Patterson, Chair brief the council that the committee is in its infancy and is still adding members to support the initiatives. These initiative include enhancing the current DMVA Veterans'

Registry and creating a Commonwealth repository of discharge documents where all departments who utilize discharge documents in order to assist veterans would be able to share the data. The concept is that veterans would have a one-stop shop within the Commonwealth. Barriers at this point include the unknown funding for 2018-2019 to substantiate the plans and what the repository will be referred as. Next steps include continuing to add to the cross-agency committee which should be done by year end. At that point the committee will be asked to approve the project charter which lays out what the steps will be to get a start on their initiatives.

Questions/Comments: None at this time.

- **Suicide Prevention-Peer (SPPEER) Committee:** Mr. Rick Hamp, Chair presented that the Suicide Prevention-Peer Committee is comprised of several subject matter experts on suicide prevention because the issue is bigger than any one department. The committee has representation from the military side of the house, as well as state agencies, and VA Healthcare system. The committee is focused on what the next steps are and how to address the emerging needs of each geographic area. To do so, they have established working groups which include “Training and Education”, “Community Awareness and Communication”, and “Prevention and Treatment Services and Strategies”. Mr. Hamp provided some statistics which support that on a national level, Pennsylvania is an anomaly because we have a higher number of ideations and completions of suicide over the last 3 years.

Questions/Comments: Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Weller asked what the national average of suicides per day at this point are. Mr. Hamp stated that current studies show it is 21.

4. **New Business:**

Questions/Comments: Mr. Scott Sheely mentioned that one of the great partnerships that have been made over the last few years is honoring Veterans and their families at the Pennsylvania Farm Show. This year Veteran and Military Family Day at the Farm Show will be on January 11, 2018.

Mr. Kit Watson reiterated that although the GAC-VS Resource Guide provides a listing of what state agencies offer Veterans, there is much more out there that is not listed (i.e. a county specific event). Maj. Gen. Anthony Carrelli asked if that is something that could be populated through the Network of Care. The Network of Care website has an option to specifically search for resources by county or zip code. The difficulty is connecting Veterans who could benefit from the services that various organizations have to offer.

Mr. Michael Woody is looking to work with the various agencies to help advocate veterans starting their own businesses. The VA has a self-employment benefit available which many veterans may not know exist or how to go about applying for.

5. **Governor Tom Wolf's Arrival:**

Maj. Gen. Anthony Carrelli briefed Governor Tom Wolf on each of the Governor's Advisory Council for Veteran Services Committees and their initiatives. Governor Wolf expressed his appreciation to everyone who

participates in the Council for the work that is done to help Pennsylvania's Veterans.

6. **Next Meeting Date:** Wednesday, February 21 from 1:00PM to 3:00PM, at Arrowhead's Community Club, Fort Indiantown Gap.
7. **Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 5:04PM

The minutes of this meeting are respectfully submitted by: Crystal Petery-Sherman,
Administrative Officer, OVA