

Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services
Building 9-65, Arrowheads Community Club
Fort Indiantown Gap
Annville, PA 17003

August 15, 2018
MEETING MINUTES

1. **Call to Order:** Ms. Crystal Petery, called the Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans' Services to order at 1:00PM.

- Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance led by Brian Natali.
- Introduction of the Council was conducted.

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

Ms. Jodi Skiles - Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs
Ms. Christine Hawk - Department of Education
Mr. Ryan Yoder - Department of Corrections
Mr. William Otis - PA Board of Probation and Parole
COL (Ret) H. Ward Adams - Member at Large
Mr. Rick Hamp - DMVA, Office of Veterans' Affairs
Maj. Gen. (Ret) Eric Weller, Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans' Affairs - Chairman
Ms. Crystal Petery - DMVA, Office of Veterans' Affairs
Mr. Eric Darling - Valhalla Veterans Services
Mr. Brian Natali - DMVA, Office of Veterans' Affairs
Ms. Katie Johnson - PA National Guard, Transition Assistance Advisor
Ms. Samantha Cossman - Department of Aging
Mr. Terry Stokes - PA VFW, Veteran Court Advocate
Mr. Tim Irvin - DMVA, Information Technology
Mr. Eric Felty - DMVA, Information Technology
Mr. James Fearn - Department of Aging, Office of Long Term Living
Ms. Belinda Albright - Northumberland County of Veterans' Affairs
Mr. Tim Cleveland - Tioga County of Veterans' Affairs
Ms. Sandra Patterson - Office of Administration, Health and Human Services Delivery Center
Ms. Manisha Arya - Office of Administration, Health and Human Services Delivery Center
SSgt. Jose Lopez - PA Army National Guard, State Military Family Services
Ms. Jeanne Block - PA Department of Labor and Industry
Ms. JoAnn Tresco - PA Army National Guard, State Military Family Services
Mr. Mark Todero - PA Army National Guard, State Military Family Services
Mr. Thomas Applebach - Lehigh County Director of Veterans' Affairs
LTC Peter Mielo - DMVA, Policy and Legislative Affairs
Ms. Katie Merritt - Department of Health
Mr. Kory Auch - Office of Administration
Mr. Cory Bender - DMVA, Office of Veterans' Affairs
Mr. Jeffrey White - Vietnam Veterans of America PA State Council
Ms. Christina Kotsalos - PA Banking and Securities
Ms. Sherry Peters - Department of Human Services, Office of Mental Health Substance Abuse Svcs.
Mr. Pete Freudenberger - Steven Cohen Military Family Clinic at UPenn
Ms. Constance Snavelly - State Veterans' Commission

Ms. Jamie Dunlap - PA Council on the Arts
Mr. Frederick Nardei, Jr. - U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs
Mr. Chip Gilliland - DMVA, Office of Veterans' Affairs
Ms. Joan Stakem - DMVA, Bureau of Veterans' Homes
Ms. Elizabeth Pettis - DMVA, Chief Counsel

3. Old Business:

- **Review and Approval of May 16, 2018 Meeting Minutes**

COL Ward Adams motioned to approve the minutes, Ms. Jodi Skiles seconded.

- **Reminder to the attendees to please hold all questions until the end of the Committee presentations. This meeting is for the established Committees to brief the Council on their initiatives and only questions from the Council should be posed.**

- **Aging Committee:** Ms. Samantha Cossman, Co-Chair briefed that Ms. Joan Stakem is now the Co-Chair of their committee. Joan is the Social Work Discipline Coordinator with the Bureau of Veterans' Homes. The committee has decided to form a workgroup to focus on the community engagement opportunities. Chris Kemmerer with DCNR has reported that there is a reenergized effort to leverage the programs in the state parks for Veterans. The Committee has reached out to VISN 4 who has expressed that they are not currently pursuing partnerships with the Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) to expand Veterans Directed Care. Maj. Gen. (Ret) Eric Weller asked if it would help if he would reengage with Dr. Adelman. Ms. Cossman affirmed that could help; they have at least 22 AAAs that would at least discuss expanding that program. She offered the data on which AAAs are interested in meeting. There are Veterans Community Partnerships developed at the VA Medical Centers; essentially the VA enters into informal partnerships with community providers that offer supports outside of the VA, and the staff is equip with what is going on in the area. The Aging Committee is working to see how the PA Link can expand that list of partners. The Benefits and Rights of Older Pennsylvanians booklets are being disseminated. There is an introductory call between the two chapters of the Alzheimer's Association, the VA, DMVA, and the local County Director to discuss where relationships have been built and where they could be improved. They are in the beginning stages of discussing what the Veterans Day message sent out by the PA Link. They are close to launching their two-step plan of introducing the AAA Directors and the County Directors for Veterans' Affairs. They are looking to create a work group to explore educating skilled nursing facilities and acute rehab centers about military culture and veteran practices, so that aging Veterans not in the State Veterans' Homes are receiving the best care from nursing staff.

The Aging Committee has partnered with the Health and Behavioral Service Committee to form the Joint Committee to reduce homelessness. They have created the following workgroups: Transitional Housing, Adult Day and LIFE, Cross-System Collaboration, and Resource Inventory. Each workgroup will establish vision statements and focus areas.

Questions/Comments: Maj. Gen. (Ret) Eric Weller invited Ms. Cossman and the Committee to attend the meeting with Department of Human Services regarding the LIFE Program.

- **Education, Employment and Workforce Development Committee:** Mr. Kory Auch presented that the committee has added a few more key representatives. They have divided out available programs based on the decisions a Veteran may be faced with, such as a new job, going

to school, changing careers, or starting their own business. The plan is for them to brief on each of these next step options that are available. Mr. Auch highlighted education and employment related events that were supported by committee members and various state departments. Ms. Tina Kotsalos shared information about the upcoming Making Sense of Finance event on September 7, 2018 at Fort Indiantown Gap Building 8-80. Ms. Christine Hawk emphasized the specifics of the GI Bill and the program's statistics and more recent changes. Ms. Jeanne Block informed the council that there are 57 Career Link sites that provide services which are prepaid mainly through tax dollars, so there is little to no cost for their services. The Career Links are a conglomerate of governmental agencies and private organizations, but are not a state agency themselves. The Department of Labor and Industry oversees the sites. Veterans and eligible spouses get first opportunity to the employment opportunities, workshops, and any other programs that the Career Links offer.

Questions/Comments: Mr. Fred Nardi asked if Pennsylvania is involved with the Growing Veterans Program which is dedicated to Veterans interested in a career in farming. He added that The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration has money earmarked for Veterans to purchase property and equipment to begin a profession in farming. Mr. Auch answered that they do have representation from the Department of Agriculture on their committee and it is one of the programs that they are looking at deeper to further refine the information on. Ms. Hawk stated that they are reaching out to improve the various opportunities of on the job trainings covered by the GI Bill; to include farming and agriculture.

- **Health and Behavioral Service Committee:** Mr. Rick Hamp, Chair updated the Council that funding has been an issue for many of the committee initiatives. There are successful Fairweather Lodges in Venango County, one in Cumberland/Perry County, and two in Erie County. The Lackawanna County lodge is still in the planning phases with a projection to open sometime in the next quarter. Lebanon County has opened a Fairweather Lodge that is not Veteran Centric, but they will be accepting Veterans once they begin to apply.

Questions/Comments: Maj. Gen. (Ret) Eric Weller addressed the partnership with the facility New Vitae, which has been provided the Fairweather Lodge concept. Mr. Hamp explained the sober living community that New Vitae has set up and combined that with the Fairweather Lodge concept. Veterans are permitted to stay for as long as they need for treatment and they receive job skills training and reintegration into the community while there.

- **Health and Behavioral Service Committee (continued):** Dr. Jackson, DMVA Chief Medical Officer and Mr. Hamp represent DMVA in the Community Centered Behavioral Health Clinics Steering Committee. The clinics are providing direct medical services to Veterans and their families as a priority population. The people in need of elder care or structured medical treatment these clinics are referring directly to the State Veteran Homes.

Questions/Comments: Maj. Gen. (Ret) Eric Weller mentioned the benefit of building the relationships between these clinics to expand the network throughout all counties in the Commonwealth.

- **Health and Behavioral Service Committee (continued):** Mr. Hamp went on to say that DMVA is looking to regionalize its outreach efforts and compile a list of community providers to better service the needs of Veterans and their families.

- **Women Veteran Committee:** Ms. Constance Snavelly provided the committee update to the Council in Jody Zucco's absence. The Women Veteran Committee has been adding committee members in an effort to diversify the service era representation. One of the individuals has been a mentor on the Dauphin County Veteran Court Team as a mentor. Introductions will be made once the additions are confirmed. The data from the questionnaire is currently being analyzed and more will follow once that is complete. On June 30, 2018 the Women Veteran Town Hall and Expo was held at the Army Heritage Education Center in Carlisle. The Committee thanks all the agencies who supported the event. The next Town Hall/Expo will be held in Philadelphia on October 27, 2018 potentially at the Women Veterans Center. A Save the Date will be disseminated once all planning details are confirmed. They would like to incorporate the Federal VA's theme 'I Am Not Invisible' into this event. Any agency who would be willing to set up an exhibitor table in support of this event, it would be greatly appreciated.

Questions/Comments: Maj. Gen. (Ret) Eric Weller expressed that the first Town Hall/Expo set up was fantastic, but that DMVA dropped the ball with regards to the marketing aspect. There was a lot of good interaction among the attendees and the speakers. He also stated that he is committed to better support the Philadelphia event from a marketing standpoint. Holding 5 per year regionally would be a great way to get feedback from the women Veterans in the Commonwealth.

- **Judiciary Committee:** Mr. Ryan Yoder, Chair briefed the council on the Judiciary Committee's activity. He explained that he and the committee members often work hands on together visiting VSUs and attend various Veteran related events in addition to emails and phone calls. The County Commissioner's Association held their annual conference where the discussion on services for Veterans has become one of the top priorities. Establishing a relationship with the Association will help highlight the initiatives for Pennsylvania Veterans and hopefully strengthen their momentum. Two additional VSUs have been added to the State Corrections system; SCI-Phoenix and SCI-Muncy. Phoenix will house 60 incarcerated Veterans and Muncy will be the first all-female Veteran Service Unit in the state and possibly the country. Mr. Yoder has been working with Mr. Fred Nardei with the VA to arrange for Mr. Nardei to speak to the Veterans in the VSUs. The Veteran Service Office concept has come to fruition in all Correctional Institutions that do not have Veteran Service Units. All incarcerated Veterans now have access to services within the state corrections system. Department of Corrections has been working to partner with Guardian Angels Medical Service Dogs Inc. for a program to allow incarcerated Veterans to train service dogs to be then given to Pennsylvania Veterans. Mr. Yoder explained that York County and Allegheny County have reached to him and now have Veteran Service Units in their County Prisons.

Questions/Comments: Maj. Gen. (Ret) Eric Weller mentioned that the County Commissioner's Association is extremely interested in setting up VSUs in the county prisons and commended Mr. Yoder on his program. Maj. Gen. (Ret) Eric Weller suggested that The Women Veteran Committee be a part of the grand opening of the VSU in SCI-Muncy. He also pointed out that the Administrative Office of PA Courts is looking to set up Regional Veteran Courts in various counties through the state.

- **Office of Administration/Information Technology Committee:** Ms. Sandra Patterson, Chair briefed the council that currently there are well over 15,000 Veterans who signed up the Veterans Registry. In compliance with Act 69, an administrative website was set up for agencies to report the number of Veterans uninterested in signing up for the Veteran Registry. They will continue working to improve the Registry to allow functionality of uploading a DD214, make corrections to information, and some add administrative analysis capabilities. They have begun adding the

Registry link to other agencies' websites for ease of access and will continue working with the vendor to make enhancements.

Questions/Comments: None at this time

- **Suicide Prevention-Peer (SPPEER) Committee:** Mr. Rick Hamp, Chair presented that he is looking to leverage the funds from the Veteran Behavioral Health Grant Program to help Veterans with behavioral health issues with co-occurring substance abuse issues. If successful programs are created, a direct impact on the number of suicides in the Commonwealth will be made.

Mr. Mark Todero briefed that the Community Awareness and Communication subcommittee has a September deadline to have a strategic plan in place. There is a Resource Fair on 7 September in area 14 on FTIG, all are welcome to participate. They are working on a Memorandum of Understanding with the American Foundation for Suicide of Prevention.

Ms. Sherry Peters explained that the Prevention and Treatment Services subcommittee has finalized a resource list of providers and services available in the community. The list includes a Crisis section followed by Screening, Prevention, and Treatment Services which would explain who each service is for and how they are implemented. It can be found on the Prevent Suicide PA website at <https://www.preventsuicidepa.org>. Collaboration continues among the subcommittees and the list is updated on a regular basis.

Mr. Fred Nardei shared that his subcommittee is working on provider trainings and suicide prevention education for family members other gate keepers. He pointed out the September is National Suicide Prevention Month. They continue to update the database of said trainings in the Commonwealth including Mental Health First Aide, ASSIST training, QPR training, and trainings within the VA and talent management system. Mr. Nardei has been approached by the employee education within the VA to ask him if he would train the peer support supervisors and local recovery coordinators to better understand the role of a peer specialist who are many times on the front lines as providers. August 25, 2018 is the Out of the Darkness Walk in Pittsburgh. The Pittsburgh VA has formed a Suicide Prevention Outreach Committee which he has been invited to participate in. He has distributed a leadership toolkit for suicide prevention which is a new initiative for the VA. The VA has also released its National Strategy for Suicide Prevention. He visited the VSU at SCI-Dallas and had the opportunity to answer questions from the incarcerated Veterans about being a Peer Specialist with the VA. The VA is now on a mission to hire more Peer Specialists for Community Based Outreach Clinics in rural areas because of the need. The Veteran X Program in the Pittsburgh where 30-40 Veterans voluntarily participate and about 1/3 of them have a Reach Vet Flag which is an algorithm that the VA uses to identify the top 1% of Veterans who are at highest risk for suicide. The Veterans have given very positive feedback on the positive ways it impacts their lives.

Questions/Comments: None at this time

4. New Business:

The Committee Chairs are asked to continue to focus on their goals in alignment with their mission statements. Each committee is doing great work through this Council and that information will be going through DMVA's PPL Office to get to the Governor's Policy Office.

5. **Questions/Comments from the floor:** Mr. Jeff White asked what information the Aging Committee is providing to seniors regarding community partnerships. Ms. Samantha Cossman responded that the Committee is working with the VA in hopes to help them expand the community partnerships to fill gaps with each medical center on what types of providers they don't have good representation from. As far as the aging network in general, there is a plethora of information that is provided.

Mr. White asked if there is an age limit for those seeking assistance from the Career Link Offices. The answer is no, there is no age limit or requirement.

Mr. White asked Mr. Ryan Yoder if during intake into the State Correctional Facility is the time when an inmate is identified as a Veteran. Mr. Yoder answered that they can verbally indicate that they are a Veteran during intake. The Department of Corrections also works with the VA to match personal identifying information.

Mr. Scott Sheely announced that the 193rd Pennsylvania Farm Show will be on January 5-12, 2019. Thursday, January 10th is Veteran and Active Military Day. Veteran Service Organizations are invited to participate to reach the public.

Mr. Eric Darling asked if the Veteran Designation on the PA Driver's License is linked with the database that the OA-IT Committee is working on. He also mentioned that he is working with a local county who does not have a Veteran Court to figure out a Veteran status identification process. Ms. Sandy Patterson answered that the Veteran Designation Program is not linked to the database. Mr. Brian Natali explained that when a Veteran opts to have their DD214 sent to the State Director for Veterans Affairs upon discharge, DMVA cannot legally share that document to other agencies under the Governor's purview. Ms. Elizabeth Pettis commented that she didn't think that PennDot even asked people for their DD214s for that program. Ms. Crystal Petery confirmed that PennDot does not require a driver provide a DD214 to add the Veteran designation nor do they provide DMVA with a full social for verification purposes.

Ms. Samantha Cossman asked Ms. Sandy Patterson if some of the Area Agencies on Aging or a community mental health provider wanted to put the link to the Veteran Registry on their websites, would they be allowed to do so? Ms. Sandy Patterson answered that they would certainly be able to and would not need authorization to do so. Ms. Cossman also mentioned to Mr. White that the Department of Aging has a Senior Community Service Employment Program for people 55 and above and of low income which would help some Veterans who may be seeking supplemental employment.

Mr. Jeff White asked if the regional veterans court concept is on hold because of funding. Maj. Gen. (Ret) Eric Weller explained that the AOPC is modeling their regional Veterans courts after their current regional drug courts but would like to work out the issues with them and have them running successfully before setting up Veterans courts the same way.

Maj. Gen. (Ret) Eric Weller commented that the common theme is information sharing. There are so many people and organizations doing great things throughout the Commonwealth but the problem is that no one knows everything. Regionalization may help change that by increasing information sharing on what is available for Veterans. Ms. Samantha Cossman asked if Maj. Gen. (Ret) Eric Weller has details on the regional borders of the outreach. He agreed that at the next GAC-VS meeting in November, he will be prepared to present the information on the regional concept.

6. **Next Meeting Date:** Wednesday, November 14 from 1:00PM to 3:00PM, at Arrowhead's Community Club, Fort Indiantown Gap.
7. **Adjournment:** Mr. Brian Natali closed the meeting in prayer and retired the colors. The meeting was adjourned at 3:05PM

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