

**Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans' Services**  
Arrowheads Community Club  
Ft. Indiantown Gap  
Annville, PA 17003  
**February 15, 2017**

1. **Call to Order:** Mr. John Brenner, Vice-Chairman, called the Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans' Services to order at 2:05PM.

- **Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance**

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

Maj. Gen. Eric Weller, USAF Ret. - Chairman, Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans Affairs  
Mr. John Brenner - Vice Chairman, State Veterans' Commission  
Ms. Anne Long - Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs  
Ms. Jodi Zucco - Office of Attorney General  
Ms. Lisa Kaye - Monroe County Director of Veterans Affairs  
Ms. Constance Snavelly - State Veterans' Commission  
Mr. Tom Applebach - Lehigh County Director of Veterans Affairs  
Ms. Angela Keen - VA VISN 4  
Ms. Shelly Forté - Office of Administration  
Mr. Terry Stokes - State Veterans' Commission  
Ms. Belinda Albright - Northumberland County Director of Veterans Affairs  
Mr. Joel Mutschler - DMVA Policy and Legislative Affairs  
Ms. Deborah Delgado - Disability Rights PA  
Ms. Lan Do - Disability Rights PA  
COL Ward Adams - Member at Large  
Ms. Joan Nissley - DMVA Office of Public Affairs  
Mr. Joseph Butera - DMVA Office of Public Affairs  
Ms. Holli Senior - Department of Health  
Ms. Kimberly Early - Department of Human Services  
Mr. Ryan Yoder - Department of Corrections  
Ms. Kimberly McGriff - Board of Probation and Parole  
Ms. Cheryl Cook - Department of Agriculture  
Ms. Christine Hawk - Department of Education  
Ms. Karen Herrling - Department of Human Services  
Mr. Ed Beck – DMVA, Bureau of Veterans Homes Office of Veterans Affairs  
Ms. Samantha Cossman - Department of Aging  
Ms. Patricia Conroy - VAMC Wilkes-Barre  
Mr. Scott Sheely - Department of Agriculture  
Mr. Brian LaForme - Banking and Securities  
Ms. Tina Kotsalos - Banking and Securities  
Mr. Rick Hamp - DMVA, Office of Veterans Affairs  
Mr. Chip Gilliland - DMVA, Office of Veterans Affairs  
Mr. Brian Natali - DMVA, Office of Veterans Affairs

### 3. Old Business:

- **Review and Approval of November 16, 2016 Meeting Minutes:** Correction to minutes to add Ms. Christine Hawk with the Department of Education in attendance. Maj. Gen. Eric Weller motioned to approve the minutes from the November 16, 2016 meeting. Ms. Christine Hawk seconded. Motion carried and minutes approved.

- **Committee Updates:**

- **Aging Committee:** Mr. Ed Beck and Ms. Samantha Cossman, co-chairs introduced two new committee members: Mr. Philip Horn from PA Council of the Arts and Ms. Deborah Allen of the PA Behavioral Health and Aging Coalition. The co-chairs provided an update on their initiatives. Adult Day Care is on hold until the construction project at Southeast Veterans Center begins which is about one year away. They are continuing to work on the partnership with County Homes; discussed awaiting information from the VA on getting the County Homes recognized as State Veterans Homes and having met with 3 nursing homes so far. Committee still working on reducing aging veteran homelessness; intends to set up a meeting with Health and Behavioral Service Committee to explore more on this issue. They are looking to expand PA Link initiatives for aging veterans by identifying barrier gaps and the next steps to overcome those gaps. The committee presented collaboration and education ideas on working with other organizations and groups who also face aging veteran issues. Next steps they are taking include seeking information to expand and promote outdoor activities for aging veterans and proposed DMVA speaking with VISN4 about the interest level of other VA Medical Centers have in partnering with local Area Agency on Aging to make veteran directed home and community based service available.

**Questions/Comments:** Maj. Gen. Eric Weller stated that DMVA will take that last item for action. Mr. John Brenner stated that there are York County fishing and hunting organizations that look for veterans to get involved in their activities. Act 66, County directors, and veteran service organizations could also make these activities a point of focus for veterans.

- **Education, Employment and Workforce Development Committee:** Mr. Brian LaForme, Chair provided a brief update on their efforts. Their committee is focusing on leveraging collaboration among other agencies.
- **Health and Behavioral Service Committee:** Mr. Rick Hamp, Chair informed the council that their committee met via desktop pc/teleconference 1 Jan 2017. He provided an update on the committee's veteran wellness initiatives specifically mentioning suicide. OMHSAS funded 4 Mental Health First Aide classes which trained 97 people including veterans, health care professionals, and community members on the importance of knowing when to ask for help and when to recognize those in need. The classes were very valuable but funding does not allow for any more classes this year.

**Questions/Comments:** Mr. Brian LaForme asked if funding could come from the private sector. Mr. Rick Hamp affirmed and discussion continued on the third party who provides the training (Mental Wellness Association of America). Ms. Samantha Cossman inquired where the need is the most throughout the

Commonwealth. Mr. Rick Hamp responded indicating the central part of the state, Centre, Blair, and Bedford Counties.

Mr. Rick Hamp provided an update on the Veteran Centric Fairweather Lodge which places veterans facing challenges with PTSD, TBI, anger management, addiction, etc. in a safe environment with fellow veterans who may have similar issues. The expectation is that they become responsible for one another which mirrors the military mindset and they help each other stay well. Job skills training program would be available with a business plan where the veterans work together as active members in the business. Currently there are approximately 12 veterans in 3 different homes in Erie, Cumberland County, and Venango County. Examination is being done to assess where the need is and determine the veteran population in those areas. The goal is to open 3 more Lodges this year. A brief update was given on a new project Veteran Treatment Services Workgroup; a partnership between DMVA, DHS-OMHSAS, DGS, and DDAP. The initiative is to leverage \$750,000.00 in funding to provide no-cost services to veterans and their families in areas such as drug, alcohol, and sex-offender treatment services, housing assistance, peer support services, workforce development, family reunification, etc. Press release scheduled for end of February, beginning of March.

**Questions/Comments:** Maj. Gen. Eric Weller clarified that Mr. Rick Hamp should be the point of contact for any donations to the Mental Health First Aide classes.

- **Women Veteran Committee:** Ms. Jodi Zucco, Chair introduced herself as well as two other new members to the committee: Ms. Patricia Conroy and Ms. Desmarie Decuir. The chair provided reiteration of the committee objectives: outreach, veteran symposium, identifying emerging needs, identifying gaps in benefits and services. Before accomplishing initiatives the committee wants to ascertain the unique needs of women veterans. They are planning to propagate a questionnaire through the DMVA digest to seek input from women veterans within 30 days. Discussed creating a brochure specific to programs and services for women veterans and are aiming to provide a list of objectives at the next GAC-VS meeting. Ms. Jodi Zucco gave an evaluation of the film clip “Soldier On, Life After Deployment”. After the committee reviewed the film, it is their strong recommendation that the film not be utilized

**Questions/Comments:** Maj. Gen. Eric Weller offered the support and assistance of DMVA with regard to communications in their plan for a questionnaire and brochure. Mr. John Brenner suggested the VFW and the Women Veteran Committee start collaboration.

- **Judiciary Committee:** Mr. Ryan Yoder, Chair introduced himself as the new committee chair and provided a background of his experience and efforts within the Department of Corrections. The Department identifies inmates that are veterans and is providing a packet to those veterans which he intends to share at the next meeting. The packet includes services that the veterans are afforded, a request form to obtain their DD214, and a 1010EZ to enroll in VA Healthcare. Mr. Ryan Yoder also discussed Veteran Service Units (VSUs) as an objective; VSUs are transitional housing units for veteran inmates located in regions across the Commonwealth. Western region VSU is currently at SCI-Pittsburgh until its closure then expectantly being relocated to SCI-Mercer, Central region VSU is located at SCI-Houtzdale, and Eastern region VSU is located at SCI-Dallas.

**Questions/Comments:** none at this time

- **Veterans Resource Guide and Veterans Resource Directory:** The Resource Guide is as quad-fold currently published hard copy and electronically. The Veterans Resource Directory is much larger and currently available electronically. The Secretaries are asked to review both resources quarterly in case any edits or updates should be made. If there are, please contact Crystal Petery-Sherman via email [cpeteryshe@pa.gov](mailto:cpeteryshe@pa.gov) with those changes.
- **Joint State Government Commission Report on Veterans Benefits and Programs in PA** can be located at <http://jsg.legis.state.pa.us/>.

#### 4. **New Business:**

- Mr. Rick Hamp welcomed the new Committee Chairs and addressed utilizing the expertise of the Council Members from Communications and Policy, Planning, and Legislative offices to assist in correctly representing the Council in public affairs, printing literature, changes in policy or legislation, etc.

**Questions/Comments:** Mr. Scott Sheely introduced Ms. Cheryl Cook as the Department of Agriculture Designee. Mr. Scott Sheely discussed the shared challenge of getting the thoughts and needs of veterans and suggested an increase of collaboration among agencies and organizations with regards to surveying so that it is done effectively so each department is not separately surveying people. Maj. Gen. Eric Weller stated that OVA would take action to work with Communications on figuring out the best methods of communication would be and present a recommendation at the next GAC-VS meeting. Ms. Kimberly Early suggested inviting veterans of different age groups to provide input on how to reach their fellow veterans.

#### 5. **Open Discussion:**

- Deborah Delgado introduced herself and her colleague Lan Do both with the Disability Rights of Pennsylvania which is involved with PA Cares. Ms. Delgado provided a handout on the services they provide and a joint initiative between the National Disability Rights Network and the Department of Veterans Affairs Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Services to better meet the needs of veterans. The Disability Rights of Pennsylvania has applied for a grant from the Developmental Disabilities Council to assist veterans primarily who have sustained a disability before the age of 22 years old. The grant award decision will be made in April 2017.
- Ms. Belinda Albright inquired about programs at a state-wide level for veteran employees of the prisons, e.g. prison guards. Mr. Chip Gilliland referenced occasions when he participated in meeting with prison employees regarding services and benefits available to them. Mr. Ryan Yoder confirmed he will be working with facility coordinators to expand veterans' services to the staff.

6. **Next Meeting Date:** Wednesday, May 17, 2017 at 2:00PM, Arrowheads Community Club  
Annville, PA 17003

7. **Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 3:27PM.

The minutes of this meeting are respectfully submitted by:

Crystal Petery-Sherman,  
Administrative Officer, OVA