

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

May 15, 2019
MEETING MINUTES

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

- Pledge of Allegiance and moment of silence.
- Welcome and Introduction of the Council was conducted.

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

Ms. Valerie Vicari - Dept. of Human Services, Office of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Svcs.
Mr. Andrew Barnes - Governor's Policy Office
Mr. Jeff Geibel - Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs
Dr. Rachel Levine - Department of Health
Maj. Gen. Anthony Carrelli, The Adjutant General
Maj. Gen. (Ret) Eric Weller, Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans' Affairs - Chairman
Ms. Crystal Petery - DMVA, Office of Veterans' Affairs
Dr. Kraig Kiehl - Department of Education
Mr. Rich Podguski - PA Board of Probation and Parole
Ms. Cheryl Cook - Department of Agriculture
Mr. Chip Gilliland - DMVA, Veterans' Affairs
Ms. Lisa Kaye - Monroe County Veterans' Affairs
Ms. Constance Snively - Keystone Paralyzed Veterans and State Veterans Commission
Ms. JoAnn Tresco - PA Army National Guard, State Military Family Services
Mr. Jeffrey White - Vietnam Veterans of America
Mr. Joel Mutschler - DMVA, Office of Veterans' Affairs
Mr. Tim Irvin - DMVA, Information Technology
Mr. Kory Auch - Office of Administration
Mr. Jeremy Schlieve - Office of Administration
Mr. Rich Krankota - Crawford County Veterans' Affairs
Kathy Silvia - Women's Memorial
Ms. Corinna Wilson - Widener Law
Mr. Christian Johnson - Widener Law
Mr. Parker Beene - Department of Health
Mr. Kevin Hancock - Department of Human Services
Ms. Jamie Dunlap - PA Council on the Arts
Mr. Larry Furlong - PA Fish and Boat Commission
Ms. Sierra Bilous - Dept. of Human Services, Office of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Svcs.
Ms. Donna Hess - Dept. of Human Services, Office of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Svcs.
Mr. Andy Simpson - Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts
Mr. Mark Toderio - PA Army National Guard, State Military Family Services
Mr. Bill Hoke - New Vitae Inc.
Ms. Jessica Penn-Shires - Dept. of Human Services, Office of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Svcs.
Mr. Robert Rounce - Department of Health

Mr. Jonathan Bowman - Department of Human Services
Ms. Patty Derry - DMVA, Office of Administration
Ms. Samantha Cossman - Department of Aging
Mr. Norman Marden - Office Attorney General
Ms. Elizabeth McCloud - PHEAA
Mr. Isaac Green - PHEAA
Mr. Cory Bender - DMVA, Office of Veterans' Affairs
Dr. Scott Sheely - Department of Agriculture
Mr. David Dunkel - Retreat Behavioral Health
Mr. Thomas Applebach - Lehigh County Director of Veterans' Affairs
Mr. James Fearn - Office of Long-Term Living
Mr. Randal McKinney - Department of Education
Mr. Rick Hamp - DMVA, Office of Veterans' Affairs

3. Old Business:

- **Review and Approval of March 27, 2019 Meeting Minutes**

Mr. Andrew Barnes motioned to approve the minutes, Mr. Rich Podguski seconded.

- **Aging Committee:** Ms. Samantha Cossman, Chair, shared the Aging Committee vision statement which is “expand the awareness of and access to services, supports, benefits, and opportunities for Pennsylvania’s aging Veterans and their families and caregivers.” The task of Expanding PA Link Initiatives continues with the introductions of county directors and area agencies on aging, distribution of the 2019 Benefits and Rights for Older Pennsylvanians books, collaboration between the DMVA Registry and the PACE Program. The Alzheimers Association is scheduled to present at the County Director for Veteran Affairs conference. If there are any organizations who are interested in having the Alzheimers Association or PACE program provide an educational presentation, please contact Samantha Cossman. The VA Pittsburgh is in the process of expanding Veterans Directed Care Program to Fayette, Washington, and Greene Counties. Ms. Cossman shared that they are trying to disseminate information on Veteran pension poaching out to the skilled nursing facilities, acute rehabs and senior living communities. They are working to connect the community partners with the VISN so that Veterans have access to the services that they VISN may not provide. The committee is looking to cross-educate Department of Aging, the VA, and DMVA Bureau of Homes on each of their caregiver support programs.

The Aging Committee’s small working group which is exploring opportunities between Department of Aging, PA Department of Conservation Natural Resources, PA Council on the Arts, and PA Fish and Boat Commission is looking to submit articles to any publication that will help promote the community involvement, socialization, and outdoor activities that are available to aging veterans, their families, and caregivers.

Mr. Kevin Hancock gave an update in the Expanding Long-Term Care Subcommittee. The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs reached out to the Department of Human Services to use their expertise regarding community based long term care opportunities that may be available and affordable to Veterans. They are also looking to integrate Medicare and Medicaid systems because many eligible residents of the DMVA Homes are dually eligible. The working group is considering the LIFE model as an option and are looking to educate community providers which may be able to support this type of reform. In scope, the group is also working to parallel areas of knowledge to allow DMVA facilities to be able to bill through Medicare part

A and also offer the chances for information and referral. Examples include the LINK Program through Aging, drug and alcohol treatments tied to behavioral health programs through DDAP and DHS, suicide prevention services offered through Medicaid Behavioral Health System and OHMSAS, physical health services, etc. They are also exploring the overlapping opportunities with Veteran homelessness, long-term care, and behavioral health services and how to package all these services to make them easily available to Veterans. The first deliverable for the working group is to develop a report of recommendations for how these reforms can be implemented. They are aiming to meeting twice a month and ask that any other subcommittees with overlapping focus areas to reach out so that efforts are not duplicated.

- **Education, Employment and Workforce Development Committee:** Mr. Kory Auch welcomed a few new members to their committee and presented the committee vision statement of “To create greater awareness and synergy among government entities that serve veterans at the point they are asking themselves ‘what do I want to do next’ as it relates to employment, self-employment, and education. He updated the council that a local company has recently hired two new employees, both whom are veterans, because the candidates applied after seeing the company’s postings through the DMVA Digest. Ms. Christine Hawk retired from the Department of Education and was recognized with a Commendation Medal by The Adjutant General for her work on the G.I. Bill. Mr. Randy McKinney from the Department of Education presented a detailed brief on the G.I. Bill.

Questions/Comments: Mr. Richard Podguski commented that they are seeing more individuals who served post-Vietnam but pre-911 and asked if there are any specific programs for the people who fall into that time frame? Mr. McKinney stated that many who qualified for the G.I. Bill then served more time which bumped them into qualifying for the Post 911 Bill but stated that he will look into it further and follow up with Mr. Podguski.

Ms. Elizabeth McCloud with the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency presented a detailed brief on the PA State Grant Program. Mr. Isaac Green with the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency presented a detailed brief on the Pennsylvania Targeted Industry Program (PA-TIP). For detailed information and data on these programs, see this meeting Power Point slide presentation.

- **Health and Behavioral Service Committee:** Mr. Joel Mutschler, Chair said that the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA) Regionalization Initiative is coming along as they are awaiting the outcome of the Governor’s budget where 5 new positions have been requested to place in regions across the Commonwealth. Currently the resource tool, which is a listing of various service providers throughout the state, is being created and in testing phase. The Health and Behavioral Service Committee has added some new members and highlighted that May is National Mental Health Awareness month. The Federal VA is the largest mental health service provider in the nation with over 11,000 providers in the area and as Veteran advocates they want to ensure that those who need it are getting connected to these services. Mr. Mutschler reported that they are developing a plan to create more Fairweather Lodges across Pennsylvania. Community Centered Behavioral Health Clinics program is continuing to serve 310 Veterans, 5 active duty service members, and 7 national guard/reserve service members and community organizations and partnerships are growing. Mental Health First Aid courses are being offered at no cost at various private organizations throughout the Commonwealth. This type of information is what DMVA would like to include in the regionalization resource tool to aid in the cross share of information.

The initiatives under the Opioid Use Disorder Response are on target. At the yearly accreditation training in October, there will be Veteran Service Officer Awareness Training. Mr. Mutschler briefed that the Joint Committee on Homelessness has developed a lot of resources which have been pulled into the regionalization resource tool.

Questions/Comments: Maj. Gen. (Ret) Eric Weller asked if the Behavioral Health Services Committee could ultimately set a goal for Fairweather Lodges by implementing them through the County Directors and County Commissioners. Assisting them by providing the blueprint on how to set the lodges up would expand the number of lodges exponentially. He also mentioned that the various suicide prevention trainings could be cataloged into the resource tool so that more people could locate the information on what is available.

- **Women Veteran Committee:** Ms. Constance Snavelly briefed that the committee has created a vision statement to better accomplish their mission. The committee has been reaching out to other Women Veterans group to work collaboratively on the common issues. The committee members have broken down into working groups to further analyze the 761 survey responses and hundreds of comments, and to plan and conduct future Town Hall and Expos. There is a press conference being held to highlight that there is a Servicewoman and Veteran Caucus to address issues facing the fastest growing cohort, Women. The next Town Hall/Expo is going to be held in Wilkes-Barre in Aug 2019 with the support of DMVA, Veterans Resource Coalition of NEPA and the VA Wilkes-Barre. Once again, any agency that is willing to support the event by sending a representative as an exhibitor, please contact Jodi Zucco or Crystal Petery.

Questions/Comments: Maj. Gen. (Ret) Eric Weller pointed out that the women who started the Veterans Resource Coalition of NEPA have created a transitional housing unit similar to a Fairweather Lodge and they are passionate about helping Veterans in their community. Ms. Kathy Silvia mentioned a few of the groups that she is involved with and some of their upcoming event.

- **Judiciary Committee:** Mr. Chip Gilliland briefed the council that the Judiciary Committee has added new members Ms. Katie Merritt and Ms. Jessica Penn-Shires. He shared that the mission of the Judiciary Committee remains “to build productive and sustaining relationships with GAC-VS committee members and other Veteran-related organizations in order to collaborate and expand services and support for justice involved Veterans in such a way to promote public safety, reduce recidivism and costs while improving the lives of Veterans, their families, and our communities. All Veterans deserve the opportunity to be identified, educated, and provided services and support regardless of background and circumstance. We will leave no Veteran behind.” On April 4th Mr. Yoder put together a team of 24 members, which included Secretary Wetzell, members of the Department of Corrections and the Probation and Parole Board to serve lunch to 40 Veterans at the Paul r. Gordon Veteran Social Center in Reading, PA as an initiative of Veterans Making a Difference Program. They also did this on May 1st at St. Francis Commons which is a 30-bed living facility that currently houses 20 Veterans in Scranton, PA and provides them with up to 24 months of housing, case management, food, clothing, transportation, vocational assistance, recreational opportunities, counseling services, and referrals to other services as needed.

Mr. Yoder is currently participating in a panel discussion in Washington D.C. hosted by the National Institute of Corrections in collaboration with the Veterans History Project. It is a great

opportunity to focus on improving outcomes for justice-involved Veterans with PTSD. April 22 to 26 Chip and experienced VSO from Vietnam Veterans of America, Tim Susengill visited all 5 of the Veteran Service Units to provide information on Federal Compensation and Pension Claims, State Veteran Benefits and conduct one on one sessions to answer any questions. Mr. Susengill also conducted his Post Traumatic Stress Disorder training session at these visits. Mr. Gilliland further briefed that Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts (AOPC) has added 5 new Veteran Treatment Courts in 2019 so far. In 2017 there have been 196 successful graduates and 2018 statistics will be coming soon. For detailed data, visit <http://www.pacourts.us/news-and-statistics/research-and-statistics/veterans-courts-data>. In June AOPC will be hosting statewide Veteran Treatment Court Strategic Planning Session. They are holding an operational tune up training for Carbon, Montgomery, and Lackawanna Counties September 5-6, a Volunteer Veteran Mentor Bootcamp September 18-19, annual PA Veteran Court at Widener Law on September 20, and the 2nd annual VJO Workshop in November.

Questions/Comments: Mr. Rich Podguski mentioned that he and Mr. Yoder will be attending Memorial Day Service on May 24 and on May 17th Dauphin County Veterans Court will be having their graduation ceremony.

- **Office of Administration/Information Technology Committee:** Mr. Tim Irvin provided the committee update. The total number of registrants now on the Veterans Registry is 21,175. Under the direction of the Governor, they are working with the Department of State to connect the Registry with voter registration. The committee is working with to enable registrants to click to register to vote, so that their information would then be sent directly to the Department of State and register them to vote.

Questions/Comments: None at this time

- **Suicide Prevention-Peer (SPPEER) Committee:** Mr. Rick Hamp, Chair informed the Council that the BE THERE Campaign initiated by the Department of Defense and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention is now underway. The state suicide prevention plan is tied into the BE THERE Campaign by promoting and conducting more mental health first aid classes provided by community partners. One of the preventative methods that the Federal VA is using is introducing a safe firearm storage toolkit because they recognize that many Veterans do not want to disclose that they own a firearm out of fear of them being taken away. The Commonwealth is forming a Suicide Prevention Task Force made up of members of Department of Health, Department of Human Services, Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, Prevent Suicide PA, and other agencies and community partners. PA National Guard Service Member and Family Support Division is offering various trainings. For those dates, please follow PNG Service Member & Family Support Division on Facebook to see upcoming events for Veterans and families.

Questions/Comments: Ms. Donna Tilley-Hess informed the group that Berks County is creating a public service message related to suicide prevention. PA Cares participated in a successful event for mental health awareness on May 8th in Harrisburg.

4. New Business:

Maj. Gen. (Ret) Eric Weller commented that the regionalization concept will organize Veteran related information to be easily accessible. He is hoping that by the next meeting there will be an example of what the resource tool will look like. All the committees are asked to begin to compile as much data on their successes to date for the November 2019 meeting as it may be held with Governor Wolf in attendance.

Maj. Gen. Anthony Carrelli expressed his gratitude to everyone for their participation and what they do for the Veteran community. DMVA is small in reference to state government agencies and although budgeted to do a few tasks, there are so many things being done through the collaboration with all other state agencies and other organizations. He mentioned that they are taking much of what they are learning through this Council and applying it to the military side in the PA Guard. "Last year we lost 11 servicemembers to suicide and 5 opioid overdose deaths." By the work being done through the Council we are making a difference to Veterans and our currently serving families' lives.

5. Next Meeting Date:

Wednesday, August 21, 2019 from 1:00PM to 3:00PM, at Arrowhead's Community Club, Fort Indiantown Gap.

6. Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 2:38 PM

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