

Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans' Services
Arrowheads Community Club
Ft. Indiantown Gap
Annville, PA 17003
May 17, 2017

1. **Call to Order:** Mr. John Brenner, Vice-Chairman, called the Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans' Services to order at 2:00PM.

- **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. Callie McKeon - Governor's Policy Office
Ms. Kimberly Early - Department of Human Services
Mr. Steven Wolf - Department of Labor and Industry
Ms. Christine Hawk - Department of Education
Mr. Scott Sheely - Department of Agriculture
Mr. John Vento - Member at Large
COL Ward Adams - Member at Large
Dr. Sonya Borrero - Member at Large
Ms. Jodi Skiles - Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs
Mr. Ryan Yoder - Department of Corrections
Mr. Richard Podguski - Board of Probation and Parole
MG Robert French - Civilian Aide to Secretary of the Army
Ms. Anne Long - Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs
Mr. Chip Gilliland - DMVA, Office of Veterans Affairs
Ms. Constance Snavelly - State Veterans' Commission
Ms. Samantha Cossman - Department of Aging
Ms. Joanna Zigerell - PA Behavioral Health and Aging Coalition
Ms. Jodi Zucco - Office of Attorney General
Ms. Lisa Kaye - Monroe County Director of Veterans Affairs
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
Mr. Ben Laudermilch - Department of Human Services
Mr. James Fearn - Office of Long Term Living
Mr. Joel Mutschler - DMVA Policy and Legislative Affairs
Ms. Joan Nissley - DMVA Office of Public Affairs
Mr. Dusty Durand - DMVA Policy and Legislative Affairs
Mr. Brian LaForme - Department of Banking and Securities
Ms. Holli Senior - Department of Health
Mr. Ed Beck - DMVA, Bureau of Veterans Homes Office of Veterans Affairs
Ms. Patricia Conroy - VAMC Wilkes-Barre
Mr. Cory Bender - DMVA, Office of Veterans Affairs
Mr. Rick Hamp - DMVA, Office of Veterans Affairs

3. Old Business:

- **Review and Approval of February 15, 2017 Meeting Minutes:** Ms. Kimberly Early motioned to approve the minutes from the February 15, 2017 meeting. COL. Ward Adams seconded. Motion carried and minutes approved.

- **Committee Updates:**
 - **Aging Committee:** Ms. Samantha Cossman, co-chair provided an update on their initiatives. The Committee's focus areas are adult day care, county home partnerships, reducing aging veteran homelessness, and expanding the PA Link initiatives for aging veterans. Ms. Cossman briefed that the Aging Committee will be partnering with the Health and Behavioral Service Committee to tackle the homelessness issue. In the effort to expand PA Link initiatives the Committee is looking at how they can support caregivers of aging veterans. They are working with PA Council of the Arts to create programs which would provide respite and stress reduction opportunities (i.e. Fairs, Concerts, Theaters, Art Exhibits, etc.) within the Commonwealth for the caregivers of aging veterans and the veterans themselves. The committee is also exploring an idea of caregiver information being provided through the local public libraries (as done in the Pittsburgh area). Transportation issues is another area of concern for the committee. They are looking at viable options of transporting aging veterans and would like to compile a list of transportation providers. Also looking at details of various transit programs (free, fixed route, volunteer drivers, etc.), AARP Driver Safety Program, Auto Insurance and Registration Fee discounts which are all options for veterans. In home care and assistance is another focus of the Aging Committee. They are looking to facilitate meetings to expand the Veterans Directed Home Community Based Services Program. Ms. Cossman suggested that cross trainings occur between Veteran Service Officers on resources (meals, socialization, transportation resources, legal assistance, etc.) and programs (such as Aging Waivers programs, Community Health Choices program, and the OPTIONS program, etc.) available within the traditional aging network and the different aging network providers who may not know what Veteran Service Officers can do and why it's so important to connect those aging veterans with the VSOs; possibly distributing a list of their capabilities to the area providers like the Area Agencies on Aging, healthcare systems, and partners to better serve the veterans. The committee intends to send information out through the DMVA Digest and also plans to create information pages on VSOs for Person Centered Counseling Staff and other traditional aging network providers. Mr. Ed Beck provided an update on the partnership with the County Homes in areas where there is no State Veteran Home. State funding does not allow for construction of any new State Veterans Homes and with County Homes having been steadily closing for the past 10-15 years, they are looking at the option of taking over those homes (currently there are 23 county homes). The question was whether or not the VA would recognize them as a State Veterans Home if they are not owned by the state. After meetings with the VA, they believe it would be a possibility pending a state employee is operating the home. Moving forward, they are working out the logistics of the takeover (i.e. county or state employees, whose license will they be operating under, etc.).

Questions/Comments: Maj. Gen. Eric Weller asked if the committee has reached out to the veteran service organizations regarding the county homes; the service organizations have been briefed on the efforts at the State Veteran Commission meetings and the Veterans Homes Advisory Council meetings.

- **Education, Employment and Workforce Development Committee:** Mr. Brian LaForme will be stepping down as the Committee Chair and Mr. Ruben Pachay with the Department of Labor and Industry will be taking on this role going forward. Mr. LaForme provided an update at this meeting on their next steps. Their committee is focusing on leveraging collaboration among other agencies by conducting joint events to increase audience attendance and sharing information. Mr. Scott Sheely briefed on working out details of engaging the farmer workforce system. At this point there is not a statewide Memorandum of Understanding and there are rules put in place by the US Department of Labor and Industry which need to be followed. Mr. Cory Bender briefed on the details of Education Gratuity Program offered through PA Department of Military and Veterans Affairs; currently 138 students are enrolled in the program and the resources are there to aide even more. Ms. Shelly Forté provided an update on Office of Administration's new employment website which features employment opportunities and a specific area where veterans can learn about veteran's preference and apply.

Questions/Comments: Mr. Richard Podguski asked if there was an MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) crosswalk to open vacancies. Ms. Shelly Forté answered at this point there is not a direct link on the new site. Mr. Rick Hamp added that under the 'Resources' option, the site will route to PA Career Link where there is an MOS list.

Mr. Steven Wolf spoke on behalf of his Director, Mr. Ruben Pachay who will be taking over as the Chair of Education, Employment, and Workforce Development Committee. They are planning a meeting in June to be brought abreast on what the committee has been working on so that they can further those efforts. Currently, PA Labor and Industry is going through a hiring initiative which will fill 15 total veteran positions; 7 Local Veterans Employment Representatives and 8 Disabled Veteran Outreach Program Specialists.

Questions/Comments: Maj. Gen. Eric Weller clarified that the DVOP and LVER positions are state positions that are federally funded and there are currently 43 positions filled (21 DVOPs and 17 LVERs). He suggested that the DVOPs and LVERs reach out to the universities within Pennsylvania that have veteran resource centers in efforts to help veterans attending those schools and to help student graduates find employment.

Mr. Brian LaForme provided a list of upcoming events that Banking and Securities will be hosting and/or attending. He referenced a documentary called "When I'm 65" and a similar video created at the state level.

- **Health and Behavioral Service Committee:** Mr. Rick Hamp, Chair informed the council that of the committee's Mental Health First Aid classes funded by OMHSAS 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. The Veteran Service Program of Trout Unlimited has been a big

sponsor of Mental Health First Aid for SMV&F in Central PA. An additional 74 people were trained by the help of various private organization sponsorships.

Questions/Comments: Maj. Gen. Eric Weller asked what the cost of these courses are. Mr. Rick Hamp confirmed that OMHSAS provided about \$16,000.00 last year which funded 5 classes. Each course is an 8 hour class, so they can be done in one day; but have been done over a course of 2 days. Discussion continued on what is taught through these courses.

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 veterans in 3 different homes 6 veterans in the Erie Lodge, 4 veterans in the Cumberland County Lodge, and 3 veterans in the Venango County Lodge. Planning for a new lodge in Lackawanna County is currently underway. The intent is for the lodges to be self-sustaining within 5 years. Stairways Behavioral Health is the partner in this initiative and so far the 3 functioning lodges are quite successful.

Questions/Comments: Maj. Gen. Eric Weller referred to the American Legion Homes which are a similar concept. He asked if there was an opportunity to get funding support from the service organizations. Mr. Hamp responded that they are always looking for partners and assistance in getting these lodges established and noted that the SVC has been briefed on the Fairweather Lodges.

Mr. Rick Hamp notified the Council on the efforts of Veteran Treatment Service Work Group which have had to be put on hold pending a resolution of budgetary and funding issues.

- **Women Veteran Committee:** Ms. Jodi Zucco, Chair provided a reiteration of the committee mission: outreach, veteran symposium, identifying emerging needs, identifying gaps in benefits and services. The primary impediment of accomplishing initiatives has been getting feedback on what the unique needs of Pennsylvania women veterans actually are. As planned, they have created a questionnaire to seek this input and are now trying to pinpoint where to reach these women veterans and moving forward with the best means to disseminate the questionnaire; especially to women who don't have internet access or who are no longer serving nor have the support services of an installation. Next on the scope for the committee will be coordinating a one day town hall style women's symposium as opposed to weekend women symposiums that have been held in the past.

Questions/Comments: Ms. Callie McKeon asked when the surveys will be disseminated; Ms. Jodi Zucco replied 'eminently'. Maj. Gen. Eric Weller expressed his support of both the questionnaire and the town hall style symposium to ascertain what the needs are for our women veterans. Ms. Lisa Kaye commented that she would like to get the questionnaire finalized to present it at the County Director Training Conference in June. Dr. Sonya Borrero shared that recently the UPMC in Pittsburgh recently held a town hall forum for women where they watched a documentary called "Journey to Normal" which featured women returning from Iraq and Afghanistan who were facing a variety of issues. She shared that it was a great way to bring the providers together with the women veterans in attendance. Mr. Dusty Durand stated that they recently discovered a

women's veterans group in Reading, PA and suggested a pilot for the town hall with that organization. Ms. Lisa Kaye has affirmed that they have been in touch with that group. Ms. Samantha Cossman suggested that the Women Committee look to the Area Agencies on Aging for the input from aging female veterans. Ms. Kimberly Early suggested reaching out to the Office of Administration for input from women veterans who may be employed by the Commonwealth.

- **Judiciary Committee:** Mr. Ryan Yoder, Chair shared copies of the Inmate Veteran Packet as promised at the last quarterly meeting. These packets are provided to all incoming veterans and includes information on the services that the veterans are afforded, a request form to obtain their DD214, and a 1010EZ to enroll in VA Healthcare. Mr. Yoder shared information on a podcast that the Department of Corrections (DOC) aired called "Bustin Walls" which features Veterans Services Initiatives and the Veterans Service Units (VSUs) within the DOC. After its airing, the National Institute of Corrections contacted Mr. Yoder in the interest to nationally publish what they are doing for veterans in the VSUs in Pennsylvania. The central office of DOC conducted a donation drive for the Robert Jackson House. In addition to assisting veterans and inmate veterans, they are focusing on veterans among the DOC staff and a new initiative called COVER Corrections Outreach for Veterans and Employee Restoration. The idea is to hold one day information sharing events for employees to let them know that they are not alone and 'we got your six'. DOC employees are many times in a stressful environment and also have military and law enforcement backgrounds so they may suffer from effects of that (PTSD, depression, etc.). More on COVER is to come at the next GAC-VS meeting. Mr. Richard Podguski spoke on the collaboration between DOC and PA Board of Probation and Parole (PBPP) regarding success in the transition into reentry. Mr. Terry Stokes provided information on the veterans' courts within the Commonwealth. Through his efforts, Clinton County and Carbon County have added veterans' courts to make the total of 20 courts in the 67 counties of Pennsylvania. Some of the counties utilize veterans' courts and some also have magisterial district diversion programs which assist veterans within the court system. House Bill 887 would allow counties to share operation of a veterans' court program. Another hurdle is that there is not currently any reporting requirements of participation, graduation, cost savings, etc. which would show the benefits that veterans and diversion courts have. One of the goals would be to have a requirement of every county to report these statistics to aid in promoting these programs.

Questions/Comments: The question was asked if there were any statistics on female veterans who have been a part of any veterans' court programs. Mr. Terry Stokes does not have those statistics at this time due to the reporting requirements hurdle.

4. **New Business:**

- Ms. Katherine Reim with Pennsylvania Assistive Technology Foundation (PATF) briefed the Council on what the foundation does. PATF is a low interest loan program for people with disabilities and their families. It is the largest low interest loan program (by loan volume) in the nation that aides in purchasing assistive technology services and devices to help people be able to live independently (i.e. adapted vehicles, ramps, stair glides, hearing and vision aides, computers with specialized software, scooters, etc.). Ms. Reim reviewed the two types of loan programs: Mini Loan Program and Low-Interest Loan Program. She also discussed a grant program through Achieva Family Trust who works with men, women, and children with disabilities within the Commonwealth. Sometimes PATF and Achieva Family Trust will work together to combine funds and work with various waiver

programs. They differ from traditional lenders because they will assist in seeking out other funding resources and they are more flexible with eligibility requirements.

Questions/Comments: Ms. Samantha Cossman expressed that she asked to have Ms. Reim present on PATF and Achieva Family Trust to illustrate that there are resources for the family members of veterans to ease the financial strain of home modifications and assistive technologies.

5. **Next Meeting Date:** Wednesday, August 16, 2017 at 2:00PM, Arrowheads Community Club
Annville, PA 17003

6. **Open Discussion:**

- Ms. Kimberly Early reiterated that the late Mr. Dennis Marion with Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services has wanted to make sure that the Council was aware that OMHSAS applied for technical assistance through Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSA) for service members and their families. An implementation plan was developed specifically related to suicide prevention.
- Maj. Gen. Eric Weller thanked the committees for the informative reports. He hopes to keep the communication ongoing between the agencies and ideas flowing; offering his assistance among the committees. If any committee would like Maj. Gen. Eric Weller to participate in any teleconferences or face to face meetings, he would love the opportunity to do so. Also, please let DMVA know if there are any agency events that we can help promote, we can certainly put it in the DMVA Digest.
- Mr. Brenner also commended the reports on the efforts and initiatives.

7. **Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 4:09PM.

The minutes of this meeting are respectfully submitted by:

Crystal Petery-Sherman,
Administrative Officer, OVA