

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

**August 21, 2019  
MEETING MINUTES**

1. **Call to Order:** Ms. Crystal Petery, called the Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans' Services to order at 1:02 PM.

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

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

Mr. Randal McKinney - Department of Education  
Mr. Jeff Geibel - Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs  
Ms. Donna Hess - Dept. of Human Services, Office of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Svcs.  
Mr. Andrew Barnes - Governor's Policy Office  
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  
COL (Ret) H. Ward Adams - Member at Large  
Mr. Ryan Yoder - Department of Corrections  
Deputy Secretary Cheryl Cook - Department of Agriculture  
Mr. Kory Auch - Office of Administration  
Ms. Lisa Kaye - Monroe County Veterans' Affairs  
Mr. Tom Peters - Veterans Multi-Service Center  
Mr. Chip Gilliland - DMVA, Veterans' Affairs  
Ms. Constance Snavely - Keystone Paralyzed Veterans and State Veterans Commission  
Ms. Christina Kotsalos - Department of Banking and Securities  
Mr. Gelu Negrea - Lebanon VA Medical Center  
Ms. Sierra Bilous - Dept. of Human Services, Office of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Svcs.  
Mr. Mark Pugliese - DMVA, Office of Veterans' Affairs  
Ms. JoAnn Tresco - PA Army National Guard, State Military Family Services  
Mr. Terry Stokes - Department of PA VFW  
Mr. Jamal Wakeem - Department of Education  
Mr. Joel Mutschler - DMVA, Office of Veterans' Affairs  
Mr. Bill Hoke - New Vitae, Inc.  
Mr. Jeremy Schlieve - Office of Administration  
Mr. Brian Natali - DMVA, Office of Veterans' Affairs  
Mr. Eric Ramsey - Department of Labor and Industry  
Mr. James Fearn - Office of Long-Term Living  
Ms. Janice Mazzitti - Department of Labor and Industry, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation  
Ms. Jamie Dunlap - PA Council on the Arts  
Ms. Samantha Cossman - Department of Aging  
Mr. Donald Poligone - Department of Community and Economic Development  
Mr. Stephen Lew - Disability Rights of PA  
Ms. Kathy Silva - Women's Memorial PA State Ambassador

Mr. Rich Krankota - Crawford County Veterans' Affairs  
Mr. Mark Todero - PA Army National Guard, State Military Family Services  
Mr. Rick Vilello - Department of Community and Economic Development  
Ms. Evelyn Chianelli - Department of Community and Economic Development  
Ms. Ginny Mastrine - Dept. of Human Svcs., Office of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Svcs.  
Dr. Darryl Jackson - DMVA, Bureau of Veteran Homes  
Ms. Jeanne Block - Department of Labor and Industry  
Mr. Thomas Applebach - Lehigh County Director of Veterans' Affairs  
Mr. Cory Bender - DMVA, Office of Veterans' Affairs  
Mr. Andy Simpson - Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts  
Mr. Kevin Hancock - Department of Human Services  
Mr. Victor Cabral - Department of Human Services  
Mr. Jonathan Bowman - Department of Human Services  
Mr. Jonathan McVey - Department of Human Services  
Ms. Laura Cunningham - Retreat Behavioral Health  
Mr. Raymond Soto - Claremont Nursing & Rehabilitation Center  
Ms. Lisa Grayson - Cumberland County Register of Wills & Clerk of Orphans' Court  
Ms. Lan Do - Disability Rights of PA  
Ms. Helen Schultz - Claremont Nursing & Rehabilitation Center  
Ms. Angela Stateler - DMVA, Policy and Planning  
Ms. Danielle Bush - Veterans Leadership Program  
Ms. Patricia Landis - Department of Education  
Ms. Katie Merritt - DMVA, Policy and Planning  
Mr. Norman Marden - Office Attorney General

### 3. Old Business:

- **Review and Approval of May 15, 2019 Meeting Minutes**  
**Deputy Secretary Cheryl Cook motioned to approve the minutes, Mr. Andrew Barnes seconded.**
  - **Mr. Joel Mutschler provided a review of the structure of the committees under the Governor's Advisory Council for Veteran Services (GAC-VS). For the November meeting at the Governor's Residence, the committees are asked to highlight the committee and agency's accomplishments and provide any recommendations on how they can be assisted in achieving their goals.**
  - **The Expanding Long-Term Care Options Committee is newly formed under the GAC-VS and has been requested by the Governor's Policy Office to provide a report on the items outlined on slide four (4) of the power point presentation.**
  - **Mr. Joel Mutschler shared printouts of the PA VETCONNECT concept and implementation briefing document which explains how DMVA is regionalizing their outreach efforts.**
- **Aging Committee:** Ms. Samantha Cossman, Co-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." Their three main goals are to provide awareness among the veteran and aging systems in Pennsylvania by

making sure those professionals know what programs and services exist within each of those networks, raise awareness of the community engagement opportunities for veterans, their caregivers, and their families, and to safeguard Pennsylvania's aging veterans from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and self-harm. Ms. Cossman shared the strategies they have been using to achieve their goals. Some include introductions between the County Directors for Veterans Affairs and the Area Agency on Aging (AAA) Directors, collaboration between DMVA and the Department of Aging regarding veteran benefits and services and the PACE Program. They are looking to conduct more introductions and increase working relationships between the AAA and the Aging network staff and expand veteran community partnerships at the VA Medical Centers. The committee continues their community engagement efforts by setting a goal of submitting 10 articles, blogs, etc. per fiscal year to veteran centric publications and websites to raise awareness about opportunities in the Commonwealth. Ms. Cossman briefed that the Aging Committee has created a new goal of safeguarding Pennsylvania's aging veterans from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and self-harm. They are planning to raise awareness about 'pension poaching' among networks serving aging veterans such as assisted livings, nursing facilities, home care organizations, etc. Provide additional education on the adult protective services program available through the Department of Aging and who to call if they suspect some kind of abuse or neglect. The Aging Committee is also looking to work with the Health Promotions Committee on suicide prevention awareness as many aging veterans experience thoughts and incidents of self-harm.

- **Joint Committee on Reducing Homelessness** is Co-Chaired by Samantha Cossman and Joel Mutschler. Ms. Cossman leads the Collaboration and Resource Inventory workgroup where they have been looking at state level program to help find, obtain, and retain housing. For example, PA Banking and Securities offers a lot of workshops and educational programs on various things such as budgeting, investing, and retirement planning. The PA Housing Finance Agency offers resources for buyers, renters, and homeowners. Mr. Tom Peters leads the CoC and Veterans Data Management workgroup. He explained what the point in time (PIT) count is and shared data on the reduction of homelessness in Pennsylvania over the last eight years. The workgroup is trying to find out what organizations are leading initiatives to end homelessness by focusing on the federal standards set forth by the HUD, the VA, and USICH and then capturing their progress. They would like to work with the counties through the committee and develop a reporting mechanism which will help the identify the barriers in each community then work as a committee to focus on plans and mitigation factors to overcome obstacles.

**Questions/Comments:** Kathy Silvia asked if Mr. Peters covers Berks County, to which he answered 'no' but they are hoping to find out who is leading homelessness efforts in Berks County in order to bring them on board to participate in this committee effort. Ms. Silva stated that she asked because there are homeless women veterans in Berks County and Mr. Peters requested that they discuss the matter further after the meeting.

The question was asked how HUD collects their data and Mr. Peters explained that they capture data based on individuals receiving federal grant funding through homeless management information systems and through outreach teams conducting actual manual counts. Mr. Tom Applebach expanded further on the barriers of manual PIT counts.

- **Education, Employment and Workforce Development Committee:** Mr. Kory Auch, Chair explained the vision of the committee and the structure of their battle rhythm. He shared some successes of the committee such as the Fish and Boat Commission being able to fill ten open positions by advertising them in the DMVA Digest, participation in PA Chamber Day, and the Hire Veterans Medallion Program. The committee further briefed on career focused programs in the Commonwealth. Mr. Eric Ramsey with the Department of Labor and Industry shared the details and statistics of the Registered Apprenticeship Program and the PAsmart initiative which is aimed at enticing employers to hire more veterans into apprenticeship programs. For more information on registered apprenticeships contact them at [RA-LIATO-APPR-TRAIN@pa.gov](mailto:RA-LIATO-APPR-TRAIN@pa.gov).

**Questions/Comments:** Mr. Jeff Geibel asked how the apprenticeship programs work in relation to civil service requirements. Mr. Ramsey answered that the union and management are involved in the approval process of implementing these programs. Ms. Donna Tilley Hess commented that DHS underwent the process for the forensic security positions where the training curriculum was reviewed and approved.

Mr. Jamal Wakeem with the Department of Education presented the details on the Troops to Teachers Program. The program assists transitioning service members with meeting requirements to obtain teaching certifications which also serves as a way to address the teacher shortage areas. Veterans receive a discounted application fee and individualized counseling. To date there have been over 200 veterans that have received specific information related to the program.

**Questions/Comments:** Maj. Gen. Anthony Carrelli asked if the Department of Education has ever worked with the PA National Guard Association. The Association has a parallel effort in Pennsylvania to recognize institutions of higher learning as military/veteran friendly schools. To be identified as one of these schools, the school must meet a set of 10 factors. MG Carrelli asked if the committee would get connected with the PA National Guard Association and this initiative.

Ms. Janice Mazzetti with PA Department of Labor and Industry presented the details on Vocational Rehabilitation Program. It is eligibility based and offers evaluations, counseling, training, restorative services, placement assistance, assistive technology, and support services by making referrals to other agencies. Other key initiatives include workforce collaboration, employer wage reimbursement, on the job training, assistance with the purchase of tools, licenses and equipment, and pre-apprenticeship programs.

- **Health Promotion Committee:** Ms. Donna Tilley Hess, Chair briefed the council that the Health Promotion Committee has combined with the Suicide Prevention Peer Committee and updated the Mission and Vision statements. They are continuing the provision of MHFA, QPR, and ASIST trainings, working with community partners to establish 2 Fairweather Lodges each year, and provide certified training annually. Members of the committee attended a state strategy session on March 15<sup>th</sup> for a Tobacco Free initiative where they are expanding interagency partnerships, creating collaborations among other states to expand efforts to reduce tobacco use among those with behavioral health disorders and how to better assist them on tobacco quit lines. Ms. Tilley Hess shared the federal grant funding award for the Opioid Housing Initiative and the Veterans in Crisis Outreach plan and gave an overview of the updated bill related to proposed policies and programs related to the Problem Gambling Consortium. Dr. Angela Keen and Ms.

Leslie Neal are the Co-Chairs of the Suicide Prevention Sub-Committee but were not able to attend the meeting, so Ms. Donna Tilley Hess provided the briefing. The sub-committee's vision was also updated. The VA's National Suicide Data Report for 2005-2016 key points show that the firearm use remains high, rates are highest among veterans ages 18-34, but the rate of suicides among veterans receiving VHA services is increasing at a slower pace than those who are not receiving care.

**Questions/Comments:** The question was asked, "in terms of VA mental health services and community mental health services, where is the gap in the access to services? Why are some individuals not getting these services? Ms. Tilley Hess stated that the answers are multilevel; individuals have a choice of where they are getting services. What is available in the communities where they live and are they familiar with what is available? She explains, "Pennsylvania takes a no wrong door approach." If someone doesn't have a participating insurance or an undesirable military discharge they will try to get the individual to where they can get the services they need.

Ms. Tilley Hess shared more statistics on veteran suicide to include count vs. rate and the current efforts within the VA. For more detailed data and information, see the power point slides. Ms. Tilley Hess shared the VA Mission Act of 2018 which focuses on how internal systems and external networks can better serve veterans.

On July 10, 2019 a statewide suicide prevention strategy session was held by DHS and OMHSAS in the effort to get away from siloed initiatives of sister agencies on suicide prevention. There are several listening sessions being held throughout the end of the calendar year; for a list of dates and times, please contact DHS. Resources within state military family services include Family Assistance Center Specialists, Family Readiness Support Assistants, and Transitions Assistance Advisors which can help military service members and their families get connected to behavioral health services, drug and alcohol services, and employment services. The Lebanon VA Medical Center is hosting a mental health summit on September 13, 2019. There will be more of these held next year throughout the Commonwealth where you can receive a lot great information.

**Questions/Comments:** The question was asked if any insight could be provided into why there are more non-combat veterans committing suicide than combat veterans. Ms. Tilley Hess answered that they discussed this matter at a Suicide prevention roundtable recently with SME's in Philadelphia, whom several were doctors, and their focus was generational resiliency. Mr. Mark Todero commented that there is a theory of servicemembers who have deployed have built and maintained relationships amongst each other. In the PA Guard, the majority of suicides have been individuals who have less than 2 years of service and have not been deployed, therefore they have not a chance to make those connections. There are discussions of how to get them to build relationships the way deployed servicemembers inherently do.

- **Women Veteran Committee:** Ms. Constance Snavelly briefed that they are trying to increase the visibility of Pennsylvania women veterans by meeting and collaborating with other women veteran organizations, attending community events and providing outreach. They reach to the

other organizations to learn what the needs and concerns are regarding women veterans. They have conducted two town hall/expos and are having the third in Wilkes-Barre on Saturday, August 24<sup>th</sup>. Through these events, the committee has gained the attention of other veteran advocates and members have been invited to be guest speakers at other events. They have been requested to present their briefing at the Bucks County Veteran Expo at Parx Casino on November 8, 2019. Ms. Snively provided a few key highlights of the ongoing networking that they have been doing with many organizations to help promote veteran and women veteran events. A new initiative they have taken on is the proposal of an update to the Paralyzed Veterans of America Logo. The proposal has been approved at the state level and is now awaiting national approval. It is potentially the first veteran service organization to include a female in its logo at a national level. The committee would like to build a network of email groups for the events and information to share among each other. The hurdles that the committee face are the funding for the travel and accommodations involved to host and attend events located in farther areas of the state and when they are doing outreach they do not have any type of validation of who they are conducting business on behalf of a Governor appointed council because most of them are retired.

**Questions/Comments:** Maj. Gen. Eric Weller stated that he would pay for business cards for the committee and further stated that he will pay for the members of the committee's hotel expenses out of his own pocket if necessary; to allow for them to hold a town hall in the Pittsburgh area.

- **Judiciary Committee:** Mr. Ryan Yoder, Chair introduced and welcomed several new members to the Judiciary Committee. He gave an overview of the Bureau of Pennsylvania Correctional Industries (PCI) under the Department of Corrections. It provides vocational training and work experience to inmates within the DOC to reduce recidivism and provide skills to find and keep meaningful employment upon parole. An initiative was originated to collect the surplus of items and give back to the community by creating care packages for donation. The committee continues to work closely with AOPC on promoting veteran courts across the Commonwealth. They had the opportunity to attend a Dauphin County veteran court graduation where Mr. Yoder was asked to be the keynote speaker. In June, AOPC hosted a veteran treatment court strategic planning workshop which encouraged attendees to brainstorm about ways to expand the access to veteran treatment courts in Pennsylvania. Mr. Andy Simpson with AOPC explained that they would provide more detail on the strategic planning process at the November GAC-VS meeting. The plan itself is being finalized through the Center for Court Innovation and will be unveiled in November. He highlighted that Pennsylvania now has 25 veteran treatment courts, an increase of 5 in 2019 alone. AOPC is hosting a Volunteer Veteran Mentor Boot Camp September 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> to provide valuable training to mentors of veterans and foster networking among colleagues. On September 20<sup>th</sup> Widener Law Commonwealth is hosting "Veteran Courts in Pennsylvania: Making a Case for Veterans Courts." To register and for more information, visit <https://commonwealthlaw.widener.edu>.
- **Office of Administration/Information Technology Committee:** Ms. Crystal Petery provided the update on the Veterans Registry Statistics; now currently at 23,824 registrants as of 8/2/19. The committee continues to work with the Department of State on the voter registration initiative and is supporting DMVA's PA VETCONNECT initiative.

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

Ms. Angela Stateler with DMVA's Policy, Planning & Legislative Affairs Office briefed the Council and attendees on the Pennsylvania State Employee Recognition Program. The Program was established by Executive Order signed by Governor Wolf on June 14, 2019 in the effort to annually recognize Commonwealth employees who serve or have served in the US Armed Forces, including the Reserves and National Guard. She gave an overview of the purpose of the recognition, who is eligible, the agency presentation details, and agency responsibilities. Mr. Kory Auch explained that the role of the appointed VIPS Committee POC will be to assist their agency with the coordination recognition ceremonies. After the initial recognition ceremony, it will be more of a focus on assisting other eligible members and conducting outreach within their agencies.

**Questions/Comments:** Mr. Ryan Yoder commented that he emailed the leadership at DOC and their agency is very excited for this initiative.

Maj. Gen. Eric Weller delivered closing remarks on the importance of organizing a way to further make the connections and network all the programs, benefits, and services in the Commonwealth.

**5. Next Meeting Date:**

Tuesday, November 19, 2019 from 1:00PM to 3:00PM, at the Governor's Residence, Harrisburg, PA 17102.

**6. Adjournment:**

The meeting was adjourned at 3:02 PM

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