



Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services

MEETING MINUTES
November 3, 2021 1:00-2:57 PM
Arrowheads Community Club, FTIG

COUNCIL MEMBERS/DESIGNEES IN ATTENDANCE

BG (PA) Maureen H. Weigl, Chairwoman, Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans Affairs	MG Mark J. Schindler, The Adjutant General, DMVA
Tammy Ferguson, Dept. of Corrections	Kory Auch, Office of Administration
Denise Verchimak, Dept. of Education	Parker Beene, Dept. of Health
Crystal Houser, Dept. of Labor & Industry	Terrell Martin, DCED
Andrew Barnes, Dept. of Human Services	Kurt Myers, PennDOT
Micah Snead, Member at Large	Toshua Jarrett, Member at Large
Col (R) Ward Adams, Member at Large	Christina Kotsalos, Dept. of Banking & Securities
Jeff Geibel, Dept. of Drug & Alcohol Programs	Ryan Dysinger, DCNR
Cheryl Cook, Dept. of Agriculture	Jake Derrick, Governor's Policy Office

COUNCIL MEMBERS/DESIGNEES NOT IN ATTENDANCE

Nick Taylor, State Veterans Commission	Woody Hogan, PWVC
Thomas Burrell, Fish & Boat Commission	Jeffrey Wallace, State Civil Service Commission
Kevin Atkinson, Dept. of Aging	Jamie Dunlap, PA Council on the Arts

OTHERS PRESENT

*Tom Wolf, Governor, and special guest	Marc Ferraro, DMVA
Margo Coleman, DMVA	Joshua Scheinberg, Dept. of Agriculture
Angela Lowry, AOPC	Bill Cress, VISN 4
Nick Haller, VISN 4	Michael Carrington, Dept. of Corrections
Col Christine Munch, DMVA, PAANG	Janette Krolczyk, DMVA
Craig Swineford, DMVA	Tim Arthun, Dept. of Banking & Securities
Elizabeth Cooper, DVOP Franklin/Adams Co	Philip Mader, DHS
Donna Tilley Hess, DHS, OMHSAS	Nicholas "Chip" Gilliland, DMVA
Jonathan Bowman, DHS, OLTL	James Stafford, DMVA
Charlee Redick, Lebanon VA Medical Center	Brian Natali, DMVA
Kathy Silvia, Military Women's Memorial	Dr. Angela Keen, VISN 4
Seth Benge, DMVA, PPL	Samantha Cossman, DMVA
AJ Byerly, NG Psychological Health	Erica Moore, DMVA
Lori Murphy, NG Psychological Health	Chelsea Ellsworth, DMVA
Jolene Richardson, NG Psychological Health	Rick Hamp, DMVA
Dee Watkins, PAARNG	Jennifer Spitler, DMVA
Mark Toderro, PAARNG	Joel Mutschler, DMVA
Joann Tresco, PAARNG	Erin Walters, Dept. of Aging
James Fearn, DHS, OLTL	Shannon Degiglio, US Small Business Admin.
Amanda Olaviany, Wilkes-Barre VA	Celeste Brucklacher, SCI Muncy
Laura Cunningham, Acadia Healthcare	Tom Applebach, Lehigh County VA

<p>CALL TO ORDER, INTRODUCTIONS, AND OPENING REMARKS</p>	<p>The Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services (GAC-VS) was called to order at 1:00 PM.</p> <p>Ms. Janette Krolczyk welcomed everyone for joining in person or on the conference line and encouraged all callers to send an email so their attendance could be counted. She then led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance, and Col (R) Ward Adams led the group in a moment of silence/quiet reflection.</p> <p>MG Mark J. Schindler introduced Governor Tom Wolf to the meeting. Governor Wolf expressed his thanks for being welcomed at the meeting and commended all members on their advocacy and diligent work to help veterans and their families through unique needs during and after their service. He expressed his appreciation for the continued efforts the GAC-VS put forth, especially throughout this COVID-19 pandemic, as many veterans' challenges worsened. Governor Wolf complimented all Council and committee members on their dedicated collaboration, which aided the formation of PA VETConnect last year. He stated that such programs are vital to connecting veterans and advocates with valuable information and resources efficiently.</p> <p>Seated members or designees at the table introduced themselves, followed by opening remarks from MG Schindler. MG Schindler expressed his thanks to all veterans who participated in the meeting as Veteran's Day approached. He also commended members for continuing to reach goals and make a difference in veterans' lives despite pandemic challenges.</p> <p>BG (PA), and Chairwoman, Maureen Weigl addressed the Council and expressed her profound thanks for the dedication to assisting veterans from all participants. She explained that Pennsylvania is unique in having a Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services and how fortunate that makes the commonwealth's veteran population. The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs is not equipped to assist nearly 800,000 veterans' needs, so the sister agency supports the GAC-VS provides is vital to caring for the veteran population. With the help of the PA VETConnect outreach program, agencies can significantly assist advocates with finding resources to aid unique challenges. One of BG (PA) Weigl's goals was to grow the Veterans Trust Fund to disburse more grants, providing aid to more veterans in local communities.</p>
<p>APPROVAL OF AUGUST 11, 2021 MINUTES</p>	<p>No questions or corrections were noted on the draft minutes. Mr. Kory Auch made a motion to approve the minutes, which was seconded by Col (R) Ward Adams, and unanimously approved.</p>
<p>AWARD PRESENTATION</p>	<p>MG Schindler, BG (PA) Weigl, and Mr. Andrew Barnes presented Ms. Donna Hess with a Veteran Service Award. Ms. Hess distinguished herself as a commensurate veteran advocate during her 20 years of public service, including her work chairing the Health Promotions Committee of the Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services as well as her role as Working Group Leader for</p>

	<p>the Governor’s Challenge to prevent suicide among service members, veterans, and their families.</p>
<p>AGING COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ms. Margo Coleman addressed the group and explained that the past few months had focused on financial exploitation or abuse of aging veterans. In late August, members of local law enforcement and employees of a veteran's home met to discuss the investigation process. ▪ Ms. Coleman thanked Lt. Dan Lynch for his assistance in spearheading the law enforcement language to educate those wanting to improve their part of this process to improve the protection of veteran residents. ▪ Items uncovered from the collaborative meeting showed that a standardized investigation process might not exist across all counties or municipalities. Also, considering that a nursing home resident has contact with many individuals (nurses, activities staff, etc.), it may be complicated to identify a perpetrator. ▪ An opportunity could be to train the nurses and social workers to take better witness statements, as this task usually falls on those positions. ▪ Recommendations from the Financial Exploitation Task Force included contacting the local District Attorney's office for help working a more detailed investigation and possibly contacting the Social Security Office to protect a resident's funds further if financial exploitation is identified.
<p>HOMELESS COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mrs. Samantha Cossman opened by discussing the hard work done by the Hard-to-Place workgroup and the newly-established Affordable Veteran Housing workgroup. ▪ Future initiatives will include working with the National Guard for referrals into Coordinated Entry. National Guard members who were never federally activated will not qualify for certain homeless services. ▪ Mrs. Cossman described the difference between Rapid Rehousing (RRH) and Homeless Prevention (HP) enrollments for Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF). RRH classifies individuals as currently homeless, while HP individuals would have been homeless without the intervention of an SSVF provider. ▪ A future goal would be to assist VISN 4 in utilizing every available HUD-VASH voucher for maximum impact. ▪ HUD-VASH criteria recently expanded, and approximately 20 veterans claimed HUD-VASH vouchers as a direct result. ▪ Mrs. Cossman explained that the homeless Point in Time (PIT) count is always a 24-hour period every January. Although the data showed a drop in veteran homeless numbers, COVID impacted many Continuums of Care (COC), so some could not execute the unsheltered count for 2021. Each of the 16 COCs conduct their own count. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Mr. Micah Snead asked about how to accomplish 100% HUD-VASH voucher utilization. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mrs. Cossman suggested support from the commonwealth to encourage local landlords to rent to veterans or find funding sources to create affordable housing.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mr. James Stafford suggested that the commonwealth support landlords by viewing them as business owners and entrepreneurs.
<p>EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ms. Crystal Houser began the committee briefing by focusing on the fourth quarter’s topic of self-employment and reminded the membership that the annual stats for all areas under their committee would be on the slides posted on the DMVA website after the meeting. ▪ Mr. Terrell martin briefed on the PA Business One-Stop Shop, which was established in 2018 as the sole source of information to guide businesses through all stages of development. The business.pa.gov webpage has a section of resources for veteran business owners and entrepreneurs. ▪ Ms. Shannon Degiglio briefed on the Boots-to-Business program, established in 2013. Due to the pandemic, veteran training programs have been offered virtually, but they have increased course attendees since last year. ▪ Dr. Joshua Scheinberg briefed on the Veterans in Agriculture initiative, which centers around engagement with organizations focused on veterans in agriculture to provide direct outreach and support to veterans seeking new careers in agriculture or those engaging in agriculture for recreation or therapy. Dr. Scheinberg noted that the list of agriculture-related apprenticeships continues to grow and highlighted the Rodale Institute Farmer Training Program. While this program is not an apprenticeship, it is another support for those seeking to change their career into the agriculture industry. ▪ Deputy Secretary Tim Arthun briefed on the PA Military Finance Alliance and the Making Sense of Finance events. Mr. Arthun explained that these events have been offered for the past seven years and have reached over 1,000 individuals. In-person events should begin again in 2022, and Ms. Tina Kotsalos explained that her team is a well-oiled machine for providing this financial training. She encouraged anyone to reach out to her if there is a venue and a veteran audience, and she would assist in holding an event. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Mr. Snead asked if conversations could take place with DCED regarding the One-Stop Shop being utilized as a landlord recruitment tool regarding the veteran homeless challenges referenced earlier. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mr. Martin explained the One-Stop Shop may not be the location for landlord resources, but elsewhere in DCED may be the proper location. He agreed to connect with Mr. Snead for a further discussion.
<p>HEALTH PROMOTIONS COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr. Parker Beene thanked Donna for her work on the committee and helping him transition. Mr. Beene listed the number of individuals trained in the various program categories within 2021. The Star Behavioral Health Providers Program (SBHP) offers a public online registry allowing service members, veterans, families, military

	<p>behavioral health providers, military leaders, and others to easily search for trained providers in their local areas. Over 400 training workshops were completed in 2021 alone. There are over 1,000 providers on the registry spanning 20 states.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr. Beene explained that VHA TRAIN is an electronic training program. Community providers who treat Veterans are invited to take a variety of self-paced, accredited online courses offered 24/7. Referencing the Mission Act (MA) Curriculum, sections 131 and 133 require the VA to ensure that all community providers treating veterans meet specific requirements regarding opioid prescribing practices and meet certain competency standards. These courses available on VHA TRAIN MA provide training and resources on military culture, suicide prevention, and other veteran-related topics. ▪ A Veteran Fairweather Lodge will be announced on December 9, 2021, and in 2022, the committee will work on better communicating training options to increase awareness and participation.
<p>WOMEN VETERANS COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Col Christine Munch shared that Celeste (SCI Muncy) had been recently added to the committee and is adding her knowledge to discussions regarding incarcerated women veterans. The goal would be to ensure individuals know what community supports exist for transitioning women veterans so that once they leave incarceration, they will never return. In addition, there may be areas to work with a few other committees moving forward. ▪ Another committee goal would be continuing to work with County Directors of Veterans Affairs and identify a women veteran in each county who could act as a support for women veterans who would rather interact with a fellow woman veteran. These advocates would ideally be trained through a Peer-to-Peer support program to serve women in need of assistance. A comprehensive list of these contacts will be added to PA VETConnect once identified. ▪ In October, the PA VFW Women Veterans Retreat went well, and the committee looks forward to participating in future years/events to share information about where to turn for services specific to women. ▪ Conversations continue regarding effective communication of services available upon transition from active duty to civilian status. The goal is for information specific to women veterans to be shared widely. ▪ A few new members have been added to the committee in the past few weeks, so Col Munch thanked everyone for their recommendations, and she looked forward to getting these ladies plugged into current initiatives.
<p>JUDICIARY COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr. Michael Carrington discussed the focus on identifying veterans either early in the process for a justice-involved individual. Of the inmate population, about 6.2% are veterans, which has been a consistent percentage, but the DOC knows more may exist that have not been identified across their facilities. The Dept. of Corrections (DOC) is currently developing a classification tool to assist in identifying veteran

	<p>inmates. This information would filter to the new veteran coordinators at each facility to assist with programs and supports available to those who qualify. The classification tool should launch in the third quarter of 2022.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr. Carrington provided an example of a woman in Adams County who lost her veteran husband and needed help with burial costs. Mr. Carrington explained that with the help of the DMVA, federal VA, County Directors for Veterans Affairs, and other contacts, he was educated on where to turn for supports. The woman in question received the wrap-around support needed to bury her husband. ▪ Committee recommendations covered continued development and expansion of current initiatives.
<p>VETERANS IN PUBLIC SERVICE (ViPS)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr. Kory Auch explained that as other committees look outwardly at serving the nearly 800,000 veterans in the commonwealth, the ViPS looks inward to the roughly 15,000 state employees who had military service. The recognition campaign process has worked well and functions as intended. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ Deputy Secretary Tammy Ferguson commented on the email sent regarding the Air Force's birthday. She expressed how such a simple gesture created a genuine connection between the branch employees as the message was unexpected but well appreciated. ➢ Ms. Krolczyk reminded everyone that the recognition campaign is underway, and all agency POCs have been given an excel spreadsheet with individuals needing recognition on Tab 1. However, Tab 2 contains the list of all currently employed veterans who were recognized in past years. Those individuals should not be forgotten, so a simple message of thanks would mean so much.
<p>NEW BUSINESS/ GOOD OF THE ORDER</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Col (R) Ward Adams commented on the example Mr. Carrington gave regarding assisting the woman from Adams county who lost her husband. He reminded everyone that helping veterans, in any way possible, is what brings everyone together on the GAC-VS. ▪ Caller Ms. Charlee Redick stated she was new to the area and requested networking contacts to troubleshoot veteran issues as they came up in her job at the Lebanon VA. ▪ Mr. Micah Snead commented that the addition of the five Veteran Coordinator positions at the DOC and the RPOC positions that work within the PA VETConnect program at DMVA show complete leadership support. Arranging for new positions is no small task, and they are vital to connecting the bits of veteran resources together for a larger impact. He stated that we sometimes rely on individuals to assist instead of processes to assist. When a knowledgeable individual leaves employment, that knowledge disappears without a process in place first. Mr. Snead also explained that the veteran homelessness issue needs more

	<p>attention, and he wanted to connect with anyone interested in the affordable housing conversation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr. Jake Derrick of the Governor’s Policy Office stated that the First Lady's office had been getting more engaged with housing issues, so there may be opportunities to partner on that topic. Mr. Derrick explained that the Governor's Office is underway regarding budget planning. There are multiple pieces of legislation moving that will affect veteran services, and he would assist with questions on either topic. He ended by offering his help with any council-related issues that the Governor's Office may be able to help with over the next year. ▪ BG (PA) Weigl stated she learns many insightful things from every quarterly GAC-VS meeting. She appreciated all the comments and questions discussed, as that is the purpose of collaborating on veteran issues and challenges. She thanked all the Chairs, committee members, and agencies for their commitment to work together. BG (PA) Weigl also thanked the DMVA team for their daily efforts of helping veterans and working the action items that emerge from these larger meetings. ▪ MG Schindler closed by thanking everyone involved for their continued service to assisting the veterans of the commonwealth. He stated that participants tended to be modest about accomplishments during the past year but was impressed by the essential work completed despite lingering pandemic challenges. Every veteran assisted is a success story. ▪ Ms. Krolczyk reminded all participants to check the DMVA website (www.dmva.pa.gov), where the approved meeting minutes and full slide deck will be available. ▪ Ms. Krolczyk also reminded all service members, veterans, family members, and caregivers to sign up for the Veterans Registry (www.register.dmva.pa.gov). Individuals can opt-in to the DMVA digest, the weekly publication filled with beneficial information.
	<p>Next Meeting: February 2, 2022 1:00-3:00PM Arrowheads Community Club, FTIG, Bldg. 9-65, unless otherwise noted.</p>
ADJOURNMENT	The meeting adjourned at 2:57 PM.

NEW ACTION ITEMS

#	ACTION	STATUS
1	Janette Krolczyk will connect with Charlee Redick, of the Lebanon VA, with agency and community support to better assist veteran callers in crisis.	Completed
2	Janette Krolczyk will connect MAL Micah Snead with Terrell Martin from DCED regarding landlord recruitment questions.	Completed

OLD ACTION ITEMS

#	ACTION	STATUS
1	Samantha Cossman will provide a schedule of committee spotlight presentations.	Pending
2	Homeless/Judiciary committees to touch base regarding legal assistance for homeless veterans.	Completed