



Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services

MEETING MINUTES
August 11, 2021 1:00-2:15 PM
Webex Meeting

COUNCIL MEMBERS/DESIGNEES IN ATTENDANCE

BG (PA) Maureen H. Weigl, Chairwoman Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans Affairs	Marc Ferraro, DMVA
Tammy Ferguson, Dept of Corrections	Kory Auch, Office of Administration
Denise Verchimak, Dept of Education	Matthew James, Dept of Health
Crystal Houser, Dept of Labor & Industry	Terrell Martin, DCED
Thomas Burrell, Fish & Boat Commission	Kurt Myers, PennDOT
Kevin Atkinson, Dept of Aging	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	John Hallas, DCNR
Micah Snead, Member at Large	

COUNCIL MEMBERS/DESIGNEES NOT IN ATTENDANCE

Sam Petrovich, State Veterans Commission	Woody Hogan, PWVC
Meg Snead/Kristen Houser, DHS	Jeffrey Wallace, State Civil Service Commission
Russell Redding/Cheryl Cook, Dept of Agriculture	Jamie Dunlap, PA Council on the Arts
Jake Derrick, Governor's Policy Office	

OTHERS PRESENT

Margo Coleman, DMVA	Andy Simpson, Assoc. of PA Courts
Col Christine Munch, DMVA, PAANG	Janette Krolczyk, DMVA
Craig Swineford, DMVA	Taylor Dippery, DMVA
Elizabeth Cooper, DVOP Franklin/Adams Co	Tara Loew, L&I
Donna Tilley Hess, DHS, OMHSAS	Nicholas "Chip" Gilliland, DMVA
Jonathan Bowman, DHS, OLTL	Katie Reibsane, DMVA
David Trevaskis, PA Bar Association	Brian Natali, DMVA
Janice Mazzitti, L&I	Eric Felty, DMVA
Michelle Garrison, DMVA	Samantha Cossman, DMVA
Daniel Lynch, PA Chiefs of Police Assoc.	Chelsea Ellsworth, DMVA
Jane Heiple	Jennifer Spitler, DMVA
Joshua Scheinberg, Dept of Agriculture	Susan Meighen, DMVA
Norm Marden, OAG	Joseph Daly, PA Chiefs of Police Assoc.
Tom Snedden, PACE	Erin Walters, Aging
James Fearn, DHS, OLTL	Joe Butera, DMVA
William Reed, YWCA of Greater Harrisburg	Joel Mutschler, DMVA
Michael Carrington, Dept of Corrections	Seth Benge, DMVA
Danny Osten, Cumberland County VA	Greg Holler, DMVA
MG (R) Robert French	Zaccariah, Pearson, DMVA
Sam Estrada, DMVA	Tom Applebach, Lehigh County VA
Lisa Kaye, Monroe County VA	Sierra Bilous, DHS, OMHSAS

CALL TO ORDER, INTRODUCTIONS, AND WELCOME	<p>The Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services (GAC-VS) was called to order at 1:00 PM.</p> <p>Ms. Janette Krolczyk led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance and moment of silence. She thanked everyone for joining the meeting and asked that participants enter their name and agency into the chat panel or email her for attendance purposes.</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 was happy to meet with each Committee Chair and to join many of the committee meetings over the past few months to discuss the various initiatives underway and how she could potentially assist.</p> <p>General Weigl also explained that the inter-agency approach to assisting veterans is the way to move initiatives forward. She encouraged continued collaboration and idea-sharing on how to accomplish collective goals.</p>
APPROVAL OF MAY 19, 2021 MINUTES	<p>Ms. Krolczyk explained that the draft meeting minutes were sent to the presenters for correction and distributed to the membership via the meeting notice. All prior action items had been addressed. Instead of a vote, Ms. Krolczyk asked if there were any needed edits. Hearing no comments, Ms. Krolczyk approved and accepted the minutes.</p>
AGING COMMITTEE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ms. Margo Coleman addressed the group and explained that her report focused on committee Goal #3. ▪ This goal covers safeguarding Pennsylvania's aging veterans from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and self-harm. Collaboration already exists with the Financial Exploitation Task Force (FETF), so the next step would be to discuss with law enforcement their point of view on the topic. ▪ The committee has an upcoming meeting with Veteran Home staff and local law enforcement within the Allegheny County area to discuss generating a feedback loop regarding abuse reporting and investigations. ▪ After discussing with various experts, the committee would report back to the FETF results of those conversations, areas of challenge that were uncovered, and recommendations for moving forward.
HOMELESS COMMITTEE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The committee will promote VA's Project CHALENG (Community Housing Assessment, Local Education & Networking Groups). An annual survey drives national data relating to unmet veteran needs, and anyone with a vested interest is encouraged to complete the survey. ▪ Mrs. Cossman shared that legal assistance for homeless veterans remains a top need. Due to this, Mrs. Cossman reached out to the Judiciary Committee for any members, particularly from the PA Bar Association, to begin conversations surrounding legal assistance for this target

	<p>population. Identifying resources around the commonwealth is key to filling this gap.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mrs. Cossman shared that the VA Medical Centers now accept HUD-VASH referrals using the same criteria as the SSVF providers and GPD. Additional VA homeless services can provide a free Samsung phone with a one-year data plan and access to rideshare programs for appointments. ▪ The 2022 SSVF awards increased from 2021, but the total was less than FFY 2017 and 2018. A list of awards was provided. ▪ Mrs. Cossman provided an open invitation for anyone interested in joining a committee spotlight presentation to be welcomed to do so. Once the schedule is completed, Mrs. Cossman will give a copy to Ms. Krolczyk for disbursal. ▪ As the CDC Eviction Moratorium ended on July 31, 2021, a temporary program (ERAP) has become available in each county. Attached to the meeting notice was a document detailing resources for our homeless population and providers.
<p>EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ms. Crystal Houser began the committee briefing by focusing on the second quarter’s topic of retraining. ▪ Ms. Tara Loew, Director of the Apprenticeship and Training Office, presented on registered apprenticeships. She explained that registered apprenticeships were described as a flagship model for Pennsylvania. Apprenticeships provide an excellent way for employers to invest in their workforce, and many employers wish to serve underrepresented populations, like veterans. ▪ Various funding opportunities exist for veterans to access an apprenticeship program. August 11th was the day an NGA was announced in the amount of \$12.5 million through the PA SMART initiative to support apprenticeships' growth and support infrastructure building. ▪ Ms. Jane Heiple spoke about the Troops to Teachers program. This program assists in transitioning service members into teaching positions that will serve shortage areas. ▪ Although this program will sunset on October 1, 2021, the Department of Education will use available grant funding to continue services through May of 2022. However, movement at the federal level may allow for the financing of Troops to Teachers in 2022 through the National Defense Authorization Act. ▪ Ms. Janice Mazzitti spoke about the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. Their purpose is to assist individuals who have disabilities to either maintain employment or help them obtain new employment. This office can also provide services like worksite evaluations, or funding for education (college and trade schools), to employers for on-the-job training and for apprenticeship programs. ▪ For the current FFY, OVR had 836 veteran cases, and 120 were able to obtain employment.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A question came in through chat regarding Purple Heart universities and what they or other schools are doing to assist with veterans’ tuition, much like Mercyhurst University. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ms. Heiple responded that during the Troops to Teachers grant, they had had a regional partnership program. Among these critical players were Slippery Rock University, Mercyhurst University, and Temple University. Ms. Heiple also clarified that there are two Purple Heart schools: Mercyhurst University and St. Joseph University (Philadelphia). ➤ Another chat comment raised the question of how many new teachers would be needed each year. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ms. Heiple explained that this is dependent on subject area need. The high-need subjects remain math, science, special education, and foreign languages. Coming out of the pandemic, the number of needed teachers will increase. Reporting challenges make it difficult to determine specific shortages, but 761 vacancies in PA school districts are listed on the PA REAP site.
<p style="text-align: center;">HEALTH PROMOTIONS COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ms. Donna Tilley Hess highlighted the work of SFC Lopez and his team with ongoing practical training and best practices regarding suicide prevention and resiliency that have been completed. ▪ Ms. Hess shared the 5k Run for Life event at Fort Indiantown Gap on 10 September 2021 near Memorial Lake. ▪ Star Behavioral Health Providers Program information was presented, highlighting the expansion of free training to local mental health community providers. ▪ VISN 4 continues to be an active partner in areas of suicide prevention and mental health treatment. ▪ The CDC, Pitt PERU, and other partners continue collaborative efforts to implement the NW PA Suicide Prevention Program, a five-year plan. ▪ Ms. Hess showed the PA Cares meeting schedule and provided one update. The August 12th meeting covering “The Veterans Channel” will be rescheduled for January of 2022.
<p style="text-align: center;">WOMEN VETERANS COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Col Christine Munch shared the many initiatives occurring within the Trauma Workgroup and asked Ms. Elizabeth Cooper to cover some highlights. ▪ Ms. Cooper explained that the Regional Program Outreach Coordinators (RPOCs) assist in developing a list of resources led by women veterans. Workgroup conversations also surround fears women veterans experience, the issue of MST, and ways to reduce the stigma that women may face. ▪ Ms. Cooper is undergoing training through the Women Veterans Network to conduct community outreach sessions with peer-to-peer interactions. Additionally, Ms. Cooper has conducted outreach to female offenders to move past barriers to future employment.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Trauma Workgroup is also helping compile the draft Outreach Toolkit, which the committee will discuss near the end of August. ▪ Col Munch explained that as she is still serving in the military, she helped start a women's group that meets monthly on drill weekends. During these meetings many topics come up that directly relate to work being facilitated by the Trauma Workgroup. There will be a continued effort on both sides of the service line to discuss issues and improve service women's experience.
<p style="text-align: center;">JUDICIARY COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr. Michael Carrington explained that 6.2% of the inmate population have been verified as veterans. There are also about 7,000 veteran employees within the DOC and PPB. The goal will be to develop a mechanism for communicating with veteran employees directly to ensure awareness of benefits and resources and aid their needs. ▪ There was also a discussion of reaching out to the PA State Police Association to encourage the development of a veteran coordinator position or someone who could ensure that the large number of veteran employees at PSP were aware of benefits and resources. ▪ Committee conversations have covered the need for veteran-related training within the workplace, so resources can be shared easily, especially for employees that may work on challenging shifts. ▪ General Weigl traveled to the SCI Houtzdale Veteran Service Unit (VSU) and met with DOC leadership on July 30th. ▪ The last Veteran Coordinator/Unit Manager position will be filled within a month. These positions will be responsible for advocating on behalf of the inmate and employee veterans within the agency. ▪ Mr. Carrington stated that he would like to recommend another candidate for the Women Veterans Committee. The candidate is a new hire and a veteran who had completed training for MST while during her service. ▪ Mr. Carrington recapped the long and short-term goals for his agency. He expressed his interest in working with anyone with information, resources, or programming that would benefit the inmates within the VSUs. These veterans are looking for any help available as they leave the VSUs and transition back into society. Anyone wanting to assist should get in touch with Mr. Carrington for collaboration or visit coordination. ▪ Mr. Andrew Simpson briefed about the 5th annual Widener Veteran Services event, co-sponsored by AOPC. The virtual event will be covered over three dates in late September to early October. ▪ Mr. Simpson shared that the posters generated for their awareness campaign have been printed and should be mailed in the coming weeks. ▪ The AOPC is also nearing the completion of a mobile app that allows members of the Veterans Treatment Court teams to communicate efficiently. Completion should be no later than October of 2021. ▪ Committee initiatives remain unchanged due to long-term efforts that will take coordinated measures to accomplish. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A chat question asked about the number of veterans in the general PA population compared to the incarcerated percentage of 6.2%.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Several answers came through, with the estimate somewhere between 6-10%.
NEW BUSINESS/ GOOD OF THE ORDER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ms. Krolczyk shared the flyer for the 5K Run for Life and Resource Event on September 10th at Memorial Lake at Fort Indiantown Gap. The event is open to anyone, and lunch is provided. ▪ Mr. Thomas Burrell, from DCNR, explained that his agency is in the process of hiring for the next Conservation Officer class, and he is looking to push this awareness to veterans as much as possible. There had been a drop in veteran numbers, so the agency is looking at reaching the pool of veterans. Mr. Burrell asked for help in sharing this information so that veterans know the opportunity to apply and stated he would provide information as soon as it is available. ▪ Military recognition dates were shared for August to remind us that many of these dates do not get widely discussed. However, they occur throughout the year, creating an excellent excuse to thank a service member or veteran or reach out to a battle buddy to check-in. ▪ 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.
	Next Meeting: November 3, 2021 1:00-3:00PM Arrowheads Community Club, FTIG, Bldg. 9-65
ADJOURNMENT	The meeting adjourned at 2:15 PM.

NEW ACTION ITEMS

#	ACTION	STATUS
1	Samantha Cossman to provide a schedule of committee spotlight presentations.	Pending
2	Homeless/Judiciary committees to touch base regarding legal assistance for homeless veterans.	Pending
3	Michael Carrington to send over his recommendation for a Women Veterans Committee member for consideration.	Completed
4	OA/EEWD/DMVA to connect with Thomas Burrell of the Fish and Boat Commission regarding job opportunities in which the agency would like to increase veteran applicants.	Completed

OLD ACTION ITEMS

#	ACTION	STATUS
1	N/A	