



Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services

MEETING MINUTES
May 19, 2021 1:00-2:48 PM
Webex Meeting

COUNCIL MEMBERS/DESIGNEES IN ATTENDANCE

BG (PA) Maureen H. Weigl, Chairwoman Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans Affairs	MG Mark J. Schindler, Acting Adjutant General
Jake Derrick, Governor's Policy Office	Kory Auch, Office of Administration
Denise Verchimak, Dept of Education	Matthew James, Dept of Health
Tammy Ferguson, Dept of Corrections	Cheryl Cook, Dept of Agriculture
Crystal Houser, Dept of Labor & Industry	Jamie Dunlap, PA Council on the Arts
Larry Furlong, Fish & Boat Commission	Kurt Myers, PennDOT
Kevin Longenecker, Dept of Aging	Toshua Jarrett, Member at Large
Col (R) Ward Adams, Member at Large	Christina Kotsalos, Dept of Banking & Securities

COUNCIL MEMBERS/DESIGNEES NOT IN ATTENDANCE

Terrell Martin, DCED	PWVC
Teresa Miller/Kristen Houser, DHS	State Civil Service Commission
Cindy Dunn/John Hallas, DCNR	Jeff Geibel, Dept of Drug & Alcohol Programs
Sam Petrovich, State Veterans Commission	Micah Snead, Member at Large

OTHERS PRESENT

Margo Coleman, DMVA	Andy Simpson, Assoc. of PA Courts
Col Christine Munch, DMVA, PAANG	Janette Krolczyk, DMVA
Donald Poligone, DCED	Cory Bender, DMVA
Elizabeth Cooper, DVOP Franklin/Adams Co	Elizabeth McCloud, PHEAA
Donna Tilley Hess, DHS, OMHSAS	Nicholas "Chip" Gilliland, DMVA
Jonathan Bowman, DHS, OLTL	Katie Reibsane, DMVA
Hayley Miller	Brian Natali, DMVA
Jusup McChesney, PDE	Eric Felty, DMVA
Michelle Garrison, DMVA	Samantha Cossman, DMVA
Daniel Lynch, PA Chiefs of Police Assoc.	Chelsea Ellsworth, DMVA
Fred Nardei, Pittsburgh VA	Jennifer Spitler, DMVA
Joshua Scheinberg, Dept of Agriculture	Erica Moore, DMVA
Norm Marden, OAG	Joseph Daly, PA Chiefs of Police Assoc.
Marilyn Kelly-Cavotta, Moravian College	Laura Cunningham, Acadia Healthcare
James Fearn, DHS, OLTL	Joan Nissley, DMVA
Leslie Neal, Elk County	Tim Irvin, DMVA
Michael Carrington, Dept of Corrections	Ivy Lloyd, DMVA
Danny Osten, Cumberland County VA	Greg Holler, DMVA
MG (R) Robert French	Paul DeVincenzo, DMVA
Lisa Grayson, Cumberland County	Tom Applebach, Lehigh County VA

Tracy Donley, DCED	Maj Gen (R) Eric Weller
Lisa Kaye, Monroe County VA	Jeremiah Underhill, Dept of L&I
Sierra Bilous, DHS, OMHSAS	Billy Lanham, USDOL, VETS
Sam Estrada, DMVA	William Reed, YWCA of Greater Harrisburg

<p>CALL TO ORDER, INTRODUCTIONS, AND WELCOME</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 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>MG Mark J. Schindler, Acting Adjutant General for Pennsylvania, addressed the membership and introduced the new Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans Affairs (DAG-VA) and Chairperson of the GAC-VS, BG (PA) Maureen Weigl. He provided a warm welcome to the department and the Council. He described the many ways in which BG (PA) Weigl served service members during her time in uniform and how she continues to serve veterans in her retirement.</p> <p>BG (PA) Weigl addressed the Council and expressed her enthusiasm to work with the group by helping to progress the vital initiatives currently underway.</p>
<p>APPROVAL OF FEB 3, 2021 MINUTES</p>	<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>
<p>AGING COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ms. Margo Coleman addressed the group and explained that she and Co-Chair Jonathan Bowman continue to work on initiatives derived from the Expanding Long-Term Care Services Report. ▪ The committee continues to focus on Goal 1 and 3 of their listing. Goal 1 has been researched through the DMVA PPL office. The committee is considering generating an awareness campaign to communicate with local nursing homes and other entities on identifying veterans and how to have those individuals assessed or reassessed through the Federal VA for benefit evaluation. ▪ Goal 3 discusses safeguarding Pennsylvania's aging veterans from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and self-harm. Due to the participation on the Dept of Aging's Financial Exploitation Task Force (FETF), the committee co-chairs were able to make two recommendations and have them accepted by the group. ▪ Co-chairs have been asked to lead a new collaborative task force born out of the FETF. ▪ A Pension Poaching Awareness Campaign will launch on June 1, 2021.

<p>HOMELESS COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mrs. Cossman briefed that committee meetings involve various stakeholders and include different spotlight presentations on pertinent topics. ▪ Mrs. Cossman shared various updates related to the Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF) programs and highlights regarding homeless programs from the Federal VA that the committee continues to work with regularly. ▪ The committee is currently becoming involved with the VA CHALENG (Community Homelessness Assessment Local Education & Networking Groups) program. An annual survey drives national data relating to unmet veteran needs. The committee will continue to promote project CHALENG by raising awareness, obtaining PA data, analyzing results, and assisting the VAMCs.
<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 veteran education. ▪ Ms. Denise Verchimak discussed the GI Bill program details and current statistics. She also shared that the Veteran Rapid Retraining Assistance Program (VRRAP) is a new program introduced this year in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It offers education and training for high-demand jobs to veterans who are unemployed due to the pandemic. An important note is that a veteran could have already exhausted GI Bill benefits or not have been eligible in the first place and still take advantage of this new program. ▪ Ms. Verchimak also explained that a recent IG national audit led to the VA Oversight Memo, which generated new approval criteria for schools to follow regarding the utilization of veterans' educational benefits. Also, the Isakson and Roe legislation passed in January included 15 immediately effective provisions and numerous others, which will take effect in August of 2021, some of which are tied to the Oversight Memo. ▪ For the Education Assistance Program, Ms. Houser explained the essential criteria for eligibility to the PA National Guard members. Over 400 schools across the state participate in this program, which offers a ceiling of \$4,097 per semester. ▪ In the 2021 school year, a new program launched called the Military Family Education Program. This program has similar eligibility requirements to the EAP, but this benefit assists family members of PA National Guard members. As this program is new, there will be data to share next year. ▪ Ms. Elizabeth McCloud briefed as a representative of PHEAA on two programs. The PA State Grant Program is the fourth largest need-based grant program in the country. Students take their eligibility with them to various institutions and are not limited to only certain types. Veteran applicants also qualify for the maximum award. The recent change to the max award increased due to assistance from the Federal CARES Act Funding. ▪ Ms. McCloud also discussed the PA-TIP, which was initially entirely funded with PHEAA business earnings, before having a solidified

	<p>appropriation. PA-TIP assists with shorter programs of study in high-demand industries that may not be eligible for other types of assistance. This program also collaborates with the Department of Labor and Industry and the Department of Education.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ PHEAA has brochures highlighting the PA-TIP, the PA State Grant Program, the EAP, and MFEP, and can be ordered free of charge on the PHEAA website.
<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. ▪ An updated staff listing for the Army and Air Guard psychological health professionals was included. ▪ Star Behavioral Health Providers Program information was presented, highlighting the expansion of free training to local mental health community providers. ▪ Ms. Hess highlighted the many resources and pieces of training the Federal VA offers, with links for more information on how to sign up to participate. ▪ The SAVE LIVES Act discussed all service members, veterans, families, and caregivers eligible for the COVID-19 vaccination. The "Keep Me Informed" tool aids with getting an appointment. ▪ The Veteran Fairweather Lodge (VFWL) in Lawrence County will begin renovations on July 1, 2021. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Fred Nardei commented that the Pittsburgh VA announced that they would vaccinate any family or household member of any veteran or employee who can respond to a two-hour notice to get immunized for COVID-19. ▪ The Governor’s Challenge on Suicide Prevention continues collaborations on all three priorities. Awareness campaigns, and military culturally competent VFR Healthcare updates will be forthcoming.
<p style="text-align: center;">WOMEN VETERANS COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Col Christine Munch shared the progress of a few committee goals. The members are currently working on material needed to generate a Women Veterans Outreach Toolkit, and Women Veterans tile that will be part of the DMVA website overhaul. ▪ Col Munch will be working with the Chair of the PA VFW Women Veterans Committee to generate women-centric information from various areas for a 30-minute presentation at the upcoming women’s retreat in October. ▪ Ms. Erica Moore explained that the new Trauma Workgroup is working to address several issues to fill additional gaps for women veterans and generate valuable resources that will be added to the Women Veterans tile of the DMVA website. ▪ Ms. Elizabeth Cooper shared that she is currently working on an eight-week course. At the completion, she will be certified as a Peer Support Specialist and provide peer-to-peer support sessions within her community.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Col Munch encouraged every women veteran to participate in the Women Veteran Survey that the University of Alabama hosts, active through June 30, 2021. The university will assist in providing PA stats for our use, which is a huge benefit. ▪ As a member of the Women Veterans Committee, Ms. Marilyn Kelly-Cavotta was recognized alongside 18 other women on March 30, 2021, at the Women Veterans Day event, hosted by the Governor's office and the PA Commission for Women.
<p style="text-align: center;">JUDICIARY COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr. Michael Carrington expressed his appreciation for the committee members for their continued participation and progress as they tackle multiple goals, like the early identification of veterans. ▪ COVID-19 remains a challenge to work through, but the SCI locations have made improvements in their Veteran Service Units. ▪ The executive team at the Department of Corrections (DOC) has agreed to hire a Veteran Service Unit Manager at each VSU to assist with the veterans in the correctional system and the veteran employees on staff. ▪ The PA Bar Association expressed interest assisting veterans within the DOC. A team with over 100 lawyers may provide pro bono work to staff and inmates alike on various issues. ▪ The DOC will take the next 6-8 months to generate more specialized data on veteran recidivism rates. ▪ Mr. Andrew Simpson hopes to have 2020 data posted to the AOPC website shortly. ▪ Mr. Simpson encouraged everyone on the call to join in for the virtual Statewide Veterans Treatment Court (VTC) Summit with Justice for Vets occurring Thursday and Friday, May 20-21. ▪ Mass printing of posters will be the focus after the summit. These posters will be distributed to the 500+ magisterial district courts and other locations throughout the commonwealth to identify veterans that may be justice-involved. The posters will also assist in recruiting volunteer mentors for the VTCs and educating judges and court staff to inquire about military service. Recording veteran information within the state-wide justice system is necessary for those individuals to benefit from early identification.
<p style="text-align: center;">PENSION POACHING AWARENESS CAMPAIGN</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mrs. Samantha Cossman explained VA Pensions, the various criteria listed for these benefits, and noted that these pensions are not typical "retirement" pensions. The pensions in question would likely center around older citizens. ▪ There are many ways scammers can take advantage of veterans, and in each case, the issue constitutes financial exploitation against veterans, which is a severe problem. ▪ Educating veterans' health and social service providers and their staff about these potential dangers is the way to stop this abuse. Veterans should always go through an accredited Veteran Service Officer (VSO) and never pay for getting help filing for benefits.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Pension Poaching Awareness Campaign will launch on June 1, 2021, with at least an annual recurrence after that. June is World Elder Abuse Month, and June 15 is World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, so this month will have continued focus on these issues.
NEW BUSINESS/ GOOD OF THE ORDER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr. Jake Derrick addressed the group and complimented everyone on providing informative and insightful information about veterans' needs. He stated he would keep the Council abreast of pertinent information coming out of the Governor's Office in the future, and he looked forward to working together. ▪ PA BG (R) Weigl expressed her thanks to the membership for their continued support of Pennsylvania's veterans and stated that she looked forward to meeting with individuals to become involved with specific initiatives and provide guidance moving forward. ▪ Col (R) Ward Adams reminded everyone of the Memorial Day holiday coming up soon and encouraged everyone to find an event to attend. ▪ 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: August 11, 2021 1:00-3:00PM Webex Meeting
ADJOURNMENT	The meeting adjourned at 2:48 PM.

NEW ACTION ITEMS

#	ACTION	STATUS
1	One-on-one meetings to be scheduled between various committee chairs or subject matter experts with PA BG (R) Weigl.	Complete

OLD ACTION ITEMS

#	ACTION	STATUS
1	N/A	