



---

## Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services

---

MEETING MINUTES  
November 18, 2020 1:00-2:50 PM  
Webex Meeting

### COUNCIL MEMBERS/DESIGNEES IN ATTENDANCE

Maj Gen (R) Eric G. Weller, Chairman Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans Affairs	Andrew Barnes, Governor's Policy Office
Kory Auch, Office of Administration	Ward Adams, Member at Large
Denise Verchimak, Dept of Education	Terrell Martin, DCED
Tammy Ferguson, Dept of Corrections	Kurt Myers, PennDOT
Crystal Houser, Dept of Labor & Industry	Christina Kotsalos, Dept of Banking & Securities
Larry Furlong, Fish & Boat Commission	Kevin Longenecker, Dept of Aging
Cheryl Cook, Dept of Agriculture	Toshua Jarrett, Member at Large
Jennifer Smith, Dept of Drug & Alcohol Programs	

### COUNCIL MEMBERS/DESIGNEES NOT IN ATTENDANCE

Maj Gen Anthony Carrelli, The Adjutant General	John Vento, Member at Large
Sam Petrovich, State Veterans Commission	State Civil Service Commission
Kit Watson, PWVC	Cindy Dunn/John Hallas, DCNR
Teresa Miller/Kristen Houser, Dept of Human Services	Karl Blischke/Jamie Dunlap, PA Council on the Arts
Dr. Levine/Matthew James, Dept of Health	

### OTHERS PRESENT

<b>*Tom Wolf, Governor, and special guest</b>	Andy Simpson, Assoc. of PA Courts
Patty Derry, DMVA	Janette Krolczyk, DMVA
Dr. Angela Keen, VISN 4	Joel Mutschler, DMVA
Dwaneen Hicks, DHS, OMHSAS	Katie Reibsane, DMVA
Elizabeth Cooper, DVOP Franklin/Adams Co	Chelsea Ellsworth, DMVA
Paul DeVincenzo, DMVA	Samantha Cossman, DMVA
Lori Murphy, PAARNG	Mike Palarino, DMVA
Donna Tilley Hess, DHS, OMHSAS	Jen Spitler, DMVA
Shannon Degiglio, Small Business Administration	Erica Moore, DMVA
Michael Kane, Small Business Administration	Pat Conroy, Wilkes-Barre VA
Ginny Mastrine, DHS, OMHSAS	Fred Nardei, Pittsburgh VA
Katie Dzurec, PID	Joshua Scheinberg, Dept of Agriculture
Megan Barbour, PID	Norm Marden, OAG
Jonathan Bowman, DHS, OLTL	Gilbert "Dusty" Durand, DMVA
Kimberly Sell-Shemansky, Pittsburgh VA	Rick Hamp, DMVA
Beth Ellis, DHS	Marilyn Kelly-Cavotta, Moravian College
Daniel Lynch, PA Chiefs of Police Association	Nicholas "Chip" Gilliland, DMVA
Julia Chagnon, DMVA	James Fearn, DHS, OLTL
Tom Applebach, Lehigh County VA	Richard Podguski, DOC

Brian Natali, DMVA	Manisha Arya, OA (IT)
Seth Benge, DMVA	Lisa Kaye, Monroe County VA
Dr. Darryl Jackson, DMVA	Tim Irvin, DMVA
Jeff Wallitsch, DMVA	Lisa Grayson, Cumberland County
Eric Felty, DMVA	Joan Nissley, DMVA

<p><b>CALL TO ORDER, INTRODUCTIONS, AND WELCOME</b></p>	<p>The Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services was called to order at 1:00 PM.</p> <p>Mr. Andrew Barnes introduced Governor Tom Wolf to the meeting. The Governor offered a brief "thank you" message to the Council and Committee members for supporting veterans' issues by sharing information and collaborating among all the state agencies to serve those who have served, making the commonwealth a better place for all in the process.</p> <p>Maj Gen (R) Weller provided Governor Wolf with a brief update highlighting the eight committees, including various accomplishments, goals, or initiatives for each. Maj Gen (R) Weller then described the type of wrap-around service system that is becoming achievable through multiple partnerships with veteran advocates and stakeholders and the PA VETConnect methodology.</p> <p>Working with the Federal VA on Tele-Town Hall events, advocates achieved measurable successes by reaching over 230,000 veterans throughout the commonwealth. The Federal Veterans Experience Office has also started working with DMVA, in conjunction with the County Directors for Veterans Affairs and the Service Organizations, to run a pilot program that reached 530 veterans, culminating in starting the process for veterans benefit claims.</p> <p>DMVA applied for \$13 million in grant funding and expects to receive \$7 million, which will flow to community organizations already organized to deal with the challenges in their areas, such as homelessness and substance abuse. The goal of connecting veterans to agencies and resources in the community has become realized through the PA VETConnect model and improves every day. Maj Gen (R) Weller thanked Governor Wolf for the ability to work with the sister agencies to tackle challenging issues on behalf of the veteran population, leading to an impressive update to close out the year.</p> <p>Governor Wolf thanked Maj Gen (R) Weller for his update. He commended the department and the Council for working across silos to share information, which is a difficult but necessary component for success. Governor Wolf then recapped each Committee's vital work and explained how valuable those efforts continue to be for our veterans. He also expressed his gratitude for the connections made between state services and veterans' needs. Governor Wolf mentioned that this is an implicit recognition of how the commonwealth recognizes and honors veterans by caring for our veterans' unique needs in a relevant and timely manner.</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 all participants either enter their full name into the Webex chat box or email her directly to ensure accurate attendance.</p>
<p><b>APPROVAL OF AUG 20, 2020 MINUTES</b></p>	<p>Ms. Krolczyk explained that the draft meeting minutes were distributed to the presenters for correction and then provided to the entire GAC-VS distribution via the meeting notice. Instead of a vote, Ms. Krolczyk asked for any requested edits. Hearing no comments, Ms. Krolczyk approved and accepted the minutes.</p>
<p><b>VETERANS IN PUBLIC SERVICE COMMITTEE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mr. Kory Auch briefed that the second year of the Military Employee Recognition Campaign is underway, with agencies hosting most of the recognition events around Veterans Day or during the month of November. Agencies are creatively working around the COVID-19 social distancing restrictions and ensuring employees feel valued during dignified interactions.</li> <li>▪ The Campaign has recognized a cumulative total of approximately 15,000 commonwealth employees since its inception.</li> <li>▪ The first quarter of 2021 will focus on contacting agencies for a ViPS Representative, which may or may not be the same individual who currently executes the Recognition Campaign on behalf of each agency. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ A question arose regarding the extension to local or county government. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mr. Auch explained that the ViPS has an inward focus for commonwealth employees; however, there could be discussions regarding the "pin" portion of the recognition campaign in the future.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>AGING COMMITTEE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ms. Margo Coleman addressed the group as the newest Committee Chair, taking over for Dr. Jackson. Ms. Coleman's background is in long-term care, of which she is very passionate. In her work history, she has had the opportunity to work with many agencies directly involved with long-term care to ensure aging advocates serve this population to the best of their ability.</li> <li>▪ Ms. Coleman stated that the Aging Committee identified sister agencies who were already performing excellent cross-system awareness, allowing the Committee to focus on new objectives for 2021.</li> <li>▪ The Committee will utilize various recommendations from the "Expanding Long-Term Care Services to Pennsylvania Veterans" report for their guidance moving forward.</li> <li>▪ Ms. Coleman explained that partnering with other committees and sister agencies may help discuss our aging veteran population's potential exploitation.</li> </ul>
<p><b>HEALTH PROMOTIONS COMMITTEE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ms. Donna Tilley-Hess began by updating the Council on the various training classes completed for the Army and Air National Guard members and the scheduled classes offered for 2021.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Star Behavioral Health Providers Program continues to benefit attendees. These sessions will be available online, and over 100 individuals participated in sessions during the last quarter.</li> <li>▪ Ms. Tilley-Hess explained that many experts and providers had come together to assist veterans' behavioral health needs, including federal, state, county, and community groups.</li> <li>▪ The Office of Advocacy and Reform (OAR) was established as part of Governor Wolf's "Reach Out PA" initiative in July 2019. To date, OAR has established a plan to build a trauma-informed Pennsylvania. Trauma-informed care needs to be included in the narrative about comprehensive mental wellness services and supports. Such awareness will not only benefit our military and veterans' population, but everyone seeking services in Pennsylvania.</li> <li>▪ Survey results indicated that most individuals using Telehealth services agreed they were a good idea. They will revisit the survey in the future to obtain on-going awareness of how patients feel about this service. If results remain positive, various services that were made available virtually due to Covid-19 may remain options permanently.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>HOMELESS COMMITTEE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mrs. Samantha Cossman explained that a focus for 2020 was to increase participation for the monthly committee meetings by garnering buy-in from various homeless and housing advocates, including the Supportive Services for Veterans Family (SSVF) providers and the Continuums of Care (COCs). This added participation has led to robust conversation and collaboration, leading to breaking down silos, sharing information, and finding solutions for veterans' difficult problems.</li> <li>▪ The five PA VETConnect Regional Program Outreach Coordinators (RPOCs) have been actively participating and working within their respective region of the commonwealth to connect with the homeless and housing advocates.</li> <li>▪ Mrs. Cossman explained that from 10/1/19 to 9/30/20 there were 2,460 veteran households across the commonwealth served by SSVF (these households were either homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless if not for the intervention of SSVF).</li> <li>▪ The five PA VETConnect RPOCs and the Homeless Committee co-chairs have done an excellent job of developing relationships with the VA Medical Center homeless care teams, allowing for data share from VISN 4 of the Federal VA. Over the past year, across all eight VA Medical Centers, 1,339 veterans accessed permanent housing through one or more of the VA homeless programs.</li> <li>▪ Mrs. Cossman stated that the Homeless Committee would consider taking action on the lack of resources in the communities (warming shelters, emergency shelter beds, and affordable housing) and work more closely with the Women Veterans, Aging, and Judiciary Committees in the future.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, WORKFORCE</b></p>	

**DEVELOPMENT  
COMMITTEE**

- Ms. Crystal Houser introduced Chelsea Ellsworth as the newest committee member. Ms. Ellsworth is a PA VETConnect RPOC and is committed to serving veterans in the community.
- Ms. Houser explained the fourth quarter's briefing focuses on veterans who want to start their own business, covering four different programs.
- Mr. Terrell Martin (DCED) briefed on the PA Business One-Stop Shop. Individuals who want to start or grow a business can call the toll-free number or visit the website for the program and obtain information on planning a business, registration and permitting, hiring employees, receiving funding, technical assistance, and more. This site also contains information on veteran-owned businesses, including federal, state, and regional resources. This program's ultimate purpose is to provide resources and excellent customer service to individuals wanting to do business in the commonwealth.
- Mr. Michael Kane is the Deputy District Director for the Small Business Administration (SBA) in eastern Pennsylvania. SBA's mission is to empower small businesses with the resources and support to start and grow their businesses and assist in times of crisis. Mr. Kane introduced Ms. Shannon Degiglio, a Lender Relation Specialist for the SBA, a Veteran Business Development Officer, and is an SFC in the PA Army National Guard.
- To date, Mrs. Degiglio explained that the Boots-to-Business program had held nine workshops, with over 98 attendees, for training on how to start a business as a veteran entrepreneur. Boots-to-Business (B2B) is a program for members who are currently transitioning out of the military, while the Reboot training is available in a one-day format to any individual who has served.
- These sessions are now offered online and will be for the foreseeable future. Future focus will include increasing participation in these programs and promoting awareness of the many benefits and supports that the SBA can offer to veteran entrepreneurs.
- Dr. Joshua Scheinberg (Eastern Regional Director for the Secretary of Agriculture's Executive Staff) briefed on the Homegrown by Heroes program and other initiatives. Dr. Scheinberg will be assuming the role of the Veteran Coordinator. One of the goals will be to connect with organizations that already support veterans in agriculture. Participants of the Homegrown by Heroes will be contacted for a survey to obtain feedback on how to expand the program and make significant changes. Dr. Scheinberg also explained that the Farmer Veteran Coalition is looking to establish a Pennsylvania chapter, making collaboration more straightforward in the future.
- Ms. Tina Kotsalos shared information on the PA Military Finance Alliance Webinars. Ms. Kotsalos explained that the Alliance's goal has always been to deliver free, unbiased investor and financial education tools to service members, veterans, their families, and caregivers. This program educates participants on managing their money with confidence, better understanding personal investing, and improving financial knowledge confidence if they wish to start their own business. The

	<p>sessions in 2021 will be offered online for the first time to assist individuals through the pandemic social distancing restrictions. The sessions will be interactive, less than one hour, and participants will have the ability to have their specific questions answered.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ms. Houser concluded by reminding the audience that the EEWD Committee has additional slides included in the slide presentation posted on the DMVA, GAC-VS website after the meeting.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>WOMEN VETERANS COMMITTEE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Col. Christine Munch briefed that she has transferred into a new position in the last quarter, putting a short hold on some committee operations.</li> <li>▪ Materials for out-processing military personnel are being generated for dissemination to allow those individuals to know what resources are available to them upon separation. This material includes DMVA and Federal VA programs, contact information for the County Directors for Veterans Affairs, the Veterans Crisis Line, and the Veterans Registry, among other items.</li> <li>▪ Col. Munch explained that some issues that women veterans face are slightly different from their male counterparts, plus women may be more hesitant to reach out for help. She also shared that the Women Veterans Committee would love to work with Ms. Cossman and the Homeless Committee to address women veterans' needs continually.</li> <li>▪ Col. Munch was approached by a few individuals who wanted to engage in the Committee, which could greatly assist with project advancement and Town Hall initiatives. This welcomed help could also aid committee conversations regarding new ways to reach the women veterans in the commonwealth, allowing for the Committee to gain speed in 2021.</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>JUDICIARY COMMITTEE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mr. Podguski shared that the Dept. of Corrections aims to identify veterans in the justice system and assist as many veterans as possible within a Veterans Service Unit (VSU). These units teach life skills, provide cognitive interventions, and discuss re-entry planning. The teams that manage the VSUs commonly consist of veterans who understand the specific challenges these individuals face.</li> <li>▪ Throughout the pandemic, the Dept. of Corrections has utilized video conference technology to provide information seminars, telehealth services, and treatment interventions.</li> <li>▪ From the Association of PA Courts (AOPC), Mr. Andrew Simpson briefed that Senate Bill 976 was recently signed into law, becoming effective on January 2, 2021. This bill highlights three main points: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ It allows veterans to participate in treatment courts in other counties.</li> <li>○ It encourages counties to work together on multi-county (or regional) veterans treatment courts.</li> <li>○ It addresses the establishment of veterans tracks within existing treatment courts.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Mr. Simpson also explained there had been immediate interest from various counties who would like to set up veterans' courts or a veterans' track.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Committee focus for 2021 will center around establishing new veterans courts, VSUs and solidifying the process for C &amp; P Exams for incarcerated veterans.</li> </ul>
<p><b>TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mr. Tim Irvin stepped in to provide the briefing for Ms. Patterson. Mr. Irvin explained that the voter registration link connected to the Veterans Registry would function in early December. This initiative needed additional time to implement due to the recent election and Covid-19 efforts.</li> <li>▪ Mr. Irvin briefly showed the enhancements to the PA VETConnect interface, which is an on-going effort.</li> <li>▪ Total Registry numbers are resting at 34,718, with 6,817 individuals added within 2020. Of these individuals, most of the members are between the ages of 55-69, are male, and are veterans. Mr. Irvin included a graphical breakdown by county.</li> </ul>
<p><b>PA VETCONNECT UPDATE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mr. Joel Mutschler provided an update on PA VETConnect. He began by saying "Thank You" to the audience as the GAC-VS has been instrumental in connecting with stakeholders from various agencies and building a robust network of veteran advocates.</li> <li>▪ PA VETConnect officially launched on November 9, 2020.</li> <li>▪ The objectives are simple: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Determine the needs of veterans.</li> <li>○ Find resources that meet those needs.</li> <li>○ Connect veterans with the right resources.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ RPOC interactions are close to 14,000 since last November.</li> <li>▪ Mr. Mutschler provided a few examples of how the RPOCs are making connections and changing lives for the veterans in the commonwealth through the network of advocates that has continued to develop.</li> <li>▪ Mr. Mutschler explained that the PA VETConnect Information and Referral Database Tool has almost 1,600 resources and highlighted the top ten programs and top nine services within the database.</li> <li>▪ The Department of Human Services is working on a commonwealth-wide referral tool that can link together with the PA VETConnect resources.</li> <li>▪ Mr. Mutschler concluded by explaining how many advocates are now on board, working together to provide wrap-around services as the veteran is the center of work focus. The following advocates have worked together to support our veterans: Federal social workers at the VA Medical Centers, various state agencies, seven Veteran Service Officers from service organizations, public contact employees at both of the two Regional Offices for the Veterans Benefits Administration have all been working together to support our veterans.</li> <li>▪ Mr. Mutschler explained the plan to participate in more virtual events during 2021 with the Tele-Town Halls or with the Veterans Benefits Administration, as the recent events were highly successful.</li> </ul>
<p><b>NEW BUSINESS/</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Maj Gen (R) Weller concluded by explaining the GAC-VS is the center of DMVA's universe due to the collaborative efforts that have expanded over</li> </ul>

<p><b>GOOD OF THE ORDER</b></p>	<p>the past few years. These relationships are essential as the department connects with veterans, agencies, and resources.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ On behalf of Governor Wolf, Mr. Andrew Barnes, and Maj Gen Carrelli, Maj Gen (R) Weller thanked the audience for all the work accomplished to help veterans during another high-performing year. He looks forward to continually improving statistics each year.</li>   <li>▪ Ms. Janette Krolczyk reminded the audience to visit the department website to look at the meeting slides, 2021 meeting dates, and other pertinent information. Visit <a href="http://www.dmva.pa.gov">www.dmva.pa.gov</a> and under Veterans Affairs, click the Governor’s Advisory Council on Veterans Affairs (GAC-VS) link.</li>   <li>▪ Ms. Krolczyk also reminded everyone to sign up for the Veterans Registry (<a href="http://www.register.dmva.pa.gov">www.register.dmva.pa.gov</a>) and the DMVA Digest, a weekly digital publication. The information is veteran-centric, showcasing highlights and links to information that affect our Service Member, Veteran, Family and Caregiver population. If anyone has information that may be beneficial to include in the publication, please contact <a href="mailto:RA-VA-Newsletter@pa.gov">RA-VA-Newsletter@pa.gov</a>.</li> </ul>
	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Next Meeting: FEB 3, 2021 1:00-3:00PM Arrowheads Community Club, Fort Indiantown Gap (TENTATIVE)</b></p>
<p><b>ADJOURNMENT</b></p>	<p>The meeting adjourned at 2:50 PM.</p>

**NEW ACTION ITEMS**

#	ACTION	STATUS
1	Aging Committee to connect with DMVA-PPL on possible policy changes.	Scheduled
2	Homeless Committee to connect with the Aging, Judiciary, and Women Veterans Committees.	Completed

**OLD ACTION ITEMS**

#	ACTION	STATUS
1	N/A	