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## Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services

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MEETING MINUTES  
August 19, 2020 1:00-3:02 PM  
Webex Meeting

### COUNCIL MEMBERS/DESIGNEES IN ATTENDANCE

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| Maj Gen (R) Eric G. Weller, Chairman<br>Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans Affairs | Kory Auch, Office of Administration          |
| Andrew Barnes, Governor's Policy Office  | Kristen Houser, Dept of Human Services       |
| Denise Verchimak, Dept of Education  | Terrell Martin, DCED                         |
| Tammy Ferguson, Dept of Corrections  | Kurt Myers, PennDOT                          |
| Jamie Dunlap, PA Council on the Arts   | Jeff Geibel, Dept of Drug & Alcohol Programs |
| Larry Furlong, Fish & Boat Commission  | Kevin Longenecker, Dept of Aging             |
| Cheryl Cook, Dept of Agriculture   | Crystal Houser, Dept of Labor & Industry     |
| Christina Kotsalos, Dept of Banking & Securities                                     | Kit Watson, PWVC                             |
| Sam Petrovich, State Veterans Commission   |  |

### COUNCIL MEMBERS/DESIGNEES NOT IN ATTENDANCE

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| Maj Gen Anthony Carrelli, The Adjutant General | John Vento, Member at Large              |
| Ward Adams, Member at Large                    | State Civil Service Commission           |
| Cindy Dunn/John Hallas, DCNR                   | Dr. Levine/Matthew James, Dept of Health |

### OTHERS PRESENT

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| Andy Simpson, Assoc. of PA Courts             | Brian Natali, DMVA                        |
| Constance Snavelly, SVC                       | Joel Mutschler, DMVA                      |
| Erica Moore, DMVA                             | Jeremiah Underhill, L&I, OVR              |
| Lisa Kaye, Monroe County VA                   | Janette Krolczyk, DMVA                    |
| Greg Holler, DMVA                             | Katie Reibsane, DMVA                      |
| Ryan Yoder, Dept of Corrections               | Rick Vilello, DCED                        |
| Tim Irvin, DMVA                               | Chelsea Ellsworth, DMVA                   |
| Donna Tilley Hess, DHS, OMHSAS                | Sierra Bilous, DHS, OMHSAS                |
| Mark Pugliese I, DMVA                         | Jane Heiple, Dept of Education            |
| Laura Cunningham, Retreat Behavioral Health   | Pat Conroy, Wilkes-Barre VA               |
| Lisa Grayson, Cumberland County               | Fred Nardei, Pittsburgh VA                |
| Dr. Angela Keen, VISN 4                       | Joshua Scheinberg, Dept of Agriculture    |
| Sandy Patterson, OA IT                        | Scot Albert, DMVA                         |
| Roy Remone, CompeerCORPS                      | Gilbert "Dusty" Durand, DMVA              |
| Eric Ramsay, Dept of Labor & Industry         | Justin Slep, Franklin County VA / PSACDVA |
| Jen Spitler, DMVA                             | Marilyn Kelly-Cavotta, Moravian College   |
| Daniel Lynch, PA Chiefs of Police Association | Samantha Cossman, DMVA                    |
| Joe Daly, PA Chiefs of Police Association     | James Fearn, Office of Long-Term Living   |
| Tom Applebach, Lehigh County VA               | Mike Palarino, DMVA                       |
| Rick Hamp, DMVA                               | Manisha Arya, DMVA                        |
| Michelle Baxter, DHS, OMHSAS                  | Lori Quigley, PennDOT                     |

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| Dwaneen Hicks, DHS, OMHSAS | Jamie Buchenauer, DHS |
| Jeff Wallitsch, DMVA       | Joan Nissley, DMVA    |
| Ryan Hyde, L&I, OVR        | Sam Estrada, DMVA     |

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| <p><b>CALL TO ORDER, INTRODUCTIONS AND WELCOME</b></p> | <p>The Governor’s Advisory Council on Veterans Services was called to order at 1:00PM. 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 and agency into the chat box on Webex or email her directly to ensure attendance is captured.</p> <p>As Maj Gen Carrelli was unable to attend the meeting, Maj Gen (R) Eric Weller, Chairman, addressed the group for a few opening comments. General Weller thanked everyone for joining the meeting and expressed his amazement and appreciation of how everyone has been able to adapt to the changing times due to COVID-19. He also stated that he was impressed by how adaptable our workforce has been, and in some cases the teleworking environment is allowing for employees to be even more productive, with various agencies not skipping a step.</p> <p>Ms. Kristen Houser, Deputy Secretary for DHS, OMHSAS was introduced. Ms. Houser was asked to testify before the House Human Services Committee and wanted to ask the group for possible anecdotal comments regarding substance use and COVID-19 that she could include.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Mr. Fred Nardei wrote in a chat comment for Ms. Houser that stated, “Telehealth technology issues for our older adults and those with SUD and SMI challenges.”</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>APPROVAL OF MAY 20, 2020 MINUTES</b></p>         | <p>Ms. Krolczyk explained that the meeting minutes were distributed to the May 20<sup>th</sup> presenters for correction and then provided to the entire GAC-VS distribution via the meeting notice. In lieu of a vote, Ms. Krolczyk asked for any requested edits. Hearing none, the minutes were accepted and approved.</p>  |
| <p><b>HEALTH PROMOTIONS COMMITTEE</b></p>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ms. Donna Tilley Hess began by welcoming Ms. Lori Murphy, Director of Psychological Health to the Committee, as well as Dorothy “Dee” Watkins, who filled Lt. Brandberg’s position. She also mentioned that the Mission and Vision for the Committee was updated to reflect the holistic approach being taken for assisting Service Members, veterans and their families, as well as a desire to see these members thrive, with zero suicides among those who have served.</li> <li>▪ Ms. Hess was happy to report that through the COVID-19 environment, the Health Promotions Committee has been able to adapt and still provide trainings that are in line with their goals. Various trainings have been adapted to address the challenges of COVID and the Star Behavioral Health Providers Program completely converted to on-line sessions.</li> <li>▪ The SAMHSA Governor’s Challenge for Suicide Prevention priorities were touched on, and the members who have worked on these initiatives will now serve as mentors to smaller groups in Pittsburgh and</li> </ul>   |

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|                                  | <p>Philadelphia. Additional grant funds have been applied for, which would assist with the action plans for the outlined initiatives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Second Lady Karen Pence and Mr. Robert Wilkie, Secretary of Veterans Affairs, both attended a creative arts therapy roundtable at the Pittsburgh VA and then visited nearby Forever Heart Farm to see the Bee Bootcamp Program. These events were valuable in showing the types of avenues available to assist service members who are trying to reintegrate.</li> <li>▪ Ms. Hess explained that PATH is a funding source and SOAR is a formula or methodology that can be used to increase access to other benefits. She went on to say that many of the GAC-VS Committees overlap in the work they do when assisting someone in need.</li> <li>▪ Ms. Hess touched on an initiative for all agencies working together to help vulnerable populations understand trauma-informed care. The 4 Rs to keep in mind are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Realize the depth and breadth of trauma</li> <li>• Recognize trauma-impacted behavior as symptoms of deeper wounds</li> <li>• Respond to those in a trauma-informed manner</li> <li>• Resist retraumatizing for all</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ September is Suicide Prevention Month and Retreat is doing a training related to this topic.</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>HOMELESS COMMITTEE</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mrs. Samantha Cossman shared a handful of bullets on the progress that the committee has made since the May quarterly meeting.</li> <li>▪ Mrs. Cossman, along with her fellow Regional Program Outreach Coordinators (RPOCs), have been attending as many housing/homeless meetings as they can. They are still in the process of uncovering a few additional resources out there, and are trying to reach the remaining entitlement Continuums of Care (COCs) to get that information on their calendars.</li> <li>▪ In the various meetings being held, Mrs. Cossman explained that anyone experiencing homelessness can call 211, or have someone call 211 for them, to be connected to Coordinated Entry, but feedback from some counties is that the process for being connected to Coordinated Entry is not always easy, or it does not always function as designed.</li> <li>▪ In July, Homeless Committee Co-Chairs had a meeting with Michelle Baxter of OMHSAS to invite her to participate in upcoming meetings, but also to connect her to Bill Cress who is the Homeless Lead for VISN 4. Many social workers at the Lebanon VA Homeless Care Team were trained to be SOAR certified and the goal will be to work with VISN 4 to see if other VA locations have SOAR certified personnel on staff, or if they want to have some trained.</li> <li>▪ Mr. Randy Nolen from the Office of Long-Term Living was supposed to present information regarding the Community Health Choices Program to the Homeless Committee in early August, but that presentation will be postponed.</li> </ul> |

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|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mrs. Cossman explained that there are many different sources that are capturing homeless veteran information, but they all use different systems, so it is very difficult to pool the information and obtain a clear picture of veteran homelessness state-wide. The PIT count is helpful for putting a finger on the pulse of what is occurring in a 24-hour period in Winter, but this snapshot does not give the full story of what may be occurring for our veterans and their families.</li> <li>▪ The eviction moratorium had been extended through August 31, so the Homeless Committee had legal aid provide some background education on the moratorium and where people can go for help. As this deadline approaches, veteran advocates may experience a tidal wave of veterans reaching out for assistance once the moratorium is over and eviction notices are received going forward. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Mr. Andrew Barnes asked who the DCED representatives are on the committee. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Angela Susten is on the committee and Brendan Auman has started to participate as well.</li> </ul> </li> <li>➤ Mr. Barnes also asked, at the agency level, where the gaps are and what can be done as a committee to help lift the challenges? Mr. Barnes explained that the administration discussed this information earlier in the day and the federal and state moratorium on housing is set to be lifted, requiring significant changes to be made, so an update from DCED was requested. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No one from DCED was able to comment at that time.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>EDUCATION,<br/>EMPLOYMENT,<br/>WORKFORCE<br/>DEVELOPMENT<br/>COMMITTEE</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ms. Crystal Houser opened by introducing herself to the Council. For Labor and Industry, she is the acting Division Chief of Quality Assurance for the Bureau of Workforce Partnership and Operations. She is an Army veteran of the Desert Shield/Storm era, comes from large military family and is grateful for the opportunity to serve as the Chair for a committee under the GAC-VS.</li> <li>▪ Ms. Houser expressed that individuals can have complicated needs, and she is committed to building relationships, using the PA VETConnect model and connecting a veteran to all the resources they may need, even beyond the framework of the EEWD Committee, to ensure they are being served as a whole.</li> <li>▪ As this is the third quarter of the year, the committee briefing focused on Retraining, or “I want a new career.”</li> <li>▪ Mr. Eric Ramsay, Director of Apprenticeships Training Office for the Department of Labor and Industry, briefed on Registered Apprenticeships highlighting some main points and showing a number of agencies that work to offer apprenticeships to veterans.</li> <li>▪ Ms. Denise Verchimak, from the Division of Veterans and Military Education, Department of Education, presented on On-The-Job Training and Apprenticeship Programs, as it relates to the GI Bill. These are very helpful options as the veteran receives a stipend as they are being trained in a work environment, which can also help the employer as well.</li> </ul>  |

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|  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Technical difficulties prevented Mr. Jamal Wakeem from briefing, but Ms. Jane Heiple, Program Coordinator for Troops-To-Teachers (TTT), was able to step in and provide the briefing. To date there are 71 veterans who have been hired in PA school districts, 34% of whom have been employed since 2017. TTT is a national program that is funded through a grant from the Department of Defense at a level of \$1.3 million for five years. Ms. Heiple explained that they have partnerships with Slippery Rock University, Temple University, and recently added Mercyhurst University, although they work with all higher education institutions across the commonwealth. This has been such a productive program as there are teacher shortages and veterans are outstanding candidates that can fill this need. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Mr. Andrew Barnes asked if there were any statistics on the success of the Military Family Education Program (MFEP), that the PA National Guard is offering. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No one on the call could offer information about this program, but the proper individuals would be contacted for an update.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>  |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>WOMEN<br/>VETERANS<br/>COMMITTEE</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ms. Constance Snavely stood in for Col. Christine Munch for this committee briefing. Ms. Snavely explained that the committee has been brainstorming ways to reach out to more women veterans, especially during the current environment.</li> <li>▪ The committee has discussed expanding their Town Hall slides by adding speaking notes, and possibly posting to the DMVA website. This information could also be shared with the County Directors and/or the Women’s Multi-Service Center.</li> <li>▪ Ms. Snavely also mentioned that with information constantly changing, it may be beneficial to touch base with those working on PA VETConnect to ensure that resources are current and information can be shared quickly.</li> <li>▪ The group is also looking to possibly touch base with the different TAP programs to determine how much information is put out about what DMVA has available, information on the Veterans’ Registry, and specific information relating to women’s resources. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Ms. Krolczyk updated the Council that the Women Veterans Committee had a very productive meeting a few weeks prior where they made a number of suggestions on how the DMVA website could be updated/improved. Right after that committee meeting, members of the Office of Veterans Affairs met with the DMVA Public Affairs Office for an initial brainstorming meeting on how to make the department website more visually appealing and user-friendly. Their suggestions were very helpful to the PAO team, as they will be doing the update in-house.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>JUDICIARY<br/>COMMITTEE</b></p>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mr. Ryan Yoder welcomed the two newest members to the committee; Mr. Dan Lynch and Mr. Joe Daly.</li> <li>▪ Mr. Yoder received an email regarding an incarcerated veteran in the western area of PA who is set to be released in September and has nowhere to live. Mr. Yoder’s contacts reached out to him for assistance to</li> </ul>  |

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|  | <p>make sure this veteran will have all the help and assistance as possible prior to being released. Due to the threat of being potentially homeless, Mr. Yoder and his colleagues connected with Mrs. Samantha Cossman, due to her work with the Homeless Committee, and was able to provide some great resources to the individuals assisting this veteran in need.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mr. Andy Simpson from AOPC explained how impressed he was at how the court system has adapted to the current challenges. Some events and initiatives remain in a holding pattern, but the courts are still being supported.</li> <li>▪ Mr. Yoder expressed how meaningful veterans court involvement had been for him and encouraged everyone to get involved, or at least participate in one of the graduations. The ultimate goal is for all 67 counties to have their own Veterans Court, which is a necessity. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Many comments came in over the Webex chat that wished Mr. Yoder well in his future endeavors and explained that he will be missed.</li> <li>➤ Mrs. Samantha Cossman asked if Allegheny County jail had put together a how-to guide that other county jails could use if they also wanted to stand up a VSU. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mr. Yoder didn't want to speak on behalf of the county, but he was positive that the leadership would be more than happy to assist other counties who had questions on their process.</li> </ul> </li> <li>➤ Ms. Krolczyk added that the Veterans Courts are always looking for volunteer Veteran Mentors to participate. Currently there are 25 Veterans Courts in PA and mentors are a large part of their success.</li> <li>➤ Ms. Verchimak asked if there was a website for Veteran Mentors. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mr. Simpson provided the link: <a href="http://www.pacourts.us/assets/files/setting-3862/file-3815.pdf?cb=cdfbbd">http://www.pacourts.us/assets/files/setting-3862/file-3815.pdf?cb=cdfbbd</a> to connect with a <u>Veteran Treatment Court Program Coordinator</u> for more information. Currently, there are Veterans Courts in the following counties: Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Berks, Butler, Cambria, Carbon, Chester, Clinton, Dauphin, Delaware, Erie, Fayette, Indiana, Lackawanna, Lancaster, Lebanon, Lycoming, Mercer, Montgomery, Northumberland, Philadelphia, Washington, Westmoreland, and York.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
| <p><b>VETERANS IN PUBLIC SERVICE COMMITTEE</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mr. Kory Auch briefed that the ViPS planning group has been established to discuss next steps for how the committee will take shape.</li> <li>▪ The 2020 recognition campaign, a permanent recurring event, has kicked off with OA and DMVA working together on communications. This year, and each year afterwards, will focus on new employees to the commonwealth who have military service. Communication from OA went out to those employees who still need to confirm their military service so that they can receive a pin that they may not have received last year.</li> </ul>  |

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| <p><b>TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE</b></p>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ms. Sandra Patterson explained that her team has been working with PAI, a website vendor, and the Department of State to assist with solidifying the link to voter registration on the Veterans Registry. The deployment date for this initiative has been moved back to September 29, 2020.</li> <li>▪ The PA VETConnect enhancements are keeping in line with the Governor’s customer service transformation initiative where work is constantly being done to ensure business partners and citizens have an easier time accessing information they may need from the commonwealth.</li> <li>▪ The commonwealth is working on a web-based application where multiple agencies can pool their information for individuals to search for resources and make referrals. This is currently in the procurement process and should be available sometime next year.</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>AGING COMMITTEE</b></p>                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Standing in for Dr. Jackson was Mrs. Samantha Cossman. She explained that the RPOC meeting with the Department of Aging’s APRISE program is to share what that program has to offer to older Pennsylvanians who have Medicare, or individuals with disabilities who have Medicare. This program can help someone find the best Medicare plan or help them save money on their prescriptions and copays.</li> <li>▪ PACE has been reworking their enrollment system and they do anticipate that the reported enrollment numbers will increase going forward after that data gets vetted.</li> <li>▪ “Extra Help” is a part of Medicare that can assist with reduced prescription drug costs.</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>NEW BUSINESS/ GOOD OF THE ORDER</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mr. Joel Mutschler provided an update on PA VETConnect. 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>○ All five RPOCs have been hired and as of June 2020, they have compiled an impressive number of contacts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Connected with federal, state or local government officials 443 times</li> <li>▪ Connected with County Directors for Veterans Affairs 533 times</li> <li>▪ Connected with non-profit organizations, veteran service organizations, and community leaders 255 times</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Currently, 250 veteran advocates have access to the information and referral (I&amp;R) tool, compiled specifically to improve the lives of service members, veterans and their families.</li> <li>○ A pilot program has been established involving 12 veteran service officers from veteran service organizations who will learn more about the program and will assist in improving and expanding the network.</li> <li>○ The I&amp;R tool is populated with valuable networking information thanks to extensive interagency coordination and partnerships with</li> </ul> |

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|                    | <p>community organizations spearheaded by the DMVA. Everyone enhancing the I&amp;R tool is working towards a one-stop-shop solution consistent with the Governor’s Customer Service Transformation initiative.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The PA VETConnect webpage is set to launch by Fall 2020 and program demos have been provided to multiple individuals/organizations including the Undersecretary of Benefits for the US Department of Veterans Affairs, at his request.</li> <li>○ The DMVA realizes that a program of this magnitude can only be successful with the continued cooperation of our governmental and community partners, especially those who work every day to improve the lives of veterans. A heartfelt “Thank You” to the overwhelming number of supporters who have taken the initiative and reached out, asked questions, and gotten involved to assist us with serving this population, upon hearing about this program.</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ms. Krolczyk reminded everyone that DMVA operates the DMVA Digest, which is a weekly digital publication that is sent to about 30,000 individuals that have signed up to be on the Veterans’ Registry. The information is veteran-centric, showcasing highlights and links to information that affect our Service Member, Veteran and Family population. If anyone has information that may be beneficial to include, please contact <a href="mailto:RA-VA-Newsletter@pa.gov">RA-VA-Newsletter@pa.gov</a> for possible inclusion.</li> <li>▪ Ms. Krolczyk also explained that the GAC-VS meeting dates for 2021 will be set and communicated by the November meeting.</li> </ul> |
|                    | <p><b>Next Meeting:</b><br/> <b>NOV 18, 2020 1:00-3:00PM</b><br/> <b>Arrowheads Community Club, Fort Indiantown Gap</b><br/> <b>(TENTATIVE)</b></p>  |
| <b>ADJOURNMENT</b> | The meeting was adjourned at 3:02PM.   |

**NEW ACTION ITEMS**

| # | ACTION  | STATUS    |
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| 1 | <p>Information from DCED regarding the gaps in service as it relates to the moratoriums ending and veteran homelessness:</p> <p>DCED explained that significant funding will be needed in this area moving forward. Focus will be individuals who are currently housed but are at imminent risk for homelessness.</p> | Completed |
| 2 | <p>Statistics on the success of the MFEP program:</p> <p>COVID did impact student attendance. Many college students are taking a gap semester/year.</p> <p>As of September 16, 2020, a total of 136 (<b>updated</b> as of Nov 3, 147) family members are using the MFEP this semester.</p>                            | Completed |

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|  | <p><b>PA National Guard</b><br/> Total PANG Enrolled: 2,162 (and, 106 pending)<br/> Total Officer: 567<br/> Total Enlisted: 1,818</p> <p><b>Army National Guard</b><br/> Total PAARNG enrolled: 1109 (and, 77 pending)<br/> Total Officers enrolled in MFEP: 339<br/> Total Enlisted enrolled in MFEP: 654<br/> Total PAARNG currently enrolled in MFEP: 993</p> <p><b>Air National Guard</b><br/> Total PAANG enrolled: 1053 (and, 39 pending)<br/> Total Officers enrolled: 228<br/> Total Enlisted enrolled: 825</p> |  |
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**OLD ACTION ITEMS**

| # | ACTION | STATUS |
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| 1 | N/A    |        |