



The Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services

MEETING MINUTES
MAY 20, 2020 1:00-1:57PM
Webex meeting

COUNCIL MEMBERS/DESIGNEES IN ATTENDANCE

Maj Gen (R) Eric G. Weller, Chairman Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans Affairs	Kory Auch, Office of Administration
Andrew Barnes, Governor's Policy Office	Col (R) Ward Adams, Member at Large
Denise Verchimak, Dept of Education	Kristen Houser, Dept of Human Services
Jeff Geibel, Dept of Drug & Alcohol Programs	Jamie Dunlap, PA Council on the Arts
Larry Furlong, Fish & Boat Commission	Christina Kotsalos, Dept of Banking & Securities
Kurt Myers, PennDOT	Kevin Longenecker, Dept of Aging
Terrell Martin, DCED	Cheryl Cook, Agriculture
Ryan Yoder, Corrections	Jeanne Block, Dept of Labor & Industry
Sam Petrovich, State Veterans Commission	

COUNCIL MEMBERS/DESIGNEES NOT IN ATTENDANCE

Maj Gen Anthony Carrelli, The Adjutant General	Kit Watson, PWVC
John Vento, Member at Large	Cindy Dunn/John Hallas, DCNR
Teresa Osborne, State Civil Service Commission	Dr. Levine/Doug Snyder, Dept of Health

OTHERS PRESENT

Richard Podguski, Corrections	Donna Tilley-Hess, OMHSAS
MG (R) Robert French	Lisa Kaye, Monroe County VA
Govan Martin, Prevent Suicide PA	Mark Pugliese, DMVA
Samantha Cossman, DMVA	Katie Reibsane, DMVA
Janette Krolczyk, DMVA	Margo Coleman, DMVA
Penni Bernard, PennDOT	Nicholas "Chip" Gilliland, DMVA
Cory Bender, DMVA	Joel Mutschler, DMVA
Dr. Noretta Kime, PA Air National Guard	Colonel Christine Munch, PAANG
Tim Irvin, DMVA	Dr. Angela Keen, VISN 4
Roy Remone, PA Compeer Coalition	Kimberly Gerlach, L&I
Pat Conroy, Wilkes-Barre VAMC	Fred Nardei, VA Pittsburgh
Dusty Durand, DMVA	Eric Felty, DMVA
Victor Cabral, Public Welfare	Laura Cunningham, Retreat
Tom Applebach, Lehigh County VA	Andy Simpson, Assoc. of PA Courts
Jonathan Bowman, Office of Long-Term Living	Marilyn Kelly-Cavotta, Moravian College
Laura Cunningham, Retreat Behavioral Health	Ginny Mastrine, OMHSAS
James Fearn, Office of Long-Term Living	Joan Nissley, DMVA
Brian Natali, DMVA	Rick Hamp, DMVA
Norm Marden, Office of the Attorney General	Mark Todero, State Military Family Services

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<p>CALL TO ORDER, INTRODUCTIONS AND WELCOME</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/quiet reflection. She then thanked everyone for making time to participate in this session of the GAC-VS and asked that anyone joining from a computer type in their first and last names into the chat box for inclusion in the meeting minutes. Those joining by phone were asked to email Ms. Krolczyk directly at jkrolczyk@pa.gov if they also wanted to be counted.</p> <p>As Maj Gen Carrelli was unable to attend the meeting, Maj Gen (R) Weller, Chairman, addressed the group. He gave his thanks to everyone for doing their best under the current environment and expressed his appreciation for everything being done to help veterans and others in need throughout the commonwealth during this especially challenging time.</p>
<p>APPROVAL OF MAR 4, 2020 MINUTES</p>	<p>Ms. Krolczyk explained that the meeting minutes were distributed to the March 4th presenters for correction. One minor correction was made, and the minutes were then distributed to the GAC-VS membership and committee contact lists via the meeting notice. In lieu of a vote, Ms. Krolczyk asked if there were any additional edits requested. Hearing none, the minutes were accepted and approved.</p>
<p>AGING COMMITTEE</p>	<p>No brief was included from the Aging Committee for this session due to the committee members being health care workers who needed to focus on the mission at hand.</p>
<p>HEALTH PROMOTIONS COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ms. Donna Tilley Hess briefed that the committee mission and vision statements are being updated to reflect the current direction of the committee and will be included at a later meeting. ▪ Many Suicide Prevention efforts are up and running through the commonwealth. Ms. Hess provided information on COVID Coach, the newest VA support tool for managing stress related to the current pandemic. COVID Coach was developed by the Mobile Mental Health Apps Team at the VA’s National Center for PTSD. ▪ The committee remains dedicated to the Governor’s Challenge to prevent suicide and works diligently with Rick Hamp, the commonwealth’s lead on this initiative, regarding three priorities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement community-level prevention and postvention strategies • Promote connectedness and improve care transitions • Increase lethal means safety and safety planning ▪ Various suicide prevention/intervention trainings and events are being scheduled to provide awareness of risk/warning signs and to ensure individuals know how to obtain the care needed. ▪ Star Behavioral Health Providers Program remains a useful tool for National Guard members and their families to utilize. This resource and referral program will allow individuals to access behavioral health treatment/resources in their area.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ms. Hess shared web links to various telehealth, behavioral health and COVID related resources.
<p>HOMELESS COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr. Joel Mutschler explained that this former joint committee is now stand-alone and has brought in some new members to its listing. ▪ Mission and Vision statements have been adjusted to reflect the committee’s current trajectory and multiple calls have been facilitated since the last GAC-VS meeting in March. The most recent call on May 13, 2020 involved almost 30 individuals including Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF) Providers, Continuums of Care reps, VISN staff and some PA Department staff. Everyone greatly benefitted from learning about what DMVA programs, services and support were available, and vice versa. ▪ Governor Wolf joined the challenge to end Veteran Homelessness in 2015. Since then, according to the latest data including 2019 numbers, there has been an overall downward trend in the number of Homeless Veterans and Unsheltered Veterans. ▪ The Homeless Committee continues to work closely with SSVF members, who have currently served well over 500,000 veterans nationwide since its inception. However, in recent years, SSVF funding and the number of awards has started to decline. In conjunction with SSVF, the Homeless Veterans’ Reintegration Program (HVRP) focuses on integrating veterans into meaningful employment. These grantees serve almost half the counties of the commonwealth.
<p>EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT (EEWD) COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ms. Jeanne Block has taken over as Chair of the committee and expressed her excitement with getting to work more with the Council. ▪ The committee goals have been broken up into three stages: Enhance Council’s knowledge; Evaluate data-based strategies; Widen the impact of agency efforts. ▪ Some ideas for reaching the committee goals would be to ensure the agencies represented on the GAC-VS were aware of educational and training opportunities offered through the Dept. of Education, and Labor & Industry. Additionally, the committee would like to spearhead discussion groups/opportunities for keeping veterans’ issues in the forefront of agency work, and brainstorm how all agencies could spread the word about PA VETConnect. ▪ Ms. Block briefed that the Dept. of Education has been working to protect the integrity of the GI Bill; there will be no change in housing allowance payments until 12/21/2020. Also, the passing of the Student Veteran Coronavirus Response Act will further protect and extend benefits to veterans. ▪ USDOL/VETS has also remained open since the onset of COVID-19 and they remain dedicated to their mission of assisting veterans, service members and their families to become, and remain, gainfully employed. ▪ Ms. Block then asked the Council and attendees if their agency or organization had any EEWD-type components, or veteran-centric initiatives that her committee could learn more about.

	<p><u>Comments from the group chat that were made:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ms. Lisa Kaye stated that Monroe County has VA Work Study students. ➤ Ms. Marilyn Kelly-Cavotta stated that Moravian College is currently applying for a VA work-study site, as they have 31 veteran students. ➤ Mrs. Samantha Cossman listed Veterans Community Initiatives (VCI) in Johnstown and Veterans Leadership Program (VLP) in Pittsburgh as both offering great employment programs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Block was excited for the information and will be able to connect after the meeting. ➤ Mr. Podguski asked if veterans had been hit harder than the general population, as a result of COVID-19, but there was no information to confirm.
<p>WOMEN VETERANS COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Colonel Christine Munch joined as a new member to Chair the Committee and expressed the challenges that COVID-19 has placed on everyone, and their schedules. ▪ Col Munch briefed that gathering information specific to women veterans' needs, and then sharing resources available to that population, remain the committee's objectives. ▪ Working through critical needs and next steps will be focused on in the coming months.
<p>JUDICIARY COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Due to technical difficulties, Mr. Ryan Yoder was not able to provide the brief for the committee. Mr. Rich Podguski was able to brief in his place. ▪ Mr. Podguski explained that when Governor Wolf ordered the Dept. of Corrections (DOC) to establish a temporary reprieve program, only one incarcerated veteran was eligible for potential release, out of the 1,500-1,800 individuals identified. A successful reentry was executed for that one veteran. ▪ The DOC has been working with the Federal VA to coordinate Compensation and Pension (C&P) Exams for incarcerated veterans. These exams will be at no cost to the commonwealth and will be completed within the correctional facility. ▪ Members of the Judiciary Committee are also actively engaged with the VA/SAMHSA Suicide Prevention Team. ▪ Mr. Podguski then explained that the "Time Served" video was just made public. This video showcases an example of what it's like to participate in a Veterans Court (a diversionary program) and also a Veterans Service Unit (VSU) within a correctional facility, whereby an inmate with a military background is housed in a unit that is segregated from the rest of the inmate population. Inmates in a VSU can benefit from counseling along with other services and opportunities through the US Dept. of Veterans Affairs Administration.
<p>VETERANS IN PUBLIC SERVICE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr. Kory Auch explained that this committee was established by Executive Order 2019-03 and will target internal commonwealth employees with military experience.

<p>(ViPS) COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr. Auch shared that this committee is in the beginning stages of forming, but there will be great possibilities in the future for reaching commonwealth employees and offering the facilitation of “veterans helping veterans”. ▪ As OA and DMVA work to identify employees with military service and perform the annual Recognition Campaign, the ViPS Committee will be able to benefit from the listing of service members and will be able to plot the way ahead regarding goals, setting up a communication network and provide opportunities for camaraderie and voluntary engagements.
<p>TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr. Tim Irvin explained that the committee purpose is to assist various GAC-VS Committees, as requested, with their initiatives and to assist their business needs with potential IT solutions. ▪ The first project is voter registration via the Veterans Registry. This project is set to deploy on July 8, 2020 and will allow individuals completing the process of the Veterans Registry to click “yes” if they wish to register to vote. This action will transfer them to the Department of State to complete their voter registration application. ▪ PA VETConnect remains a continued project. A recent update to the Resource and Referral Tool was completed on May 15 and access via SharePoint was provided to facilitate easier updating of resources from more remote locations. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Mr. Rich Podguski asked if there were any plans to examine how registration could be integrated with electronic voting. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Irvin stated there were no plans at this time.
<p>NEW BUSINESS/ GOOD OF THE ORDER</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr. Andrew Barnes expressed his gratitude on behalf of the Governor’s Office for everyone adapting to these challenging times and keeping veterans in the foreground. Veterans are a vulnerable population that need assistance now more than ever, and everyone on the GAC-VS plays an important role. ▪ Mr. Fred Nardei communicated by chat that an amazing job is being done by the 800 Veteran Crisis Line (VCL) workers across the three call centers. They have all switched to telework, while fielding a 15% increase in calls during March and April. There has been a decrease in Veteran suicide in those same months, which is quite a testament to their commitment to our nations’ heroes. ▪ Mr. Nardei also wanted to celebrate the Senate who unanimously approved the 988 three-digit crisis line number last week. ▪ Ms. Krolczyk reminded everyone to look out for Council-related communications regarding how the next meeting will take place and she encouraged everyone to stay home, stay safe and stay healthy in the meantime.
	<p style="text-align: center;">Next Meeting: August 19, 2020 1:00-3:00PM WEBEX Online Session (Dial-in information will be available for those without computer access.)</p>
<p>ADJOURNMENT</p>	<p>The meeting was adjourned at 1:57PM.</p>

NEW ACTION ITEMS

#	ACTION	STATUS
	There were no new action items noted for this meeting	

OLD ACTION ITEMS

#	ACTION	STATUS
1	DMVA to work with Judiciary Chair to research a law enforcement representative who could sit on this Committee.	Complete