

**Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services
Building 9-65, Arrowheads Community Club
Fort Indiantown Gap
Annville, PA 17003**

**November 14, 2018
MEETING MINUTES**

1. **Call to Order:** Ms. Crystal Petery, called the Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans' Services to order at 1:01PM.

- Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance led by Brian Natali.
- Introduction of the Council was conducted.

2. **Introductions:** The following Council Members, Representatives, designees and others were present:

Mr. Kory Auch - Office of Administration
Mr. Sam Petrovich - State Veteran Commission
Mr. Brian Natali - DMVA, Office of Veterans' Affairs
Lt. Rose Brandberg - PA Army National Guard, State Military Family Services
Mr. Mark Todero - PA Army National Guard, State Military Family Services
Mr. Thomas Applebach - Lehigh County Director of Veterans' Affairs
Ms. Jamie Dunlap - PA Council on the Arts
Mr. Michael McManus - Community and Economic Development
Mr. Chris Kemmerer - Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
Mr. Eric Felty - DMVA, Information Technology
Mr. Tim Irvin - DMVA, Information Technology
Secretary Jennifer Smith - Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs
Ms. Samantha Cossman - Department of Aging
Mr. Frederick Nardei, Jr. - U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs
Ms. Donna Hess - Dept. of Human Services, Office of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Svcs.
Dr. Scott Sheely - Department of Agriculture
Ms. Lisa Kaye - Monroe County Director of Veterans' Affairs
COL (Ret) H. Ward Adams - Member at Large
Ms. Christine Hawk - Department of Education
MG (Ret) Robert French - Civilian Aide to the Secretary of the Army
Mr. Joel Mutschler - DMVA, Office of Veterans' Affairs
Mr. Dusty Durand - DMVA, Policy Planning and Legislative Affairs
Mr. Robert Rounce - Department of Health
Mr. Cory Bender - DMVA, Office of Veterans' Affairs
Mr. Kevin Longenecker - Department of Aging
Mr. Ben Laudermilch - Department of Human Services
Ms. Cheryl Cook - Department of Agriculture
Mr. Ryan Yoder - Department of Corrections
Mr. Rich Podguski - PA Board of Probation and Parole
Ms. Christina Kotsalos - PA Banking and Securities
Mr. Andrew Barnes - Governor's Policy Office
Secretary Teresa Osborne - Department of Aging
Mr. Rick Hamp - DMVA, Office of Veterans' Affairs
Maj. Gen. (Ret) Eric Weller, Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans' Affairs - Chairman

Ms. Crystal Petery - DMVA, Office of Veterans' Affairs
Ms. Sandra Patterson - Office of Administration, Health and Human Services Delivery Center
Ms. Jeanne Block - PA Department of Labor and Industry
Ms. Jodi Zucco - Office of Attorney General
Ms. JoAnn Tresco - PA Army National Guard, State Military Family Services
Ms. Constance Snavely - State Veterans' Commission
Ms. Pat Conroy - Women Veterans Program Manager, Wilkes-Barre VA
Ms. Audrey Bergstresser - Vietnam Veterans of America
Ms. Joan Stakem - DMVA, Bureau of Veteran Homes
Ms. Val Scott - DMVA, Bureau of Veteran Homes

3. **Old Business:**

- **Review and Approval of August 15, 2018 Meeting Minutes**

Secretary Smith motioned to approve the minutes, Mr. Rich Podguski seconded.

- **Aging Committee:** Ms. Samantha Cossman, Co-Chair informed the Council that the Committee will be adding Tamaria Featherlin with DMVA Bureau of Veteran Homes and Kevin Longenecker with the Department of Aging. The Adult Day care is in a design phase, so they are tabling that until July 2019. County Home Partnerships is now being referred to as Expanding Veteran Long Term Care Partnerships and there was a meeting on 8 November. Co-Chair Joan Stakem explained that they are looking at doing a study on other viable options since the county homes are not an option. MG (Ret) Eric Weller added that the delay regarding the partnerships was due to the Federal VA not funding the construction in these facilities since the homes were not owned by the state. Recently the VA is now considering releasing funds if those homes were being leased by the state. Those options are now being explored. The committee has decided to form a workgroup to focus on the community engagement opportunities. Chris Kemmerer with DCNR has worked to provide the Veterans Homes' with contacts from their local State Parks to partner and coordinate participation for the homes' residents. Lackawanna State Park held an event which Gino Merli was able to take residents to this year and the hope is for all the Homes to take advantage of what is happening near them. PA Link Veterans Day Message was sent out last week to all 15 service areas which includes about 7,200 email addresses across the state. They have been working to collaborate communication between the County Directors and the Area Agency on Aging Directors. They have provided 2018 Benefits and Rights of Aging Booklets to those in attendance at the County Director Conference and at the National Association of County Veteran Service Officer Conference. The PA Link has been working with the Veteran Community Partnership Coordinators to help enhance their provider partnerships. An introductory call between two chapters of The Alzheimer's Association, DMVA, and county Director for Veterans Affairs was held to build a collaboration for Veterans faced with Alzheimer's or related dementias. It was mentioned that there is potential for The Alzheimer's Association to present at the 2019 County Director's Conference. They have also requested that a call be set up with the VISN now that it is understood there is a different array of services provided at the federal, state, and county levels. A work group was established to help educate nursing and personal care homes, rehab and senior centers on aid and attendance scams.

The Joint Committee on Homelessness has developed workgroups to focus on the transitional housing, cross system collaboration and resource inventory, adult day and LIFE programs. The Cross-System Collaboration group has begun to assemble a directory of key statewide resources for homeless Veterans. The Transitional Housing Group is focusing on shortening the time in transitional housing by identifying new resources for permanent housing. Recently DMVA and

Office of Long-Term Living met to discuss the LIFE Program and DMVA staff is planning to tour and meet with all LIFE locations in the Commonwealth.

Mr. Tom Applebach from Lehigh County briefed on the reduction of SSVF Funding which was key to reducing Veteran Homelessness in the Lehigh Valley. They are preparing to request funding from the PA General Fund and have been working with Senator Pat Brown to get it into State Legislation. While they are going to look to applying for grants, they are looking for recurring permanent funding to fill this gap.

Questions/Comments: Mr. Rich Podguski asked if the funding was all federal dollars and Mr. Tom Applebach answered yes. There has not been any state funding allocated directly to Veteran homeless.

- **Education, Employment and Workforce Development Committee:** Mr. Kory Auch presented that most of the employment and education programs that are offered are federal programs. The Committee is solidifying state program review to enhance awareness and understanding. While unemployment rates are not high, there is no clear data on Veteran unemployment, but they are working to obtain accurate statistics to be able to keep abreast of that initiative. Farming and Agriculture programs will be highlighted at a future meeting, but Mr. Auch wanted to mention that Mr. Scott Sheely will be attending the upcoming National Farmers Veteran Coalition meeting to see if there are valuable resources that would be applicable here. Mr. Auch had a productive meeting with the Small Business Administration, a federal entity, to discuss their programs. The representative from the Eastern Pennsylvania District agreed to present their reference materials at an upcoming meeting. Mr. Michael McManus from the Department of Community and Economic Development presented on the Pennsylvania Business One Stop Shop. It is a customer focused initiative for Commonwealth residents to use as a resource if they are interested in starting their own business. For more information, please visit www.business.pa.gov. Ms. Tina Kotsalos with the Department of Banking and Securities briefed that one of the priority needs is financial education for PA Veterans and services members. Government and non-profit agencies have formed the PA Finance Alliance to provide a wide variety of financial education through events. Mr. Mark Todero commented that many of the active guard service members have benefitted from those events and he confirmed that finances are a huge stress factor which is also linked to suicide prevention.

Questions/Comments: None at this time

- **Health and Behavioral Service Committee:** Mr. Rick Hamp, Chair introduced Mr. Joel Mutschler, Director of Programs, Initiatives, Reintegration and Outreach of DMVA as the new committee chair. Mr. Hamp updated the council on the Fairweather Lodges in the Commonwealth. The Venango County Fairweather Lodge was originally funded by Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services. The lodge coordinator has recently been raising money to make some lodge repairs, but the Veterans there are doing well. The Erie County Lodges are running by a money follows the person concept which seems to be working out. The Cumberland/ Perry Lodge has a transportation system that may be used as a model for other lodges. Secretary Jennifer Smith of Department of Human Services spoke about a grant from the federal government which allocated money directly toward the opioid crisis. These federal grants are very specific on how they are to be used and they have fairly strict reporting requirements attached to them. Mr. Hamp briefed that the Community Centered Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHC) serves a population of Veterans who have a severe need and little to no benefits. The clinics are funding Mental Health First Aide trainings and Question Persuade Refer (QPR) trainings and providing behavioral health, ptsd,

and co-occurring drug and alcohol addiction services. Even a few of the CCBHCs are networking amongst themselves to offer services that may not be provided at any one facility. Mr. Hamp went on to explain that DMVA is looking to regionalize its outreach efforts and compile a list of community providers to better service the needs of Veterans and their families. Maj. Gen. (Ret) Eric Weller will brief more on that later this meeting. The CDC has shared best practices and strategies to address tobacco use by those who are challenged with mental health and substance abuse disorders. For more information please visit <https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/disparities/promising-policies-and-practices/index.html>. Mr. Hamp touched base on the success of the Opioid Use Disorder Warm Hand Off and shared that the partners are gearing up for the second round of the summit.

- **Women Veteran Committee:** Ms. Jodi Zucco provided the committee update to the Council and introduced new committee members, Althea Circillo and Rhonda Smith. After review of the preliminary data from the survey, the responses mirror the national occurring concerns among women Veterans. Those concerns are gender bias, not being recognized, unfamiliarity with services and benefits, and access to women's healthcare. This information is also syncing with what is being learned at the Town Hall/Expos. The Carlisle Town Hall/Expo was held in June and the Philadelphia Town Hall/Expo was held in October. The next Town Hall/Expo will be held in Pittsburgh in early 2019. Ms. Constance Snavelly added that the events are procuring additional networking for the committee and they are now getting invitations to other events and building valuable partnerships.

Questions/Comments: Maj. Gen. (Ret) Eric Weller thanked the Women's Committee and expressed that the Philadelphia Town Hall/Expo was much better attended, and the networking is key.

- **Judiciary Committee:** Mr. Ryan Yoder, Chair briefed the council that the Judiciary Committee has added Mr. Andy Simpson with the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts. He asked Mr. Rich Podguski to brief on an initiative called County Veterans Reentry Program. Mr. Podguski explained that they are focused on doing a better job identifying veterans on state parole and leveraging the available services to them as they transition into the community through what the Veterans Courts in the Commonwealth can offer. They are working in Allegheny County and SCI-Mercer to explore how they can better serve the Veterans once they are returning to Allegheny County. Mr. Yoder stated that the SCI-Muncy Veteran Service Unit (VSU) grand opening will be on November 19, 2018. There will be tours for anyone interested in gaining the clearance to do so. He also discussed the piece that Penn Media filmed that was released on Veteran's Day which highlighted what the VSUs are about. To watch the clip, please visit https://youtu.be/rkC_0cOUSKs.

Questions/Comments: COL (Ret) Ward Adams commented on how well Ryan did and what a great clip it is. Ms. Crystal Petery added that there has been very positive feedback among the GAC-VS. Ms. Petery also mentioned that she and Mr. Chip Gilliland attended the Veteran Justice Outreach (VJO) Training Session and were able to make great contacts. The VJOs are a crucial part of the treatment team within each county veteran court program and they are some of the biggest advocates for the expansion of Veterans Courts and regionalization concept that AOPC is proposing.

- **Office of Administration/Information Technology Committee:** Ms. Sandra Patterson, Chair briefed the council that they are focusing on enhancing the Veterans Registry. It equates to about 1,500 enrollments per quarter. Phase two of the Registry will increase functionality by allowing

registrant to upload their discharge documents, update their personal information, and have some administrative reporting capabilities. Phase two is currently in testing phase and will be implemented in December 2018.

Questions/Comments: None at this time

- **Suicide Prevention-Peer (SPPEER) Committee:** Mr. Rick Hamp, Chair presented that the 3 subcommittees will be working together over the next quarter because there is a lot of overlap. The Community Awareness and Communication subcommittee has devised a strategic plan which outlines where they want to go as a committee. The Prevention and Treatment Services subcommittee has compiled a vast list of resources providers and services available in the community. The list includes a Crisis section followed by Screening, Prevention, and Treatment Services which would explain who each service is for and how they are implemented. Ms. Sherry Peters who has led the subcommittee has since retired from her position at DHS and she will be greatly missed. Mr. Fred Nardei leads the Training and Education subcommittee and has been invited to participate with the Allegheny County Veterans Court team and is going to be presenting at the National Suicide Prevention and Health and Wellness Conference.

Questions/Comments: None at this time

4. New Business:

Dr. Scott Sheely with the Department of Agriculture highlighted some of the events planned for Veteran and Military Family Day at the upcoming 103rd Pennsylvania Farm Show on January 10, 2019. A joint press release was sent out, please forward it on. If anyone is interested in booth space or has ideas for 20 to 30 minute programs for the public please contact Dr. Scott Sheely.

5. Commendation:

By Order of the Governor, the award of the Pennsylvania Commendation Medal for Meritorious Service was awarded to Ms. Samantha Cossman. Samantha Cossman has distinguished herself as an outstanding advocate for the citizens of Pennsylvania with special emphasis toward our Service Members, Veterans and their families through her leadership as the designee for the Secretary of the Department of Aging on the Governor's Advisory Council for Veteran Services. As Chairperson of the Aging Committee, Samantha has provided the leadership and resourcing to coordinate information sharing between the Area Agencies on Aging (AAA), the County Directors of Veterans Affairs and various community partners. Samantha and her teams have successfully focused interagency support and resources toward our currently serving military members, Veterans and their families. This interagency Veterans Day Message that she helped create has been a truly innovative and successful method of reaching our aging Veterans with relevant and timely information that they use to improve their quality of life. Samantha is a true Advocate whose dedication and selfless service truly demonstrate Government that Works. Samantha's dedication to advocacy reflects great credit upon herself, the Department of Aging, the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

6. New Business (continued):

Maj. Gen. (Ret) Eric Weller presented a proposed regionalization plan to address Veterans outreach, Veteran Homes admission and domicile transition, Veteran homelessness/employment/addiction treatments/PTSD, enhance partnerships with state agencies,

federal, county, and private entities. He would like to organize a spreadsheet by county, to list various categories of all the services and resources to promote and share the information across the Commonwealth. The goal is to not only promote cross tell but also enhance access to additional funding.

7. Next Meeting Date:

Wednesday, February 20, 2019 from 1:00PM to 3:00PM, at Arrowhead's Community Club, Fort Indiantown Gap.

8. Adjournment:

Mr. Brian Natali closed the meeting in prayer and retired the colors. The meeting was adjourned at 3:07PM

The minutes of this meeting are respectfully submitted by: Crystal Petery, Administrative Officer, OVA