

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

**November 19, 2019
MEETING MINUTES**

1. Call to Order: Ms. Crystal Petery, called the Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services to order at 1:03 PM.

- Pledge of Allegiance and moment of silence.
- Introduction of the Council and Welcome was conducted.

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

Mr. Kip Hurst - DCNR
Mr. Kory Auch - Office of Administration
Mr. Larry Furlong - Fish & Boat Commission
Mr. Ryan Yoder - Department of Corrections
Mr. Sam Petrovich - State Veterans Commission - Co Chair
Mr. Andrew Barnes - Governor's Policy Office
Maj. Gen. Anthony Carrelli, The Adjutant General
Ms. Crystal Petery - DMVA, Office of Veterans Affairs
Maj. Gen. (Ret) Eric Weller, Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans Affairs - Chairman
Mr. Rich Podguski - Department of Corrections/Probation and Parole
Mr. Jeff Geibel - Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs
Mr. Randal McKinney - Department of Education
Mr. Doug Snyder - Department of Health
Ms. Val Vicari - Dept. of Human Services, Office of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Svcs.
Mr. Kit Watson - PA War Council
Ms. Samantha Cossman - DMVA, Office of Veterans Affairs
Dr. Darryl Jackson - DMVA, Bureau of Veteran Homes
Mr. Kevin Hancock - Department of Human Services
Ms. Donna Hess - Dept. of Human Services, Office of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Svcs.
Ms. Jodi Zucco - Women Veteran Committee Chair, USAR Retired
Ms. Sandra Patterson - Office of Administration
Ms. Lisa Kaye - Monroe County Veterans' Affairs
Mr. Timothy Irvin - DMVA, IT
Mr. Eric Felty - DMVA, IT
Ms. Jeanne Block - Department of Labor and Industry
Ms. Ginny Mastrine - Dept. of Human Services, Office of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Svcs.
Ms. Constance Snavely - Keystone Paralyzed Veterans and State Veterans Commission
Dr. Scott Sheely - Department of Agriculture
Ms. Sierra Bilous - Dept. of Human Services, Office of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Svcs.
Ms. Jessica Penn-Shires - Dept. of Human Services, Office of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Svcs.
Mr. Andy Simpson - Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts
Ms. Janice Mazzitti - Department of Labor and Industry, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
Mr. Thomas Applebach - Lehigh County Veterans' Affairs
Ms. Leslie Neal - Elk County Veterans' Affairs
Ms. Lana Evans - Elk County Veterans' Affairs

Dr. Noretta Kime - PA Air National Guard
Mr. Fred Nardei - Department of Veteran Affairs
Mr. Mark Pugliese - DMVA, Office of Veterans Affairs
Ms. Kathy Silva - Women's Memorial PA State Ambassador
Mr. Jonathan Bowman - Department of Human Services
Ms. Rochelle Troutman - PA Developmental Disabilities Council
Mr. James Fearn - Office of Long-Term Living
Ms. Althea Circillo - Dauphin County Veteran Court Mentor, USAR Retired
Ms. Pat Conroy - Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center
Mr. Norman Marden - Office Attorney General
Mr. Jeff Wallitsch - DMVA, Office of Chief Council
Mr. Rich Krankota - Crawford County Veterans' Affairs
Mr. Michael McManus - Department of Community and Economic Development
Ms. Lisa Grayson - Cumberland County Register of Wills & Clerk of Orphans' Court
Ms. Christina Kotsalos - Department of Banking and Securities
Mr. Terry Stokes - Department of PA VFW
Mr. Stephen Lew - Disability Rights of PA
Mr. Mark Todero - PA Army National Guard, State Military Family Services
Ms. JoAnn Tresco - PA Army National Guard, State Military Family Services

3. Old Business:

- **Review and Approval of August 21, 2019 Meeting Minutes**
Mr. Rich Podguski motioned to approve the minutes,
Mr. Larry Furlong seconded.
- **Aging Committee:** Ms. Samantha Cossman, Co-Chair, shared the Aging Committee will continue to be Co-Chaired by Dr. Darryl Jackson and she will remain a member, but a new co-chair will be named by the Department of Aging since she has taken a new position with DMVA. In support of the mission/vision statement, “expand the awareness of and access to services, supports, benefits, and opportunities for Pennsylvania’s aging veterans and their families and caregivers” the committee wants to tackle the three main goals which are: increasing awareness among the aging and veteran system professionals about what programs and services exist within each of those networks, raise awareness of the community engagement opportunities for veterans, their caregivers, and their families, and to safeguard Pennsylvania’s aging veterans from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and self-harm. Ms. Cossman shared an overview of the partnership developments that have been made and the success of collaborative activities that have occurred over the past two years. Through the DMVA and PACE partnership there has been 2,362 mailing about PACE sent across DMVA’s 5 regions. 7 of the Department of Aging programs have been presented during PA Army National Guard Family Assistance Center calls. This year marks the 3rd consecutive year for the PA Link’s Veterans Day message. There have been 19 introductions between County Directors for Veterans Affairs and the Area Agency on Aging (AAA) Directors upon position turnover. The Department of Aging, Office of Long Term Living under Department of Human Services, Department of Health, PALA and PA Homecare Association have all committed to a veteran pension poaching awareness initiative in the coming year. The goal is to safeguard Pennsylvania’s aging veterans from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and self-harm and the committee is forming a workgroup to develop strategies to do so. Veterans Directed Care had a go-live date of 1 October in the Washington County area. Ms. Cossman briefed that the community engagement awareness initiative has been beneficial; the Fish and Boat Commission has issued 53 special activity permits for veteran fishing events in 2019 which included authorization of exemption fishing licenses for attendees, 40 attendees from 14 senior centers in York County learned about the programming available through Fish and Boat Commission, State Parks, and PA Council on the Arts.

The Aging Committee recommends an awareness campaign to promote and refer by asking ‘Have you served’ rather than ‘are you a veteran?’ They also suggest that a cross system conference to bring together key system stakeholders throughout the aging and veteran networks. This would promote information sharing, identify service gaps, and endorse solution planning. The committee mentioned that educational videos jointly presented by aging and veteran system stakeholders to explain programming and resources available to aging veteran and caregivers should be created and posted to social media and agency websites. Launching a veteran pension poaching awareness initiative and holding regional aging veteran and veteran caregiver town halls and listening sessions.

- **Joint Committee on Reducing Homelessness:** Co-Chaired by Ms. Samantha Cossman and Mr. Joel Mutschler. Ms. Cossman briefed that the mission/vision is to “collaborate with federal, state, and local government, as well as community partners to identify and build resource awareness for veterans experiencing or at risk of housing instability.” The committee goals are to establish and maintain relationships with all the Continuums of Care (CoCs) serving PA, assist DMVA and CDVAs in collaborating with community providers and resources to address needs and service gaps, obtain and analyze data from VISN, PA CoCs, and SSVF grantees, and identify the models and best practices utilized by CoCs that have successfully met US Interagency Council on Homelessness criteria to achieve and end veteran homelessness. Ms. Cossman share updated data including the point-in-time (PIT) count which shows a decrease in veteran homelessness across the state from 2016 to 2019. She also shared data received from the VISN which include programs such as HUD-VASH, SSVF, etc.

Ms. Cossman shared that the committee also recommends an awareness campaign around ‘Have you served?’ They also suggest that once service gaps are identified, a cross-system team be leveraged to work on solutions to those gaps. Ms. Cossman also recommended that a strategic referral process for connecting veterans in need with the available resources; utilizing PA VETCONNECT.

- **Expanding Long Term Care Options Committee:** Dr. Darryl Jackson and Mr. Kevin Hancock Co-Chairs, shared that they are researching and developing a report of recommendations which will be completed by 31 Dec 2019. There are now 6 working groups which have been working very well together. Some issues that came to light regarding behavioral health are peer to peer for the veterans but also for family members. The report covers much of what the Aging and Homelessness Committees have mentioned but there needs to be a specific focus on behavioral health as it relates to homelessness. Home and community-based services is another area of concern that they are looking into. Facility services is also being considered; Dr. Jackson explained that they are exploring utilizing assisted living facilities since not all veterans in the Commonwealth are able to benefit from the services provided by the Veterans Homes due to locale and level of care. This includes considering a process where insurance will cover this level of care so that veterans can reside in assisted living rather than nursing homes. Mr. Hancock stated that a draft of the report will be circulated with recommendations as to what will need to happen for a transition to take place. He stated that the report will also include the array of VA benefits and how they can be coupled with other benefits such as Medicaid or Medicare services. Their hope is to have the opportunity to be able to discuss the report, the recommendations and feedback from the council in detail at a future meeting.
- **Education, Employment and Workforce Development Committee:** Mr. Kory Auch, Chair shared the vision of ‘create greater awareness and synergy among agencies serving veterans when they are asking themselves “what do I want to do next?” The goals of the committee are to establish a recurring rhythm to present program information, magnitude, results and initiatives to the GAC-VS, use program understanding to better connect the information to the entities that need it most... those that engage veterans daily, and fully synergize agency programs into the PA VETCONNECT model. Mr. Auch gave

a year end brief to the council and provided related statistics. In 2019, 57 Career Link offices statewide served 6,555 veterans, 1,083 veterans were hired for full-time positions within Commonwealth agencies, and 27 PA businesses were recognized veteran friendly under the HIRE Vets Medallion Program which is 3rd highest in the nation. Under the PA GI Bill there were 26,362 beneficiaries receiving \$354M, there were 2,059 recipients receiving \$12.1M under the Education Assistance Program from PHEAA and the PA National Guard. The PA State Grant Program at PHEAA awarded \$5.6M to 2,311 veterans, and the PA Targeted Industry Program at PHEAA awarded \$525K to 135 veterans in 2019. In reference to employment and retraining, Veterans make up 10% of all active apprentices with the registered apprenticeships with Labor and Industry, the Troops to Teachers program hired 30 veterans in the 44 participating school districts across the Commonwealth. There were 1,761 veterans served through the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation with Labor and Industry which achieved 286 employment outcomes. In addition, Mr. Auch provided the data on individuals looking to start their own business. 71 veteran owned businesses have been served since the launch of PA Business One-Stop Shop. The Boots to Business and Re-Boot programs through the US Small Business Administration had 386 participants at 32 events across PA since 2014. The Department of Agriculture's Homegrown by Heroes identified 24 farms in 16 counties as part of the program and 3 apprenticeships completed. The PA Military Finance Alliance under the Department of Banking and Securities had 1,030 participants at the 12 events held across PA since 2014. Mr. Auch highlighted that awareness among those in contact with veterans using the PA V will then help to continue to incorporate other governmental programs which will then determine if and where any gaps may exist.

Questions/Comments: Mr. Rich Podguski asked what the PA Career Link's 'priority of service to all veterans' looks like when talking about finding a new job. Mr. Auch replied that it means when a customer comes into a Career Link office who identifies as a veteran, they are served first. Some Career Link offices do have staff members known as Disabled Veteran Outreach Program Specialist (DVOPS) and Local Veteran Employment Representatives (LVERs) who specialize in connecting veterans to employment resources they need.

Ms. Samantha Cossman commented that during a recent meeting with the Lycoming County DVOP she was informed that 11 out of the 12 most recent veterans who met with that DVOP are over age 55 seeking new employment due to financial circumstance changes. A big challenge is that these veterans are now limited physically to perform many jobs and additionally these veterans are struggling to keep up with the rapid change in technology.

- **Health Promotion Committee:** Ms. Donna Tilley Hess, Chair briefed the council that the Health Promotion Committee has combined with the Suicide Prevention Peer Committee and updated the Mission and Vision statements. Their goals are to continue the provision of Mental Health First Aid (MHFA), Question Persuade Refer (QPR), and Applied Suicide Intervention Skills (ASIST) trainings; aiming for 3 per quarter annually as a minimum, working with community partners to establish at least 2 Fairweather Lodges each year, and provide certified evidence-based training modality annually. Ms. Tilley Hess shared they intend to continue the collaborative Mental Health/Behavioral Health Summits in the Commonwealth. Since November 2018 the committee has partnered with the Federal VA on the #BeThere Campaign, Operation S.A.V.E., Reach Vet, and the Veteran X program. There were 12 Mental Health Summits conducted in communities within VISN 4. PA National Guard Service Member Family Support has worked in collaboration with community resources to ensure service members are able to recognize warning signs and get the next level of care as needed. Those accomplishments include

6 ASIST training sessions with a total of 134 participants, Ask Care Escort-Suicide Intervention (ACE-SI) Train the Trainer with a total of 63 trained, Resource Fair at Fort Indiantown Gap with 250 attendees, supported 10 Out of The Darkness Walks, SafeTalk Training with a total of 24 trained, 24 Master Resilience Trainers trained and 3 level II trained, conducted a live 60 minute radio broadcast on WITF about suicide prevention with the National Guard. The Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (OMHSAS) has also worked collaboratively with federal, state, county and community partners to provide the awareness and education that is effective in supporting trauma informed care, suicide prevention, and intervention. Those accomplishments include 50 participants in Compeer Corp Training, 20 QPR trainings where 600 individuals were trained across 5 counties, ASIST trainings with a total of 15 trained, 7 Trauma Summits training 1980 participants across 8 counties, QPR training with a total of 1337 trained which includes 12 QPR Train the Trainer sessions, and 30 individuals trained in MHFA Train the Trainer sessions. The Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic in the first 2 years served 636 veterans, 6 active duty, and 19 currently serving Guard/Reserves members. Ms. Tilley Hess highlighted that \$2M in State Opioid Grant funding will aid in bringing awareness and address substance abuse disorder and co-occurring conditions often associated.

Ms. Tilley Hess shared that the committee's recommendations be all encompassing to all branches and all service member/veteran categories (deployed or not). Following through, consistency, community partner involvement all helps service members and veterans, but also help fight the stigma of mental health. Education and awareness of resources may help expedite the services needed but it also addresses the ongoing challenge that service members fear speaking up due to an adverse impact on their career. For the list of recommendations, please see the November 2019 GAC-VS power point slides 33-34 or contact Crystal Petery, GAC-VS Coordinator at crpetery@pa.gov.

- **Women Veteran Committee:** Ms. Jodi Zucco, Chair briefed that the committee's mission remains identifying the unique concerns to women veterans and making recommendations to address those concerns. They shared that the committee goals include actively engaging in the military and veteran community to promote awareness of their committee and provide education and outreach on benefits and healthcare available to Pennsylvania's women veterans. They have conducted a survey which identified top issues to women veterans as gender bias, access to medical care and veteran benefits, and a lack of inclusiveness in veteran organizations. Ms. Zucco briefed that the committee has participated in several guest speaking events in 2019 including the Military Museum Honoring Military Women, State Association of County Directors June Conference, Monroe County Criminal Justice Advisory Board meeting, and Tobyhanna Army Depot Retirement Day. They have participated in VFW Women's Retreat, PA Commission for Women Honoring Female Veterans, Philadelphia Honor Flight, ribbon cutting for SCI-Muncy VSU opening, roundtable discussion with Congresswoman Susan Wild, and Allentown VA Clinic orientation with Congressman Conor Lamb. They have conducted 2 more town halls/expos, one in Philadelphia and one in Wilkes-Barre, and were invited to present at the town hall hosted by Buck County Veteran Affairs' at Parx Casino in Buck's County. They have been establishing partnerships and networking among federal, state, and local entities. The committee hopes to further network among more veteran and women veteran organizations. While most of the committee members are not current Commonwealth employees, they do work and volunteer in a variety of veteran related initiatives; to include female veteran in agriculture, veteran court mentorship, stolen valor and pension poaching legal actions, and disabled women veteran equal representation. Ms. Zucco shared that the committee recommends developing a brochure on the GAC-VS to highlight each committee. They also suggested that conducting roundtable events with select service organizations and women's groups could be educated on the mission of the committee and work together collaboratively.

- **Judiciary Committee:** Mr. Ryan Yoder, Chair briefed that his committee membership has increased in 2019 which shows the dedication to fellow veterans. He shared that in 2019 the Department of Corrections has approximately 2829 verified inmate veterans who represent 6% of the total population within their facilities. That number is a decrease of over 600 less inmates incarcerated since 2016. They now have 5 Veteran Service Units (VSU) including one all-female VSU at SCI-Muncy. Since November 2018 Department of Military and Veteran Affairs Veteran Service Officers have provided one on one outreach benefit and claims counseling services to 120 incarcerated veterans. Mr. Yoder provided the statistics on recidivism rates for the 5 VSUs. Mr. Jeff Geibel asked how recidivism is defined. Mr. Yoder explained that in this instance, it means that the inmate reoffends and returns to prison. Mr. Rich Podguski added that it could be due to new charges or it could mean a violation of parole. The total number of inmates released was 337 and total of 34 returned to prison which is a rate of approximately 10%. Comparatively speaking the general population recidivism rate is between 50-55% within the first year, post release. For a breakdown of this data please refer to November 2019 GAC-VS power point slide 46 or contact Crystal Petery, GAC-VS Coordinator at crpetery@pa.gov.

One of the issues the DOC is working to fix in 2020 is a hurdle all incarcerated veterans face which is the difficulty in getting the required Compensation and Pension examinations required to file a VA claim. The Department of Corrections is in the early stages of working with representatives in Washington D.C. on a new program to allow for inmates to be seen by VA professionals while incarcerated. They are exploring different options on how they will be able to make this happen.

Mr. Andy Simpson briefed that in 2019, 5 more veteran courts were added bringing the total to 25 across the Commonwealth. As of September 2019, 51 of 67 counties currently have a type of treatment court and the total is expected to grow in 2020. The counties that do not have a specific dedicated veteran court often have a track with their treatment courts which veterans can participate in. The total number of veterans who successfully graduated from a veteran treatment court during 2017-2018 was 403 individuals. In September the Administrative Office of PA Courts (AOPC) hosted their first Veteran Mentor Boot Camp where a 98-year-old WWII veteran mentor was honored for his service in Lancaster County Veteran Court. Mr. Simpson also shared that AOPC in collaboration with the Center for Court Innovation is finalizing their statewide strategic plan and more will come on that.

Mr. Yoder updated the council that a national publication is in the final stages featuring Pennsylvania as one of four state's correction systems being featured for their VSUs. He will share the information and publication from National Institute of Corrections once it is available.

- **Office of Administration/Information Technology Committee:** Ms. Sandra Patterson, Chair briefed the council that many of their committee members are subject matter experts that weigh in on an ad hoc basis. As of October 2, there have been 25,373 registrants on the Veterans Registry since its creation in 2015. They have created the capability for users to upload their discharge documents in the registry. Ms. Patterson highlighted some age, gender, and county location metrics on those who have registered.

4. New Business:

Mr. Andrew Barnes thanked the committees and all attendees on behalf of Governor Wolf and noted that in the needs of veterans is a priority for 2020 so the administration plans to recommit their attention and additional resources to the veteran community. He called on all state agencies to be active participants, as taking care of veterans does not fall on any one agency or committee. Mr. Barnes shared that launching an

elder abuse campaign is also priority because aging Pennsylvanians and aging Pennsylvania veterans are a target. Mr. Barnes asked if the Department of Labor and Industry has training videos within the Career Link to identify a veteran and how those next steps are handled to getting veterans connected to the services they need. He referred to Act 69 which makes state agencies responsible to providing more of a warm hand off rather than just signing veterans up for the registry. Mr. Barnes stated that he would like to see local and or state law enforcement representation on the Judiciary Committee. Many times, it's the first responder that is encountering a veteran in need and many first responders are themselves veterans which could prove to be a strong bond. Mr. Barnes requested that those in attendance affiliated with state agencies go back to their agencies and work with executive leadership because responsibility to Act 69 needs to be recommitted to ensure everyone is complying. He gave the example that while 25,000 individuals connected to the Veterans Registry is great, we have over 600,000 veterans in the Commonwealth, so we all have some work to do to get our veteran constituents connected to DMVA and the Veterans Registry.

Ms. Angela Stateler provided a summary of the key changes made by the update of the Executive Order that Governor Wolf signed on 4 November 2019.

Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Eric Weller expressed his appreciation for all the statistics provided. He feels that we are well on our way to identifying what all agencies are doing for veterans and one of our missions is going to be to do a better job at highlighting the programs and resources that each agency is providing and getting veterans connected to those services.

5. Next Meeting Date:

Wednesday, February 19, 2020 from 1:00PM to 3:00PM, at the Arrowheads Community Club, Fort Indiantown Gap, Annville, PA 17003.

6. Adjournment:

The meeting was adjourned at 2:52 PM

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