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<b>1000 (5)</b>	<b>CALL TO ORDER</b>	Chairman Sam Petrovich
	Moment of Silence	Vice-Chairman Nick Taylor
	Pledge of Allegiance	Chairman Sam Petrovich
<b>1005 (5)</b>	Commission Introduction	Chairman Sam Petrovich
<b>1010 (3)</b>	Oath of Office	MG Mark Schindler
	Robert Forbes- AMVETS	
<b>1013 (3)</b>	Approval of 4 December meeting minutes	<b>REQUIRES A VOTE</b>
<b>1016 (10)</b>	DMVA Military Update	MG Mark Schindler
<b>1026 (15)</b>	VISN 4	Mr. Tim Liezert
	<b>OLD BUSINESS</b>	
	<b>NEW BUSINESS</b>	
<b>1041 (5)</b>	DMVA, Policy, Planning & Legislative Affairs	Mr. Seth Bengé
<b>1046 (10)</b>	DMVA, Bureau of Veterans Homes	Mr. Rich Adams
<b>1056 (10)</b>	DMVA, Bureau of Programs, Initiatives, Reintegration and Outreach (PIRO)	Mr. Joel Mutschler
<b>1106 (4)</b>	Approval of Programs Report (Report provided by DMVA)	<b>REQUIRES A VOTE</b>
<b>1110 (5)</b>	Act 66 Committee report	Mr. Anthony Jorgenson
<b>1115 (5)</b>	RETX Committee report	Mr. Justin Slep
<b>1120 (5)</b>	Legislative Committee report	Chairman Sam Petrovich
<b>1125 (5)</b>	Pensions & Relief/Grave markings Committee report	Ms. Connie Snavelly
<b>1135 (10)</b>	Member-at-Large Committee	Chairman Sam Petrovich
<b>1145 (10)</b>	Good of the Order	Chairman Sam Petrovich
<b>1155 (5)</b>	<b>Next Meeting:</b>	
	April 2, 2021	
	Webex Virtual	
<b>1200</b>	<b>ADJOURNMENT</b>	Chairman Sam Petrovich
	<b>RETIRING OF COLORS</b>	Chairman Sam Petrovich

# State Veterans Commission

## Meeting Minutes

December 4, 2020  
10:00 AM to 11:48 AM  
Webex Video Teleconference

<b>Call to Order</b>	<b>Chairman Samuel Petrovich</b>
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The Pennsylvania State Veterans Commission (SVC) meeting was called to order at 10:00 AM by Chairman Samuel Petrovich.

### Moment of Silence and Pledge of Allegiance

The meeting was opened with a moment of silence for the upcoming 79th anniversary of the attack on Pearl Harbor, and recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance led by Chairman Samuel Petrovich.

### Commission Introductions

Maj Gen Anthony Carrelli	The Adjutant General
Mr. Samuel Petrovich	Chairman, SVC
MG Mark Schindler	Deputy Adjutant General – Army
Maj Gen (Ret) Eric Weller	Deputy Adjutant General – Veterans Affairs
Mr. Nicholas Taylor	Vice Chairman, SVC
Mr. John Pliska	Executive Director, AMVETS
Mr. Ronald Peters	Commander, Veterans of Foreign Wars
Mr. John Getz	Adjutant, Veterans of Foreign Wars
Mr. Leonard Johnson	Commander, Disabled American Veterans
Mr. William Albert	President, Blinded Veterans Association
Mr. Justin Slep	President, PA State Association of County Directors of Veterans Affairs
Mr. Keith Beebe	President, Military Officers Association of America
Mr. Larry Googins	Commander, Vietnam Veterans of America
Mr. Christopher Fidler	Representative, Keystone Paralyzed Veterans of America
Mr. Robert Ziltz	Commandant, Marine Corps League
Mr. Philip Arnold	Adjutant, Military Order of the Purple Heart
Mr. James Hogan	Adjutant, The American Legion
Mr. Robert John	Commander, The American Legion
Ms. Constance Snavelly	Member at Large
Mr. Tim Liezert	Director, VISN 4
<b>Others Present</b>	
Mr. James Metcalfe	VA – National Cemetery Administration
Mr. Nathan Silcox	Office of Sen. Mike Regan
Ms. Patricia Derry	DMVA-OA
Ms. Elizabeth Pettis	DMVA-OCC
Mr. Jeffrey Wallitsch	DMVA-OCC
Mr. Gilbert Durand	DMVA-PPL
Mr. Seth Bengel	DMVA-PPL
Mr. Rick Hamp	DMVA-OVA

Ms. Janette Krolczyk	DMVA-OVA
Mr. Andrew Ruscavage	DMVA-BVH
Mr. Michael Palarino	DMVA-BVH
Ms. Jennifer Spitler	DMVA-BVH
Mr. Joel Mutschler	DMVA-PIRO
Mr. Chip Gilliland	DMVA-PIRO (Outreach and Reintegration)
Mr. Paul DeVincenzo	DMVA-PIRO (Outreach and Reintegration)
Ms. Erica Moore	DMVA-PIRO (Outreach and Reintegration)
Mr. Greg Holler	DMVA-PIRO (Programs and Services)
Ms. Catherine Reibsane	DMVA-PIRO (Programs and Services)
Mr. Brian Natali	DMVA-PIRO (Programs and Services)
Mr. Jeffery King	DMVA-PIRO (Programs and Services)
Ms. Brett Anne Beatty	DMVA-PIRO (Programs and Services – Phila.)
Mr. Aaron Rieber	DMVA-PIRO (Programs and Services – Pitt.)
Mr. Ken Lebron	Berks County Office of Veterans Affairs
Ms. Susan Price	Chester County Office of Veterans Affairs
Mr. Anthony Digiacommo	Crawford County Office of Veterans Affairs
Mr. Danny Osten	Cumberland County Office of Veterans Affairs
Mr. Thomas Coreau	Dauphin County Office of Veterans Affairs
Mr. Tony DiFrancesco	Dauphin County Office of Veterans Affairs
Ms. Leslie Neal	Elk County Office of Veterans Affairs
Ms. Lana Vendur	Elk County Office of Veterans Affairs
Mr. Eric Cepek	Forest County Office of Veterans Affairs
Mr. Brian Bassett	Huntingdon County Office of Veterans Affairs
Ms. Jodi Barone	Lancaster County Office of Veterans Affairs
Mr. David Reitz	Jefferson County Office of Veterans Affairs
Mr. James Conway	Mifflin County Office of Veterans Affairs
Mr. Alex Carillo	Northampton County Office of Veterans Affairs
Mr. David Cowgill	Department of Veterans Affairs
Mr. Robert Forbes	AMVETS
Mr. Robert Gray	Keystone Paralyzed Veterans of America ne
Mr. Richard Hudzinski	Vietnam Veterans of America
Mr. Charles Jackson	Veterans of Foreign Wars
Mr. Kit Watson	American Legion

<b>Oath of Office</b>	<b>Maj Gen Carrelli</b>
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General Carrelli administered the oath of office to Mr. William Albert, Blind Veterans of America, as a new member of the State Veterans Commission.

<b>Award Presentation</b>	<b>Maj Gen Carrelli</b>
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General Carrelli awarded the Pennsylvania Veterans Service Award to Mr. James Metcalfe II, former Director, Indiantown Gap National Cemetery.

**Approval of the October 2, 2020 Meeting Minutes**

**Motion:** Mr. Taylor, Vice Chairman, made a motion to approve the minutes.

**Second:** Mr. John, American Legion, seconded the motion.

The body agreed; motion carried.

<b>Military Update</b>	<b>Maj Gen Anthony Carrelli</b>
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With respect to the military update, PANG is having another big year. The Expeditionary Combat Aviation Brigade is the biggest unit out now and there will be multiple large groups going out over the next year. So, our operation tempo is picking up, along with everything we are doing for COVID19. The President extended our COVID19 orders yesterday, we are extended through the end of March 2021. I think we have been in 45 nursing homes throughout the state and we are in several homes this week as well. With respect to civil unrest, since the last meeting, unfortunately there was a shooting in Philadelphia which caused some mass protests, and we got called to go in again. We had nearly 2,000 Guardsmen in the city for approximately ten days during the election period. We are looking at sending close to 1,000 Guardsmen down to the DC area for the inauguration, which we support every four years. We are not sure what this inauguration is going to look like with the COVID19 outbreak the way it is. DC has been very concerned about the numbers so far that are committed to go. As busy as we are, we are still going to be able to commit some people to get down there. So, on the Guard side we are extremely busy with all the work we are doing here at home as well.

As far as COVID19 concerns, I was in a call with the Secretary of Health recently. We are in the middle of another big wave. I think the numbers I saw yesterday or the day before, we were over 8,000 new cases a day in Pennsylvania. The numbers are still on the rise which is extremely concerning. We have far exceeded where we were in the spring, which we thought was the worst, and we are seeing it correspondingly in our homes. The number of cases in homes of residents and staff are way up. We had gone a while with zero cases in our homes, sometimes for weeks, and we are doing general population testing almost weekly now. It is very frequent, and the numbers are still on the rise. There is some hope out there with the vaccines. The Secretary of Health outlined the plan that they are talking about to vaccinate the first set of people in PA: healthcare workers, seniors, people in long-term care homes, first responders... that is Group 1. And, she seems to think it will take three to three and half months to get all of them vaccinated. So, if we start in earnest at the beginning of the new year, we are at least until March or the end of March until we get all the folks in Group 1 vaccinated, then we are into the general population. The models show that the COVID19 outbreak we are experiencing right now is probably going to peak sometime in mid-January to early February. So, we are going to be under this for a while and we will continue to struggle in the way that we reach out to our Veterans, especially elderly Veterans, and their need to stay out of public places because of the pandemic conditions. There are no safe counties anymore.

On the state side, the Governor's Office came out and said we are going to continue to telework. That was originally through the end of December, it has now been extended to the end of June. I'm bringing this up so everyone knows this is going to be a long-term situation. The way we have been conducting these meetings in a virtual format is going to continue for quite some time, at least through spring and into early summer. I'm throwing that out for everyone's planning.

The Legislature met and approved a budget that the Governor signed. So, we have "budget part 2" for the year. If you remember they had approved 5/12 of the budget and full funding for some of the Veterans' programs earlier in the year. Now, they have approved the other 7/12 of the budget. The numbers are out, it is public information, but we will make sure you get these. We took cuts in our GGO account which holds the salaries for Guard and some of our Veterans Affairs employees. So, we took almost a 2% cut there. That was a little painful, but I think we will be able to take those cuts out of some things we had hoped to buy and some modernization projects we had planned. We are still under a hiring freeze, so we have had people who have retired and not replacing in some cases. I think we will be able to manage that cut without a furlough or having to stop with any current programs. So, even with that cut, I think we will survive ok. Everything else is pretty level except we lost \$3 million in the homes. But again, we have plans to use some CARES money and COVID19 money to cover those costs as well. The only other account of interest: the DAV money for transportation was fully funded in the earlier budget, and Act 66 was really the only other thing. We got 5/12 earlier and now they gave us the bulk of the 7/12, so they essentially restored us back to last year's amount. If

you remember, there was an addition last year that plussed us up to \$3.14 million, and then in the proposed Governor's budget there was a decrease to that, then that was restored. So, in this budget, we are back up to \$3.14 million again, essentially level from last year.

Obviously, there are a lot of internal workings for next year's budget. Those are set to begin in February. There are some more hearings this year, and it is the first time for DMVA to be doing the performance-based budgeting. We will have a hearing for that in January and then the regular hearings start back in February. Am I concerned? Yes, I am very concerned. Revenues are down and we must look at worst case versus best case scenarios, but we are hoping to hold where we are. Worst case, there was talk of massive furloughs and the grant programs getting cut in half. We did not actually see that, so I am hoping revenues start to rebound. But, the concern right now with COVID19 is if it does interrupt commerce and the amount of revenue coming into the Commonwealth will influence what we will have to spend next year. Still some concerns about what this upcoming budget process will look like, so we must stay engaged.

Mr. Chairman, I got your email on the nominations and the new process. I want to commend and thank everyone for their time. We spent a lot of time over the last couple years developing that process. You guys lived through it. You went through all the steps in that process and gave me a really good product. I just looked at it briefly; Dusty is going to put it together for me with all the packages and we will get it down to the Governor's Office and get some appointments made. Regarding some new information I got from Dusty yesterday, Mr. Chairman, we talked about how do we extend the at-large positions? But then we got some information from the Governor's Office. Essentially, all four of the at-large positions have set term dates on the calendar. So, whenever we put someone into a position, they are filling the rest of that term. When that term ends, a new term begins. So, we are going to have to work with that matrix and put the two new nominees into those appropriate slots and the existing members whose terms have expired, we will have to do it again. This time, when we advertise, as we do this again, we will have to publish the dates. We will say: "We are advertising an at-large position which starts at this time and ends at this time." Again, we are going to have to fit into these established term dates that the Governor's Office already has. I appreciate the time and effort you all put in to give me that really good product, it was a huge success.

#### Questions/Discussion

Mr. Petrovich: Everyone just heard General Carrelli on the Member-at Large topic. I would just like to thank the whole Committee and Dusty for all their efforts. We got that wrinkle from the Governor's Office. I thought we had a really good solution, but it only lasted from Indiantown Gap to Harrisburg. Dusty and the Committee will have some conversations next week, so we will get back to you. Again, I thank everybody.

**VISN 4**

**Mr. Tim Liezert**

You have received our slides with updated access, wait time, and care in the community data as a read ahead. Please let me know if you have any questions

#### **Leadership Update**

I am pleased to announce the appointment of Mr. Jeffrey Beiler as the new director of the Coatesville VA Medical Center effective October 11th. Mr. Beiler previously served as the associate director of our Lebanon VA Medical Center since Nov. 12, 2017. We are currently searching for new chiefs of staff for our Butler and Erie VAs and for a new associate director for the Lebanon VA.

#### **Billing Statements**

The printing of billing statements will resume in January 2021 which will include unpaid charges incurred prior to April 2020 and charges for services and medications received from April 2020 through December 31, 2020. I have included a list of frequently asked questions as part of your read ahead material.

### **Flu Shots**

I encourage everyone to get a flu shot if you have not done so already. The sooner you receive your shot, the sooner you will be protected. Getting a flu vaccine is more important than ever this year to protect yourself and the people around you from flu, and to help reduce the strain on health care systems responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. All nine VISN 4 facilities, including outpatient clinics, have implemented many different ways to get a flu shot from VA – we are hosting walk-in clinics, drive-through clinics, and scheduling brief appointments just for flu shots. Check your facility’s webpage or Facebook page to learn more. Eligible Veterans can also choose to get a flu shot at a retail pharmacy or urgent care location who participates in our Community Care Network. No appointment or VA referral is required. Veterans just need to present a valid government-issued identification (such as a Veterans Health ID Card, Department of Defense ID card, state-issued driver's license or ID card, etc.). You can visit [www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/flushot.asp](http://www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/flushot.asp) to learn more. If a Veteran patient gets their flu shot somewhere other than a VA facility or a VA community care facility, we do ask that they call their VA provider or send them a secure message via My HealtheVet with all the details – where, when and type of flu shot.

### **Caregiver Support Update**

On October first, VA’s Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers expanded eligibility to include Veterans who incurred or aggravated a serious injury or illness in the line of duty on or before May 7, 1975 (WWII, Korean War and Vietnam Veterans). It previously served only post-9/11 Veterans. In two years, VA will expand the benefit to all Veterans. The program provides family caregivers of eligible Veterans with benefits that include training, enhanced respite care, counseling, technical support, beneficiary travel, a monthly stipend payment and access to health care. Both the VISN team and each facility have been hiring additional staff and working very hard to prepare for this expansion. In addition, all Caregivers who provide personal care services to Veterans enrolled in Veterans Affairs(VA) healthcare have access to the Program of General Caregiver Support Services. For more information on either program and other VA services for caregivers, visit [www.caregiver.va.gov](http://www.caregiver.va.gov). During the first 25 days of the program expansion, VISN 4 received 502 applications. During the same time frame nearly 16,000 applications were received nationwide. More than 57 percent of the VISN 4 applications are for Veterans who are more than 70 years old.

### **Customer Service Update**

Nationally, VA’s trust score over the last 90 days was 89.4. In VISN 4, our trust score over the last 90 days was 92.1, which is the third highest VISN in the nation. In late October, VISN 4 participated in the Pennsylvania Virtual Veteran Experience Action Center event, which connected Veterans to VA and community services through telephone appointments. More than 500 Veterans were served over the course of the 3-day event, with VISN 4 directly assisting about ten percent of those Veterans. All VISN 4 VA medical centers had staff standing by to assist Veterans as a part of this event, and we were pleased to hear that so many Veterans had positive things to say about their experience.

### **Connected Care Update**

Veterans with a My HealtheVet Premium Account can now join their VA Video Connect appointment on the View My VA Appointments page. The “Join Session” button will be grayed out while it is inactive and will turn green 30 minutes prior to their appointment. The button will stay green until 12 hours after the start of their appointment. VA Video Connect appointments that occurred in the past (after 12 hours) will no longer display

in My HealtheVet. Starting November first, the VISN 4 Tele Urgent Care expanded the operations from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. 365 days/year! Veterans and caregivers can call 1-833-TELE-URGENT (1-833-835-3874) to talk to one of our nurses who will assess their needs. This is a great option for Veterans who want to limit exposure or would have a hard time traveling. They can save time and money! Our Tele Urgent Care staff can advise Veterans about their care and also help treat many common conditions including rashes, cuts, tick and insect bites, headaches, cold and flu symptoms, back/joint pain, pink eye, and upset stomach to name a few. Depending on their condition, some Veterans can be transferred in real time to a provider who will serve them through a video appointment. Beginning November second, Veterans, caregivers, and beneficiaries who are eligible for reimbursement of mileage and other travel expenses to and from approved health care appointments are now able to enter claims in the new Beneficiary Travel Self-Service System. This online portal will simplify the current claim submission process for beneficiaries and ensure timely processing and payment of travel reimbursements. It will require a DS logon. You can access this system at access dot v-a dot gov. If Veterans have questions about this, they may send a message through My HealtheVet to their facility's Beneficiary Travel Secure Messaging Team.

### **Coronavirus Preparedness and Response - Update**

VISN 4 is committed to providing exceptional and safe care to our Veterans – their trust in VA is paramount. Additionally, the safety of both our patients and our employees continues to be our top priority during this ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. As part of this commitment, we must ensure that our Veteran patients are receiving the best and most appropriate level of care for their current condition and needs. COVID-19 is a brand-new disease, and as more and more research is conducted, medical professionals are learning more and adapting guidance and procedures for treating and handling this disease. Our incident command and infection prevention teams are staying up to date with all of this new information, along with monitoring community prevalence and supply availability, to help guide facility procedures for providing exceptional and safe care to both Veterans with COVID-19 and Veterans without COVID-19. We are working to prepare for when a vaccine becomes available. Here is the message we would like to ensure our Veterans hear: Do not delay getting care. Make sure you're taking care of the medical needs you would have addressed before COVID-19, like renewing prescriptions and having regular check-ins with your care team. If you feel like something is not quite right and you would normally see a doctor during non-COVID-19 times, call your care team. It is far better to have someone on your care team review your symptoms than wait until it's harder to treat them. We encourage you to consider a phone or video appointment for routine needs. However, for those who are severely ill or require intervention for life-threatening conditions, there is no substitute for in-person care. VA is ready, and we're able to handle your immediate health care needs right now. As we continue to move forward, be assured, safe care is our mission and our continuing commitment to our Veterans, visitors, and employees.

In closing, I'd like to thank you for your continued support of VISN 4.

#### Questions/Discussion

Mr. Petrovich: I would like to personally thank you and members of your staff –Dave Cowgill, Karen O'Neill, and Nicole Lynn– for working with the hospitals to ensure the vans that transport Veterans are outfitted and prepared to keep driver and passenger safety at the utmost. Thank you for moving that forward.

Mr. Liezert: You're welcome, it's our pleasure.

#### **OLD BUSINESS**

None.

#### **NEW BUSINESS**

**DMVA Policy, Planning & Legislative Affairs**

**Mr. Seth Bengé**

## Legislation Supporting Veterans

**SB 952** (Regan) Amends Title 51 (Military Affairs), in veterans' preference, repealing provisions relating to soldier defined, for purpose and definitions, repealing provisions relating to credits in civil service exams, for preference in appointment or promotion. Senate Floor Amendment A06047 (Regan) agreed to; 6/8/20. **Final passage in Senate 50-0; 6/9/20.** Received in the House and referred to VAEP; 6/15/20. Amendment (A07413) Barrar; Adopted; 09/30/20. Rereferred to House Appropriations; 9/30/20. **Final Passage in House 202-0; 10/19/20.** Senate concurred in House Amendments 48-0; 10/20. Signed in House and Senate; 10/20. Approved by Governor 10/29/20. (Act # 102). Earliest effective date: 12/28/20. [Previously the language referred to "soldier." The term "veteran" is now better defined in the law. It has also added a statement of service, so when a servicemember returns to PA, they can apply for veterans' preference with a statement of service before they get their DD-214.)

**HB 375** (Goodman) Removes the value of federal veteran's disability payments and the value of all state service-connected payments from income eligibility calculations for the PACE and PACENET programs. **Final House Passage 193-0; 5/14/19.** Received in Senate and referred to Aging & Youth; 5/24/19. Reported as committed from Senate Appropriations; 10/21/19. Set on Senate Calendar 1/27/2020; Reported as committed from Senate Appropriations; 10/21/19. **Final Passage in Senate; 49-0; 10/21/20.** Signed in the House and Senate; 10/21. Approved by the Governor; 10/29/20 (Act # 82). Earliest effective date: 10/29/20.

**HB 86** (Maloney) Amends act granting the Governor of the Commonwealth the sole authority for regulating the display of the flag of the United States from any public ground or building, further providing for the display of the official POW/MIA flag. **Final Passage in the House 198-0; 4/8/19.** Received in the Senate and referred to State Government Committee; 4/22/19. Reported as committed from Senate Appropriations; 10/19/20. Companions: SB 42 (Schwank). Related. **Final Passage in Senate: 49-0; 10/21/20.** Signed in the House and Senate 10/21. Approved by Governor; 10/29. (Act # 81). Earliest effective date: 12/28/20.

**SB 1076** (Baker) Removes the expiration date (6/30/2020) from the Military Family Relief Assistance Program. **Final passage in Senate; 50-0; 5/28/20.** Received in the House and referred to VAEP 6/8/20; Rereferred to House Appropriations; 6/23/20. Reported as committed from House Appropriations; 10/20/20. Companions: HB 2604 (Polinchock), Identical. **Final Passage in House; 202-0; 10/20/20.** Laid out for discussion; 10/21/20. House (Barrar) motion to suspend rules for immediate consideration of amendment A07791; 10/21/20. House 3rd reading amendment A07791 (Barrar) adopted: 201-0; 10/21/20. Re-reported on concurrence as committed Senate Rules and Exec. Nominations; 10/21/20. Senate concurred in House Amendments: 47-0; 10/21/20. Signed in Senate 10/21/20. Signed in the House; 10/26/20. Approved by the Governor; 10/29/20. (Act # 104). Earliest effective date: 10/29/20. [This Act now has no sunset date.]

**SB 395** (Brooks) Amending the act of March 4, 1970 (P.L.128, No.49), entitled "An act granting to the Governor of the Commonwealth the sole authority for regulating the display of the flag of the United States from any public ground or building and from any ground or building of certain other institutions," further providing for display of flag. Amendments A06402 (Brooks) and A06491 agreed to (adopted); 6/29/20. Reported as committed from Senate Appropriations; 9/21/20. **Final Passage in Senate: 49-0; 9/22/20.** Received in House and referred to House State Government Committee; 9/23/20. Reported as committed from House State Government; 9/30/20. Voted favorably, committed, amended; House Appropriations; 10/21/20. **Final passage: 201-0; 10/21/20.** Re-reported on concurrence in Senate Rules and Exec. Nominations; 10/21/20. Senate concurred in House amendments: 47-0; 10/21/20. Signed in Senate: 10/21/20. Signed in House; 10/26/20. Approved by Governor; 11/3/20. (Act # 109). Earliest effective date: 1/02/21. [This Act authorizes the Honor and Remembrance flag to honor Gold Star families. Agencies now have authority to fly that on any Commonwealth property.]

**HB 1050** (Burns) Would establish enrollment requirements for military personnel, veterans and their families to help qualify for in-state tuition rates at public colleges and universities. **Final House Passage 192-0; 6/3/19.** Received in the Senate and referred to VAEP; 6/6/19. Reported as committed from Senate Appropriations; 4/21/20. Set on Senate Calendar, laid on table pursuant to Senate Rule 9; 9/8/20. Awaiting Third Consideration.

**HB 233** (O'Neal) Second Class County Code/veterans grave decorations. The legislation would enhance current law to require cemeteries to remove flags when they become unsightly or weatherworn after Veterans Day, and for the flags to be American made. The proposal allows for a family member to remove and keep the flag from the grave after Veterans Day. The measure applies only to Allegheny County. **Final House Passage 194-0; 2/4/19.** Received in the Senate and referred to VAEP; 2/8/19. Reported as committed from Senate Appropriations 9/23/19. Laid on the Senate table (pursuant to Senate Rule 9, 11/19/19; Awaiting Third Consideration.

**HB 630** (Day) Would provide employment protections to Pennsylvania residents who are members of a National Guard or Reserve unit in another state. **Final House Passage 192—0; 6/3/19.** Received in the Senate and referred to VAEP; 6/6/19. Rereferred to Senate Appropriations 2/3/20; Awaiting Third consideration.

**HB 2022** (Kauffer) Amends Title 51 (Military Affairs), in Department of Military Affairs, establishing the Veterans' Outreach and Support Network Program. **Final Passage in the House 202-0; 9/16/20.** Received in the Senate and referred to VAEP; 9/18/20. Voted favorably from committee and reported as committed; 9/21/20. Set on Senate calendar 10/5/20. Awaiting Second Consideration. [Very similar to VA's Solid Start Program, where VA tries to contact Veterans at 90, 180 and 365 days. It provides a welcome to the Commonwealth for new Veterans.]

### **Legislation of Interest**

**HB 297** (Mako) Amends the Public-School Code, in preliminary provisions, providing for career information and recruitment. Amendments A00278; (Mako), A00319; (Harkins) adopted on Second. **Final Passage Vote in the House 193-1; 3/20/19.** Received in Senate and referred to Education; 3/28/19. Rereferred to Senate Appropriations; 6/17/19. Awaiting Third consideration

**HB 862** (Barra) Act authorizing the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to join the Physical Therapy Licensure Compact; and providing for the form of the compact. Introduced and referred to House Professional Licensure Committee; 9/15/20. Rereferred to House Appropriations; 9/17/20. Companions: SB 640 (Boscola) Identical. **Final Passage: 202-0; 9/29/20.** Received in the Senate and referred to Consumer Protection & Prof. Licensure; 10/2/20. Voted favorably and reported as Committed; Senate Consumer Protection and Prof. Licensure; 10/6/20. Set on Senate calendar; 11/12/20. Companions: SB 640 (Boscola) Identical. Awaiting Second Consideration. [Now passed and signed by the Governor. Allows portability of physical therapy licenses for military spouses. This is part of a multi-state compact regarding portability of licenses for military spouses.]

**HB 980** (Hickernell) Amends Title 51 (Military Affairs), in State Veterans Commission and Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans Affairs, further providing for Navy Club of the U.S. as a voting member. Introduced and referred to House VAEP; 3/26/19. **Final Passage: 202-0; 09/30/20.** Received in the Senate and referred to VAEP; 10/2/20. Awaiting First consideration.

**SB 42** (Schwank) - Amends an act granting to the Governor the sole authority for regulating the display of the U.S. Flag from any public ground or building, further providing for the display of the POW/MIA flag. *Introduced and referred to State Government Committee; 1/11/19.* Reported as committed from State Government; 6/22/20. Companions: HB 86 (Maloney) Related. Rereferred to Senate Appropriations; 6/30/20. Awaiting Third consideration.

**HB 1338** (Barrar) Establishes the Keystone State Challenge Academy Fund as a special fund within the Treasury. Introduced and referred to House VAEP committee; 4/26/19. Voted favorably and reported as amended House VAEP; 5/8/19. Set on Tabled House calendar 11/12/20. Awaiting Second Consideration. [Did not pass. This would have created a special fund with a 2/3 match from the federal government. It would have also allowed us to fundraise for Keystone State Challenge Academy.]

### **Bills In Opposite Chamber – Supporting Veterans**

**HB 1609** (O'Mara) Increases the amount an applicant can contribute to the Veterans' Trust Fund through the Department of Transportation from \$3 to \$5. *Final House Passage 192-0; 6/20/19*. Received in the Senate and referred to VAEP 6/21/2019; awaiting First consideration. Companions: HB 900 (O'mara), Identical. Introduced and referred to House VAEP 3/20/19. Awaiting First Consideration.

**SB 276** (Ward) Increases the monthly pension amounts for both the programs from the current \$150 to \$180. *Final passage in Senate 50-0; 6/8/20*. Received in the House and referred to House VAEP; 6/9/20; Companions: HB 1199 (Goodman), Related; HB 2082 (Gregory), Related. Awaiting First consideration

**HB 2082** (Gregory) Increases the monthly pension amounts for both the blind and paralyzed/amputee veterans pension programs from the current \$150 to \$200. *Final passage in House 193-0; 2/4/20*. Received in the Senate and referred to Senate VAEP; 2/19/20; Companions: HB 1199 (Goodman), Identical, SB 276 (Ward), Related. Awaiting First consideration.

**SB 957** (Bartolotta) Creates a veterans-owned small business logo to recognized Pennsylvania businesses which are 51% owned by veterans, National Guard, or reserve members. *Final Passage in Senate 50-0, 6/22/20*; Received in the House and referred to House VAEP. Awaiting First consideration; 6/23/20.

**HB 408** (Staats) Requires funeral directors and cemeteries to notify the county veterans affairs director of a deceased service person and that contact information for the director be given to the families of the deceased service person. *Final House Passage 194-0*, Referred to the Senate VAEP 1/23/2020; Awaiting First consideration.

**HB 1380** (Boback) Would provide for fishing license and hunting license reciprocity for active duty military members and disabled veterans. *Final House Passage 200-0, 6/27/19*. Referred to the Senate Game and Fisheries 7/8/2019; Awaiting First consideration.

**HB 2319** (Kaufer) Amends Title 75 (Transportation), in registration of vehicles, providing for return of registration plate, for person with disability plate and placard and for special plates for recipients of Purple Heart, in rules of road, parking regulations. *Final Passage: 202-0; 5/18/20*. Received in the Senate Transportation Committee, Awaiting First consideration.

**SB 439** (Regan) Amends the Enforcement Officer Disability Benefits Law, further providing for disability benefits and for definitions.

*Final passage in Senate 49-1; 9/25/19*. Received in House and referred to House Judiciary; 10/15/19. Rereferred to House and Labor Committee; 2/5/20. Awaiting First consideration.

**HB 239** (Readshaw) Amends the act "requiring the superintendent of every public-school district to make available, upon request, lists of graduating seniors to armed forces recruiters;" further providing for title and for legislative intent. *Final Passage in the House: 170-30; 6/27/19*. Received in the Senate and referred to Senate Education. Awaiting First consideration; 7/8/19.

**HB 1311** (Murt) Amending the act of June 28, 1995 (P.L.89, No.18), entitled "An act creating the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources consisting of certain functions of the Department of Environmental Resources and the Department of Community Affairs; providing discounts to Armed Forces, Retired Armed Forces and 100% disabled Veterans and their immediate family members. *Final passage in House 201-0; 7/8/20.* Received in the Senate; 7/13/20 and referred to the Senate Environmental Resources and Energy. Awaiting First Consideration.

### **Bills In Opposite Chamber – Legislation Under Review**

**HB 2626** (Moul) - Amends the Election Code, in the Secretary of the Commonwealth; in county boards of elections; in prep. For & conduct of primaries & elections; in voting by qualified absentee electors; in voting by qualified mail-in electors; and making a repeal. Amendment (A06851/Everett Adopted; 9/1/20; 108-94) **Final passage in the House 112 –90; 9/2/20.** Received in Senate and referred to State Government Committee; 9/2/20. Rereferred to Senate Appropriations 9/9/20. Press conference held 11/10. Awaiting Third Consideration.

**SB 987** (Hutchinson) Senate Floor, amended; A06287 6/30/20; Amends Title 35 (Health and Safety), in commonwealth services, providing definitions and establishing the State Fire Commissioner to be confirmed by the Senate. Provides that the commissioner shall establish guidelines for curriculum and training and establishes the commissioner's implementation of the firefighting program under the Pennsylvania State Fire Academy. This legislation also provides for the creation of a State Fire Advisory Board and member selection process. **Final passage in Senate 34-16; 6/30/20.** Received in the House and referred to Veterans Affairs & Emergency Prep Cmte; 7/8/20. Awaiting First consideration.

**HB 2100** (Boback) Act designating September 11 of each year as "September 11th Remembrance Day" in this Commonwealth;

providing for observance in public school entities and during public meetings. Introduced and referred to House VAEP 12/2/19. House 2nd reading floor Amendment A06988 (Polinchock) Adopted 202-0; 9/15/20. **Final passage in House 202-0; 9/16/20.** Awaiting to be received in Senate. Awaiting First Consideration.

### Questions/Discussion

None.

### **DMVA Bureau of Veterans Homes**

**Mr. Andrew Ruscavage**

[Mr. Ruscavage's report was interrupted by technical difficulties throughout. His slides are available in the Committee's read-ahead packets, or on request from Mr. Greg Holler.]

With respect to licensure status and inspections, we know the PA Department of Health is behind schedule because of the pandemic, but the inspections are starting to get back on track and we will see them come up.

Mr. Ruscavage presented timetables, as of 20 November, for re-opening the homes. He noted however that the timetables have drastically changed since then, and he will have updated numbers at the next meeting. [...] COVID19 is on the rise and the homes keep getting positive test results, so the numbers constantly change. This makes it painful for the residents and families because they are told we will be lifting the restrictions, only to have another positive test result. Then they must wait another two weeks. It is very frustrating, especially for family members with loved ones in the homes. [...] The timetables and reopening plans are on the BVH website.

Mr. Ruscavage next presented a COVID-19 update for each of the homes, recounting number of staff currently positive (54), number of staff tests performed (25,138), cumulative number of staff positives (184), and number of staff deaths (0). [...] For our staff members, 54 were positive. We currently now have 107 staff members out

of work for COVID19 reasons, meaning they may not be positive, but they may have signs and symptoms or a family member at home who has tested positive.

With respect to positivity rates, currently three homes –Delaware Valley, Holidaysburg, and the PA Soldiers and Sailors Home– are in red and all other homes are in yellow. We have not pasted one week without someone testing positive in all the homes. The virus is here, in all our counties, and you can see what’s going on yourselves, the numbers on tv, and what’s going on in the communities. We must start following universal source control by wearing masks, proper hygiene, and start doing the right things to get a handle on the virus.

Reopening plans for the Personal Care Homes are posted on the DMVA web site and are updated weekly as conditions and plans change due to the current COVID19 status in each Veterans Home. Go to <https://www.dmva.pa.gov/Pages/default.aspx>. [....]

#### Questions/Discussions

Mr. Hudzinski, VVA: It may be too soon to ask, but considering there has been an uptick and we constantly say the Veterans in the homes are more vulnerable than the average population due to disabilities/conditions, has there been any discussion about the vaccine distribution plan? Do we get any priority?

Mr. Ruscavage: We have been sending out notifications to families. [...] There is nothing in reference to us getting a priority. Our workers and residents will be among the first to receive it here in Pennsylvania. There are some discussions with the PA Department of Health this afternoon that our Chief Medical Officer and Chief Pharmacist are taking part in. We have been providing information and notifications to residents and families about what is coming out, but there is no discussion of us getting priority over other nursing homes.

Maj Gen (Ret) Weller: As you can see, our homes are in the counties that are hotspots. The numbers that Andrew presents are no different than any numbers on the DOH website. For some reason, we make the news a lot, but our numbers are no different than anyone else’s. The issue right now is that we’re going through that third wave, but the thing that people are starting to understand is that most people who are testing positive now are asymptomatic, they don’t even know they have the virus. And, most of the people we’re testing positive in the homes are the same way. The only reason we’re able to catch these people today is the amount of testing we’re doing. Large scale testing wasn’t available back in March and April. I just want to make sure everybody understands we couldn’t test people that were asymptomatic back in March and April. In a lot of cases we couldn’t even test people back then that were symptomatic. At the same time though, the expiration rates aren’t following the rise in asymptomatic cases. As Andrew and his staff mentioned, they have worked very hard to make sure that we’re in line for those vaccines when they come out with a plan in place. We are not getting priority over other long-term care facilities, but all long-term care facilities are in the number one priority set with Department of Health, that’s a good thing. I hope everyone understands what we’ve been facing as we move forward in dealing with COVID19.

**DMVA Bureau of PIRO**

**Mr. Joel Mutschler**

Just a general update on what we have had going on. We graduated 180 students during our virtual VSO accreditation training, to include DMVA staff, 67 counties and their staff, and the DAV. We utilized webinars and knowledge checks. Important to note we pivoted from in-person to online training rather quickly. My hats is off to DMVA staff for being able to do that as quickly as they were, and my hat is off to the students who were able to get through those webinars and accomplish training in the virtual environment.

Mr. Liezert mentioned the VEAC, the Virtual Veteran Experience Action Center. The cool thing there for us was a great team effort across the Veterans community. We had VSOs from DMVA, county directors’ staff, DAV, VFW, and The American Legion engaging on a 22-person team over three days, taking care of those 503 Veterans. Great effort across the entire team.

About the VBA tele-townhall... great numbers there. We have reached over 267,000 Veterans and family members in those five engagements with Dr. Lawrence, a huge success. Just being able to touch them and let them know that we are here as a resource, connecting with those 33 Veterans directly and then pulling in VSOs from the counties and organizations was very cool. I want to do more of that, so I am looking at how we can do that virtually in Pennsylvania, regionally doing tele-townhalls, and how we can support you and your organizations at virtual events for membership. We would love to help you through that.

With the SVC VSO Grant Program Committee, we did a listening session here last month. Great conversation and I appreciated their feedback as we continue to do process improvement on that grant program. We will be scheduling another listening session in January. The one in November was the groups talking to us; January will be us talking to the groups and going through some things. We greatly appreciate the candor and look forward to more conversations. I will open it up to any other SVC committee: if you would like me or any of our senior leaders to come talk to you, just let me know. We want to be doing things better as Veterans advocates and want to have the conversations.

Regarding suicide prevention, a lot of great collaboration going on with the Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs and UPMC PERU. We have a \$7M grant coming in and we're working to establish a Northwest PA Suicide Prevention Program that will serve Veterans in 15 counties in the PA VetConnect Region 1. More to follow. Great effort by Mr. Hamp building that out and bringing in grant dollars. We have also engaged with Together with Veterans, as we briefed in the last meeting. We are starting that program in Carbon County. Again, another great effort working with that federal program.

We are currently at 34,977 Veterans, advocates, and family members registered with the Veterans Registry. Please get the word out. That allows folks to sign up for the DMVA Digest that goes out every Wednesday with upcoming events, employment, training opportunities, and so on. I would encourage you to sign up. If you don't want to, you can go to our website to download the pdf version of our Digest to get the information.

One thing to highlight with the Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services, we have five county court administrators who have added the Veterans Trust Fund to their county juror donation list. This is a direct result of our GAC-VS Coordinator Janette Krolczyk taking the initiative and talking with these administrators, and we're able to start bringing in some donations to the trust fund because of that. Just a fantastic way one of our staff members saw a need and met that need.

PA VetConnect launched on November 9th. We've provided three demonstrations for the SVC over the last month or so. I'm certainly willing to do more one on one. We have our seven VSOs within our pilot program – our intent is to get all the VSOs in the VSO Grant Program into PA VetConnect and engaged. So, we're continuing to add. We also just added the Community Engagement Partnership Coordinators (CEPCs) from VISN 4 yesterday. They are going to be engaging with our RPOCs. The CEPCs are like our RPOCs, but more focused on suicide prevention. We are going to get them onboard as advocates along with our Regional Offices' Public Contact folks added as well.

Major General Weller (Ret), Danny Osteen from Cumberland County, Justin Slep, Bill Reid from YWCA of Greater Harrisburg, Major General Carrelli, and Steve Bart from Just for Today Veterans Support and Recovery Services were at the press conference. One cool thing is that Bill Reid and Steve Bard did not know each other, so they got connected through PA VetConnect and are now working together to help Veterans out in that space. We are going to continue to build and develop PA VetConnect.

RPOCs are working in the virtual environment. They have had about 15,000 contacts since we brought them on last November. A very adaptable group of folks. You can see how those contacts came in on the slide. Regarding Governor Wolfe's Customer Service Transformation, we are continuing to work with the Department of Human Services, so down the line when that system comes online our hope is to connect our cars to that locomotive and let it go, as far as the resource and referral tool. That doesn't mean that PA

VetConnect SharePoint site will go away. It just means that the tool will move to an enterprise-level solution to break down silos and provide better services.

Before we get into the reports, Mr. Chairman, I am open to any questions.

### Questions/Discussion

Mr. Hudzinski, VVA: Last meeting I asked for the Governor's long-range suicide prevention plan and was told that it has already been put out. I have looked all over for it. I'm looking for something innovative in this area where maybe we can contribute as Veterans' organizations.

Mr. Hamp: The press release was done on October 12th. When I find it, I will forward it to you. On that press release, if I remember right, there was a link to the plan. We do have it on our SharePoint site. I'll send you some information to get your registered on our SharePoint site so you can see it. But I will actually email you a hardcopy after we get off here.

Maj Gen Weller (Ret): Pulling off the virtual training was amazing. The fact the staff was able to do that and get everybody the training they need was fantastic. It allowed us to explore the technical possibilities as we move into the future. We are also exploring ways to continue with the tele-townhalls on our own in the state of Pennsylvania if the VBA pulls out. The VVEAC is another thing we want to keep going, hopefully with participation from the counties and service organizations. My goal would be to have one of those a month: line up 500 interviews and knock them out in a 2 to 3-day period. I also just want to take a moment to thank TAG for working with the folks downtown to ensure we don't lose money from the VSO Grant Program. He's been working hard at that. He won't tell you that, but I will. Suicide prevention is an umbrella term: it covers everything that potentially leads to suicide. Rick Hamp has been able to pull in \$7 million that goes not just to suicide but suicide prevention, which may be homelessness, drug addiction, unemployment and any contributing factors. Our goal is to increase that money to the best of our ability which doesn't come out of the state budget. Lastly, I just want to make sure you understand that PA VetConnect is everything we do. The database is a key part of it, but it is everything that we are doing.

### **Programs Report**

**Mr. Joel Mutschler**

With respect to the OVA/VSO Grant Program slide, you can pull up more detail by going to [dmva.pa.gov](http://dmva.pa.gov) and simply clicking on VSO Grant Program. The ROI, as noted before, is down to \$77.

Veterans Trust Fund: Working balance is a little over \$2.5 million. We are trying to find ways to garner donations into the VTF during this time. On the DMVA website, you can make online donations to the VTF, as you can with the resident funds at the homes, so be sure to check that out.

Veterans Temporary Assistance: We have had 100 approved claims this FY. I just want to give a shout out to one of our staff members, Dan Kindrick. Dan has been doing yeoman's work to keep this program moving during the pandemic period. We've continued to adapt, we're able to get claims approved quickly and that goes to the work Dan's been doing.

Blind Veterans Pension: 103 Claimants currently on the program. Program is on target

Amputee & Paralyzed Veterans Pension: 2,038 Claimants currently on the program.

Educational Gratuity: 105 students currently on program.

Military Family Relief Assistance Program: As was indicated, the sunset date was removed. We continue to process applications as they are received.

Disabled Veterans Real Estate Tax Exemption: We have the new RETX presumptive income threshold based on the CPI found in Title 51, it is \$95,279. There are 14,279 Veterans currently on the program. 905 applications adjudicated between 16 September through 18 November.

Pennsylvania Veterans Memorial: We continue to encourage donations. Just as a note, we do have online donation capability for the Veterans Memorial and Veterans Trust Fund on our webpage.

That is our Programs Report, pending Commission Approval

Questions/Discussion

None.

### **Approval of Programs Reports**

**Motion:** Mr. Peters, VFW, made a motion to approve the programs report.

**Second:** Mr. Johnson, DAV, seconded the motion.

The body agreed; motion carried.

### **SVC Act 66 Committee**

**Mr. Sam Petrovich**

I would just like to give thanks to all the service organizations. We had several meetings with different Senators and Representatives pushing to get the funding at least back to last year's level. There were some great conversations, and it was educational on both sides. Now we'll start working on the next funding – it's a never-ending battle.

Questions/Discussion

None.

### **SVC RETX Committee**

**Mr. Justin Slep**

No report at this time.

Questions/Discussion

Mr. Petrovich: Did you get a call yesterday from a gentleman who was working with Rep. Lawrence regarding the threshold and parameters for RETX eligibility? He was very upset because he makes more than the parameters and now, he has to find write-offs for he and his wife's income.

Mr. Slep: I did not, but that's very interesting. I'll let you know if I do and will keep you in the loop.

### **SVC Legislative Committee**

**Mr. Samuel Petrovich**

The Committee will be working on goals and objectives for the coming year. We plan to have those to you before the February meeting.

Questions/Discussion

Mr. John, American Legion: Maybe you're the wrong person, but about HB 777 that was recently passed, when does this become relevant? The language says the process will be good for one year after either of the following are terminated by the executive order: the proclamation of disaster emergency or a declaration of disaster emergency related to more COVID19. The question is, this thing hasn't taken effect yet and will not take effect until the Governor or someone declares that the COVID19 emergency is over. Then it will be good for a period of one year after that. Is that correct?

Mr. Bengé: I'm looking at the bill now, and what you just said is accurate. But I think I would be unwilling to give a yes or no answer right now. I will take a note. Maybe we must look at it further or contact the author to see what their intent was. We will get back to you.

Mr. John, American Legion: I would appreciate that because we have had some calls from our posts.

**SVC Pensions, Relief/Grave Marking/State Military Cemetery Committee** **Ms. Constance Snavelly**

Currently our committee is in a watch and follow-up pattern. We are awaiting the final approval and enactment of the Bills increasing the monthly pension amounts for blind, paralyzed and amputee veterans. Once that is accomplished, we will work to have an annual Cost of Living Allowance be tied to the monthly pension.

As our committee is responsible for state veteran cemeteries, we are also following Federal HR 5487, short titled "Veterans Cemetery Grants Improvement Act," which increases grants to states for operating and maintaining veterans' cemeteries. The bill proposes doubling the Department of Veterans Affairs grant amount to \$10,000,000.

We are also following up on ensuring that the County Code is updated to cover the use of all the approved flag holders for private cemeteries as well as having the DMVA add a page on their website showing all approved flag holders for continuity across the 67 counties as approved at the August SVC meeting.

Lastly, we continue to follow the status of HR.5639, Chuck Osier Burial Benefits Act, which would provide a free urn or plaque for eligible Veterans who used cremation, burial at sea, or another alternative to interment in a cemetery. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that about 45,000 veterans would use the new benefit in 2021.

Questions/Discussions

Mr. Justin Slep: I did get your email about the images. Right now, I'm working with other directors and companies. I just want to be able to get you the correct answer. Some of the companies have the correct information but the images are different. I just want to make sure I get you the correct answer and will as soon as I can.

Ms. Snavelly: Thank you.

**Member-at-Large Committee** **Mr. Sam Petrovich**

You heard General Carrelli with what was going on with the selections for the two vacant positions. I will be calling a meeting with the Committee and Dusty hopefully early next week to get some things ironed out while General Carrelli is reviewing the current results and other data. It was a lot of data but hopefully it was in a very manageable array. We will be doing that and trying to make sure the General has all the information he needs prior to his selection to the Governor's Office.

Questions/Discussion

None.

**Good of The Order/Announcements**

Mr. Petrovich: Rick I owe you a name for your committee. I do have a name, but he had some questions prior to committing. If you can send me any information you have on meeting dates and other commitments that he would be signing up for, then I can get back with him, and get back to you.

Mr. Hamp: At this moment, we're engaged with PERU in the Northwest PA Suicide Prevention Program. Joel is going to be in touch with you to see if you can give us nominations to serve on three different advisory

committees. You could reach out to anyone in that region, including County Directors if you'd like, but we would like to have at least one Veteran on each of the committees.

Mr. Petrovich: So, just to be clear, you're looking for three different names on top of the other one I'm working on?

Mr. Hamp: That is correct.

Mr. Silcox, Sen. Regan's Office: A lot of good things happened this year, from the Military Family Education Program to the Veterans Courts that Senator Regan was pushing for. So, thank you to the Veterans Commission and the DMVA, and to every one of you for your work and support on these measures. We're looking forward to working with you. I don't know if Sen. Regan will stay on as Chairman of the Veterans Committee, nor do I know my exact status here in terms of the next session, but it has been a pleasure working with everyone here these past two years. I wish everybody well and Happy Holidays. Thank you.

Mr. Petrovich: Nate, thank you for everything you've done for us. We really appreciate it. I hope we get to work together more.

Mr. Osten, Cumberland County: Thank you for letting me take a moment on this. I just wanted to let all the organizations here know that I have come across several Veterans using a third-party group that is charging to create a nexus letter without an examination and coaching the Veterans through the Compensation & Pension process. The company is charging the Veterans for that service, and the Veterans are loading the nexus letters through their own eBenefits portal to hide the third party's involvement. The Veterans were using the organizations for their POA and were calling to ask us to track these claims through the process. Once I learned how this came about, I have revoked their POA. This is a problem that is becoming more common at least in my county and I just wanted to make all the organizations aware of this.

Mr. Petrovich: Danny, do you know the name of that company?

Mr. Osten, Cumberland County: Not off the top of my head. One Veteran wanted to bring me fliers, but I told him to keep that stuff away from us. I did a quick search on the internet and found three different groups that provide these types of services.

Mr. Petrovich: We will get that out to the service organizations. All you must do is watch television and you will see the advertisements saying we won't take any money unless you win. That's a little different, but still it's a place that Veterans need not go.

Mr. Osten, Cumberland County: I just think it puts us in an uncomfortable position as we represent the Veterans. We not be involved or input on how that claim was created. I don't feel comfortable representing somebody else's work is what it comes down to.

Mr. Petrovich: I will just encourage the other service organizations to put that out so they can pass it on. Joel, maybe that's a warning that we can put in the Registry to pass the word around to stay away from these things. You can do this free at the County or any of the service organizations.

Mr. Mutschler: Danny, if you can figure out what company that was, please get in touch with Brian Natali of my office and we will talk to the Attorney General's Office on that front. Additionally, we're working on getting some messaging out. We must make sure our Veterans aren't being taken advantage.

Mr. Osten, Cumberland County: I will work on getting the name of that company out. I will give it to Justin, and you can take it from there.

Mr. Slep: I have a meeting set up for the 9th. I need to add Danny to it and to brief up DMVA and yourself. I have a letter from Danny. As soon as I have a little more detail, I will provide that to you at my earliest convenience. I will send it to you directly.

Maj Gen Weller (Ret): While we have Mr. Liezert on the line, he and the VISN 4 staff have been phenomenal in helping us deal with COVID, all the different facilities in VISN 4. I also wanted to give a shout out to our BVH staff. Andrew, as you could see, was up at the Erie facility most of the week. I can tell you these people have been working heart and soul on this issue since March and before and sometimes without some of the help and equipment they needed to be successful. I can assure you that these people have been working tirelessly on behalf of our Veterans. I think they deserve recognition. I don't know why we haven't had great publicity – you can't always believe everything you read. Please, anytime you see any of them, give them a vote of thanks because they deserve it.

Mr. Johnson, DAV: Seth could I get your email, please?

Mr. Benge: Sure, it is sbenge@pa.gov.

Mr. Petrovich: Prior to adjournment, I just want to wish everyone and their families a very safe holiday season and hopefully a better and safer New Year. Maybe by the August meeting we can all sit around the same table again and be able to talk to each other face to face. Happy Holidays, Happy New Year, and we will see you all at the next meeting on February 5th.

**Next Meeting**

February 5, 2021  
Forum: TBD

**Adjournment**

Chairman Petrovich retired the colors and adjourned the meeting at 11:48 a.m.

The minutes of this meeting are respectfully submitted by:

Maj Gen (Ret) Eric G. Weller  
Deputy Adjutant General  
Veterans Affairs



**STATE VETERANS COMMISSION MEETING  
FEBRUARY 5, 2020**





## **DMVA MILITARY UPDATE**







# CURRENT MOBILIZATIONS & TOTAL DEPLOYMENTS



## PAARNG Current Deployments

MDATE	MSAD	UNIT	OPN	PAX	MISSION	Projected Return Date
11&18 JUN 20	06 JUL 20	28 <sup>th</sup> ECAB	OSS 19-21	852	Aviation Support	31 MAY 2021
Various Individual MOB Soldiers				15	Various Missions	Various based on tour
Total PAARNG Deployed: 876						

## PAANG Current Deployments

Unit	Opn	Pax
193 SOW	OFS-OIR-OSS, OJM, Other	14/5/6
111 ATKW	IPR (HS), OIR	36/1
171 ARW	Alert Status (HS), OFS-OIR-OSS	37/2
<b>Total PAANG Deployed</b>		<b>101</b>

**Total PANG Deployed 906**

As of 20JAN21

# VISN 4 Access – Fiscal Year 2021 Wait Times



Clinics FY21 thru Nov. 11	Number of Appointments	Wait <30 Days	% Wait <30 Days	Average Wait
Mental Health	54,957	53,752	98.1%	2.9
Primary Care	107,755	104,067	96.6%	4.8
Specialty Care	169,829	150,648	89.2%	13.2
ALL	556,421	521,373	93.9%	7.7

Data updated 1/15/2020 with appointment info as of 1/12/21.

## VISN 4 Access – Current Average Wait Times



VISN 4 Facility	Primary Care		Mental Health Care	
	New Patients	Returning Patients	New Patients	Returning Patients
James E. Van Zandt VAMC	8	1	9	5
Abie Abraham HCC	20	1	15	2
Coatesville VAMC	16	4	14	4
Erie VAMC	14	5	10	2
Lebanon VAMC	9	5	7	4
Corporal Michael J. Crescenz VAMC	11	5	14	1
VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System	15 (Hz) 20 (UD)	9 (Hz) 10 (UD)	5 (Hz) 10 (UD)	3 (Hz) 3 (UD)
Wilkes-Barre VAMC	18	4	7	2
Wilmington VAMC	14	10	2	2

NOTE: The facility wait times on the Public facing Access to Care site seem to be normalizing. However, some sites are still showing higher than normal wait times for new patients, and the data should be used with caution when reporting.

Data updated 1/15/2021 with wait times as of 1/4/21 for last 30 days.

[accesstocare.va.gov](https://accesstocare.va.gov)

## VISN 4 Care in the Community



	Care in the Community Consults (Scheduled and Completed)	Non-VA Unique Patients*
FY 17	74,568	58,699
FY 18	87,706	62,428
FY 19	101,068	70,376
FY 20	153,510	87,042
FY 21 (as of 1/14/21)	45,369	40,367

\*Number of unique enrolled Veterans who receive community care at VA expense

Data updated 1/15/2021 with consult info as of 1/14/21.

## 2021-2022 Legislative Session



**Karen Boback**  
Majority Chair  
117<sup>th</sup> District  
Luzerne/Lackawanna  
/Wyoming



**Mike Armanini**  
75<sup>th</sup> District  
Clearfield/Elk



**Stephanie Borowicz**  
76<sup>th</sup> District  
Clinton/Center



**Lynda Schlegel Culver**  
108<sup>th</sup> District  
Northumberland  
/Snyder



**Mark Gillen**  
128<sup>th</sup> District  
Berks/Lancaster



**Chris Sainato**  
Minority Chair  
9<sup>th</sup> District  
Lawrence



**Frank Burns**  
72<sup>nd</sup> District  
Cambria



**Carol Hill-Evans**  
95<sup>th</sup> District  
York



**Kristine Howard**  
167<sup>th</sup> District  
Chester



**Keith Greiner**  
43<sup>rd</sup> District  
Lancaster



**\*Joe Hamm**  
84<sup>th</sup> District  
Lycoming/Union



**\*Zachary Mako**  
183<sup>rd</sup> District  
Northampton/  
Lehigh



**\*Natalie Mihalek**  
40<sup>th</sup> District  
Allegheny/  
Washington



**\*Timothy O'Neal**  
48<sup>th</sup> District  
Washington



**Anita Astorino Kulik**  
45<sup>th</sup> District  
Allegheny



**Brandon Markosek**  
25<sup>th</sup> District  
Allegheny



**Jennifer O'Mara**  
165<sup>th</sup> District  
Delaware



**Christina Sappey**  
158<sup>th</sup> District  
Chester



**\*Tracy Pennycuick**  
147<sup>th</sup> District  
Montgomery



**\*F. Todd Polinchock**  
144<sup>th</sup> District  
Bucks



**Jim Rigby**  
71<sup>st</sup> District  
Cambria/Somerset



**\*Francis Ryan**  
101<sup>st</sup> District  
Lebanon



**\*Craig Williams**  
160<sup>th</sup> District  
Delaware/Chester



**\*Joe Webster**  
150<sup>th</sup> District  
Montgomery



**Dan Williams**  
74<sup>th</sup> District  
Chester

\* Denotes  
Veteran/Military  
Service

## 2021-2022 Legislative Session



**Patrick Stefano**  
Majority Chair  
32<sup>nd</sup> District  
Fayette  
/Somerset  
/Westmoreland



**Michele Brooks**  
Vice Chair  
50<sup>th</sup> District  
Crawford/Erie  
/Mercer/Warren



**\*Lisa Baker**  
20<sup>th</sup> District  
Luzerne/Pike  
/Susquehanna  
/Wayne/Wyoming



**Camera Bartolotta**  
46<sup>th</sup> District  
Beaver /  
Washington  
/Greene



**Katie Muth**  
Minority Chair  
44<sup>th</sup> District  
Montgomery  
/Chester  
/Berks



**Carolyn Comitta**  
19<sup>th</sup> District  
Chester



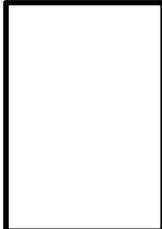
**John Kane**  
9<sup>th</sup> District  
Delaware  
/Chester



**Lindsey Williams**  
38<sup>th</sup> District  
Allegheny



**\*Cris Dush**  
25<sup>th</sup> District  
Cameron /  
Clinton / Elk /  
Jefferson  
/McKean  
/Potter /Tioga  
/Clearfield



**Vacant**

\* Denotes  
Veteran/Military Service

## Legislation Introduced Supporting Veterans

**HB 164** (Staats) Act amending Title 51 (Military Affairs) in Department of Military Affairs, providing for burial benefits. 1/14/21 HVETERANS

### Co-sponsorship Memos Circulated - RETX

**SCO 266** (Sabatina) Expands the Disabled Veterans' Real Estate Tax Exemption program.

**SCO 270** (Bartolotta) Expands the Property Tax Exemption Program for disabled veterans.

**SCO 316** (Tartaglione) Amends the Disabled Veterans Real Estate Tax Exemption Law relating to calculation of income and the determination of need.

### Co-sponsorship Memos Circulated - Considered last session and under review

**HCO 201** (Boback) Exempts 100 percent of a veteran's federal disability compensation or pension from income calculations for any commonwealth program or benefit.

**SCO 351** (Bartolotta) Directs the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs to create logos to be used to promote veteran-owned businesses.

**SCO 209** (Ward) Increases the monthly pension amounts for the Blind Veterans Pension Program and the Amputee and Paralyzed Veterans Pension Program.

**SCO 499** (Robinson) Increases voluntary donation amounts to the Veterans' Trust Fund when applying for or renewing a driver's license, ID card or vehicle registration.

**HCO 262** (Pisciottan) Creates a new instant lottery game to benefit the commonwealth's aging veterans.

**HCO 457** (Pisciottan) Increases the monthly stipend for veterans who are blind, paralyzed, or amputees as a result of their service to \$200 per month.

**HCO 503** (O'Neal) Requires cemeteries to remove flags when they become unsightly or weatherworn after Veteran's Day, and for the flags to be American-made.

**SCO 286** (Stefano) Provides a reduction in fees for military veterans acquiring license plate registration

## Co-sponsorship Memos Circulated

**HCO 465** (Deasy) Amends Title 51 to require the establishment of a "Combat to College" program at state education institutions.

**HCO 471** (Deasy) Allows club licensees the same opportunity as restaurants and allows a club license to remain in safekeeping for up to two years, and subsequent years for an additional fee.

**HCO 45** (Staats) Requires licensed funeral directors or relevant entities to notify the county veterans affairs director of a deceased serviceperson and notify the decedent's family with the contact information for the veterans affairs director.

**HCO 552** (Warner) Proposes statutory language to allow Small Games of Chance licensees to conduct online games as well as conduct online transactions during the duration of the COVID-19 emergency declaration.

**HCO 606** (Evans) Allows incarcerated veterans, diagnosed after imprisonment, to apply to the court for relief putting forward their diagnosis of post- traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injuries as mitigating factors in post- conviction review.

**HCO 618** (Evans) Provides for a program to combat veteran homelessness and a housing ombudsman to advocate for homeless veterans.

## Co-sponsorship Memos Circulated

**HCO 624** (Kirkland) Provides one free medical record to any homeless veteran for the purpose of applying for disability benefits.

**HCO 694** (Markosek) Creates a "Green Alert" system in Pennsylvania.

**HCO 816** (Gillen) Ensures that a service member's military education and training are taken into consideration for the purpose of fulfilling requirements for professional credentials related to agriculture.

**HCO 860** (Guenst) Provides \$500,000 for the diagnostic technology to carry out the scans and another \$500,000 to pay for hardware and software costs of the diagnostic technology and administrative costs for service members and veterans.

**HCO 867** (Guenst) Supplements the Returning Heroes Tax Credit with an additional \$2,000 tax credit.

**SCO 119** (Boscola) Amends the State Lottery Law to exclude veterans' service-related disability compensation from being considered as income when determining eligibility for PACE and PACENET.

**SCO 125** (Pittman) Excludes federal veteran's disability benefits from the calculation of income.

**SCO 135** (Pittman) Allows volunteer fire departments, veterans organizations and other non-profits to conduct small games of chance (SGOC) fundraisers online amidst the COVID-19 disaster emergency declaration.

## Co-sponsorship Memos Circulated

**SCO 193** (Scavello) Extends Pennsylvania veteran benefits to veterans of allied countries living in the commonwealth.

**SCO 299** (Hutchinson) Changes several aspects of Title 30 and Title 34 relating to license fees and requirements relating to active duty and veteran military personnel.

**SCO 363** (Tomlinson) Grants disabled veterans a 50 percent discount in toll rates for use of the Pennsylvania Turnpike.

**SCO 396** (Brooks) Treats banquet halls of Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFWs) and American Legions in the same manner as fire stations and libraries when being considered for tax exemptions.

**SCO 411** (Costa) Exempts veterans' disability benefits as eligible income under the following acts: Senior Citizen Property Tax and Rent Rebate Assistance (Act 1), PACE/PACENET and Section 1901 of the Vehicle Code (exempts persons, entities, and vehicles).

**SCO 448** (Muth) Establishes the Emergency Relief Program.

**SCO 490** (Brewster) Exempts the cost of fishing licenses in Pennsylvania for veterans and other individuals taking steps towards physical or mental recovery as part of therapeutic recreation events or programs.

## Current Licensure Status

Regulatory Agency	DVVH	GMVC	HVH	PSSH	SEVC	SWVC
<b>Dates of Last Inspection</b>						
<b>PA Department of Health</b>	02/2020 Full Standard Licensure Status	01/2020 Inspection Provisional 1 Effective 10/02/2020	11/2019 Full Standard Licensure Status	12/2019 Full Standard Licensure Status	10/2019 Full Standard Licensure Status	11/2019 Full Standard Licensure Status
<b>PA Department of Human Services</b>	N/A	N/A	11/2019 Full Standard Licensure Status	08/2019 Full Standard Licensure Status	11/2019 Full Standard Licensure Status	N/A
<b>US Department of Veterans Affairs</b>	04/2019 Full Standard Licensure Status	02/2020 Full Standard Licensure Status	06/2019 Full Standard Licensure Status	02/2020 Full Standard Licensure Status	02/2020 Full Standard Licensure Status	05/2019 Full Standard Licensure Status

## Timetable for Reopening the Pennsylvania Veterans Homes Skilled Nursing

Reopening time frames for the Skilled nursing units of the PVHs			
Home	Date of Last Positive Test Result for Resident or Staff (day zero, date of test)	Date Outbreak Testing is Estimated to be Completed or was Completed	Date Estimated to Begin Lifting Restrictions
DVVH	1/19/2021	2/2/2021	2/3/2021
GMVC	1/21/2021	1/25/2021	2/5/2021
HVH	1/22/2021	2/5/2021	2/19/2021
PSSH	1/20/2021	2/17/2021	2/17/2021
SEVC	1/22/2021	2/6/2021	2/8/2021
SWVC	1/21/2021	1/25/2021	1/26/2021

## Timetable for Reopening the Pennsylvania Veterans Homes Personal Care

Reopening time frames for the Personal Care Units at HVH/PSSH/SEVC					
Home	Date of Last Positive Test Result for Resident or Staff (day zero, date of test)	Date Outbreak Testing is Estimated to be Completed or was Completed	Estimated Date to Enter Step 1	Estimated Date to Enter Step 2	Estimated Date to Enter Step 3
<b>HVH</b>	1/21/2021	2/4/2021	2/18/2021	3/4/2021	3/15/2021
<b>PSSH</b>	1/20/2021	2/17/2021	3/3/2021	3/17/2021	3/31/2021
<b>SEVC</b>	1/6/2021	1/20/2021	1/22/2021	2/5/2021	2/19/2021

## Resident COVID-19 Update

Residents						
Home	Data Date	# of Residents Currently Positive in Facility	# of Total Residents Tested	# of Residents Positive for COVID-19 Cumulative	# of Residents Recovered	# of Residents That Expired with a Positive COVID-19 Status.
DVVH	1/25/2021	2	2155	75	55	18
GMVC	1/25/2021	28	4382	52	18	6
HVH	1/25/2021	60	3866	110	33	17
PSSH	1/25/2021	0	2647	125	97	18
SEVC	1/25/2021	1	4679	122	62	42
SWVC	1/25/2021	0	4597	18	15	3
<b>Total:</b>		91	22326	502	280	104

## Staff COVID-19 Update

Staff		02	04	06	07
Home	Data Date	# of Staff Currently Positive	# of Total Staff Tested	# of Staff Tested Positive for COVID-19 Cumulative	# of Staff Returned to Work Cumulative
<b>DVVH</b>	1/25/2021	5	5455	73	160
<b>GMVC</b>	1/25/2021	11	6983	61	81
<b>HVH</b>	1/25/2021	11	12511	129	848
<b>PSSH</b>	1/25/2021	1	4172	62	182
<b>SEVC</b>	1/25/2021	6	7525	106	238
<b>SWVC</b>	1/25/2021	1	10145	38	257
<b>Total:</b>		35	46791	469	1766

## Pennsylvania Veterans Homes COVID-19 Update

Reopening plans for the Personal Care Homes are posted on the DMVA web site and are updated weekly as conditions and plans change due to the current COVID-19 status in each Veterans Home.

Go to: <https://www.dmva.pa.gov/Pages/default.aspx>

- Click on Veterans Homes top right
- Click on Veterans Homes COVID-19 Updates tab
- The following items are located on this page
  - FAQ's
  - Status report link for DOH statistics
  - Admissions information
  - Contact information
  - Reopening plans BVH /PVH's

## Pennsylvania Veterans Homes COVID-19 Update

COVID-19 links for information related to the Veterans Homes and skilled nursing facilities.

- <https://www.dmva.pa.gov/Pages/default.aspx>
- <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/LTCF-Data.aspx>
- <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Monitoring-Dashboard.aspx>
- <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Guidance/SNF-Guidance.aspx>
- <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/19MpLoPxayE1MDwQJJYCZxISN64V4FJSJPGzfvVBb5Mw/edit#gid=1511961664>

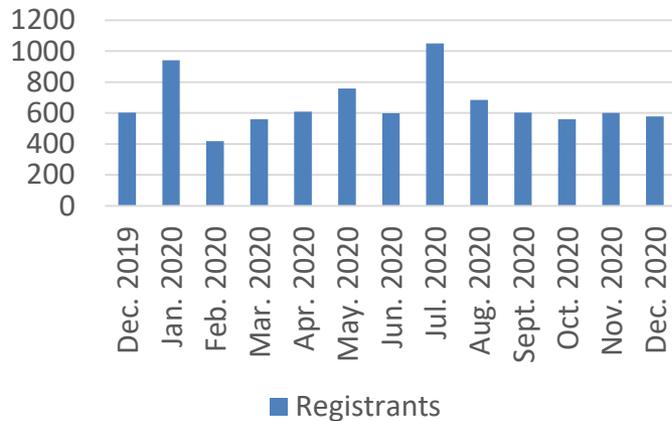


- **2020 Virtual VSO Accreditation Training** - 180 Veteran Service Officers trained from DMVA, the 67 counties, and the DAV. We utilized webinars and knowledge checks through the National Veterans Legal Services Program (NVLSP).
- **VBA Tele Town Halls with Dr. Paul Lawrence, Under Secretary for Benefits for the USDVA.**
  - **267,055 total Veterans and family members reached. DMVA Veterans directly assisted 33 veterans.**
- **V-VEAC/RallyPoint Q&A (19 Oct 20)** We joined subject matter experts from VBA, VHA, and Delaware Valley Veterans Consortium respond to answer questions through RallyPoint a social media platform for veterans. We had 15.9K impressions and 186 comments/questions/answers. We responded directly to 25 comments addressing community resources, state/county programs, and general benefit questions.
- **Virtual Veteran Experience Action Center (21 to 23 Oct 20)** – USDVA sponsored event to provide direct services and personally connect veterans to services. TEAM EFFORT – **VSOs from DMVA, County Directors of Veterans Affairs, DAV, VFW, and the American Legion** made up a 22 person team that assisted 503 veterans and family members over the 3 day event. Second state in this pilot program.
- **SVC VSO Grant Program (Act 66 of 2007) Committee Listening Session** – Conducted a listening session on 17 Nov 20 and 12 Jan 21 to learn how we can collaborate better and continue to find efficiencies. We look forward to our continued work together.  
**Suicide Prevention** – Collaborating with DDAP and the UPMC Program, Evaluation and Research Unit (PERU) awarded over \$7M grant. In process of implementing the NW PA Suicide Prevention Program that will serve Veterans in 15 counties in the PA VETConnect Region 1. Engaged with Together with Veterans in NE PA (Carbon County).
- **State Veterans Commission and Governor’s Advisory Council on Veterans Services:** We remain in contact with the membership of the SVC and GAC-VS to continue our collaborative efforts to assist the veterans’ community.
- **Federal Partnerships:** Continued relationship building with VHA and VBA.
- **Veterans Centric Fairweather Lodges** - We continue to work with the PA Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse and the Coalition for Community Living in revitalizing this initiative. DMVA provides referrals and support, as well as system linkages and knowledge of the veteran culture.
- **Pension Poaching Awareness Campaign** - Cross-system cooperative effort to raise awareness among mainstream human service and healthcare providers about the issue of veteran pension poaching and the importance of referring Veterans and their families to an accredited VSO. Sister state agencies, trade organizations and state-level oversight groups are collaborating with us to send this important information out to the local levels via their communication avenues

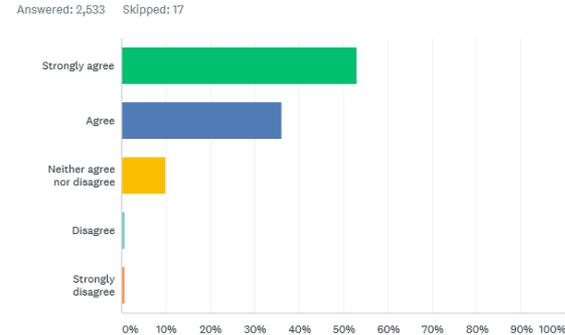
# VETERANS REGISTRY



We have a total as 34,853 Veterans in the PA Veteran Registry and 1,237 of Non-Veterans. The registry has about 1,200 records that are duplicated emails and names. DMVA is currently working with PA Interactive to address duplicate records and have restrictions on entry fields within Veteran Registry to prevent future duplicate records.



I am satisfied with my customer experience today.



- The GAC-VS met on November 18, 2020. The following synopsis is provided:
  - General Weller provided a preliminary update highlighting the purpose, initiatives, and/or accomplishments of all eight (8) of the committees currently serving the GAC-VS. The key has been our ability to establish multiple partnerships (federal, county, non-profit, for-profit, etc.) to address issues important to our veterans' community.
  - Governor Wolf attended the meeting and expressed his gratitude for the initiatives being worked by the eight (8) committees of the GAC-VS. He shared how difficult working across silos can be and was very appreciative of how many productive partnerships have been established to combat the complicated challenges facing our veterans population.
  - Copies of the meeting minutes and presentations from the GAC-VS meetings may be found at [dmva.pa.gov](https://dmva.pa.gov) then clicking on Veterans Affairs and then GAC-VS.
- As of 18 NOV 2020, there are now five county court administrators who have added the Veterans Trust Fund (VTF) to their county juror donation listing. Those counties include Dauphin, Cambria, Erie, Fayette and Westmoreland. About 10 additional counties have been contacted and will need to be followed up with, but all county court administrators will be contacted over the next few months in an attempt to generate more revenue for the VTF.



## Improve Essential Services for the Veterans Community

Understanding thematic community needs, DMVA applies for funding to assist targeted areas and provides assistance with regional challenges through the cross-agency collaboration of the Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services (GAC-VS).



## Identify Appropriate Resources and Referral Mechanism

CDVA/VSO directs veteran to potential resources, ensuring issue resolution. Federal, state, and local veteran advocates are helping to break down silos, increase awareness of services, and educate front-line staff on resources that can address the unmet needs of our service members, veterans and their families.

# PAVETCONNECT

[dmva.pa.gov/VetConnect](http://dmva.pa.gov/VetConnect)



## Identify Individual Veteran Needs and Systemic Veteran Community Trends

County Directors for Veterans Affairs (CDVA)/ Accredited Veteran Service Officer (VSO) assesses veteran's critical needs, and provides area data and trends back to DMVA for analysis.



## Organize Known Resource Information

The Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA) continually researches, verifies and categorizes resources for more efficient use.



## Create, Enhance and Educate Networks

Regional Program Outreach Coordinators (RPOCs) outreach and build relationships with veteran advocates in their regions, providing assistance, cultural competency, education and awareness of veterans issues and benefits where possible.



**FASTER RESULTS**

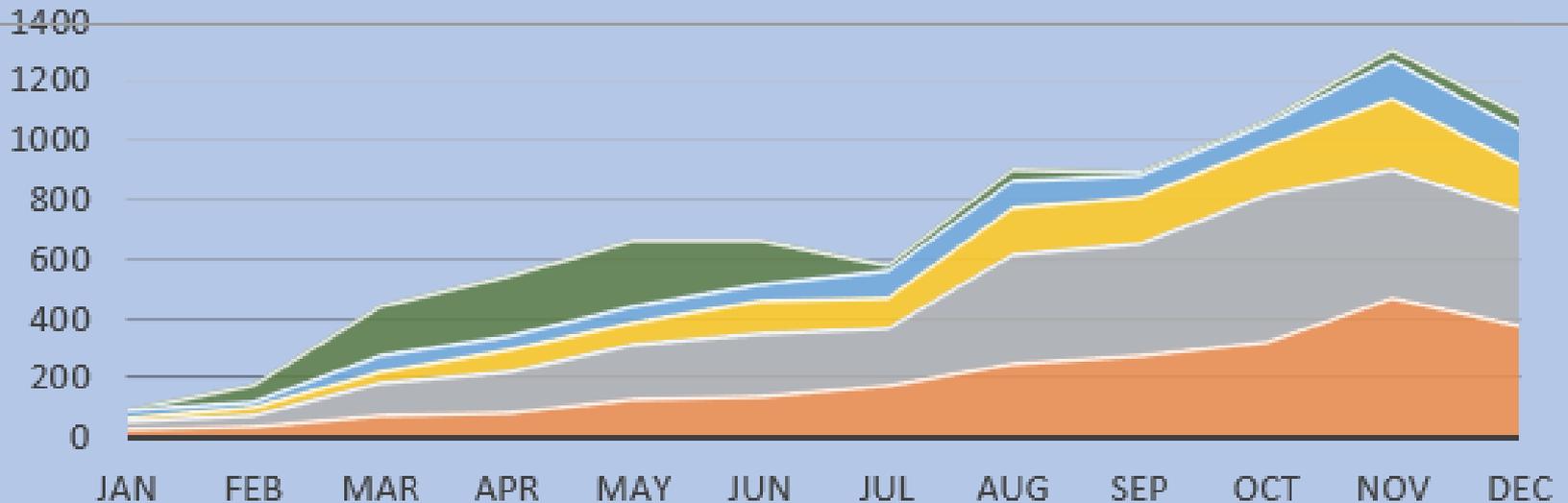


**WIDER NETWORK OF RESOURCES**



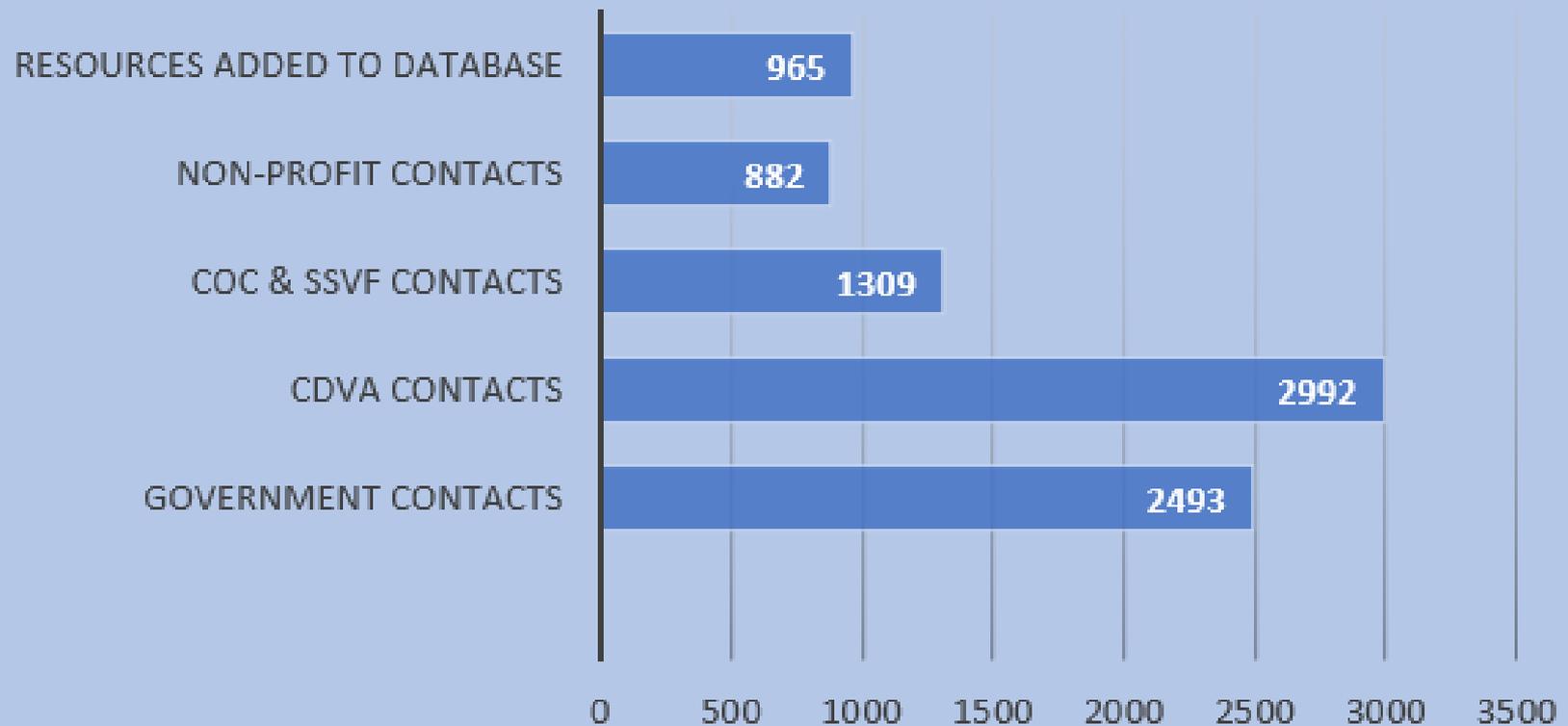
**BETTER SERVICE**

## RPOC Contacts



- Strategic Metrics
- Government Contacts Actual
- CDVA Contacts Actual
- COC & SSVF Contacts Actual
- Non-Profit Contacts Actual
- Resources added to Database Actual

## RPOC Collaboration 2020



## RESOURCES WITHIN DATABASE

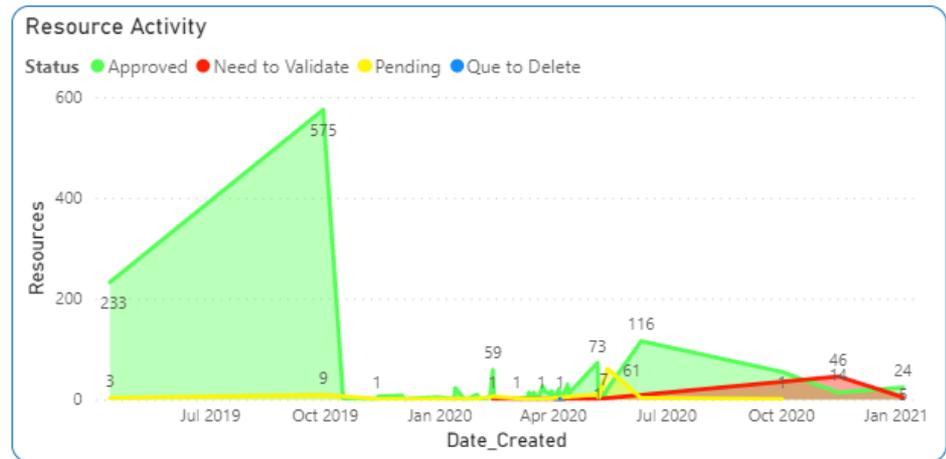
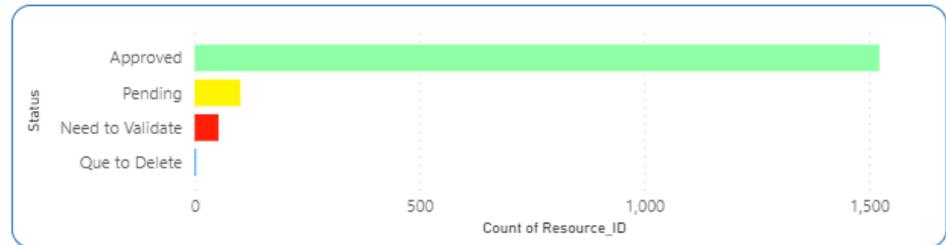
### Totals / Regional Totals

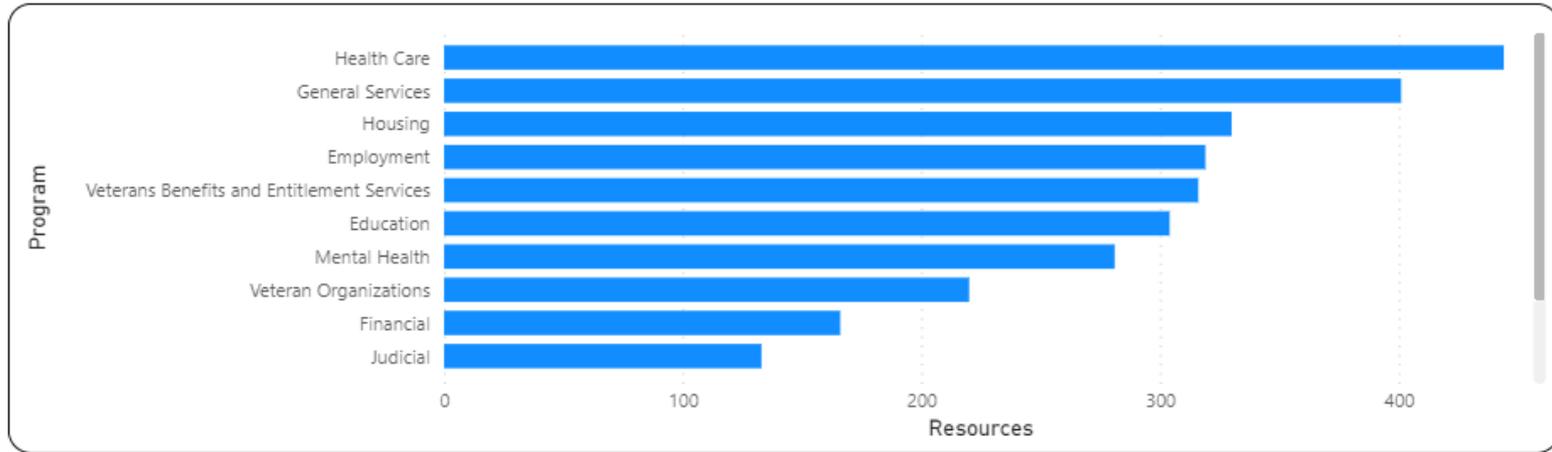
**1679**  
Total in System

**1523**  
Approved

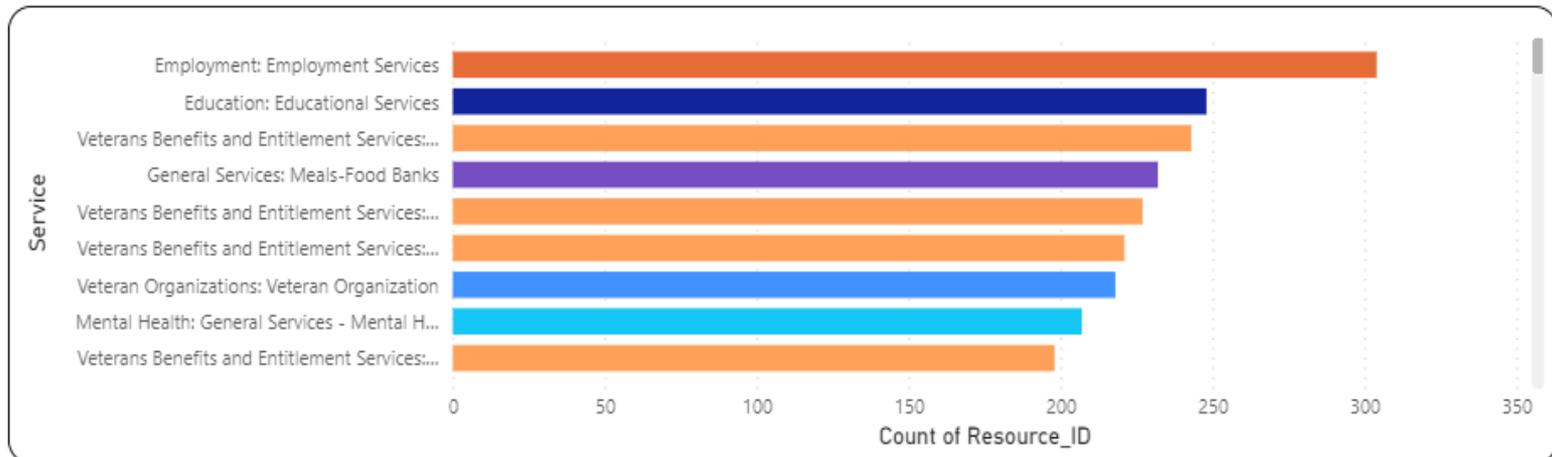
Status	Resources
Approved	1523
Need to Validate	53
Pending	102
Que to Delete	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>1679</b>

### Resource Data Entry Activity



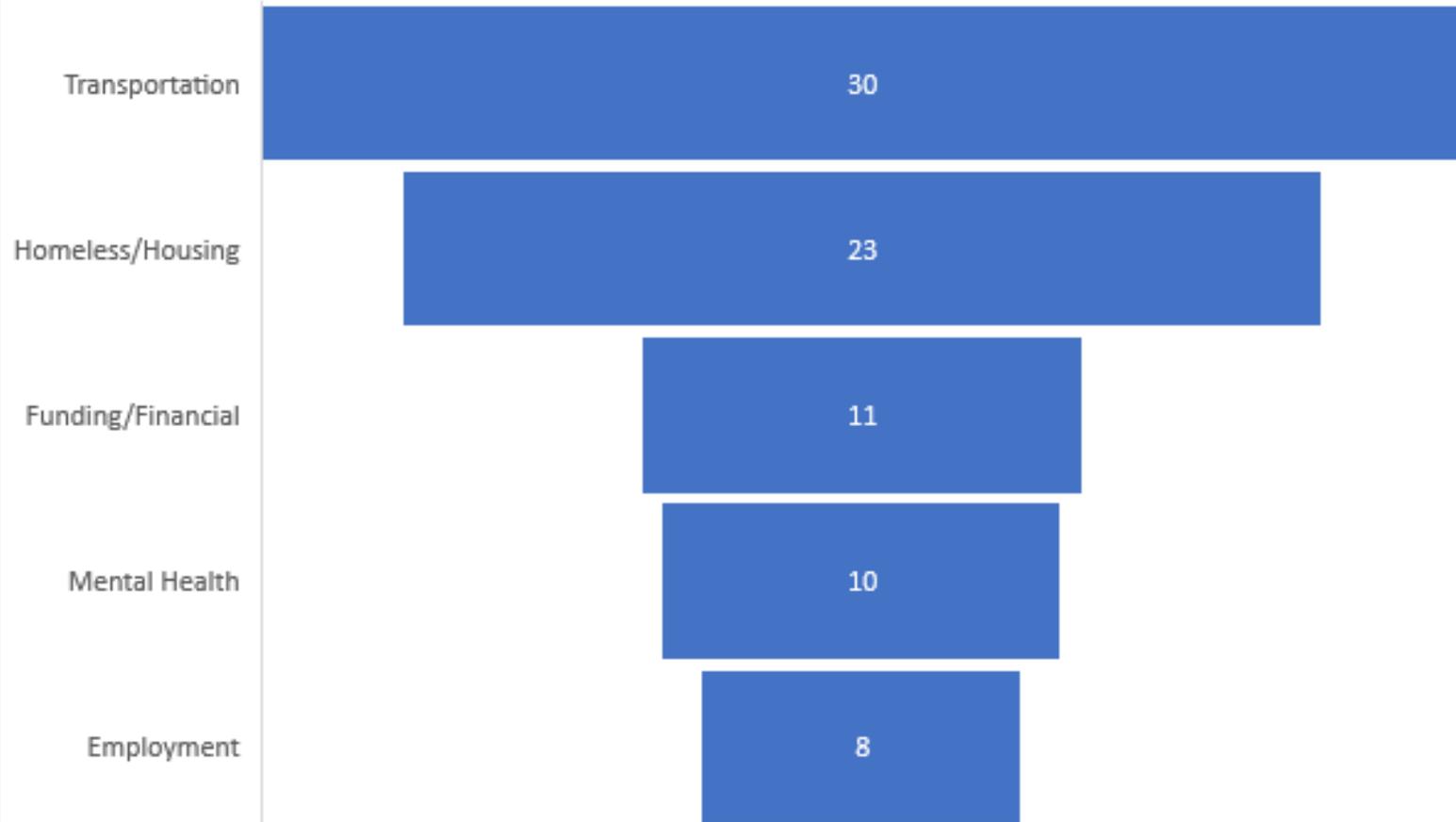


## Top Ten Programs With Resources In Database



## Top Nine Services With Resources In Database

## County Survey and Tracking Results



- “PA VETConnect is a best practice for other states to follow.”  
-**Dr. Paul Lawrence, Former Under Secretary of Benefits, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**
- “My office uses the PA VETConnect frequently to assist the more than 20,000 veterans in our county. The program is efficiently able to “drill down” to find helpful organizations that can help with a huge number of issues. We have gone from telling veterans and their families to try someplace else, to having points of contact at specific offices to get the help that is needed. Thank you for this invaluable resource!”  
-**Cumberland County VA Director**
- “The PA VETConnect and RPOCs are critical to ensuring county-level and regional success. Working in the Greater Philadelphia Area, PA DMVA’s efforts to create an infrastructure to connect resources within our communities is absolutely welcome and has been sorely needed for some time. As more service members continue to transition, we look forward to building out the future for veteran transition and support by increasing collaborating with veteran organizations across the board.”  
-**Philadelphia County VA Director**

- “As a regular user, we have been very pleased with the PA VETConnect Tool offered by the PA Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (PA DMVA) since its launch. The tool allows for an extensive and thorough list of resources and programs offered by county or region in Pennsylvania based on the individual needs of the veteran or their family. As a VSO, I have been able to identify and share resources quickly with veterans and their families, sometimes sharing resources of which I was not initially aware. The informative search results can also be shared with the veteran in a comprehensive excel spreadsheet report directly to their email address.”

**-Berks County VA Director**

- “The PA VETConnect program has been a great asset to our office. This will stop the veterans from having a difficult time finding the resources when they move back to any town USA. They will have everything they need at their fingertips. We also like the idea of having the RPOC in our back pocket for guidance and helping with all veteran matters. “

**-County Veteran Service Officer from Region 2**

# OVA / VSO GRANT PROGRAM SUMMARY



<b>FY 20 - 21 Claims, Compensation and Pension Summary</b>	
<b>Year to Date Claims Submitted</b>	<b>Year to Date Value of Awards</b>
<b>4,998</b>	<b>\$30,054,754.00</b>
<b>Year to Date Claims Submitted Previous Year 19 - 20</b>	<b>Year to Date Value of Awards Previous Year 19 - 20</b>
<b>11,689</b>	<b>\$72,969,738.00</b>

<b>FY 19 - 20 Claims, Compensation and Pension Summary</b>	
<b>Year to Date Claims Submitted</b>	<b>Year to Date Value of Awards</b>
<b>11,689</b>	<b>\$72,969,738.00</b>
<b>Year to Date Claims Submitted Previous Year 18 - 19</b>	<b>Year to Date Value of Awards Previous Year 18 - 19</b>
<b>10,942</b>	<b>\$87,759,860.00</b>

Note: Organization specific reporting under the VSO Grant Program website page found on the DMVA website or by [clicking here](#)

# VSO Grant Program —11 Year ROI



Fiscal Year	Number of Processed Claims	DMVA Grant Expenditures	Federal Award Totals	ROI (for \$1: ROI) Or Express as %
FY 08-09	9,782	\$1,612,698	\$207,152,605	\$1: \$127
FY 09-10	22,133	\$1,600,156	\$351,575,352	\$1: \$219
FY 10-11	26,675	\$1,568,871	\$315,006,318	\$1: \$200
FY 11-12	14,312	\$1,614,656	\$166,784,422	\$1: \$102
FY 12-13	12,927	\$1,606,926	\$168,506,244	\$1: \$104
FY 13-14	14,125	\$2,324,335	\$155,355,988	\$1: \$66
FY 14-15	14,891	\$2,432,000	\$108,525,112	\$1: \$44
FY 15-16	18,371	\$2,332,000	\$123,739,236	\$1: \$52
FY 16-17	32,756	\$2,326,111	\$81,888,628	\$1: \$34
FY 17-18	27,733	\$2,332,000	\$75,621,230	\$1: \$31
FY 18-19	18,299	\$2,832,000	\$164,325,655	\$1: \$57
FY 19-20	14,589	\$3,139,000	\$93,521,296	\$1: \$29
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>226,593</b>	<b>\$25,720,753</b>	<b>\$2,012,002,086</b>	<b>\$1: \$77</b>

**ROI is \$1/\$77  
over the life of the program**

- FY 07-08 was a partial year of data and is not included in this return on investment projection.
- The 6 organizations involved in this program employ an average of 60 employees.

# VETERANS' TRUST FUND



## VTF Report

Source	Week	Month to Date	Fiscal Year Total		Total	# HOV Sold
Appropriation Transfer to VTF	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$1,700,000.00	
HOV License Plate	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$600.00	40	\$50,580.00	3,372
PA Monuments LP	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	0	\$0.00	0
HOV Motorcycle License Plate	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$150.00	10	\$3,150.00	210
HOV Women's License Plate	\$0.00	\$0.00	-\$30.00	-2	\$615.00	41
Checkoff & Donations	\$30,883.00	\$54,813.00	\$665,638.90		\$11,208,365.92	
Veterans Trust Fund Online Donations	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$120.00		\$5,198.00	
SECA Donations	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$943.64		\$9,427.00	
Interest	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$3,454.36		\$177,262.63	
VSO	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$700,000.00	
PENNDOT Costs (SFY 16-17)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$194,000.00	
PENNDOT Costs (SFY 15-16)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$194,000.00	
PENNDOT Costs (SFY 14-15)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$194,000.00	
PENNDOT Costs (SFY 13-14)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$194,000.00	
VTF Grant NOFA (SFY 19-20)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$93,145.96		\$793,629.96	
VTF Grant NOFA (SFY 18-19)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$800,000.00	
VTF Grant NOFA (SFY 17-18)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$777,909.21	
VTF Grant NOFA (SFY 16-17)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$641,329.75	
VTF Grant NOFA (SFY 15-16)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$502,126.03	
VTF Grant NOFA (SFY 14-15)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$472,473.67	
VTF Grant NOFA (SFY 13-14)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$442,020.00	
Veteran Programs Training	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$8,700.00	
Veterans Assistance	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$22,901.34	
VTA	\$15,927.00	\$21,787.00	\$241,746.00		4,558,895.32	
Working Balance	\$14,956.00	\$33,026.00	\$335,984.94		\$2,658,613.27	3,623

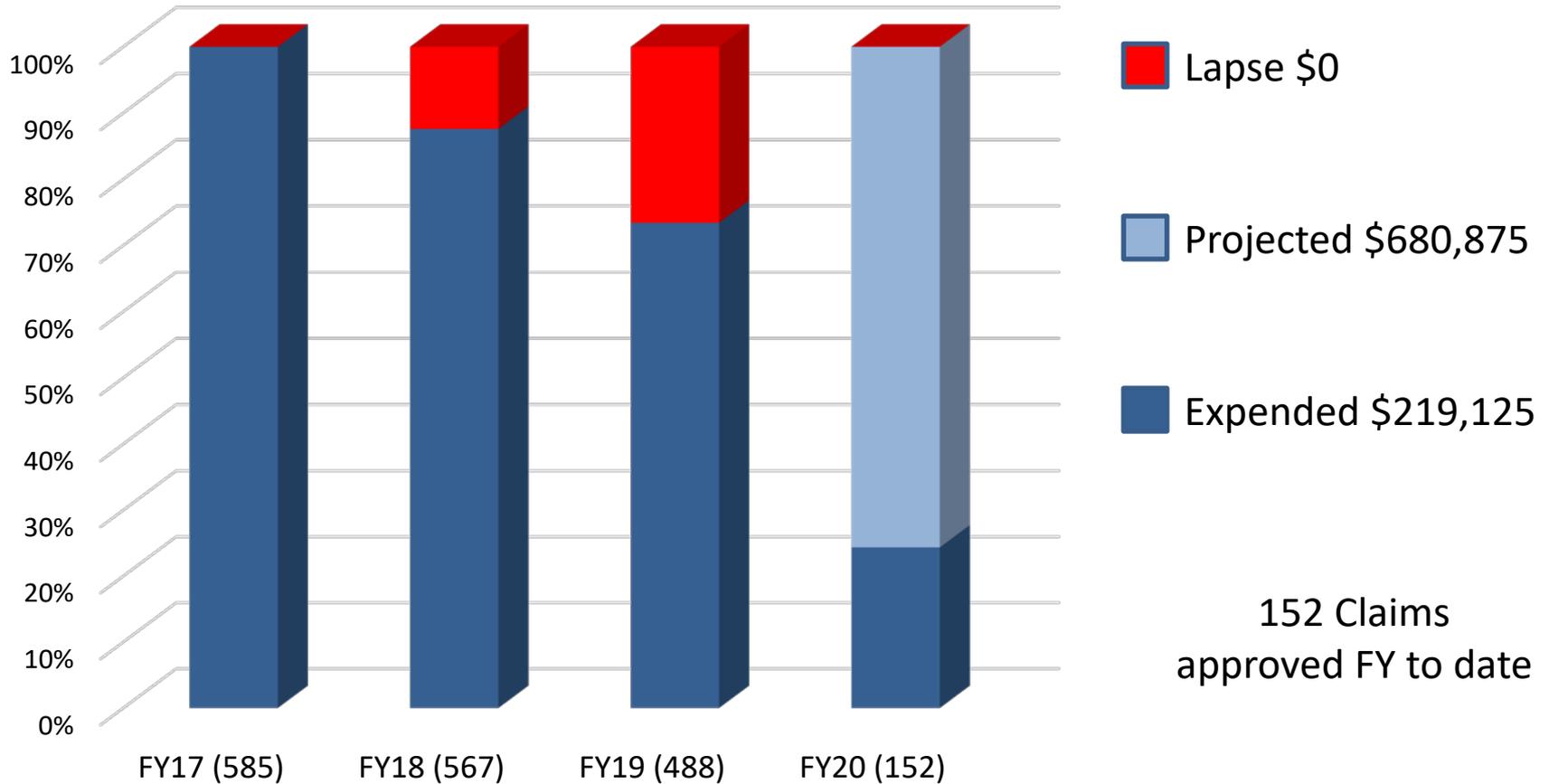
As of 13 January 2021

> community > commonwealth > country

# VETERANS TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE



\$900,000



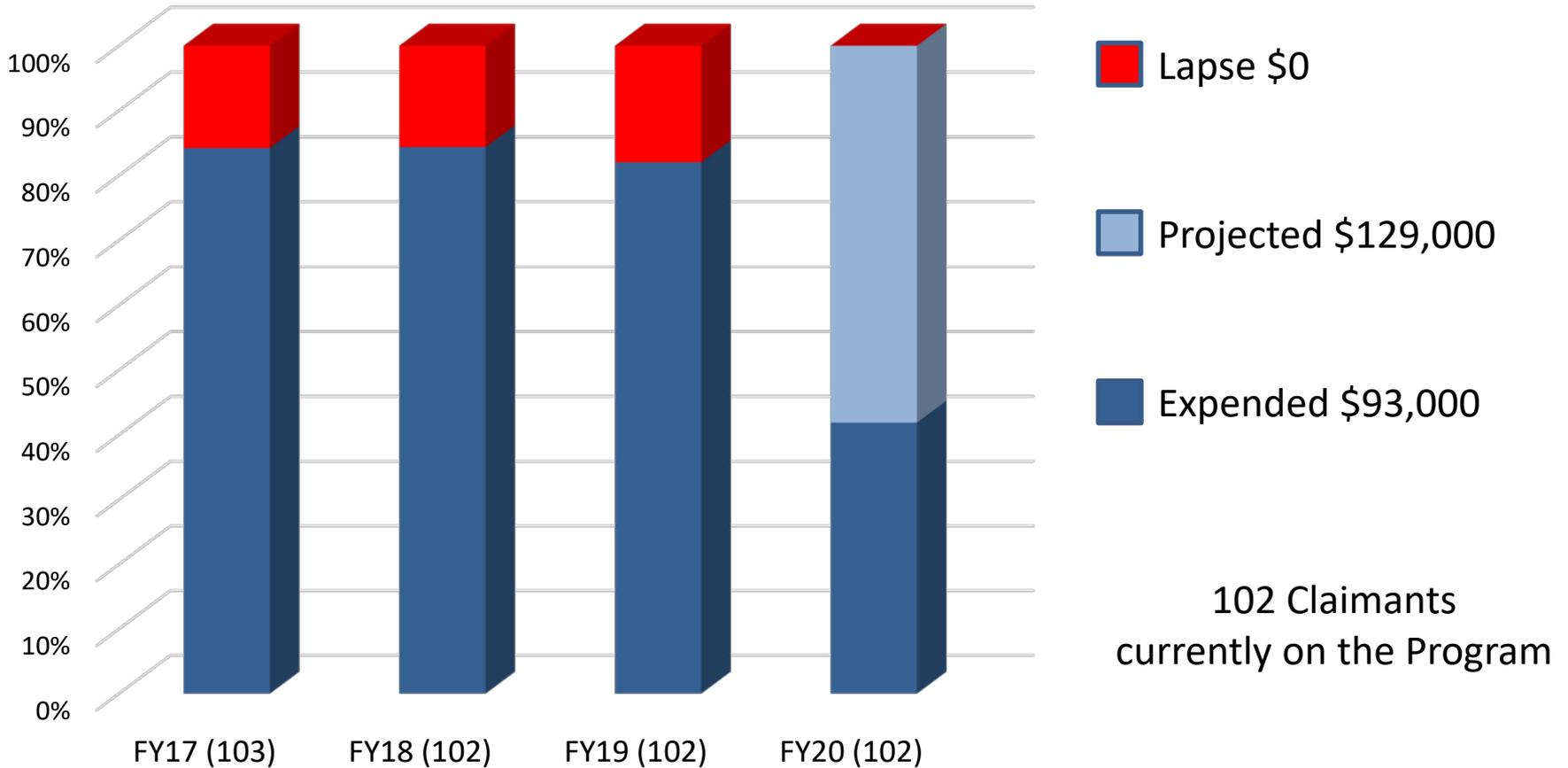
As of 31 Dec 2020

> community > commonwealth > country

# BLIND VETERANS PENSION



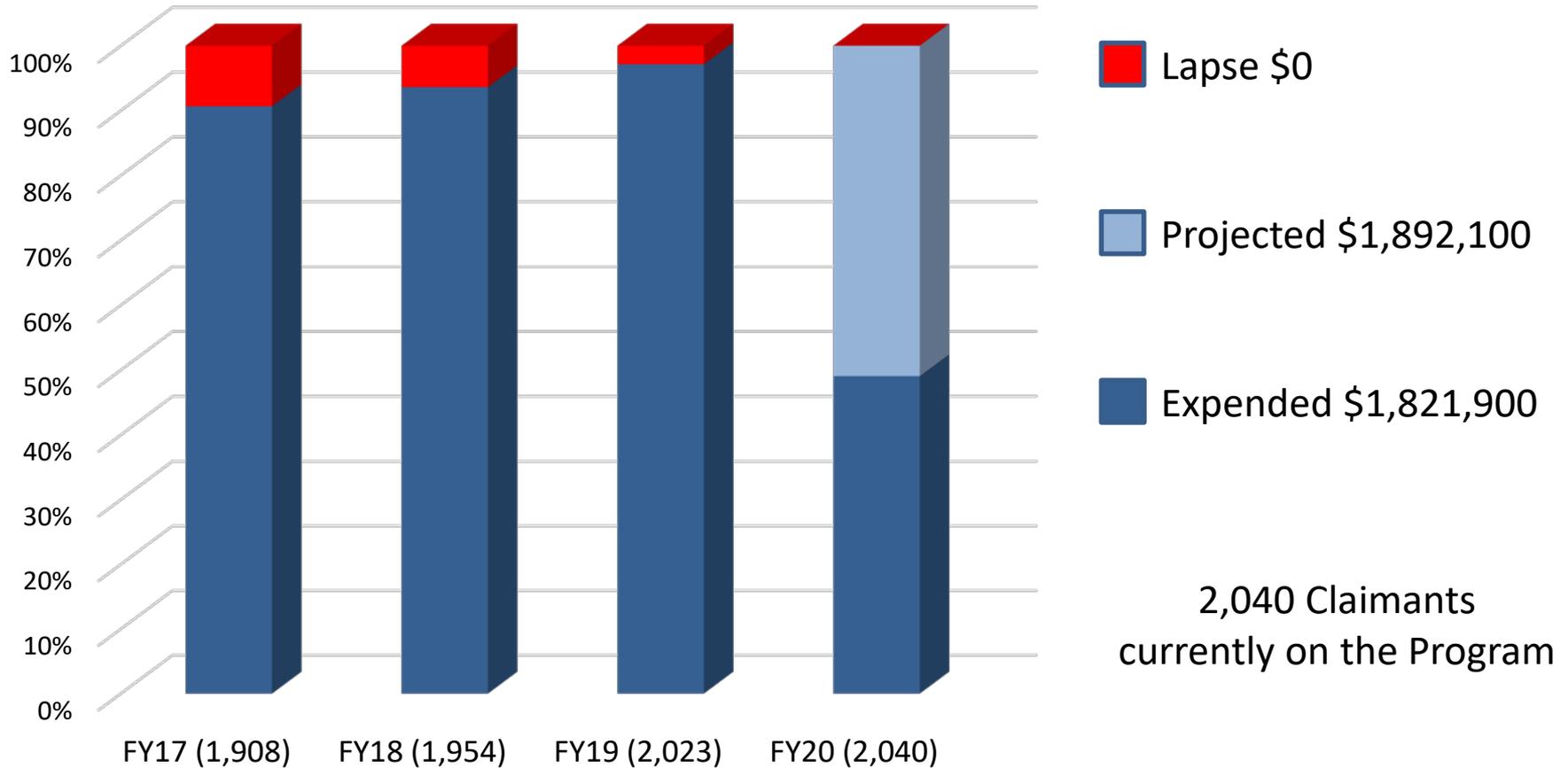
\$222,000



# AMPUTEE & PARALYZED VETERANS PENSION



\$3,714,000



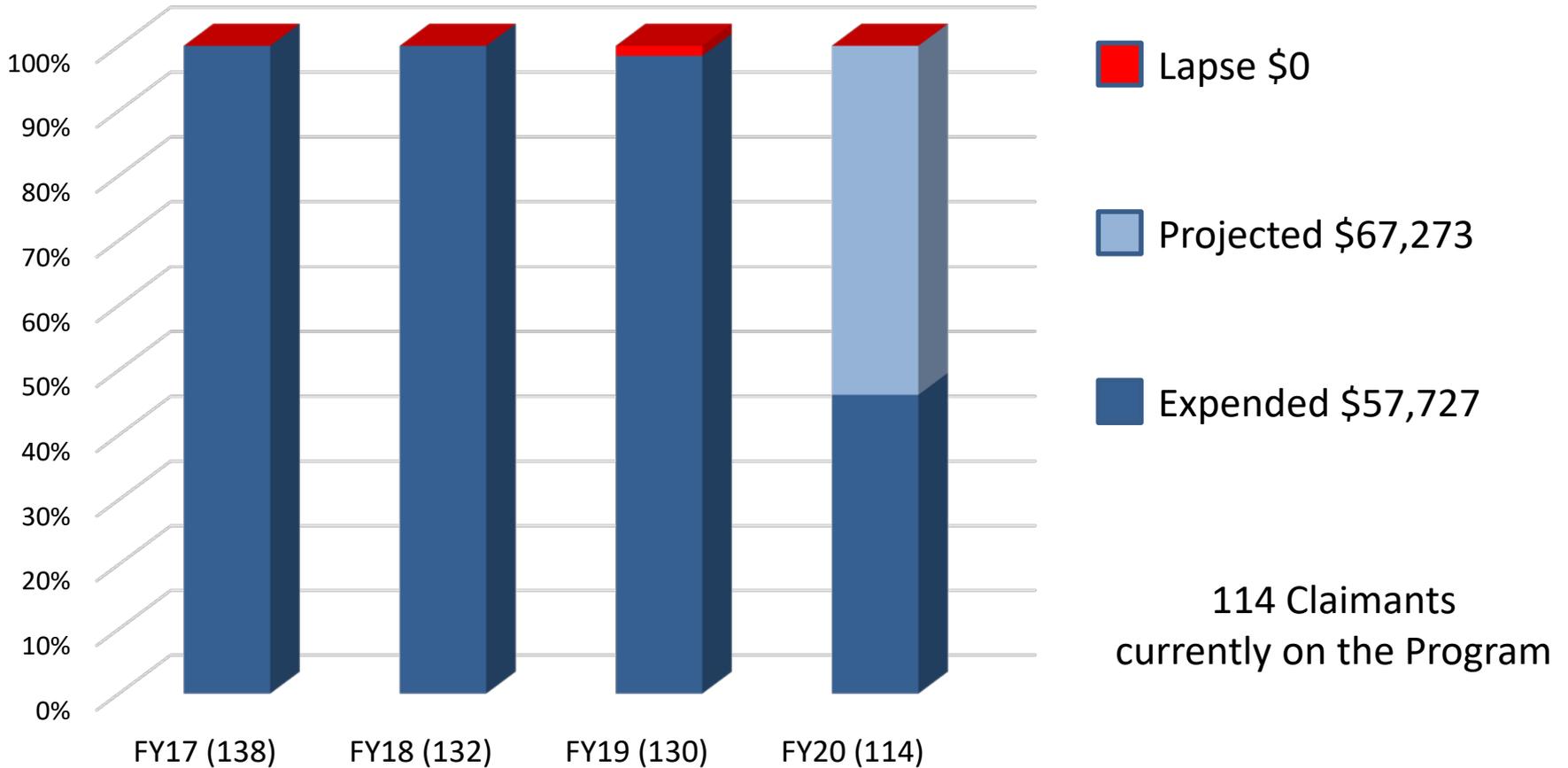
As of 31 Dec 2020

> community > commonwealth > country

# EDUCATIONAL GRATUITY



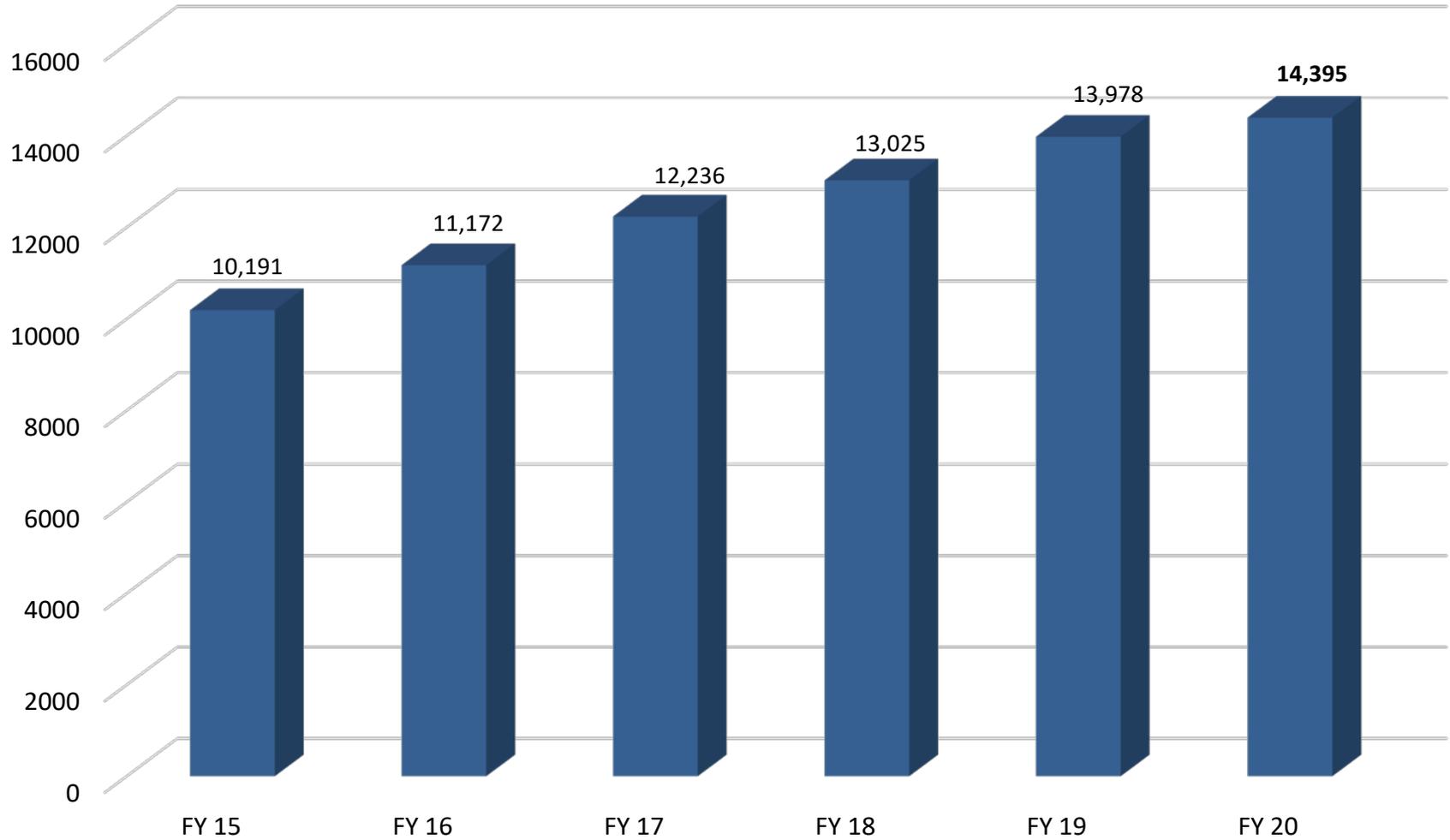
\$125,000



**OVERALL MFRAP CONTRIBUTIONS AND PAYMENTS: FY 2005 – FY 2020**  
**(PROGRAM REAUTHORIZED 29 OCT 2020)**

Total Private Donations.....	\$136,727.69
Total Department of Revenue, PIT Donations.....	\$1,806,436.90
Total All Contributions: Private and PIT Donations.....	\$1,943,164.59
Approved Grant Application Payments.....	\$894,421.86
FY20 Approved Grant Application Payments.....	\$3,500
Account Balance.....	\$1,045,242.73

# DISABLED VETERANS TAX EXEMPTION PROGRAM



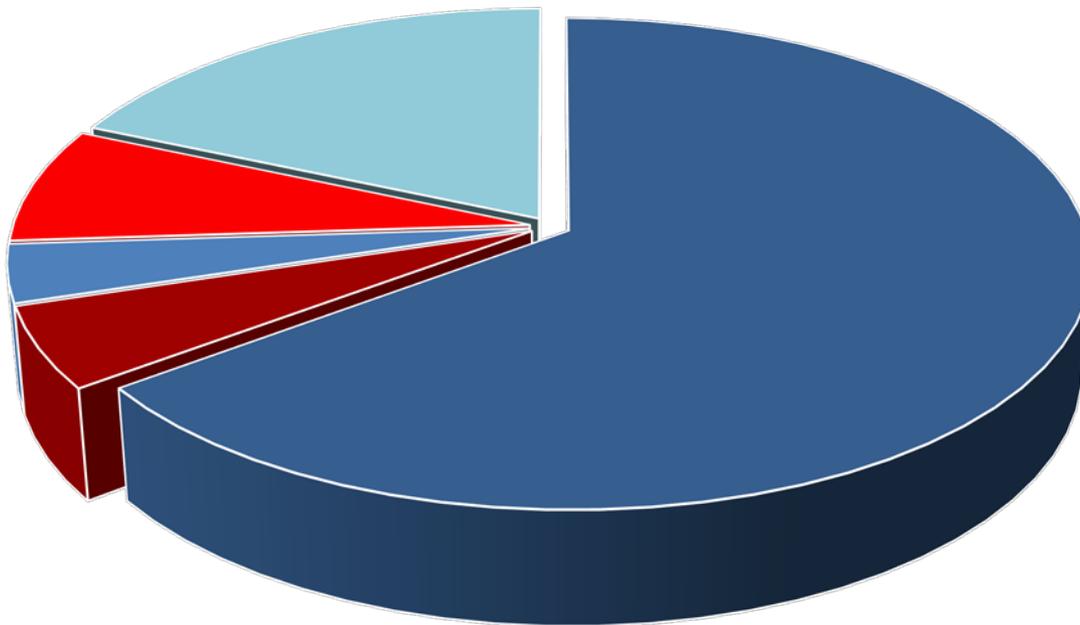
As of 19 Jan 2021

[> community](#) [> commonwealth](#) [> country](#)

# DISABLED VETERANS TAX EXEMPTION PROGRAM



871 Applications Adjudicated  
From 19 Nov 2020 to 19 Jan 2021



- 577 Approved
- 48 Denied: Financial Need
- 34 Denied: Ineligible\*
- 68 Removed: No Response
- 164 Removed: Eligibility Change

**\* 34 Applications Ineligible by Reason:**

- 1 – Property Sold
- 4 – Veteran not rated total and permanent 100% during lifetime
- 4 – Property not owned solely by Veteran or as estate by the entirety with spouse
- 18 – Veteran did not serve during a period of war or armed conflict
- 7 – Veteran did not have a 100% permanent disability due to a future exam.

**NEXT MEETING**



**APRIL 2, 2021**

**WEBEX VIRTUAL**

**Fort Indiantown Gap**

**Annville, PA**

**\*Visit [www.svc.pa.gov](http://www.svc.pa.gov) for all SVC info.\***

# **Pennsylvania State Veterans Commission**

## **February 5, 2021**

### **VISN 4 Update**

Good morning, everyone! This is Tim Liezert, VISN 4 network director.

You have received our slides with updated access, wait time, and care in the community data as a read ahead. Please let me know if you have any questions.

#### **1. Leadership Update**

Jaconda Lightburn, Ph.D., has been appointed as the associate director/chief operating officer at Lebanon VA Medical Center effective January 17, 2021. Lightburn is currently the assistant medical center director at the Veterans Health System of the Ozarks in Fayetteville, Arkansas and led the health care system's response to the national pandemic. Prior to this role, she has had multiple senior leadership experiences at several VA healthcare facilities including acting assistant director at the Washington DC Veterans Affairs Medical Center and acting assistant/associate director at the Charleston VA Medical Center, South Carolina. She began her VA career as the chief of safety, and green environmental management system manager at the Charleston VA Medical Center. Lightburn is a retired Veteran with over 24 years of honorable and distinguished service.

Barb Forsha, Deputy Director of the VA Pittsburgh began serving as the Acting Director of the Clarksburg VA on January 4. William Shaughnessy, VA Pittsburgh Administrative Services Officer for Surgery is currently serving as the Deputy Director in Pittsburgh.

We are currently searching for new chiefs of staff for our Medical Center's in Butler and Erie.

#### **2. VISN 4 Mental Health Update**

Two strategic goals for FY21:

**Increase use of VVC at all facilities:** Build upon successes in offering video care for mental health services to maintain access, particularly in the provision of individual and group psychotherapy; having VVC be an option for all clinicians to use when clinically appropriate and acceptable to a Veteran; rates of VVC utilization in mental health programs increased monthly since the start of the pandemic response, with December showing 27.1% of all MH workload done by VVC (inclusive of Homeless Programs).

**Expansion of Substance Abuse Disorder care at all facilities:** Re-establish in-person care whenever safe to do so while taking necessary precautions; establish or expand virtual groups; expand prescribing efforts beyond mental health programs; expand and maximize residential program bed access.

## **Suicide Prevention Update:**

- Key suicide prevention initiatives across VISN 4 included further expansion of efforts with community and state partners. VA's public health strategy combines partnerships with communities to implement tailored, local prevention plans while also focusing on evidence based clinical strategies for intervention.
- The goals of VA's suicide prevention efforts is not to get every Veteran enrolled in VA care, but rather to equip communities to help Veterans get the right care, whenever and wherever they need it. Put simply, VA must ensure suicide prevention is part of every aspect of Veterans' lives, just not their interaction with VA.
- In support of this model, VISN 4 has hired a Community Engagement and Partnership Coordinator (CEPC) at each of our nine medical centers. Their work will focus on Community Coalition Building.
- We continue to emphasize outreach to our vulnerable populations and to assure that Veterans have access to MH care during the pandemic.
- VISN 4 has also selected Pete Albert as our new VISN 4 Suicide Prevention Program Manager. He will assist with the roll-out of this new public-health approach, assist facilities with implementation of suicide prevention strategies, and will serve as a point of contact and subject matter expert. Mr. Albert has a wealth of experience within the suicide prevention realm that he brings to the position.

### **3. COVID-19 Vaccine – Update**

During the week of December 14<sup>th</sup>, our Pittsburgh and Philadelphia VAs began receiving and administering the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine.

During the week of December 21<sup>st</sup>, the seven other VISN 4 facilities began receiving and administering the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine.

Some community-based outpatient clinics have already begun administering the vaccine, and some parent facilities are still working out logistics for offering vaccines there. We are working hard and carefully to ensure strict adherence to storage and preparation guidelines and timeframes as well as zero waste results.

VA worked with the CDC to develop a phased distribution plan to maximize the benefit of COVID-19 vaccine. In these first weeks, there is limited vaccine available. As production increases, our goal is to offer a COVID-19 vaccine to all Veterans and health care workers who choose to be vaccinated. The different VISN 4 facilities are at different stages in the distribution plan.

VA has set up a website, which includes a Keep Me Informed tool, to help keep Veterans updated regarding vaccine distribution. While Veterans don't need to sign up

for this (or anywhere) to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, it may be helpful for both them and their local facility for planning purposes if they do.

As vaccine supply increases and we move through the distribution plan, care teams and local facilities will contact Veterans to let them know of their options.

VA announced earlier this month that it had administered initial COVID-19 vaccine doses to more than 14,000 Veterans at high risk of getting COVID-19 infection, and more than 132,000 health care employees as of Jan. 4.

In the meeting minutes we will share VA's main COVID-19 COVID vaccine webpage ([www.va.gov/health-care/covid-19-vaccine/](http://www.va.gov/health-care/covid-19-vaccine/)).

#### **4. Caregiver Support Update**

On Oct. 1, VA's Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers expanded eligibility to include Veterans who incurred or aggravated a serious injury or illness in the line of duty on or before May 7, 1975 (WWII, Korean War and Vietnam Veterans). It previously served only post-9/11 Veterans. The final phase of expansion will occur two years from the expansion date and will expand PCAFC to include eligible Veterans from all eras who have a serious injury incurred or aggravated in the line of duty in the active military, naval, or air service.

The program provides family caregivers of eligible Veterans with benefits that include training, enhanced respite care, counseling, technical support, beneficiary travel, a monthly stipend payment and access to health care (if qualified) through the Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Department of Veterans Affairs (CHAMPVA).

Both the VISN Centralized Eligibility and Appeals team and each facility have been hiring additional staff and working very hard to manage the expansion.

In addition, all caregivers who provide personal care services to Veterans enrolled in Veterans Affairs (VA) health care have access to the Program of General Caregiver Support Services. Every site is working on continuing to expand the PGCSS this fiscal year by offering groups, individual interventions, staff training, community outreach, and many other activities.

For more information on either program, and other VA services for caregivers, visit [www.caregiver.va.gov](http://www.caregiver.va.gov).

During the first 90 days of the program expansion, VISN 4 received approximately 1,137 applications. During the same time frame about 35,168 applications were received nationwide.

More than 59% of the VISN 4 applications are for Veterans who are more than 70 years old. As of January 11, 78 applications have been approved.

### **5. Customer Service Update**

Nationally, VA's trust score over the last 90 days was 89.6. In VISN 4, our trust score over the last 90 days was 92, which remains the third highest VISN in the nation. The top 5 compliment themes over the last 90 days were quality of care, interactions with staff, satisfaction with specialty care, ear clinic services, and podiatry services.

### **6. Connected Care Update**

VA launched the new "VA Video Connect Now" application which allows providers and patients to meet through video quickly and efficiently. A provider can initiate a video visit on-demand to ensure they provide the best care possible even when the visit began as a phone call. This new application can send the video link to the patient's email or text it to their smartphone in a couple of minutes. Veterans are no longer required to download an app to join video sessions. We encourage Veterans to try video appointments to minimize their need to travel to VA facilities and to reduce their risk of exposure.

To help prevent the spread of COVID-19, Veterans are encouraged to register for a My Health<sup>e</sup>Vet Premium account to access tools that let them manage their VA care remotely. With a My Health<sup>e</sup>Vet Premium Account, Veterans can:

- Contact their VA Care Team through Secure Messaging
- Manage their VA Appointments and join VA Video Connect appointments
- Order VA Prescription Refills

My Health<sup>e</sup>Vet Coordinators at VISN 4 medical centers are assisting Veterans with this process through VA Video Connect. Veterans wishing to register for a My Health<sup>e</sup>Vet account should visit [www.myhealth.va.gov](http://www.myhealth.va.gov), then contact their local Coordinator to upgrade their account through video. Veterans with a My Health<sup>e</sup>Vet account who need assistance or have questions may contact their local My Health<sup>e</sup>Vet Coordinator to set up a video link. For those Veterans who need an upgraded account to Premium so they may communicate with their VA care teams through Secure Messaging, the local My Health<sup>e</sup>Vet Coordinator can complete the necessary Identity Verification process through video.

### **Closing**

In closing, I'd like to thank you for your continued support of VISN 4. Please let me know if you have any questions for me.

**Bureau of Veterans' Homes  
Available Beds Monthly Status Report  
from December 1 to 31, 2020**

<b>Delaware Valley Veterans' Home, Philadelphia PA - Peter Ojeda - Commandant</b>						
Level of Care	Available Beds	Beds Assigned	Beds Vacant	Average Beds Vacant	Percentage Filled	Waiting List Veteran / Placing
Nursing Care*	90	47	43		52%	69
Memory Care	30	27	3		90%	32
Placing						<b>0</b>
Totals Less Wait List Placing	<b>120</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>46</b>	<u>47</u>	62%	<b>101</b>
Non-Veteran Census Percent				47	5%	
<b>Gino J. Merli Veterans' Center, Scranton PA - James Miller - Commandant</b>						
Level of Care	Available Beds	Beds Assigned	Beds Vacant	Average Beds Vacant	Percentage Filled	Waiting List Veteran / Placing
Nursing Care	156	115	41		74%	23
Memory Care	40	30	10		75%	9
Placing						<b>0</b>
Totals Less Wait List Placing	<b>196</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>51</b>	<u>45</u>	74%	<b>32</b>
Non-Veteran Census Percent				48	9%	
<b>Hollidaysburg Veterans' Home, Hollidaysburg PA - Deborah Nesbella - Commandant</b>						
Level of Care	Available Beds	Beds Assigned	Beds Vacant	Average Beds Vacant	Percentage Filled	Waiting List Veteran / Placing
Nursing Care	231	143	88		62%	7
Memory Care	26	14	12		54%	0
Personal Care	101	28	73		28%	0
Domiciliary	66	62	4		94%	0
Placing						<b>0</b>
Totals Less Wait List Placing	<b>424</b>	<b>247</b>	<b>177</b>	<u>152</u>	58%	<b>7</b>
Non-Veteran Census Percent				165	14%	
<b>Pennsylvania Soldiers' &amp; Sailors Home, Erie PA - Barbara Raymond - Commandant</b>						
Level of Care	Available Beds	Beds Assigned	Beds Vacant	Average Beds Vacant	Percentage Filled	Waiting List Veteran / Placing
Nursing Care	75	53	22		71%	16
Memory Care	32	18	14		56%	7
Personal Care	80	36	44		45%	5
Domiciliary	20	20	0		100%	0
Placing						<b>0</b>
Totals Less Wait List Placing	<b>207</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>80</b>	<u>58</u>	61%	<b>28</b>
Non-Veteran Census Percent				69	14%	
<b>Southeastern Veterans' Center, Spring City PA - Barbara Raymond - Acting Commandant</b>						
Level of Care	Available Beds	Beds Assigned	Beds Vacant	Average Beds Vacant	Percentage Filled	Waiting List Veteran / Placing
Nursing Care	208	117	91		56%	65
Memory Care	30	27	3		90%	35
Personal Care	54	34	20		63%	22
Placing						<b>2</b>
Totals Less Wait List Placing	<b>292</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>114</b>	<u>115</u>	61%	<b>120</b>
Non-Veteran Census Percent				115	9%	
<b>Southwestern Veterans' Center, Pittsburgh PA - Richard Adams - Commandant</b>						
Level of Care	Available Beds	Beds Assigned	Beds Vacant	Average Beds Vacant	Percentage Filled	Waiting List Veteran / Placing
Nursing Care	196	132	64		67%	39
Memory Care	40	36	4		90%	7
Placing						<b>0</b>
Totals Less Wait List Placing	<b>236</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>68</b>	<u>57</u>	71%	<b>46</b>
Non-Veteran Census Percent				63	18%	
<b>Recapitulation / Pennsylvania Bureau of Veterans' Homes</b>						
Level of Care	Available Beds	*Beds Assigned	Beds Vacant	Average Beds Vacant	Percentage Filled	Waiting List Veteran / Placing
Nursing Care	956	607	349		63%	219
Memory Care	198	152	46		77%	90
Personal Care	235	98	137		42%	27
Domiciliary	86	82	4		95%	0
Placing Total						<b>2</b>
Totals Less Wait List Placing	<b>1,475</b>	<b>939</b>	<b>536</b>	<u>422</u>	64%	<b>334</b>
				479		
<b>Non-Veteran Census Number</b>						
DVVH	3		4%			
GJMVC	13		9%			
HVH	33		13%			
PSSH	17		13%			
SEVC	16		9%			
SWVC	29		17%			
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>111</b>		<b>12%</b>			

RETX- Exempt list(New)

mvfigsqlprod01  
 1/20/2021  
 rep\_VADC\_RETX\_Exempt\_List\_  
 New

**Summary of Current Applications (Exempt)**

Count	No Activity	Review Process Started	Review App Received	New Apps Pending
14395	13684	603	108	241

**Summary of Activity from 11/19/2020 to 01/19/2021**

<b>Apps Created : 447</b>	
New	250
Review:	197
<b>Apps Approved :577</b>	
New	333
Review	244
Apps Denied Fin:	48
Apps Denied (Ineligible):	34
Apps Removed from Exempt List (No Response):	68
Apps Removed from Exempt List(Eligibility Changed):	164

**Summary of Ineligible Reason**

Reason	Count
	2
Property Sold	1
The property for which you claim exemption is not owned solely by you, or as an estate by the entirety with your spouse.	4
The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has determined that the veteran did not have a total and/or 100% permanent disability during their lifetime.	2
The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has determined that the veteran did not serve during a period of war or armed conflict.	18
The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs stated that you have a future exam , therefore, your disability has not been rated as total or 100% permanent.	7

**Summary of Activity from 11/19/2020 to 1/19/2021**

<b>APPS APPROVED</b>	577
NEW	333
REVIEW	244

<b>APPS DENIED</b>	
Financial Need	48
Ineligible	34
No Response	68
Change of Eligibility	164

<b>HH OVER INCOME</b>	21	4%
NEW	8	2%
REVIEW	13	5%

APPS CREATED	447
<b>TOTAL ADJUDICATED</b>	891

## COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS 2020-2021

### ACT 66 COMMITTEE

MR. ANTHONY JORGENSEN (COMMITTEE CHAIR)	TAL (SME)
MR. JOHN PLISKA	AMVETS
MR. ROBERT FORBES	AMVETS
MR. CHARLES JACKSON	VFW (SME)
MR. RICHARD HUDZINSKI	VVA (SME)
MR. JOHN GETZ	VFW
MR. BRUCE FOSTER	DAV (SME)
MR. SAM PETROVICH	SVC CHAIRMAN
MR. PHILIP ARNOLD	MOPH (SME)
MR. CHIP GILLILAND	DMVA

### RETX COMMITTEE

MR. JUSTIN SLEP (COMMITTEE CHAIR)	CDVA
MR. KEITH BEEBE	MOAA
MR. CHRIS FIDLER	KPVA
MR. ROBERT ZILTZ	MCL
MR. NICHOLAS TAYLOR	SVC VICE-CHAIR
MR. JOHN CYPRIAN	MAL
MR. BRIAN NATALI	DMVA
MS. TRACY WYLIE-PERRY	DMVA

### LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE

MR. SAM PETROVICH (COMMITTEE CHAIR)	SVC CHAIRMAN
MR. JOHN GETZ	VFW
MR. ROBERT FORBES	AMVETS
MR. JOHN PLISKA	AMVETS
MR. RICHARD HUDZINSKI	VVA (SME)
MR. ROBERT GRAY	MOAA (SME)
MR. PHILIP ARNOLD	MOPH (SME)
MR. BRUCE FOSTER	DAV (SME)
MR. CHARLES JACKSON	VFW (SME)
MR. ANTHONY JORGENSEN	TAL (SME)
MR. DUSTY DURAND	DMVA

### PENSIONS & RELIEF/GRAVE MARKING/CEMETARY COMMITTEE

MS. CONSTANCE SNAVELY (COMMITTEE CHAIR)	MAL
MR. LARRY GOOGINS	VVA
MR. WALTER ALBERT	BVA
MR. LOUIS SANTANGELO	KWV
MR. JUSTIN SLEP	CDVA
MR. CHRIS FIDLER	KPVA
MR. WALTER ALBERT	BVA
MS. JOAN HESS	DMVA

**MEMBER AT LARGE COMMITTEE**

<b>MR. SAM PETROVICH (COMMITTEE CHAIR)</b>	<b>SVC CHAIRMAN</b>
<b>MR. PHILIP ARNOLD</b>	<b>MOPH (SME)</b>
<b>MR. RICHARD HUDZINSKI</b>	<b>VVA (SME)</b>
<b>MR. CHRIS FIDLER</b>	<b>KPVA</b>
<b>MR. DUSTY DURAND</b>	<b>DMVA</b>

# PA State Veterans' Commission Legislative Committee

## Veterans Issues for 2020-2021

27 January 2021

### 1. MEMBERS:

- Sam Petrovich (DAV), Chairman
- Robert Forbes (AMVETS)
- Bruce Foster (DAV)
- Bob Gray (MOAA)
- Philip Arnold (MOPH)
- Anthony Jorgensen (TAL)
- John Getz (VFW)
- Chuck Jackson (VFW)
- Richard Hudzinski (VVA)

### 2. ISSUES TO BE ACTIVELY PURSUED THIS LEGISLATIVE CYCLE:

- Obtain legislative changes to 51 Pa. C.S. Chapter 17 which clarify the role of the State Veterans' Commission for the purpose of improving its effectiveness in performing its intended purpose as an independent advisory board, administratively supported by the DMVA, with some regulatory functions.
- Review both the funding for the Act 66 of 2007 outreach program against the Governor's proposed executive budget and the DMVA's administration of the program, acting to ensure program stability and improved management where legislative activity is required.
- Increase the awareness within state government of the importance of the little understood DAV-VHA collaborative partnership known as the Veterans Transportation Network (VTN). Advocate for an increase to the state's portion of this program's funding; (2) DMVA's diligence in timely administration; and (3) legislation or written agreement to ensure all Commonwealth funds appropriated for the Disabled American Veterans Transportation line item are for the use of the Pennsylvania Department of the Disabled American Veterans VTN program only as originally intended.
- Support legislative efforts which (1) supplement the Veterans Treatment Court (aka veterans' diversion court) movement by adding the requirements that every County District Court of Common Pleas take positive steps to identify all veterans appearing before it; and, prior to sentencing, performs a professional diagnosis for the presence of PTSD or TBI when a preliminary screening of the veteran indicates such is needed; and (2) allow prison-sentenced veterans to apply for a post-conviction review of their *sentences* if Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) was incurred while serving their country, if not previously done.
- Support a bill without amendments which exclusively focuses on a state constitutional amendment to the Disabled Veterans' Real Estate Tax Exemption (Chapter 89 of Title 51) adding unmarried spouses of service members killed in action (KIA) or missing in action (MIA) passed.

### 3. OTHER ISSUES/POSITIONS:

- Support a robust, well-managed state long-term healthcare system for those veterans and their dependents in need, regardless of who manages it.
- Support and encourage those measures which ensure our veterans have unrestricted; access to state drug and alcohol programs when and where needed, and do not exclude them because of the mistaken belief that all veterans have access to or want VA healthcare.
- Preserve or improve the protections provided by the Commonwealth's law concerning small dollar loans (both Pay Day loans and Consumer Installment loans).