

# Agenda

## Pennsylvania State Veterans Commission

04 December 2020 at 10:00 AM

Virtual Meeting

<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 (2)</b>	Commission Introduction	Chairman Sam Petrovich
<b>1007 (3)</b>	Oath of Office	Maj Gen Anthony Carrelli
	Walter Albert, President BVA	
<b>1010 (3)</b>	Pennsylvania Veteran Service Award	Maj Gen Anthony Carrelli
	James Metcalfe II	
<b>1013 (3)</b>	Approval of 2 October meeting minutes	<b>REQUIRES A VOTE</b>
<b>1016 (10)</b>	DMVA Military Update	Maj Gen Anthony Carrelli
<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. Andrew Ruscavage
<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	TBD
<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>	
	February 4, 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

October 2, 2020  
10:00 AM to 12:27 PM  
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 and recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance led by Chairman Samuel Petrovich.

### Commission Introductions

Maj Gen Anthony Carrelli	The Adjutant General
Mr. Samuel Petrovich	SVC, Chairman
Maj Gen (Ret) Eric Weller	Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans Affairs
Mr. John Pliska	Executive Director, AMVETS
Mr. Ronald Peters	Commander, Veterans of Foreign Wars
Mr. John Getz	Adjutant, Veterans of Foreign Wars
Mr. Keith Beebe	President, Military Officers Association of America
Mr. Justin Slep	President, PA State Association of County Directors of Veterans Affairs
Mr. Neil Appleby	President, Blinded Veterans Association
Mr. Robert Ziltz	Commandant, Marine Corps League
Mr. Leonard Johnson	Commander, Disabled American Veterans
Mr. Christopher Fidler	Representative, Keystone Paralyzed Veterans of America
Mr. Frank Bokan	President, Military Order of the Purple Heart
Mr. Kit Watson	Adjutant, The American Legion
Mr. Robert John	Commander, The American Legion
Ms. Constance Snavelly	Member at Large/ SVC Vice-Chairwoman
Mr. Edgar Burris	Member at Large
Mr. Nicholas Taylor	Commander, Catholic War Veterans
Mr. Larry Googins	Commander, Vietnam Veterans of America
Mr. Tim Liezert	VISN-4

### Others Present

MG Mark Schindler	Deputy Adjutant General- PA National Guard-Army
Mr. Nathan Silcox	PA Senator Regan-Chief of Staff
Mr. Anthony Jorgensen	The American Legion
Mr. Richard Hudzinski	Vietnam Veterans of America
Mr. Phillip Arnold	Adjutant, Military Order of Purple Hearts
Mr. Robert Gray	Keystone Paralyzed Veterans of America
Mr. Mike Mescavage	Military Order of Purple Hearts
Ms. Lisa Kaye	PASACD-Monroe County

Ms. Susan Meighen	PASACD-Washington County
Mr. Tim Cleveland	PASACD-Tioga County
Mr. Zachary Pearson	PASACD-McKean County
Mr. Charles Jackson	Veterans of Foreign Wars
Mr. David Cowgill	VISN4
Mr. Noah Erwin	Unknown
Mr. Aaron Reiber	VSOPITT
Ms. Joan Nissley	DMVA-Public Affairs
Mr. Kory Auch	PA Office of Administration
Mr. Jeffrey Wallitsch	DMVA-OCC
Mr. Sam Estrada	DMVA-Policy, Planning & Legislative Affairs
Ms. Lauren Troutman	DMVA-Policy, Planning & Legislative Affairs
Mr. Rick Hamp	DMVA-OVA
Mr. Andrew Ruscavage	DMVA-BVH
Mr. Joel Mutschler	DMVA-PIRO
Mr. Chip Gilliland	DMVA-PIRO (Outreach and Reintegration)
Ms. Erica Moore	DMVA-PIRO (Outreach and Reintegration)
Mr. Michael Palarino	DMVA-PIRO (Outreach and Reintegration)
Ms. Samantha Crossman	DMVA-PIRO (Outreach and Reintegration)
Ms. Janette Krolczyk	DMVA-OVA
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. Tracy Wylie-Perry	DMVA-PIRO (Programs and Services)
<b>Oath of Office</b>	<b>Maj Gen Carrelli</b>
General Carrelli administered the oath of office to Mr. Larry Googins, Vietnam Veterans of America, and Mr. Ronald Peters, Veterans of Foreign Wars, as new members of the State Veterans Commission.	
<b>Approval of the August 7, 2020 Meeting Minutes</b>	
<b>Motion:</b> Mr. Taylor, CWV, made a motion to approve the minutes.	
<b>Second:</b> Mr. Bokan, MOPH, seconded the motion.	
The body agreed; motion carried.	
<b>Military Update</b>	<b>Maj Gen Anthony Carrelli</b>
Major General Carrelli thanked everyone for joining.	
With respect to the military update, PANG currently has over 1,000 members deployed, mostly from the Expeditionary Combat Aviation Brigade. The Department of Defense is back to full operations. During the height of COVID-19 there was a freeze on some movements, but we are back to normal again. Nationwide, members now must put in a two-week quarantine on the front end of a deployment and another two weeks on return. So, a nine-month deployment is a ten-month deployment, or a six-month deployment is a seven-month. That is how they are managing deployments now, so we are doing that in Pennsylvania.	
We have about 240 Guardsmen on federal 502-F orders doing COVID operations within the state. They are in several long-term care and nursing homes doing staffing assistance, testing, PPE and decontamination, but mostly testing. A few dozen Guardsmen are also doing contact-tracing for the State, as well as manning several testing sites, like one in Allegheny County.	

We are also working with the State on elections, but still defining our role. It appears we will have some role, even if just for security around the Commonwealth. With the national elections come an inauguration. We are already committed to sending at least 1,000 Guardsmen down to Washington DC for the inauguration, as we do every four years.

On the Veterans side, currently there are no Veterans in our Homes testing positive for COVID-19. We do currently have four staff members testing positive, two from Holidaysburg and two from Southeast. About Christmas visitation, we have a system in place to allow phased visitation. It just depends on the pandemic as far as what those Homes are seeing. We are doing some outside visitation at Delaware Valley in Philadelphia. We are about to start that at Gino Merli [in Scranton] and Soldiers and Sailors in Erie because we have not had a positive case among the residents or staff in those Homes for the timeline that we are allowed to open up. Unfortunately, Southwest, Southeast, and Holidaysburg are being held up by recent positive tests. Once we get a positive test, that resets the timeline so we must wait until we can reopen. These guidelines come from the Department of Health and then we must investigate how we are going to do it.

I know there are a lot of families and we are getting a lot of calls about visitation. The frustrating part is that we will get close to being able to open and then someone tests positive. Then we have to lock it back down and restart the timeline again. If you see throughout the Commonwealth, COVID is still out there. This is our second straight day now with over 1,100 new cases in PA, so it is not a time to let our guard down. About some sort of a full-scale Christmas reopening, I just do not see it happening. I would love to be wrong and see COVID go on a huge downslide, but I do not see that happening in the next few months. So, if things do not change, we are not going to be able to reopen full-scale for Christmas. We need a back-up plan. We should be able to come up with something we can do to show support and bring the holiday. We just must do it safely. Whether that is a drive-by parade or something, just so everyone knows we are still thinking of them. We need to start thinking up those plans now though.

There was a lot of discussion at the last meeting about PA VetConnect. We gave you the resources and outlined an answer. I just want to let everyone know that this has been a completely open initiative that we have been chairing over the last two-plus years. The name has changed from a regional mental health initiative to regionalization and finally to PA VetConnect, but it is something we have been working with for a while. It is a great tool to connect many different organizations regionally with VSOs so we can better connect people with resources and be able to better identify areas where there are no resources. Once we exhaust all the organizations and governmental resources, we can allocate more Departmental resources, like grants from the Veterans Trust Fund, or go to the legislature to ask for specific funding for regions that are uncovered. There is talk that the Act 66 money has been going into PA VetConnect and that is just not true. The appropriated money that goes into Act 66 must be allocated out to the penny. It would be illegal for us not to do that. This is a great program though. We have been briefing the federal VA; they think this is a model program to spread to other states.

We are under a hiring freeze now; we got 5/12 of our budget. For Act 66, you got half a years' worth. Next month, after the elections, we should see budget discussions. We are enduring budget cuts right now because of a lack of state revenue. Other funding, like funding for our vacant positions, is being taken away from us. Some of our general government accounts with O&M money has been taken away. So, we are under a tight budget situation right now and we are just waiting to see what comes of those November discussions.

#### Questions/Discussion

Mr. Petrovich: I think as we found out about the President and First Lady this morning, no house is safe from COVID. So, do what you need to do to stay safe. And, with respect to needing more people out in the field, maybe instead of taking money from the Trust Fund, we can push the legislature to increase the budget for

Act 66 and see if we can get more people out into the field that way. With the budget discussions soon to come up, hopefully we will know a lot more.

**VISN 4**

**Mr. Tim Liezert**

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. VISN 4 Leadership Update**

Jennifer Harkins, Associate Director for Finance and Operations, continues to serve as the Acting Director in Coatesville, and we continue to work through the process of recruiting a new facility Director. Her detail ends on September 28<sup>th</sup> and Nancy Schmid, Associate Director for Patient Care Services will be the acting Director at Coatesville until the new director is appointed.

Robert Askey continues to serve as the Acting Associate Director for Support Services in Philadelphia.

Dr. Joanne Suffoletto, the chief of staff in Butler, transferred to another VA and Dr. David Lavin, chief of staff at the Erie VA will be retiring this month. Dr. Erika Hoffman, Supervisory primary care physician at VA Pittsburgh is currently the acting Chief of Staff at Butler.

We are currently recruiting for both these Chief of Staff positions.

### **2. COVID-19 Update**

We are constantly evaluating community prevalence of COVID-19 cases, supply availability, and other community and facility-based considerations to determine how we can continue providing safe care both virtually and in person.

All Veterans are encouraged to contact their facility to review their health care options before coming to the facility in person, unless they are experiencing an emergency. Clinical staff will conduct reviews to determine referral prioritization - whether at VA or for community care. VA will continue to offer virtual and telephone appointments for most routine visits as appropriate. VA providers will continue to schedule face-to-face appointments when determined to be clinically necessary.

As we continue to move forward, be assured, safe care is our mission and our continuing commitment to our Veterans, visitors, and employees.

VISN 4 staff continue to support VA's 4<sup>th</sup> Mission by being deployed to hot spots across the country to serve Veterans where the need is the greatest. Nearly 150 of our staff have volunteered to deploy or are deployed on over 300 (14) day deployments to assist in VA Facilities or State Nursing Homes in New York City, New Jersey, New Orleans, Pennsylvania, and most recently Mississippi, Oklahoma, Texas and Arizona.

### **3. Flu Shots**

Here is my Public Service Announcement for everyone to get their Flu Shots! Eligible Veterans can now receive their seasonal flu shots at more than 60,000 Community Care Network (CCN) retail pharmacies and urgent care locations. This replaces the Walgreens Retail Immunization Care Coordination Program, which ended in March 2020.

You received a link with your read ahead material to learn more about these CCN locations. You can access a map to all community in-network locations and a chart indicating what type of locations Veterans can go to in their regions to receive their flu shots.

No appointment or VA referral is required. Veterans need to present a valid government-issued identification (e.g., Veterans' Health ID Card, Department of Defense ID card, state-issued driver's license or ID card, etc.).

Veterans can also use the VA Locator to find a VA facility, in-network retail pharmacy or urgent care location near them by using the link that you have in your packets.

#### Eligibility

- Retail pharmacies: Veterans must be enrolled in the VA health care system
- Urgent care locations: Veterans must be enrolled in the VA health care system and have received care from a VA or in-network community provider in the past 24 months

#### **4. Customer Service Update**

Nationally, VA's trust score over the last 90 days was 89.2. In VISN 4, our trust score over the last 90 days was 92.1, which is the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest VISN in the nation.

The Top 5 Compliment themes over last 90 days were quality of care, interactions with staff, cleanliness of facility, wait time at the facility, and courtesy of the healthcare providers.

#### **5. Connected Care Update- Tele Urgent Care**

Veterans are now able to access VA Tele Urgent Care from home. Veterans and caregivers may 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! Depending on their condition, some Veterans can be transferred in real time to a provider who will serve them through video. 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. The VISN 4 Tele Urgent Care is currently operating Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m. with plans is to expand to 8:00 a.m.-8:00 p.m. 365 days/year on November 1, 2020!

#### **6. MISSION Act/CCN Update**

All VISN 4 medical centers are successfully able to schedule and coordinate care utilizing the Optum Community Care Network. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we have been successful in scheduling urgent and emergent care. We continue collaboration with Optum through regularly scheduled meetings with each medical center and VISN points of contact. These meetings address network adequacy within each geographic location.

An enhancement to the recently implemented centralized emergency care treatment notification center process includes ensuring that when the emergency notification has suicidal or homicidal indications there is immediate contact and warm handoff to the VA medical center who is responsible for coordinating that care.

#### **7. Caregiver Support Update**

The Caregiver Support Program is working on its two programs for caregivers.

The Program of General Caregiver Support Services (eligible Veterans all eras)- Under this program facilities are expanding the resources being offered to Caregivers of all eras, including hosting summits with community partners, resource fairs for caregivers, and offering additional referrals and interventions.

The Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) is expanding under the new final regulation and changes will be in October 2020. PCAFC expansion will occur in two phases, once the Secretary of Veterans Affairs has certified to Congress that VA's new caregiver information technology system is fully implemented. The first phase will include eligible Veterans who incurred or aggravated a serious injury in the line of duty in the active military, naval, or air service on or before May 7, 1975. WWII, Korean, and Vietnam Veterans will be able to apply after the official launch date, which will be announced by VA in mid-September. The final phase will occur two years following the first date of expansion and will expand PCAFC

eligibility to include eligible Veterans from all eras regardless of when an eligible Veteran's serious injury was incurred or aggravated in the line of duty in the active military, naval, or air service.

I have included links with your read-ahead material that provide more details on both programs.

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

#### Questions/Discussion

Mr. Petrovich: I know your office put out guidelines for ensuring driver and passenger safety in VA vans. The guidelines were excellent. I know Erie probably followed them to the "t," but I got a call from my folks at Wilkes-Barre where they are not planning on doing anything. They took a poll of the drivers and they are going to refuse to drive unless some precautions are taken for driver safety. I would ask that you or someone in VISN-4 look to see what has transpired with those guidelines at each hospital because we do not want to put the drivers nor the passengers in any kind of jeopardy from the virus.

Mr. Liezert: Absolutely, I will check into that.

#### **Veteran Suicide Presentation**

**Mr. Rick Hamp**

Veterans suicide is a huge issue for us here in the Commonwealth. We have been working on suicide prevention efforts since 2013 and before. One of the first things we did was working with SAMHSA and the suicide peer initiative, and you will remember we rolled that effort up into the health promotions committee about a year and half ago. We have a lot of suicide peers out there. They are busy and engaged. It is very important that we continue with some of those efforts, but as we move forward, I want to capture some of the more recent things we have been doing.

Veteran Suicide Prevention Roundtable Discussions (July – September 2019). General Carrelli was involved in a lot of those along with Sen. Mike Regan and other Secretaries of various departments. We have a lot of great feedback from those.

The Governors Suicide Prevention Task Force was started in May 2019. I represent the Department on that task force. Again, a lot of sister departments and multiple agencies working together toward a single result of reducing suicide in the Commonwealth. Of course, we want to be Veteran-centric and there are a number of our sister departments who have declared Veterans to be a priority population, so they are focusing on Veterans as they deliver suicide prevention efforts through their programs. And, of course, our VISN-4 partners are at the forefront of that. They bring the big resources.

The Special Council on Gun Violence: We started work back in 2018 and we were able to deliver a Final Report in March 2020. There were 36 total recommendations in there. We have been able to incorporate about nine of those into our overarching suicide prevention plan. For us, we look at lethal means safety, limiting access to lethal means, and a lot of different things that include firearms, drugs, etc.

If you will remember, back in January the Governor came out with the Reach Out PA: Your Mental Health Matters campaign. We played a big part in helping design and put that campaign together. That was also the impetus for helping us to start a communications campaign to reduce stigma.

Again, in January 2020, the Governor accepted the VA/SAMHSA Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide among SMVF. That is a premier initiative that we are working on now, bringing all the things I have previously mentioned together into an overarching strategic plan that is focused on impacting how we work together with interagency, private partners, VISN-4, service organizations, etc. coming together to make a difference in how we prevent suicide among Servicemembers, Veterans, and their families.

Since May 2020, we have been working together with VA/SAMHSA and have been recognized for the progress we have made in the Commonwealth. We were then invited to nominate a city to join the Mayor's Challenge to

Prevent Suicide among SMVF. This is the bigger part of the effort to get boots on the ground. It was determined that we should invite the City of Pittsburgh and they joined in May 2020. We are working with them as mentors and partners to prevent suicide among Servicemembers, Veterans, and their families.

Also, in May 2020, we became aware of and asked to join another initiative called Together With Veterans. They really like to move into a community to put together some grass-roots initiatives about suicide prevention, suicide awareness, and reducing stigma. Working together with Mr. Robert Dare, the VA Representative, it was determined that we wanted to move into Carbon County. The Adjutant General and Mr. Dare approved of that, and I am happy to tell you they are working together with PIRO and the RPOCs in Carbon County because of the suicide rate in that county, and they are doing very well. They have a strategic plan and they are starting to do some community outreach.

In June 2020, we had the opportunity to join the City of Philadelphia Suicide Prevention Task Force. They hired a Suicide Prevention Coordinator towards the end of May and in June they reached out to us to work with them in the City of Philadelphia. So really, we have two cities working with us on a Mayor's Challenge and we are very proud about that and happy to be working with them both as partners and mentors

A little about some of the grant activity for suicide prevention and co-occurring conditions:

- State Opioid Response Grant Funding - \$2 Million Awarded
- CDC Comprehensive Suicide Prevention Grant \$5 Million over 5 Years
- CDC COVID-19 Suicide Prevention Grant \$800K over 18 Months

Grant opportunities soon: CDC Foundation Veteran Suicide Prevention Evaluation Demonstration Project, \$50,000 over eight months. Designed to look at efforts already in play and focus on demonstration and evaluation, not research. So, it is about performance.

The last thing I would like to talk about is the Governor's Challenge Team. This is a very diverse team that consists of nine state departments and agencies working together with us, Penn State University, Drexel University, and other educational partners, the Veterans Clearinghouse, as well as other private and non-profit 501C3 organizations working together with us. The SVC was represented by Mr. Bob John, American Legion, as a member of the team. Unfortunately, back in June he had to back out of working on that team. It is a very busy team. We have three different priorities, nine different committees and subcommittees under them, but we would like to get a representative from the SVC back on the team. So, I am asking, Mr. Chairman, if you could, please work with the service organizations to get us another member to sit on this team. They bring another perspective that we need and certainly we want to keep you included in the work we are doing there. I think it is important to say we have SVC membership on this team.

That ends my update. If there are any questions, I would be happy to answer them.

#### Questions/Discussion

Mr. Hudzinski, VVA: When the Governor formed his Suicide Prevention Task Force, they talked about providing in Q1 2020 a Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan. Have they completed that, or have I missed it?

Mr. Hamp: You missed it and I missed it in my notes too. As part of the Suicide Prevention Task Force, we were working on the Statewide Suicide Prevention Plan. That Plan was unveiled and delivered to the community on October 10<sup>th</sup> of this year, World Suicide Prevention Recognition Day. So, the Plan is out there, I can share links with you, but it is also out on the web.

Mr. Hudzinski: Would you please share the links with all of us, because I looked, and I did not catch it.

Mr. Hamp: Of course, I will be happy to share it with the Commission.

Maj Gen Carrelli: I want to pat Rick on the back. He has done a tremendous job as a one-man show bringing a tremendous amount of money into the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania with these grants and shining a huge

spotlight on suicide prevention. I was also going to mention the Governor also has a Task Force within PA and Rick did a lot of the detail work on that as well. As you look over that plan, you will see Veterans mentioned a lot in there. We made sure Veterans were included in the state plan, so we are going to get resources from that as well. I will also mention we are doing some pilot programs even on the National Guard side, many of our Guardsmen of course are Veterans so they stand to benefit from that work as well. Just to let everyone know, we have had six PA Guardsmen commit suicide so far this year. That is twice what we had last year, but half what we had the year before. So, it is up and down, but it is a big problem in PA. Obviously it hits the Veteran population much harder than the general population, but there is an array of programs we are working on. If you remember, a few months ago I asked the organizations that sit around this table to give me input. Veteran suicide by firearm is the method and we really need to have some serious discussions about that topic. I know it is a tough conversation, but we cannot avoid it. We need to have these open and honest, uncomfortable conversations to see where we are and see if we can dramatically reduce the number. A lot of legislators and program managers are asking us, "What do the Veterans' organizations and what do the Veterans of Pennsylvania feel about this?" Again, we have not had that conversation and I need your input. We need to get there.

I also want Rick to quickly comment on an innovative way, as part of SAMHSA, to include sportsman's' clubs into the firearm discussion. Rick, can you briefly outline that, so everyone has knowledge of it?

Mr. Hamp: Yes, sir, thanks for allowing me to do that. TAG has been in discussions with me and other leaders around the Commonwealth about this topic, so it is important to have a member from the SVC on this team. It is all about community and connectedness. To the point that the TAG made about this innovative method of limiting access to lethal means. If we could keep our Veterans connected and help them to understand that it is ok to ask for help, and it is even more encouraged that if you recognize you are going into crisis and then associate that with the need to look for safe storage of a firearm.... We are working with a group called Hold My Guns (Ms. Sarah Albrecht is the president of that group and is working nationally but she lives here in PA) to work with gun shops and ranges to establish safe off-site storage. What that means for us is how to create relationships and partnerships with gun shops and ranges around the state, where if a Veteran or family member is in crisis or going into crisis, they can have the ability to take their weapons to a facility that we identify as a safe storage site and drop the weapons off for a period of time. We all know we can save lives by putting time and space between the idea and the ability. So, these safe off-site storage locations are a big deal for us. We are working through a couple legal challenges right now. I was talking with Widener Law School to get some pro bono help to go over actual documents that will establish our certification process and allow us to limit some liability for these off-site gun shops and ranges that would act as safe storage locations for us. So, it is a big initiative and we need a lot of help to get it done because we need to get the ground rules in place, then we are going to be out there contacting gun shops and ranges in community to get them to step up and partner with us to implement this action plan and actually save some lives.

Maj Gen Carrelli: Great job, Rick. Again, we need everybody's help here. This is something we are all going to have to get involved in. I think this is a great way to approach this. If we put a thousand man-hours into this and save one life, it was well worth our time. So again, I am asking everybody to help us out with this effort.

Mr. Petrovich: To everybody, you will be getting something from me in an email about this topic and reminding you to respond. I just went out to check on suicides in the U.S. For men, firearms account for 55.9% of suicides; it is a little lower for women, 31.5%. So, yes, this is a great problem. Whatever we can do to help, we need to do it. And, regarding providing an SVC member to the Governor's Challenge Team, we will do it the easy way first. If you would like to volunteer for this, send your name either to me or Greg Holler. Rick, I will be in touch with you about that and if I do not get a great response, I will have to find a volunteer.

Maj Gen (Ret) Weller: The great part about this program is that we keep talking about suicide prevention, but it is really an umbrella that a lot of other things fall under homelessness, drug abuse, lack of employment, mental health... all contributing to suicide. So, I would like to tie it quickly back to PA VetConnect. One of the ways

that we can figure out where the problems are is working through the PA VetConnect program, working with the counties to figure out what the major problems are within their counties and so on. Whether the money comes to us directly or indirectly, that is how we can find the recommendations as to where the money should go: through the information we are getting from the counties and through the PA VetConnect program. For the short amount of time that we have been working on this PA VetConnect in conjunction with suicide prevention, you can see the success of having this just by researching and having the information available. So, we look forward to working even closer with the County Directors on the individual problems they are having in their counties, seeing what type of money under this umbrella we can throw their way.

### OLD BUSINESS

None.

### NEW BUSINESS

**DMVA Policy, Planning & Legislative Affairs**

**Mr. Sam Estrada**

I would like to start by piggybacking off the suicide prevention discussion. I just finished an executive summary for Dusty concerning the federal suicide prevention and mental health legislation. As some of you may know, on September 23<sup>rd</sup>, the Commander John Scott Hannon Veterans Mental Health Care Improvement Act was passed by a voice vote in the House and Senate, and now heads to the President's desk. If signed, the law would provide \$174 million to help Veterans access mental health care. It is named after Commander John Scott Hannon, a leader in the SEAL Teams. After 23 years of service, he committed suicide. He had been treated for PTSD, TBI, severe depression and bipolar disorder by the VA in Montana. Because he was committed to helping others while seeking his own recovery, that is why the bill was named in his honor. The law requires the VA and DoD to develop a plan on how to help Veterans access health care after discharge from service and create community-based programs that provide access to various mental health services and therapies. The GAO would also be tasked with studying Veteran suicide and evaluating the adequacy of VA mental health services. The bill aims to improve VA mental health care by grants to community organizations working to help Veterans in crisis, studying complementary and alternative care such as animal therapy, yoga, meditation, acupuncture, etc. It also extends expansion of care to Veterans with other than honorable discharges, transition assistance, and hiring more suicide prevention coordinators for each VA. I can send this executive summary to each of you if you would like to read more in detail.

Moving forward to legislation on the State side.

#### **Legislation Supporting Veterans**

**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.

(What I mean by "Awaiting Third Consideration," is that these bills have been organized based on the process of the bill in terms of progression. So, the bills in the first and second slide have passed into the opposite chamber from where they originated, so they are closer to becoming law than the other bills.)

**HB 375** (Goodman) Removes the value of federal Veterans 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; 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 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. Rereferred to Senate Appropriations 6/30/20. Companions: SB 42 (Schwank). Related. Awaiting Third consideration.

### **Legislation Supporting Veterans**

**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.

**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. Companions: HB 2604 (Polinchock), Identical. Awaiting Third consideration.

**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. Voted favorably from committee as amended; 9/16/20. Set on House calendar 9/29/20. Awaiting Second Consideration.

**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*. Reported as committed from VAEP; 9/16/20. Set on House Calendar 9/29/20. Awaiting Second 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. Awaiting Second Consideration. Scheduled for vote on October 5<sup>th</sup>.

### **Legislation of Interest**

**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. *Introduced and referred to State Government Committee; 3/5/19*. Reported as committed from State Government; 6/22/20. Amendments A06402 (Brooks) and A06491 (Brooks) agreed to (adopted); 6/29/20. Rereferred to Senate Appropriations 6/30/20. Meeting set for Off the Floor, Senate Chamber, Senate Appropriations; 9/21/20. Awaiting Third 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. Rereferred to Senate Appropriations; 6/30/20. Awaiting Third consideration.*

**HB 862** (Barrar) 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; 3/18/19. Reported as committed from Professional Licensure; 9/15/20. Rereferred to House Appropriations; 9/17/20. Heading to Senate for First 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 from committee as amended; 5/8/19. Set on Tabled House calendar 9/29/20. Awaiting Second Consideration.*

#### Questions/Discussion

Mr. Hudzinski: I have two questions. HB 1050, about military personnel qualifying for in-state tuition, and their families – I thought we had addressed that several years ago. It was a major MOAA initiative. What is the difference here?

Mr. Estrada: As I understand it, this is basically codified it into legislation. So, dependents of military family members who enroll at a public college or university in PA are charged in-state tuition rates. Some students lose their in-state tuition rates if their military parent is reassigned to another state on the day, they are accepted to a PA college or university. Basically, this bill guarantees in-state tuition as soon as the student submits a deposit enrollment to start school.

Mr. Hudzinski: Okay. I thought we had a 30-day residency requirement and then it automatically kicked in. Evidently, I am wrong. I will have to look. The other thing is SB 1076 regarding MFRAP. Is the new legislation going to make it a forever bill? This should be a slam dunk. It is not about funding; it is about execution.

Mr. Estrada: To be honest, I am not sure, but I will certainly investigate it and see where each chamber stands on it.

Mr. Hudzinski: MFRAP does affect some Veterans, those that are disabled coming out. But, MFRAP is a good program and should be used or combined with another so we do not have this problem in the future.

Maj Gen Carrelli: Rich, you are exactly right. MFRAP expired last spring and it was not high on the priority of getting done. I do not think it was discussed this week when the House was in session. We tried to get that pushed up; I do not think anyone is going to argue against this, that it needs to get put back in. You are right, there is money in the program. We continue to receive donations. So, there is funding there and there is not an absence of people who need the help. But we are unable to process anything because the legislation ran out. It is very frustrating on our part as well. We have been pushing and pushing, but it did not make the top of the list of things they were going to address when first in session. Again though, anything you guys can do to help us as well.... I appreciate anyone's support who can help us get this through.

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

**Mr. Andrew Ruscavage**

I provided slides for you in your read-ahead packets. As you see from our slide here, all our Homes' licenses are in a regular or green status. You will notice that some of the inspection dates are over a year old. Some of our routine inspections have been placed on hold because of the COVID-19 pandemic, and we are not going to start seeing those routine or scheduled annual inspections start back up anytime soon. The inspections that have been occurring are infection control and complaint surveys that have been ongoing across the Veterans Homes, again with no negative results against our licensure status.

In our last meeting, we were talking about getting some updates about the COVID-19 pandemic and how we are handling it in our Veterans Homes, and General Carrelli already provided a lot of that information. This timetable [second slide] is also available on our website and as I go through my presentation, I will give you

some websites to go to for more updates on COVID-19 in our Veterans Homes. This timetable shows information as of September 30. Some of the information has changed. For the Holidaysburg, Southwest, and Southeast Homes, those dates have changed because, as General Carrelli mentioned, they have had positive results for either staff or residents in those homes. Every time a facility gets one positive resident or staff member, it restarts the reopening of that Home all over again. General Carrelli did mention that the Delaware Valley Home in Philadelphia and the Gino Merli Home in Scranton have started their reopening. They are moving into Phase Charlie; they are currently in Phase Bravo where they are doing outside visitations with family members and Veterans at the facilities. The weather is changing though, and you can only imagine that it is going to be very cold at the Soldiers and Sailors Home in Erie when they get to Phase Bravo and outside visitation in the middle of October. I bring this up because we have some conflicting information from the PA Department of Health and the Center for Medicare/Medicaid Services (CMS) in reference to guidance for visitation. We have been working with the Department of Health, asking for information and looking for updates. Basically, the conflicting information is that CMS has a lighter touch toward visitation. They want us to have a visitation because they know that not having it does affect the residents; it affects their psycho-social wellbeing. We are looking at ways to do it safely to get the visitation for our Veterans. So, more to come on that in the next meeting. Our website has this timetable on it though to show you where we are at.

The next slide talks about our residents, and these numbers again are as of September 30. General Carrelli mentioned we have no positive residents in any of the Homes at this time. We are still conducting routine testing; we test everybody that comes into a Veterans Home, no matter if it is a staff member or a vendor. Everyone gets screened at each Home. Currently, we have conducted 7,019 tests for our residents, and out of those, 149 have come up positive. The way we are doing our tests is by using guidance from the PA Department of Health. It is the county in which the facility is located, it is their positivity rate (the number of positive individuals divided by the number of tests performed) which tells when we do test. All our Homes are in the green status, which means all the counties in which they are located are below 5% positivity rate.

We are doing more testing for our staff. Currently, we have four staff members that have tested positive for COVID-19 and we had one additional since September 30. For our staff members, our current total testing administered is 14,320. Now, we do not have 14,000 employees, but again we are required to test, so if the home is in a green status, less than 5% positivity rate for that county, then they are required to test every staff member monthly. If they are at 5 to 10% positivity for the county, they would be required to test every staff member weekly. If the county is over 10% positivity rate, they are required to test every staff member twice a week. So, you can see how the testing is going to increase more so for our staff members than our residents. Now, out of those 14,320 tests administered, only 81 staff members overall since the beginning of the pandemic have been identified as positive for COVID-19. Of course, we have had no deaths, and most of our staff who have been identified as positive are asymptomatic. They have no signs or symptoms of COVID-19 but they still must be out of work. They must be quarantined for 14 days before they can come back into the facility.

That timetable was part of our reopening plans. On our website, we have our reopening plan. The plans are individualized for each facility. On our website is the overall BVH Plan, and then each facility has to have its own individualized plan. As you saw on the timetable, all the homes are not on the same schedule. It is going to fluctuate depending upon positive test results.

The next slide gives some other useful webpages: DMVA, a PA Department of Health page for Coronavirus (and that is where you will find a lot of the long-term facility care data, not only for our Veterans Homes but every nursing facility so you can see what is going on across the state), next is the DOH dashboard, and lastly the DOH disease control guidance for skilled nursing facilities.

The Veterans Homes are constantly updating our policies and procedures about COVID-19 because we are currently looking at I-couldn't-tell-you-how-many changes to the guidance coming out from DOH. But, as that DOH guidance changes, we constantly must change our procedures. It is almost weekly, sometimes twice-a-

week, that the guidance changes on how we are to act with respect to COVID-19: how to test, visitation, you name it. And, as that guidance changes, we must keep changing with it.

Mr. Chairman, that is my last slide. Any questions?

#### Questions/Discussions

Mr. Hudzinski: Very thorough, Andy, and I do not envy your situation. Looking at your report on the infection rates for the Homes, I assume this is the correct data. Why is it that there is a difference between this and the DOH and DHS reports? You are showing 13 deaths, for example, in the Delaware Valley Home and 28 for the Southeast Home, but when you go to the DOH site, it shows them all in the Southeast Home. And, then it shows in personal care an additional six. Why is that happening?

Mr. Ruscavage: Rich, I do not have a good answer for you. We do report all our cases, no matter positivity or deaths, to the proper authorities, that being to the DOH –that is the 1-2-3 Survey Reporting– as well as to the CMS and CDC. I cannot explain why the numbers show like that. Now, here where you see the Southeast Home numbers, we wrapped up the personal and skilled care numbers into one; we did not list them out separate. But, why are the Delaware Valley numbers skewed, we do not know. We were having issues with the Delaware Valley Home reporting their numbers several months ago. That had to do with our computer connections and firewall, but we cleaned that up and we are 100% assured by DOH that all our Homes have reported the most up-to-date and accurate information. Why it is not getting to their dashboard and their websites? That I cannot answer.

Mr. Hudzinski: Right, the reason why I ask is because it does you a disservice in their reporting. Also, in the past, they have said there was no data at the Delaware Home and now, all-the-sudden, 13, which would make you think something happened.

Mr. Ruscavage: That was the disconnect where we were working with DOH every day, their IT and our IT, and then when it was fixed, you just saw that blow right up. But that was not all at once, it was over a period.

Mr. Hudzinski: Thank you for doing the report. This helps.

Mr. Ruscavage: We will keep everyone updated on what is going on. And, like I said, most of this information is out there on our website.

Mr. Petrovich: One other thing.... I want to thank you for the report you put in with the read-ahead. Very thorough, excellent, and again thank you for doing that. We appreciate it.

**DMVA Bureau of PIRO**

**Mr. Joel Mutschler**

As Sam and The Adjutant General had noted, with the MFRAP program, we continue to take applications. We are holding those until that legislation is passed. So, we continue to monitor that situation. The only other thing I wanted to point out on this slide is: for our VSO accreditation training, we are utilizing the webinars and knowledge checks through the National Veterans Legal Service Program, and that is going very well. In this time of COVID, we had to switch on a dime to do online training versus our in-person conference. Our staff has done a fantastic job in getting that training up and running and dealing with concerns from our customers, whether County Directors, their staff, or VSOs from the organizations attending this training. I greatly appreciate the work that Katie Reibsane has been doing to keep that moving through, as well as those of your staff who are attending the training and providing feedback. It is greatly appreciated.

I also wanted to point out with relation to our VBA tele-townhalls with Dr. Lawrence, we have reached over 142,000 Veterans and family members through those three engagements. During the last one in September, we assisted up to 15 Veterans based on direct referrals from the VBA. Just to highlight, we had one Veteran who was in crisis on the call with Dr. Lawrence. We were able to engage between VBA staff, the Veterans Crisis Line, our staff at DMVA, the County Directors of Veterans Affairs, specifically Justin Slep, and our DAV

service officers to get this Veteran safe and to get him to the resources he needed to square away his claim. DAV service officers are working with him currently to do just that. So, a great example of how we were able to take care of that one Veteran across federal, state, county, and service organizations. When we were able to do that, it really shines a light on just how we can make things happen.

We talked about PA VetConnect, and TAG and General Weller mentioned it as well. As a direct result of that, we are involved with a federal VA pilot program, the Virtual Veteran Experience Action Center. After this meeting, we are going to have a sidebar just to go over and update leadership on the organization side. This is an exciting opportunity for us. We have a three-day period where we are going to provide direct services and personally connect with Veterans through 30-minute appointments with VSOs from DMVA, the County Directors, American Legion, DAV, and VFW. All these VSOs are lined up with VBMS access. I am happy to report that the federal VA asked us for 20 VSOs, and we were able to provide 28 for this event. Also, very exciting, we beat out Florida. We already have 350 Veterans signed up for appointments during our event and Florida fell a little behind us in the same timeframe. The VA is very happy with the team effort going into this. Additionally, we will have our RPOCs engaged with the Community Action Boards as well. Great event.

At our last meeting, I briefed you on our Veterans Registry. We currently have 33, almost 34,000 Veterans and family members (advocates) signed up on our Registry. And, our customer satisfaction survey shows that folks strongly agree that they are getting a good customer experience by signing up for the Registry. This is important because not only does the Registry allow them to upload documents and get information on benefits, but it also gets them signed up for our weekly DMVA Digest newsletter. If you have not signed up, I would ask you to do so. If folks do not want to sign up, you can still read the Digest on our website, but I would ask that you really encourage our Veterans out there to sign up with the Veterans Registry.

Just to highlight some of the Governor's Advisory Committee on Veterans Services events.... The Homeless Committee is a very engaging committee right now as we have been working to break down silos and build relationships with Continuance of Care, SSVF providers, Single County Authorities and so forth. We continue those meeting frequently and we are doing training sessions to entice new folks. We welcome the representatives from the organizations in any of our committees. We have members from the SVC on both the Homeless and Women Veterans Committees. Really encourage you to get plugged in if you can; just reach out and let us know.

Again, Mr. Hamp noted the Health Promotions Committee and the suicide prevention work going on there. In the Aging Committee, we continue to develop those relationships between DMVA and Department of Aging, specifically PACE. We had some great conversations with my counterpart director in PACE, so we are just continuing to develop that relationship. Based on GAC-VS efforts, we have been able to get note of the Veterans Registry in PACE outreach material. And, we can make the correlation that outreach is higher than some of the referrals we get from other agencies.

General Carrelli and General Weller already spoke to you about PA VetConnect. I just want to give you an update over a few slides showing what the tool looks like. The Chair and I had a great conversation not too long ago. We will set up demonstrations, just contact the Chairman. We are more than happy to do that at any time if you would like us to present to your leadership, just reach out. We have nine VSOs from the organizations engaged with, trained, and providing feedback on PA VetConnect. We do still have three slots open for that program, so if you have VSOs interested, please let me know. I would love to fill those vacancies. It is really exciting to hear that these VSOs are pleased with the relationship-building tools in PA VetConnect.

The next slide shows the breakdown of where our RPOCs are assigned across the Commonwealth, along with their contact information. I would like to point out Region 4, as Mr. Hamp talked about Carbon County and Together With Veterans – a great initiative up there, and our RPOC Jennifer Spitler has been integral in

getting that off the ground with Mr. Bob Pare of Together With Veterans and we are going to continue to build that relationship in Region 4 and across the Commonwealth.

Our first two RPOCs were hired in October-November 2019, and the remainder came on board in March 2020. A little dated, but they have over a thousand contacts with folks across the spectrum, building relationships to serve Veterans across the Commonwealth.

We are in an austere budget environment, so we continue to work through development, but where we are heading is enhancing our information referral tool in concert with the Governor's transformation initiative. We are engaged with the Department of Human Services in a project there to ensure that we only end up with one system, but we continue to develop. We are looking to the future, but if you do want to get engaged with this, we encourage open dialog and I would love to hear feedback, but we are looking at future state.

I just want to dive into the PA VetConnect IR tool here. I think it is important for the Commission to see where we are at and what we are doing. We have about 1,500 resources in the system and are building that out every day. There are 13 programs, almost 100 programs and services, and again 1,500 resources in the system. [Mr. Mutschler walks the Commission through slides that show graphical representations of PA VetConnect and the different resources in the system.] As we have been moving through, we have been developing a PA VetConnect webpage and Sharepoint site. Over 250 advocates have access to this: our County Directors of Veterans Affairs, those nine VSOs from the service organizations (and hopefully more going forward), and the social workers at our VAMCs. We are also in discussion with the RO Directors at Philadelphia and Pittsburgh to try and get the Public Contact folks' access to this tool and providing feedback. We hope to launch this webpage within the next 30 days. [Mr. Mutschler shows screenshots of what the PA VetConnect webpages look like, as well as the Sharepoint side; slides provided in read-ahead material.]

Mr. Chairman, the General provided a response to the Act 66 Committee's list of concerns, and we would like those added to the minutes. But I want to echo the General's comments on this one, the bottom line is we are here and are ready to have open dialogue with members of the Commission. The Chairman informed me of, and I am looking forward to learning more on, some things the Act 66 Committee is working on. We are all Veterans Advocates and we are all here for the same reason, to take care Veterans. I hope we can continue to have an open dialogue and continue to work together to take care of the Veterans of the Commonwealth.

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

#### Questions/Discussion

Mr. Petrovich: Just a comment.... The feedback I have gotten on the VSO training is that people like doing it this way [online] versus going to Erie. I do not have the cost difference, but I am assuming that doing it this way is a lot cheaper than dragging everyone to Erie.

Mr. Mutschler: Yes sir, it is, by about half. We are looking at continuing to do it this way, but there is a lot of value to having an in-person conference. But I am also looking at, does it make more sense to bring it closer to the middle of the state? We do see value in having that in-person conference for the networking opportunity, but we know going to Erie is a long trip from Central PA.

Mr. Petrovich: I did not mean just going to Erie; I meant going to any hotel. The cost of holding it at a hotel must be quite a bit more. Right, like you said, twice as much. But they are getting a lot out of it going this way. I just thought I would pass that on.

#### **Programs Report**

**Mr. Joel Mutschler**

With respect to the OVA/VSO Grant Program slide, you can dig down further into the numbers by going to [dmva.pa.gov](http://dmva.pa.gov) and simply clicking on VSO Grant Program. The ROI went down from my last brief. It was \$83 and is down to \$77 because we added in the FY 19-20 dollars. So, we had a slight decrease in ROI.

Because of COVID, we are still doing limited outreach events. We have not had many events though, other than one-on-one. So, if your organization would like us to give a VA 101, we are available to do that. If you want us to do that virtually, just let us know.

Veterans Trust Fund: Working balance is a little over \$2.4 million.

Veterans Temporary Assistance: We have had 43 approved claims this FY, and again we are taking questions at 800-527-2823. If by chance a County Director's staff is not available to field questions, our staff is standing by.

Blind Veterans Pension: 103 Claimants currently on the program.

Amputee & Paralyzed Veterans Pension: 2,043 Claimants currently on the program.

Educational Gratuity: 02 students currently on program – we are getting into that season now.

Disabled Veterans Real Estate Tax Exemption: 14,064 Veterans currently on the program. 528 applications adjudicated between 07 August and 15 September, the date of this report.

Military Family Relief Assistance Program: Account balance is healthy [\$1,044,912.18].

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

Mr. Petrovich: Just a comment.... I know on the slide where you show all the years of the program, I think we need to add that basically over a quarter of the year we were shut down by COVID. If you look at the numbers, we were really going in a great direction. Not an excuse, but just a reality of why that drop from \$83 to \$77. I also just want to put this out again: The Van Program, we have heard zero from DHS. Now we are into October with no contact. I have mentioned it to Dusty and Jennifer. When people ask how we are doing spending money, my only answer is "We have no money." The requests to purchase vans is probably going to come in sometime later this month. So, if there is anything you guys can do to help, we would greatly appreciate it.

Mr. Mutschler: Yes sir, I will reach out and figure out what is going on with that. I will get back to you.

Maj Gen Carrelli: I will send something off to the Budget Office right now and see if I can get an answer.

#### Approval of Programs Reports

**Motion:** Mr. Taylor, CWV, made a motion to approve the programs report.

**Second:** Mr. Peters, VFW, seconded the motion.

The body agreed; motion carried.

#### SVC Act 66 Committee

**Mr. Kit D. Watson**

I would like to give my thanks to The Adjutant General and his staff for putting an answer together for the questions we submitted at the last meeting.

The Act 66 Committee has been meeting regularly. I am happy to report that we united in our mission to service PA Veterans with the best use of taxpayer money. With the question and answers with General Carrelli, we hope to establish a better line of communications with you, General Weller, and your staff. We see no reason why PA cannot be the standard for how this should be done. My counterparts in other states are seeing the same thing we are. Not every state has a program like this; we patterned ours off Michigan. And, in eleven short years, we have outperformed what Michigan has doing since 1931. So, I think it is pretty telling –not just the 77 to 1 ratio– but I think we have something here that can last long into the future to address Veterans and their needs.

With that, I will give an open invitation (we can separate here in our back room safely or virtually) not just to the Committee, but to General Carrelli and General Weller and some of your staff, in hopes that you may be interested in getting together one-on-one to further the lines of communication.

Questions/Discussion

None.

**SVC RETX Committee**

**Mr. Justin Slep**

I do not have a very comprehensive report. I did get together with Matt [Zamosky] and he did pass that the last time the Committee met was in February. I do need to get together with the Committee to set up some meetings.

One of the things passed on to me was that HB 1787 came out of Committee, but it is supposed to be reintroduced sometime soon... eliminating wartime service, adding line of duty death, possibly eliminating VA comp from income, a look at household income, and some language pertaining to Permanent and Total ratings. He also informed me that SB 92 which is a proportional view of property taxes did come out of Committee, but there was no follow-up passed on to me. In the future, I will have a more comprehensive report, but that is my report for today.

Questions/Discussion

None.

**SVC Legislative Committee**

**Chairman Samuel Petrovich**

No report.

Questions/Discussion

None.

**SVC Pensions, Relief/Grave Marking/State Military Cemetery Committee**

**Ms. Constance Snavely**

I recently received two queries from DMVA pertaining to funds to maintain Veteran graves. One query came through the DMVA's contact site and the other through DMVA's legislative aide. There is a group of volunteers trying to maintain an abandoned cemetery with over 400 interred Veterans. They are seeking funds to assist with maintenance. Section 1915(a) Care of Graves and Headstones, PA County Code, reads, in part, that the "County Commissioners of each county may ensure that the graves and headstones of all deceased service persons and all other veterans who are buried in the county, receive proper and care and may employ all necessary assistance to carry out the provisions of this section." To change the wording to reflect that they will ensure proper care will probably be no small feat. I imagine some county budgets are not going to be able to carry the extra expense. Still, I think it is something worth raising and looking at. Matt Zamosky told me that some county commissioners do provide an annual stipend per cemetery per headstone in an amount that can range from about \$1 to \$6, averaging around \$1.75. That is not a lot, but it is something.

Next, since our Committee is responsible for state Veterans cemeteries, I think we should follow the federal HR 5487, Veterans Cemetery Grants Improvement Act, which increases grants to states for operating and maintaining Veterans cemeteries. The bill proposes doubling the VA grants amount to \$10 million. I am not sure if it can help with the first issue, but it is worth following.

Lastly, just for information, HR 5639, the Chuck Osier Burial Benefits Act is a bill that could help a Veteran who uses a body disposition option other than a cemetery. This bill would provide a free urn or plaque for a

Veteran who uses cremation or burial at sea or another alternative to interment in a cemetery. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that about 45,000 Veterans would use this new benefit in 2021.

Questions/Discussions

None.

**Member-at-Large Committee**

**Mr. Sam Petrovich**

The Member-at-Large process has begun. I was in communication with Dusty Durand on Wednesday and as of that time there were five applications submitted. That is a good thing; people are not waiting until the end. The end is October 23, 2020. At that time, the Committee will start their review of applications. For right now, we are still gathering applications and hoping for more.

So, if you know anyone, let them know. DMVA has published this and a lot of the service organizations have put this out to their members. Job well done to everyone getting the word out. Just a shout out to everyone on the Committee and the work Dusty did to get this out on the DMVA website and advertised. I will keep you posted.

Questions/Discussion

None.

**Good of The Order/Announcements**

Chris Fidler, Keystone Paralyzed Veterans of America: Just to follow up on the conversation we had yesterday with regard to DAV and the transport for Veterans in wheelchairs. I put out some inquiries and I am still waiting for responses. I did hear back from the Lebanon SEI Coordinator. She tells me the issue is on hold because of the pandemic. So, I know everything must be put on hold because DAV is not making as many trips. But the future should include any transport for wheelchair Veterans. I looked at VISN-4 website and they do have information there that a Veteran would have to get permission before he can get transport. It does not have any options for emergency. It is not relevant now because most Veterans are doing telehealth now, but as we go forward it is something to keep on the burner.

Chairman Petrovich: Thank you, Chris. Once we start breaking out of this, please keep track of the stats and any problems you come across. I think this is something we can bring to the VISN-4 Director's attention. For those of you who did not know, we do not have access to purchase wheelchair-accessible vans. The VA, due to liability, uses their own drivers and vans. A lot of our drivers are hesitant to take on the responsibility of securing those Veterans in our vans. As a driver, you must show proof of insurance to the VA and that sort of scares a lot of our drivers off from doing that. Hopefully we can work a little better system out with the VA. So, Chris, just keep on tracking those stats and we will get back to them.

**Elections**

**Call for nominations for the position of Chairman**

Mr. Taylor, CWV: I would like to indicate that Mr. Sam Petrovich has done an excellent job in this position and represents us superbly. Therefore, it is with great pride that I nominate Mr. Sam Petrovich to continue as the Chairman of the State Veterans Commission.

Mr. Pliska, AMVETS, seconded the nomination.

No other nominations being made, the nominations for Chairman were closed.

**Motion:** Mr. Taylor, CWV, made a motion to approve the nomination of Mr. Petrovich as Chairman.

<b>Second:</b> Mr. Johnson, DAV, seconded the motion.
The body agreed; motion carried. The Executive Secretary, Maj Gen (Ret) Weller casted one unanimous vote for Mr. Sam Petrovich as Chairman of the State Veterans Commission.
<b>Call for nominations for the position of Vice Chairman</b>
Mr. Peters, VFW: I would like to nominate Mr. Nicholas Taylor, Catholic War Veterans, for Vice Chairman. Mr. Johnson, DAV, seconded the nomination. No other nominations being made, the nominations for Vice Chairman were closed.
<b>Motion:</b> Mr. Taylor, CWV, made a motion to approve the nomination of Mr. Taylor as Vice Chairman.
<b>Second:</b> Mr. Peters, VFW, seconded the motion.
The body agreed; motion carried. The Executive Secretary, Maj Gen (Ret) Weller casted one unanimous vote for Mr. Nicholas Taylor as Vice Chairman of the State Veterans Commission.
<b>Oath of Office</b> <span style="float: right;"><b>Maj Gen Carrelli</b></span>
General Carrelli administered the oath of office to Mr. Sam Petrovich and Mr. Nicholas Taylor as incoming Chairman and Vice Chairman, respectively, of the State Veterans Commission.
<b>Next Meeting</b>
December 4, 2020 Forum: TBD
<b>Adjournment</b>
Chairman Petrovich adjourned the meeting at 12:27 p.m.

The minutes of this meeting are respectfully submitted by:

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

# **2021 STATE VETERANS COMMISSION MEETING CALENDAR**

## **FRIDAY, February 5, 2021– 10:00 am**

Webex Virtual  
Fort Indiantown Gap  
Anville, Pa 17003-5002

## **FRIDAY, APRIL 2, 2021 – 10:00 am**

Webex Virtual  
Fort Indiantown Gap  
Anville, Pa 17003-5002

## **FRIDAY, JUNE 4, 2021– 10:00 am**

Webex Virtual  
Fort Indiantown Gap  
Anville, Pa 17003-5002

## **FRIDAY, August 6, 2021 – 10:00 am**

Arrowheads Community Club  
Building 9-65 Fort Indiantown Gap  
Anville, Pa 17003-5002

## **FRIDAY, OCTOBER 1, 2021 – 10:00 am**

Arrowheads Community Club  
Building 9-65 Fort Indiantown Gap  
Anville, Pa 17003-5002

## **FRIDAY, DECEMBER 3, 2021 – 10:00 am**

Arrowheads Community Club  
Building 9-65 Fort Indiantown Gap  
Anville, Pa 17003-5002

**NOTE: MEETING LOCATIONS ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE UPON SPECIAL EVENT OR CIRCUMSTANCE**



**STATE VETERANS COMMISSION MEETING  
DECEMBER 4, 2020**





## **DMVA MILITARY UPDATE**







# CURRENT MOBILIZATIONS & TOTAL DEPLOYMENTS



## PAARNG Current Deployments

MDATE	MSAD	UNIT	OPN	PAX	MISSION	Projected Return Date
25 JAN 20	28 JAN 20	213 <sup>th</sup> HR CO	OSS 19-21	5	Gateway Support	13 DEC 20
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				17	Various Missions	Various based on tour
Total PAARNG Deployed: 874						

## PAANG Current Deployments

Unit	Opn	Pax
193 SOW	OIR	191
111 ATKW	IPR (HS)/Various	36/12
171 ARW	Alert Status (HS)/OIR	37/31
<b>Total PAANG Deployed</b>		<b>307</b>

**Total PANG Deployed 906**

# 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	22,405	21,939	98.2%	2.8
Primary Care	48,635	47,040	96.7%	4.8
Specialty Care	72,918	64,200	88.5%	14.1
ALL	237,293	222,030	93.8%	8.0

Data updated 11/13/2020 with appointment info as of 11/11/20.

## 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	22	2	5	3
Abie Abraham HCC	25	2	10	4
Coatesville VAMC	12	2	13	4
Erie VAMC	15	7	12	1
Lebanon VAMC	16	4	9	5
Corporal Michael J. Crescenz VAMC	11	4	9	1
VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System	26 (HZ) 16 (UD)	13 (HZ) 11 (UD)	7 (HZ) 10 (UD)	6 (HZ) 2 (UD)
Wilkes-Barre VAMC	13	3	5	2
Wilmington VAMC	13	13	3	2

NOTE: The facility wait times seem to be normalizing possibly due to restarting face to face visits. However, some sites are showing higher than normal wait times for new patients, likely still a result of COVID-19 impact.

Data updated 11/12/2020 with wait times as of 11/2/20 for last 30 days.

[acesstocare.va.gov](https://www.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	70,378
FY 20	153,517	87,402
FY 21 (as of 11/11/20)	18,167	19,904

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

Data updated 11/12/2020 with consult info as of 11/11/20.

## 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.

**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

### Legislation Supporting Veterans

**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.

**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.

## Legislation Supporting Veterans

**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.

## 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** (Barrar) 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.

**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.

### 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.

### Bills In Opposite Chamber – Supporting Veterans

**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.

## 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

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	11/19 /2020	12/3/2020	12/3/2020
GMVC	11/16/2020	11/18/2020	11/30/2020
HVH	11/16/2020	12/04/2020	12/04/2020
PSSH	11/16/2020	12/10/2020	12/10/2020
SEVC	11/09/2020	11/28/2020	11/30/2020
SWVC	11/17/2020	12/3/2020	12/7/2020

## Timetable for Reopening the Pennsylvania Veterans Homes Personal Care

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>	<b>11/12/2020</b>	<b>11/26/2020</b>	<b>11/27/2020</b>	<b>12/11/2020</b>	<b>12/25/2020</b>
<b>PSSH</b>	<b>10/22/2020</b>	<b>11/13/2020</b>	<b>11/27/2020</b>	<b>12/11/2020</b>	<b>12/25/2020</b>
<b>SEVC</b>	<b>11/09/2020</b>	<b>11/28/2020</b>	<b>11/30/2020</b>	<b>12/14/2020</b>	<b>12/28/2020</b>

## Pennsylvania Veterans Homes COVID-19 Update

Home	# Residents Currently Positive	# Resident Tests Performed	# Residents Positive Cumulative	# Resident COVID-19 Deaths
DVVH	2	1267	45	13
GMVC	2	2171	3	0
HVH	12	2070	34	10
PSSH	16	1700	32	3
SEVC	0	2717	112	28
SWVC	3	2174	15	3
				14 presumed COVID-19 positive
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>12,099</b>	<b>241</b>	<b>71</b>

## Pennsylvania Veterans Homes COVID-19 Update

Home	# Staff Currently Positive	# Staff Tests Performed	# Staff Positive Cumulative	# Staff COVID-19 Deaths
DVVH	10	3238	30	0
GMVC	6	3293	16	0
HVH	14	6147	34	0
PSSH	17	2394	19	0
SEVC	3	3985	64	0
SWVC	4	6081	21	0
TOTALS	54	25,138	184	0

## Pennsylvania Veterans Homes COVID-19 Update

**Positivity Rate:** One of the most important metrics for tracking COVID-19 is the “positivity rate” — or how prevalent positive cases of the disease are, when compared to the number of tests being completed. Recent updates to CMS guidance utilize positivity rate within the county to determine testing patterns for residents and staff. The percentage of residents / staff who test positive for the virus of those overall, who have been tested.

Counties with test percent positivity <5.0% or with <10 tests in past 7 days: Green; 5.0%-10.0%: Yellow; >10.0%: Red. Test positivity is rounded to the nearest tenth of a percent before classifying. This information is available at: <https://data.cms.gov/stories/s/COVID-19-Nursing-Home-Data/bkwz-xpvg>

The following data was updated by CMS from 29 October to 11 November 2020. Trends are showing increases for five of six PVH counties for positive test results. The average rate of the contiguous counties is provided as a reference to what is going on around the PVH's county.

The rolling 7-day average calculated by PA DOH indicates that all PVH counties are on the rise. For testing strategies the PVHs utilize the CMS bi-weekly percentages.

## Pennsylvania Veterans Homes COVID-19 Update

	Positivity Rates %						
State	9.6						
PVH Resident	0.019						
PVH Staff	0.007						
	October 1-14	October 8-21	October 15-28	October 22-November 4	October 29-November 11	Contiguous County Rates	PA DOH 7-day rolling avg.
<b>DVVH</b>	4.0	5.0	6.4	7.9	10.3↑	7.8	12.5
<b>GMVC</b>	6.6	7.4	6.3	5.1	4.8↓	7.7	6.3
<b>HVH</b>	4.6	5.0	5.5	7.1	8.8↑	9.4	9.6
<b>PSSH</b>	2.7	2.9	4.2	6.9	9.7↑	8.8	10.6
<b>SEVC</b>	3.3	3.3	3.8	4.9	6.3↑	7.9	7.1
<b>SWVC</b>	3.3	3.5	3.8	4.0	5.9↑	8.0	7.7

## 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>



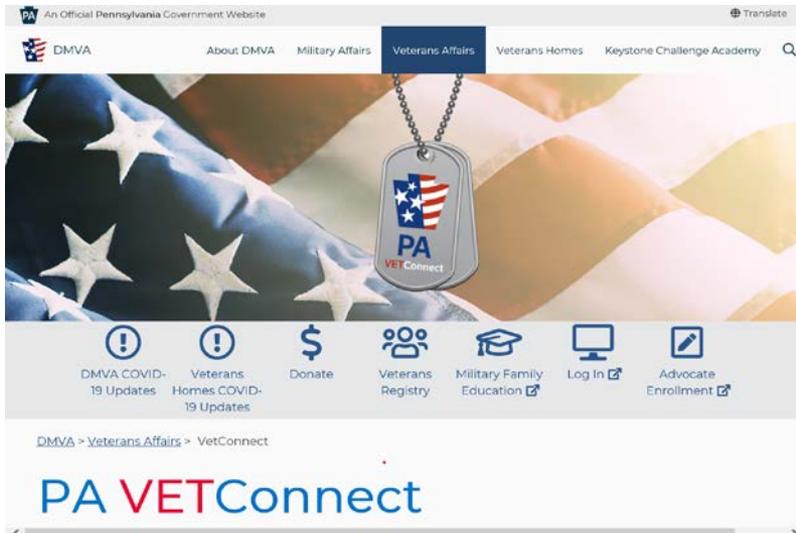
- **2020 Virtual VSO Accreditation Training** - 180 Veteran Service Officers trained from DMVA, the 67 counties, and the DAV. We utilized webinars and knowledge checks through the National Veterans Legal Services Program (NVLSP).
- **VBA Tele Town Halls with Dr. Paul Lawrence, Under Secretary for Benefits for the USDVA.**
  - **267,055 total Veterans and family members reached. DMVA Veterans directly assisted 33 veterans.**
    - 38,094 Veterans and family members on 19 Oct 20. DMVA assisted 7 veterans from direct referrals from VBA.
    - 87,000 Veterans and family members on 14 Oct 20. DMVA assisted 6 veterans from direct referrals from VBA.
    - 39,261 Veterans and family members on 21 Sep 20. DMVA assisted 11 veterans from direct referrals from VBA.
    - 66,700 Veterans and family members on 22 Jul 20. DMVA assisted 4 veterans from direct referrals from VBA.
    - 36,000 Veterans and family members on 7 Apr 20.
- **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. This event generated several follow up conversations and one referral to the Department of Labor and Industry.
- **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.
- **SVC VSO Grant Program (Act 66 of 2007) Committee Listening Session** – Conducted a listening session on 17 Nov 20 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).

Veterans, family members, and veterans' advocates can also learn more about programs and services by signing up for the free Pennsylvania Veterans Registry. Signing up is quick and easy and can be done online at [register.dmva.pa.gov](https://register.dmva.pa.gov). This also allows registrants to select to receive the *DMVA Digest*, our weekly electronic newsletter.

Time frame	Counts
10/23/2015 to 12/31/2015	234
01/01/2016 to 12/31/2016	5,436
01/01/2017 to 12/31/2017	5,621
01/01/2018 to 12/31/2018	6,397
01/01/2019 to 12/31/2019	10,107
01/01/2020 to 10/31/2020	6,817
<b>Total as of 10/31/2020</b>	<b>34,718</b>

- 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 four county court administrators who have added the Veterans Trust Fund (VTF) to their county juror donation listing. Those counties include Dauphin, 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.

- Launched on 11/09/2020! [www.dmva.pa.gov/vetconnect](http://www.dmva.pa.gov/vetconnect)
  - Dedicated log in for veterans advocates to collaborate and access the PA VETConnect I&R tool and other tools.
    - Over 1,500 resources, 250 veterans advocates and growing!
    - Currently 7 Veteran Service Officers from Veteran Service Organizations
    - DMVA Staff
    - County Veterans Affairs Staff



## DMVA Regional Program Outreach Coordinators (RPOCs)

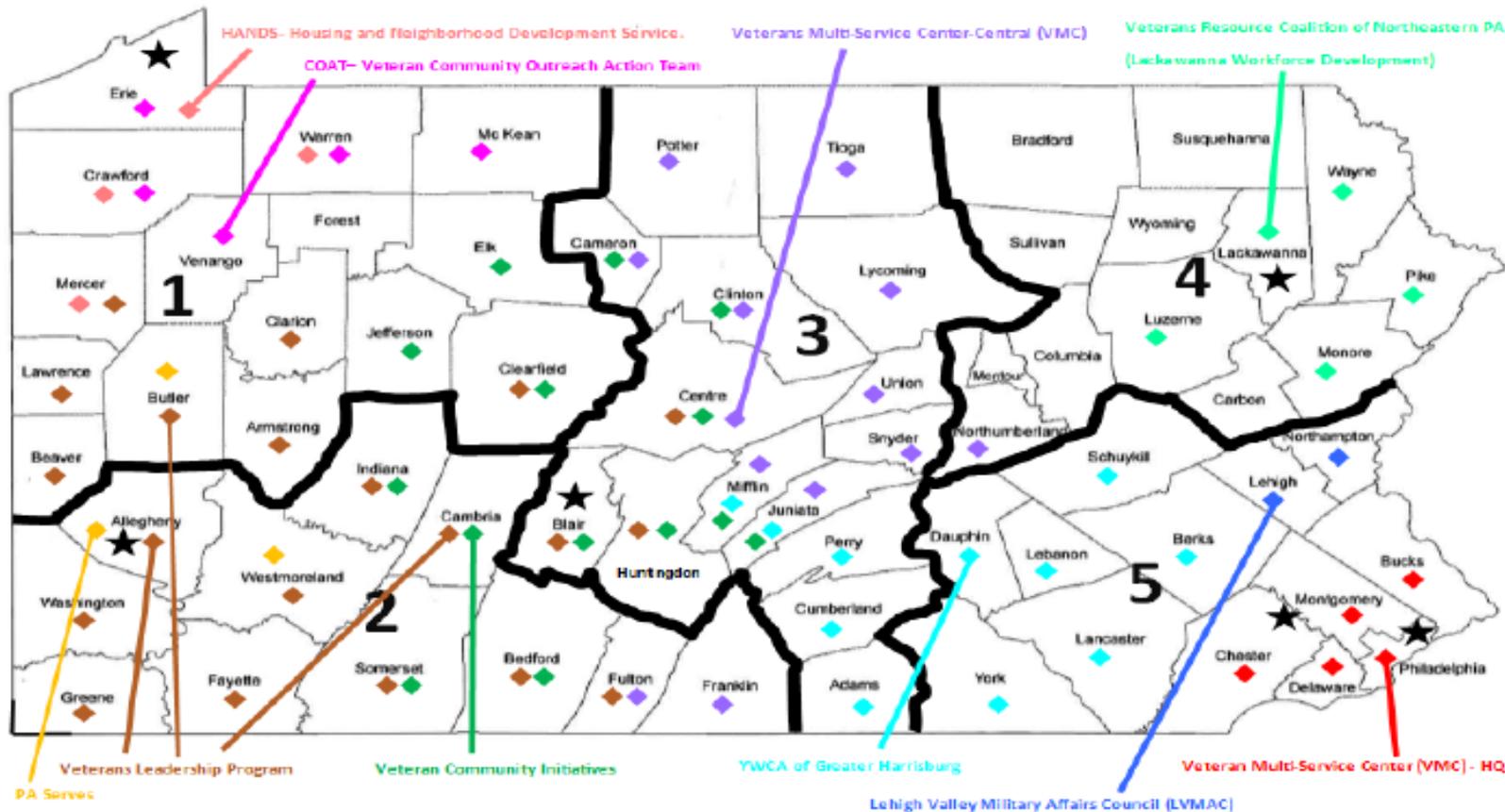
**Region 1 – Chelsea Ellsworth**  
(O) 814.878.8080 (M) 814.323.8006  
[cellsworth@pa.gov](mailto:cellsworth@pa.gov)

**Region 2 - Mike Palarino**  
(O) 412.204.8221 (M) 412.500.6109  
[mipalarino@pa.gov](mailto:mipalarino@pa.gov)

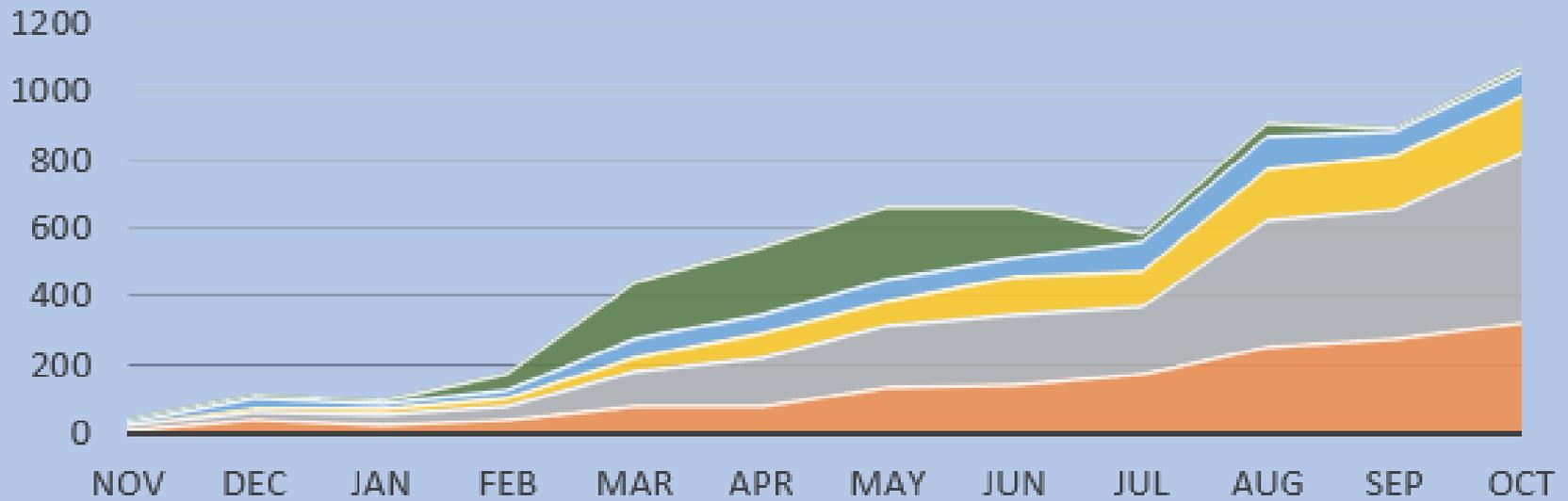
**Region 3 – Samantha Cossman**  
(O) 814.696.5525 (M) 814.502.9900  
[scossman@pa.gov](mailto:scossman@pa.gov)

**Region 4 – Jennifer Spitler**  
(O) 570.961.4472 x 472 (M) 570.445.8255  
[jespitler@pa.gov](mailto:jespitler@pa.gov)

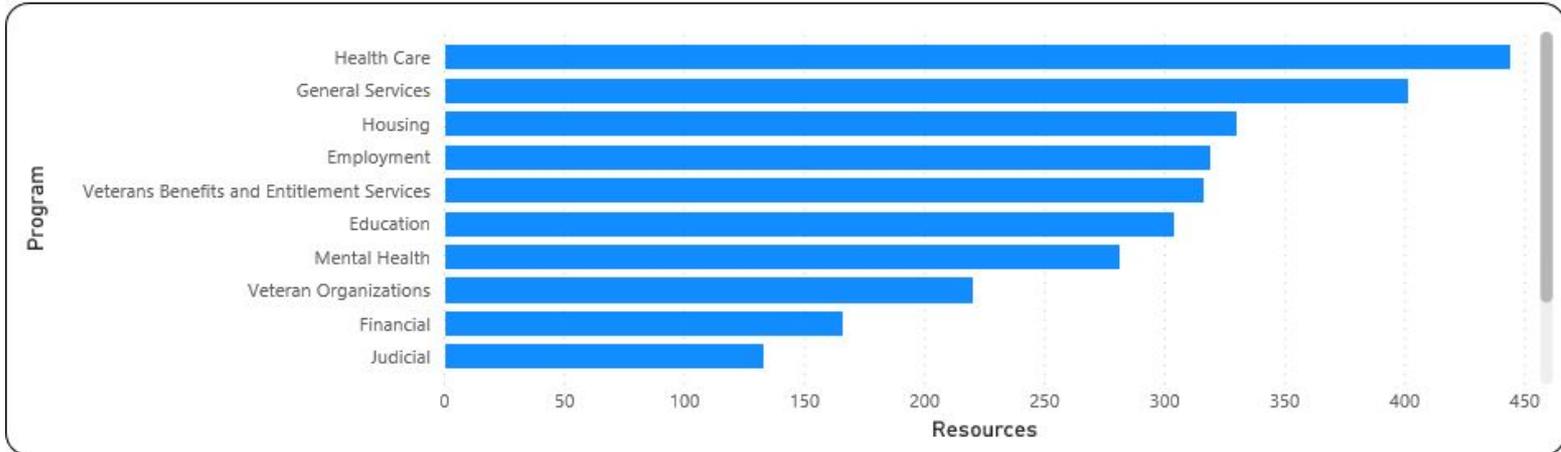
**Region 5 – Erica Moore**  
(O) 717.861.9251 (M) 717.507.3057  
[ericamoore@pa.gov](mailto:ericamoore@pa.gov)



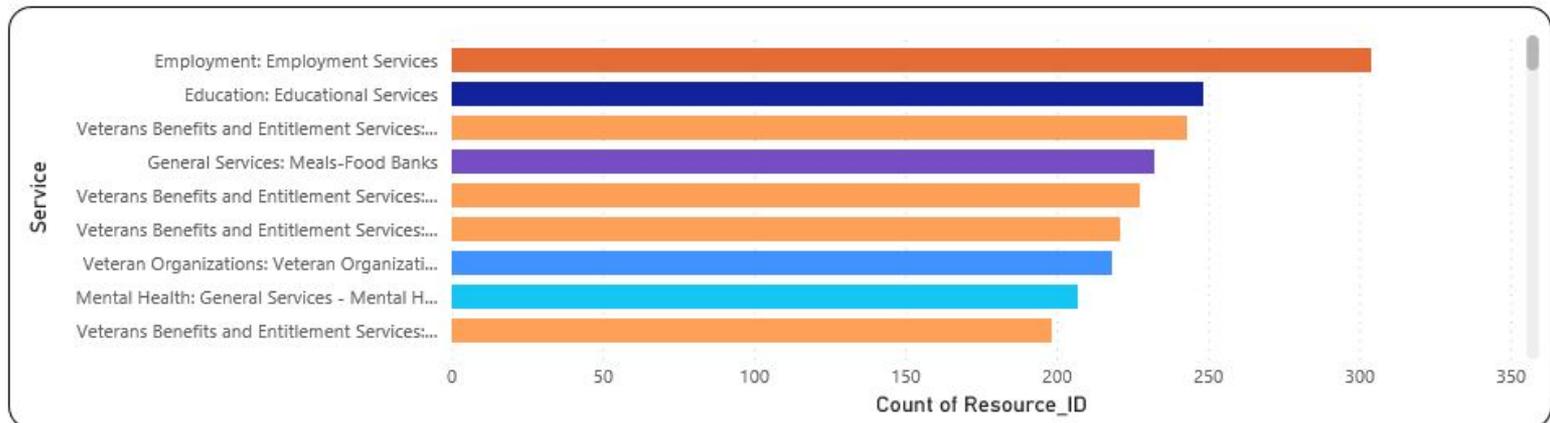
## RPOC Contacts



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



## Top Ten Programs With Resources In Database



## Top Nine Services With Resources In Database

## **Examples of the relationship building and collaboration these team members are making in service to the veteran's community:**

- RPOC R1 interacted with the Forest County CDVA who was assisting the county with recent elections and was not in his office. Together they assisted a veteran who was suffering from cancer and needed transportation assistance while staying in Pittsburgh for medical treatment. Through the I&R tool they were able to find transportation providers and financial resources to assist the veteran during this critical time of treatment.
- RPOC R2 worked with a justice-involved veteran on a housing/care matter involving Allegheny County CDVA and Allegheny County Prison. The veteran was not eligible for admission to the Pennsylvania Veterans Homes based on various factors. Through this collaborative effort the veteran was transferred to another long-term care home in his area.

- RPOC R3 learned of an unfortunate situation for a family via a collaborative group listserv. A 2-yr.-old girl died unexpectedly during routine surgery and this lower-income family could not pay for the burial/funeral. This case was not veteran-related, but the RPOC used what she knew through her community contacts to connect the family with resources that assisted with funeral expenses.
- RPOC R4 continues to work towards identifying a county within the region to connect with Together with Veterans (TWW) and received a positive response from at least one county. This USDVA-funded program enlists rural veterans and their local partners to join forces to reduce veteran suicide in their community. There will be a continued effort to explore areas within the commonwealth to partner and assist in this program.
- RPOC R5 connected with a local PA Link Coordinator and staff from the Lancaster VET Center to assist a veteran with a Veterans Temporary Assistance (VTA) grant application. This interaction allowed for intergovernmental collaboration, provided an opportunity for the RPOC to educate others about DMVA programs, and the veteran was approved for the VTA grant within three days.

# OVA / VSO GRANT PROGRAM SUMMARY



FY 20 - 21 Claims, Compensation and Pension Summary	
Year to Date Claims Submitted	Year to Date Value of Awards
3,068	\$17,441,290.00
Year to Date Claims Submitted Previous Year 19 - 20	Year to Date Value of Awards Previous Year 19 - 20
6,993	\$33,705,274.00

FY 19 - 20 Claims, Compensation and Pension Summary	
Year to Date Claims Submitted	Year to Date Value of Awards
6,993	\$33,705,274.00
Year to Date Claims Submitted Previous Year 18 - 19	Year to Date Value of Awards Previous Year 18 - 19
6,881	\$38,366,916.00

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	\$585.00	39	\$50,565.00	3,371
PA Monuments LP	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	0	\$0.00	0
HOV Motorcycle License Plate	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$135.00	9	\$3,135.00	209
HOV Women's License Plate	\$0.00	\$0.00	-\$30.00	-2	\$615.00	41
Checkoff & Donations	\$41,996.00	\$57,127.00	\$471,874.00		\$11,014,601.02	
Veterans Trust Fund Online Donations	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$120.00		\$5,198.00	
SECA Donations	\$377.09	\$377.09	\$943.64		\$9,427.00	
Interest	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$2,733.13		\$176,541.40	
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	\$8,000.00	\$17,516.00	\$162,194.00		4,479,343.32	
Working Balance	\$34,373.09	\$39,988.09	\$221,020.81		\$2,543,649.14	3,621

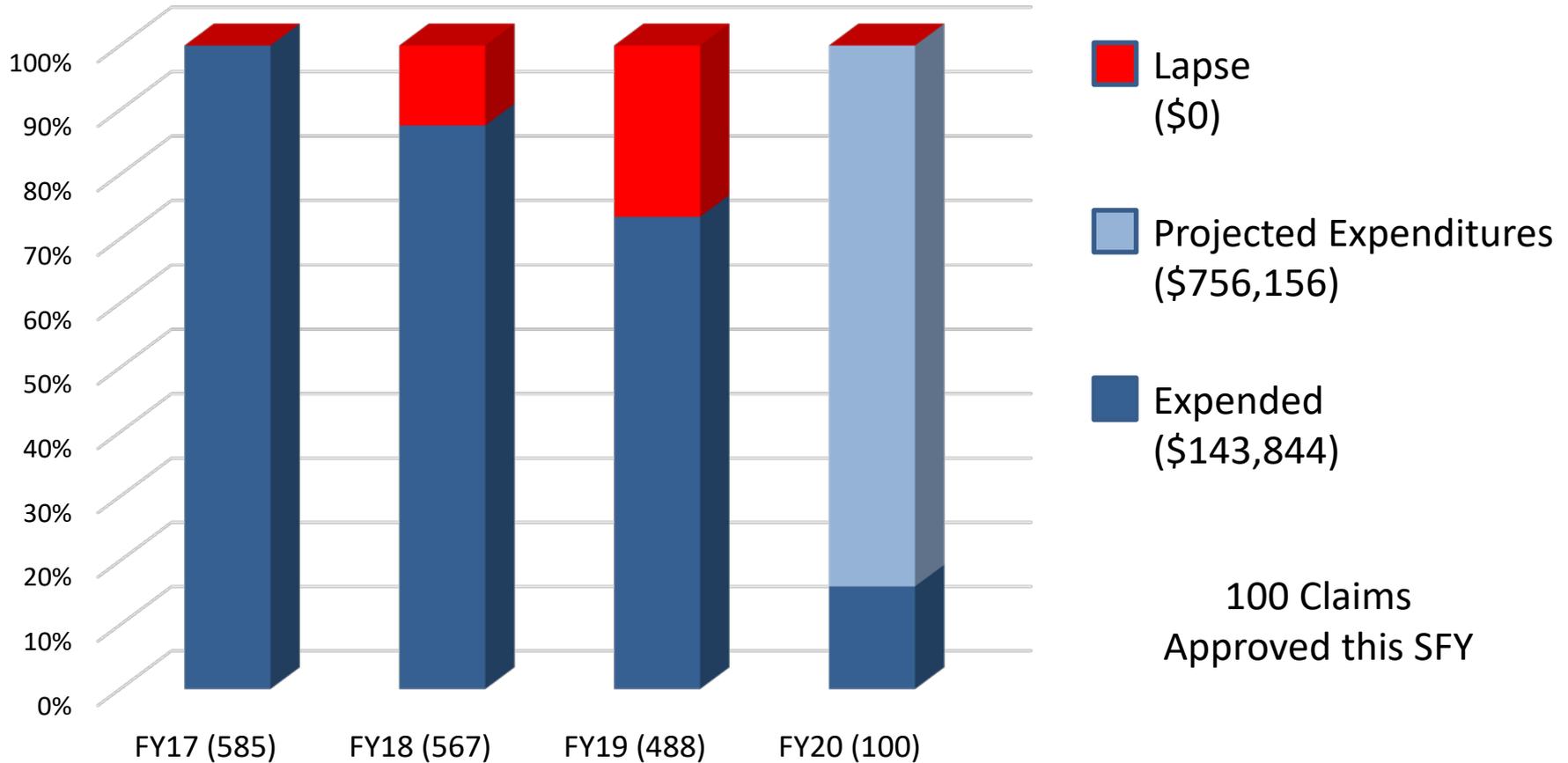
As of 18 November 20

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# VETERANS TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE



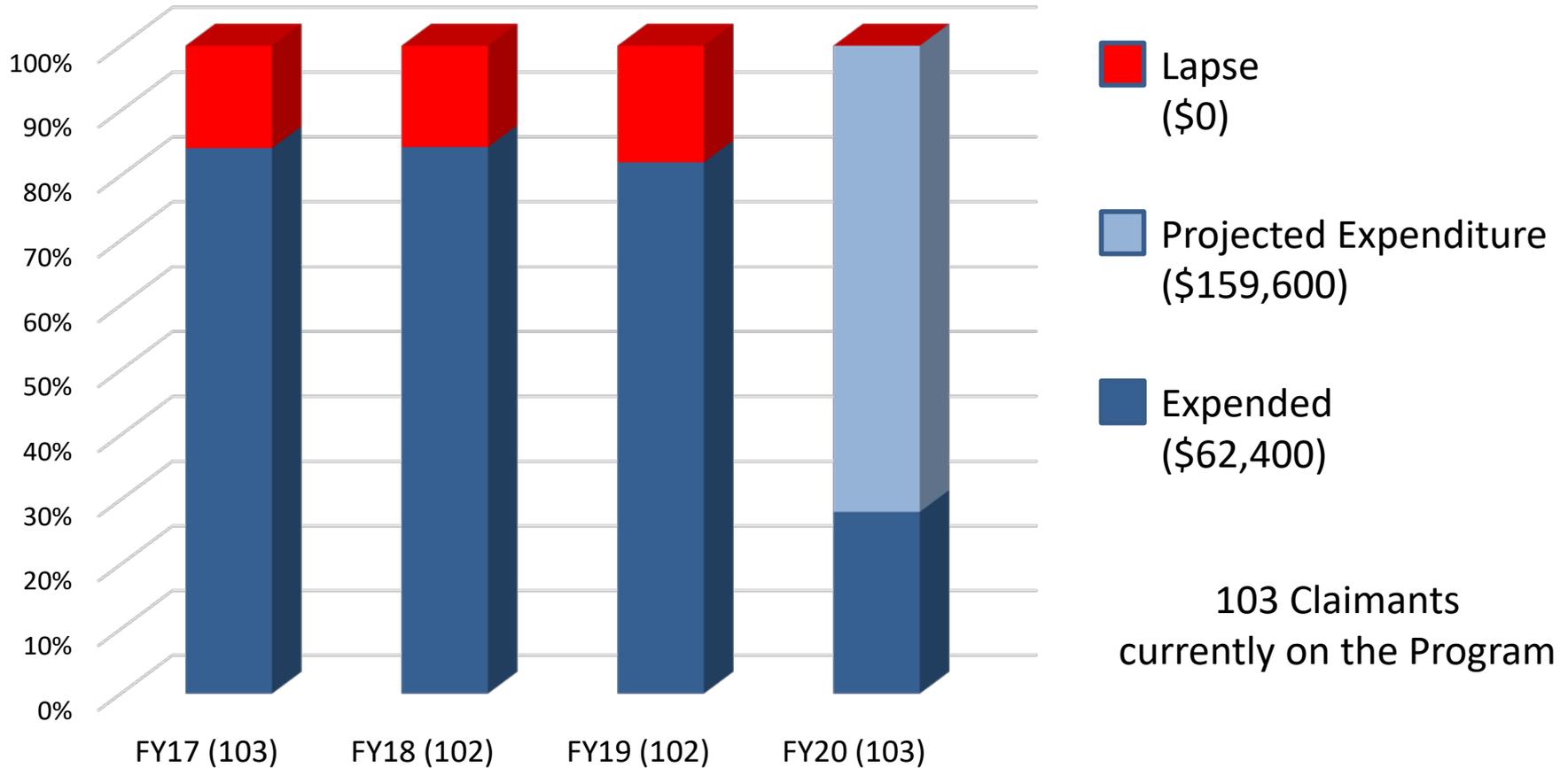
\$900,000



# BLIND VETERANS PENSION



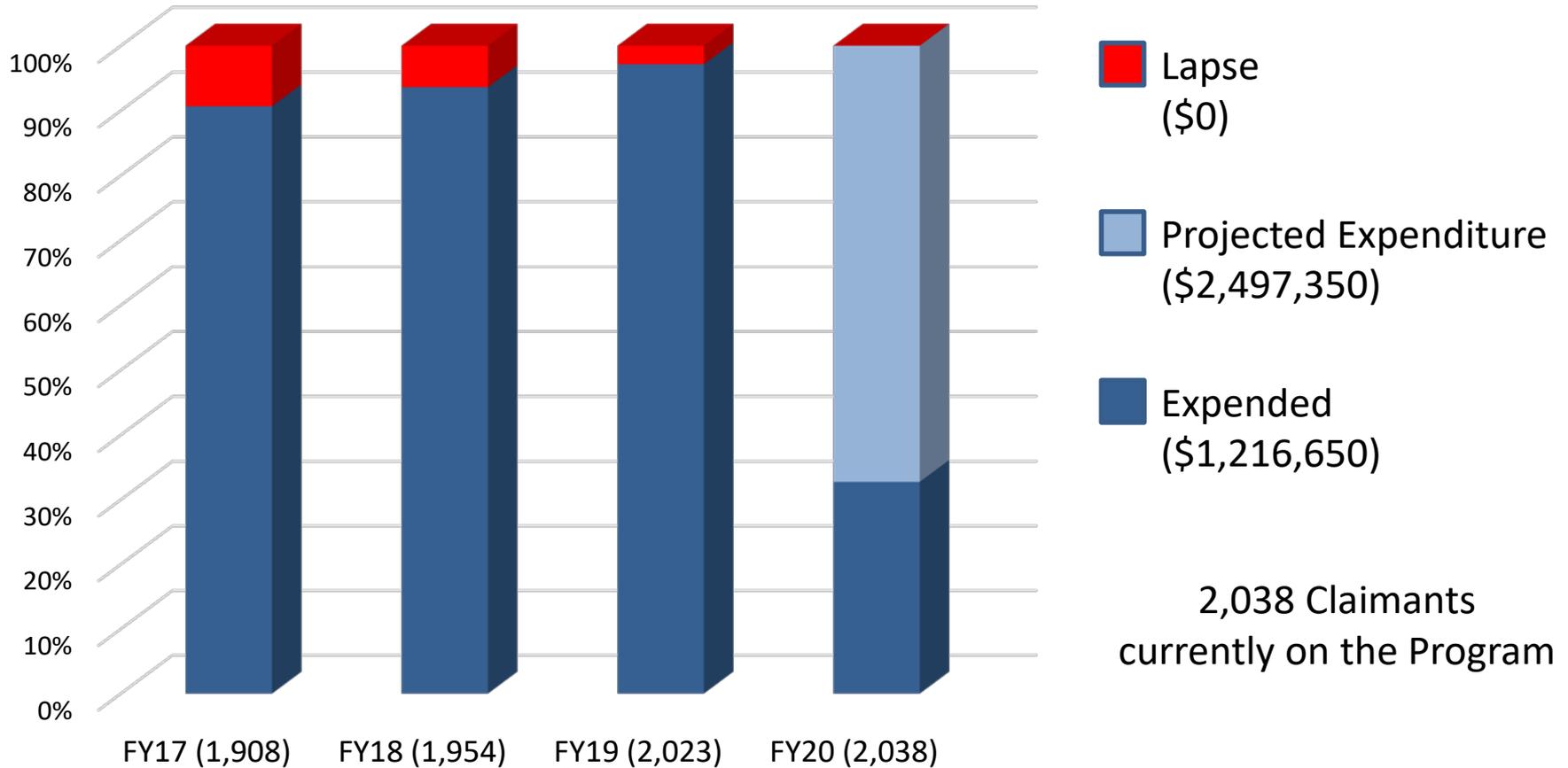
\$222,000



# AMPUTEE & PARALYZED VETERANS PENSION



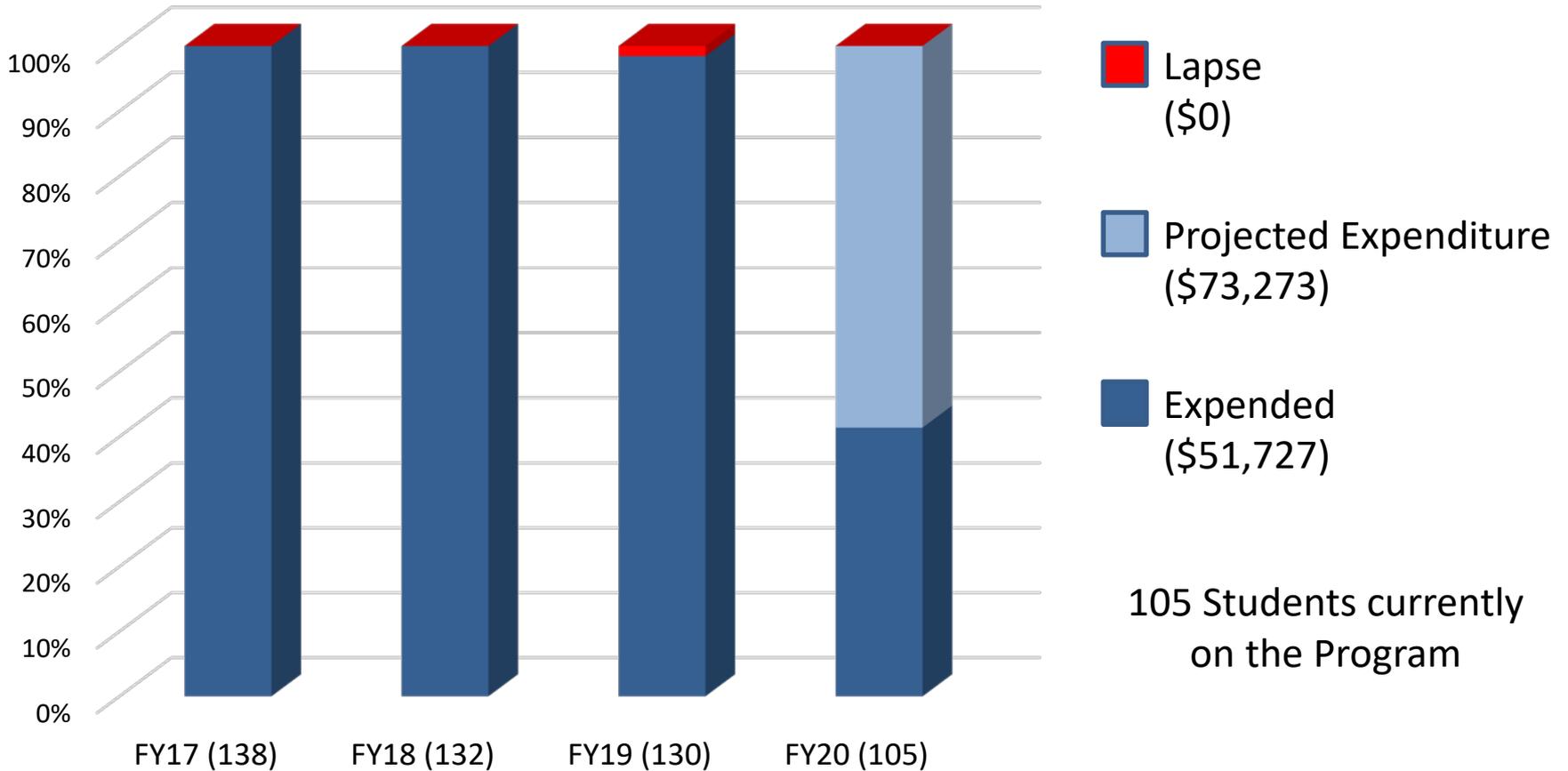
\$3,714,000



# EDUCATIONAL GRATUITY



\$125,000



105 Students currently on the Program

**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.....	\$1,805,583.65
Total All Contributions: Private and PIT Donations.....	\$1,942,311.34
Approved Grant Application Payments.....	\$894,421.86
FY20 Approved Grant Application Payments.....	\$0
Account Balance.....	\$1,047,889.48

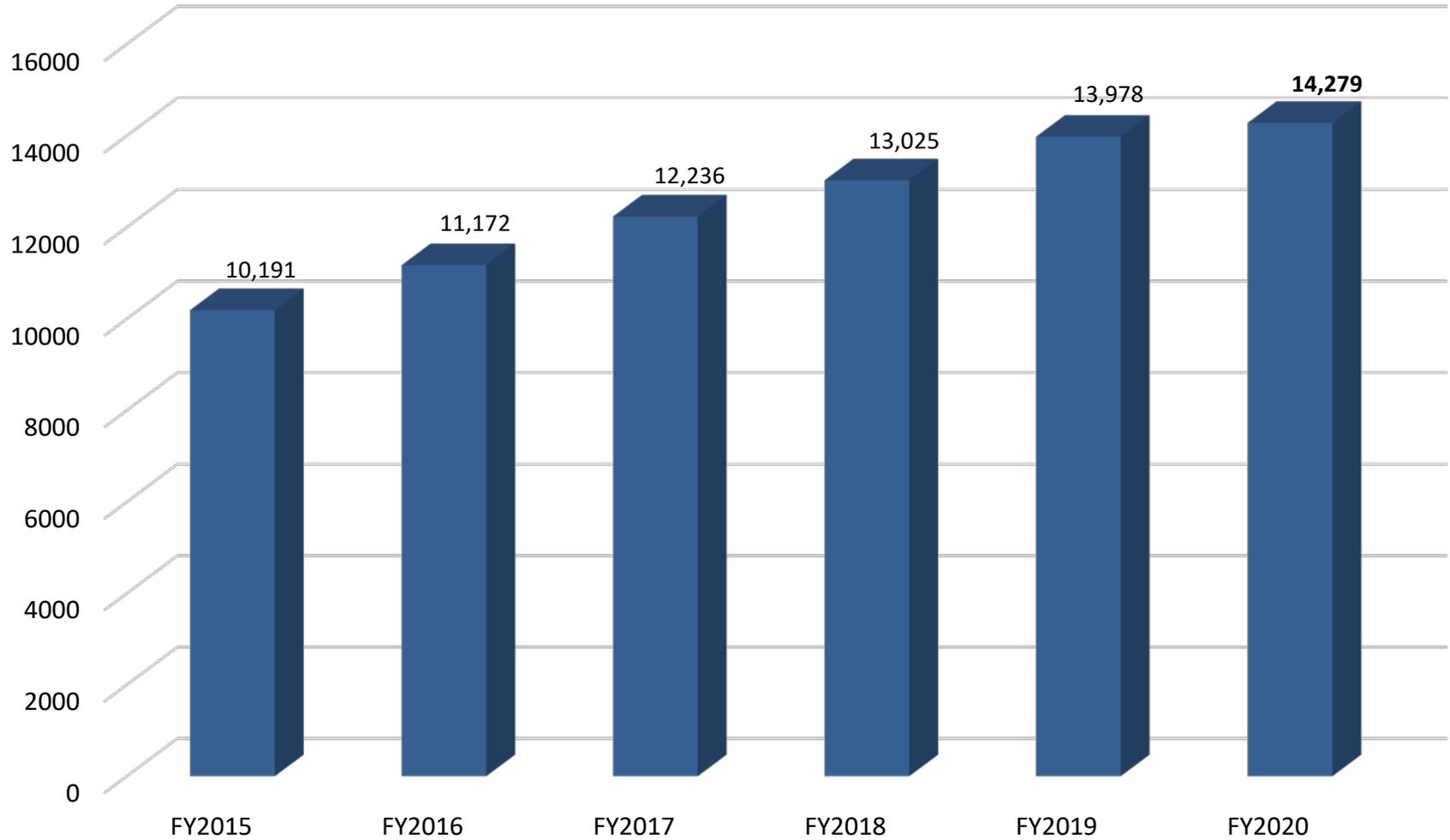
# DISABLED VETERANS TAX EXEMPTION PROGRAM



## New RETX Presumptive Income Threshold \$95,279

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q
1	<b>Consumer Price Index - All Urban Consumers</b>																
2	<b>1-Month Percent Change</b>																
3																	
4	Series Id:	CUUR0000SA0															
5	<b>Not Seasonally Adjusted</b>																
6	Area:	U.S. city average															
7	Item:	All items															
8	Base Period:	1982-84=100															
9	Years:	2004 to 2019															
10																	
11	Year	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Annual	HALF1	HALF2	Presumptive Ammount
26	2018	0.5	0.2	-0.1	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.3	0.0	0.0		4.50%		
27	2019	0.0	0.2	0.4	0.3	0.1	0.1	0.3	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.2	0.2				92,594
28	2020	0.1	0.1	-0.4	-0.8	-0.1	0.6	0.6	0.4	0.2	0.0				2.90%		95,279
29																	
30																	
31																	
32	Base Amount:	92,594															
33	Adjusted Amount:	95,279															
34																	

# DISABLED VETERANS TAX EXEMPTION PROGRAM



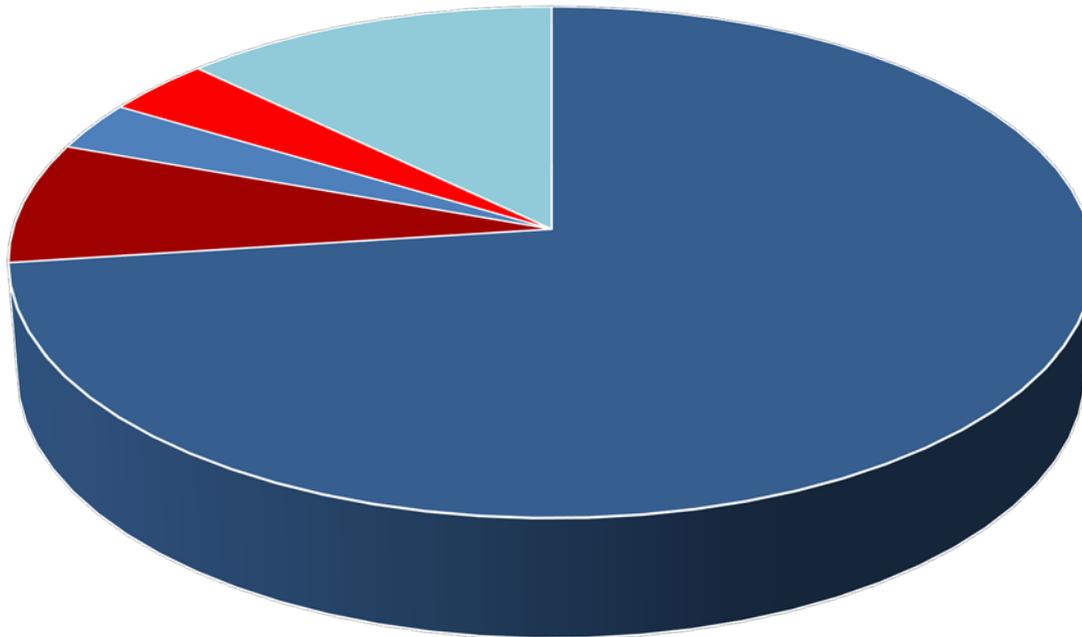
As of 18 Nov 2020

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

# DISABLED VETERANS TAX EXEMPTION PROGRAM



905 Applications Adjudicated  
from 16 Sep to 18 Nov 2020



- 642 Approved
- 63 Denied: Financial Need
- 33 Denied: Ineligible\*
- 48 Removed: No Response
- 119 Removed: Eligibility Change

**\* 33 Applications Ineligible by Reason:**

- 3 – Veteran did not occupy property as principal dwelling
- 8 – Property not owned solely by Veteran or as estate by the entirety with spouse
- 1 – Veteran not rated total and permanent 100% during lifetime
- 14 – 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.

# PENNSYLVANIA VETERANS MEMORIAL



## Pennsylvania Veterans Memorial Trust Fund

Beginning Trust Fund Balance (July 1, 2020)	\$120,364.03
Grants Received	0
Public / Private Donations	\$400,150
License Plate Donations	\$69.00
Interest	\$135.17
Refunds of Expenditures	0
Total Receipts	\$400,354.17
Expenses	(\$11,203.33)
Ending Balance	\$509,514.87

As of 31 Oct 2020

> community > commonwealth > country

**NEXT MEETING**



**FEBRUARY 4, 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**

## **December 4, 2020**

### **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**

I am pleased to announce the appointment of Mr. Jeffrey Beiler as the new director of the Coatesville VA Medical Center effective October 11<sup>th</sup>.

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.

#### **2. 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.

#### **3. 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 [v-a dot gov slash community care slash flu shot dot a-s-p](http://v-a.dot.gov/communitycare/flushot/a-s-p) to learn more. ([www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/flushot.asp](http://www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/flushot.asp))

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 HealthVet with all the details – where, when and type of flu shot.

#### **4. 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 [caregiver dot v-a dot gov](http://caregiver.v-a.dot.gov). ([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.

#### **5. 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.

## **6. Connected Care Update**

Veterans with a My Health eVet 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 Health eVet.

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](https://access.v-a.gov). If Veterans have questions about this, they may send a message through My Health eVet to their facility's Beneficiary Travel Secure Messaging Team.

## **7. 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.

### **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.

**SOUTHEASTERN VETERANS' CENTER ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES**

**July 9, 2020**

The Southeastern Veterans' Center Advisory Council met July 9, 2020 at 10:00AM via conference call. Virtual meeting was scheduled due to facility lock-down during COVID-19 pandemic.

**Advisory Council Members Participating:**

Barry Amole, Vietnam Veterans of America, President  
Thomas Applebach, Lehigh County Office of Veterans' Affairs  
Mary Archey, Marine Corps League  
Anthony Arnao, Jr., Catholic War Veterans  
Thomas Brown, Veterans of Foreign Wars  
Richard Doherty, Military Officers Assoc. of America  
Jeffrey Elliot, PA AMVETS, Vice President  
John Getz, Veterans of Foreign Wars  
The Hon. Tim Hennessey, PA House of Representatives  
The Hon. Bob Mensch, PA State Senate  
Robert G. Richardson, Resident Representative  
Kenneth Schweitzer, American Legion

**Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs/Southeastern Veterans' Center:**

Jill Alwine, Admissions and Marketing Coordinator - SEVC  
Edward Beck, Chief of Operations, Veterans' Homes - DMVA  
Mildred Butler-Coleman, Deputy Commandant – SEVC  
Barbara Raymond, Acting Commandant  
Maj. Gen. Eric Weller (Ret.), Deputy Adjutant General - DMVA

**Visitors:**

Seth Benge, Executive Legislative Affairs Specialist – DMVA  
Dusty Durand, Director of Policy, Planning and Legislative Affairs – DMVA  
The Hon. Katie Muth, PA State Senate  
Nikki Whitlock, Constituency Relations, Sen. Katie Muth's Office

**Excused Absence:**

William Cornwell, Resident Representative  
Doug Forsythe, Disabled American Veterans  
Maj. Gen. Anthony J. Carrelli, Adjutant General – DMVA  
Maur Levan, Jewish War Veterans  
Andrew Ruscavage, Director of State Homes  
Robert Stone, The American Legion

**Call to Order:**

The Advisory Council Meeting was called to order by Barry Amole at 10:00 AM. There was a moment of silence, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

**Review and Approval of April 9, 2020 Meeting Minutes:**

Robert Richardson moved, and Ken Schweitzer seconded, approval of minutes of the April 9, 2020 Advisory Council Meeting.

**Report of the Medical Director:**

No medical director's report.

**Report of the Admissions and Marketing Coordinator:**

Jill Alwine reported 24 new admissions since the last Advisory Council meeting; the last two admissions occurred in early March. There are 134 people on the waiting list. Applications are still being received.

**Remarks by Deputy Adjutant General MG Eric G. Weller:**

National Guard dispatched throughout the state, assisting with COVID testing, helping in nursing homes, and assisting law enforcement at protest locations.

Making progress with PA Vets Connect program. Database operational, providing resources to veterans re: employment opportunities and mental health issues. Hired regional points of contact throughout the state.

Regarding the reopening of Veterans' homes, we're following PA DOH guidance. Reopening plan is broken into four phases – posted on DMVA website. It's a slow, conservative process.

Also looking at obtaining more PPE.

Rep. Hennessey asked about National Guard rotation at SEVC, changing staff every two weeks. Barb Raymond explained that we continue to see guard members with the same skill sets with each rotation, but the number of guards in each shift diminishes, as we hire more of our own staff.

**Remarks by Barbara Raymond, SEVC Acting Commandant:**

Arrived on site May 28.

As of this meeting, facility has two positive residents; they are prior positives, but this time exhibit no symptoms of the virus. Also waiting on test results for two other prior positives – one developed a fever and was tested out of caution. Resident moved to a Yellow unit.

Management company – The Long Hill Co. – came on site July 1.

We're also hiring Commonwealth staff – ADON, two infection preventionists, one registered nurse instructor, and one registered nurse assessment coordinator.

As of this meeting, completed 66% of staff COVID testing as part of a second round of testing. The first round of testing occurred May 28-June 19.

Following Gov. Wolf's protocols on travel to states where there is a greater COVID risk. We currently have five staff members out due to this.

Currently have five VA nurses in house; they will end their time with us at the end of this week.

In regard to DOH deficiencies – they are not yet public record; however, they include matters pertaining to infection control, PPE use, and screening. Screening is occurring before anyone enters the building, and we're also conducting contact tracing in relation to any positive residents or staff. Other items include adding hospice paperwork to medical records, quality assurance meeting required participation, inaccurate record (missing note re: Tylenol), notification of change, and resident rights in relation to recovery plan.

PCU Resident Representative Rob Richardson asked about family notification in regard to medications. Barb Raymond explained that if the resident requests that we do not report a medication to families, that request is documented and we do not notify the family. We do, however, discuss this request with the resident each time there is a medication update, and document the resident's request.

**Remarks by Mildred Butler-Coleman, Deputy Commandant:**

SEVC ancillary services reviewing budgetary requirements at the end of the quarter, and for the fiscal year ahead.

Also overseeing receipt of and monitoring PPE levels. We've been able to support demand; challenge remains the proper use of PPE and notification of when PPE is needed.

Also monitoring receipt of swabbing equipment. Test results taking 4-7 days to come back, probably taking longer due to the fact that more people statewide are being tested.

Part of reopening plan includes bringing providers – dentist, podiatrist, etc. – back into the facility. They must provide us with their infection control plans, including negative COVID test results.

Adult Day Health Care construction is on hold for now, and no construction contractors are currently on site for this project.

**Remarks by Ed Beck, COO, Veterans' Homes – DMVA:**

All projects were stopped when COVID started. Part of our recovery plan includes resumption of the Adult Day Health Care construction. Work can take place because it occurs outside the building. Total project only 1% completed, and will still take 366 days to complete.

**Comments from the Council:**

Ken Schweitzer asked status of Mildred Butler-Coleman as Deputy Commandant. Mildred confirmed that she still holds that position.

Mary Archey asked about "COVID wards" and when residents are moved from those units. Barb Raymond explained that residents have been moved after two negative tests. Fortunately, with whole house testing, we've been able to convert entire floors from yellow to green, with all residents on those floors testing negative. Any positive residents are moved to the red zone, where they spend two weeks and can then move to a yellow zone for another two weeks, then finally to a green zone. This process is slower than was

the CDC calls for, but we're being cautious. In addition, "evergreen" residents are being kept together, as are green residents who were once positive and have recovered. This is the process for Coates Hall. In CLC, because each resident is in a single room, that room can be designated as yellow without the resident having to move.

When asked about when residents can begin to go outside, Barb explained that she is working with the PC unit administrator on a plan.

Regarding the resumption of activities for residents, Barb said this is a slow process, but that indoor activities are part of our recovery plan.

Ed Beck added his appreciation for everything the staff is doing to get the facility ready for reopening. He reiterated that we're being more conservative with our planning than what DOH and CDC are recommending. He mentioned that in preparation for outside visitation, we will be installing plexiglass screens, incorporating them into our existing gazebo space, to allow for safe, socially distant visits.

He confirmed that we are in the pre-Alpha phase, with Alpha being the first of the reopening phases. We need to have no new positive cases for 14 days in order to begin the Alpha phase.

Barry Amole expressed concern that DMVA has provided very little information to the Advisory Council during the course of the COVID pandemic. They're learning news about the facility from articles in the Philadelphia Inquirer, rather than from DMVA. They found out about the new interim Commandant in the newspaper. Noting the same concern were council members Ken Schweitzer, Richard Doherty, John Getz, and Jeff Elliot. Barb Raymond apologized that the information was not conveyed to the board sooner, and asked how they would like us to communicate with them going forward. The interim Commandant had sent e-mail to the council upon her arrival at the facility, and will continue to communicate with council with e-mail updates.

Ken Schweitzer asked Gen. Weller about the status of Andrew Ruscavage, Director of Veteran Homes. Ed Beck explained the chain of command at SEVC as: Barb Raymond, Ed Beck, then Gen. Weller.

Rep. Hennessey asked about the status of the ongoing investigation of SEVC, particularly how long will the investigation last and when will there be a report. Gen. Weller said the investigation is about 25% completed at this time. Rep. Hennessey also asked about staff morale, and if there is any way council can help with that. Barb said staff is struggling a bit, that the loss of residents is like a loss of family members for them. On top of that, staff is dealing with a number of administrative changes. We have been scheduling time for representatives from the state's SEAP program, to assist with any emotional needs. Barb also updates staff, residents, and families on a regular basis, via e-mail and regular mail. Mildred Butler-Coleman added that staff morale is negatively impacted when articles about the facility appear in the newspapers. When you know you're doing your best, but keep getting attacked in the media, it "beats you down," she said.

Guest participant, Sen. Katie Muth, thanked everyone for increased communication during this difficult situation. She said that despite what people may be feeling about the newspaper articles, this was the method through which staff was being heard. They were not being heard before this. Moving forward, she gives credit to staff for speaking up. She added that we have a duty and an obligation to work together.

Barb Raymond noted that staff is being praised for hard work, and that staff is doing their best to improve their own processes. We've also increased education and auditing of processes.

**Old Business:**

None

**New Business:**

None

**Election of Officers:**

Barry Amole elected President

John Getz elected Vice President

**Good of the Council**

None

**Time and Date for the next Meeting:**

With no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned. The next regular meeting of the Advisory Council will be held on October 8, 2020 at 10:00 AM in the Coates Hall All-purpose Room, pending any stay-at-home restrictions.

Approved:

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Barry Amole, President

Minutes submitted by: Kathy Knaub



**DELAWARE VALLEY VETERANS HOME  
ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES  
August 12, 2020  
Conference Call**

**Present:**

**Advisory Council Members**

Douglas Craig, Military Officers Association  
Larry Holman, Jewish War Veterans  
Samuel Huhn, Blinded Veterans Association  
Daniel Murray, Marine Corps League  
John O'Donnell, American Legion  
James Ritchie, Veterans of Foreign Wars  
Martina White, Pa House of Representatives

**Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and  
Delaware Valley Veterans Home**

Eric Weller, DAG  
Andrew Ruscavage, Director State Veterans' Homes  
Peter Ojeda, Commandant  
Rita Yeung, Business Manager  
Yahvae Jones, Admissions/Marketing  
Violetta Berdichevskaya, Medical Director  
Susan Riever, Adm. Asst.

**Absent**

Allan Abramson, Jewish War Vets  
Bruce Boice, Disabled American Veterans  
Daniel McCollum, American Legion  
Charles Petronis, Catholic War Veterans  
Kerry Judge, Senator Robert Tomlinson's Office

**Residents**

No Residents Attended due to quarantine.

**Visitors**

None due to Covid.

- Moment of Silence
- Pledge of Allegiance
- Introduction of Attendees
- Approval of Minutes from May 13, 2020

**Report from Violetta Berdichevskaya, Medical Director**

- A-Unit residents were moved upstairs. We had a cleaning service come in to deep clean and disinfect the A Unit. Resident's will be moved back to this unit on Monday. C Unit will move to D Unit so construction can be completed.
- We lost a total of 12 residents. We were the last of the homes to get Covid-19 because we restricted anyone from coming into the building before we were required. We are looking closely at the upcoming Flu season. All residents will be given the flu shot. We will also restrict visitors from coming into the building the same as we did last year.

**Report from Yahvae Jones, Admissions/Marketing**

- Waiting list – 119. We have 64 skilled, 26 secure and the balance are spouses or those who have not met requirements or are out of state. Marketing via email with hospital social workers and virtual meeting monthly with the VA Advisory Council. I will drop off 150 admission packets to Councilman Robert Henon who is sponsoring a drive-in movie night and will hand out packets to those in attendance.

**Report from Eric Weller, Deputy Adjutant General**

- During this Pandemic everything was kept up and running.
- PA Veterans Connect Data Base – 5 regions with 14 counties per region.
- Veterans Trust Fund – We have money to disperse to veterans in need.
- Veterans Homes - Newspapers are not always true with information. We are doing everything we can in the homes to address the Covid problems. An outbreak in one of our homes has been contained and we are continuing to work hard to keep it that way. Private care facility statistics look about the same as our homes. 90% of our home's population are men and 80% are women and women tend to have better immune systems than men. Many employees who tested positive were asymptomatic. All our employees and residents are tested on a regular basis. We have had a 2<sup>nd</sup> wave of Covid and I believe a 3<sup>rd</sup> wave is coming. Hopefully, we will have a vaccine soon. Philadelphia was the hot spot area in Pennsylvania.
- PPE Equipment – All of our homes have all the necessary protective equipment. There was a national and international shortage so that was a big issue at the beginning of the pandemic.

**Report from Andrew Ruscavage, Director Veterans Homes**

- DVVH is doing very well. Staff and residents are being tested regularly and we are doing contact tracing. Most of our staff who tested positive were asymptomatic with no symptoms. We have done 4,775 tests on residents alone. DVVH is on its 10<sup>th</sup> round of testing.
- Reopening of Homes – the timetable for reopening is September 1<sup>st</sup>. The phases are ALPHA-BRAVO-CHARLIE-DELTA. There will be 21 days between each phase, but if there is a positive result with either the staff or residents, we begin all over again.
- Rapid Testing Machines – shorter swab, both nostrils and put into the machine with a 15-minute wait time.
- Construction - should begin soon on Main Street, the Bistro, Lounge and the last unit.
- Newsletter is posted on the website on a monthly basis.

**WEBSITE – [WWW.DMVA.PA.GOV](http://WWW.DMVA.PA.GOV)**



**Report from Peter Ojeda, Commandant**

Over the past 3 months we had **20** discharges.

Donations for the past 3 months totaled \$1260.00

Activities are presently held on the units due to Covid-19.

Letters go out to the families of the residents on a weekly basis to keep them updated on their loved ones and what is going on in the home.

Skype for residents and their families. We do about 15 per week. Family members can also set up a time to come and visit their loved one through the window.

Construction should resume soon. We continue general maintenance on the grounds and building.

**Old Business:**

**New Business:**

**Good of the Counsel:** Martina White thanked Peter and all the staff at DVVH for all their hard work during Covid-19. If any help is needed, please let her know.

**Adjourned: 10:50AM**

**Next Meeting: November 4, 2020**

HOLLIDAYSBURG VETERANS' HOME (HVH)

**ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES FROM *TELEPHONIC MEETING***  
**THURSDAY, July 16, 2020**  
**EISENHOWER HALL / HOLLIDAYSBURG VETERANS HOME**  
**10:00 A.M.**

Deputy Commandant Sam Dunkle conducted a telephonic rollcall with the below findings:

**ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Tim Susengill (Council Present), Vietnam Veterans Association  
State Senator Judy Ward  
Raymond Lenz, American Legion Department of PA  
Joe Rodkey, Blinded Veterans  
Brian Querry, Centre County, Director of VA  
David Wagner, DAV  
Duffy Hines, Marine Corps League Department of PA  
Robert "Hank" Sembower, Military Officers Association of America  
John Gority, Military Order of the Purple Heart  
Richard Orłowski, Resident Representative

**OTHERS PRESENT:**

Major General (Ret.) Eric Weller, The Deputy Adjutant General of Veteran Affairs  
Director of Bureau of Veterans Homes, Andrew Ruscavage  
Dr. Reinhardt, Medical Director  
Deborah Nesbella, Commandant  
Sam Dunkle, Deputy Commandant  
Kelly Smith, Director of Nursing  
Samantha Cossman, Regional Program Outreach Coordinator  
Mrs. Anna Marie Rodkey, Spouse of Joe Rodkey  
Constance Stransky, Guest of Council Member Ray Lenz  
Joe Patterson, Assistant to the Commandant, Recorder

**ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT:**

State Representative Louis Schmitt Jr.  
Henry Gaunt, AMVETS  
Jim Lamison, Past AMVETS Commander  
Michael Billotte, Catholic War Vets  
Stanley Rolnik, Jewish War Veterans  
Dwayne Anders, VFW Department of PA

**Called to Order**

Tim Susengill called the meeting to order at 1000hrs and asked everyone to stand for a moment of silence to honor our deceased veterans and residents; and afterwards everyone joined-in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance to the United States of America.

### Swearing-In New Members

Major General (Ret.) Weller read the oath of office and sworn-in David Wagner, DAV. Henry Gaunt, AMVETS, was to be sworn-in but was not present.

### Medical Director, John Reinhardt

Dr. Reinhardt said the last four (4) months has been unprecedented time and the most unique of his 32 years of practice. Dr. Reinhardt said, one (1) of his plans was to have Assistant Medical Director Dr. Froncillo exclusively assigned to visit HVH's residents daily from March 11th to July 3rd – and not seeing any other patients. He said this would not only benefit our residents but also Dr. Froncillo's family.

Dr. Reinhardt said his plan was simple and straight forward – and as the first line of defense for this virus is not any treatment or medication. Dr. Reinhardt said the best line of defense is avoiding exposure and through protecting e.g. monitoring staff and resident for COVID signs and symptoms, restricting visitation, proper use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), identifying residents that are at-risk for COVID, and testing and isolating as necessary. Dr. Reinhardt said, up-to-this point the staff at HVH has done a fantastic job protecting our resident and two (2) weeks ago HVH did very well on its Department of Health (DoH) survey.

### **QUESTIONS, COMMENTS or CONCERNS:**

Tim Susengill said he recently received an email from HVH, noting a tentative plan to reopen HVH around July 20th. He asked Dr. Reinhardt if the tentative plan remains because of the recent spike in positive cases in-around the area of Blair county? Dr. Reinhardt said the HVH Management is working diligently with the DMVA and following PA Health Alert Network (PAHAN) guidelines start chaperoned visits. Dr. Reinhardt further discussed how our residents could succumb to depression due to not seeing their love ones coupled seeing staff members in surgical mask every day.

### Major General (Ret.) Eric Weller, The Adjutant General of Veterans Affairs

The General said all the state veteran's assistant programs e.g. PA Paralyzed Veterans and Veteran's Trust Fund, are sustaining operations and running as normal with many employees telecommunicating. **PA Veterans Connect** Data Bases continues to operate and in the processing of exporting to county directors via SharePoint; and showing them how to use the program. The General said there are plans on hiring five (5) more staff for different regions with intent to establish or reestablish networks with other non-profits. The General said his office is going after grant monies to deal with the many issues within our counties e.g. education, transportation, and suicide prevention.

The General emphasized the vulnerability of our elderly veterans within our Veterans Homes with respect to staff member being Asymptomatic to COVID-19. He expressed the important for all staff members to adhere to protocols and to practice Social Distancing and to wear a mask – not only while at work but also when in the community.

The General expressed his concern of [us] not having proper PPE available e.g. masks, gowns, and face shields etc. for our veterans due to the world-wide shortage of certain equipment. He said the BVHs directive is to ensure every Veterans Home has a six (6) month supply of PPE on-hand.

The General discussed the importance of having COVID testing available for resident and staff, and fortunately HVH has joined forces with James Van Zandt Medical Center to have Cepheid tests (results within hours).

Major General (Ret.) Eric Weller, The Adjutant General of Veterans Affairs (Cont.)

**QUESTIONS, COMMENTS or CONCERNS:**

Tim Susengill asked the General if there is any discussion regarding the loss of revenue and how this may affect the homes? The General said this is a great concern, but his office was told there is 100% of funding through November 2020.

**QUESTIONS, COMMENTS or CONCERNS:**

Tim Susengill asked if the PA Veterans Connect Data Base will be available to Service Organizations? The General said "yes", eventually all veterans will have access to the network for their own use. The General noted his intention is to roll-out the data base slowly – the 1st step would be for all county directors, then to Social Workers at the Federal VA, then eventually to all veterans.

Director Andrew Ruscavage, Bureau of Veterans Homes

Andrew discussed HVH's preparations to impede any residents contracting COVID-19. He said one thing is for sure is that COVID19 is not over! Andrew said HVH has been preparing for months e.g. closing roads on campus and standing-up a Security Checkpoint to obtain the physical temperature of employees and vendors entering campus. He said Checkpoint operations will continue for some time in the future.

Andrew said HVH continues to hire new employees e.g. Nurses, Security Officers and Military Affairs Activities Assistants (MAAA).

Bureau of Veterans Homes Reopening Plan. Andrew said plans can be found on the DVMA's website, as it outlines all the details for homes to reopen. Andrew said the Reopening Plan, guidance and criteria can be found on the website and its covered by Phase Alpha, Bravo, Charlie and Delta. Andrew said HVH will be the first home to enter Phase Alpha ~ and what does this mean? On Monday, July 20th, HVH will enter Phase Alpha of its reopening plan ~ and not much changes in this phase except the home will be open to outside ancillary services e.g. Podiatrist and Audiology. And they will still be screened and possibly COVID-19 tested. Andrew explained each phase will consists of 14 days as per the Department of Health guidelines.

Andrew explained no matter what phase a home is in....at any time if a resident or employee tests positive for COVID19 – all operations stop for the home and the home reverts to the beginning.

HVHs Tentative Reopening Plan/ Phase Timeline:

**Phase Alpha:** Monday, July 20th – enter in Ancillary Services

**Phase Bravo:** Monday, August 3rd – enter socialization outside with escorted visitation for Family Members.

Andrew said plexiglass barriers have been installed and Family Members will be coached-up to ensure the safety of our residents – and by appointment only to ensure proper sanitation and housekeeping between visits.

**Phase Charlie:** Monday, August 17th – enter in visitation within designated areas within the buildings – again, by appointment only.

**Phase Delta:** Monday, August 31st – enter in the new normal. Andrew said in this phase the HVH will be open to volunteers [treated as if they are staff] and they will be screened at the Checkpoint and could be subjected to COVID-19 testing. Furthermore, all volunteers will be required to wear the appropriate PPE while on campus and around our residents.

Director Andrew Ruscavage, Bureau of Veterans Homes (Cont.)

**QUESTIONS, COMMENTS or CONCERNS**

Tim Susengill asked if the pandemic created any delays in the planning for the new Community Living Center (CLC) project? Andrew said, "yes" it has delayed the project by at least six (6) months. He said the longer we wait in the design phase due to the pandemic the more delays we will have. Andrew said over-all the CLC is still on schedule and more information is forthcoming.

Senator Judy Ward said Dr. Reinhardt mentioned a Cepheid/ Rapid test, where results are known within 1 hour. The Senator asked where HVH gained this opportunity and with whom? Andrew asked the Commandant to provide insight to her question. The Commandant said she gained this opportunity by partnering with/joining forces with the James E. Van Zandt Medical Center (VZMC) and their Director Sigrid Andrew. The Commandant explained the VZMC has helped the HVH tremendously with providing Cepheid test and utilizing their laboratory for quick results. The Commandant explained, Cepheid tests are not administered to every resident; but instead on a case-by-case bases and depending on clinical facts.

Brian Querry said with the outlook of the different phases – the earliest [that he sees] an applicate could seek admissions into the home is August 31st. Brian asked Andrew if this would be true...and the reason he is asking is due to the amount of people who ask him. Brian asked if it would be safe to say admission seekers should expect to wait up to six (6) months...Andrew said it all depends on positive cases within the home. Andrew explained there is an admission waiting list [65 individuals] and ask Brian to encourage individuals to submit their admissions packet if they are interested. Furthermore, Andrew explained all applicates will be required to have a negative COVID-19 test result prior to being accepted.

Richard Orlowski asked when the PCU resident will be authorized to leave campus? The Commandant explained, in HVH's plan residents to allowed to depart campus in Charlie Phase – barring any positive cases or setbacks. She continued by noting when this happens – all PCU resident will required to be screened prior to depart and upon return.

Senator Judy Ward ask the status of negative pressure rooms at HVH. Andrew explained a lot of the newer Veterans Homes within the state have these rooms; however, but HVH does not have any at the present time. Andrew said, portable negative pressure rooms have been ordered for HVH to be installed in the isolation units. Andrew said the need for negative pressure rooms have been built into the design of the new CLC at HVH.

DEBORAH NESBELLA, Commandant

The Commandant (CMD) opened by welcoming all the Council Members and thanked them for joining the meeting.

**CENSUS:**

She noted the HVH is at **81%** Skilled Nursing Occupancy and Whole House is **74%**.

**PERSONAL STATUS:**

The Commandant said HVH continues to hire and consequently gaining 79 new employees since January 16th. The Commandant said, due to the pandemic, HVH will be hiring additional Security Officer 2s and 1s to cover the Checkpoint and more MAAAs, due to the increased need of resident activities.

**DEBORAH NESBELLA, Commandant (Cont.)**

**POINTS OF INTEREST:**

**HVH's COVID-19 Update**

First and foremost – from the clinical and maintenance staff down to the housekeeping staff, and all staff in-between...everyone has stepped-up to the COVID-19 response; and she is extremely proud of the HVH's staff! She continued by explaining the amount of work/ time and hurdles of transitioning a normal unit into a Yellow or Red unit [moving residents and cleaning]. She said, in the face of many challenges to keep our resident/ veterans safe – HVH's staff have never surrendered.

**HVH's COVID-19 TIMELINE:**

- Tuesday, March 10, 2020 – Suspended Visitation - continue Virtual Visits via iPads for residents with family
- Monday, March 16, 2020 – Hold on Admissions
- Tuesday, March 17, 2020 – Closed all HVH's Roads, except the front main entrance
- Monday, March 23, 2020 – Front main Checkpoint established with COVID-19 Screening initiated
- Tuesday, May 5, 2020 – Entered into a contact with QUEST Laboratory
- Wednesday, June 3, 2020 – with cooperation with the Department of Health state laboratory – HVH completed its 1st Baseline Testing for all residents and staff [930 tests total] and received two (2) positive cases (residents).

She explained the residents that tested positive were then retested after 24 hours and tested negative – a false positive case. The Commandant said the Department of Health still considers these two (2) cases as positive; however, at this present time HVH has no positive COVID-19 cases.

**Department of Health (DoH), COVID-19 | Infection Control Survey**

The Commandant said three (3) DoH members recently surveyed HVH for three (3) days and they exited with “no finding”.

**QUESTIONS, COMMENTS or CONCERNS:**

Tim Susengill asked when residents will be authorized to participate in off-campus activities with Service Organizations in the community? The Commandant explained it could be possible in the Delta Phase; however, keep in-mind the HVH Dietary Department has stepped-up and have created an atmosphere like off-campus social gatherings.

Tim said his Disabled American Veterans (DAV) organization normally host a Veteran's Appreciation Day/ luncheon the first week of September and would like to invite approximately thirty (3) veterans from HVH. Andrew said it is difficult to gauge what HVH's posture would look-like come September – Tim agreed it would be safer to not have HVH commit.

Duffy Hines asked if the HVH is still accepting “gently used” clothing items if they are clean? The Commandant explained, under the current conditions and for the safety of our residents – used items are not being accepted. The Commandant informed HVH is accepting new items such as sweatpants, winter hats, gloves and socks.

**Review of Council Member Status:** None received

**Old Business:** Ray Lenz asked Tim if he still wishes to step-down from the Presidency? Tim said yes.

**New Business**

Duffy Hines said he is extremely proud to be apart of the HVH Advisory Council and the HVH team – as they have answered the call to ensure the safety of our veterans.

John Gority asked if anyone heard Michael Billotte, Catholic War Vets, will stepping down from his position and hopes to have his position filled by John Marrion...he asked if anyone heard this? Joe Patterson asked John Gority to have Mr. Marrion contact him ~ John acknowledged.

**Announcements/ Good of The Council:**

Ray Lenz acknowledged the recent passing of a Registered Nurse Supervisor that served HVH for 20-years.

Tim said the next Advisory Council Meeting will be on Thursday, October 15, 2020; and the meeting was adjourned approximately 1120hrs.

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Duffy Hines, Secretary

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Tim Susengill (Council Present)

**Bureau of Veterans' Homes  
Available Beds Monthly Status Report  
from October 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	57	33		63%	66
Memory Care	30	30	0		100%	32
Placing						0
<b>Totals Less Wait List Placing</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>98</b>
Non-Veteran Census Percent				57	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	120	36		77%	29
Memory Care	40	32	8		80%	11
Placing						1
<b>Totals Less Wait List Placing</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>78%</b>	<b>39</b>
Non-Veteran Census Percent				42	10%	
<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	177	54		77%	7
Memory Care	26	14	12		54%	0
Personal Care	101	44	57		44%	0
Domiciliary	66	49	17		74%	0
Placing						0
<b>Totals Less Wait List Placing</b>	<b>424</b>	<b>284</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>7</b>
Non-Veteran Census Percent				133	12%	
<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	74	1		99%	17
Memory Care	32	18	14		56%	7
Personal Care	80	42	38		53%	5
Domiciliary	20	20	0		100%	0
Placing						0
<b>Totals Less Wait List Placing</b>	<b>207</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>29</b>
Non-Veteran Census Percent				51	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	113	95		54%	64
Memory Care	30	30	0		100%	27
Personal Care	54	35	19		65%	23
Placing						5
<b>Totals Less Wait List Placing</b>	<b>292</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>109</b>
Non-Veteran Census Percent				113	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	148	48		76%	40
Memory Care	40	32	8		80%	6
Placing						0
<b>Totals Less Wait List Placing</b>	<b>236</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>76%</b>	<b>46</b>
Non-Veteran Census Percent				52	17%	
<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	689	267		72%	223
Memory Care	198	156	42		79%	83
Personal Care	235	121	114		51%	28
Domiciliary	86	69	17		80%	0
<b>Placing Total</b>						<b>6</b>
<b>Totals Less Wait List Placing</b>	<b>1,475</b>	<b>1,035</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>333</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>328</b>
				387		
<b>Non-Veteran Census Number</b>						
DVVH	4	5%				
GJMVC	15	10%				
HVH	34	12%				
PSSH	21	14%				
SEVC	15	9%				
SWVC	29	16%				
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>11%</b>				

**Summary of Activity from 9/16/2020 to 11/18/2020**

<b>APPS APPROVED</b>	642
<b>NEW</b>	347
<b>REVIEW</b>	295

<b>APPS DENIED</b>	
<b>Financial Need</b>	63
<b>Ineligible</b>	33
No Response	48
Change of Eligibility	119

<b>HH OVER INCOME</b>	9
<b>NEW</b>	5
<b>REVIEW</b>	4

1%
1%
1%

APPS CREATED	317
TOTAL ADJUDICATED	905

**RETX Exempt List (New)**mvfigsqlprod01  
11/18/2020  
rep\_VADC\_RETX\_Exempt\_List\_New**Summary of Current Applications (Exempt)**

Count	No Activity	Review Process Started	Review App Received	New Apps Pending
14278	13728	458	92	256

**Summary of Activity from 09/16/2020 to 11/18/2020**

<b>Apps Created: 317</b>	
New	158
Review:	159
<b>Apps Approved: 642</b>	
New	347
Review	295
Apps Denied Fin:	63
Apps Denied (Ineligible):	33
Apps Removed from Exempt List (No Response):	48
Apps Removed from Exempt List (Eligibility Changed):	119

**Summary of Ineligible Reason**

Reason	Count
	3
The property for which you claim exemption is not owned solely by you, or as an estate by the entirety with your spouse.	8
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.	1
The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has determined that the veteran did not serve during a period of war or armed conflict.	14
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

## VA Suspension of Monthly Statements/Collection Actions October/November 2020

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### **Why are Veterans currently not receiving monthly patient statements from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)?**

Due to the potential impact COVID-19 may have on Veterans' financial well-being, VA is not printing and mailing patient statements for health-care-associated costs from April 6, 2020, through December 31, 2020. This means Veterans will not receive a monthly bill for any copays incurred during this time. VA will not be adding late charges or interest to accounts or take any collection action on medical care debt until after December 31, 2020.

#### **When will the printing and mailing of statements resume?**

Patient statements are expected to resume mail delivery in January 2021. Those patient statements will include unpaid charges incurred prior to April 2020 and charges for services and medications received from April 2020 through December 31, 2020.

#### **How can Veterans find their current balances?**

Veterans can obtain balances by calling 866-400-1238 or their local VA medical center's revenue office. In November 2020, Veterans will receive a letter citing a current balance owed on accounts, with information on how payments may be voluntarily made. An outgoing call campaign will commence on November 6, 2020 and will include Office of Community Care Revenue Operations staff calling Veterans with a greater than \$2,000 copayment balance.

#### **What happens in January 2021 when statements resume? Will Veterans be required to pay the full statement balance?**

In January 2021, Veterans will have the option to pay their charges in full or arrange a payment plan to make smaller monthly payments. VA continues to consider Veterans who experienced changes to income and are struggling to make copayments due to COVID-19. Financial Hardship arrangements can also be requested at this time or earlier.

#### **How do Veterans make payments on their accounts if they are not receiving monthly patient statements?**

Veterans can make payments to accounts during this time. Veterans or other payers must have their account number.

An account balance can be obtained by:

- Calling 866-400-1238
- Calling the local VA medical center's facility revenue office

- Consulting the November letter containing their account balance and additional details on the halt in patient statement printing and mailing (Appendix A)

**Methods by which a Veteran can pay on a balance:**

- [www.pay.gov](http://www.pay.gov)
- Calling a VA medical center facility revenue office
- By mail:  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
PO Box 3978  
Portland, OR 97208-3978
- By phone at 888-827-4817

**What debt relief options are available to Veterans?**

Debt relief options are always available to Veterans. They include:

- Set up a repayment plan
- Request a waiver, write off or compromise of your debt
- Request a VA Hardship Determination

To learn more, please visit <https://www.va.gov/health-care/pay-copay-bill/financial-hardship/>



## Appendix A

VA MONTANA HEALTHCARE SYSTEM  
PO BOX 1500  
FORT HARRISON MT 59636-9999



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

QUESTIONS OR ADDRESS CHANGE?  
Call 1-866-393-1846

11/23/2020

TESTFIRST W TESTLAST000000081814  
1717 38TH AVE NE  
HAVRE MT 59501-6513

VA would like to provide you with important information about your VA health care, community care, and prescription copays.

We know that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused financial hardship for some Veterans. That's why we put our monthly patient statements on hold starting on April 6, 2020. We'll begin sending patient statements again in January 2021, and we want to make sure you have the information you need to prepare.

Here's what you need to know for January

In January 2021, you will receive a patient statement that may include the total amount of any:

- New charges for medical care and prescriptions you received from April 6, 2020 through December 31, 2020.
- Unpaid charges for medical care and prescriptions you received before April 2020.

You don't have to make any payments until January 2021. But you can choose to make early payments before January if you'd like.

Your current balance is                     \$265.00                     AS OF NOVEMBER 20, 2020.

If you would like to make a payment at any time between now and January 2021

You can pay in any of the ways listed below. Please have your account number ready when making a payment.

- o Online: [www.pay.gov](http://www.pay.gov)
- o By mail:
  - Department of Veterans Affairs
  - PO Box 3978
  - Portland, OR 97208-3978
- o In person: At a VA medical center agent cashier's office
- o By phone: 888-827-4817

If you can't make your payments when billing starts again:

Please contact VA at 866-400-1238 or 844-698-2311. We can work with you to determine your debt relief options. These may include:

- Establishing a repayment plan
- Requesting a waiver, write off or compromise of your debt
- Requesting a VA Hardship Determination

For more information:

- Visit <https://www.va.gov/health-care/pay-copay-bill/financial-hardship/>
- Or contact your nearest VA health care facility's business office. Find a VA location at <https://www.va.gov/find-locations>.