

Pennsylvania State Veterans Commission

Meeting Agenda

08 October 2021 at 1000 AM

Location: Arrowheads Community Club

1000	Call to Order	Chairman Samuel Petrovich
	Moment of Silence	Vice-Chairman Nicholas Taylor
	Pledge of Allegiance	Chairman Samuel Petrovich
	Introduction of Commission Members	Chairman Samuel Petrovich
	Chairman's Opening Remarks	Chairman Samuel Petrovich
	TAG's Opening Remarks and Comments	EDS Marc Ferraro
	Approval of 10 September Meeting Minutes	Requires Vote
	Reading of Official and Other Communications	Chairman Samuel Petrovich
	DAG-VA Opening Remarks and Report	BG (PA) Maureen Weigl
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Programs Report	Requires Vote
	VISN 4	Mr. Chuck Thilges
	Act 66 Committee Report	Mr. Richard Hudzinski
	RETX Committee Report	Mr. Justin Slep
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Motion: Accept RETX recommendations• Motion: Accept white paper	Vote Vote
	Legislative Committee Report	Mr. Charles Jackson
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Motion: Accept proposals to PA Constitution Article VIII, 2(c)• Motion: Determine Chairman's requested response HB 1868	Vote Vote
	Pensions/Relief/Grave Markings Committee Report	Ms. Constance Snavelly
	MAL Committee Report	Chairman Samuel Petrovich
	Unfinished Business	
	New Business	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Election• Oath of Office: Chairman and Vice Chairman	Mr. Jeffrey Wallitsch EDS Marc Ferraro
	Good of the Order	Chairman Samuel Petrovich
	Agenda Items for Next Meeting	Chairman Samuel Petrovich
	Closing Remarks	Chairman Samuel Petrovich
	Next Meeting	
	December 3, 2021 at 10AM	
	Fort Indiantown Gap, Annville	
	Adjournment	Chairman Samuel Petrovich
	Retiring of the Colors	Chairman Samuel Petrovich

State Veterans Commission

Meeting Minutes

September 10, 2021
10:00 AM to 11:55 AM

Arrowheads Community Center, Fort Indiantown Gap

Call to Order

Chairman Samuel Petrovich

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

Vice Chairman Taylor opened the meeting with a moment of reflection on the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks at Shanksville, PA, the Pentagon, and the World Trade Center. Chairman Petrovich led a recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance.

Commission Introductions

MG Mark Schindler	The Adjutant General
BG Maureen Weigl (PA)	Deputy Adjutant General-OVA
Mr. Samuel Petrovich	Chairman, SVC
Mr. Nicholas Taylor	Vice Chairman, SVC; Commander, Catholic War Veterans
Mr. Gerald Hawk	Executive Director, AMVETS
Mr. Bernard McDonald	Commander, AMVETS
Mr. Nathaniel Smith	Commander, Veterans of Foreign Wars
Mr. John Getz	Adjutant, Veterans of Foreign Wars
Mr. William Hines	Commander, Disabled American Veterans
Mr. Justin Slep	President, PA State Association of County Directors of Veterans Affairs
Mr. Keith Beebe	President, Military Officers Association of America
Mr. Larry Googins	Commander, Vietnam Veterans of America
Mr. Christopher Fidler	Director, Keystone Paralyzed Veterans of America
Mr. Phillip Arnold	Adjutant, Military Order of the Purple Heart
Mr. James Hogan	Adjutant, The American Legion
Mr. Michael Murphy	Commander, The American Legion
Mr. Louis Santangelo	Representative, Korean War Veterans
Mr. Richard Fine	Commander, Jewish War Veterans
Mr. David Brady	Commandant, Marine Corps League
Ms. Constance Snively	Member-at-Large
Mr. John Cyprian	Member-at-Large
Mr. Charles Jackson	Member-at-Large
Mr. Michael Brooker	Member-at-Large
Mr. David Cowgill	VISN 4 Communications Manager

Others Present

Mr. Marc Ferraro	Executive Deputy Secretary
Mr. Nate Silcox	Office of State Senator Patrick Steffano
Mr. Richard Hamp	DMVA-OVA

Mr. Brian Natali	DMVA-PIRO (Programs and Services)
Mr. Jeffrey King	DMVA-PIRO (Programs and Services)
Ms. Katie Reibsane	DMVA-PIRO (Programs and Services)
Ms. Elizabeth Pettis	DMVA-OCC
Mr. Dusty Durand	DMVA-PPL
Mr. Paul DeVincenzo	DMVA-PIRO (Outreach and Reintegration)
Ms. Samantha Cossman	DMVA-PIRO (Outreach and Reintegration)
Mr. Craig Swineford	DMVA-PIRO (Outreach and Reintegration)
Ms. Erica Moore	DMVA-PIRO (Outreach and Reintegration)
Mr. James Stafford	DMVA-PIRO (Outreach and Reintegration)
Ms. Joan Nissley	DMVA-Public Affairs
Colonel Laura McHugh	PANG
CSM Jon B. Worley	PANG
Mr. Richard Hudzinski	Vietnam Veterans of America
Mr. Allan P. Atwell	Citizen at Large
Mr. Carl Curtis	Vietnam Veterans of America
Ms. Kathy Silvia	PA Ambassador Military Women's Memorial
Mr. Dan Osten	PASACDVA-Cumberland County
Mr. William Wright	Catholic War Veterans
Mr. Anthony DiFrancesco	PASACDVA-Dauphin County
Mr. Thomas Coreau	PASACDVA-Dauphin County
Mr. David Reinersten	The American Legion

Oath of Office	MG Schindler
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General Schindler administered the oath of office to Michael Murphy (TAL), Bernie McDonald (AMVETS), Gerald Hawk (AMVETS), William Hines (DAV), David Brady (MCL), Nathaniel Smith (VFW), and Richard Fine (JWV) as new members of the State Veterans Commission.

Opening Remarks	MG Schindler
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General Schindler welcomed the commissioners and reported that he was officially sworn in as The Adjutant General of Pennsylvania on June 21, 2021. Before that he was serving in an Acting capacity. He is happy to move forward and looks forward to the new agenda. Gave thanks for support given to the Department and the Chairman as they work through issues affecting Veterans as well as organization of the SVC. There is more work to do, and they look forward to that.

General Schindler noted the passing, on September 6th, of 2001 DMVA Hall of Fame Inductee Mr. Dominic DiFrancesco. He was a 67-year member of American Legion Post 594 in Middletown, serving in multiple posts, departmental, and national-level leadership positions, including PA State Commander from 1986 to 1987 and National Commander from 1991 to 1992.

The general's priority is to reorganize the veteran's homes' organization and functions. He has organized a new team focused on how to do better business in the homes. Secondly, to look at the SVC and see how the SVC and DMVA can work better and more transparently together. Mark Ferraro now focuses on DMVA's day-to-day operations and will work with the Chairman. If there is anything TAG can lawfully have commissioners participate in, they are welcome to. The invitation is open.

Questions/Discussion

Mr. Petrovich, Chairman: I have had more interaction with DMVA over the last 6-7 months than I have seen in the last seven years on the Commission. There is open dialog and transparency. Thank you for that.

Approval of the June 4, 2021 Meeting Minutes

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

Second: Mr. Fine, JWV, seconded the motion.

The body agreed; motion carried.

Deputy Adjutant General-VA Remarks

BG Weigl (PA)

In PA, we have over 796,000 Veterans and we take care of them from the day they swear-in to the day we pay funeral honors and start taking care of their families. The work the SVC does, as well as the folks in PIRO and Homes, it is an amazing job. General Weigl has three priorities: Getting the Homes back to “five-star” ratings, increasing long-term care options for all Veterans, and looking at gaps in the continuum of care (employment, education, housing, support for Veterans with PTSD/TBI) ... making sure all those areas are covered. Let’s also bring Veterans back to PA. 200,000 Veterans leave active duty every year and we want them to come back here to help our communities and grow our economy. We are working with UPMC, Heinz, Comcast, et al., to tell these Veterans that PA is hiring, and we want them to come back.

Lastly, there are about 100 applications a year for grants from the Veterans Trust Fund (VTF) and DMVA is only able to take care of about 20 of those organizations. All these organizations and non-profits are meaningful, and we cannot serve Veterans without them. “Let’s grow the VTF. There is no reason why these big corporations should not be donating except that they do not know they can. Let’s work on that.”

General Weigl followed up on reorganization in the Bureau of Veterans Homes. There is a new Executive Director, new Director of Homes, and a Medical Advisory Committee of three outside physicians (infectious disease control, behavioral health, and palliative care). This creates diversity of thought to work with the Chief Medical Officer and medical officers in the homes.

The homes are currently pretty much COVID-free, but it changes daily. COVID is back but thankfully we have learned how to mitigate risks and safeguard residents. About 95 percent of our residents are vaccinated. Those that are testing positive are recovering quicker. Close to 70 percent of staff is vaccinated. DMVA is building a new facility in Hollidaysburg, and construction projects at other facilities are back on starting this summer.

Pennsylvania is the only state with a Governor’s Advisory Committee. This committee brings the interagency together through seven different committees: Aging, Health & Wellness, Women’s Issues, Suicide Prevention, Homelessness, Employment [and Justice]. This type of collaboration helps us succeed. PA VETConnect is another success story.

Questions/Discussion

None.

DMVA Bureau of PIRO

Mr. Brian Natali

Mr. Natali presented the state veterans’ programs for approval: Blind Veterans’ Pension, Amputee & Paralyzed Veterans’ Pension, Educational Gratuity, Veterans’ Temporary Assistance, Military Family Relief Assistance, and the Disabled Veterans’ Real Estate Tax Exemption. All reports were with the members.

Approval of State Veterans’ Programs Reports

Motion: Mr. Cyprian, MAL, made a motion to approve the programs report.

Second: Mr. Taylor, Vice Chair, seconded the motion.

The body agreed; motion carried.

Questions/Discussion

Mr. Natali, DMVA PIRO: The Pennsylvania State Veterans Memorial at Indiantown Gap National Cemetery is having its 20th anniversary next month and we will also be celebrating that at the Veterans Day ceremony on November 7th. The memorial requires maintenance and upkeep. Cement in the forms allows for recesses throughout where water can freeze, and it has caused damage over the years. We are working through a \$3.5M capital improvement project right now, a big part of that is waterproofing to fix the damage. We do not need a motion, but for your information the memorial will look slightly different in the future as the waterproofing will slightly change the color.

Mr. Fidler, KPVA: Will there be anything to address the slickness on the surfaces after waterproofing so people do not fall?

Mr. Natali, DMVA PIRO: This is only the vertical surfaces, nothing anyone would ambulate on.

Mr. Hogan, TAL: Is there an avenue for making donations to the memorial?

Mr. Natali, DMVA PIRO: At the Department's website you can donate in any amount by credit card. You can also donate to the State Veterans Homes' activity funds at the same site. You can also mail checks and/or cash.

Committee Reports

Act 66 Committee

Mr. Rich Hudzinski

The committee has been meeting over the last few months with DMVA/PIRO management. We believe Act 66 is the most important benefit program that the department offers. It is a supplement to the Veterans Affairs system in Pennsylvania, meant to augment the county directors of Veterans Affairs. The committee has been focusing on a results-based accountability system using key performance indicator metrics. The idea is to get beyond production data in analyzing how successful the quality of services is and where to improve. Volume does not necessarily equate to success. How do we capture all the important duties of a Veterans Services Officer though? We want to investigate the notice of grant application process because that is the starting point for the Act 66 grant. We need an accounting system for data collection. We need DMV to lay out what its special desires are in the grant cycle. This is about us understanding a methodology of evaluation. We are also having round discussions of the pros and cons of cross-accreditation. There are different views on that and limitations in different veterans' organizations that discourage it, but there are exemptions as well. We also realize that Act 66 is a resource under PA VETConnect and we have not been fully integrated into that program. While PA VETConnect has been incorporated with the county directors, the Act 66 organizations still need to be included. Lastly, September 15th at 10:00 AM, various organizations will be at the capitol to assist veterans that work at the capitol with their benefits. It also provides a photo op for legislators interested in Veterans Affairs and that is good because it allows us to promote Act 66 programming.

Questions/Discussion

Mr. Slep, PASACDVA: The county directors are very open and willing to sit with the Act 66 organizations to see what more we can do to better the teamwork.

Mr. Hudzinski, VVA: Thank you. We will be sitting down and talking this year.

SVC RETX Committee

Mr. Justin Slep

The last time we met was July 27th and a report was submitted on that meeting. We discussed SB 578. The committee wanted to make an amendment to that bill before it leaves any committee. We talked about amending page two, lines 8-11 where we are concerned with the word "or" being taken out and replaced with the word "and." That would have an impact on veterans with Individual Unemployability (TDIU). We discussed reaching out to the SVC and DMVA general counsel about grandfathering in those veterans with TDIU if this bill were passed as written. We also talked about lines 22-26 and replacing the language of "killed

in action” with something along the lines of “death while in service.” Another item we discussed was that a lot of these bills have the financial need determination language built into them. Through working with DMVA and with guidance of general counsel, we concluded that the VA compensation we have talked about removing from the financial need determination can be done at the SVC-level. That does not need to be included in any bills or through constitutional amendments. We have the ability and authority to define what that financial need determination is. We believe at the committee that this is something the SVC should take under consideration and focus on removing VA compensation from the financial need determination. The General Assembly will be coming back September 27th on the House side, and the Senate on the 20th. HB 1815 introduced last week is similar to some of recommendations we have put forth, but it is not as comprehensive with The TDIU language and also the continuation of the exemption if a veteran is in nursing care.

Questions/Discussion

Mr. Petrovich, Chairman: As a county director, when the veteran comes in and wants to apply for a tax exemption, can you go through that process as to what a county looks at and where do you pass it?

Mr. Slep, PASACDVA: What we do, especially during COVID, is set up a virtual meeting for a consultation. I always take the first sheet of the application and we go over the checklist and all the documentation needed. We do not want to send in any application that's not fully developed. If they do not meet financial need, we go over the expenditures. We talked about the taxing periods and when and which tax return to utilize. Once we do that, we bring them back into the office we fill out the application and when we submit it to the state, we put it in order so that it correlates with checklist so they can adjudicate the claim within a reasonable amount of time. We also print out code sheets and pay screens from the VA.

Mr. Petrovich, Chairman: When they get that back from the state and it's approved, do you pass that on to the taxing authority? And do they have to approve it, or can they deny that veterans tax exemption?

Mr. Slep, PASACDVA: When we get the letters back, we ensure that we reach out to the applicant to make sure they got it in the mail, but we also get a courtesy copy from the state. They in turn deliver those letters to the taxing authority. We hold those documents in their internal files so we can keep an eye on the five-year mark. It's by county but I'm not aware of anyone who has been approved by the state and denied at the county level. I have never seen that.

Mr. Petrovich, Chairman: So, it *can* be disapproved by a county or local taxing authority? Or are they compelled by law to accept the decision of the state?

Mr. Slep, PASACDVA: I don't want to speak out of turn and I'm not going to comment on the law, but I have never been made aware of that happening. If the state denies an application though, the veteran can go back to appeal that denial at the county level, and I *have* seen counties approve the tax exemption for veterans denied by the state.

Mr. Jackson, MAL: It sounds to me like everything the county directors send up has gone through a very detailed process and it is basically a good claim. If that is the case, I do not quite understand why, in the pie chart, out of 1,836 applications there are 132 denied by financial need. I'm wondering why a county director would not pick up that someone does not have financial need? Secondly, 91 were denied because of ineligibility, no response for 84 (I am not sure what the COVID waiver is), and 197 were removed for eligibility change (I assume that is the 5-year review). How is this chart compatible with everything Justin tells us about the claims that go forward?

Mr. Slep, PASACDVA: To answer that question, we are not the decision-makers. It is the same as if we are filing claim with the VA, we are not the adjudicators. The counties are developing the claims as much as possible. There are cases where we have been able to work through challenging service periods, there could have been documentation received by DMVA staff in an application that was not developed enough. When it comes down to financial need, as DMVA staff works through the expenses some may or may not be allowable

under their rules. DMVA staff would have to answer that. Again though, we develop the claims but are not the adjudicators and I have to give these applications to the decision-makers to allow them to do that.

Mr. Cyprian, MAL: On some of the applications we already know they will be denied, but rather than sitting and arguing with them, we just go ahead and send the application in.

Mr. Slep, PASACDVA: Another area is that some organizations review retroactive compensation differently and the state will look at that and make the determination.

Mr. Petrovich, Chairman: I can only speak to the DAV process in Act 66. When a veteran comes in and you know they are going to be ineligible, but they insist on filing that claim, you just send it forward and the VA will come back with the denial. I think what you are saying is the same thing: for [RETX] you send it through so nobody is ever denied the availability of a claim or their due process.

Mr. Natali, DMVA PIRO: Absolutely, send it in and let our people look at it. The goal is a fully developed claim but that is not always possible, whatever the benefits. Good catch, Mr. Jackson, there is a long list of reasons why we may deny someone even though we do not like doing that. But there are rules and guidelines that we must follow, so we want to be 100 percent up front with everyone here and anybody who has a question on what we do that these are the reasons for the decisions we make.

Mr. Hudzinski, VVA: On your question about county taxing authorities implementing the decision, I thought that was settled several years ago and I have not heard of any incidents where that has not been observed. There was a problem a while back and I thought our office of counsel had settled that. The constitution makes it clear that it is the State Veterans Commission that makes the decision. If it is a question, then we may need to put something out or it may need to be written in the code or something of that nature. I think Mr. Jackson was trying to help with is it an issue of better training or coaching of the clients. If you forward something that you know is going to be rejected, it is administrative time on the behalf of DMVA and they have other things to do. The keyword is if they *insist*. There is no simple solution to this.

Mr. Petrovich, Chairman: I think for that issue and VA claims, you do counsel the veteran to say there is nothing here, but the word “insist” comes into play.

Mr. Cyprian, MAL: Mr. Hudzinski, how many claims have you filed for the tax exemption?

Mr. Hudzinski, VVA: None.

Mr. Cyprian, MAL: Exactly. So, why don't we leave it to the people that deal with them? Because you are trying to make policy on something you have never done. The taxing authority comes from the county commissioners and there have been plenty of applications, and Tioga County is one of them, where even if veterans do not meet the criteria for the SVC, they can pass a resolution where they can still get a tax exemption from them. There is an inference with these numbers that counties are not doing their jobs and that is not the case. My question would be that this is supposed to be a controlled form so that veterans must go through the count directors, so how many applications come in outside of the county directors?

Mr. Natali, DMVA PIRO: I cannot give you a hard and fast number on that, but occasionally we get calls from veterans who cannot get ahold of the county office for whatever reason, and they are frustrated because they want service. So, we service them, then we reach back to the county and let them know. We must take care of our customers just like you do, but I cannot give you a hard and fast number.

Mr. Cyprian, MAL: If we want to reference this report, let's just make sure we understand that it is not all county numbers coming in here. And, again, if you want to look at a great model for how a county can approve a tax exemption when the SVC has denied it, look at Tioga County. They have a great example of that.

Approval of RETX Committee Report

Motion: Mr. Cyprian, MAL, made a motion to approve the Act 66 Committee report.

Second: Mr. McDonald, AMVETS, seconded the motion.

The body agreed; motion carried.

SVC Legislative Committee

Mr. Charles Jackson

The legislative committee met, and we also know that the legislative committee of the PWVC is going to send out a list of their objectives: Act 66, the Veterans Transportation Network, Title 51 revision clarifying the relationship between the SVC and DMVA, Veterans Justice, and the constitutional amendment for the real estate tax exemption. We talked about these bills. The ones we looked at most closely is HB 1852 submittable the other one was HB 910. Both bills have strong points, but yet both of them could use a little of tweaking. In addition, both bills have decisions on More time service and how much disability at cetera. So, what we're going to do is look at these two bills and write up proposed letter to the committee on Veterans Affairs and emergency preparedness where both belts have been sent. We are going to make some comments on how to strengthen these bills and ask if we can have a joint meeting between the legislators and the SVC. We are going to put those things together and present them in the form of draft letters. Justin has already mentioned that his committee has certain strong feelings about VA compensation and things like that. So, we're going to produce draft letters to be included in the read-ahead material for the next SVC meeting, said the commissioners will have final say over what comes out of here under the chairman's signature.

Questions/Discussions

Mr. Durand, DMVA PPL: DMVA has been working with the RETX Committee on language and we would like to work with the legislative committee as well to make sure that we are all adjoined with what we are looking for in the language. We have been working with the RETX Committee for almost two years. The bills are not inclusive of any input from DMVA. Those are from those legislators with input from their constituents. If we can work together, we can work together to try to get the RETX language and bills passed.

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

Ms. Constance Snavely

Our committee is continuing to follow up on the approved guidance for flag holders at local cemeteries, recommendations for changes to the county code, and recommendations to add the approved flag holders to the DMVA website. Additionally, our committee is continuing to participate in the DMVA's working groups on pensions and honor guards. Other than that, we continue to assist DMVA with requests for information on issues with local cemeteries and honor guards.

Questions/Discussions

None.

Approval of Pensions/Relief/Grave Marking/State Military Cemetery Committee Report

Motion: Mr. Jackson, MAL, made a motion to approve the Pension and Grave Marker report.

Second: Mr. Hogan, TAL, seconded the motion.

The body agreed; motion carried.

Member-at-Large Committee

Mr. Sam Petrovich

The committee has met during the last few months and we got to the finish line and submitted three names through [Mr. Durand, DMVA PPL], which he can tell us the status of at this point.

Questions/Discussion

Mr. Durand, DMVA PPL: Members-at-large nominations were approved by General Schindler and are on the way to the governor for final approval.

Mr. Petrovich, Chairman: Thanks. I know we all learned the lesson and now we do have the terms down pat.

OLD BUSINESS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

VISN 4

Mr. Tim Liezert

Mr. David Cowgill, VISN-4 Communications Director, presented on Mr. Liezert's behalf.

Leadership Update

Don Koenig, VA Pittsburgh Director has been detailed to temporarily serve VHA in the Central Office as a Special Advisor to the USH for Integrated Veterans Care. He was asked to lead the Integrated Veterans Care transformation implementation, clarifying roles and responsibilities for accessing care coordination, and providing enterprise coordination across direct and community care access functions.

Kevin Amick, the Butler Director has been detailed to Pittsburgh to serve as their Medical Center Director. Sharon Coyle, Nurse Executive at Butler is serving as their Director.

Wilmington hired Dr. Pamela LeDeaux as their Chief of Staff. She started on July 19th.

Barb Forsha, deputy director of VA Pittsburgh continues to serve as the acting director of the Clarksburg VA.

We continue to recruit for a new chief of staff for the Butler and Altoona VAs.

National Veterans Wheelchair Games

With the Paralyzed Veterans of America, VA recently co-hosted the 40th National Veterans Wheelchair Games in New York City, August 7-14. This event is the world's largest annual wheelchair sports event solely for U.S. military veterans with spinal cord injuries, amputations, multiple sclerosis, or other central neurological conditions who require a wheelchair for athletic competition. The event demonstrates the unstoppable character of veterans and seeks to foster wider respect for all people with disabilities. In an effort to ensure a safe and COVID-19 free environment, athletes, coaches and attendees were COVID-19 tested daily and monitored closely throughout their stay.

Patient Experience Innovation Award

Congratulations to the VISN 4 facilities who received awards during the recent VA Patient Experience Symposium:

Erie VAMC won the Patient Experience Innovation Award for their "Care Closer to Home" project! This award was decided by a panel of VA patient experience professionals, as well as by the votes of thousands of VA employees.

James E. Van Zandt Altoona VAMC won the award for Best Overall Patient Experience in a level III facility, and Lebanon VAMC won the award for Best Overall Patient Experience in a level II facility. Both of these awards were based off of All Employee Survey and patient satisfaction (i.e. SHEP) scores.

These awards are an indication of the Veteran-centric culture at these facilities.

COVID-19 Vaccine – Update

The pandemic is not over, and critical months lie ahead.

Cases are emerging at their highest rate in six months as the Delta variant continues to tear across the country. Many hospitals in the South are overwhelmed, with more cases identified in Florida, Louisiana and Mississippi

than at any previous point of the pandemic. At the same time, reports of new cases have started to level off in Missouri, the first state to endure a major summer surge. In VHA facilities, inpatient admissions are increasing nationally, as is the proportion of beds occupied by COVID-19 Veteran patients. The age distribution of inpatients continues to shift towards younger Veterans. Deaths have so far been increasing more slowly than cases, as more vulnerable Veterans 65 and older have been fully vaccinated.

Veterans deserve a fully vaccinated workforce and employees, who have given so much during this pandemic, deserve a safe workplace. The Secretary's announcement on August 13th expands the previous vaccine requirements to include psychologists, pharmacists, social workers, nursing assistants, physical therapists, respiratory therapists, peer specialists, medical support assistants, engineers, housekeepers and other VHA clinical and administrative employees, who work in or travel to VHA locations who have the potential for direct or indirect exposure to patients or infectious materials. The expansion also includes volunteers, contractors, and trainees including students, residents, and fellows.

On August 12th, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) authorized a third dose of COVID-19 vaccine for people with moderate to severe immunocompromise who received the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna vaccines. There is no third dose recommended for those who have received the Janssen COVID-19 vaccine at this time. Other fully vaccinated individuals do not need a third dose right now. The need for and timing of COVID-19 third doses for the rest of the population have not been established.

It's never been easier for Veterans and their eligible spouses, beneficiaries, and caregivers to get vaccinated.

Caregiver Support Update

VISN 4 continues to do well at processing applications in a thorough and timely manner. PGCSS (Program of General Caregiver Services) are being offered robustly at each facility. All facilities have been planning or have hosted their Annual Caregiver and Family Resources Fair for families and caregiver and the Caregiver Summit for VA and community partners. I encourage you to reach out to their local facility Caregiver Support Program to find out the specific dates if you would like to participate in either or both events. There will be a mix of virtual and in person events based on the guidelines set by the facility. The CSP will welcome your participation! And in the future, there is a CSP Events Tab on the [Caregiver.va.gov](https://www.caregiver.va.gov) website where you can access the list of events directly.

Customer Service Update

Nationally, VA's trust score over the last 90 days was 90.1. In VISN 4, our trust score over the last 90 days was 92.5, which remains the third highest VISN in the nation. The top 5 compliment themes over the last 90 days were interactions with staff, quality of care, satisfaction with specialty care, interactions with staff, and general care compliments from Vietnam Veterans.

Connected Care Update

My VA Images

My VA Images is a secure web application that allows Veterans to send images and videos to a VA provider while avoiding the time and trouble of traveling to the clinic for a follow up. Once a VA provider authorizes use of the app as part of a Veteran's care plan, the Veteran will receive an email request to submit photos or videos with a link to the My VA Images app. The app will guide the Veteran through taking the required photos and/or videos and remind them when the images are due. Using a smart mobile device or personal computer, the Veteran can avoid travel and wait times while receiving expert health care for specified needs from the VA provider anywhere, anytime.

Features of My VA Images:

- Receive care from your VA provider in the convenience of your own home or on the go
- Securely upload requested photos and videos for review by your VA provider

- Respond to follow-up requests for images and videos from your VA provider
- Send updated information to your provider about your care and condition
- Review comments and guidance from your VA provider about images and video submitted

Note: My VA Images use is initiated by the VA provider. Veterans should contact their VA Provider to determine if My VA Images is the right tool for their care.

Heart Failure Hub

The VISN 4 Clinical Resource Hub is currently piloting a Heart Failure Hub to supplement the care Veterans receive with the goal of early intervention to reduce hospitalizations. The program, which will be trialed at the Butler and Wilmington VA Medical Centers, centers on close collaboration with the sites' Home Telehealth programs. The data collected by Home Telehealth nurses will be monitored by an interdisciplinary team, including registered nurses, pharmacists, nurse practitioners, and physicians. In a traditional model of care, Primary Care Providers (PCPs) would be notified by Home Telehealth if Veterans appeared to be experiencing the onset of an exacerbation of their heart failure. PCPs are put in the position of analyzing the Home Telehealth data and making referrals for these individuals while also juggling their other clinical duties. Plus, if they needed input from a Cardiology team, Veterans may experience scheduling delays, which even if minor, could mean the difference between a hospitalization and getting to remain at home. This new program eliminates these delays and assists PCPs with the management of their heart failure patients by putting Veterans in direct, regular contact with a Cardiology team. It is hoped that following this initial pilot, all VISN 4 facilities will have this program available to them.

Questions/Discussion

Mr. Cyprian, MAL: Do you know the new maximum dollar figure available for Caregiver Support?

Mr. Cowgill, VISN-4: I do not know, but I will get back to you about that.

Mr. Cyprian, MAL: And, under the My VA Images, is there any way to integrate that with My HealtheVet?

Mr. Cowgill, VISN-4: Great question. I do not know the answer to that but let me take it back to our staff.

Good of The Order/Announcements

Mr. Brady, MCL: We received a document about the Veterans Service Officer grant program and there seems to be a conflict. On the first page it says applications are due November 1st, but elsewhere in the document it says the application is due October 1st.

Mr. Gilliland, DMVA PIRO: November 1st.

Mr. Brooker, MAL: There are two places of hallowed ground in Pennsylvania, one is Gettysburg Battlefield and the other is the Flight 93 National Memorial. Today at 5:30 the Notre Dame Clubs of Greensburg, Uniontown, and Central PA will be holding a Mass of Solemn Remembrance at the Flight 93 National Memorial. I would invite any commissioners. We are anticipating that several family members and friends of people who died on Flight 93 will be joining us. At 7:30, the Friends of Flight 93 will be holding a luminaria event at the memorial. The Johnstown Symphony will be there to provide musical accompaniment.

Mr. Hudzinski, VVA: Are you going to make the announcement of the passage of SB 484, which dealt with us having a member on the Long-Term Care Council?

Mr. Petrovich, Chairman: Yes, that legislation was passed, and we will be the 24th member on the council. It names the chairman of the SVC as the member. I am asking you to look into your organizations for someone with that type of background to represent the SVC as my designee. You can contact Greg Holler and he will contact me to move forward. We need a name back within the next two weeks along with a resume. Please get the word out.

Mr. Sylcox, Office of State Senator Steffan: We were pleased to get SB 484 passed along and look forward to having the State Veterans Commission having representation on the Pennsylvania Long-Term Care Council. For the legislative committee, SB 578, that is the RETX constitutional amendment.... the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee did take that up and it was reported out of committee. It will be going to the Senate Appropriations Committee when we return this fall. Penn State University unveiled its POW/MIA chair of honor. They did that in honor of Major Lewis Smith, a Vietnam Veteran who was presumed dead. This coming Wednesday from 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM we will be with sponsoring the Veterans Service Officer day at the capitol. At 10:30 AM on Wednesday we will be holding a press conference to highlight the role of VSOs. On Monday October 25th from 10:30 to 12:30 PM the committee will hold a hearing on veterans' services in Pennsylvania. There will be more information to come on that.

Mr. Petrovich, Chairman: If you would like to get something on the agenda for the next meeting, please get it to Greg Holler.

Motion to Approve the New Agenda Format

Motion: Mr. Hogan, TAL, made a motion to approve the new agenda format.

Second: Mr. McDonald, AMVETS, seconded the motion.

The body agreed; motion carried.

Next Meeting

October 8, 2021, 10:00 AM
Forum: Arrowheads Community Center, FIG

Adjournment

Chairman Petrovich retired the colors and adjourned the meeting at 11:55 AM.

The minutes of this meeting are respectfully submitted by:

Maureen Weigl BG (PA)
Deputy Adjutant General
Veterans Affairs



STATE VETERANS COMMISSION MEETING
October 8, 2021





DMVA MILITARY UPDATE



CURRENT MOBILIZATIONS & TOTAL DEPLOYMENTS



PAARNG Current Deployments

MDATE	MSAD	UNIT	OPN	PAX	MISSION	Projected Return Date
18 FEB 21	21 FEB 21	108 ASMC	EDI 20-22	78	T10, 12304B	18 DEC 21
13 JUN 21	15 JUN 21	1-104 CAV	MFO-21-23	204	T10, 12304B	22 APR 22
ARNG Soldiers at MOB/DEMOB Sites				111	Various Missions	Various based on tour
Various Individual MOB Soldiers				2	Various Missions	Various based on tour
Total PAARNG Deployed: 395						

PAANG Current Deployments

Unit	Opn	Pax
193 SOW	OFS-OIR-OSS, OAR	4/12
111 ATKW	IPR (HS), OFS-OIR-OSS, OAR	36/30/28
171 ARW	Alert Status (HS), OAR	37/4
Total PAANG Deployed		151

Total PANG Deployed

Legislation of Interest.

- SB 96 (Robinson) PN 75) Amends Title 75 (Vehicles), in registration of vehicles, increasing optional contributions to the Veterans' Trust Fund during driver's license issue and renewal from \$3 to \$5, vehicle registration, increases VTF contribution from \$6 to \$10. Comp: HB 556 (O'Mara) Identical, **Governor Signed Act 55.**
- SB 550 (Robinson) *Comp: HB 202 (O'Neal) Identical; HB 233 (Warren) Identical.*- Amends Second Class County Code, in special powers and duties of the county, further providing for flags to decorate graves. **Final Passage House 6/23/2021. Awaiting First Consideration. Received by House VAEP.**
- HB 995 (Kaufer) - Amends Title 51 (Military Affairs), in Department of Military Affairs, establishing the Veterans' Outreach and Support Network Program. Provides for a program that will improve the health and wellbeing of veterans and the families of veterans through community engagement and consistent network communication and organize participants to cooperate with network partners to provide for proactive solutions to address the problems faced by veterans. **Final Passage in House 6/09/2021. Awaiting First Consideration. Received in Senate VAEP; (Seeking an Amendment in the Senate)**
- HB 164 (Staats) Act amending Title 51 (Military Affairs), providing that a licensed funeral director, funeral entity or cemetery company shall, within 96 hours of receipt of the remains of a deceased serviceperson, notify the county director of veteran's affairs of a deceased serviceperson having legal residence in the county at the time of death and provide the family of the deceased serviceperson with the contact information for the county director of veteran's affairs. **Final Passage House 6/09/2021. Received by Senate VAEP.**
- HB 1421 (Thomas) Amends Title 51 (Military Affairs), in Department of Military Affairs, providing that the department may request the Pennsylvania National Guard for assistance in burials and provides that if a contract is executed the department shall pay an amount not exceeding \$250. **Final Passage House 6/09/2021. Received by Senate VAEP.**
- HB 1057 (Hickernell) Amends Title 51 (Military Affairs), in State Veterans' Commission and Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans' Affairs, further providing for State Veterans' Commission. **Final Passage House 6/09/2021. Received by Senate VAEP.**
- HB 491 (Boback) Amends Title 51 (Military Affairs) establishing Chapter 99 regarding Veterans' Benefit Payment Exclusion. One hundred percent of a veterans' benefit payment may not be included as income for any commonwealth program. **Final passage in House 3/24/2021. Received in Senate VAEP.**

Legislation of Interest.

- SB 455 (Bartolotta) Amends Title 51 (Military Affairs), in veteran-owned small businesses, The legislation provides for eligibility, issuance and administration of the logotypes and the system for verification. Money may be utilized from the Veterans' Trust Fund to establish the logotypes and a system for verification. Violation of this act is a misdemeanor of the third degree if the individual fraudulently holds the logotype. Further provides the full amount of each fine collected for a violation shall be deposited into the Veterans' Trust Fund. **Awaiting 3rd consideration. Rereferred to Senate Approps.**
- SB 272 (Mastriano) Amends Title 30 (Fish), in fishing licenses, providing free resident fishing licenses for first responders who have a disability incurred in the line of duty that prevents substantial employment and meets certain qualifications. **Awaiting 3rd consideration. Rereferred to Senate Approps.**
- SB 150 (Ward) *Comp: HB 477 (Pisciottano)* Amends Title 51 (Military Affairs), in veterans' pensions and benefits, further providing for blind veteran's pension and for amputee and paralyzed veteran's pension by increasing the compensation from \$150 to \$180. **Awaiting 2nd consideration. Rereferred to S Approp.**
- SB 578 (Bartolotta) Joint Resolution proposing an amendment to the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, in taxation and finance, further providing for exemptions and special provisions. **Awaiting Second Consideration. Set on Senate Calendar 6/25/2021. (Companion in the House (Sainato)? Does this have the SVC/PWVC language complete?)**
- HB 1427 (Boback) Amends Title 51 (Military Affairs), in Veterans' Organizations, providing for grants to veterans' service officer programs and for the transfer of \$1 million under the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 to the department for that purpose. **Awaiting 2nd consideration.**
- HB 1389 (Sainato) - Amends Title 51 (Military Affairs), in Veterans Trust Fund and the transfer of \$1 million under the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 to the department for that purpose. **Awaiting 2nd consideration.**
- HB 1055 (Webster) Amends "An act to authorize the recorder of deeds in the several counties of this Commonwealth to record the discharges of all honorably discharged officers and soldiers," providing that a veteran's records of discharge shall be inaccessible to anyone other than the veteran or an immediate family member or authorized agent for 85 years. **Awaiting 2nd consideration.**

Federal Legislation

H.R.1448 — PAWS for Veterans Therapy Act. This bill implements a program and a policy related to service dog therapy for veterans. Specifically, the bill requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to implement a five-year pilot program to assess the effectiveness of addressing post-deployment mental health and post-traumatic stress disorder through a method using veterans to train service dogs for veterans with disabilities. The bill also authorizes the VA to provide service dogs to veterans with mental illnesses, regardless of whether they have a mobility impairment.

Rep. Stivers, Steve [R-OH-15] (Introduced 03/01/2021) Cosponsors: (317)

Latest Action: **Presented to the President – 08/20/2021**

S.894 - Hire Veteran Health Heroes Act of 2021

This bill requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to consult with the Department of Defense to identify members of the Armed Forces in health care occupations who are separating from the Armed Forces. The VA must refer interested members to a recruiter for consideration of open positions in the member's specialty and geography of interest.

Sen. Braun, Mike [R-IN] (Introduced 03/23/2021) Cosponsors: (1)

Latest Action: **Passed the Senate – 07/21/2021**

S.189 - Veterans' Compensation Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act of 2021 This bill provides that whenever there is a cost-of-living increase in benefits for Social Security recipients, the Department of Veterans Affairs shall increase by the same percentage the amounts payable for veterans' disability compensation, additional compensation for dependents, the clothing allowance for certain disabled veterans, and dependency and indemnity compensation for surviving spouses and children.

Sen. Thune, John [R-SD] (Introduced 02/03/2021) Cosponsors: (9)

Latest Action: **Passed the Senate – 07/21/2021**

S.89 - Ensuring Survivor Benefits during COVID-19 Act of 2021 This bill requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to obtain a medical opinion that determines whether a service-connected disability was the principal or contributory cause of death for a veteran who died from COVID-19.

Sen. Sinema, Kyrsten [D-AZ] (Introduced 01/28/2021) Cosponsors: (17)

Latest Action: **Passed the Senate – 07/21/2021**

Federal Legislation

S.1031 This bill requires the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to conduct a study to assess whether there are disparities associated with race and ethnicity with respect to (1) compensation benefits administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), (2) disability ratings determined by the VA, and (3) the rejection of fully developed claims for VA benefits. The GAO must also develop recommendations to facilitate better data collection on such disparities associated with race and ethnicity. Within one year, the GAO must brief Congress on the initial results of the study. The GAO must also submit a final report on the study following the briefing.

Sen. Warnock, Raphael G. [D-GA] (Introduced 03/25/2021) Cosponsors: (6)

Latest Action: **Passed the Senate – 08/06/2021**

S.1095 - Colonel John M. McHugh Tuition Fairness for Survivors Act of 2021 to provide for the disapproval by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs of courses of education offered by public institutions of higher learning that do not charge veterans the in-State tuition rate for purposes of Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance Program.

Sen. Moran, Jerry [R-KS] (Introduced 04/13/2021) Cosponsors: (4)

Latest Action: **Passed the Senate – 06/24/2021**

H.R.2494 This bill establishes the Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration to administer economic opportunity assistance programs for veterans and their dependents and survivors. Specifically, the Veterans Economic Opportunity and Transition Administration must administer the following Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) programs: vocational rehabilitation and employment programs, educational assistance programs, veterans' housing loan and related programs, the Transition Assistance Program, and the database of small business concerns owned and controlled by veterans. Prior to the transfer of administrative responsibilities, the bill requires the VA to certify that (1) the transition of the provision of services will not negatively affect the provision of such services to veterans, and (2) such services are ready to be transferred.

Rep. Wenstrup, Brad R. [R-OH-2] (Introduced 04/13/2021) Cosponsors: (2)

Latest Action: **Passed the House – 05/18/2021**

PVH Current Licensure Status

Regulatory Agency	DVVH	GMVC	HVH	PSSH	SEVC	SWVC
Dates of Last Inspection						
PA Department of Health	02/2020 Full Standard Licensure Status	02/2021 Full Standard Licensure Status	09/2021 TBD Status	07/2021 Full Standard Licensure Status	07/2021 Full Standard Licensure Status	05/2021 Full Standard Licensure Status
PA Department of Human Services	N/A	N/A	11/2019 Full Standard Licensure Status	09/2021 TBDStatus	06/2021 Full Standard Licensure Status	N/A
US Department of Veterans Affairs	12/2020 Provisional Certification Status	09/2021 TBD Status	02/2021 Provisional Certification Status	04/2021 Provisional Certification Status	02/2021 Provisional Certification Status	02/2021 Provisional Certification Status

Each DMVA Pennsylvania Veterans' Home is currently licensed by the PA Department of Health, PA Department of Human Services and certified by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. HVH, PSSH and SEVC have a Personal Care program.

Last updated: 09-21-21

BUREAU OF VETERANS' HOMES



Resident COVID-19 Update

Residents		01	02	03	04	05	06	07	09	10
Home	Data Date	# of Residents with S/S of COVID-19	# of Residents Currently Positive in Facility	# of Residents Waiting Test Results	# of Residents in Hospital for COVID-19 Reasons	# of Total Residents Tested	General Resident Population Testing, Enter round # and S-Started C-Complete	# of Residents Positive for COVID-19 Cumulative	# of Residents Recovered	# of Residents That Expired with a Positive COVID-19 Status.
DVWH	9/22/2021	0	0	2	0	3429	49-C	79	61	18
GMVC	9/22/2021	0	0	0	0	8340	59-C	64	45	19
HVH	9/22/2021	0	0	131	0	7994	42-C	129	111	20
PSSH	9/22/2021	0	0	0	3	702	63-C	135	104	19
SEVC	9/22/2021	1	2	173	0	10711	57-C	128	66	42
SWVC	9/22/2021	5	5	11	0	8287	45-C	33	26	3
Total:		6	7	317	3	39463		568	413	121

As of 22 Sep 21

> community > commonwealth

> country

BUREAU OF VETERANS' HOMES



Staff COVID-19 Update

Staff		01	02	03	04	06	07
Home	Data Date	# of Staff Currently Out for COVID-19 Reasons	# of Staff Currently Positive	# of Staff Waiting Test Results	# of Total Staff Tested	# of Staff Tested Positive for COVID-19 Cumulative	# of Staff Returned to Work Cumulative
DVVH	9/22/2021	0	0	43	8958	84	202
GMVC	9/22/2021	0	0	0	15328	68	96
HVH	9/22/2021	18	7	6	26506	187	1236
PSSH	9/22/2021	5	0	0	10371	87	290
SEVC	9/22/2021	4	1	1289	16190	158	361
SWVC	9/22/2021	9	8	150	16804	91	369
Total:		36	16	1488	94157	675	2554

As of 22 Sep 21

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> country

COVID-19 Vaccination Update

		Vaccinations - Residents/Staff						
		Census	Fully Vaccinated	% Fully Vaccinated	Partially Vaccinated	Not Vaccinated	* Booster Rec'd	% Booster Rec'd
DVVH	Residents	106	104	98%	1	1	0	0.0%
	Staff	238	206	87%	9	28	0	0.0%
GMVC	Residents	139	138	99%	0	1	5	3.6%
	Staff	308	281	91%	4	23	7	2.3%
HVH	Residents	227	198	87%	1	28		0.0%
	Staff	550	245	45%	15	290		0.0%
PSSH	Residents	141	140	99%	0	1	5	3.5%
	Staff	227	141	62%	0	86	2	0.9%
SEVC	Residents	181	179	99%	0	2		0.0%
	Staff	360	241	67%	7	112		0.0%
SWVC	Residents	153	148	97%	0	5	12	7.8%
	Staff	311	218	70%	8	85	2	0.6%

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/19MpLoPxayE1MDwQJYCZxISN64V4FJSJPGzfvVBb5Mw/edit#gid=1511961664>

Bureau Activities



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AND VETERANS AFFAIRS

- **BVH/PIRO Collaboration** - Our accredited Veteran Services Officers with the Office of Veterans Affairs (BVH & PIRO) worked together to find increases in benefits. This is a routine process in providing ongoing case management for our Veterans and families within the Pennsylvania Veterans Homes.
- **Title 43 Regulatory Update Project** – We are conducting a regulatory review of the application and adjudication procedures for our state veterans’ benefits programs codified in 43 Pa. Code. The review follows a detailed process governed by the Regulatory Review Act and overseen by the Independent Regulatory Review Commission. We have included stakeholders from across the PA military and veterans’ community in our working group, including representatives of the State Veterans Commission and several veterans service organizations, the PA State Association of County Directors of Veterans Affairs, the PA National Guard, and cross-programmatic support from the DMVA staff, as well as DHS legal staff. The review is expected to continue through 2022, and a regular five-year review process will be established.
- **Veterans Centric Fairweather Lodges** - The Fairweather Lodge Program helps people reintegrate themselves into the community. The goal is to provide emotional support, a place to live, and employment for its’ members. The program was developed by Dr. George Fairweather in California in 1963 as a result of extensive experimental research DMVA provides referrals and support, as well as system linkages and knowledge of the veteran culture. There currently two veteran-centric lodges in Pennsylvania (Venango & Lawrence Counties). There are a total of 43 Lodges operating in 21 Counties.
- **Stakeholder Engagement** - We realize that there is no way we can successfully serve veterans without the cooperation of our government partners and community partners, especially those who are on the ground level and work every day to improve the lives of veterans. We are taking a positive and collaborative approach in all we do. As veteran advocates we are holistically connecting Pennsylvania’s service members, veterans, and their families to local, state, and federal benefits, programs, and recognition they have earned. DMVA and The American Legion, Department of Pennsylvania, have signed a cross-accreditation agreement to better serve the veterans of Pennsylvania.

- Presentation of PA VETConnect as a Best Practice at the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs Conference (September 2021). Presentation was well received.
- Through collaboration with veterans' advocates, PA VETConnect reached **over 270,000 veterans and their family members** in SFY 2020-21.
- Ensured **13,089 connections** during SFY 2020-21 and increased approved resources in the PA VETConnect I&R Tool from **799 to 1,613**.
- Our current focus is serving veterans advocates who are directly engaging with veterans in order to meet the immediate need. Through these efforts we have served **1,145** veterans and/or families by providing direct services and following up with advocates as required this past SFY.
- The RPOC in Northeastern PA attended the Elder Justice Day for Pike County Aging and spoke to the Seniors regarding veterans' affairs. After her sharing with the Seniors that if they were a veteran or the spouse of a veteran there are benefits that can be accessed that they may not know about, a large group of seniors met back at the table where the RPOC had been handing out information. The RPOC provided more specific information and assistance as well as her contact information to assist further. The group was so grateful that the RPOC joined us at the "Elder Justice Day."
- The RPOC in Northwestern PA was contacted by the Clearfield County Veteran Affairs Director and asked if knew of any non-profit or an organization that could help a small local VFW find funding for a new flagpole. On a call with the RPOC from Region 5, she mentioned a conversation she was having with a statewide organization that does small funding to local organizations in need. I told her of the situation at the VFW in Clearfield, and asked for the contact, which she provided. Making that connection indeed paid off. The organization was able to fund the flagpole along with a new American Flag and Prisoner of War flag for the VFW. The VFW members were thankful to have advocates on their side to find such resources for their situation.
- The RPOC in Southeastern PA was contacted by a Senator's office in reference to a veteran that had been evicted and was homeless. RPOC spoke to the veteran, Utility Emergency Services Fund (UESF) and the Veteran Multiservice Center and together they were able to get the veteran housing.
- The RPOC in Southwestern PA is currently collaborating with the VA in establishing a TWV (Together with Veterans) Program in both Greene and Cambria County. These two counties will be the second and third counties in the Commonwealth with TWV Programs funded by the VA Office of Rural Health to reduce and ultimately end rural veteran suicide. TWV partnerships develop a unique suicide prevention action plan based on specific community strengths and addressing community needs. The Region 2 RPOC has become an integral part of the TWV Steering Committee in both counties. In addition, she is assisting Washington County in establishing a Suicide Prevention Task Force.

Veteran Suicide Prevention Efforts



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AND VETERANS AFFAIRS

DMVA continues to collaborate to ensure that veteran suicide remains a high priority within the commonwealth.

- Pennsylvania is engaged at the national level with VA/SAMHSA and the **Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide among service members, veterans, and their families (SMVF)** led by Mr. Rick Hamp, Special Assistant to the Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans Affairs.
- Working with the Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs (DDAP) we were able to capture \$2M in **State Opioid Response (SOR) Grant funds**. These funds are being distributed in the form of sub-grants to community partners who to address the co-occurring conditions that complicate and often lead to suicide. These SOR funds will benefit SMVF in all 67 counties.
- We are collaborating with the UPMC Program, Evaluation and Research Unit (PERU) to implement the **Northwest Suicide Prevention Program**. The region consists of 15 counties in Region 1 (\$3.7M grant over a 5-year performance period).
- **Together with Veterans Northeastern Pennsylvania (TWV NEPA)** - In region 4, DMVA is working alongside local and regional behavioral health professionals, veteran advocates, local government as well as VA staff on developing a grass-roots rural public health initiative to address veteran suicide prevention in communities in Carbon County and the NE PA region, which faces some of the highest rates for veterans' suicide within the Commonwealth.
 - The TWV initiative was developed through the U.S. Department Veteran Affairs, VHA Office of Rural Health. This initiative brings three years of seed funding through the VA to develop a robust veteran-focused suicide prevention outreach program. Each of these initiatives will provide us with valuable information and best practices that we will be able to export throughout the commonwealth and share nationally.

OVA / VSO GRANT PROGRAM SUMMARY



FY 21 - 22	
Claims, Compensation and Pension Summary	
Year to Date Claims Submitted	Year to Date Value of Awards
1,894	\$8,406,035.00
Year to Date Claims Submitted Previous Year 20 - 21	Year to Date Value of Awards Previous Year 20 - 21
1,012	\$4,475,498.00

FY 20 - 21	
Claims, Compensation and Pension Summary	
Year to Date Claims Submitted	Year to Date Value of Awards
1,012	\$4,475,498.00
Year to Date Claims Submitted Previous Year 19 - 20	Year to Date Value of Awards Previous Year 19 - 20
2,397	\$9,236,043.00

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

VSO Grant Program —13 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
FY 20-21	11,099	\$3,189,000	\$121,868,978	\$1: \$37
TOTAL	237,692	\$28,909,753	\$2,133,871,064	\$1: \$85

**ROI is \$1/\$85
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 5 organizations involved in this program employ an average of 55 employees.

Outreach Monthly Overview



Outreach Statistics

	1st Qtr	2nd Qtr	3rd Qtr	4th Qtr	Year to Date
Outreach Events Supported	10	0	0	0	10
Mobile Outreach Van Events	8	0	0	0	8
Veteran Interactions	271	0	0	0	271
Claim referrals to County Directors and Service Organizations	33	0	0	0	33
Claim referrals to other state, county and local organizations assisting Veterans	8	0	0	0	8
Health Care Enrollment Referrals	32	0	0	0	32
Number of Veterans Registry Cards distributed	54	0	0	0	54
Number of Veterans Registered	0	0	0	0	0
Number of Veterans paper form	0	0	0	0	0
Number of Veterans who opted out of the Veterans Registry	0	0	0	0	0

As of 31 August 2021

> community > commonwealth > country

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	\$15.00	\$30.00	\$870.00	58	\$52,350.00	3,490
PA Monuments LP	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	0	\$0.00	0
HOV Motorcycle License Plate	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$45.00	3	\$3,315.00	221
HOV Women's License Plate	\$0.00	\$15.00	\$420.00	28	\$1,455.00	97
Checkoff & Donations	\$23,865.10	\$66,514.01	\$266,137.08		\$12,093,539.55	
Veterans Trust Fund Online Donations	\$0.00	\$405.00	\$405.00		\$5,703.00	
SECA Donations	\$0.00	\$535.78	\$535.78		\$11,751.88	
Interest	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$193.79		\$178,871.27	
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 20-21)	\$8,176.00	\$8,176.00	\$39,285.32		\$781,109.32	
VTF Grant NOFA (SFY 19-20)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$800,000.00	
VTF Grant NOFA (SFY 18-19)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$780,137.46	
VTF Grant NOFA (SFY 17-18)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$763,749.14	
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	\$13,932.00	\$30,059.00	\$115,813.00		4,899,850.32	
Working Balance	\$1,772.10	\$29,264.79	\$113,508.33		\$2,456,588.67	3,808

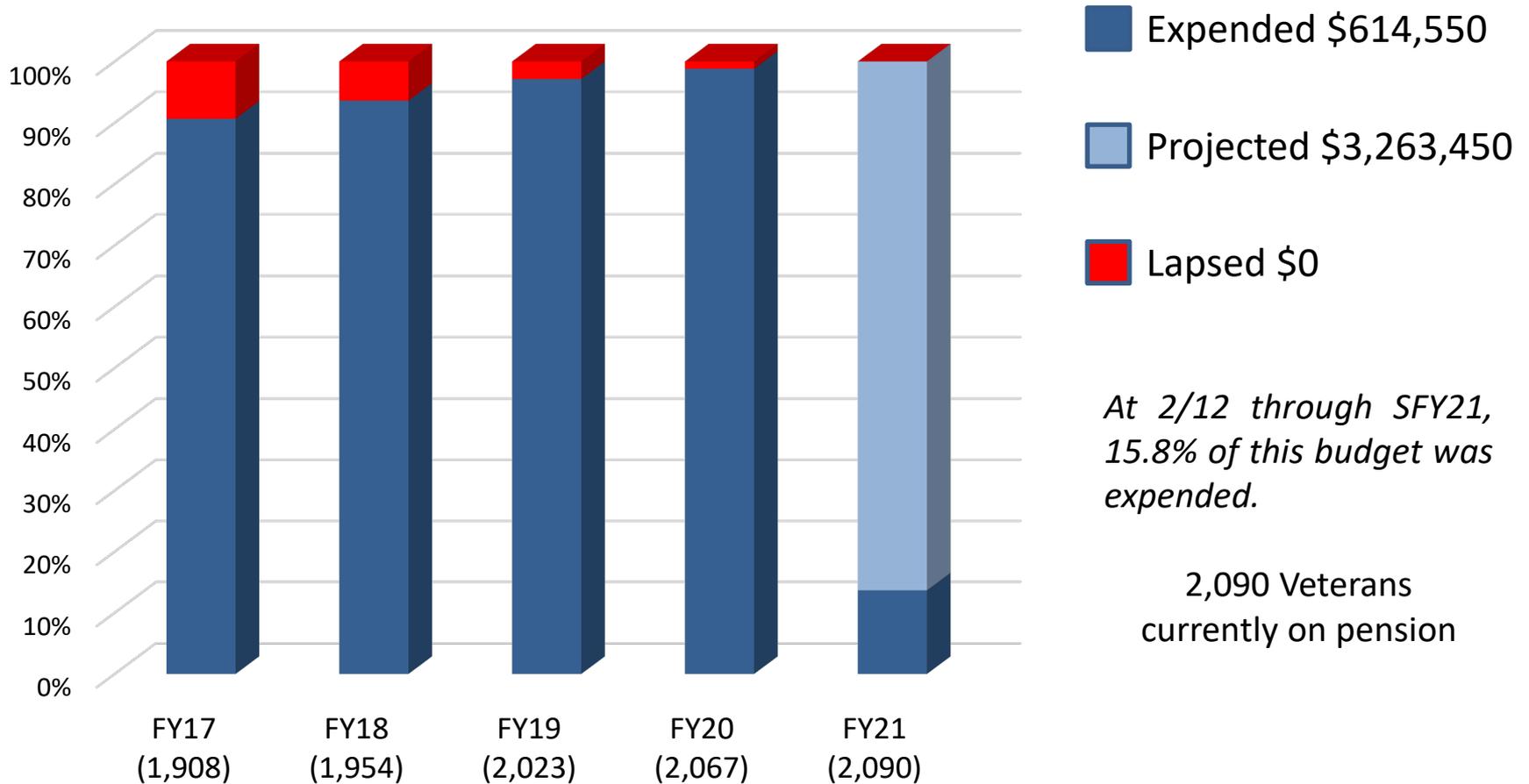
As of 15 September 2021

> community > commonwealth > country

AMPUTEE & PARALYZED VETERANS' PENSION



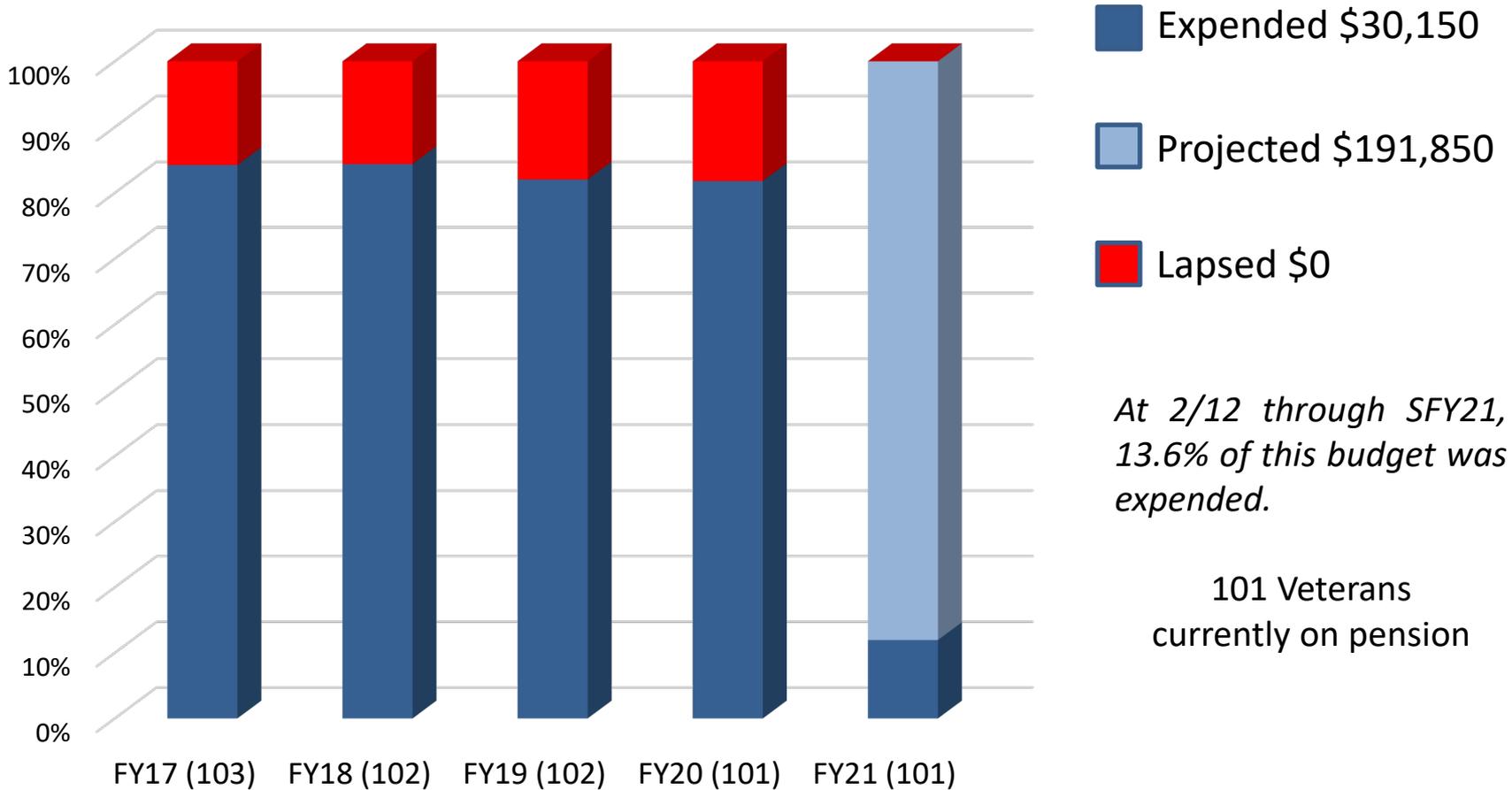
\$3,878,000



BLIND VETERANS' PENSION



\$222,000



- Expended \$30,150
- Projected \$191,850
- Lapsed \$0

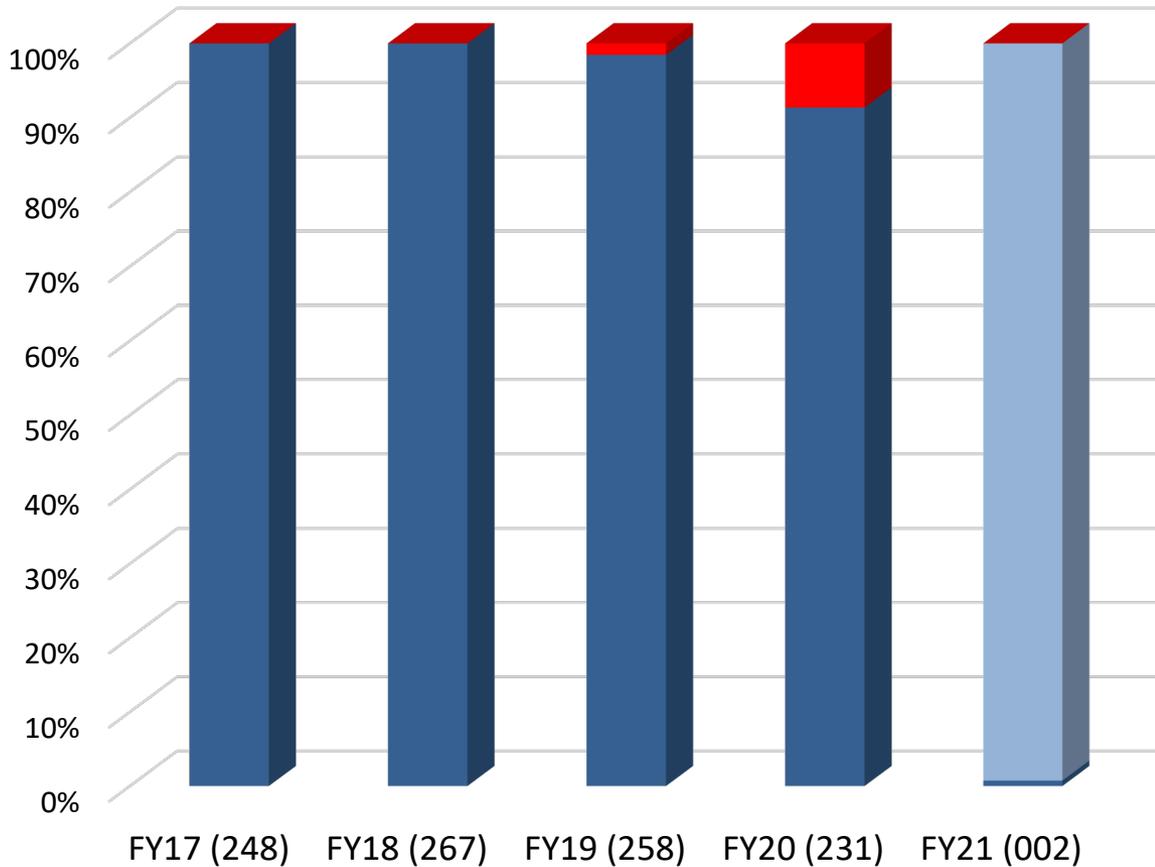
At 2/12 through SFY21, 13.6% of this budget was expended.

101 Veterans currently on pension

EDUCATIONAL GRATUITY



\$135,000



- Expended \$1,000
- Projected \$134,000
- Lapsed \$0

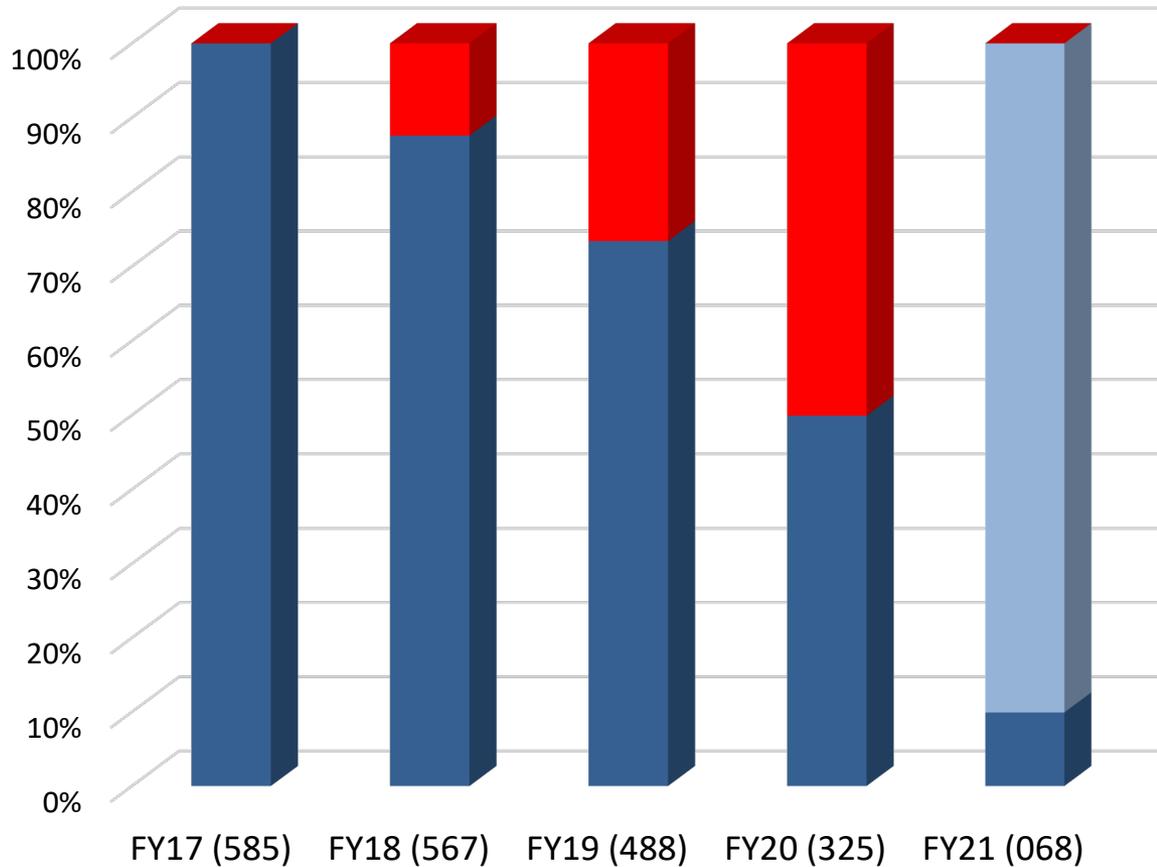
*At 2/12 through SFY21,
.074% of this budget was
expended.*

02 claims
approved FYTD

VETERANS TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE



\$900,000



- Expended \$99,257
- Projected \$800,743
- Lapsed \$0

*At 2/12 through SFY21,
11.0% of this budget was
expended.*

68 claims
approved FYTD

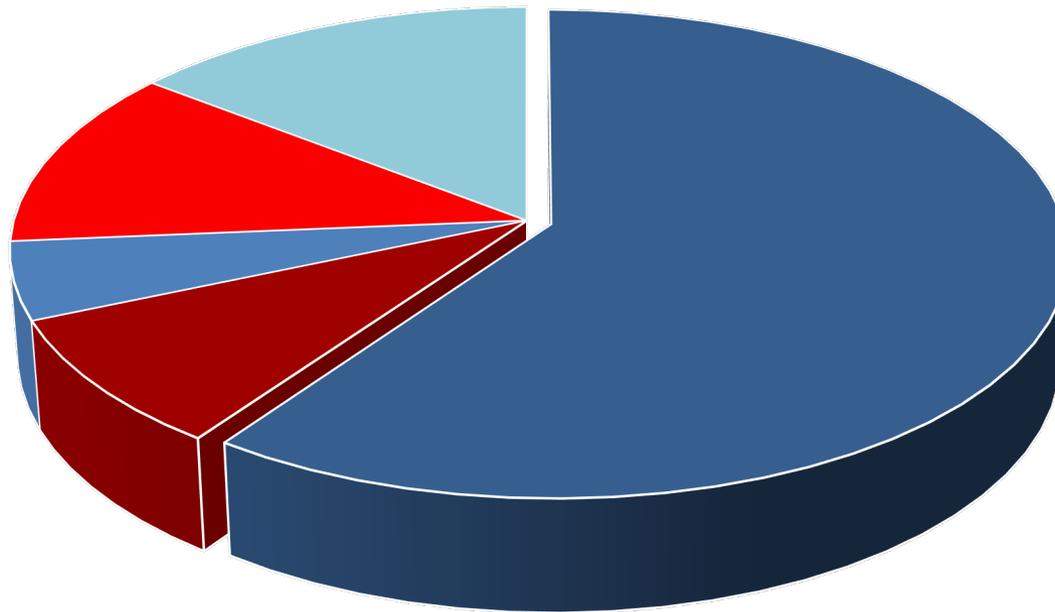
OVERALL MFRAP CONTRIBUTIONS AND PAYMENTS: FY 2005 – FY 2021

Total Private Contributions.....	\$139,872.69
Total Department of Revenue, PIT Contributions.....	\$1,810,882.63
Total All Contributions, Private and PIT.....	\$1,950,755.32
Total Approved Grant Payments.....	\$907,921.86
Approved Grant Payments FYTD 2021.....	\$3,000.00
Account Balance.....	\$1,042,833.46

DISABLED VETERANS' REAL ESTATE TAX EXEMPTION



368 Total Adjudications
August 25 to September 24, 2021



- 220 Approved (59.8%)
- 32 Denied: Financial Need
- 19 Denied: Ineligible*
- 44 Removed: No Response
- 53 Removed: Eligibility Change

*** 19 Applicants Ineligible by Reason:**

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

410 claimants currently on statutory waiver of 5-year review.
Waiver ends September 30, 2021.

DISABLED VETERANS' REAL ESTATE TAX EXEMPTION



As of 24 Sep 2021

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

VISN 4 Access – Fiscal Year 2021 Wait Times



Clinics FY21 thru Sept. 15	Number of Appointments	Wait <30 Days	% Wait <30 Days	Average Wait
Mental Health	229,914	223,968	97.7%	3.3
Primary Care	584,493	568,607	97.3%	3.9
Specialty Care	736,546	665,438	91.0%	11.2
Other	720,793	683,969	94.9%	6.2
ALL	2,271,746	2,141,982	94.5%	6.9

Data updated 9/17/2021 with appointment info as of 9/15/2021.

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	6	1	14	4
Abie Abraham HCC	9	1	15	3
Coatesville VAMC	11	4	19	5
Erie VAMC	25	6	13	2
Lebanon VAMC	9	4	14	4
Corporal Michael J. Crescenz VAMC	12	9	21	2
VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System	13 (Hz) 15 (UD)	10 (Hz) 7 (UD)	9 (Hz) 22 (UD)	2 (Hz) 2 (UD)
Wilkes-Barre VAMC	10	6	12	4
Wilmington VAMC	12	8	9	5

Data updated 9/17/2021 with wait times as of 9/6/21 for last 30 days.

accesstocare.va.gov

October 2021 Update

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

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	62,427
FY 19	101,068	70,376
FY 20	153,508	87,042
FY 21 (as of 9/16/21)	150,050	84,951

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

Data updated 9/17/2021 with consult info as of 9/16/21.



The Pennsylvania
STATE VETERANS' COMMISSION

A Briefing on HB 1868

Adds Chapter 33 (Veterans Licensure)
to Title 63 (Professions and Occupations, State Licensed)
of the Consolidated Statutes

8 October 2021

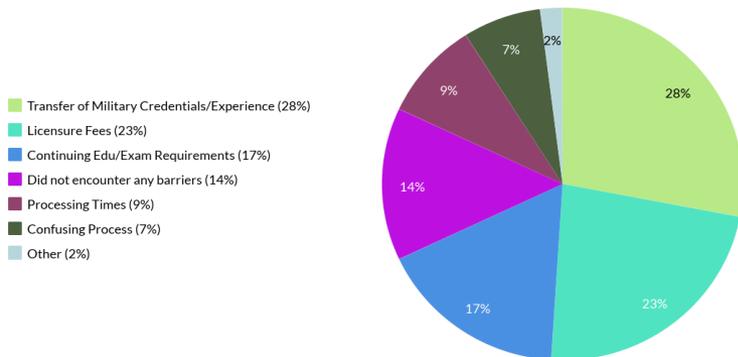
Decision Briefing

Findings of the Recent, Dept. of State Veterans' Licensure Survey

- Most respondents received their Pennsylvania occupational license within 3 months of applying
- A majority of respondents spent between \$200-\$500 in initial licensing expenses
- Difficulty in transferring military credentials and experience to satisfy state occupational licensure requirements pose a significant barrier to veterans
- Respondents reported that "Acceptance of military training, education, and experience" as well as "Licensure fee waivers" would be most beneficial to veterans and military spouses when obtaining licensure

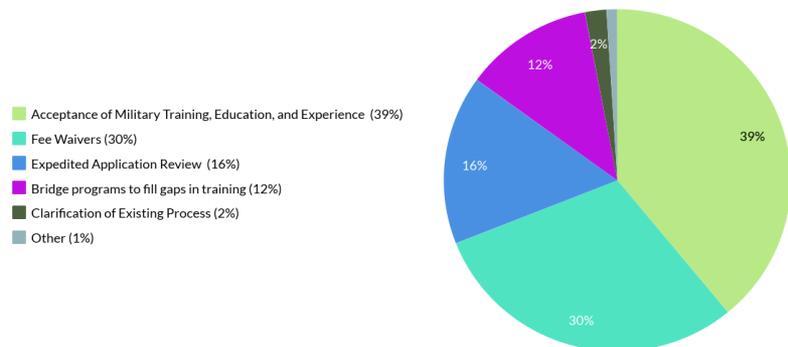
Finding #3 - Difficulty in transferring Military Credentials and Experience to satisfy state occupational licensure requirements pose a significant barrier to veterans

Barriers encountered when obtaining licensure



Finding #4 - Respondents reported that "Acceptance of military training, education, and experience" as well as "Licensure fee waivers" would be most beneficial to veterans and military spouses when obtaining licensure

Action that would be most beneficial when obtaining licensure



Study Recommendations

- Support legislative approaches that call for recognition of military training and experience to satisfy licensure requirements
- Establish processes to expedite review of license applications for veterans and military spouses
- Institute waivers for initial licensure fees of military spouses
- Increase veteran and military spouse presence on state licensing boards
- Allow veterans to be licensed by examination
- Work with education providers (State educational and technical institutions) and the U.S. Department of Defense to develop bridge programs to fill gaps in training for veterans returning to the civilian workforce

HB 1868 Proposal

What it Would Do

- ✓ Address the plight of military service members in transition and active duty military spouses being relocated
- ✓ Allow for military experience to substitute for educational criteria
- ✓ Use examinations and other considerations
- ✓ Force all 29 boards and commissions (“licensing boards”) to develop military occupational code crosswalk (entails matching about 350 MOC to 100 professions) to assist in their decisions
- ✓ Alert the licensing boards to the need for expedited processing
- ✓ Provide for expedited temporary licensing
- ✓ Waive military spouse fee when relocating as a result of orders
- ✓ Cause licensing board representation
- ✓ Create reports on the results
- ✓ Reinforce and improve Act 41 of 2019 for this specific population

HB 1868 Proposal

Recommendations for Improvement

- ❑ Specify the processing time from the date a complete application was submitted for expedited licensing (many states have)
- ❑ Limit to servicemembers separating from active military service (includes AGR) and the relocating spouses of reassigned active duty servicemembers and KIA -- and set a shorter time period for application submission. Current proposal seems to allow any veteran or spouse up to five years to apply in effect, lessening the rationale behind expedited processing
- ❑ Clarify how the public member on a board is selected and his/her status (if this provision is really needed)
- ❑ Make reporting a permanent feature (not just for six years) and expand reporting to DLI, DMVA and SVC, as the provision affects veterans employment
- ❑ The added chapter be a reward for honorable service alone, not all characterizations of service – not only veteran status needs to be considered but also the quality of service to the nation

NEXT MEETING



Friday December 3, 2021

at 10:00AM

Arrowheads Community Club

Fort Indiantown Gap

Annville, PA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
VA Healthcare – VISN 4

VISN 4 Update

Good morning, everyone! This is Chuck Thilges, VISN 4 Deputy 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

Kevin Amick, the Butler Director continues to serve as Medical Center Director in Pittsburgh while Don Koenig is detailed to VA Central office leading the Integrated Veterans Care transformation implementation.

Sharon Coyle, Nurse Executive at Butler is serving as the Butler Director.

Barb Forsha, deputy director of the VA Pittsburgh continues to serve as the acting director of the Clarksburg VA.

We continue to recruit for a new chief of staff for the Butler and Altoona VA's.

2. New Facility Websites

To better meet the needs of our website visitors, VA built an all-new website template for medical centers and clinics. We used Veteran feedback to help develop a site that provides everything that Veterans, families and caregivers need to prepare for a visit, get care, and connect with the Veteran's VA health care team including:

- Directions to main medical centers and clinics
- Phone numbers
- Parking and transportation information
- Hospital and clinic hours

Veterans will also find a new, standardized list of VA health services using patient-friendly names and descriptions for primary care, specialty care, and mental health care, and listings of care coordinators for LGBT Veterans, women Veterans, and returning service members.

Nearly half of our website traffic now comes from mobile devices, and users now have easy access at any time to patient registration, online scheduling, prescription refills, and medical records.

VA Pittsburgh was the pilot site for this project and was the first to go live in January 2020. The remaining sites in VISN 4 have also transitioned to the new website format with the last site Philadelphia going live on Sept. 22.

So far 34 VA sites have migrated, and VHA Digital Media is working to update all remaining websites by the end of the calendar year. Keep in mind that VA is building all new websites from scratch, and as more sites are being updated, changes are continually being made to the format, layout and content.

A link to the new VA Pittsburgh site was included in your read ahead material so you can see the new website format.

VA Pittsburgh Website: [VA Pittsburgh Health Care | Veterans Affairs](#)

3. Flu Shots

It's never too early to start thinking about receiving your annual flu shot, and with COVID-19 getting a flu shot is more important than ever. A flu shot is a safe way to help protect yourself, and those around you, from getting sick and having complications from flu. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it is especially important for all of us to do our part to help reduce the spread of the flu in our communities.

Flu vaccines are now available at no cost to eligible Veterans at more than 70,000 in-network community providers nationwide.

To be eligible, Veterans must be enrolled in the VA health care system **and** received care through VA from either a VA or community provider within the past 24 months (the second requirement is new for the 2021-2022 flu season).

To check their eligibility, Veterans can call 800-MyVA411 (800-698-2411) select option 1, then option 3, and then select option 1 again or contact their local VA medical facility. [Veterans can follow these steps](#) to find an in-network provider or call (877)-881-7618 or their local VA medical facility for help locating an in-network provider.

With flu and COVID-19 circulating, getting a flu shot is more important than ever! All Veterans are encouraged to get their annual flu shot and protect themselves, their family, and the community. Flu Shots will be available from September 15, 2021 – March 31, 2022.

A link will be included in the minutes on where flu shots are available.

Visit <https://www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/flushot.asp>

[VA Facility Locator](#)

4. COVID-19 Vaccine – Update

Coronavirus deaths in the United States continue to rise, but hospitalizations and reports of new cases are starting to level off or decline. The South experienced the worst of the summer surge, but the outbreak is now easing in much of that region. The Upper Midwest and Northeast have so far avoided the worst of the Delta variant, but cases continue to rise in states like Ohio, Maine and North Dakota.

Three-quarters of American adults have started the vaccination process. The pace of vaccination has been trending steadily upward as more employers announced mandates.

On September 9th, President Biden signed two Executive Orders mandating all federal employees and contractors be vaccinated against COVID 19

You can find the latest updates on COVID-19 vaccines, additional doses or boosters, and FDA approvals on the VA.gov vaccine page. A link was provided in your read ahead material.

5. Caregiver Support Update

The VA Caregiver Support Program is extending eligibility through Sept. 30, 2022 for Veterans who are legacy participants, legacy applicants and their family caregivers, participating in the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers.

This extension applies to Veterans who were participating in PCAFC before Oct.1, 2020, individuals who applied for PCAFC before Oct.1, 2020 and those who were accepted into the program after Oct.1, 2020.

The extension will provide VA an additional year to conduct required reassessments of this cohort.

PCAFC offers enhanced clinical support for family caregivers of eligible Veterans who incurred or aggravated a serious injury in the line of duty and meet other eligibility criteria. Benefits under PCAFC include education and training, enhanced respite care, counseling, a monthly stipend, CHAMPVA (if eligible) and certain travel expenses, among others.

All legacy participants, legacy applicants and their family caregivers will be reassessed based upon the new eligibility criteria resulting from the Final Rule which became effective Oct. 1, 2020. Links with additional information were included in your read ahead material.

Questions about PCAFC should be directed to local VA facility Caregiver Support Program staff or the Caregiver Support Line, tollfree at 855-260-3274. Find your Caregiver Support team or Caregiver Support coordinator using the [facility locator](#) which was included in your read ahead material.

6.Customer Service Update

Nationally, VA's trust score over the last 90 days was 89.9. In VISN 4, our trust score over the last 90 days was 92.6, which is the second highest VISN in the nation. The top 5 compliment themes over the last 90 days were interactions with staff, quality of care, cleanliness of facility, courtesy of healthcare providers, and satisfaction with laboratory services.

7.Connected Care Update

My HealtheVet Advanced Accounts: Beginning September 15, 2021, My HealtheVet Advanced Accounts were discontinued and reverted back to Basic Accounts. What does this mean?

- The My HealtheVet Users who **have not used their Advanced accounts to request VA prescription refills in the past 12 months** no longer have access to the My HealtheVet's Pharmacy features.
- The My HealtheVet Users who **have used their Advanced accounts to request VA prescription refills in the past 12 months** will retain their access to request VA prescription refills for a limited time. This grace period will avoid disruption in services for those who actively use My HealtheVet to refill prescriptions. However, these users will no longer be able to access prescription notifications or track or view medications in VA Blue Button until they upgrade to a Premium account. The deadline for these users to upgrade to Premium will be announced at a later date but is anticipated to be before the end of the calendar year.

It is our goal to have all My HealtheVet Users have a Premium Account in order to access all features within My HealtheVet. There are three ways to upgrade accounts: in-person, online or through video. **Upgrading is free!** If a Veteran wants to upgrade in person or through video, contact needs to be made with the My HealtheVet Coordinator at their local VA Medical Center. To upgrade online, Veterans need to use their DS Logon Premium account or ID.me sign-in credentials.

COVID Test Results: Veterans who received the COVID-19 vaccine at a VA facility can access their vaccination history online with a My HealtheVet Premium Account. Using the VA Blue Button and VA Health Summary feature in My HealtheVet, Veterans can review their COVID-19 vaccine information, print it for their records, and share it with other health care providers. [My HealtheVet COVID-19 Testing Flyer \(va.gov\)](#)

1. **Sign in** to your account at myhealth.va.gov
2. Under **Health Records**, select **Labs + Tests**
3. Under **VA Chemistry/Hematology**, select **View More**
4. **Review the summary list** to find your COVID-19 test and **select the date of the test** for more details
- 5.

Ask VA: On October 18, 2021, the VAs Information Routing and Inquiry Service (IRIS) and the GI Bill Help Portal will be replaced with a new service called Ask VA (AVA). This new service is for all Veterans and members of the Veteran community to submit questions, concerns, and recommendations to VA. The VA is updating their systems to make it easier and faster for Veterans to get the answers they need. When a question is submitted through AVA, it will be routed directly to the appropriate benefit office to get an accurate, timely answer.

For questions about GI Bill benefits, Veterans will need to sign in with one of the following accounts to verify their identify:

- My Health eVet Premium Account
- DS Logon Premium Account
- ID.me Verified Account

NOTE: For questions about other VA benefits, Veterans do not need to sign in, but they will not have access to all the features this new service offers.

If Veterans sign-in to VA.gov using one of the verifying accounts (above), they can access the following features:

- Some of their information will be filled in automatically each time a new question is asked
- Veterans can track the questions they submit
- Veterans can add more information to a question they previously submitted or ask a follow-up question

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.

**Southwestern Veterans' Center
Advisory Council Meeting
April 16, 2021**

Advisory Council Members Present:

Thomas Tallon, Military Officers Assoc. of America
Edward Hanke, Disabled American Veterans
William Aronson, Military Order of the Purple Hearts
James Lamison, AMVETS

Advisory Council Members Excused

Rommel Dacanay, Blind Veterans Assoc. of PA
Ronald F. Conley, American Legion
William Roland, Veterans of Foreign Wars
Tim Sager, Keystone Paralyzed Veterans
Albert Schraepfer, The American Legion
David White, Marine Corps League
Kenneth Stubbs, Resident Representative
Kim Ward, Senator
Natalie Mihalek, Representative

Advisory Council Members Absent

NONE

Others Present

James Hamp, Asst to Deputy Adjutant General
Travis Davis, Director of State Homes
Rich Adams, Commandant, SWVC
Erin Rakow, Deputy Commandant
Cheri McAfee. Assistant to the Commandant

Visitors

Minutes taken by Cheri McAfee

CALL TO ORDER:

Meeting was called to order by Mr. Tallon at 10:00 AM. The Pledge of Allegiance was said and held a Moment of Silence.

ROLL CALL:

Roll call was taken.

MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING:

None.

REMARKS FROM THE MEDICAL DIRECTOR:

None.

REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL MEMBER STATUS

None.

ADMISSIONS & MARKETING UPDATE:

- Admissions have started
- Following guidelines to keep residents and staff safe
- Potential residents are swabbed before being admitted
- Some vaccinated some getting vaccine after admittance
- 74 available beds (some being held for potential breakout)
- 236 person capacity

REMARKS FROM THE DEPUTY ADJUTANT GENERAL:

- Introduced the new Director of Homes, Travis Davis
- Spoke of things to be expected of the director in the near future and the fact that he will be visiting the homes again next week with the DAG
- Acknowledged that he was a great addition to the DMVA
- Spoke of the new Deputy Adjunct General and her future endeavors with DMVA
- The new DAG and director intend on being more active within all 6 homes, more visits are planned
- Overall the status of Covid 19 within the 6 homes is good
- High number of residents are vaccinated
- Staff numbers of vaccination could be improved
- All 9 federal VA homes are vaccinating both vets and their spouses
- Admissions in the 6 homes has begun

- Visitations are still controlled but hoping to expand in the coming summer months
- There is hope for returning to some normalcy over the summer months

REMARKS OF THE DIRECTOR OF STATE HOMES:

- The new director introduced himself and gave a told a bit about his background

REPORT OF THE COMMANDANT:

Commandant's report reviewed

- Spoke of the upcoming admissions and the progress of slowly working way through the waitlist, especially those who are still in their homes
- Have had a few positive cases pop up
- The VA survey went well as well as the Life Safety survey, the DOH is expected soon
- Currently we are working on moving visitation forward especially if both resident and family have been vaccinated
- Deputy Commandant Erin went over the Covid status:
 - 69 employees and 6 staff (4 break through vaccinated staff tested positive)
 - 90% resident vaccination
 - 42% staff vaccination
 - Currently 3 employees and 1 resident are positive
- AVH is working with us as well as the VA for testing staff
- Still doing weekly testing to catch asymptomatic
- Mr. Cody Gomberg passed away – all expressed their sympathies

REPORT OF THE COUNCIL MEMBERS:

None.

OLD BUSINESS:

NONE

NEW BUSINESS:

A questions was posed as to the manner in which the meeting are being held; an inquiry was made as to whether or not ZOOM could be utilized or possibly a teleconference.

GOOD OF THE COUNCIL:

Mr. Tallon inquired as to when the Advisory Council meetings could return to in person?

Commandant noted that the next meeting will probably still be remote but there was a possibility that the October meeting could be in person.

Mr. Lamison stated that he felt that attendance at the meetings was horrible and inquired if there was another way of promoting attendance.

Mr. Tallon agreed that it needed to be worked on.

ADJOURNMENT:

Meeting called to close at 10:30 AM

**Next meeting will be held July 16, 2021 at
10:00 AM**

**GINO J. MERLI VETERANS' CENTER
ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING
May 20, 2021**

CALL TO ORDER

Meeting was held vis telephone conference.

James Miller, GMVC Commandant called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.

INVOCATION

Secretary Ron Faust led the Council in the invocation.

ROLL CALL

Secretary Ron Faust recorded roll call and attendance was as follows:

MEMBERS

Lisa Solarczyk, Acting President - Marine Corps League

Ronald Faust, Secretary - AMVETS

Robert Cudworth - Military Officers Association of America (Excused)

Robert Smith - Military Order of the Purple Heart (Excused)

Russell Canevari - Veterans of Foreign Wars (Excused)

William Smith - The American Legion

Richard Green - Blinded Veterans Association (Excused)

Joe Sylvester - Disabled American Veterans

Lisa Baker - PA State Senate

Carol Sweeney Karen Boback - PA House of Representatives

Tim Cleveland - PSACDVA

Lisa Kaye - PSACDVA

William Brandenburg - GJMVC Resident Representative

DMVA

Rick Hamp for Major General Mark J. Schindler - The Acting, Adjutant General, Pennsylvania

Colonel Maureen Weigl - Deputy Adjutant General, VA (Excused)

Travis Davis - Director, Bureau of Veterans Homes

James Miller - GJMVC Commandant

Kathleen Ambrose - GJMVC Deputy Commandant

OTHERS PRESENT / INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Lynn O'Day, Recorder

Dr. Kazmierski, GMVC Medical Director

Sara Butler, Admissions

Janice McAllister, Volunteers

Andrew Ruscavage, CSM

MOMENT OF SILENCE

- A moment of silence was held in the memory of Samuel Greenberg, President, who passed away on Saturday, May 8, 2021.

- Lisa Solarczyk will become Acting President and the Vice President position will remain open until August. We will then hold general elections for Advisory Council seats.

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF VETERANS' HOMES

- We have been hosting mobile vaccine clinics. GMVC just held theirs on the 18th. We did a pilot program here and had a great turnout. 15 additional employees, 13 family members and 1 resident.
- Gino Merli is the highest of all the other homes regarding vaccination rates for staff and residents.
- He applauded the staff and management here for their hard work in getting the vaccination information out.

REPORT OF THE COMMANDANT

- Jim announced that he continues the weekly updates on Wednesdays.
- We are now a green facility. 1 South is now empty but will be used as the quarantine unit. Hoping in time to open back to residential housing.
- Visits have started again. We do have protocols in place and set visitation hours.
- We are currently working on a Leave of Absence Policy for vaccinated residents.
- We have begun planning outside trips for the residents. Residents are happy with the “re-opening” of the facility.
- We had our revisit from the Department of Health and Life Safety. We were found to be 100% compliant and have received a full, regular license.
 - Ron Faust asked for clarification on outside trips.
 - Jim stated that we are planning country rides, ice cream, outdoor activities but will be continuing to keep units isolated and on the same bus for tracking.
 - Joe Sylvester asked when her residents will be able to go to restaurants and other offsite activities. He states that his group used to take the residents for breakfast and lunches.
 - Jim stated that we are currently working on these items. He is hoping that sometime in the Summer and being vaccinated, they will be able to do these things.
 - Ron Faust asked if the residents will be able to attend Francis Slocum this year. Every year his organization hosts an outdoor cook-out and event at Francis Slocum for the residents.
 - Jim stated that it is a possibility since it is outside and they will look into it.
 - Joe Sylvester asked if the residents will be participating, outdoors, in the Flag Service on June 14th.
 - Jim stated that the facility is working on the list of residents who will be participating in the service.

REPORT OF THE MEDICAL DIRECTOR

- Dr. Kazmierski reported that vaccinations have contributed to the improvements in the numbers and openings and increase in mobility.
- The staff here at the facility has done a good job in getting vaccinated and getting the word out of the importance of vaccinations.
- The vaccination rate in our county is the 3rd highest in the state.
- 64 total staff had tested positive. The last positive was March 18. There were 68 total resident infections and 19 total deaths attributed to COVID. We had 7 residents who were re-infected after 90 days which were all believed to be residual infections and shedding of

the virus. Only 2 of those re-infections were symptomatic and they were mild and recovered quickly. The last positive resident we had was April 21st which was a re-infection after 90 days with no symptoms.

- We had 221 total staff vaccinated. 5 staff with only 1 dose. This is a high vaccination rate for staff. We had 127 total residents vaccinated and only 3 were not vaccinated.
- Slowly but surely, we are coming out of this. We are still diligent with mask wearing and proof of vaccinations for visitors. We will be starting to work on other issues such as reducing polypharmacy, antibiotic stewardship, and issues we were working on before COVID.
 - Karen Boback asked if there was a requirement that all staff receive the vaccine.
 - Dr. Kazmierski stated that we strongly encouraged it. Jim stated that we do have guidelines for those who aren't vaccinated such as respirators and eye protection and we are testing no-vaccinated staff weekly. He stated that we may get to that point in time but no guidelines at this time. Rick Hamp stated that the fact that the vaccines are only approved under emergency use, we cannot mandate or require that the staff receive the vaccine.
 - Karen Boback asked what the percentage of staff that were vaccinated was.
 - Jim stated that the staff percentage was at 75%. The state average for staff is only about 50-60 percent.
 - Rick Hamp stated that a good majority of the push for 75% happened with the vaccine clinic. Jim stated that the mobile clinic pushed us from 73 to 75% and it was very successful.

REPORT OF ADMISSIONS

- Our current census is 130. We do have an admission coming in today. We continue to have 36 beds reserved for quarantine unit which leaves us 29 beds to fill. Since our last meeting we had 24 admissions and we have had 14 deaths or discharges. We currently have 22 veterans on our waiting list, 21 non-veterans and we are processing 15 new applications right now.
- As moving through the waiting list, we are seeing a lot of applications closed due to death or have been placed in other facilities. She asked all the members to spread the word and if there is anyone that they know of who needs placement, to mention Gino Merli and provide them with her contact information.
 - Ron Faust asked for clarification of the 36 beds that are currently quarantine.
 - The beds are being saved incase of infection. One side of the unit is red and the other is yellow.
 - Jim stated that as we move further that COVID is going to be treated as any other infectious disease. We are hoping to open 1S again.
 - Lisa Baker asked if there is an effect on the budget from the red.
 - Travis stated that that COVID costs drained budgets, but we do have our 5-year programs and allocated programs. Repairs and unforeseen expenses are causing the challenge.
 - Lisa Baker asked if there is any additional stimulus available or what exactly are the needs. She stated that both herself and Karen Boback would like to be able to take that information back to the House before the budget vote is brought to the table.

- Rick stated that there is some talk of additional funding becoming available to the states from the federal government. From the best of his knowledge those funds are not contingent up the passing of any state budget. These funds are directly related to the costs incurred by long term care facilities because of COVID.

VOLUNTEERS

- Janice McAllister stated that she is currently working on getting the volunteers back into the facility.
- We received a donation this morning from Colbert and Grebas.
- We have a meeting with Harley Davison American Warhorse this Saturday morning to discuss the annual motorcycle ride. It will possibly be here on the premises on August 7th.

CLINICAL SERVICES

- Andrew Ruscavage stated that one of the big things being talked about now is the vaccine. Although we are doing very well with vaccinations, the vaccine does dictate what you can and can't do when it comes to visitation, outing etc. If you're interested in an outing or visitation, please call here to the facility and we will be able to help with the information.
- We have all green units. All the residents can move about the facility. We do have to take precautions depending on what the situation is.

THE GOOD OF THE COUNCIL

- Ron Faust asked about council member status updates. He stated that he will be retiring and that a new member of the AM Vets will be appointed.
- Karen Boback the DMVA has been talking about the virtual VSOs which be coming to the legislative offices. At first, she was hesitant, but the demonstration was great. People will still be coming to the offices, but this will expedite those who are on a waiting list to be assigned a VSO. She also stated that there has been issues of pension poaching for the veterans. No one should have to pay a fee for advice of help from a VSO regarding benefits and pensions. She also reminded everyone that Elder Abuse Awareness Month is June. She stated that she attended the services for Sam Greenberg, and they were beautiful. She stated that the family had nothing but praise for the facility and they he considered the facility family. The family was very pleased and grateful for all the facility has done for him.
- Jim stated that we are planning to carry out the next meeting inside the facility rather than via teleconference.

ADJOURNMENT

The next meeting was announced: August 19, 2021 at 10:00 a.m.

SOUTHEASTERN VETERANS' CENTER ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

July 8, 2021

The Southeastern Veterans' Center Advisory Council met July 8, 2021 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
Doug Forsythe, Disabled American Veterans
The Hon. Tim Hennessey, PA House of Representatives
Robert G. Richardson, Resident Representative
Kenneth Schweitzer, American Legion

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

Maureen Weigl, BG (PA Retired), DAG-VA – DMVA
Travis J. Davis, Executive Director, Long-Term Care – DMVA
Barbara Raymond, Director of Veterans' Homes – DMVA
Brian Gula, Commandant - SEVC
Mildred Butler-Coleman, Deputy Commandant – SEVC
Eve Domish, DON - SEVC

Visitors:

Nikki Whitlock, Constituency Relations, Sen. Katie Muth's Office

Excused Absence:

Jill Alwine, Admissions and Marketing Coordinator – SEVC
Edward Beck, Chief of Operations, Veterans' Homes - DMVA
Jeffrey Elliot, PA AMVETS
John Getz, Veterans of Foreign Wars
The Hon. Bob Mensch, PA State Senate
Robert Stone, 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.

Council member Doug Forsythe stated he contests this meeting opening without a prayer or bible present, and he is protesting meeting.

Swearing in of Council Members

Doug Forsythe received re-appointment to council and was sworn in by Maureen Weigl, BG (PA Retired) – DAG-VA.

Review and Approval of April 8, 2021 Meeting Minutes:

Motion made and seconded to approve minutes from the April 8 meeting. Minutes approved.

Report of the Medical Director:

Director of Veterans' Homes Barb Raymond reported on behalf of Medical Director Dr. Michele Shrikanthan. We continue to monitor COVID-19, particularly the Delta variant. We have none in the facility. We're also looking at another respiratory virus – RSV – that's spreading throughout the country. So far, we have no RSV in the facility.

Report of the Admissions and Marketing Coordinator:

With this being the first meeting for new Commandant Brian Gula, Barb Raymond, acting in a support role, provided this report. SEVC has a robust waiting list of 159 individuals. We continue to take admissions, but we've had to slow the process due to staffing. Our Admissions and Marketing Coordinator is currently on vacation, but she is working on marketing options to get name out in community.

Report of the Deputy Adjutant General – DMVA:

Gen. Weigl reported that she and The Adjutant General, MG Mark Schindler, will be visiting SEVC in September, to meet staff. Gen. Weigl also noted leadership changes – Barb Raymond is now Director of Veterans' Homes, and Travis Davis is Executive Director of Long-term Care.

Report of the Executive Director, Long-term Care – Travis Davis – DMVA:

Travis Davis thanked council members for their participation, and noted that he would like to resume in-person Advisory Council with the next meeting.

He also introduced the new Commandant, Brian Gula, and new DON, Eve Domish. Both individuals hit the ground running, and are here for right reasons - to serve our veterans. Travis also extended congratulations to Barb in her new role as director of homes. She has served as Commandant at our Erie home, but also at SEVC as Commandant and DON, as well as assisting in the onboarding of new leadership. She is still spending time at SEVC, but is transitioning into the director role. The more Barb touches in our homes the more our homes become better places to live.

Also, DMVA held a mobile vaccine clinic at SEVC on June 21. The mobile clinic went to all six homes. We were able to increase vaccinated and residents, and also opened up clinics to families. Our goal is a 100% vaccination rate.

Nikki Whitlock, Constituency Relations representative for Sen. Katie Muth, asked for staff and resident vaccination rates – For all homes it's 95% of residents and 60% of staff, fully vaccinated. After the federal vaccination initiative, there have not been many other initiatives to provide vaccines. Now, all six homes' pharmacies have vaccines in house.

Nikki also asked for the proper spellings of Brian's and Eve's names.

Doug Forsythe asked for a reason why we have 5% unvaccinated residents. Travis explained that unvaccinated individuals, both residents and staff, chose not to be vaccinated. However, our vaccination numbers are still trending upward; there's been no plateau.

Rep. Tim Hennessey congratulated Barb for efforts to get SEVC back on track, and on her new assignment. He also welcomed Brian and Eve.

Report of the Director of Veterans' Homes – Barb Raymond – DMVA:

Barb provided an update on the homes – we're recruiting for a commandant for the Erie home and the Altoona-area home (Hollidaysburg). Also, all homes are admitting new residents, but slowly, mostly due to staffing (nationwide challenge).

Report of the Commandant – Brian Gula – SEVC:

Brian said he is excited to be here and be a part of team. He thanked everyone for their support. He is moving forward, following the leadership of Barb and Barry Lowen, and looking forward to many great years here.

Report of the Deputy Commandant – Mildred Butler-Coleman – SEVC:

Mildred provided facility updates:

- New roof for our storage barn. Waiting for L&I to approve the work.
- New nurse call bell system – vendor is Symtech – money has been set aside.
- Working on new permanent chiller for Tilghman and Coates Hall.
- New furniture for conference room and several offices in the administrative portion of the facility.

Doug Forsythe asked if Rep. Hennessey could provide any assistance with the L&I approval process. Rep. Hennessey said if the work is an emergency repair, we could get a temporary covering until the permanent fix can occur. Barb will reach out to L&I and contact Rep. Hennessey if we need assistance.

Council Resident Representative Rob Richardson asked for an update on the new boiler for the east side of Coates Hall. Mildred said money is set aside and work has started, noting that the boiler serves the entire building. Deadline is the end of this year. Also, in response to a question from Rep. Hennessey, Mildred explained that we have a back-up boiler system, so there is no need to keep the old system in place once the replacement is installed.

Nikki Whitlock asked for an update on the Adult Day Health Care project. Mildred noted that the area is still under construction, with expected completion in August. No programming until November.

Doug Forsythe asked Nikki to pass along his thanks to Sen. Muth for her Legion of Honor award sponsorship.

Comments from the Council:

Anthony Arnao noted that his organization, the Catholic War Veterans, has been meeting offline, but is planning an in-person meeting in September.

Richard Doherty asked why SEVC's fill rate is not at 100%. Barb explained that we are at 63% filled, due to staffing. Barb added that she was part of a meeting this week with the HR staff at headquarters, discussing recruitment and retention for all six homes; Nikki noted that she heard an ad for SEVC openings on a Philadelphia radio station.

Mary Archey asked how SEVC compares to other homes when it comes to retention. Barb noted that all homes are experiencing similar employee retention issues, but she would work to get specifics for the next meeting.

Doug Forsythe said that all Veterans' organizations he works with are getting back to normal.

Rep. Hennessey stated that DMVA did fairly well in the state budget.

Barry Amole asked if resident trips have resumed. Mildred said there was a Personal Care resident trip Walmart, which was our first attempt at putting our new plan for trips into action. We can only take eight people at one time, including the driver and an escort. Both the Activity and Volunteer directors are looking at options for getting more people out at one time. Barry said to let him know if we need funding for any outings.

Old Business:

Richard Doherty said that at last meeting the group discussed the possibility of distributing a positive press release to announce how well SEVC is doing now. Barb said nothing has been issued yet, but she will discuss with Travis and Gen. Weigl. Something like this also needs to go through Harrisburg for approval.

New Business:

Nothing to report.

Election of Officers:

President – unanimous nominations and election of Barry Amole to serve as President.

Vice President – unanimous nominations and election of Mary Archey to serve as Vice President.

Good of the Council

Nothing to report.

Time and Date for the next Meeting:

With no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 10:40 a.m. The next regular meeting of the SEVC Advisory Council will be held on October 14, 2021 at 10:00 AM.

Approved:

Barry Amole, President

Minutes submitted by: Kathy Knaub



**DELAWARE VALLEY VETERANS HOME
ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES
May 12, 2021
Conference Call**

Present:

Advisory Council Members

Allan Abramson, Jewish War Veterans
Bruce Boice, Disabled American Veterans
Douglas Craig, Military Officers Association
Richard Fine, AMVETS
Larry Holman, Jewish War Veterans
Samuel Huhn, Blinded Veterans Association
Benjamin Mastridge, Vietnam Veterans
John O'Donnell, American Legion
James Ritchie, Veteran of Foreign Wars

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

Travis Davis, Director, Bureau of Veterans Homes
Maureen Weigl, Deputy Adjutant General
Deborah Olivieri, Director of Nursing
Rita Yeung, Business Manager
Violetta Berdichevskaya, Medical Director
Jack Thompson, ADON
Mia Woods, Compliance Officer
Josh Spigner, Regional Compliance Officer
Susan Riever, Adm. Secretary

Absent

Daniel McCollum, American Legion
Daniel Murray, Marine Corps League
Kerry Judge, Senator Robert Tomlinson
Martina White, PA House of Representatives

Residents

No residents due to Covid precautions.

Visitors via Conference Call

- Moment of Silence
- Pledge of Allegiance
- Introduction of Attendees
- Approval of Minutes from February 10, 2021

Report from Violetta Berdichevskaya, Medical Director

- Our facility is presently in the Green Phase with no positive Covid cases. Staff are 56% vaccinated. Due to the family's choice, four residents have not received the Covid vaccine. Flu vaccine and PPD's are all 100%
- Admissions – In the past month we have had 15 new admissions. Some of these admissions came with wounds, but they are healing nicely.
- Hospice – This is a pain free building and we will not let our veterans suffer. Aurora Hospice is doing a very good job. There are 2 Aurora nurses who are designated specifically to our facility. We presently have 5 residents on hospice. As you all know, this is a pain free building and we are pro-hospice.
- Visitation – we have an outside setting for visitors to meet with their loved ones. If the weather is bad, we have an inside area set up.

Report from Peter Ojeda for Admissions/Marketing

- Our resident census is 84. This week we will have 5 admissions and next week another 5 admissions. One of the residents has not been Covid vaccinated so we will take him to the VA for the injection. We are getting ready for an additional 16 residents for the C-Unit. 16 beds will be kept open in case of a Covid positive resident.

Report from Mia Woods, Compliance Officer

- Prior to the pandemic it was set up that I would report compliance updates to the Advisory Council. The program is still not officially approved, but we are working on this. New updates should begin sometime this month. We have 2 new staff. One of them is Josh Spigner, Regional Compliance office for BVH. Josh stated that he is happy to be learning from Mia.

Report from Travis Davis, Director, Bureau of Veterans

- Introduced himself and Maureen Weigl, DAG. We are both looking forward to meeting all of you. Our homes are in the green zone, so we are moving forward with admissions, visitations and outings. The Philadelphia 76er's will honor one of our WWII Veterans on Friday, May 14th at the Wells Fargo Center.
- **Sam Huhn, Advisory Member** asked if we could get a copy of the report regarding the status of all the homes that was submitted to Congress. Travis will investigate this and if it is public knowledge it can be shared.

Report from Maureen Weigl, Deputy Adjutant General

- Looking forward to meeting of the Advisory Board members.

Report from Peter Ojeda, Commandant

- Over the past 3 months we had 19 admissions and 5 discharges. Monetary donations for the past 3 months totaled \$5300.00
Activities are still limited due to the Pandemic and are presently held on each unit. Residents are now going outside on nice days. We continue to have bingo on the units and birthday cakes for residents' birthdays. Thank you to all the veteran's organizations who have donated food, pizza and other items to our residents and staff.
The Korean Ambassador was here on April 13th to donate masks and sanitizer to our facility. My team is doing an exceptional job in our facility to always keep our residents safe and healthy. Construction in the building continues. The Canteen is almost finished, and all construction should be completed by the end of June. General maintenance on the grounds and building.



Allan Abramson, Advisory Member

- Asked about the Volunteer Coordinator position.
Peter stated that our new Volunteer Coordinator, Bill McGoldrick will be here on Monday, May 17th.
Allan wished everyone a Happy Memorial Day.

Old Business:

New Business: Hopefully we can have an in person Advisory Meeting on August 11, 2021.

Good of the Counsel:

Adjourned: 10:50AM

Next Meeting: August 11, 2021

**Bureau of Veterans' Homes
Available Beds Monthly Status Report
as of August 31, 2021**

Delaware Valley Veterans' Home, Philadelphia PA - Peter Ojeda - Commandant						
Level of Care	Available Beds	Beds Assigned	Beds Vacant	Average Beds Vacant	Percentage Filled	Waiting List Veteran / Placing
Nursing Care	141	78	63		55%	59
Memory Care	30	25	5		83%	21
Placing						6
Totals Less Wait List Placing	171	103	68	64	60%	74
Non-Veteran Census Percent				66	5%	
Gino J. Merli Veterans' Center, Scranton PA - James Miller - Commandant						
Level of Care	Available Beds	Beds Assigned	Beds Vacant	Average Beds Vacant	Percentage Filled	Waiting List Veteran / Placing
Nursing Care	156	111	45		71%	8
Memory Care	40	28	12		70%	3
Placing						2
Totals Less Wait List Placing	196	139	57	59	71%	9
Non-Veteran Census Percent				58	11%	
Hollidaysburg Veterans' Home, Hollidaysburg PA - Sam Dunkle - Commandant						
Level of Care	Available Beds	Beds Assigned	Beds Vacant	Average Beds Vacant	Percentage Filled	Waiting List Veteran / Placing
Nursing Care	231	135	96		58%	5
Memory Care	26	17	9		65%	0
Personal Care	167	76	91		46%	2
Placing						0
Totals Less Wait List Placing	424	228	196	198	54%	7
Non-Veteran Census Percent				197	14%	
Pennsylvania Soldiers' & Sailors Home, Erie PA - Elizabeth Seibert - Acting Commandant						
Level of Care	Available Beds	Beds Assigned	Beds Vacant	Average Beds Vacant	Percentage Filled	Waiting List Veteran / Placing
Nursing Care	75	67	8		89%	4
Memory Care	32	18	14		56%	1
Personal Care	100	53	47		53%	3
Placing						4
Totals Less Wait List Placing	207	138	69	76	67%	4
Non-Veteran Census Percent				73	12%	
Southeastern Veterans' Center, Spring City PA - Brian Gula - Commandant						
Level of Care	Available Beds	Beds Assigned	Beds Vacant	Average Beds Vacant	Percentage Filled	Waiting List Veteran / Placing
Nursing Care	208	123	85		59%	66
Memory Care	30	27	3		90%	23
Personal Care	54	31	23		57%	5
Placing						8
Totals Less Wait List Placing	292	181	111	113	62%	86
Non-Veteran Census Percent				112	9%	
Southwestern Veterans' Center, Pittsburgh PA - Richard Adams - Commandant						
Level of Care	Available Beds	Beds Assigned	Beds Vacant	Average Beds Vacant	Percentage Filled	Waiting List Veteran / Placing
Nursing Care	196	123	73		63%	19
Memory Care	40	33	7		83%	3
Placing						0
Totals Less Wait List Placing	236	156	80	73	66%	22
Non-Veteran Census Percent				77	17%	
Recapitulation / Pennsylvania Bureau of Veterans' Homes						
Level of Care	Available Beds	*Beds Assigned	Beds Vacant	Average Beds Vacant	Percentage Filled	Waiting List Veteran / Placing
Nursing Care	1,007	637	370		63%	161
Memory Care	198	148	50		75%	51
Personal Care	321	160	161		50%	10
Placing Total						20
Totals Less Wait List Placing	1,526	945	581	574	62%	202
				578		
Non-Veteran Census Number						
DVVH	5	5%				
GJMVC	14	10%				
HVH	30	13%				
PSSH	16	12%				
SEVC	15	8%				
SWVC	26	17%				
TOTAL	106	11%				

RETX- Exempt list(New)

mvfigsqlprod01
9/24/2021
rep_VADC_RETX_Exempt_List_
New

Summary of Current Applications (Exempt)

Count	No Activity	Review Process Started	Review App Received	New Apps Pending
15130	14839	257	34	167

Summary of Activity from 08/25/2021 to 09/24/2021

Apps Created : 239	
New	155
Review:	84
Apps Approved :220	
New	121
Review	99
Apps Denied Fin:	32
Apps Denied (Ineligible):	19
Apps Removed from Exempt List (No Response):	44
Apps Removed from Exempt List(Eligibility Changed):	53

Summary of Ineligible Reason

Reason	Count
It has been determined that the information submitted with your application does not substantiate your financial need for the exemption.	2
The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has determined that the veteran did not have a total and/or 100% permanent disability during their lifetime.	2
The property for which you claim exemption is not owned solely by you, or as an estate by the entirety with your spouse.	3
The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has determined that the veteran did not serve during a period of war or armed conflict.	9
Your disability has not been declared by the U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs to be a total or 100% permanent disability.	1
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.	4

Summary of Activity from 8/25/2021 to 9/24/2021

APPS APPROVED	220
NEW	121
REVIEW	99

APPS DENIED	148
Financial Need	32
Ineligible	19
No Response	44
Change of Eligibility	53

HH Over Income	30
NEW	17
REVIEW	13

14%
14%
13%

APPS CREATED	239
TOTAL ADJUDICATED	368

Pennsylvania State Veterans Commission

SVC RETX Committee Meeting

September 28, 2021 0900

Justin D. Slep, PSACDVA President

Members

MR. JUSTIN SLEP (COMMITTEE CHAIR) PSACDVA - Present

MR. KEITH BEEBE MOAA - Present

MR. CHRIS FIDLER KPVA - Present

MR. ROBERT ZILTZ MCL – Not on the SVC anymore

MR. NICHOLAS TAYLOR SVC VICE-CHAIR – Excused

MR. JOHN CYPRIAN MAL –Present

MR. BRIAN NATALI DMVA – Present

MS. TRACY WYLIE-PERRY DMVA – Present

Guests

Mr. Seth Bengel – Present

Discussion Topics:

- Remove armed conflict or Wartime service requirement
- Extend the RETX to surviving spouse of those killed in action, missing in action, or determined posthumously to be 100% disabled (Permanent)
- Remove any KIA language and replace with “died in the line of duty”
- Allow Veterans who reside in a Long Term Care facility to still receive the exemption
- Removing VA Compensation from the financial determination regulations at the SVC level
 - The committee has agreed and recommends that VA Compensation be removed from the financial determination through the regulatory review process [43 PA Code, Section 5.22, Definition of Income]. The members of the SVC and DMVA can work together to remove this section and exempt VA Compensation from the financial determination section within the regulations. The committee wants to focus on making positive regulation changes versus regulations being placed in Bills.
- Definition of “**were honorably discharged or released under honorable circumstances**”
 - The definition will follow 38 U.S. Code § 101 Paragraph 18
 - The term “discharge or release” includes (A) retirement from the active military, naval, air, or space service, and (B) the satisfactory completion of the period of active military, naval, air, or space service for which a person was obligated at the time of entry into such service in the case of a person who, due to enlistment or reenlistment, was not awarded a discharge or release from such period of service at the time of such completion thereof and who, at such time, would otherwise have been

Pennsylvania State Veterans Commission

eligible for the award of a discharge or release under conditions other than dishonorable.

- Permanent and Total or Compensated at 100% definition
 - rated as 100% permanent and totally disabled or compensated at the 100% disability rate through the Individual Unemployability program by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs

Comments:

- The committee is working on tracking any and all bills that involve some aspect of RETX
- Any Bill or regulatory change needs to ensure that the surviving spouse is being taken care of
- Work on a comprehensive amendment that would remove all regulatory items out of the Constitution
- DMVA reported that they currently have approximately 15,100 in the RETX program

Included with this report is a document titled "Disabled Veterans' Real Estate Tax Exemption (RETX) Program. This document was previously submitted to the SVC Chair and the SVC Legislative Chair on 30 March 2021.

Chris Fidler (KPVA) made a motion to accept and prioritize this committee's agenda items listed on this report and accept the Disabled Veterans' Real Estate Tax Exemption (RETX) Program document as written.

John Cyprian (MAL) seconded the motion and a vote was made.

DMVA staff members abstained from voting.

Nicholas Taylor voted by proxy with a "Yes".

The motion passed.

SB 578 is attached for your reference.

Disabled Veterans' Real Estate Tax Exemption (RETX) Program

Veterans around the Commonwealth have expressed concerns that the current eligibility criteria create inequity in determining which Veterans receive the RETX benefit. The recommendations provided within this document are from continued discussions with the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania (CCAP), Pennsylvania Association of County Directors of Veterans Affairs, the State Veterans Commission (SVC), and the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA).

Background:

The RETX Program provides county tax exemptions for the Veterans' primary residence. The Pennsylvania Constitution, Pennsylvania Statutes Title 51 Pa. CSA. Military Affairs and the Pennsylvania Code define eligibility as a Veteran of the United States Armed Forces who; is a resident of the Commonwealth, discharged under conditions other than dishonorable, that served during wartime or armed conflict, deemed 100% service-connected disabled (total or permanent disability), and has a demonstrated financial need. The laws extend the benefit to the unmarried surviving spouse of a Veteran who met the criteria before passing.

Wartime Service.

The Wartime Service requirement does not require a Veteran to be wounded or injured in direct combat or even on an overseas deployment; the only requirement is that an injury occurs within a particular set of dates determined in federal law. Veterans outside these dates could sustain service-connected injuries in the same manner as those during Wartime service, but they would not be eligible. There are currently 14,426 residences owned by eligible disabled Veterans or their unmarried surviving spouses for exemption from real estate taxes under this program. By removing the wartime service or armed conflict requirement, over 45,000 Veterans would meet the program's basic disability requirement. This number is before applying all other eligibility criteria, which will reduce the overall number. [The proposed language removes both the Wartime service requirement, thereby applying the additional RETX standards equally to all disabled Veterans.](#)

Service-Related Deaths.

When a service member dies while on active service, their unmarried surviving spouse is not eligible because the USDVA never rated the servicemember as 100% permanent and totally disabled. Many of these Gold Star Spouses and military widows/widowers have contacted the DMVA expressing frustration with this omission. Unmarried surviving spouses of Veterans who the USDVA has granted the 100% disability rating are eligible for RETX, creating an unequal system. [Undoing this injustice requires the language we are proposing to allow the unmarried surviving spouses of those who died in the line of duty or were posthumously rated 100% to receive the RETX benefit.](#)

Individual Unemployable.

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) pays many Veterans at the 100% disabled rate that may be rated as low as 60% disabled. These Veterans qualify for the RETX under the USDVA program called Individual Unemployability (I/U). To be eligible for Individual Unemployability payments at 100%, a Veterans must have; at least one service-connected disability rated at 60% or more disabling, or two or more service-connected disabilities—with at least one rated at 40% or more disabling and a combined rating of 70% or more. And documentation that the Veteran cannot hold down a steady job that supports them financially because of their service-connected disability. The number of Veterans in the state receiving USDVA compensation at 70% or higher is 56,908 as of the federal fiscal year 2019. The DMVA Chief Counsel rendered an opinion that the Constitutional provision of "total **or** 100% permanent disability" may include those rated as eligible for I/U. [Maintaining I/U eligibility requires the proposal having language specifying eligibility for those compensated at 100% through the I/U program.](#)

Residents of Long-Term Care Facilities.

The current language of the RETX program requires Veterans to own and occupy the residence for which the taxes will be exempt. This requirement creates issues in certain limited situations. There are times when Veterans may temporarily or permanently reside within Long-Term Care Facilities, either private, State Veterans Home, or a USDVA facility. In these cases, the otherwise eligible Veteran loses the RETX benefit. The loss of benefits can create a financial burden on a Veteran and their spouse when the Veteran is already in need of physical care. [The proposed language allows Veterans residing in a Long-Term Care facility to remain eligible for RETX if they still own the residence.](#)

Current Law and References:

Article VIII, Section 2(c) of Pennsylvania's Constitution establishes veterans' eligibility criteria to receive the RETX benefit. To amend the Pennsylvania Constitution, the General Assembly must approve the proposed constitutional amendment in two different sessions; it's placed on the ballot and approved by Pennsylvania voters.

Title 51 Pa CS Chapter 89 provides the statutory provisions for the RETX program. Once the constitutional amendment is approved, the General Assembly will need to amend several sections of Title 51; § 8902, related to eligibility; § 8903 pertaining to the tax assessment board; and § 8904 related to the duties of the SVC.

43 Pa Code Chapter 5, Subchapter C (43 Pa Code § 5.21 – 5.27) implements the program's constitutional provisions. Specifically, this chapter outlines the eligibility criteria, application process, periodic review, and appeals process. Changes to the code will be the last step in implementing the necessary changes.

Recommendations:

Proposed Amendment to Article VIII, Section 2(c) would make the following changes:

1. Remove the Wartime Service/armed conflict requirement. Rescinding this condition would expand the benefit to disabled Pennsylvania Veterans regardless of service date.
2. Extends the RETX to unmarried surviving spouses of those died in the line of duty or determined to be 100% disabled posthumously.
3. Keep those eligible under I/U by specifying eligibility for Veterans compensated at the 100% disability rate through the Individual Unemployability program.
4. Ensure Veterans who reside in Long-Term Care facilities (i.e., State Veterans Home or VA Hospital) still receive the exemption.

Following changes in the PA Constitution, the General Assembly will need to amend Title 51 to conform with the new program. Part of this process should include considering removing the Veterans Affairs compensation from the determination of need in the Title 51 or 43 PA Code.

Proportional RETX Benefits:

In prior sessions of the Pennsylvania General Assembly, members introduced legislation to make the RETX benefit proportional; such a change would dramatically expand the program. The general concept of a proportional RETX would give the same percentage of real estate tax exemption as the Veteran's rating from the USDVA. This expansion would cause an administrative burden on the DMVA and drastically reduce the local taxing authority's revenue. The DMVA estimates a proportional RETX could add 82,000 more Veterans to the program. Veterans ratings can change frequently. Proportional RETX would require the DMVA and the SVC to reassess eligible Veterans rating continually. For these reasons, DMVA cannot support changes to RETX, which includes proportional RETX benefits.

The Legislative Committee of the SVC supports a two phase approach to improving the real estate tax exemption (RETX) program. The first phase is to effect changes to the Pennsylvania Constitution, and the second phase is to add, delete, or modify changes to existing law.

At this time, we will only address constitutional changes. We will present four proposed changes to the SVC to vote on: We will then send a letter from the SVC to the House and Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committees and the sponsors of the several bills that have been submitted. The thrust of the letters will be to state that the SVC supports four constitutional changes, and that other issues in legislation should be removed until after the constitutional changes have been dealt with.

ORIGINAL EXEMPTION IN CONSTITUTION (from Article VIII)

Section 2(c) Citizens and residents of this Commonwealth, ***who served in any war or armed conflict*** in which the United States was engaged and ***were honorably discharged or released under honorable circumstances*** from active service, shall be exempt from the payment of all real property taxes upon the residence occupied by the said citizens and residents of this Commonwealth imposed by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania or any of its political subdivisions if, as a result of military service, they are blind, paraplegic or double or quadruple amputees or ***have a service-connected disability declared by the United States Veterans Administration or its successor to be a total or 100% permanent disability***, and if the State Veterans' Commission determines that such persons are in need of the tax exemptions granted herein. This exemption shall be ***extended to the unmarried surviving spouse upon the death of an eligible veteran*** provided that the State Veterans' Commission determines that such person is in need of the exemption.

ISSUES OR CONCERNS:

1. ***who served in any war or armed conflict***

- There are some who would change this requirement and open RETX to non-wartime service. This could include mobilization and deployment to a stateside location for training or other service.
- Considering the nature of the original intent of the constitutional amendment as it pertains to veterans, ***the SVC Legislative committee favors leaving 'war or armed conflict' as the sole qualifier***. Peacetime work/training accidents are more properly addressed by Article VIII, Sec. 2(b)(ii) which allows the General Assembly to “[e]stablish as a class or classes of subjects of taxation the property or privileges of persons who, because of age, disability, infirmity or poverty are determined to be in need of tax exemption or of special tax provisions, and for any such class or classes, uniform standards and qualifications”

2. ***were honorably discharged or released under honorable circumstances***

- The Legislative Committee agrees with the concept of “honorably discharged.”
- We do not like released under “honorable circumstances” statement since the introduction of the General Discharge under Honorable Conditions was created, for the “under Honorable Conditions” now suggests the same meaning and introduces confusion. A General discharge does not have the same status as service characterized as ‘honorable at the time of separation’ or because the service secretary granted release before the service contract was fulfilled (e.g. for hardship or a medical condition) as was originally meant by the constitutional phrasing, Instead we suggest ***“were discharged or released by the service secretary with an “honorable” characterization of service.”*** Quoting CPT Bill Wilks, an Army Trial Counsel “Recipients of General Discharges usually have engaged in minor misconduct or have received nonjudicial punishment under Article 15, UCMJ. While the “under honorable conditions” terminology is slightly confusing, there is a clear disadvantage to receiving a General Discharge in contrast to an Honorable Discharge. While recipients of a General Discharge will receive entitlement to benefits such as VA medical and dental services, VA home loans and burial in national cemeteries, they will not receive educational benefits under either the Montgomery or Post-9/11 GI Bill.”
- The SVC Legislative Committee favors revising “or released under honorable circumstances.” to ***“were honorably discharged or released under circumstances characterized as honorable”*** If a servicemember discharged “under honorable conditions” desires to try to get their discharge upgraded to “honorable,” there are ways to get that done.

3. ***have ... a total or 100% permanent (VA) disability***

- The SVC Legislative Committee believes the phraseology if “they are blind, paraplegic or double or quadruple amputees” originally applied to the Civil War era circumstances of a veteran so wounded that he/she could not manually labor effectively, and therefore was at risk of unfairly losing his home and property while trying to support his family. To make the wounded veteran competitive with others, the real estate tax exemption was conceived.
- With that thinking in mind, the SVC Legislative Committee favors ***“total and permanent VA disability”*** as the metric for disability qualification of RETX. We do not support any constitutional change to allow only a portion of real estate tax to be exempted based on less than “total and permanent (VA) disability.”

4. ***extended to the unmarried surviving spouse upon the death of an eligible veteran***

- The SVC Legislative Committee endorses a constitutional amendment to include the spouse of an eligible ***service*** member or veteran ***who was KIA, MIA, or POW under honorable circumstances as best known, based on official certification by the Department of Defense***

- **ADDITIONAL NOTE:** directives on what should or should not be included as income or assets, as in HB 1815 on the matter of compensation, do not belong in the Constitution; and should ultimately be a SVC decision, as implied by the Constitution.

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

SENATE BILL

No. 578 Session of
2021

INTRODUCED BY BARTOLOTTA, VOGEL, STREET, J. WARD, FONTANA,
PHILLIPS-HILL, SANTARSIERO, STEFANO, LANGERHOLC, ROBINSON,
MENSCH, MASTRIANO, HUTCHINSON, REGAN, COSTA, PITTMAN, KANE,
AUMENT, BOSCOLA AND HAYWOOD, APRIL 20, 2021

REFERRED TO VETERANS AFFAIRS AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS,
APRIL 20, 2021

A JOINT RESOLUTION

1 Proposing an amendment to the Constitution of the Commonwealth
2 of Pennsylvania, in taxation and finance, further providing
3 for exemptions and special provisions.

4 The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
5 hereby resolves as follows:

6 Section 1. The following amendment to the Constitution of
7 Pennsylvania is proposed in accordance with Article XI:

8 That section 2(c) of Article VIII be amended and the section
9 be amended by adding subsections to read:

10 § 2. Exemptions and special provisions.

11 * * *

12 (c) Citizens and residents of this Commonwealth, who [served
13 in any war or armed conflict in which the United States was
14 engaged and were honorably discharged or released under
15 honorable circumstances from active service] served as a member
16 of the armed forces of the United States, including a reserve

1 component or National Guard, and received a discharge from
2 service under conditions other than dishonorable, shall be
3 exempt from the payment of all real property taxes upon the
4 residence occupied by the said citizens and residents of this
5 Commonwealth imposed by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania or any
6 of its political subdivisions if, as a result of military
7 service, they are blind, paraplegic or double or quadruple
8 amputees or have a service-connected disability declared, rated
9 or compensated by the United States [Veterans Administration]
10 Department of Veterans Affairs or its successor to be [a total
11 or] 100% [permanent disability] permanent and totally disabled,
12 and if the State Veterans' Commission determines that such
13 persons are in need of the tax exemptions [granted herein.]
14 based on the economic circumstances that exist at the member's
15 place of residence. The exemption shall apply to the primary
16 residence even if the eligible veteran resides at a long-term
17 care facility until the eligible veteran no longer retains
18 ownership of the residence. Compensation received by the member
19 for an injury due to service as indicated in this section may
20 not be considered by the State Veterans' Commission. This
21 exemption shall be extended to the unmarried surviving spouse
22 upon the death of an eligible veteran and to the surviving
23 spouse of a member of the armed forces of the United States,
24 including a reserve component or National Guard, who was killed
25 in action and died as a result of injuries received while in
26 active service in a written finding, provided that the State
27 Veterans' Commission determines that such person is in need of
28 the exemption.

29 (d) The unmarried surviving spouse upon the death of an
30 eligible veteran or whose spouse was killed in the line of duty,

1 becomes missing in action, presumed dead, becomes a prisoner of
2 war or is posthumously determined to be 100% disabled as
3 determined by the United States Department of Defense or
4 Department of Veterans Affairs shall be exempt from the payment
5 of all real property taxes on the surviving spouse's primary
6 place of residence imposed by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
7 or any of its political subdivisions if the State Veterans'
8 Commission determines that the person is in need of the
9 exemption. There shall be no restriction on a surviving spouse
10 who is eligible for an exemption under this subsection if the
11 surviving spouse relocated to another primary place of residence
12 or the surviving spouse resides outside of this Commonwealth at
13 the time of death of the member of the armed forces of the
14 United States. The exemption under this subsection shall cease
15 if the surviving spouse remarries and shall not be claimed
16 thereafter.

17 (e) After an exemption has been approved under subsection
18 (c) or (d), the amount of real property taxes due for the
19 applicable tax year shall be prorated from the date the
20 application for the exemption is received by the State Veterans'
21 Commission.

22 Section 2. (a) Upon the first passage by the General
23 Assembly of this proposed constitutional amendment, the
24 Secretary of the Commonwealth shall proceed immediately to
25 comply with the advertising requirements of section 1 of Article
26 XI of the Constitution of Pennsylvania and shall transmit the
27 required advertisements to two newspapers in every county in
28 which such newspapers are published in sufficient time after
29 passage of this proposed constitutional amendment.

30 (b) Upon the second passage by the General Assembly of this

1 proposed constitutional amendment, the Secretary of the
2 Commonwealth shall proceed immediately to comply with the
3 advertising requirements of section 1 of Article XI of the
4 Constitution of Pennsylvania and shall transmit the required
5 advertisements to two newspapers in every county in which such
6 newspapers are published in sufficient time after passage of
7 this proposed constitutional amendment. The Secretary of the
8 Commonwealth shall submit this proposed constitutional amendment
9 to the qualified electors of this Commonwealth at the first
10 primary, general or municipal election which meets the
11 requirements of and is in conformance with section 1 of Article
12 XI of the Constitution of Pennsylvania and which occurs at least
13 three months after the proposed constitutional amendment is
14 passed by the General Assembly.

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

HOUSE BILL

No. 1868 Session of
2021

INTRODUCED BY MAKO, HICKERNELL, WHEATLEY, BOBACK, SAINATO,
RIGBY, DELLOSO, SCHMITT, N. NELSON, KINSEY, HENNESSEY,
McNEILL, HILL-EVANS, POLINCHOCK, JAMES, MOUL, MILLARD,
SOLOMON, KERWIN, CIRESI, BERNSTINE, HOWARD, HAMM, R. BROWN,
FITZGERALD, SCHLEGEL CULVER, PISCIOTTANO AND NEILSON,
SEPTEMBER 15, 2021

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON PROFESSIONAL LICENSURE,
SEPTEMBER 15, 2021

AN ACT

1 Amending Title 63 (Professions and Occupations (State Licensed))
2 of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, adding provisions
3 relating to veterans' licensure by providing for
4 representation on licensing boards, for expedited license,
5 for military experience in place of education criteria, for
6 expedited temporary license, for relevant military
7 experience, for renewal of license for deployed
8 servicemembers, for fees and for reports.

9 The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
10 hereby enacts as follows:

11 Section 1. Title 63 of the Pennsylvania Consolidated
12 Statutes is amended by adding a chapter to read:

13 CHAPTER 33

14 VETERANS' LICENSURE

15 Sec.

16 3301. Definitions.

17 3302. Representation on licensing boards.

18 3303. Expedited license.

1 3304. Military experience in place of education criteria.

2 3305. Expedited temporary license.

3 3306. Relevant military experience.

4 3307. Renewal of license for deployed servicemembers.

5 3308. Fees.

6 3309. Reports.

7 § 3301. Definitions.

8 The following words and phrases when used in this chapter
9 shall have the meanings given to them in this section unless the
10 context clearly indicates otherwise:

11 "Bureau." The Bureau of Professional and Occupational
12 Affairs in the Department of State.

13 "License." A registration permit, certificate or license
14 issued by a licensing board.

15 "Licensing board." A departmental or administrative board or
16 commission under the bureau.

17 "Military Occupational Codes Crosswalk." A module created by
18 a licensing board to provide guidance when evaluating
19 servicemembers' and veterans' applications for licensure to
20 identify skills, experience, credentials and education that have
21 been obtained in the military and crosswalking those skills,
22 experience, credentials and education into substitute licensure
23 requirements.

24 "Military spouse." The spouse of a servicemember or veteran.
25 The term includes an unmarried spouse of a deceased
26 servicemember where the servicemember died one year before the
27 date an application for a license is submitted to a licensing
28 board.

29 "Qualified applicant." A servicemember, veteran or military
30 spouse for a license.

1 "Servicemember." An active duty member of the armed forces
2 of the United States, a reserve component or the national guard
3 of a state.

4 "Veteran." A former servicemember who was discharged from
5 active duty under circumstances other than dishonorable.

6 § 3302. Representation on licensing boards.

7 The Governor shall provide preference to and strive to
8 achieve the goal of one servicemember, veteran or military
9 spouse serving on a licensing board in this Commonwealth. The
10 servicemember, veteran or military spouse shall be a public
11 member of the licensing board and not an elected or appointed
12 member.

13 § 3303. Expedited license.

14 (a) Application question.--A licensing board shall include a
15 question on applications for licensure, renewal and reactivation
16 whether the individual submitting the application is a
17 servicemember, veteran or military spouse.

18 (b) Processing.--If an applicant is deemed as a qualified
19 applicant, the licensing board shall:

20 (1) Request that the qualified applicant submit
21 documentation to the licensing board demonstrating status as
22 a servicemember, veteran or military spouse.

23 (2) Upon submission, expedite the processing of the
24 application.

25 § 3304. Military experience in place of education criteria.

26 A licensing board shall issue a license to a qualified
27 applicant who does not meet the educational requirements for the
28 license so long as the qualified applicant:

29 (1) Submits an application and fee as prescribed by the
30 board by regulation.

1 (2) Passes all exams required for licensure.

2 (3) Has completed a military program and was awarded a
3 military occupational specialty.

4 (4) Performed in that occupational specialty at a level
5 that is substantially equivalent to the academic requirements
6 for the license that the qualified applicant applied.

7 (5) Has engaged in active practice for at least two of
8 the previous five years before submitting the application. A
9 qualified applicant's relevant military service experience of
10 the qualified applicant's official duties must be credited in
11 the calculation of the number of years the qualified
12 applicant has practiced in the profession.

13 (6) Meets all other noneducational requirements for
14 licensure.

15 § 3305. Expedited temporary license.

16 (a) Requirements of temporary license.--Each licensing board
17 shall issue an expedited temporary license to a qualified
18 applicant who meets the criteria of subsection (c).

19 (b) Expiration.--The expedited temporary license shall be
20 valid until the earlier of one of:

21 (1) Six months after the date of issuance of the
22 temporary license by the licensing board.

23 (2) The date a nontemporary license is granted.

24 (3) The date a notice to deny a license is issued under
25 subsection (f).

26 (c) Criteria.--An application for an expedited temporary
27 license shall include the following documentation that the
28 applicant:

29 (1) Is a servicemember, veteran or military spouse.

30 (2) Holds a valid license in good standing issued in

1 another state.

2 (3) Is assigned to a duty station in this Commonwealth
3 or has established legal residence in this Commonwealth.

4 (4) Has submitted a full application for licensure.

5 (d) State equivalent.--Except as provided for in subsection
6 (e), before issuing an expedited temporary license to a
7 qualified applicant under this section, the licensing board
8 shall determine that the requirements for licensure in another
9 state the qualified applicant is licensed are substantially
10 equivalent to or exceed the requirements for licensure in this
11 Commonwealth.

12 (e) Not substantially equivalent.--If a licensing board
13 determines that the requirements for licensure in another state
14 the qualified applicant is licensed are not substantially
15 equivalent to licensure in this Commonwealth, the licensing
16 board may issue an expedited temporary license for a limited
17 period of time at the discretion of the licensing board while
18 the qualified applicant completes additional requirements for
19 licensure in this Commonwealth.

20 (f) Denial of temporary license.--A licensing board may not
21 issue an expedited temporary license if the issuance of the
22 license poses a risk to public health, safety or welfare.

23 (g) Publication.--The process for obtaining an expedited
24 temporary license shall be published on a licensing board's
25 publicly accessible Internet website.

26 § 3306. Relevant military experience.

27 (a) Years of experience.--Notwithstanding any other
28 provision of law, in calculating a qualified applicant's years
29 of practice or experience in an occupation or a profession, a
30 licensing board shall give credit to the qualified applicant for

1 relevant experience obtained as a servicemember or veteran.

2 (b) Training or education provided by military.--A licensing
3 board shall give credit for training and education provided by
4 the military and completed by a qualified applicant toward
5 training or education requirements for licensure, if the
6 training or education is determined by the licensing board to be
7 substantially equivalent to the training or education required
8 for licensure in this Commonwealth.

9 (c) Military Occupational Codes Crosswalk.--A licensing
10 board shall use the Military Occupational Codes Crosswalk to
11 facilitate the acceptance of military practice or experience if
12 training or education requirements for licensure are incomplete.

13 § 3307. Renewal of license for deployed servicemembers.

14 (a) Renewal application submission before deployment.--

15 (1) A servicemember who is scheduled to be deployed
16 outside this Commonwealth may apply for renewal of a license
17 if the deployment will occur when the license is eligible for
18 renewal.

19 (2) The servicemember may submit to the licensing board
20 all requirements for renewal prior to deployment.

21 (3) The licensing board shall provide a review of the
22 application and information received.

23 (4) If the licensing board finds that a requirement is
24 not met, the licensing board may notify the servicemember of
25 the deficiency but may not process the renewal until the
26 biennial renewal cycle begins.

27 (b) Late renew after deployment.--A licensing board may
28 renew a license of a servicemember after the expiration of the
29 license without penalty if the late renewal is a direct result
30 of deployment.

1 (c) Extension of continued education.--A licensing board may
2 extend a requirement to complete continuing education or
3 continued competency requirements for up to three months after
4 deployment of a servicemember if the servicemember meets all
5 other requirements for license renewal.

6 (d) Military spouse.--This section shall apply to a military
7 spouse if the military spouse travels with the servicemember
8 during deployment.

9 § 3308. Fees.

10 A licensing board may not assess a fee for an initial
11 licensure of a military spouse who relocated to this
12 Commonwealth as a result of the servicemember's military orders.

13 § 3309. Reports.

14 The bureau shall submit an annual report once for six years
15 to the chairperson and minority chairperson of the Consumer
16 Protection and Professional Licensure Committee of the Senate
17 and the chairperson and minority chairperson of the Professional
18 Licensure Committee of the House of Representatives. The report
19 shall include:

20 (1) The number of qualified applicants.

21 (2) The number of qualified applicants who were approved
22 for licensure.

23 (3) The number of qualified applicants who were denied
24 licensure including data on the reasons for denial.

25 (4) Data on the licensing board's application processing
26 times for qualified applicants including reasons for delays.

27 (5) Recommendations on ways to improve the licensing
28 board's ability to meet the licensing needs of
29 servicemembers, veterans and military spouses.

30 Section 2. This act shall take effect in 60 days.