

1000 (5)	CALL TO ORDER	Chairman Sam Petrovich
	Moment of Silence	Vice-Chairman Nick Taylor
	Pledge of Allegiance	Chairman Sam Petrovich
1005 (2)	Commission Introduction	Chairman Sam Petrovich
1007 (2)	Approval of 02 April meeting minutes	REQUIRES A VOTE
1009 (2)	Oath of Office	MG Mark Schindler
	James “Woody” Hogan-TAL	
1011 (10)	DMVA Military Update	MG Mark Schindler
1021 (10)	VISN 4	Mr. Tim Liezert
1031(10)	GAC-VS Homeless Committee	Ms. Samantha Cossman
	OLD BUSINESS	
	NEW BUSINESS	
1041 (5)	DMVA, Policy, Planning & Legislative Affairs	Mr. Seth Benge
1046 (10)	DMVA, Bureau of Veterans Homes	Mr. Travis Davis
1056 (10)	DMVA, Bureau of Programs, Initiatives, Reintegration and Outreach (PIRO)	Mr. Joel Mutschler
1106 (4)	Approval of Programs Report (Report provided by DMVA)	REQUIRES A VOTE
1110 (5)	Act 66 Committee report	Mr. Richard Hudzinski
1115 (5)	RETX Committee report	Mr. Justin Slep
1120 (5)	Legislative Committee report	Mr. Charles Jackson
1125 (5)	Pensions & Relief/Grave markings Committee report	Ms. Connie Snavelly
1135 (10)	Member-at-Large Committee	Chairman Sam Petrovich
1145 (10)	Good of the Order	Chairman Sam Petrovich
1155 (5)	Next Meeting:	
	September 10, 2021	
	Arrowheads Community Club	
	FIG, Annville	
1200	ADJOURNMENT	Chairman Sam Petrovich
	RETIRING OF COLORS	Chairman Sam Petrovich

State Veterans Commission

Meeting Minutes

April 2, 2021

10:00 AM to 12:00 PM

WebEx Video Teleconference

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 Nicholas Taylor opened the meeting with a recognition of the April birthdays of the Air Force Reserve and Army Reserve, as well as a moment of reflection and respect for Gold Star Spouses Day observed on April 5, 2021. Chairman Samuel Petrovich led a recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance.

Commission Introductions

MG Mark Schindler	The Adjutant General (Acting)
Mr. Mark Ferraro	Executive Deputy Secretary-DMVA
Mr. Samuel Petrovich	Chairman, SVC
Mr. Nicholas Taylor	Vice Chairman, SVC
Mr. Robert Forbes	Executive Director, AMVETS
Mr. John Pliska	Commander, AMVETS
Mr. Robert Ziltz	Commandant, Marine Corp League
Mr. William Albert	President, Blinded Veterans Association
Mr. Justin Slep	President, PA State Association of County Directors of Veterans Affairs
Mr. Keith Beebe	President, Military Officers Association of America
Mr. Larry Googins	Commander, Vietnam Veterans of America
Mr. Christopher Fidler	Director, Keystone Paralyzed Veterans of America
Ms. Constance Snively	Member at Large
Mr. Charles Jackson	Member at Large
Mr. Michael Brooker	Member at Large
Mr. Tim Liezert	Director, VISN 4

Others Present

Mr. Richard Hamp	DMVA-OVA
Mr. Joel Mutschler	DMVA-PIRO
Mr. Brian Natali	DMVA-PIRO (Programs and Services)
Mr. Cory Bender	DMVA-PIRO (Outreach and Reintegration)
Mr. Jeff King	DMVA-PIRO (Programs and Services)
Ms. Tracy Wylie-Perry	DMVA-PIRO (Programs and Services)
Mr. Paul DeVincenzo	DMVA-PIRO (Outreach and Reintegration)
Ms. Michelle Garrison	DMVA-PIRO (Programs and Services)
Ms. Brett Anne Beatty	DMVA-PIRO (Programs and Services-Phila)
Mr. Aaron Reiber	DMVA-PIRO (Programs and Services-Pitt)
Ms. Jennifer Spittler	DMVA- PIRO (Outreach and Reintegration)

Ms. Chelsea Ellsworth	DMVA-PIRO (Outreach and Reintegration)
Mr. Robert Lithgow	DMVA-PIRO (Outreach and Reintegration)
Ms. Catherine Reibsane	DMVA-PIRO (Programs and Services)
Mr. Greg Holler	DMVA-PIRO (Programs and Services)
Ms. Joan Nissley	DMVA-Public Affairs
Mr. Edward Beck	DMVA-BVH
Mr. Dusty Durand	DMVA-PPL
Mr. Seth Benge	DMVA-PPL
Mr. Jeff Wallitch	DMVA-OCC
Ms. Karin Simpson	DMVA-OCC
Ms. Lauren Troutman	PA Office of Budget
Ms. Colleen Kling	PA Office of Budget-Executive Manager
Mr. David Cowgill	VISN 4
Ms. Susan Meighen	PASACDVA-Washington County
Mr. Richard Hudzinski	Vietnam Veterans of America
Mr. Bruce Foster	The American Legion
Mr. Robert Gray	Keystone Paralyzed Veterans of America
Mr. David Reinertsen	The American Legion
Mr. William Wright	Catholic War Veterans
4 Unknown Callers	
Oath of Office	MG Schindler
[On agenda but not administered due to absence of Mr. Hogan.]	
Approval of the February 5, 2021 Meeting Minutes	
Motion: Mr. Taylor, Vice Chairman, made a motion to approve the minutes.	
Second: Mr. Pliska, AMVETS, seconded the motion.	
The body agreed; motion carried.	
<u>Questions/Discussion</u>	
Mr. Petrovich: Greg, would you attach the minutes from the last legislative committee meeting with the legislative goals.	
Mr. Jackson: I will read them in during this legislative committee report.	
Military Update	MG Schindler
<p>Thank you all for joining us today.</p> <p>Just over 1,200 mobilized from PANG. Continuation of air units and their mobilizations. Current deployments are still averaging about 1,000-1,200 per year, and it looks to be that way for the next few years.</p> <p>Stateside, PANG finished its mission in DC in March. Our Soldiers and Airmen came home as promised. PANG remains very busy. Engaged in Op Warp Speed, administering COVID-19 vaccinations to our own forces. Currently we have about 4,000 Soldiers and Airmen now vaccinated, and we continue to work through our chains of command to ensure that those who want a vaccine to get a vaccine.</p> <p>We are also very busy with our own COVID response. As I briefed last time, we had about 275 Soldiers and Airmen supporting long-term care facility requests throughout the state. We have seen less requests for long-term care facility support; requests and our attention have shifted to vaccination programs across the state.</p>	

Our needs were required for the approximately 10 intermediate unit (IU) vaccination centers supporting schools and teachers. We had approximately 100 clinical and non-clinical Guardsmen supporting those sites throughout the month of March vaccinating well over 14,000 teachers and support staff. At the same, we stood up a dual-status commander because FEMA stood up a type 1 vaccination site at the convention center in Philadelphia. It is still set up. That vaccination site is full of active duty Soldiers and it is augmented by about 40 PANG Soldiers and members of the Civil Air Patrol also. We are performing a non-clinical role there. Simultaneously, next week we will also stand up another vaccination center about 30 miles from there in Philadelphia, and send about 150 Soldiers and Airmen, clinical and non-clinical support. That will be a type 2 vaccination center. Concurrently, we are working with PEMA to set up support to regional facilities across the state of Pennsylvania. They are still in the planning stages, but we are looking at how we can best balance support of these vaccination centers as well as the federal mission support. For the National Guard, we are beginning to get into the busy season of annual training periods, so we do need medics and support personnel to be able to conduct those also. Those are the missions we have been busy with and will continue.

I would also like to take a minute to update the Commission on some personnel moves within the department:

I am pleased to announce the appointment of retired Army Colonel Maureen Weigl as new Deputy Adjutant General–Veterans Affairs effective April 12. Maureen served in numerous assignments of increased responsibility in both the Active Army and National Guard as an Adjutant General Corps Officer. Most notable were her assignments as the Executive Assistant to the Vice Chief, National Guard Bureau; Deputy Division Chief for the Army National Guard Strength Maintenance Division; and Division Chief of Soldier and Family Support. While serving as the Chief, Soldier and Family Support Division, she developed and implemented policies with DoD, VA, and others to minimize unemployment, sexual harassment, sexual assault and suicide in the National Guard. In 2008, in response to the large number of personnel who returned from combat theaters with traumatic brain injury or mild traumatic brain injury, COL Weigl deployed to Iraq to research methods of documenting those servicemembers who were exposed to rapid acceleration and/or concussive events, such as IED Blasts.

Since her retirement, Maureen has been serving Veterans. She started and served as president of a woman owned/service-disabled Veteran owned small business, where she provides government consulting, talent management and recruiting services. Maureen serves on boards for nonprofit agencies that help Veterans and Veteran spouses find employment including “Vets2Set” which she serves as executive director and cofounder. She served on a Veteran task force for the Lt. Governor of Pennsylvania for two years and co-hosted the Philadelphia Veteran’s Day Parade for the last five years. She has also been partnering with clothing manufacturers to make adjustable clothing for Veterans and others with prosthetic limbs.

Maureen holds a bachelor’s degree in Political Science and Communications from the University of Pittsburgh, a Master of Business Administration and Ethics Degree from Duquesne University, and a Master of Strategic Studies from the U.S. Army War College.

We have also hired a new Director of the Bureau of Veterans Homes, Mr. Travis Davis. Travis comes from the private sector with approximately eight years of long-term care facility experience. Travis will start with us on 7 April.

We have also selected a new Southeast Veterans Home Commandant. That selection still needs to be vetted, so an announcement will be coming soon.

Lastly, I am also pleased to announce the appointment of COL Laura McHugh as Deputy Adjutant General–Army, effective 1 April 2021. COL McHugh is a former AGR officer in the Pennsylvania Army National Guard, and brings extensive knowledge, experience, and leadership skills to this assignment.

She began her career by enlisting into the PA Army National Guard in 1986 with the 1068th MP Company, and she has held numerous, diverse positions throughout her 35-year career, such as serving as JFHQ Army

Chief of Staff, Commander 213th Regional Support Group, and she deployed to Iraq from February 2003 to May 2004 in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

COL McHugh attended King's College where she earned a Bachelor of Science Degree in Finance and was commissioned through Scranton University's ROTC program in 1991. She earned her Master of Science Degree in Leadership and Business Ethics from Duquesne University in May 2009 and graduated from the U.S. Army War College in July 2015, where she earned a Master of Strategic Studies Degree.

Pending any questions, that is all I have today.

Questions/Discussion

Mr. Petrovich, Chairman: Please pass on the Commission's welcome to everyone new on board.

MG Schindler: I will. We are excited to have them on board. I think everyone will be impressed by their credentials and their willingness to work together as a team doing what we are all here to do for our Veteran population in the Commonwealth.

VISN 4

Mr. Tim Liezert

Thank you and good morning all.

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

Dr. Borys Loza, MD has been appointed Chief of Staff at the Erie VAMC effective March 14, 2021. He has been the Acting Chief of Staff since October 1, 2020. Dr. Loza began his VA career at the North Florida South Georgia VA Health Care System as a Staff Physician in Primary Care at the Villages, Florida CBOC.

George Tzanis, former Wilmington Chief of Staff was appointed VISN 4 Clinical Resource Hub Director.

Barb Forsha, Deputy Director of the VA Pittsburgh continues to serve as the Acting Director of the Clarksburg VA.

Nancy Schmid, Associate Director for Patient Care Services, at Coatesville is retiring on March 26.

We are currently recruiting for a new Chief of Staff for Wilmington and Butler.

2. New Beneficiary Travel Self-Service System (BTSSS)

I am pleased to announce another option for eligible Veterans and their caregivers to submit claims for mileage reimbursement and other travel related expenses. The new system, called the Beneficiary Travel Self-Service System (BTSSS), offers many benefits:

- Access 24/7/365 from your PC, tablet or smart phone;
- Faster payments and direct deposit;
- Ability to check the status of your claim anytime, anywhere;
- Prefilled appointments, mileage, and other information that make filing a claim easier than ever.

Eligible Veterans and caregivers are encouraged to submit claims and supporting documentation for reimbursement of costs incurred for use of a personally-owned vehicle and other travel-related expenses such as tolls and parking. Find out if you are eligible for beneficiary travel benefits at the [VA Travel Pay Reimbursement](#) webpage.

Web links for easy filing and faster payments were included in your read ahead material: [file your claims using BTSSS](#) at <https://access.va.gov>.

Step by Step instructions were also provided in the read-aheads.

3. COVID-19 Vaccine – Update

The number of doses administered to Veterans at each facility is now updated daily on the [VA COVID-19 National Summary website](#). This link was provided in your read ahead material.

For Veterans who are wondering how to get a COVID-19 vaccine, please encourage them to visit VA’s COVID-19 vaccine website, which includes a Keep Me Informed tool, to help keep Veterans updated regarding vaccine distribution. While Veterans don’t need to sign up for this (or anywhere) to receive the COVID-19 vaccine, it may be helpful for both them and their local facility for planning purposes if they do.

As vaccine supply increases and we move through the distribution plan, care teams and local facilities will contact Veterans to let them know of their options. A link to the VA’s main COVID-19 COVID vaccine webpage was provided in your read-aheads. . Please share this link as widely as possible. (www.va.gov/health-care/covid-19-vaccine/).

4. Caregiver Support Update

The Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers (PCAFC) was created in 2011 and was previously open only to post-9/11 Veterans and their families. Under the MISSION Act of 2018, VA made changes to criteria for who qualifies for the program effective Oct. 1, 2020. These changes included expanded eligibility beyond post-9/11 Veterans, as well as targeting Veterans with moderate to severe health care needs.

Applications to the program are reviewed at the facility and VISN levels, with a level 1 and level 2 appeals process in place for denials. Staff from multiple VISNs work together to review appeals.

Since Oct. 1, 2020, VISN 4 has received 2,403 (as of Mar. 11) applications. 195 of the POST EXPANSION applications have been approved; 1,446 applications have been denied; and 762 are still being processed. Between both LEGACY PARTICIPANTS(approved before 10/1/20) and POST EXPANSION Participants, there are 698 Veterans with a total of 780 Caregivers in VISN 4 currently enrolled in the Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers(PCAFC)(Some Veterans have Primary Caregivers and up to two additional Secondary Caregivers).

PCAFC COVID Status for VISN 4:

127(16.28%) of our 780 Caregivers have received a COVID vaccine as of 3/10/21.(Some of those may include Caregivers who are also Veterans)

Currently staff are processing applications in a timely manner or quicker. 95% or more applications are adjudicated within 90 days in VISN 4 with the benchmark being 90%.

In addition to the PCAFC, is the Program of General Caregiver Support Services (PGCSS). VA has taken steps to enhance those resources for Veterans and caregivers, including adding dedicated staff at each facility. Veterans in this program don’t have to meet the requirements for the comprehensive program and will meet with staff for an introductory appointment.

Enhanced services in the PGCSS include:

- Group and individual interventions
- Suicide prevention training for caregivers
- Annual Caregiver Summit and Resource Fair
- Whole Health Coaching will be expanded to caregivers starting at the pilot site of Philadelphia VAMC in VISN 4
- Staff training on the Campaign for Inclusive Care

Staff regularly use technology and have capacity to reach out to Veterans over video or phone to provide care. Staff also provide education about safety and suicide prevention for caregivers to help them understand and increase safety in households. Last year the annual summits and resource fairs for caregivers were mainly held virtually but had tremendous response and great community participation.

Each VISN will have one pilot site offering whole health coaching for caregivers. In VISN 4, Philadelphia VA Medical Center will be a pilot site. As expansion rolls out, there will be more opportunities for other facilities. Staff are encouraging and empowering caregivers to have goals and be active members of the treatment process, as well as including providers to help everyone work together.

The national VA caregiver website is: www.Caregiver.va.gov

5. 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, which is the fourth highest VISN in the nation. The top 5 compliment themes over the last 90 days were quality of care, interactions with staff, satisfaction with specialty care, ear clinic services, and podiatry services.

6. Connected Care Update

With March being National Nutrition Month, Veterans can now take part in nutritional programs offered via VA Video Connect keeping them safe during the COVID pandemic. VISN 4 Nutrition Programs offered via Video to Home include MOVE!, Healthy Teaching Kitchen, Diabetes Management, and other collaborations with the Whole Health Program. Veterans who are interested in participating with the Nutrition Programs should contact their Primary Care Team at their local VA Facility for further information.

The Veterans Health Library has a new and improved look! <http://www.veteranshealthlibrary.va.gov/>

- New Medication Education Material
 - Concise, easy-to-understand instructions
 - Content written to activate patients at lower health literacy levels
 - QR code enabling patients to access more in-depth content
- Improved print functions
- New Wallet Card

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

Questions/Discussion

Mr. Hudzinski, VVA: The COVID-19 scheduling is currently of, are there any plans to take it online? I don't have a problem with the system, but there may be some that want or need that capability because of disability.

Mr. Liezert: There are several ways through the KeepMeInformed website. We are using VetText as a reach-out to Veterans who we have identified as not having the vaccine. They get a text indicating availability and they can respond to get scheduled. There are a couple other pathways we're exploring to get the vaccines out. We also are now operating the three different agents: Pfizer, Moderna, and Johnson & Johnson. About J&J, it provides a capability that doesn't require extreme refrigeration. So, we are using that agent to go out to our CBOCs and to reach the rural veterans at a higher rate. We are also sending home based primary care out to veterans to vaccinate in their homes. So, we are working a lot of different pathways.

Mr. Hudzinski: What I was really getting at is when you go to the private sites, you can register online. When you go to the VA, it says not currently set up for online registration.

Mr. Liezert: Thanks, got it. I will investigate that.

Mr. Slep, PASACDVA: DMVA staff and I met with the RO Directors to voice concern on inadequate processes going on with contracted C&P examines. We are getting reports that Veterans are being physically manipulated beyond pain thresholds. There are enough complaints and they seem to be consistent. They are all going through LHI. We took our complaints to the Regional Directors directly and provided them with file numbers and names. They are going to look closely into those providers. I did question them about their quality review process. I was told that there are about 1,000 exams per month run through quality assurance measures. Pittsburgh did provide around 10,800 exams this fiscal year. Again, my concern is with the physical manipulation during some of these exams. As a follow-up, I know that contract exams are here to stay, but is there any talk about VHA assuming any of the C&P exams at all?

Mr. Liezert: There has been ongoing discussion with respect to backlogs in musculoskeletal, audiology, and mental health exams that have built up over the pandemic. We're looking at our capabilities to help VBA out with that. I don't have definitive numbers, but we've received the ask and we're seeing what we can do.

OLD BUSINESS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

DMVA Policy, Planning & Legislative Affairs

Mr. Seth Benge

There have been some changes since the slides in your read-ahead material, so the slides today are updated.

Legislation Under Review

HB 290 (Warner) Amends the Local Option Small Games of Chance Act, in miscellaneous provisions, providing for games of chance operations during COVID-19 disaster emergency. Committee Report 3/24/21. First Consideration 3/24/21.

HB 556 (O'Mara) Amends Title 75 (Vehicles), in registration of vehicles, increasing the amount an applicant can contribute to the Veterans' Trust Fund through the Department of Transportation from \$3 to \$5. Effective in 60 days. Committee Report 3/23/21, First Consideration 3/23/21. Companion bill to SB 96 (below).

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. For vehicle registration, increases VTF contribution from \$6 to \$10. Final passage in Senate 46-0; 2/24/21.

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. The exclusion shall also apply to an unmarried surviving spouse upon the death of a veteran for any compensation or payment the unmarried surviving spouse is entitled to receive. Final Passage House 201-0; 3/24/21.

SB 155 (Mastriano) Amends Title 12 (Commerce and Trade), in Pennsylvania Military Community Enhancement Commission, providing that appointed commission members will be appointed to a three-year term with an opportunity for additional terms and that they serve until their successor is appointed. The act provides that members appointed by the governor will serve at the determination of the governor. This act applies to members appointed or reappointed after the date of passage. Final Passage in Senate 46-0. 2/24/21.

HB 196 (Day) Amends Title 51 (Military Affairs), in military leave of absence, further providing for employment discrimination for military membership or duty. Awaiting Second Consideration. Final passage in House 201-0; 3/17/21.

SB 274 (Fontana) Act authorizing the Dept. of General Services, with the approval of the Dept. of Military and Veterans Affairs and the Governor, to grant and convey, certain lands, buildings and improvements situate in (Coraopolis Maintenance Facility) Allegheny County. S SGOVT 2/21/21. Second Consideration 3/24/21.

HB 803 (O'Neal) Establishes the Keystone State Challenge Academy Special Fund for the PA National Guard Youth Challenge Program. H VAEP Committee 3/8/21. Final Passage in House 201-0. 3/24/21.

SB 455 (Bartolotta) Amends Title 51 (Military Affairs), in veteran-owned small businesses, establishing a veteran, reservist or National Guard-owned business logotype. SVAEP Committee Report 3/23/21. Regarding SB 455, look at Wisconsin DMVA for an example.

Real Estate Tax Exemption Legislation

SB 244 (Pittman) Amends Title 51 (Military Affairs), in disabled veterans' real estate tax exemption, providing compensation received by an individual for an injury due to service may not be considered by the commission for determining the need for exemption from payment of real estate taxes granted under this act. S VAEP. 2/18/21.

SB 253 (Tartaglione) Amends Title 51 (Military Affairs), in disabled veterans' real estate tax exemption, further providing for definitions and for duty of commission. The bill establishes that the State Veterans' Commission shall fix uniform and equitable standards for determining the need for exemption from the payment of real estate taxes. In fixing such uniform and equitable standards, an applicant with annual income of \$75,000 or less shall be deemed to be in need of the exemption. For applicants with an annual income that exceeds \$75,000, the commission shall determine the need of the applicant after submission of proof of need by the applicant for exemption from payment of real estate taxes. S VAEP. 2/22/21.

HB 910 (Mackenzie) Joint Resolution proposing an amendment to the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania providing for exemptions and special provisions exempting from the payment of all real property taxes all citizens and residents who were honorably discharged, released under honorable circumstances from active military service, or have a service-connected disability rated by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs to be 100 percent. The exemption shall also apply to the surviving spouse of any member of the Armed Forces of the United States who was killed in action in any war of armed conflict or who died as a result of injuries in any war or armed conflict. Constitutional amendments require approval in two consecutive legislative sessions and then approval by the voters through a referendum. H VAEP 3/15/21.

HB 1032 (Sappey) Joint Resolution proposing an amendment to the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, further providing for exemptions and special provisions exempting from property taxes all citizens and residents who were honorably discharged or released under honorable circumstances from active military service. Removes the wartime service requirement. HVAEP 3/29/21.

Co-sponsorship Memos Circulated

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

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

Legislation Enacted/Vetoed

HB 326 (O'Neal) Amends Titles 35 (Health & Safety) and 51 (Military Affairs), in COVID-19 disaster emergency, providing that within 45 days of the effective date, the National Guard shall establish and operate in each county a site for the mass distribution and administration of any vaccine for COVID-19; in the governor as commander-in-chief, limiting the powers of the governor related to public health duties; and, in Pennsylvania National Guard, providing that the guard shall perform the duties relating to COVID-19 vaccine. Active Duty for Emergency. New language adds C.) Distribution and administration of items for a virus; D – Report (45-day window for NG to report to GA) Defines "Region" and "Virus." Final Passage in House 202-0; 2/5/21. Final Passage in the Senate 46-0; 2/21/21. Approved by Governor (ACT 4) 3/3/21. Earliest Effective Date: 3/3/21.

Federal Legislation

H.R. 1276 SAVE LIVES Act

Rep. Mark Takano (D-CA) 4. 03/24/2021 Signed by President.

Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans' and Caregivers' COVID-19 Immunizations Now Expanded Act of 2021 or the VA VACCINE Act of 2021.

This bill authorizes the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to furnish a COVID-19 (i.e., coronavirus disease 2019) vaccine to covered individuals during the COVID-19 public health emergency.

Under the bill, covered individuals are

- veterans who are not eligible to enroll in the VA health care system;
- specified veterans who are eligible for hospital care, medical services, and nursing home care abroad;
- family caregivers of veterans participating in the VA's Program of Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers;
- caregivers of veterans participating in the VA's Program of General Caregiver Support Services; and
- caregivers of veterans participating in the VA's Medical Foster Home Program, Bowel and Bladder Program, Home Based Primary Care Program, or Veteran Directed Care Program.

The VA must prioritize the vaccination of veterans who are enrolled in the VA health care system. Additionally, vaccines furnished abroad are authorized regardless of whether vaccines are needed for the treatment of veterans with a service-connected disability (including those participating in a VA rehabilitation program).

That is all I have pending any questions.

Questions/Discussion

Mr. Liezert, VISN-4: Just a clarification on the SAVES LIVES Act. It also includes spouses and caregivers. And recently, in the last 24 hours, it has been decided to include National Guard and Reserve who have not been activated, as well as all categories of Veterans up to and including honorably discharged. It continues to be expanded and we are working on the implementation process, but if you have interested parties feel free to contact your local VA.

Mr. Bengé: Thank you, good information, especially on National Guard and Reserve.

DMVA Bureau of Veterans Homes

Mr. Rich Adams

Good morning, this is Ed Beck, Chief Operations Officer in Homes, in place of Mr. Richard Adams today.

All our homes are currently at full licensure with Department of Health and Department of Human Resources, as well as full recognition from VA.

Regarding out timetable for fully reopening. We are doing admissions at 5 of 6 homes, other than Soldiers & Sailors in Erie. We are also reopening for in-person, inside visitation at all six homes. Because personal care homes are monitored by a different state agency, there are different reopening timetables for the three facilities with personal care.

We have had a total of 28,486 tests conducted in facilities. We have been doing regular, weekly, and at many times during the pandemic twice-a-week testing. We have had many recoveries, 387. We continue to monitor, and we follow CDC guidelines for testing. If we do have a positive case, we go to weekly testing, otherwise residents are tested monthly.

Staff is tested monthly. If county positivity rate is over 5%, they get tested once a week. If it goes over 10%, they get tested twice a week. Numbers are going down for both residents and staff as we get people vaccinated and as county positivity rates have gone down.

If you are looking for more information about our reopening plans or have other questions, please go to our website <https://www.dmv.pa.gov/Pages/default.aspx>. Of course, if you cannot find the answer to your questions there, we are more than happy to help.

Questions/Discussions

Mr. Hudzinski, VVA: On the COVID chart for residents, column 10, I'm concerned about misleading information that incites people. Are you saying those people died of COVID? Because we're talking about a 12% death rate. I don't know if COVID is that virulent in the homes to cause that high a level. Are these certified as a cause of death due to COVID?

Mr. Beck, BVH: What we are reporting here is people who have died while having COVID. COVID may not necessarily be the primary cause of death, but this is how we are required to report it. Not all those people would have had COVID listed on their death certificate as the primary cause of death, but they would have been listed as being COVID positive. It is hard to say what caused the death with underlying medical conditions and comorbidities.

Mr. Hudzinski: Right, that's the coroner's decision, but I would footnote that if I were you. I'm talking about fairness of reporting. On number 5, I would retitle that: that's the number of tests administered, not the number of unique.

Mr. Petrovich, Chairman: We had the minutes from the two homes who had conducted meetings with their advisory boards in our read-ahead. Are those the only two meetings since October? Do they meet regularly, or have they not met regularly because of COVID?

Mr. Beck: They have met regularly. I believe we have only had two meetings that didn't meet because they couldn't get a quorum. But they meet quarterly and most of those meetings have occurred remotely. I'm not sure which copies you have, but I can get you the other copies.

Mr. Petrovich: I would appreciate that so we can distribute them out.

DMVA Bureau of PIRO

Mr. Joel Mutschler

Just a quick update on what we have had going on since we met last.

Suicide Prevention - The Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Servicemembers, Veterans and their Families, led by Mr. Rick Hamp, is going very well. Collaborating with DDAP and the UPMC Program, Evaluation and Research Unit (PERU) awarded over \$7M grant. In process of implementing the NW PA Suicide Prevention Program that will serve Veterans in 15 counties in the PA VETConnect Region 1. Engaged with Together with Veterans in NE PA (Carbon County).

VSO Stakeholder Engagement – We are very pleased with the teamwork here. We continue to encourage members of the Veteran Service Organizations to join in our outgoing efforts to serve the veterans community through PA VETConnect and the Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services. For example, the Marine Corps League Chaplain has been participating with the GAC-VS Homeless Committee over the past several months and is adding perspective in this space. We also have members of the veterans' services organizations engaged with the working group to update regulatory guidance and with our strategic planning.

We realize that there is no way we can successfully serve veterans without the cooperation of our 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.

Examples of this collaboration with the member organizations of the SVC are as follows:

- Pa Governor's Challenge to End Veterans Suicide – SVC Vice Chair
- NW PA Suicide Prevention Program and Together With Veterans (Carbon County)
- Cross Accreditation Agreement
 - The American Legion- we are working on a cross accreditation agreement to better serve our Veterans' community
- Burial Payments
- PA War Veterans Council
- 43 Pa Code Chapter 5 Update Working Group
 - MOAA - RETX
 - PSACDVA - RETX, Burial, Pension, EG
 - Member at Large - Burial
 - KPVA - Pension
 - VFW - Burial
- Transportation
 - DAV- improving the process of the transportation grants
- PA VETConnect Pilot- 7 VSOS from TAL, VFW, AMVETS, DAV, VVA. Anytime an accredited service officer wants to get plugged into PA VETConnect, please get in touch with Chip Gilliland.
- GAC-VS. I'm hoping we see more engagement GAC-VS committees, pulling folks from the orgs into their committee meetings.

With respect to our **Pension Poaching Awareness Campaign**. This is a cross-system cooperative effort to raise awareness among mainstream human service and healthcare providers about the issue of veteran pension poaching and the importance of referring Veterans and their families to an accredited VSO. Sister state agencies, trade organizations and state-level oversight groups are collaborating with us to send this important information out to the local levels via their communication avenues. The presentation is in your read-ahead packets. If your organization is interested in engaging with this, get in touch with Greg and we will get you plugged in. We are looking to kick that off on World Elder Abuse Awareness Day coming up in June.

RPOC contacts continue to grow. Four of five RPOCs are on the ground with one in the hiring process. We are covering down on Region 2 where we have that vacancy. There is a lot of great collaboration going on. We did kick off our Regional Advisory Board meetings a month or so ago. We had 22 attendees from various organizations across the Veterans community and it was a success. The point is to get into those regions, and find out what the issues are, what we need to be engaging on.

There are currently 1804 resources in the database. We continue to work with DHS on integrating into RISE PA, the enterprise system coming into play over the next few years. Once we can merge our I&R tool into RISE PA it will give us a much more robust capability.

I'll just move into the programs reports, Mr. Chairman, and then we will open to any questions.

Programs Report

Mr. Joel Mutschler

With respect to the OVA/VSO Grant Program slide, you can see where we are today. The VSO Grant Program ROI, as noted before, is 77 to 1. I will note there the very comprehensive feedback that we got from the SVC committee. We will continue to work on that.

Veterans Trust Fund: Working balance is a little over \$2.8 million.

PA Veterans Registry: little over 37,000 folks in the Registry currently.

Veterans Temporary Assistance: We continue to serve – 225 approved claims this FY.

Blind Veterans Pension: 102 Claimants currently on the program.

Amputee & Paralyzed Veterans Pension: 2,047 Claimants currently on the program.

Educational Gratuity: 212 claims paid so far this FY.

Military Family Relief Assistance Program: Healthy balance; continue to take applications.

Disabled Veterans Real Estate Tax Exemption: There are 14,518 Veterans currently on the program. 887 adjudications since the last meeting. Program continues to grow.

That is our Programs Report, pending Commission's Approval.

Approval of Programs Reports

Motion: Ms. Snavelly, Member-at-Large, made a motion to approve the programs report.

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

The body agreed; motion carried.

Questions/Discussion

Mr. Jackson, Member-at-Large: Three questions. How much does PA Vet Registry cost? We have 37,000 people on it with 700,000 Veterans.

Mr. Mutschler, PIRO: It's a statutorily required program and is included in our GGO budget for administration. I would have to get a number for you, but it is statutorily required.

Mr. Jackson: Ok, my thought is we could statutorily unrequired it if needed because it doesn't seem to be serving many Veterans. Secondly, do you have any data driving veterans pension poaching?

Mr. Mutschler: Through collaborative efforts with the PA Department of Aging, there is a need based on data. We have been working with the Office of Attorney General as well. I do not have any specific PA Veterans data at this point, but we are working toward getting more information on that front.

Mr. Jackson: I'm hoping there is data to support that. Thirdly, on your PA VETConnect chart, you have Local, County Directors, but service organizations are tiny. How come County Directors get the same billing as the others on the top line on that chart?

Mr. Mutschler: County Directors are statutorily required partners. We accredit them and they provide advocacy our state claims. The organizations area force multiplier. I don't think anyone is any more important than another.

Mr. Jackson: I'm glad to hear that, maybe next time the organizations will equal the others. That's all.

Mr. Hudzinski, VVA: Three questions. Has there been any progress in adding the Act 66 VSO locations to your PA VETConnect website? It's rather limited, and this is a major resource to you, but it's not occurring on your website.

Mr. Mutschler: They are on the website, those that have been trained up. I understand your concern, but that is just the way we have it. Again, any VSO from the service organizations who wants to take part in this simply needs to reach out to us and we can get them plugged in.

Mr. Hudzinski: I respect what you're saying but it's the same logic that occurred originally with the Veterans Registry. You couldn't get the newsletter or the information unless you were registered which defeats the

purpose of the Department or OVA being involved in Veterans Affairs. You have a resource here. This stuff is not rocket science in providing services. These folks are already trained up, it's just letting the public know where they are in providing that resource. Second question, Fairweather Lodges. Good concept, good idea, been around for a long time. How many veteran-centric lodges are there?

Mr. Mutschler: Two. Currently they're in the process of reenergizing the Veteran Centric Fairweather Lodges. I will give a more detailed brief at the next meeting.

Mr. Hudzinski: There's one in Venango County, what is the other?

Mr. Mutschler: I'm sorry, I will let you know.

Mr. Hudzinski: Last question. On MFRAP, that was originally designed to support the National Guard. Then you created the Veteran component. Do we deconflict these financial aid programs, do we check one against the other?

Mr. Mutschler: Yes. If we get an MFRAP application, staff checks them. If they don't qualify for MFRAP, we are looking at whether they qualify for VTA, and vice versa.

Mr. Hudzinski: It seems over the years it's a relatively underutilized program in comparison to VTA. So, if they could be tapping into MFRAP, it reinforces the need for that program. Otherwise, would it be advisable to combine the MFRAP and VTA programs?

Mr. Mutschler: Interesting question....

Mr. Petrovich, Chairman: On the one chart with the transportation, getting together and looking at how the program is going with disbursement of funds.... Do you have any idea of when we're going to start working on that? Again, I got the money at the third quarter of the year. We had to fund that program for three whole quarters.

Mr. Mutschler: Now that we have it back at DMVA, you, Jen, and I can sit down and have a conversation on that. Making sure that we're able to administer that program.

Mr. Petrovich: Ok, I didn't know you brought it back to DMVA?

Mr. Mutschler: There was an update to the fiscal code that allows us to do that. That will allow us to administer it through our grants program.

Mr. Petrovich: I know Dusty was working on a rewrite and there were some major problems with that. Can I see what's there now?

Mr. Mutschler: He was working on a 51 rewrite that did not go through. The way they corrected that was to put language into the fiscal code that allows DMVA to administer it through our grant program instead of through the MOA with DHS.

Mr. Petrovich: Ok. You, Jen, and I need to sit down then.

Mr. Petrovich: I've spoken to Joel about bringing the chairs in from the GAC-VS so that Commissioners can get a better feel for what they're doing so we can get more interaction with the GAC-VS like Marine Corps League and VFW did. Also, I know we've been seeing slides since last October of all the interaction going on with PA VETConnect. How are you tracking and what results can you show of the Veterans being helped?

Mr. Mutschler: The program itself is still in infancy. We launched November 9th. The primary purpose of our RPOCs is to be the link for the county directors and other VSOs. That's where our metrics currently lie, and I can share those if you like. But we're also looking at and sharing humanistic stories.

Mr. Petrovich: When you're talking VSOs.... When I think of a VSO, I think of as a person a Veteran sits with to work through a claim. For someone who just sends someone to those people, those are like navigators. They're directing or pointing them to a VSO, to people that can help.

Mr. Mutschler: VSOs are advocates who are doing a multitude of things under one hat. For example, if I have a Veteran in crisis sitting in front of me, what should happen is that we should ask some questions and get that Veteran connected to the appropriate resources. How are we connecting that Veteran to services? That's where PA VETConnect comes in. Depending on the circumstances, when that Veteran is sitting in front of us, we may or may not know what services they're eligible for. That's when we can plug into the I&R tool and make a warm hand-off. I look at VSOs from a holistic perspective. It's not just about doing claims. It's about getting Veterans connected to the services they need.

Mr. Jackson: On the right-hand side of your chart it said Local – CDVAs, Service Orgs and non-profits interacting with Veterans. In the center, you have PA VETConnect, with 17 people, connecting with the others. How many times does someone on the local side go to PA VETConnect and say I'm at a loss? Can you help me get someone to the right place? I don't really want to say they used an excel spreadsheet to find it. How many "pings" does the local side of your chart get from the center to get their Veterans to the right services?

Mr. Mutschler: I go back to the briefings we've given. I will make sure we make those charts available again. It happens daily and it continues to increase. Part of the teamwork is ensuring that across the continuum we're all working together. Our RPOCs are on the phone with county directors daily. They're on the phone with VSOs under the VSO grant program quite often, but we have some work to do there. I will include those metric reports in future briefings.

Mr. Petrovich: Thanks Joel, thanks for putting up with us.

SVC Act 66 Committee

Mr. Rich Hudzinski

We met with Joel et al. on 10 March where they introduced a grant info sheet. We had a good discussion. After that meeting, we sent a piece of staffing that we have been working on for close to a year on a KPI (key performance indicator) proposal – results-based accountability. That is the stepping-stone to the next part. We are going to be reaching out to Joel and Chip to try to set up another meeting in the next few weeks. I'm waiting to get the final review done on the grant timeline and rating methodology. The other things we want to talk about is the allocation formula. Nobody seems to know what that is or how it's done. The other thing is a common DMVA reporting database for Act 66. In 2007, the TAG at the time, Jessica Wright, asked for a data dump on comp and pension awards down to the POA level in the state. It's an issue of talking to VA and coding things. The other thing is incorporation of the KPI proposal into the strategic plan. You should be getting the idea that there has been very little consideration of the Act 66 in the direction you're going. Our view is that you should use it as contracted labor to expand your reach. It is not a VTF-type grant program. This is a tool at your disposal. We would like to see us more incorporated in your thinking. There is not much in your current strategic plan on PA VETConnect, but there has been a lot of effort in that area. All this is being done to solve some problems like funding on time, getting the term of a contract in sync with the period of performance. Then a rating methodology so you can properly assess how well they're doing. So, we will be getting back to you about that in the coming weeks, then we will follow up with the county directors.

Questions/Discussion

None.

SVC RETX Committee

Mr. Justin Slep

In Seth's presentation, he showed some of the RETX bills. We met March 23, I sent in our notes on that. We discussed HB 491, HB 910, HB 927, SB 244, SB 253, SB 424, and the co-sponsorship memos. Also, there was language provided to the committee for the proposed Constitutional amendments that the committee reviewed

and decided to push over to the Legislative Committee. I sent that over to the legislative chairperson for their committee and to you, Mr. Chairman, as well.

Questions/Discussion

Mr. Hudzinski, VVA: I've seen good work being done in RETX Committee, but I still don't see MIA being addressed. I see KIA. Have you seen any action in that area in suggested language? Is that too complicated to handle currently?

Mr. Slep PSACDVA: I will take that back and address it, talk to the committee and Seth about where that language could appear.

Hudzinski: Tied to that is the POW, as a subset. MIA should address the POW issue as well.

Mr. Bengel, PPL: In the language we've been discussing we do address MIA but not POW, so we need to look at that.

SVC Legislative Committee

Mr. Charles Jackson

Committee met March 1. With your indulgence, I will read into the minutes a memo from the PA SVC Legislative Committee.

1. Members:

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

2. ISSUES TO BE ACTIVELY PURSUED THIS LEGISLATIVE CYCLE:

- Obtain legislative changes to 51 Pa. C.S. Chapter 17 which clarify the role of the State Veterans' Commission for the purpose of improving its effectiveness in performing its intended purpose as an independent advisory board, administratively supported by the DMVA, with some regulatory functions.
- Review both the funding for the Act 66 of 2007 outreach program against the Governor's proposed executive budget and the DMVA's administration of the program, acting to ensure program stability and improved management where legislative activity is required.
- Increase the awareness within state government of the importance of the little understood DAV-VHA collaborative partnership known as the Veterans Transportation Network (VTN). Lobby for an increase to the state's portion of this program's funding; (2) DMVA's diligence in timely administration; and (3) legislation or written agreement to ensure all Commonwealth funds appropriated for the Disabled American Veterans Transportation line item are for the use of the Pennsylvania Department of the Disabled American Veterans VTN program only as originally intended.
- Support legislative efforts which (1) supplement the Veterans Treatment Court (aka veterans' diversion court) movement by adding the requirements that every County District Court of Common Pleas take positive steps to identify all veterans appearing before it; and, prior to sentencing, performs a professional diagnosis for the presences of PTSD or TBI when a preliminary screening of the veteran indicates such is needed; and (2) all prison-sentenced veterans to apply for a post-conviction review of their *sentences* if Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) was incurred while serving their country, if not previously done.

- Support a bill without amendments which exclusively focuses on a state constitutional amendment to the Disabled Veterans’ Real Estate Tax Exemption (Chapter 89 of Title 51) adding unmarried spouses of service members killed in action (KIA) or missing in action (MIA) passed.

3. OTHER ISSUES/POSITIONS:

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

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for allowing me to read that in.

The PA Department of Aging is establishing a Long-term Care Council. The concept of long-term care is covered by the SVC’s other issues to be pursued, specifically “Support a robust, well-managed state long-term healthcare system for those veterans and their dependents in need, regardless of who manages it.” Nate Silcox invited the SVC Chairman, Bob Gray, Rich Hudzinski, and me to a meeting pertaining to the organization of this council, and he suggested adding a 43rd member to the council: the SVC Chairman or his designee.

Motion: Mr. Jackson made a motion to approve joining the Department of Aging’s Long-term Care Council with the Chairman or his approved designee representing the SVC.

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

The body agreed; motion carried.

HB 491, which has passed the House, would remove all Veterans’ income from VA disability or pension benefits plus any state program from being counted as income for state programs. We agree with the PA War Veterans Council which will be outlining at least four issues with the bill. Among these will be issues with certain phrasing and definitions, the vagueness of disability pensions, and the bill’s impact on RETX. It would negatively affect the State Veteran Commission’s authority to administer the RETX program. The Legislative Committee recommends we do not support HB 491.

Motion: Mr. Jackson made a motion that the SVC does not support HB 491 as written.

Second: None.

Motion dies.

HB 995 is legislative justification for PA VETConnect. The Legislative Committee notes there is no mention of Act 66 or the state veterans service organizations. We recommend we do not support HB 995 as written.

Motion: Mr. Jackson made a motion that the SVC does not support HB 995 as written.

Second: None.

Motion dies.

HB 910 is a RETX bill that has merit. It adds KIA to eligibility and requires a partial tax exemption dating to the submission of the application. It is missing MIA/POW. This is the domain of the RETX Committee, so I pass that on to them.

SB 253, also a bill with RETX implications, has the effect of seriously diminishing the SVC's authority to perform its role in determining RETX need. I pass this bill on to the RETX Committee also.

HB 1057 adds Navy Club to SVC. The Navy Club has no state HQ. It is a member of the PA War Veterans Council and has not attended any meetings in the past several months. The SVC Secretary is contacting them, and our position should be if the Navy Club determines they do not want to be a member of PWVC, we will report that out and make it known to HB 1057.

Lastly, the Legislative Committee has been informed that the ranking and minority executive directors of the House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committees continue their work to have a response to our proposed revision to Title 51, Chapter 17. That proposed revision will clarify the role of SVC. The target date for their response is 20 April.

Questions/Discussion

Mr. Petrovich, Chairman: Thank you, just one correction. Secretary of PWVC will be reaching out to Navy Club.

Mr. Jackson: I thought that's what I said. I'm sorry.

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

Good morning. As DMVA already stated, there is a working group to update the regulations for several of their programs. The working group is broken down into small teams according to the specific programs. Members of our committee are assisting on the Burial Grant and Blind and Paralyzed/Amputee Pension Programs.

Questions/Discussions

None.

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

There will be an invitation for a meeting going out this coming week. We have three slots to fill. One of those slots is Michael Brooker's slot, who just came on. Our goal is to fill the two Member-at-Large positions. One is a female Veteran (held by Connie currently), and the one held by John Cyprian, and then Michael's. We will be going over the webpage and advertising based on what we learned last time. We thought we did a great job last time, but you learn things that may make things a little better. We will keep you posted on those activities.

Questions/Discussion

None.

Good of The Order/Announcements

Mr. Petrovich: We are currently scheduled to meet in June and then in August. Last year, with COVID-19, the meeting in August did not conflict with the organizations' national conventions. In the past we did not meet in August for this reason. What I am asking, and I've spoken with Mr. Ferraro and the PWVC about this, what we would like to do is cancel the August meeting and reschedule for Friday, September 10 which is the week after Labor Day. I will also try to get the PWVC to move their meeting as well.

Motion: Mr. Talyor, Vice Chairman, moved to cancel the August meeting and reschedule for September 10.

Second: Mr. Fidler, KPVA, seconded the motion.

The body agreed; motion carried.

Mr. Hudzinski, VVA: Mr. Jackson brought up some issues that right now the Commissioners are not prepared to decide on. One of the issues that has come up in legislation is where they address service-connected disability, but what they don't address is the disability pension. Really, it's an indigency pension, and when you're going to exclude those people from access to services because of lack of proper wording, I don't think that is good. I think the Commissioners need to realize that one of the points that Mr. Jackson was raising in his motion was the fact that it is that some of the legislation was not addressing some of the Veterans that most need the help. Presently those with pensions are excluded while those with service-connected disability compensation are included.

Mr. Petrovich: Thank you. Get that information to Justin.

Next Meeting

June 4, 2021
Forum: Virtual

Adjournment

Chairman Petrovich retired the colors and adjourned the meeting at 12:00 p.m.

The minutes of this meeting are respectfully submitted by:

Mr. Marc Ferraro
Interim Lead Deputy
Veterans Affairs



STATE VETERANS COMMISSION MEETING
June 4, 2021





DMVA MILITARY UPDATE



CURRENT MOBILIZATIONS & TOTAL DEPLOYMENTS



PAARNG Current Deployments

MDATE	MSAD	UNIT	OPN	PAX	MISSION	Projected Return Date
11&18 JUN 20	06 JUL 20	28 th ECAB	OSS 19-21	538	Aviation Support	31 MAY 2021
18 FEB 21	21 FEB 21	108 ASMC	EDI 20-22	78	T10, 12304B	18 DEC 2021
ARNG Soldiers at MOB/DEMOB Sites				398	Various Missions	Various based on tour
Various Individual MOB Soldiers				20	Various Missions	Various based on tour
Total PAARNG Deployed: 1034						

PAANG Current Deployments

Unit	Opn	Pax
193 SOW	OFS-OIR-OSS, Other	8/1
111 ATKW	IPR (HS), OFS-OIR-OSS, TS	36/6/40
171 ARW	Alert Status (HS), OFS-OIR-OSS	37
Total PAANG Deployed		128

Total PANG Deployed 1162

VISN 4 Access – Fiscal Year 2021 Wait Times



Clinics FY21 thru May 13	Number of Appointments	Wait <30 Days	% Wait <30 Days	Average Wait
Mental Health	136,674	133,582	98.0%	3.0
Primary Care	421,862	412,613	97.8%	3.2
Specialty Care	458,680	414,969	91.0%	11.5
ALL	1,503,853	1,423,351	94.8%	6.7

Data updated 5/14/2021 with appointment info as of 5/13/2021.

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	2	1	14	2
Abie Abraham HCC	16	1	9	2
Coatesville VAMC	4	2	16	5
Erie VAMC	6	5	9	1
Lebanon VAMC	2	3	5	3
Corporal Michael J. Crescenz VAMC	13	6	13	2
VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System	21 (HZ) 6 (UD)	7 (HZ) 5 (UD)	1 (HZ) 9 (UD)	4 (HZ) 1 (UD)
Wilkes-Barre VAMC	5	2	11	3
Wilmington VAMC	4	5	1	3

Data updated 5/14/2021 with wait times as of 5/3/21 for last 30 days.

accesstocare.va.gov

June 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	153,509	87,042
FY 21 (as of 5/13/21)	99,191	66,685

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

Data updated 5/14/2021 with consult info as of 5/13/21.

Vision:

Be the premier forum for seamless communication and collaboration in effectively understanding and responding to Veteran homelessness within Pennsylvania.

Mission:

Build collaborative intergovernmental and community-based relationships to identify and promote awareness of the resources that could help veterans experiencing or at risk for housing instability.

- **Diligently developed working relationships across stakeholder systems**
 - VISN 4 Homeless Lead and VAMC Homeless Care Teams
 - Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF) grantees
 - Continuum of Care (CoC) representatives
 - State agencies
 - Veterans advocates like VSOs (CDVAs now also participate as well as MCL Chaplain)
 - New committee participants are always welcome!

- **Working across stakeholder systems to obtain data in order to get a better understanding veteran homelessness and housing insecurity in Pennsylvania.**
 - VISN 4 (information from HOMES)
 - SSVF (annual enrollments)
 - Continuums of Care (annual PIT counts)

Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF)

Total for 12 SSVF grantees – 2,460 Veteran households enrolled from 10/1/19 to 9/30/20

Data source: Pennsylvania's SSVF grantees

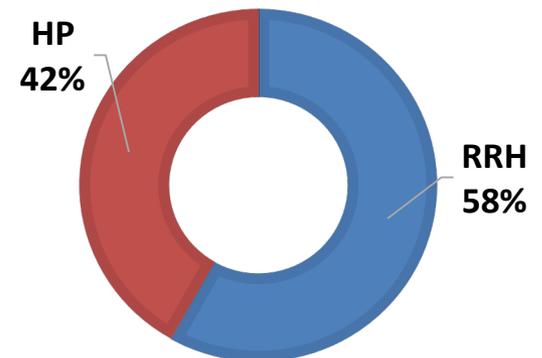
Rapid Rehousing enrollments – 1,430 Veteran households

Literally homeless; lacked a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence (e.g. a place not meant for human habitation, a shelter, exiting institution after 90 days or less and homeless prior to entering, or fleeing/trying to flee domestic violence)

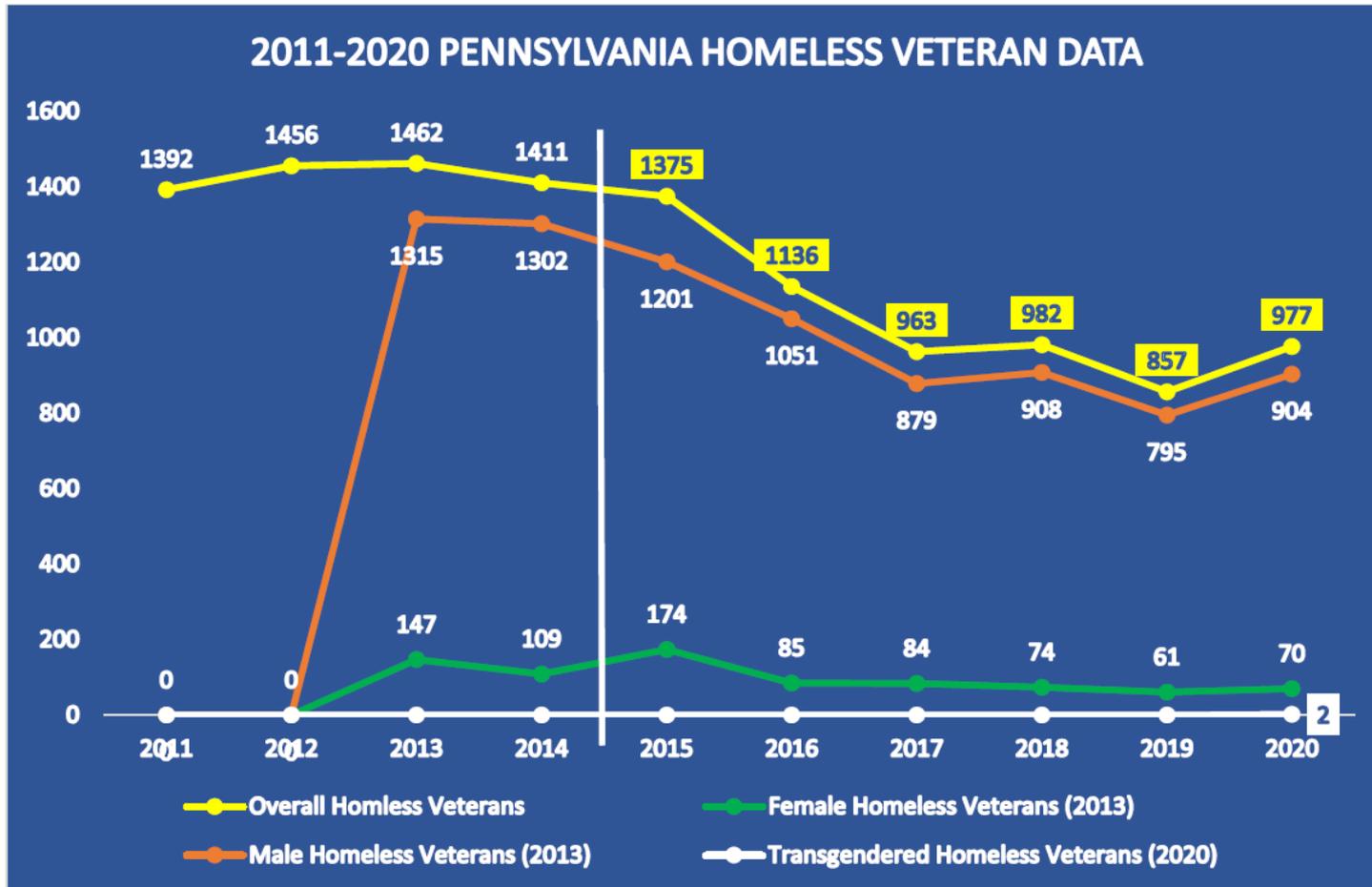
Homeless Prevention enrollments – 1,030 Veteran households

Imminently at risk for becoming homeless; SSVF enrollment is preventing it (e.g. needed assistance to retain current permanent housing or help in finding better suited housing)

**RAPID REHOUSING (RRH) VS
HOMELESS PREVENTION (HP)
ENROLLMENTS FOR SSVF
(10/1/19 TO 9/30/20)**



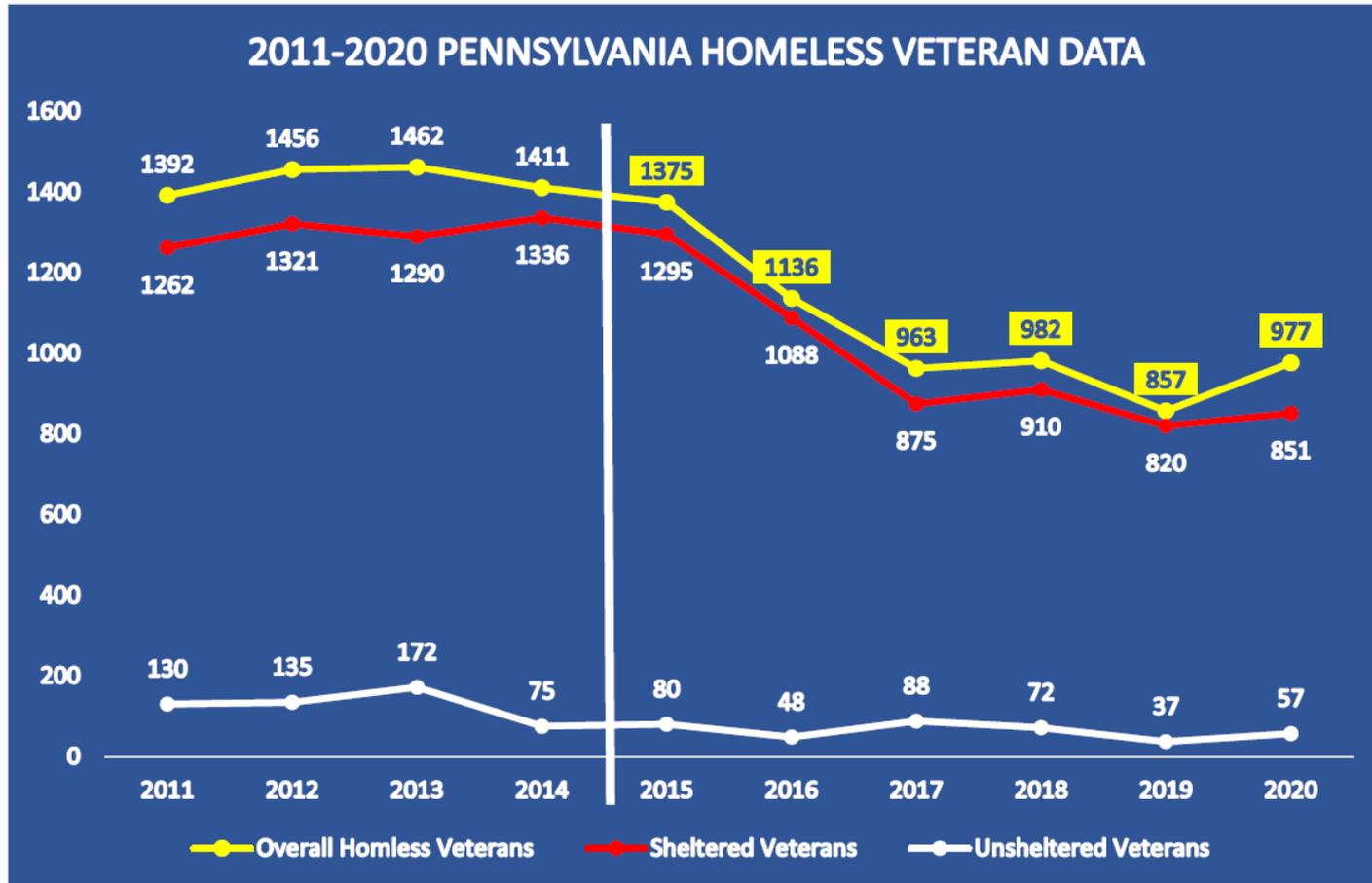
GAC-VS Homeless Committee



2015 Governor Wolf joined the challenge to end Veteran Homelessness

* <https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/5948/2019-ahar-part-1-pit-estimates-of-homelessness-in-the-us/>

GAC-VS Homeless Committee



*2015 Gov. Wolf joined the challenge to end Veteran Homelessness

** <https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/5948/2019-ahar-part-1-pit-estimates-of-homelessness-in-the-us/>

- **Provide education to stakeholders on programs that can benefit Veteran households facing homelessness or housing insecurity:**
 - 6/2020 – PACE and PACENet
 - 8/2020 – Eviction Process and Legal Assistance
 - 9/2020 – Case Management at Single County Authorities and County Mental Health Offices
 - 10/2020 – The Clearinghouse
 - 2/2021 – Fair Housing and Reasonable Accommodations
 - 3/2021 – Evictions – Process and Protections
 - 4/2021 – DCED’s Neighborhood Assistance Program
 - 5/2021 – VHA’s Homeless Program Office 5 year strategic plan overview
 - 6/2021 – slated: USDA Single Family Housing Programs
- **Wrote three information papers pertaining to Veteran homelessness in PA:**
 - Veteran Homelessness in PA (a general overview)
 - Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF) Program
 - Funding Streams to Address Veteran Housing Instability

- **Working across GAC-VS Committees to discuss how homelessness affects and can be addressed for specific subgroups of veterans:**
 - Workgroup with Judiciary Committee looking at how we can help veterans who are incarcerated avoid homelessness or housing insecurity upon re-entry
 - Workgroup of members from Homelessness, Women Veterans and Health Promotions Committee looking at trauma for women veterans and how it can affect housing stability
 - Discussions with the Aging Committee around ways to help older veterans avoid homelessness and housing insecurity

VA's Project CHALENG

“Project CHALENG (Community Homelessness Assessment, Local Education and Networking Groups) unites homeless service providers, advocates, Veterans and concerned citizens toward the goal of meeting the evolving needs of Veterans who are homeless. This process describes the needs of homeless Veterans, identifies the barriers they face in obtaining permanent housing and works to resolve them through planning and cooperative action.” There are two components: 1) annual survey 2) local meetings facilitated by each VAMC

2021 CHALENG survey is open - <https://www.va.gov/homeless/chaleng.asp>

Who should complete the survey? Anyone with insights into the needs of homeless veterans

- veterans who are or who have experienced homelessness
- federal, state and local/community government
- non-profit housing and homelessness stakeholder)

Survey results are used by VA to respond to unmet needs, create new partnerships and new programs (e.g. Homeless Veterans Dental Program, expansion of HUD-VASH and SSVF)

We will promote participation in both facets of CHALENG (survey and local meetings) moving forward

- VA’s 2020 Project CHALENG Fact Sheet provides **national insights**; issued April 2021 (w/ ~10% of Veteran respondents from VISN 4 it also provides good insight for PA)
- If more stakeholders and veterans from PA participate in this annual survey, we can glean the insights to help address what resources need to be found or created to meet top unmet needs

Top Ten Highest Unmet Needs, Male Veterans

Rank	Male Homeless Veteran Highest Unmet Needs
1	Registered Sex Offender Housing
2	Legal Assistance for Court Fees/Court Fines
3	Child Care
4	Legal Assistance for Credit Issues/Debt Collection
5	Family Law (i.e. divorce, child custody)
6	Legal Assistance to Expunge a Criminal Record
7	Tax Issues
8	Discharge Upgrade Appeals 
9	Legal Assistance for Child Support Issues
10	Family Reconciliation Assistance

Top Ten Highest Unmet Needs, Female Veterans

Rank	Female Homeless Veteran Highest Unmet Needs
1	Registered Sex Offender Housing
2	Child Care
3	Family Law (i.e. divorce, child custody)
4	Legal Assistance for Court Fees/Court Fines
5	Legal Assistance for Credit Issues/Debt Collection
6	Legal Assistance to Expunge a Criminal Record
7	Tax Issues
8	Family Reconciliation Assistance
9	Credit Counseling 
10	Legal Assistance for Child Support Issues

*Notes: - 9 of top 10 unmet needs were the same for both groups (red arrows denote difference).
- 50% of unmet needs in both groups were for some type of legal assistance.

Policy, Planning, Legislative Affairs

Legislation Under Review

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. For vehicle registration, increases VTF contribution from \$6 to \$10. Final passage in Senate 46-0; 2/24/21. **Awaiting 2nd consideration. Set on House Calendar 5/24/21.** Comp: HB 556 (O'Mara) Identical

SB 155 (Mastriano) Amends Title 12 (Commerce and Trade), in Pennsylvania Military Community Enhancement Commission, providing that appointed commission members will be appointed to a three-year term with an opportunity for additional terms and that they serve until their successor is appointed. The act provides that members appointed by the governor will serve at the determination of the governor. This act applies to members appointed or reappointed after the date of passage. **Final Passage S 46-0 2/24/21. Received in House VAEP 2/26/21.**

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. The exclusion shall also apply to an unmarried surviving spouse upon the death of a veteran for any compensation or payment the unmarried surviving spouse is entitled to receive. **Final passage in House 201-0 3/24/21. Received in Senate VAEP 3/25/21.**

HB 290 (Warner) Proposes statutory language to allow Small Games of Chance licensees to conduct online games as well as conduct online transactions during the duration of the COVID-19 emergency declaration. 2 floor amendments adopted 4/6/21. **Final Passage: 193-8 4/7/21. Received in the Senate Comm. Econ/Rec Dev. 4/13/21**

HB 196 (Day) Amends Title 51 (Military Affairs), in military leave of absence, further providing for employment discrimination for military membership or duty. **Final passage in House 201-0 3/17/21. Awaiting to be received in Senate.**

Legislation Under Review

SB 248 (Phillips-Hill) Amends Title 38 (Holidays and Observances) providing for holidays and observances. March 6 of each year is designated as "Persian Gulf War Veterans Day", October 7 of each year is designated as "Global War on Terrorism War Veterans Day", and December 18 of each year is designated as "Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation New Dawn Veterans Day. **Final Passage in Senate 47-0 4/20/21. HVAEP 4/21/21. Awaiting First consideration in House.**

SB 150 (Ward) 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. S VAEP 2/1/21. **Awaiting 2nd consideration. Set on S calendar 5/10/21.** Comp: HB 477 (Pisciottano)

HB 556 (O'Mara) Amends Title 75 (Vehicles), in registration of vehicles, increasing the amount an applicant can contribute to the Veterans' Trust Fund through the Department of Transportation from \$3 to \$5. **Awaiting 2nd consideration. Set on H Tabled calendar 5/24/21.** Comp: SB 96 (Robinson) Identical.

HB 1108 (Neilson) Amends Title 30 (Fish), in fishing licenses, further providing for exemptions from license requirements for therapeutic recreational programs. **Awaiting 2nd consideration. Set on Tabled H calendar. 5/24/21.**

SB 241 (Brewster) Amends Title 30 (Fish), in fishing licenses, exempting individuals participating in therapeutic recreation programs. **Awaiting 2nd consideration. Set on S calendar 5/10/21.** Comp: HB 1056 (Hickernell) Related; B 1108 (Neilson) Identical

Legislation Under Review

SB 243 (Pittman) Allows volunteer fire departments, veterans organizations and other non-profits to conduct small games of chance (SGOC) fundraisers online amidst the COVID-19 disaster emergency declaration. S Comm, Econ, & Rev Dev. 2/22/21. **Awaiting 2nd consideration. Set on S Calendar 5/10/21.**

SB 484 (Stefano) - Amends the Pennsylvania Long-term Care Council Act adding the chair of the State Veterans' Commission or his designee to the Pennsylvania Long-Term Care Council. S Aging & Youth 3/25/21. Voted favorably and reported as committed S Aging & Youth 4/28/21. **Awaiting 2nd consideration. Set on S calendar 5/10/21.**

HB 490 (Boback) Amends Titles 30 (Fish) and 34 (Game), in fishing licenses, providing for active-duty military fishing reciprocity and for disabled veteran annual fishing license reciprocity; and, in hunting and fur-taking licenses, providing for active-duty military hunting reciprocity and for disabled veteran annual hunting license reciprocity. The bill authorizes the attorney general to enter into reciprocity agreements with other states for mutual recognition of active-duty military fishing licenses, disabled veteran annual fishing licenses, active-duty military hunting licenses, and disabled veteran annual hunting licenses. The attorney general shall report annually concerning such reciprocity agreements. Voted favorably and reported as committed H Game & Fish 4/21/21. **Set on Tabled calendar 5/24/21. Awaiting 2nd consideration.**

SB 550 (Robinson) - Amends Second Class County Code, in special powers and duties of the county, further providing for flags to decorate graves. Reported as amended S VAEP 4/28/21. **Awaiting 2nd consideration. Set on S Calendar 5/10/21.** Comp: HB 202 (O'Neal) Identical; HB 233 (Warren) Identical.

Legislation Under Review

SB 455 (Bartolotta) - Amends Title 51 (Military Affairs), in veteran-owned small businesses, establishing a veteran, reservist or National Guard-owned business logotype, which shall include the commonwealth coat of arms and the words "Pennsylvania veteran-owned business," "Pennsylvania reservist-owned business" or "Pennsylvania National Guard-owned business." 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 2nd consideration. Set on S calendar 5/10/21. (Pending Amendment)**

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

HB 995 (Kaufer) - Amends Title 51 (Military Affairs), in Department of Military Affairs, establishing the Veterans' Outreach and Support Network Program. Provides that the program 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 when transitioning from military service to civilian life. Provides for the program's requirements and duties of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. **H VAEP 3/23/21.**

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. **H VAEP 3/31/21.**

Legislation Under Review

HB 1057 (Hickernell) Amends Title 51 (Military Affairs), in State Veterans' Commission and Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans' Affairs, including the Navy Club of the United States of America to the list of organizations represented on the State Veterans' Commission. **H VAEP 3/31/21.**

HB 1220 (Gregory) 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 \$200. **H VAEP 4/20/21.** Comp: HB 477 (Pisciottano) Related; SB 150 (Ward) Related.

HB 691 (Evans) Allows incarcerated veterans, diagnosed after imprisonment, to apply to the court for relief putting forward their diagnosis of post- traumatic stress disorder and traumatic brain injuries as mitigating factors in post-conviction review. **H Judiciary 2/26/21.**

Legislation – Military/NG

SB 274 (Fontana) Act authorizing the Dept. of General Services, with the approval of the Dept. of Military and Veterans Affairs and the Governor, to grant and convey, certain lands, buildings and improvements situate in (Coraopolis Maintenance Facility) Allegheny County. **Awaiting 3rd consideration. Set on Senate calendar 5/10/21.**

SB 503 (Regan) - Amends the Enforcement Officer Disability Benefits Law providing for disability benefits for additional members of law enforcement injured in the line of duty to include probation officers; campus police officers employed by a participating university; police officers employed by the Department of Corrections and Bureau of Investigations and Intelligence; Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) rangers, ranger supervisors, ranger operations specialists, ranger trainees, and state park officers employed by DCNR; members of the **Fort Indiantown Gap Police**; investigative staff of the Office of Inspector General; members of the Allegheny County Port Authority Police; Allegheny County Housing Authority Police; county corrections officers; and forest fire wardens or wildland firefighters employed by the commonwealth. **Voted favorably and reported as committed 4/27/21. Awaiting 3rd consideration. Rereferred to S Approp. 4/28/21.**

HB 941 (Burns) - Amends an act entitled "An act conferring limited residency status on military personnel, their dependents and civilian personnel assigned to an active-duty station in Pennsylvania," providing in-state tuition as soon as a qualified student submits their enrollment deposit. **H VAEP 3/17/21.**

SB 433 (Stefano) - Amends Title 51 (Military Affairs), in National Guard Youth Challenge Program, further providing for definitions and for administration, establishing the Keystone State Challenge Academy Fund and further providing for report and for audit required. **Awaiting 3rd consideration. Rereferred to S Appropriations. 3/24/21.** Comp: HB 803 (O'Neal) Related.

Federal Legislation Passed House

H.R.2523 —THRIVE Act. The bill excludes programs pursued solely through distance learning on a half-time basis or less from the housing stipend available to those participating in the retraining program. Next, the VA must provide veterans and members of the Armed Forces with information about whether (1) a postsecondary education institution is listed on the College Navigator website as being affiliated with a certain religion, (2) an institution is minority serving, and (3) an institution is gender specific. The bill includes for-profit educational institutions that are converted to public educational institutions in the annual risk-based survey the state approving agency must conduct. Finally, the VA must take certain disciplinary action when any person with whom an educational institution has an agreement for marketing, advertising, educational programs, recruiting, or admissions services engages in specified behaviors, such as providing a type of incentive payment to persons engaged in student recruiting.

Rep. Levin, Mike [D-CA-49] (Introduced 04/14/2021) **Cosponsors: (1)**

Latest Action: **House - 04/27/2021 Referred to the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity.**

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 where veterans 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: **House - 05/12/2021**

H.R.958 — Protecting Moms Who Served Act. This bill requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to implement the maternity care coordination program. The VA must provide community maternity care providers (i.e., non-VA maternity care providers) with training and support with respect to the unique needs of pregnant and postpartum veterans, particularly regarding mental and behavioral health conditions in relation to the service of the veterans in the Armed Forces. Additionally, the Government Accountability Office must report on maternal mortality and severe maternal morbidity among pregnant and postpartum veterans, with a focus on racial and ethnic disparities in maternal health outcomes for veterans.

Sponsor: Rep. Underwood, Lauren [D-IL-14] (Introduced 02/08/2021) **Cosponsors: (43)**

Latest Action: **House - 05/12/2021**

BUREAU OF VETERANS' HOMES



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	11/2019 Full Standard Licensure Status	12/2019 Full Standard Licensure Status	10/2019 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	08/2019 Full Standard Licensure Status	11/2019 Full Standard Licensure Status	N/A
US Department of Veterans Affairs	12/2020 Full Standard Licensure Status	02/2020 Full Standard Licensure Status	02/2021 Full Standard Licensure Status	04/2021 Full Standard Licensure Status	02/2021 Full Standard Licensure Status	02/2021 Full Standard Licensure 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: 05-21-21

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	5/23/2021	0	0	6	0	2971	43-C	75	57	18
GMVC	5/23/2021	0	0	0	0	6879	50-C	66	46	20
HVH	5/23/2021	0	0	0	0	6309	33-C	127	110	20
PSSH	5/23/2021	0	0	0	0	4423	53-C	133	103	19
SEVC	5/23/2021	0	1	0	0	9160	45-C	125	65	42
SWVC	5/23/2021	0	0	0	0	6839	39-C	20	17	3
Total:		0	1	6	0	36581		546	398	122

As of 22 Mar 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	5/23/2021	2	1	20	7856	83	199
GMVC	5/23/2021	0	0	0	12765	64	96
HVH	5/23/2021	10	6	0	21416	169	1070
PSSH	5/23/2021	0	0	0	8811	86	270
SEVC	5/23/2021	7	4	0	13830	148	337
SWVC	5/23/2021	0	0	0	14762	73	357
Total:		19	11	20	79440	623	2329

As of 24 May 21

> community > commonwealth

> country

COVID-19 Vaccination Update

		Vaccinations - Residents/Staff				
		Census	Fully Vaccinated	% Fully Vaccinated	Partially Vaccinated	Not Vaccinated
DVVH	Residents	89	85	96%	0	4
	Staff	230	122	53%	7	101
GMVC	Residents	131	128	98%	0	3
	Staff	298	232	78%	11	55
HVH	Residents	227	199	88%	1	27
	Staff	552	232	42%	7	313
PSSH	Residents	130	123	95%	1	6
	Staff	248	136	55%	1	111
SEVC	Residents	180	176	98%	0	4
	Staff	349	206	59%	6	137
SWVC	Residents	166	153	92%	1	12
	Staff	304	166	55%	9	129

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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- **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.
- **Pension Poaching Awareness Campaign** - Cross-system cooperative effort to raise awareness among mainstream human service and healthcare providers about the issue of veteran pension poaching and the importance of referring Veterans and their families to an accredited VSO. Sister state agencies, trade organizations and state-level oversight groups are collaborating with us to send this important information out to the local levels via their communication avenues in June 2021.
- **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.

Bureau Activities



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AND VETERANS AFFAIRS

- **VTF Donations** in 6 county court juror donation programs and revenue generated \$2,991.
- **Veteran Service Officer Accreditation Training** - DMVA is an accredited Veteran Service Organization that is authorized to represent veterans claims with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Our Veteran Service Officers are accredited through an approved course curriculum by the federal VA. On average we serve 200 students per year during our annual accreditation training. This year we are again partnering with the National Veterans Legal Services Program a virtual training to meet our federal accreditation standards. Service organizations participating in our annual training are typically Vietnam Veterans of America, Disabled American Veterans, and The American Legion. Our training is also in accordance with the requirements of the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers.
- **Burial Honors Program:** Provides a stipend of \$150/day to veteran organizations that provide burial honors at the 3 active National Cemeteries located in the Commonwealth. The active cemeteries are Indiantown Gap National Cemetery, National Cemetery of the Alleghenies, and Washington Crossing National Cemetery. In Fiscal Year 2019-2020 there were 6 (six) different veteran organizations that performed the burial honors: Vet 21 Salute (Lancaster/Lebanon County), VFW Posts 23 (Lebanon County) and 191 (Washington County), Marine Corps League (Lebanon County), American Legion Post 175 (Washington County) and Guardians of the Cemetery (Bucks County). In FY 18/19 2,731 veterans were interred with honors and in FY19/20 there were 2227 (this number is lower due to the pandemic). We are at 2,245 so far for FY20/21.
- **Military Records Request Program:** Aids in requesting military service records to include DD Form 214, DD Form 215, NGB Form 22, NGB Form 23, and other service-related documents. We currently receive, process, and store more than 360,000 records within this program. We currently receive and process more than 1,400 requests for records annually.

Veteran Suicide Prevention Efforts



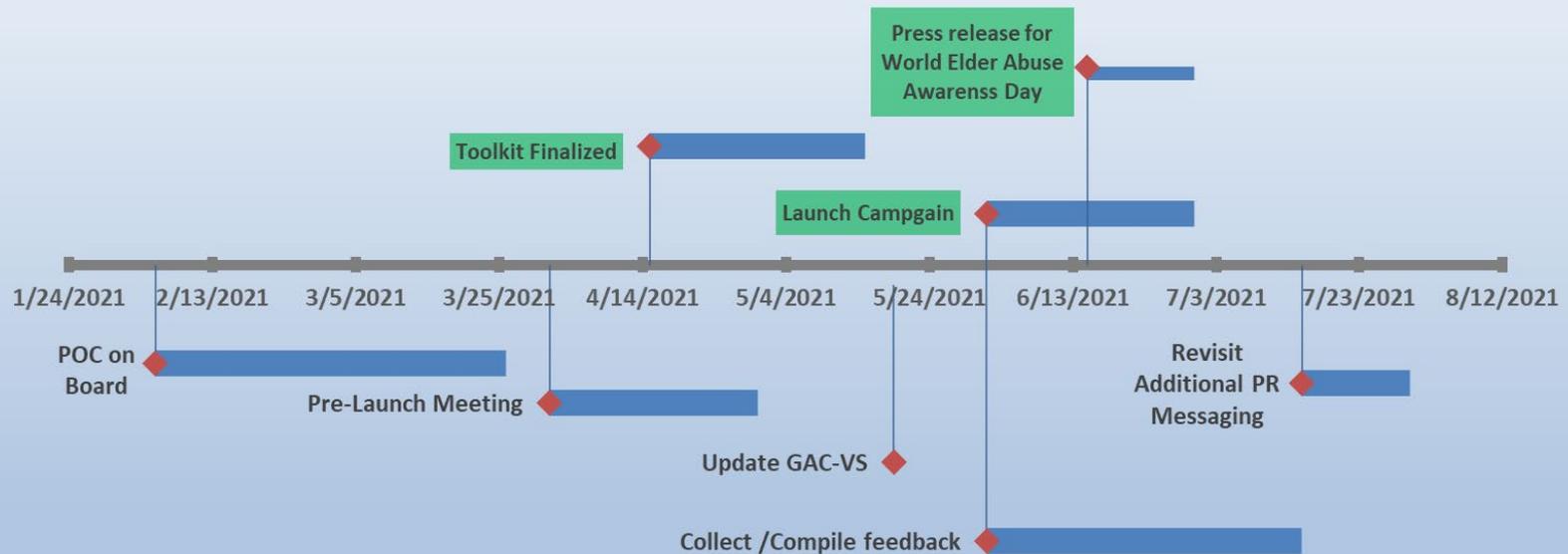
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DMVA continues to collaborate to ensure that veteran suicide remains a high priority within the commonwealth.

- 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.



Veterans Pension Poaching Awareness Campaign





Improve Essential Services for the Veterans Community

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



Identify Appropriate Resources and Referral Mechanism

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

PAVETCONNECT

dmva.pa.gov/VetConnect



Identify Individual Veteran Needs and Systemic Veteran Community Trends

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



Organize Known Resource Information

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



Create, Enhance and Educate Networks

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



FASTER RESULTS



**WIDER NETWORK
OF RESOURCES**



BETTER SERVICE



OVA Annual Report
2020/2021

	Performance Metric Title	Year- To- Date Total	Feb	Mar	Apr	May
	Strategic Metrics					
1	Federal Government Agencies					
	State Government Agencies					
	County & Local Government Agencies					
	Monthly Totals	4436	559	551	294	363
2	Meet/ Contact with County Directors	3657	381	331	214	331
3	Continuum of Care (CoC), Coordinated Entry System (CES), Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF)	1608	157	104	120	153
4	Non-Profit Organizations & Community Leaders	1529	199	124	97	135
5	Veteran Service Organizations	515	64	47	31	41
6	Community forums, events and outreach	329	14	14	16	15
7	Community providers/agencies	692	98	86	42	40
8	Town Hall style meetings/SVC, GAC-VS, etc	1357	65	156	7	9
9	Number of resources vetted and/or added to database	391	4	34	74	61
10	Number of subject matter experts added to training database	23	0	0	0	0
11	Advisory council/group meetings	576	70	65	20	57
12	Number of veterans and/or families provided direct service	1639	208	179	179	151
13	Number of follow-ups with veterans and/or families	1370	152	130	176	155
14	Faith-Based Organizations	62	5	7	2	3
15	Possible funding resources identified	13	3	1	0	0
16	Other	19	0	0	1	0
	Total	18,216	1979	1829	1273	1514

[OVA Monthly Combined Metrics Year-to-Date.](#)

- The Regional Program Outreach Coordinators (RPOCs) develop and maintain relationships with federal, state, and county government partners; on average of 272 connections a month.
- RPOCs continue to facilitate collaborative engagements with non-profit organizations and community leaders on an average of 86 connections a month.
- Through collaboration with veterans' advocates, PA VETConnect reached over 270,000 veterans and their family members in SFY 2020-21. We build relationships that amplify service to the veteran community.
- 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 of veterans and/or families by providing direct services and following up with advocates as required.
- DMVA staff collaborates with more than 200 VSOs who serve service members, veterans, and their families throughout the commonwealth.



RESOURCES WITHIN DATABASE

Totals / Regional Totals



Resource Data Entry Activity



OVA / VSO GRANT PROGRAM SUMMARY



FY 20 - 21 Claims, Compensation and Pension Summary	
Year to Date Claims Submitted	Year to Date Value of Awards
9,003	\$101,391,905.00
Year to Date Claims Submitted Previous Year 19 - 20	Year to Date Value of Awards Previous Year 19 - 20
19,873	\$206,324,534.00

FY 19 - 20 Claims, Compensation and Pension Summary	
Year to Date Claims Submitted	Year to Date Value of Awards
19,873	\$206,324,534.00
Year to Date Claims Submitted Previous Year 18 - 19	Year to Date Value of Awards Previous Year 18 - 19
21,181	\$251,993,244.00

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

VSO Grant Program —11 Year ROI



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

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

- FY 07-08 was a partial year of data and is not included in this return-on-investment projection.
- The 5 organizations involved in this program employ an average of 55 employees.

OUTREACH ENGAGEMENTS



Outreach Statistics

	1st Qtr	2nd Qtr	3rd Qtr	4th Qtr	Year to Date
Outreach Events Supported	0	0	1	1	2
Mobile Outreach Van Events	0	0	0	1	1
Veteran Interactions	0	0	10	0	10
Claim referrals to County Directors and Service Organizations	0	0	2	0	2
Legislator Attended Events	0	0	0	0	0

Upcoming Events – August

- **Legislative Events –**
- **Events –**
- **Legislators Attending Events –**

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	\$135.00	\$150.00	\$1,395.00	93	\$51,375.00	3,425
PA Monuments LP	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	0	\$0.00	0
HOV Motorcycle License Plate	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$255.00	17	\$3,255.00	217
HOV Women's License Plate	\$60.00	\$60.00	\$360.00	24	\$1,005.00	67
Checkoff & Donations	\$29,402.00	\$57,235.00	\$1,116,249.80		\$11,658,976.82	
Veterans Trust Fund Online Donations	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$220.00		\$5,298.00	
SECA Donations	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$2,732.74		\$11,216.10	
Interest	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$4,472.79		\$178,281.06	
VSO	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$700,000.00	
PENNDOT Costs (SFY 16-17)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$194,000.00	
PENNDOT Costs (SFY 15-16)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$194,000.00	
PENNDOT Costs (SFY 14-15)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$194,000.00	
PENNDOT Costs (SFY 13-14)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$194,000.00	
VTF Grant NOFA (SFY 19-20)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$78,985.89		\$779,469.89	
VTF Grant NOFA (SFY 18-19)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$800,000.00	
VTF Grant NOFA (SFY 17-18)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$777,909.21	
VTF Grant NOFA (SFY 16-17)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$641,329.75	
VTF Grant NOFA (SFY 15-16)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$502,126.03	
VTF Grant NOFA (SFY 14-15)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$472,473.67	
VTF Grant NOFA (SFY 13-14)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$442,020.00	
Veteran Programs Training	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$8,700.00	
Veterans Assistance	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		\$22,901.34	
VTA	\$9,000.00	\$14,888.00	\$411,181.00		\$4,728,330.32	
Working Balance	\$20,597.00	\$42,557.00	\$635,518.44		\$2,958,146.77	3,709

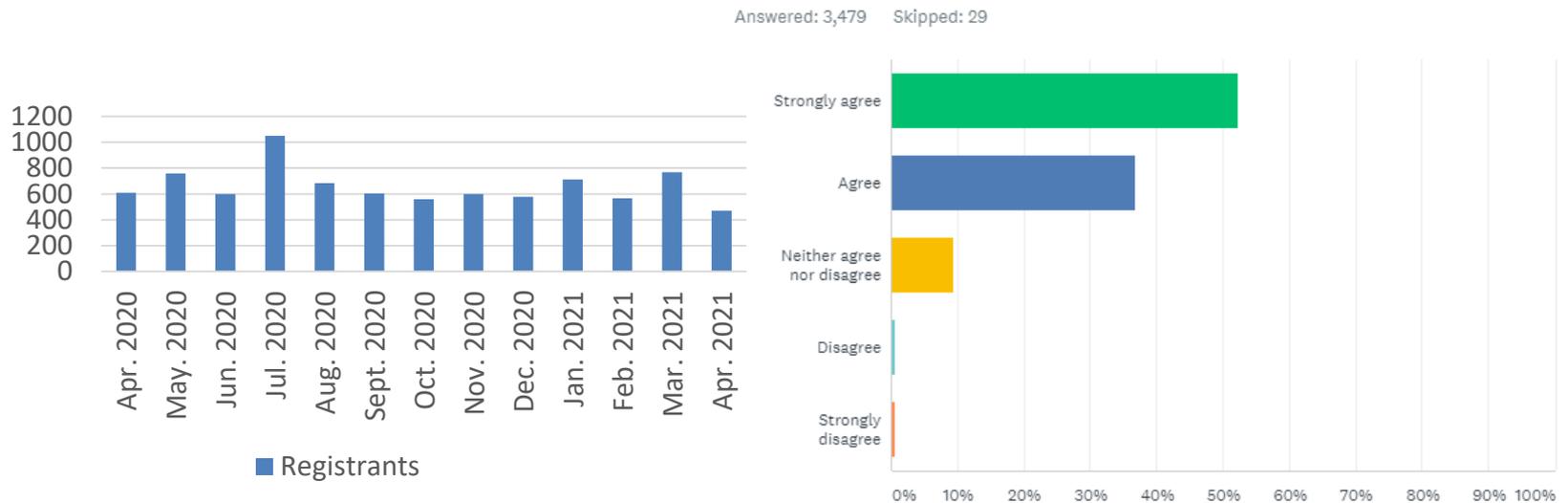
As of 12 May 2021

> community > commonwealth > country

PENNSYLVANIA VETERANS' REGISTRY



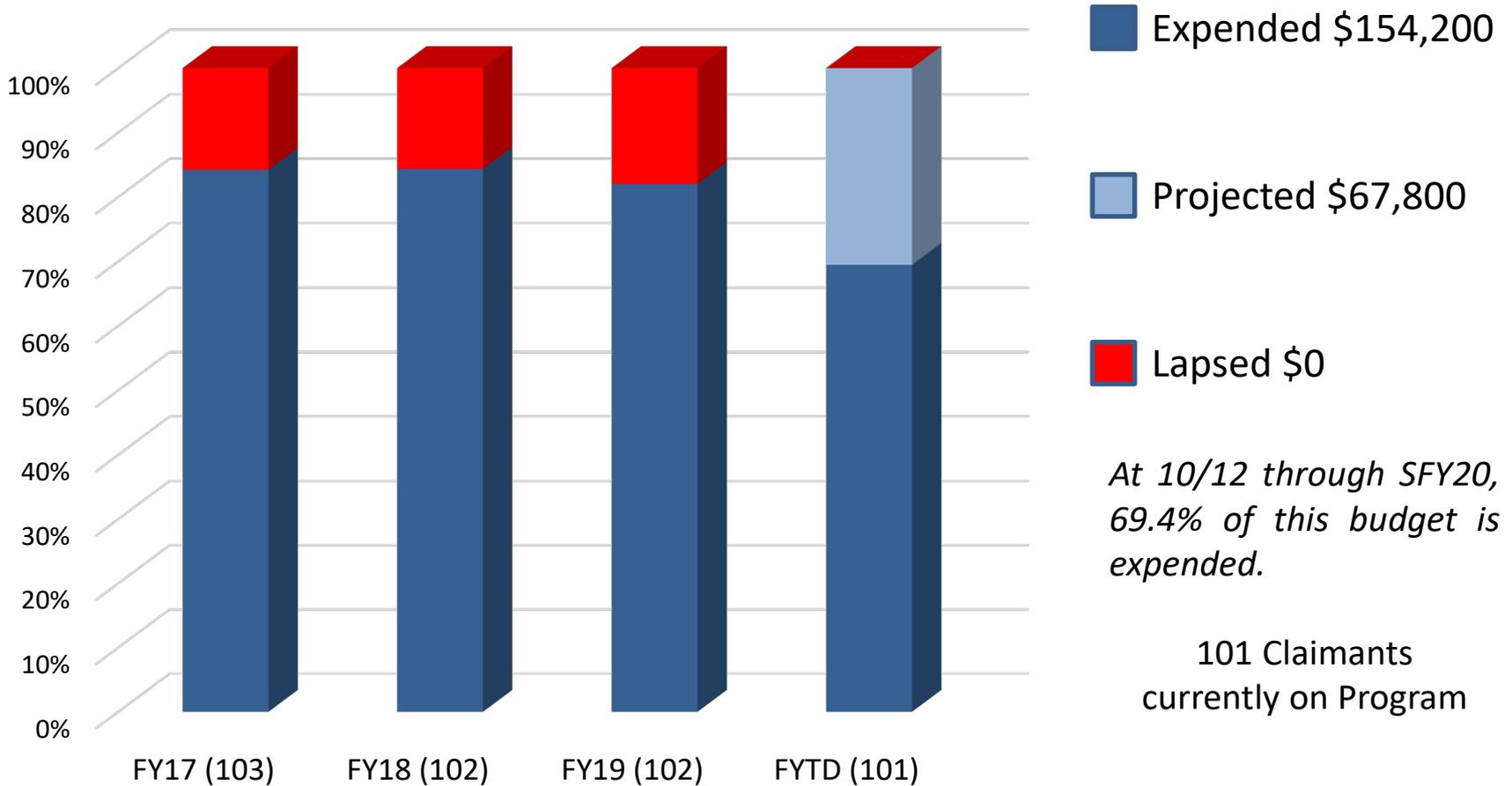
We have a total increase of 769 bringing the total number of registrants to 38,045.



BLIND VETERANS' PENSION



\$222,000



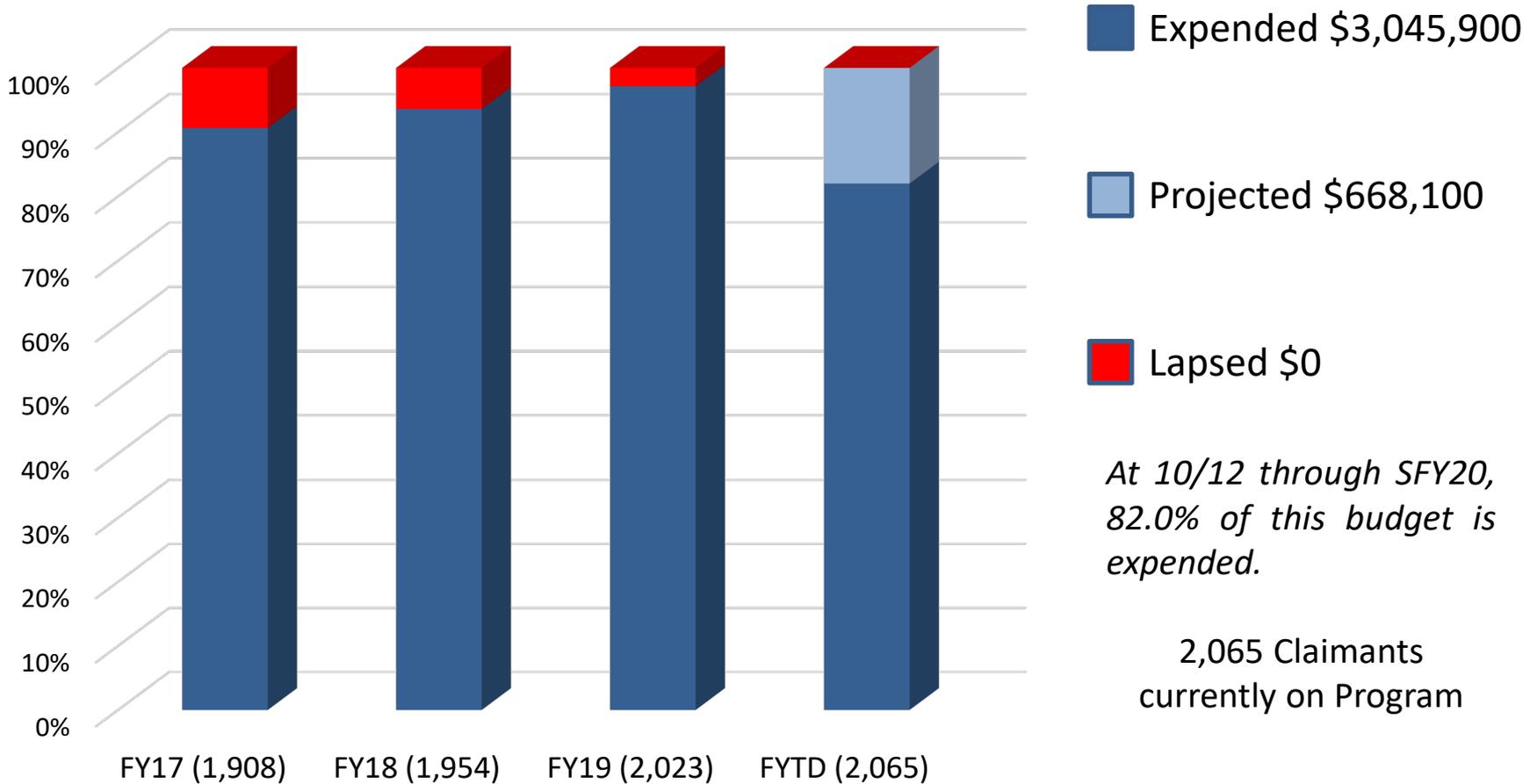
At 10/12 through SFY20, 69.4% of this budget is expended.

101 Claimants currently on Program

AMPUTEE & PARALYZED VETERANS' PENSION



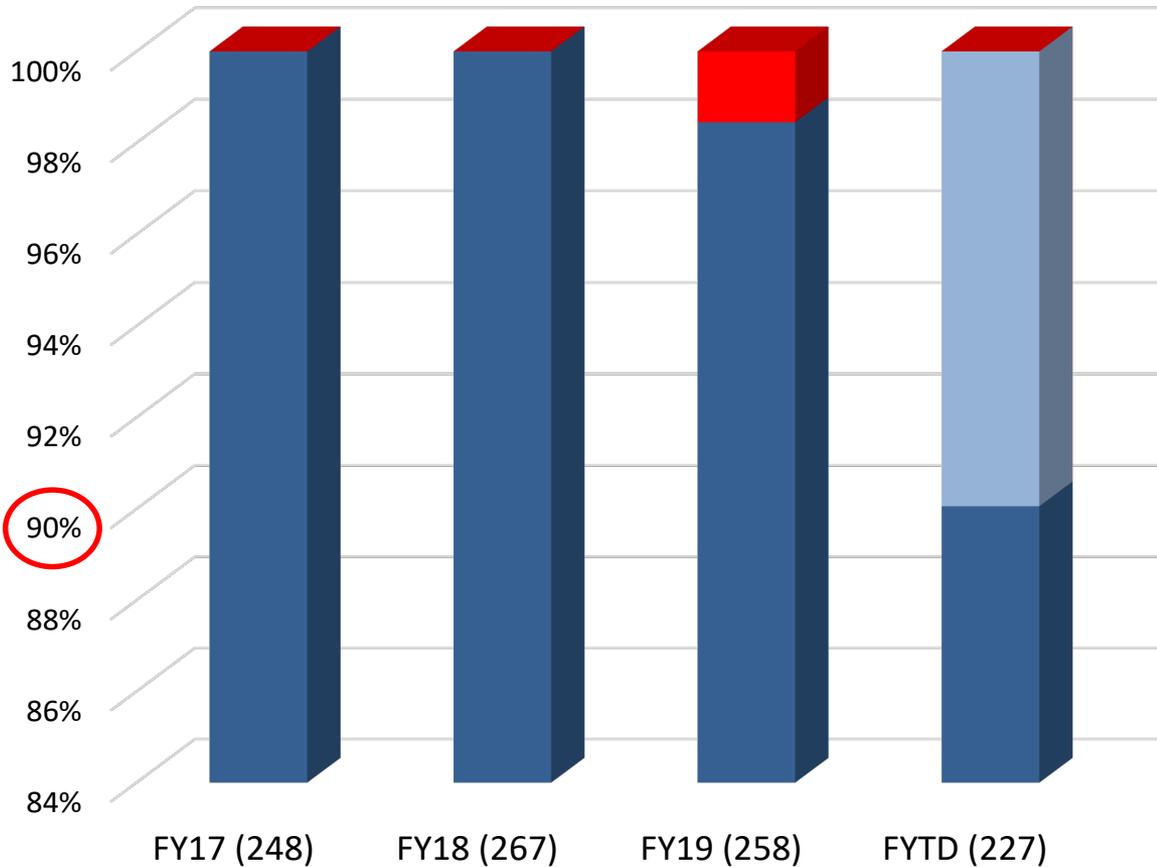
\$3,714,000



EDUCATIONAL GRATUITY



\$125,000



Expended \$111,203

Projected \$13,797

Lapsed \$0

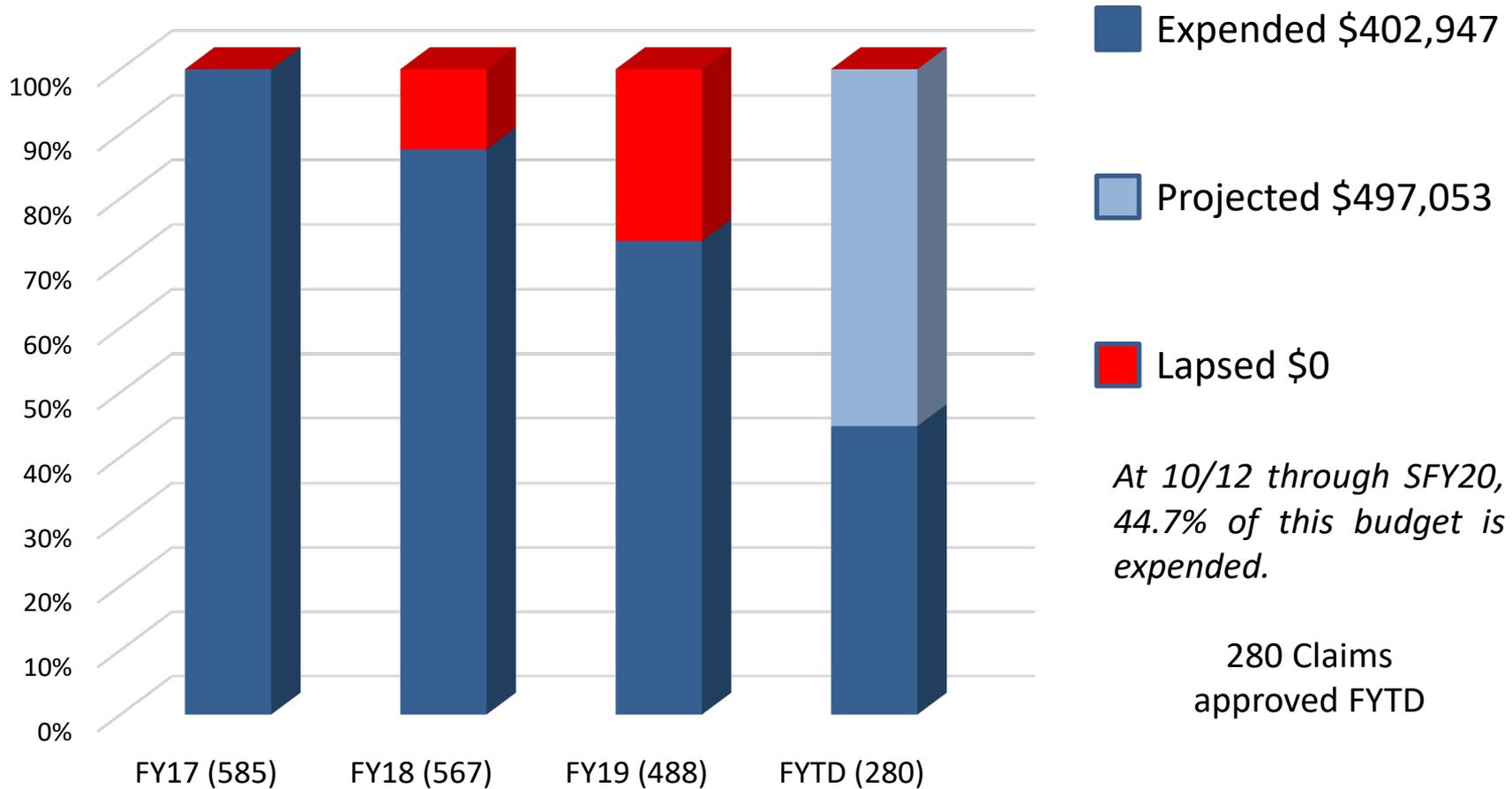
At 10/12 through SFY20, 88.9% of this budget is expended.

227 Claims approved FYTD

VETERANS TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE



\$900,000



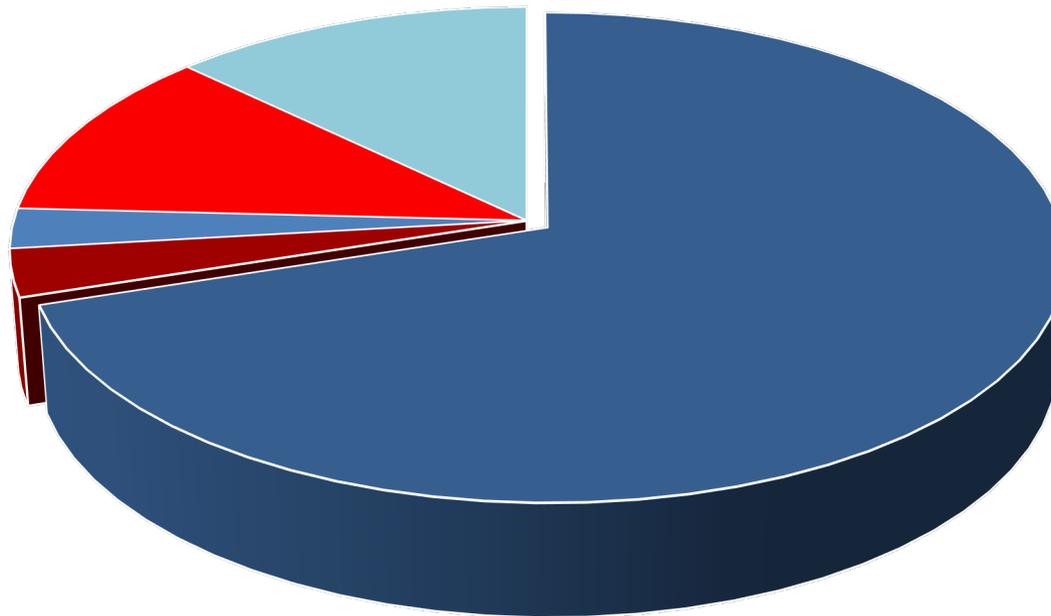
OVERALL MFRAP CONTRIBUTIONS AND PAYMENTS: FY 2005 – FY 2020
(PROGRAM REAUTHORIZED 29 OCT 2020)

Total Private Contributions.....	\$138,232.69
Total Department of Revenue, PIT Contributions.....	\$1,810,882.63
Total All Contributions, Private and PIT.....	\$1,949,115.32
Total Approved Grant Payments.....	\$901,421.86
<i>Approved Grant Payments FYTD.....</i>	<i>.....</i>
<i>\$7,000</i>	
Account Balance.....	\$1,047,693.46

DISABLED VETERANS' REAL ESTATE TAX EXEMPTION



980 Total Adjudications between
March 18 and May 14, 2021



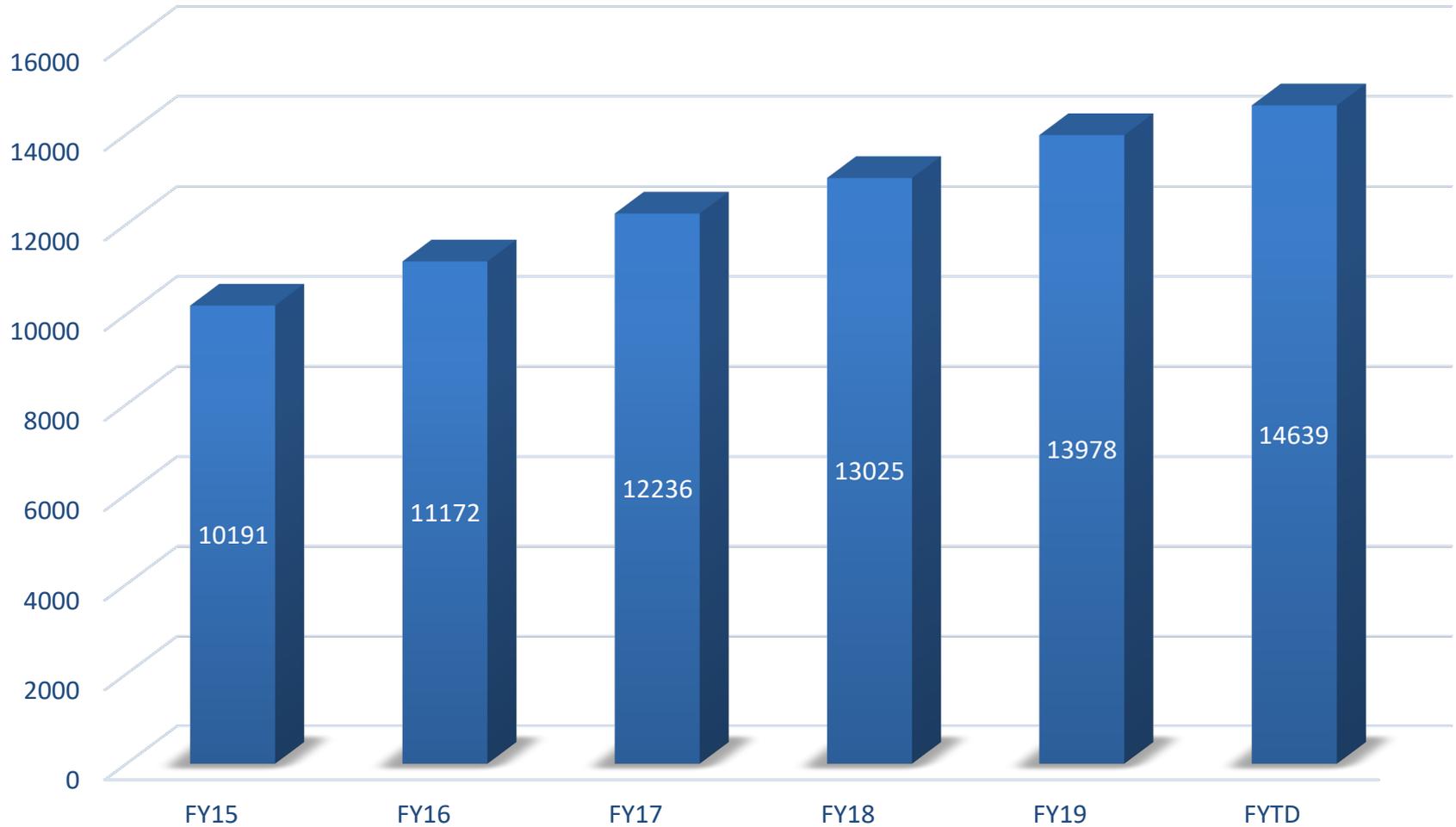
- 686 Approved (71.3%)
- 31 Denied: Financial Need
- 26 Denied: Ineligible*
- 112 No Response (COVID Waiver)
- 125 Removed (Eligibility Change)

*** 26 Applications Ineligible by Reason:**

- 4 – Veteran not rated total or 100% permanent during lifetime
- 1 – No longer interested
- 1 – Property not owned solely by Veteran or as an estate by the entirety with spouse
- 12 – Veteran did not serve during a period of war armed conflict
- 1 – Veteran did not serve during a period of war armed conflict and has a future exam
- 1 – Veteran has a disability which has not been declared total or 100% permanent.
- 1 – Veteran has a future exam, has not been rated as total or 100% permanent

*427 Veterans currently on emergency waiver of 5-year review

DISABLED VETERANS' REAL ESTATE TAX EXEMPTION



As of 14 May 2021

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

NEXT MEETING



Friday, September 10, 2021

at 10:00AM

Arrowheads Community Club

Fort Indiantown Gap

Annville, PA

Visit www.svc.pa.gov for all SVC info.



VISN 4 Update

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

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

Leadership Updates

Barb Forsha, deputy director of VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System continues to serve as the acting director of the Clarksburg VA. VA Pittsburgh's associate director for patient care services and chief nurse executive, Dr. Brenda Shaffer, is also serving as Clarksburg VA's acting associate director for patient care services and chief nurse executive.

We are currently recruiting for a new chief of staff for the Wilmington and Butler VA medical centers. We also began recruitment for an associate director for patient care services at the Coatesville VA.

Homeless Veterans – Program Update

Since the start of the pandemic, VA's homeless Veterans program received strong national support. President Biden's American Rescue Plan, passed in March 2021, provides \$5 billion to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to help people experiencing homelessness, including Veterans. Of that, an estimated \$835 million will go towards HUD-VASH appropriations.

The national homeless program office just released its five-year strategic plan, highlighting six key objectives:

1. Outreach
2. Health care treatment
3. Housing solutions and supportive services
4. Community employment
5. Community partnerships
6. Administrative operations

Underlying all objectives are data analytics and research.

Direct link to the plan was included with your read ahead material:

<https://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/docs/VHA-Strategic-Plan-External-Final-508-v2.pdf>

As of fiscal year 2021 (FY21), VISN 4 now has 32 "Grant & per Diem" grants utilizing 809 beds, an increase of 71 from last year.

Every VISN received CARES Act funding for hotel/motel placement and to increase per diem rates due to COVID-19 costs. Additionally, VISN homeless programs received robust assistance to provide smart phones with data for Veterans.

As of FY21, VISN 4 now has 3,250 HUD-VASH Vouchers, an increase of 108 from last year.

The National Defense Authorization Act for 2021 will expand HUD-VASH eligibility to include Veterans who are otherwise ineligible for VA health care services. This will be identical to the eligibility requirements of the Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) and Grant and Per Diem (GPD) programs, which state that a Veteran must have served at least one day of active duty and not have an other-than-honorable discharge or court martial.

In FY20, VISN 4 permanently housed 1,668 Veterans using one or more VA homeless programs.

Women Veterans Health – Program Update

Women Veterans Health is currently receiving a lot of congressional interest, including VA's Office of Women's Health Services receiving funding for staffing and equipment. VISNs can submit applications for funding to continue enhancing care for women Veterans. Meanwhile, virtual educational programs for health care providers will continue. VA Central Office is also seeking opinions and perspectives from women Veterans. Each facility will host a local focus group for women Veterans before the end of the current fiscal year. Program managers will work with their local public affairs officers to facilitate the focus groups.

In VISN 4, three facilities are currently recruiting new women Veteran program managers; Altoona has selected one who started on May 10 and both Butler and Wilkes-Barre are interviewing candidates.

New Beneficiary Travel Self-Service System (BTSSS)

Veterans claiming Beneficiary Travel Mileage benefits will experience faster payment (10 days) if they use the online Beneficiary Travel Self-Service System (BTSSS) versus filing a paper claim (45 days).

The Veterans Transportation Program has issued a six-part YouTube video series that walks Veterans step-by-step through the BTSSS. Please share these links that were included in your read ahead material widely to help us spread the word of this change.

Playlist "Beneficiary Travel Self-Service System":

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL3AQ_JVoBEyzJnt68Eq_mPBdyZfkvq0Wu

Veterans must receive their Beneficiary Travel Mileage benefits from either an Electronic Funds Transfer or Direct Express (no-fee debit card). Veterans are being encouraged to contact their local Beneficiary Travel office for more information.

COVID-19 Vaccine – Update

VA resumed offering the Johnson & Johnson (Janssen) COVID-19 vaccine to individuals 18 years and older on April 26, in accordance with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) guidance following a 10-day pause recommended by the CDC and FDA after a very small number of people who received the vaccine experienced rare but serious blood clots. After careful review and evaluation, the FDA and CDC have confidence that this vaccine is safe for use and effective in preventing COVID-19. The available data show that the vaccine's benefits outweigh its risks and the chance of blood clots occurring following its administration is very low. Anyone who is offered the Janssen vaccine from VA will receive information about the potential risks and benefits of the vaccine, including the rare risk of blood clots and will be made aware of alternative vaccine options. The primary goal of COVID-19 vaccination is to protect those we serve from COVID-19, and VA's priority remains the safety of all those receiving vaccine from VA, including Veterans, their spouses, caregivers, employees, and federal partners.

Caregiver Support Update

VISN 4 continues to do well at processing applications in a thorough and timely manner. The Program of General Caregiver Services is being offered robustly at each facility. We are approaching the time for the Annual Caregiver and Family Resources Fair for families and caregivers and the Caregiver Summit for VA and community partners. There will be a mix of virtual and in-person events based on the guidelines set by each facility.

Customer Service Update

Nationally, VA's trust score over the last 90 days was 90.6. In VISN 4, our trust score over the last 90 days was 92.8, which is the third highest VISN score in the nation. The top 5 compliment themes over the last 90 days were interactions with staff, quality of care, satisfaction with specialty care, ear clinic services, and allergy and immunology services.

VA Copay Forgiveness

VA copayments received between April 6, 2020, and Sept. 30, 2021, will be waived, refunded and forgiven under the American Recovery Plan. What this means for Veterans receiving care through VA:

- If you received a patient statement in January 2021 that included copayments for services received on or after April 6, 2020, those charges will be canceled. You should not pay them.
- If you already paid your copayments for services received on or after April 6, 2020, you will receive a refund.
- If you have unpaid copayments for services received prior to April 6, 2020, your payment is not required or expected to be paid until October 2021. VA will not pursue collection action on charges during this time. Any Veterans who prefer to continue making payments on their balances for services prior to April 6, 2020 may do so.

Connected Care Update

Telehealth is more than a 'chat'

Using a computer or mobile device, patients can meet with their VA doctor virtually or send important health data from the comfort of their home. It's much more than a social "chat" and with some preparation, patients can make it a productive appointment. To make sure patients are using everything Telehealth can offer, here is a list of questions for patients to ask the next time they speak with or send a secure message to their VA provider or health care team:

- Start by asking: 'Can I use Telehealth?'
- Explain your situation and ask which option fits your needs. Based on your location and condition, VA can offer three types of Telehealth.
- To help with long travel or wait times, ask about **Store-and-Forward Telehealth or VA Video Connect**. With Store-and-Forward, you may be able to have sounds, images, and video health data collected at a clinic nearby and then sent to your VA provider. VA Video Connect offers you the flexibility to have appointments from a location of your choice.
- Make sure you understand what technology you'll need to get started. If you don't have a device, VA can loan you a device with a data plan.
- Finally, ask what specialties are available by Telehealth at your facility.

A link was included in your read ahead material for to learn more:

<https://telehealth.va.gov/type/clinic>.

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.

Summary of Current Applications (Exempt)

Count	No Activity	Review Process Started	Review App Received	New Apps Pending
14631	14051	480	100	284

Summary of Activity from 03/18/2021 to 05/14/2021

Apps Created: 616	
New	383
Review:	233
Apps Approved: 686	
New	341
Review	345
Apps Denied (Financial Need):	31
Apps Denied (Ineligible):	26
Apps Removed from Exempt List (No Response):	112
Apps Removed from Exempt List (Eligibility Changed):	125

Summary of Ineligible Reasons

Reason	Count
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.	4
No Longer Interested	1
The property for which you claim exemption is not owned solely by you, or as an estate by the entirety with your spouse.	1
The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has determined that the veteran did not serve during a period of war or armed conflict.	12
The U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs has determined that you did not serve during a period of war or armed conflict and you have a future exam, therefore, your disability has not been rated as total or 100% permanent.	1
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.	6

Summary of Activity from 3/18/2021 to 5/14/2021

APPS APPROVED	686
NEW	341
REVIEW	345

APPS DENIED	294
Financial Need	31
Ineligible	26
No Response	112
Change of Eligibility	125

OVER INCOME	62	9%
NEW	30	9%
REVIEW	32	9%

APPS CREATED 616
TOTAL ADJUDICATED 980

**GINO J. MERLI VETERANS' CENTER
ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING
February 18, 2021**

CALL TO ORDER

Meeting was held vis telephone conference.

President Sam Greenberg 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

Samuel Greenberg, President - Jewish War Veterans (Excused)

Lisa Solarczyk, Vice President - Marine Corps League

Ronald Faust, Secretary - AMVETS

Robert Cudworth - Military Officers Association of America

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

Russell Canevari - Veterans of Foreign Wars

William Smith - The American Legion

Richard Green - Blinded Veterans Association (Excused)

Joe Sylvester - Disabled American Veterans

Chris Morsey for Lisa Baker - PA State Senate

Karen Boback - PA House of Representatives

Tim Cleveland - PSACDVA (Excused)

Lisa Kaye - PSACDVA

William Brandenburg - GJMVC Resident Representative (Excused)

DMVA

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

Major General Eric Weller - Deputy Adjutant General, VA

Ed Beck for Richard Adams - Acting, 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

Michelle Koziel, WBVAMC

REPORT OF THE ADJUTANT GENERAL

- Rick Hamp spoke on behalf of the Major General. He thanked everyone for what they are doing and for keeping our residents and each other safe. He asked that we continue to keep in touch and to keep the Generals informed.

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF VETERANS' HOMES

- Ed Beck spoke on behalf of the acting director for the Bureau of Veterans Homes, Rich Adams.
- Currently, we have 6 residents positive across all homes. We have 65 staff members out either from exposure, signs and symptoms or a positive test result.
- We had a total of 565 positive residents. This number includes residents who tested positive multiple times.
- 504 positive staff. 381 recovered and 1,892 staff have returned to work after testing positive, signs and symptoms or exposures.
- We are at 91% for residents receiving the vaccine which is higher than the national average.
- We are at 44.3% for staff receiving the vaccine which is lower than the national average but 10% higher than the average nursing home staff.
- There has been a large reduction in cases across the county. Testing will be given according to the numbers. Once the numbers drop below 10%, we will begin looking into opening and visits. Pittsburgh has had 5 new admissions. Delaware Valley is scheduled to open next week. It all revolves around the county positivity rate and the homes ability to remain virus free for 14 days.
- We have new technology and safety equipment. We have a robot that goes throughout the facility to kill bacteria, including the coronavirus. We have a new machine to fit staff with the N95 masks. We have received electrostatic sprayers for use throughout the facility.

REPORT OF THE COMMANDANT

- Jim announced that the facility had its annual survey and passed, returning us back to a full license. This past survey was the best that Gino has had in several years.
- We had our annual Life Safety survey. They found a few small items which have been addressed and corrected.
- We currently have 1 positive resident, and they are in quarantine. We will be having new admissions March 2nd if we continue to have no positive residents or staff and the numbers continue to drop in the county.

REPORT OF THE MEDICAL DIRECTOR

- We have no other outbreaks of illness so far. We have had no cases of the FLU.
- Our COVID vaccines are better for the staff than the other homes. 204 have had their 2nd dose, 4 have had 1 and 72 have refused.
- We have a census of 122. Of those we have had 188 residents receive both doses, 1 with 1 dose and 3 refusals.
- We had no cases for the longest time. Our first true case was on November 5th and it was a resident and his roommate.
- We had a significant outbreak at one point. Of the residents we have had 62 positives, 18 deaths, 43 recovered and currently one positive in quarantine. Of the staff, we have had 63 positive cases and 63 recovered.
- We have been using protective gear and our precautions seem to be working. We have not had any positives or exposures for 10 days so far.
 - Lisa Baker asked for information on the wellbeing and mental health of the residents. Dr, Kazmierski stated that some have had a psychological decline but that the staff has done a great job in keeping them as active as possible.

- Ron Faust asked if there is a policy on how new hires and new admissions are going to be handled? Will they require testing and/or the vaccine? Dr. Kazmierski stated that all new admissions must test prior to admission and then spend 14 days in the yellow unit. We are not requiring vaccinations but are strongly encouraging the vaccine for all. Currently CVS has come in for specific vaccine clinics. We are hoping to be able to get vaccines in the home so that we can administer them when they are requested.
- Lisa Baker asked if we are doing in person visits yet. Dr. Kazmierski stated that we are doing window visits but are looking forward to offering in person visiting, with COVID precautions once the county rate drops below 5%.

REPORT OF ADMISSIONS

- Our current census is 122. We did have a few admissions in December but had to stop.
- We currently have 64 on the waiting list, 41 are veterans and 23 are non-veterans.

THE GOOD OF THE COUNCIL

- Lisa Baker thanked everyone for what they are doing. She told all to stay safe, healthy and positive.
- Bill Smith told all to stay healthy and safe. He thanked everyone for an outstanding job.
- Joe Sylvester thanked everyone for their great work.
- Karen Boback informed the group that Louis Pugh was buried with honors in Arlington National Cemetery.
- Jim Miller told the council that he will continue to send weekly updates and remain transparent. He stated that we are lucky to be where we are and that the staff has done a great job and will continue to do so.
- At 10:30, Jim Miller made a motion to adjourn, and Bill Smith seconded the motion.

ADJOURNMENT

The next meeting was announced: May 20, 2021 at 10:00 a.m.

SOUTHEASTERN VETERANS' CENTER ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

April 8, 2021

The Southeastern Veterans' Center Advisory Council met April 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
Thomas Brown, Veterans of Foreign Wars
William Cornwell, Resident Representative
Richard Doherty, Military Officers Assoc. of America
John Getz, Veterans of Foreign Wars
Robert G. Richardson, Resident Representative
Kenneth Schweitzer, American Legion

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

Edward Beck, Chief of Operations, Veterans' Homes - DMVA
Mildred Butler-Coleman, Deputy Commandant – SEVC
Travis Davis, Director, BVH
Barry Lowen, Acting Commandant - SEVC
Barbara Raymond, Acting DON

Visitors:

MaCherie Dunbar, Office of U.S. Rep. Chrissy Houlihan
Nikki Whitlock, Constituency Relations, Sen. Katie Muth's Office

Excused Absence:

Jill Alwine, Admissions and Marketing Coordinator - SEVC
Anthony Arnao, Jr. Catholic War Veterans
Jeffrey Elliot, PA AMVETS
Doug Forsythe, Disabled American Veterans
The Hon. Tim Hennessey, PA House of Representatives
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 Ken Schweitzer was sworn in for reappointment.

Review and Approval of January 14, 2021 Meeting Minutes:

Ken Schweitzer moved and Tom Brown seconded approval of minutes of the January 14, 2021 Advisory Council.

Report of the Medical Director:

Dr. Carl Burnett, Acting Medical Director, was unable to attend the meeting. Acting DON Barb Raymond provided the following update:

- We have no positive residents, but posted one positive staff member today. The staff member was vaccinated and is currently asymptomatic and stable. As background, the vaccine is not a cure-all but prevents serious illness/death, so it's not unusual to have a positive. We've had no cases of flu, and no other infection control issues.
- We just started new lab services this past Monday. That is going well.
- We are searching for new in-house psych. services vendor. We also use VA psych services.
- Med Director Dr. Shirkanthan scheduled to return next week.
- Offer has been made for DON position to Evelyn Domish. Tentative start date is May 17. Barb will remain on site to assist with the transition
- Still in the selection and negotiation process for new Commandant. Hope to decide in the next week or so.
- All ADON positions are filled.

Richard Doherty – asked how close we are to finalizing Commandant selection – Barb said we made an offer and are now in the negotiation stage.

Report of the Admissions and Marketing Coordinator:

Acting Commandant Barry Lowen presented for Admissions and Marketing Coordinator Jill Alwine, who was handling an admission at the time of the meeting.

Restarted admissions process as of 3/30/2021; admitted 3 new residents. Plan calls for admission of 2 Skilled Nursing residents and 1 Personal Care resident every week until all available beds are filled. We have 16 Skilled Nursing and 8 Personal Care beds to be filled.

Admissions continue as long as the COVID positivity rate stays low. However, it's going up, and is now at 7.2% in Chester County. Nationwide, nearly 50% of all positive cases are in 5 states – PA, Mich., NY, NJ, and FLA. We receive a report every Monday night on the county positivity rate.

Occupancy rates: 44% for Skilled Nursing, 80% for Memory Care, and 59% for Personal Care. Total facility occupancy rate is 51%. We have 186 people on our waiting list.

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

Overview of all BVH homes:

- Vaccination rate is 88% for residents, which is above the national average.
- Vaccination rate for staff 51.2%, which is still above national average for long-term care facilities. Expect to see rate go up as more people realize vaccine is safe.
- All homes are admitting and open for visitors, with restrictions.
- Barber and beauty services have resumed.
- For last two years, we've been reporting challenges in filling positions. Today, happy to report for our salaried positions we have 98% of our complement filled; we were able to do this despite the pandemic and a state hiring freeze. We continue to post and fill vacancies.

Personnel changes at HQ:

- New DAG – Col. Maureen Weigl.
- New BVH Dir. – Ed introduced Travis Davis, who spoke briefly. He's from the Lakawanna County area, and has spent 7 years working in long-term care. He looks forward to working with the team, and thanks the Advisory Council for work done to date.

Questions:

Nikki Whitlock, from Sen. Katie Muth's office – Asked for a repeat of Col. Weigl's title and the facility capacity rates. Acting Commandant Barry Lowen added that with our current round of admissions will include 16 Skilled Nursing residents and 8 Person Care residents. After that we will reassess and come up with another plan.

Robert Richardson, Personal Care Resident Representative – Asked about schedule for the barber. Deputy Commandant Mildred Butler-Coleman explained that barber services are every Tuesday and Thursday, and she rotates locations. She does not go to yellow units.

Nikki Whitlock – Asked about yellow units. Acting DON Barb Raymond explained that we currently have 1 yellow Skilled Nursing unit, and 1 yellow Personal Care unit. In addition, we maintain 1 constant yellow for residents who are new admissions or left the facility for a hospital visit or overnight trip with family.

Barb further explained that we test weekly and if someone tests positive, we convert any unit on which they worked to yellow.

John Getz – Asked if we've considered mandatory vaccinations for staff and residents. Barb said we can't for residents, as that is a resident rights issue. For employees, there's the issue of unions, and that there is discussion as to whether or not employers can mandate vaccination because the COVID vaccines only have emergency use authorization from the FDA.

Richard Doherty – Question about whether or not we have Independent Living. Ed clarified that our Personal Care is not the same as Independent Living in the sense that where Richard lives, Independent Living means residents come and go as they please, more like apartment living. Barb further explained that our Personal Care falls under DHS, and is more like what Richard would consider Assisted Living. Independent Living residents take care of own meds, bathing, etc. Assisted living a little higher level of care.

Remarks by Barry Lowen, SEVC Acting Commandant:

Recruitment:

- We've filled 16 positions since January.
- We have 27 veterans on staff.
- Open positions in Dietary (3), Housekeeping (13), Admissions (1), Nursing (36.5), Pharmacy (1), Administration (1), Activities (3), Maintenance (1), Social Services (1).

COVID-19 updates – Eight staff members vaccinated at a Walgreen's mini vaccine clinic held at our facility. Overall, 98% of our residents have been vaccinated; 60% of staff vaccinated. We continue to support staff who have changed their minds about the vaccine – Veterans can go to the VA, and there could be other opportunities for us to bring in another pharmacy to provide vaccinations. Also, with Chester County's positivity rate in yellow, we're swabbing weekly. When the positivity rate is over 10% we have to test twice weekly. We're watching as rate increases.

Donations – Overall monetary donations this year to date total \$3,225, with an additional \$1,800 in gift cards for parties and activities. Highlights include \$1,000 in gift cards and other items from the American Legion post #626 of Birdsboro; \$400 in Dunkin Gift Cards, checks for Valentines, and 10 large-face watches from the VFW Auxiliary Dept. of PA; various monthly donations from the Community Club of Collegeville; \$500 from the Knights of Columbus; and various donations from local church organizations. We've also received cases of Girl Scout cookies, postage stamps, bouquets of flowers and carnations, and hand sanitizer. Everyone has been thanked via letters and in our monthly newsletter.

Activities – Resident parties held for New Year's Eve, Valentine's Day, Super Bowl Sunday, Mardi Gras, St. Patrick's Day, and Easter. In addition, residents created a 2020 Time Capsule, learned about Chinese New Year, planted pansies, and welcomed Baseball Opening Day with Philly soft pretzels and Italian water ice. Upcoming activities include transforming the Coates Hall sunroom into a resident-run greenhouse, establishing resident gardening programs, and holding outdoor picnics.

Remarks by Mildred Butler-Coleman, Deputy Commandant:

ADHC Construction – Anticipated opening November 2021.

General Maintenance - New chiller towers for air conditioning in Coates Hall; new roof on storage barn

Resident Services – Chaplin back, starting bible study and church services next week; also have dentist, podiatrist, audiologist, and ophthalmologist back in the building. Having services back helps to improve resident moral.

Questions:

Robert Richardson asked if there are any photos of the ADHC construction. Mildred said no, but that we have renderings of what the area is supposed to look like that she could share with him.

Comments from the Council:

John Getz – Thank you to SEVC staff for what they do.

Thomas Applebach – Glad we're finally opening back up and that residents are able to see family; also nice that we're bringing back our in-house services.

Mary Archey – Also glad we're able to open up, and looking forward to when volunteers can come back. Barb said this week she's asking HQ about the return of volunteers.

Thomas Brown – In reference to a negative newspaper article about SEVC from July 2020, he would like to know if/when we will get word out to the media about the positive changes we've made and that we're doing an outstanding job now. He also asked about the timeline of our last DOH survey – Barb explained that our last full survey was over a year ago; in early January they visited due to a complaint but the findings were unsubstantiated. Barb added that Ed can reach out to Joan Nissley, our press secretary, to see if there's anything we can do. Ed noted that while we have a communications director, we do not have the authority to send our own press releases. We have to go through the Governor's office.

MaCherie Dunbar, Office of U.S. Rep. Chrissy Houlihan – Before issuing a press release about how well things are going at the home, has there been a survey of resident/families to make sure they are satisfied? Excellent changes have been made, but are you collecting data on satisfaction?

Barb and Ed explained that we conduct 2 resident satisfaction surveys per year. We also conduct 1 friends and family survey every two years. We have not done a resident survey since last year due to COVID. The plan is to do one this summer. The friends and family survey was done. Ed said we consistently have 81% resident satisfaction. Lowest ratings are usually in food service – we're working on that, with a new menu – and also laundry.

Richard Doherty – SEVC has made a lot of progress and it's welcome news that they're doing well.

Ken Schweitzer – Everyone is doing a great job under the circumstances.

Old Business:

None

New Business:

Robert Richardson – Asked Mildred about a lack of hot water on 4East. She said we’re getting a new boiler to address the issue. She will inform him of the exact date.

Good of the Council

Nikki Whitlock – Asked if our two legislative council members were on the call today. Secretary Kathy Knaub reported that Sen. Mensch was unable to participate and Rep. Hennessey was going to call in for a portion of the call, but could not participate in the entire call due to a conflicting engagement.

Time and Date for the next Meeting:

With no further business to discuss, President Barry Amole adjourned the meeting. The next regular meeting of the Advisory Council will be held on July 8, 2021 at 10:00 AM.

Approved:

Barry Amole, President

Minutes submitted by: Kathy Knaub

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

Advisory Council Members Present:

Thomas Tallon, Military Officers Assoc. of America
William Roland, Veterans of Foreign Wars
David White, Marine Corps League
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
Tim Sager, Keystone Paralyzed Veterans
Albert Schraepfer, The American Legion
Edward Hanke, Disabled American Veterans
Clarence Gomberg, Jewish War Veterans
Kenneth Stubbs, Resident Representative
Kim Ward, Senator
Natalie Mihalek, Representative

Advisory Council Members Absent

NONE

Others Present

James Hamp, Asst to Deputy Adjutant General
Rich Adams, Director of State Homes
Rich Adams, Commandant, SWVC
Dr. David Blinn, Medical Director, SWVC

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 the Moment of Silence.

ROLL CALL:

Roll call was taken.

MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING:

None.

REMARKS FROM THE MEDICAL DIRECTOR:

- 37 staff and 18 resident cases to date
- 0 active positive cases for residents currently 4 staff on quarantine
- 128 residents have received first round of vaccine and preparing for 2nd dose next week while 20 more residents will receive their 1st doses next week – which is about 90 percent of the residents
- There are 16 refusals with one being contra indicated
- Overall, approximately 33% of staff have received their vaccines, many hesitant and waiting to see how it goes
- Praised staff leadership o their handling of the pandemic

Mr. Hanke complemented the job that the leadership has done to get the home through this pandemic.

ADMISSIONS & MARKETING UPDATE:

None.

REMARKS FROM THE DEPUTY ADJUTANT GENERAL:

- Highlighted the vaccine distribution made remarks regarding policy for the future
- Requirement for admission will be a negative swab before coming and then once admitted will offer the vaccine
- Those who are new admits will be quarantined for two weeks before moving them into population

An inquiry was made as to policy and procedure for admission to which Rich replaced that at this current time a policy is being written for a new admission procedure.

- Touched on the Vet Outreach program which was up and running and will have a database which was initiated November and our ability to make vets aware of the 6 state homes and what they have to offer

- Training of VSO has been done virtually and will continue that way with some hybrid training options being explored for the future
- PPE, testing supplies were a challenge in the beginning but have managed to stockpile 2.5 months of supplies
- Mandated testing of employees continues
- Bacteria robots have been delivered to each home with training taking place for their use, they will be up and running in the near future
- Construction is scheduled to pick up in each home

Mr. Hanke inquired as to what the Bacteria Robot was?

Acting Director of Homes Rich Adam briefly explained that it was a machine which used UV to disinfect large areas. The machine is placed in a room and runs on a 5 minute cycle. It is said to be 99% effective in killing germs.

REMARKS OF THE DIRECTOR OF STATE HOMES:

- Mentioned that most of the 6 homes have had their first round of vaccine with the 2nd shots being giving approximately 3 to 4 weeks later
- Staff participation varies from home to home
- VA has been helpful in supplying supplies for the continued testing which has occurred for approximately 30 weeks
- There is a consensus to get the barber/beauty shops as well as podiatry and mental health services, to return in the upcoming weeks as it is hopeful that these service providers can be included in not only the testing, but in the vaccination process

REPORT OF THE COMMANDANT:

Commandant's report reviewed

- Currently 34 new hires with a total of 39 vets
- Currently 68 vacant beds due to the COVID crisis with beds needing to be available for the Red/Yellow units
- Approximately 12 beds available for admissions
- VA would like to start admitting if SWVC, they are very ready to fill the empty beds and if SWVC continues to have negative testing along with the vaccines, it is a possibility for the near future
- Testing is currently being done twice a week, lab is efficient in getting results back in approximately 8 to 10 hours helping to keep exposure to a minimum
- We have done approximately 4500 resident swabs and 10k employee swabs

- 18 total positive residents (5 of which I feel were false), 15 recovered and unfortunately 3 have passed (back in June)
- Last 2 rounds of tests where there have been no positives; the positivity rate has gone below 10 percent and we are able to cut back on swabbing in the near future
- VA has been phenomenal keeping us well supplied for testing
- Gave accolades to all who have put effort into making things work under the circumstances
- Vaccine has been a huge pick me up for both staff and residents

REPORT OF THE COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Mr. Lamison commented that there are currently 54 empty beds, questioned if our marketing was not aggressive enough. *Rich answered with that is part for us and we actually have 68 beds available but that some had to stay empty for isolation reasons, he also mentioned that he is in touch with the VA every week with respect to admissions.*

Mr. Roland remarked that VFWs would like to come and interview the Commandants of all 6 facilities but instead will send questionnaires through the mail with respect to the COVID crisis.

Mr. White commented on the tremendous and outstanding job that staff was doing

Mr. Aronson mentioned that a few of the executive boards are short on funds but were trying to continue to continue helping the hospitals as best they could. Commended the staff.

Mr. Lamison commended the staff and appreciates the frequent updates

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.

Cheri will email all involved to find out what capabilities they have and council preference.

GOOD OF THE COUNCIL:

Mr. Aronson mentioned that he had heard that the VA hospital was vaccinating veterans in Oakland on a walk in basis for those 75+

Dr Blinn mentioned that there were 2 separate events at the Oakland Campus. WPXI has an article listed with the specifics.

An inquiry was made as to the progress of filling the seat for Mr. Abbott. Rich Hamp stated that there was a list of appointments set up by the councils and that as soon as they are made councils will be notified.

ADJOURNMENT:

Meeting called to close at 11:30 AM

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

**Bureau of Veterans' Homes
Available Beds Monthly Status Report
from April 1 to 30, 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*	90	66	24		73%	58
Memory Care	30	19	11		63%	22
Placing						6
Totals Less Wait List Placing	120	85	35	43	71%	74
Non-Veteran Census Percent				39	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	108	48		69%	21
Memory Care	40	22	18		55%	10
Placing						4
Totals Less Wait List Placing	196	130	66	71	66%	27
Non-Veteran Census Percent				69	11%	
Hollidaysburg Veterans' Home, Hollidaysburg PA - Deborah Nesbella - Commandant						
Level of Care	Available Beds	Beds Assigned	Beds Vacant	Average Beds Vacant	Percentage Filled	Waiting List Veteran / Placing
Nursing Care	231	137	94		59%	9
Memory Care	26	14	12		54%	3
Personal Care	167	80	87		48%	3
Placing						5
Totals Less Wait List Placing	424	231	193	195	54%	10
Non-Veteran Census Percent				194	13%	
Pennsylvania Soldiers' & Sailors' Home, Erie PA - Barbara Raymond - Commandant						
Level of Care	Available Beds	Beds Assigned	Beds Vacant	Average Beds Vacant	Percentage Filled	Waiting List Veteran / Placing
Nursing Care	75	51	24		68%	15
Memory Care	32	15	17		47%	1
Personal Care	100	56	44		56%	2
Placing						7
Totals Less Wait List Placing	207	122	85	89	59%	11
Non-Veteran Census Percent				87	14%	
Southeastern Veterans' Center, Spring City PA - Barry Lowen - Acting Commandant						
Level of Care	Available Beds	Beds Assigned	Beds Vacant	Average Beds Vacant	Percentage Filled	Waiting List Veteran / Placing
Nursing Care	208	118	90		57%	62
Memory Care	30	28	2		93%	26
Personal Care	54	31	23		57%	11
Placing						8
Totals Less Wait List Placing	292	177	115	122	61%	91
Non-Veteran Census Percent				119	10%	
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	130	66		66%	33
Memory Care	40	38	2		95%	2
Placing						2
Totals Less Wait List Placing	236	168	68	71	71%	33
Non-Veteran Census Percent				70	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	956	610	346		64%	198
Memory Care	198	136	62		69%	64
Personal Care	321	167	154		52%	16
Placing Total						32
Totals Less Wait List Placing	1,475	913	562	588	62%	246
				575		
Non-Veteran Census Number						
DVVH	4	5%				
GJMVC	14	11%				
HVH	30	13%				
PSSH	16	13%				
SEVC	16	9%				
SWVC	27	16%				
TOTAL	107	12%				

**Bureau of Veterans' Homes
Available Beds Monthly Status Report
from March 1 to 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*	90	59	31		66%	65
Memory Care	30	20	10		67%	27
Placing						9
Totals Less Wait List Placing	120	79	41	45	66%	83
Non-Veteran Census Percent				43	4%	
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%	23
Memory Care	40	18	22		45%	12
Placing						2
Totals Less Wait List Placing	196	129	67	74	66%	33
Non-Veteran Census Percent				71	11%	
Hollidaysburg Veterans' Home, Hollidaysburg PA - Deborah Nesbella - Commandant						
Level of Care	Available Beds	Beds Assigned	Beds Vacant	Average Beds Vacant	Percentage Filled	Waiting List Veteran / Placing
Nursing Care	231	137	94		59%	16
Memory Care	26	13	13		50%	4
Personal Care	167	81	86		49%	3
Placing						2
Totals Less Wait List Placing	424	231	193	197	54%	21
Non-Veteran Census Percent				195	14%	
Pennsylvania Soldiers' & Sailors Home, Erie PA - Barbara Raymond - Commandant						
Level of Care	Available Beds	Beds Assigned	Beds Vacant	Average Beds Vacant	Percentage Filled	Waiting List Veteran / Placing
Nursing Care	75	51	24		68%	22
Memory Care	32	11	21		34%	4
Personal Care	100	55	45		55%	6
Placing						0
Totals Less Wait List Placing	207	117	90	87	57%	32
Non-Veteran Census Percent				89	14%	
Southeastern Veterans' Center, Spring City PA - Barry Lowen - Acting Commandant						
Level of Care	Available Beds	Beds Assigned	Beds Vacant	Average Beds Vacant	Percentage Filled	Waiting List Veteran / Placing
Nursing Care	208	119	89		57%	67
Memory Care	30	20	10		67%	32
Personal Care	54	31	23		57%	16
Placing						10
Totals Less Wait List Placing	292	170	122	121	58%	105
Non-Veteran Census Percent				122	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	142	54		72%	35
Memory Care	40	23	17		58%	3
Placing						0
Totals Less Wait List Placing	236	165	71	71	70%	38
Non-Veteran Census Percent				71	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	956	619	337		65%	228
Memory Care	198	105	93		53%	82
Personal Care	321	167	154		52%	25
Placing Total						23
Totals Less Wait List Placing	1,475	891	584	591	60%	312
				588		
Non-Veteran Census Number						
DVVH	3				4%	
GJMVC	13				10%	
HVH	31				14%	
PSSH	16				14%	
SEVC	15				9%	
SWVC	27				16%	
TOTAL	105				12%	

COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS 2020-2021

ACT 66 COMMITTEE

MR. RICHARD HUDZINSKI (COMMITTEE CHAIR)	VVA (SME)
MR. JAMES "WOODY" HOGAN	TAL
MR. ROBERT FORBES	AMVETS
MR. CHARLES JACKSON	MAL
MR. JOHN GETZ	VFW
MS. LIZ SALVADOR	VFW (SME)
MR. BRUCE FOSTER	TAL (SME)
MR. DAVID REINERTSEN	TAL (SME)
MR. SAM PETROVICH	SVC CHAIRMAN
MR. PHILIP ARNOLD	MOPH (SME)
MR. CHIP GILLILAND	DMVA

RETX COMMITTEE

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

LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE

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

PENSIONS & RELIEF/GRAVE MARKING/CEMETARY COMMITTEE

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

MEMBER AT LARGE COMMITTEE

MR. SAM PETROVICH (COMMITTEE CHAIR)

SVC CHAIRMAN

MR. PHILIP ARNOLD

MOPH (SME)

MR. RICHARD HUDZINSKI

VVA (SME)

MR. CHRIS FIDLER

KPVA

MR. SETH BENGE

DMVA

Pennsylvania State Veterans Commission

SVC RETX Committee Meeting

April 27, 2021 0900

Justin D. Slep, PSACDVA President

Members

MR. JUSTIN SLEP (COMMITTEE CHAIR) PSACDVA - Present

MR. KEITH BEEBE MOAA - Present

MR. CHRIS FIDLER KPVA - Excused

MR. ROBERT ZILTZ MCL - Excused

MR. NICHOLAS TAYLOR SVC VICE-CHAIR – Excused

MR. JOHN CYPRIAN MAL – Excused

MR. BRIAN NATALI DMVA – Present

MS. TRACY WYLIE-PERRY DMVA – Present

Guests

Mr. Seth Bengel – Present

Discussion Topics:

- HB 491 referred back to Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness on 3-25-21(Passed the House unanimously). Currently with S VAEP. It would remove the VA income and any veterans' benefits from the state from the needs determination. This would affect all state Veterans programs.
- SB 244 removes VA income from needs determination. May not be necessary. Still in committee. (Pittman) Amends Title 51 (Military Affairs), in disabled veterans' real estate tax exemption, providing compensation received by an individual for an injury due to service may not be considered by the commission for determining the need for exemption from payment of real estate taxes granted under this act. S VAEP. 2/18/21.
- 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 by allowing an exemption for a portion, instead of all, of real estate taxes for veterans that have a permanent disability of 50 percent or greater. The percentage of exemption from real property taxes shall be in direct proportion to the percentage of disability. S VAEP 4/20/21. (NEW)
- DMVA is working on re-writing the regulations as part of the CH5 43 Pa Code work group

Comments:

- The committee is working on tracking any and all bills that involve some aspect of RETX