

**PENNSYLVANIA STATE VETERANS' COMMISSION MEETING  
ARROWHEADS COMMUNITY CLUB  
BLDG 9-65, FORT INDIANTOWN GAP  
ANNVILLE, PA 17003-5002**

**Friday, June 6, 2014**

**Call to Order:** The State Veterans' Commission (SVC) meeting was called to order at 10:00 am by Chairman John Brenner. The meeting was opened with an invocation and the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance.

**Awards:** Brigadier General Jerry G. Beck, Jr. Beck presented the Pennsylvania Commendation Medal to Mr. William T. Harris, III, for exceptionally meritorious service to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as a member of the State Veterans Commission.

**Governor Tom Corbett:** Governor Corbett via conference call advised the State Veterans Commission Members of an effort he led in unity with the Governors of Florida, Texas, Kansas Maine and Louisiana; calling on President Obama to immediately put the health and safety of our nation's veterans first and bring quick and decisive reforms to end the problems plaguing U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' health system nationwide.

These six Governors have signed a letter to the President recommending state-based action. The letter urges President Obama to allow states to conduct reviews of VHA facilities and recommend solutions by those outside of the current failed system, which will ensure accountability as changes are put into place to support our veterans.

The letter also calls for the immediate suspension of the current VHA bonus system and to redirect that money for health care block grants, based upon the percentage of veterans in the state. Additionally, the Governors are seeking federal vouchers to access non-VA health care for any veteran who is unable to secure a medical appointment within a 30-day period from the VA.

In addition, the governor has launched an easy to complete, internet-based form for Pennsylvania veteran's to report concerns experienced at VA hospitals and facilities in Pennsylvania. The form can be accessed at [www.vaconcerns.pa.gov](http://www.vaconcerns.pa.gov).

The feedback from this website will be compiled and shared with our federal colleagues. The experiences shared on this website could be used to assess needs, determine where to apply resources, and serve to help Veterans across the Commonwealth.

**Colonel Marc Ferraro – Acting Deputy Adjutant General - Army:** BG Beck introduced COL Marc Ferraro who is serving as the Acting Deputy Adjutant General – Army for the Pennsylvania National Guard. COL Ferraro gave a run down on the changes in senior leadership taking place upon the retirement of BG Randall Marchi.

**BG Jerry G. Beck, Jr. – Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans Affairs:** BG Beck provided the Commission an update on the current and upcoming PA Army and Air National Guard deployments. He briefed the Commission on Veterans' Trust Fund Finances. He also provided an Act 66 Claims, Compensation, Pension and Recovery Summary, and conveyed

Outreach Engagement information and statistics. General Beck gave a briefing on the Governor's Advisory Council Brochure. This brochure contains a consolidated listing of programs, benefits and services for Veterans and their families in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. BG Beck advised Commission members that immediately following the meeting we will be giving each Veterans Organization enough copies to hand out to each of their individual members.

**Mr. William England – VISN 4 – Associate Director, Lebanon VAMC:** Mr. England provided the following updates:

- **Leadership Changes:**

- **Wilkes-Barre** – Dr. Michael Adelman has been appointed as the new director of the Wilkes-Barre VA Medical Center. Dr. Adelman joined VA approximately 14 years ago and has been serving as the director at the Erie VA since August 2006. He also served as acting chief medical officer of VISN 4 for nearly a year as well as interim director of the Philadelphia VA. Dr. Adelman began his appointment at Wilkes-Barre on June 1.
- **Erie** – Recruitment is under way for a new director.
- **VISN 4** – Mr. Gary Devansky continues to serve as Interim Network Director. Recruitment for the permanent position is being conducted through VA Central Office, and is under way.

- **Workload Update:**

Through the second quarter of fiscal year 2014, VISN 4 treated 275,965 unique Veterans and conducted 833,540 outpatient visits.

- **Wheelchair Games:**

- The Philadelphia VA is preparing to host the 34th National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Philadelphia from August 12 through August 17, 2014. Mr. England asked Commission members if they were able, to please attend and cheer on these heroes. He advised that if they wanted to learn more they could find the schedule, at [www.va.gov/opa/speceven/wcg](http://www.va.gov/opa/speceven/wcg).

- **Openings:**

- On May 28<sup>th</sup>, the VA in Altoona held a ribbon-cutting and open house for the recently relocated and expanded Johnstown community-based outpatient clinic. They began treating Veterans there on April 29<sup>th</sup>. Services offered include primary care, mental health, specialty care, telehealth, and ancillary services such as laboratory. The new clinic will improve health care for Veterans through support of the Patient Aligned Care team model, virtual care, women's health, home based primary care, and other VA strategic initiatives. Altoona is also preparing to activate two new community-based outpatient clinics in Indiana and Huntingdon counties by the end of this fiscal year. These clinics will expand access to health care for Veterans in underserved parts of Pennsylvania to include Indiana and surrounding counties and Huntingdon, Mifflin, Juniata, and northern

Bedford counties. Both locations will provide basic primary care, general mental health, audiology, optometry with tele-retinal screening, social services, laboratory services, tele-health, and radiological services.

- On June 10<sup>th</sup>, the VA in Butler will hold a ribbon-cutting ceremony for their new Community Living Center. We will report more on that at the next meeting.
- Wilkes-Barre announced the award of a contract for a new outreach clinic to Wayne Memorial Community Health Centers to provide primary care, telehealth and women's health services in rural Honesdale, Pennsylvania. This new site will serve rural Veterans in Wayne and Pike Counties who normally travel into Wilkes-Barre for their healthcare needs. It is anticipated that the clinic will be open in 2014.

- **Closing Remarks:**

- At VA, our most important mission is to care for Veterans and provide them with the high quality care and benefits they have earned and deserve. VA has made strong progress in recent years to better serve Veterans both now and in the future. However, we know that there is more work to do.
- In VISN 4, we are on a continuous quest to improve and expand the services we offer and the ways we deliver care. We are committed to providing quality, safe and compassionate care to Veterans. I want to extend my sincere gratitude to all of you here today for continuing to partner with us to ensure that Veterans receive the care and services they have earned.
- Veterans deserve to have full faith in their VA care. And we are endeavoring every day to earn your steadfast confidence. Thank you for allowing us to continue to serve you.

**Review and Approval of April 4, 2014 Meeting Minutes:** Mr. Dominic DiFrancesco made a motion to approve the April 4, 2014 meeting minutes as presented. Mr. Michael Iacavazzi seconded the motion. Motion carried.

**OLD BUSINESS:**

**Chief Counsel Update by Ms. Marsha Mills:** Packets containing proposed changes to several regulations were distributed to each of the Commission Members. The contents of the packets were outlined and discussed. Packet included proposed changes to the following programs:

- **Veterans Services**

- Chapter 5, Proposed changes to Regulations, 43 Pa. Code
  - ✓ 5.11 - 5.20 - Education Gratuity Program
  - ✓ 5.21 - 5.27 - Disabled Veterans' Real Estate Exemption Program
  - ✓ 5.31 - 5.36 - Blind Veterans Pension
  - ✓ 5.41 - 5.46 - Existing Paralyzed Veteran's Pension

- ✓ 5.41 - 5.46 - Proposed Regulations if the Amputee and Paralyzed Veteran's Pension Bill passes

- **Bureau of Veterans Homes**

- Chapter 7, Proposed Veterans Homes Regulations, 43 Pa. Code

A motion was made by Mr. Tim Cleveland to accept the package of updates and changes to regulation as presented by Ms. Mills. The motion was seconded by Mr. Russell Canevari. The motion carried.

**Office of Policy and Legislative Affairs Update by Mr. Dusty Durand:** Mr. Durand updated Commission Members on the status of the following legislation of interest:

- **Current Legislative Priorities:**

- Amputee and Paralyzed Veteran Pension
- Education Assistance Program
- Military Physician Incentive Program
- Military Family Relief Assistance Program
- VTF Amendment
- Randolp Sheppard

- **Proposed Legislative Priorities**

- Motorcycle License Plate
- Volunteer Behavioral Health
- Sell / Convey Hunt / Pine Grove Armories
- Youth Challenge Program

- **Current Legislation of Interest**

- Education / PA Residency to Military / Veterans
- Priority Registration for Current Military Service Personnel and Veterans
- Developing Opportunities in Veterans' Education – Dove Program
- Providing for Transfer & Articulation Oversight Committee
- Local Earned Income Tax for Active Duty Pay
- Veterans Lottery Game

**State Veterans' Homes Status Update by Mr. Andrew Ruscavage:** Mr. Ruscavage provided the following information:

- **Occupancy Statistics:**

- Total State Occupancy – 90%
- Total State Veterans' Homes Non-Veteran Census Percentage – 10%
- State Veterans' Homes Nursing Care / Dementia Occupancy – 95%
- State Veterans' Homes Personal Care / Domiciliary Occupancy – 78%

- **Veterans Homes Waiting List / Application Process:**

No matter which of the six Veterans Homes the Veteran is applying for, the application process begins by submitting an application to the Bureau of Veterans

Homes Office at Fort Indiantown Gap. All applications must be processed through this office.

On the application, the Veteran is asked to select a primary and secondary home of choice. This is because Veterans homes located in larger metropolitan areas have longer waiting lists.

Each application is reviewed for completion of information. If the information is complete the application is date stamped. The date stamp is the date used for order of placement on the waiting list.

If an application is not complete the Bureau of Veterans Homes will contact the individual and request the information. The application will not be processed until all required information is complete, for example: DD 214 or equivalent, MA-51 Medical Assessment form and Activities of Daily Living Information Form. Once all of the required information is provided the application gets a date stamp and is entered into the system.

Every applicant must undergo a background check. Background checks are completed at Fort Indiantown Gap. Veterans seeking admission cannot have a felony on their record. Upon satisfactory completion of the background check the Veteran is entered into the system electronically.

The original application is mailed to the primary home selection and a copy is mailed to the secondary home. If the primary home of choice does not have a vacancy, the secondary choice home will begin the process.

The Homes application process begins with the Admissions Committee. Each home has an Admissions Committee made up of clinical and non-clinical staff. The goal of the committee is to determine the level of care for the Veteran; whether it is personal care, nursing care or dementia. The information is reviewed to assess financial status, patient needs, and costs of care.

No Veterans Home has the authority to deny an application. If the Admissions Committee feels that the Home cannot care for the Veteran; whether it is medically related, financially related, or because they believe that the Veteran has behavioral problems that might be harmful to himself or others; a request for denial must be processed through the Bureau of Veterans Homes.

All applicants on the waiting list are processed by the date stamp on the application. The list is not jumped for anyone; the only exception is that Veterans are selected before a non-Veteran spouse.

Once the home and level of care is identified, the approved Veteran, or their caretaker is notified of either admission to the home, or placement on the waiting list. If they are placed on a waiting list they are advised of an “approximate” wait time. It is made clear that the wait time is an approximation.

Upon notification of an admission date and the offering of a bed, the applicant will have 5 days to enter into the Veterans Home. If there are extenuating circumstances,

the Veteran can request an additional 5 days (up to a total of 10 days) to enter the Home. If the Veteran does not enter into the home within the allotted timeframe, the application is considered closed and the next Veteran on the waiting list will be offered the bed.

Applicants can be on two waiting lists at one time, however for statistical reporting purposes they only show up on the primary choice list.

An example of the waiting list was shared from the Delaware Valley Veterans Home in Philadelphia. In April and May as the Admissions Director was working down the waiting list it was determined that three of the Veterans had passed away while waiting for a bed to open. Eight Veterans decided that they did not want to come to the Home for various reasons; they had moved in with a relative, or got an apartment for example. Three of the Veterans on the list decided to move into a different Veterans Home; two choosing the Holidaysburg Veterans Home, one choosing the Gino J. Merli Veterans Center and one Veteran decided to move into a private nursing facility in the Philadelphia area. The Admission Director moved through 14 people on the waiting list that did not move into the home.

Delaware Valley maintains one of the largest waiting lists. They also maintain a 100% occupancy rate most of the time. While there are openings in other homes, it is often difficult to get individuals to move from one area to another. The average age of the Veterans and their spouses is 80 years old. It is hard for an 80 year old spouse to travel two, three and four hours to visit. Veterans would rather remain on the waiting list for an opening in a home that is closer to family.

- **State Veteran's Home Week:**

June 8 through June 14, 2014 is State Veteran's Home Week. All six Veteran's Homes have a variety of events and activities scheduled. A calendar of events for each of the homes has been included in the hand-out packet starting on page 30.

**Paralyzed Veterans Pension Program Summary by Mr. Brian Natali:** Mr. Natali provided a general briefing on the Paralyzed Veterans Pension Program as follows:

- **Eligibility Requirements:**

- Applicant must have been discharged from the armed forces of the United States under honorable conditions
- Applicant must have been a legal resident of Pennsylvania at time of entry into the armed forces of the United States
- Suffered a service-connected injury or disease resulting in a loss or loss of use of two or more extremities
- Applicant must have suffered an injury or incurred a disease resulting in the loss or loss of use of two or more extremities (arms/hands or legs/feet) as a result of his or her performance of duties connected with their military service
- Provides eligible paralyzed veterans a pension of \$150.00 per month
- Entitlement ends at death

- **What is Needed to Apply:**
  - Completed application (MA-VA 80)
  - Copy of a DD214
  - VA form 3288 for Paralyzed Pension
  - VA rating decision or code sheet if available

**Review / Approval of Program Reports Requiring a Vote by Mr. Brian Natali:** Mr. Natali presented the following reports for approval “in total”. This means that the vote for approval will encompass all reports presented in a singular vote. The following reports were presented:

- Blind Veterans’ Pension Report
- Paralyzed Veterans’ Pension Report
- Veterans Emergency Assistance Report
- Educational Gratuity Report
- Persian Gulf Veterans’ Program Report
- Disabled Veterans’ Real Estate Tax Exemption Program Report
  - Three (3 ea) Requests for Waiver to the 5 Acre Rule were presented to the Commission. Chairman Brenner reminded the Commission that there was a standing motion in place not to approve request for exemption of any property that exceeds the 5 acres allowable by law.
  - Mr. Rich Hudzinski noted that the Bradford County request from Mr. Lee T. Spinner barely exceeded the 5 acre rule. The property measured 5.4 acres. He felt that since the acreage was barely over the minimum that this request should be granted. He wanted to know if the Veteran indicated a financial need and wanted to see financial records.
  - Mr. Natali indicated that he did not have a copy of the financial records on hand. He informed Mr. Hudzinski that the financial need for tax exemption had been established prior to being placed before the Commission.
  - Mr. Chris Fidler stated that if Commission members were to make informed decisions, pertinent information such as financial records should be made available.
  - Mr. Natali explained that financial need had been established prior to presenting the request to the committee. He went on to explain County and the State Veterans Commissions’ roles and duties in regards to Property Tax Exemption determinations. He cited case precedence of Susquehanna vs. Vanderbilt, and explained that the vote before the Commission was not whether or not to approve the tax exemption to which the Veteran was entitled; but to approve or disapprove the request for the additional exemption of property exceeding the 5 acres as allowed by law.
  - Mr. Hudzinski made a motion to utilize the standing motion for two of the three requests, but to table the vote on Mr. Spinner’s request for exemption until the Commission had the opportunity to review his financial records. Mr. Chris Fidler seconded the motion.
  - Mr. Canevari pointed out that since the State Veterans Commission had already voted when it established the standing motion of no exemptions for any property exceeding 5 acres; he did not see a need to take up any more of the body’s time to vote on the issue again.

- Chairman Brenner pointed out that it was necessary for the Commission to vote since a motion had been made and seconded to table the vote on the Spinner property.
- A vote was called and the motion made by Mr. Hudzinski did not carry.
- Chairman Brenner announced the motion to table the vote was defeated, and the standing motion of the State Veterans Commission would be upheld for all three of the properties.

Mr. Tim Cleveland made a motion that the above reports be approved in total. The motion was seconded by Mr. Canevari. The motion carried.

**Program Not Requiring a Vote by Mr. Brian Natali:** Mr. Natali presented the following report to the Commission:

- Military Family Relief Assistance Program Report

**NEW BUSINESS:**

**Senate Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness Committee by Senator Bob Mensch:**

Senator Bob Mensch thanked the Commission for allowing him time to speak. He provided a background history of himself, and his prior military experience as an Army Reserves Engineer. He cited that this is his 8th year as a legislator, and 5th year in the Senate. Previously he was the Chairman of the Aging and Youth Committee wrestling with the fallout of the Jerry Sandusky situation. This involved entire rewrites of statutes; and developing bills that resulted in better safeguards for the youth of our state. This was accomplished in a very bipartisan manner. He stated that this would be his approach working with the State Veterans Commission as well. He stated that he looks forward to working with everyone.

**Hall of Fame Nomination:** The Southeast Veterans Center submitted a Hall of Fame Nomination for Mr. Kenneth Schweitzer. Joseph Palaia made a motion to approve the nomination. The motion was seconded by Mr. Iacavazzi. The motion carried and the nomination was approved.

**PA War Veterans Council Legislative Committee Update – Mr. Robert Gray:** Mr. Gray briefed Commission Members on the following legislation of interest to the PA War Veterans Council:

- Education Package – 2 of 3 bills passed
  - HB 1164 – Priority Registration
  - HB 1460 – Holds student status and payments until return to class and “M” for Military Status on student transcripts
  - HB 472 – Stalled in Education Committee – Grants waiver of the 1 year residency requirement so Veterans can pay in state tuition at state schools
- New Payday Lending Bill to be introduced :

90 Day Loan - 28% interest  
\$20.00 application fee  
Plus other fees: Databae fee, 10% fee on loan balance at each payment

Must have language to determine APR of loan, interest plus fees = APR

**ANNOUNCEMENTS / GOOD OF THE ORDER:**

- Women's Veterans Symposium to be held in Pittsburgh, June 6 - 8, 2014
- Veterans Homes Week – Open House at all six Veterans Homes across the Commonwealth to be held June 9-13, 2014
- AMVETS Convention June 26 – 29, 2014
- Mr. Chris Fidler provided copies of a Statement of the Keystone Chapter of the Paralyzed Veterans of America to the Pennsylvania State Veterans Commission, in response to the letter from the Governors of Florida, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, Pennsylvania and Texas to the President of the United States

**Adjournment:** Chairman Brenner adjourned that meeting at 11:52 am

**Time and Location of Next Meeting:**

Friday, September 5, 2014 at 10:00 am  
Keystone Conference Center  
Fort Indiantown Gap  
Annville, PA 17003

**The following members of the Commission were present:**

Mr. John Brenner, Chairman, State Veterans Commission  
BG Jerry G. Beck, Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans Affairs  
COL Marc Ferraro, Acting Deputy Adjutant General, Army  
Mr. William England, Director, Lebanon VAMC, VISN 4  
Mr. Harold Gennaria, Emeritus  
Mr. Dominic DiFrancesco, Member at Large  
Mr. William Cleveland, Commander, American Legion  
Mr. Kit Watson, Adjutant, American Legion  
Mr. Samuel Blow, Commander, Disabled American Veterans  
Mr. Jim White, Adjutant, Disabled American Veterans  
Mr. Stanley Rolnik, Commander, Jewish War Veterans  
Mr. Gordon Sheriff, Commandant, Marine Corps League  
Mr. Gerry Hawk, Vice Chairman, State Veterans Commission  
Mr. Colt Coleman, Commander, AMVETS  
Mr. Neil Appleby, President, Blinded Veterans Association  
Mr. Tim Cleveland, President, State Association of County Directors  
Mr. Russell Canevari, State Commander, Veterans of Foreign War  
Mr. John Getz, Jr., State Adjutant, Veterans of Foreign War  
Mr. Michael Iacavazzi, Commander, Italian American War Veterans  
Mr. Robert L. Gray, President, Military Officers Association of America  
Mr. Joseph Palaia, Designee for Commander, Catholic War Veterans  
Mr. Rich Hudzinski, Designee for President, Vietnam Veterans of America  
Mr. Chris Fidler, Director, Keystone Paralyzed Veterans

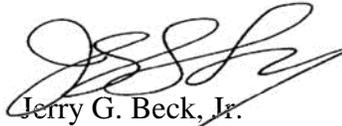
**The following members of the Commission were absent:**

Mr. Donald McMaster, Commander, Catholic War Veterans  
Mr. Michael Mescavage, Commander, Military Order of the Purple Heart  
Ms. Jeannine Botta-Guth, Member at Large

**Others Present:**

Senator Bob Mensch, Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness Committee  
BG Carrelli, Deputy Adjutant General -Air  
Mr. Rick Hamp, DMVA-VA  
Mr. Dennis Guise, DMVA-CC  
Ms. Marsha Mills , DMVA-CC  
Mr. Andrew Ruscavage, DMVA- VA-HOMES  
Mr. Brian Natali, DMVA-VA  
Ms. Joan Nissley – DMVA-PAO  
Mr. Tom Cherry – DMVA-PAO  
Ms. Sue Kenney – DMVA-VA  
Mr. William Harris, Military Officers Association of America  
Mr. Roger Snook, Snyder County VSO  
Ms. Belinda Albright, Northumberland County VSO  
Mr. Henry Desrosiers, Carbon County VSO  
Mr. Michael McLane, Veterans of Foreign War  
Ms. Colleen Washinger, Dauphin County VA  
Mr. Tony DiFrancesco, Dauphin County VA  
Mr. Hank Fiola , Marine Corps League  
Mr. Raymond Greene, Disabled American Veterans  
Mr. Frank Homme, Disabled American Veterans  
Mr. Jim Powers, Marine Corps League  
Mr. Douglas Etter, Lebanon VAMC  
Ms. Viola Hertzog, Lebanon County Veterans Affairs  
Mr. Thomas Applebach, Lehigh County

The minutes of this meeting are respectfully submitted by:



Jerry G. Beck, Jr.  
BG, USA, Retired  
Deputy Adjutant General  
for Veterans' Affairs