**KEYSTONE CONFERENCE CENTER**

**FORT INDIANTOWN GAP**

**ANNVILLE, PA 17003**

1. **CALL TO ORDER:** The Pennsylvania State Veterans’ Commission (SVC) meeting was called to order at 10:00AM by Chairman John Brenner.
2. **INVOCATION/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:** The meeting was opened with an invocation and recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance led by Vice Chairman Kit Watson.
3. **COMMISSION INTRODUCTION:** Commission members introduced themselves and their guests in attendance.
	1. **Members Present:**

Mr. Gerald Hawk, Executive Director, AMVETS

Mr. KC Simpson, Commander, AMVETS

Mr. Dwight Fuhrman, Designee, Veterans of Foreign Wars

Mr. Michael Iacavazzi, Commander, Disabled American Veterans

Mr. Samuel Petrovich, Adjutant, Disabled American Veterans

Mr. Neil Appleby, President, Blinded Veterans Association

Mr. Henry Desrosiers, President, County Directors of Veterans Affairs

Mr. Chris Fidler, Representative, Keystone Paralyzed Veterans of America

Ms. Jeannine Botta-Guth, Member at Large

Mr. Thomas Haberkorn, President, Vietnam Veterans of America

Mr. Nick Taylor, Commander, Catholic War Veterans

Mr. Robert Cudworth, President, Military Officers Association of America

Mr. James Powell, Designee, Marine Corps League

Mr. Jerome Frank, Commander, Jewish War Veterans

Mr. William Kelley, Representative, Korean War Veterans

Mr. Michael Mescavage, Commander, Military Order of the Purple Heart

Mr. Kit Watson, Adjutant, The American Legion

Mr. Carl Olshefskie, Commander, The American Legion

Brigadier General Anthony Carrelli, The Adjutant General

Mr. John Brenner, Chairman, State Veterans Commission

* 1. **Others Present:**

Brigadier General (Ret) Jerry Beck, Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans Affairs

Dr. Michael Adelman, Representative, VISN 4

Mr. Bernie McDonald, Past Commander, AMVETS

Ms. Belinda Albright, Northumberland County Veterans Affairs

Ms. Colleen Washinger, Dauphin County Veterans Affairs

Mr. Tony DiFrancesco, Dauphin County Veterans Affairs

Mr. Richard Fine, Jewish War Veterans

Mr. Chuck Jackson, Adjutant, Military Order of the Purple Heart

Ms. Angela Callie, USDA-Rural Development

Ms. Tonya Stutzenburg, USDA-Rural Development

Mr. Paul DeVincenzo, The American Legion

Mr. Bruce Foster, The American Legion

Mr. Danny Osten, The American Legion

Mr. Rich Hudzinski, Vietnam Veterans of America

Mr. Brian Natali, DMVA-OVA

Mr. David Cummiskey, USDOL-VETS

Ms. Constance Snavely, Keystone Paralyzed Veterans of America

Mr. Nate Silcox, Pennsylvania Senate

Ms. Jodi Zucco, Office of the Attorney General

Mr. Robert Gray, Past President, Military Officers Association of America

Dr. John Bart, DMVA-BVH

Mr. Frank Homme, Disabled American Veterans

Mr. Ray Greene, Disabled American Veterans

Ms. Joan Nissley, DMVA-PAO

Mr. Dusty Durand, DMVA-PPL

Mr. Richard Hamp, DMVA-OVA

Ms. Joyce Gibson, Executive Secretary, DMVA-OVA

1. **AWARDS PRESENTATION:** BG Beck presented the Pennsylvania Commendation Medal to the following outgoing members for exceptionally meritorious service to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as a member of the Pennsylvania State Veterans’ Commission:
	* + Mr. Bernie McDonald, Past Department Commander, AMVETS
		+ Mr. James Powell, Past Department Commandant, Marine Corps League
		+ Mr. Robert Gray, Past Department President, Military Officers Association of America
2. **OATH OF OFFICE:** BG Beck administered the Oath of Office to the following newly appointed Pennsylvania State Veterans’ Commission members:
	* + Mr. Carl Olshefskie, Commander, The American Legion
		+ Mr. Boyd “KC” Simpson, Commander, AMVETS
		+ Mr. Henry Desrosiers, President, County Directors for Veterans Affairs
		+ Mr. Michael Iacavazzi, Commander, Disabled American Veterans
		+ Mr. Jerome Frank, Commander, Jewish War Veterans
		+ Mr. William Kelley, Representative, Korean War Veterans
3. **REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF THE JUNE 3, 2016 MEETING MINUTES:** The minutes from the June 3, 2016 Pennsylvania State Veterans’ Commission meeting was presented for approval. Mr. Mescavage, MOPH, made a motion to approve the minutes as presented. Mr. Taylor, CWV, seconded the motion. The motion carried.
4. **MILITARY UPDATE:** Brigadier General Tony Carrelli reminded the Commission the legislators are back in session. He then spoke about recent Pennsylvania National Guard domestic activities. Due to recent domestic terrorism and the need for National Guard support Kevlar vests are being utilized by National Guard members.

Approximately 750 soldiers and airmen are currently deployed. Mobilization requests for National Guard support extend throughout next year.

Brig Gen Carrelli read a POW/MIA Recognition Day proclamation signed by Governor Tom Wolf.

1. **VISN 4 UPDATE:**

Leadership: Wilkes-Barre VAMC welcomes Russell Lloyd as their new director. Dr. Judy Hayman is serving as the interim medical director of the Altoona VAMC.

Access: At this time in the VISN 4 network, there are no Veterans waiting more than 30 days for an urgent primary care appointment.

Non-VA Care: As of July 31, 2016, there are 592 active provider agreements in VISN 4 and 5,797 active provider agreements nationally. Since April 2016, VA has been able to use these provider agreements to schedule services on its own when the Choice third party administrators are unable to schedule services or the needed services are not covered in the Choice contract.

Same Day Access: VHA’s pledge to Veterans and their caregivers is that by the end of December 2016, Veterans will be able to have their health needs addressed on the same day at all VHA medical centers. Depending on the urgency, they will address their needs that day, or develop a plan for appropriate follow-up care. Five VISN 4 medical centers already provide same day access and all facilities provide same day access in their emergency departments.

Ending Veteran Homelessness – Newsbreak: Two formerly homeless Veterans share their experiences during a video intro to VISN 4 services available to end Veteran homelessness. You can view their story at [www.visn4.va.gov](http://www.visn4.va.gov).

Human Engineering Research Laboratories (HERL): A joint venture between the Department of Veterans Affairs, the University of Pittsburgh and the UPMC Health System recently celebrated its five-year anniversary in an ultramodern lab and office facility. The HERL team is a VA national research center of excellence. Check out their facebook page at facebook.com/herlpitt.

Questions/Comments: There was an incident where a Veteran was turned away from an Urgent Care he then committed suicide in the parking lot. What is VISN 4 doing to ensure Veterans are not turned away? Dr. Adelman responded he’s been adamant that scripts be used to ensure that every single person is treated appropriately, especially for mental health issues.

1. **OLD BUSINESS**
	1. **Policy, Planning and Legislative Affairs Update:** Mr. Dusty Durand presented four bills they are currently tracking. HB 1226 aligns the Veterans Trust Fund (VTF) and Veterans Temporary Assistance together. SB 1727 relates to Pennsylvania Achievement Award and a Veterans Service Awards. HB 2304 changes the VTF to remove memorials and put them under one Memorial Trust Fund. SB 1109 pertains to the Real Estate Tax Exemption Program to include spouses of KIA.
	2. **Public Affairs Update:** Ms. Joan Nissley briefed on the VVMF’s Wall of Faces program. Of the 3,148 Pennsylvanian’s on the wall in Washington D.C. only 328 are still needed. Students from Stevenson University, in Stevenson, MD have asked to join us in our search for Pennsylvanian’s for the Wall of Faces.

The Veterans Registry, which offers the weekly DMVA Digest is looking for information to use in the digest. Please submit job opportunities, events and other information for the weekly DMVA Digest.

* 1. **State Veterans Homes Update:** Dr. John Bart briefed the commission on the Performance Report conducted by the Department of Health (DOH). The Auditor General looked back three years on how the DOH conducted nursing home inspections. As a result, DOH announced they will update their policies to include increasing enforcement of regulatory sanctions.

Based on the DOH inspection in July 2016, Southwestern Veterans’ Center was issued a provisional license. SWVC has executed their plan of correction with a certain compliance date of September 12. SWVC has begun the appeal process for this licensure decision. They received a compliance date from DOH of January 14, 2017. They are currently awaiting inspection. General Beck stated they are appealing the decision of a provisional license instead of a $2,000 fine.

Gino Merli Veterans’ Center hosted a Mental Health First Aid class in June 2016 with about 20 participants. Southwestern Veterans’ Center hosted a class in August 2016 with about 20 participants.

Dr. Bart cautioned commission members about the ZIKA virus. ZIKA may Guillain–Barré syndrome and microcephaly in fetuses. Protect yourselves by using insect repellant containing DEET, wearing light colored clothes that cover most of the body and using physical barriers such as screens and sleeping under a mosquito net. You can go to [www.zika.pa.gov](http://www.zika.pa.gov) for more information.

Questions:

Where can more information be obtained about the Mental Health First Aid Initiative? Talk to Rick Hamp or Dr. Bart for more information.

Was the SWVC provisional license due to the one event? Yes, three deficiencies were received due to the one incident.

* 1. **Programs, Initiatives, Reintegration & Outreach Update:** Mr. Rick Hamp provided an operational highlight to the commission. The budget is out and it is a flat budget. That basically means no new funding has been provided and funding has not been taken away.

It appears additional personnel will be received, as requested. Requests were made for 2 Veteran Service Specialists (VSS), 2 Administrative Officer 1’s (AO1) and a clerk II who has already been hired.

Funding Notice has gone out for the Act 66 grants.

The DMVA and Chairman Brenner and members of the Commission talked about building out the action plans next year. Committees and work groups are needed for the following action plans; Strategic Plan work group, Veteran’s Trust Fund committee, Veterans Award Program committee, DMVA/VSO Partner Information Video Initiative, Governor’s Advisory Council for Veterans Services, Digits to Digits Initiatives, RETX Program work group, Veteran Service Officer Grant Program, and Operational Outreach Plans.

* 1. **Review and Approval of Veterans’ Programs Reports:** Mr. Brian Natali presented the reports needing a vote from the Commission.
		+ **Veterans temporary Assistance:** Budgeted $600,000, expended $100,324 with 76 claimants on the programs.
		+ **Blind Veterans Pension:** Budgeted $222,000, expended $31,350 with 104 Veterans on the program
		+ **Amputee & Paralyzed Veterans Pension:** Budgeted $3,606,000, expended $541,800 with 1,804 claimants on the program.
		+ **Educational Gratuity:** Budgeted $101,000, students are now returning to school, as a result no payments have been made.
		+ **Disabled Veteran Tax Exemption Program:** Approved 828 applications, denied for financial reasons 52 applications and 71 applications did not meet eligibility requirements. There are 10,553 Veterans on the program.

Mr. Michael Mescavage, Military Order of the Purple Heart, made a motion to accept the reports as presented. Mr. Nicholas Taylor, Catholic War Veterans, seconded the motion. The motion carried.

* + - **Persian Gulf Veterans Benefit Program:** Received 12,016 total lifetime applications, paid out in total $3,941,112 with an average payment of $424.15 and just under 6 days for processing.
		- **Military Family Relief Assistance Program:** Received a total of $1,695,451 in private and PIT donations with an account balance of $921,669.
		- **Pennsylvania Veterans Memorial:** The wall cap repairs have been completed and they are currently working on the main entrance repairs. The PA Veterans Memorial Trust Fund began with a balance of $565,829, $6,599 has been expended with a current balance of $561,286. The solution for the calcium cleaning was tested and was not acceptable. They have regrouped to determine the best course of action.
	1. **Outreach & Reintegration Update:** Mr. Rick Hamp presented the current Act 66 summary. 3,548 claims have been submitted this year with $9,448,608 year to date value of awards. Mr. Hamp noted the outreach engagements and some upcoming legislative events. Mr. Hamp provided a briefing on the Veterans’ Trust Fund and the cumulative totals.
	2. **RETX Committee Update:** Mr. Nick Taylor presented the RETX Committee update. No recommendations were presented to the commission at this time.

BG Beck informed Mr. Taylor the commission needs a recommendation at next meeting.

Chairman Brenner stated there are recommendations for the committee. Mr. Taylor said the only piece missing was the methodology for calculating fair and equitable across the state.

Brig Gen Carrelli stated until the statute is changed, guidance for how to proceed in the meantime is what is needed.

General Beck asked that a copy of VA Form 40 be handed out at the next meeting and a copy of the recommended changes.

* 1. **PA War Veterans Council (WVC) Legislative Update:** Mr. Bruce Foster informed the commission elections were held for the WVC, Mr. Carl Olshefskie was elected as president. Funding was approved for Veterans’ Day at the Capitol on October 26, 2016. The WVC meeting conference room is being moved to accommodate people with disabilities.
1. **NEW BUSINESS**
	1. **Annual Reports:** BG Beck provided a copy of the MFRAP and VTF Annual Reports. They are posted on the website.
	2. **Act 66 Service Officer Outreach Program:** Mr. Sam Petrovich spoke to the commission about the issue of the ability of the Service Organizations to attract and retain qualified and dedicated Service Officers. Please encourage state lawmakers and the Governor to support those funds that will provide additional grant dollars to the service officer program.

Mr. Petrovich asked for support from the State Veterans’ Commission to move forward in order to ensure these funds will not be taken out of the next budget and following budgets. Mr. Nicholas Taylor, CWV, made a motion that the Commission unanimously adopt a resolution in support, as presented by Sam Petrovich. Mr. Robert Cudworth, MOAA, seconded the motion. The motion carried. Chairman Brenner asked for the committee come up with a resolution and to work with TAG’s staff on the resolution.

* 1. **Hall of Fame Nominations:** Chairman Brenner presented 1 Medal of Honor recipient being inducted into Delaware Valley Veterans’ Home, 3 Medal of Honor recipient being inducted into Gino Merli Veterans’ Center, 4 Medal of Honor recipient being inducted into Southwestern Veterans’ Center and 2 Hall of Fame nominations for Mr. Richard Green and Mr. Bernard McDonald to be inducted into Gino Merli Veterans’ Center Hall of Fame. Mr. Robert Cudworth, Military Officers Association of America, made a motion to approve the Hall of Fame nomination for Mr. Richard Green. Mr. Henry Desrosiers, County Directors for Veterans Affairs, seconded the motion. The motion carried. Mr. Taylor, CWV, made a motion to approve the Hall of Fame nomination for Mr. Bernard McDonald. Mr. Michael Mescavage, Military Order of the Purple Heart, seconded the motion. The motion carried.
	2. **SVC Veterans Appreciation Day:** Chairman Brenner thanked CPT Matt Pochak for his help in putting the Veterans Appreciation Day together. October 26 at 8:00AM Veterans Day at the Capital begins. Service organizations are needed to support this event. The event will include a social breakfast and an informational hearing for the Senate and House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness committee members. He is asking for each organization to complete an information sheet for the briefings. Attendees will have a chance to visit their own legislators and tour the capital.
	3. **PA State Family Program, Family Assistance Center:** Ms. Corrie Wadel spoke to the commission about the State Family Program and the Military Share Program, which is a new initiative. The Family Program has three branches; child and youth, family readiness and family assistance. They are the case management for the National Guard and all military in Pennsylvania. They are contacted by the National Guard but family assistance is for anyone military affiliated. There are 13 family assistance specialist located across the state. The Military Share Initiative began with the Central PA Food Bank wanting to provide food for military families. They provide a box of non-perishable food that will last for 2-3 weeks, as well as some perishable items. They partner with the regional family assistance centers to find military families in need of food. The State Family Office would like to make it a vendor event, similar to a “Mini Stand Down”. They have held 12 events so far. They would like to partner with the State Veterans’ Commission and the Veterans Organizations, if you know of a military affiliated person in need, direct them to a Family Assistance Specialist.
	4. **United States Department of Agriculture, Rural Development:** Ms. Angie Callie presented on the USDA Rural Development and how Veterans are being help. Rural Development has three specific service agencies; rural utility service, rural housing and community facilities service and rural business and co-operative development service. Most Veterans in pa live in rural areas, rural development and where Veterans live intersect. Rural Development wants to collaborate with Veterans themselves or organizations interacting with Veterans.

Questions/Comments: General Beck commented a meeting needs to take place between DMVA and Rural Development, many of the initiatives the DMVA is working on coincide with Rural Developments programs and initiatives.

Chairman Brenner asked the commission to get the word out about these programs.

* 1. **Task Force:** The Lieutenant Governor recently created a task force. The Commission has invited him to a meeting to speak about why it was formed and who will it include. Chairman Brenner is completing the paperwork to invite the Lieutenant Governor to the next meeting.
1. **GOOD OF THE ORDER/ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

General Beck used this opportunity to thank the Commission for all they do for Veterans.

Mr. Kit Watson informed the Commission on the 16th of September they are having a POW/MIA service in Soldiers’ Grove. Transportation is available from the American Legion headquarters and back. Mr. Watson extended an open invitation to all participating organizations.

The Pennsylvania State Veterans Commission took this opportunity to thank Brigadier General (Ret) Jerry Beck for his service and to wish him well in his retirement.

1. **NEXT MEETING:** Friday, **October 14**, 2016 at **10:00AM**

**Arrowheads Community Club**

Fort Indiantown Gap, Annville, PA 17003

1. **ADJOURNMENT:** Chairman Brenner adjourned the meeting at 12:51PM.

The minutes of this meeting are respectfully submitted by:

Jerry G. Beck, Jr.

Brigadier General, USA, Retired

Deputy Adjutant General

Veterans’ Affairs