



Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services

MEETING MINUTES
February 2, 2022 1:00-2:53 PM
NCTC, Bldg. 8-63, FTIG

COUNCIL MEMBERS/DESIGNEES IN ATTENDANCE

BG (PA) Maureen H. Weigl, Chairwoman, Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans Affairs	Marc Ferraro, DMVA
Tammy Ferguson, Dept. of Corrections	Kory Auch, Office of Administration
Denise Verchimak, Dept. of Education	Jamie Dunlap, PA Council on the Arts
Crystal Houser, Dept. of Labor & Industry	Terrell Martin, DCED
Jeffrey Wallace, State Civil Service Commission	Kurt Myers, PennDOT
Micah Snead, Member at Large	Toshua Jarrett, Member at Large
Col (R) Ward Adams, Member at Large	Christina Kotsalos, Dept. of Banking & Securities
Jeff Geibel, Dept. of Drug & Alcohol Programs	John Hallas, DCNR
Cheryl Cook, Dept. of Agriculture	Jake Derrick, Governor's Policy Office
Kevin Atkinson, Dept. of Aging	James "Woody" Hogan, PWVC

COUNCIL MEMBERS/DESIGNEES NOT IN ATTENDANCE

Nick Taylor, State Veterans Commission	Keara Klinepeter/Judy Mahoney- Dept. of Health
Tim Schaeffer/Tom Burrell, Fish & Boat Comm.	Meg Snead/Kristin Houser, DHS

OTHERS PRESENT

Ana Arcs, DHS	Brendan Auman, DCED
Margo Coleman, DMVA	Joshua Scheinberg, Dept. of Agriculture
Angela Lowry, AOPC	Cam Richardson
Nick Haller, VISN 4	Michael Carrington, Dept. of Corrections
Jillian Rodgers	Janette Krolczyk, DMVA
Joan Nissley, DMVA	John Schwartz, Center for Combatting Elder Financial Abuse
Elizabeth Cooper, DVOP Franklin/Adams Co	Kristi Brawley, PSU
Donna Tilley Hess, DHS, OMHSAS	Nicholas "Chip" Gilliland, DMVA
Jonathan Bowman, DHS, OLTL	Greg Holler, DMVA
Charlee Redick, Lebanon VA Medical Center	Brian Natali, DMVA
Kathy Silvia, Military Women's Memorial	Dr. Angela Keen, VISN 4
Seth Benge, DMVA, PPL	Greg Fry, DMVA
AJ Byerly, 193 rd Special Op Wing, PAANG	Erica Moore, DMVA
Jolene Richardson, 193 rd Special Op Wing, PAANG	Chelsea Ellsworth, DMVA
Dee Watkins, PAARNG	Jennifer Spitler, DMVA
Danielle Rudy, PHFA	Joel Mutschler, DMVA
Katie Dzurec, PID	Susan Meighen, DMVA
Katie Merritt, PID	Leora Appleby, DCED
Lisa Grayson, PA Bar Association	Marilyn Kelly-Cavotta, Moravian College
Laura Maggiorini, VMC	Maj Gen (R) Eric Weller
Laura Cunningham, Acadia Healthcare	Tom Applebach, CDVA Lehigh County

Danny Osten, CDVA Cumberland County	Tom Cherry, DMVA
Sam Estrada, DMVA	Sierra Bilous, DHS, OMHSAS
Hayley Miller, VLP of Western PA	Troy Edwards, DOC
Dan Lynch, PA Chiefs of Police Association	Rick Hamp, DMVA

<p>CALL TO ORDER, INTRODUCTIONS, AND OPENING REMARKS</p>	<p>The Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services (GAC-VS) was called to order at 1:00 PM.</p> <p>Ms. Janette Krolczyk welcomed everyone for joining the hybrid meeting and asked everyone to sign in or send an email to have their attendance counted. She then led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance and Moment of Silence.</p> <p>Seated members or designees at the table introduced themselves, followed by opening remarks from The Adjutant General's Designee, Mr. Ferraro. Mr. Ferraro explained that MG Schindler expressed his thanks for all the work done during the previous year, and he looks forward to another year of fruitful efforts in support of the veterans' community.</p> <p>BG (PA), and Chairwoman, Maureen Weigl addressed the Council and expressed her excitement for working with all members on veterans' issues. General Weigl mentioned the many ongoing initiatives involving the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Corrections, and challenges surrounding the number of female veterans rising, which will require more resources and more shelters to prevent homelessness in communities.</p>
<p>APPROVAL OF NOVEMBER 3, 2021 MINUTES</p>	<p>No questions or corrections were noted on the draft minutes. Ms. Cheryl Cook made a motion to approve the minutes, which was seconded by Mr. Kory Auch, and unanimously approved.</p>
<p>AGING COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ms. Margo Coleman shared the main committee goals of increasing awareness of services and supports and safeguarding aging veterans from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and self-harm. ▪ Through a connection from Ms. Samantha Cossman, the Aging Committee contacted Mr. Chris Grill, an Army veteran working for Geisinger who is trying to generate more veteran-centric programs within the Geisinger healthcare arena. He began by looking at what resources, information, and services they could offer the veteran employees and soon turned to how they could serve their veteran clients and patients. ▪ Mr. Grill will assist in sharing various DMVA messaging on the Geisinger scrolling boards to reach more veterans and share information. Mr. Grill is also looking at educating his staff on military cultural competency to best meet the needs of veterans they serve. Additionally, when a veteran is identified within the Geisinger healthcare system, a notation will be made on their chart so all caregivers will have that background awareness.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Work continues with the Financial Exploitation Task Force. Main recommendations included classification standardization for financial exploitation, consistent reporting structures, and education for those working with elder veterans who may be at risk of abuse. ▪ Through a leadership connection, Ms. Coleman connected with John Schwartz, Founder, and President of the Center for Combating Elder Financial Abuse. Mr. Schwartz met with members of the Office of Veterans Affairs to partner on this topic. As a veteran and retired FBI agent, Mr. Schwartz shared his study of predator fundamentals, his model for identifying abuse, and his steps for protecting vulnerable elders. ▪ Mr. Schwartz will be a future guest speaker at an Aging Committee meeting and looks forward to educating advocates on the early detection of predators. He will also connect with workgroups under the Department of Aging, Office of the Attorney General (OAG), and Temple University, to assist agencies and organizations. ▪ Ms. Coleman explained that although preliminary discussions with law enforcement regarding current training, protocols, and investigating practices were beneficial, it was difficult to connect with many members. However, the workgroup involving the OAG and Temple University appears to progress on these discussions. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ BG (PA) Weigl suggested that the processes created through Mr. Grill at Geisinger could be exported to other groups of large nursing homes as a model.
<p>HOMELESS COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr. Brendan Auman began by sharing the committee list of goals and initiatives. A survey at the end of last year obtained feedback on where efforts should be placed moving into 2022, including coordinating with a few other committees on joint efforts. ▪ Regarding coordinated entry access sites, Mr. Auman explained that the Western Continuum of Care (COC) is redesigning. However, the Eastern COC has three veteran-specific groups that provide coordinated entry: the Veterans Leadership Program, the Veterans Multiservice Center, and the Lebanon VA Medical Center. Opportunities for the Western COC may be forthcoming in this respect. ▪ By connecting with the PA Bar Association, a three-part training series has been scheduled for April 4, August 4, and December 7. These sessions will cover legal resources for advocates assisting veterans. The brochure will be shared with the membership. ▪ PennDOT has agreed to execute a targeted mailing to homeless individuals who requested a free ID with the veteran designation to share valuable resources they may need. The agency has also offered to share veteran-centric messages on their closed-circuit digital displays at the driver's license centers, which has the potential of reaching 20,000 customers a day. ▪ DCED will need to develop allocation plans for the HOME ARP Program. This will require a consultant to coordinate with multiple groups and facilitate stakeholder meetings. One of the meetings will be

	<p>veteran-specific so advocates can attend and share needs relating to housing and homelessness.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ At a recent Homeless Committee meeting, Mr. Auman also provided a spotlight presentation on the Emergency Solutions Grant Program to detail what resources DCED can offer. ▪ Considering the sustained challenges of COVID-19 impacts, there are resources for testing available for various settings, including shelters. www.letsendthistogether.com can offer those details. ▪ The “Build Back Better” bill also has opportunities for additional housing resources if it passes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ms. Kathy Silvia asked if there are any opportunities to repurpose vacant office buildings for homeless efforts. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mr. Auman explained that using vacant office space is a possibility under both the HOME ARP Program and the Emergency Solutions Grant Program. ➤ Mr. Micah Snead asked why PennDOT could not provide details of homeless veterans to DMVA. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mr. Joel Mutschler explained that the Motor License Fund rules prohibit PennDOT from sharing any data they collect from the public. However, they can assist other agencies with targeted mailings instead of sharing that information. The example provided stated that PennDOT and the Federal VA will assist DMVA with a mailing that will reach every individual in the commonwealth who received a veteran designation on their license or a veteran license plate. This effort should reach over 550,000 residents this Spring.
<p>EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ms. Crystal Houser briefed on career opportunities covered by the committee. She first discussed details of the PA CareerLink® locations. Ms. Houser explained that the DVOP positions assist veterans directly, while the LVER positions assist employers to create opportunities to serve and hire veterans. Ms. Houser explained that some "significant barriers to employment" could include low-income veterans, those who have disabilities, experience homelessness, or do not have a high school diploma or GED. ▪ The COVID-19 pandemic has decreased foot traffic at the physical offices, but the CareerLink® locations have increased their ability to offer virtual assistance. ▪ The Department of Labor and Industry recently launched a veteran employment grant program. The application deadline ended on December 30, 2021, and those applications are now being reviewed. The grant aims to identify innovative ideas which will help veterans overcome significant barriers to employment. PA CareerLink® locations are eager to see how they can partner with the organizations that receive grant funding. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ms. Krolczyk asked about the date of the grant announcements.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ms. Houser explained that application reviews must be completed by February 3, 2022, and the announcement will be in the near future. ▪ Mr. Kory Auch shared the veterans hiring data points from the past year and explained that the Veterans Preference law is working as intended. Over the past three years, the percentage of veterans hired has remained between 15-18%. Mr. Auch stated that in 2020 the General Assembly adopted a new amendment to the Veterans Preference, which clarified language surrounding an earned benefit for veterans. Another amendment is pending, referencing those discharged due to a disability. ▪ Ms. Houser filled in for Mr. Billy Lanham on the HIRE Vets Medallion Program. Applications are being accepted now through April 30th for this program, the only federal-level employer recognition program of its kind. ▪ Ms. Houser explained that as Pennsylvania is listed 6th in the U.S. for the number of recognized veteran employers, the goal would be to move up on that list during 2022. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Deputy Secretary Tammy Ferguson asked if state agencies were included in the Hire Vets Medallion Program. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mr. Auch confirmed that government entities are not eligible for that program distinction.
<p style="text-align: center;">HEALTH PROMOTIONS COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr. Joel Mutschler stepped in to brief. He began by stating that the committee is actively recruiting for a committee chair after the departure of Mr. Parker Beene. ▪ As part of their suicide prevention teams, all nine VISN facilities have added new Community Engagement and Partnership Coordinators (CEPCs). These CEPCs are well-connected to the Regional Program Outreach Coordinators (RPOCs) at DMVA through the PA VETConnect program. ▪ VISN 4 tracks substance use disorder services and monitors related data. They look to return to pre-pandemic levels. ▪ Four different “Caring Messages” were sent to almost 27,000 individuals this past December. The messages encouraged everyone touching a veteran to “brighten a veteran’s day, save a life.” These messages were sent to Chaplains, County Directors of Veterans Affairs, Faith-Based Organizations, and Social Workers. ▪ Mr. Mutschler explained that Mr. Rick Hamp (PA SAMPHSA lead) provided a radio interview to Radio PA on the topic, and partners at PennDOT have shared this message through their channels.
<p style="text-align: center;">WOMEN VETERANS COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ms. Erica Moore filled in for Colonel Christine Munch to provide the briefing. Ms. Moore covered the current goals looking at 2022. She identified two veterans and former PA residents now working in Washington, DC on women veterans' issues that would be great to contact in the coming months. ▪ A committee member, Elizabeth Cooper, has established a Veteran Employee Workgroup that pulled together the Chairs of the Judiciary and

	<p>EEWD Committees. This group discusses what resources can be packaged for veterans who are employees of the Department of Corrections.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ms. Moore highlighted a list of upcoming events throughout March in which female veterans will be the focus. ▪ Ms. Moore mentioned First Lady Francis Wolf’s “Women in Reentry” series. Although this series did not touch on veterans specifically, it did cover maternal health, mental health, employment challenges, housing instability, and clemency opportunities. These are all topics that the GAC-VS covers and the series offered excellent speakers and subject matter experts who tackled these areas.
<p>JUDICIARY COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr. Michael Carrington briefed on the current committee goals. He explained that within the Department of Corrections (DOC), inmates would be classified as veterans during the intake process and move to a Veteran Service Unit (VSU) facility from the beginning instead of transferring later. ▪ Mr. Carrington welcomed Mr. Troy Edwards to the committee. As a VSU manager at SCI Dallas, Troy comes with background knowledge and creative ideas to assist the committee moving forward. ▪ Working with DMVA, an outreach support schedule will be developed for the DOC veteran employees. These individuals at all the state facilities will have access to veteran resources and the outreach team annually. ▪ The DOC is working with their IT department to ensure staff and inmate veterans have access to PA VETConnect and other pertinent information, especially when planning for veteran reentry. ▪ Moving forward, the committee will research the best way of expanding veterans’ courts and tracks in underserved areas. ▪ Although the COVID-19 pandemic still prevents certain types of outreach events, the committee has discussed how to promote Criminal Justice careers through workshops or small events with organizations or schools. The benefits, needs, and impacts of this work will be discussed to encourage quality candidates to take these positions in the future. ▪ Mr. Carrington highlighted the contributions of Mr. Daniel Mowrey. Mr. Mowrey is the VSU manager at SCI Houtzdale, and he consistently works to provide information and suggestions on how all the VSUs can rise to the same level of excellence. His dedication and commitment are greatly appreciated. ▪ Mr. Carrington closed by providing an example of how outreach efforts and networking with stakeholders can make a difference. Mr. Carrington explained that a few guest speakers from the Veterans Multiservice Center (VMC) recently came to an SCI facility. Soon after learning about the VMC, a homeless veteran who was maxing out from his sentence needed assistance upon reentry. This veteran was nursing-home eligible but was considered hard-to-place due to his criminal record. Through coordination between the County Director for Veterans Affairs, the VMC representatives, and the DOC, that veteran was admitted to a

	<p>nursing home. His family obtained additional services within a few weeks.</p>
<p>GUEST SPEAKER PA INSURANCE DEPARTMENT (PID)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ms. Katie Merritt began by explaining a pie chart of insurance types in Pennsylvania. PID regulates the individual market (Pennie), the state-based exchange. They also regulate the small and large group markets. ▪ Katie Dzurec explained that the Mental Health and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 (MHPAEA) built onto The Mental Health Parity Act of 1996, which focused on mental health alone. MHPAEA ensures that no arbitrary restrictions are imposed, and that behavioral and surgical/medical services are treated the same. MHPAEA is a discrimination prohibition, and it assumes that violations are happening until insurance companies provide the analysis explaining the limitations on services are done fairly and that violations are not occurring. ▪ The Affordable Care Act lists ten categories of services that major medical insurance companies must cover. This list includes treatment services for behavioral health, mental health, and substance use disorder. Some of the other group plans may not require these services, but if they do, then MHPAEA applies. ▪ Each state was able to choose a Benchmark Plan, and the details of Pennsylvania’s plan were explained. ▪ Ms. Merritt explained the PID role in ensuring regulatory compliance with insurance products sold within the commonwealth. Corrective actions under their purview have resulted in hundreds of thousands of dollars in restitution returned to consumers. ▪ Different ways of reporting violations were shared, in addition to contacting Ms. Merritt directly. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Mr. Snead asked what complaints may come up regarding red flags. He also asked about difficulties in finding providers to get the help needed. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Under network adequacy, if an individual cannot find a provider within the time or distance requirements, available providers are not taking new patients, or providers state a long wait time, a complaint can be filed. ○ Ms. Dzurec also used the example of a medical professional telling a patient that they need 20 hours a month to treat a behavioral health challenge. However, the insurance provider only wants to allow 15 hours. This is another reason to file a complaint and also ask for the reasoning behind those decisions. ➤ Mr. James “Woody” Hogan suggested that Act 150 of 1998 be amended to add PTSD and TBI to the list that must be covered. That addition would be helpful for the veterans of the commonwealth who have their insurance. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ms. Dzurec stated that companies could not discriminate. Even though PTSD and TBI are not included in the nine serious mental health illnesses, companies should still provide mental and behavioral health services for PTSD

	<p>just as they would for schizophrenia. If they are NOT, then PID needs to know about those instances.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A chat question from Cam Richardson asking if PID ever asks insurers to engage with providers who offer telehealth visits as a workaround for the limited availability of providers or long-distance in-person locations? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ms. Dzurek stated that PID recognizes the importance of telehealth services and has done work around telehealth being offered as part of network solutions to fill gaps. Many insurance companies also understand the importance of these services, but there is still a long way to go. Telehealth also has its own limitations relating to bandwidth challenges for rural locations, cost of internet access, and hardware needs. Insurance companies should also not push individuals towards telehealth options if it is not clinically appropriate. ○ Ms. Merritt explained that all ten of their insurers do cover telehealth options to varying degrees. ▪ Ms. Dzurek explained the market conduct reports can be found on the department website: www.insurance.pa.gov
NEW BUSINESS/ GOOD OF THE ORDER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ BG (PA) Weigl closed by thanking all the briefers and the guest speakers. She was impressed by all the goals and initiatives addressed and looked forward to working with everyone throughout the year. ▪ Ms. Krolczyk reminded all participants to check the DMVA website (www.dmva.pa.gov), where the approved meeting minutes and full slide deck will be available. ▪ Ms. Krolczyk also reminded all service members, veterans, family members, and caregivers to sign up for the Veterans Registry (www.register.dmva.pa.gov). Individuals can opt-in to the DMVA digest, the weekly publication filled with beneficial information.
	<p>Next Meeting: May 11, 2022 1:00-3:00PM Location to be determined.</p>
ADJOURNMENT	The meeting adjourned at 2:53 PM.

NEW ACTION ITEMS

#	ACTION	STATUS
1	Brendan Auman to share the Veterans Homeless Advocacy Training brochure for the three-part legal needs training series.	Completed
2	Brendan Auman to share veteran-centric meeting details regarding the HOME ARP Program allocation plan.	Completed
3	Janette Krolczyk to share the PID informational attachments.	Completed

OLD ACTION ITEMS

#	ACTION	STATUS
1	Samantha Cossman will provide a schedule of committee spotlight presentations.	In Progress