



Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services

MEETING MINUTES
May 3, 2023, 1:00-3:01 PM
Dept. of Agriculture, 2301 N. Cameron Street, Harrisburg

COUNCIL MEMBERS/DESIGNEES IN ATTENDANCE

BG (PA) Maureen H. Weigl, Chairwoman, Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans Affairs	Marc Ferraro, DMVA
Steve D'Ettoire, Governor's Policy Office	Danielle Pierre, Dept. of Health
Tammy Ferguson, Dept. of Corrections	Kory Auch, Office of Administration
Denise Verchimak, Dept. of Education	Terrell Martin, DCED
Kevin Atkinson, Dept. of Aging	Kurt Myers, PennDOT
Micah Snead, Member at Large	John Hallas, DCNR
Pam Iovino, State Civil Service Commission	Cheryl Cook, Dept. of Agriculture
Col (R) Ward Adams, Member at Large	Jeff Geibel, Dept. of Drug & Alcohol Programs
Tina Kotsalos, Dept. of Banking & Securities	Jamie Dunlap, PA Council on the Arts
Donna Tilley Hess, Dept. of Human Services	

COUNCIL MEMBERS/DESIGNEES NOT IN ATTENDANCE

Nick Taylor, State Veterans Commission	Toshua Jarrett, Member at Large
James "Woody" Hogan, PWVC	Dan Kuba/Crystal Houser, Dept. of L & I
Tom Edwards, Fish & Boat Commission	

OTHERS PRESENT

Michael Pipe, Gov's Office, Dep. Chief of Staff	Gavin Lichtenstein, Gov's Office
Tom Foley, Gov's Policy Office	Neil Hartnett, Lieutenant Governor's Office
Elizabeth McCloud, PHEAA	Trent Anderson, PA CareerLink, L&I
David Brady, Marine Corps League	Jason Albert, DOC
Michael Gourley, DOC	Randy Evans, DOC
Ted Carter, DOC	Stacy Albert, DOC
Andrew Barnes, DHS	Aaron Riggelman, PA Chamber of Commerce
Billy Lanham, DOL VETS	Angela Keen, VISN 4
Margo Coleman, DMVA	Janette Krolczyk, DMVA
Joe Batt, DMVA	Jen Snyder, DMVA
Erik Orient, UPMC	Tiffany Cleary, DMVA
Doug Ickes, UPMC	Tom Cherry, DMVA
John Noll, DMVA	Greg Fry, DMVA
Bill Cress, VISN 4	James Stafford, DMVA
Keisha Kerr, VISN 4	Angela Eder, Penn Waver
Michael Carrington, DOC	Sam Estrada, DMVA
Taylor Dippery, DMVA	Erica Nocho, DDAP
Rick Hamp, DMVA	Brendan Auman, DCED
Troy Edwards, DOC	Hayley Miller, VLP
Ralph Roach, L&I	Joan Nissley, DMVA

Cam Richardson, PSU	John Schwartz, Center for Combatting Elder Financial Abuse
Kristi Brawley, PSU	Leora Appleby, DCED
Katie Davenport, PSU	Jolene Richardson, PAANG
James Fearn, DHS	Jillian Rodgers, PSU
Norm Marden, OAG	Danny Perkins, PSU
Bill Reed, YWCA	Maria Tagliaferri, DMVA
Elizabeth Cooper, DVOP, L&I	Brian Natali, DMVA
Kathy Silvia, Military Women's Memorial	Joann Tresco, PAARNG
Chris Clark, DMVA	Michael Belcher, DMVA
Dan Dudkiewicz, DMVA	Lisa Kaye, CDVA – Monroe County
Joel Mutschler, DMVA	Samantha Cossman, DMVA
Tom Applebach, CDVA – Lehigh County	Chelsea Ellsworth, DMVA
Jennifer Hagaman, DMVA	Craig Swineford, DMVA
Susan Meighen, DMVA	Greg Holler, DMVA
Chip Gilliland, DMVA	Erica Moore, DMVA
Sierra Bilous, DHS, OMHSAS	Abby, Archive Captioning
Anne Hopkins, Landmark Solutions	

<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 led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance and Moment of Silence.</p> <p>Mr. Marc Ferraro thanked everyone for joining the quarterly meeting and thanked everyone for everything they do in support of PA veterans.</p>
<p>APPROVAL OF FEB 1, 2023, MINUTES</p>	<p>No questions or corrections were noted on the draft minutes. Ms. Cheryl Cook motioned to approve the minutes, which Ms. Donna Tilley Hess seconded, and all unanimously approved.</p>
<p>GUEST SPEAKER: PENN STATE UNIVERSITY - CLEARINGHOUSE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dr. Danial Perkins explained how the Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness works, combining applied research, science, education, and outreach to assist veterans. ▪ Funded primarily through the Department of Defense (DOD), the VA, and private foundations, the Clearinghouse provides access to various resources and tools. Additionally, technical assistance is available from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm EST with the team responding within two days to any after-hours messages. ▪ The MySTeP program is new. Funded by the DOD, the Clearinghouse created the curriculum to assist military spouses during the service member's transition into, during, and out of the military. ▪ One longitudinal study followed approximately 10,000 separated veterans from three months after leaving the military to 6.5 years later.

	<p>Information gathered included aspects of financial, mental, and social health, along with what was and was not going well for these individuals, so evaluation and predictions could be generated.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Mr. Kory Auch asked if there was any uncovered evidence that the “veterans helping veterans” model works. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Dr. Perkins did not find documentation to support this concept yet. ➤ Ms. Cheryl Cook asked if there were any trends in study participation. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Dr. Perkins did explain that the number of participants reduced as time went on. ➤ BG (PA) Maureen Weigl stated that across the US, transitioning service members do not know that state offices of veterans' affairs, or county resources exist, or where to turn for resources. Data on this topic would be helpful as it would show the DOD the importance of sharing transitioning service member information with these state offices, so transitioning issues would lessen. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Dr. Perkins concurred that within the first three months of transitioning, service members are underutilizing veteran resources because they don't know what is available, they don't know if they are eligible, or they don't feel they need support.
<p style="text-align: center;">AGING COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ms. Margo Coleman discussed committee goals underway for 2023. Two new members have been added to the committee to assist with committee topics. ▪ Veterans’ services can be a complicated topic to navigate. Ms. Coleman explained that every social worker in the commonwealth must is required to take Continuing Education Unit (CEU) courses, so the committee is working on bringing veteran resources to those providers for awareness, creating a win-win scenario. ▪ Currently, work between DMVA and the PA Council on the Arts has offered two PA Veterans Homes the Arts in Residency Programs. This does come at a cost to the home, but the homes have been using the Welfare Fund to reinstate the programs. If a Home committee votes to deny these funds, another funding source must be identified. ▪ Housing challenges are present with the older veteran population, depending on various factors, and finding areas that accept VASH vouchers is another barrier.
<p style="text-align: center;">HOMELESS COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr. Brendan Auman explained that the assembly is currently looking at a bill to create a commonwealth-wide housing committee to tackle housing issues. This group could work to set policies and strategies to address the continual need. ▪ Mr. Auman and the committee wish to increase the number of veterans with lived experience on the committee and continually offer to work with other committees on housing issues.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Federal VA posted the new goal for housing an additional 38,000 veterans during the calendar year 2023. As additional goals, the Federal VA wishes to ensure that 95% of veterans housed in 2023 do not return to homelessness the following year and to specifically engage with at least 28,000 unsheltered veterans. ▪ Veterans now have access to acute suicidal care through the Federal VA. The homeless population and veterans have a higher risk of factors that may lead to suicidal ideations. ▪ Mr. Micah Snead explained how the Housing First model works as an evidence-based practice, which was used in the successful placement of over 40,000 veterans by the Federal VA last year. ▪ The National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) released a toolkit on eviction record sealing and expungement protections. This is helpful for advocates working with a population that has housing insecurity. An eviction can be debilitating as it can remain on one’s record for years. ▪ Resource links included information for unsheltered homelessness, which is on the rise in Pennsylvania. As homeless cases are driven down generally, the remaining cases may be harder to tackle and require higher levels of need not met by traditional housing programs. ▪ Pennsylvania was awarded \$12 million that PA Housing and Finance Authority (PHFA) will administer for housing affordability projects, including rental units. ▪ As an aside, Mr. Auman shared that the US Dept. of Agriculture announced \$45 million to support underserved veteran farmers, ranchers, and foresters. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ BG (PA) Maureen Weigl stated a large need is getting veterans into long-term care facilities. Many veterans are denied access due to issues that need care that the facilities cannot address, and their spouses cannot care for either. This explains why so many Vietnam-era veterans end up homeless in some cases. Finding these individuals safe, accessible options can be difficult. ➢ Ms. Krolczyk asked if PA has the number of veterans that the Federal VA wishes our commonwealth to house this year. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ms. Keisha Kerr explained that the number for VISN 4 in PA is 1,545 veterans. ○ Mr. Bill Cress shared that last year a percentage of the housed veterans returned to homelessness, so this year's goal will focus on staying housed. After Housing First, then critical time intervention occurs, ensuring wrap-around services are available to meet all needs that exist or occur later. ○ Mr. Snead shared that housing is always the first step, which can be challenging, but then hard work must begin after that point to care for individuals as they age and have more health concerns.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ms. Erica Nocho touched upon committee goals before discussing their current Educational Awareness Campaign initiative. Through social

<p>HEALTH PROMOTIONS COMMITTEE</p>	<p>media, the committee will share posts that engage veterans and/or those that serve veterans, showing a glimpse of what resources exist. Service providers may see rapid turnover, so these messages can assist professionals who may not realize the resources they can utilize for their clients.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Prototype posts have been developed and the request is for other agencies to like or share posts further after seeing them go live at various points during this summer. These topics will include aspects of stigma and bias around veterans and mental health, which aim to correct some misinformation that may exist.
<p>EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ms. Elizabeth McCloud (from PHEAA) briefed on the Education Assistance (EAP) and Military Family Educational Programs (MFEP). Both programs require a 6-year National Guard commitment. The MFEP is available to selected family members of service members who sign up for an additional 6-year commitment. These programs revert to loans if the service commitment is not fulfilled. ▪ Possible increases to state-owned tuition rates will be announced in July. An increase would result in higher EAP and MFEP award maximums. ▪ Ms. McCloud discussed the PA State Grant Program as the flagship need-based aid program available in the commonwealth. Students can utilize this aid to attend programs of study across multiple sectors, which is not always available in every state. Funding is available, regardless of university, college, trade school, etc., if a student is enrolled at an eligible institution and is enrolled in an eligible program that is at least two years in length. ▪ Ms. McCloud also spoke about the PA Targeted Industry Program (PA-TIP). As Health was added as an eligible area of study in 2019, PA-TIP has awarded many short-term health programs including nursing training programs, which greatly assisted during the pandemic. PHEAA works with the Department of Labor and Industry to obtain information on occupations with large numbers of job opening and then maps eligible programs every three years. The next updated list will go into effect this Fall for the 2023-24 academic year. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Mr. Ferraro asked if this program could assist with clinical shortages facing the commonwealth agencies. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ms. McCloud stated that it is possible that PA-TIP could assist, so perhaps a further conversation is warranted. ➤ Mr. Andrew Barnes concurred that commonwealth clinical positions have difficulty staying competitive, especially for individuals going through CNA or LPN training, so programs such as PA-TIP can certainly assist. ▪ Ms. McCloud also shared that not all institutions that offer programs that could be eligible under PA-TIP have engaged in the program and applied to participate so their student will receive these awards. Targeting educational institutions is key in this regard.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ms. Denise Verchimak briefed on the GI Bill. The Federal VA rolled out a digital technology update, called Enrollment Manager, making the process much easier for educational institutions to certify students. ▪ Risk-Based surveys are new this year, so Ms. Verchimak’s office has developed a work process and has conducted about 30 surveys thus far. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ms. Tammy Ferguson stated that at the Dept. of Corrections, they have apprenticeship programs that utilize the GI Bill. She asked how they could find out about additional programs for trades like plumbers and welders that could also qualify for GI Bill funding to accelerate interest in their department. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Ms. Verchimak stated that her office in the Dept. of Education could assist in looking at positions or training plans to suit their needs. ➤ Ms. Hess thanked the Dept. of Education for assisting the Dept. of Human Services with on-the-job training for their forensic security employees.
<p style="text-align: center;">WOMEN VETERANS COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ms. Elizabeth Cooper briefed on current initiatives. The PA Women Veterans Toolkit is a magazine of resources that would serve all veterans, although there would be a focus on women veterans. This project should be finalized in 2024. ▪ Ms. Cooper also explained that additional improvements to VA care are needed regarding cancer concerns. When a man is diagnosed with cancer and told he will lose his hair, the action of losing hair or shaving one's head is not traumatic in many cases. However, for women who receive the same news, losing hair or shaving her head can be upsetting on many levels. Hair can be integral to a person's identity, so perhaps better bedside manner or offering wigs, or even breast prostheses, could accompany this type of devastating news where applicable.
<p style="text-align: center;">JUDICIARY COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr. Michael Carrington briefly touched on committee goals. He explained that the SCI Phoenix VSU’s VVA Chapter completed a clothing drive and raised over \$7,000 to provide clothing for needy veterans in the Philadelphia area. ▪ The agreement between SCI Mercer and the Mercer Veteran Treatment Court recently allowed for mentor connections. They hope to replicate this process with the Philadelphia County Veteran Treatment Board. ▪ Mr. Carrington explained the Law Enforcement Treatment Initiative (LETI) program, which now has 20 counties participating. Before arrest, law enforcement officers are starting to identify individuals who have various needs and can refer them to substance use programs before booking. ▪ Mr. Carrington offered anyone interested a tour of a Veteran Service Unit. These units are special due to their veteran focus and low recidivism rates. ▪ Major Jason Albert was presented with the Veteran of the Quarter certificate. Major Albert volunteers with the K-9 Hero Haven

	<p>organization which accepts dogs who have been trained for law enforcement or military combat and rehabilitates them for adoption.</p>
<p>GOOD OF THE ORDER / CLOSING REMARKS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ BG (PA) Weigl explained that PA moved from ninth to seventh regarding benefit compensation. June 14th, 2023, is the next Veteran Town Hall, hosted by DMVA, where veterans are encouraged to obtain benefit information so they can submit a claim and apply. ▪ For education and vocational rehab employment, PA went from 12th to 11th, but the veteran population in PA continues to decline. DMVA has been working very hard to connect employers with the DOD SkillBridge and other programs aimed at attracting transitioning service members back to PA. ▪ May 2nd was the groundbreaking ceremony in Hollidaysburg for the new 200-bed skilled nursing facility to replace the old structure. Governor Shapiro worked with the President of the United States and the Secretary of the VA to get the waiver passed. DGS had also been very supportive, so this was a major accomplishment. ▪ DMVA has been working with the Montel Williams show on a segment called Military Makeover, Operation Career. The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania was chosen as an employer to highlight veteran employees, so details are being finalized for those segments now. ▪ Mr. Ferraro explained that the DMVA is in the process of purchasing an elementary school in Lickdale, down the street from Fort Indiantown Gap, to be used as an outreach center. This would be a one-stop shop with Veteran Service Officers and others assisting veterans, service members, and their families. Mr. Ferraro offered the agencies on the GAC-VS space to have agency representatives there to further assist this population. DMVA would pay for upgrades and furniture so that collaborative efforts would be supported. The Council members and Designees were encouraged to speak internally about this opportunity to determine who may want to be involved. The settlement timeframe would be around September, so additional information will be given to agencies as that time nears. ▪ 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 with beneficial information.
	<p>Next Meeting: August 2, 2023, 1:00-3:00 PM</p>

	NCTC Classroom, Bldg. 8-63, Fort Indiantown Gap
ADJOURNMENT	The meeting adjourned at 3:01 PM.

NEW ACTION ITEMS

#	ACTION	STATUS
1	DMVA leadership to discuss if staff are aware that institutions may be utilizing PA-TIP for shorter training programs.	Complete
2	Ms. Krolczyk to connect DOC and DOE for apprenticeship needs.	Complete
3	Women Veterans Committee to work with Aging Committee on ideas to educate older veterans on email and internet usage at PA CareerLink locations.	Complete

OLD ACTION ITEMS

#	ACTION	STATUS
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