1```

State Veterans Commission Meeting Minutes

February 4, 2022
10:00 AM to 11:01 AM
WebEx Video Teleconference

Call to Order	**Chairman Nicholas Taylor**
The Pennsylvania State Veterans Commission (SVC) meeting was called to order at 10:00 AM.	

Moment of Silence and Pledge of Allegiance

Vice Chairman Smith opened the meeting with a moment of silence commemorating the 31st anniversary of the ending of Operation Desert Storm. Let us pause to remember all Veterans who lost their lives during this and all wars. Chairman Taylor led a recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance.

Commission Introductions	
MG Mark Schindler	The Adjutant General
BG (PA) Maureen Weigl	DAG DMVA-OVA
Mr. Nicholas Taylor	SVC Chairman, Commander Catholic War Veterans
Mr. Nathaniel Smith	SVC Vice Chairman; Commander, Veterans of Foreign Wars
Mr. Bernard McDonald	Commander, AMVETS
Mr. Gerald Hawk	Executive Director, AMVETS
Mr. John Getz	Adjutant, Veterans of Foreign Wars
Mr. William Hines	Commander, Disabled American Veterans
Mr. Samuel Petrovich	Adjutant, Disabled American Veterans
Mr. William Albert	Commander, Blinded Veterans of America
Mr. Justin Slep	President, PA State Association of County Directors of Veterans Affairs
Mr. Robert Heister	President, Military Officers Association of America
Mr. Joseph Chiodo	Commander, Italian American War Veterans
Mr. Larry Googins	President, Vietnam Veterans of America
Mr. Christopher Fidler	Director, Keystone Paralyzed Veterans of America
Mr. David Brady	Commandant, Marine Corps League
Mr. Richard Fine	Commander, Jewish War Veterans
Mr. Frank Bokan	Commander, Military Order of the Purple Heart
Mr. Philip Arnold	Adjutant, Military Order of the Purple Heart
Mr. James Hogan	Adjutant, The American Legion
Ms. Lisa Kaye	Member-at-Large
Mr. Charles Jackson	Member-at-Large
Mr. Mark Baylis	Member-at-Large
Mr. Michael Brooker	Member-at-Large
Others Present	
Mr. Tim Liezert	VISN-4
BG Laura McHugh	DAG PANG-Army
Mr. Nate Silcox	Executive Director PA Senate Veterans Affairs and Preparedness Committee
Mr. Marc Ferraro	Deputy Executive Secretary-DMVA
Mr. Richard Hamp	Special Assistant-DMVA-OVA

Mr. Joel Mutschler	Director DMVA-PIRO
Mr. Travis Davis	Director DMVA-BVH
Mr. Brian Natali	DMVA-PIRO (Programs and Services)
Mr. Jeffery King	DMVA-PIRO (Programs and Services)
Ms. Brett Ann Beatty	DMVA-PIRO (Programs and Services)
Ms. Katherine Reibsane	DMVA-PIRO (Programs and Services)
Ms. Jeffrey Wallitch	DMVA-OCC
Ms. Jennifer Vandermolen	VBA-RO PITT
Mr. Gilbert Durand	DMVA-PPL
Mr. Seth Benge	DMVA-PPL
Mr. Nicholas 'Chip' Gilliland	DMVA-PIRO (Outreach and Reintegration)
Mr. Paul DeVincenzo	DMVA-PIRO (Outreach and Reintegration)
Mr. Robert Lithgow	DMVA-PIRO (Outreach and Reintegration)
Mr. Daniel Dudkiewicz	DMVA-PIRO (Outreach and Reintegration)
Ms. Chelsea Ellsworth	DMVA-PIRO (Outreach and Reintegration)
Ms. Samantha Cossman	DMVA-PIRO (Outreach and Reintegration)
Ms. Susan Meighen	DMVA-PIRO (Outreach and Reintegration)
Ms. Erica Moore	DMVA-PIRO (Outreach and Reintegration)
Ms. Jennifer Spitler	DMVA-PIRO (Outreach and Reintegration)
Ms. Joan Nissley	DMVA-Public Affairs
Ms. Patty Derry	DMVA-Administration
CSM Jon B. Worley	PANG-Army
Mr. David Cowgill	VISN 4
Mr. Matt Hansen	Director Continuous Process Improvement-Ex. Deputy Secretary
Mr. Thomas Coreau	PASACDVA-Dauphin County
Mr. Timothy Cleveland	PASACDVA-Tioga County
Ms. Jennifer Hagaman	PASACDVA-Clinton County
Mr. David Eisele	PASACDVA-Lackawanna County
Mr. Robert Gray	Keystone Paralyzed Veterans of America
Mr. Richard Hudzinski	Vietnam Veterans of America
Mr. Bruce Foster	The American Legion
Ms. Elizabeth Salvador	Veterans of Foreign Wars
Ms. Constance Snavely	Keystone Paralyzed Veterans of America
Ms. Kristi Brawley	Penn State-Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness
Mr. Cameron Richardson	Penn State-Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness
Ms. Jillian Rodgers	Penn State-Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness
Six Telephone Callers	Unknown

Chairman's Opening Remarks — **Chairman Taylor**

No remarks at this time, will comment as we work through the agenda.

Questions/Discussion

None.

TAG's Opening Remarks — **MG Schindler**

Referring to slides, PANG, Army and Air, remain relevant as far as overseas deployments. We have approximately 190 on orders supporting long-term care facilities across the state in coordination with Department of Health and PEMA. Also, just over 60 Soldiers and Airmen providing wrap-around support as part of a chronic care task force. Not clinical, these are support folks to allow the clinical staff to do clinical

work. Also, on 15 February, will be hosting the Lithuanian Chief of Defense. He will be in DC-area visiting senior leadership and will make a swing up here as well. Since our last meeting, we did have just over 90 personnel in our PA Task Force on alert for state active duty, 16-17 January, for the storm that came through.

It was great to see quite a few of you at the Farm Show in January. We were able to serve lunch to just over 300 Veterans, servicemembers and families with the support of the Robert Irvine Foundation and Mission BBQ. On 21 January, spoke at the VFW mid-winter conference in Lancaster. Always a pleasure to get out and visit. Also on the calendar, on 29 March, the 5th annual Vietnam Veterans Recognition Day in Johnstown.

Questions/Discussion

None.

Approval of the January 7, 2022 Meeting Minutes

Motion: Mr. McDonald, AMVETS, made a motion to approve the minutes.

Second: Mr. Fine, Jewish War Veterans, seconded the motion.

Mr. Jackson: In the business portion, Senator Browne's name is misspelled.

Chairman Taylor: Noted, will correct.

The body agreed; motion carried. Minutes approved with single correction noted.

Reading of Official and Other Communications **Chairman Taylor**

Nothing currently.

Questions/Discussion

None.

Deputy Adjutant General-VA Remarks **BG (PA) Weigl**

Kicked off a great GAC-VS this week, with updates on women initiatives, employment initiatives, suicide prevention efforts, judicial and corrections, aging, and homelessness initiatives. Had honor to meet with The American Legion in Pittsburgh. They raised over $100,000 for homelessness in that area. Great feedback from non-profits, county directors, and RPOCs in PA VETConnect. Great meeting with Pennsylvania War Counsel yesterday. Joel and Travis will give those updates.

Questions/Discussion

None.

DMVA Bureau of PIRO **Mr. Joel Mutschler**

We continue to make great strides with PA VETConnect. We're focusing on bringing veterans back to PA. Working with Hershey, QVC, Heinz, PNC as examples. Continue to develop relationships and help them get connected into the Veteran community. Our partnership with Pitt PERU and CDC northwest suicide prevention program are going well, building out opportunities to take care of veterans in northwest corner. Also working with Together with Veterans in Green County and working diligently to get the program running in Carbon County for Veterans in northeast PA. Engaging with stakeholders to ensure justice-involved Veterans are receiving the resources they need and building our relationships between our RPOCs and the Veterans Coordinators in the Veteran Service Units. Coming alongside the counties to see what we can do to help them build out services like those in Allegheny County being provided through their "Veterans Service Pod."

16,000 PA VETConnect connections across all stakeholders and over 1,800 resources in that system. Looking at a technology upgrade too. More to come on that.

Over 90 apps currently in evaluation process for Veterans Trust Fund grants. Also, in evaluation process for VSO grant program.

On Outreach side, kicking off virtual Veterans Townhalls. The first on 16 March from 5-6:30 pm, focusing in on northeast region and Scranton in particular. Focused on suicide prevention and mental health. A save the date will come out shortly. Will be hosted on WebEx and hopefully Facebook Live.

In partnership with VHA VISN-4, PennDOT, and DMVA, conducting a mailing campaign to the over 530,000 veterans with military license plates and drivers' license designations. VISN-4 is covering cost and getting the word out about federal benefits, including a letter from MG Schindler and DMVA this spring. Additionally working to put DMVA outreach material in PennDOT Drivers' License centers.

Farm show attendance was down by 40% overall, but over 300 veterans connected with us. We processed 41 referrals to VSOs across the Commonwealth as well as 11 referrals to organizations in PA VETConnect.

Thanks to the Act 66 Committee. Working on new standard for reporting on our federal portfolio. We will now be able to provide a consolidated report using VBA data. New report will reduce reporting requirements across the board and produce a more holistic picture of the portfolio. Greatly appreciate collaboration with the Act 66 Committee.

Kicking off accreditation training soon. The 16th annual Harrisburg Homeless Standdown will be at the Farm Show Complex, 26 Feb. More information can be found on the YWCA website at YWCAHBG.org.

Questions/Discussion

Chairman Taylor: Can you refresh on how we request support from a DMVA Outreach team/van?

Mr. Mutschler: Head out to the DMVA website, click on Veterans Affairs and Mobile Outreach Team. You can always call us be we like to have the information on that form. I'll have Greg send out the email address. More than happy to take those requests.

DMVA Bureau of Veterans Homes **Mr. Davis**

Across the six homes, about 60% bed fill. Admissions are coming slowly due to staffing. Not in a crisis, but in a contingent staffing mode, meaning below where we want to be. Adequate staff to meet the needs of our Veterans though. Heavily reliant on overtime; frontline staff working hard, long hours. Big priority on recruitment and retention. Infection control: 9 positive residents across all six homes and 53 positive staff members, thankfully all mild cases. Vaccine rates are above national averages. Currently federal surveys going on in Erie and Southeastern Veteran Center, wrapping up today.

Last week, Governor Wolf announced American Rescue Plan funding for acute care hospitals. We were upset that long-term care was left out. However, this week the Governor announced another round of funding, and long-term care was a part of that. We were happy to be in that round, but this proposal still requires legislative approval. Long-term care certainly needs the help.

Looking forward the Governor's budget call next week. Looking for substantial investment in state Medicaid program. It is needed and overdue.

Questions/Discussion

None.

Approval of State Veterans' Programs Reports

Motion: Mr. Smith, Vice Chairman, made a motion to approve the programs report.

Second: Mr. Heister, MOAA, seconded the motion.

No discussion. The body agreed; motion carried.

VHA, VISN-4 **Mr. Liezert**

Report was submitted ahead, just wanted to foot-stomp the trust scores. VISN-4 continues to be the best in the nation in terms of trust scores and it has been a major focus for us through the pandemic and beyond. More great news last week, Becker's Hospital Review ranks all hospitals, and our Altoona VAMC was named best hospital in that market area.

Questions/Discussion

Mr. Petrovich: I would like to give a shout-out to Tim and his staff. We started quarterly meetings with the Chief of Voluntary Services at all VISN-4 hospitals. Great first quarterly meeting at the end of January with a lot of ideas and back-and-forth. Thank you to you and your staff.

Committee Reports

Act 66 Committee **Mr. Foster**

At our 27 January committee meeting, purpose to display and demonstrate new reporting that DMVA allowed us to see in advance, so we could give input. I would like to recognize Mr. Brian Natali for his efforts in putting together this new reporting system. We're getting data straight from the VA. It is by far the best data we have ever had in our efforts working together. Brian's hard work with the Central Office and Pittsburgh Regional Office should not go unrecognized. We decided who would receive the reports. We will continue to work with the Department to advance as much as possible.

Questions/Discussion

Chairman Taylor: I'm all about formal recognition. Let's get together offline to work on something for Mr. Natali.

RETX Committee **Mr. Slep**

No official report for this meeting. Some committee members met at the end of January. Seth met with us to give an update on legislation. We continue to follow SB 578 and any activity pertaining to it.

Questions/Discussion

None.

Legislative Committee **Mr. Jackson**

Met by Zoom on 31 January, all members were in attendance, including DMVA PPL. Primary focus was on the Veterans Justice Project. Specifically, to determine if Senator Muth's blueback had useful provisions to include in any bill on the subject, to review and discuss Sen Browne's blueback, and to review coordination to date between the two senators' staffs. About Senator Muth's blueback, they have added court notification to the Department of Corrections, and required judges be trained to review matters pertaining to Veterans. With regard to Senator Browne's blueback, virtually everything VVA proposed to his staff was included. It would ensure:

1. Veterans coming before courts are identified.
2. Except for capital cases, Veterans will be assessed for PTSD and/or TBI, and such information will be used in the sentencing phase whether by plea or trial.
3. Prisoners are allowed to appeal sentencing if such conditions exist and were not considered at time of trial.
4. Such information is considered before Boards of Pardon and Parole.
5. Authorized funding for assessments.

Representative Hills-Evans HB 691, nearly a companion bill to Senator Muth's blueback. On 27 January, representatives met with a key member of Senator Browne's staff and members of the Legislative Committees of the PA War Veterans Council and SVC. Expedited action and team effort were agreed on. The House is awaiting Senator Browne's draft blueback as a starting point. That should be published next week.

Lastly, the Veterans Justice Project should be recognized as a major goal of the SVC. For years it has been a main goal of the Pennsylvania VVA. I request that the Chairman request VVA take SVC lead on Veterans

Justice Project. The involvement of SVC can help favorably influence the legislature to get the Veterans Justice Project into law.

Questions/Discussions

Chairman Taylor: I hear your recommendation. Mr. Googins, is this something you and the VVA are willing to do currently?

Mr. Googins: Yes, I am active in the Veterans Treatment Court issue. I am willing to work with that. Mr. Tim Susengill is also involved with Incarcerated Veterans, and I can work with Mr. Hudzinski and Mr. Jackson on it. Long answer to say, yes.

Chairman Taylor: Appreciate your willingness to do that. No objections heard. Mr. Googins, I will send you a letter to that end.

Pensions/Relief/Grave Marking/State Military Cemetery Committee **Mr. Googins**

No real report. Planning on some visits to Cemetery of the Alleghenies to talk about issues there, as well as planned visits to the other cemeteries. But no report yet. I would also still like a little more guidance from the Commission as to any issues for the committee to investigate.

Questions/Discussions

Chairman Taylor: I have created a format that will officially appoint the committees and give some general guidance and instructions on what to focus on. I will have that out before our next meeting, I hope within the next two weeks. If you are the chairman of a committee, you will have something here very soon.

Women Veterans Committee **Ms. Kaye**

On 20 January, I spoke at the PA Commission for Women's quarterly meeting. Great day to network and collaborate. Coming up in March, Ms. Donna Hess with PA CARES and DOH is doing a summit on resources, challenges, services. I'm trying to collaborate with her as well. In my county, they are trying to do peer-to-peer for female veterans. This will be a first for my county. Setting up meetings with legislators on female veterans' issues. On 24 March, I was invited to SCI Dallas for a Veterans Expo. On 31 March, Female Veterans Day at Governor's mansion, hosted by the PA Commission for Women. Always a great opportunity to connect with female veterans and leaders. Hope to make more connections there.

Questions/Discussions

Mr. Foster: If your committee and mine can collaborate, I think we can do a lot. Let's start that.

Ms. Kaye: Will do. A lot of people want to do things but don't have good direction from us.

Veterans' Health Committee **Mr. Baylis**

In January the committee was challenged by Omicron. Did manage to speak to Doctor, Colonel (ret.), Mulfair's staff about toxic exposure options for veterans in PA. Hopes to encourage his advice for creating a warning signs list and self-care options as tools for reducing long-term exposure health risks. The meeting is not yet scheduled as the doctor was out of town. Feel free to email Mr. Baylis with questions and comments.

Questions/Discussions

Mr. Foster: Exposure issues are big. I would be happy to coordinate with this committee to provide exposure information as well.

Chairman Taylor: I think that would be a great help to him. Thank you for your offer.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

None.

NEW BUSINESS

Chairman Taylor: Regarding the Long-term Care Council, we have received some guidance from the Governor's Office. I have not had the chance to talk with Michael Murphy about these changes yet, but I will talk with him about it and keep the Commission informed about the way forward. <u>Questions/Discussions</u> None.
Good of the Order
Mr. Foster: I just wanted to bring to attention veterans discounts. Home Depot changed their policy effective 1 Feb. Veterans now must register on their website or in the store to get their discount.
Announcements
Chairman Taylor: Feel free to contact me with agenda items for the next meeting in April.
Next Meeting
April 8, 2022, 10:00 AM Forum: Arrowheads Community Center, FIG

The minutes of this meeting are respectfully submitted by:

BG (PA) Maureen Weigl
Deputy Adjutant General
Veterans Affairs