

Pennsylvania Soldiers' and Sailors' Home

Advisory Council Meeting

Erie, Pennsylvania

June 14, 2023

9:00a.m.

ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT

Mr. Gary Fry, President, AMVETS

Mr. Richard DiGiacomo, Secretary, Military Officers Assoc. of America

Mr. Anthony DiGiacomo, County Director of Veterans Affairs

Mr. Harry Stewart, American Legion

Ms. Karen Foust, Disabled American Veterans

Mr. William Rose, PSSH Resident Council President

Mr. Richard Supak, Catholic War Veterans

Mr. Joe Benacci, Director of Veterans Affairs

The Honorable Daniel Laughlin, PA Senator

ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT

Mr. Raymond J. Chambers, Vice President, Marine Corps League

Mr. David Price, Military Order of the Purple Heart

The Honorable Curt Sonney, PA House of Representatives

Mr. Robert C. Eiler, Veterans of Foreign Wars

OTHERS PRESENT

Ms. Maureen Weigl, BG (PA Retired), Deputy Adjutant General-VA

Mr. Travis Davis, MHA, NHA, HSE, Executive Director, Long-Term Care

Mrs. Barbara Raymond, RN, NHA, Director of Veterans' Homes

Ms. Cheri Spacht, RN, NHA, PSSH Commandant

Ms. Deborah Cubero, PSSH DON

Mrs. Elizabeth Seibert, PSSH Deputy Commandant

Ms. Alyssa Cooley, PSSH Commandant Assistant

Mr. Nicholas Wood, PSSH Admissions Coordinator

Ms. Beth Werner, Compliance Department

DRAFT

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Gary Fry called the meeting to order at 9:00a.m.

MOMENT OF SILENT AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mr. Gary Fry led a moment of silence, and the Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

ROLL CALL

Ms. Alyssa Cooley took roll call for all present.

SWEARING IN OF COUNCIL MEMBERS

Ms. Karen Foust, Disabled American Veterans, was sworn in.

APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES

A motion was made by Mr. Supak and seconded by Mr. Benacci to approve the minutes of the Advisory Council Meeting held on March 9, 2023. Motion carried, and minutes were approved as written.

MEDICAL DIRECTOR UPDATE

Ms. Cubero provided update on behalf of Dr. Milie:

We are currently not masking. Our guidelines are based on hospital admission rates now. We have not changed our testing guidelines. We still test all residents and employees who are symptomatic or have known exposure, new admissions and hospital returns. We are saving some beds in case we have covid positives. We are at 86% capacity for Nursing Care and about 52% for Personal Care.

ADMISSIONS AND MARKETING UPDATE

Ms. Cheri Spacht provided update on behalf of the Admission Department:

Mr. Nicholas Wood was announced as the new Admissions Coordinator for PSSH. If you hear of anyone needing our services, please do not hesitate to reach out to Nicholas or Emily or even myself. We can coordinate and do a visit with the veteran who needs placement.

Our current census is 146. Total authorized beds is 207. We have 28 Memory Care beds filled. We have 2 veterans and 3 non-veterans on that waiting list.

There are 65 total Nursing Care beds filled. We have 7 veterans and 1 non-veteran on that waiting list.

There are 53 beds filled on Personal Care. We have 4 veterans and 1 non-veteran on that waiting list.

These numbers may have fluctuated because we are getting at least 2-3 admissions weekly until we get to capacity and our numbers have been fluctuating due to re-hospitalizations as well for our current residents.

REPORT OF THE DEPUTY ADJUTANT GENERAL

General Weigl provided update:

I will be here for the entire evening. I hope some of you will be joining us for the PACT Act that we will have this evening. Hopefully we have some residents coming. It's a nice event. We've been making a lot of progress getting the word out. There is a lot of changes for veterans with the PACT Act. Many Vietnam era veterans and other veterans don't realize if you have a claim, you can do another claim to get your benefits and your disability increased. As you know, when you come to our nursing homes, 70% is the magic number so your cost of care is covered by the Federal VA. We are trying to put out to the communities to let them know to come back and let us look at your PACT Act and your benefits is really important. We're hoping we have a big crowd tonight and hoping we can talk about the nursing homes. You'd be surprised how many people do not realize we actually have 6 Long-Term Care Homes for our veterans and their spouses. We are really pushing all that information.

They are looking to increase the Paralyzed Blind Pension and Paralyzed Pension. They are at about \$150 a month. They're looking to raise them anywhere from \$200-\$250. Two draft legislations out there but that'll be important and also impact some of the veterans here in the Home.

Monday, June 12th was the Women's Veterans Day. Senator Tracy Pennycuick got that passed through. Pennsylvania now joins 16 other States who have that as a day of recognition commemorating the 75th anniversary since 1948 when women were actually able to enlist, and African American women were able to stay in the military.

Governor Shapiro has been very active. He's attending Hollidaysburg ground-breaking. He's attended events; He's been at Fort Indian Town GAP learning about veteran issues. He opened a webpage trying to encourage more service members coming off active duty, helping them find the resources. He supports and will continue the Governor's Advisory Council for Veterans Services. We have 7 different committees that are shared by all of our sister agencies, to talk about all the state and federal resources coming to Pennsylvania.

I will be back out here in July for the Manufacturing Association. Talking about how to bring service members coming off active duty back to Erie. We are going to teach them how to hire veterans, how to find those service members coming back and hopefully we can get more veterans back into your community.

This whole month there are national and state conferences for the VFWs, AMVETS, American Legions, I believe I'm speaking at all of them about all the resources.

I have a conference in Buffalo talking to the Secretary of VA and others on national initiatives and resources for our veterans and Travis and the team will be going to a conference with his counterparts, talking about health benefits and what we need in the nursing homes. If you have ideas, questions or concerns, share them with us. We both go to conferences, and we'd love to champion anything you need.

Mr. Benacci questioned if they ever looked at requirements for the amputee pension? Is it down to one limb instead of two?

General Weigl responded they have. It is part of the stuff they are looking at in the language of the bill. If I'm not mistaken, it has not passed. It is still being discussed. There are a few different versions but, it is being discussed.

Mr. Fry questioned if the War Veterans Council and Commission were behind this?

General Weigl responded yes, absolutely.

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF LONG-TERM CARE

Executive Director Davis provided report:

At the end of May Governor Shapiro signed an executive order directing the Department of Aging to develop a 10 year Pennsylvania Master Plan for older adults. This 10 year strategic plan is going to be led by Secretary Kavulich out of Aging. It's looking for what are our needs for seniors in Pennsylvania for those with disabilities and how to coordinate services and what new initiatives do we need. There are various stake holders involved. General Weigl and myself will represent the DMVA and support all things veterans. We will be meeting with them every other week. It's a good initiative and I really think we're going to put this plan into place.

Included in your packet is a new procedure regarding standardizing across the Homes how we write up our Advisory Council minutes. The end goal is to get them on our website. Today will be the first meeting we do this at. Within 20 days of this meeting, you will see a draft on our website of the minutes. That draft will be up there until our next meeting when we approve them. Once they are approved, we will add a signature from someone on the committee, most likely the President. They will then be official and within 5 days we will get them up on our website. That way anyone who needs information, it is readily accessible. It's a big benefit that we stay transparent with all of our stakeholders.

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF VETERANS' HOMES

Director Raymond provided update:

The Public Health Emergency ended on May 11th. Our Centers for Medicare and Medicaid services told us that they are not going to enforce that vaccine mandate. Unfortunately, there is now some conflicting guidance that were having, and that the vaccine mandate will be enforced out of the Pennsylvania Department of Health. We are currently working through that confusion to give guidance to our Homes on that. However, our employees that are currently in house, we do maintain well over a 60% vaccine rate and everybody currently from an employee perspective has either an ADA or religious accommodation. We are meeting that requirement anyway, its just the guidance we are receiving is back to confusing. More to come on that.

From a covid perspective we had several good weeks of no positives at any of our Homes from a staff or resident perspective. Unfortunately, earlier in the week we had at our Gino Merli facility, 3 employees that are positive. It was very minimal exposure to the rest of the facility, so we didn't have to go into a lot of different masking. Yesterday at our Southwest facility, we do have a positive resident. That resident has minor symptoms, very stable. Also, minimal exposure but some of the staff had to go back into the masking.

We have across the 6 Homes, State Veterans Weeks going on. It a great celebration and we had great weather at our Philly location. Both of our Philly Homes did pig roasts. The residents truly enjoyed it. Different Homes are doing different things. We have a carnival here and a couple different events.

Staffing we are definitely challenged with our nursing staff primarily. Our housekeeping, activities, security, maintenance and dietary for the most part are stable across the 6 Homes. Where we are challenged is the nursing and that is anywhere from the Registered Nurse to the Licensed Nurse to the Certified Nursing Assistant.

A few things we are doing is, we partner with schools to come in and help train individuals to become that nursing assistant. We pay for that for them and pay for their testing as well. Unfortunately, we can't do the bonuses and the sign on bonuses that the private sector does. We do have different things from a tuition reimbursement program that we are readily advertising and trying to encourage individuals to further their education to become that nurse. We're hopeful that will help the situation.

All 6 of our Homes are growing. We are up to 145 souls in our building right now. Which is a great increase from the beginning of the year. However, due to staffing we are being very cautious with how far we are going. Our staffing numbers when you look at it on paper are beautiful. We are well above the state minimums. However, because of our behaviors we want to increase our numbers to well above those state minimums. State minimums on July 1st are moving up to 2.87 hours per patient per day. We are well above that. Here in Erie, we are well above that, and the other Homes are well above that as well. That increase in regulation really won't affect us, but again, we don't like to take in those admissions one after another just because we don't want to stress or overwhelm our staff or current resident population.

A lot of the new regulations coming out on July 1st are very similar to what is in the CMS guidance. The Pennsylvania Department of Health was kind of just catching up to that language. We don't expect to see a whole lot of differences in our processes and procedures, but we are looking through that.

The VA was just at our Hollidaysburg facility. We do have some work to do there. We have new leadership there. We will be announcing a new Commandant at that facility within the next week or two. We've had an interim Commandant there for several months now.

At our Delaware Valley facility in Philadelphia, we also have an interim Commandant there. The normal Commandant is out on a long-term leave probably looking towards retirement.

Across the Homes we are doing active shooter drills. In our Emergency Management Plan, we are going across the 6 Homes doing risk assessments to see where our risks are and where we can improve on. For example, one of our Homes in the Philadelphia area, it is a wide open field and their normal evacuation route from fire is into a wide open grassy area. That's not a great evacuation place for an active shooter. It's those things we are looking at tying into our existing emergency plan to make things more cohesive and better for overall. We're starting with our Gino Merli facility, our Delaware Valley facility and our Southeast facility. Those 3 wanted there's done first so that is where we are starting with those assessments.

From a 5 star perspective, we do have our Delaware Valley, our Erie facility and Gino Merli facility in Scranton at 5 stars. What that means is when anybody is looking for a nursing home they will look at "Nursing Home Compare" to see how the information is at that particular nursing home. we also look at it. When I was talking about that Commandant position we were filling in Altoona we were looking at the applicants by star ratings. How did they do, how did they manage their facility. 3 of our Homes are 5 stars. Hollidaysburg, Southwest and Southeast facilities are at 3 stars.

Where the changes happen, staffing is one component, quality measures is another component. That is an area that we are working with the team and the Homes to drive everyone's quality measures up. The information that we provide for that 5 star rating piece is sometimes a documentation piece. We're providing the care to the veterans and to the residents, we just may not be capturing it on the other side and therefore it doesn't show up on the internet for that 5 star rating. The other component is the survey process. Generally speaking, our Homes have fantastic surveys. The 3 star rating is because of a survey. We're hoping that will drop off soon and bring our star rating up at that facility.

Mr. DiGiacomo questioned if the active shooter drill was an internal assessment or were we paying someone?

Director Raymond responded what we did at our Altoona facility they brought their local fire departments in and local police department in, the VA was heavily involved. Everybody did it, believe it or not, on a volunteer basis. The active shooter piece of it, yes, we are paying someone for that. We have a contract with ALICE to complete that.

Mr. DiGiacomo questioned if there was training yet at all of the Homes, or will it follow?

Director Raymond responded it will follow. We've been doing these short, small meetings and what's been coming up is what do we do with the residents? The training in the real world is you run and hide but, we have residents. That's what we are working through. if we're in the process do we put them behind closed doors? What if they don't want too? We're tying resident rights in with safety. That's where the training piece is coming through.

Mr. Rose added for those who may not know, we had an active shooter situation right in our front yard. If you think it doesn't happen, it happens.

Mr. Rose questioned if the 2.87 per patient per day hours were the same for the PCU Domiciliary side?

Director Raymond responded no; it is 1.0.

REPORT OF THE COMMANDANT

Ms. Spacht provided update:

Our current authorized complement for employees is 272. We have 240 of those positions currently filled leaving vacancies at 32. 1 of our vacancies is a Quality Assurance Coordinator which we are in the process of getting a list for interview candidates. We currently have 5 LPN openings, 5 RN openings, 18 Nurse Aide openings, 1 RNS opening, 1 Food Service Worker opening and 1 Custodial Worker opening. We currently have 4 CNAs in training. They will take their class in August. We are still doing the walk-in Wednesdays for interviews. We are working on scheduling our next round of job fairs coming up in September.

Senator Laughlin questioned the starting salary for Custodial Workers and Food Service Workers.

Director Raymond responded \$16.53 an hour to start for the Custodial Worker. *(Current hourly rate for Food Service Worker could not be found at the time and will be provided at a later date)* **16.43**

Ms. Spacht responded feel free to have them reach out to us or give them our information. Even though we have walk-in Wednesdays we're always open for people to come in looking for employment. We can

walk them through how to setup an account to get updates of when positions are opening and get the application started.

We've been very active with our annual surveys for all of our regulatory agencies. We had our VA survey in February. Our plan of correction was completed and submitted to them. We are just waiting on their approval. We also had the Department of Human Services in February for the PCU side of campus. Our plan of correction is currently being worked. Our date of completion for that is June 30th. In April we had our 2023 Pennsylvania Department of Health annual survey. We had 0 deficiencies for that survey. Our Department of Health Life Safety survey was also conducted in April. We had 2 deficiencies. we completed the plan of correction and are currently in full compliance. In addition to our regulatory agencies, we also have our internal Facility Performance Assessment that was completed, and we are waiting approval for that plan.

In April of 2023, the facility identified an issue with therapy equipment leading to 2 residents having blisters. These 2 residents do not require any significant or serious medical treatment and are well. The therapy equipment that was being used was taken out of service immediately. On May 15th the Pennsylvania Department of Health came to our facility for an investigation and follow up and cited the facility with a serious level of a deficiency due to the incident. A plan of correction was implemented, and we are prepared for the DOH to come back in as a follow up visit. We are currently appealing the level of the deficiency that PSSH was cited for.

We are hosting a Flag Day Ceremony at 10am today. Ken is currently preparing for that. He did a great job on our Memorial Day Ceremony. It was a beautiful ceremony with a great turnout.

We are celebrating State Veterans Home Week. We have Carnival Day tomorrow. We have a lot of activities scheduled, music, a petting zoo etc. for residents and staff to enjoy.

Certified Nursing Assistant week begins today. We will be following up through mid-next week celebrating our nursing assistants. On that note, all of our departments are recognized, and they have their specialty weeks throughout the year. We believe everyone needs to be recognized for the hard work they do.

Our renovation projects are going well. The patio out front of the NCU are still in progress but are due to be completed mid-month. The DOH will be in at the end of June to survey those areas. Short hall unit A exit ramp is still in progress. Security at the front gate is operational along with the pole light installed at that location and the 2 new cameras are operational. The data issue we had in the NCU addition is completed. PCU restroom renovations are completed. We are now able to take admissions on PCU now that restrooms are complete. The call bell system in the facility is in progress of being replaced. Stormwater management infrastructure in the parking lot of out front is completed. The boiler house sidewalk project has been completed. The exterior chapel elevation wall is being worked on currently. The masonry work and waterproofing is in progress. The HVAC system in the PCU dining room is complete.

Executive Director Travis added about the incident they had with the therapy equipment. It will likely drop our star rating. That one component that Barb mentioned with the health inspection. Although we are disputing it, it is likely to drop. The next time we get together we will likely see that. That incident, we self-reported. We immediately made sure the safety of our residents was taken care of. We put a

plan of correction in place and immediately educated staff. Luckily no one was seriously hurt. I do feel that the DOH came down very hard on us for having done all of those things the correct way. That's why we are disputing the severity of the tag. Cheri mentioned, a few months before that the DOH was here for their annual survey and we were deficiency free. Which is very difficult thing to achieve. I just wanted you all to be aware the severity of when something like that does happen in terms of our health inspections. It will have implications for 2 years.

Director Raymond added that is where we have the Southeast facility at 3 stars because of a survey process. We are very likely going to see the same thing here.

Mr. Stewart questioned if there was an update on the pavilion?

Ms. Spacht responded we have a 5 year plan negotiation coming up in the next few weeks and I can get information for you on that at the next meeting.

Mr. Stewart responded there was a Commander who was very active in making sure the pavilion was built properly with steel anchors in the ground that will last forever. Please get back to me.

Mr. DiGiacomo questioned is there any serious impact on the chillers? Replacement of the Chillers and components that supply air conditioning to the NCU, ACU, Pharmacy and Situation Room areas. –
Contractors have ordered the equipment, however this equipment has a long lead time of 42 weeks or more. These have a very long lead time because they are large specialize HVAC equipment, we dealt with similar long lead times for the HVAC equipment during the recent NCU renovation/addition project as well.

Ms. Spacht responded no. It is a work in progress, but there is nothing going on with that currently.

COMPLIANCE REPORT

Ms. Werner provided update:

Currently the Compliance Department has finished the 7 Facility Performance Assessment. We were here visiting this facility in February. We hope it helps them survey prep for all the agencies that come in and survey the facilities every year.

Currently there is 1 open investigation across all 6 Homes. It is the exclusionary checks. We are waiting for the approval of the Justifacts process to be approved and put into place. Which is the part that continues to screen the staff.

The other 2 contract reviews that are underway are Benchmark and Vista Med.

REPORT OF THE DEPUTY COMMANDANT

Ms. Seibert provided report:

Ms. Seibert shared the photo of all resident and staff taken in front of the PCU building. Ken is working on framing the larger picture. Ms. Seibert pointed out that the names of all individuals in the photo were listed to help find yourself in the picture.

Ms. Seibert mentioned the current resident silent auction taking place in the main hallway of the PCU building and invited all to take a look at all items being auctioned.

REPORT OF THE COUNCIL MEMBERS

Mr. Tony DiGiacomo stated they run a Veteran Resource Fair every year around July and August. This year it is July 31st from noon to 4pm. It will be in the downtown mall in Meadville. Anybody who is interested in being involved as far as a table, just let me know. We still have a few tables left.

Mr. Stewart stated we are getting the Activities Committee reactivated at the Home. It should get more involvement coming into the Home.

Ms. Foust introduced herself and stated Harry and her were on the committee at the American Legion at the state level and able to vote for hospital volunteer of the year and also activities of the year. You can use the VA and the Soldiers' and Sailors' Home to accumulate your hours. Not one 700 Post put any nominee in. It's my goal this year to have at least one nominee. Harry's Post and my Post are all in and the hours come from both the VA and the Soldiers' and Sailors' Home. So, what Harry said about giving activities back, we can use all those hours from both organizations to have at least one nominee for this district.

Mr. Supak introduced his guest Dan Drayer stating his brother is currently in the Home. He thanked everyone for working with him and his family to get his brother in.

Mr. Supak thanked Alyssa Cooley for helping him with a problem he's been having for 6 months and sticking by him until it was solved.

Mr. Supak stated he was present at the DAV fishing trip where we sent 2 bus loads of people. It was really a good time. The guys really enjoyed it. I want to thank the bus drivers that brought them down there.

Mr. Benacci stated they have relocated. They are no longer in the Court house. We have taken over at Chookie's old office and Congressman Kelly's. we moved there on the 15th so, we are operational. All of our contact information is the same except the change of address. We are scheduling an open house this month on the 28th. Everyone is welcome to attend. I just sent out a bunch of invites, if you didn't get one, I apologize. It is open to everyone. The thing we added to this since we have so much space, I want to try to make it an area where veterans, if they want to come in and read the paper, read a book, they can. That area has a couple small couches and some coffee tables. It will also have some computers that they can get on. We hope to have all that in place for our open house.

Mr. Benacci stated next month is the Roll-in for Veterans event that I'm on the committee and working on. It's going to be a 3 day event here at the Erie Sports Center. Saturday is going to be the big day. It will start off with a parade of vehicles, they have bands all day. We will have some sky divers and an awards ceremony. I'm working on flyovers. It will be July 14th, 15th and 16th.

Mr. Rich DiGiacomo thanked Cheri and Alyssa for the communication in keeping everyone updated. He appreciates that we keep everyone informed of the good as well as the bad news.

Chookie LaCamera (Guest) stated he works with Congressman Mike Kelly. He is the veteran and military services rep. He takes care of all the issues that veterans have. He works with outreach agencies connecting the dots from one to the other. He works with Congressman Kelly on a little bit of legislation. If you have legislative concerns, you may contact me or Joe.

Ed Kissel (Guest) complimented the Soldiers' and Sailors Home on a number of initiatives. We have a fishing club called "Sons of Lake Erie" we've worked with the vets, with Cheri and Beth on many issues. Penn Dot paid 2.7 million dollars to put a new bridge in to access the cemetery to go along with 100 million dollar plan to redo our bayfront by moving it. That will be a big showcase. I've been trying to get some help to name the bridge. **We will discuss naming of the bridge in resident council, come up with a few names and the residents and staff will vote on it.** By naming it, it gives a light to this facility. I've also been working on trying to connect our Anthony Wayne Blockhouse with other historical events on our Erie waterfront including the lighthouse, which is the oldest lighthouse on Lake Erie. Penn Dot is working on continuing a promenade from Parade Street connecting it to this facility under a controlled system where your vets and visitors could access the pavilion out here and go down to a nice green lawn along the corridor of Erie's front street connecting with a new bridge that will carry pedestrians in safe way over to our library and then farther west. **The pavilion is still being discussed awaiting follow up.**

Mr. Ed Kissel suggested the Commandants House be looked at as a possibility for the homeless or handicap veterans to have a home nearby where they can facilitate going on their own down along our bayfront and connecting to our historical museum and other waterfront uses. **Due to regulatory compliance the commandant house is in discussion of being removed, the request is with the historical commission currently.**

Senator Laughlin stated that Senate Bill 189 is sponsored by Senator Judy Ward. It is currently with the appropriations committee. Senator Laughlin also stated he noticed we have vacancies for the Jewish War Veteran and Blinded Veterans Association. He had a meeting yesterday with Linda Moore and inquired if there were any veterans who may be interested in filling the spots.

Gary Fry stated in his community they have a cruise on Memorial Day weekend. This year they had over 300 cars in Sugar Grove, PA. they take the proceeds and give some to the local church, food pantry, fire department and the last few years they've been sending it to Soldiers' and Sailors' Home. *Mr. Gary Fry presented a check to Ms. Seibert for the Soldiers' and Sailors' Home.*

OLD BUSINESS

No old business to discuss.

NEW BUSINESS

No new business to discuss.

GOOD OF THE COUNCIL

Mr. Rose stated we have 4 resident computers on the PCU side that have internet access. That program has been up and running for 6 months without incident. I'm proud to say that the employee computers went down once, and the resident computers were still up and running. It's been working very well for us.

Mr. Rose stated a couple employee were walking by and made remarks of feeling odd because they no longer had to wear a mask. They felt like they were doing something wrong. It struck a chord with me, and I just want to pass it on to you that that feeling is what it is like when you come back from an overseas tour. You don't have your weapon on you anymore, you feel naked without your armor. That is a little bit what it feels like when veterans come back. You feel out of place.

Mr. Fry stated he and his wife attended the Memorial Day Ceremony and they hit a home run. It was outstanding. Ken did an amazing job.

ADJOURNMENT

Meeting was adjourned at 10:03AM

The next Advisory Council Meeting is scheduled for Thursday, September 14, 2023, at 0900.

DRAFT