

Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services
Arrowheads Community Club
Ft. Indiantown Gap
Annville, PA 17003
August 16, 2017

1. **Call to Order:** Maj. Gen. Eric Weller, USAF Ret., Chairman, called the Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans' Services to order at 2:01PM.

- Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance led by Col. Ward Adams.

2. **Introductions:** The following Council Members, Representatives, designees and others were present:

Maj. Gen. Eric Weller, USAF Ret. - Chairman, Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans' Affairs
COL Ward Adams - Member at Large
Mr. Rick Hamp - DMVA, Office of Veterans' Affairs
Mr. Dusty Durand - DMVA Policy and Legislative Affairs
Ms. Kimberly Early - Department of Human Services
Ms. Christine Hawk - Department of Education
Mr. Steven Wolf - Department of Labor and Industry
Dr. Dale Adair - Department of Human Services
Ms. Anne Long - Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs
Mr. Chip Gilliland - DMVA, Office of Veterans' Affairs
Ms. Janette Krolczyk - DMVA, Office of Veterans' Affairs
Ms. Crystal Petery-Sherman - DMVA, Office of Veterans' Affairs
Mr. James Fearn - Department of Aging, Office of Long Term Living
Ms. Samantha Cossman - Department of Aging
Mr. Chris Kemmerer - Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
Ms. Belinda Albright - Northumberland County Veterans' Affairs
Ms. Lorta Valente - Luthercare/PA Cares
Mr. Michael Woody - Job Advocate
Ms. Shallyn Harmon - Job Advocate
Mr. Terry Stokes - State Veterans' Commission
Mr. Tim Irvin - DMVA, Information Technology
Ms. Christina Kotsalos - Department of Banking and Securities
Mr. Robert Rounce - Department of Health
Mr. Joel Mutschler - DMVA Policy and Legislative Affairs
Mr. Walt Remmert - Department of Agriculture
Mr. Cory Bender - DMVA, Office of Veterans' Affairs
Ms. Lisa Kaye - Monroe County Director of Veterans Affairs
Ms. Patricia Conroy - VAMC Wilkes-Barre
Ms. Constance Snavely - State Veterans' Commission
Ms. Jodi Zucco - Office of Attorney General
Ms. Shelly Forté - Office of Administration
Ms. Joan Nissley - DMVA Office of Public Affairs
Mr. Timothy Cowan - Stantec
Mr. Steven Jecker - Verdant Holdings, LLC/Greensburg Veterans Sunrise Center
Ms. Tracey Graham - Stantec
Mr. Rhett Goldsmith - Verdant Holdings, LLC/ Greensburg Veterans Sunrise Center
Mr. David Goldsmith - Verdant Holdings, LLC/ Greensburg Veterans Sunrise Center

Mr. Robert Wright - Stantec
Dr. Thomas Simpatico – Greensburg Veterans Sunrise Center
Mr. Larry Furlong - PA Fish and Boat Commission
Ms. Callie McKeon - Governor's Policy Office

3. Old Business:

- **Brief overview of the objective of the Governor's Advisory Council for Veteran Services (GAC-VS)**
 - **Review and Approval of May 17, 2017 Meeting Minutes**
 - **Committee Updates:**
- **Aging Committee:** Ms. Samantha Cossman, co-chair provided an update on their initiatives. The Committee's focus areas are adult day care, county home partnerships, reducing aging veteran homelessness, and expanding the PA Link initiatives for aging veterans. Ms. Cossman briefed that there was a tour of the Delaware County Nursing Home in June which determined that there is enough space, however upgrades estimated between \$8 and \$12 million will need to be made to meet VA requirements. BVH Director is continuing to work with the VA on this partnership. Aging Committee has partnered with the Health and Behavioral Service Committee to tackle the homelessness issue; Mr. Rick Hamp will present the outcome of the joint committee meeting under the Health and Behavioral Services Committee briefing. In the effort to expand PA Link initiatives the Committee is going to present on veterans systems and supports at the monthly PA Link monthly webinar for their partner network and Person-Centered Counselors in September which will also be available on the Long Term Training Institute website. In October the Director for Erie Agency on Aging and the Western Regional APPRISE Coordinator will be presenting at the training conference in Erie to help educate VSOs on some of the non-traditional services through the Aging Network that are available for veterans, their families, and caregivers. PA Link is developing a Veterans Day message to promote the local VSOs and Aid and Attendance assistance. The Committee is also in the planning stages of compiling a detailed list of PA partnered transportation options which will be a searchable list. The list will not only provide what type of transportation and where, but also capabilities (i.e. can they transport someone who is bariatric or on oxygen, can an attendant ride for free, is it curbside or door service?) and other key information. The Aging Committee is also exploring entertainment and recreational programs that exist for aging veterans within the state, pinpointing where there is a need for new programs, and how to promote them throughout the Commonwealth.

Questions/Comments: The question was asked if PA Link has a website; at this point they do not have their own site. There are service areas for the PA Link in the state that have their own websites (i.e. the Berks, Lancaster, Lebanon coordinator, Brian Long maintains a website which lists the services in that specific area).

- **Education, Employment and Workforce Development Committee:** Mr. Steven Wolf presented that the Committee is planning to hold a meeting in September. The Department of Labor & Industry met with Department of Military and Veterans Affairs to discuss way to assist each other in their efforts. L&I has Disabled Veteran Outreach Program Specialists (DVOPs) and Local Veteran Employment Representatives (LVERs) in CareerLink offices throughout the state. L&I is planning to prepare summaries on their quarterly reports which will provide information to DMVA on what those DVOPs and LVERs are doing in the field. The Department of Labor and Industry is looking how to foster strong relationships between DVOPs, LVERs, and VSOs to better assist veterans.

Questions/Comments: Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Eric Weller expressed that DMVA is willing to assist L&I in getting those DVOP and LVER positions filled and networked with VSOs and County Directors' offices. Ms. Samantha Cossman asked if it were possible to have LVERs attend PA Partner meetings to help promote the hiring of veterans.

- **Health and Behavioral Service Committee:** Mr. Rick Hamp, Chair informed the council that the Aging and the Health and Behavioral Services Committees held a joint meeting at which they came to the determination to focus on the issue of housing/homelessness. Next steps for this initiative is to solidify key stakeholder/SME involvement, develop the vision, goals, and strategy which will be reported on in November.

Questions/Comments: Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Eric Weller asked that the joint initiative also look at finding a solution for those veterans in domiciliary care in the state veterans' homes. Maximizing the use of the homes for veterans who require skilled care is imperative so Mr. Hamp did highlight that they are looking into alternative options for those who are able to take care of themselves but just need permanent/sanctuary housing.

Mr. Hamp provided updates on the 3 Veteran Centric Fairweather Lodges in the state and the impending new lodge in Lackawanna County. The OHMSAS team met with Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Eric Weller on 18 July to inform him on this initiative.

Questions/Comments: Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Eric Weller would like to set up a program of record by having the committee consider setting a goal of opening a projected number of lodges per year. The key is getting the counties who are interested in opening lodges partnered with the various agencies involved.

Mr. Rick Hamp also updated that the Mental Health First Aid classes are in demand but currently on hold due to the budgetary issues. They are funded by discretionary funding from OMHSAS; the plan is in place to hold 9 classes once the budget challenges are hurdled. Mr. Hamp proposed to add a sub-committee, Suicide Prevention-Peer Initiative or SPPEER Committee which will be represented by DMVA, PAARNG, and OMHSAS, and Joint Force Headquarters J-9.

Questions/Comments: The proposal was not opposed and the SPPEER Committee will constitute their membership.

Mr. Rick Hamp requested to also add an Information Technology sub-committee which would be formed to address proposed Legislation inter-departmental information sharing requirements. Secretary Sharon Minnich of Office of Administration (OA) is aware of the plan and concurs that OA and IT should be involved in the outlining of what the software would look like.

Questions/Comments: Ms. Kimberly Early asked if the proposed Legislation specifies which departments or agencies will be required to share information. Mr. Dusty Durand answered that it will be all governmental agencies within the Executive Branch. Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Eric Weller asked if there was any opposition to form an IT Committee within the GAC-VS; no one opposed. Mr. Steven Wolf mentioned that

L&I are involved in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh with the homeless veteran reintegration program grant which could assist homeless veterans in their transition to find employment.

- **Women Veteran Committee:** Ms. Jodi Zucco, Chair provided a reiteration of the committee mission: outreach, veteran symposium, identifying emerging needs, identifying gaps in benefits and services. The primary impediment of accomplishing initiatives has been getting feedback on what the unique needs of Pennsylvania women veterans actually are. To overcome this challenge the Committee has created a questionnaire, is in the planning stages of town hall meetings, and has been supplementing both of those initiatives with academic research. The questionnaire and town hall meetings would be most illuminating on the issues that Commonwealth female veterans face due to the research not being PA specific and the findings being inconsistent and vague. At this point the questionnaire is undergoing edits and they hope to have the questions and concerns with recommended edits resolved so that there will be more to report in the near future. The town hall meetings would be a forum for information sharing (i.e. benefits and services that are available) but also gathering to help them get an idea on what the unique needs of PA female veterans are. These meetings are in the planning phases but the Committee is looking to team up with DMVA to host the first one in Central PA as early as this fall.

Questions/Comments: Mr. Michael Woody asked the Committee what their ‘call to action’ is and expressed a willingness to assist the Women’s Committee in the effort. Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Eric Weller asked if there was a marketing plan of the questionnaire once it is finalized and Ms. Jodi Zucco responded that a plan could be put together pretty quickly. Ms. Belinda Albright asked that a town hall meeting be considered in the State College area for those women in more rural areas.

- **Judiciary Committee:** Mr. Chip Gilliland briefed the Judiciary Committee’s initiatives on behalf of their Committee Chair, Ryan Yoder. The three focus areas for the Judiciary Committee are the promotion of Veteran Service Units (VSUs) within the Department of Corrections, Veterans’ Court programs in the County Courts across Pennsylvania, and outreach to incarcerated veterans. SCI-Dallas has a 160-bed VSU, SCI-Houtzdale has a 196-bed VSU, and SCI-Mercer has a 126-bed VSU. The incarcerated veterans within those VSUs receive services tailored to them and unique assistance in preparing for transitioning back into the community. Many of the long-term incarcerated guys serve as mentors to the short-term offenders in an effort to help steer them in the right direction to utilize what the service unit offers to better themselves for re-entry into society and in turn, cut down on recidivism. National Institute of Corrections visited the VSU at SCI-Houtzdale and responded with “*Your program is the gold standard for what we should expect both in our treatment of veterans and in our criminal justice system...*” Mr. Gilliland attested how the atmosphere in a VSU differs from general population within a state correctional facility. Inmates within the VSUs participate in dog training programs which has been very effective.

Questions/Comments: Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Weller commented on the success of the VSUs and addressed the main issue being a number of inmates are paroled but must stay in prison because they do not have a ‘home plan’. This is problematic because it costs the state roughly \$45,000 a year to house one prisoner.

Mr. Chip Gilliland explained that hard to place paroled veterans (i.e. sex offenders and arsonists) are more likely to max out on their sentences and when they do, without a ‘home

plan', they leave the facility without any services or support to reintegrate into society. When provided with what a VSU offers (i.e. housing, employment, rehabilitative needs, etc.) they have a higher success rate upon being paroled. The Judiciary Committee and DMVA staff attended a Veteran's Court session in Dauphin County on 4 August to see how their program runs. The key component of the program are the assigned mentors which help the veterans through the three phases of the program. Currently there are 20 out of 67 counties in the Commonwealth that have Veteran's Courts; and while not every county may have the need for its own program, Dauphin County exemplified that multiple counties can work together to get veterans into these beneficial programs. The recidivism rates for specialty courts like Veteran's Court is dramatically lower than that of regular court. On 22 September, Widener University is hosting a Veteran's Court Conference which Judiciary Committee members plan to attend to find an avenue to encourage president judges throughout the counties to utilize existing or implement their own veteran's courts. A visit to the new VSU at SCI-Mercer on 21 July was an outreach effort that occurred where 50 veterans were provided information on benefits and supportive services by representatives from DMVA, L&I, VA Medical Center, and Tomorrow's Hope. These VSU outreach visits will continue to help lower recidivism rates.

Questions/Comments: Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Weller expressed his wish to sign an official memorandum of agreement with the Department of Corrections to reinforce DMVA's support with outreach efforts within the facilities. Ms. Constance Snavely inquired about the percentages of females going through Veteran's Court and also asked about the outreach efforts at SCI-Muncy which houses female offenders. Mr. Gilliland answered that he has been to both SCI-Muncy and SCI-Cambridge Springs. Ms. Kimberly Early asked if there was specific criteria for veterans to be accepted into the VSUs. Mr. Gilliland answered, 'absolutely'. They are screened by DOC. Ms. Samantha Cossman suggested reaching out to The Self Determination Housing Project as they do assist in housing hard to place offenders. Col. Ward Adams commented on how impressive Dauphin County Veteran's Court was organized and carried out. Ms. Callie McKeon commented that although counties may not want to be burdened with upfront costs to implement veteran's court, there may be an opportunity to think creatively to use the mentorship program in a county that may never have veteran's court. Mr. Gilliland did comment that they are looking to promote the collaboration between counties so that they all have the capability to guide veterans toward those programs. Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Weller pointed out that it was great to see that many of the mentors are through the service organizations. Mr. Terry Stokes pointed out that they were trying to associate a dollar value to help promote veteran's court in an effort to save the counties money. They have encountered a hurdle with that; the county commissioners tend to look at the savings as an avenue to make cuts. The Committee will have to look at another way to help promote veteran's court to be implemented or at least utilized.

4. New Business:

- Verdant Holdings, LLC presented their concept of The Greensburg Veterans Sunrise Center. They purchased the Greensburg State Correctional Institution in hopes to transform it into a complex to provide comprehensive health and wellness to veterans. They would build transitional safe housing surrounding the prison and the prison itself would become the clinic which would provide clinical services to any veterans coming into the facility including homeless transition, behavioral health care, substance abuse rehabilitation, physical

disabilities rehabilitation, mental illness and psychosocial treatment programs. They have partnered with a team of clinical providers and also architects and engineers from Stantec who will design and convert the prison as well as build the surrounding housing including a specialized wing for female veterans. Their goals are to create a VA approved “Veterans Choice Act” behavioral health, clinical, and transitional facility; become certified and licensed as a “Service Continuum of Care Provider” to the 23 VISNs within the DOD; and provide supportive housing to veterans including re-entry programs, veteran’s court and drug court adjudications. The project is completely privately funded; they only need they have are the referrals of veterans to their facility. They would like the support of the Commonwealth including DMVA ensuring future veteran referrals. For a video of the concept, visit <http://veteranssunrisecenter.com/>.

Questions/Comments: Maj. Gen. (Ret.) Weller clarified that they are fully funded and not looking for any monetary support. They confirmed that they are looking for a letter of agreement to provide referrals of veterans. The hope is to extend resources for veterans in addition to the existing services. The question was asked if they have considered the licensing requirements for the clinical services they will provide. The answer was given that the preplanning of occupancy will drive what type of licensure and accreditation will be required and that will happen well in advance before anyone will be living there or using the services. Ms. Kimberly Early asked if veterans will be living there with their families. Mr. David Goldsmith responded “yes, that will be a possibility.” Ms. Jodi Zucco asked if this an initiative derived from similar missions nationwide or if this is an original mission. Mr. David Goldsmith replied that it is an original mission and explained how the idea came to light. She also asked if they have formal arrangements with the VA and DOD. Mr. Goldsmith then responded that they are currently talking to the VA. Ms. Tracey Graham with Stantec explained that the programs would be geared to have the same standards and requirements to ease the transition from the DOD and or the VA. They are prepared to execute planning and services to satisfy whatever the VA would want them to do.

5. **Next Meeting Date:** Monday, November 13, 2017 from 3:00PM to 5:00PM, at the Governor’s Residence
6. **Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 4:08PM

The minutes of this meeting are respectfully submitted by: Crystal Petery-Sherman,
Administrative Officer, OVA