



Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services

MEETING MINUTES
February 3, 2021 1:00-2:44 PM
Webex Meeting

COUNCIL MEMBERS/DESIGNEES IN ATTENDANCE

Maj Gen (R) Eric G. Weller, Chairman Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans Affairs	MG Mark J. Schindler, Acting Adjutant General
Andrew Barnes, Governor's Policy Office	Kory Auch, Office of Administration
Denise Verchimak, Dept of Education	Matthew James, Dept of Health
Tammy Ferguson, Dept of Corrections	Cheryl Cook, Dept of Agriculture
Crystal Houser, Dept of Labor & Industry	Jamie Dunlap, PA Council on the Arts
Larry Furlong, Fish & Boat Commission	Kurt Myers, PennDOT
Terrell Martin, DCED	Micah Snead, Member at Large
Kevin Longenecker, Dept of Aging	Toshua Jarrett, Member at Large
Christina Kotsalos, Dept of Banking & Securities	Sam Petrovich, State Veterans Commission
Jeff Geibel, Dept of Drug & Alcohol Programs	

COUNCIL MEMBERS/DESIGNEES NOT IN ATTENDANCE

Col (R) Ward Adams, Member at Large	PWVC
Teresa Miller/Kristen Houser, DHS	State Civil Service Commission
Cindy Dunn/John Hallas, DCNR	

OTHERS PRESENT

Margo Coleman, DMVA	Andy Simpson, Assoc. of PA Courts
Col Christine Munch, DMVA, PAANG	Janette Krolczyk, DMVA
Dr. Angela Keen, VISN 4	Joel Mutschler, DMVA
Elizabeth Cooper, DVOP Franklin/Adams Co	Rick Hamp, DMVA
Donna Tilley Hess, DHS, OMHSAS	Nicholas "Chip" Gilliland, DMVA
Ginny Mastrine, DHS, OMHSAS	Katie Reibsane, DMVA
Jonathan Bowman, DHS, OLTL	Brian Natali, DMVA
Marc Ferraro, DMVA	Eric Felty, DMVA
Michelle Garrison, DMVA	Samantha Cossman, DMVA
Daniel Lynch, PA Chiefs of Police Assoc.	Chelsea Ellsworth, DMVA
Fred Nardei, Pittsburgh VA	Jennifer Spitler, DMVA
Joshua Scheinberg, Dept of Agriculture	Erica Moore, DMVA
Norm Marden, OAG	Gilbert "Dusty" Durand, DMVA
Marilyn Kelly-Cavotta, Moravian College	Seth Benge, DMVA
James Fearn, DHS, OLTL	Joan Nissley, DMVA
Richard Podguski, Dept of Corrections	Tim Irvin, DMVA
Michael Carrington, Dept of Corrections	Ivy Lloyd, DMVA
Danny Osten, Cumberland County VA	Greg Holler, DMVA
MG (R) Robert French	Robbie Chiappelli, PennDOT

Lisa Grayson, Cumberland County	Evelyn Chianelli, DCED
Justin Slep, PSACDVA President	William Reed, YWCA of Greater Harrisburg
Lisa Kaye, Monroe County VA	Jolene Richardson, 193 SOW
Sierra Bilous, DHS, OMHSAS	Billy Lanham, USDOL, VETS
Bill Cress, VA Healthcare	Annie Beegle, Volunteers of America SSVF
Lee Ann Stewart, PA Office of Vocational Rehab	Tom Stark, CCAP
Tara Okon, Dept of L&I	Jessica Penn-Shire, DHS, OMHSAS
AJ Byerly, Air Guard, Middletown	Audrey Berstreser, VVA
Danielle Rudy, PA Housing Finance Agency	Erin Walters, Dept of Aging
Janice Mazzitti, Dept of L&I	Jeremiah Underhill, Dept of L&I
Sam Estrada, DMVA	

<p>CALL TO ORDER, INTRODUCTIONS AND WELCOME</p>	<p>The Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services was called to order at 1:00 PM.</p> <p>Ms. Janette Krolczyk led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance and moment of silence. She thanked everyone for joining the meeting and asked that participants enter their name and agency into the chat panel or email her for attendance purposes.</p> <p>MG Mark J. Schindler, Acting Adjutant General for Pennsylvania, addressed the membership to introduce himself. He took a moment to express his thanks for all the individual and collective work the Council and Committees were doing for the veterans of Pennsylvania and explained how proud he is to be the lead veteran advocate for the commonwealth in his new position. MG Schindler added that the DMVA would continue to work collaboratively with sister departments, agencies, and external working groups to explore capabilities that help deliver the best services to service members, veterans, and their families.</p> <p>Maj Gen (R) Eric Weller added his thanks for the fantastic work that the Council and Committees have been able to accomplish through the COVID-19 pandemic and any other challenges that have come up due to the dedication from everyone who continues to participate in serving veterans.</p>
<p>APPROVAL OF NOV 18, 2020 MINUTES</p>	<p>Ms. Krolczyk explained that the draft meeting minutes were sent to the presenters for correction and then distributed to the membership via the meeting notice. All prior action items were addressed. Instead of a vote, Ms. Krolczyk asked if there were any needed edits. Hearing no comments, Ms. Krolczyk approved and accepted the minutes.</p>
<p>AGING COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ms. Margo Coleman addressed the group and explained that she and her Co-Chair, Jonathan Bowman, continue to hold committee meetings to discuss plans for their various goals. ▪ Goal 1 outlines the increased awareness of services and supports for aging veterans. The committee considers using public and nonpublic nursing bed capacity for veterans in need of long-term care if DMVA

	<p>beds are unavailable. Many steps are required for goal accomplishment, but future meetings will look into possible policy changes or other necessary considerations.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Goal 2 discusses increasing awareness of opportunities for community engagement. Educational videos or programming resources would be ideal for this goal, but the committee is still working on a path forward. Potential items may include webinars or public service announcements that could reach large numbers of individuals. ▪ Goal 3 discusses safeguarding Pennsylvania's aging veterans from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and self-harm. Many entities are working on this topic, namely the Older Adult Financial Exploitation Task Force, spearheaded by the Area Agencies on Aging. The Aging Committee will continue to work with the Task Force, participate in the monthly meetings, and glean any recommendations from the study to advocate in any way possible. ▪ Mrs. Samantha Cossman briefed about the veteran Pension Poaching Awareness Campaign. The goal will be to educate the mainstream healthcare and human service providers across the commonwealth about pension poaching regarding elder abuse. Mrs. Cossman explained that there are large numbers of individuals and locations that the campaign would ideally touch. Communication will occur electronically, sending a postcard through pre-existing channels in sister state agencies, trade organizations, and other service providers. These advocates will disburse the information toolkit during the month of June, which is world elder abuse awareness month. ▪ Mrs. Cossman also shared a training update for the Protecting Aging Veterans Work Group. She explained that one area of discussion was how to provide virtual education to veteran advocates from all systems regarding older adult protective services. This group is partnering with the Protective Services Division of the Department of Aging and will be hosting four one-hour training sessions in the spring. All content will be the same, and veteran advocates only need to attend one session. Dates will be forthcoming.
<p>HOMELESS COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mrs. Cossman briefed that new areas of effort recently centered around the awareness of veteran considerations among other agencies. An example would be the income thresholds for veterans accepted into veteran housing units. Educational resources may help key veteran advocates at agencies that could assist with the housing issue to ensure veterans meet these units' criteria and keep them filled. By raising awareness among the Public Housing Authorities to screen applicants for military service, they can obtain the assistance of the Regional Program Outreach Coordinators (RPOCs) and PA VETConnect for any required wrap-around supports these potential tenants would need. ▪ Mrs. Cossman explained that the Homeless Committee had offered an open invitation for veteran advocates to join the monthly committee meetings. Each month a committee meeting will focus on a different topic for an in-depth look.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Homeless Committee has also begun collaborating with three other committees so far. Various workgroups are developing for specific discussions between the Women Veterans, Judiciary, and Aging Committees. ▪ The Homeless Committee would also like to work with the Health Promotions Committee potentially. Mrs. Cossman has heard that veterans sometimes have difficulty accessing emergency shelters due to behavioral health issues. ▪ Healthcare Navigators are now at each Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF) location. The RPOCs will be interfacing with these individuals for mutual support. ▪ Mrs. Cossman provided some additional information from Mr. Bill Cress that states: The National Defense Authorization Act was enacted into law on January 1, 2021, and includes a provision (Section 9103) that expands HUD-VASH eligibility to include veterans with an “other than honorable” discharge status. The National HUD-VASH Program Office, in consultation with the Office of General Counsel, is actively working to develop implementation guidance to reflect this eligibility change. The National Homeless Program office will be sharing additional information soon, but in the meantime, proceed with normal operations.
<p>EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ms. Crystal Houser addressed the audience and explained the briefing would cover areas of "employment" for the first quarter, including PA CareerLink, Veteran's Hiring, and the HIRE Vets Medallion Program. ▪ Ms. Houser shared that out of the 58 comprehensive CareerLink locations across the commonwealth, there are 30 Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialists (DVOPS) in 29 of the CareerLink offices. These DVOPS are equipped to assist veterans with significant barriers to employment, including service-connected disabilities, homelessness, justice-involved individuals, those who lack a high school diploma, have low income, or are between the ages of 18-24. ▪ Twenty-three of the PA CareerLink locations also have 25 Local Veteran Employment Representatives (LVERS). These individuals serve businesses that may be unaware of the benefits or incentives of hiring veterans. ▪ The CareerLink locations depend on their network of partners to serve the commonwealth's veterans. For example, DMVA shared an announcement regarding the waiver of the CDL skills test for current or former military members who operated a commercial vehicle as part of their military duties. Ms. Houser immediately shared this information with the CareerLink staff members, as they interface with veterans every day. ▪ In 2020, over 13,000 veterans were served by the CareerLink locations. In 2021, initiatives are to identify and strengthen the connection to community partners in all areas across Pennsylvania and focus on outreach. ▪ Mr. Kory Auch explained that a few years ago, there was a significant HR effort to consolidate the hiring functions for both civil service and

	<p>non-civil service state government positions into a common platform. Since then, the State FY 19-20 showed that over 1,100 veterans were hired into permanent, full-time, externally posted positions. Mr. Auch shared that the Veterans Preference law is working as intended. There was also an update to the law in October 2020 to clarify and refine the language.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr. Auch also explained that previously Veterans Preference would not be applied for an active-duty service member who was in the process of transitioning back into civilian life but whose separation was not yet complete. The update to the law also allows service members within 90 days of separation to have Veterans Preference applied. Additionally, many military skills are hard to translate to civilian resumes, so this law reinforces and values the experiences and training obtained during service. ▪ Mr. Billy Lanham briefed on the HIRE Vets Medallion Program, the only federal-level program that recognizes employers. Employers of all sizes can receive this award from the Department of Labor for their efforts to recruit, employ and retain veterans in their workforce. This program is now accepting applications for 2021, and employers can apply online at www.hirevets.com. Employers who have been awarded the digital medallion from the Secretary of Labor can showcase it on websites and marketing materials, acknowledging they are veteran-friendly. ▪ During 2019-2020, the Department of Labor contacted over 3 million employers throughout Pennsylvania and the surrounding states. Many organizations promote the value of this program.
<p style="text-align: center;">HEALTH PROMOTIONS COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ms. Donna Tilley Hess welcomed AJ Byerly and Jolene Richardson to the committee. Both ladies work for the special operations wing at the 193rd and are very experienced in assisting our service members. ▪ The committee is still waiting on the ASIST licensing. ▪ Donna explained the graphs presented covered data from the Psychological Health Program. These data points showcased the total number of services provided by month for 2019 and 2020, as well as an annual total. The data was further broken down by type of activity. ▪ The Star Behavioral Health Program (SBHP) and other initiatives such as the Governor's Challenge focus on ensuring proper services and resources are available and that the providers understand military culture. ▪ Lori Murphy has done an excellent job connecting with the community resources and ensuring awareness of these programs is shared. Ms. Byerly and Ms. Richardson's contact information will be added for future reference as they all work towards the same effort. ▪ The Federal VA now has nine Community Engagement and Partnership Coordinators (CEPC) located at the VA locations that service Pennsylvania. The five RPOCs will be interfacing with these individuals to ensure constant education regarding what each entity does, where gaps in services may occur, and what resources are available.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In response to the pandemic, there has been a considerable increase in the use of VA Video Connect (VVC), which allows for telepsych and telehealth appointments. ▪ The VA has also set up a website, including a "Keep Me Informed" tool, which offers excellent information on the vaccine distribution. ▪ The Veterans Channel is a podcast that provides collaborative efforts to reduce service member and veteran suicides, and many individuals from the committee provided information and resources to be shared. These podcasts are also recorded so listeners can revisit or catch up on the news. ▪ Ms. Tilley Hess explained that an application was submitted for funding to assist with expanding the Fairweather Lodge initiative. She also explained that it would be beneficial to work with the Homeless Committee on shelter/housing challenges. ▪ OMHSAS obtained a grant to implement the 988 dialing code, which would replace the full-sized suicide prevention/crisis line. This shortened code would be easier to remember and, therefore, more user-friendly. ▪ Continued efforts surround the HEAL PA initiative, ensuring that trauma-informed care culture is present through state agencies' policies and practices, which focus on prevention and healing.
<p style="text-align: center;">WOMEN VETERANS COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Col Christine Munch provided a briefing that included some new initiatives for 2021. As briefings occur, the committee members look at how each topic can specifically pertain to women. ▪ Four new members were added to the committee (Elizabeth Cooper, Dwaneen Hicks, Erica Moore, and Ivy Lloyd), which will help accomplish new initiatives. ▪ Committee members will interface with members of the Homeless Committee to discuss homelessness among the women's population. Homelessness among women is on the rise across the US, not just with the veteran sector, but this awareness will assist in working on this initiative in the future. ▪ Col Munch explained that the committee continues to gather information on how to do a virtual Town Hall event potentially. They are looking into a few possibilities, and this may involve leaning on other committees to get this initiative across the finish line. ▪ The committee looks forward to the generation of women-centric information that can be incorporated into PA VETConnect. The committee would also like to develop a Toolkit that could be shared through many avenues. California put together a great example of something that could be done for Pennsylvania women veterans. Virginia and Ohio also have excellent materials that could aid the committee without having to start from scratch. These items will also assist in drawing women veterans in, communicating unmet needs, and allowing their voices to be heard. ▪ As March is Women's History Month, committee members discussed the possibility of doing some annual event in the future.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The PA VFW has a Women Veterans Committee, and Col Munch explained they would link up to discuss their annual women's retreat, in addition to other mutual efforts. ▪ Col Munch ended by saying that there are other groups that the committee can connect with regarding their continual efforts: to identify women veterans and provide outreach and awareness of resources, of which they may not be aware.
<p style="text-align: center;">JUDICIARY COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr. Michael Carrington addressed the membership as the Statewide Veterans Coordinator for the Department of Corrections and the most current Chair for the Judiciary Committee. Mr. Carrington arrived in his Coordinator position in mid-December of 2020, so he spent the previous month or two getting caught up with committee initiatives and timeline details. ▪ Mr. Carrington updated the membership on the number of verified veterans within the facilities and information on the Veterans Service Units (VSUs), including approximate recidivism rates. ▪ Over 120 employees have been identified, covering all facilities, who want to engage with veteran reentry services, which was very encouraging. ▪ The facilities identified many COVID-19 cases, so the veteran services have been put on hold. However, due to many inmates in the VSU at SCI Houtzdale, this location took the initiative of using technology to assist with remote learning and program coordination during this time. Packets of information were also generated so the inmates could continue to engage and move forward with their program work and reentry efforts. Mr. Carrington stated that through the assistance of SCI Houtzdale, they are hoping to create a packaged curriculum that can be distributed to the other institutions, allowing for positive engagement during the pandemic. ▪ Mr. Carrington explained that obtaining his position during this time is an excellent opportunity for the department to hit the “reset” button, engage the 120+ volunteers at all locations, and work on a uniformed reentry-focused plan for our incarcerated veterans. ▪ The Department of Corrections discussed many short-term goals. These included maintaining and sharing the verified veterans listing with all local coordinators on (at least) a quarterly basis. Facilities will identify barriers to veterans’ services, form subcommittees to address uniformity issues, and provide VSU program curriculum packets to coordinators for statewide distribution. ▪ Long-term goals included ensuring a consistent and uniformed approach to veteran-specific programming, filling all VSU beds available, and temporarily transferring VSU inmates to high-functioning VSUs. This opportunity would allow inmates to bring the experience back to the parent institution. ▪ Mr. Andrew Simpson briefed for the Association of PA Courts. He explained that he would update the membership with 2020 year-end stats in a few months when the statistics department has that information generated.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Although no new Veterans Treatment Courts (VTCs) were established in 2020, there will be reasonable effort during the upcoming year. There has also been good discussion regarding the concept of a regional veteran's court in central Pennsylvania. This area of the commonwealth doesn't have many specialty courts, so this effort would be an excellent opportunity to assist many veterans. Adding a Veterans Track is always an option for a county with an existing specialty court, which would serve the same purpose by providing the immediate care and specialized services justice-involved veterans need. ▪ Mr. Simpson explained that the awareness campaign is making progress. Materials are being developed and distributed to the 500+ MDJ offices and county courthouses to address the early identification of veterans in the system, recruit veteran mentors and raise awareness of the Veteran Treatment Court successes. Mr. Simpson is hoping for an execution time of summer or fall of this year. ▪ For the existing 25 VTCs, a veteran's court mobile app is being developed for all Vet Court team members, a one-stop-shop for all the resources these teams will need. ▪ The online Veterans Mentor training course will be updated and will hopefully be available sometime in March. Since there were Adobe Flash Player issues, this offered an opportunity to update some of the content. ▪ This May, there will be a Statewide VTC Virtual Symposium. AOPC is working with Justice for Vets, and there will also be some national speakers on a range of topics. ▪ This April, Rich Podguski will deliver a motivational interview training to the treatment court judges. ▪ Mr. Carrington concluded by covering the committee goals. These goals include identifying veterans, expanding VTCs and VSUs, executing C&P exams, reporting measurable outcomes, and working with the Homeless Committee. Many inmates leaving the system and reentering society lack the social supports they need to be successful.
<p>PA VETCONNECT UPDATE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr. Mutschler explained that PA VETConnect looks for the gaps in services and works to find collaborative solutions through multiple sources, including the GAC-VS. ▪ RPOCs continue to make meaningful connections, and there have been over 14,000 connections made since the inception of the program. ▪ RISE PA is the upcoming statewide resource and referral tool that is being generated. PA VETConnect resource information has been designed to integrate with this commonwealth tool. ▪ Mr. Mutschler explained the five-step process that dissects the PA VETConnect process, provided measurable data obtained from the program, and showed the top five issues named by the County Directors who participated in a recent survey. ▪ Through participation with the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), DMVA participated in five tele-Town Hall events and reached over 267,000 veterans and family members.

NEW BUSINESS/ GOOD OF THE ORDER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr. Andrew Barnes expressed his thanks to the members of the Council and Committees for the work accomplished. He explained that the GAC-VS is an entity that the Governor believes to be valuable. He is committed to breaking down barriers and putting resources into education and workforce development. ▪ Maj Gen (R) Weller also expressed his thanks to the membership for their continued support of Pennsylvania's veterans. He was amazed at the work accomplished, simply because people decided to work together on challenging issues. ▪ 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.
	Next Meeting: May 19, 2021 1:00-3:00PM Webex Meeting
ADJOURNMENT	The meeting adjourned at 2:44 PM.

NEW ACTION ITEMS

#	ACTION	STATUS
1	Homeless and Health Promotions Committees to discuss ways they could assist veterans who are trying to access emergency shelter when they are displaying signs of behavioral health issues.	Complete

OLD ACTION ITEMS

#	ACTION	STATUS
1	N/A	