

**Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services**  
**Building 4-134**  
**Fort Indiantown Gap**  
**Annville, PA 17003**

**May 16, 2018**  
**MEETING MINUTES**

1. **Call to Order:** Ms. Crystal Petery, called the Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans' Services to order at 1:01PM.

- Invocation and Pledge of Allegiance led by Brian Natali.
- Introduction of the Council was conducted.

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

Maj. Gen. Anthony Carrelli, The Adjutant General Pennsylvania National Guard  
Maj. Gen. (Ret) Eric Weller, Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans' Affairs - Chairman  
Mr. Edgar Burris, Chairman of the State Veterans' Commission - Co-Chairman  
COL (Ret) H. Ward Adams - Member at Large  
Ms. Donna Hess - Department of Human Services, Office of Mental Health Substance Abuse Svcs.  
Ms. Jodi Skiles - Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs  
Mr. Robert Rounce - Department of Health  
Mr. Ryan Yoder - Department of Corrections  
Mr. William Otis - PA Board of Probation and Parole  
Ms. Crystal Petery - DMVA, Office of Veterans' Affairs  
Mr. Andrew Barnes - Governor's Policy Office  
Mr. Kory Auch - Office of Administration  
Ms. Sandra Patterson - Office of Administration, Health and Human Services Delivery Center  
Ms. Christine Hawk - Department of Education  
Mr. Tim Irvin - DMVA, Information Technology  
Mr. Eric Felty - DMVA, Information Technology  
Mr. Terry Stokes - PA VFW, Veteran Court Advocate  
Mr. Brian Natali - DMVA, Office of Veterans' Affairs  
Ms. Jamie Dunlap - PA Council on the Arts  
Mr. Kit Watson - Pennsylvania American Legion  
Mr. Ed Beck - DMVA, Bureau of Veterans' Homes  
Mr. James Fearn - Department of Aging, Office of Long Term Living  
Ms. Samantha Cossman - Department of Aging  
Mr. Ben Laudermilch - Department of Human Services  
Mr. Larry Furlong - PA Fish and Boat Commission  
Mr. Cory Bender - DMVA, Office of Veterans' Affairs  
Mr. Greg Holler - DMVA, Office of Veterans' Affairs  
Ms. Belinda Albright - Northumberland County of Veterans' Affairs  
Ms. Audrey Bergstresser - Vietnam Veterans of America  
Mr. Jon Peterson - Care Partners Plus  
Mr. Joel Mutschler - DMVA, Policy and Legislative Affairs  
Ms. Lisa Kaye - Monroe County Director of Veterans' Affairs  
Ms. JoAnn Tresco - State Military Family Services  
Ms. Pat Conroy - Wilkes Barre VA Medical Center

Mr. Michael McManus - Department of Community and Economic Development  
Ms. Cheryl Cook - Department of Agriculture  
Mr. Mark Todero - PA Army National Guard  
Ms. Jodi Zucco - Office of Attorney General  
Mr. Ben Lipschultz - Central Penn College  
Mr. William Habacirch - Central Penn College  
Mr. Don Guerrisi - Central Penn College  
Mr. Eric Darling - Valhalla Veterans Services  
Mr. Jeffrey White - Vietnam Veterans of America PA State Council  
Ms. Constance Snively - State Veterans' Commission  
Ms. Manisha Arya - Office of Administration, Health and Human Services Delivery Center  
Mr. Frederick Nardei, Jr. - U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs  
Ms. Christina Kotsalos - PA Banking and Securities  
Mr. Thomas Applebach - Lehigh County Director of Veterans' Affairs  
Ms. Sherry Peters - Department of Human Services, Office of Mental Health Substance Abuse Svcs.  
Mr. Rick Hamp - DMVA, Office of Veterans' Affairs  
Mr. Chip Gilliland - DMVA, Office of Veterans' Affairs

### 3. **Old Business:**

- **Review and Approval of February 21, 2018 Meeting Minutes**

**Mr. Ed Burris motioned to approve the minutes, Maj. Gen. (Ret) Eric Weller seconded.**

- **Committee Updates:**

- **Aging Committee:** Mr. Ed Beck, Co-chair briefed that their committee would like to broaden the reach and look at other agencies can support other adult day care providers rather than limiting adult day programs and county home partnerships to the State Veterans' Homes. They intend to transition the adult day initiative to work with the joint committee on homelessness to further pursue that.

The Adult Day is currently on hold until for the construction project. There have been meetings with legislators who've expressed interest in the County Home Partnerships and the next steps will be meeting with Department of Health to discuss regulatory considerations. The committee has been exploring socialization and recreational opportunities for aging Veterans, family members, and caregivers within the Commonwealth. They have been working with Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Fish and Boat Commission to learn more about discounted licenses, activities, and upcoming events and how to promote that information through military and Veteran publications. They also will be partnering with the PA Council on the Arts to explore what programs they offer. They are looking to set up pilot sites across the state to enhance partnerships between service organization posts and Council of the Art or DCNR or Fish & Boat to use arts to help Veterans especially those with Dementia. They are also hoping to link with the other committees within the GAC on using arts to help Veterans heal from military sexual trauma, behavioral health or suicide ideations, or those within the prison system. The Committee has also been looking to expand PA Link initiatives by partnering with the DMVA and VISN by offering caregiver support programming, possibly conducting a caregiver forum. They have discussed hooking up the State Veteran Homes with the Alzheimer Association to make sure that connection is there. They would also like to find a point of contact at VISN4 to inquire if there is interest in pursuing Veterans Directed Care. They would also like to send out a blanket message to the

County Directors and all Area Agency on Aging Directors to encourage the formation of partnerships.

The Aging Committee has partnered with the Health and Behavioral Service Committee to tackle reducing veteran homelessness. They have created the following workgroups: Transitional Housing, Adult Day and LIFE, Cross-System Collaboration, and Resource Inventory. One of the focuses of the Transitional Housing workgroup is looking at transitional housing programs and determining how to get them to help veterans into a more permanent living situation. The Adult Day and Life workgroup is focusing on community living solutions. The Cross-System Collaboration and Resource Inventory workgroups are still being formed and have been charged with determining leads and establishing a meeting schedule. At the August GAC-VS meeting, there will be an update on those work groups' initiatives.

**Questions/Comments:** Maj. Gen. (Ret) Eric Weller invited Ms. Cossman and the Committee to attend the meeting with Department of Human Services regarding the LIFE Program.

- **Education, Employment and Workforce Development Committee:** Mr. Kory Auch is the new Chair and presented that the committee is trying to lean toward customer centric rather than government centric. The committee has been a part of various job fairs, expos, and the Making Sense of Finance events throughout the state. Mr. Auch discussed that the committee is reassessing the different veteran programs across the Commonwealth that are already available and plan to look at how well advertised they are. This reassessment has allowed for the different agencies to really focus on how their programs are set up and if any changes could be made to improve those programs for those who would benefit from them. They will then try to identify the gaps in programs and services until they can determine what is already out there and how well it is being used.

**Questions/Comments:** Mr. Ed Burris asked if it is Mr. Auch's intention to have the Department of Labor and Industry provide an update on their rebranding and consolidation of the Career Link offices. Mr. Auch replied that it could be one of the agency projects that is showcased at the next meeting.

- **Health and Behavioral Service Committee:** Mr. Rick Hamp, Chair updated the Council on the Fairweather Lodge initiative. The committee members visited the Lodge in Cumberland/Perry in April and the Lodge in Carlisle. While the Carlisle Lodge is not Veteran specific, it is run as a true Fairweather Lodge. There was a conference in State College for Fairweather Lodge Coordinators where we were able to gain a lot of information.

**Questions/Comments:** Maj. Gen. (Ret) Eric Weller asked if the facility in Quakertown, New Vitae, is considered a Fairweather Lodge. Mr. Hamp and Ms. Donna Tilley-Hess answered that at this point, they are not licensed as a Fairweather Lodge through the Department of Human Services. Maj. Gen. (Ret) Eric Weller asked if there is anything that the Council can do to help garner interest in these Lodges from the County Commissioners or the Directors for Veterans' Affairs. Mr. Rick Hamp stated that they are working with some of the county representatives who are interested in taking steps to building lodges and working through the licensing process.

- **Health and Behavioral Service Committee (continued):** Dr. Jackson, DMVA Chief Medical Officer is now involved in the Community Centered Behavioral Health Clinics Steering Committee. The clinics are providing direct medical services to veterans and their families. Mr. Hamp referred to the current opioid crisis that and the partnerships among Commonwealth agencies allowed us the opportunity to participate in six (6) different summits. They are also continuing to build partnerships with other community organizations in relation to those who face behavioral health challenges. The Mental Wellness Association of America has raised funds to conduct Mental Health First Aid classes and making us aware of where those classes are being held. There are visits to The New Vitae Wellness and Recovery in Quakertown because they will be expanding services for Veterans who suffer from PTSD and co-occurring drug and alcohol challenges. In addition, a visit to Retreat, located in Lancaster, is scheduled to get a better idea on the services they offer to Veterans and their families.

**Questions/Comments:** Maj. Gen. (Ret) Eric Weller asked if DHS has a preferred referral list of the PTSD and drug and alcohol programs/providers. Ms. Donna Tilley-Hess answered that they held regional trainings to promote military cultural evidence and best practices to the audience which was comprised of providers. Upon completion of the training those providers then had the option of being added to a list vetted by DHS. That regional training was held a few years ago, so the list may be slightly outdated. Ms. Sherry Peters stated that three County Directors for Veterans' Affairs offices received funding from Drug and Alcohol Department to aid in behavioral health training.

- **Women Veteran Committee:** Ms. Jodi Zucco, Chair provided an update to the Council that they have been adding committee members in the effort to diversify the service era representation. The questionnaire was disseminated on April 19, 2018 and will be on DMVA's website until the end of June. June 30, 2018 is the date of the Women Veteran Town Hall and Expo at the Army Heritage Education Center in Carlisle. Any agency who would be willing to set up an exhibitor table in support of this event, it would be greatly appreciated. The main topics of discussion will focus on benefits and health care, but other areas such as education, employment, housing, and finance are informative as well.

**Questions/Comments:** Maj. Gen. (Ret) Eric Weller asked if the committee has reached out to the women's group of Berks County to participate in the Town Hall and Expo. Ms. Zucco affirmed that she has contacted that group. Ms. Donna Tilley-Hess asked if they could be informed what other groups will be participating so as not to duplicate information at the event. Mr. Jeff White asked if there is a flyer for the Town Hall and Expo. Ms. Zucco explained that it is part of the next steps of the communication plan. Mr. White asked if the event is exclusive to Pennsylvania women veterans only. Ms. Zucco responded that no one will be turned away but the information available will be Pennsylvania specific.

- **Judiciary Committee:** Mr. Ryan Yoder, Chair briefed the council on the Judiciary Committee's activity. He and Mr. Chip Gilliland visited SCI-Fayette to speak with the incarcerated Veterans on the benefits and services available to them. They also had a chance to present statistics on the VSUs. A VSU at SCI-Phoenix is projected to open in the summer and one in SCI-Muncy is to open in July. The unit at SCI-Muncy is the first all-female VSU in the state and possibly the country. Mr. Yoder provided an overview of a new concept of having a Veteran Service Office to assist incarcerated Veterans with community reentry

services is being generated. The Veteran Service Offices will be located in the state correctional facilities that do not have a VSU; currently there are 22 facilities and would support any incarcerated Veteran who wishes to participate in a reentry program. Mr. Yoder briefed that NFL great Rocky Bleier visited a couple of the correctional facilities to talk about his Quarterback for Life Program and to and take pictures with the Veterans of the VSUs. Mr. Bleier presented a Vietnam Veteran pin to one of the DOC employees to honor his service. Several members of the Judiciary Committee have visited the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts regarding their Veteran Courts and a regional concept that they are working on.

**Questions/Comments:** Maj. Gen. Eric Weller added that once a plan is in place for regional Veteran courts, he would like to have the service organizations to help set up mentorship programs within each of the counties. Maj. Gen. Eric Weller and Mr. Chip Gilliland have been working to identify premier Veterans groups in the state. One thing they are talking to these groups about are the hard to place Veterans who are in need of a housing plan in order to be paroled. Maj. Gen. Eric Weller provided Mr. Yoder with the contact information of one particular transitional housing facility for those hard to place individuals. Maj. Gen. Eric Weller stated that Mr. Rich Hudzinski of Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) inquired about post-sentence PTSD testing. Mr. Yoder and Maj. Gen. Weller agreed to set up a meeting to include Mr. Hudzinski.

Mr. Jeff White asked how many incarcerated Veterans there are in the state. Mr. Yoder answered that there are currently about 3,000. Mr. White asked how many of those incarcerated Veterans will be able to enter into the VSU program. Mr. Yoder explained that there is criteria inmate Veterans must meet. The Veteran Service Office would bridge that gap for incarcerated Veterans who would not be eligible to be a part of the VSUs.

- **Office of Administration/Information Technology Committee:** Ms. Sandra Patterson, Chair briefed the council on some statistics since the implementation of Act 69 with regard to the Veterans Registry. 4,500 citizens visited the website, but from that 652 registered and out of those people about 15% indicated that they preferred not to share their information with other state agencies. The committee is working on the creating the capability for people to upload their DD214 to the Registry. She has been working with DMVA, Department of Education, PennDot, and Department of Health to determine how each agency uses the documents. It has been learned that most agencies do not have a need for maintaining the DD214s. The plan is for each agency to promote the Registry as it relates to their programs and incentives.

**Questions/Comments:** Mr. Jeff White with VVA commented that while he supports the idea of the Registry, there should be a way to express how valuable of a tool it is to Veterans. Ms. Patterson explained that the agency and organizational partners are being relied upon to do just that. Ms. Lisa Kaye stated that she disseminates the Veteran Registry cards with the VA ID card instructions.

- **Suicide Prevention-Peer (SPPEER) Committee:** Mr. Rick Hamp, Chair presented that the Committee has been involved with the certified community behavioral health clinics, warm hand-off opioid survivor initiative, and the Veteran Behavioral Health Support Grant Program.

Mr. Mark Todero briefed that the Community Awareness and Communication subcommittee has been working to overcome the hurdle of spreading information to all different eras of Veterans. They are hoping to create and present a strategic plan and work alongside the other subcommittees. They have continued to work with the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention's Out of the Darkness Walks and other various task forces in the community.

Ms. Sherry Peters shared that the Prevention and Treatment Services subcommittee has finalized a resource list of providers and services available in the community. The list includes a Crisis section followed by Screening, Prevention, and Treatment Services which would explain who each service is for and how they are implemented. It can be found on the Prevent Suicide PA website at <https://www.preventsuicidepa.org>.

Mr. Fred Nardei explained that his subcommittee is working on provider trainings and suicide prevention education for family members other gate keepers. They have built a database of said trainings in the Commonwealth including Mental Health First Aide, ASSIST training, QPR training, and trainings within the VA and talent management system. Mr. Nardei has been conducting trainings and will be speaking at the PA Cares Training Summit on May 24<sup>th</sup>. He explained that the Veteran X Program is one of the most successful programs within the VA. It was kicked off in Pittsburgh and currently average 30 Veterans a week who come together and empower each other while learning about the resources and services within the community. Subject matter experts are brought in to provide information. The Philadelphia Phillies and Pittsburgh Pirates have offered a program day to spread the information on the program. The next step for the subcommittee is to create a database of culturally competent behavioral health providers in the community.

**Questions/Comments:** Ms. Samantha Cossman asked if the committee is looking to push any type of suicide prevention training in effort to get word out; because the PA Link often hosts or attempts to cover the cost of QPR Trainings. She asked if there is a military specific QPR Training or if it's the same training program. Mr. Nardei responded that he wasn't sure if there is a military specific QPR Training but his hope is to get the word out about as many suicide prevention training as possible. Mr. Mark Todero stated that there is a military based training on the Army side called Ace Training but the QPR is the best one for families and caregivers. Ms. Cossman asked Ms. Peters if she is looking to disperse the resource list imminently; she answered that they are. Mr. Nardei added that the resource lists will need updated periodically. Mr. Eric Darling from Valhalla Veterans' Services pointed out that they offer free ASSIST training to all Veterans. Mr. Burris asked if the committee is reaching out to the veteran service organizations who have daily contact with veterans and their families. Mr. Hamp answered that Mental Health First Aide classes were hosted at many of the services organizations. Part of the communications plan is to include the service organizations in reaching the families and service members about the various training opportunities that are available.

#### **4. New Business:**

- Jon Peterson presented information about Care Partners Plus. They have been working with the VA in a pilot to present IT solutions to address specific problems. The system is cloud based and puts the Veteran at the center of their own healthcare, benefits, and services. It provides early access to care, provides rapid care, and cuts down on spending. It allows the

DoD and the VA systems to speak. Mr. Peterson gave an overview of how the system is designed to work.

**Questions/Comments:** Ms. Jodi Zucco asked when Care Partners Plus anticipates rolling this program out. Mr. Peterson answered that it is dependent on the decision of the Federal VA. Ms. Cheryl Cook asked if it has been tested with wide spread use; the answer was no, not with a mass amount of users at once. Ms. Donna Hess asked how many users were there during the initial 3 week trial which included Philadelphia, Washington D.C., and New Jersey. Mr. Peterson answered that there were about 450 users. How many peer personnel were hired to assist the users; Mr. Peterson answered that there were 11 Veterans in need of employment who were utilizing Veteran Service Centers. The question was asked how they plan to publicize once this system is rolled out. Mr. Peterson answered that it would be through social media, mail, and the VA.

5. **Next Meeting Date:** Wednesday, August 15 from 1:00PM to 3:00PM, at Arrowhead's Community Club, Fort Indiantown Gap.
6. **Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 2:59PM

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