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## Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services

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### MEETING MINUTES

MAY 1, 2024, 1:00–2:52 p.m.

Dept. of Corrections HQ, 1920 Technology Parkway, Mechanicsburg

#### COUNCIL MEMBERS/DESIGNEES IN ATTENDANCE

BG (PA) Maureen H. Weigl, Chairwoman, Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans Affairs	Marc Ferraro, DMVA
Toshua Jarrett, Member at Large	Mike Wenerowicz, Dept. of Corrections
Col (R) Ward Adams, Member at Large	Tina Kotsalos, Dept. of Banking & Securities
Dan Kuba, Dept. of L&I	Cheryl Cook, Dept. of Agriculture
Joe Shamonsky, Dept. of Health	Kory Auch, Office of Administration
Emily Butler, Dept. of Education	Leora Appleby, DCED
Kevin Atkinson, Dept. of Aging	Kara Templeton, PennDOT
Jamie Dunlap, PA Council on the Arts	Andrew Barnes, Dept. of Human Services
Bernadette Hatok, State Civil Service Commission	Nicole Faraguna, Dept. of Conservation/Nat Resources
Tom Edwards, Fish & Boat Commission	Nick Taylor, State Veterans Commission
Jeff Geibel, Dept. of Drug & Alcohol Programs	

#### COUNCIL MEMBERS/DESIGNEES NOT IN ATTENDANCE

Akbar Hossain/Steve D’Ettorre, Governor’s Policy Office	James “Woody” Hogan, PWVC
Micah Snead, Member at Large	

#### OTHERS PRESENT

Lynda Cox, T2T	Rick Hamp, DMVA
Justin Holcomb, T2T	Travis Davis, DMVA
John Rivello, DOC	Karen Leonovich, P4A
Joe Batt, DMVA	Andrew LaFratte, DOS
Bill Reed, YWCA of Greater Harrisburg	Michelle Copeland, DMVA
Bill Cress, VISN 4	John Noll, DMVA
Janette Krolczyk, DMVA	Taylor Dippery, DMVA
Tiffany Cleary, DMVA	Angela Watson, DMVA
Jen Snyder, DMVA	Elizabeth Cooper, DMVA
Elizabeth McCloud, PHEAA	Jessica Penn Shires, DOC
Sierra Bilous, DHS	Randy Wright, DOL VETS
Norm Marden, OAG	John Hickey, VOPA
Kelly Hitz, DMVA	Keisha Kerr, VISN 4
Margo Coleman, DMVA	Elizabeth Boateng, AOPC
Sarah Herr, DMVA	Ralph Roach, L&I
Michael Carrington, DOC	James Rowland, DHS
Brendan Auman, DCED	Kristi Brawley, PSU
Troy Edwards, DOC	Jillian Rodgers, PSU

Tom Snedden, PDA-PACE	Dan Gruver, DMVA
Ally O’Neal, Bayada Hospice	Ashley McNeely, YWCA of Greater Harrisburg
Chuck Matter, DMVA	Fred Nardei, VA Pittsburgh
Tammy Ferguson	Troy Edwards, DOC
Amy Friel Capretto, VISN 4	Celeste Brucklacher, DOC
Ed Cherry, DMVA	James Stafford, DMVA
John Schwartz, Center for Combatting Elder Financial Abuse	Annalisa Kelly-Cavotta, St. Lukes University Health Network
Marilyn Kelly-Cavotta, DMVA	Erica Moore, DMVA
Robert Graves, DOC	Coren Jagnow, DMVA
Jeff Baker, DOC	Daniel Mowrey, DOC
Celeste Brucklacher, DOC	Matthew Colian, L&I
Angela Eder, Penn Waver	Tom Applebach, CDVA – Lehigh County
Lana Evans, DMVA	Karen Olson, DMVA
Michael Belcher, DMVA	Chelsea Ellsworth, DMVA
Maria Tagliaferri, DMVA	Lisa Kaye, CDVA- Monroe County
Joel Mutschler, DMVA	Jennifer Spitler, DMVA
Jennifer Hagaman, DMVA	Samantha Cossman, DMVA
Chris Clark, DMVA	Amy Rose Napolitano
Angel McLaughlin, VOPA	

<p><b>CALL TO ORDER, INTRODUCTIONS, AND OPENING REMARKS</b></p>	<p>The Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services (GAC-VS) was called to order at 1:00 p.m.</p> <p>Ms. Janette Krolczyk welcomed everyone joining the hybrid meeting and asked that everyone sign in or send an email to have their attendance counted. She led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance and Moment of Silence.</p> <p>Mr. Ferraro shared his appreciation for everyone joining the meeting and provided a few updates. The outreach center DMVA wants to create at the Lickdale Elementary school location is inching closer to fruition as the land settlement was about to occur and the opening should happen around September. He encouraged sister agencies to use the space in a multi-agency fashion for our veterans. Mr. Ferraro also explained that the weekly, digital DMVA Digest will transition to a monthly publication soon. All agencies were welcomed to contribute information for veterans within the new format.</p>
<p><b>APPROVAL OF FEB 7, 2024, MINUTES</b></p>	<p>No questions or corrections occurred on the draft minutes. Mr. Kory Auch motioned to approve the minutes, which Mr. Nick Taylor seconded, and all unanimously approved.</p>
<p><b>ADVOCATE OF THE QUARTER</b></p>	<p>The GAC-VS recognized Shining Light Academy as the quarter’s veteran advocate for their work in the SCI Dallas Veteran Service Unit. By providing interactive programming and new perspectives incarcerated individuals develop healthy skills to use when working through life’s challenges, significantly reducing recidivism rates. The team working at SCI Dallas is providing the programming for free and having a tremendous impact on participants.</p>

<p><b>GUEST SPEAKER</b></p> <p><b>PA AGING PLAN / DMVA VETERANS HOMES</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mr. Travis Davis introduced Ms. Michelle Copeland, the new Social Work Coordinator for the Bureau of Veterans Homes and will also serve as the GAC-VS Aging Committee Chair. Ms. Copeland brings a wealth of knowledge with her from the private sector and was excited to join the team.</li> <li>▪ Last year, Governor Shapiro signed an executive order directing the PA Department of Aging to develop a 10-year master plan on Aging that will hopefully serve as an example for the nation.</li> <li>▪ Mr. Davis shared the plan’s five priority areas: unlocking access; aging in the community; gateways to independence; caregiver supports; education and navigation.</li> <li>▪ Secretary Jason Kavulich for the Department of Aging has done a great job steering the process of stakeholder engagement for the plan’s implementation.</li> <li>▪ Mr. Davis explained that in his lengthy career, three challenge areas consistently affect the aging population who remain in their communities, which are transportation, housing, and caregiver support. Mr. Davis is happy to share that the PA Aging Plan specifically addresses these areas, among others.</li> <li>▪ The DMVA operates six Veterans Homes around the Commonwealth of PA, yet many individuals have no idea these options exist. Not only for veterans themselves, but spouses are also eligible to be residents of these facilities, which offers excellent care, high ratings, many activities, and other benefits. Individuals using Medicaid will typically have a \$45/month allowance to use on anything they wish. However, the “enhanced veteran reimbursement rate” is used for our six Veteran Homes, so that any Medicaid residents (veteran or spouse) will receive \$450/month, a significant difference.</li> <li>▪ Mr. Davis stated the importance of sharing the awareness of all that our Veterans Homes have to offer. In this way, community individuals know about these possibilities, fill out applications early, and possibly get themselves or a family member onto a waitlist before they need to access a facility. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Ms. Angel McLaughlin asked a question regarding SSI/SSDI and whether the homes would accept those sources as payment. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Mr. Davis stated that the Veterans Homes do accept these forms of payment.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>GUEST SPEAKER</b></p> <p><b>TUNNELS TO TOWERS FOUNDATION</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mr. Justin Holcomb provided background on the founding of the Tunnels to Towers Foundation and the various projects completed throughout Pennsylvania to date. He also provided an overview of the Homeless Veteran Program (HVP) and shared that 118 PA veterans were served by this program last year.</li> <li>▪ Focusing on the HVP information, Mr. Holcomb explained the approach the organization utilizes when setting up a veteran village combined with the support from the national case management provider network they have developed.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Diagrams were provided that showcase how the veteran village will look when the property is completed in Harrisburg and the supports that will be available.</li> <li>▪ Mr. Holcomb provided examples of other projects at various stages of development throughout the country and a list of other locations that will be in development in the future. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Mr. Brendan Auman asked if the Harrisburg location was to be transitional housing or permanent long-term care. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Mr. Holcomb and Ms. Lynda Cox explained that through a partnership with Veterans Outreach of PA (VOPA), some individuals will use the transitional housing (tiny home) units and then graduate to the permanent long-term housing options offered by the Tunnels to Towers Foundation on the shared parcel of land. These units will be permanent long-term housing that will not exceed 30% of a veteran’s income, so that they have ownership in their housing plan and they will receive all the support needed to integrate back into society in the way they choose.</li> </ul> </li> <li>➤ Mr. Kory Auch asked if the model allowed for foot traffic to flow to the community, or if the community would remain intimate with only those housed on site. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ms. Cox explained that the community would remain private for those living on site and receiving the supportive services at that location.</li> </ul> </li> <li>➤ Mr. James Stafford asked about eligibility criteria for these locations. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ms. Cox explained that veterans will need an honorable discharge to enter. Those with violent criminal records, or those with a history of sexual assault will not be admitted. In these cases, the National Case Management partners assist in finding a suitable alternative to help.</li> </ul> </li> <li>➤ Mr. Jeff Geibel asked about security measures at the housing location. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ms. Cox shared that there is 24-hour security and has cameras and other security measures in place.</li> </ul> </li> <li>➤ Mr. Andrew Barnes asked about how waitlists were managed. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ms. Cox stated that anyone waiting for assistance could get help from the National Case Management Network if there was no room at a particular site.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>HOMELESS COMMITTEE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mr. Auman shared the importance of keeping committee members informed of best practices, new programs, and awareness of resources for collective use in community.</li> <li>▪ Mr. Auman updated the audience on a supreme court case in Oregon that remains ongoing. A city in Oregon saw an explosion of encampments in their community due to a lack of shelter beds and affordable housing options, yet the ordinances criminalize homelessness, leaving a large number of people without options. As this violates the 8<sup>th</sup> amendment,</li> </ul>

	<p>results from the case could impact the nation. Results should be available in June.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Committee conversations have expanded the knowledge about the HUD-VASH vouchers, who is eligible, and how to utilize them. There is new leeway in the program that include a variety of housing types, so sharing that knowledge can help the veteran population. Additionally, around 900 VASH vouchers are unused in Pennsylvania, so the committee is discussing how to share awareness to ensure those get allocated.</li> <li>▪ The PA Dept. of Aging provided a presentation to the Homeless Committee on the SHARE program and how it is useful to all parties involved. After being piloted in 2017, the program has grown and now reaches about 13 counties. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Mr. Tom Applebach wanted to add that both parties in the SHARE program are heavily vetted to ensure a good and safe match. There can also be a trial period for parties to test the living arrangement to see if the match will work well, and case management services remain a constant for the parties involved.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Mr. Jim Rowland shared a contact he made with a local combat veteran who offers a meet and greet coffee and refreshment tent every Friday morning in Cumberland County, and a veteran support group every Wednesday night at Christian Life Ministries in Camp Hill.</li> <li>▪ Mr. Rowland will meet with a representative of the Housing Coalition of Cumberland County to see what can be done to enhance landlord engagement to encourage local landlords to house veterans. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Ms. Samantha Cossman asked if there was any word on whether the HUD-VASH voucher value would increase. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Mr. Auman explained that there may be some news around the federal budget announcement. There will likely be increases for the fair market rent, so news may come at that time.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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<p><b>EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ms. Emily Butler provided an update on the GI Bill® and what role her team at the PA Dept. of Education plays as the state approving agency. She explained that the Federal VA created a list of factors that could possibly trigger a risk-based survey at an institution of higher education. In late Fall of 2023, congress intervened and instructed the VA to reduce the list of triggers. Many community colleges in PA were showing up on those lists for various reasons that did not actually impact the integrity of the GI Bill®. After the VA removed the usual risk factors, the number of PA schools on the list went from 29 down to eight.</li> <li>▪ Ms. Butler also shared that the VA generated a uniform application for 2024 so all state approving agencies across the country will now use the same form. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Mr. Stafford asked to connect with Ms. Butler regarding college and university partners working with PA VETConnect.</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Ms. Elizabeth McCloud provided important web links to various programs that she covered within her briefing. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <a href="#">Our Toolkit Helps you Complete the FAFSA   PHEAA</a></li> <li>➤ <a href="#">Aid for Military and Pennsylvania National Guard   PHEAA</a></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ms. McCloud shared that out of the total recipients for the 2022-23 award year for the PA State Grant Program, over 1,300 recipients were veterans. PHEAA also saw a 16% decline in the number of FAFSA applications submitted, so they had been trying to spread the word to encourage anyone interested in higher education to use the resources posted on PHEAA’s website and submit their application.</li> <li>▪ For the most recently completed award year of 2022-23, 26 veterans were served through the PA-TIP with a total of \$84,000 awarded.</li> </ul>
<b>JUDICIARY COMMITTEE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mr. Michael Carrington mentioned that the goals and initiatives have remain largely unchanged. He did compliment the Shining Light team for their amazing work at SCI Dallas and agreed that they are changing lives.</li> <li>▪ Mr. Carrington covered some encouraging updates and explained that the Veteran Service Units at the five correctional institutions have made a significant impact on the lives of the incarcerated veterans living there. The five VSU managers were present at the meeting and were recognized in front of the audience. Mr. Carrington also explained that a recent presentation occurred at the PA Board of Pardons in which it was explained that inmates are assisting other inmates in many of the available programs offered. In this way, incarcerated individuals were not only making personal improvements, they were also greatly assisting others stay on a better path to improve as a group.</li> <li>▪ Regarding the C&amp;P exam process, Mr. Carrington explained that not one exam has been canceled in the past three years due to the streamlined process developed by the team. Hearing exams still pose a challenge due to needing soundproofed rooms to conduct those exams. However, they are making strides to work with contractors who have the proper equipment to be brought into the facilities to conduct those exams.</li> <li>▪ The Department of Corrections went from having no full-time veteran-designated positions within the agency to six positions with a possibility of up to five more in the future.</li> <li>▪ In June, the Middle Atlantic States Correctional Association (MASCA) conference will be held in Hershey which includes seven states. Speakers from DMVA will be present to discuss partnerships with the PA Dept. of Corrections, available resources, and the GAC-VS. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Mr. Bill Reed commented on the amazing work the PA Dept. of Corrections has done regarding programs and support for the veteran inmates and also veteran employees.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>WOMEN VETERANS COMMITTEE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ms. Marilyn Kelly-Cavotta explained that a non-profit organization called Women Veterans Empowered and Thriving hosted a series of writing workshops at SCI Muncy, the female prison.</li> <li>▪ Regional town halls are still an interest of the group and Ms. Kelly-Cavotta shared that she will be working with the DMVA outreach team to accomplish this initiative. In year’s past, these town halls were not well-attended due to the challenges of reaching women veterans in the first place, so new strategies will be developed for hosting town halls moving forward.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ms. Kelly-Cavotta explained various upcoming events that centered around Women Veteran’s Day in Pennsylvania and shared how difficult it is to reach other women veterans due to most women veteran not identifying in various ways. As an example, women veterans are less likely to wear military or service organization-related clothing or adornments, making them easily identifiable in public.</li> <li>▪ The Pennsylvania edition of the Women Veterans Magazine was available for preorder. This magazine was put together through the non-profit Women Veterans Alliance and was available in June for Women Veterans Day. This magazine may also assist with some missing data on women veterans in Pennsylvania that DMVA simply does not have on this population in local communities. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Ms. Samantha Cossman suggested to do some type of awareness campaign with state agency partners much like how the annual Pension Poaching Campaign is conducted. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ms. Kelly-Cavotta stated they would look into how that may work.</li> </ul> </li> <li>➤ Mr. James Stafford asked how the I Am Not Invisible Campaign works. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ms. Kelly-Cavotta shared that through social media, advertisements are created which attract women veteran interest. Interested parties have a black and white photo taken and a blurb is written about their service, which is then posted on a specific webpage created for the campaign, based on who is hosting the current exhibit.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>GOOD OF THE ORDER / CLOSING REMARKS</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ms. Angel McLaughlin, from Veterans Outreach of PA, offered interested parties a tour of the Tiny Home Village in Harrisburg directly after the meeting.</li> <li>▪ Ms. Krolczyk reminded the audience that May is the Month of the Military Caregiver. As Pennsylvania was recognized in 2023 as a Hidden Heroes commonwealth by the Elizabeth Dole Foundation and the state legislature, everyone should commit to discuss caregivers any time veteran conversations occur.</li> <li>▪ Ms. Krolczyk reminded all participants to check the following resources: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ DMVA website for the approved meeting materials. (<a href="http://www.dmva.pa.gov">www.dmva.pa.gov</a>)</li> <li>➤ GAC-VS Webpage: (<a href="http://Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans' Services (pa.gov)">Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans' Services (pa.gov)</a>)</li> <li>➤ Veterans Registry is where service members, veterans, family members, and caregivers can sign up for the DMVA Digest. (<a href="http://www.register.dmva.pa.gov">www.register.dmva.pa.gov</a>).</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
	<p><b>Next Meeting:</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>August 7th, 2024, 1:00–3:00 p.m.</b>  Dept. of Agriculture HQ, 2301 N. Cameron Street, Harrisburg</p>
<p><b>ADJOURNMENT</b></p>	<p>The meeting adjourned at 2:52 p.m.</p>

**NEW ACTION ITEMS**

<b>#</b>	<b>ACTION</b>	<b>STATUS</b>
1	Mr. Travis Davis to connect with Ms. Angel McLaughlin regarding SSI/SSDI payment information for the DMVA Veterans Homes.	Complete
2	Mr. Brendan Auman to connect with the Tunnels to Towers representatives.	Complete
3	Mr. James Stafford to connect with Ms. Emily Butler regarding college and university certifying officials working with PA VETConnect regional coalitions.	Complete

**OLD ACTION ITEMS**

<b>#</b>	<b>ACTION</b>	<b>STATUS</b>
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