



Pennsylvania
**Department of Military
and Veterans Affairs**

SOUTHEASTERN VETERANS' CENTER ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

July 10, 2025

The Southeastern Veterans' Center Advisory Council met on July 10, 2025 at 10:00 AM in the All-Purpose Room of Coates Hall at the Southeastern Veterans' Center.

Advisory Council Members Participating:

Barry Amole, Vietnam Veterans of America, President
Thomas Applebach, Lehigh County Office of Veterans' Affairs, Vice President
Kenneth Schweitzer, American Legion, Secretary
Doug Forsythe, Disabled American Veterans
Kenneth Nadwodny, Catholic War Veterans
Thomas Brown, Veterans of Foreign Wars
Eric Hofer, Military Officers Association of America
Emil Messikomer, Marine Corps League
Robert Richardson, Resident Representative

Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs/Southeastern Veterans' Center:

Maureen Weigl, Deputy Adjutant General of Veterans' Affairs – DMVA
Travis Davis, Executive Director, Long-Term Care – DMVA
Michael Belcher, Veterans' Services Specialist- DMVA
Brian Gula, Commandant – SEVC
Amanda Bokosky, Director of Nursing- SEVC
Jill Alwine, Admissions and Marketing Coordinator- SEVC
Dr. Sin Kei Yeung, Medical Director- SEVC
Patty Carfagno, Social Services Clerk – SEVC

Visitors:

Nikki Whitlock, Chief of Staff, Senator Katie Muth's Office
Dan Kuper, Personal Care Resident
Nate Schaefer, Constituent Specialist, Senator Tracy Pennycuick's Office- **via Microsoft TEAMS**
Anna Brown, wife of Thomas Brown

Excused Absence:

John Getz, Veterans of Foreign Wars
Jeffrey Elliot, PA AMVETS
Thomas Coreau, Dauphin County Office of Veterans' Affairs
The Honorable Tracy Pennycuick, PA State Senate
The Honorable Dan Williams, PA House of Representatives
MG John R. Pippy, Adjutant General – DMVA
Mia Woods, Compliance and Ethics Officer- DMVA
Barbara Raymond, BVH Director – DMVA

Mildred Butler-Coleman, Deputy Commandant- SEVC

Call to Order:

The Advisory Council Meeting was called to order by Barry Amole at 10:00 AM. There was a moment of silence, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Swearing in of Council Members:

Emil Messikomer, Marine Corps League, was sworn in by General Maureen Weigl.

Review and Approval of April 10, 2025 Meeting Minutes:

A motion was made by Doug Forsythe and seconded by Ken Schweitzer to approve the minutes of the Advisory Council Meeting held on April 10, 2025. Motion carried, and minutes were approved as written.

Report of the Medical Director - Dr. Sin Kei Yeung - SEVC:

Dr. Sin Kei Yeung, Medical Director, provided an update to the council. Our SEVC medical provider team is currently composed of one physician, Sin Kei Yeung MD and one CRNP, Erin Freeman. Mrs. Freeman has been with Southeast for about one year and has made significant contributions to the quality of care for our veterans in the facility. We look forward to hiring a second CRNP that is dedicated and knowledgeable.

We continue to work on fall prevention with the monthly falls committee meetings working specifically to reduce the number of falls.

We continue to work on psychotropic medication reductions with weekly committee meetings to identify possible patients who would benefit from gradual dose reduction. We also continue to work on antibiotic stewardship with other preventative measures to reduce multidrug resistance organisms. Reductions in unnecessary medications and treatments are ongoing to decrease pill burden based on patient and family goals with emphasis on quality and less on quantity and excess.

Over the past quarter, we had one influenza A case treated in hospital in May. Southeast did not see any RSV cases this last quarter. Our Covid 19 outbreak was officially over mid-April. Vaccinations consents are addressed upon admission to facilitate vaccination which continues to be our best line of defense against infection in addition to hand washing and overall preventative hygiene measures.

Our veterans continue to age, and their chronic diseases continue to progress especially Parkinson's Disease and Dementia requiring more help with daily living activities. We continue to apply for more benefits for our population with the Veterans Administration through facilitating compensation evaluations and application for housebound status or permanent need for regular aid and attendance and catastrophically disability.

Report of the Admissions and Marketing Coordinator - Jill Alwine - SEVC:

Jill Alwine, Admissions Coordinator, reported that our current census is 235, which is the highest it has been since the pandemic. We have admitted 56 residents so far this year. Our occupancy rating for skilled nursing is 82 percent, which is an increase from 73 percent last quarter. Our occupancy rating in personal care is 74 percent. We still have 48 bed offline, 40 of which are due to a change in room size for infection control

purposes. We have 71 applicants on our waitlist, 61 veterans and 10 spouses. Our waitlist times are 1-2 months for personal care, 3-4 months for skilled nursing and our secured unit is now only a 3-6 month wait. Jill stated that she will be on a panel alongside representatives from Coatesville VA presenting about the veterans' homes at the PA Elder Law Conference in Harrisburg in a few weeks.

Employee Recognition:

Brian Gula, Commandant, recognized some employees for their years of service to the Commonwealth. Unfortunately, the employees were unable to attend the meeting in person.

- One employee celebrating 5 years of service at SEVC
- Four employees celebrating 10 years of service at SEVC
- One employee celebrating 15 years of service at SEVC

Also, since April, we have had 4 employees retire. Their combined years of service at SEVC is an astounding 119 years.

- One employee was with SEVC for 25 years
- One employee was with SEVC for 29 years
- One employee was with SEVC for 30 years
- One employee was with SEVC for 35 years

Thank you for all that you do for our veterans!

Report of the Deputy Adjutant General – General Maureen Weigl – DMVA:

General Weigl stated that she has been very busy this summer attending almost all of the military organization's State and National Conventions with MG Pippy. They will attending the American Legion Convention on the 19th.

There was a ribbon cutting ceremony about 2 weeks ago for the new Lickdale Veterans' Outreach Center. The DMVA purchased and renovated the old Lickdale Elementary center and converted it into a regional center for veterans. The VA is hoping to put an outreach team at the center to help people sign up for benefits. The Small Business Association and Department of Labor are also looking at setting up a Career Links area.

Earlier this week, General Weigl attended a Women Veterans roundtable discussion in Lehigh Valley with the First Lady on suicide prevention and military sexual trauma. The First Lady was very engaged and really enjoyed meeting the veterans.

Regarding the VA Federal government, Secretary Collins stated a one point that he was going to cut 80,000 personnel over the next 2 years. They have since changed that number to about 30,000. They are looking to cut 12,000 more staff positions this year from the Federal VA. We are unsure how this will impact all of us, but we do not think that it will affect claims and benefits or healthcare. Right now, we are seeing no issues with claims and benefits being processed.

The United States Marine Corps and the Navy are celebrating their 250th birthdays this year. We are actively working with the folks that are doing the birthday celebrations in Philadelphia.

Plans for the 2025 Veterans Conference are going along well. It will be at Valley Forge Conference Center. We are waiting to hear if Secretary Collins can join, but the Governor will be in attendance along with a lot of our State Secretaries. We will have great speakers, workshops, and “Veteran’s Shark Tank” where the winner will go on to compete in Philadelphia in December for \$50,000 for their company.

In response to a question, General Weigl explained more about the Veterans Conference. Last year, we brought together all the stakeholders that take care of veterans to discuss important issues and get updates on what kind of things each entity was working on. We also had workgroup sessions, such as: behavioral health and mental health, corrections and judicial, and employment and economic development. She also stated that this year’s conference would be taking place October 22nd to 25th at the Valley Forge Conference Center.

Report of the Executive Director, Long Term Care – Travis Davis – DMVA:

Travis Davis stated that over the last quarter, we have had many health inspections and visits from the Department of Health and Federal VA. Southwest recently had back-to-back visits from the Federal VA and Department of Health. The Federal VA is currently at our facility in Erie conducting their annual survey. So far that is going well. The Department of Health was also at Gino Merli for a follow-up visit to their annual survey. They were cleared and are now back in compliance.

The only change in 5-star ratings since the last meeting is that Southwestern dropped from a 4-star to a 3-star. The drop is because an Immediate Jeopardy tag that occurred in December of last year finally hit our score. We will carry that for a little bit, but we do expect to get back up to a 4-star.

Respiratory illness update: we have no Covid or flu among residents or staff across the state. Our flu vaccine numbers continue to climb. Currently, we have roughly 936 residents vaccinated for flu.

Our Admission teams across the state are doing a great job. Three of our homes, Delaware Valley, Gino Merli, and Soldiers and Sailors, are at a 90 percent occupancy rate for skilled nursing. We have about 250 veterans and spouses on our waiting list. Our current census across all six homes is 1166 residents. In June, we did 38 admissions and 34 discharges. Our goal is to outpace our discharges with our admissions, which we have done every month this year.

Staffing still remains a challenge. We have had a little bit of luck with our referral program. We are going to submit a grant application for next year and are planning on including some additional incentives for our direct care nursing staff. We have talked to other states to see what types of things they have done, so we will be including some of those suggestions in this next application.

Construction update: the construction project for the Hollidaysburg facility is about 98 percent complete. We were hoping to do a ribbon cutting this year, but we are waiting on a transfer switch for a generator. We do not have a set delivery and installation date yet. It will mostly likely be in the middle of winter, but that is not an ideal time for us to move 200 residents. We are hoping by March or April that we will have that building up and occupied. There is a construction project going on at Delaware Valley to expand the back patio and put in artificial turf. That should be wrapping up in the next month or so. Southwest is planning a major capital project to renovate all of their resident bathrooms and bedrooms. We are going to do it unit by unit. The building is about 25 years old, so it is due for an upgrade. Our next big capital project is projected for 2030. That project will replace Coates Hall here at Southeast with a new CLC

building. We have had some basic conversations regarding the design. We want to have a plan before we engage with the Department of General Services about designing it. What we have learned from the last few construction projects is once we get the design, it is very hard to make changes. There are many things we need to consider in the design, such as parking for staff and layout of the new building so we do not need to have 2 kitchens. We have had to deal with operating multiple kitchens on other sites and it adds to our labor costs, and it is not very efficient.

From a legislative standpoint, we have no real update from the federal side. We do not know yet if the bill that President Trump just passed regarding Medicaid will have any major impacts to nursing homes. We do not believe there will be, but we will keep an eye on how everything plays out. From a state level, the budget still has not passed, so really no update there. Senate Bill 129 was passed, which made some changes to our Advisory Council. It increased the number of members from 13 to 15. The council will now be comprised of 10 veterans from the community appointed by the Governor through the PA War Council, 3 members appointed by the governor to include at least 1 family member of a current or former resident, 1 member appointed by the Speaker of the House, and one member appointed by the House of Representatives. Another change is that council will have to submit an annual report. We have a meeting tomorrow regarding what the annual report will look like to help streamline the format. From there, we will work with the President and Vice President of the committee to comprise the report. Once we have more information on this, we will share it with the rest of the members.

Thomas Applebach asked who the report would go to. Travis answered that the report would go to the Adjutant General.

Compliance Report – Mia Woods – DMVA:

Mia Woods was not able to attend the meeting to give the compliance report.

Report of the Commandant – Brian Gula– SEVC:

Brian Gula informed the council that Mildred Butler-Coleman, Deputy Commandant, was at Fort Indiantown GAP attending a conference, so he will go over her report as well.

Brian introduced Amanda Bokosky, who is our new Director of Nursing/ Clinical Services Manager. While new to the role, she is not new to Southeast. She has been with Southeast for about 15 years as an RN Supervisor and an RN Assessment Coordinator. We are very excited to have Amanda in this new role.

We also have a new HR Director, Steve Gombar. He is a transfer from the Department of Health, where he worked in their Labor Relations for about a year and a half. He comes to us with 15 years of HR experience and worked from the ground up, so we feel he has the knowledge and ability to connect with our floor staff and direct care staff. We are excited to have him on board. His primary function will be focusing on employee engagement, employee retention, and recruitment.

As Travis mentioned, we want to provide an update on our regulatory surveys. We had our Annual Department of Health survey in May, along with our Lifesafety survey. Unfortunately, during our Department of Health Annual survey, we were cited for a high severity level deficiency. We had a staff member heat up a cup of soup for a resident and the resident suffered what they classify as a burn. We unfortunately received an Immediate Jeopardy deficiency for that incident. However, one thing we want to highlight is that the team responded immediately and implemented a Plan of Correction right when the

event occurred. In an effort to prevent this from happening again, we have to roll out education immediately to the entire facility, perform audits, and conduct training. We also had another unfortunate event in June that resulted in a Department of Health deficiency. A staff member did not follow a resident's plan of care, and the resident sustained a fall with significant injury. Again, the team responded immediately to help prevent it from happening to another resident.

Travis stated that transparency when incidents occur is very important to us. When both incidents happened, we reported them immediately to the Department of Health. When the Department of Health came in for the fall incident, they cited us with a G level deficiency, but they cited us as "Past Non-Compliance". This means that the Department of Health looked at everything the facility did in response to the incident, and they deemed that it met the Department of Health's standards and there was nothing further that we had to do. This gives us reassurance that the homes are responding immediately and correctly. However, it does not take away the significance of the deficiency in the eyes of the Department of Health. Even though we immediately self-reported when the event occurred, implemented a plan to prevent the incident from happening again, and the Department of Health deemed that no further action was needed from the facility, there is no difference in the penalty that we received than if we had not completed any of those steps. They treat both scenarios the same way. This is something that we feel is a type of flaw in the system. The results of these surveys are public information. If someone were to go on the Department of Health website and look at our facility, they would see that we received deficiencies for these events. But it would not show that they were self-reported and a plan of correction, auditing, education, etc. were implemented immediately. Unfortunately, the events will affect our 5-star rating. We predict that the deficiencies will drop us to a 3-star or 4-star rating depending on our quality measures. Our team is working hard on our quality measures to try and bump us to that 4-star rating.

In April, we had a Volunteer Appreciation Luncheon event that was catered in Tilghman Hall. We recognized 100 volunteers for the many hours that they have served our residents.

In June, we had Veterans' Home Week, which included events like a Phillies Tailgate party, Hulu dancers and water ice, and one of the biggest hits was baby goat snuggling.

In August, we will be having a Korean War Veteran tribute. It will be a black-tie event with a Frank Sinatra impersonator and featured alcoholic drinks; Old-fashioned, Manhattans, and Gin and Tonics.

Regarding updates on Mildred's behalf: the contractor completed the installation of the electronic monitoring device sensors in the elevators of our CLC building. Now, anyone that is a high elopement risk with an ESD cannot access the elevators to travel between floors. This is just another level of security we have put in place to keep our eloping residents safe.

Renovation update: our staff breakrooms on the floors of both buildings are complete. They look fantastic. The new furniture will be coming in this month. The main breakroom on the ground floor of Coates Hall is being renovated, and once finished, the project will be complete.

Our Institutional Fire and Safety Specialist conducted a hands-on evacuation drill. He always does a phenomenal job. We utilize all of our evacuation transport equipment during the drill, so staff can learn how the equipment works. We had over 50 employees across all 3 shifts participate in the drill. This training is completed annually.

Thomas Applebach asked if the new CLC would be an addition to the current CLC or a separate building. Travis Davis responded that the new CLC would be a completely new building to replace Coates Hall, which would then come offline. We need to figure out the design and layout, especially regarding the kitchen, but it will not add any additional beds to our current complement.

Comments from the Council:

Thomas Brown said he attended the VFW Convention in Harrisburg and stated that it was very nice and that they keep pushing hard for our veterans. Pennsylvania will have a National Commander in 3 years. Glen Umberger can present himself very well and will bring a lot of new ideas to the VFW. Thomas also stated that he thinks everyone at Southeast is doing a great job.

Ken Nadwodny stated that the mobile Vietnam Memorial Wall is in the area. It was transported from Valley Forge visitor center to Montgomeryville. It will be open 24 hours a day until Sunday at noon.

Eric Hofer stated this was his second meeting as the Military Officers Association of America representative and that he has also been involved in volunteering at the facility. He is very impressed with the facility and the staff. Keep up the good work!

Doug Forsythe thanked everyone for always putting the residents first.

Emil Messikomer thanked everyone for the opportunity to join the council and said he is looking forward serving the council.

Dan Kuper stated that last month, there was a trip to the Mid-Atlantic Air Museum in Reading for a World War II reenactment. It was absolutely fantastic. He strongly recommended that people take the opportunity to go and see it.

Nikki Whitlock stated that Senator Muth's Veterans Expo will be September 27th. At VetCon, the Senate Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness committee will be having a hearing on National Guard retention. Regarding the Korean War event in August, the Korean consulate provides Peace Medals. Nikki stated Senator Muth's office can assist with getting some for the event. Brian Gula stated we will get in touch if we need any assistance.

Rob Richardson mentioned that he had an uncle who served in World War II as an Air Force Pilot and received many Presidential and Vice-Presidential citations for his time in service.

Mike Belcher introduced himself and told the council that last month, they participated in Honor Flight down in Washington DC. They took 1 World War II veteran and many Korean War veterans and Vietnam War veterans to see the monuments. He is going to get in touch with Brian about possibly taking some of our veterans down next year.

Nate Schaefer, from Senator Pennycuick's office, stated that House Bill 865 passed. The bill expanded the Military Family Education Program and the Education Assistance Program, so if guard members reenlist for another 6 years contract, they are eligible again for these programs. Also, Senate Bill 232 was signed into law. One-hundred percent service-connected disabled veterans are now able to submit a one-time free application for a PA fishing license. It is a lifetime license, so they are no longer required to pay annual fees or apply annually to renew. The bill passed both houses unanimously.

Old Business:

Nothing to Report.

New Business:

Nothing to Report.

Election of Officers:

Doug Forsythe made a motion to continue with the elected officers as sitting. Officers accepted the nominations. Motion was seconded and passed unanimously for Barry Amole to serve as President, Thomas Applebach to serve as Vice President, and Kenneth Schweitzer to serve as Secretary.

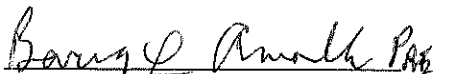
Good of the Council:

Nothing to Report.

Time and Date for the next Meeting:

With no further business to discuss, a motion was made to end the meeting. Motion carried. The next regular meeting of the Advisory Council will be held on October 9, 2025, at 10:00 a.m.

Approved:


Kenneth Schweitzer, Secretary

Minutes submitted by: Sarah Klufas