



Pennsylvania
**Department of Military
and Veterans Affairs**
Pennsylvania Soldiers' and Sailors' Home

**Pennsylvania Soldiers' and Sailors' Home
Advisory Council Meeting
Erie, Pennsylvania
December 12, 2024
9:00 a.m.**

ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT

Mr. Gary Fry, President, AMVETS
Mr. Raymond Chambers, Marine Corps League
Mrs. Bobbi Cumpston, Washington County Dir. Of Veterans Affairs
Mr. Richard DiGiacomo, Military Order of the Purple Heart
Mr. Robert C. Eiler, Veterans of Foreign Wars
Mrs. Karen Foust, Disabled American Veterans
Mr. Joe Benacci, Director, Erie County Veterans Services
Mr. Anthony DiGiacomo, County Director of Veterans Affairs
The Honorable Patrick J. Harkins, PA House of Representatives
The Honorable Daniel Laughlin, PA Senator (Katie Nagle)
Mr. Keith Eller, PSSH Resident Council President

ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT

Mr. David Price, Military Order of the Purple Heart
Mr. Richard Supak, Catholic War Veterans



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OTHERS PRESENT

Mrs. Maureen Weigl, BG (PA Retired), Deputy Adjutant General-VA
Mr. Travis Davis, MHA, NHA, HSE, Executive Director, Long Term Care
Mrs. Barbara Raymond, RN, NHA, Director of Veterans' Home
Mrs. Cheri Spacht, RN, NHA, PSSH Commandant
Mrs. Deborah Harris, PSSH Director of Nursing,
Mrs. Elizabeth Seibert, PSSH Deputy Commandant
Mrs. Rasheda Goodwine, PSSH Commandant Assistant
Mrs. Emily Heubel, PSSH Admissions Coordinator
Mr. Ken Vybiral, PSSH Volunteer Outreach Coordinator
Mrs. Danielle Ahlbrandt, PSSH PCU Administrator
Mrs. Teresa Brown, PSSH Quality Assurance Risk Management Coordinator
Mrs. Ashley Meghat on behalf of Congressman Mike Kelly's office
Mrs. Crystal Ferran, Corporate Compliance Officer

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Fry called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

MOMENT OF SILENCE AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mr. Fry led a moment of silence, and the Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

ROLL CALL

Ms. Goodwine took roll call for all present.

SWEARING IN OF COUNCIL MEMBERS



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There were no council members to be sworn in.

APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES

A motion was made by Mr. Fry and seconded by Mr. Chambers to approve the minutes of the Advisory Council Meeting held on December 12, 2024. Motion carried, and minutes were approved and written.

MEDICAL DIRECTOR UPDATE

Mrs. Harris provided update on behalf of Dr. Millie:

Mrs. Harris stated, "We recently gave out our COVID and Flu vaccines to all the residents. Just to note, we don't have any COVID positive employees or residents. We had 101 residents that received their COVID vaccines. We had 120 residents receive the flu vaccine. It was also given to our staff. We had 19 receive the COVID, and 15 received the flu vaccine. It is an on-going process, so if someone comes to us next week and asked to receive a vaccine, we will give it to them.

Any Questions?

ADMISSIONS AND MARKETING UPDATE

Mrs. Heubel provided update:

Mrs. Heubel began, "Currently our census is 167. We have 31 residents in our memory care unit, with 8 on the waitlist. There are 74 residents in our nursing care unit, with 17 on the waitlist. We have 62 residents on our personal care unit with 6 on the waitlist. For the next couple of months, I will be making rounds to some nursing homes in the area, along with the personal care homes and homeless shelters."

Any Questions?

EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION

Mrs. Seibert provided update:

Mrs. Seibert started, "I love this part. Today we want to recognize an individual by the name of Hysni Morina. Hysni, can you please come over with your supervisor, Dennis Peters. She continued, Hysni was promoted to Security Supervisor on February 23, 2022. After being hired in Security on this date December 12, 2016. So today is your anniversary! Hysni brings a level of professionalism that is impressive every day he works. He keeps a level of awareness for all happenings on campus and initiates appropriate actions to safeguard our residents, families, and visitors. He is calm under pressure and has been very effective as an Incident Commander when our emergency disaster plan has needed to be initiated, most recently with the latest snow. When our emergency disaster plan was initiated due to the snowstorm, he altered his schedule to be on campus at various hours of the day and night. He gave good direction to the staff to clear the emergency exits and walkways, assisted with transporting staff to and from work to support the care of the residents, and



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he also put a shovel to the ground and did a lot of snow removal himself to make sure everything was clear as needed. All the while, he continued with routine assignments as necessary to keep the operations running. Hysni is a role model to all of our staff, and because of his dedication, he deserves our recognition today.”

REPORT OF THE DEPUTY ADJUTANT GENERAL

Mrs. Raymond provided update on General Weigl’s behalf:

Mrs. Raymond announced, “Good morning everyone. General Weigl and Travis are both on the virtual TEAMS call, and I am going to give report for the both of them if no one minds. They are here to answer any other questions if I don’t cover everything. General Weigl wanted to make sure you are aware of General Pippy; he is our acting Adjutant General. We are just waiting for Senate confirmation for him. We’re not sure when that is going to be, but we don’t anticipate any issues or concerns from that end. He has already hit the ground running. He’s visited several of the State Veterans Homes. He has not been out to our Erie facility, yet, due to the snow. But we will make sure he gets out to see the facility and meet the team. He did have the opportunity to meet Cheri already at a meeting we had down in Fort Indiantown Gap. So, he is quite versed in what we’re doing at the State Veterans Home level. We are excited to have him as our soon-to-be new general.

General Weigl also wanted to mention, we did have some staffing changes. We do have Keith Raynham, who is Travis’s counterpart on the pyro side. So, he is the Executive Director for the outreach side of the house. He is new for our agency. He has also hit the ground running and doing quite well from our outreach side. General Weigl wanted to mention that we gave 1.2 billion dollars in claims from the outreach side of the offices. So, we are quite excited for our veteran’s in the state of Pennsylvania, that’s a lot of money for them to get.

Any Questions?

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF LONG-TERM CARE

Mrs. Raymond provided update on behalf of Mr. Davis:

Mrs. Raymond began, “From the home side of the house, as I mentioned, the TAG visits are ongoing at the facilities, other than Erie. We will get him out here. He really is enjoying meeting all the veterans and the staff that supports the veterans in the homes. The homes across the board are doing a wonderful job with all of the holiday planning and events that they’re having for their staff. It’s always a good time of year to have fun events going on.”

Any questions?

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF VETERNS’ HOMES

Mrs. Raymond provided update:

Mrs. Raymond continued, “From a COVID perspective, we currently have 7 residents at our Southwest facility. All of those residents are stable. No concerns from that perspective. So COVID, as we all know, it’s never going anywhere, it’s much like the flu at this point. We’ll continue to monitor COVID cases. Speaking of Influenza, we do have 5 cases for



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residents at our Gino J. Merli facility up in Scranton. All of those residents are stable as well. No hospitalizations, no additional treatment other than traditional medications that we get to mitigate that viral load.

From a vaccination perspective, flu vaccines were up about 80% for our residents across the homes. COVID vaccines were actually about 60% before that most recent COVID vaccination for residents across the homes. We do encourage our staff to get those additional COVID vaccines as well as flu vaccination. And as Deborah mentioned here at Soldiers' and Sailors' Home, we had the same process at the other 5 State Veteran's Homes as well. We give that COVID vaccine as long as the CDC permits it, and we give the flu vaccine all the way up through the end of March. So, we offer those quite frequently as well.

We are still watching that staffing mandate from CMS that we've been talking about. We are not sure where it's going to change with the election going on, so we are monitoring it to see if and where anything changes. Because in the last two weeks, CMS as well as the Office of Inspector General sent out regulations, updating regulations for nursing homes throughout the country and both of those reports heavily included that staffing mandate. We are watching it very, very closely to see if and when that were to change.

Speaking from a survey end of things, we are preparing for our VA survey in the first quarter of the year at our Southeast Gino Merli, and our Erie facility. So, we are prepping for that, and part of the way we prep for that is the headquarters team goes into the state veterans homes prior to any of the inspections to help prepare the facilities to meet any of the requirements, particularly the new requirements that are coming out at the beginning of the year.

From a survey perspective, Our Delaware Valley facility in the last quarter, they had a situation what we've talked about several times those immediate jeopardies. So, we did have a situation at our Delaware Valley facility where we were out on an activity at an event much like the Erie Playhouse. We had our veterans and residents out of one of those types of events and unfortunately we turned our back and one of the residents wandered off and walked away. The resident is fine. We got him back without any issues or concerns there. However, by regulatory requirements, we did report that incident to the surveying agency. They came in and did give us what's called intermediate jeopardy because the event happened. However, we anticipated making sure that everything was going to be in place to prevent something like this from happening again. So, when the Department of Health came in, they gave us what's called a past noncompliance. What that means is that because we did everything that we were supposed to after the event, they gave us a lesser fine as well as lesser points on that 5star rating, we always talk about. So that we've mitigated as much risk as we can. Yes, the event did happen, but we put in place procedures, so it didn't happen again. We also rolled that out to all of the other five state veterans homes as well to prevent anything like that from ever happening again.

Staffing wise, we still are absolutely challenged from that RN, LPN, CNA perspective doing various events such as Walk in Wednesdays, where we do open interviews. Now we will do open interviews at anytime with anybody who comes in, but we advertise Walk in Wednesdays. We are doing job fairs and different levels of recruitment and retention. We also got a VA grant to help support any type of bonuses. They are significantly smaller bonuses than the private sector can offer, but it's more that we had ever been able to do in the past to offer those types of bonuses from a recruitment and retention perspective. The other staffing challenge we have are registered dieticians. We're struggling with dieticians across the facilities, in our Altoona facility, quite a bit. We did just recently hire a dietician here; Cheri will touch on that. And then at our Southeast facility out in the Philadelphia area. We are doing things that we can do to change their pay rate because the requirements for dieticians in Pennsylvania have also changed. So, we are looking at our pay rates to bump them up a level and hopefully that would help with recruitment and retention from that end.



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As far as admissions goes, we are 1105 veterans and residents in our state veterans home, that's 74% total in our nursing homes at Delaware Valley, Soldiers' and Sailors' Home and Gino Merli. We up over 90% occupancy. That's a very good thing from that reimbursement perspective, when it comes to the VA. We do have currently 295 on our waitlist. The only reason that we have a waitlist, the primary reason we have a waitlist is again that staffing perspective. Some of the waitlists may be because we don't have the proper clinical or medical information that we need to make that decision. Some of the waitlists may be because it's a female to female individual and we don't have a female bed available and that sort of thing. But the vast majority of that 295 is unfortunately because of staffing.

Pertaining to our five star ratings, we have our Hollidaysburg and our Southwest facility at three stars currently and they're at three stars because of recent health inspections. Southwest was one of those immediate jeopardies and that will fall off within the next year, I believe. Our Soldiers' and Sailors Home is at a four star, Delaware Valley, Gino Merli, and Southeast are currently at that five star rating. So, we are always looking to improve, how can we improve, and what can we do to make sure we're all in five stars? It's an ongoing busy endeavor for the state veterans homes.

From a construction perspective, we did have a little bit of a hiccup at our Hollidaysburg facility. It shouldn't affect us greatly, from a cost perspective, it is minimal. Again, we're still anticipating 2025 to open our Hollidaysburg facility.

And as always we just continue our revenue team works with the veterans to get them as much as they can from that catastrophic disability medication wise as well as pack anything we can do to increase their service connection and the revenue team does a great job at lowering as much out of pocket expenses that our veterans pay, if possible. I think that's all the fun stuff.

Before I sign off, I know we recognized Hysni, but I just wanted to take an opportunity to recognize our Commandant, Deputy Commandant, D.O.N., and any of the staff that helped during our Snowmageddon. Again, I had a different travel issue, I was stuck in Charlotte, which was way better than being stuck here. Unfortunately, I missed the entire event, but I do know that Cheri, Beth, and Deborah went out and picked up and dropped off staff, and they should have been off for the holidays. Since they are all here, I just wanted to thank them and say everyone did a phenomenal job."

Travis or General Weigl, anything else?

Any Questions for me?

Mr. DiGiacomo asked, "So, for Delaware Valley, it's a brand new one, and for the system it's a second one?"

Mrs. Raymond answers, "Correct."

REPORT OF THE COMMANDANT

Mrs. Spacht provided update:

Mrs. Spacht began, "Good morning. We'll get to the snow, but for now I want to go over our open positions. Currently the total authorized positions that we have is 279. We currently have 150 employees here. Our vacancies are 29. We have 6 LPN positions open, 6 RN positions open, 1 clerical assistant, 1 accountant, 2 food service workers, 1 ADON, 1 custodial worker. The ADON position we have open is due to someone within our building transferring to a different position. We



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have interviewed for that ADON position, and we have made an offer. We did have a dietician issue, we had two full time positions for a dietician, and we have one that's here and has been here.

We did not have much luck after posting the other full time position, probably three times. So, then we just got creative and tried to do like two part-time positions to kind of work around people's hours like if they would like to pick up something part-time and we did have success with that. However, the two that we hired, one had to resign already due to family illness that her family immediately had and it's sad but understandable, of course. The other part-time dietician will start at the beginning of the year.

We're still doing the nurse aide training course and have that position open here, if anyone in the community needs direction on wanting to look into it, just let us know. It is a successful program. We do run up against an issue with the instructors for the program when they go to HVA, but that seems to be smoothing out. It's a great program and it's very helpful to us because while the CNA trainees are in that program, they still work here and help us on the units. They have certain job duties that they're able to do as a trainee, but just having them on board with the extra hands and eyes and to just sit with the residents, talk and engage with the residents goes a long way to helping keep our residents safe. It's very, very, helpful.

Pertaining to construction, we are currently, completely remodeling the personal care unit dish room. It is off schedule a little bit due to a few things that weren't anticipated but that happens with any type of project you have. Personal care unit and memory care unit employee breakrooms have been completely renovated. We are waiting on a few different things, like computer installation on one of them and just a few final touches in those rooms. We're slated for pavilion structure near the existing gazebo on the new concrete pad outside of the visitors parking lot. The design is due to begin. The nursing administrative offices and conference area flooring designs begin soon. Our personal care units, nursing station, treatment area, and CRNP office flooring design is to begin soon on. GFCI outlets upgrading, design will begin soon. We are getting a divider wall similar to this one but more updated on our nursing home side in the dining room that involves the large area that we have multi uses for. We are in the middle of doing various painting construction for our parking lot and roadways within the campus is complete. Personal Care Unit front entrance is complete. The logo was installed but I don't know if you'll be able to see it when you go out there, but it looks great. And we did a purchase order executed to have the sign hung on the bridge because it is quite a distance and there was no way without serious equipment that we could get that sign up. That is coming and we will definitely have a ceremony that's completed. I don't want to steal anyone's thunder because Ken is going to talk about all the stuff we're doing for the holidays.

As Barb said, we are within our survey window for the VA, but we are also lucky enough to be within our survey window for all three of our regulating agencies. So, we are very excited to have them come in, even though they come in back to back to back, that is ok. We are prepared and have been. That's all I have for my report."

Any questions?

Mr. Chambers inquired, *"I noticed the snow removal equipment, does that belong to the home now?"*

Mrs. Spacht responded, *"Yes."*

Mr. Chambers continued, *"I was kind of wondering because of what you've had in the past."*

Mrs. Raymond replies, *"We've always had our own, at least in the 16 years that I've been around."*



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Mr. Chambers retorted, *"Years ago, it was a small pick up truck, with a one time dump truck and that took care of the whole facility. Were you able to utilize the emergency personnel or transportations for anything while they were here?"*

Mrs. Spacht explained, *"From what I understand, they were very instrumental helping folks that were on 90 and Route 5 that couldn't get anywhere because there was nobody getting to them, and they couldn't get out at any point unless they went on foot. In 2017, when we had that snowstorm then, we did a lot of the things but the amount of snow we got in the short amount of time is crippling. That's why Deborah, Beth, and I went out on our own, with Hysni too, to get people and bring them in to work. Some people couldn't even open their doors to get out. We also stayed connected with the Erie County Disaster Management contact that we have and report off where we were at, as well as the Hamot Emergency Director. We are closely aligned with them and that is really helpful."*

Mr. Chambers declared, *"I'm going back to those who have been around here a long time, back when Mayor Lou Tullio was in office. When we got hit with a blizzard, he would grab anybody like the water department who had heavy equipment and tell them to go help out because they didn't have proper equipment at that time."*

Mrs. Spacht added, *"Our headquarters were right with us, even though they were not here in person. They were a phone call away, and anything that we needed, it was done. So, we had a lot of support."*

Any other questions?

REPORT OF THE DEPUTY COMMANDANT

Mrs. Seibert provided update:

Mrs. Seibert said, *"I don't have much of a report, other than to just say Merry Christmas, Happy New Year, thank you for everything you guys have shared with us throughout the year. That's it. Thank you."*

Mrs. Crystal Ferran provided Compliance Report:

Mrs. Ferran began, *"Hello, good morning. Crystal Ferran with the Compliance Department here at the GAP. I do have a small little report. There are no open investigations for PSSH and none for the BVH, as a whole. PSSH, the annual facility performance assessment FPA, was completed in 2024 to prepare them for the 2025 survey cycle. The next upcoming facility performance assessment for PSSH is at the end of July. July 22nd through July 24th. That's for skilled nursing. The personal care FPA would be July 29th through July 31st. Then we will be doing a re audit in the middle of November. November 12th through November 14th if necessary. That's all I have for today. Thank you."*

Any questions?

REPORT OF THE COUNCIL MEMBERS

Mr. Eller stated, *"I'm Keith Eller, I don't have anything to report on. I hope everyone enjoys the holidays."*



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Mrs. Meghat started, *"Hello everyone, Ashley from Congressman Kelly's office. I'm sorry for coming in late, obviously the snow gave me a little bit of a delay. As always if you all need anything from our office, please let me know. We're always here to help."*

Mrs. Nagle started, *"Good morning. I'm Katie from Senator Laughlin's office. I'm also here to help. I work with Ken often. We were in here twice in the last six months to celebrate some milestone birthdays. It's always exciting, the Senator loves to come in and meet with the residents. We are also working on a possible WWII medal ceremony, which Ken will touch on. So that is something nice that the Senate is doing in other districts, that Joe and Ken brought to my attention, and we are going to work on getting that done in Erie as well."*

Mr. Benacci asserted, *"Good morning. I have got \$2 billion dollars in service connected compensation between my office and your VSO. So, we account for a little over 1 million dollars in that. So, we are doing well in our area. Another one is, speaking of disaster, I was working up at the EOC. The National Guard was there, and they were transporting critical personnel to their employments (nurses and doctors). So, if this ever does happen again keep an eye out for that. The other thing I would like to talk about for some veterans in the room and those that we know is the Veterans Temporary Assistance Grant. We do have right now, a sort of abbreviated, I'll call it a grant program. Any veteran or spouse, and married spouse of a deceased veteran can apply for the Veterans Temporary Assistant Grant for up to \$1600. And one of the big eligibilities is the financial lead due to no fault of your own, well Mother Nature is due to no fault of our own. So yes, storm damage, gutters falling off, insurance deductibles, and frozen pipes, they can apply for that. It's still will be on a financial need but we kind of short cut it so all we need is a copy of DD214, a copy of your driver's license, a copy of your most recent bank statement and a picture of the damage and a rough estimate. So, it's kind of just two or three quick things. They can give our office a call and we can help them apply for that and get that going for them."*

Mr. DiGiacomo started, *"Joe, we talked about the headstones (when it's nice out again), we talked with Gannon R.O.T.C so you have a body of people and once we get those chemical cleaning products, we will get out there and do the cleaning. I don't have anything else to add except, the game is Saturday, Go Army!"*

Any Questions?

Mr. DiGiacomo asked, *"Joe, pertaining to the National Guard, is there a way to get them, here first?"*

Mr. Benacci answered, *"How it works is at the beginning they were on recovery. They were out on I-90 recovering vehicles and individuals, getting them to warming shelters. Once that phase was done, then we got into transport phase, and then towards the end of it, we used them for the 211 calls. So, they were running food and water to individuals, mostly elderly or disabled who could not get out their homes. We were picking up prescriptions. They would go in and shovel the doors out for ingress to the home. But everything was run through the 211, to the EOC, and then we would task them. They did roughly 264 missions in about 5 days. So, they had 20 soldiers up there with let's say 3 or 4 HMTV's. They had a couple Humvees. They were also on call for emergencies, so if they had a life threatening call and the ambulance couldn't get to the facility, they would piggyback with them. They would go to the home, get the patient in the ambulance and transport them to the point where the ambulance could make it to the hospital."*

Mr. Chambers said, *"Good morning everyone, on getting the water buffalo, either the water authority or the city of Erie had about a 2,000 gallon stainless steel tanker that they could haul water when they needed to different facilities. You maybe able to get them to donate it. Other than that, it's good to see everyone here today. I don't know what all this fuss*



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is over a little bit of snow. You get up, brush the car off, and go. The hardest part is getting out the back door. I hope everyone had a Merry Christmas and a Happy and Safe New Year."

Mrs. Cumpston responded via TEAMS, *"This is Bobbi Cumpston. I don't have anything to add at this time, but I hope everyone has a Merry Christmas."*

General Weigl responded via TEAMS, *"This is General Weigl, and I just want to say Merry Christmas and I will see whoever's going to be there at Wreaths Across America on Saturday. I'm so looking forward to seeing everybody."*

Mrs. Grassi responded via TEAMS, *"This is Alicia Grassi, Rasheda's mom and I just want to say Merry Christmas everyone."*

Mr. Eiler responded via TEAMS, *"This is Bob Eiler with the VFW. Merry Christmas to all and safe travels."*

Mr. Vybrial added, "I just want to recap our efforts since we last met. Emily and I attended Representative Jake Vance's Expo in September along with Brett Marski and Harkins Expo. October brought an Erie resource meet up along with the Mercer County stand down events, which is always a good one. In November our representative Park Wettling did a veteran's breakfast that we attended, it's the county ceremony, which is always great, nice work Joe. For the Veterans Day Parade, Cheri and I marched in with some residents. That was a great event, along with the following day of Veterans Breakfast event at the Polish Falcon's Club. Our ceremony here on November 11th was well attended and a couple of great keynote speakers, native Erieites returning to deliver those addresses. That was a great event for us, followed by Mercyhurst University celebration of valor later that evening. As we move into December, this past Tuesday we did a Silence of the Season holiday concert with the Erie Philharmonic. It was a very nice turn out from the residents and the community as well. All of our unit Christmas parties are ongoing and still to come this month. As it has been mentioned, our Wreaths Across America event is this Saturday December 14th. The ceremony kicks off at noon with replaying to immediately follow. Our American Legion Holiday Tour has been rescheduled. That will occur on Saturday the 21st at 9:30 am. So hopefully, you'll be able to make it to Wreaths Across America this Saturday. Those of you that have kind of been with me from the beginning know just how much that event has grown and what it means to our community. So hopefully, I'll see you there. And if I don't I would like to wish you all a wonderful holiday season. Mr. President, that is my report.

OLD BUSINESS

No old business to discuss.

NEW BUSINESS

No new business to discuss.

GOOD OF THE COUNCIL

Mr. Fry thanked everyone and wished everyone a Merry Christmas.



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ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 10:00 am.

The next Advisory Council Meeting is scheduled for Thursday March 13, 2025, at 9:00 am.

Approved: