

Pennsylvania State Veterans Commission

Meeting Agenda

January 12, at 1000 AM

Location: Arrowheads Community Club

1000	Call to Order	Chairman Nicholas Taylor
	Moment of Silence	Vice-Chair Constance Snavelly
	Pledge of Allegiance	Chairman Nicholas Taylor
	Introduction of Commission Members	Chairman Nicholas Taylor
	Vice-Chairman Opening Remarks	Vice-Chair Constance Snavelly
	Chairman Opening Remarks	Chairman Nicholas Taylor
	TAG's Opening Remarks and Comments	MG Mark Schindler
	Approval of 08 December 2023 Meeting Minutes	Requires Vote
	Reading of Official and Other Communications	Chairman Nicholas Taylor
	DAG-VA Opening Remarks and Report	BG (PA) Maureen Weigl
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• PPL, BVH, PIRO• Programs Report	Requires Vote
	VISN 4	Mr. Timothy Liezert
	Committee Reports	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Legislative• Pensions/Relief/Grave Markings• RETX• MAL• Transportation• Veterans' Health• VSO Grant• Women Veterans• PAWVC Update	
	Unfinished Business	Mr. Larry Googins
	New Business	Mr. Jesiah Schrader
	Good of the Order	Ms. Constance Snavelly
	Agenda Items for Next Meeting	Mr. William Hines
	Closing Remarks	Mr. Mark Baylis
	Next Meeting	Mr. Matthew Hollenbeck
	February 2, 2024, at 10 AM	Ms. Lisa Kaye
	Fort Indiantown Gap, Annville	Mr. David Gyger
	Retiring of the Colors	Chairman Nicholas Taylor
	Adjournment	Chairman Nicholas Taylor



Call to Order

Chairman Nicholas Taylor

The Pennsylvania State Veterans' Commission (SVC) meeting was called to order at 10:00 AM.

Moment of Silence and Pledge of Allegiance

Vice Chairwoman Constance Snavelly led the moment of silence.

Commission Introductions

MG Mark Schindler	The Adjutant General
BG (PA) Maureen Weigl	DAG DMVA-OVA
Mr. Nicholas Taylor	SVC Chairman; Commander, Catholic War Veterans
Mr. Paul Foresman	Commander, AMVETS
Mr. David Gui	Adjutant, Disabled American Veterans
Mr. William Albert	Commander, Blinded Veterans of America
Mr. Jesiah Schrader	President, PA State Association of County Directors of Veterans Affairs
Mr. Robert Heister	President, Military Officers Association of America
Mr. Richard Hudzinski	Designee, Vietnam Veterans of America
Ms. Victoria McCoy	Designee, Marine Corps League
Mr. James Hogan	Adjutant, The American Legion
Ms. Lisa Kaye	Member-at-Large
Mr. Mark Baylis	Member-at-Large
Mr. Charles Jackson	Member-at-Large
Mr. Michael Brooker	Member-at-Large
Mr. Gerald Hawk	Executive Director, AMVETS
Mr. John Getz	Adjutant, Veterans of Foreign Wars
Mr. Christopher Fidler	Director, Keystone Chapter Paralyzed Veterans of America
Ms. Constance Snavelly	SVC V-Chairwoman, Representative, Korean War Veterans
Mr. Michael Rang	Commander, Catholic War Veterans
Mr. Philip Arnold	Adjutant, Military Order of Purple Hearts
Mr. Stephen Lavelle	Commander, The American Legion
Mr. Tim Liezert	VISN 4

Absent

Mr. Timothy Alexander	Commander, Disabled American Veterans
Mr. Stanley Majocka	Commander, Italian American War Veterans
Mr. David Gyger	Commander, Veterans of Foreign Wars
Mr. Richard Fine	Commander, Jewish War Veterans

Others Present

Mr. Marc Ferraro	DMVA-EDS
Ms. Angela Watson	Director, DMVA-Communications
Mr. David Cowgill	VISN 4
Mr. Nate Silcox	Executive Director, PA Senate VAEP
Mr. Rick Hamp	Special Assistant-DAG-DMVA-OVA
Mr. Joel Mutschler	Director DMVA-PIRO

Mr. Travis Davis	Executive Director, DMVA-BVH
Ms. Marilyn Kelly-Cavotta	Minority Strategic Advisor, DMVA-OVA
Mr. Brian Natali	DMVA-PIRO (Programs and Services)
Mr. Gregory Jolissaint, MD	Guest Speaker
Mr. Edward Cherry	DMVA-OCC
Mr. Joseph Batt	DMVA-OCC
Mr. Jeff Wallitsch	DMVA-OCC
Mr. Jeff King	DMVA-PIRO (Programs and Services)
Mr. Bradley Rank	DMVA-PIRO (Programs and Services)
Ms. Jennifer Snyder	Administrator 3, DMVA-OVA
Ms. Janette Krolczyk	Coordinator GAC-VS, DMVA-OVA
Mr. Zackery Portser	DMVA-PIRO (Outreach, Initiatives and Reintegration)
Mr. Daniel Dudkiewicz	DMVA-PIRO (Outreach, Initiatives and Reintegration)
Ms. Chelsea Ellsworth	DMVA-PIRO (Outreach, Initiatives and Reintegration)
Ms. Lana Evans	DMVA-PIRO (Outreach, Initiatives and Reintegration)
Mr. James Stafford	DMVA-PIRO (Outreach, Initiatives and Reintegration)
Ms. Jennifer Hagaman	DMVA-PIRO (Outreach, Initiatives and Reintegration)
Ms. Serena Cruz	DMVA-BVH
Ms. Tammy Weaver	DMVA-PPL
Ms. Anna Sassaman	DMVA-PPL
Mr. Seth Benge	DMVA-PPL
Mr. Leonard M. Johnson	DAV
Mr. William Hines	DAV
Mr. David L. Wagner	DAV
Mr. Matt Hollenbeck	TAL
Ms. Rose Brunner	Guest
Ms. Tanya L. Austin-Maccagno-Taylor	Guest
Ms. Sinai Maccagno	Guest
TEAMS Virtual Non-DMVA Guests	41
Award	MG Schindler/Chairman Taylor
The Adjutant General (TAG) and Chairman Taylor presented a Certificate of Appreciation to Mr. Robert Heister-MOAA for his dedicated service to the SVC and veterans overall.	
Chairman's Opening Remarks	Chairman Taylor
<p>The Chairman greeted the members and welcomed them to the SVC meeting. He then recognized Ms. Rosita Brunner a former DMVA staff member welcoming her to the meeting.</p> <p>The Chairman then briefed the members on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Tuesday DMVA/Chair/V-Chair meetings are productive/informative. • Attended the recent GAC-VA meeting at the Governor's residence. Governor Shapiro expressed his dedication to PA's veterans and their families. • MAL Mr. Michael Brooker was appointed to serve on the VTF committee. • Chairman attended the VFW Veterans Day Ceremony, the Altoona Veteran's Day parade. • Updated members on new MAL application SOP and informed only one applicant so far for the MAL-Vietnam seat. Urged commissioner to spread the word. And updated on the Chairman writing a new SOP for Hall of Fame (HOF) applications. • Urged all members but especially the larger veteran service organizations to spread the word among their membership about veteran benefits. <p>Chairman Closed by thanking all the work for veterans the commissioners do.</p>	

Questions/Discussion

None.

TAG's Opening Remarks

MG Schindler

TAG greeted and welcomed the members to the meeting.

TAG briefed the members on the following:

- Directed members to the slides, informed 100 Air-PANG (171 & 193rd) wings serving at many different locations within small mobilizations, 25 Army-PANG serving at the Southwest border. He informed members that the Governor will hold a MSTEAMS event with service members to wish them a Happy Holiday and safe deployment. He said 1000 Army-PANG will deploy in January; and thanked the members who attend the send offs and returns. They are appreciated by the soldiers and their families.
- TAG said he attended many Veteran Day events and breakfasts events with several legislators. He expressed it is important to get the word out to veterans about the VA benefits, and how the DMVA can assist.
- TAG informed about speaking on 12DEC23 at the Wreaths Across America event at the Capitol, and again at FIG.

TAG closed by thanking the commissioners for all they do for veterans.

Questions/Discussion

None.

Approval of the September 8, 2023, Meeting Minutes

Motion: Mr. Robert Heister, MOAA, made a motion to approve the minutes.

Second: Mr. John Getz, VFW, seconded the motion.

The body agreed; motion carried. Minutes approved.

Reading of Official and Other Communications

Chairman Taylor

No official communications.

Questions/Discussion

None.

Deputy Adjutant General-VA Remarks

BG (PA) Weigl

DAG greeted the members and wished them a Happy Holiday. DAG informed the members that the central issue she is encountering is the lack of understand the veterans have of everything available to them. She informed the members that DMAV Director of Communications Ms. Angela Watson has been increasing the social media plugs on available benefits, i.e., X, Facebook, LinkedIn...across all media. DAG then called on the member's service organizations media sections to work in a coordinated manner with DMVA-OVA to get the word out.,

MAL Mr. Michael Brooker asked DAG what the demographics of the veterans are who seem uninformed (older, younger or a blend).

DAG said the one that stands out is how many older veterans don't know DMVA-OVA operates six homes (5 Star rated) throughout the commonwealth, and that they and their wife's can take advantage of it. She said there are a lot of veterans in private nursing homes who don't realize they have an option.

DAG then informed the members that TAG has allowed the hiring of Ms. Marilyn Kelly-Cavotta as a minority strategic advisor. Ms. Cavotta is an Army veteran and has been focused for the last 8 years on minority and women initiatives, LGBTQ, so she will bring professionalism and experience as she works throughout the commonwealth.

Questions/Discussion

None.

DMVA Policy, Planning, and Legislation

Mr. Benge

Mr. Seth Benge briefed the members on the following:

- Mr. Benge updated since the creation of the slide the Baker bill moved out of the VAEP committee and said SB147 PA VETConnect Program is out of committee.
- He said he listed the three Blind/Paralyzed pension bills but doesn't know which one will pass or when.
- He said SB1227 moved out of committee which removes war time service and grants spouses of service members killed in action eligible for RETX. He said this bill require a constitutional amendment, as would any of the RETX bills. He then explained that process in detail.
- Mr. Benge said SB146 (not on slide) the Free Fishing License for veterans will possible move soon. He noted two resolutions: 'Reach Across America' and 'Battle of Bulge' which involved PA's 28th Div.

Mr. Benge made two announcements: The interment of unaccompanied veteran Robert Ericson on 13DEC23 at 11:30am, asked for attendance. He then announced the retirement of PPL staff member Ms. Tammy Weaver after serving 25 years and introduced her replacement Ms. Anna Sassaman.

Questions/Discussion

Mr. Richard Hudzinski-VVA and Mr. Leonard Johnson both inquired as to when and which Blind/Paralyzed pension bill will pass. Mr. Benge said he doesn't like making bill predictions. Mr. Nate Silcox VAEP Executive Director said SB189 has passed everything and now in appropriations and that is the hold up.

There was some discussion on the budget led by Mr. Hudzinski, but EDS Mr. Marc Ferrero explained that the issue with the budget is complex but doesn't impact DMVA.

DMVA Bureau of Homes

Mr Travis Davis

Mr. Travis Davis briefed the members on the following:

- Mr. Davis reviewed the slides with the members.
- BVH had five compliant surveys from PA Dept. of Health and Human Services, 4 were good with one pending at the Southwest Veterans Center. The personal care annual survey at the Southeast Veterans Center went well. BVH is still waiting for the annual VA survey to wrap up for 2023. Inspections went well, BVH has maintained its number of homes with 5-Star ratings.
- COVID numbers: 12 residents and 21 staff across the six homes. BVH has available vaccines for the flu, COVID, and RSV.
- Census remains strong: 1080 residents, 71% occupancy and wait list 254.
- BVH has a new missions coordinator to get veterans into the homes faster. BVH is looking to better provide customer service to our veterans to place them and their spouses.
- BVH is currently waiting for the Governor's Office to appoint two directors of nursing: Hollidaysburg and Gino Merle. The new commandant at the Delaware Valley Veterans Home is Ms. Margo Coleman.

Questions/Discussion

Mr. James Hogan-TAL asked Mr. Davis why members from TAL were denied access to the DVVH pre-arranged activities function. Mr. Davis asked to speak with Mr. Hogan after the meeting. Mr. Davis

speculated the DVVH might have had a spike in the flu and that was the reason for the cancellation. Mr. Davis informed the members they are not restricting visits, aren't requiring masking of visitors.

DMVA Bureau of PIRO

Mr. Mutschler

Mr. Joel Mutschler briefed the members on the following: Referred them to the slides in the read ahead.

- Mr. Mutschler told the members that a Outreach Regional member was approached from family members concerned because the veteran was in hospice and his water heater broke. The Regional member acted swiftly, secured the funds, and had the hot water heater replaced less than 24 hours later.
- Informed members in the past week DMVA-PIRO sent out \$20,000 dispersed to 14 clients in 11 different counties. He emphasized that was a lot in one week and highlighted the hard work the staff put into that. The majority was in housing insecurities, and some checks were hand delivered.
- The most recent Veterans Drug Court will be in Northampton County, and by the end of 2024 there will be 38 Veteran Drug Courts throughout PA with veterans' treatment programs.
- Mr. Mutschler said the Skills Bridge is accepting applications with currently 135 companies participating; he noted it is a very influential program in the commonwealth.

Questions/Discussion

Mr. Heister-MOAA asked Mr. Mutschler if he considered using the US Senate's census alignments noting his concern was with region one and region 2, especially the greater Pittsburgh area. Mr. Mutschler said the DMVA uses the VA veteran population mapping, and region one and region 2 work in tandem-overlapping, and cross communications to ensure veterans are receiving what they need.

Mr. Hudzinski-VVA asked regarding the following: Veterans registry, Veterans ID on PA driver's license (DL). A lengthy exchange occurred between Mr. Hudzinski and Mr. Mutschler. The primary issue surrounding the DL for Mr. Hudzinski was non-veterans getting veteran designation on their DL due to a poor vetting process. Mr. Mutschler pointed out that the DMVA does not control DL but PennDOT; however, the rate of false DL's is less than one percent. Mr. Mutschler agreed with Mr. Hudzinski about increasing the veteran's registry is of paramount importance to DMVA. DMVA is working through many different processes already in place that DMVA is utilizing, exploring more methods (legislative initiatives) to increase contacts, and working to improve communications to push out VA benefit information.

- A Mr. Larry Holman-guest what is being done to encourage PA veterans to reach out to their legislators to expedite passage of some important legislative initiatives. Chairman Taylor said the PA Veterans War Council is doing that and SVC works with them and DMVA for this process.

Approval of State Veterans' Programs Reports

Motion: Mr. Jesiah Schrader, PSACDVA, made a motion to approve the programs report.

Second: Ms. Constance Snavelly, MAL, seconded the motion.

The body agreed; motion carried. Programs reports approved.

VISN-4

Mr. Liezert

Mr. Liezert reviewed/ highlighted the following talking points/slides that were available in the read ahead

- New VA Chief of Staff who will focus on VA benefits, new Deputy and Under Secretary.
- Directed members to read ahead regarding: the nine facilities update, expansion of availability for WWII veterans, Parkinson's Disease and family members who were exposed to toxicity. The

annual suicide report listed (6392 suicides in 2021). Suicide abatement is the top priority of the undersecretary.

- Lastly, directed them to the update in the read ahead on the care programs and telehealth. And flu and COVID vaccines are available.

Questions/Discussions

Ms. Victoria McCoy-MCLA said she had been reading data showing a correlation between chronic pain and suicide, she asked if VISN 4 had data on veterans committing suicide due to chronic pain. Mr. Liezert said he doesn't doubt the specifics but will share when it becomes available.

Mr. Hudzinski asked if VISN 4 would report on quality of care as it regards follow-ups: readmissions after surgery, infections, etc. Mr. Liezert said he will add that to his staff sheet.

Committee Reports

Legislative Committee

Mr. Heister

Mr. Robert Heister told the members that the legislative committee had sent a letter to the Chairman reflecting the committee's judgement that the current system of oversight for the PA Bureau of Veterans Homes that having an advisory council for each home is all DMVA needs.

Chairman Taylor stated he had received the letter and will present it to the commissioners at the next meeting for a vote.

Questions/Discussion

None

Pensions/Relief/Grave Markings/State Military Cemetery Committee

Mr. Googins

No official report.

Questions/Discussions

None.

RETX

Mr. Schrader

No official Report

Mr. Schrader stated he is in the process of forming his committee. And his committee will focus on supporting HB1227.

Mr. Schrader recommended the SVC write a letter to the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania endorsing PA General Assembly House Bill 1127.

Chairman Taylor called for a motion.

Questions/Discussions

None.

Motion: Mr. Mark Baylis-MAL, made a motion to approve the letter endorsing.

Second: Ms. Lisa Kaye-MAL, seconded the motion.

The body agreed; motion carried. Minutes approved.

MAL

Vice Chairwoman Constance Snively

Ms. Snively informed the committee that to date there had only been one application for the MAL Vietnam Veteran position on the SVC.

She said the committee was working on revising the scoring sheet and updated SOP of the application process for current and future applications.

Chairman Taylor advised that two MAL positions will open in approximately 6 months.

Transportation Committee

Mr. Hines

Mr. William Hines reported on the following statics for first quarter 2023-2014:

- Total vans 126, 17 out of service, 6 going to auction (In service 109)
- Mileage increased by 16.45% over last year at this period.
- Volunteer hours increased 8.71%
- Veterans Transported increased 1.19%
- 324 Volunteer Drivers, transported 5617 vets increased by 2%

Mr. Hines reported on the DAV National Statistics and Lifetime.

Chairman Taylor requested that document placed into the SVC file of record. Chairman Taylor then requested Mr. Hines invite him to the next Transportation Committee meeting once it is established.

Questions/Discussions

None

Veteran Health Committee

Mr. Baylis

Mr. Mark Baylis briefed on his involvement as the SVC representative at the Long-Term Care Council.

- MPOA outdoor spaces for people aging in urban areas-curbs, sidewalks, and doors to help with disabilities.
- Mr. Baylis is advocating for rural outdoor spaces and seeking more data rural illnesses and disabilities. Seeking some site visits with LTCC director Mr. Hancock.
- MPOA transportation subcommittee recommendations to Governor: life cycle replacement plan for DAV vans with 4-year phase in of new fleet with lift capability. Budget of 3.5 million with \$200,000 inflation increase after 3 years. Fleet study to assess impact on rural veteran health care. Bus stops at all VA and veteran facilities with free public transportation.
- Mr. Baylis discussed PennDOT handicapped supporting van money does exist but requires a 20% matching funding.

Questions/Discussions

A discussion occurred revolving around funding, transporting rural veterans including how inclement weather impacts veterans in rural areas can access health care. The discussion also explored other means of transportation besides vans, i.e., Uber/Lyft as well as in-home care as veterans age in place.

VSO Grant Committee

Mr. Hollenbeck

No official Report

Mr. Hollenbeck informed the members about an alarming trend of companies forming to assist veterans file for disability which is not supposed to happened. It appears this is occurring due to a loophole in US Senate Bill 1789. Mr. Hollenbeck said he will have more information at the next meeting.

Questions/Discussions

None.

Womens Health

Ms. Kaye

Ms. Lisa Kaye did not have an official report. However, she congratulated Ms. Marilyn Cavotta on her new position, informed the committee members on Ms. Cavotta's outstanding record and devotion, dedication and expertise.

Ms. Kaye mentioned she had a productive meeting with Mr. Mutschler and the Vice Chairwoman on data collection.

Questions/Discussions

None

PAWVC

Mr. Gyger

No Official Report	<u>Questions/Discussions</u>
None	
Unfinished Business	
None	
New Business	
<p>Chairman Taylor introduced Mr. Greg Jolissaint, MD as the guest presenter on RTM Traumatic Memories: Mr. Jolissaint briefed on ‘reconsolidation of traumatic memories (RTM) Protocol.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PTSD in U.S. Military Service Members • Development of Timeline in RTM Protocol • Mechanism of Action • Advocate for training RTM therapists to address PTSD <p>See Mr. Jolissaint’s slides/materials in the read ahead for more detailed information.</p>	
Good of the Order	
None	
Agenda for Next Meeting	
None	
Closing Remarks	
Chairman invited all members and guests to his Christmas lunch.	
Next Meeting	
<p>Friday, January 12, 2024, at 10:00 AM Arrowheads Community Center, FIG</p>	

The minutes of this meeting are respectfully submitted by:

BG (PA) Maureen Weigl
Deputy Adjutant General-Office of Veterans Affairs



**STATE VETERANS COMMISSION MEETING
JANUARY 12, 2024**



DMVA MILITARY UPDATE

CURRENT AND FUTURE UNIT MOBILIZATIONS



2024									2025											
DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN		
ET 1 B - SWB -23 PAX																				
2-112 IN - HOA#1 -1099 PAX																				
		56 SBCT - FLEE / FLEW - 14 PAX																		
		28 MP - GTMO -111 PAX																		
								56 SBCT - JMTG-E -165 PAX												
								56 SBCT - HOA#2 -1099 PAX												
								213 PC - OSS -16 PAX												
								213 PC - OSS -20 PAX												
									213 PC - OIR -10 PAX											
												528 FIN - OSS - 25 PAX								
																		3622 ODCO - OSS - 159 PAX		

ARNG Unit Soldiers in Theater: **23**
 ARNG Soldiers at MOB/DEMOB Site: **29**
 ARNG Individual Mob: **6**
 Total ARNG Mob: **58**

**Total PANG
 Mobilized: 806**

Current ANG Unit Airmen Mob: 113
Current ANG Individual Mob: 15
Total: ANG Mob: 128

As of 28DEC23

> community > commonwealth > country

CURRENT MOBILIZATIONS & TOTAL DEPLOYMENTS



PAARNG Current Deployments						
MDATE	MSAD	UNIT	OPN	PAX	MISSION	Projected Return Date
07 OCT 23	10 OCT 23	Det 1 B, 1-224 AVN	Counter Drug	23	T10, 12302	12 NOV 24
ARNG Soldiers at MOB/DEMOB Sites				29	Various Missions	Various based on tour
Various Individual MOB Soldiers				6	Various Missions	Various based on tour
Total PAARNG Deployed: 58						

PAANG Current Deployments		
Unit	Opn	Pax
193 SOW	OFS-OIR-OSS, Other	8/1
111 ATKW	IPR (HS), OFS-OIR-OSS, TS	36/6/40
171 ARW	Alert Status (HS), OFS-OIR-OSS	37
Total PAANG Deployed		128

Total PANG Deployed 806

As of 28DEC23

> community > commonwealth > country

CURRENT MOBILIZATIONS & TOTAL DEPLOYMENTS



PAANG Current Deployments

Unit	Opn	Pax
193 SOW	RCP, ANT	53
111 ATKW	IPR (HS), AFRICOM	36/1
171 ARW	Alert Status (HS), OFS-OIR-OSS	37/17
Total PAANG Deployed		144



**DMVA
POLICY, PLANNING & LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS
MR. SETH BENGE**



Policy, Planning and Legislative Affairs (PPL)



HB 325 (Staats) Act amending Title 51 (Military Affairs) in Department of Military Affairs, providing for burial benefits. **05/23/23 Awaiting 2nd Consideration, laid on the table.**

SB 531 (Baker, L) Amends Title 51 (Military Affairs), in State Veterans' Commission and Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans' Affairs, further providing for Veterans' Trust Fund. (Has not crossed opposite chamber). **10/03/23 Passed Senate, referred to House VAEP Cmte.**

SB 447 (Mastriano) Amends Title 51 (Military Affairs), in Department of Military Affairs, establishing the PA VETConnect Program. **10/31/23 1st Consideration in House.**

HB 892 (Kaufer) Identical. **06/13/23 Pass House, referred to Senate VAEP Cmte.**

Blind, amputee and paralyzed veteran's pensions

HB 1091 (Williams, D) \$270/month. **05/23/23 Awaiting 2nd Consideration, laid on the table.**

HB 542 (Gregory) \$250/month. **3/20/23 Introduced and referred to House VAEP Cmte.**

SB 189 (Ward, J) \$200/month. **05/01/23 Awaiting 2nd Consideration, re-referred to Senate Appropriations.**

RETX

HB 1227 (Sappey) [Companion Bill SB 177 Bartolotta] A Joint Resolution proposing an amendment to the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, further providing for exemptions and special provisions. **11/15/23 Voted favorably from House VAEP Cmte, awaiting 1st Consideration.**

[Report on RETX bills:](#) HB 171, HB 1227, HB 1401, SB 177, SB 194, SB 450, SB 844, SB 947

[Report crossed chambers bills:](#) HB 269, HB 363, HB 877, HB 892, HB 1086, SB 126, SB 146, SB 209, SB 248, SB 411, SB 429, SB 438, SB, 447, SB 477, SB 531, SB 933

[Report on passed bills:](#) HB 157, HB 404, HB 804, HB 1094, SB 141, SB 829

As of 28 Dec 2023

> community > commonwealth > country

2024 Significant Dates

Governor's Budget Address: February 6, 2024

Continuing Resolutions: January 19, 2024 - Agriculture, Energy-Water, **Military Construction-VA**, and Transportation-HUD bills.

February 2, 2024 - Commerce-Justice-Science, **Defense**, Financial Services-General Government, Homeland Security, Interior-Environment, Labor-HHS-Education, Legislative Branch, and State-Foreign Operations bills

General Assembly

Senate: January 16, 17; February 5, 6, 7; March 18, 19, 20; April 8, 9, 10, 29, 30; May 1, 6, 7, 8; June 3, 4, 5, 10, 11, 12, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30

House: February 6; March 18, 19, 20, 25, 26, 27; April 8, 9, 10, 15, 16, 17, 29, 30; May 1, 6, 7, 8, 20, 21, 22; June 3, 4, 5, 10, 11, 12, 17, 18, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28

Last day to REGISTER before the primary: April 8, 2024

Pennsylvania Primary: April 23, 2024

Last day to REGISTER before General Election: October 21, 2024

General Election: November 5, 2024

General Assembly Schedule can be found at: [Session Information - PA General Assembly \(state.pa.us\)](https://www.state.pa.us/session-information)

For all Pennsylvania Election dates: [Upcoming Elections \(pa.gov\)](https://www.pa.gov/elections)



**DMVA BUREAU OF VETERANS HOMES
MR. TRAVIS DAVIS**



PVH Current Licensure Status



SVH Survey Table as of 21 Dec 2023				
SVH	Regulatory Agency	Survey Reason/Type	Survey Date(s)	Status/comments
DVVH	DOH Nursing	Annual Recertification	12/18/23 – 12/21/23	Results Pending
	DOH Nursing	Abbreviated - Incident	12/06/23	Cleared
	DOH Nursing	Abbreviated - Complaint	11/07/23	Cleared
	DOH Nursing	Abbreviated - Complaint	09/26/23	Cleared
	DOH Nursing	Abbreviated - Complaint	09/14/23	Cleared
	DOH Nursing	Abbreviated - Complaint	08/14/23	Cleared
	DOH Nursing	Abbreviated - Complaint	05/30/23	Cleared
	DOH Life Safety	Annual Recertification	03/21/23	Cleared
	VA	Recognition Survey	12/14/22 - 12/16/22	Cleared
VA	Annual Recertification	12/19/23 – 12/22/23	Results Pending	
GMVC	DOH Nursing	Annual Recertification	08/29/23 - 09/01/23	Cleared
	DOH Nursing	Abbreviated - Complaint	03/01/23	Cleared
	DOH Life Safety	Annual Recertification	09/12/23	Cleared
	VA	Annual Recertification	02/14/23 - 02/17/23	Cleared
HVH	DOH Nursing	Annual Recertification	08/21/23 - 08/24/23	Cleared
	DOH Nursing	Abbreviated - Complaint	12/12/23 – 12/13/23	Unsubstantiated
	DOH Nursing	Abbreviated - Complaint	08/08/23	Cleared
	DOH Nursing	Abbreviated - Complaint	06/15/23	Cleared
	DOH Nursing	Abbreviated - Complaint	04/14/23	Cleared
	DOH Life Safety	Annual Recertification	07/17/23 - 07/19/23	Cleared
	DHS	Annual Recertification	08/16/22 - 08/17/22	Cleared
	VA	Annual Recertification	06/05/23 - 06/08/23	Cleared, provisional certification granted

Ratings as of 17 Nov 2023			
Facility	5 Star Rating	Facility	5 Star Rating
DVVH	★★★★★	PSSH	★★★★★
GJMVC	★★★★★	SEVC	★★★★★
HVH	★★★★★	SWVC	★★★★★

Each DMVA Pennsylvania Veterans' Home is currently licensed by the PA Department of Health, PA Department of Human Services and certified by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. HVH, PSSH and SEVC have a Personal Care program.

Last updated: 8-24-2023

PVH Current Licensure Status



SVH Survey Table as of 21 Dec 2023				
SVH	Regulatory Agency	Survey Reason/Type	Survey Date(s)	Status/comments
PSSH	DOH Nursing	Annual Recertification	04/18/23 - 04/21/23	Cleared
	DOH Nursing	Abbreviated - Incident	05/15/23	Cleared
	DOH Life Safety	Annual Recertification	04/25/23	Cleared
	DOH Life Safety	Occupancy Inspection	06/28/23	Cleared
	DHS	Annual Recertification	02/21/23 - 02/23/23	Cleared
	DHS	Abbreviated - Complaint	08/30/23	Cleared
	DHS	Abbreviated - Incident	05/02/23	Cleared
	DHS	Abbreviated - Incident	03/09/23	Cleared
	VA	Annual Recertification	02/13/23 - 02/17/23	Cleared, full certification
SEVC	DOH Nursing	Annual Recertification	08/21/23 - 08/24/23	Cleared
	DOH Nursing	Abbreviated - Complaint	10/25/23	Cleared
	DOH Nursing	Abbreviated - Event	03/16/23	Cleared
	DOH Life Safety	Annual Recertification	08/07/23	Cleared
	DHS	Annual Recertification	10/04/23	Cleared
	VA	Annual Recertification	02/27/23 – 03/03/23	Cleared, full certification
SWVC	DOH Nursing	Annual Recertification	12/20/23 – 12/21/23	Results Pending
	DOH Nursing	Abbreviated - Complaint	11/21/23, 11/28/23	POC submitted, awaiting reply
	DOH Nursing	Abbreviated - Complaint	11/08/23	Cleared
	DOH Nursing	Abbreviated - Complaint	08/17/23	Cleared
	DOH Nursing	Abbreviated - Complaint	01/26/23	Cleared
	DOH Life Safety	Annual Recertification	06/28/23 - 06/29/23	Cleared
	VA	Annual Recertification	05/02/23 - 05/05/23	CAP accepted; date certain 8/15

Each DMVA Pennsylvania Veterans' Home is currently licensed by the PA Department of Health, PA Department of Human Services and certified by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. HVH, PSSH and SEVC have a Personal Care program.

Last updated: 8-24-2023

Resident COVID-19 Update

Resident COVID-19 Status: 22 Dec 2023			
Veteran Home	Isolation COVID	Quarantine	Isolation Influenza
DVVH	0	0	0
GMVC	0	0	0
HVH	1	3	0
PSSH	16	0	0
SEVC	1	0	0
SWVC	0	0	0

Resident and Staff COVID-19/Influenza Update

Number of Resident and Staff COVID-19/Influenza Positive							
22 Dec 2023	DVVH	GJMVC	HVH	PSSH	SEVC	SWVC	TOTAL
Total # of COVID + residents	0	0	1	16	1	0	18
Total # of COVID + staff	0	2	3	6	7	9	27
Total # of residents + for Influenza	0	0	3	0	0	0	3
Total # of staff + for Influenza	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Total # of staff who received the 23/24 COVID vaccine	28	4	3	25	7	14	84
Total # of residents who received the 23/24 COVID vaccine	71	76	73	111	60	86	477
Total # of staff who received the Flu Vaccine	76	73	65	54	58	121	447
Total # of residents who received the Flu Vaccine	133	142	168	137	133	136	849

Pennsylvania Veterans Homes COVID-19 Update

COVID-19 links for information related to the Veterans Homes and skilled nursing facilities.

- <https://www.dmva.pa.gov/Pages/default.aspx>
- <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/LTCF-Data.aspx>
- <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Monitoring-Dashboard.aspx>
- <https://www.health.pa.gov/topics/disease/coronavirus/Pages/Guidance/SNF-Guidance.aspx>
- <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/19MpLoPxayE1MDwQJJYCZxISN64V4FJSJPGzfvVBb5Mw/edit#gid=1511961664>



**BUREAU OF VETERANS PROGRAMS,
INITIATIVES, REINTEGRATION, AND OUTREACH
MR. JOEL MUTSCHLER**





**BUREAU OF VETERANS PROGRAMS,
INITIATIVES, REINTEGRATION, AND OUTREACH
MR. JOEL MUTSCHLER**



- Our Servicemember, Veterans, and their Families (SMVF) Community
 - Comprises approximately 14% of Pennsylvania's total population
 - Find resources and link to our team through PA VETConnect – dmva.pa.gov/vetconnect
- PACT Act Impact:
 - Over 637,000 Total Veterans/Survivors nationwide completed PACT Act-related claims
 - Pennsylvania is 8th out of 55 state/territories in completed claims
 - Over 35,000 from PA Veterans/Survivors (as of 31 Dec 23)
 - Visit www.va.gov/PACT to get the latest information and updates
- Expanding Outreach Efforts
 - Pennsylvania Salutes You for Your Service: www.pa.gov/welcome-back-veterans
 - Sign up for PA Veterans Registry and the *DMVA Digest* – register.dmva.pa.gov





PA VETConnect

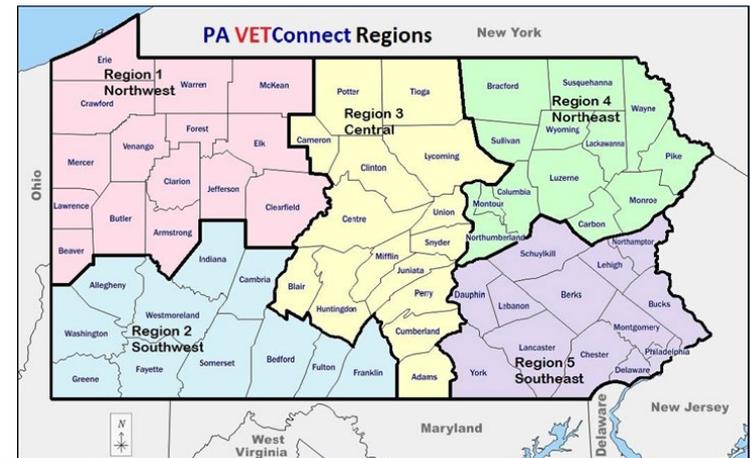


We build relationships that amplify service to the SMVF community

- Region 1 - R1 VSS assisted Veteran with locating contractor to perform home repairs and connected with personal care resources.
- Region 2 - R2 VSS connected a veteran with VLP resources who needed food assistance, and subsequently discovered he needed assistance to pay overdue car insurance and is working with PA Serves to address this need.
- Region 3 – R3 Team worked with Blair county CDVA to facilitate a VTF approval for a veteran who needed car repairs.
- Region 4 - R4 VSS assisted a veteran with C&P claim process, as the veteran now lives in NJ was having difficulty navigating the process, claim was filed and waiting on VA appointments.
- Region 5 – Region 5 team working to address veteran food insecurity by working to stand up a Military Food Share program potentially with TAL post 466 collaboration.

■ Successes

- >17,000 Connections
- > 2,000 resources
- Building trust within the network



www.dmv.pa.gov/vetconnect

> community > commonwealth > country

Reintegration and Outreach Events Overview



Outreach Statistics

	1st Qtr	2nd Qtr	3rd Qtr	4th Qtr	Year to Date
Outreach Events Supported	87	91			178
Mobile Outreach Van Events	8	9			17
Veteran Interactions	2,202	1,471			3,673
Claim referrals to County Directors and Service Organizations	684	369			1,053
Claim referrals to other state, county and local organizations assisting Veterans	626	371			997
Health Care Enrollment Referrals	438	182			620
Number of Veterans Registry Cards distributed	350	143			493
County Directors Office Attended	45	41			86
Legislative attended events	56	41			97

VETERANS' TRUST FUND



VTF Report						
Source	Week	Month to Date	Fiscal Year Total	Total	# HOV Sold	
Appropriation Transfer to VTF	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$1,700,000.00		
HOV License Plate	\$0.00	\$15.00	\$1,148.00	\$56,820.00	77	3,788
PA Monuments LP	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	0	0
HOV Motorcycle License Plate	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$75.00	\$3,706.00	5	247
HOV Women's License Plate	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$310.00	\$2,080.00	21	139
Checkoff & Donations	\$11,976.00	\$88,469.70	\$426,025.70	\$14,759,718.98		
Veterans Trust Fund Online Donations	\$92.00	\$92.00	\$665.00	\$7,645.00		
SECA Donations	\$0.00	\$246.28	\$2,054.66	\$19,121.88		
County Juror Donations	\$0.00	\$742.90	\$4,651.30	\$77,831.65		
Casino Donations	\$1,166.35	\$2,394.31	\$6,487.50	\$52,732.26		
Interest	\$0.00	\$8,254.50	\$40,486.95	\$299,450.77		
VSO	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$700,000.00		
PENNDOT Costs (SFY 16-17)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$194,000.00		
PENNDOT Costs (SFY 15-16)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$194,000.00		
PENNDOT Costs (SFY 14-15)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$194,000.00		
PENNDOT Costs (SFY 13-14)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$194,000.00		
VTF Grant NOFA (SFY 22-23)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00		
VTF Grant NOFA (SFY 21-22)	\$0.00	\$0.00	-\$25,483.07	\$800,000.00		
VTF Grant NOFA (SFY 20-21)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$1,320,926.68		
VTF Grant NOFA (SFY 19-20)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$789,809.33		
VTF Grant NOFA (SFY 18-19)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$789,349.09		
VTF Grant NOFA (SFY 17-18)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$768,801.35		
VTF Grant NOFA (SFY 16-17)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$763,749.14		
VTF Grant NOFA (SFY 15-16)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$641,329.75		
VTF Grant NOFA (SFY 14-15)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$522,368.88		
VTF Grant NOFA (SFY 13-14)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$472,473.67		
VTF Grant NOFA (SFY 13-12)	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$421,777.15		
Veteran Programs Training	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$8,700.00		
Veterans Assistance	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$22,901.34		
VTA	\$9,850.00	\$72,547.00	\$289,124.00	6,358,972.32		
Working Balance	\$3,384.35	\$27,667.69	\$218,263.18	\$1,821,947.84		4,174

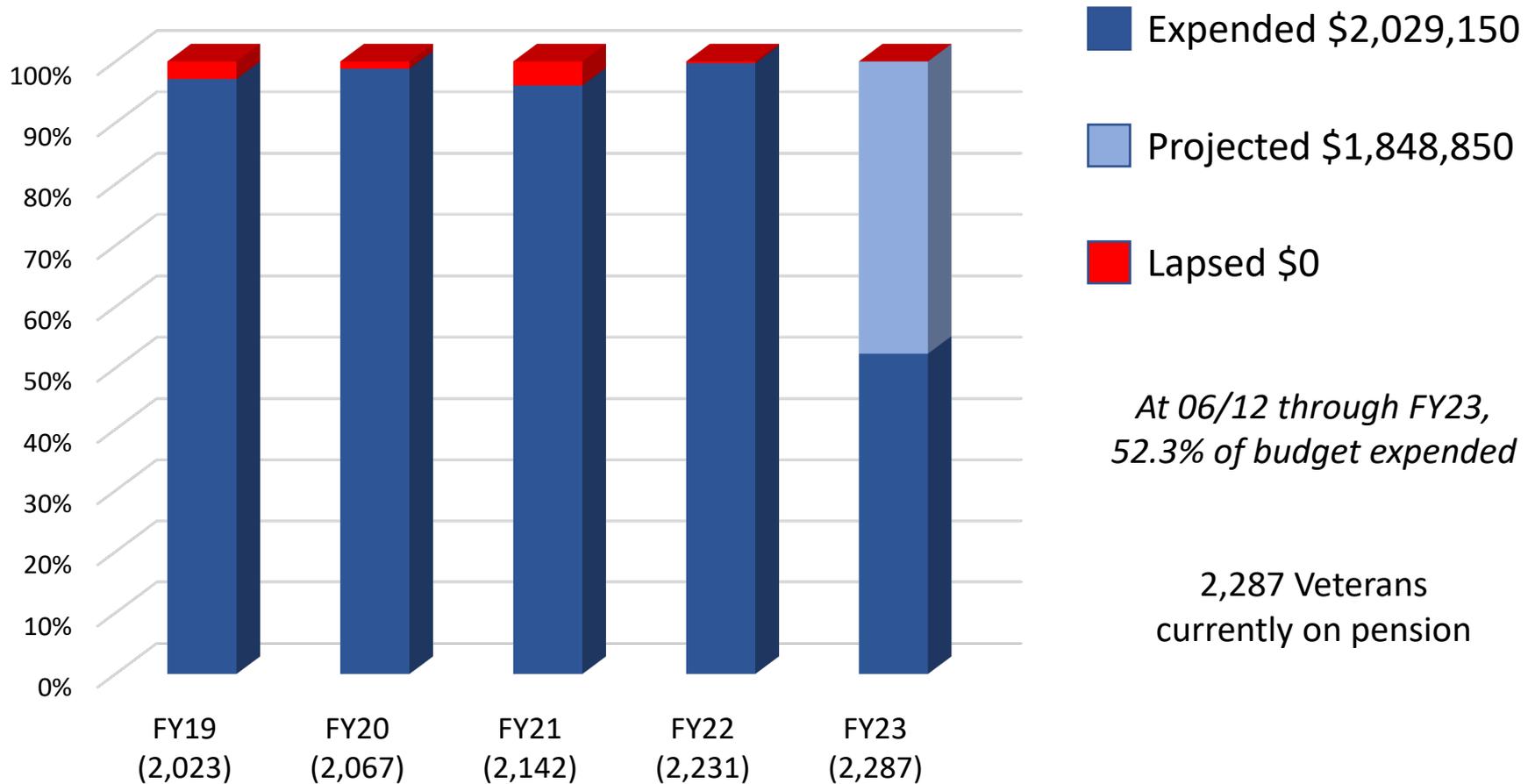
As of 27 December 2023

> community > commonwealth > country

AMPUTEE & PARALYZED VETERANS' PENSION



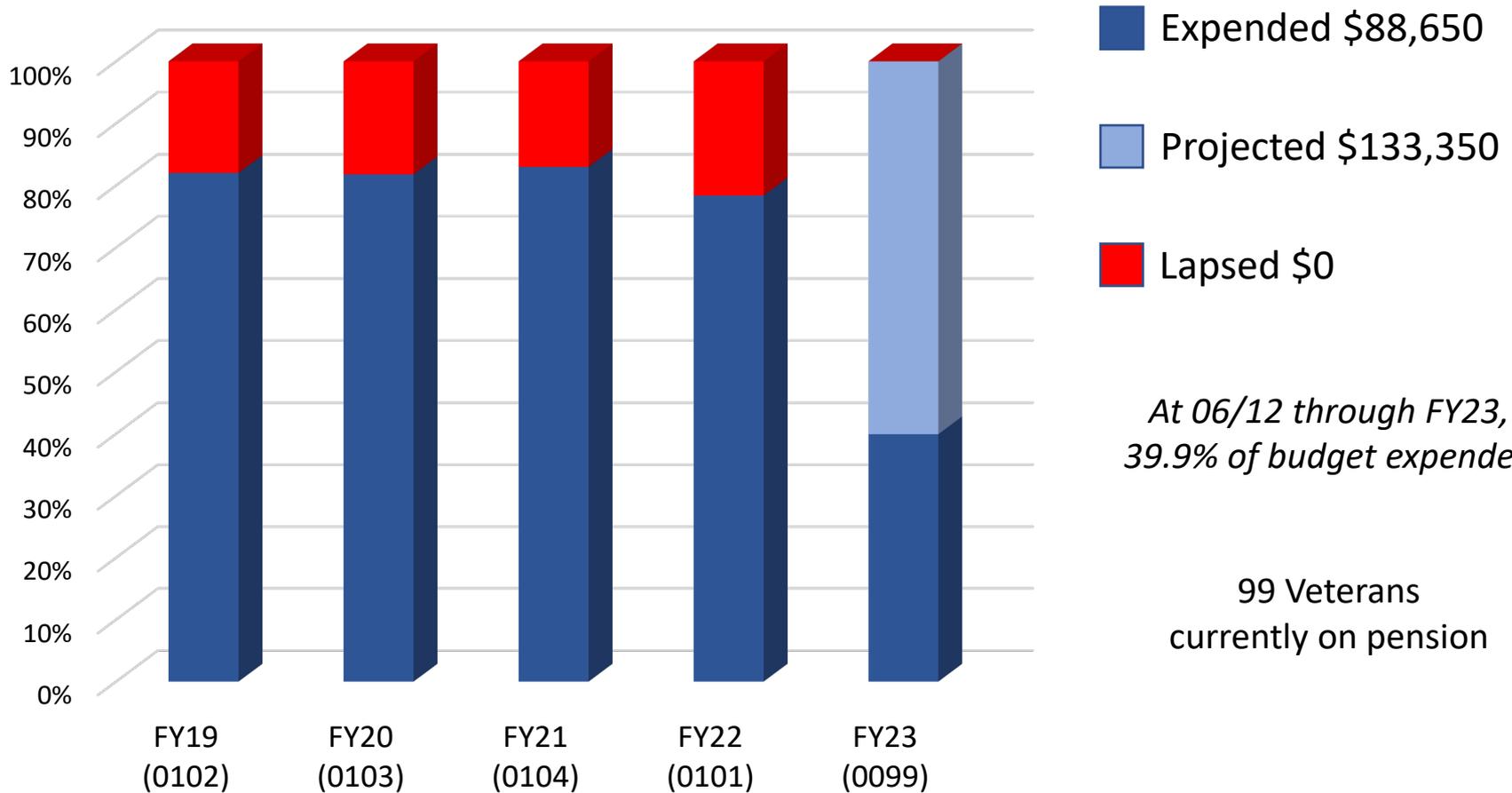
\$3,878,000



BLIND VETERANS' PENSION



\$222,000



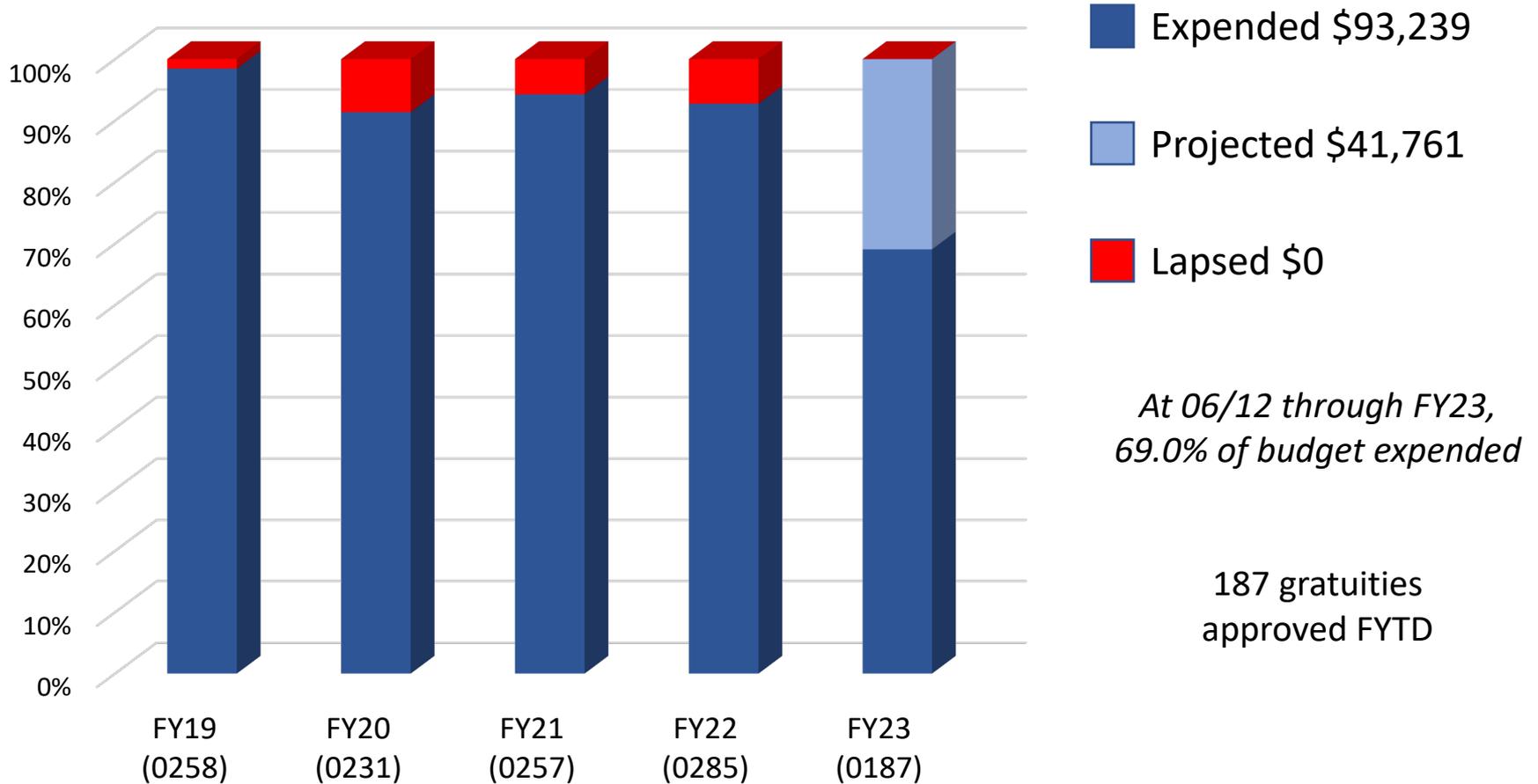
At 06/12 through FY23, 39.9% of budget expended

99 Veterans currently on pension

EDUCATIONAL GRATUITY



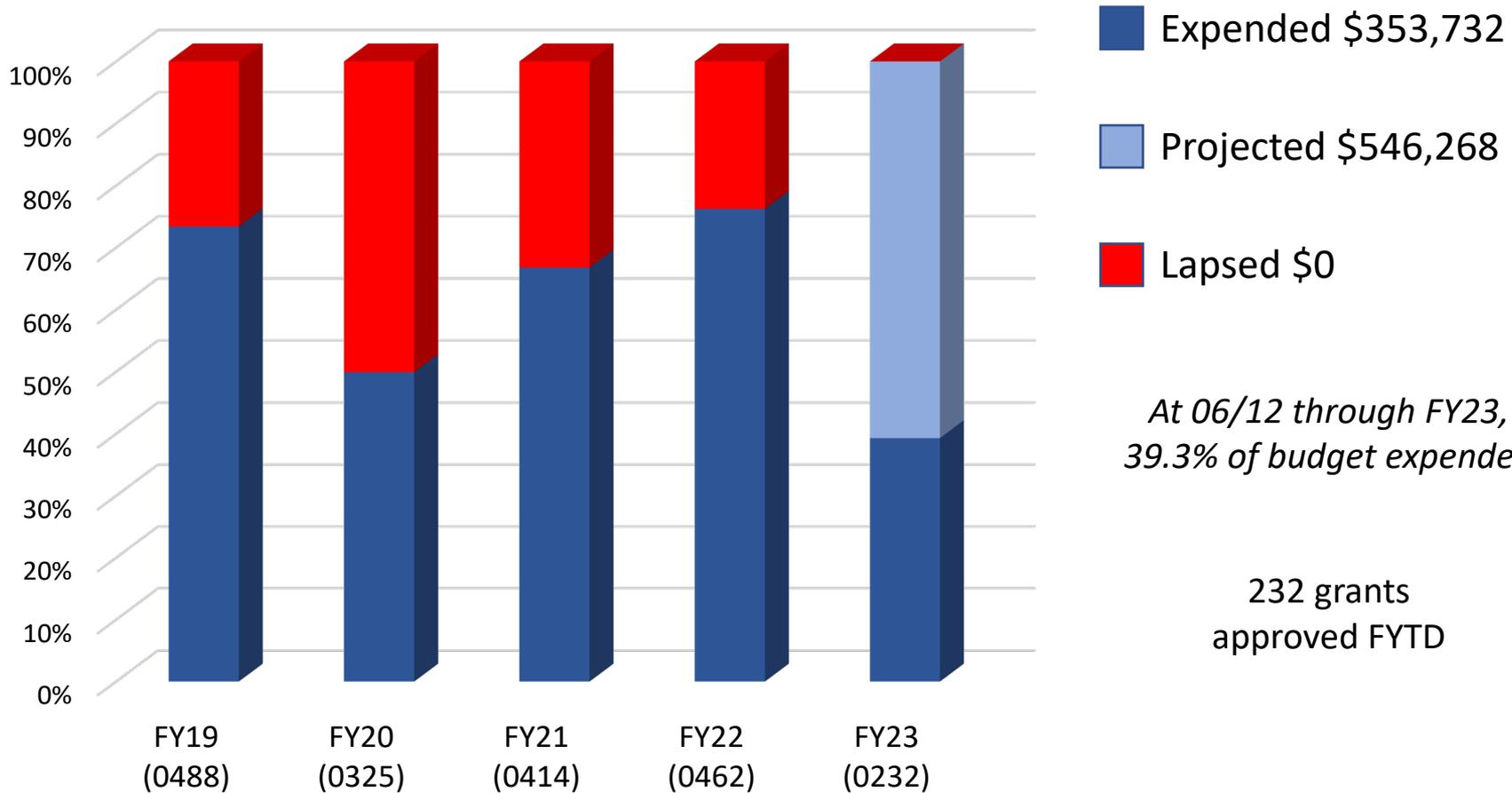
\$135,000



VETERANS' TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE



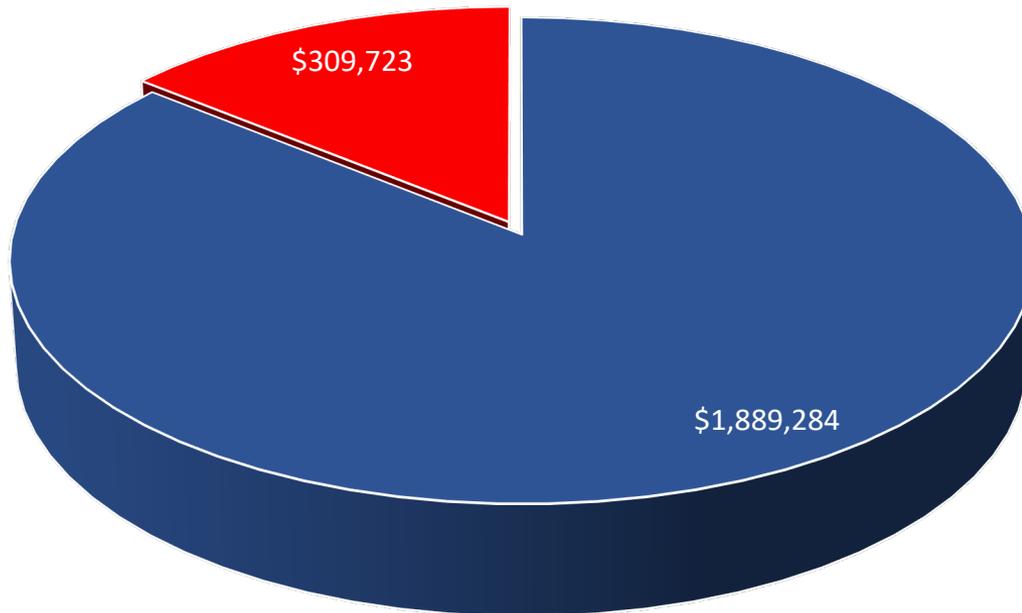
\$900,000 (VTF)



*At 06/12 through FY23,
39.3% of budget expended*

232 grants
approved FYTD

MFRAP Fund Balance \$1,198,227.40



Total Donations FY05-23: \$2,198,897.26

- Personal Income Tax Donations
- Private/Cash/Other Donations

Total Grants FY05-22: \$1,000,669.86*

FY23 Total Donations: \$553.11

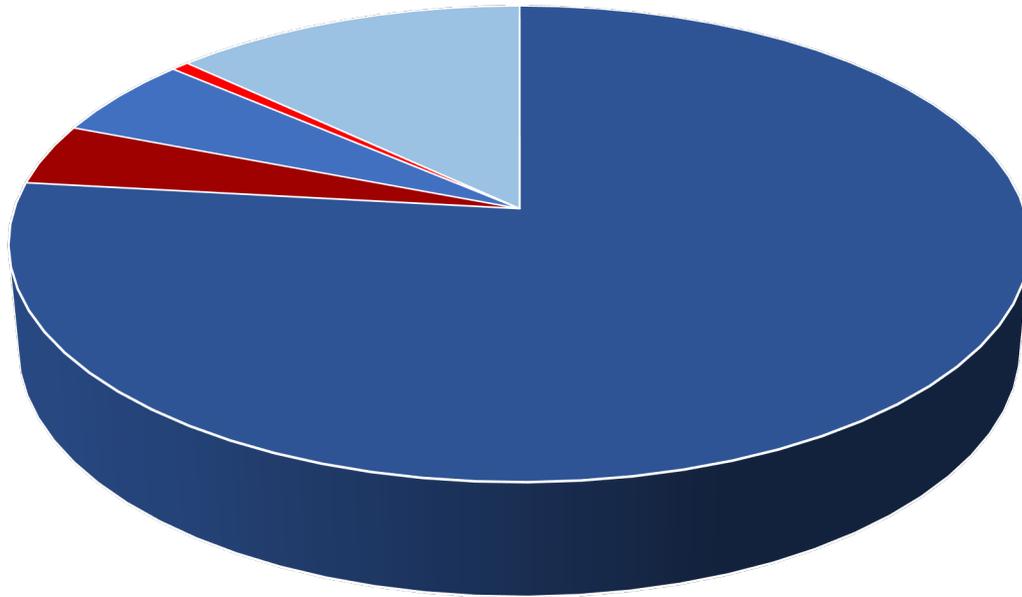
FY23 Total Grants: \$22,668

**Program surpassed \$1M in total grants in November 2023.*

DISABLED VETERANS' REAL ESTATE TAX EXEMPTION



457 Total Adjudications
from 22 Nov to 29 Dec 2023



- 351 Approved (76.8%)
- 19 Denied: Financial Need
- 25 Denied: Ineligible*
- 03 Removed: No Response
- 59 Removed: Eligibility Change

*** 25 Applications Ineligible by Reason**

- 01 – Veteran did not have total or 100% permanent disability during lifetime
- 06 – Property not owned solely by Veteran or jointly/estate by entirety with spouse
- 10 – Veteran did not have service during a period of war or armed conflict
- 08 – Veteran's disability not rated 100% permanent due to future exams

DISABLED VETERANS' REAL ESTATE TAX EXEMPTION

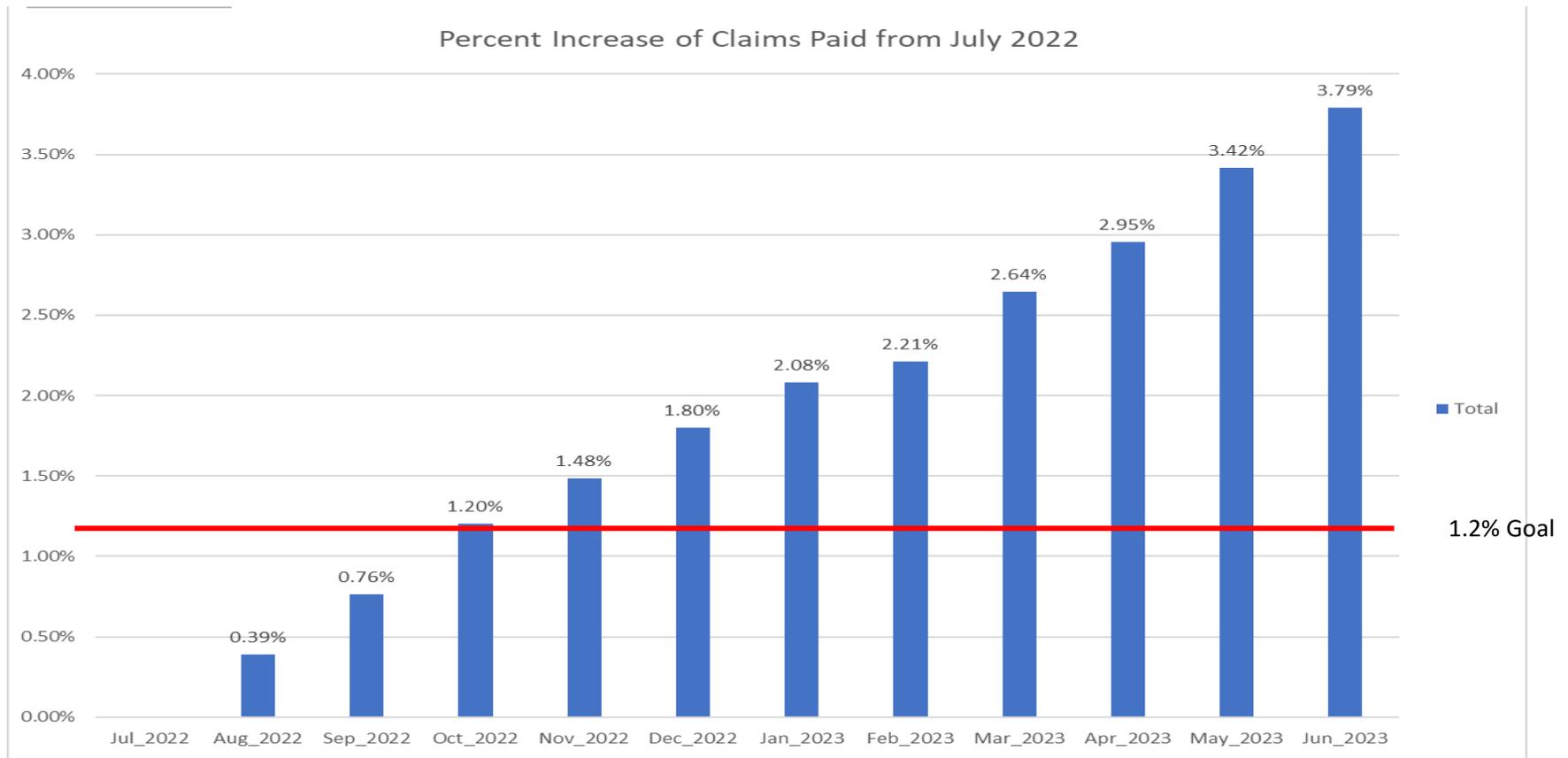


Estimated \$55.2M in real estate tax exemptions to disabled veterans and their surviving spouses.

As of 29 Dec 2023

> community > commonwealth > country

Claims Paid As Reported By VA Central Office (VACO)



% reflects the combined efforts of: AMVETs, DAV, DMVA (to include counties), TAL, VFW, and VVA in federal VA compensation and pension claims.

As of 30 JUL 2023

[> community](#) [> commonwealth](#) [> country](#)



VISN 4

MR. TIM LIEZERT



VISN 4 Access – Fiscal Year 2024 Wait Times



Clinics FY24 thru Dec. 16	Number of Appointments	Average Wait
Mental Health	78,114	5.5
Primary Care	115,464	4.6
Specialty Care	219,038	10.0
Other	155,465	6.4
ALL	568,081	7.3

FY24 data updated 12/18/2023 with appointment info as of 12/16/2023.

VISN 4 Access – Current Average Wait Times



VISN 4 Facility	Primary Care	
	New Patients	Returning Patients
James E. Van Zandt VAMC	14	2
Abie Abraham HCC	14	1
Coatesville VAMC	27	9
Erie VAMC	16	3
Lebanon VAMC	13	5
Corporal Michael J. Crescenz VAMC	34	6
VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System (University Drive)	NA	8
VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System (H.J. Heinz)	28	15
Wilkes-Barre VAMC	12	2
Wilmington VAMC	13	12

FY24 data updated 12/18/2023 with wait times as of 12/17/2023 for the last 30 days.

www.accesstocare.va.gov

January 2024 Update

> community > commonwealth > country

Improvements to the Access to Care website

Average wait times for all VHA medical centers and clinics are now calculated to include additional steps in the appointment process that had not been captured in the past.

- For **new patient** appointments, average wait time is calculated from the earliest time a request for care is consistently recorded in the scheduling system to the date the appointment is completed – or the date it is scheduled to occur if not yet completed.
- For **established patient** appointments, average wait times are measured from the date agreed upon between a Veteran and provider for future care and ends on the date care is received, or the date that care is scheduled to occur if it has not yet occurred.

The upgraded calculation makes the website more reflective of the complete process of requesting and receiving care. Averages are representative of general performance and may not represent individual experience. Average wait times are never used to determine eligibility for community care.

VISN 4 Care in the Community



	Care in the Community Consults (Scheduled and Completed)	Non-VA Unique Patients*
FY22	168,182	89,683
FY23	190,813	99,278
FY24 (as of 12/18/23)	46,442	44,488

*Number of unique enrolled Veterans who receive community care at VA expense

FY24 data updated 12/18/2023 with consult info as of 12/18/2023.

CMS Star Ratings – Publicly Reported July 2023



Facility Name	Peer Grouping	Overall Star Rating	Hospital Summary Score
James E. Van Zandt VAMC	4	★★★	0.12
Lebanon VAMC	4	★★★★	0.33
Corporal Michael J. Crescenz VAMC	5	★★★★★	0.41
VA Pittsburgh Healthcare System (University Drive)	5	★	-1.31
Wilkes-Barre VAMC	4	★★★★	0.39
Wilmington VAMC	4	★★★	0.10

- The CMS Star ratings, available publicly, show 50% of applicable VISN 4 facilities performing at 4 or 5 stars (5 stars being the highest rating).
- Six facilities are included in star ratings due to number of patient discharges.

- 1 star facility trending ‘no different than the national rate’ in Patient Safety Measures
 - Indicates improved performance
- January 2024 CMS Preview report shows improved performance compared to July 2023 release
 - Anticipate increases in multiple domains
 - Anticipate increase in overall star rating

SAIL Radar



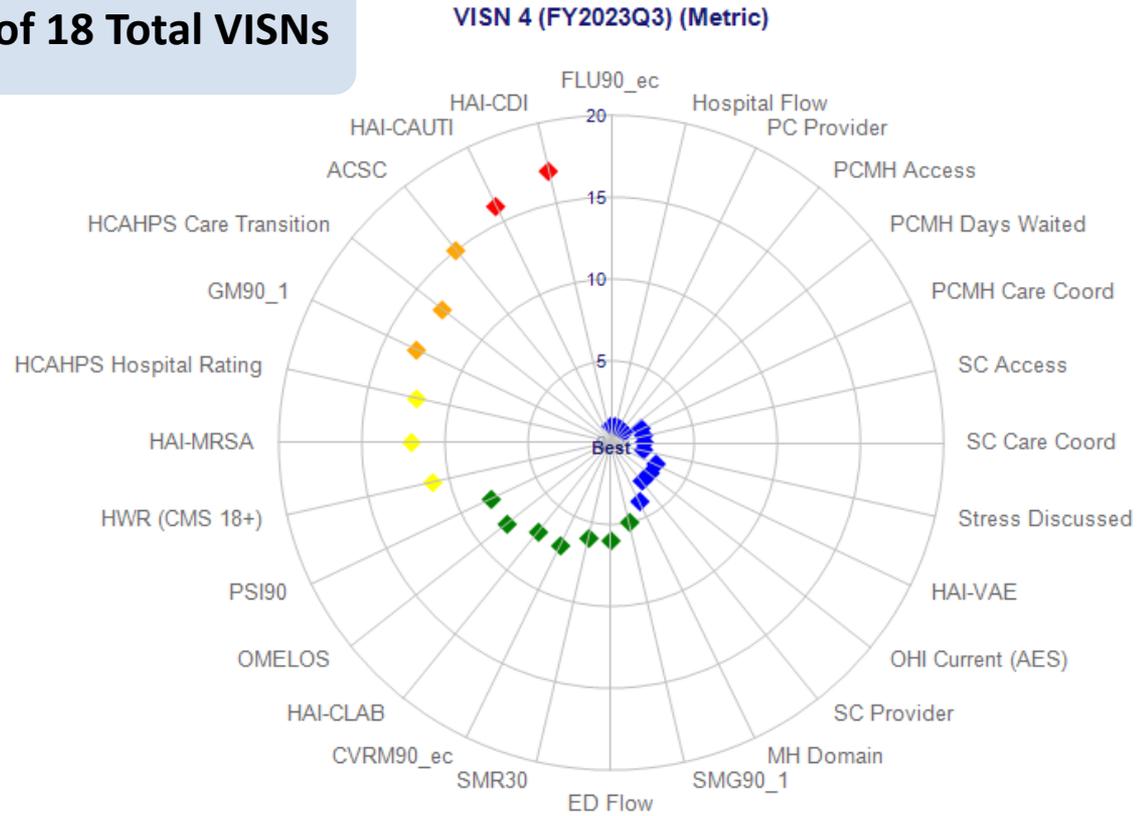
FY23Q3 Rank vs. FY23Q2 Rank

• Ranked out of 18 Total VISNs

↓ Rank Improved = 8
↑ Rank Worsened = 5
↔ No Change = 15

**Note – preferred direction in rank is down

5
 Main measures ranked **1st** in performance among 18 total VISNs



Marker color: Blue - 1st quintile; Green - 2nd; Yellow - 3rd; Orange - 4th; Red - 5th quintile.

NEXT MEETING



**Friday February 2, 2024
at 10:00AM**

**Arrowheads Community Club
Fort Indiantown Gap
Annville, PA 17003**

VISIT www.dmva.pa.gov/veterans/commissionsandcouncils FOR SVC INFO



VISN 4 Update

January 12, 2024

Leadership Update

Robert Kling, was selected as the associate director of the VA Pittsburgh. He has been serving in this role on an interim appointment since August.

Jeston Robinson, the assistant director of the VA Pittsburgh, has accepted a detail as associate director at Atlanta VA Health Care System, beginning December 4.

Jason Fay, will serve as the acting assistant director for Pittsburgh during Mr. Robinson's detail. In this role, he will oversee the Center for Development and Civic Engagement and the Veterans Transportation Program. He will also serve as the Western Market Lead for VISN 4.

Tara Callahan, Chief of Biomed at the Coatesville VA continues to serve as their interim Associate Director.

Teresa Waksmonski-Frye, the Deputy VISN CFO continues to serve as Interim CFO.

Paul Woodland, the Chief of Police at the Wilmington VA is currently serving as our Acting VISN 4 Security Officer.

Patient Experience Update

VISN 4 has consistently received the highest trust score in the nation at 94.1%. Our network also has the highest number of compliments at 78% and the lowest number of recommendations at 10.5% as well as concerns at 11.4%.

VISN 4 Quality Data Update

In response to a request at the last State Veterans Commission Meeting, I have included VISN 4 quality data in slides 5-7 in the presentation included with your read ahead material.

The quality outcomes among the nine facilities in VISN 4 are apparent, as evidenced by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) Star Ratings and the VA Strategic Analytics for Improvement and Learning (SAIL) Measures. The CMS Star ratings, available publicly, show 50% of applicable VISN 4 facilities performing at 4 or 5 stars, 5 stars being the highest rating (note 6 facilities are included in star ratings due to number of patient discharges). The SAIL measures, reported most recently for fiscal year 23 quarter 3 (FY23Q3), shows VISN 4 having 46% of quality measures in the top performing quintile with six of those ranking as the number one performer across all 18 VISNs.

These top quality outcomes for our Veterans are a direct reflection of the robust safety culture woven throughout the network. The safety culture measures, as captured through employee survey results, are all trending at 3.9 or greater on a scale of 0 to 5, 5 being the best performance. This performance indicates a high level of trust among employees in the VISN and an environment of consistent Just Culture practices and processes. The ratio of close call events, or events that could have reached a Veteran and caused harm but did not, compared to actual harm events, is consistently increasing, meaning the proactive nature of employees among VISN 4 is apparent and resulting in less harm to Veterans. Employees are reporting these almost harmful events occurring and initiating process changes, creating a safer environment for care. As a result of this proactive identification and mitigation, the total number of actual events causing harm to a Veteran has seen steady and continuous decline over the past 3 quarters.

VHA Priority 1 update: Hire Faster and more competitively

PACT Act pay authorities have allowed us to recruit and retain top talent at all levels within VISN 4's medical centers. VISN 4's workforce grew by 6.1% in FY23, with a net change of 1,015 FTEE. Also in FY23, VISN 4's total loss rate was 8.2%, which is the lowest in over 7 years. This workforce stabilization is due in large part to the new pay flexibilities offered by the PACT Act. Examples include:

- a. Offering Critical Skills Incentives to employees in 11 shortage occupations, impacting 1,800 employees in our VISN.
- b. Narrowing the salary gap with the community for key occupations. In FY23, VISN 4 implemented 156 new Special Salary Rates.
- c. Retaining and attracting highly qualified employees by offering Student Loan Repayment. In FY23, VISN 4 increased its utilization rate by 50%.

We are proud to have 3,776 Veterans employed across VISN 4 positions participating in care and services for Veterans.

VHA Priority 2 update: Connect Veterans to the Soonest and best care

The Connected Care program in VISN 4 is a crucial part of VA's goal to connect Veterans to the soonest and best care. In fiscal year 2023, we have completed more than 475,000 telehealth visits, allowing Veterans to be seen in their homes, reduce travel, and avoid inclement weather. In Fy 2023, Veterans have also sent 685,648 secure messages to their providers and care teams, often negating the need to make an appointment. We offer tele-eye, dermatology, and sleep services in nearly all of our community clinics to ensure Veterans don't have to travel out of their communities to receive these crucial services.

In Fy 2023, our VISN 4 clinical contact center has served 2,346,402 Veteran callers among all four services: Pharmacy, RN, Administration and Tele-Urgent Care.

VHA Priority 3 update: Serve Veterans with military environmental exposures

Our staff continue to find new ways to reach out and serve Veterans with military environmental exposures. As of December 5, a total of 225,744 Veterans (58.3% of enrolled Veterans) in VISN 4 have received a toxic exposure screening. Any Veterans who needed follow-up screenings were promptly referred to the appropriate staff who could ensure all needs were met.

VHA Priority 4 update: Accelerate VA's journey to a High Reliability Organization

Our commitment to High Reliability is integrated within the fabric of our operations and culture. In VISN 4 we have implemented all four foundational HRO practices:

1. Safety Huddles—work units gather briefly to communicate and discuss plans for the day ahead, as well as potential risks or concerns.
2. Leader Rounding—facility health care leaders set aside dedicated time to talk with staff in their work settings providing an opportunity for open and closed loop communication with staff.
3. Patient Safety Forums—large group meeting where executive leaders, patient safety staff members and front-line personnel have an equal voice and an opportunity to review errors and safety concerns.
4. Visual Management Boards—provides a snapshot of performance information and data for the facility and work settings to develop real time action plans which ensure safety and quality care.

VHA Priority 5 update: Support Veterans' whole health, their caregivers and survivors

All 9 of our facilities in VISN 4 now offer virtual whole health and complementary and integrative health treatment in some capacity. We also have a tele whole health hub, which expands virtual access to whole health offerings like coaching and Tai Chi. In

fiscal year 2023, we have increased the number of Veterans who use whole health services by 29.54%, far exceeding the goal of 14%.

All VISN 4 facilities have a whole health program manager and a steering committee. We also have an active VISN wide whole health steering committee. The steering committee allows for diverse perspectives in developing the strategy for whole health implementation in VISN 4, visibility of initiatives across the Network, and sharing of best practices.

VHA Priority 6 update: Prevent Veterans Suicide

On July 16, 2022, the Veterans Crisis Line (VCL) transitioned to a new 3-digit number. Veterans can now use this new option by dialing 988 then pressing 1 to contact the Veterans Crisis Line. In FY23, VISN 4 had a 99.11% success rate for successful closure—within 3 days of the initial call—to the Veteran Crisis Line. In VISN 4, there have been 6,304 total requests from the VCL for Veteran follow-up, and 1,225 resulted in dispatch of emergency service to the Veteran.

Community Engagement and Partnership Coordinators (CEPCs) serve as subject matter experts in public health approaches, coalition development and facilitation, and other community-based models for Veteran suicide prevention. They collaboratively work with communities to develop, facilitate, and strengthen community-based interventions for suicide prevention at community, state, and regional levels.

In FY23, VISN 4 has filled all current CEPC positions (a total of 12 positions, across the 9 VISN facilities). In FY 2023, these CEPCs established 54 new suicide prevention community coalitions within VISN 4. Total community coalitions established since the launch of the program is 110.

FY 2023, VISN 4 exceeded the Comprehensive Suicide Risk Evaluation (CSRE1) national adherence rate (VISN 4: 90%. National 85%). Percentage of Veterans with timely completion of the comprehensive suicide risk evaluation following a positive suicide screen.

FY 2023, VISN 4 exceeded the Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale (CSSRS1) national adherence rate (VISN 4: 65%. National 60%). Percentage of Veterans with timely completion of the suicide screening when it was due.

Authorized Monthly Status Report November 1 to 30 2023 Midnight

Variations relevant to the most recent census report

1. Homes are displayed differently in the new report.

DVVH

GMVC

SWVC

HVH

PSSH

SEVC

2. Homes' level of care categorized into 2 sections.

SNF- Skilled Nursing Facility

Level of Care
Nursing Care

PCU- Personal Care Unit

Level of Care
Nursing Care
Personal Care

(old version has Memory care now in new report that numbers under the SNF)

3. The new report with home and category:

DVVH - SNF

GMVC - SNF

SWVC - SNF

HVH - SNF & PCU

PSSH - SNF & PCU

SEVC- SNF & PCU

For Example: GMVC - SNF

Gino J. Merli Veterans' Center, Scranton PA - Vito Ruggiero - Commandant									
Level of Care	Authorized Beds	Beds Assigned	Beds Vacant	Filled %	Non-Veteran Census %	Admissions	Discharges/ Expirations	Attaining Adm Veteran	Attaining Adm Non-Veteran
Nursing Care	196	163	33	83%	12%	5	3	25	17

For Example: HVH – SNF & PCU

Hollidaysburg Veterans' Home, Hollidaysburg PA - Christina Dambeck - Commandant									
Level of Care	Authorized Beds	Beds Assigned	Beds Vacant	Filled %	Non-Veteran Census %	Admissions	Discharges/ Expirations	Attaining Adm Veteran	Attaining Adm Non-Veteran
Nursing Care	257	175	82	68%	8%	8	12	14	4
Personal Care	167	72	95	43%		2	1	5	3
Total	424	247	177	58%		10	13	19	7

4. Admissions are as is.

Admissions	I
8	
2	
10	

5. Discharges and Expirations are combined.

Discharges/ Expirations
12
1
13

6. Instead of Wait time the rephrase version is “Attaining Admission Veteran” and “Attaining Admission Non-Veteran”.

Attaining Adm Veteran	Attaining Adm Non-Veteran
27	7

7. Non-Veteran Census percentage included for each home.

Non- Veteran Census %
12%

8. In the summary section the changes are as follow:

Male Veterans

Male Non-Veterans

Female Veterans

Female Non-Veterans

Total Veterans

Total Non-Veterans

Total Vet Percentage

Total Non-Veterans Percentage

Veterans Home Total

Veteran Status: NonVeteran/Veteran	Male Vets	Male Non-Vets	Female Vets	Female Non-Vets	Total Vets	Total Non-Vets	Toatal Vets %	Total Non-Vet %	VH Totals
DVVH	145	1	2	9	147	10	86%	6%	157
GJMVC	137	1	2	23	139	24	71%	12%	163
HVH	203	1	11	32	214	33	50%	8%	247
PSSH	133	3	6	17	139	20	67%	10%	159
SEVC	172	1	14	17	186	18	64%	6%	204
SWVC	125	2	3	19	128	21	54%	9%	149
Totals	915	9	38	117	953	126	62%	8%	1079

Thank you and please reach out to me if you have any questions.

Binal Patel | MHA | Admissions and Outreach Coordinator
PA Department of Military and Veterans Affairs | Bureau of Veterans Homes
Edward Martin Hall, Fort Indiantown Gap
Annville, PA 17003
Phone: 717.376.6969



Authorized Monthly Status Report November 1 to 30 2023 Midnight

Delaware Valley Veterans' Home, Philadelphia PA - Margo Coleman - Commandant

Level of Care	Authorized Beds	Beds Assigned	Beds Vacant	Filled %	Non-Veteran Census %	Admissions	Discharges/Expirations	Attaining Adm Veteran	Attaining Adm Non-Veteran
Nursing Care	171	157	14	92%	6%	7	2	45	18

Gino J. Merli Veterans' Center, Scranton PA - Vito Ruggiero - Commandant

Level of Care	Authorized Beds	Beds Assigned	Beds Vacant	Filled %	Non-Veteran Census %	Admissions	Discharges/Expirations	Attaining Adm Veteran	Attaining Adm Non-Veteran
Nursing Care	196	163	33	83%	12%	5	3	25	17

Southwestern Veterans' Center, Pittsburgh PA -Richard Adams - Commandant

Level of Care	Authorized Beds	Beds Assigned	Beds Vacant	Filled %	Non-Veteran Census %	Admissions	Discharges/Expirations	Attaining Adm Veteran	Attaining Adm Non-Veteran
Nursing Care	236	149	87	63%	9%	3	2	27	7

Hollidaysburg Veterans' Home, Hollidaysburg PA - Christina Dambeck - Commandant

Level of Care	Authorized Beds	Beds Assigned	Beds Vacant	Filled %	Non-Veteran Census %	Admissions	Discharges/Expirations	Attaining Adm Veteran	Attaining Adm Non-Veteran
Nursing Care	257	175	82	68%	8%	8	12	14	4
Personal Care	167	72	95	43%		2	1	5	3
Total	424	247	177	58%		10	13	19	7

Pennsylvania Soldiers' & Sailors' Home, Erie PA - Cheri Spacht - Commandant

Level of Care	Authorized Beds	Beds Assigned	Beds Vacant	Filled %	Non-Veteran Census %	Admissions	Discharges/Expirations	Attaining Adm Veteran	Attaining Adm Non-Veteran
Nursing Care	107	103	4	96%	10%	6	5	15	6
Personal Care	100	56	44	56%		3	5	7	0
Total	207	159	48	77%		9	10	22	6

Southeastern Veterans' Center, Spring City PA - Brian Gula - Commandant

Level of Care	Authorized Beds	Beds Assigned	Beds Vacant	Filled %	Non-Veteran Census %	Admissions	Discharges/Expirations	Attaining Adm Veteran	Attaining Adm Non-Veteran
Nursing Care	238	171	67	72%	6%	8	4	39	8
Personal Care	54	33	21	61%		1	0	10	4
Total	292	204	88	70%		9	4	49	12

Summary / Pennsylvania Bureau of Veterans' Homes

Veteran Census/Events	Authorized Beds	Beds Assigned	Beds Vacant	Filled %	Non-Veteran Census %	Admissions	Discharges/Expirations	Attaining Adm Veteran	Attaining Adm Non-Veteran
Nursing Care	1205	918	287	76%	12%	37	28	165	60
Personal Care	321	161	160	50%		6	6	22	7
Total	1,526	1079	447	71%		43	34	187	67

Veteran Status: Non-Veteran/Veteran	Male Vets	Male Non-Vets	Female Vets	Female Non-Vets	Total Vets	Total Non-Vets	Toatal Vets %	Total Non-Vet %	VH Totals
DVVH	145	1	2	9	147	10	86%	6%	157
GJMVC	137	1	2	23	139	24	71%	12%	163
HVH	203	1	11	32	214	33	50%	8%	247
PSSH	133	3	6	17	139	20	67%	10%	159
SEVC	172	1	14	17	186	18	64%	6%	204
SWVC	125	2	3	19	128	21	54%	9%	149
Totals	915	9	38	117	953	126	88%	12%	1079

SUMMARY OF ACTIVITY 11/22/2023 - 12/29/2023

APPLICATIONS APPROVED	351
New	196
Review	155

APPLICATIONS DENIED	106
Financial Need	19
Ineligible	25
No Response	3
Change of Eligibility	59

OVER INCOME	35
New	14
Review	21

10%
7%
14%

APPLICATIONS CREATED	427
TOTAL ADJUDICATED	457

RETX- Exempt list (New)

mvfigsqlprod01
12/29/2023
rep_VADC_RETX_Exempt_List_New

Summary of Current Applications (Exempt)

Count	No Activity	Review Process Started	Review App Received	New Apps Pending
18288	17374	847	67	238

Summary of Activity from 11/22/2023 to 12/29/2023

Apps Created: 427	
New:	246
Review:	181
Apps Approved: 351	
New:	196
Review:	155
Apps Denied (Need):	19
Apps Denied (Ineligible):	25
Apps Removed (No Response):	3
Apps Removed (Eligibility Change):	59

Summary of Ineligible Reason

Reason	Count
The property for which you claim exemption is not owned solely by you, or as an estate by the entirety with your spouse.	6
The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has determined that the veteran did not serve during a period of war or armed conflict.	10
The U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs has determined that you did not serve during a period of war or armed conflict and you have a future exam, therefore, your disability has not been rated as total or 100% permanent.	1
The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs stated that you have a future exam , therefore, your disability has not been rated as total or 100% permanent.	8



**Pennsylvania Soldiers' and Sailors' Home
Advisory Council Meeting
Erie, Pennsylvania
September 14, 2023
9:00a.m.**

ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT

Mr. Gary Fry, President, AMVETS
Mr. Richard DiGiacomo, Secretary, Military Officers Assoc. of America
Mr. Harry Stewart, American Legion
Ms. Karen Foust, Disabled American Veterans
Mr. Robert C. Eiler, Veterans of Foreign Wars
Mr. William Rose, PSSH Resident Council President
Mr. Richard Supak, Catholic War Veterans
Mr. Joe Benacci, Director of Veterans Affairs

ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT

Mr. Raymond J. Chambers, Vice President, Marine Corps League
Mr. David Price, Military Order of the Purple Heart
Mr. Anthony DiGiacomo, County Director of Veterans Affairs
The Honorable Curt Sonney, PA House of Representatives
The Honorable Daniel Laughlin, PA Senator

OTHERS PRESENT

Mr. Travis Davis, MHA, NHA, HSE, Executive Director, Long-Term Care

Mrs. Barbara Raymond, RN, NHA, Director of Veterans' Homes

Ms. Cheri Spacht, RN, NHA, PSSH Commandant

Ms. Deborah Cubero, PSSH DON

Mrs. Elizabeth Seibert, PSSH Deputy Commandant

Ms. Alyssa Cooley, PSSH Commandant Assistant

Mr. Nicholas Wood, PSSH Admissions Coordinator

Ms. Beth Werner, Compliance Department

Ms. Ashley Megat on behalf of Congressman Mike Kelly's office

Ms. Katie on behalf of Senator Daniel Laughlin's office

Mr. Dusty Durand

CALL TO ORDER

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

MOMENT OF SILENT AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

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

ROLL CALL

Ms. Alyssa Cooley took roll call for all present.

SWEARING IN OF COUNCIL MEMBERS

No Council Members were sworn in.

APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES

A motion was made by Mr. Eiler and seconded by Mr. DiGiacomo to approve the minutes of the Advisory Council Meeting held on June 14, 2023. Motion carried, and minutes were approved as written.

MEDICAL DIRECTOR UPDATE

Ms. Cubero provided update on behalf of Dr. Milie:

We are seeing an uptick of Covid right now in the ERs, but it is not as bad as last year. the hospitalization rates remain low. We currently have no residents with Covid. We have one staff member out and that is why we are masking in the facility.

Per Dr. Milie he has not seen any RSV in the ER. Flu season is around the corner. We will be giving residents their flu shots. We will also be giving flu shots to the staff for those who wish to get it.

There is discussion on another Covid vaccine, but it has not been said if we will be giving it as of yet. Also, the RSV vaccine, once we know what we are going to do with that, it will be passed on to the family members to make the decision if they want their loved ones to get that.

Any Questions?

ADMISSIONS AND MARKETING UPDATE

Mr. Wood provided update:

If you look at the paper in your packet dated the 1st, there has been some slight changes. On the Dementia unit we have 31 out of 32 beds filled. On Nursing Care, we have 67 out of 75 beds filled. On Personal Care we have 56 out of 100 beds filled. Our total is 154 out of 207 beds filled.



For our waiting list we have 5 vets and 0 non-vets for our Personal Care unit. 16 vets and 1 non-vet for our Nursing Care unit. 1 vet and 4 non-vets for our Dementia Care.

We also have 2 admissions coming over the next 2 weeks for our skilled nursing. We're hoping to have our skilled nursing side filled by the end of the month and also our memory care unit filled by the end of the month.

Any questions?

Why is the Personal Care side not being filled? Mr. Wood responded, lack of interest in the Personal Care side. Most veterans that come to us are in need of nursing care.

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF LONG-TERM CARE

Executive Director Davis provided report:

Last meeting, I talked about our minutes and how we're going to be overly transparent with minutes. We're going to put them on our website. If you were on the DMVA website, you would see our draft minutes that were up from last meeting. We'll make our corrections and get them finalized and they will be posted. That process is moving forward.

On September 1st the Feds came out with a staffing minimum. This is really the first time ever that we've seen something from CMS. It is a proposal at this point. They're asking for feedback from facilities. The proposal right now has set a minimum for RNs and for CNAs. It's interesting that LPNs were left out of this. We're not sure why. What I think is most concerning about the federal proposed mandate is that there is no funding tied to this. CMS is estimating that the total cost of this proposal is going to be over 40 billion dollars over a 10 year period. That's over 4 billion per year if you break that down, per facility in the United States that's about a \$300,000 increase annually to providers. Long-term care facilities are really expected to bare the burden of these costs unless payers step up with increases in reimbursements. With that being said, we are a different animal in the game. This will affect us to some degree, but our staffing numbers are strong. We're not concerned that we're not going to be able to meet this but overall, for the industry this is a big concern for providers. We're seeing providers close their doors right now. The number of nursing facilities in Pennsylvania has gone down in the last 2 years. We're anticipating seeing more closures. Where I think it may affect us is, it's going to get even more competitive for healthcare workers. As you all know, those \$10,000, \$20,000 bonuses we see on billboards, we can't compete with that. We have to do a good job at retaining the staff we have as we look for more ideas on how to recruit and work on retention.

The state budget fiscal code. If you remember earlier this year, we talked about how the PA Department of Health had their own staffing minimums they put out last year. We're going into year 2 of that. We were waiting for the state budget to come out, hoping that there would be an increase. There really hasn't been anything significant. We're waiting to see if it's anything the fiscal code is going to address. I think it's highly doubtful that we'll see much of an increase. I also think it's doubtful that we'll see an appeal for what their proposing for us to be doing in year 2. Right now, we're okay. We're in position to meet the year 2 minimums, but a lot of providers out there are not.

How do the state minimums compare to the federal minimums? Executive Director Davis responded, there different and every provider is going to be a little bit different with the federal mandate. There looking at acuity right now. The calculations aren't the same. We're waiting to see how Pennsylvania is going to respond. Are they maybe going to drop

theirs and go just towards the federal mandate, are they going to keep theirs as it is right now. We really don't know. It's interesting right now and I think that is why the Feds are looking for feedback from providers.

Are the state numbers higher than the Feds? Director Raymond responded right now, yes, because there is no federal requirement right now. We're surveyed and have to follow the VA regs as well, the VA is 2.3 hours per patient per day. Pennsylvania is 2.87 hours per patient per day. The CMS currently does not have any sort of number. What the discussion is, there trying to talk from going from zero, no minimum, to 4.1 hours per patient per day.

Executive Director Davis then stated, the 4.1 would be above where Pennsylvania has it. Right now, when we're going into 2024, that will be year 2 of the PA Department of Health and that will bump us up to a 3.2. To give you an idea of where we are at across all of our Homes, we're usually about a 3.8 to a 4.1 on average so again, we're okay, but as you know, we also have empty beds that we can't fill because we don't have the staff to do it.

All of our annual Department of Health surveys across all 6 of our campuses have now been complete. We have 1 more VA annual survey to complete in Philadelphia. We have 2 more Department of Human Services, they survey our Personal Care Homes.

Currently out of the 6 Homes we have 5 5-star facilities. We have 1 4-star facility in Hollidaysburg. We are anticipating Erie to drop from their immediate jeopardy that we talked about last meeting. We don't know where they're going to drop quite yet. They will probably drop to a 3 or a 4. What we're working on with our quality team right now is to bump up 1 star in our quality rating which should keep Erie around a 4-star until that immediate jeopardy tag falls off. It takes the tags about 2 years to fall off totally. Its point based. We're getting hit with the most points in year 1. Year 2 it decreases. We'll get back to a 5-star, but it will take a little bit of time.

Did we appeal that? Executive Director Travis responded, yes. It's a federal and it's a State. We fought the fight as long as we could until it came to a point where it was going to be more costly to us to continue and we knew the outcome was not going to be favorable. It's really hard to overturn a deficiency like that. What we found interesting, looking at immediate jeopardies, we're seeing quite more of this and we don't know why the Department of Health is issuing more. We got some data to share with the group. Starting at 2020 Department of Health issued 19 immediate jeopardies. The following year in 2021 they doubled that number. In 2022 there was a 50% increase. In year to date they are on pace to do even more. Year after year they are issuing more immediate jeopardies. We've asked them why, is there any correlation, they aren't giving us any answers on that.

We're doing really well with admissions. We started the year with around 940. We're at about 1,077 overall for all 6 campuses. We just eclipsed the 70% occupancy mark. We still have some room to grow. Our short-term goal right now is 75%. We added a lot of residents across various locations, but I think most significantly in the next month or so, in Pittsburgh were adding about 12 additional residents which will really help their waitlist. Overall waitlist for the State, we're around 239. That's 189 veterans and 59 spouses.

Our new building in Hollidaysburg is still making progress there.

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF VETERANS' HOMES

Director Raymond provided report:



Covid numbers, we currently have 7 residents across the 6 Homes. We have positive residents at our Hollidaysburg, Southeast, Southwest and Delaware Valley facilities. We have positive staff members at our Hollidaysburg, Soldiers' and Sailors' and Southeast facilities and we have a pending person at our Southwest facility. Currently no influenza at any of the 6 Homes. We will be starting the influenza vaccines. Most of the Homes have them onsite. Most are just waiting for consents to get back and educations. We have to educate and get consents on an annual basis.

As far as the new covid vaccine, the recommendation from the CDC is everyone over 6 months is eligible. It does take care of the most recent BA.2.86 mutation as well as the XBB variant from the Omicron virus. Unfortunately, from the CDC call earlier this week there was no timing discussed as far as if you just recently received your vaccine. Most of our residents don't fall into that category. We really haven't given many covid vaccines within the last several months. As soon as we got those on order through our supplier and they're available later on this fall, we will begin with the covid vaccinations.

There is now an RSV vaccine that is also recommended from the CDC. It is recommended for our population, anyone over 60.

We had our Gino Merli, Hollidaysburg and Southeast Department of Health surveys all back to back. No major deficiencies out of any of the 3 of them. Some paper compliance type of things, no major trends that we need to look at for any of the Homes.

The admissions form may look a little different at the next meeting. If you look at the waiting list column, it looks like we have quite a bit on there. You maybe wondering why we aren't bringing them in besides from a staffing perspective. When we inquired about that, not all of those people are ready to go. We're going to maybe make a little bit of an adjustment to those columns. A waiting list for folks who ready to come in and then a waiting list for individuals who may not be ready just yet because those numbers just look a bit off.

Staffing, we have a few key positions open. Our Deputy Commandant at Hollidaysburg is open because our former Deputy Commandant is now the Commandant there. Our Delaware Valley Commandant is vacant due to retirement. He had been with us for 20 years. We have an open Physician position at our Southeast facility that we are actively recruiting for. We just recently finished up the interviews and the offer is being made.

What is the specialty of the physician? Director Raymond responded, no specialty, internal medicine, family practice, geriatric care. They don't need to be board certified in geriatrics or anything like that.

Construction for Hollidaysburg is moving right along. That is the facility that is a brand new building.

REPORT OF THE COMMANDANT

Ms. Spacht provided update:

Currently, PSSH is authorized 272 employee positions. We currently have 248 filled. Our total vacancies is 24. We have 1 Quality Assurance Coordinator position open which we are currently interviewing for. 4 LPN positions opens, 2 RNs, 15 nurse aides, 1 food service worker and 1 custodial position open.

There was a question last meeting of what our food service worker rate starts out at, and that is 16.48hr.



We have a job fair scheduled for October 11th from 1-5pm here at the facility. We are still doing "Walk-in Wednesdays". We also have 13 CNA trainee positions that are all filled right now. We work with HVA, a local organization, to get them certified. Of the 13, 7 of them will start class on Monday. The other 6 will start class in October. After they take the class, they will apply to get certified. We hope they will all stay with us. Those positions will then open again, and we will fill them until we get our CNA positions filled.

We are approaching our survey window. Our survey window opens for the VA Department of Health and Department of Human Services between February and March of 2024. Currently this week, we have our Facility Performance Assessment going on which is a mock survey we do with headquarters here for our facility. They're doing our Nursing Home side this week and Personal Care side next week. That helps us to prepare and lets us know what we need to be working on going forward.

The VA survey we had for this year is coming to an end. The final audit will be submitted this month.

The DHS survey we had for 2023 was approved and we are in compliance.

The DOH survey from May of 2023 is completed and the final audit will be completed for October of 2023.

There has been discussion of the naming of the bridge outback. I will let Mr. Will Rose talk further on that.

We're still waiting for devices for the nurse call bell system. That is in the works still being implemented. The chapel renovation, repointing, masonry repair and waterproofing is still finishing up, but is close to being completed. The replacement chillers and components that we spoke about at the last meeting, they ordered the equipment, but it has a long lead time of 42 weeks or longer. We have held project scope meetings for several JOC projects on this year's 5 year plan. The replacement of several exit doors, PCU entrance roof, paving, paging system and some masonry repairs. We are also working on the plans for the Commandant House as well.

What is the plan on the Commandant's house? Ms. Spacht responded, as we discussed last meeting, there was a question about the Commandant's house and what we were doing. We're still working on that.

It hasn't been decided to be torn down yet? Ms. Spacht responded, there is still discussion of that, as well as, if it is torn down, what we would do with that space.

Is there any update on the pavilion? Ms. Spacht responded, that is part of what is incorporated into the Commandant's house area. We're working on seeing what direction we're going to go with all of that. Requested Greg/Mike Follow up.

We are currently celebrating housekeeping appreciation this week. We are looking forward to the holiday season, we have a lot planned.

COMPLIANCE REPORT

Ms. Werner provided update:

We have completed all of the Facility Performance Assessments across all of the Homes. Which is 6 skilled facilities and 3 personal cares. We are back in Erie for our Facility Performance Assessment this week and will be finishing up today. We are on the skilled side, next week we will do the personal care side. That's being done about 5 months before there last



Department of Health or Department of Human Services survey in preparation of helping the facility to be prepared when they come back in again for their survey. We were in Erie in February and now we're back again.

Currently Erie has no open investigations with the Compliance Department. The Compliance Department does continue to review some contracts. Benchmark and VistaMed are being reviewed as far as contracts go. There is 1 investigation that was closed that was discussed at the last meeting is exclusions checks. The Justifacts process is moving forward. It will help to verify the employees on an ongoing basis.

Any questions?

REPORT OF THE DEPUTY COMMANDANT

No report.

REPORT OF THE COUNCIL MEMBERS

Mr. Eiler thanked the staff for bringing the residents down to the annual "Sharing and Caring" boat ride. This year we had 498 residents. He mentioned being disappointed in the VA again. They are a major contributor to patients coming on the boat ride but now they won't even talk to us. They do not want to be bothered to bring their patients once a year to the boat ride. It is very disappointing. We cut the boat ride down from 4 days to 2 days. Next year I hope everybody will bring more people in. we work all year very hard to put this on. There are 20 organizations that participated to make this happen. I also have about 450 pairs of socks in my car to donate after the meeting. Thank you very much.

Mr. Supak thanked the Commandant and staff for bringing residents to the fish fry held at the Titusville VFW. The who came were very professional and kind. Thank you.

Ms. Foust mentioned they had a zoo trip that residents of the VA attended.

Mr. Stewart stated on Veterans Day we will be having a small group passing out cards. It will be a little later than normal, probably around 1 o'clock being that Veterans Day falls on Saturday. Also, the Christmas tour will be Sunday, December 3rd at 10:00AM. Previously, we always made arrangements for lunch here. hopefully we can make the same arrangements this year. We can discuss it later. Also, the New Year's Eve party, we'll have to talk about that and what we can do. I know right before covid we moved it to after lunch so we could celebrate New Years before 8 o'clock at night. Hopefully we can do that again this year. Thank you. **Ken and myself met with Harry Stewart, Karen Faust, and Kay Suhucki yesterday to talk about upcoming special events and included the information we discussed.**

Mr. Rose thanked everyone for their service. He stated that the Sharing and Caring and fishing trip with the follow up fish fry continues to be very popular with the residents. On behalf of the residents, I want to thank you for sponsoring those activities. He also stated, with volunteer support, the 4 computers we have with internet access for residents on the PCU side have had zero down time. they have been up and running the whole time and have not been down for any reason so we are really happy about that. Mr. Rose also mentioned, it was brought up last meeting about perhaps naming the bridge recently built outback. We canvassed the residents for names. We have it down to 3 names right now, "Veterans Memorial Bridge", "Blockhouse Bridge" and "Anthony Wayne Passover". We received suggestions from residents and the Resident Councils widdled the list down. We then had a vote on the NCU side and PCU side to decide what our suggestion for the bridge would be. Right now, we're at the point where it is back in Resident Council hands. We will put forward this month at our respective meetings, the proposals for the name. By the next quarterly meeting

you will have something from the residents on the naming of the bridge. Mr. Rose also asked for help getting reenactors in the Home as part of our State Veterans Home Week. If you come across a situation where you can mention to any reenactors that we would love to have them come in during State Veterans Home Week on anyone of the days for a hour or two, in period costume and maybe answer some questions. If you run across anything like that, please contact Ken Vybiral. **The bridge name issue is being brought up at the Oct council meetings with a vote ongoing until the Nov meetings, where the final decision will be announced. Will has it figured out to be completed by the next Advisory meeting.**

To date, I have not received any additional contact information regarding potential reenactments here at PSSH

Executive Director Davis introduced Dusty Durand. He is the Director of Policy and Legislative Affairs for DMVA. He was up here yesterday and met with Senator Laughlin's team to talk about things like the Commandant's House and the bridge. Dusty thanked everyone for inviting him and apologized for being late. He stated if there is anything that the Department can do, they will do their best to help support that. We are working on doing a better job at making sure we have the appointments for the Advisory Councils, and we start working on those early on and hopefully have a bank of participants who are waiting to be appointed, rather than trying to search for them when the vacancies occur. Thank you.

Ms. Ashley on behalf of Congressman Mike Kelly's office stated they do not have an update on the Federal end. If we ever need anything on their end, please contact our Erie office, I am always available. I'm definitely going to look into the minimum hours set for staffing. I will reach out to our DC office to get a little more information on that. Thank you.

Ms. Katie on behalf of Senator Daniel Laughlin's office stated the Senator wants to be helpful to the residents as much as possible but also realizes his presence can bring more bureaucracy to it, so we are trying to get that balance of where he can help out best. Also, we will try to push out information regarding the job fair so if you have anything, please send it over. We have a lot of unemployment calls we receive at our office. Thank you.

Mr. Fry stated that he was sorry to hear about Sharing and Caring. I've always thought that it was one of the nicest things done for veterans in this Commonwealth. I've been there quite a few times and I am sorry to hear that. Mr. Eiler responded that it seems like the VA doesn't want to be bothered. We contacted some of the residents and asked if they would be interested in coming and the VA told them if they go on the boat ride, they will be quarantined for 2 weeks when they get back so, they wouldn't come. We've been doing this for 35 years and usually have 2 thousand patients in 4 days.

Mr. Vybiral gave recognition to Ashley from Congressman Mike Kelly's office. She was instrumental in providing certificates after our last Advisory Council meeting in June for our Cold War recognition. Thank you, Ashley. He also gave recognition to Mr. Benacci. The county did a fantastic job this past Monday for the 9/11 memorial down in front of the library. Job well done, Joe. Outreach has been strong the last few months. We attended the VA Resource Fair, Crawford County Resource Fair, Erie Zoo Resource Fair and Rep Ryan Bizarro's Resource Fair. This past Saturday we hosted a group of Navy Chief selectees. They toured the facility and learned a little bit about us and the history here. From a resident engagement standpoint, Erie County Library Bookmobile has resumed its regular stops and visits here at the Home. We've also hosted 2 military bands. U.S Army Field Band sent and ensemble that performed here as well as the U.S Airforce Rhythm and Blue Jazz ensemble. Upcoming, we have a resource fair with Representative Jake Banda as well as Representative Merski and Harkins next Friday. Hope to see you all in November for our Veterans Day Ceremony. Thank you.

OLD BUSINESS

No old business to discuss.

NEW BUSINESS

No new business to discuss.

GOOD OF THE COUNCIL

Mr. Fry thanked everyone for attending.

ADJOURNMENT

Meeting was adjourned at 9:50AM

The next Advisory Council Meeting is scheduled for Thursday, December 14, 2023, at 0900.

Approved:

Gary Fry, President, AMVETS

Minutes submitted by: Alyssa Cooley

**GINO J. MERLI VETERANS' CENTER
ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING
August 17, 2023**

CALL TO ORDER

Travis Davis, Executive Director, called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.

ROLL CALL

Secretary Bernie McDonald recorded roll call and attendance was as follows:

MEMBERS

Lisa Solarczyk, President - Marine Corps League (Excused)
William Smith, Vice President - The American Legion
Bernard "Bernie" McDonald, Secretary - AMVETS
Robert Cudworth - Military Officers Association of America (Excused)
Robert Smith - Military Order of the Purple Heart (Excused)
Russell Canevari - Veterans of Foreign Wars
Joe Sylvester - Disabled American Veterans
Abbey Russell for Rosemary Brown - PA State Senate
Kyle Donahue – PA State Representative
Tim Cleveland – PSACDVA
Lisa Kaye – PSACDVA
Roger Risner - GJMVC Resident Representative

DMVA

Major General Mark J. Schindler - Adjutant General, Pennsylvania (Excused)
Maureen Weigl, BG - Deputy Adjutant General, VA
Travis Davis – Executive Director, Long-Term Care
Barbara Raymond – Director, Bureau of Veterans' Homes (Excused)
Vito P. Ruggiero – GJMVC Commandant
Kathleen Ambrose - GJMVC Deputy Commandant

OTHERS PRESENT / INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

Lynn O'Day, Recorder
Sarah Butler, Admissions Coordinator
Janice Mcallister, Volunteer Coordinator
Maria Coles, ADON
Erica Comine, Infection Preventionist
Beth Warner, Regional Compliance Officer
Dr. Kazmierski, Medical Director
Janice Gavern, The American Legion

MOMENT OF SILENCE

- A moment of silence was led by Travis Davis, Executive Director.
Mr. Richard Green, Blinded Veterans, recently passed away.

REVIEW OF PREVIOUS MINUTES

- Previous minutes accepted as written.

REVIEW OF MEMBER STATUS

<i>Jewish War Veterans</i>	<i>(Vacant)</i>
<i>Catholic War Veteran</i>	<i>(Vacant)</i>
<i>Military Order of the Purple Heart</i>	<i>(Vacant)</i>
<i>Blinded Veterans Association</i>	<i>(Vacant)</i>

REPORT OF THE DEPUTY ADJUTANT GENERAL

- General Weigl reported that 5 of our 6 homes are 5 stars and 1 is 4 stars.
- She stated that she attended the NASVH conference and gathered a great deal of information that she will be sharing.
- Next week is the National AM Vets convention in Pittsburgh.
- The motorcycle ride for Gino Merli will be this weekend.
- The Hollidaysburg project is going well.
- We will be starting to use ID badges to get on and off base.

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF LONG-TERM CARE

- Travis Davis reported that we will begin posting the meeting minutes from all homes on the website. They will be in draft form until signed off at the next meeting.
- Long-term care budget will receive an increase from DOH next year.
- Our homes have had over 2 dozen inspections and surveys over the past year as well as internal surveys by our compliance team.
- 5 of our facilities have acquired 5-star ratings. There are over 700 facilities in the state, and we rank in the top 10%. Star ratings can change month to month, and we are hoping and striving to maintain that status.
- We have had 1,060 admissions which is the highest in 3 years. There is an overall waitlist of 239 and 180 of them are veterans.
- We remain above the minimum for staffing. We have been focusing on recruitment and retention. We have a lot of overtime and agency staff being utilized.
- The project in Hollidaysburg is moving forward. We did have a few setbacks. We hit a powerline and had to transport some residents to the local VA. The team responded very well.
- We have a new commandant at Hollidaysburg, Christina Dambeck and we also have an open director of nursing position at Delaware Valley.

REPORT OF THE MEDICAL DIRECTOR

- Dr. Kazmierski reported that the new strain of COVID is currently in house. We have 10 residents, 1 in the hospital and 12 staff positive. Initial indications are mild. They should be releasing a booster late this September or early October. It will be available for compromised individuals and those with respiratory issues.
- We are ready to administer immunizations against FLU. We had a strong FLU season last year.
- All usual vaccines are or will be available to staff and residents.
- We continue to reduce the use of antibiotics and catheters.
- We are continuing to reduce the use of antipsychotic medications.

REPORT OF THE ADMISSIONS DIRECTOR

- Sarah Butler reported that our census is at 162. We had 31 admissions, 2 discharges and 20 expired. That is a 5% increase.
- We received 20 applications in July.
- Our waitlist is now at 3 to 4 weeks for veterans and 1 to 3 months for non-veterans.
- We ask that you continue to help with the application process within the community. Take application packets with you and give them when needed. The packets answer questions and have all the contact information in them.

REPORT OF THE COMMANDANT

- Vito Ruggiero reported that we are within the top 10% of the facilities in the state. He expressed his thanks for the leadership in the facility and asked that the council promote this status within the community.
- We have some construction and projects going on around the facility and grounds.
 - The trees are gone to make way for a new fence.
 - Utility lines are being laid for the corner LED message board.
 - We are repaving the parking lot.
 - We will be giving a facelift to the internal areas.
 - The canteen will be getting a facelift, it will be moved to a new are. It will have new items as well as indoor and outdoor seating.
- Our facility assessment went well. We need to put a plan in place by September 1.
- We are currently dealing with COVID and masking.
- Our annual motorcycle ride is this weekend. It will be at Harley Davidson in Dickson City. We encourage everyone to come out and enjoy the day.
- The golf tournament hasn't been finalized yet but we should have the numbers for you by the next meeting in November.

THE GOOD OF THE COUNCIL

- Janice Gavern presented the facility with photos and portraits to be displayed throughout the women's wing and the facility.

ADJOURNMENT

The next meeting was announced: November 16, 2023, at 10:00 a.m.

HOLLIDAYSBURG VETERANS' HOME (HVH) ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES
THURSDAY, July 20, 2023
10:00 A.M.

ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT:

Ildephonse "Duffy" Hines (Council President), Marine Corps League Department of PA
R. Raymond Lenz, American Legion Department of PA
Henry Gaunt, AMVETS
Joe Rodkey, Blinded Veterans Association
Goose Marin, Catholic War Vets
Brian Querry, Centre County, Director of VA
Thomas Williams, VFW Department of PA
Tim Susengill, Vietnam Veterans Association
David Wagner, DAV
Michael "Mick" Hoover, MOPH

VIPs PRESENT:

State Representative Louis Schmitt Jr.

DMVA PRESENT

Brigadier General (Ret.) Maureen Weigl, Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans' Affairs – via telephone
Travis Davis, Executive Director of Long-Term Care
Barb Raymond, Director, Bureau of Veterans Homes
Craig Swineford, Veterans' Service Specialist, Central PA Region

HVH PRESENT

Chrissy Dambeck, Commandant
John Reinhardt, Doctor
Kelly Smith, Director of Nursing
Joe Patterson, Admissions & Marketing
Tyler Daugherty, Maintenance
Melissa Meade, Assistant to the Deputy Commandant
Tia Williams, Assistant to the Commandant and *Recorder*

OTHERS PRESENT:

Mrs. Anna Marie Rodkey, Spouse of Joe Rodkey
Constance Stransky, Guest of Council Member Ray Lenz
Rick Orłowski, MacArthur Hall Resident
Nancy Hoover, Spouse of Mick Hoover

VACANT POSITIONS:

Jewish War Veterans, Vacant

ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT:

Robert “Hank” Sembower, Military Officers Association of America
HVH Resident Representative

Called to Order/ Roll Call

Duffy Hines called the meeting to order at 1000hrs and asked everyone in attendance to introduce themselves and to provide their title and or Service Organization.

Moment of Silence and Pledge of Allegiance

Duffy asked everyone to stand and to take a Moment of Silence and then asked for everyone to stand and join-in reciting the Pledge of Allegiance to the United States of America. Duffy asked Henry Gaunt to lead the Pledge of Allegiance.

REVIEW OF MINUTES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

Duffy asked every member if they had any question, comments, or concerns regarding the Minutes from the previous meeting held on Thursday, April 20, 2023, ~ Brian Querry asked for verification of percentage of non-Vets as printed on page 7 in the packet handout – Barb Raymond stated it is correct as typed. She explained we keep the percentage lower due to fluctuation of admissions/discharges . With no other questions, comments or concerns, Duffy said the minutes for April are accepted as posted.

Swearing-In New Members

General Weigl swore in the following members via telephone –

Duffy Hines (Council Present), Marine Corps League Department of PA
Raymond Lenz, American Legion Department of PA
Henry Gaunt, AMVETS
Joe Rodkey, Blinded Veterans Association
Brian Querry, Centre County, Director of VA
Tim Susengill, Vietnam Veterans Association
David Wagner, DAV
Michael “Mick” Hoover, MOPH

Dr. John Reinhardt

Dr. Reinhardt commented on new residents and how he enjoys seeing them, especially when they recognize him. Last Monday, received a message about the power outage and DOH being in. Came in on Tuesday and it was wonderful. The staff were smiling, happy, the first resident he saw had a lantern and was in good spirits. Could not have been more happy to be somewhere that “rolled with the punches”. Temporary resident moves during the outage to VZMC went smoothly; VA staff very cooperative and helpful. HVH staff was absolutely wonderful.

Questions, Comments or Concerns for Dr. John Reinhardt

Lou Schmitt - COVID seems to have receded, is there any consensus in the medical community/cdc about vaccines? – Dr. Reinhardt stated, unfortunately boosters have not worked thus far hopeful this will change with an annual booster – compared to flu vax that has now moved to two per year – problem with covid was get new variant, create new vax and booster and by then variant was likely gone. Virulent has dropped – essentially a cold. Colds can be significant if frail/elderly. Looking at what can make booster/annual vax more effective. CDC on hold – probably get some type of guidance in August. In works and testing boosters now.

Tim Susengill – variant strain is producing less of a problem? – Dr. Reinhardt stated the biggest problem with booster is its late – by the time produced and put out, strain is mostly gone. Even within a season, viruses can change. COVID – people have not been getting as sick which is great to hear.

Travis Davis, Executive Director

Announced General Weigl is speaking at event in North Carolina now, will present certificates at next meeting. Welcomed group and congratulated new Commandant, Chrissy Dambeck. Chrissy has 27 years experience in long-term care and started in the private sector. Came to DMVA as a nursing administrator, then came to HVH as Deputy and now Commandant. Wanted to echo some of the statements from Dr. Reinhardt - Contractors hit main power source for Arnold Hall and Eisenhower Hall. Power went to backup generators, but they only support general life safety measures. Haven't updated generators due to new building being built. Temperatures in Arnold Hall building were entering an unsafe range. No residents were complaining because of the heat, but still an unsafe temperature was being reached in some rooms. Staff used emergency preparedness plan. Looked at VZMC and sister Veterans' homes throughout the state. Ultimately, we only had to move 19 residents to VZMC along with staff, meds, etc. In order to get power back up to the buildings, it took working around the clock, nobody was injured and all residents were safe. It tested us to see how we would respond. Lessons learned to pass on to all other veterans homes. Team did an excellent job.

New procedure in packets for how we handle Advisory Council meetings and minutes. Outlines how we let public know about the meetings and DMVA uses social media to get the word out as well. For minutes, we want to increase transparency to public so we will post on website. Will get a draft posted until approved, then once signed, will move to official.

State budget still not passed, moving on with business as usual. Waiting to see if there is there going to be an increase to Medicaid. Last year we saw 17% increase, one of the largest which is used for staffing ratio increase. Unsure what is going to happen to support the year two staffing increase; hearing 1%. If this is true, there are concerns about how this staffing increase regulation will be funded for industry as a whole. Will be hard for nursing homes to hit these numbers without support from Medicaid.

Questions, Comments or Concerns for Travis Davis

Duffy said to the council to think about who wants to be secretary for council to sign minutes, per the handout in the packet. Duffy asked if anyone would volunteer. Raymond Lenz volunteered. Joe Rodkey gave a motion to appoint Raymond Lenz as Secretary of the Advisory Council and Goose Marin seconded. Raymond Lenz elected Secretary for Advisory Council.

Barbara Raymond, Director

It's been a busy last three months. We were still in the public health emergency when we last met in April and were still in masks. Currently, no residents with COVID across all six homes. Out of masks except SWVC, one staff positive last week. The staff has no symptoms and little exposure, so only a few people are in masks. Last several weeks have been okay from a COVID perspective. As far as vaccine, monitoring closely to get further guidance. Moderna and Pfizer to go commercial – no longer emergency use. This will likely be when we get guidance, anticipating September. Amount of illness we see is very low. There is a variant that has been getting news recently – in the United States – variant of Omicron. This variant has been in the states since fall of last year and is not the most common variant. Not sure why it is getting press, but we are keeping a close eye on it. This variant is taking herd immunity and vaccinated and pushing through those. Not seeing a lot of changes but nursing teams keeping a close eye on. Public health emergency ended on May 11th.

New DOH regulations went into effect July 1st. Very similar to CMS regulations, however, this is the state matching those regs. All six homes are well aware of regulations, had to update policies and procedures and no major changes from that perspective other than staffing.

HVH fairly good with staffing. Across six homes, social workers and nurses is what we are struggling with. Doing various things from the state end for retention.

Nurses week/nursing asst week. Had celebrations across homes. Leadership paid for a lot out of pocket. State veterans homes week in June. A lot of fun activities, Barb was at HVH. Some events scaled back here because of construction but staff and residents had a great time.

From survey perspective – HVH and SEVC are in window for Department of Health annual inspection. We go through various surveys a year. DHS in three buildings, DOH in all buildings, VA comes in, in addition to internal facility assessments.

Star ratings

Two homes increased; SEVC, SWVC bumped to five star.

HVH working to bump up star rating. Staffing numbers great, quality measures great, health inspections are issue.

Questions, Comments or Concerns for Barb Raymond

N/A

Chrissy Dambeck, Commandant

Duffy stated this is Chrissy's first report as Commandant – Chrissy thanked everyone for their support. Stated she is daughter of a Veteran, aunt of a Veteran, has a God daughter serving in Africa, member of American Legion Auxiliary and Legion Riders. Here to improve lives of those who served our country. Resident advocate. Believes

in leading by example. Its been a rocky start – was congratulated on first day and then DOH walked in for annual survey. Then power was out. Everything went as well as it could with the power outage. With DOH, because they had no wifi connection, they left. We are anticipating they will be back any day. Life Safety came in this week and exited already. HVH received 6 tags, but other than that it was a good inspection. Groundbreaking ceremony for new CLC was held on May 2nd. Pictures can be seen in packet handout. We still have multiple residents talk about the ceremony on a regular basis. Pictures from the ceremony are scrolling on the screens in residential buildings for all to see. Annual VA survey was conducted beginning June 6th; received several deficiencies. Working on corrective action plan and staff education. Submitting plan for approval within the next few days. June 15th, DOH came in on complaint of care and services. Multiple concerns voiced by individual. Complaints were unsubstantiated and no deficiencies were received from this visit. Carnival was held on June 15th. We had to scale back because of construction but it was still a good time for all. Oktoberfest will be happening September 21st, but also will be scaled back. June 21st meeting with VZMC, tour of facility and discussed admissions. Working very closely with them and maintaining positive relationship. Patriotic contest was held with various prizes given. Continuing to do contest on quarterly basis. Morale committee meetings happening on monthly basis. Having first annual softball marathon competing with VZMC, tentatively planned for August. Open to all staff, families and friends. Will let everyone know when date and time is officially decided.

Vacancies – 3 open social worker positions, Accountant 3 and Dietician openings as well. Having difficulty recruiting Dieticians.

Questions, Comments or Concerns for Chrissy Dambeck

Brian query – on the census, it says “total non-Vet”. Could we provide a breakdown with spouses and national guard? National Guard does not like to be called “non-Vet”. - Barb asked if we could add line for National Guard - Are there people on standby if there are open beds? – Joe will go into detail on this in his Admissions report.

Joe Patterson, Admissions & Marketing

Admissions report - quick at a glance, April thru June admissions, discharge and deceased. For April 4 new admissions, 4 deceased, 2 discharged (1 to public, 1 hospitalized then passed). For May 9 new admissions, 2 discharge (1 within SVH, 1 to public). For June 7 new admissions, 2 discharge (1 in SVH, 1 hospital), 2 deceased. Admissions by county provided in handout.

Marketing – two senior expos coming up, every Tuesday Veteran coffee social, Rotary Club went well this week – a lot of networking in Huntingdon, Blair, Mifflin, many counties. Little things – phone calls, special forces chapter 67 wants to present beret to one of veterans here, interacting with community.

Questions, Comments or Concerns for Joe Patterson

Brian Query- asked for population by county. When he talks to people, would like to tell them amount of Veterans in HVH from certain counties – makes more personable. Joe said this could be done. Barb likes this idea. – Brian asked if anyone is on standby? – Joe asked for him to explain – Brian stated anyone with full package in but because of non-Vet standing, waiting? Joe said there is only waiting list on secure unit. Processing list – turn in all revenue paperwork to revenue, they talk directly to POA – total of 9. Of this 9 some are non-vet, service members and spouses, some not ready to come in. Brian asked him to verify number of Veterans on wait list because no bed available because they are non-Vet – Joe stated there are two – Brian asked what is hold up on these two? – service members – Barb said need to look at percentage; we will figure out how many discharges we would need to put us close to 25%. We check risk before admit in. Brian asked when first came to Advisory Council, Joe gave a handout showing where people were in process, it hasn't been included the last two times. Joe said he thought that handout might be confusing to some. Brian stated he didn't think was confusing. It provided a lot of questions and thinks it should be put back in. When people come to him, it is an issue, don't know where they can go, don't have money, can't wait 30-40 days. Feels that his responsibility is to push group - how can admission process be sped up? Barb will work with team on this. Brian said Joe works well with him, but finds that when looks at process, surprised at why we don't ask for medical records at the beginning. Joe stated we need authorization first. Brian said what if Veteran would provide? Joe explained the admissions process -pre-committee review – next week 3 veterans, awaiting medical doc once received sent to FIG to see if DD-214 is good/background check, when we get back, getting last 90 days of clinical, vaccine records, whole picture then take to committee, post-committee awaiting cost of care, the more information we are provided by the Veteran, the quicker we can go, if they want to be full cost of care we can bring in sooner, cost of care given and accepted, revisits (if committee needs more documentation or if site visit needed). Brian said some have been done quickly. Barb will work with Chrissy on how process can be done quicker.

Chrissy- did recently have two admissions turned over rather quickly. Asked Joe to talk about when met with VZMC HUD-VASH.

Joe – did go talk to leadership and social services at VZMC. Every situation is different. If there is a situation out of Joes hands, Commandant and Barb decide if emergency. In month of April, turned an admission in three days. One was a Veteran from a personal care home that decided to close, another was when house was being sold.

Barb – some are from literally on the streets. Joe said some come straight from being incarcerated to temporarily with VZMC, denied because not evicted, came to us and took appropriate action.

Brian – thought someone couldn't be accepted if they are a convicted felon? Barb said different legal opinion on good behavior for 5 years. Some say even though if in prison, some want not incarcerated in 5 years. Most recent legal guidance say it is okay if the Veteran had no problems/issues in legal system. Not sure what current chief counsels interpretation of what "good behavior" will be. Most recent scenario, individual timed out and would have been on the streets.

Duffy Hines – Report of Status:

Mick Hoover officially a member, Goose Marin waiting for reappointment

Jewish War Vets position still open – Duffy started working on Jewish War Vet opening years ago. Called Pittsburgh and was told this person wasn't in charge of it anymore. Got to Commandant for Jewish War Vets in PA – lives in New Jersey. Jewish War Council from Blair county back in 1950's died out, did not have enough people to keep going. Commandant had no Solutions, but was going back to headquarters to ask if member not associated with particular unit might live in the area and willing to serve. As of two weeks ago thought he had someone who would be willing to serve here, waiting for call back on who this person is. If this doesn't work out, only one alternative. If cant find someone from Jewish War Vets, need to come up with another military group to supply member; unsure who that would be. We have a good representation now of who is available and operating in the area. Hoping this works out with Jewish War Vets – be thinking what organization we can go to if we need to.

Tim Susengill - Does it have to be nationally chartered organization? Through VA sponsored meetings for women veterans – a few groups getting bigger but not formal service organization. Would be nice to have woman vet on committee. Barb looking into.

Duffy – War council has to make recommendation to Governor – not sure how it would go if not. Barb looked up Title 51 Establishment of Advisory Council – 12 members shall be appointed by Governor from list of nominations. Duffy knows some organizations are getting started – one in particular a take on Vietnam Veterans. Believes there are people who would be viable candidates – has to present to war council. Tim – IAVA nationally chartered but no local chapter – local members. Not part of council yet. Younger group. Duffy said one issue is we don't have local representation we get back in to a situation where people have to travel far. Some younger members of organizations don't want to serve, have to work, so they don't have the time.

Travis – reached out to war council last week, issue with Scranton filling their Jewish War Vet position as well. Barb looked up PA War Council – theirs is specific. Are they thinking our Advisory Council has to be as specific?

Brian Querry – Barb brings up good point – even if we work out with Jewish War Vets, could we add a womens Veteran representative? Feels as if we are missing this as a group. Barb said it seems as though we could. Duffy said we could submit info and see where it goes.

Ray Lenz – a few years ago we had a woman on this committee. In honor guard, have about six active women helping with military funerals. Feels as though one would be happy to do it. Duffy said we need a volunteer, male or female. Should try to satisfy Jewish War Veteran vacancy then go from there.

Tom Williams - Does Jewish War council have member? Duffy called local Synagogue and left message to ask for assistance.

Old Business:

N/A

New Business:

Chrissy – apologizes as far as employee recognition, invited Tyler as Maintenance representative. Tyler worked straight through and didn't leave until Tuesday. Joe Patterson really stepped up and took charge. Kelly Smith, Melissa Meade, Tia Williams, Adrienne Bilek and everyone really pulled together. Teamwork at its best.

Lou Schmitt brief on budget – involved extensively over the years – reassured the group that PA will get a budget, have to pass, but when and what cant say at this point. State budget is passed like any other law. Senate can amend and this year was amended bill and sent back to house. Was hopeful when was sent home that budget would be worked on – yesterday Allegheny county resigned. Left us with 101 Democrats and 101 Republicans. In order to implement budget, have to pass code bills, say where money is spent, etc. Probably nothing until September. Ray – If budget hasn't passed within in a certain period of time, does state allocate funds? Lou – There will be a point where state agencies run out of money. Have been funded on emergency basis in past. First people to make noise is usually human services, then law enforcement then state employees. Doesn't anticipate dragging into next year. Reminded the group that everyone in this budget process is new to positions. A little learning curve/negotiation.

Wagner – finance chairman for DAV – two grants – grants come from DMVA – unsure what can be given until budgets passed. Lou said school districts don't know what theyre getting either. Everybody is in limbo waiting for state budget to happen.

Announcements/ Good or the Council:

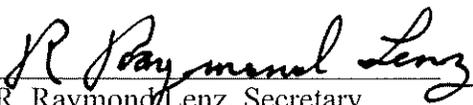
N/A

Adjournment

Duffy reminded everyone the next Advisory Council Meeting will be on Thursday, October 19, 2023, at 1000hrs.

A motion to adjourn was made by Tim Susengill and seconded by Mick Hoover

Meeting was adjourned at 1200hrs.


R. Raymond Lenz, Secretary



SOUTHEASTERN VETERANS' CENTER ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

July 13, 2023

The Southeastern Veterans' Center Advisory Council met July 13, 2023 at 10:00 AM in the All- Purpose Room at the Southeastern Veterans' Center.

Advisory Council Members Participating:

Barry Amole, Vietnam Veterans of America, President
Kenneth Schweitzer, American Legion, Secretary
Richard Doherty, Military Officers Association of America
Thomas Applebach, Lehigh County Office of Veterans' Affairs
Kenneth Nadwodny, Catholic War Veterans
Robert Richardson, Resident Representative
John Getz, Veterans of Foreign Wars
Thomas Brown, Veterans of Foreign Wars
The Hon. Tracy Pennycuick, PA State Senate
Daniel Kuper, Resident Representative

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

Maureen Weigl, BG (PA) – DMVA
Travis Davis, Executive Director, Long-Term Care - DMVA
Barbara Raymond, BVH Director – DMVA
Mike Hoover, Chief of Operations- DMVA
Josh Spigner, Regional Compliance Officer- DMVA
Erica Moore, Regional Program Outreach Coordinator- DMVA
Mike Belcher, Veteran Service Specialist- DMVA
Brian Gula, Commandant – SEVC
Lauren Stenson, Director of Nursing - SEVC
Jill Alwine, Admissions and Marketing Coordinator – SEVC
Sarah Klufas, Assistant to the Commandant - SEVC

Visitors:

Nikki Whitlock, Constituency Relations, Senator Katie Muth's Office
Lisa Walters, Chief of Staff, Senator Tracy Pennycuick's Office
Linda Neiman, Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary
Anna Brown

Excused Absence:

Mary Archey, Marine Corps League, Vice President
Jeffrey Elliot, PA AMVETS
Doug Forsythe, Disabled American Veterans
VACANT, PA House of Representatives
MG Mark J. Schindler, Adjutant General - DMVA
Robert Stone, American Legion

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.

Review and Approval of April 13, 2023 Meeting Minutes:

A motion was made by John Getz and seconded by Thomas Brown to approve the minutes of the Advisory Council Meeting held on April 13, 2023. Motion carried, and minutes were approved as written.

Report of the Medical Director:

Lauren Stenson, Director of Nursing, reported on behalf of Medical Director Dr. Monika VanSant. We are currently in our window for our Department of Health annual survey, so we have started doing some preparations. We have onboarded 3 nurses and 3 CNAs since the last Advisory Council meeting. We are currently recruiting for a full-time CRNP and another Assistant Director of Nursing, along with our continuous search for RNs, LPNs, and CNAs.

SEVC is moving forward on the collaboration with Reading Area Community College to become one of their clinical sites for their nursing program. We have another meeting with them next week. In addition, our nursing administration will be keeping an eye out for career fairs and other events at local colleges to attend to let our presence be known within the community.

We opened our 3 West unit of Coates Hall in May and are trying to fill as many of those beds as we can, while maintaining a healthy staff ratio for the facility.

Report of the Admissions and Marketing Coordinator:

Jill Alwine, Admissions Coordinator, provided the council with an admissions update. Jill reported that as of June 30, 2023, the facility had 201 residents, leaving us with 91 vacancies. The reasonings for the bed vacancies are due to staffing issues and our 3 East unit being reserved for quarantine. At this point we only have 2 available beds that we can fill, and we have admissions currently scheduled for them. Once we get a better complement of staff, we will be able to fill more beds. We have been working with the local VA medical centers to ensure we can get residents in here that need to be here. The Coatesville Medical Center recently closed one of their homeless buildings, so we received many referrals for our personal care unit and were able to admit some of those residents as well. There are currently 77 people on the waitlist, 64 veterans and 13 non-veterans/ spouses. The approximate waitlist times for skilled nursing and personal care are 3-6 months and 2-4 months, respectively. Our memory care unit is currently about a 15-18 month wait, due to it being our smallest area.

Richard Doherty asked Jill to repeat the waitlist times and wondered about how many admissions we do a year. Jill stated that year-to-date we have taken in about 36 admissions so far. Our waitlist is down from last year, which was about 120-150 people. Richard Doherty stated that he does not believe that the community knows much about our state veterans' homes and asked that we provide handouts to him to pass along. Thomas Applebach stated that the DMVA has 2 trifolds that provides information on our homes. Jill Alwine stated that if anyone wants pamphlets about our home, that she can provide those after the meeting. She also stated that we do attend expos and work with social workers in the community to try and get the word out and educate everyone the best we can.

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

General Weigl began by welcoming Senator Pennycuick to the council.

Gen Weigl stated that we are sitting at a census of about 1051 across all 6 homes. At the beginning of the year, we started at about 950.

Gen Weigl also wanted to offer kudos to her team and Christine, the new Commandant at Hollidaysburg. Construction for the new building at Hollidaysburg has been ongoing. Unfortunately, earlier this week while they were digging, they cut all the powerlines. Two buildings were affected, and some residents needed to be evacuated to the VA. Generators were brought in to keep the power going. Greg Lehman and the maintenance team were up all night working with the contactors to fix the issues. There were also other organizations in the community like Sheetz and Walmart that pitched in to help where they could.

Gen Weigl informed the council that Senator Pennycuick, who was in attendance, started a women's health taskforce initiative and signed into legislation Women's Veteran's Day to be celebrated on June 12th. Two pieces of legislation that are still pending are the increase in the paralyzed and blind pensions, going anywhere from 150 to 200 or even 250.

We are continuing to educate veterans in the community about the PACT ACT. We really want to try and get the word out. We will gladly come to your local chapters and sit down and talk about the benefits and even bring our mobile vans to help people do their claims. When we are in those smaller environments, we can have more intimate conversations and really determine what people need. We are also reaching out to all the homes to make sure that residents and staff know about their claims and benefits.

Kenneth Nadwodny stated that he has been receiving calls from spouses and children of veterans asking about what they can do for their loved one when they are incapacitated. Gen Weigl stated that we are trying to work on campaigns that put the word out about these programs to a broader demographic, including these caregivers. Thomas Applebach stated that there is a county office of veterans' affairs in every county in PA and his advice to everyone is to direct these people to call their county office for guidance. He also stated that the VA is mailing letters about the PACT ACT and the additional benefits to all the veterans in their system, and that they are getting a lot of calls from people inquiring about it.

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

Travis Davis started off by introducing Mike Hoover, Chief Operating Officer for the veterans' homes. Regarding the incident at Hollidaysburg, we had to utilize our Emergency Management plans. Our staff are trained on these each year and, although we hope to never have to use them, we did on Monday. The team responded very well, and all the residents were kept safe. We had 245 residents on campus when this happened, about 174 were potentially affected and we had plans in place to transport and place 147 residents at one point. Fortunately, we were able to restore power to some parts of the campus and we only had to relocate 19 residents to our local VA. Mike Hoover met with the team at Hollidaysburg and they discussed what went well, what we could improve on, and where communication can be improved in case this happens in the future. We are going to roll this out to all our facilities, so we are even better prepared to handle something like this in the future. The other 5 homes are equipped with newer generators where, if we ran into a similar issue here, the generators would be able to handle more than just your basic lifesafety measures. Because we are putting up the new building at Hollidaysburg, their system was not upgraded at that time. We expect to be back on utilities there by the end of next week.

We have had over 20 inspections from outside agencies take place across the 6 homes. In addition to that, the DMVA has also completed facility performance appraisals at 5 of our 6 homes.

Travis informed the council that we are going to be posting the Advisory Council minutes on the DMVA website to increase our transparency. They were posted years ago, but throughout Covid and everything, it has fallen by the wayside. After the meetings, a draft version of the minutes will be posted online. Once the minutes have been approved at the next meeting, they will be moved to an approved final status.

The state budget still has not passed. We do not quite know what it means for us and long-term care. We believe what we will likely see is a 1% increase for Medicaid. This could change, but this is what our advocacy groups and membership groups believe will happen. If that does happen, we will have some concerns, especially with the 17.5% increase last year for Medicaid. Our operating costs have significantly increased due to staffing shortages, increases in PPD, and the DOH increasing our minimum staffing requirements. So, depending on where the state budget goes next year, if we see a moderate to low increase in Medicaid, our question is where is that funding coming from to sustain year 2 of the increase. We typically staff higher than the state minimums, so we feel comfortable that we will be in compliance with the new ratios. However, it could limit our ability to fill our beds to some degree.

Thomas Applebach asked who sets the ratios. Travis replied that right now they are state governed, so the Department on Health sets those ratios, but CMS is looking at a minimum for the nation. Nothing has been passed yet. Thomas Applebach asked why they are increasing the ratios. Senator Pennycuick stated that there is a bill in the House and the Senate to require staffing minimums. Travis stated that we are in a good position right now with our ratios as we staff higher due to our population. However, we do not believe in a 'one-size fits all' approach to staffing. Senator Pennycuick agreed that one-size does not fit all and that is a huge issue, especially when we have such a nursing shortage.

Out of the 6 homes, there are 3 homes that are 5- star facilities, Delaware Valley, Gino Merli, and Erie. Our Hollidaysburg and Southwestern facilities are currently ranked at 4-stars, and Southeastern is currently a 3-star facility. There is currently no covid among residents or staff. Currently, we have a waitlist of 263 veterans and spouses from across the state. Recruitment and retention remain our biggest challenge. Our total complement for all 6 veterans' homes is just under 2200 and we currently have several hundred vacant positions. We are still hosting events, such as the Walk-in Wednesdays, to help recruit for these vacant positions. In each home about 30% of beds remain vacant and that is mainly due to staffing. The issue is not that we do not have enough staff to care for our veterans, it is that we do not have enough staff to fill all the beds.

Regarding some key positions, we recently named a new Commandant for the Hollidaysburg facility. We also have a new Director of Nursing at the Delaware Valley facility, and we are actively recruiting for additional help on the physician's service side here at Southeastern.

Senator Pennycuick stated that if Travis sends her the vacancies that she will post them on her webpage and her e-blast.

John Getz asked why Southeastern is only rated a 3-star facility. Brian Gula stated that he will talk a little more about that during his report.

Report of the Director of Veterans' Homes – Barbara Raymond – DMVA:

Barbara Raymond started by stating that since we last met, the public health emergency has ended. The vaccine mandate will officially be ending as of August 6th. However, the CMS has stated that they will not enforce the vaccine mandates prior to it ending. Right now, we are not including the vaccine mandate on any of our job postings. We were hoping to a slight uptick in the number of applications we received for our postings once it was removed. We have not seen this yet, but we did just take it off.

We are currently monitoring a strain of the Covid Omicron virus called XBB. It has been in the states since the fall timeframe. It is currently not the dominant strain, but it has been in the news lately. Unfortunately, this strain is pushing past immunities from having covid prior as well as those that are vaccinated. We have gone about 2 weeks since anyone at our homes has been Covid positive and about 3 months since any major outbreaks. Come the fall time, we are expecting to see an increase in cases just like with influenza. We had no influenza deaths this year and only 1 death attributed to Covid, although it was not the primary cause.

We did have new Department of Health regulations come into effect as of July 1, 2023. One of those regulations as mentioned prior was the increase in the staffing ratios. The other regulatory changes were primarily in line with CMS. At the homes we have gone through and updated our policies and procedures so that we are fully compliant with the new state regulations that just took effect.

Since we last met, we celebrated Nurses' Week, CNA Week, and Veterans Home week. Brian will touch on this more in this report.

In addition to the power outage at the Hollidaysburg facility, the Department of Health came in that day to the facility to conduct their annual survey. They were kind enough to step out and return the next day. In the end, they decided to exit and not conduct the survey this week. We are guessing they will be back sometime in the near future, probably next week.

Robert Richardson stated that he has yet to hear of anyone getting a PPD. Barbara Raymond stated that our rules are a little bit different. Upon admission or hire, you receive them. However, unless your county is in a high TB area, we are only required to check for symptoms. You should be asked about symptoms on an annual basis.

Report of the Commandant – Brian Gula– SEVC:

Brian Gula stated that along with his report, he will be giving an update on construction projects for Mildred as she is out on a planned leave.

To address the question posed earlier by John Getz, Southeastern is currently at a 3-star rating. This is a national rating system for all nursing homes and the information is available to the public. The three major categories that this rating is broken into is quality measures, health inspections, and staffing. Our current rating is really driven by the outcome of our health inspections. Currently, SEVC is at a 5-star rating for staffing, 3- star rating for quality measures, and 2-star for health inspections. Scores are refreshed quarterly. The good news is that when scores refresh in July, we will return to a 4-star rating. The issue is health inspections affect your star rating for 3 years. Every time the facility receives a deficiency, the deficiency is assigned a certain number of points based on the severity. The more points you have, the worse your star rating is for health inspections, the lesser amount of points you have, the better your star rating is. Back in June 2020, at the beginning of Covid, our facility unfortunately had a very tough survey and received 156 points for this survey. So come the refresh in

July, after that 3-year mark, those points will be dropped from our rating. In response to a follow-up question asked by John Getz, Brian further explained that during that survey, the facility received one of the highest severity levels for infection control and our protocols.

Travis Davis stated that of the 3 categories that the star ratings are based upon, most of are facilities are at a 5-star for staffing and we are really trying to focus on the quality measure piece. We have a quality team that helps support the quality teams at the homes and we are seeing improvements on those quality measure scores as well.

General Weigl reiterated that the surveys are public, and anyone can review the information and see what type of deficiencies a home has received. She stated that deficiencies can be in many different areas such as food not being at the right temperature, calendars for resident events not being updated, etc. It is not all lifesafety or neglect issues. Furthermore, she told the council that if anyone has any concerns or would like to view the findings of the health inspection surveys, that they can reach out to us, and we can direct them to where the results can be found or even offer explanations if there are ever any questions.

Construction project updates: We will be installing a security gate on Brown Drive to help prevent unauthorized vehicles from coming onto the property. Security will also be able to monitor the gates via a camera and even open the gates to allow vehicles in. If the gate is closed, staff will be able to open the gate with a swipe of their employee badge. We have plans to have one placed at the top of the hill on Dunlap Drive if all goes well.

We are currently replacing all numbered keypads in our CLC building with badge readers as well to enhance security and make sure that residents or unauthorized personnel are not learning the codes and able to access areas they are not supposed to.

Another big project coming up is the renovation of our staff break rooms. We will be renovating all the staff break rooms in both buildings including new floors, ceilings, fixtures, furniture, etc. We are currently getting staff input on what they would like to see in their breakrooms.

To reiterate what Lauren Stenson said, we are currently in our window for our annual Department of Health survey. We have audits and processes in place to prepare for that. We had our VA survey back in February. We were cited for a few minor items. We continue to work on our corrective action plan. There is education and auditing taking place and we will shortly present all this back to the VA in hopes it is approved and that we are placed back in compliance with their regulations.

We have filled 2 key positions since our last meeting, our Activities Director and our Facility and Grounds Director. We are very excited to have them onboard and are confident that they will be an asset to our staff and SEVC.

ADHC update: at our last meeting we received our Occupancy Permit, so we are finally able to utilize the space. We have been using it for staff meetings, trainings, and we used it to host our job fair. We are also looking into using it for a CNA training course.

We had a great month of June celebrating Nurses' week, CNA week, and Veterans Home week. Nurses' week and CNA week were filled with giveaways, games, gift basket raffles, all provided by staff, pizza, and other yummy treats. For Veterans Home week, our amazing Activities department and Volunteer

department put on a carnival with a pie-eating contest and dunk tank, Luau and pig roast, big prize Bingo and many more events!

Barb Raymond made sure to reiterate that the state is not permitted to use our state budget to do all the staff appreciation things, so everything that took place during those weeks was donated by SEVC staff.

Gen Weigl also mentioned we will be hosting a 100th birthday party in September for one of our World War II veterans who is in personal care. Nikki Whitlock mentioned that as a resident of SD44, they can provide a Senate Citation for his 100th birthday.

John Getz asked if they would have any issues coming in with the new security gates that will be installed. Brian Gula responded that we are going to see how everything goes, but we will most likely have them open during normal business hours. However, if they are closed for any reason, you will be able to ring a buzzer and someone at the security desk will be able to let you in. We are installing the first one on Brown Drive to test everything and see how it goes. Barb asked if we will be using pressure pads that will open the gate on the way out like some of the other homes have. Brian is not sure yet on all the details.

Compliance Update:

Josh Spigner provided a short compliance update. Currently, the exclusion checks that are being run at the homes are being done by staff at each home. We are trying to get on the Justifacts contract so we can automate this process and run the exclusion checks in a less cumbersome way. Josh also mentioned that the compliance team is doing contractual compliance reviews for Benchmark and Vistamed to make sure the contracts are being followed.

Comments from the Council:

Thomas Brown stated that everyone here is doing a fine job. Furthermore, he wanted to tell everyone to not lose sight of our main goal: helping veterans, including those out in the community that need our help. This should not only be a goal in our working lives, but in our personal lives as well.

Senator Tracy Pennycuick reiterated that they just passed the resolution for the Women Veteran's Health Taskforce, so they will be looking over the next 18 months at the women veterans in Pennsylvania and what they are getting for healthcare. She is hoping that taskforce will come up with recommendations to the federal VA to supply more money for the choice program. Additionally, there are some legislative actions, one is to remove the wartime service from the real estate tax exemption. That has been ongoing in several different ways, and we are trying to make that happen. There is also have a bill coming out that would lower the assessment on your real estate for tax purposes. Senator Pennycuick suggested adding informational briefs in the tax bills to help get information out there.

John Getz commented that the VFW has a retreat every year and this past year they had 165 women veterans attend. They are hoping to have another retreat in March. Overall, these retreats are very productive and many of the female veterans are learning a lot about healthcare benefits that they can take advantage of. He concluded by stating that everyday is Veterans Day.

Richard Doherty reiterated that everyone needs to push to get the word out to communities, but overall, he thinks everyone is doing an amazing job. He asked for clarification on the 100th birthday celebration. Richard also asked how old the veterans homes system is. Jill Alwine stated that this building opened in

1986 but was not fully operational until about 1991-1992. Gen Weigl stated that Delaware Valley just celebrated their 20th anniversary and Southwestern will be celebrating their 25th anniversary soon. Anna Brown comment that she used to come here to play Bingo back in the 1970s, it was a VA hospital at the time.

Robert Richardson stated that he has been noticing that there is nothing in the state for the Native Americans. He was wondering if we planned on doing anything or looking into that. Gen Weigl answered that there are some programs offered by the Federal VA that we push out, but the state has not done their own Native American function. She said she will look into doing something for Pennsylvania.

Nikki Whitlock stated that they are in the middle of planning Senator Muth's Annual Veteran's Expo. They are shooting for the fall and will let everyone know when there is a date nailed down.

Erica Moore introduced herself and stated that in the fall, they will be making visits to the local VFWs and American Legions to provide info to the community about various programs.

Old Business:

Nothing to Report.

New Business:

Nothing to Report.

Election of Officers:

President -- unanimous nominations and election of Barry Arnole to serve as President.

Vice President -- unanimous nominations and election of Mary Archey to serve as Vice President.

Secretary - unanimous nominations and election of Ken 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 12, 2023 at 10:00 a.m.

Approved:

Kenneth Schweitzer
Kenneth Schweitzer, Secretary

Minutes submitted by: Sarah Klufas



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of the American Service Member and that's why we are committed to helping end homelessness amongst the Veteran Community and ensure no Veteran is left behind.

Providing a safe and dignified home is an integral part of helping Veterans who are homeless reclaim their lives.

Tunnel to Towers' national program aims to eradicate homelessness by providing housing and services to Veterans who are homeless across America.

If you are a Veteran or know of a Veteran experiencing homelessness or at risk of becoming homeless, please complete this form.

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The Program's Impact

Through its strategic partnerships, generous grants, expansive Helping Heroes National Network, and innovative new projects, Tunnel to Towers achieved a remarkable feat in 2022 by providing safe haven and comprehensive support to more than 500 veterans who had previously faced homelessness or were at risk of experiencing it. This exceptional accomplishment stands as a testament to Tunnel to Towers' unwavering commitment to our nation's heroes, ensuring they not only find stable housing but also receive the necessary services to rebuild their lives with dignity and hope.

By continuing to forge impactful partnerships, secure vital grants, and launch pioneering initiatives, Tunnel to Towers is dedicated to extending its reach and impact, ushering in a brighter future for even more veterans in need.

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National Case Management Network

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America, no matter the location, and are connecting homeless veterans with safe, dignified housing options and providing direct financial assistance from Tunnel to Towers to get them housed.

After the shelter and basic needs of veterans are met, our team then works with the veterans to determine their immediate needs, such as mental, physical, emotional or financial needs. Tunnel to Towers is building a national network of public and private organizations, regional VA agents, attorneys, landlords, mental health counselors, employers, and financial counselors. We are currently working with hundreds of organizations across the nation to rapidly house our Veterans, then we meet veterans' specific needs, to ensure they can sustain their housing accommodations, and begin to build back their lives.

In addition to the Foundation's properties which address veteran homelessness in key metro-areas, the Foundation is also building a national referral network to support veterans struggling with homelessness across the nation, no matter the location.

The Homeless Veteran Program's National Case Management Network will provide veterans with the housing, servicing, and financial assistance needed to get their lives back on track. We are working with a litany of private organizations, VA offices, landlords, and employment agencies to provide holistic support to veterans and their families, no matter their location.

Our National Case Management Network's goal is to eliminate barriers to housing by providing timely assistance and support to help Veterans navigate through systems and resources needed to re-integrate into the community. Once the Foundation provides the needed financial assistance to get a Veteran rapidly housed and the Veteran's immediate crisis has been addressed, we provide support to address any psycho-social factors that may be impeding a Veteran's stability, including mental, physical, and financial wellness.

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causes of homelessness. Our Program works with both homeless veterans and veterans who are at-risk of becoming homeless. We follow the principles of the housing first model and use evidence based practices in our approach.

The Homeless Veterans Program provides assistance to Homeless Veterans in the following ways:

Broker Fees, 1st Month rent, Security deposits

Utility Deposits or Arrears

Housing Application Fees

Items needed to support a move into housing (storage, movers, etc)

Immediate shelter/hotel stay if no shelter beds available

Essential items such as food or child care supplies

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such as professional
attire

location or coordinated
entry point

Current Building Projects

Embarking on a path of impactful innovation, Tunnel to Towers is currently spearheading a series of transformative projects aimed at making a tangible difference in the lives of those it serves. These projects embody Tunnel to Towers' unwavering dedication to its mission, offering a glimpse into the organization's future-focused initiatives that promise to uplift, empower, and inspire.

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Houston, Texas

The Tunnel to Towers Foundation has fully converted a 161-room hotel in Houston, TX, which provides permanent and transitional housing to service hundreds of veterans in Houston and the surrounding areas. The property is equipped with a comprehensive service center on the first floor, offering veterans a litany of supportive services, provided by U.S. VETS. Phase II of our Houston Veterans Village will be complemented with 15-20 comfort homes, serving as permanent housing for senior citizen veterans.



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The Tunnel to Towers Foundation has reached an agreement with Manatee County for the donation of 8.7 acres of land in Bradenton, FL. Tunnel to Towers will construct 38 comfort homes centered around an 84-unit apartment complex and comprehensive supportive service center. Anticipated construction begins Q2 of 2024.



Riverside, California

On March Air Force Base, the Tunnel to Towers Foundation is currently funding the creation of a community of comfort homes as well as a multi-family/supportive service facility in Riverside, California on U.S. VETS' March Veterans Village.

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Atlanta, Georgia

The Tunnel to Towers Foundation is in the process of renovating a 101-room hotel in Atlanta which will provide permanent housing and supportive services to hundreds of veterans in the Atlanta area. The full-scale conversion has an anticipated completion date of Q3 2024.

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Phoenix, Arizona

The Tunnel to Towers Foundation has provided grant funds and support to U.S. VETS to renovate a 150-room hotel in Phoenix, Arizona which is serving as permanent supportive housing for hundreds of veterans in the Phoenix area.

Austin, Texas

The Tunnel to Towers Foundation has provided grant funds to provide 10 comfort homes to veterans on Mobile Loaves & Fishes' property in Austin, TX, as well as supportive services for 32 veterans.

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The Tunnel to Towers Foundation is finalizing the purchase of an 8.5 acre tract of waterfront property on the Susquehanna River, where we will construct a permanent housing Village encompassing a 50-60 unit apartment complex and comprehensive supportive service center, complemented by 15-20 Comfort Homes.

New York Metro / New Jersey

The Tunnel to Towers Foundation is currently searching for properties in the NYC metro area to provide permanent housing and supportive services to homeless veterans throughout Queens, Manhattan, Brooklyn, Bronx, Staten Island, and Long Island.

West Los Angeles, California

With over 11,000 homeless veterans in California, the Tunnel to Towers Foundation realized that efforts would need to be substantial enough to meet the current problem. In CA, Tunnel to Towers has provided extensive grant funds to a 388-acre property in West Los Angeles, California, which is being transformed into a community campus for over 3,000 veterans, upon completion. Building 207, opened in February 2023, provides housing and services to 67 veterans. The full campus, with almost a dozen other buildings, is expected to be completed by

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Veterans Collective (U.S VETS, Thomas Saffron & Associates, and Century Housing) is to provide over 715 housing units to the campus.

Future Veterans Villages

Detroit, MI

Denver, CO

San Francisco, CA

Portland, OR

Charlotte, NC

Myrtle Beach, SC

Seattle, WA

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Program Eligibility Requirements

When evaluating applicants for our Homeless Veteran Program, the Foundation considers the following criteria:

- The applicant must be a Veteran of the U.S. Military Service with an Honorable Discharge or Under Honorable Discharge.
- The applicant must demonstrate proof of homelessness or proof of being at risk of becoming homeless.

Documents needed for eligibility and pre-screening:

- Proof of Veteran status and identification.
- Proof of Honorable Discharge or Under Honorable Discharges.
- Proof of housing crisis.
- If applicable, proof of income, benefits and/or housing voucher.

The Foundation reserves the right to make exceptions on a case-by-case basis.

To see if you or someone you know may meet the program eligibility requirements, please complete this form.

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Pledge to help eradicate veteran homelessness in America. Support our nation's vulnerable veterans with needed housing and assistance through the Tunnel to Towers Foundation's Homeless Veteran Program.

HOMELESS VETERAN PROGRAM – INQUIRY FORM

The Tunnel to Towers Foundation is committed to honoring the dignity of the American Service Members, and that's why we are committed to helping end homelessness amongst the Veteran Community.

Providing a safe and dignified home is an integral part of helping Veterans who are homeless reclaim their lives, and we have implemented our Homeless Veteran Program to assist with the mission of eradicating homelessness.

-

If you are a Veteran or know of a Veteran experiencing homelessness or at risk of becoming homeless, please complete the Inquiry form below. *Please make sure to have the contact information of the Veteran you are referring so that we can make outreach efforts.*

DONATE NOW

Veteran's First Name *

First Name

Veteran's Last Name *

Last Name

If you are referring a Veteran, please provide your First and Last Name and contact information.

How did you hear about Tunnel to Towers and/or our Homeless Veteran Program? *

- Friend
- Family
- Other non-profit organization
- Case Worker
- TV or other media outlet
- Other

Branch of Service *

- Air Force

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Army

- Army Reserve
- Army National Guard
- Coast Guard
- Coast Guard Reserve
- Marine Corps
- Marine Corps Reserve
- Navy
- Navy Reserve
- Space Force
- Unknown

Phone Number *

City and State where Veteran is currently located

City *

State *

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Country *

Are you currently homeless or at risk of becoming homeless? *

- Yes
- No
- Other Circumstance

Are there children (under 18 and/or with special needs) in the household? *

- Yes
- No
- Unknown

Do you have access to a device to participate in a video call (Zoom, Google Meet, etc.)? *

- Yes
- No

Do you have proof of your Veteran status (DD-214, VA ID, etc.)? *

- Yes

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Do you have a service-connected disability or physical limitation? *

- Yes
- No
- Unknown

If yes, please enter your disability percentage.

Please describe, in detail, your current housing crisis and request for needed assistance. *

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TO The County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania

FROM LTC Nicholas M. Taylor, US Army (Ret.)
Chairman, Pennsylvania State Veterans Commission

DATE 15 December 2023

RE Endorsement of Pennsylvania General Assembly House Bill 1227

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide a formal endorsement for House Bill 1227 that expands and modifies the Pennsylvania Disabled Veterans' Real Estate Tax Exemption Program.

The Pennsylvania State Veterans' Commission unanimously passed a resolution to modify the current Real Estate Tax Exemption Program in October 2021. The resolution was endorsed and recommended for approval by the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA).

This legislation has been the product of many former bills that conform to the recommendation of the Commission. This legislation will provide property tax relief to deserving Veterans and their families.

Your action will honor the hard work and the sacrifices of the Veterans of the Commonwealth and their families. I urge you to get behind this bill and show that Pennsylvania cares for its Veterans and their families.

This Commission is also aware that the Pennsylvania War Veterans Council endorses this bill. Together, we present ONE STRONG VOICE for its passage.


NICHOLAS M. TAYLOR
Lieutenant Colonel, US Army (Ret.)
Chairman, Pennsylvania State Veterans Commission