Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services

February 4, 2026 at 1:00 PM
Hartranft Conference Room, Fort Indiantown Gap

AGENDA

1:00 p.m.	**CALL TO ORDER**
	PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE / MOMENT OF SILENCE
	COUNCIL INTRODUCTIONS
	LEADERSHIP COMMENTS
	OLD BUSINESS
	• Review and approval of the minutes from November 5, 2025
	AWARDS
	• GAC-VS Veteran Advocate of the Quarter
	DISCUSSION TOPIC:
	• **Veteran Suicide Prevention and Collaborative Pathways**
	----------short break----------
	• **General Discussion**
3:00 p.m.	**ADJOURNMENT**

Next Meeting is scheduled for:
May 6, 2026, at 1:00PM
Dept. of Corrections, Mechanicsburg

Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services

MEETING MINUTES
FEBRUARY 4, 2026, 1:00–3:00 p.m.
Hartranft Conference Room, Fort Indiantown Gap

COUNCIL MEMBERS/DESIGNEES **IN ATTENDANCE**

BG (PA) Maureen H. Weigl, Chairwoman, Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans Affairs	MG John Pippy, DMVA
Stephen D'Ettorre, Governor's Policy Office	Laurel Harry, Dept. of Corrections
Andrew Barnes, Dept. of Human Services	Leora Appleby, DCED
Toshua Jarrett, Member at Large	Kara Templeton, Dept. of Transportation
Emily Butler, Dept. of Education	Michael Adelberg, Dept. of Health
Kevin Atkinson, Dept. of Aging	Lisa Verbos, Dept. of Drug & Alcohol Programs
Karl Blischke, PA Council on the Arts	James "Woody" Hogan, PWVC
Jeffrey Wallace, State Civil Service Commission	Mike Rang, State Veterans Commission
Nicole Faraguna, Dept. of Conservation/Natural Resources	

COUNCIL MEMBERS/DESIGNEES **NOT IN ATTENDANCE**

Kory Auch, Office of Administration	Tammy Ferguson, Member at Large
Wendy Spicher/Tina Kotsalos, Dept. of Banking & Securities	Nancy Walker/Crystal Houser, Dept. of Labor & Industry
Russell Redding/Heidi Secord, Dept. of Agriculture	Timothy Shaeffer/Christi Dunning, Fish & Boat Commission
Micah Snead, Member at Large	

OTHERS PRESENT

Patti Tanner, DMVA	Janette Krolczyk, DMVA
Dr. Keith Aronson, PSU Clearinghouse	John Noll, DMVA
Rafael Torres, PA CareerLink	Dr. Michele Bratina, West Chester University
Fred Nardei, VA Pittsburgh	Rebecca Feldman, Widener University
Paul Amigh, DOH	Andrew LaFratte, DOS
Lucinda Piper, DOH	Bill Cress, VISN 4
Nate Silcox, ED-Senate VAEP Committee	Alexis Vogan, DOC
John Schwartz, Center for Combating Elder Financial Abuse	Ward Adams
Troy Edwards, DOC	Celeste Brucklacher, DOC
Seth Benge, DMVA	Marc Ferraro, DMVA
Sierra Bilous, DHS	Jennifer Adams, DMVA
John Buffone, CCAP	Amy Capretto, VISN 4
Kim McDonnell, CCAP	Keisha Kerr, VISN 4
Taylor Dippery, DMVA	Michael Carrington, DOC
Kim McDonnell, CCAP	Norm Marden, OAG
Marilyn Kelly-Cavotta, DMVA	Ally Murr-Curry, VTC Mentor

Bill Reed, VOPA	Alanna Caffas, Veterans Health Foundation
Cherryann Joseph, Military Women's Memorial	Courtney Carmichael, PSU
Beth Pooler, PDA	Lisa Grayson, PA Bar Assn.
Jessica Penn-Shires, DOC	Michelle Copeland, DMVA
Matt Colian, PA CareerLink	Elizabeth Bumbarger, DMVA
Brendan Auman, DCED	Kim Kreiser, DMVA
Ralph Roach, L&I	Michelle McGinnis, DHS
Lucinda Piper, DOH	Randy Wright, DOL VETS
Kristi Brawley, PSU	Fred Burke, DDAP
Keith Graham, DMVA	Joe Batt, DMVA
Samantha Cossman, DMVA	Erica Moore, DMVA
Tom Applebach, CDVA – Lehigh County	Elizabeth Cooper, DMVA
Ed Cherry, DMVA	Karen Olson, DMVA
Angel McLaughlin, VOPA	Brian Natali, DMVA
Maria Tagliaferri, DMVA	Zackary Portser, DMVA
Samantha Cossman, DMVA	Kaitlyn Boswell, DMVA
Susan Meighen, DMVA	Heather Hewitt, VMCenter
Jennifer Hagaman, DMVA	Erin Burkett, wesoldieron.org
Chris Clark, DMVA	Catherine Bichler, wesoldieron.org
Michael Belcher, DMVA	Jeremy Schoeppner, VA
Eric Morin, Monroe County	Samantha Petrides, LCCAP

CALL TO ORDER, INTRODUCTIONS, AND OPENING REMARKS	The Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services (GAC-VS) was called to order at 1:00 p.m. Mr. John Noll welcomed everyone joining the hybrid meeting and led the Pledge of Allegiance and Moment of Silence. MG John Pippy, Adjutant General for the DMVA, provided welcoming remarks and expressed appreciation for the collaborative expertise represented at Council meetings. Chairwoman, BG (PA) Maureen Weigl welcomed attendees and shared updates on the upcoming VetCon, tentatively planned for either fall 2026 or the following spring. She also highlighted recent updates to the VetConnect website and a Smart Card resource showcasing DMVA data collection efforts.
APPROVAL OF NOV 5, 2025, MINUTES	No questions or corrections were raised. BG (PA) Maureen Weigl motioned to approve the minutes, seconded by Secretary Laurel Harry. The motion passed unanimously.
AWARDS	The Council recognized Ms. Sarah Herr as the February Veteran Advocate of the Quarter for her continued efforts to secure funding for veteran initiatives, including the Byrne SCIP grant supporting suicide prevention efforts.
UDATE SINCE LAST MEETING	Mr. Noll presented a "year in review" highlighting the Council's accomplishments in 2025, including several first-time initiatives.
	Veterans Suicide Prevention and Collaborative Pathways

DISCUSSION TOPIC	
OPENING ACTIVITY & PANELIST INTRODUCTIONS	▪ Ms. Patti Tanner, DMVA Veteran Mental and Behavioral Health Subject Matter Expert, opened the panel with a trauma-informed exercise focused on emotional awareness and self-care, encouraging psychological safety and emotional intelligence among participants. ▪ Panelists included: ➢ Dr. Keith Aronson, Penn State Clearinghouse ➢ Marilyn Kelly-Cavotta, DMVA ➢ Rafael Torres, PA CareerLink ➢ Michael Carrington, DOC
PANEL DISCUSSION	<u>The importance of identifying military service</u>: ▪ Panelists emphasized the importance of asking "have you ever served in the military?" as a gateway to tailored resources and support. Failure to identify military service can contribute to gaps in care, which may impact suicidal ideations. ▪ Panelists agreed that coming together across agencies to discuss ways to better connect with those they serve will lead to positive outcomes downstream. ▪ Social determinants of health were identified as significant risk factors for suicidality, particularly among minority populations. Understanding an individual's background allows for more effective engagement and intervention. ▪ Building rapport with a client using trauma-informed and empathetic approaches helps to identify needs and prevents misconceptions or misdiagnoses. <u>Impact of veteran identification on care and justice-involved populations</u>: ▪ Panelists discussed the value of military cultural competency, rapport-building, and trauma-informed approaches when engaging veterans. Peer-based programs and shared lived experience can foster trust, especially within the justice system. Early engagement and coordinated support can build camaraderie through pro-social behavior and help veterans return to a life of service and purpose by helping others. <u>Example of known veteran status leading to positive outcomes</u>: ▪ Untreated mental health challenges can lead to enhanced risk factors for social determinants of health. When someone experiencing desperate circumstances gets assistance, risk factors for suicide are reduced, creating a protective factor for keeping that individual on a positive path with healthy outcomes. ▪ It is important for providers to avoid working in silos and connect with other resources that can assist someone in need. <u>Cultural awareness in veteran and family engagement</u>: ▪ Panelists highlighted the elevated suicide risk among women veterans and the importance of intentional connection. Trauma histories often

	predate military service and underscore the need for sensitive engagement strategies. ▪ Trauma survivors can have many triggers requiring respectful inquiry practices. Although individuals may deny suicide is not on their mind, follow-up questions regarding stressors and social determinants of health can reveal needs not immediately disclosed. <u>Training staff for action after identifying veteran status</u>: ▪ Organizations are encouraged to ensure that identifying veteran status leads to action and assistance, not just used for data collection. Staff awareness of specialized resources is critical, even when individuals are hesitant to share personal details. <u>Improving veteran identification across systems</u>: ▪ Challenges in information sharing across agencies were noted. Strategies discussed included placing skilled communicators in intake roles, improving internal tracking, learning from unsuccessful cases, and empowering women veterans to identify with and take pride in their service. ▪ Connecting research to policy was also identified as a key opportunity for systemic improvement.
Q & A	▪ Veteran status questions on forms: ➢ A suggestion was made to require veteran status questions on all state program applications through legislative guidance. ▪ DOC peer support programs: ➢ DOC confirmed that certified recovery specialist training resulted in veteran inmates being certified to provide peer support services. ▪ Research informing policy: ➢ PSU Clearinghouse contains research that could support future policy development. ▪ Recognizing women veterans: ➢ Panelists emphasized intentional inquiry and follow-up questions to foster recognition, comfort, and engagement among women veterans. *MG John Pippy encouraged continued dialogue through the GAC-VS and noted regulatory, policy, or agency-level recommendations are always welcome.
REMINDERS	▪ Mr. Noll reminded the group to review the following resources: ➢ DMVA website for the approved meeting materials. (www.dmva.pa.gov) ➢ GAC-VS Webpage: (Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans' Services (pa.gov)) Veterans Registry is where service members, veterans, family members, and caregivers can sign up for the "Together We Serve" publication. (www.register.dmva.pa.gov).
	Next Meeting:

	May 6th, 2025, 1:00–3:00 p.m. Department of Corrections, Mechanicsburg
ADJOURNMENT	The meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m.

NEW ACTION ITEMS

#	ACTION	STATUS
1	Ms. Krolczyk will distribute digital meeting materials to the GAC-VS distribution list.	Complete
2	DMVA will connect with Dr. Aronson regarding research to inform policy development/change.	Complete

OLD ACTION ITEMS

#	ACTION	STATUS

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WELCOME

Feb. 4, 2026

Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services

Fort Indiantown Gap
Annville

This meeting, and all content, is being recorded for executive documentation only.
Your continued participation is acknowledgement and approval of recording.

--We will begin at 1:00pm--

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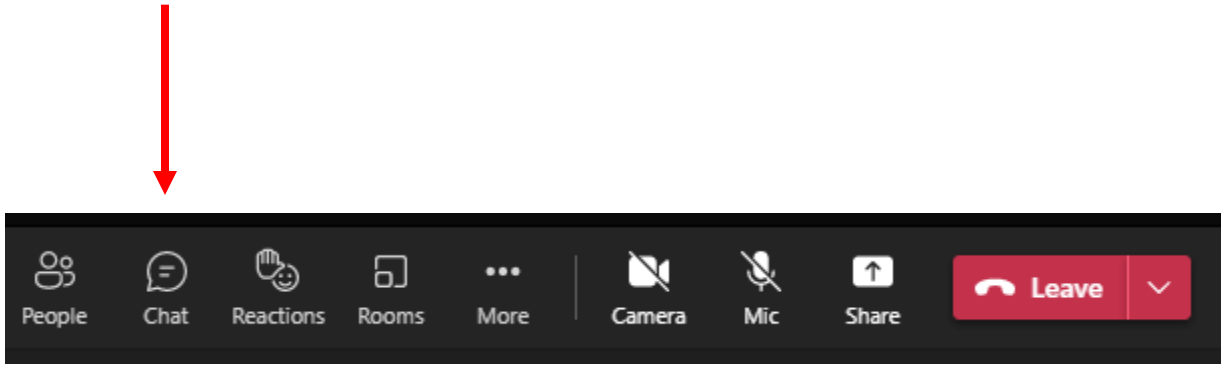
Chat function is used to submit comments or questions



*Please enter your **full name and agency** for attendance purposes

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INTRODUCTIONS & LEADERSHIP COMMENTS

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OLD BUSINESS

VETERAN ADVOCATE OF THE QUARTER

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Ms. Sarah Herr

- Ms. Herr puts her policy and research expertise to excellent use as the Keystone Culture and Grants Officer.
- Ms. Herr was instrumental in obtaining the Byrne SCIP grant for about $150,000 to be used toward veteran suicide prevention efforts.

YEAR IN REVIEW - 2025

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- 60 committee meetings held
- Recognized about 1,000 employees through the State Employee Military Service Recognition Campaign
- Trained 421 participants through the “Safeguarding our Veterans” sessions
- Pension Poaching Awareness Campaign (78 partners and refreshed materials)
- GAC-VS Collaborative Homelessness Paper
- Created a Housing Crisis Pilot group and met 3 times – continuing work

YEAR IN REVIEW - 2025

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- VTF Jury donations + $14,000 from 6 counties ($125,000 since inception)
- 3 Testimonial Articles
- 3 Forest Bathing test events held
- Created an educational Women Veterans Brochure
- Completed our first annual GAC-VS video
- National Pillars of Excellence Award received

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DISCUSSION TOPIC

Veterans Suicide Prevention and Collaborative Pathways

OPENING RITUAL

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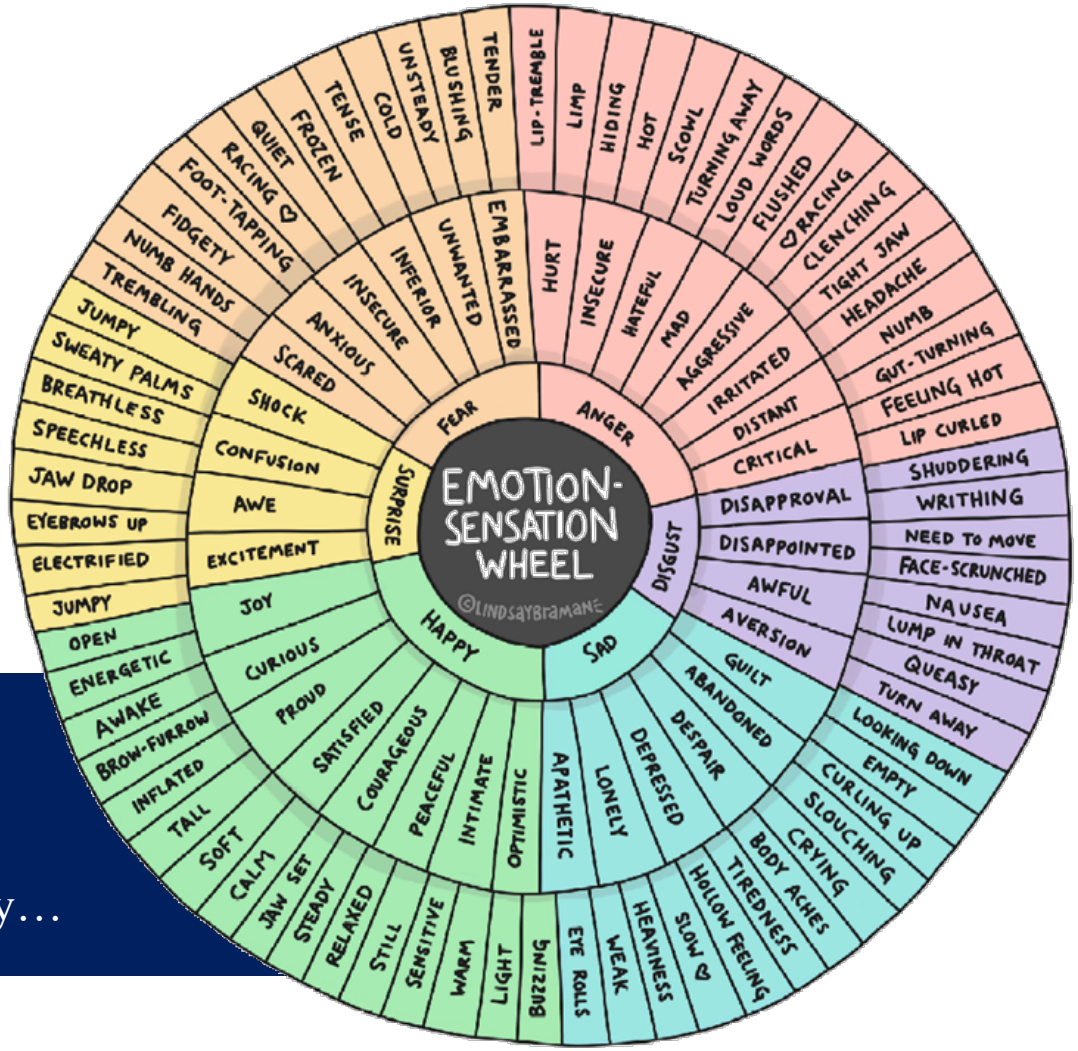
- Trauma-informed
- Promotes emotional intelligence
- Suicide prevention
    - Connection!



1. Name (pronouns optional)
2. "I feel _____" statement
3. I will take care of myself by…

Adapted from The Sanctuary Model by Dr. Sandra Bloom

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PANELISTS

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Dr. Keith Aronson
Penn State Clearinghouse for Military Family Readiness

Marilyn Kelly-Cavotta
Pennsylvania Dept. of Military and Veterans Affairs

Rafael Torres
Pennsylvania CareerLink

Michael Carrington
Pennsylvania Dept. of Corrections

Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services

--SHORT BREAK--

QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION

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- Questions?

- Where are opportunities to begin implementing the “Ask the Question” campaign in your agencies/organizations?

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- **DMVA website: www.dmva.pa.gov**

- **Visit the GAC-VS webpage for meeting materials**

- **Sign up for the Veterans' Registry and the *"Together We Serve"* online monthly newsletter**

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NEXT MEETING:

May 6 at 1:00PM

Dept. of Corrections, Mechanicsburg