



Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services

November 5, 2025 at 1:00 PM

AGENDA

1:00 p.m.

CALL TO ORDER

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE / MOMENT OF SILENCE

GAC-VS VIDEO – VETERANS TREATMENT COURTS

GOVERNOR'S REMARKS and GROUP PHOTO

LEADERSHIP COMMENTS

COUNCIL INTRODUCTIONS

AWARDS

- GAC-VS Veteran of the Quarter

OLD BUSINESS

- Review and approval of the minutes from August 6, 2025

COMMITTEE UPDATES

- **Veterans in Public Service (ViPS)** – *Mr. Kory Auch*
- **Education, Employment, Workforce Development** – *Ms. Crystal Houser*
- **Homeless** – *Mr. Brendan Auman*
- **Aging** – *Ms. Michelle Copeland*

-----short break-----

- **Health Promotions** – *Ms. Patti Tanner*
- **Women Veterans** – *Ms. Marilyn Kelly-Cavotta*
- **Judiciary** – *Mr. Michael Carrington*

3:00 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

Next Meeting is scheduled for:
February 4, 2026, at 1:00PM
Location: Fort Indiantown Gap



Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services

MEETING MINUTES
NOVEMBER 5, 2025, 1:00–3:02 p.m.
State Capitol, Harrisburg

COUNCIL MEMBERS/DESIGNEES IN ATTENDANCE

BG (PA) Maureen H. Weigl, Chairwoman, Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans Affairs	MG John Pippy, DMVA
Steve D’Ettorre, Governor’s Policy Office	Micah Snead, Member at Large
Tammy Ferguson, Member at Large	Laurel Harry, Dept. of Corrections
Toshua Jarrett, Member at Large	Russell Redding, Dept. of Agriculture
Andrew Barnes, Dept. of Human Services	Jeffrey Wallace, State Civil Service Commission
Debra Bogen, Dept. of Health	Leora Appleby, DCED
Kevin Atkinson, Dept. of Aging	Kara Templeton, Dept. of Transportation
Crystal Houser, Dept. of Labor & Industry	Nick Taylor, State Veterans Commission
Nicole Faraguna, Dept. of Conservation/Natural Resources	James “Woody” Hogan, PWVC
Cathy Hall, Dept. of Education	Lisa Verbos, Drug & Alcohol Programs
Kory Auch, Office of Administration	Tina Kotsalos, Dept. of Banking & Securities
Karl Blischke, PA Council on the Arts	Christi Dunning, Fish & Boat Commission

OTHERS PRESENT

Patti Tanner, DMVA	Marc Ferraro, DMVA
Mike Pipe, Governor’s Office	James Fedele, VMC
Keisha Kerr, VISN 4	Jacob Arquisola, DMVA
Sierra Bilous, DHS	Rick Hamp, DMVA
Joe Shamonsky, DOH	Janette Krolczyk, DMVA
Bill Cress, VISN 4	Angela Watson, DMVA
Bill Reed, VOPA	John Noll, DMVA
Dusty Durand, DMVA	Michelle Copeland, DMVA
Travis Davis, DMVA	Michelle McGinnis, DHS
Seth Benge, DMVA	Ed Cherry, DMVA
Shannon Wanyo, DOH	Jamie Dunlap, PA Council on the Arts
Nick Haller, VISN 4	Kristin LaVanish, DOE
Amy Capretto Gramc, VISN 4	Rebekah Orlando, DHS
Karen Leonovich, P4A	Keith Graham, DMVA
Jessica Penn Shires, DOC	Stephanie Meyer, DHS
Elizabeth Cooper, DMVA	Joe Batt, DMVA
Heather Hewitt, VMC	Marilyn Kelly-Cavotta, DMVA
Angel McLaughlin, VOPA	Paul Amigh, DOH
Stephanie Shirk, Dept. of Agriculture	Mary Dougherty, L&I
Tiffany Cleary, DMVA	Chelsea Ellsworth, DMVA
Danielle Rudy, PHFA	Brian Natali, DMVA
Beth Pooler, PDA	Alexis Vogan, DOC

Ward Adams	Brendan Auman, DCED
Tom Applebach, CDVA – Lehigh County	Norm Marden, OAG
Kristi Brawley, PSU	Michael Carrington, DOC
Samantha Bessell, LCCAP	Elizabeth Bumbarger, DMVA
Lisa Grayson, PA Bar Assn.	Ralph Roach, L&I
Mike Moss, DMVA	Lucinda Piper, DOH
Zackary Portser, DMVA	Susan Meighen, DMVA
Sara Small, Veterans Multi-Service Center	Karen Olson, DMVA
Erica Moore, DMVA	Tom Cherry, DMVA
Jennifer Adams, DMVA	Lana Evans, DMVA
Catherine Bichler, wesoldieron.org	Erin Burkett, wesoldieron.org

<p>CALL TO ORDER, INTRODUCTIONS, AND LEADERSHIP REMARKS</p>	<p>The Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services (GAC-VS) was called to order at 1:00 p.m.</p> <p>Ms. Janette Krolczyk welcomed participants and led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance and Moment of Silence.</p> <p>The first GAC-VS video was presented, featuring Veteran Treatment Courts in Pennsylvania.</p> <p>MG John Pippy welcomed participants, thanked everyone for supporting the GAC-VS, and expressed appreciation for ongoing initiatives benefiting service members, veterans, and their families.</p> <p>BG (PA) Maureen Weigl thanked those who contributed to the 2025 VetCon, particularly the GAC-VS Committee Chairs, whose sessions strengthened interagency collaboration. She noted that Pennsylvania continues to stand out nationally and other states are taking notice of Pennsylvania programs, setting us apart in positive ways.</p>
<p>AWARDS</p>	<p>Mr. Rick Hamp was recognized as the GAC-VS Veteran of the Quarter for his dedicated service to DMVA and years of relationship-building that continue to support the Office of Veterans Affairs. Mr. Hamp was presented with a Pennsylvania Commendation Medal and a Governor’s Citation.</p>
<p>APPROVAL OF AUG 6, 2025 MINUTES</p>	<p>The minutes from the August 6, 2025, meeting were unanimously approved following a motion by Mr. Kory Auch and a second by M. Nick Taylor.</p>
<p>UPDATE SINCE LAST MEETING</p>	<p>Ms. Krolczyk shared an overview of the work done since last quarter:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ GAC-VS received the national Pillars of Excellence Award for innovative state programming. ▪ DMVA held a second Housing Crisis Pilot Meeting, with a third meeting scheduled for later in November. ▪ The next testimonial article has been listed on the website, featuring the Veteran’s Trust Fund and the impact those donated dollars have on our veteran community.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The 2025 VetCon featured exceptional, high-caliber breakout sessions organized by our GAC-VS committee chairs.
VETERANS IN PUBLIC SERVICE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr. Kory Auch presented data on the commonwealth workforce with military connections, including agency and branch breakdowns. ▪ He reported that the Governor’s State Employee Military Service Recognition Campaign is set to recognize approximately 1,000 employees this year, with over 20,000 honored since inception. ▪ A new orientation program launching in 2026 will help new veteran hires connect with resources and camaraderie.
EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ms. Crystal Houser provided many highlights from commonwealth programs that help veterans find resources, jobs, and support. The programs and data discussed revealed successes from multiple agencies serving veterans and emphasized the desire to bring more service members and veterans back to Pennsylvania for their next chapter. ▪ Ms. Houser emphasized interagency collaboration and using PA CareerLink® locations to reach the public. ▪ BG (PA) Weigl added that agencies are exploring ways to promote Pennsylvania opportunities at military installations to encourage transitioning service members to make Pennsylvania their next home.
HOMELESS COMMITTEE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr. Brendan Auman discussed efforts to assist “hard-to-place” veterans facing housing barriers and shared that national best practices have been discussed for possible implementation. ▪ He noted ongoing multi-agency collaboration supported by senior leadership. Data collection remains a key need, with discussions underway to integrate the Federal VA and HMIS systems to improve tracking and support.
AGING COMMITTEE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The “Safeguarding our Veterans” training reached over 400 participants in 2025, sharing valuable information on identifying and preventing scams targeting veterans. The annual Pension Poaching materials also received a refresh for state-wide distribution. ▪ Pennsylvania continues its partnership with the Elizabeth Dole Foundation as a Hidden Heroes Commonwealth, recognizing caregivers supporting veterans. ▪ The committee is exploring ways to possibly assist older veterans with digital literacy and access to reliable online resources.
HEALTH PROMOTIONS COMMITTEE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ms. Patti Tanner reported the success of forest bathing events during Suicide Prevention Month, in which DMVA partnered with DCNR. There are plans to expand the program to six events in 2026. ▪ She described the Suicide Mortality Review (SMR) process, which identifies gaps in service and informs prevention strategies. ▪ MG Pippy thanked Ms. Tanner and the team for leading the Suicide Prevention Summit at VetCon, which drew over 60 participants.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ms. Tanner also highlighted the Governor’s Challenge Team, a statewide initiative focused on suicide prevention among service members, veterans, and their families. She emphasized the importance of agencies collecting veteran demographic data to strengthen outreach and support. ▪ An inquiry was made as to why the Office of Administration (OA) does not track cause of death. The office does not track cause of death for an individual employee as it is not needed information for concluding employment/settling final benefits and payments. Employee deaths occurring on-duty are subject to further investigation.
<p style="text-align: center;">WOMEN VETERANS COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ms. Marilyn Kelly-Cavotta announced that new training focused on issues specific to women veterans will be offered in 2026 across commonwealth agencies. ▪ She shared information about Pennsylvania’s connection to the 6888th Battalion in WWII and ongoing planning for Maternal Health Listening Sessions to bridge gaps between VA and community care. ▪ Ms. Kelly-Cavotta, representing all minority veteran populations including LGBTQ+ and transgender service members/veterans, noted that additional transition support will soon be needed for transgender veterans leaving active duty.
<p style="text-align: center;">JUDICIARY COMMITTEE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mr. Michael Carrington discussed initiatives within the DOC to prepare veterans for successful reentry, including veterans under supervision and the C&P exams conducted in correctional institutions. These ensure continued access to benefits upon release. ▪ Mr. Carrington also highlighted virtual collaboration between VSUs at SCI Dallas, Muncy, and Houtzdale for shared events like the Shining Light Academy graduation, strengthening post-release support networks.
<p style="text-align: center;">SECRETARY COMMENTS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Secretary Harry emphasized the importance of sharing DOC initiatives through the GAC-VS and social media to raise awareness and encourage collaboration. ▪ Secretary Redding praised cross-agency partnerships and their role in promoting trauma-informed care and therapeutic activities such as gardening for healing. ▪ Secretary Bogen reaffirmed that effective government relies on strong interagency collaboration and shared that the Maternal Health Strategic Plan will be released soon.
<p style="text-align: center;">REMINDERS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ MG Pippy reminded participants that various state awards exist for military and <u>civilians</u> who demonstrate commendable service to the Commonwealth. ▪ Explore resources and prepare for the next quarterly meeting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ DMVA website: (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: February 4th, 2025, 1:00–3:00 p.m. Location: Fort Indiantown Gap
ADJOURNMENT	The meeting adjourned at 3:02 p.m.

NEW ACTION ITEMS

#	ACTION	STATUS
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OLD ACTION ITEMS

#	ACTION	STATUS
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WELCOME

November 5, 2025

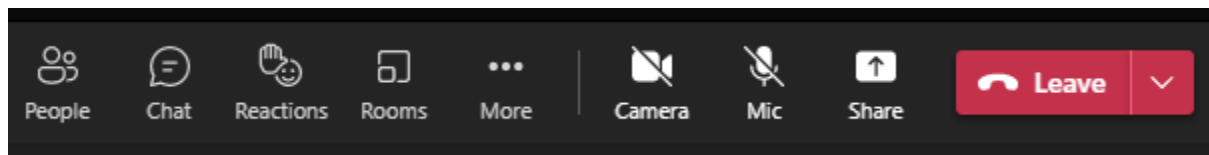
Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services Harrisburg

**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--



Chat function is used to submit comments or questions



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





VIDEO

Veteran Treatment Courts



LEADERSHIP COMMENTS



COUNCIL INTRODUCTIONS



AWARDS

VETERAN OF THE QUARTER



Pennsylvania
Department of Military
and Veterans Affairs

Mr. Richard Hamp

Mr. Hamp has been instrumental in advancing the agency's mission during his career.

He fostered critical relationships and laid a strong foundation for many DMVA program areas for our continued success.

His exemplary career reflects the highest standards of leadership – marked by wisdom, foresight, and unwavering integrity.





OLD BUSINESS

SINCE LAST MEETING



Pennsylvania
Department of Military
and Veterans Affairs

- The GAC-VS won the Pillars of Excellence Award
- DMVA held a second Housing Crisis Pilot Program meeting in October
- The second GAC-VS testimonial article is on our webpage highlighting the Veteran's Trust Fund
- VetCon breakout sessions aligned with GAC-VS committee topics

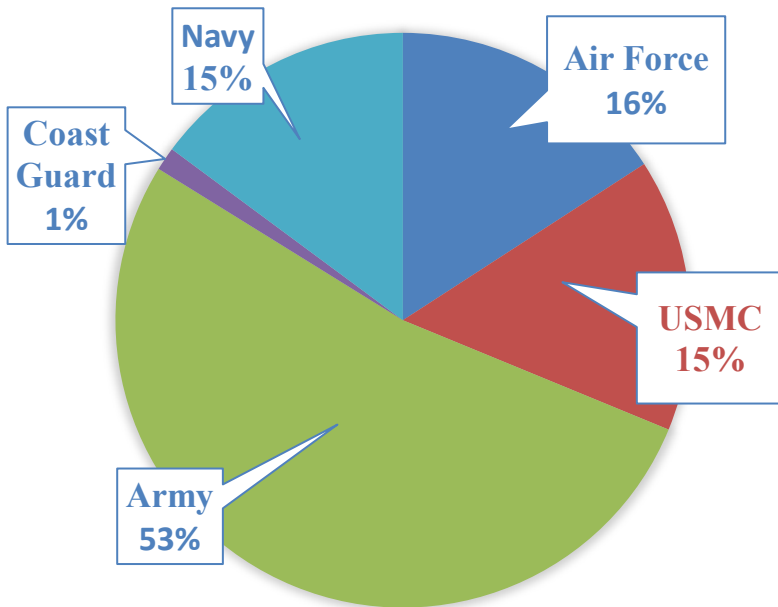


VETERANS IN PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr. Kory Auch



13K employees with military service
16% of our workforce
1K still serving in Guard/Reserve



Top Five Percent	Top Five Number
DOC 34%	DOC 5000
PEMA 29%	PennDOT 1400
Parole 28%	PSP 1400
Fish & Boat 22%	DHS 1300
PSP 21%	L&I 500

2025 Recognition Campaign:

- 35 Agencies
- Estimate 1000 employees



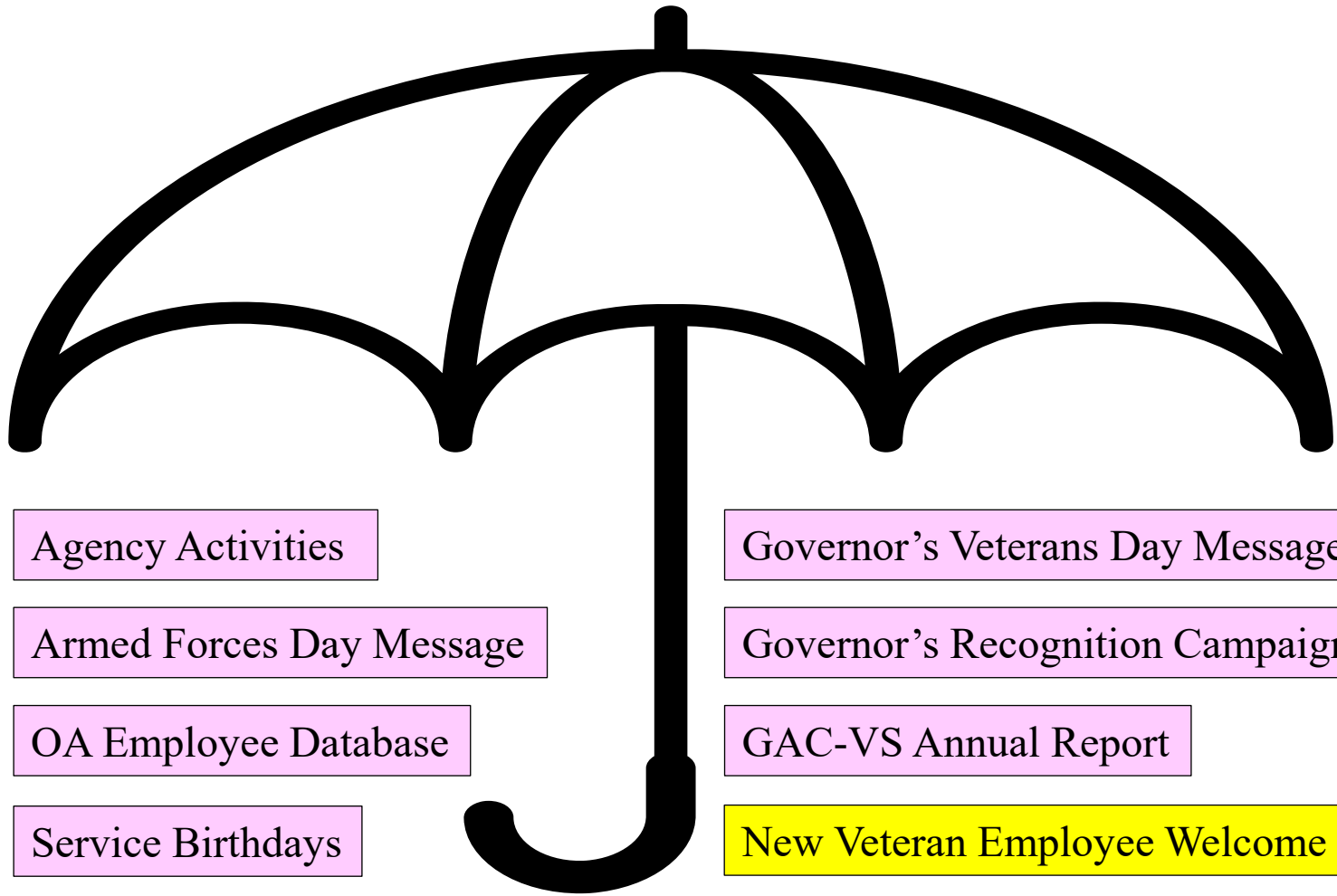
over 20K since inception

Veteran Preference Hiring SFY24-25

- Nearly 1300 vets hired with VP (11%)
- 4% PA's working age pop are veterans

- **Hiring a veteran isn't charity - it's a smart strategy.** Veterans offer proven productivity, lower turnover rates, natural leadership skills, deep-rooted loyalty and relentless dedication to the mission.
- **Veterans show up. They lead. They deliver.** From the battlefield to the boardroom, veterans bring discipline, grit, and mission focus to every role they take on. When you hire a veteran, you're not just filling a position—you're adding a force multiplier to your team.

DOL National Hire a Veteran Day 2025



Agency Activities

Armed Forces Day Message

OA Employee Database

Service Birthdays

Veteran Employee Resources

Governor's Veterans Day Message

Governor's Recognition Campaign

GAC-VS Annual Report

New Veteran Employee Welcome



PA Veteran Employee Orientation Program
[HIRE Committe Initiative]

Welcome - military veteran within agency

Resources - programs & benefits

- DMVA ... state & federal programs for veterans
- OA ... military/veteran programs for employees

Goal is to launch in Spring 2026



EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Crystal Houser, Chair



Updates

Veterans Preference Hiring in Government (OA)

- 1,271 veterans hired for full-time commonwealth positions

Homegrown by Heroes (Ag)

- 69 farms in 37 counties
- 9 Apprenticeships

GI Bill® (PDE)

- In FFY 2024, 17,370 beneficiaries utilized their veterans' education benefits and 556 facilities approved for the G.I. Bill® were active*
- **(Active means that at least one beneficiary was enrolled and certified to the VA during the fiscal year)*

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation

- 2024/2025 (10/1/2024 – 9/30/2025) 709 veterans served /160 achieved employment outcomes



Updates

Apprenticeship and Training Office

- During calendar year 2024, 6.75% of active apprentices in PA identified as veteran.
- Additionally, 6.57% of newly enrolled apprentices in PA identified as veteran.
- [Apprenticeship for Veterans- Quick Guide](#) is a resource for veteran jobseekers looking for more information on how to access a program, the benefits of the model, and/or how the GI Bill can be used during a program.

Department of State

- 2,165 military applicants.
- 1,920 military applicants who were approved for licensure.



Updates

PA CareerLink®

- 1,876 veterans received intensive services from the Disabled Veteran Outreach Program Specialists
- 9,383 veterans served through the PA CareerLink® Offices

Business One-Stop Shop (DCED)

- October 1, 2024–September 30, 2025: 2,023 veterans served, 782 self-identifying as service-disabled veterans
- Since program inception (10/19/2019–9/30/25): 9,546 veterans served, 3,344 self-identifying as service-disabled veterans



Looking Forward

The committee will continue to:

- Work collaboratively with agencies/organizations dedicated to serving veterans
- Work to spread awareness about veteran programs



HOMELESS

Mr. Brendan Auman, Chair



HOMELESS



Pennsylvania
Department of Military
and Veterans Affairs

Updates

- Focus on the “hard to place” veterans with barriers to housing such as criminal record, poor rental history, mental/behavioral health challenges, substance abuse disorder, etc.
- Shared best practices, new training and funding opportunities, National and State policy updates on housing
- Support provider voices in state-system planning processes
 - PA Housing Action Plan, Keystones of Health: Bridges to Success, Interagency Council on Homelessness
- With federal funding at-risk, facilitated discussions on what communities are doing to identify local funding or creative partnerships to support programming



Looking Forward

- Continue building upon data collection and sharing efforts
- Enhance partnerships with behavioral health, mental health, and substance abuse disorder treatments to support veterans in stability
- Engagement with landlords to educate on programs and services veterans receive to increase the pool of rental units available to quickly end an episode of homelessness or instability
- Explore creating funding opportunities to support gaps in federal funding



AGING

Ms. Michelle Copeland, Chair



Updates

- Completed 2 sessions of Safeguarding Our Veterans Training
- Updated pension poaching awareness materials
- Completed successful music therapy pilot program at Delaware Valley Veterans Home



Looking Forward

- Discuss details for a Hidden Heroes Day recognition in 2026
- Creating a digital bridge



Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services

--SHORT BREAK--



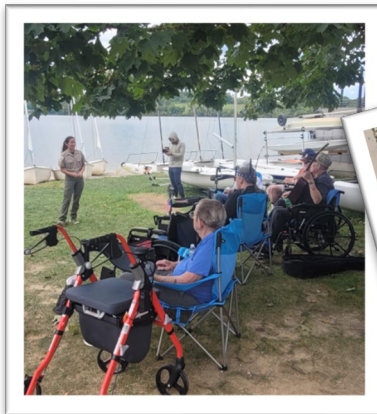
HEALTH PROMOTIONS

Ms. Patti Tanner, Co-Chair



Updates

- Partnered with the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) to host forest bathing events in 3 regions across the Commonwealth.



- Collaborated with the Suicide Mortality Review (SMR) Program to distribute educational materials about SMR Committees and PA Act 101.
- Coordinated the Suicide Prevention Summit at VetCon.



Looking Forward

- Expand forest bathing partnership with DCNR to 6 event locations in 2026!
- Partner with the Governor's Challenge Team on Priority Area 1: to formalize Veteran Status as a standard demographic variable across PA state agencies.
 - **62.4% of Veterans do not have VA coverage.**
 - Community providers **rarely (~19%) ask patients about their military history.**
 - Veterans have **higher rates of substance use disorders (3x greater) and suicide (1.5x greater)** than the general population.



WOMEN VETERANS

Ms. Marilyn Kelly-Cavotta, Chair



Updates

- Training intended for VSOs and agencies working with women veterans
- 6888th Grave initiative - [Families honor Black WWII veterans at Pennsylvania ceremony | fox43.com](#)
- Maternal Health Listening sessions
- Seeing an increase in annual events held throughout the Commonwealth to recognize June 12th as Women Veterans Recognition Day.





Looking Forward

- DOH/DHS/DMVA – Maternal Health Listening Session with women veterans
- Partnering with DVA – Center for Women Veterans
- Increasing engagement with women veterans



JUDICIARY

Mr. Michael Carrington, Chair



Updates

DOC/PPB Veterans

- *4,986 Staff Veterans*
- *2,072 Certified Inmate Veterans in SCIs*
- *600 Veterans in Veteran Service Units (VSUs)*
- *1,263 Certified Veteran Reentrants Under Supervision*

DOC Veteran Services Team

- *One (1) Statewide Veterans Coordinator*
- *Five (5) Veteran Service Unit Managers*
- *Two (2) Veteran Service Unit Social Workers*
- *Twenty-One (21) Veteran Resource Agents*

DOC Veterans Under Supervision – *Officially kicked off 5/28/25 with a training event at the DOC Training Academy*



Updates

VSU Team Monthly Averages

- *85 Employees Assisted*
- *52 Buddy Checks Completed*
- *5 Veteran Events Held or Participated In*
- *35 C&P Exams Facilitated within SCIs*

Additional Highlights

- *Shining Light Academy Active at Dallas, Muncy, and Houtzdale VSUs*
- *Standard VSU-214 Document Created to Summarize Progress for State Parole and Pardon Board Members*
- *Veteran Service Team Members Scheduled to Become Veteran X Trainers in December*
- *More than 200 DOC Staff Veterans Assisted with Service Connection Claims in 2025*



Looking Forward

- SCI Muncy VSU receiving new greenhouse and horticulture program
- Optamo Program to begin screening incarcerated veteran population daily and highlighting those eligible for VSU placement
- Proposal for a Long-Term Veteran Offender Program being reviewed for possible implementation at SCI Houtzdale
- UTHHealth Houston approved for a research project focusing on veterans within the PA DOC that is expected to run through August 2028.
- York County Prison plans to reopen Veterans Pod

REMINDERS



Pennsylvania
Department of Military
and Veterans Affairs

- **DMVA website: www.dmva.pa.gov**
- **Visit the [GAC-VS webpage](#) for council materials**
- **Sign up for the [Veterans' Registry](#) and the “*Together We Serve*” online monthly newsletter**



NEXT MEETING:

February 4 at 1:00PM
Fort Indiantown Gap