Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services

May 6, 2026 at 1:00 PM
Dept. of Corrections HQ, 1920 Technology Parkway, Mechanicsburg

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 February 4, 2026
	AWARDS
	• GAC-VS Veteran Advocates of the Quarter
	DISCUSSION TOPIC:
	• **Veteran Caregiving**
	----------short break----------
	• **Q and A Session**
3:00 p.m.	**ADJOURNMENT**

Next Meeting is scheduled for:
August 5, 2026, at 1:00PM
Department of Agriculture, Harrisburg

Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services

MEETING MINUTES
MAY 6, 2026, 1:05–2:46 p.m.
Dept. of Corrections HQ, Mechanicsburg

COUNCIL MEMBERS/DESIGNEES **IN ATTENDANCE**

BG (PA) Maureen H. Weigl, Chairwoman, Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans Affairs	Marc Ferraro, DMVA
Micah Snead, Member at Large	Laurel Harry, Dept. of Corrections
Andrew Barnes, Dept. of Human Services	Leora Appleby, DCED
Kory Auch, Office of Administration	Christi Dunning, Fish & Boat Commission
Tammy Ferguson, Member at Large	Heidi Secord, Dept. of Agriculture
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	Fred Burke, Dept. of Drug & Alcohol Programs
Jeffrey Wallace, State Civil Service Commission	Nick Taylor, State Veterans Commission
Nicole Faraguna, Dept. of Conservation/Natural Resources	

COUNCIL MEMBERS/DESIGNEES **NOT IN ATTENDANCE**

Stephen D'Ettorre, Governor's Policy Office	Karl Blischke, PA Council on the Arts
Wendy Spicher/Tina Kotsalos, Dept. of Banking & Securities	Nancy Walker/Crystal Houser, Dept. of Labor & Industry
James "Woody" Hogan, PWVC	

OTHERS PRESENT

Michelle Copeland, DMVA	Janette Krolczyk, DMVA
Patti Tanner, DMVA	Sierra Bilous, DHS
Lara Garey, Elizabeth Dole Foundation	John Noll, DMVA
John Rivello, DOC	Phineas Rummel, DMVA
Karen Leonovich, P4A	Sara Whitman, T2T
Ally O'Neal, Bayada Home Health Care	Nathan Lampenfeld, DOA
Heidi Woodring, Elizabeth Dole Foundation	Linda Eich, Elizabeth Dole Foundation
Jordan Purcell, VOPA-VETS	Andrew LaFratte, DOS
Nate Silcox, ED-Senate VAEP Committee	Amy Capretto Gramc, VISN 4
Sally Sudman, Rep. Solomon's Office	Mindy Davis, DOC
Michael Hillman, ED-House VAEP Committee	Kelly Ciambra, DDAP
Katy Morton, PMHCC	Brendan Auman, DCED
Troy Edwards, DOC	Keisha Kerr, VISN 4
Jared Stump, DMVA	Michele Messinger, DHS
Daniel Mowery, DOC	Marilyn Kelly-Cavotta, DMVA
Jennifer Adams, DMVA	Michael Carrington, DOC
Sara Small, VMC	Norm Marden, OAG

Beth Pooler, PDA	Tom Applebach, CDVA – Lehigh County
Samantha Petrides, LCCAP	Kim Kreiser, DMVA
Ralph Roach, L&I	Michelle McGinnis, DHS
Alex Folmar, VMC	Randy Wright, DOL VETS
Kristi Brawley, PSU	Serena Cruz, DMVA
Clay Hazam, DMVA	Joe Batt, DMVA
Kathy Knaub, DMVA	Doug Turner, DMVA
Sierra Ratcliffe, DMVA	Joe Butera, DMVA
Ed Cherry, DMVA	Karen Olson, DMVA
Angel McLaughlin, VOPA	Tiffany Cleary, DMVA
Maria Tagliaferri, DMVA	Sarah Herr, DMVA
Lisa Kaye, CDVA – Monroe County	Brian Natali, DMVA
Elizabeth Cooper, DMVA	Heather Hewitt, VMCenter
Jennifer Hagaman, DMVA	Shannon Cullen, DMVA
Chris Clark, DMVA	Catherine Bichler, wesoldieron.org
Jeremy Schoeppner, VA	

CALL TO ORDER, INTRODUCTIONS, AND OPENING REMARKS	The Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services (GAC-VS) was called to order at 1:05 p.m. Ms. Janette Krolczyk welcomed everyone joining the hybrid meeting and led the Pledge of Allegiance and Moment of Silence. Mr. Marc Ferraro, Executive Deputy Secretary for the DMVA, provided welcoming remarks and expressed appreciation for all the support received through the Council as the discussions help determine what the agency and Commonwealth can do to better support our veterans. Chairwoman, BG (PA) Maureen Weigl welcomed attendees and shared the importance of meeting with sister agency leadership and sharing information. BG (PA) Weigl shared key dates for the audience's awareness: • National Nurses Week – May 6-12 • TAG Fishing Trip – June 4 • Guard and Veteran Day at the Capitol – June 10 • DMVA Homes Week – events occurring from June 12-20 Everyone was encouraged to participate as able and reach to DMVA if support is needed as Memorial Day approaches and agencies would like to honor veterans. VETCon is scheduled for April 2027 to avoid any complex challenges while providing time to improve the agenda and obtain input from workgroup leads.
APPROVAL OF FEB 4, 2026, MINUTES	No questions or corrections were raised. Mr. Kory Auch motioned to approve the minutes, seconded by Ms. Kara Templeton. The motion passed unanimously.
AWARDS	The Council recognized members of the Veterans' Preference Team for their diligent work ensuring the policy is properly utilized for commonwealth positions.

UDATE SINCE LAST MEETING	Ms. Krolczyk shared that another 156 individuals participated in the "Safeguarding our Veterans" training, bringing the total to 577 to date. A one-page document on caregiving in Pennsylvania is in development with the Elizabeth Dole Foundation and will be shared soon. The annual video poll was sent to members and designees, and DMVA received a Governor's Proclamation naming May 1, 2026 as Hidden Heroes Day to honor those serving as military and veteran caregivers and the GAC-VS presented the proclamation to Ms. Heidi Woodring, herself a Hidden Hero through the Elizabeth Dole Foundation.
DISCUSSION TOPIC	Veterans Caregiving
PANEL DISCUSSION	Ms. Krolczyk introduced the panelists: ➢ Michelle Copeland, DMVA (Moderator) ➢ Karen Leonovich, PA Assn. for Area Agencies on Aging ➢ Ally O'Neal, BAYADA Home Health Care ➢ Nathan Lampenfeld, Department of Aging ➢ Lara Garey, Elizabeth Dole Foundation Ms. Copeland shared some statistics for the discussion which covered challenges, resources, and support for this population. ▪ Caregiving can take a profound toll on both caregivers and those they support. Caregivers experience a 67% higher mortality rate than their non-caregiver peers, with 30% passing before the person in their care – a figure that rises to 40% for dementia caregivers and 70% for caregivers over age 70. Early Intervention and Burnout Prevention: ▪ Caregivers are often introduced to complex care responsibilities too late, leaving them overwhelmed by symptom management, medication, emotional care, and navigating both community and veteran-specific systems. ▪ Healthcare providers, especially primary care professionals, should engage caregivers earlier, treating them as part of the care team from the beginning rather than waiting until crisis points. ▪ Earlier education on disease progression, hospice, palliative care, and veteran benefits can significantly reduce caregiver burnout, especially during transitions in care, which include hospital to home, or curative to comfort care, which can cause emotional overload and confusion. ▪ Caregiver readiness assessments are essential to evaluate whether caregivers are physically, emotionally, and logistically prepared. Hospice, Palliative Care, and Veteran-Specific Support: ▪ Misunderstandings and stigma around hospice delay access to valuable services and early conversations about end-of-life care and available benefits (like Aid and Attendance) are critical, as delayed applications often prevent veterans from receiving services in time. ▪ VA-sponsored hospice offers additional advantages, such as allowing veterans to keep existing providers while receiving hospice support.

	▪ Some helpful resources may include VA Comprehensive Care Programs, Palliative Care teams, Veterans-Directed Care services, and the book *Gone From My Sight* for end-of-life preparation. Elizabeth Dole Act Updates: ▪ The Act expanded access to home-based skilled care by removing previous cost caps so veterans can now receive more extensive in-home services, including around-the-clock care. ▪ It also improves access to non-skilled support through Veterans-Directed Care programs; however, provider awareness and system navigation remain barriers. Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) as Critical Entry Points: ▪ AAA serves as the primary gateway for Pennsylvanians aged 60+ to access caregiver assessment and support, respite resources, in-home care, delivered meals, Medicare counseling, protective services and investigations, and coordination to other needs like veteran service offices. ▪ The AAA system assists aging Pennsylvanians and families I plain language, helping along the aging journey. PA CareKit and Community Resources: ▪ The PA CareKit is a comprehensive caregiver resource developed through the Aging Our Way, PA plan. It provides planning tools, educational worksheets, caregiver self-assessments, personalized resource guides, and training videos. ▪ The PA CareKit is designed to help caregivers proactively plan rather than react to crisis. ▪ Word-of-mouth outreach and organizational partnerships are essential to expanding awareness. Major Ongoing Challenges: ▪ Lack of caregiver identification and inclusion in healthcare conversations, and limited provider knowledge of available veteran programs. ▪ System complexity across VA, healthcare, and community resources. ▪ Emotional, mental health, and physical strain on caregivers. ▪ Delayed access to benefits and services, often due to stigma. Best Practices for Professionals: ▪ Recognize caregivers as essential members of the care team and simplify communication to avoid jargon. ▪ Routinely assess caregiver wellness and mental health and create safe environments where caregivers feel heard. ▪ Connect caregivers to support groups, the PA CareKit, AAA resources, VA programs, and the Elizabeth Dole Foundation early. Recommended Immediate Pathways for New Caregivers: ▪ When caring for a loved one over age 60, contact the local AAA office. For veteran caregivers under age 60, contact the local county VA office, as well as the Elizabeth Dole Foundation. ▪ Everyone is encouraged to utilize the Crisis Line (Dial 988) and Press 1 for veterans. Key Takeaways:

	▪ The most effective way to support veteran caregivers (or caregivers in general) is through earlier intervention, proactive education, simplified system navigation, caregiver inclusion, and a broad awareness of existing resources. Reducing crisis-driven care depends on recognizing caregivers sooner, equipping them adequately, and ensuring they receive ongoing emotional, logistical, and practical support. If anyone knows a caregiver, reach out, ask about how they are doing, offer to cook them a meal, let them know they are doing a good job, and ensure they know they are supported.
LINKS SHARED THROUGH CHAT	▪ https://www.pa.gov/agencies/aging/pa-carekit ▪ PA CareKit Evaluation Study - Caregiver Interest Form ▪ PA CareKit Training Video - YouTube ▪ Financial Planning and Paying for Care | Department of Aging | Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
REMINDERS	▪ Ms. Krolczyk 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: **August 5, 2026, 1:00–3:00 p.m.** Department of Agriculture, Harrisburg
ADJOURNMENT	The meeting adjourned at 2:46 p.m.

NEW ACTION ITEMS

#	ACTION	STATUS
1	Ms. Krolczyk will share the schedule for DMVA's Homes Week with agency leaders.	Complete
2	DMVA will share information about the TAG Fishing Tournament with key leaders who may wish to participate and interact with veteran home residents.	Complete
3	DMVA will share PA CareKit through agency communication channels.	Complete
4	DMVA will share the opportunity for caregivers in community to participate in the Department of Aging evaluation study.	Complete
5	DMVA will connect with the AAA system regarding ways to help educate professionals on veteran-related resources and options in community.	Complete
6	Ms. Copeland will share the podcast mentioned during the discussion with Ms. Appleby.	Complete

OLD ACTION ITEMS

#	ACTION	STATUS

Pennsylvania
Department of Military and Veterans Affairs

WELCOME

May 6, 2026

Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services

Dept. of Corrections
Mechanicsburg

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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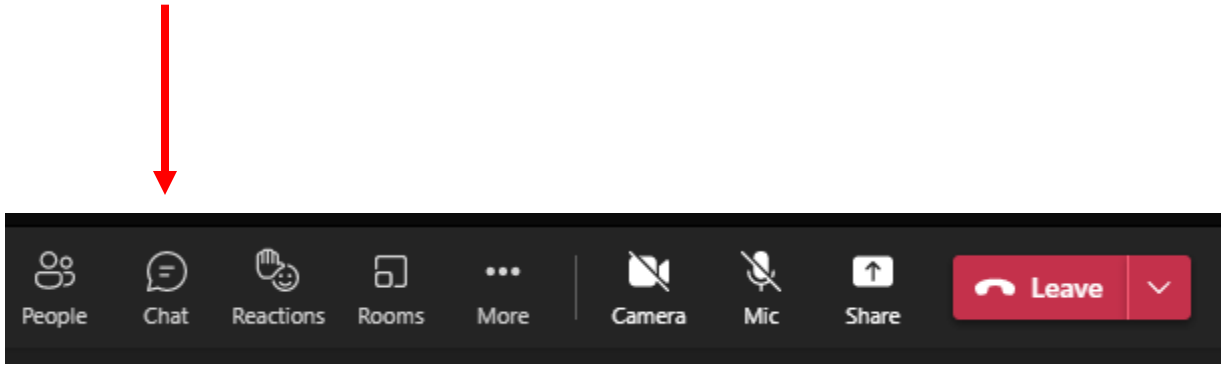
Chat function is used to submit comments or questions



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

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INTRODUCTIONS & LEADERSHIP COMMENTS

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OLD BUSINESS

VETERAN ADVOCATES OF THE QUARTER

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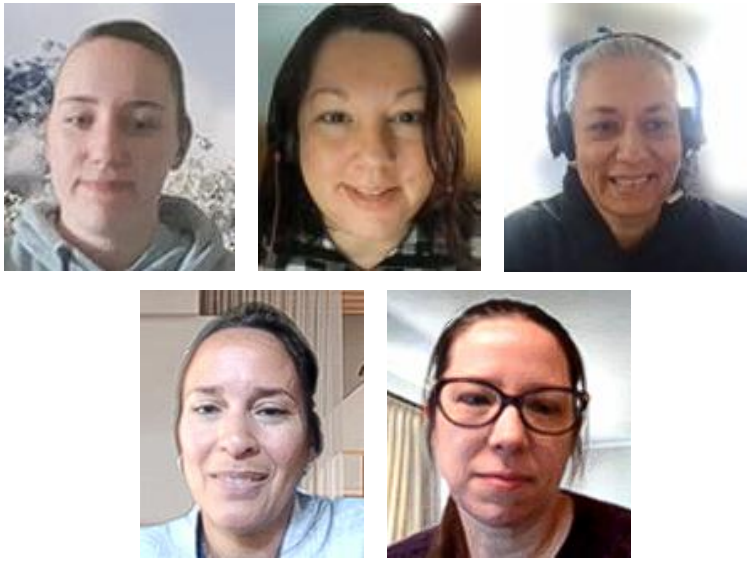
Veterans' Preference Team

- This team ensures Veterans' Preference is properly awarded.
- Almost 20,000 veteran applications are reviewed annually out of about 250,000 total applications.
- Significant effort and attention to detail is required of this team.



*Not pictured: Cathy Kissinger

SINCE LAST MEETING

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- Educated 156 participants through the "Safeguarding our Veterans" April session, for a total of 577 individuals to date
- Worked with the Elizabeth Dole Foundation on a caregiving flyer
- Launched annual GAC-VS video poll (reminder for members/designees to make your selections by May 15!)
- May 1, 2026: Hidden Heroes Day – Governor's Proclamation

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DISCUSSION TOPIC

Veteran Caregiving

PANELISTS

Pennsylvania
Department of Military and Veterans Affairs

Michelle Copeland
PA Dept. of Military and Veterans Affairs

Ally O'Neal
BAYADA Home Health Care

Karen Leonovich
PA Association of Area Agencies on Aging

Nathan Lampenfeld
Pennsylvania Dept. of Aging

Lara Garey
Elizabeth Dole Foundation

Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services

--SHORT BREAK--

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Q & A

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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:

August 5 at 1 p.m.
Dept. of Agriculture, Harrisburg