



**Pennsylvania Soldiers' and Sailors' Home  
Advisory Council Meeting  
Erie, Pennsylvania  
March 12, 2026  
9:00 a.m.**

**ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS PRESENT**

Mr. Gary Fry, President, AMVETS

Mr. Raymond J. Chambers, Vice President, Marine Corps League

Mr. Richard DiGiacomo, Secretary, Military Officers Assoc. of America

Mr. Richard Supak, Catholic War Veterans

Mrs. Karen Foust, Disabled American Veterans

Mr. Ron Hartman, PCU Resident Council President

Mr. Joe Benacci, Director Erie County Veterans Services

Mr. Anthony DiGiacomo, County Director of Veterans Affairs

The Honorable Daniel Laughlin, PA Senator

The Honorable Patrick J. Harkins, PA Representative

Mrs. Charlotte Lupp, NCU Resident Council President

Mr. David Thiemann, PSSH Family Representative

**ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS ABSENT**

Mr. Brian Fuller, Military Order of the Purple Heart

Mr. Robert C. Eiler, Veterans of Foreign Wars

Mrs. Bobbi Cumpston, County Director of Veterans Affairs

**OTHERS PRESENT**

Mrs. Maureen Weigl, BG (PA Retired), Deputy Adjutant General-VA

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

Mrs. Cheri Spacht, RN, NHA, PSSH Commandant

Mr. Michael Edwards, PSSH Director of Nursing

Mrs. Elizabeth Seibert, PSSH Deputy Commandant

Mrs. Rasheda Goodwine, PSSH Commandant Assistant

Mrs. Emily Heubel, PSSH Admissions Coordinator

Mrs. Danielle Stouffer, PSSH PCU Administrator

Mr. Ken Vybrial, PSSH Volunteer Outreach Coordinator

Mrs. Jessica Kanash, PSSH Facility Reimbursement Officer

Mrs. Katie Nagle on behalf of Senator Daniel Laughlin's office

Mrs. Alicia Grassi, Visitor

Mrs. Shiela Fitzgerald Sterrett, Visitor

Mrs. Chelsea Elsworth, Visitor

Mrs. Doris Svitek, Visitor

Mr. William Rose, Visitor

Mrs. Teresa Brown, PSSH Quality Assurance Coordinator

Mr. Anthony Zenobi, PSSH Quality Assurance & Risk Management Specialist

Mr. Michael Ferrito, Visitor via TEAMS

Mr. Eric Luke, Visitor via TEAMS

### **CALL TO ORDER**

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

### **MOMENT OF SILENCE AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

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

### **ROLL CALL**

Mrs. Goodwine took roll call for all present.

### **SWEARING IN OF COUNCIL MEMBERS**

Mr. Benacci, Mr. Hartman, Mr. Chambers, Mr. A. DiGiacomo, Mr. R. DiGiacomo, Mrs. Foust, Mr. Fry, Mr. Supak, Mr. Thiemann, Mrs. Lupp, & Mr. Chambers were sworn in by General Weigl.

### **APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES**

A motion was made by Mr. Benacci and seconded by Mr. DiGiacomo to approve the minutes of the Advisory Council Meeting held on December 11, 2025. Motion carried, and minutes were approved and written.

### **MEDICAL DIRECTOR UPDATE**

Mr. Edwards provided update on behalf of Dr. Millie:

Mr. Edwards began, “Good morning everyone. Mike Edwards here on behalf of Dr. Millie. We have no Covid, RSV, or Influenza. We had a GI issue that we dealt with last week and the week before. That’s really all I have for my report, unless there are any questions.

Any questions?

### **ADMISSIONS AND MARKETING UPDATE**

Mrs. Heubel provided the update:

Mrs. Heubel started, “Good morning. Currently our census is 156. We have 30 residents in our memory care unit with 3 on the wait list. There are 73 residents in our nursing care unit. There's 3 on the wait list. We have 53 residents in our personal care unit and 1 on the waitlist for marketing. For marketing, I met with the Senior Helpers of Erie County, Titusville Hospital, VFW, American Legions, & their Senior Center, and some personal care and nursing home facilities out in Titusville.

Any questions?

### **EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION**

Mrs. Seibert provided the update:

Mrs. Seibert began, “Today we're going to recognize Jessica Kanash. Jessica was hired at the PSSH in the revenue office as a clerk 2 on August 3, 2015. Then she was promoted in revenue on June 13, 2020, as a facility reimbursement technician Her second promotion took place on April 2, 2022, as a Facility Reimbursement Officer in the revenue office and she's the head revenue gal at PSSH. As part of her responsibility, she obtained her credentials to function as a VSO or a Veteran Service Officer. She has been instrumental in supporting veterans and families to obtain benefits they're eligible for, where in some cases when they came to us they didn't even know that they were eligible for that support. Prior to admissions She meets with veterans and the families to review what is expected once they become a resident at PSSH making that transition a stronger one. During their stay she remains available to guide them through what can feel like a challenging financial process. She remains professional & caring and with them along the way. For our staff, she leads the employee appreciation committee. She organizes many fun themed events throughout the year to make our community what it is. If you visit her office you'll always find some gift baskets, raffle trees, giveaways, chocolate, pretzels and all sorts of things to snap on. She remembers always including all three shifts in on the festivities, even if it means getting in

here early or staying late to make sure it happens. Jessica, thank you for your role modeling to all of our staff and for taking care of the residents as you do along with their families and all of us at PSSH.”

## **REPORT OF THE DEPUTY ADJUTANT GENERAL**

General Weigl provided the update:

General Weigl stated, “Good morning everybody. Nice to see you all. I came out because I heard it was going to be 75 degrees yesterday. But I do want to give a shout out because this morning I woke up to the news and our friends and our colleagues to the left of us in Ohio and Indiana had about 20 tornadoes that touched down yesterday. I did reach out to all of our counterparts. There was one that struck very close to one of their nursing homes, one of their long term care veteran homes, that did not hit it. There was structural that does impact our staff that works out there. And some of their families were impacted. So, I would ask that all of you please keep all of our colleagues and our veterans in those states, and all the employees that work at those homes in your thoughts & prayers this morning. But they did report that the homes are all good. That was some good news.

General Pippy sends his regards. He is tied up right now with some Army National Guard meetings today, but he will be out of one of these Advisory meetings. He does intend to make them and see all of you. It's just right now there's a lot going on with the Army National Guard core structure and some changes. So, he's working with him on some meetings that he had to walk into with the Pentagon today. So, he has some high level meetings and he sends his regards, but he'll get out here. You know last March we opened up the outreach center outside of Fort Indiantown Gap. It's our Lickdale Outreach center. We've seen an uptick and a lot of people walking in. We've been sharing the space with the Ambassador of the American Legion to help us cover down on all of those walk ins. Unfortunately, as luck would always have it we have a roofing issue and an air conditioning issue. Now already that's going to have to be fixed.

So, we will continue to do business, but we will be using trailers outside of the facility. Probably starting in the next few months as we renovate that. But the facility is open. We're still taking walk ins but the team's going to have to be out of that building for a while. Speaking of bad luck, our Hollidaysburg Veteran Home was supposed to be open now, but there were some construction issues as well. So that has been delayed. So now we're waiting until the weather gets warmer to start moving residents in, but the process is tedious. We have to go through VA surveys and recognition surveys for them to open the facility. So, we have to put 25 residents into the home and then hope that they don't find any dust or any small issues that will actually prevent us from using it. It could take us a few times. So based on that, once they leave and come back 30 days later and leave and come back. So, we are hoping to move everybody in by the summer and then have a ribbon cutting ceremony once we know everybody's good. And probably in the Fall we'll be more than happy to invite all of you across to Hollidaysburg.

Hollidaysburg is a nice home for all of you to see. A lot of times residents need to get into our facilities, and they only want to come into Erie, but they need placed immediately and we might have a waiting list. We usually, almost always have a bed available at Hollidaysburg. They will not lose their place on the waiting list at Erie, but we can emergency place them and then bring them back to Erie when that time



opens up. So, it is a great facility. It's going to be brand new, which is amazing. We're very excited about it. Unfortunately, we are just a little bit delayed. This week we have CCAP. Many of the County Commissioners are going to work with us. Brian Vitale is going to be there so we can talk to them about the work we do with the County Directors, and why they want to support the county director. So, Brian will be reaching out. If you have anything you want to add to Brian, he'll be there on Sunday and Monday with the County Commissioners. We had a discussion on VETCON. As you know, we set up veteran conferences every year. We were looking to do one in the Fall of 2026 to continue what we're doing. But in the last two years we had VETCON, sadly we didn't have a state and federal budget. So, I got caught up with employees and people from the Federal VA and people all across the state that wanted to join our conference, but they were unable to travel. This year we decided to postpone it this Fall and move it to March/April. So, it'll be beginning of April of 2027 in Pittsburgh again. We will get out here one of these days to the conference. So, we're just going with the tried and true we're going to do that conference. We will be opening it up again to federal & state partners, legislators. It's a great opportunity for all of the stakeholders to come under one facility and talk about veteran issues and how we can share resources better across the Commonwealth. If we don't have a budget in March or April of 2027 we have more problems than having a conference. I'm confident we'll be okay by that time. That's why we're moving into Spring and then we'll just continue to do it every Spring and then we'll rotate it where we go. Last week I was at NASVDA down in D.C. with Secretary Collins, met with all of the other staff at the VHA and BVA to talk about veteran issues. I just want to give a shout out, we also went to the Hill and testified with the American Legion, DAV, VFW, National Guard Association and different associations. But your voices do matter if you were paying attention. There was a big blow up on the VA interim final rule that was processed and they were going to push that out without any comments from us, which normally you get 90 days when they're going to change a rule. What this rule would have done is if you are on medicine and you go to do a claim, the way they look at your disability ratings instead of just taking into account your condition, they would assume that if I'm giving you medicine, which is a blood pressure medicine and the blood pressure medicine is working, then why would you need a VA disability rating on that? So, it would impact people that were applying for new claims, but it would also impact those that have to go on annual exams to get reevaluated. So, if you said your cancer drugs are working, we don't need to give you disability for cancer. The drugs should be solving the problem. There problem was fixed. That was stopped and rescinded. But those are the things you have to keep an eye on. Because that was passed without any kind of discussion. The DAV jumped on it first and they were the loudest, everybody pushed back and Secretary Collins did rescind it. But that's the benefit of all of us talking about these issues. When you read something, you hear something. We all have to just pay attention to those things. It was a great meeting; Secretary Collins has a lot of positive energy for the future for the VA healthcare. He is trying to streamline processes using a lot of AI. We are seeing claims process quicker so we'll see how that works. But he's trying to make a lot of changes on electronic healthcare records. Pennsylvania is on the list to get them between now and 2028 and that's for the VA hospitals, which really makes sense. If you're in Ohio and you get injured and need to use the VA hospital believe it or not they can't see your

records very easily. So, the electronic healthcare record really helps all of us as you're going around the country. So anyways that's all I have unless anyone has any questions for me.

Any questions?

*Mr. R. DiGiacomo stated, "One of the other things that you mentioned were all the good talks that generate and flow out of the Hill. I think also this week there was, as it related to the VA and making referral's to the DOJ for veterans that have financial issues. They have a fiduciary now, that would make a referral for the DOJ and veterans were prohibited from having firearms as a result of that. And that was changed as well or stopped. So that is another point as to what you were talking about."*

*General Weigl responded, "Yeah and there's a lot of stuff that I mean every day there's news and I can share some information with you about those topics."*

Any other questions?

## **REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF LONG-TERM CARE**

Director Raymond provided the update on Executive Director Davis's behalf:

Director Raymond began, "Good morning everyone. Travis says sends his regards he is actually at our Hollidaysburg facility. We are touring Gold Star families in that area at that new facility. He does send his regards, so I will cover the report for the state veterans homes. We've been busy with surveys though, we have had our VA surveys at our Erie facility, Gino Merli facility, and our Southeastern facility. Just this past quarter. In December, we finished our VA survey at our Delaware Valley facility. Overall, from a survey and a deficiency perspective, very minor issues that we're working on. Cheri will go into more here at this facility. But for the most part they're very minor issues that we're working on correcting. And what we do when we receive those results, we look at everything that's gone on, like if there's anything we can fix in any of the other state veterans homes. We don't just isolate it to the individual state veterans home. That just makes us better overall. We currently have the Department of Health here at the Erie facility. Cheri will talk about that. And we also have the Department of Health at our Pittsburgh facility today. There were just a couple of minor concerns that we self-reported. We will see what the outcomes of those are. Various things that we self-report are things like falls and injuries. We recently had a survey at our Hollidaysburg facility where a resident did slide out of their mechanical lift. So, the Department of Health came in, we had already gone through the processes. As I said, we take everything, every incident that happens in our facility and we look at what happened, and what we can do to prevent it from happening again. So, we put corrective action plans in place in a proactive manner.

We're always looking at ways to improve. So, what happens when the survey teams come in, they will recognize that we prefer the incident to not happen at all. But what will happen is when the survey team comes in, they will review everything that we did and then we end up in a situation that's called past noncompliance. And so, what that means is that we did our jobs correcting the issue, but the Department of Health still has to acknowledge that the event happened, but they also acknowledge the facility that they put all of the right steps into place to hopefully prevent anything like that from happening again. We prefer the incident not to happen at all. But when those unfortunate incidents happen, the homes are very good at being proactive to prevent something like that from happening again. From an infection control perspective, we're wrapping up the flu season. However, we do currently have 4 residents that have influenza. They're all stable. We have 2 at our Southwest facility and 2 at our Delaware Valley facility. No flu at any of the 6 veterans homes. Covid wise, we do have 1 resident that's positive at our Southwest facility and 1 at our Delaware Valley facility that is positive as well. We ended up from a vaccination perspective with 82% of our of our residents were vaccinated against influenza and 56% of our residents were vaccinated against Covid. As I mentioned, flu season is wrapping up so we will not be getting that flu vaccine after the end of this month. Some of the docs do like to continue giving it into April so that March, April time frame is wrapping up flu season. Covid vaccinations, we just will continue to offer the most up to date vaccinations. Fun stuff we've got going on, Spring events. All the homes are gearing up for Saint Patrick's Day, yes we do serve green beer, so lots of fun there. Believe it or not State Veterans Homes week will be here very quickly, so the homes are very busy getting those events planned. The Adjutant General is hoping to make it out to each of the State Veterans Homes, so we're getting the information gathered for his schedule as well so we can see him at each of the homes. It's a busy but fun week.”

Any Questions?

## **REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF VETERANS' HOMES**

Director Raymond provided the update:

Director Raymond continued, “Facebook Pages I think I mentioned Facebook pages the last time we met. We are continuing to move on. Each of the state Veterans homes will have their own Facebook pages. We're very excited about that. Only having the one overall DMVA Facebook pages, some of the stuff gets missed. We would like to highlight the staff. We like to highlight the fun things, & fun events that the residents are doing in the home. So having our own individual Facebook pages at each of the 6 homes will allow a lot more interaction. We will absolutely let you know when those are up and running. That way you guys can share those. Follow our pages, share them with your constituents. Looking forward to that. It shouldn't be long now. Lots of things behind the scenes that have to be done for that. Regarding our star ratings, we still have 2 of our facilities that have 5 stars. 3 of our facilities including the Soldiers’

and Sailors' home are a 4 star. We do have 1 of our facilities, our Southwest facility that did drop to a 2 star overall that's due to health inspections. We will just keep working with that facility to improve that star rating. CMS did change the way the star rating worked as well, back in this first quarter of the year. So, we're just starting now to see some of how those changes are affecting those star ratings. One of the things that we talked about at the last meeting was the menu changes. I know we had some of our residents that weren't happy with some of the menu changes. We are going back changing things for the Spring menu that will be coming out. In addition to that, we do have a food nutrition meeting at Fort Indiantown Gap for our six veterans homes, our dietitians and our food and nutrition directors. We will be meeting in two weeks to go over some of the concerns that we have had about the menu changes as well. As well as some regulatory updates. Regulations are always changing so we like to keep our team updated and informed of anything from that perspective. We've been working with the VA at the 6 veterans homes including here in Erie regarding primary care. So, when a veteran comes into a state veteran's home, we take over primary care. That's part of the VA regulation. Some of our VA's, the local VA's of jurisdiction aren't quite understanding, that's how those regulations work. So, we've been working with the VISN to work with the individual VMACS of jurisdiction to make sure that the individual VMACS are aware that we take over primary voice care. We are working on getting access to the VA system, the CPRS system, so our docs at the State Veterans homes can take over ordering any of those specialty type services. Whether it's a cardiology appointment or a CT scan, MRI, those sorts of things, saving the veteran a trip to the VA when we can manage that all right in house. It's going well. We are finalized at our Hollidaysburg facility from that perspective. And Erie, our physician here is going through the process of credentialing at the VA as well as the various education that he needs for CPRS access. From what I'm hearing it's quite an antiquated system. The VA will be getting a new electronic record system, but not until 2031. Interestingly, I found out yesterday that CPRS system was the very first electronic health record in the United States and it was built by the government. So, if that tells you anything, it's quite the old system. The VA in general as well as our providers are very much looking forward to 2031. But we'll work with the system that we have for now. Bylaws, so we talked a little bit about bylaws. We've drafted at Fort Indiantown Gap, the drafted bylaws for the advisory committee as well as drafted bylaws for resident council, nursing care and personal care councils. The draft is finalized. We will be getting that out for comments. The nursing and personal care bylaws will be getting out via the social workers in the 6 veterans will be that back on anything that needs to change. And once we're finalized with the advisory council on those we'll come out to the residents to get feedback on any of those bylaws. We followed the Roberts rules type of process for those bylaws. There shouldn't be any real surprises, it defines things such as elections, when those should be held, those sorts of things are written there & the purpose of the council. Pertaining to staffing, staffing of course tends to be a challenge. RN's, LPN's, & CNA's tend to be the biggest challenge. Nursing assistance across all 6 homes is indeed the biggest issue. Some of the things that we've been doing, things like walk in Wednesdays, things like job fairs, different advertisements, working with different schools that offer nurse aide training, those are the types of things that we're working towards getting that increase in nursing aides in our State Veterans homes. We also have a VA grant that we were approved for recruitment and retention. Some of the things that we struggled with being able to do just based on various constrictions that we have. We couldn't go as large

as some of the other states did, but we did our best on getting some stuff for that recruitment and retention perspective. We focused a lot on education. So, we focused on being able to take our nurses aid through a restorative nursing program to get certified as actual restorative nursing assistants. So that's a certification that they will be able to hold. We focused on infection control, getting more of our nurses certified, an infection control perspectives. So those are some of the things that we did with the VA grant. It was a 50/50 match. The VA from the federal side put in 50% of the cost and then the state had to come up with the other 50%. We just found out that we were fully authorized for that. We're looking forward to a little bit of additions for that retention perspective and hopefully recruitment as well. Admission wise, as Emily mentioned here at the facility. Our Delaware Valley, Geno Merli and our Erie facilities were up by over 90%. From a capacity perspective, our Southeast and Hollidaysburg facilities are actually very close. They're 84% and 85% full. It's our Southwest facility that we're struggling the most with. Our waiting list of okay there. However, we are the most challenged there from that nursing assistant perspective. So that's why we're only at 78% occupied at our Southwest facility. But that's only unfortunately because of staffing levels. We currently have 156 individuals on our waiting list at these six veterans homes, and we are currently at 1183 individuals that are in the six veterans homes. Overall nursing is 85% and 78% for that overall nursing and personal care. As General Weigel mentioned, she was just in DC for NASVDA. The confidante Travis and I were in DC for NASVH. NASVH focuses more, of course, on the 153 state veterans homes in the entire country. And a couple of things that we focus on when we go up to the Hill are the VA regulations and the duplicative surveys. So, we have duplicative surveys, meaning as I talked earlier about the VA coming in and also the local centers for Medicare and Medicaid services state surveys. Most of the states have those duplicative surveys where the VA comes in and their individual state departments of health come in. The regulations are extraordinarily similar. Very, very minor differences in the regulations. The VA also looks at our finances in a different manner than the CMS department of health type of surveys. We have for years now requested our legislators to try and eliminate those duplicative surveys. It takes a lot from the staff, takes a lot from the residents to have the different survey teams in. Cheri had the VA in last month and now she's got the Department of Health in. So that just takes a lot of time to correct anything that they may have found. A lot of times it is things that we're always working on in the homes anyway. So that's one of the things that we look at as well as high cost meds. With high cost medications, if that same veteran is in a state veteran home compared to a private nursing home, the VA pays for those high cost medications. Things like oral chemotherapeutic agents that may be given in the nursing home itself. We have to cover that out of the per diem that we receive from the VA, where a private nursing home doesn't have to cover that out of their cost. So those are things that we're just asking the federal legislators to take a look at to help support from that perspective. Last on my list, the Auditor General. So, you may see anything from an Auditor General report. Those of us that have been around 100 years know that we had an AG report about 10 years ago, hit the newspapers and media. The AG's office does various audits about every 2 to 3 years. We had our big federal single audit done that started at the end of August, beginning of September this past year. And they looked at twelve months of whatever we did with our finances. Anything from the federal government that was spent, which is what our budget is, they look at everything that we did with those dollars. You name it, they

looked at it. It was a 6 month survey of a year's worth of data. I'm very happy to report that we only had 2 areas of deficient practice. One was it's something called a SOC report. If I have any. IT knows what the SOC report is. The SOC report is a security operation. But the SOC (System and Organization Controls) report is information that we looked at to make sure that any of the data is secured. It was something that we had looked at in 2024 but unfortunately, we did not look at it in 2025. So, we put a process in place to make sure we didn't miss those SOC reports. The SOC reports are from our electronic health record. We've already put a plan in place to make sure that we review that information. There was nothing wrong with the information exchange. However, our IT department at headquarters simply did not request or look at that SOC report. The other area was the HR department. We didn't have a good plan in place to make sure anybody that separated from Commonwealth employment or anybody that changed positions or anything like that, we didn't have a good practice in place to make sure that they didn't have access to our electronic health records. Now we know anybody that's separated, we shut their information off, so they certainly don't have any access to the electronic health record. However, we couldn't prove that to the AG's office. We put a plan in place to make sure that we are auditing it to make sure there is no access for an individual that is no longer in Commonwealth employment or any individual that changed positions that any information from that electronic health record, they couldn't access any longer. So out of a huge audit, and again they looked at everything from the procurement of items to the amount of money that we're taking in from residents for their maintenance fees and those are the only two issues. So, I was quite pleased with that. That is my report unless anyone has any questions for me.

Any questions?

*Mr. R. DiGiacomo asked, "Pertaining to the duplicative survey, do you have a preference, if they limited the duplicity, who would you prefer did just the survey?"*

*Director Raymond answered, "The VA. It's just more thorough from a financial perspective."*

*Mr. R. DiGiacomo added, "With the high cost meds, it almost seems like the veterans are being penalized."*

*Director Raymond answered, "You got it."*

*General Weigl added, "We can get you a copy of the 2 legislative bills we are advocating for. I know the VFW and American Legion doesn't always have that information and advocate on the homes side; you focus on terms and benefits."*

*Mr. A. DiGiacomo stated, "House resolution 1970 would be for the and then Senate Bill 3532."*

*Director Raymond, said, "Well get those over to Rasheda to get out to you."*

## **REPORT OF THE COMMANDANT**

Mrs. Spacht provided update:

Mrs. Spacht began, “Good morning everyone. I’m just going to go back to the survey discussion because we did have the Dept of Human Services here to survey our DOM & PCU side. They returned with 5 citations, which were none related to direct care which is good. Congratulations to Danielle. We submitted our plan of correction to them and we are awaiting response. As Barb said, then the VA was here February 9th through February 13th on our DOM PCU side, we had 0 deficiencies. Congratulations Danielle. And 2 citations on the nursing home side which is very good. Currently, as Barb said we have the Department of Health here for our annual survey right now, they will be exiting Friday and we’re doing pretty well with that. For our personnel report, we have a total of 278 positions available here in the facility of which 242 are filled. We have 36 vacancies, 9 LPN’s, 9 RN’s, 14 Nurse Aides, 1 Dietitian, 1 Nurse Supervisor, 2 Food Service Workers for a total of 36. For the registered nurse supervisor, we do have two candidates that we will be scheduling interviews for and then 2 food service workers since this was prepared have been filled. We still work with HVA and the CNA training program which really does benefit us. A lot of those folks come, and they complete the class, get licensed and then stay with us, which is a tremendous help. We still do general orientation every two weeks and we do walk-in Wednesdays as well. Mike attended a job fair at Penn State Behrend for nursing students. And as Barb said, we continue on with job fairs to try and recruit, any questions on staffing.

Any questions on staffing?

*Senator Laughlin stated, “Good morning. It’s good to be back. I was on the Pennsylvania website and the only thing I could was the LPN’s, I don’t know why that is.”*

*General Weigl commented, “We’ll bring that up to the Office of Administration, they post that for all for all of the Commonwealth positions. Thank you.”*

Mrs. Spacht continued on, “I’m going to move into the construction report, so our job order contract for the Unit C nurses station, treatment room and our nurse practitioner’s office flooring, that job was complete and is back up and running. Our job order contract for the upgrade of GSCI outlets on the nursing home side is complete. Our job order contract for the nursing home dining room divider wall is complete. Job order contract Pavilion, in front of our personal care side of the campus is complete. We are waiting for furniture currently. Our job order contract PCU elevator renovation I am happy to say is in construction as we speak. It started two weeks ago so we are making do with that, and it’s been a long time coming to that one. Our job order contract HVAC split system, air conditioning and heat pump for Unit B short hall on the nursing home side is complete. Our job order contract, Campus paging system almost complete. Black box is working on upgrading the phone system which will be connected to the

paging system. The old paging system is still in place and operational. Once the new system is connected to the new phone system and operational, the contractor will remove the old paging system. The military emblems for the bridge out back have been ordered, shipped, and should be arriving soon. That is all for my report unless anyone has any other questions.”

Any questions?

## **COMPLIANCE REPORT**

Mrs. Seibert provided update on behalf of Kristal Ferron:

Mrs. Seibert states, “Good morning all. The Compliance report includes seven different elements. The first one is with regards to communication. There have been no hotline emails or hotline calls for this past quarter. Under governance and oversight with regard to staffing, we do have a new compliance supervisor by the name of Stephanie Cole who has joined the BVH team and they are actively recruiting for a Regional Compliance Officer. Auditing and monitoring-The PSSH 2026 Facility Performance Assessment was completed last year, and the upcoming one will include an update to the FPA Privacy audit. With regard to policies and procedures, there are no new policies with regard to compliance. A pending procedure is the facility performance assessment, policy protocol, quarterly compliance committee meeting, and all three protocols related to that, so those are pending and will be implemented once it’s available. With regards to privacy, the policy that was updated in February of this year with regards to medical records fee policy, BVH privacy audits policy protocol that also is updated in March of this year. A pending one is the medical records retention policy. With regards to training and education, the annual fraud waste and abuse /HIPAA and Privacy training was updated and sent to the Registered Nurse Instructors for use in the homes on 3/1/2026. With regards to enforcement and prompt there are no pending enforcement actions for PSSH. From a risk assessment/management perspective, we will be bringing BVH’s required annual HIPAA privacy and security assessments in house with the internal team this year. In regard to the privacy program, we are currently working with communications dept for the posting of the notice of privacy practices on the website required by regulations and the development of a communications campaign via a new mascot to creatively address message fatigue. With regard to PSSH our new staff members to the corporate compliance program are offered training and our quarterly meetings continue to occur. The latest assessment has been completed and is available for anyone who may wish to see it. The tool is one where we capture current resident information, support and resources available in case we need to implement our Emergency Disaster Plan. That completes the report unless there are any questions.

Any questions?

## **REPORT OF THE COUNCIL MEMBERS**

Mr. Fry commented, “I would like to share a little story. I live in Sugar Grove in Warren County, and they have a little café there. Some of the locals gather on Wednesday morning at what they call the table of knowledge. So, you can kind of gather what the topics are sometimes. We’re talking about going to the VA and all this stuff, just throwing things around. And one gentleman mentions that a friend of his had a family member that just got on board here at Pennsylvania Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Home. And the family spoke very highly of how the procedure was to get here, how this person was treated, and so on and so forth. And Brian didn’t know, but when he got all done telling me about it, I said I’ll bring that up at the Advisory Council meeting tomorrow morning. He said, what’s that? I said, that’s I’m the president of the Advisory Council there. And it was nice to hear out on the street that somebody didn’t know who I was or who anybody else was. So, everybody stick your chin out a little bit. I thought that’s a nice heartwarming little story.”

Mr. Chambers began, “Hello everyone. I have nothing negative to say today and I do have a very positive comment to make. And it’s going to have a little history. It has to do with the Activities Department. Back 20 years or so ago, we had a state convention for the Marine Corps here in Erie. And one of the things we did was we would have a tour here and memorial service here for our veterans, our members who passed away. Well, our Ladies Auxiliary took a real liking to the home. So, they asked is there anything we can do for the home to go far and beyond sending them birthday cards, & Christmas cards and things like that. They said could we buy gifts for the residents, for the Marine residents? What they do now every Christmas, it starts in September. My wife gets a hold of the activities department. She is the local contacts for the state. And the activities department goes around and makes a wish list from each one of the veterans, it might be a sweatshirt, or it might be for a Walmart gift card. If dietary dept approves, they might get Oreo cookies, they might get Pepsi, or whatever. And then they send it to my wife at the end of September, and my wife gets it out to the quarterly Fall meeting for our auxiliary out at the Gap. And come early November until middle of December the mailman cusses us out because we get nothing, but gifts marked for the Soldiers and Sailors home, only they’ll have my wife’s name on it, and then it’ll have the resident’s name on it. And I just want to say it’s great cooperation we have with the activities department, and this has been going on for 20 + years. So, whoever can pass that on to the activities, please let them know that they do a fantastic job. Thank you”

Mr. R. DiGiacomo started with, “Good morning everyone. Rich DiGiacomo, and I would like to piggyback on some stuff that everybody has said. We all took an oath here, unique from the one’s I’ve taken in the past, we added the Pennsylvania Constitution, and you spoke about how Pennsylvania has done better than any other states you’ve been in. We have elected officials here and I want to highlight that the Pennsylvania Constitution actually predates the United States Constitution by 10 years. And I think that’s because of a long tradition that still comes forward with the ability to work together. Thou it may not seem like that at times. And in so many ways Pennsylvania leads the way. And there are several things in the Pennsylvania Constitution which the US Constitution is not able to accomplish.



For example, the Bill of Rights had to be added to the Federal Constitution US Constitution. It is part of the Pennsylvania Constitution. There are several rights that we have in Pennsylvania that keep what other states don't have. Because the Federal Constitution is only the bare minimum guarantee of protection and rights of citizens. States can always go above and beyond, Pennsylvania predating by 10 years the Federal Constitution did that. And a couple of the things that we have in this state don't recognize necessarily beyond the pursuit of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness in the Federal Constitution is that we also have the right to our own reputation, and that is protected by the Pennsylvania Constitution. Any citizen that believes that that may be being infringed upon their reputation. The Pennsylvania Constitution covers that directly in the Constitution. The only other point that I'd mention also is that life, liberty, in addition to reputation, we also have the right to possess, own and have your own property, which is not explicitly part of the Federal Constitution. So, for all those things, I started with taking the oath and it made me think I've taken the oath many times, but I don't recall Pennsylvania being part of it. You spoke about how Pennsylvania does so well, and I know our elected officials and everybody here, Pennsylvania is a pretty darn good place and our Soldiers' and Sailors' Home and other veteran homes are pretty amazing. Thank you."

Mr. A. DiGiacomo declared, "Good morning. Tony DiGiacomo, Crawford County Veteran Services. The only thing I really have to say is, those two bills we spoke about earlier, Call your federal representative and tell them to support those bills so they can get passed. Thank you."

Mrs. Foust mentioned, "Hi, Karen Foust. I will agree with you Mrs. Lupp. I've known your family my whole life. You lived around the corner from me. We used to always love to see your husband come into the VA and give him a good chance to catch up. You'll be hard pressed to find a VA that's better than ours. We're in the top five in the entire country. Starting at the seventh floor with the leadership & flows down to the outpatient clinics. It's just awesome. I've been volunteering there for 19 years and I'm proud every day when I go in as a veteran myself, to take care of them. I worked in the Urgent care section, so I see people when they're sick and ornery, and still what wonderful care they get there. And I used to work at the front desk and greeted every single person who came in every day. I told them to have a nice night when they went home. It's just an honor to be a veteran who gets here there and be someone who takes care of them when they come in. And I would say that I have referred people here to this Soldiers' and Sailors' Home. And I talk to people who are already here and they would say the same about this home as they do about the Erie VA. So, it's nice to have the people that are on this side of the room taking care of our veterans down here. I don't have anything to say from the DAV but I of course also talk about the American Legion because we don't have a rep yet. We love coming down here for the holiday tour. We already talked about it here at this meeting in January, but we keep getting word from the state. We are multi- people & the best tour. We'll just keep that up again for the next year."

Mr. Supak remarked, “My name is Rich Supak. I'm the Commander of the Catholic War Vets located in Venango County. And what I'd like to do is, I didn't attend a meeting in December because of the weather conditions. But I'd like to thank Commandant Spacht, Ken Vybrial & the Commander of Catholic War Vets in Erie, Michael Rang for helping with our organization when we came up in the Fall, distributing the Vietnam era pins. The Vietnam hero pins were given out for anybody male, female who served during the Vietnam era and that was from 1955 through 1975. And it could have been in any branch of the service. Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Coast Guard. It served anywhere in the world, not just in Vietnam, It's a Vietnam Era Pin. And so, Ken organized a pretty nice get together. He would gather the amount of veterans in the home that were classified by what I just said. And there were approximately around 75, 30 of which participated in the pin distribution. And the Commander, Mike Rang, came from the Commander of Catholic War Vet's for Pennsylvania came, with and he and I distributed pins, as Ken read the name, they stood up or their aides put their hands up for them, the ones that were in chairs and he would go over and thank them for their service. and I would distribute the pin with the literature that goes with it. After the meeting, a couple of the vets came up to us and thanked us. What really touched me was when we were ready to leave one of the wives of a veteran came over and thanked us for recognizing her husband. So again, I would like to thank you for letting us do that and I appreciate it being done in this home. Thank you.”

Mr. Benacci spoke, “Good morning. Joe Bonacci, Erie County Veteran Services, there's two topics I'd like to discuss here this morning. One is the BVA. And I know we beat them up pretty hard, but I have to actually give them some kudos. Fully developed claims have been really, really turning around very quickly. I'm seeing these claims getting adjudicated in less than 30 days, which is pretty much unheard of. And to coincide with that is VIC claims. These are turning around in days, where in the past it used to be once, and especially the VIC claims for spouses of deceased veterans. We had one woman come in and she was just frantic. Her husband had passed, she had no income, and it was taking months to get her claim put that. So, I don't know what they will change, but they change for the better. Now, on the other hand, unfortunately, here recently, with the current operations overseas, we had lost southern army reservists. A lot of times army reservists don't get the credit due. And by having this, it kind of brought up something that was brought to my attention by another reservist that I had the pleasure to serve with. And being that we are a state organization and we have a lot of national guards men and women who deploy around the world. There's a little inequity that kind of bubbled up. It's called the TRICARE Fairness Act. Back in 2008, Congress passed legislation that reservists and National Guards, depending on their deployment, are able to retire early. I believe it's as far as 55. I know it's 57, but I heard that one back to 55. So, what happens? They're able to pull their pension at 55. Where the inequity is they're not allowed to have their Tricare until they turn 60. So, unlike the active duty, once you retire, you can start your Tricare for the reservist, you can draw your pension, but you cannot draw your Tricare until 60. So, like General Weigel and some of the other people here, I was down in Washington last month and at the legislative conference speaking with NAC DSO and I'm also sitting on the military and veterans affairs

committee for Naco and we went to the Hill also. I met Congressman Kelly's office along with Senator Fetterman's office and brought this to their attention. Along with that again is the bill that's been kicked down the road, and it got kicked down the road again here just recently, is a concurrent receipt near Richard Starr Act. Again, many of you don't realize veterans who have a VA disability rating of less than 50% and who have retired do not draw both. They offset that amount. Again, DOD money compared to VA money, completely different buckets. Another inequity for our veterans and of course the Richard Starr act for those who are medically retired are unable to call for both the disability & retirement act. So, these are some pretty important bills that have been in legislation for as long as I can remember and then once again they got drawn or got disapproved by one vote. I think the senators dropped a short straw to see who was going to vote it down every year. So, if you see your national legislators, make sure you hit them up on this. These are very important acts that can really make a difference in veteran's lives. Thank you."

Senator Laughlin commented, "First off, I mentioned earlier, it's great to be back, and I think Joe does a really great job. It's really been a couple of busy years from my schedule to the Advisory Council schedule. I think most of you know. But I would say it here at meeting, April 29th is the veteran breakfast that we have each year. I believe we're nearing capacity if we're not we're almost there, and Ken always brings a group of folks from here. If we are back staffed, we're not. Okay, great. We would certainly double up our tables for the residents. We're doing a little something different this year. UPMC and AHN are going to have screenings set up at the veterans breakfast, as well. The school has benefits for veterans that might not normally go to their doctor, check their blood pressure, just simple stuff like that. But I think that's important. And then just on a little side note that's up on social media the last day or two about feeding our veterans steak & lobsters. They deserve it. So, I'm glad to see that they're getting well fed when they are overseas. So, thank you."

Representative Harkins stated, "Good morning everyone. State Representative Pat Harkins. Great to be with you. It's relatively quiet right now. There are budget hearings going on in Harrisburg. The governor gave his budget address in early February and now it's the process of everybody putting forth their ideas and their proposals. So, we haven't been to Harrisburg very much. We probably won't be because of an election year. So less we're there, the less damage we can do and with that I'll turn it over. Thank you."

Mr. Thieman replied, "Good morning everyone. David Thieman. I am the new face in group. I was nominated and elected to be part of this council. I am the Soldiers' and Sailors' home family representative. My mother is currently a resident of the B unit, Helen Cancilla. Next month mom will be 99 years old on April 20<sup>th</sup>. I must tell you that I'm more than likely one of the biggest cheerleaders for the incredible people that run this campus and are part of this campus, with every single person I believe knows Helen Cancilla, I'm proud to be able to offer my input as we go forward. Thank you for this opportunity."

Mrs. Lupp began, "Good morning. My husband was in the Navy. He got out of the service and he died 2yrs ago. We lived in Colorado, & Tennessee and there's nothing compared to what they have in Erie." I'm the representative for Unit A & B. Of all the places, this is good place to be. It has it's ups and downs. We have some nurses that are fantastic. The staff and our activities are wonderful! I used to volunteer at the nursing homes before, and they didn't have the activities like we have here. I mean, we have a new couple on the unit that says they keep us so busy we don't have time to do anything else. We try to get more people to do it, but some people just want to stay in their room. But there is so much out there to keep people happy and not depressed. We have good staff and this is the end of the road for me. So, until then, I'm going to chugging and moving on. Thank you."

Mr. Hartman included, "My name is Ron Hartman and I'm a new face here too. I've been elected to represent the residents on the personal care side. When you mentioned medication, it kind of struck a nerve with me. When I was at home I always received tax free exempt. I have almost a million dollars invested in my body, thanks to the VA and all the outside services. And I look up the medication that I receive here and at the VA over the years. I find this mind-blowing. For the medication I'm referring to it's \$950 for a little bottle, half full. I have to take four drops a day everyday out of that one bottle. In the United States, due to our government, it is \$950 a bottle. That same bottle in France is \$20 from the same company. This is all due to kickbacks from drug companies for campaigns. Until we get this together the veterans will continue to suffer. That's all I have to say. Thank you."

General Weigl spoke once more, "I just want to say thank you to the legislators. We recently changed our advisory board makeup and now we have more family members and more residents, and I will tell you the last few advisory meetings I've been at in the other homes, with this new group has been really meaningful and impactful and I think we all really appreciate having you. So, thank you to the legislature for passing that bill to change it. I think it's a true value add. I think having more family members involved and residents involved really adds to this meeting. And we want you to come with all your input. You've heard all of us talk, but please do that. And Joe, to your point Secretary Collins last week, his goal is to ensure that when you leave the department of war and you go to the VA, that transition is seamless, so the records go and that you don't have to make an eighteen page claim. It should be 4 pages. We don't need to ask your medical or your military background. We should already have that in your military files and transfer. So, he's been working really closely with David W to do that. So, I think you're going to see a lot more positive changes. Anyway, for all of you that are new, one of the best parts we do is recognize employees. Everyone always talks about how great Ken is, with all this stuff that he does with volunteers. He does a lot of work and we always value what makes our home so special, all volunteers. Other nursing homes cannot possibly take people to Walmart & go to all these events. It sounds fun but it's not always an easy lift for the staff to do that. We're always short staffed and then we're out in community and institute all the volunteers that Ken brings together. So it is, you know, something that makes our home special."

Mr. Vybrial stated, “Good morning. It’s nice to see everyone. I am the Volunteer Coordinator here at the Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Home. Shortly after we concluded our last meeting, we wrapped up another successful Wreaths Across America campaign. So certainly, proud to see how that has grown over the years into one of Erie’s biggest volunteer events. The following week we welcomed the Erie Philharmonics for their annual holiday concerts. On January 31st of this year, we were able to attend the Military Order of the Purple Hearts Chapter 197’s Washington dinner. I know Brian Fuller is not here today, but I certainly wanted to mention that since our last meeting we lost a good friend and a patriot of the home Mr. Bob Hill, past Commander of the Military Order of the Purple Heart. On February 3rd, our Four Chaplains ceremony was once again commemorated. Once again, there was a nice turnout from the community and residents and staff for that as well. On February 12th, Emily and I attended the Mercyhurst Veterans Outreach Center’s Health Fair on February 19th, we hosted a tour from Erie County Technical School. On the 21st of February, we had the pleasure of hosting the US Navy Bands, Woodwind Quintet and Saxophone Quartet. And then again, just this past Monday, I had the honor of touring our new city of Erie Mayor Daria Devlin here at home to introduce her to our operations and the great work that we do. Lastly, on February 22nd, the Soldiers and Sailors home commemorated their 140th anniversary. I look forward to seeing everybody on Memorial Day. Our ceremony is scheduled for the 24th of May at 1300. Mr. President, this is my report. One more thing, Mr. President, I would like to make a motion to reschedule our next Advisory Council meeting for June 18th. Mr. Benacci seconded. Motion, carried. So changed.”

### **OLD BUSINESS**

No old business to discuss.

### **NEW BUSINESS**

No new business to discuss.

### **GOOD OF THE COUNCIL**

General Weigl continued, “Good morning, again. So, one of the new requirements besides changing the makeup of this board was that we provide an annual report. This year it’s a little shorter of a report because the requirement came out a little bit late. So, it wasn’t a full 12 months. However, next year we will probably have a little bit more data in there. But this is the format and what we’re doing is we are taking each of the Advisory minutes from all of the homes and we built a format to make it easy for the Advisories and my staff to consolidate all of the advisory notes, findings, & recommendations from all six homes. So, this was our first report, it was submitted on time, and I think you’ll find in the future we

consolidate and talk a little bit more details on some numbers and stuff. But this was just the very first report. If you have comments and feedback for us, we encourage all that feedback. You can add it to the calendar for your next meeting if you want to change anything or add. Just know this is just a short timeline. That's why it's a very basic type of report. We do take all your minutes. We have it on a share point where all the staff can grab the notes, put them in, and then we easily take the information out. But next year we will give you the draft report before its final so you can review it and make sure if there's anything else you want to add. We can add that this year we didn't have a lot of time to do that for the first year. The only other, the only other item would be that we're going to be looking for recommendations that we can take back to the Adjutant General from the council. We gather everything that you guys have and a lot of times you guys have given those recommendations, so those are the things that we've incorporated in the report as well as our quarterly meeting minutes. Things like what recommendations that you all make from that staffing perspective. Those are a lot of the things that we get back to you guys. But that'll be just something that's coming, to look forward to, from you folks. What kind of recommendations that you can provide to the Adjutant General to help support the state veterans homes. And to that note, we do still keep the advisories a little separate. This home recommended having bylaws because you have personal care and you have skilled. Some other advisories said that they don't need bylaws. So, there's somethings that we recommend that might not be on behalf of all six times, but we'll separate and differentiate that, so you all feel that you're individualist kind of reports.

So, Philadelphia has a Greater Philadelphia Veteran Business Network. They give \$50,000 out as a shark tank competition to veteran entrepreneurs. We had our first one in central Pennsylvania. We tried to mirror that and bring in veterans. We sent a note out to about 150 veteran employers or veteran entrepreneurs, & small businesses. We had over 75 show up. They loved it. They asked that we do it again quarterly. So now they've created a Central Pennsylvania Veteran Alliance. This evening, I am working with a group to do one in Pittsburgh, and I would offer Pennsylvania National Guard Association, DMVA would love to partner out here in Erie & bring together all of your small businesses. DGS Secretary comes out. They immediately help veterans sign up as a small business to compete for federal and state contracts. So, we would love to do that and build that network and then push the veteran business network collectively around Pennsylvania, so they can all leverage each other's businesses. They're just great practices that we could talk to & bring economic development and help those businesses thrive. So, we're going to start doing more of that and I'm happy to work with all of you and your associations & your local legislators to get that together out here in Erie.”

**ADJOURNMENT**

Meeting adjourned at 10:45 am.

The next Advisory Council Meeting is scheduled for Thursday June 18, 2026, at 9:00 am.

Approved:

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