

Maryland Veterans Commission Meeting
Tuesday, April 19, 2022
100 Community Place, Crownsville, MD

Chairman Tyler called the meeting to order at 10:30 am

Vice Chairman Thornton gave the invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance

Chairman Tyler Introduced the Guests:

Presenters:

- LTC Kimberly Myers, U. S. Space Force
- Dowan Reaves, Veteran Employment Specialist, Easterseals

Guests

- Austin Morris, Senator Van Hollen's office (calling in)
- Walter Kirkland, 100 Black Men, Guest of the Chairman
- Joy Ashcraft, Director, Maryland's Commitment to Veterans
- Cynthia Cavalieri, Federal Executive Board, invited by Commissioner Seidel
- Jason Marshall, Serving Together, invited by Commissioner Seidel
- James Wade, Commander, VFW (calling in), invited by Commissioner Davis

Commissioners Absent:

Blair, Green, Rosas and Welsh

Chairman Tyler asked for a recommendation regarding the January Meeting Minutes. Commissioner Reuter made a Motion Minutes be accepted as written. Motion was seconded and passed.

Chairman Tyler called on Austin Morris for an update:

- Senator Van Hollen has co-sponsored the Camp LeJeune Justice Act
- Senator Van Hollen also announced the recognition of SPC Ronald Dolecki, who had just received his POW medal, after being denied for more than a decade.
<https://www.vanhollen.senate.gov/news/press-releases/van-hollen-announces-army-recognition-of-maryland-veteran-ronald-dolecki-with-pow-medal>

Chairman Tyler called on Deputy Secretary Robert Finn for the MDVA update:

Deputy Secretary Robert Finn:

Good morning,

I will be giving the update today for Secretary Owings. He is at Charlotte Hall Veterans Home today for a presentation with Congressman Steny Hoyer.

- *Congressman Hoyer is presenting a Bronze Star to the family of Sgt. Christopher Swanson, who was killed in Iraq in 2006.*

I would like to begin today by recognizing several Commissioners:

- *Commissioner Leonard Kirk, American Ex-POWs. Commissioner Kirk has decided he will not seek reappointment at the end of his term. We thank him for his service to this Commission*
- *Penny Collins, Fleet Reserve Association, who has also decided not to seek reappointment. Penny has been an active member of this Commission and she will be missed.*
- *Commissioner Stanley Seidel who was recently featured in an Aberdeen Proving Ground news article about his volunteer efforts at MCVET. Thank you, Stan for your efforts there.*
- *Commissioner Cynthia Macri, who was recently appointed to the VA's Advisory Committee on Women Veterans. Congratulations to Dr. Macri, this is a very prestigious appointment.*

Program Updates:

Charlotte Hall Veterans Home

- *No cases of COVID at Charlotte Hall for either residents or staff.*
- *Visitors and volunteers at Charlotte Hall have resumed.*
- *A new Charlotte Hall dedicated ambulance has been purchased with State funds. This will allow transportation, if needed of Charlotte Hall residents without affecting southern Maryland community EMS services. We are providing office space for the EMS personnel in the old CBOC building.*
- *Large recent Donations to Charlotte Hall:*

- *Margaret Brent Middle School Mechanicsville MD donated \$4,000.00 and an additional \$330.00 in gift cards*
 - *Moose Lodge 495 & Women of the Moose Chapter 444 donated \$2,000.00*
 - *Exelon Generation of Calvert County donated \$15,000.00*
 - *Solid Rock Baptist Church of King George, Va. donated \$1,500.00*
 - *American Legion Post 206 Chesapeake Beach MD donated \$5,000.00 in Amazon Gift Cards*
 - *B.P.O. Elks 622 donated \$1,500.00*
 - *American Legion Post 91 Dorchester MD - donated \$6,000.00*
 - *SOMD Loves You Inc. donated \$2,000.00*
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- ***Second Home Update:*** *VA Home Construction Grant for 2nd Home submitted to the VA on March 29, 2022. They are in the process of reviewing the document. We have been given an application number which means we can be reimbursed by the VA for any expenses incurred for construction of the new Home.*

Trust Fund

- *The Trust Fund just keeps breaking records - \$300,000 has been given in grants to Maryland Veterans since July 1st when the 2022 Fiscal Year began.*
- *After receiving recent funds from two of the casinos, the Fund is currently at \$400,000.*
- *The Trust Fund Board has been meeting about possibly beginning to fund non-profits who provide direct service to Veterans, but details have not been worked out.*

Service & Benefits

- *The Service & Benefits program has had over 162,000 public contacts since the fiscal year began, resulting in almost 3,000 claims.*
- *Those claims have returned more than \$4 Million to Maryland Veterans in new benefits and \$23 Million in retroactive benefits.*

- *Keri Keefer, the Benefits Specialist in Frederick is currently out following the birth of her baby, but we are rotating in other Benefits Specialists to assist Veterans in the Frederick area. There are plans to move the Frederick office to the new Goodwill facility being built in Frederick. Goodwill offered free space to MDVA.*
- *Service & Benefits assistance remains by appointment only. Walk-in service has not resumed.*

Cemeteries & Memorials

- *Two very well attended Unaccompanied Burial Services were held this winter for Veterans at Crownsville and Garrison Forest (on 28 Jan and 4 Feb respectively). Going forward these ceremonies will be held quarterly.*
- *Expansion project at Cheltenham should be completed by the end of this month. Also, security cameras have been installed after some recent break-ins/thefts. Newly installed fence along Tippet Road was damaged by very high winds recently and repairs have been made.*
- *Expansion plans for Crownsville include new administration building and new Committal Shelter. The Carillon will be repainted.*
- *Eastern Shore will have new asphalt work and repairs to the Administration building.*
- *World War II Memorial – we have requested the transfer of the Ritchie Overlook which sits between the WWII Memorial and the Gold Star Family Monument so that we can maintain it to MDVA standards.*
 - *Commissioner Moore asked if Transportation would pay for the repairs of the Overlook. Response – unknown, but MDVA would like to take over to ensure it is maintained properly.*

Communications, Outreach & Advocacy

- *A new toolkit is available on the website where you may find the MDVA one-pager, graphics and other information you may be interested in using to spread the word about MDVA.*

- *D.S. Finn called on Dana Burl to talk about the new toolkit*
 - *Dana – It was already sent out to all Commissioners, but Denise will resend it. Asking community partners, including the Commission to share what MDVA is doing. MDVA now has a contract with Maryland Public Television to boost MDVA information through ads and Facebook*
- *Roslyn Jones, the Women Veterans Inclusion Program Manager is planning a two-day Women Veteran Appreciation program on June 8th and 9th.*
- *The MDVA newsletter distribution list has now reached 189,000*
- *Facebook reach has increased dramatically as the partnership with Maryland Public Television continues to promote MDVA. In March alone, Facebook reach was 83,000*
- *Two more responsibilities have been added to the program*
 - *Roslyn has been assigned to the Maryland Health Equity Commission*
 - *Denise is the Secretary's Designee to the Maryland 250 (Semi quincentennial) Commission*

Fiscal Program

- *A second Procurement officer was hired for MDVA – Tom Johnson. Tom is an Army veteran who started with MDVA working at Charlotte Hall Veterans Home and has transferred to the Annapolis office.*
- *MDVA has also hired for the first time ever, an Employee Relations Specialist. Mikele Hicks comes to us from the Comptroller's office.*
- *MDVA was one of the first four State agencies to lead the conversion to the State's new online procure-to-pay system eMMA (E-Maryland Marketplace Advantage).*

Legislative Updates:

The Maryland General Assembly ended the 90-day session on Monday, April 11th. Denise has already sent around a legislative update to each of you, but there are a few legislative items I would like to highlight for you: Signed into Law on April 12th:

- *SB 5/HB 479 – Tuskegee Airmen Commemoration Day passed with the support of Commissioner Killebrew and others who have been working so hard to ensure this legislation became an official Commemoration in Maryland.*
- *SB 365 – added a new seat to the Maryland Veterans Commission – the Reserve Organization of America will join the Commission, effective October 1st. Originally formed as the Reserve Officers Assoc of America in 1922 by Gen “Black Jack” Pershing, ROA is dedicated to supporting the Reserve Forces. Jason Spiegel, former Exec Dir and one of three Maryland Army Reserve Ambassadors spearheaded the effort.*
- *SB 654/HB 279 – Veterans Advocacy & Education Act, which changes the name of the Outreach & Advocacy Program to the Communications, Outreach & Advocacy Program. It will also require the program to collaborate with the Maryland Higher Education Commission to make veterans & family members aware of access to benefits.*
- *None of the Military Retirement Subtraction Modification bills passed this session, however the Governor signed the Retirement Tax Elimination Act which provides general tax relief to Maryland retirees.*

In closing, I would like to thank you for all you do as Commissioners to assist Veterans in Maryland.

Chairman Tyler called on Denise Nooe for Update:

Denise:

- Mileage rate has increased to 58.5 cents from 56 cents last year. Please check the top of your form and correct any information, as I had to retype all the forms again
- Memorial Day is coming up next Month – please let us know about events and requests for Proclamations, as soon as possible

- Event in Indian Head on May 13th the Secretary would like a Commissioner to attend – passing around to everyone
- We are currently not on the 4th floor due to construction, but when we return, I will have probably 1,000 Welcome Home packets to prepare and I will be sending out a message asking for volunteer help from the Commissioners.
- Durable Medical Equipment Warehouse – Commissioners asked for a tour, but wanted to wait for better weather. I will be making contact to set a date and will notify all Commissioners.

Chairman Tyler called on LTC Myers for the Space Force presentation.

Questions:

- Commissioner Macri asked about procurement for the agency? Reply, have their own process.
- Vice Chairman Thornton asked how you cover the vastness of space? Reply, developing processes, policies and procedures that can carry into the future. Already working with other countries with regard to sharing the International Space Station.
- Commissioner Reuter – how do you balance the peaceful uses of space? Similar to the above – working with other countries to share resources.
- Commissioner Killebrew – how do you control civilian exploration in space? Reply, We do not control civilian activities even on earth. Space Force's role is to ensure safety & security. We track all satellites. Human space flight takes priority.
- Commissioner Stem asked if several Air Force bases have transformed to Space Force bases: Patrick, Cape Canaveral and Vandenberg. Reply – yes.
- Commissioner Lane asked about recruiting? Following the same path as other agencies. Right now Space Force is mostly using Air Force recruiters, but have a small force of their own recruiters.
- Chairman Tyler asked if boot camp is the same as Air Force boot camp? Reply, yes, but they are trying to shift to a dedicated Space Force boot camp as recruiting grows.
- Commissioner Macri asked about promoting to their own military Alumni Associations? Reply, yes, Space Force needs help advocating for new recruits. There is an interesting STEM to Space Force path which may interest new recruits.

Chairman Tyler called on Dowan Reeves for her presentation on Easterseals:

Questions:

- Commissioner Davis asked about substance abuse rehab services? Reply, clients are referred to substance abuse service, but Easterseals stays connected with them while they are in treatment.
- Vice Chairman Thornton asked about why Veterans, particularly female Veterans become homeless? Reply, often an abusive situation, but there can be many reasons. 10% of homeless female Veterans, do not come forward/identify themselves as homeless. Dowan discovered a child care scholarship provided by the Maryland Department of Labor and that has helped some homeless female Veterans to be able to work.
- Commissioner Reuter mentioned he is the Chair of the Homeless sub-committee as well as Commander of the PVA. One of his members was dumped at the Post Office in downtown Baltimore, and the only assistance he could find which was accessible was in Howard County. Reply, not much has changed. There are not many emergency housing options for women with children, especially those which are accessible.

Chairman Tyler called on the Subcommittees for their reports

Homeless Veteran subcommittee:

- Commissioner Reuter – no update

Incarcerated Veterans subcommittee:

- Commissioner Penny Collins – no update

Combating Substance Misuse Impacting Maryland's Veterans and Their Families

- Commissioner Macri gave the report
 - Subcommittee met with Department of Health officials from the Maryland Behavioral Health Administration and the Maryland Opioid Operational Command (OOC). Deputy Secretary Finn and Dana Burl also attended.
 - The subcommittee presented their interim report and asked for a reply. They also asked if state grantees were reporting the veteran status of those.
 - A follow-up was made by OOC suggesting a Summit on Nov. 10, 2022.

- Another meeting was held with the Region 3 Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).
- A written reply was received from the Behavioral Health Administration.
- Subcommittee requested at the next Commission meeting, SAMHSA be invited to present. Also the subcommittee be given more time to discuss the work the subcommittee is doing and future plans.
- Subcommittee is recruiting new member(s), as Commissioner Collins is leaving the Commission.
- Commissioner Lane added that with Commissioner Collins leaving, there is also a loss to the Incarcerated Veterans subcommittee.

The Chairman called on Mr. Walter Kirkland to discuss the 100 Black Men of Prince Georges County:

Walter Kirkland:

- Explained the Mimi-RX – Medication and Immunization Management Initiative. Also the MyVax Program: www.mimirx.org and www.myvax.com
 - Commissioner Burtnick asked if the app was available for android phones? Reply, yes.
 - Commissioner Reuter asked if the information was stored on your phone, or in the cloud? Reply, in the cloud.

Chairman Tyler called on the Commissioners for the Round Robin portion of the meeting:

- Commissioner Holcombe recently attended a meeting with Congressman Mfume and asked for his position on veterans' topics. Cong. Mfume is researching and will reply.
- Commissioner Hartman – on June 7th there will be a claims clinic in Carroll County. Thanks to Katie/Denise for Proclamation for 100-year-old Veteran. He has been working with Blue Water Sailors – the info on ships is limited. He advises sailors to find as much info as they can, and the Blue Water Sailors Association will cross-reference the ships' locations. Currently there are over 600,000 claims in the VA backlog again.
- Commissioner Reuter – PVA held an event the 1st weekend in April. The national convention is in Atlanta in May.
- Commissioner Calvert – participates in a program training service dogs in Boyds, MD. Goes for one hour per week and finds it personally rewarding. Warrior Canine Connection is in need of foster parents to raise the puppies for 24 months. The dogs are free to Veterans.

- Commissioner Killebrew – Sec. Owings deserves an Oscar for his testimony in support of the Tuskegee Airmen legislation. The day of observance will be on the 4th Thursday in March. There are only 7 pilots left and about 200 enlisted members remaining. The East Coast chapter here is the largest. This chapter is looking for a certified flight instructor.
- Commissioner Lane – no new news to report.
- Commissioner Davis – the VFW Commander sends an invitation for Commissioners to attend Convention. It will be held 31 May – 3 June at the Grand Hotel in Ocean City. On 28 April, the VFW will be holding an award ceremony in Charles County.
- Commissioner Macri – will be attending the JAVA Memorial Day event at Arlington. This is the longest continuous observance. She is on the Montgomery County Veterans Commission working with Women Veterans. Mary Washington University in Lorton is offering free art classes. 4th dose of vaccine is now being recommended for those over 50. Two of the anti-virals do not work on the new variants. You can be prescribed anti-virals at CVS and Walgreens.
- Commissioner Burtnick – Andrew Altman was recruited by Commissioner Burtnick to the Jewish War Veterans. He is the youngest member nationally. Commissioner Burtnick will be attending the Memorial Day ceremony at Garrison Forest held in the Jewish section. The ceremony is lived streamed nationally. On May 9th the community salute to recognize high school students directly into the military will be held. That will be at the B&O Railroad Museum at 5:30 pm. Also on May 15th there will be a Carroll County Veterans Collaboration at the Farm Museum.
- Commissioner Moore – He will be attending the Greenbelt Memorial Day Ceremony. American Legion Post 136 will be hosting a picnic for Rolling Thunder, prior to their ride to southern Maryland. Work has begun on the Peace Cross, and the dedication ceremony is scheduled by Veterans Day.
- Commissioner Smith – has worked on the revision and updating of the responsibilities of the Commissioners. Asked if the updated version would be considered at the next meeting. Reply from Chair, Yes.
- Commissioner Hanson – Grand Opening of the Patrol River Boat in Cambridge. If you visit, check it out. The Tuskegee Airmen are portrayed on the mural as you travel into Cambridge.
- Commissioner Collins – this is her last meeting, as she is stepping down from the Commission. She is also stepping down from her position of Secretary/Treasurer from the Fleet Reserve. She is remaining a Claims Officer for the Fleet Reserve. Prince Georges County Executive Alsobrooks held a Women Veterans recognition during Women’s History month in March. 24 May is the Annapolis Vet Center Open House from 10:00 to 2:00. 30 May the City of Annapolis will hold a Veterans Day ceremony.
- Commissioner Childs – 30 April AMVETS will be holding the Freestate Awards. Timothy Cooke, former Director of Martinsburg VA hospital is receiving the award

for 2020 and Denise Nooe will receive the award for 2021. The Rolling Remember event will be held on the 27th – 29th. This was previously Rolling Thunder. Events begin on the 27th with the motorcycle ride being the 29th.

- Commissioner Stem – she is on the Carroll County Veterans Council and they are planning the Veterans Salute on May 15th. On 27 April she will be attending the event held by the Bureau of Aging & Disabilities in Westminster, representing Secretary Owings.
- Commissioner Shiffrin – no updates.
- Commissioner Seidel – Expressed his appreciation to Commissioner Collins for all of her work.
- Commissioner Reuter – April is Paralyzed Veterans Month.

Chairman Tyler stated that the Commission will begin transition back to moving events around the state. For the July meeting, perhaps MCVET will be the location.

Vice Chairman Thornton gave the Benediction and led the Flag Salute

Commissioner Reuter made a Motion to Adjourn the meeting. It was seconded and passed.

Meeting adjourned at 1:00 pm.