

Maryland Veterans Commission Meeting  
Tuesday, July 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:

- James Whitney, MD Department of Disabilities
- Dr. Xavier Bruce, Uplift Energy Coaching

Guests

- Austin Morris, Senator Van Hollen's office (calling in)
- Cynthia Cavalieri, Federal Executive Board, invited by Commissioner Seidel
- Jason Marshall, Serving Together, invited by Commissioner Seidel
- Former Commissioner Penny Collins, Fleet Reserve Association
- Patrick Guibao, American Legion

Commissioners Absent:

Green, Rosas and Shiffrin

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

Chairman Tyler called on Secretary George Owings for the MDVA update:

Secretary Owings:

- *Good Morning Commissioners. I hope you and your families are doing well.*
- *It is good to be back together again in person with many of you.*
  - *Thank you also to those calling in by phone.*

- *Four Commissioners have been reappointed for new terms on the Commission: Commissioners **Blair, Fuentealba, Reuter** and **Shiffrin** and I thank them for their willingness to continue on the Commission and their advocacy for Veterans.*
- *Since we met in April, sadly I must report the passing of Commissioner Leonard Kirk, who represented the American Ex-POWs on the Commission. As you know, Commissioner Kirk was an active and dedicated member of this Commission.*
  - *Just a few weeks before Commissioner Kirk's passing, when he informed me that he was not planning to seek re-appointment, he told me he was trying to find someone to take his seat.*
  - *I have reached out the remaining members of the Ex-POWs in Maryland, and unfortunately due to age and health issues, we do not have an applicant for Commissioner Kirk's seat on the Commission. At this time, the seat remains vacant.*
- *I would also like to mention the passing of CSM Wilson Thornton, the brother of Veterans Commission Vice Chair Leroy Thornton. Wilson served on the War Memorial Commission and he will be truly missed.*
  - *I was able to attend the viewing last week, and Deputy Secretary Finn attended the funeral.*
  - *If you haven't already, I am sure you want to extend your condolences to Vice Chairman Thornton.*
- *I recently attended a small event with the Governor, Commissioner Killebrew and the members of the Tuskegee Airmen Mid-Atlantic Chapter to celebrate the passage of the legislation creating a Commemoration Day.*
- *We are finally seeing the light at the end of the tunnel for renovations to the MDVA Annapolis office. Staff should be able to move back into their offices in the next couple of weeks.*
- *Before we move on to my updates regarding the Department, I would like to talk with you about a piece of legislation which passed the General Assembly this year and was signed into law by the Governor.*
  - *HB167 – titled "Commission to Establish a Maryland Women Veterans Memorial" affects this Commission directly, by requiring members of the Veterans Commission to serve on this newly created Commission.*
  - *The purpose of the Commission is "establishing the Commission to Establish a Maryland Women Veterans Memorial to study establishing a memorial dedicated*

*to Maryland women veterans; and generally relating to the Commission to Establish a Maryland Women Veterans Memorial”.*

- *That is a very convoluted way of saying the Commission is being set up to make recommendations to the Governor & General Assembly for a proposed Memorial honoring Women Veterans.*
- *There is a fast timeline for this Commission requiring a preliminary report to the Governor and General Assembly by February 1, 2023 and a final report by Sept. 30, 2023.*
- *The Commission is tasked with providing recommendations for the funding, design, construction, and placement of an appropriate memorial dedicated to Maryland women veterans.*
- *What you need to know – two members of the Maryland Veterans Commission, appointed by me will serve on the new Commission. There is no requirement that the two members from the Maryland Veterans Commission be female, and those of you who have been around a while may remember that Commissioner Ken McCall served on the similar previous commission.*
  - *Two current Veterans Commission members also served on the previous commission: Karen Calvert and Denise Perry.*
- *Further, four members of Veterans Service Organizations, also appointed by me will serve on the new Commission. These VSO representatives must be female. That is stated in the legislation.*
- *What do I want from you? I want volunteers from the Veterans Commission and VSO representatives to serve on this Commission.*
  - *I want you to be prepared to work diligently and efficiently to move the work of this Commission, so that we will meet the deadlines required in the legislation.*
  - *Please do not delay in letting me know if you are interested in serving on the new Commission, either as a representative of the Veterans Commission or as a VSO representative. Please email Denise of your interest and she will gather information on the applicants from the Commission.*
  - *Thank you for your consideration of this request.*
- *The State Fiscal Year ended on June 30<sup>th</sup>, so the remainder of my remarks today will be an overview of the fiscal year.*

### **Maryland Veterans Trust Fund**

- *For the 2022 FY the Trust awarded over \$350,000 to Maryland Veterans – a new record!*
- *As you would expect, applications to the Trust fund are up, but Mark Hendricks, the Trust Fund Administrator is having the reviews done quickly by the Review Committee. A completed application is usually reviewed within two weeks.*
- *Unfortunately, many of the applications coming in are from veterans with income too high to qualify for the program. The income limit to receive a grant is 250% of the federal poverty level. An income example would be \$31,900 for a single veteran or \$65,500 for a family of four*

### **Charlotte Hall Veterans Home**

- *I missed the April Commission meeting because I was at Charlotte Hall Veterans Home with Congressman Steny Hoyer, who presented the Swanson family with the Bronze Star Medal with V for Valor. SSG Christopher Swanson was mortally wounded protecting soldiers in Ramadi, Iraq in 2006 and his family was finally presented with his Bronze Star.*
- *As is the case with the general public, the new COVID variants are very contagious and reached Charlotte Hall recently. The good news is that the positive cases for both residents and staff have been mild and all are now recovered.*
  - *Admissions are being accepted again at Charlotte Hall.*
- *Charlotte Hall has received a number of very generous donations recently, including those from:*
  - *Benedict A. Andrew American Legion Post 296 - \$3,000*
  - *Snead's Ace Home Center - \$10,000*
  - *American Legion Post 16 - \$8,000*
  - *American Legion Dorchester Post 91 - \$15,000*
  - *VFW Department of Maryland - \$7,199*
  - *DAV Department of Maryland - \$5,000*
  - *Rotary Club of Cambridge - \$2,000*

Secretary Owings called on Deputy Secretary Finn for an update on the Second Veterans Home:

Deputy Secretary Finn:

- *We are planning on a 128-bed small home concept implementing the latest technology and best practices learned from the COVID 19 outbreak.*

- *There will be larger, wheel-chair accessible rooms and the first dialysis unit to be included in a state veterans home.*
- *On March 30<sup>th</sup>, we submitted Part I & Part II program documentation to the United States VA. We have received approval for the facility plan.*
- *The Maryland Department of General Services will be issuing an RFP for the design for the home.*
- *Once cost has been determined, we will need approval from the Board of Public Works for funding for the design.*
- *Governor Hogan has placed \$62.3 Million in the budget for the state's 35% share of the cost. Estimate of total cost is \$181,000,000.*
- *Third Home*
  - *Looking to the future, Deputy Secretary Finn, Home Commission Chair BG Sumpter and former Charlotte Hall Director Sharon Murphy visited a possible location on the eastern shore. Located on Nanticoke Road near Salisbury, the former Poplar Hill Pre-Release facility is vacant state property available.*
    - *We have talked with DGS about acquiring 25 acres there.*

Secretary Owings continued his report:

**Service and Benefits Program**

- *A Claims Clinic and Resource Fair for veterans is currently scheduled for September 7th at Harford Community College.*
- *Another is being planned for November 11th at the USVA Medical Center in Baltimore.*
- *The Service program verified 82 property tax exemptions in June.*
- *MDVA is responsible for claims awarded \$31,617,932 in retro-active benefits awarded to veterans in FY22.*
- *We also filed 3715 new claims and veterans we represent were awarded \$5,556,881 recurring monies in FY22.*
- *Combined monthly and retroactive benefits is \$37,174,813 – the highest amount in 14 years.*
- *MDVA had a 94.9% approval rating for claims filed with the USDVA in June. The overall approval rating for FY22 was 91.8%*

- *The USDVA paid out over \$54,000 in burial benefits to families and surviving spouses represented by MDVA in May.*
- *The Service program verified 183 veteran status applications for the Veteran-Owned Small Business program in 2021 and has already verified 105 applications for CY22.*

### **Cemetery and Memorials Program**

- *Burials are continuing as usual, and never slowed even during the worst of the pandemic*
  - *Cemetery staff work in all weather conditions to ensure the proper burial of our veterans*
  - *I am proud of our staff who have continued with no interruption in service to veterans and their eligible family members*
- *Cheltenham Ribbon Cutting will take place on August 8th to mark the expansion of the cemetery and the completion of the new Administrative Building.*
- *We are in the process of acquiring 50+ acres from the old Rosewood State hospital, to expand Garrison Forest Veterans Cemetery.*
- *An unaccompanied burial is scheduled for July 29th at Crownsville. Another unaccompanied ceremony will be scheduled for the Eastern Shore cemetery in the future and details will be sent out to you, when available.*
- *At Crownsville, the roof on the Shelter is in need of replacement/repair, as well as the discovery of mold. Out of an abundance of caution, services will be performed outside until repairs are completed. Waiting on DGS to complete bid process for roof replacement.*
- *It has been confirmed by the National Cemetery Administration that Maryland buries over 10% of veterans in the nation.*
- *A project has been created to revitalize access to the Pearl Harbor and Midshipman Memorials at WWII Memorial – the Midshipman Memorial is currently the responsibility of the State Highway Administration. MDOT is drafting an MOU of transfer responsibility to MDVA.*

### **Communications, Outreach & Advocacy Program**

- *Our 3-person team (Dana, Denise and now Roslyn) have been very busy throughout this year. While in-person meetings and events have resumed, they are also continuing to provide virtual events, as well.*

- *For FY 2022 the team attended 425 events, up from 324 in FY21*
- *191,055 email subscribers, up from 167,616 in FY21*
- *2,059,900 opens for the newsletters*
- *791,158 Facebook post reach, up from 42,775 in FY21*
- *67,778 Twitter impressions, up from 7,482 in FY21*
- *Roslyn Jones, (formerly with Maryland DOL), was hired in August, and is our new Woman Veteran Inclusion Program Manager. She has facilitated regional focus groups to obtain information about women veteran issues and created an advisory board.*
- *Several Women Veteran events were held in June, including an in-person ceremony where eight women Veterans in state service were recognized. There was also a virtual online Women Veterans Conference.*
- *Dana and Joy Ashcraft from Maryland's Commitment to Veterans will be presenting to SAMSHA on the Governor's Challenge in Alexandria in August.*

*In closing, I thank each and every one of you for the work you do on the Commission, in the organizations you represent and in your private efforts to support Maryland Veterans*

Chairman Tyler called on Denise Nooe for Update:

Denise:

- *Mileage rates have changed again, as of July 17<sup>th</sup>.*
  - *Increased to .625 cents per mile from .585*
  - *Please check to make sure all your information at the top of the form is correct*
- *Event Briefs – reminder now that we are attending events again, Commissioners are to submit an event brief following the event.*
- *You are invited to a Ribbon Cutting at Cheltenham Veterans Cemetery on Monday, August 8<sup>th</sup> at 10:00 am to mark the expansion of the cemetery and the new Administration Building.*
- *You are invited to a Joint Veterans Commission meeting on August 16<sup>th</sup> from 8:30 am to 12:30. Location is here at 100 Community Place.*

- *Dana is the lead, all state Commissioners are invited, as well as County Commissioners*
- *Do not share this invitation with the public. Invitation is for Commissioners only.*
  
- *Welcome Home packets are transitioning. We will now be sending out postcards directing new retirees and veterans returning to Maryland to the MDVA website.*
- *Upcoming highway dedication for Army Specialist Toccara Green, KIA, Aug. 14, 2005*
- *Would a few Commissioners help to move the tables and chairs after the meeting?*

Chairman Tyler called on James Whitney for the presentation from the Maryland Department of Disabilities for his presentation

- Slides from the presentation were emailed out to the Commissioners

Homeless Veteran subcommittee:

- Commissioner Reuter – no update

Incarcerated Veterans subcommittee:

- No update –
  - Commissioner Lane reminded Commissioners that Chairman Penny Collins has left the Commission and the Sub-committee needs to reform
    - Prisons are still not allowing visitors
  
  - Commissioner Macri has visited two prisons recently to give vaccinations to incarcerated persons, agreed that no visitors are currently allowed
    - There is a lot of interest among incarcerated Veterans at Jessup for the Chronic Disease Management program
  
  - Chairman suggested that we set aside this Committee's reports until the Correctional facilities allow visitors again and the Committee reforms.

Combating Substance Misuse Impacting Maryland's Veterans and Their Families

- Commissioner Seidel gave the report
  - A written report is attached to the Minutes.

- Subcommittee is recruiting new member(s), as Commissioner Collins has left the Commission.

Additional Discussion:

- Commissioner Seidel talked about a planned Summit in the Fall and asked for other Commissioners to volunteer to help.
  - Also talked about the need to find qualified counselors?
  - With the loss of Commissioner Collins as a member, the sub-committee is looking for new members
- Commissioner Macri talked about the need for qualified professionals and suggested those who trained as Corpsman in the military.
- Commissioner Seidel says that Maryland does give credit for military experience.
  - The sub-committee is also looking for new members, with the loss of Commissioner Collins.
- Commissioner Reuter stated that the VA Hospital in Baltimore is also looking for qualified counselors.

Chairman Tyler called on the Commission for a decision on the Responsibilities of a Commissioner. The document was prepared by Commissioner Joe Smith, who consolidated two previous documents found in the Commission archives.

- Commissioner Burtnick moved that the Responsibilities be accepted, Seconded by Commissioner Moore.
  - Commission voted yes, with the exception of Commissioner Reuter who abstained/ he had not read the document, as he could not open it on his computer.

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

- Commissioner Holcombe indicated he did not have a report, but several Commissioners called out to congratulate him for his new role as Commander of the American Legion, Department of Maryland.
- Commissioner Reuter attended the PVA national Convention in Atlanta and he was presented with an award for his 25 years of work with Paralyzed Veterans.
- Commissioner Seidel mentioned the MCVET annual 5K/10K in November.

- Commissioner Burtnick – Jewish War Veterans held a ceremony on Memorial Day at Garrison Forest. More than 60 attended.
  - He always wears a veteran-related hat, because it sparks conversation with Veterans who may need information about their benefits.
  - He tells Veterans to have “Veteran” put on their driver’s license so they can access all their benefits.
  
- Commissioner Macri serves on the US Department of Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee for Women Veterans, on the Health Sub-Committee. They are recommending efforts to address military sexual trauma and intimate partner violence.
  - She participated in the wreath laying at Arlington with JAPA.
  - COVID is not over.
  - Recommended an Arts program for Veterans.
  
- Commissioner Davis, VFW national convention is happening now. Commander James Wade is there and reports all is going well.
  - Congressman Hoyer and Maryland Congressional Delegation announced funding for an expanded CBOC in Prince George’s County.
  - National Naval Officers will be having an upcoming convention in Annapolis.
  - On June 24<sup>th</sup> he went to a Change of Command ceremony in PA. The new Commander is an Ellicott City resident.
  
- Commissioner Killebrew – the photo in the newsletter for the Tuskegee Airmen Recognition Day does not tell the entire story. Secretary Owings was the driving force behind getting the legislation passed.
  - They are currently working on the history of the Tuskegee Airmen.
  - Silver Spring public library was designated as the Charles E. McGee library.
  - If you have seen the video, a young man he taught in High School, went on to the Air Force Academy.
  
- Commissioner Smith attended the Annapolis Vet Center open house.
  - He also participated in the MDVA focus group – how do we contact Veterans.
  - He went to the Durable Medical Equipment Warehouse with the group of Commissioners who toured.
  
- Commissioner Moore mentioned how impressed he was at the professionalism, compassion and effectiveness of the staff at Crownsville during the recent internment of John Hill from American Legion Post 136.

- He congratulated fellow commissioner Ron Holcombe in his election as commander of the American Legion's Department of Maryland.
- He mentioned the annual Boys Nation dinner at Greenbelt Legion Post 136 on Sunday, July 24<sup>th</sup>.
- Also, the rededication of the Bladensburg Peace Cross Veterans Memorial on Friday, November 11<sup>th</sup>. He hopes that Gov. Hogan and Secretary Owings will participate.
  
- Commissioner Wallace mentioned the upcoming DAV golf tournament.
  - Secretary Owings and several Commissioners asked him to forward the information.
  
- Commissioner Childs – AMVETS held a successful convention on June 4<sup>th</sup>, although numbers were down tremendously.
  - AMVETS is trying to attract younger members
  - AMVETS national committee will be meeting in August
  - He will retire from the DC National Guard in 43 days
  
- Commissioner Lane – congrats to Commissioner Childs on retirement
  - Congratulations to Commander Holcombe
  - Condolences to Commissioner Thornton
  - In Baltimore City, they are planning for Veterans Day
  - Regarding Incarcerated Veterans, the sub-committee will resume after COVID is not so dangerous
  - Agrees with Commissioner Seidel that there are not enough qualified counselors to help Veterans
  
- Commissioner Calvert – went to the American Legion Convention
  - Works with Warrior Canine Connection in Boyds, MD, training puppies. They are looking for puppy parents to raise puppies.
  
- Commissioner Stem – Catholic War Veterans Convention is coming up in Baltimore.
  - Carroll County office of Aging of Disabilities is offering a clinic for Women Veterans.
  
- Commissioner Fuentealba – attended the Military Order of the Purple Heart convention in OC.
  - Purple Heart also participated in the 4<sup>th</sup> of July parade in Towson

Secretary Owings – he does talk to Veterans in the community of the work of the Commission.

- Due to the death of Commissioner Kirk, we no longer have any representation of the Ex-POWs on the Commission.
- As Commissioners, you should be talking to Veterans, ask if they belong to any organizations and encourage them to join.

The Chairman asked that the information on the golf tournaments be sent to him

- Also the NABVETS convention will be held Aug. 2 – 5.
- Next meeting will be held on October 18<sup>th</sup> at 100 Community Place.

Chairman Tyler 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.