

Maryland Veterans Commission Meeting  
Tuesday, January 18, 2022  
Virtual – Google Meet

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:

- Secretary Rona Kramer, Maryland Department of Aging
- Dr. Ian Edwards, Maryland Department of Aging
- Jason Marshall, Serving Together
- Troy Jones, CEO, 108 Organization
- Stephen Walwyn, 108 Organization

Guests

- Cynthia Cavalieri, Federal Executive Board
- Anneke Vanderbroek, Easterseals

Commissioners Absent:

Blair, Green, Kirk, Lane, Seidel

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

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

- *Good Morning Commissioners and Guests. I hope you and your families are doing well.*
- *Today, we have returned to an all virtual Commission meeting. I am glad that we are still able to continue our meetings, but I am sure we all agree that it will be good when we can meet in person again.*
- *Before I begin my briefing today, I would like to welcome the two newest members of the Commission:*
  - *Retired Captain Jerome Davis, USN (Veterans of Foreign Wars)*
  - *SGM James Childs, Jr. (AMVETS), who is still serving in the DC National Guard*

- *I believe the Chairman is going to call on you to introduce yourself and tell us some more about you later in the program. If I may be of assistance to you in your role as Commissioner, please let me know.*
- *Also, I am pleased to announce that Commissioner Robert Hartman is returning to the Commission to continue representing the Vietnam Veterans of America. Bob we appreciate all you do for VVA and for the Commission.*
- *I will begin by giving you an update on the Department:*

**Annual Report** – *The 2021 MDVA Annual report has been published and provided to the Governor and Members of the General Assembly. Denise sent it around to all Commissioners and you may also view it on the MDVA website.*

### **Maryland Veterans Trust Fund**

- *Since the current Fiscal Year began on July 1<sup>st</sup>, the Trust has already awarded \$200,000 in grants to Maryland Veterans.*
- *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.*

### **Charlotte Hall Veterans Home**

- *Applications and new admissions have resumed at Charlotte Hall, but we need help getting the word out. If you receive questions about Charlotte Hall, please refer the individuals to the Admissions staff at Charlotte Hall.*
- *Volunteers are also being accepted again at Charlotte Hall and an orientation for volunteers was just held on January 14<sup>th</sup>.*
- *100% of residents have been vaccinated. 94% of Assisted Living staff have been vaccinated and 85% of Long Term staff have been vaccinated, so we are very pleased with those numbers, which is much higher than many community facilities. We will continue to offer vaccinations to the remaining staff.*
- *Like many facilities, we do have a staffing shortage, and we have consolidated some units to help with staffing. The contractor at the Home, HMR also has an aggressive hiring plan.*
- *The washing machine replacement project is complete.*
- *The elevator replacement project is still in process.*

- *The transfer of land to MDVA was approved in November for the second state Veterans home to be located in Carroll County. This is another big step in the process.*

### **Service and Benefits Program**

- *All MDVA Service offices are open for in-person appointments, but on an appointment only basis.*
  - *The Federal Building in Baltimore has reopened to the public after a closure due to COVID cases in the building in December. As you know, we have a MDVA benefits office in the federal building.*
  - *All MDVA Service & Benefits offices are now open for appointments.*
  - *If you hear from veterans who need assistance, please refer them to the MDVA website which is updated with any changes and will give them the contact information to make an appointment at the Benefits offices.*

### **Cemetery and Memorials Program**

- *Burials are continuing as usual*
  - *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.*
  - *Garrison Forest Veterans Cemetery has reached 45,000 interred there.*
  - *At the close of 2021, the total number of veterans and dependents interred in the five MDVA Veterans Cemeteries is: 114,009.*
  - *The Cheltenham Cemetery expansion is 70% complete, and we estimate full completion by the end of February.*
  - *We are expecting the unclaimed remains of approximately 24 veterans, who do not have families or their families did not claim them. They will be interred at Crownsville Veterans Cemetery and Garrison Forest Cemetery. We will let you know when that happens, in case you want to attend to show support for these veterans receiving final honors.*

### **Outreach & Advocacy Program**

- *Dana and Denise are continuing to provide briefings and outreach virtually, as well as their responsibilities related to Communications for the Department.*
- *Roslyn Jones, who joined the Department as the Women Veteran/Inclusion Program Manager is preparing for a series of Listening Sessions with Women Veteran Focus Groups beginning in February.*
- *The O&A staff is currently developing a 2022 Communications Plan with a goal of developing new strategies for social media, the newsletter and perhaps surveys to engage more veterans.*

### **Fiscal Program**

- *MDVA just hired its second procurement officer, essentially doubling the capacity of our procurement function.*
- *We are about to hire the first-ever employee relations officer for MDVA.*
- *Both of these developments are significant in terms of positioning the agency for the future.*

### **Legislative Update**

*The Maryland General Assembly convened last week, on Wednesday, January 12<sup>th</sup>. As you have probably already heard – the session will look very different again this year. So far, there have been 14 bills pre-filed of particular interest to Veterans.*

*As the Commission requests every year – I will provide a brief legislative update. I remind you that the Department, as a state agency does not take an opinion on legislation and I do not testify at hearings, unless the Governor requests that I attend and support a particular piece of legislation.*

*There will be a bill introduced again this year concerning Outreach & Advocacy:*

- *to change the name of the MDVA Outreach and Advocacy program to include “Communications” to better reflect what they do, but we do not have a bill number on that yet.*

*Other Legislation:*

- *For Commissioner Killebrew – the Tuskegee Airman Commemoration Day bill has been introduced by Senator Patterson again this year – Senate Bill 0005.*

- *There are several versions of property tax exemptions for disabled veterans and Subtraction Modification for Military Retirement income.*
- *There is a bill to expedite licensing for Service Members and Military Spouses in health occupations.*
- *Another bill proposes extending the eligibility of the Iraq & Afghanistan college scholarship program to step-children of the veteran.*
- *And there is a bill to establish a new Commission to “Establish a Maryland Women Veterans Memorial”.*

*There will be more bills introduced, I am sure - as the General Assembly has only been in session for one week.*

*The list of bills will be updated on the MDVA website each week and will also be included in the MDVA newsletter.*

*I would like to remind you once again, that if you testify on a bill, make a phone call, email or send a letter to members of the General Assembly – you may not do so as a Maryland Veterans Commissioner. If you take a position on any legislation, you should do so as a private citizen or as a representative of your Veterans Service Organization – with that organization’s permission.*

### ***Appointments Expiring in 2022***

*My final topic for today is that the term of Appointment for five of you will expire on June 30, 2022. This is a much better number than the 14 seats from last year but still,*

- *I ask that you start thinking now if you want to continue to serve beyond the end of your term.*
- *Do you have the energy, interest and commitment to continue to represent and advocate for veterans?*
- *Are there any other members of your Veteran Service Organization who would like the opportunity to serve?*
- *I am not trying to push anyone off the Commission, but we are all aging –*
- *We all talk about how to get younger veterans involved and how do we connect with them?*
- *I am not asking you to decide today. I am simply asking you to think about your future and the future of the Commission.*

- *The seats which will be up for Appointment/Reappointment this year are:*
  - *Ex-POW, held by Commissioner Leonard Kirk*
  - *Fleet Reserve Association, Penny Collins*
  - *Marine Corps League, Stuart Blair*
  - *Military Officers Association of America, James Shiffrin*
  - *Paralyzed Veterans of America, Robert Reuter*

*In closing, I thank you for all you do for Maryland Veterans and I wish you a happy and healthy New Year.*

Chairman Tyler called on Denise Nooe for Update:

- *Mileage has increased to 58.5 cents per mile. This is an increase over 2021 which was 56 cents.*
  - *I will redo the forms for the January meeting*
  - *For the new Commissioners, you are entitled to mileage to attend Commission meetings, and if you are asked to attend an event on behalf of the Department*
- *Time to file your Ethics disclosure form. You should have already gotten an email.*
- *Chair and Vice Chair met to go over the responsibilities for Commissioner. A document was prepared some years ago, but needs updating.*
  - *I will be setting up a short online meeting for the two new Commissioners.*
  - *If anyone else would like to join, please let me know.*
- *Lunches – The Ethics Commission has advised that MDVA may only pay for lunches for Commissioners and Presenters.*
  - *So a reminder that you are welcome to invite guests, such as your Commander, but they will not be provided with lunch.*

*The Ethics Commission also advises that I am not authorized to accept payment and purchase additional lunches, so please ask your guests to bring a brown bag lunch with them if they want to remain for lunch and networking after the meeting.*

Chairman Tyler called on Secretary Rona Kramer and Dr. Ian Edwards for a presentation on Maryland's Durable Medical Equipment Program

Questions:

- *Commissioner Davis – is there a delivery service for the equipment. Response: No, but the equipment can be moved to one of the agency partners for pickup*

- Commissioner Davis – Is it possible to have a tour? Response: Yes, please contact us, and perhaps offer several possible dates. Still under COVID protocols, so those have to be followed.
- Commissioner Reuter – PVA had a similar equipment lending program, but that ended after the storage area was flooded about six years ago. The top requests were for ramps and lifts.
- Commissioner Rosas explained his program Lift-A-Vet and offered to help as well as deliver equipment.
- Commissioner Macri offered the services of her contacts to help with translation to the Asian Community and the Spanish speaking community.
- Deputy Secretary Finn thanked Secretary Kramer and apologized that Secretary Owings had to miss her presentation.

Chairman Tyler introduced Jason Marshall for a presentation on Serving Together

- No questions followed the presentation

Chairman Tyler introduced Pastor Troy Jones, CEO of the 108 Organization and the B6 Men's Support Group

Questions:

- Commissioner Davis asked if there was a fee for membership. Response: Yes, private coaching is \$250, To join the Brotherhood cost \$3,500 and yearly fee is \$1,000, but they are looking for organizations to sponsor so that scholarships may be offered. No cost for weekly meetings. Will not turn away a veteran who cannot pay.
- Commissioner Reuter – this sounds like a program that is needed, a critical need for men.
- Chairman Tyler asked Pastor Jones to send the weekly meeting schedule to Denise, who will forward to Commissioners.

Chairman Tyler called on the Subcommittees for Reports

### **Homeless Veterans**

Commissioner Reuter gave the report – it is cold and there are not enough shelter beds. Has not found any unhoused veterans. More HUDVASH vouchers are needed. Forty more veteran housing units are being developed at Perry Point VAMC.

### **Incarcerated Veterans**

Commissioner Macri gave the report – met with the Secretary of Public Safety. Have not been able to meet with Education contact at Public Safety yet. Also met with Harford County Commission.

- Commissioner Reuter asked about the COVID impact on facilities. Response: Significant. Response for vaccine acceptance has been less than

100% for both inmates and staff. Commissioner Macri has volunteered to vaccinate those at Hagerstown and Cumberland facilities.

### **Combating Substance Misuse Impacting Maryland's Veterans and Their Families**

Commissioner Macri gave the report – Subcommittee meets regularly. They have now met with staff at the VA Medical Centers in Baltimore, DC and Martinsburg. Martinsburg currently has a waiting list for in-patient treatment. The Subcommittee has submitted an interim report and it has been provided to Commissioners. Easterseals is a suggested treatment alternative, if VA treatment is not available. Serving Together also maintains a list of non-profits which provide treatment. Believe there is value in having Maryland Department of Health and Contractors ask if the individual has served upon intake. Request of the Secretary to seek a joint meeting/summit with the Maryland Department of Health. Everymind has spearheaded a survey.

- Commissioner Reuter suggested this question should be required to be asked by all contractors/grant recipients. Response: It would be great if more of us would interact with various organizations and ask what they are doing for veterans?
- Commissioner Davis said report was terrific. What is the number of veterans dealing with substance abuse? What lower number are we shooting for to show improvement? Response: 21 million vets nationwide, with only 1/3 of veterans seeking VA care. Transportation is an issue. Some vets don't identify as veterans.
- Cynthia Cavalieri said the Subcommittee would include the spreadsheet in the final report.
- Dana Burl will follow-up with information regarding Suicide Prevention and the Maryland Department of Health's work.
- Commissioner Macri suggested the second state veterans home include behavioral health services.

Chairman Tyler called on Commissioners for any Round-Robin reports. As time is limited, provide updates if you have them.

- Commissioner Killebrew – noted the passing of Brigadier General Charles McGee at 102. He is working with Senator Patterson on SB0005 to establish Tuskegee Airmen Commemoration Day in Maryland. Also asked if there had been any review of the length of incarceration for veterans. No response noted.
- Commissioner Moore – sufficient funds have been raised for the restoration of the Peace Cross. The Dedication is planned for Veterans Day 2022. On 12/3 the American Legion held a National Security Briefing and Lt. Colonel Kimberly Myers of Space Force gave a briefing. He has completed his annual ethics filing.
- Commissioner Reuter – PVA held an in-person Christmas party just before the last surge. Preparing for Hill Business in March.

- Commissioner Rosas – wonders how to initiate a study of service members returning from deployment to determine the needs of that particular subgroup.
- Commissioner Macri – identified herself as the Commissioner representing Maryland District 8. The federal government will soon be supplying four free COVID tests. You may order them at [www.covidtests.gov](http://www.covidtests.gov)
- Commissioner Collins – the Fleet Reserve Association in Annapolis is a very active organization. The FRA Legislative Committee has plans to visit the Maryland General Assembly. They support additional exemption from state taxes on retirement pensions. She is a VSO for the FRA. She has been noticing a lot of retirements and noted it has been twenty years since 9/11.
- Commissioner Davis – the Testimonial Dinner celebration the VFW State Commander Mr. James F. Wade, Sr., and the VFW Auxiliary State President Ms. Cheri Brown will be holding in Annapolis, Maryland on March 19, 2022. Ticket prices for the dinner are \$50.00 per person. The Testimonial Dinner will be held at the DoubleTree Hotel in Annapolis, Maryland. Room rate for the DoubleTree for those desiring a room is \$106.00 per night.
- Commissioner Perry announced that former Delegate Tiger Davis' mother had passed away and there was an upcoming Memorial service.
- Commissioner Childs – the AMVETS Department of Maryland Annual Banquet is scheduled for April 30<sup>th</sup> and the Convention is scheduled for June 4<sup>th</sup>.
- Commissioner Hansen – KN95 Masks are currently available through the Dorchester County Health Department and may be available in other counties.

Chairman Tyler wished everyone a Happy & Healthy New Year

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