

**Maryland Veterans Commission Meeting Minutes**

**Tuesday, April 15, 2025**

Reveille Grounds

1401 Severn Street, Building C, Suite C250

Baltimore, MD 21230

Chairman Tyler called the meeting to order at 10:33 am

Vice Chairman Moore led the invocation and Pledge of Allegiance.

Commissioner Reuter made a motion to approve October minutes. Motion was seconded and passed.

Chairman Tyler introduced guests attending:

- Heather Geraldes, DVMF Maryland Trust Fund Executive Director
- Lindsay Livingston, DVMF Director, Veteran & Military Family Programs
- Roslyn Jones, DVMF Women Veterans/Inclusion Program Manager
- Tiffany Young, DVMF, Communications Director
- Morgan Murphy, DVMF Director, Intergovernmental & Legislative Affairs (Virtual)
- Jessica LeFave, VA Deflection Committee
- Alice Ford, US VA Vet Center
- Pinky Uttayaya-Andrews, Military Spouse Board Member, Reveille Grounds
- Rick Reed, Maryland's Commitment to Veterans (Virtual)
- Stan Seidel, Intergovernmental Subcommittee, VA Deflection Committee
- Jason Marshall, Serving Together
- Jacob Williams (virtual)
- Earl Lindsay (virtual)
- Audrey Moore, guest of Vice Chairman

Commissioners absent: Childs, Hardebeck, Killebrew, Rosas, Shiffrin, Spiegel, and Thornton

The Chairman called on Pinky Uttayaya-Andrews from Reveille Grounds for her Welcome to the facility.

Chairman Tyler called on Deputy Secretary Cohen for his presentation:  
Deputy Secretary Cohen –

Good morning. It is good to see all of the Commissioners and guests here today. Welcome to those attending virtually.

**Maryland Veterans Trust Fund:**

- This calendar year, we have disbursed \$302,531.93 through our individual grant program to support 52 Maryland military households.

- We have a vacant grant specialist position and are working on our hiring plan.
- We put our partner grant program on hold to focus on individual needs, as we are seeing an increase in applicants due to increased unemployment.
- We are formalizing our partnerships through a program called "Mission Support" and starting a pilot with VSOs and community-based organizations in July. These agencies will directly refer and support individual applicant success in our program.

#### **Charlotte Hall Veterans Home:**

- Charlotte Hall: We are in the process of obtaining a vendor to develop a facility plan for the home which will eventually be used to construct a modern, state of the art veterans home using the VA Small Home design that we will be using at Sykesville. · 2024  
Average Occupancy: 57%
- 47% of the population is between the ages of 70-79
- Population includes 13 female veterans & 30 female spouses
- 93% of the veteran population served during wartime
- Average Daily Census 272
- HVAC system has been replaced in all common areas of the home. Removed old equipment and replaced with new.
- Memorial Day Ceremony will be held on May 26, 2025 at 11:00am

#### **Next State Homes:**

- Sykesville: Construction drawing will be completed by 30 June. We are waiting to see if the VA State Home Construction Grant Program has enough money to fund their \$117 M share of the \$190M project (right now they only have \$160 M to fund \$1.2 B worth of projects). If so, we should be able to move forward with procuring a contractor to construct the building.
- Perry Point: We are in the process of obtaining a Letter of Instruction (LOI) from the Perry Point VA to lease land to construct a home behind the medical center. The home will be next to the future Community Living Center (CLC).

#### **Cemetery:**

- Soon we will receive ownership of 52 Acres from the former Rosewood State Hospital to expand our Garrison Forest cemetery.
- There will be no Unaccompanied Veterans Honors Ceremonies this month, as we have not been notified of any unaccompanied Veterans. The next date reserved for Unaccompanied burials will be July 25th,
- Memorial Day Ceremonies will take place at all cemeteries on May 26th, with the exception of the Eastern Shore cemetery, which will be held on May 30th.
- There will also be ceremonies at the WWII Memorial, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and for the first time in 7 years, there will be a ceremony at The Korean War Memorial - the staff and students at Towson University's Veterans Center will be organizing the ceremony.

- Crownsville Veterans Cemetery Administration Building has been remodeled to create private space for speaking with the office secretary when providing sensitive information.
- Garrison Forest's reception area has been remodeled with new flooring and new furniture.

#### **Update on Women Veterans Memorial:**

- This Commission has asked the status of the Women Veterans Memorial, since the Commission work concluded and the report was submitted.
- We followed up with Delegate Bagnall's office for an update.
  - Given the current fiscal situation, Del. Bagnall is working with Dept. of Planning to explore the possibility and process for non-profit funding & operation of the memorial. The Department of Planning is already responsible for a number of military monuments in Maryland.
  - The Department of Planning is open to adding the memorial to their inventory of military memorials.
  - Delegate Bagnall/her staff will follow-up after the session.

#### **Communications:**

- We have a new Communications Director, Tiffany Young, who has joined the team.
- Phase three of the website design will be starting soon.

#### **Military Family Programs:**

- April is the Month of the Military Child and we have partnered with multiple organizations for events such as the Army/Navy Lacrosse Game Tailgate, an event for military families in Frederick and discounts to shows.
- Check the DVMF website for more information.

#### **Benefits Program:**

- For this fiscal year beginning July 1st, 4,203 claims have been submitted to USDV for adjudication. This outpaces the claims submitted for April of last year.
- Monetary awards for this fiscal year are \$39,973,720 - which also outpaces this time last year.
- Granted claims running at 96% approval rate year to date with 4,432 claims granted and 186 denied.
- We will be opening an outreach site at Aberdeen Proving Ground beginning April 23<sup>rd</sup>. Office hours at APG will be 8-3 every other Wednesday. If demand warrants, we will look at providing outreach weekly.

#### **Q&A**

- Commissioner Reuter asked if the planned state Veterans Home at Perry Point would have a view of the water. Response, not sure, but will check. Bob Finn, reports yes, the building should have a water view.
- Commissioner Reuter also asked if the cemetery program will accept Veterans from all states. Response: Yes.
- Commissioner Collins talked about the proposed Women's Memorial and invited Ross and Morgan to a meeting on May 1<sup>st</sup> with the Maryland Military Coalition to discuss. They are considering forming a non-profit to raise funds.
- Commissioner Davis also asked about the cemetery legislation. Response: Reciprocity is required by the federal government. Veterans could have live in any state.

The Chair called on Lindsay Livingston for any update: DVMF has provided a button for each Commissioner to recognize April as the Month of the Military Child.

Deputy Secretary Cohen added the Interagency Council on Homelessness reports Veteran Homelessness has declined 34% between 2015 – 2024. SFVF and HUD-VASH have been driving this decrease.

- Commissioner Foxworth commented on what is happening in DC with federal staffing. They check with federal partners all the time. So far, they are not seeing an impact on claims processing.
- Commissioner Davis recently attended the Governor's roundtable discussion. No new policy was announced.

Morgan Murphy provided a legislative update.

- Claims Shark legislation did not pass. There was no vote in the Senate.
- Commissioner Bowers asked what we can do to better support Veterans issues receiving attention in the General Assembly. You are the best advocates. Turn out, contact legislators, be the squeaky wheel. State VSOs may not have Legislative Directors. What is your organization doing? VSOs can support the Maryland Military Coalition.
- Morgan – outside organizations are important. The Department cannot lobby, but VSOs can
- Claims Shark legislation did not pass because of a deficit of lobbying. Lobbying should continue through the interim. Start planning now for next year's legislative session.
- Slides from the legislative presentation were provided to the Commissioners.

Chairman Tyler called on Denise Nooe for her report:

Denise Nooe –

- Reminded Guests and Commissioners attending in-person to please sign in
- Mileage has increased to \$.70 per mile. New mileage forms are being provided. Please sign, add your ID number and return to Denise.

- Ethics filings were due at the beginning of April. If you have not filed yet, please do so as soon as possible.
- Memorial Day is coming up. Thank you to those who have agreed to accept events.
- I will be out for two weeks. This will delay getting the minutes to you, and also the first newsletter in May will be delayed until May 5<sup>th</sup>.

The Chairman called on Jessica Lefave to present on the VA Deflection Committee –

#### Q&A

- Stan Seidel added the Deflection Committee is pre-Veterans Court. They want to intercede before the Veteran ever reaches the court process.
  - Vice Chairman Moore added that Stan Seidel had been a Commissioner on the Veterans Commission for ten years.
- Commissioner Davis asked about services for dishonorably discharged Veterans. Response: they partner with organizations who can serve Veterans who have that type of discharge.
- Commissioner Reuter talked about the categories of discharges.
- Commissioner Bowers mentioned that TBU and PTSD have contributed to these types of discharges.
- Commissioner Davis said he has heard there is no transition assistance for dishonorably discharged Veterans. Commissioner Bowers replied they are scheduled to go through the Transition Assistance Program, but it may be virtual.
- Chairman Tyler stated he went to the Maryland Correctional Institute and Veterans there had two concerns:
  - How does the Veterans receive medical care from the VA while in a facility?
  - Finding out date for transition from the facility and receiving VA assistance is difficult.

The Chairman called on Alice Ford for the US Vet Center presentation. There are over 30 Vet Centers and outstations across the country.

#### Q&A

- Vice Chairman Moore asked about funding source. Response: Part of the US VA budget.
- Commissioner Davis asked about psychological services offered by the Vet Center. Are seasoned Mental Health professionals? Response: Providers may start out young as I did, and there are also psychologists. Veterans start with individual sessions and proceed to group sessions, if they wish.
- Commissioner Reuter – at the Baltimore VA Medical Center there is not a single Veteran amongst the social workers.

The Chairman called for the Subcommittee reports:

- Homeless Subcommittee – no report

The Chairman called for the Round Robin portion of the meeting:

- Commissioner Collins – the Maryland Military Coalition will be meeting on May 1<sup>st</sup> at the Museum in Southern Maryland. One of the topics will be the Women's Memorial.
- Commissioner Davis – provided upcoming dates for the VFW Department of Maryland Convention (May 27-30 in Ocean City) and the VFW national Convention (August 9-14 in Columbus, Ohio).
- Commissioner Sabree – attended Operation Annapolis on February 4<sup>th</sup> and lobbied. Also on March 22 the Women's Committee of the Department of Maryland hosted a reception. She will be speaking at the DAV convention.
- Commissioner Macri represents the 8<sup>th</sup> Congressional District and also serves on the Montgomery County Commission. She has been doing the Veterans in Art Program, which supports healing through the Arts. She will send the information on the Japanese American Veterans Association upcoming Memorial Day observance.
- Commissioner Stem – represents the Catholic War Veterans. Carroll County participates in suicide prevention meetings every month – Jessica Chairs. She attended both the Taneytown Welcome Home, as well as the Gilchrist Welcome Home Vietnam Veteran events. Also, the Traveling Memorial Wall is coming to Carroll County. Babylon Vault is the sponsor. Some of the speakers include George Forest and former Senator John Astle.
- Commissioner Blair – he and others from the Marine Corps League went to Buford, SC to Recruit Depot at Paris Island for Graduation week.
- Commissioner Schlesinger – he is also on the Montgomery County Commission. Montgomery County is also trying to start a Veterans court. He attended Operation Benjamin at Arlington – two Jewish service members were buried under a cross emblem, and the marker was changed to a Star of David. One relative who was 102 years old attended the ceremony. Two ceremonies for Memorial Day are coming up – a Pilot will be the keynote speaker at one of them and Stan Seidel will speak at the other.
- Commissioner Bowers represents the 6<sup>th</sup> Congressional District. He thanks DVMF for all they do. He had an uncle who was killed in Vietnam – there is a beautiful memorial in Hagerstown to those lost. There will be a ceremony there on March 29<sup>th</sup>. They are trying to get a helicopter to add to the memorial. They are also looking for an A-10. In Washington County they have not gotten much traction with the advisory committee.
- Commissioner Harris – this is her first meeting. She is active at Charlotte Hall and volunteers at the memory care unit. She also volunteers with Move United – which works with Adaptive Sports. When we are released from the military, we often isolate and Move United helps with that. She also volunteers for the Honor Flights.
- Commissioner Reuter will be attending the ceremony at the Baltimore National Cemetery on Memorial Day. PVA will be going to Capitol Hill in June. In October PVA will sponsor a caregivers retreat in Ocean City.
- Commissioner Holcombe – he is hosting the American Legion ceremony at Baltimore National Cemetery. He thanks the presenters for their presentations.

The Chairman called on Tiffany Young who was seated with the Commissioners:

- Tiffany spoke about the increased social media presence for DVMF and encouraged the Commissioners to follow the Department on Social Media.

Round Robin continued:

- Commissioner Hartman – attended the Vietnam Veteran recognition dinner at the Francis Scott Key Post representing Secretary Woods. There will be a parade in Easton sponsored by VVA. On June 14<sup>th</sup> he will attend the picnic and flag retirement ceremony sponsored by AMVETS. Also, sad to note that The Salisbury Chapter of VVA closed – they could no longer meet the requirement to maintain an active Chapter.
- Commissioner Smith – no report.
- Commissioner Detmer – attending virtually, hoped to attend in-person, but family was exposed to the flu. There is a Veterans Court on the shore. On March 29<sup>th</sup> he attended the Welcome Home event in Chestertown and then on March 30<sup>th</sup> went to the Easton VFW Welcome Home. Spoke with Bob Brown from Harford County, who wants to know who to reach Veterans who are moving into the county. On April 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>, there are two Stand Downs on the shore. He will be attending Memorial Day ceremonies on both 5/26 and 5/30.
- Commissioner Macri – there continues to be a severe shortage of mental health providers to treat Veterans. The program she is working with – Veterans in the Arts has done demonstrations at the British Embassy and at Virginia Tech. Art as Healing for Veterans in Silver Spring is another resource. She is now teaching classes to Vets in Lorton Virginia. She was serving on the VA Women Veterans Advisory Committee, but it has been disbanded. She is doing what she can to improve Women Veterans' health without the benefits of a national support network.

Chairman Tyler wrap up:

- Thank you to today's presenters. Commissioners need to take back today's information to your organizations.
- He attended the Welcome Home event sponsored by Gilchrist.
- He went with Commissioner Foxworth to the Maryland Correctional Institute at Jessup. He hopes the Incarcerated Veterans Subcommittee will reform.
- His term ends in June as Chair. He has been blessed to be on the Commission for 13 years.

Vice Chairman Moore led the Benediction and Salute to the Flag.

Chairman Tyler called for a Motion to adjourn. Meeting was adjourned.