

Maryland Veterans Commission Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, October 21, 2025

100 Community Place
Crownsville, MD 21032

Chairman Bowers called the meeting to order at 10:30 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 Bowers welcomed the Commission and introduced guests attending:

- Acting Secretary Ed Rothstein
- Denise Nooe, Staff to the Commission
- Heather Geraldus, DVMF Maryland Trust Fund Executive Director
- Lindsay Livingston, DVMF Director, Veteran & Military Family Programs
- Roslyn Jones, DVMF Women Veterans/Inclusion Program Manager
- Morgan Murphy, DVMF Director, Intergovernmental & Legislative Affairs (Virtual)
- Mike Kerley, DVMF Staff Officer
- Jeff Nash, Maryland's Commitment to Veterans
- Dr. Tiffany Daniels, VFW, virtual, guest of Commissioner Davis
- Bruce Edwards VFW Department of MD Commander, guest of Commissioner Davis
- Susan Starnes – Maryland National Guard, Integrated Primary Prevention Workforce
- Audrey Moore, guest of Vice Chairman Moore
- Bernadine Blair, guest of Commissioner Blair

Commissioners absent:

- Spiegel

The Chairman announced Denise is retiring. He also talked about the new Outreach/event form and thanked Commissioners who had submitted their activities.

The Chairman called on Acting Secretary Ed Rothstein for his presentation:

- Good Morning, I have prepared remarks, but I forgot my glasses, so I would like to have a discussion with you.
 - He is a Veteran of 30+ years on active duty, serving as the Installation Commander at Ft. Meade for his last Post.
 - This is day 21 or 22 of the government shut down. $\frac{1}{4}$ of federal employees are Veterans and $\frac{1}{4}$ of service members are food insecure. Service members are working for Uber and Door Dash right now to make ends meet.
 - Our role is to serve – One Team, One Fight
 - He spoke with service members at a recent event and many of them only think of the GI Bill when they think of the VA. No one he talked to was receiving other VA benefits.
 - Question from Commander Bruce Edwards – do civilian federal employees understand they might be laid-off or furloughed? Acting Secretary Rothstein offered to share his concern.
 - The Trust Fund is striving to help as many as possible and making efforts to reach out to others.
 - He is humbled to serve as Secretary and has been thinking of the current events strategically and tactically. Each one of these shutdowns is different.
 - Commissioner Reuter -Trust Fund – isn't that a one time only benefit? So if they receive money during the shutdown, they can't come back again? Response: Yes, but staff will refer to other resources.
 - Commissioner Davis – Are we prioritizing Veterans and those who are unemployed. Response: Yes
 - Vice Chairman Moore – even without glasses the Secretary has vision.
 - Chairman Bowers said our goal is to have the Secretary trust us and bring us along/include us in events with the Governor and the Department.

The Chairman called on Denise Nooe

- Denise took roll of the Commissioners. One Commissioners were absent: Spiegel
- Asked all guests and Commissioners to sign-in on the sheet in front of the room.
- Mileage forms -please add your social security number, sign and return them.
- Proclamations – let us know as soon as you can if you need a Proclamation for Veterans Day. For other Proclamations, you may apply directly to the Governor's office – please allow at least 30 days.

- As the Chairman mentioned, I am retiring at the end of the year. I have attended Commission meetings since 1987. I will miss the Commissioners and appreciate all of your kind words.
- Vice Chairman Moore mentioned that we will have a legislative briefing today and an Ethics briefing at the January meeting. The January meeting will be virtual, so please try to attend this important briefing.

Presentation by Kelly Dincau, Manager, Legislative Function, MD Legislative Services (slides and Ms. Dincau's email address were sent out to the Commissioners following the meeting).

Q&A

- Commissioner Davis – How do we know when a bill is approved and signed by the Governor. Also can bills go across a fiscal year? If a bill is signed, it is noted on the bill page. If a bill fails/does not pass it is dead and is not carried over to the next year. A new bill must be introduced.
- Vice Chairman Moore – difference between authorization and appropriation bills. Response: the state process is different from the federal one. There is a Capital budget and an operating budget. BRFA (Budget Reconciliation and Finance Act) is how things are balanced outside the budget bill. There used to be Bond bills which funded local projects, but those have now been rolled in to the budget.
- Commissioner Shiffrin – some bills last year were fixes to change the language from “Armed Service” to “Uniformed Services”. Should that be caught in the legislative office? Response: they can fix obsolete terms without going through new legislation. It may be a lack of knowledge on the part of the bill drafter. You can always contact the legislators.
- Morgan Murphy – as Legislative Director at DVMF, we send best practices information to all legislators.
 - Kelly Dincau asked if that could be sent to her.
- Commissioner Shiffrin asked about the fiscal note and can that be used to kill a bill. What about the benefits of the legislation? Response: the fiscal note must be factual.

Chairman Bowers called on DVMF Benefits Director Phill Munley and told him to take more time if he needed it for his briefing:

- Phil gave an overview of the Benefits program and these updates:
 - We also have some retirements coming up in the Benefits program.
 - VA benefits and the V Health Care side do not share information, so just because you change your address with one – it does not automatically transfer over to the other.

- The Baltimore office is currently closed because of the federal shutdown. The Baltimore DVMF staff cannot get into the building and are working remotely, either at home or in other DVMF offices.
- Commission Reuter asked in the office at the Baltimore VA Hospital is open. Response: No.
- Chairman Bowers asked what the acceptable wait time is to see a DVMF Benefits Specialist. Response: We should be able to have scheduled in 5 days, especially if you are willing to travel to another office.
- Waldorf office will be opening soon, and eventually the Camp Springs office will move to another location.
- Chairman Bowers asked how many offices and staff: 15 office locations and 26 staff
- Phil – Approval rate for claims is 95%
- Commissioner Davis asked on what criteria is the decision made that there is not enough information to support a claim. Response: When there are no medical information or records information to support the claim. We use current law/what is being granted now to help make the decision to pursue a claim.
- Susan Starnes with the Maryland National Guard stated newly returning service members are not always completely honest about everything they were exposed to.
- Commissioner Davis stated, “we were asked if we thought we had any mental illness. Who says yes to that?”. Response: We can file a claim later.
- Chairman Bowers, Why doesn’t the VA get out more to educate on what they do? Reach transitioning service members? If I had known, I might have documented more. The Pact Act has made people think more about exposures.
- Commissioner Macri, You don’t always know what you are exposed to at the time, such as radiation. Also, there is a shortage of mental health professionals at all levels. To fulfill the 30 day requirement, the VA gave her a group mental health appointment. Vets aren’t going to say anything in a group appointment. Women Veterans have unique and specific things that happened to them during their service. Response: At DVMF we will provide a female Benefits Specialist if the Veteran requests it. Also, if we think a case might be reversed on appeal, we will take on the claim.
- Commissioner Collins – Older Veterans do not have the records they need. Is there any quicker or better way to get these claims resolved? Response: It is a frustrating process for all. The State of Maryland has DD-214s from October of 1974, if the service member agreed to have them sent. DVMF will reach out to the VA to see what records that agency has, Look into the VA BIRLS program or help Veteran make a records request.

- Chairman Bowers – VA is in the process of digitizing all Veterans records.
- Commissioner Ottenwaelder – I retired in 2019. I went to Maryland VA and was told I did not have a claim. I went somewhere else and claim was approved. That turned him off from DVMF. Response: Any claim submitted goes through an internal review, by the area supervisor. The Commissioner has worked with Jodi Satterfield since in the Salisbury office and she also refers to local resources. Response: All Benefits Specialists are asked to develop their own local area resources.
- Phil Munley – Works with the US VA to schedule claims clinics four times per year. They have stopped for this year – the last claims clinic was canceled due to the government shutdown. Many Veterans who are in the 70 to 80 percent range come in wanting to get to 100%. We discourage them to pursue this, if they have no additional medical evidence, because the compensation rate can also be reduced. He has seen a number of reductions in recent months.

Charman Bowers called on the Commissioners for the Round Robin portion of the meeting:

NOTE: Some Commissioners submitted written reports to the Chairman of their activities over the last three months. These reports are not reprinted here, as that would make the Minutes extremely long, but those reports have been saved with the minutes at DVMF.

- Commissioner Thornton – former American Legion Department Chair, former Vice Chair of the Veterans Commission, Korean War Veteran. Just had a birthday – is 92 years old.
- Commissioner Holcombe – submitted his written report to the Chairman. Added that the Four Frenchmen ceremony is coming up, also that he will be attending several Veterans Day events.
- Commissioner Reuter – No Homeless Veterans Committee Report. Due to the shut-down does not have A VA report.
- Commissioner Blair – Marine Corps League Vets travel to Paris Island for graduation week. New graduating recruits are told to register with the VA.
- Commissioner Macri – submitted a written report to the Chair. She is on the Task Force for the responsible use of psychedelic medication. They will be voting on the final report next week. They are not advocating for legalization, but simple possession should not be a felony. There is a huge difference in safety between the use of cannabis and psychedelic medications. She also serves on the Montgomery County Veterans Commission. Serving Together now is supporting a Women Veterans collaborative. Warrior Canine Connection has named a dog in training for Commissioner Macri.

- Commissioner Foxworth – represents TREA. Also serves on the Howard County Commission for Veterans & Military Families. He attended the Veterans Expo in September and spoke to elementary school students on Career Day. He also went to Jessup Correctional facility to talk with the Incarcerated Veterans organization there.
- Commissioner Childs – will be submitting his written report. He is currently a furloughed federal employee. He is also the new State Commander of AMVETS. He is trying to increase membership, but currently he is the youngest member of the organization in Maryland.
- Commissioner Perry – represents NABVETS which is one of the smaller VSOs in size. Maryland MABVETS started a foundation to raise money for scholarships for Morgan and Coppin.
- Commissioner Collins represents the Fleet Reserve Association (FRA). She will be organizing and supporting the Veterans Day ceremony for the City of Annapolis. She will read the Governor's Proclamation at the ceremony. Delbert Ferrell will be the keynote speaker. FRA will offer a complimentary lunch after the ceremony. She likes the report form the Chair developed for Commissioners to submit their report prior to the meeting and which asks for comments about DVMFs programs. She was assisting a Veteran who applied to the Trust Fund, but he does have additional paperwork to submit. She attended the Maryland Military Coalition (MMC) listening session yesterday and there were some other Commissioners who attended. Update on the Women Veterans Memorial: there will be a conference call next Monday with MMC, the leadership of the Museum and Del. Bagnall's office.
- Commissioner Davis – the VFW has elected a female National Commander. He just received his flu vaccination and COVID vaccination at Walter Reed. They are available now. He will be at the VA hospital in DC on Veterans Day with other members of his organization to volunteer. He will be on Senator Alsobrooks Academy Review Board.
- VFW Department Commander Bruce Edwards – In July the VFW presented medals to Korean War Veterans. He will be doing several events on Veterans Day.
- Commissioner Ottenwaelder – he is retired from the Coast Guard and was appointed to the At Large seat on the Commission. He recently attended the Worcester County Veterans Memorial Golf Tournament. He has learned that Diakonia in Ocean City has been helping Veterans on the lower eastern shore. There is a challenge moving homeless Veterans on the shore to housing, so the organization Veterans Moving Veterans is helping.
- Commissioner Stem – represents the Catholic War Veterans. She attended a good event on Saturday in Keymar at Good Intentions Farm which provides equine therapy with Clydesdales. Carroll County is becoming very active in suicide prevention. She will be going to Philadelphia for the 250th Anniversary of the Marine Corps. She also requested a Proclamation.

- Commissioner Hartman – representing the Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA). VVA held the National Convention in New Orleans. While there he and others went to Camp Selby. Frederick County is now funding a fully accredited service officer, who will meet Veterans at the Veterans Service Center or make house calls. VVA Chapter 304 conducted a POW/MIA Day and he read the Secretary's Citation. He also presented the Citation for the Navy Anniversary. The Post serves dinner on Veterans Day to all Veterans and he will read the Veteran's Day Proclamation. They will also take 30 dinners to the nursing home.
- Commissioner Sabree – She represents women veterans on the Commission and she is also the DAV State Department Commander. She has been asking DAV Chapter Commanders to help Veterans in need with their line-item funds. It is time to ask corporations to help. Her last speaker was the Director of MCVET. There has been a deep dive in donations to non-profits like MCVET. Women Veterans took three boxes of supplies to Perry Point.
- Commissioner Unger – he has a short report as he was just appointed last week. He was appointed to the Second Congressional seat.
- Commissioner Shiffrin
 - MOAA is supporting the Legislator of the Month luncheon next month
 - MMC is hosting a listening session prior to the legislative session. MOAA will be prepared to testify. They support:
 - Protecting Veterans from claims sharks
 - Expanding the Veterans Trust Fund eligibility to include reservists
 - Improve the portability of professional licensing
 - Maryland Women's Memorial
 - He gave a report on local chapter events
 - He will be on Delegate Rogers scholarship review panel
- Commissioner Viramontes – She is the Service Officer at American Legion Post 175 in Severna Park, and she offers information sessions. They have been raising money Toys for Tots and for Patriot Acres. Volunteers from the Post recently served dinner at Baltimore Station. They will be holding a Veterans Day ceremony at the Post – at the ceremony, the WWII Japanese guns that have been restored will be unveiled.
- Vice Chairman Moore – Presenting two Proclamations on Veterans Day, as well as another one at a ceremony at Wiltshire Estates Retirement Community. University of Maryland is holding a Veterans Reception where they will award scholarships, followed by the football game against Michigan. Greenbelt Post 132 and the Laurel Post are partnering with Rolling Thunder and the USO to hand out turkey dinners to service members.
- Commissioner Schlesinger – participated in Dining Out program. Requested two Proclamations for Veterans Day. Also will hold the flag at Arlington on Veterans Day.
- Commissioner Killebrew – concerned for support of homeless Veterans and also widows who need support. The Tuskegee Airman East Coast Chapter now has

a recruiter. 16 students have completed the flight training program. Sergeants Association with the help of the DAV is holding claims assistance three days per week. For retirees – new ID cards will be available in December. Reminder for prostate cancer, be checked and keep an eye on your PSA levels.

- Commissioner Detmer – will send his written report to the Chairman. As a caseworker for Congressman Harris, he hears about the scarcity of resources for Veterans on the shore. He echoes Commissioner Ottenwaelder that there are services, but need to get the word out. He encourages the formation of one or more county or local Veterans Commissions. The challenge is connecting those resources to the Veteran and he hopes to facilitate that. He represented the Governor and the Secretary at an event honoring a Revolutionary War soldier. A headstone was place at a church in remembrance of the soldier. Today is the anniversary of his first fire fight.
- Chairman Bowers
 - Asked the Commissioners to sing Happy Birthday to Commissioner Thornton
 - Reminder to all to read the DVMF newsletter – you will learn a lot about the Department and upcoming events.
 - 250th Marine Corps birthday will be celebrated with a cake cutting at the State House
 - The A-10 built in Hagerstown flew into the Hagerstown airport for its last flight. Built by Fairchild.
 - November 11th he will be speaking in Prince George's County
- Commissioner Sabree mentioned a claims clinic scheduled in Towson.

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

Chairman Bowers called for a Motion to adjourn. Commissioner Reuter motioned for the meeting to adjourn. Seconded.

Meeting was adjourned.