



Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Affairs Commission

Meeting Minutes 11 July 2018

I. Call to Order - Rudy Bourg, Acting-Chairman

The July 11, 2018 meeting of the Veterans Affairs Commission was called to order by Acting Chairman Rudy Bourg at 10:04 am. The meeting was held at the Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs (LDVA) Administrative Office, 602 N. Fifth Street, Baton Rouge. The meeting opened with the pledge of allegiance recited in unison. Roll call of members was conducted by Holly Talley.

Commissioners present: Rudy Bourg, Richard O'Brien, William Detweiler, Mary Mills, Deron Santiny, Ryan Beissinger, Ray Bass, Sulanda Lonnette, and Paul Herman.

LDVA Staff: Joey Strickland, Secretary; Homer Rodgers, Undersecretary; Julie Baxter-Payer, Executive Counsel; Lisa Bruhl, Deputy Assistant Secretary/Veterans Homes; Alex Juan, Communications Director; Vanessa Melancon, Deputy Assistant Secretary/Benefits; Bill Dixon, State Approving Agency (SAA) Director; Holly Talley, Executive Management Officer; English Josey, Internal Auditor; Dustin Guy, Human Resources Director; Billy Robbins, Cemeteries Program Director; Barry Robinson, Capital Area Regional Manager/Training Officer; and Charmagne Scott, Confidential Assistant; Stephanie Wade, Chief Financial Officer; English Josey, Internal Audit Manager.

II. Introductory Remarks- Secretary Joey Strickland

Secretary Strickland welcomed Commissioners. He gave an overview of the status of the department. At this time, LDVA will have no cut to its budget thanks to the support of Veterans. LDVA is continuing to work to insure that indigent Veterans have a place to be laid to rest. There are ongoing construction and renovation projects taking place at each of the homes and cemeteries. The groundbreaking for the Jennings Cemetery is expected to take place in the Fall.

III. Approval of March 21, 2018 Minutes

The March 21, 2018 meeting minutes were distributed to the Commissioners for review prior to the meeting. A few corrections were needed for correct spellings of names of the Commissioners. There were no objections to the minutes with spelling corrections to be made. A motion was made by Mr. Hermann, seconded by Mr. Detweiler, to approve the

minutes as distributed with the correction of misspelled names. The motion passed unanimously.

V. Division Reports

Human Resources (HR). The standard handout showing vacancies within the Administrative Program and the five State Veterans' Homes (SVHs) as of June 28, 2018. Vacancies for the Administrative staff total only 3 vacancies and 47 total vacancies within the Homes. The vacancies were in: Admin-Contact Assistance- 3 VAC's (Iberia, Lafayette, and Rapides). Mr. Guy noted the vacancies at the Veterans Homes in the nursing division are 93% filled. As part of the State Civil Service Classified Workforce Compensation Plan implemented in January, employees are receiving annual adjustments for the first time in several years on July 15, 2018. Annual Affirmative Action Plan submitted and accepted by State Civil Service, which demonstrated LDVA's continued commitment to a diversified workforce.

A motion was made by Ms. Mills, seconded by Mr. Santiny to accept the Human Resources report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Fiscal. Stephanie Wade gave overview for Fiscal Department. LDVA has 4.3% of the FY 2017-18 budget remaining. The MFA Fund as of June 26, has disbursements totaling \$105,743.82, leaving \$9,784.18 at the close of FY 2017- 2018.

A motion was made by Mr. Santiny, seconded by Mr. Beissinger to accept the Fiscal report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

State Cemeteries. The standard handout concerning the status of the 4 LDVA Cemeteries was provided to the Commissioners prior to the meeting. Mr. Robbins reported the SE LA Veterans Cemetery in Slidell remains the busiest of the states 4 cemeteries. It has had a total of 248 interments for 2018. The total interments to date for this cemetery is 512 interments in its short time in existence. Plans are well underway for the cemetery in Jennings. Groundbreaking should take place sometime this fall.

With the assistance of Catholic War Veterans, Woman Veterans of Louisiana, and Church Funeral Services in Saint Amant, we have been able to arrange for homeless and indigent veterans to be interred in our veteran's cemeteries. To date in 2018, we have had six veterans interred. The Louisiana State Legislature has given our department \$75,000 to assist in this cause.

Incarcerated Veterans Program. The standard handout concerning the Incarcerated Veterans Program was provided to the Commissioners prior to the meeting. Mr. Robbins and Mr. Robinson serve as the Incarcerated Veterans Liaisons for LDVA. Mr. Robbins reported that there have been visits to many of the prisons in the state. Secretary Strickland, Ted Krumm and Mr. Robbins attended Veterans Court in Covington. On August 23, Mr. Robbins and Mr. Robinson attended the Veterans Summit at Sixty Rayburn Correctional Center. They presented Honor Medals to eligible Veterans that attended the summit.

A motion was made by Mr. Beissinger, seconded by Ms. Lonnelle, to accept the State Cemeteries and Incarcerated Veterans Program reports as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

State Veterans Homes (SVHs). Ms. Bruhl briefed on her standard consolidated report. Also, copies of demographic information for all facilities were provided to the Commissioners. Ms. Bruhl introduced Murphy Haydel as the new RN Program Coordinator to assist Linda Theriot with nursing compliance. Ms. Bruhl highlighted activities at each facility:

Southwest Veterans Home (Jennings):

- Capital Outlay project remains in the Schematic Design: 1) Walk-In-The-Park (Reflections/Alzheimer's Wing Expansion), A meeting was held on Friday June 1 @ 9:00am at the office of Facility Planning & Control to discuss a path forward with the Engineer Firm.
- Capital Outlay project has advance to Advertisement for Bid: 1) HVAC Replacement (128 Attic Units and 73 Hallway Units). A pre-Bid meeting was held at 2:00pm on Thursday June 14th in the Administrative Conference Room at SWLVH.
- During the annual Memorial Day Program on May 25 - U.S. Congressman Clay Higgins awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor to James Bollich of Eunice in recognition of his service and sacrifices. Mr. Bollich is a 96-year-old survivor of the notorious Bataan Death March in World War II.

Louisiana Veterans Home (Jackson):

- Nurse call system- Bid was awarded to John Storm and they are scheduled to start in June.
- Kitchen drainage project – Sienna -Completion date is tentatively July 26 (45 days).
- Water well project- Griner is working on permanent fix to South well and starting the process to abandon the North well.
- Annual CMS survey – deficiency free

Northeast Veterans Home (Monroe):

- Generator project pre-bid 6/15/2018 – engineer, electricians came on-site and determined re-work needed to be completed in design before going forward with bidding process.
- Cooling tower is still in the design phase with FP&C and will be completed FY 18/19.
- The walk – in cooler/freezer project will be completed FY 18/19.
- The main hallway painting project has been completed.
- Active shooter assessment/training by CoverSix 5/24 and Monroe Police Department (SWAT) 5/29 is progressing.
- Camera surveillance system is in FY 19 budget.

Northwest Veterans Home (Bossier City):

- Active shooter in-services done by Bossier Parish Office of Homeland Security & Emergency Preparedness, Bossier Fire Department, & Bossier Police Department. All staff in-serviced on their recommendation.
- Painting projects for facility hallways will pick back up next fiscal year.

Southeast Veterans Home (Reserve):

- Cooling Towers / Closed Loop- project status remains with Facility Planning & Control and the bid has been awarded to ARC Mechanical Contractors. Cooling Tower Manufacture quotes (12) week delivery time. Completion of project estimated to be August/September 2018.
- Surveillance System- Facility received approval and OSP issued notice of PO #2000336677. 96-Camera System to be installed by no later than 6/30/18. Vendor: LA TECH.
- Active Shooter Program- St. John the Baptist Sheriff Dept. will be conducting Part 2 of the in-service program during June/July.

A motion was made by Mr. Hermann, seconded by Mr. Beissinger, to accept the SVHs report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Contact Assistance. The standard handout concerning the status of Contact Assistance was provided to the Commissioners prior to the meeting. Vanessa Melancon reported the Contact Assistance is hard at work ensuring Louisiana's veterans and their dependents are able to access the benefits they have earned. This fiscal year to date, Contact Assistance has processed 120,959 claims and has made 164,877 contacts. We have recently updated the way we capture these metrics so that modern ways of communicating with clients, such as email, are now included.

Military Family Assistance Fund. Mrs. Melancon reviewed the MFA Fund report. The Military Family Assistance (MFA) Fund has been moved to the Benefits Division. Now that all veterans are eligible to apply for MFA grants, the application process relies very heavily on assistance from VACs. The MFA program has evolved into a true veterans' benefit and is now housed with similar programs.

A motion was made by Mr. Santiny, seconded by Ms. Lonnette, to accept the Contact Assistance and MFA Fund reports as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

LA Veterans Honor Medal Program. Ms. Talley reported that a total of 681 Honor Medals have been awarded since January 2018. The Reserve and Jennings Homes have held monthly ceremonies for the new residents. The other 3 homes had put a hold on ceremonies due to concerns of spreading the flu among residents, but have started to begin their ceremonies again.

A motion was made by Mr. Santiny, seconded by Mr. Beissinger, to accept the Military Family Assistance Fund and Honor Medal report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

State Approving Agency. Bill Dixon reported on SAA. The Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs, State Approving Agency (SAA), Veterans Education and Training, has completed its 2018 FY contract. For last year FY2017 the members of the Joint Peer Review Group (JPRG) reviewed the SAA self-evaluation and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) ELR Contracting Officer assessment for FY 2017 contract year. Based on the result of contractual obligations carried out or performed during FY 2017, the VA and JPRG has assigned the SAA a rating of Satisfactory. This is the highest rating an SAA can receive.

A motion was made by Mr. Hermann, seconded by Mr. O'Brien, to accept the State Approving Agency report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Internal Audit. English Josey discussed Audit Projects Conducted in Fourth Quarter, FY 2018: Presented the Fiscal Model for the Risk Based Audit Plan, as required by IIA Standards; Reported on Monthly Resident Aging Balance (March, April and May, 2018); Published an audit of Q2/Q3 transactions of the Resident Trust Funds at each Home; Audited Collections of Parish Assessments for VAC Office Cooperative Agreements; Completed Fieldwork for Imprest Fund at HQ Audit. Report to follow in July; Completed Fieldwork for P-Card Audit of Headquarters. Report to Follow in July.

A motion was made by Mr. Hermann, seconded by Ms. Mills, to accept the Internal Audit report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Executive Counsel Julie Baxter Payer reported that LDVA is working to work on issues that are going on at some of the homes. Ms. Payer also briefed on the legislation from the most recent session and outcomes some of the bills that LDVA was tracking.

A motion was made by Mr. Hermann, seconded by Mr. Santiny, to accept the legal report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Communication/Women Veteran Outreach. LDVA's Communications Department has had several Louisiana Veteran stories picked up and shared by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Those spotlights have helped us pick up new followers, attracted broader audience, and helped solidify our relationship with our Federal counterparts who now look to us for unique content ideas. In March, we helped coordinate and promote "Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day" ceremonies at each of our Veterans homes and a statewide event that Gov. John Bel Edwards attended on March 28. We received a lot of positive feedback from Veterans for those efforts.

Women Veterans Outreach. Ms. Juan continues to support women vets across the state by educating them on resources available to them and helping them to make meaningful connections with one another. She also attended the National Association of State Women Veterans Conference and will be presenting a women vets flash session at the National Association on Mental Illness conference.

A motion was made by Mr. Hermann, seconded by Mr. Beissinger, to accept the Communication and Women Veteran Outreach reports as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

VI. Other Matters

The next meeting of the VA Commission is scheduled for Wednesday, October 10, 2018 at 10:00 am.

VII. Adjournment

There being no further business to be brought before the Veterans Affairs Commission, a motion was made by Mr. Beissinger, seconded by Mr. Hermann, to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed and the meeting adjourned at 12:06 pm.

Chairman Rudolph A. Bourg, Sr.

Secretary Joey Strickland

Date of Approval

Minutes submitted by Holly Talley. Copies of all handouts are filed with the Commission minutes and are available upon request.