



Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Affairs Commission

Meeting Minutes 11 Oct 2018

I. Call to Order – Rudy Bourg, Chairman

The October 11, 2018 meeting of the Veterans Affairs Commission was called to order by Chairman Rudy Bourg at 10:05 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, Deron Santiny, Ryan Beissinger, Ray Bass, Sulanda Lonnette, and Paul Hermann.

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. A moment of silence was held in memory of Ronnie Johnson. Ronnie is the wife of Rayville Cemetery Director Tim Johnson.

III. Approval of July 11, 2018 Minutes

The July 11, 2018 meeting minutes were distributed to the Commissioners for review prior to the meeting. There were no objections to the minutes. A motion was made by Mr. Bass, seconded by Mr. O'Brien, to approve the minutes as distributed. 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 Sept. 26, 2018. Vacancies for the Administrative staff total only 3 vacancies and 56 total vacancies within the Homes. The vacancies were in: Admin-Contact Assistance- 2 VAC's and 1- Admin, Accountant. Mr. Guy noted the vacancies at the Veterans Homes in the nursing division are 92% filled. Excellent HR Full Program CS Audits at Bossier and Jennings; Upcoming audit in October at Reserve.

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

Fiscal. Stephanie Wade gave overview for Fiscal Department. LDVA had 4.1% of the FY 2017-18 budget remaining. The MFA Fund as of Sept 28, has disbursements totaling \$40,907.61. Leaving \$74,620.39 for FY 2019-19.

A motion was made by Mr. Santiny, seconded by Ms. Lonnette 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 770 interments for 2018. Plans are well underway for the cemetery in Jennings. Groundbreaking will take place on November 5. Expected completion date is November 2019.

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 7 visits to prisons in the state since the previous Commission meeting. On September 28, Julie Baxter Payer and Billy met with the Department of Corrections personnel about incarcerated Veterans. LDVA's goal is to contact each Veteran about benefits that they or a family member may be eligible to receive, even while incarcerated. Our main concentration are those Veterans that are close to being released.

A motion was made by Mr. Beissinger, seconded by Mr. Hermann, 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 highlighted activities at each facility:

Southwest Veterans Home (Jennings):

- Walk-In-The-Park (Reflections/Alzheimer's Wing Expansion) – Construction documents have been submitted to Facility Planning & Control (FP&C) and working through design issues.

- HVAC Replacement (128 Attic Units and 73 Hallway Units) - FP&C moving forward with the bid document phase.
- Cooling Tower Replacement - Completed Preliminary Project Form and sent to FP&C.

Louisiana Veterans Home (Jackson):

- Drainage kitchen project –Project completed.
- Water well project- Completion of the remainder of the project is out for bid.
- Rural Water – Continue working on the final stage of connecting to parish water.
- Nurse Call System – New system install has been completed.

Northeast Veterans Home (Monroe):

- The generator project has been awarded and waiting on start date from Facility Planning & Control (FP&C).
- The cooling tower design phase has been completed and sent out for bid process per FP&C.
- Maintenance Department is installing safety rails around the walkway (awning area) surrounding building.

Northwest Veterans Home (Bossier City):

- A statue of a female veteran was donated to the facility and the facility had a dedication ceremony in September held in honor of female veterans who have served past, present, & future.
- Large Louisiana State Trooper cookout event held at the facility. Many State Troopers from parishes all across Northwest Louisiana spent the afternoon with the Veterans. The State Troopers had the event catered by Silver Star Smokehouse who cooked on site.

Southeast Veterans Home (Reserve):

- Cooling Tower Project- Construction scheduled to begin in Mid-October.
- Surveillance System- Project completed with the installation of 96-Cameras throughout the facility.
- Replace HVAC Units - FP&C has authorized to proceed to the Bid Document Phase.
- Capital Outlay Project for the replacement of Cooler/Freezer project to begin in late October 2018.

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

Contact Assistance. We have finalized our contract with VetraSpec, a web-based claims management application. We are working to complete the set-up phase and schedule training for VACs. We look forward to the efficiencies this new system will bring to nearly all aspects of Contact Assistance and Claims.

Military Family Assistance Fund. Mrs. Melancon reviewed the MFA Fund report. The MFA Fund has had expenditures of \$41,218.76 in assisting 22 Veterans and their families to date for FY 2018-19.

A motion was made by Mr. Hermann, seconded by Mr. Santiny, 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 1,204 Honor Medals have been awarded since January 2018. The Reserve and Jennings Homes have held monthly ceremonies for the new residents.

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

State Approving Agency. Cleo Wallace reported on SAA. The LDVA's SAA program evaluates, and either approves or denies, use of the GI Bill at Louisiana colleges, universities, and vocational training facilities to include On-the-Job-Training programs. This includes all institutions of Higher Learning (IHL), Non-College Degree (NDC), Flight School, On-the-Job Training (OJT)/Apprenticeship and License and Certifications. The economic impact of federal benefits paid to Louisiana Veterans and dependents constitutes more than \$150 million annually. The SAA has approval, supervision and compliance survey responsibility for over 250 approved schools and training establishments within the State of Louisiana. Completed Active Facility Count for FY2019 with a grand total of 242 active facilities.

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

Internal Audit. English Josey discussed **Audit Projects Conducted in First Quarter, FY 2019:** Presented the Fiscal Model for the Risk Based Audit Plan, as required by IIA Standards; Reported on Monthly Resident Aging Balance (June, July and August, 2018); Completed Fieldwork for Q4 transactions of the Resident Trust Funds at each Home; Issued Final Audit Report for Imprest Fund at HQ; Issued Final Reports for P-Card Audit of Headquarters and the five Homes.

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

Executive Counsel Julie Baxter Payer reported that LDVA is working on issues that are going on at some of the homes. Ms. Payer also briefed on the LaVetCorps Program and the vision for university and community college campuses in Louisiana. She also briefly discussed the proposed legislation for the upcoming 2019 session.

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

Communication/Women Veteran Outreach. LDVA's Communications Department has been busy. We just completed the updates for our popular LDVA Benefits Booklets. We have ordered 10,000 copies and will be having them shipped to each of our homes, cemeteries, and parish service offices. On Sept. 14, we executed a successful statewide Suicide Prevention Summit that was well-received and appreciated by military memes and supports across the state. On Sept. 30, we hosted the Louisiana Gold Star Families Memorial Monument Dedication Ceremony at the Louisiana Veterans Memorial Park. The Louisiana memorial was the first of its kind in the nation to be placed on state capitol grounds

Women Veterans Outreach. LDVA's Women Veterans Outreach Coordinator continues to support women vets across the state by helping them obtain available resources and connecting them other local Veterans. She's also helped several women Vets in crisis obtain safe housing, clothing, food, and items needed for their children.

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

VII. Adjournment

There being no further business to be brought before the Veterans Affairs Commission, a motion was made by Mr. Hermann, seconded by Mr. Bass, to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed and the meeting adjourned at 12:24 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.