



## Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Affairs Commission

### Meeting Minutes May 22, 2019

#### **I. Call to Order – Rudy Bourg, Chairman**

The May 22, 2019 meeting of the Veterans Affairs Commission was called to order by 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. Prayer led by Commissioner Paul Hermann and a moment of silence to remember past Commissioner Bill Detweiler. Roll call of members was conducted by Holly Talley.

Commissioners present: Rudy Bourg, Richard O'Brien, Mary Mills, Deron Santiny, Ryan Beissinger, Ray Bass, Sulanda Lonnette, Mike Russell and Paul Hermann.

LDVA Staff: Julie Baxter-Payer, Chief of Staff; Dustin Guy, Deputy Chief of Staff; Lisa Bruhl, Deputy Assistant Secretary/Veterans Homes; Vanessa Melancon, Deputy Assistant Secretary/Benefits; Cleo Wallace, State Approving Agency (SAA) Director; Holly Talley, Executive Management Officer; English Josey, Internal Auditor; Billy Robbins, Cemeteries Program Director; Barry Robinson, Capital Area Regional Manager/Training Officer; Stephanie Wade, Chief Financial Officer; English Josey, Internal Audit Manager. Joey Strickland, Secretary; Alex Juan, Communications Director and Jennifer Hahn, Gold Star Coordinator joined the meeting late upon returning from the State Capitol.

Guests Present: Zoe O'Brien, Military Order of the Purple Heart Auxiliary; Bobbie Ragsdale, Fisher House; Tony Betts, American Legion.

#### **II. Introductory Remarks- Secretary Joey Strickland**

Julie Baxter Payer gave introductory remarks in the absence of Secretary Strickland, who was attending a meeting at the Capitol at the request of the Governor. Ms. Payer gave a brief overview of the changes in the department following the retirement of Undersecretary Homer Rodgers.

#### **III. Approval of October 11, 2018 Minutes**

The October 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.

Hermann, seconded by Mr. Santiny, to approve the minutes as distributed. The motion passed unanimously.

## **V. Division Reports**

**Legislation.** LDVA has hired a Gold-Star Coordinator, Jennifer Hahn. She will serve as the point of contact for Gold Star Families in Louisiana and help to coordinate/develop programs within LA; an update to LDVA's Administration Rules and Guidelines is set to begin at the end of June; the department is tracking a number of bills this legislative session, including the Veterans First Business Initiative.

**Fiscal.** Stephanie Smith gave overview for Fiscal Department. LDVA had 23.7% of the FY 2018-19 budget remaining. The MFA Fund as of April 4, has disbursements totaling \$95,925.00. Leaving \$19,603.00 for FY 2018-19.

**LaVetCorps.** Dr. Nikki Bray Clark briefed that LaVetCorps is on track to open 30 veteran resource centers in August 2019. All 30 participating campuses (see attached) have an approved site application and have been sent a campus contract and site invoice for the \$2500 annual site fee. Applications for the LaVetCorps Navigators are currently being taken. LaVetCorps Navigators will be trained August 4-7, 2019 in Baton Rouge at LDVA headquarters and will be on their assigned campus for the opening of the 2019-20 academic year.

**Veterans Memorial Park and Arsenal Museum.** Holly Talley briefed on the operation of the Louisiana Veterans Memorial Park and the reopening of the Arsenal Museum. The museum was officially reopened in February 2019 and is open on Thursdays from 9 am-3 pm. It will be staffed by Holly and volunteers.

## **VI. Other Matters**

### **Guest Briefings:**

**Fisher House.** Bobbie Ragsdale briefed on the proposed plans to open a Fisher House in the New Orleans area. Louisiana is currently #3 on the waiting list. It would be located on South Galvez Street in New Orleans on the VA Hospital's campus. A potential 2<sup>nd</sup> house would be located off campus in NOLA in the future. There is also consideration for future houses to be located in the Alexandria and Shreveport areas near the VA Hospitals.

### **At-Large Commissioner Briefings:**

**Ryan Beissinger- Exxon Mobile Veterans Group.** The Veterans groups hope to serve and be advocates for Veterans at Exxon, as well as in the Veteran Community. They partner with numerous community groups to participate in outreach projects. Ryan has been asked to serve on Mayor Broome's Veterans Council to discuss Veterans issues within East Baton Rouge Parish.

**Deron Santiny- Lafayette Area Veterans Groups and Coalition.** Through the coalition they are fighting for better care for Veterans. The Wounded War Heroes is working to provide peer support in the Lafayette area/community through activities such as fishing, hunting, etc. Also, working with the Veterans Center located on campus of the University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

**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. Bourg, to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed and the meeting adjourned at 11:24 am.

\_\_\_\_\_  
*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.*