



Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs Meeting Summary Minutes – April 21st, 2015

I. Call to Order & Introductions:

Jerry Godwin, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Commission on Veterans Affairs (CVA), which was held at Easter Seals. Jerry asked for all present to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance and to remain standing for a moment of silence for all of those who have given their lives and those who have been wounded for our country in the different conflicts in which our country has been engaged. A POW/MIA Empty Chair is placed at all official meetings of the Commission as a physical symbol of the thousands of American POW/MIAs still unaccounted for from all wars and conflicts involving the United States of America.

II. Approval of Minutes:

A motion was made to approve the March, 2015 Meeting Summary Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and the motion was unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva.

III. Introduction of New Officers:

Jerry introduced the newly appointed officers for the Commission. The County Executive has appointed Dan Bullis to Chair and Randy Stone to Vice Chair.

IV. Remarks – George W. Owings, III, Secretary of Veterans, Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs

Secretary Owings was sworn into office February 21st. Bio: <http://veterans.maryland.gov/secretary/>.

He discussed the current status of the [2015 Regular Session](#) with the Maryland General Assembly. The report represents highlights from the 2015 Legislative Session with impact on our military service members, veterans, and their families. (Bills highlighted in yellow represent legislation passed and affecting members military service members, veterans, and their dependents.) A few bills that were passed include:

- [SB0592 / HB0482 – Income Tax – Subtraction Modification – Military Retirement Income – Individuals at Least 65 Years Old](#) - Increases from \$5,000 to \$10,000 a subtraction modification under the State income tax for specified military retirement income for individuals who are at least 65 years old on the last day of the taxable year. Individuals under 65 can still apply for a \$5,000 exception.
- [HB0799 – Higher Education – Veterans and Dependents Nonresident Tuition](#) - Requires each public institution of higher education to comply with federal law exempting specified veterans of the U.S. Armed Forces, and their spouses and children, from paying out-of-state tuition at a public institution of higher education.
- [HB0466 – Transportation – Dedication of Structures \(Hero’s Highway Act\)](#) - Requires the Department of Transportation to establish a process by which a member of the General Assembly, another elected official, or any member of the general public may request that the Department dedicate a bridge or another appropriate structure under the jurisdiction of the Department to a specified deceased member of the armed forces or an emergency responder who died in the line of duty.
- [SB0671 / HB0846 – Motor Vehicle Administration – Commercial Driver’s License – Program for Veterans and Service Members \(Troops to Trucks\)](#) - Requires the Motor Vehicle Administration to establish a program to assist veterans and members of the military transitioning out of military service to obtain a commercial driver's license; and requires the Administration, as part of the program, to waive a specified skills test for specified program participants and coordinate and consult with specified entities to explore the feasibility of providing a commercial driver's license training course on military bases in the State.

Secretary Owings noted that [SB0381 – State Government – Display of the POW/MIA Flag on State Building Grounds](#) did not pass. This bill would have required the Secretary of General Services and the Secretary of Transportation to cause the POW/MIA flag to be flown on the grounds of all State buildings under their control whenever the flag of the United States is flown. This bill will be reintroduced next year for approval.

The Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) maintains five state cemeteries. The MDVA cemetery system is the most active veteran cemetery system in the United States. MDVA does approximately 3,200 burials per year. The Eastern Shore and Rocky Gap cemeteries will be expanding ground burial spaces and pre-placed crypts. The expansion is federally funded.

Secretary Owens reported that 425 of the 454 beds are currently filled. View [Charlotte Hall Veterans Home Quick Fact Sheet](#).

Prince Georges County has the highest veteran population in Maryland. Montgomery County has the second highest. MDVA has 11 Veteran Service Officers (VSO) that have offices located in Baltimore, Bel Air, Camp Springs, Charlotte Hall, Cumberland, Easton, Frederick, Hagerstown, Rockville, and Salisbury. Montgomery County currently only has a VSO available on Fridays. MDVA is actively hiring another VSO for the Prince Georges County office and then they will hire a full-time VSO for Montgomery County. Secretary Owings reported that Carroll County has hired two VSOs, which were trained by the VA.

Secretary Owings reported that two colleges currently have VSOs on site. Towson University is staffed by Patrick Young, Coordinator of Veterans Services and is in charge of the daily operation of the Veterans Center. Mr. Young, a veteran, is a certified VSO and is a member of the Maryland Commission on Veterans Affairs. Mr. Young was also recently sworn into the Maryland House of Delegates in January, 2015.

The MDVA will be reviewing 18 Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) that were signed by colleges and universities years ago regarding veterans service officers stationed on campuses. The MDVA wants to connect with veterans who are returning to civilian life and many returning veterans are attending school. It is important to assist them with getting their benefits.

Secretary Owings reported that Maryland has the highest unemployment rate for veterans in the country. Jane questioned that as the a few years ago we were told that we had one of the lowest rates. This statistic was questioned and Secretary Owings will report back to the Commission with the latest numbers.

MDVA has sent 550 Welcome Home packets to returning veterans this year and processes over 15,000 claims per year.

The MDVA website is being updated continuously. Dana Hendrickson, Director, MDVA Outreach and Advocacy Program, reported that she will be developing a way to maintain a web database of veteran friendly businesses throughout the State of Maryland. This list is currently stored in an Excel spreadsheet. Dana noted that the Commission can contact her with event information, which she can share via the MDVA e-mail newsletter. She encouraged Commissioners to sign up for the e-mail newsletter. Commissioners can subscribe online or e-mail Dana at dana.hendrickson@maryland.gov.

Operation Hire: MD's 100 Day Hiring Challenge began in 2014 and ran from June 1 through September 9. The campaign challenged Maryland employers to incorporate or expand upon established veteran hiring initiatives. The final participant tally totaled 184 State Agencies, local jurisdictions and private sector businesses which hired 361 veterans. Operation Hire will kick off again this July 1st but on a permanent basis. Dana added that she worked with the Community College of Baltimore County's Catonsville Campus to host a two hour lunch and learn employer panel for the student veterans group. She suggested that other colleges and universities host similar events this year. Betsy Luecking, Staff, noted that Montgomery County Government (MCG) will be participating this year. MCG has implemented a non-competitive hiring preference for veterans and people with disabilities, including veterans with disabilities. Since 2012 the County has hired 153 veterans, including 6 veterans with disabilities.

Secretary Owings offered his direct contact number and encouraged Commissioners to contact him with concerns and issues relating to MDVA.

The floor was opened to questions.

Jim Campbell, Commissioner, inquired about the State's Task Force on Military Service Members, Veterans, and the Courts. The Task Force submitted their [report](#) in December, 2013. The Task Force recommended that a veterans court be established at the circuit court level in Prince George's County (PGC). PGC was approved in May, 2014 to establish a veterans court. MDVA was able to locate \$150,000 to fund this initiative. The court is not operational at this time. Baltimore City Judge Weinstein along with several other judges is working to create a veterans docket.

Octavia Dixon, Commissioner, asked about employment programs and hiring of spouses of veterans. Stan Seidel, Easter Seals, noted that the Easter Seals [Veterans Staffing Network](#) provides temp-to-perm, contract, and direct-hire placements for veterans, National Guard, Reserves, wounded warriors, and their spouses.

Chair and Vice Chair Report:

Dan welcomed our newest Commissioners: Octavia Dixon, Jim Campbell and Dan Bolling.

Dan would like to hold a strategic planning meeting in May. Commissioners should contact Dan with preferred dates.

Roland Kauffman, Commissioner, was presented with a certificate of appreciation from the County Executive. Roland served on the Commission from 2008 to 2015. He was recognized for his dedicated service to incarcerated and at-risk veterans.

Maryland Congressman Chris Van Hollen and Montgomery County Executive Isiah Leggett announced that the Housing Opportunities Commission of Montgomery County has been granted \$72,776 in new Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) vouchers by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

There will be a Boards, Committees, and Commissions (BCC) Ethics Training on April 30th from 7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at the Executive Office Building.

Dan announced the American Legion Post 41 in Silver Spring will be hosting a DC Blues Fish Fry on July 11th. Veterans can attend for free.

Mike Subin, Commissioner, reported that the County is holding a meeting with several organizations, including Montgomery County Coalition for the Homeless and Bethesda Cares, to discuss homeless veterans.

Jerry also reported that the County is looking into memorializing those killed in action by dedicating trees to those individuals along the Capital Crescent Trail. The trees would include a memorial plaque.

The Commission will be readvertising a general public vacancy.

Joanna Starling, Combat2College, Montgomery College, reported that a veterans women's center will be opening on the Rockville Campus in May.

VI. Unfinished Business: None.

VII. New Business: None.

VIII. Roundtable:

Mike Subin, Commissioner, reported that Brian Hawkins, Medical Director, DC VA Medical Center, recently convened a meeting with Mike, Chuck Short, Special Assistant to County Executive, and representatives for Congressman Van Hollen and Senator Ben Cardin. Brian reported that the Montgomery County Community-Based Outpatient Clinic is still on track to be opened in 2016, although the size has been reduced from 25,000 square feet to 11,000 square feet.

Octavia Dixon, Commissioner, reported that VA employees, veterans and community members around the country will put on their walking shoes and join in the fifth nationwide VA2K event on May 20, 2015. The annual Walk and Roll of approximately 1.2 miles encourages people to step up their fitness level and to support homeless Veterans with donated food and clothing items.

Wayne Miller, Commissioner, reported that First Lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden visited the Silver Spring Vet Center. They visited the Vet Center in Silver Spring, Maryland, on Friday April 17 as part of their ongoing Joining Forces initiative. The Vet Centers will be promoted during the new show Night Shift which will be premiering on NBC.

Bill Gray, Commissioner, reported that the Deputy Secretary of the VA attended a group meeting at the Silver Spring Vet Center last week.

Hero Dogs will be holding an information session on Sunday, April 26th in Damascus.

Adjournment: 7:30 p.m.

Next Full Commission Meeting: Tuesday, May 19th, 2015 from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at Executive Office Building, 101 Monroe Street, Lobby Auditorium, Rockville, MD 20850.

Respectfully submitted:

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