



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Meeting Summary Minutes
December 18, 2018**

I. Call to Order & Introductions

Mike Subin welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Commission on Veterans Affairs (CVA). Mike 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

Given that the police chief needed to leave at 6:15 pm, approval of the minutes was tabled due to time constraints and deferred until the January Commission meeting. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva.

III. Legislation Proposed by Senator Kagan – Maryland Police Officer Certification – Tom Manger, Chief, and Russ Hamill, Assistant Police Chief, Montgomery County Police Department

Senator Kagan will be proposing a Senate Bill in the 2019 Maryland General Assembly that would alter the eligibility requirements for an individual to be certified by the Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission as a police officer to require an individual to be either a United States citizen or permanent legal resident of the United States who is an honorably discharged veteran of the United States armed forces.

View last year's [Senate Bill 344 – Maryland Police Training and Standards Commission – Police Officer Certification – Eligibility \(Freedom to Serve Act\)](#). Senate Bill 344 did not pass.

Chief Manger is in support of Senator Kagan's proposal. As Chief of the Montgomery County Police Department (MCPD) his three biggest responsibilities are to: hire the right people, invest in their training, and hold the men and women in his department accountable. It is becoming more of a challenge to find the right people who are suited to become police officers, who have integrity and a spirit for public service.

Montgomery County is a community of immigrants and MCPD is always trying to reflect the diversity of this County. 12% of all police officers in the U.S. are female, but in Montgomery County 18% of all police officers are female. 1 in 3 County residents were not born in the U.S.

Legal and permanent citizens of the U.S. can enlist in the military. In most states, including Maryland, an individual is required to be a U.S. citizen in order to become a police officer. Chief Manger would like to allow individuals that are legal citizens of the U.S. **and** who have been honorably discharged from the military to apply to become police officers. In Montgomery County it would help to increase the candidate pool. It would be good for the community and provide an opportunity for those who have served in the military.

There have been a few criticisms of the bill and questions regarding the loyalty of immigrants. Chief Manger argues that if they were willing to fight and die for this country, then they will serve this county. They would also have to meet every other background check and standard to become a police officer.

Chief Manger asked for the support of the Commission. A motion was made to send a letter of support to Senator Kagan. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and the motion was unanimously approved.

The floor was opened to questions.

Is there a required minimum service for police academy training? Maryland requires a high school diploma, but Montgomery County requires 60 hours of college credit. If a Veteran served three or more continual years of military service and was honorably discharged, then the education standards would be waived. They would be encouraged to continue their education because in order to be promoted to Corporal they need 60 college credits and to be promoted to Sergeant they need 120 college credits.

Are you connected with other law enforcement agencies throughout the state? Yes, Baltimore, Howard and Prince George's Counties are very supportive of this initiative. Support in some of the more rural areas in the state is not as strong, although those agencies are not as concerned about recruiting diversity because their residents are not as diverse. Montgomery County has one of the largest police departments with 1,302 police officers. Chief Hamill noted that it is hard to keep individuals in the academy and four individuals quit the last class because they could not handle it.

What is the referral process? You can email Chief Hamill or Mike Subin and they will forward it to MCPD and a recruiter will reach out to the individual.

Are there any other issues for why this bill would not be supported? One issue is County police officers belong to several Federal government task forces. To be a part of a task force, the office needs to be a U.S. citizen. Chief Manger noted that only a few dozen officers are needed to be part of these task forces and they have over 1,300 officers so there will not be an issue. There are also concerns regarding collective bargaining agreements, but Chief Manger said they know how to negotiate and work with the union.

What is the likelihood the new bill will become law this year? Each year it gains more momentum and having support from this Commission will go a long way. The opposition will still be there, but they want to show the legislature that this is a broad-based bill that is good for the community and good for Veterans. Chief Hamill said they are available to speak to any group.

Are National Guard and Reservists eligible? Yes, if they were activated and honorably discharged.

If a Veteran completed military police training would they still need to complete academy training? Yes, in order to get their state certification, they have to be certified by the state police academy. Montgomery County has their own academy that requires more of than the state including double the required shooting and fire arms training, double the drivers training, and mental health crisis training.

Are you planning to speak to non-Veteran community groups to gain support? Yes, and MCPD hosts or attends hundreds of community meetings a year. Individuals were encouraged to write letters of support as well. Commissioners were also asked to share information regarding the bill with any organization they belong to and any other contacts. Betsy Luecking, Staff, will send an e-mail to her distribution list.

The Maryland General Assembly will begin their next session on January 9th. Letters of support can be sent in after the bill has been introduced. Art Brodsky, Communications Consultant, will share with Betsy the

information about the new bill once it has been introduced. Art noted that hearings happen fairly quickly. He is also able to assist with sending letters of support.

Harvey Kaplan, Maryland Military Officers Association of America, reported the next Council meeting is scheduled for January 12th and all ten Maryland chapters will be in attendance. He will suggest adding this bill to their legislative agenda.

IV. Commission Veteran Outreach Tools – Neil Greenberger, Montgomery County Public Information Office

Neil previously worked as a reporter and editor for the Washington Post for twenty years. He worked for ten years for the County Council in charge of public relations and is now working for the County Executive's Public Information Office. This experience and knowledge provide a greater perspective.

Neil is ready and available to work with the Commission on its outreach efforts. PIO has several ways to send information out including the Paperless Airplane e-newsletter with over 120,000 subscribers, social media with over 75,000 subscribers, and the County's cable station. Neil suggested sending out a news release or information at least once a month to start a branding campaign.

For example, if the Commission would like to use the letter of support they will be writing for the bill discussed tonight, Neil can use that information to write a news release and get it out to the right people on social media.

The Commission can only promote an outside organization if the Commission supports it. The Commission does not provide services or programs. Betsy noted that Serving Together receives \$150,000 from the County and Warrior Canine Connection receives \$50,000. She suggested that both of these organizations be highlighted. These organizations also need to note on their websites that they are receiving funds from the County and support from the Commission.

Betsy also suggested highlighting the new VA Community-Based Outpatient Clinic, which is currently serving 300 patients. It is important to continue to outreach to the community about the Clinic to increase awareness and use. Ride On recently increased its service to the CBOC from the Rockville and Shady Grove Metro stations to every 30 minutes from 6:00 a.m to 8:30 p.m. It previously was only running three times a day.

Betsy encouraged agencies to notify the Commission of system issues so the County can get involved to solve the problem. Typically, these issues are initially sent to public officials such as Senators and Congressmen and then the County is notified.

It was suggested that the Commission make a regular meeting agenda item to discuss outreach awareness topics.

Neil shared the following items of interest supported by the Commission that could be used for outreach:

- Anniversary of commemoration of Vietnam Memorial (May)
- Update on Montgomery County Community Based Outpatient Clinic
- Enroll in VA Healthcare. There are 42,000 Veterans living in the County and only an estimated 11,000 are enrolled in the VA Healthcare system. Given that the County now has its first CBOC, the Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs is encouraging Veterans to enroll now. The very first step in obtaining access to your VA Health Benefits is to apply for enrollment.
- Montgomery County Veterans Benefits Specialist - MEET THE SPECIALIST. Profile.
- Montgomery County Vet Center in Silver Spring. What services available.

- New Phone Number to Access VA Services: The VA is introducing 1-844-MyVA311 (1-844-698-2311) as a go-to source for Veterans and their families who don't know what number to call. This new national toll-free number will help eliminate the feeling of frustration and confusion that Veterans and their families have expressed when navigating the 1000-plus phone numbers that currently exist.
- Statement of support from new County Executive.
- Guests speaking at regular meetings.
- Special events.
- Veterans Day events.
- Wreaths Across America.

V. Maryland Military Coalition (MMC) – Col. Bob Norton, President, MMC

About MCC: <https://montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/A%26D%20Docs/CVA/MMC2018Handout.pdf>

Bob Norton is a Vietnam Veteran who has been a member of MOAA for a number of years. MOAA was one of a number of organizations that helped put together the Maryland Military Coalition. The first handout lists 13 organizations as part of MCC, but a 14th has recently joined – the Fleet Reserve Association. Collectively, these 14 organizations representative 100,000 out of the approximately 460,000 military-connected individuals in Maryland.

MCC is loosely modeled on the National Military Coalition, which has been in existence for 32 years and is headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia. The goal of MCC is to provide a single speaking voice on issues of importance to Veterans, military service members, Active Duty, National Guard, Reserve, survivors, and their family members in Maryland. MCC hopes to make a presence in Annapolis as they move forward on issues they believe are important to Maryland Veterans, their family members and those currently serving.

MCC Legislative Agenda: <https://montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/A&D%20Docs/CVA/MCCAgenda2019.pdf>

The legislative agenda highlights issues for those currently serving, retiree benefits, surviving spouses and family members, health care, and suicide prevention.

The floor was opened to questions.

Can Montgomery County be added to the health care initiative regarding the establishment of a second State Veterans home? MCC can suggest several locations but will not focus on just one as it is not up to them to judge or decide. It was noted that Montgomery County has been suggested by the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) as a possible location for a second Veterans home. Betsy suggested inviting Secretary George Owings to a future Commission meeting to discuss this issue. With the new CBOC, it would make sense to have a second home in Montgomery County, so those residents can use the CBOC services. It was noted that currently, it takes seven hours for a Frederick County resident to make a round-trip visit to Charlotte Hall.

What does your organization do in terms of educating family members? MCC wants to be able to provide outreach so they understand benefits that are available to them. It was suggested they connect with Serving Together.

Bob encouraged Commissioners to be part of Veterans Service Organizations to consider joining MCC.

VI. Announcements

Blair Eig, Chief Medical Officer, Holy Cross Hospital, reported the [Holy Cross Military and Veterans Health Program](#) at the Kensington location is now offering compensation and pension exams. Individuals will need to go through the VA benefits office to schedule the exam.

Mike Wilson, Gaithersburg-Rockville Chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, thanked the Commission for supporting the Male Health Symposium held in November. Betsy attended the event and Commissioner Cynthia Macri presented the Chapter with a citation from Governor Hogan. Julie Riggs with Serving Together was also present.

Adjournment: 7:50pm

Next Full Commission Meeting: Tuesday, January 15th, 2019 from 6pm to 7:30pm at the Department of Health and Human Services, 401 Hungerford Drive, 1st Floor Conference Room, Rockville, MD 20850

Respectfully submitted:

Carly Clem, Administrative Specialist I

Betsy Luecking, Community Outreach Manager