



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Meeting Summary Minutes
February 20th, 2018**

I. Call to Order & Introductions

Dan Bullis, Chairman, welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Commission on Veterans Affairs (CVA). Dan 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. A moment of silence was also held for the 17 students who were killed at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida

II. Approval of Minutes

A motion was made to approve the January 2018 Meeting Summary Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken, and the January 2018 Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva.

III. Maryland Veterans Commission Overview – Fred Shinbur, Chairperson

Website: <http://veterans.maryland.gov/maryland-veterans-commission/>

Handout: www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/A%26D%20Docs/CVA/MDVAHandoutFeb2018.pdf

MDVA 2017 Annual Report: <http://veterans.maryland.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2017/01/2017-Annual-Report-FINAL.pdf>

Origins of the Maryland Veterans Commission (MVC) trace to 1924, when the Soldiers' Relief Fund Commission formed to administer a State relief fund for disabled veterans of World War I. The Commission became the Veterans Relief Commission in 1929. It was renamed the Maryland Veterans Commission in 1935. In 1971, the Commission joined the Department of Employment and Social Services, which was renamed the Department of Human Resources in 1975. In 1977, the Commission became an independent agency. With the Maryland Veterans Home Commission and the War Memorial Commission, the Maryland Veterans Commission became part of the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) in October 1999.

The Commission advises the Secretary on all issues relating to veterans and has authorized 29 commissioners. 28 positions are filled with one remaining as a member at-large. Of those 28 members – 8 are representatives from Congressional Districts; 1 member is a female Veteran at-large; 1 member is retired enlisted; 1 member is at-large from the Iraq / Afghanistan conflict; 1 member is at large (Mr. Shinbur serves in this role); and 16 members are from Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs). Commissioners are appointed to five-year terms by the Governor and the Governor appoints the Chair. All VSOs are congressionally chartered before they can become a member of the Commission and all VSO representatives are nominated by the VSO Commander or Chairman to be reviewed and approved by Governor Hogan. Legislation must be approved to add or remove a VSO. The Pearl Harbor Survivors Association had asked to be removed due to lack of participation, but legislation opted to leave them on as an honorary member.

The Commission serves as an advisory board to Secretary of MDVA and to the Governor of Maryland. MVC does not recommend legislation, although they do provide testimony on behalf of MDVA on various legislative actions when

requested by the administration. MVC members also represent the Secretary or Governor at various functions and events.

MVC meetings are held quarterly typically on the 3rd Tuesday of the month from 10:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Meeting locations are rotated throughout the state. Meetings are open to the public and notices are posted 30 days prior. In April, MVC will be holding their meeting at MCVET and in July the meeting will be held at Charlotte Hall.

MVC reviews best practices from other states regarding outreach and advocacy, business and employment, education, health, history and legacy, and recognition and awards and discuss how to incorporate those best practices into the MVC to best serve all of Maryland's Veterans.

Dana Hendrickson, Director, and Denise Nooe, Deputy Director, are the staff for the MDVA Outreach and Advocacy program. They attended 303 events in 2017, made over 7,000 face-to-face contacts with the community and grew its email distribution to over 83,000 contacts. To sign up for the bi-weekly e-newsletter, visit <http://veterans.maryland.gov/> and enter your e-mail into the sign-up box located at the bottom of the screen. Denise can assist with advertising local events and information.

MDVA has 12 service centers across the state under the Service and Benefits Program to assist Veterans and their families in obtaining benefits from the VA, DoD, State of Maryland, and other programs. Nathan Jones is the new Veterans Benefits Specialist (VBS) for Montgomery County and is located at the Montgomery College Service Center in Rockville. In 2017, the MDVA Service and Benefits Program brought in \$27,000,000 in new claims to the State of Maryland. The program also accepted power of attorney representation for 1,791 Veterans.

MDVA receives from the State DD-214s from every branch of service for those being discharged. In response, MDVA will send out a welcome package that includes information regarding Veterans entitlements. In 2017, MDVA processed 4,937 DD214s.

Charlotte Hall Veterans Home (CHVH) is the only veterans home in the state. CHVH is currently running at 90% capacity. Skilled nursing with 286 available beds is at 98% capacity and assisted living with 168 available beds is at 77% capacity. In 2017, CHVH reached nearly 21,000 donated hours of volunteer time, which represents having an additional 9.8 full-time staff. CHVH was honored to receive the prestigious "2017 Silver Award" from the American Health Care Association and is the only Veterans home winner in the nation. MDVA is in discussions to open a second Veterans home in Owings Mill, but it will be a long process if approved.

The Cemetery and Memorial Program provided 3,465 internments in 2017. The Maryland program is the busiest in the nation. The FY18 and FY19 Expansion Project Design Phase at Garrison Forest and Cheltenham Cemeteries has begun. The Rocky Gap Construction Grant has been approved and will begin soon. The Crownsville Master Plan and Expansion Phase III Project was completed in September 2017. The Eastern Shore Cemetery Expansion Project was completed in December 2017.

In 2017, the Veterans Trust Fund distributed approximately \$112,000 in grants to Veterans and eligible dependents in need – a record for the trust. Since its inception four years ago, the Fund has received \$240,000 in private individual and organizational donations. They received \$61,000 from the Maryland Lottery and \$7,790 from the Hollywood Casino in Perryville. In October 2017, with authorization by the Maryland General Assembly, the Trust Fund is now able to receive money from Trust donation boxes at all Maryland Casinos. Stan Siedel added that there is currently \$145,000 available in the fund. Grants typically take two to three weeks to be processed. All grants are given directly to the provider. The program has not been marketed extensively at this point as there is only one administrator at this point. There is a volunteer coming on board to assist with applications and they are hoping to get a few more volunteers. Then they will begin to actively promote the program. For more information about the program, eligibility requirements, or to acquire an application please contact them at 410-260-3838.

MVC was involved in legislating that the POW/MIA flag be flown over every state-owned building, in the design and legislation for Maryland military license plates, and Veteran identification on driver's licenses. Fred noted that a Veteran who has the old version of the Veteran's driver license with the Veteran identification located on the back of

the ID can visit any MVA office and receive a new ID for free with the identification located on the front of the ID. MVC has also been involved greatly with the Governor's office on methods to help reduce homeless Veterans. Regarding legislative issues, Maryland General Assembly has 93 veteran-related pieces of legislation filed currently. Of note are several bills relating to military retirement income that would phase out, over three taxable years, a certain limitation on the amount of certain military retirement income that may be included in a certain subtraction modification under the State income tax, with a total 100% exemption of military retirement income from State taxation at the end of the three-year phase. To review current legislation, visit <http://veterans.maryland.gov/2018-legislative-session-update/>.

Mr. Shinbur discussed the issue of burial entitlements for Veterans. On the Federal side, a spouse of a Veteran can be buried for free. Maryland currently charges \$700 for the burial cost. The MCV Legislative Subcommittee is promoting that the state follow Federal guidelines regarding burial entitlements. The Subcommittee is also working on issues of incarcerated Veterans.

There are approximately 330,000 to 340,000 Veterans living in Maryland. There are seven County Veterans Commissions across the state with one pending Veterans commission in Frederick County. There are two that are not chartered – the Tri County Veterans Commission and the Joint Veterans Council of Washington County. MVC has a subcommittee that is tasked with reaching out to and working with each of the established County Veterans Commissions. CommanderCarolynn Baker should be in touch within the next week with staff.

The floor was opened to questions.

It was asked if the MDVA website lists services available and if so, are they listed by County. The MDVA website features a State Resource Guide and a VA Benefits online guide, but at this point does not list service providers by County. Mr. Shinbur recommended contacting Denise to have service provider information sent out via the e-newsletter. It was suggested that MDVA website include a page of all County Commissions with contact information. He noted that creating a section of service providers on the MDVA website would take time and regular maintenance to ensure the information is accurate.

Maryland has 29 counties. Betsy Luecking, Staff, asked if Governor Hogan can mandate that each County designate a point of contact on Veterans issues, whether they have a Commission or not. The Maryland Department of Disability mandated a similar requirement in order to get information out across the State. Fred said Governor Hogan could make a request and noted that Secretary Owings has visited all 29 counties multiple times to try and enhance membership and participation.

Julie Riggs, Serving Together (ST), noted that she is a member of the Frederick County Veterans Engagement Board, which is not County chartered. She added that while some counties may not have official County Commissions it does not mean that people are not meeting to discuss Veterans issues. Betsy Luecking, Staff, said that it has proven important for a County government to have a role in Veterans issues.

IV. Chair Report

Dan Bullis reported Montgomery County Executive Isiah Leggett was honored at the County's Black History Celebration at the F. Scott Fitzgerald Theatre in Rockville. The theme for this year's celebration is, "African Americans in Times of War." The theme commemorates the centennial of the end of the First World War in 1918, and explores the complex meanings and implications of this international struggle and its aftermath. Leggett was a captain in the Army during the Vietnam war where he earned the Bronze Star Medal, the Vietnam Service, and Vietnam Campaign Medals. Bill Gray and Roland Kauffman presented County Executive Leggett with a plaque from the Vietnam Veterans of America. Dan presented him with an US Army plaque with an engraved plate from the Commission on Veterans Affairs thanking him for his unyielding advocacy for our Veterans and their families. Photos from the event can be viewed online at <https://www.flickr.com/photos/montgomerycountymd/sets/72157691485357191/>.

Dan noted that the [Walter Reed Society](#) has given approximately \$1,600,000 in grants to Montgomery County Veterans and their family members over the last several years. Dan is the point person who reviews requests at Walter Reed's Soldiers Family Assistance Center.

The General William Smallwood Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution will be honoring Betsy Luecking with a Bronze Good Citizenship Award at their dinner on March 1st. They will be recognizing her for her actions on behalf of County Veterans.

Dan has recently been visiting a Veteran who has no family and is in hospice care. He suggested to Commissioners that they may want to volunteer their time to visit other Veterans at nursing facilities from time to time.

V. Updates

Austin Morris, Representative of Senator Chris Van Hollen, gave an update on the Gaithersburg Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC). She reported the VA and Minkoff have come to an agreement regarding the outstanding cost issues that were delaying construction. Minkoff sent the paperwork back to the VA last Friday and the VA is waiting on authorization for approval. Minkoff is estimating six months to complete construction with the CBOC opening in mid-August 2018.

Mike Subin, Commissioner, reported the Vietnam War Memorial is on track to be completed by Memorial Day of this year. The memorial will be a wall with all the names of Montgomery County residents who were killed in action. The memorial will be placed at Memorial Plaza located on the Government Complex Center Terrace between the new Courthouse annex and the Executive Office Building in Rockville along Route 28.

Mike announced that County Executive Ike Leggett will dedicate and rename the Great Hall at the Silver Spring Civic Building as The Buffalo Soldiers Great Hall on Tuesday, February 27th from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. There will be a special recognition of former Buffalo Soldier and longtime Silver Spring resident James Harden Daugherty, who passed away in 2015 at the age of 91. During World War II, Daugherty served as a soldier in the Army's 92nd Infantry Division in a segregated unit made up of African Americans known as the Buffalo Soldiers. Attendees are encouraged to RSVP for the event.

VI. Announcements

Dr. Gregory Jolissaint, VP, Military and Veterans Affairs, Holy Cross Hospital, announced Holy Cross is currently training staff on military cultural competencies. Training is being conducted by Warrior Centric Health. Trainings are being modified to fit the needs of our military population, Veterans, and their family members. Holy Cross will begin advertising on April 1st that the hospital is able to serve Veterans and their family members. He noted all of Trinity Health, which includes 93 hospitals in 23 states, will be training their staff on military cultural competencies.

Jim Campbell, Commissioner, reported the Montgomery County Chapter of MOAA will be hosting a luncheon tomorrow at Manor Country Club. Special guest speaker Rear Admiral Joyce M. Johnson, DO, MA USPHS (retired) will present on the art, science and history of chocolate.

Jameelah Johnson, Commissioner, reported that on Veterans Day last year her uncle, who lives in Camden County, New Jersey, received a certificate and a medal thanking him for his service from Camden County. All Veterans were also invited to a luncheon. She suggested that Montgomery County consider replicating the recognition event for Veterans.

Dan Bolling, Commissioner, announced that at next month's meeting the non-profit organization [NS2Serves](#) will be presenting to the Commission. NS2 Serves™ is an independent, nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization established by Mark Testoni, the President of SAP National Security Services, Inc. (SAP NS2®). Their free program Boots to Suits helps Veterans by providing valuable IT training and employment assistance, at no cost to the Veterans. The course is open to post-9/11 U.S. military service Veterans and reservists (including disabled Veterans) and Gold Star spouses who meet certain eligibility requirements. As of May 2016, NS2 Serves has trained over 100 graduates within its first three years with a 100% job placement and a starting salary of at least \$70,000.

Wayne Miller, Commissioner, announced Wayne Stinchcomb has returned from Iraq and is available to participate in outreach events on behalf of the Silver Spring Vet Center. Please contact Wayne if you are interested. Wayne noted that he recently filmed an episode of Homefront for County Cable Montgomery. Betsy will send the video out to Commissioners once it is available online. Wayne also reported that Nathan Jones, VBS, is providing outreach hours at the Silver Spring Vet Center the 2nd and 4th Friday of every month from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Stan Seidel, MVC, announced that he has been working for MCVET, a nonprofit organization that treats veterans with homelessness and substance abuse, located in Baltimore, Maryland, two days a week and is available to give tours. MCVET will be hosting a [Stand Down on June 2nd and 3rd](#) at the Baltimore War Memorial Building. MCVET will also be hosting their 23rd annual 5K/10K races and walk on Sunday, June 10th.

Dave Peterson, Montgomery Chapter of Military Officers Association of America (MOAA), reported that Senator Steve Waugh is sponsoring Veterans Advocacy Day in Annapolis next week: <https://allevents.in/annapolis/veterans-advocacy-day/963791183772812>.

Julie Riggs, Serving Together (ST), reported she and Mike Ball filmed an episode of Homefront as well. Julie also reported that ST is now an affiliate of America Services, a coordinated system of public, private, and non-profit organizations working together to serve Veterans, transitioning service-members, and their families. A partnership with the AmericaServes program will allow ServingTogether to connect multiple existing county-level Veterans collaboratives into one comprehensive network that connects Veterans, service members, and their families to service providers across the entire National Capital Region. ST currently has about 30 service providers signed up in both Montgomery and Frederick Counties. 54 service providers are scheduled to receive training tomorrow in Northern Virginia. The initiative will be launched in DC in March. The goal is to have between 60 to 90 providers when the website officially goes live. The system will allow ST Peer Navigators to quickly connect Veterans and their families to services and referrals. Julie noted that since the partnership was formed and the new website was made available, ST has been receiving five calls a day, up from five calls a week.

Candance Willett, Outreach Coordinator, Steven A. Cohen Military Clinic, Easterseals, announced Easter Seals will be hosting a parenting skills workshop the 2nd Saturday of the month from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. A stress resiliency group will begin meeting on March 2nd and Veterans are invited to attend. The Steven A. Cohen Military Clinic and the Veterans Consortium will be hosting a [one-day free Veterans legal and benefits clinic](#) on Wednesday, March 7th from 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. Attorneys and representatives will be available to discuss issues and provide legal referrals in the following areas: veteran benefits; military discharge upgrade matters; disability/benefits claims; family law; consumer law; landlord/tenant law; and employment law.

Nathan Jones, VBS, MDVA, introduced himself and noted that he is currently working at the Montgomery College Service Center in Rockville Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. He thanked Wayne and Joanna Starling for assisting in a smooth transition.

Rick Yount, Warrior Canine Connection (WCC), announced WCC is seeking volunteers to help socialize new puppies. Volunteers 16 and younger must be accompanied by a parent. Interested individuals can apply online at <http://warriorcanineconnection.org/>. Rick also announced that the Associated General Contractors of America (AGC) is celebrating 100 years by focusing on the renovation of an historic barn at the Warrior Canine Connection's Healing Quarters in Boyds, Maryland. The project will create much-needed space for WCC's training programs and provide overnight accommodations for Veterans visiting WCC for advanced training with service dogs.

Octavia Dixon, Commissioner, announced that due to increased predatory lending efforts aimed towards Veterans, a bipartisan group of senators are seeking more predatory lending protections for veterans. The group has introduced the "Protecting Veterans from Predatory Lending Act of 2018" that would require lenders to demonstrate a "material benefit" to consumers when refinancing their mortgage. Octavia was asked to share information she received from the VA that could be shared with County Veterans.

Adjournment: 7:30pm

Next Full Commission Meeting: Tuesday, March 20th, 2018 from 6:00pm to 7:30pm at Health & Human Services Building, 401 Hungerford Drive, 1st Floor 1A Conference Room, Rockville, MD 20850

Respectfully submitted:

Carly Clem, Administrative Specialist I

Betsy Luecking, Community Outreach Manager