



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs  
Meeting Summary Minutes  
January 21, 2020**

**I. Call to Order**

Wayne Miller, Vice-Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Commission on Veterans Affairs (CVA). Wayne 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.

**II. Approval of Minutes**

A motion was made to approve the December 2019 Meeting Summary Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken, and the December 2019 Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva).

**III. Maryland Military Coalition Legislative Agenda – Colonel Robert (Bob) Norton, USA (Ret.),  
President, Maryland Military Coalition**

**Website:** [www.mdmilcoalition.org](http://www.mdmilcoalition.org)

**Handout – 2020 Maryland General Assembly Legislative Goals:**

[https://montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/A%26D%20Docs/CVA/MMC\\_Goals\\_Final\\_8Jan20.pdf](https://montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/A%26D%20Docs/CVA/MMC_Goals_Final_8Jan20.pdf)

The Maryland Military Coalition (MMC) is a non-profit, non-partisan policy and advocacy organization comprised of 16 military, uniformed services, veterans and survivor organizations representing more than 460,000 current and former servicemembers and veterans, their families and survivors in the State of Maryland. MMC is different from the Maryland Veterans Commission (MVC) which advises the Governor and Secretary Owings, Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA). Through MMC organization membership there is tremendous diversity representing a wide variety of interests. Bob said they collectively represent 1 out of 4 military-connected Maryland residents. MMC organizations have joined in the pursuit of the following goals:

- Maintaining a strong national defense provided by dedicated, skilled, and highly capable personnel in the seven uniformed services;
- Promoting greater recognition of the military profession and educating the public on the extraordinary demands and sacrifices associated with a career in the uniformed services;
- Advocating policies that will advance the well-being and opportunities of the uniformed services community of Maryland, including Active, National Guard, Reserve, retirees, their families and survivors;
- Advocating the interests of the uniformed services community and promoting legislation favorable to the support of uniformed services issues at all levels of state government.

The philosophy of MMC is that, by working together on issues of mutual agreement, the participating organizations can harness the grassroots support of their members plus their families and accomplish far more than by working on these initiatives separately. When one or more of the MMC organizations is invited to testify before the Maryland General Assembly, they frequently coordinate the testimony with the other MMC

associations and present it on behalf of the entire MMC. This lends greater weight and unanimity to the testimony than if it were presented by any individual association.

This past year MMC created a Facebook account ([www.facebook.com/mdmilcoalition](http://www.facebook.com/mdmilcoalition)) and continues to maintain a Twitter account (<https://twitter.com/mdmilcoalition>).

Brian T. Smith, Vice President and Navy Veteran, spends time in Annapolis every week talking with Delegates, Senators and chairs of key committees. The MMC Legislative Director, who also represents the American Legion Department of Maryland's legislative department, works with Brian to deliver letters to the Maryland General Assembly that are put together by MMC and by its member organizations. MMC is working to have its 16 organizations energize their member base and have them send e-mails which can really make a big impact and be effective when lobbying. MMC has set a goal of ten thousand communications this session.

The handout lists goals that have been structured broadly so when a bill is introduced the MMC will not have to vote whether to support if it falls under one of the goals listed. This will also help individual organizations to identify bills that are meaningful for their members. MMC will be working to develop tools and techniques that will make it an easier and simpler process for organizations and their members to contact their elected officials.

Last Tuesday Governor Hogan announced new military initiatives that include a package of legislation that will expand tuition assistance for Maryland National Guard members, provide tax relief for military retirees, and reform occupational licensing laws to create jobs and boost opportunities for military families. Press release: <https://governor.maryland.gov/2020/01/15/photo-release-governor-hogan-announces-military-initiatives-at-national-guard-armory/>

Susan Webman, Commissioner, asked if the occupational certification or license was provided by the military if it would be recognized in Maryland. The bill has yet to be introduced so it is unclear what the language states. Susan suggested asking Governor Hogan or Secretary Owings to make an amendment to include that language prior to the bill being introduced.

Bills that have been introduced that the MMC is following are:

- [SB0211 - Income Tax - Subtraction Modification - Military Retirement Income](#): This bill expands the existing military retirement income tax subtraction modification by exempting 100% of military retirement income from State taxation. The exemption is phased in over three years, beginning with tax year 2021.
- [HB0131 / SB0059 – State Lottery – Instant Ticket Lottery Machines – Fraternal Organizations \(“ITLM” for Homeless Veterans Act\)](#): This bill adds fraternal organizations to the organizations that the State Lottery and Gaming Control Agency (SLGCA) may issue a license to for up to five instant ticket lottery (pull tab) machines. After deducting prizes paid out, a fraternal organization must remit the receipts from the sale of pull tab tickets to SLGCA, who must distribute 10% to a special fund to be used by the Division of Neighborhood Revitalization in the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) to assist veterans and their families, provided that, annually, the first \$100,000 is distributed to the outreach and advocacy program in the Department of Veterans Affairs.
- [HB012 - Department of Veterans Affairs - Homes for Veterans - Veterans of Uniformed Service](#): This bill expands eligibility to reside at a veterans home supervised by the MDVA to include a veteran who has an honorable discharge from active service with a uniformed service of the United States (rather than from the armed forces). More specifically, eligibility is expanded to include the Public Health Service (PHS) Commissioned Corps and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Commissioned Officer Corps.
- [SB0203 – Income Tax Checkoff – Maryland Veterans Trust Fund](#): This bill establishes the Maryland Veterans Trust Fund (MVTF) checkoff on the individual income tax return form. After the Comptroller deducts administrative expenses, the contributions are credited to the fund and distributed by the MDVA.

- [HB0133 – Vehicle Emissions Inspection Program – Deployed Military Personnel – Exemption](#): Exempting certain active duty members of the armed services of the United States who are subject to certain deployments from certain mandatory vehicle emissions inspections; requiring all owners of a motor vehicle for which an exemption is sought under the Act to certify in a certain manner that at least one owner of the vehicle has received military orders for deployment outside the United States or to a duty station in a jurisdiction not subject to vehicle emissions control programs; etc.

Bob noted overall 260 Senate Bills and 332 House Bills have already been introduced. Every week, Brian e-mails a summary of key military and Veterans bills. If you would like to be included in the e-mail distribution list, please contact Bob. He noted that Brian also publishes a weekly blog on MOAA's website that discusses legislation in Annapolis and his perspective on various issues ([www.mdmoaa.org](http://www.mdmoaa.org)).

The second Veterans home does not require legislation. In December 2019, Dave Peterson, Military Officers of Association of America (MOAA), and Lynn Slepski-Nash, MMC Director and representative of Commissioned Officers Association of the US Public Health Service, met with Rockville Mayor Bridget Donnell Newton to discuss the option of developing a second Veterans home at the Red Gate Golf Course. Earlier this month Bob and Lynn attended walk-in hours at Rockville City Hall and had a second meeting about the Veterans home with Mayor Newton and Councilmember Monique Ashton. They also presented a packet of letters from Veterans' groups in support of the facility. This Commission wrote a letter of support. Bob recently received a letter of support from the Frederick County Veterans Advisory Council which has been given to Mayor Newton.

It is MMC's understanding that Mayor Newton and all four City of Rockville Councilmembers are supportive and receptive, but Councilmember Ashton has indicated that Rockville has to do their due diligence. The anticipated total cost of the project is a little more than \$62.4 million, with Maryland contributing roughly \$21.8 million. Secretary Owings has been clear that the state is hoping for a donation of roughly 25 acres on the former golf course site which is over 140 acres in size. Last year MMC sent a memo to federal legislators about the second Veterans home and they will continue to engage with the state and locally to make this happen. Neil Greenberg, Office of Public Information (OPI), added that the second Veterans home is starting to gain media attention. He noted that there was a recent article in the Bethesda Magazine:

<https://bethesdamagazine.com/bethesda-beat/rockville/veterans-home-proposed-for-closed-rockville-golf-course/>.

The floor was opened to questions.

Ken Reichard, Representative of Senator Ben Cardin, asked if MMC would seek out Senators and Delegates to draft legislation for MMC goals and issues that have no bills introduced. Bob said as MMC reviews bills and identifies issues that have not been addressed then they would contact Senators or Delegates about drafting up legislation.

Cynthia Macri, Commissioner, asked if MMC uses subject matter experts to discuss legislation or to enhance bill language. Bob is interested in doing so and defers to experts to offer their technical expertise as to what should be included in a bill. He asked for Cynthia's information to get her in touch with Brian.

Cynthia added that there does not seem to be as much representation of women Veterans. Bob said MMC has strenuously attempted to recruit newer Veterans groups. He has spoken with the legislative director for Service Women's Action Network (SWAN) several times but they are not interested in joining MMC. He has also reached out to Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) and Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), but some organizations exist mostly online and do not have chapters or posts with a physical presence. Transition Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS) is unable to join because they do not have the capacity. MMC is extremely sensitive about wanting to open their membership to women Veterans of all generations. Cynthia suggested reaching out to ROTC units, service academies, and the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, which has a disproportionate number of women in the nursing program. Bob said he was not sure those groups were permitted to lobby. Amse Heck, Program Director, ServingTogether (ST), suggested

contacting Blue Star Families (BSF) to include female Veterans and military spouses. She noted there are a thousand BSF members in this region.

Betsy Luecking, Staff, said in her role as Staff Manager for this Commission, the Office of Intergovernmental Relations (OIR) will send her Veteran- and military-related bills to review and provide comments regarding implications and liabilities for the County. Those comments are shared with the Maryland General Assembly every Friday morning. Betsy asked Commissioners to send her feedback regarding bills that they have an interest in.

Bob said last year this Commission and MMC worked well together to support a bill proposed by Senator Kagan 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. MMC testified in support of this legislation and the bill was ultimately passed.

#### **IV. Chair and Vice Chair Report**

Wayne attended a MDVA meeting in Crownsville last week to learn what other counties and organizations across the state are doing for Veterans and their families. Wayne gave a presentation representing this Commission.

Betsy reported the Commission will have to submit their budget priorities. Last year the Commission supported the \$650,000 the County funds to serve dishonorably discharged Veterans who are homeless. The Commission also supported the community grants from the County Executive that provide \$50,000 to the Warrior Canine Connection and \$150,000 to ServingTogether.

#### **Update – Accessible Launch at Riley’s Lock**

Montgomery Parks (MP) will be installing the accessible launch at Riley’s Lock in April. The Montgomery Parks Foundation is soliciting funds to purchase more benches. The project ended up costing double than what was anticipated. MP wants to redo the picnic area, pathways, and restrooms. Betsy anticipates a public event when the renovations to Riley’s Lock are completed.

#### **VI. Updates / Announcements**

In honor of Black History Month, SPARKLE is presenting “A Conversation with Brigadier General Charles McGee” on Wednesday February 12<sup>th</sup> from 2pm to 3:30pm at the Silver Spring Civic Building (SSCB). He is the oldest living member of the Tuskee Airmen and will share his experiences as an African American pioneer in the U.S. Army Air Corps. RSVP by e-mailing [programs@silverspringvillage.org](mailto:programs@silverspringvillage.org) or call 301-503-7401 (V). More information: [https://allevents.in/mobile/amp-event.php?event\\_id=200018798002220](https://allevents.in/mobile/amp-event.php?event_id=200018798002220).

Neil has been in touch with the family of Brigadier General McGee and he has agreed to let the County honor him for his service. Neil is working on a date with the County Executive’s office and asked that this Commission be a part of the event. He would like the event to be held during the day to get some media attention and will invite all elected officials. Cynthia is on the Advisory Board for EagleForce Warrior Foundation. Their Director of Flight Operations is a former Navy pilot and is African American. She said there would be a lot of interest in attending this event.

Neil would like to send a press release out with support from this Commission about Holy Cross Hospital (HCH) having trained over 600 colleagues over the past year on cultural competency for working with Veterans and active military. HCH are also working with the VA DC Medical Center and Gaithersburg VA CBOC to provide services that the VA does not offer. Susan Webman, Commissioner, has concerns about the Commission endorsing one hospital over another. She suggested that the County point out that this kind of program should be used by all hospitals and clinics. Betsy said the Commission cannot endorse any entity. The County would be highlighting their unique services for Veterans. Betsy encouraged Commissioners to watch the staff training video developed by Norvell V. Coats, MD, President & CEO, HCH: <https://vimeo.com/241759900/b8c73d5417>.

Betsy asked Neil to draft a press release about the Black History Month display at the SSCB. Betsy and Carly Clem, Staff, will be finishing the display tomorrow. The display features nine profiles of Montgomery County residents who are Veterans and currently serving military service members, and one resident who was killed in action in Afghanistan. There is also a display about Buffalo Soldiers that is on loan from Trooper Michael Theard of the Buffalo Soldiers Calvary. The display will stay up at least through February. The Buffalo Soldiers display may stay in the middle cases permanently if smaller pictures of the current display can be purchased.

Wayne noted that Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day is March 22<sup>nd</sup> and National Vietnam War Veterans Day is March 29<sup>th</sup>. Betsy reported Dan Bullis received two shadow boxes with photos and medals that honor two Blair High School students who were killed in action in Vietnam and suggested they could be on display at the SSCB in March.

Stan Siedel, MVC, announced Montgomery County was holding its annual point-in-time count on Wednesday, January 22<sup>nd</sup>. Volunteers can meet at Every-Mind in Rockville or at the SSCB at 9pm for training. The point-in-time count will occur from 11pm to 4am.

Amse is the new Director for ST. She previously was the DC Chapter Director for Blue Star Families. ST will be hosting a continuing education on January 28<sup>th</sup> on serving the unique needs of minority Veterans and sub-populations. Participants can attend via webinar: <https://servingtogetherproject.org/serving-the-unique-needs-of-minority-veterans-and-sub-populations/>.

Betsy asked Amse to discuss various Veterans and military events that are held throughout the area in the community. Amse said the first Sunday of every month the Washington National Cathedral holds a Military Recognition Sunday at 11:15am. Those in active duty, Veterans and their families are recognized with a welcome and prayers during the primary Sunday morning service. Following the service, chaplains from the Cathedral's Center for Prayer and Pilgrimage will be available to offer individual blessings and prayers in War Memorial Chapel and St. Joseph's Chapel. Different organizations can sponsor each Sunday and it is a way to bring awareness to your mission and your population because the National Cathedral has a national audience. For example, AMVETS is sponsoring February's Military Recognition Sunday.

Betsy said this Commission has done great advocacy work but has not done much in terms of planning events that include Veterans. She would like to work with ST in planning more events that do more outreach to Veterans and their families. There are over 42,000 Veterans living in Montgomery County and most do not know about this Commission.

**Adjournment:** 7:30pm

**Next Full Commission Meeting:** Tuesday, February 18<sup>th</sup>, 2020 from 6pm to 7:30pm. Held at Health and Human Services, 401 Hungerford Drive, 1<sup>st</sup> Floor 1A Conference Room, Rockville, MD 20850

Respectfully submitted, Carly Clem, Administrative Specialist I, Betsy Luecking, Community Outreach Manager