



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Meeting Summary Minutes
June 19th, 2018**

I. Call to Order & Introductions

Wayne Miller, Commissioner, welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Commission on Veterans Affairs (CVA) which was held at Easterseals. 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. 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

The approval of the minutes was tabled due to time constraints.

III. Debriefing of Vietnam Veterans Memorial Dedication – Mike Subin, Commissioner

The ceremony and the planning around it was an extraordinary team effort. One of the most successful parts were the number of family and friends of KIAs and MIAs who were in attendance. This was due to the incredible amount of research by Commissioners. There were approximately 100 family and friends representing 25 to 30 names on the wall and approximately at least 400 people were in attendance total. The event cost approximately \$40,000 including the wall cost of \$32,000 which was mostly for the engraving as the wall that already existed.

It was touching to have representatives from the Vietnamese American Senior Association in attendance. Tony Manh Bui, President of VASA, spoke at the event and when the VASA members were asked to stand during introductions they were given a standing ovation. It was amazing to see that support.

Mike noted that while there were many politicians in attendance that had to be announced at the beginning of the ceremony, only County Executive Isiah Leggett spoke, and Senator Chris Van Hollen read some of the names on the wall. The event wasn't about the politicians. It was for the names on the wall, their family and friends, and for Vietnam Veterans.

Betsy reported she received a phone call from the Vietnam Veteran who said after the dedication it was the first time he had ever felt proud of his service in Vietnam. Mike noted it provided a lot of closure and it was an emotional experience for all. Betsy also reported that there several surprises that were not included in the program. For example, there was a man who stood by the wall wearing white gloves who stood in salute the entire ceremony. His name is Stephen Kirk, Retired Master Sergeant and County employee who supervised the project. Also, the County's Print Shop decided on their own to design a banner to cover the wall and staff planted red, yellow and green flowers to match the color scheme of the Vietnam campaign ribbon.

The end of the ceremony was particularly moving as a police officer rang a bell after each name was read and then TAPS was played. Mike reported that since the ceremony several items have been left at the wall including a challenge coin, a bracelet and a button that each say "love", and a symbol of a Navy captain. Items will be given to Betsy and Carly Clem, Staff, to be placed at the Rockville Memorial Library or the Silver Spring Civic Building in the display cases located outside of Buffalo Soldiers Hall. Mike is working to have a case installed at the Executive Office Building to display items as well. Betsy has created an e-mail distribution list of family members and friends to keep in touch.

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is located at Memorial Plaza which is located behind the Executive Office Building, 101 Monroe Street, and the Circuit Courthouse annex. The Commission hopes to add other conflicts to the wall – at least to WWII.

Videos and photos from the event can be viewed at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/veterans.

IV. Welcome – John Horowitch, President & CEO, Easterseals

John Horowitch, President & CEO, Easterseals, welcomed Commissioners. He noted that Easterseals provides a broad array of services to Veterans and their family members, and to family members of active duty service members.

Veteran Staffing Network: Functions as a full-service staffing agency (temp, temp-to-perm, direct hire) placing veterans, military spouses, National Guard and Reservists, and wounded warriors. Revenues from placement fees are invested to provide crucial support services for veterans, wounded warriors and their families.

Military Family Respite Program: Provides a critical service for military families whose children have severe disabilities and their siblings. Families receive "time off" from parenting and specialized support for their children, creating a healthy and stable home. The program has expanded to include "Little Warriors," children of wounded soldiers.

Homeless Veterans Reintegration Programs: Helps homeless veterans reintegrate into society and the labor force while providing effective services aimed at addressing the complex challenges homeless veterans often confront. Services include job training, counseling and placement services, as well as assistance with VA benefits, health issues and transitional/permanent housing.

Family Caregiver Training: Provides comprehensive caregiver training to family caregivers of veterans. Easterseals shares its expertise in addressing the unique emotional and medical needs involved in caring for loved ones who return home with serious injuries after their service to the United States.

Little Warriors Child Development Program: Provides the highest quality early childhood education, intervention and therapy for families of wounded soldiers, allowing service members to focus on their own recovery. The program is housed in the Easterseals Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Inter-Generational Center and other Easterseals Child Development Centers throughout the region. Serves children from birth to kindergarten and accepts the Montgomery County child care voucher. The program was created by Brigadier General Coots, former Medical Director at Walter Reed.

Adult Day Services: Provides support to persons including veterans who have served our country from World War II to today's conflict. Service personnel at risk of institutionalization can find socialization, medical care, and hope in the Adult Day Centers throughout our region. Easterseals partners with VA, which provides referrals from the DC VA Medical Center, and the County to provide veterans the opportunity to attend Adult Day Services twice a week.

Easterseals is proud to partner with the County, the VA and Veteran Service Organizations such as American Legion and the Air Force Association, to be a community resource.

The floor was opened to questions.

Will Easterseals help Veterans regardless of their status? Easterseals will help anyone regardless of their status. For some programs, they will use VA funding if the person is eligible. If the individual is not eligible, Easterseals will use private funding or other resources.

Are services limited to a number of sessions? It varies program to program. For example, the medical adult day care is for people who have significant needs and some participants have been in the program 10 years or more. The behavioral health clinic focuses on people who need immediate intervention. Evidence-based therapy is provided for 12 to 15 sessions. The clinic also offers case management. Cynthia Macri, Commissioner, reported a \$32 million grant was recently posted that provides funding for evidence-based therapy. Cynthia will share this information with John.

V. Overview and Tour of the Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic – Brenda Campbell, LCWS, Outreach Manager

PowerPoint: <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/A%26D%20Docs/CVA/CohenEastersealsMCCVAJune2018.pdf>

Brenda Campbell, Outreach Manager, began by giving a tour of the Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic to Commission members. The Clinic is part of the Cohen Veterans Network and has been open since November 2017. There are 14 clinics located around the country and there are expected to be 25 clinics by 2020. Clinic locations are chosen based on VA data and the ability to complement existing services being offered by the VA. The Clinic at Easterseals is located in Silver Spring near the VA, Walter Reed, and the Silver Spring Vet Center. The Clinic receives the majority of their referrals from these three agencies with the rest coming from family and friends who have already used the Clinic's services.

The Clinic provides no-cost, confidential, high quality behavioral healthcare services to Veterans and their families as well as families of Active Duty service members including Guard and Reserve regardless of their discharge status or combat experience. Counseling is available for individuals, couples, families, and children as young as toddler age. In addition to counseling, they also offer case management which can help connect the individual to other available resources. Clinicians are social workers and psychologists. Half of the staff are Veterans, and everyone has had extensive training on military culture and evidence-based therapies.

Clinic serves Maryland, DC and Virginia. To break down the barriers to service, the Clinic provides free childcare, free parking and is Metro accessible. Childcare is provided upon request by professional child care takers that have a contract with Easterseals. The Clinic now also offers telehealth services. Intake can be completed over the phone or in the office. Services can usually be provided within a week. The Clinic offers extended hours on Wednesdays and is open the second and fourth Saturday of each month.

The Clinic originally was set to focus on post 9/11 Veterans as Steven A. Cohen, Founder, is the father of a U.S. Marine who deployed to Afghanistan. Mr. Cohen created the Cohen Veterans Network to improve the quality of life for recently returned veterans and their families by working to strengthen mental health outcomes and complement existing support. The Cohen Veterans Bioscience mission is to accelerate the detection and treatment of post-traumatic stress, traumatic brain injury, and related co-morbidities through cutting-edge research. Through this partnership, the organizations provide high-quality treatment and improve the quality of current and future care for veterans and their families.

The Clinic will never turn a Veteran away. Over 200 clients have been treated and the Clinic has the capacity to serve 500 clients per year. Approximately 25% of the Veterans using the Clinic are pre-9/11 with 75% of Veterans post-9/11. 45% of clients are a Veteran and 55% of clients are family members. 51% of clients are male and 49% of clients are female. 95% of clients surveyed reported they were satisfied with the quality of their therapy.

The Clinic has been trying to get a Veterans Benefits Specialist (VBS) in the office on a regular basis (weekly or monthly). Candace Willett, Outreach Coordinator, has talked with the VA, American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and Disabled American Veterans, but they are unable to provide a VBS due to scheduling. They would like to have someone come in once a week. They have the space to accommodate the staff. Dan suggested contacting Phil Munley, Director, Service and Benefits Program, Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA), and proposing to offer full-time space as well as a salary subsidy for the position. Candace reported Easterseals will be hosting a Community Resource Fair in September that will feature a one-day VA benefits claims clinic. She will send the information to Betsy once it has been finalized. Candace reported the Clinic is working with a pro bono legal consortium to provide a paralegal that can assist Veterans on all legal issues.

Candace has developed relationships with universities in the area including University of Maryland University College, Catholic University, University of Baltimore, American University, Georgetown University, George Washington University, University of the District of Columbia, University of Maryland, Morgan State University and Bowie State University. She suggested touring the University of Baltimore's Bob Parsons Veterans Center.

The floor was opened for questions.

Will the Cohen Clinic template expand into other Easterseal locations? Locations are chosen based on a number of factors such as available resources and high-need veteran and military family communities. The current Silver Spring location made sense given the Veterans services currently available in the area as well as the large number of Veterans, active duty service members, and their families who live in the DMV area. Clinics have also been embedded within several universities including New York University, University of Pennsylvania, and University of Colorado. Easterseals moved forward with the Cohen Clinic as they continue to serve their same overarching mission.

Will the Cohen Clinic offer alternative therapies alongside evidence-based therapy? The Clinic is working to develop partnerships to offer alternative therapies such as yoga and meditation. Part of the reason the Clinic uses evidence-based therapy as it is effective for the short-term and they are getting really good results. Brenda noted they are aware that alternative therapists including yoga, equine therapy, pet therapy, art therapy, and music therapy – all work and they want to partner with people in the community to make those services available. Because the Clinic is a non-profit all money is to serve the clients. Partners must be willing to offer services free-of-charge. The Clinic recently made an arrangement with a yoga studio nearby that will offer free yoga classes. They are having trouble locating someone to provide trauma-centered yoga for free. Joanna Starling, Montgomery College, reported that she is a trauma-centered yoga instructor and it is offered to Veterans at Montgomery College in their Combat 2 College program.

Can the Clinic help families who are having monetary issues? The Clinic's case manager is connected to the community and can assist in getting those services. Brenda also now sits on the County's Emergency Food and Shelter Program Board.

What percentage of clients require medication management and do clients pay for their medication? The Clinic does not pay for medication. The Clinic would like to hire a nurse practitioner on staff to help with medication management. Some clients get their medications from Walter Reed, but receive their behavioral health counseling at the Clinic. They also work with pharmaceutical companies to provide stipends. Approximately 1/4 to 1/3 of all clients on are medication.

More information regarding the Veterans Staff Network was requested. VSN is a full agency that offers career coaching, resume writing, interview skills, and how to use networking sites such as LinkedIn. Through grants and partnerships, the program also offers paid internship positions with the possibility of employment. VSN is a nationwide program. The Easterseals Disability Staffing Network (EDSN, pronounced "Edison") empowers people with disabilities to obtain integrated, competitive employment. It is a social venture employment agency that will match people with disabilities with a wide range of private sector employers.

Will the Clinic have a formal relationship with the Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) when it opens? Brenda asked for a contact for the CBOC to discuss the possibility. Betsy Luecking, Staff, will connect with VA staff. Wayne Miller, Silver Spring Vet Center, is hoping to have staff there, but the VA has not yet promised any specific days. The CBOC is tentatively scheduled to open on August 20th.

Are there any other collaborative organizations that are helping fund the Clinic? Mr. Cohen has been generous to fully fund the Clinic for a number of years. The goal is to eventually accept VA Choice and TriCare which will help to sustain the Clinic over time. They always want to make sure they can provide services to someone free of charge, whether they have the ability to pay or not. Easterseals is always looking for grant opportunities.

VI. Brainstorming on FY19 Work Plan for Commission – Dan Bullis, Chair

Dan suggested reviewing existing VBSs and benefits resources available in Montgomery County and in the state. The Commission could reach out to them about their experiences and see if they need assistance. Perhaps Phil Munley, MDVA, could return to discuss the issue. Joanna reported Nathan Jones, VBS, works four days a week at the Montgomery College Rockville Campus and alternates Fridays at the Silver Spring Vets Center.

Dan also suggested inviting County Executive Isiah Leggett to a Commission dinner or informal gathering to thank him for his support and acknowledge all he has done for Veterans in the County during his time in office.

Jim Campbell, Commissioner, reported that after the primaries the Commission on Aging will be contacting the candidate from each party to educate them about what the Commission considers to be the priorities for the aging population in the County. Jim suggested that the Commission on Veterans Affairs do the same. Mike noted that as long as the Commission doesn't favor one party over the other and does not illicit responses they can move forward.

Jim also reported a Maryland Military Coalition is being developed similar to the National Military Coalition. The Coalition includes representatives from Veteran Service Organizations. Since this Commission cannot be a member, it was asked how it can provide input to the Coalition.

Any other brainstorming suggestions can be e-mailed to Betsy.

VII. Chair Report: None

VIII. Updates: None

IX. Announcements:

Betsy Luecking, Staff, announced that Montgomery Parks was awarded a grant from Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to build an accessible lanuch at Riley's Lock on the Potomac River. This is where Team River Runner (TRR) partners with Walter Reed to provide kayaking to Veterans on Sundays from May through November. Work will begin in the fall.

Adjournment: 7:35 p.m.

Next Full Commission Meeting: Tuesday, September 18th, 2018 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