



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Meeting Summary Minutes
March 21st, 2017**

I. Call to Order & Introductions

Randy Stone, Vice-Chairman, welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Commission on Veterans Affairs (CVA). Randy 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. Introduction of New Commissioners

Jameelah Johnson has been appointed as the Director Designee for the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). She served in the U.S. Army for 8 years and was deployed in the first Gulf War. She has worked as a Patient Administrator Specialist in the VA hospital and currently works as a Medical Records Manager for DHHS.

Dr. Bob Koffman, appointed as a Veteran, is a recently retired Navy Medical Officer Psychiatrist in Preventative Medicine from Walter Reed and the National Center of Excellence. He volunteers at the Red Cross and is also the Medical Director for the Semper Fi Fund. He also is the Senior Medical Advisor for Warrior Canine Connection and Medical Director for the Injured Marine Semper Fi Fund

Josephine Bahn and Susan Webman were appointed as members of the General Public. Josephine is an attorney and currently serves as a federal judicial law clerk to the Honorable Joel H. Slomsky in the Federal District Court. Susan has worked for the Department of Labor and the Veteran Employment Training Service. She has worked with corporations to assist them in finding ways to employ Veterans. Last year she was a Director of a congressionally created commission that was looking at how the VA should provide health care for the next 20 years.

III. Approval of Minutes

A motion was made to approve the February 2017 Meeting Summary Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and the February 2017 Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva.

IV. Chairman and Vice-Chairman Report

Randy Stone, Vice-Chairman, reported that the County Executive is hosting his annual meeting with the Boards, Committees, and Commissions (BCCs). BCCs were required to submit their priorities prior to the meeting. The Commission has submitted to the County Executive to address funding for the County's diversion program for a mental health court that includes Veterans and to address ways the County is assisting Veterans and their families navigate and understand their available VA health benefits.

Randy reported that artwork of Col. Fred Cherry that was presented to the Commission at the last meeting on behalf of Montgomery County Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) has been placed in a display case at the Silver Spring Civic Building. The artwork depicts an F-105 piloted by Fred V. Cherry during an attack on the Ham Rong Bridge. Col. Fred Cherry was a prisoner-of-war during Vietnam and a Montgomery County resident. Randy will work on language to be included alongside the print.

Dan Bullis, Chairman, reported that he along with former Commissioners Bill Gray and Jerry Godwin attended the MOAA dinner held March 15th at Manor Country Club. Dan presented Commissioner Jane McCarthy with a

certificate of appreciation from the County Executive for her dedicated service to Veterans and their families of Montgomery County, Maryland. Jane is an original member of the Commission and served from 2008 to 2017.

V. Update – Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC)

Austin Morris, Representative of Senator Chris Van Hollen, reported that she, along with Commissioner Mike Subin and Staff Liaison Betsy Luecking, would be participating in a conference call with the VA on Friday to discuss updates on the CBOC. It was noted that the County Executive is aware of the issue regarding Ride On bus route 63 that serves Gaither Road not providing mid-day service. At this point funding to increase service is not in the FY18 budget, but once the demand is shown resources will be dedicated towards increased service. Austin will discuss with the VA their intentions on how to promote and publicize the new CBOC. Gail Nachmann, Senior Fellow, reported that the County would be willing to advertise on Ride On buses. Gail is also working to partner with non-profit service providers in the County to be located at the CBOC.

Betsy noted that there are 11,959 Montgomery County Veterans currently enrolled in the VA Healthcare System, but approximately only 6,000 of those enrolled Veterans use the DC VA Medical Center for their health care. Services expected to be provided at the CBOC include primary-care and mental-health as well as space for tele-health, patient education, hearing aid fittings and specialty care. Octavia reported that the Commission's 2016 Annual Report included 2015 U.S. Census Data indicating that 11.2% of the County's total Veteran population (41,929) was female (approximately 4,674). Susan suggesting raising this issue during the CBOC conference call and discuss if the CBOC could provide health services to women either full-time or part-time.

VI. Stop, Triage, Engage, Education, and Rehabilitate (STEER), Veterans & Jail Addiction Services – Athena Morrow, LCPC, Manager, Adult Forensic Services, Behavioral Health & Crisis Services, Department of Health & Human Services

The County uses a Sequential Intercept Model, which identifies and utilizes multiple contact points where public agencies can intervene and assist individuals presenting with a mental illness and/or substance abuse. Points include first contact with police, getting adjudicated, going through the criminal justice system, getting incarcerated, being released back into the community, and probation. The goal of the deflection model is to deflect low-risk individuals with substance use disorders away from the criminal justice system and directly into community-based treatment.

STEER is implemented early in the continuum when an individual first comes into contact with police and works to connect people to substance abuse treatment rather than arrest and pre-trial programming. The State's Attorney's Office has approved several minor non-violent offenses that are eligible for the deflection model including: trespassing, public urination, and theft. STEER gives a police officer the discretion on the street to pursue charges against an individual for the minor offense or to refer them into treatment. If referred a case manager conducts a thorough assessment to determine the level of treatment the individual needs. If the individual follows through with the treatment plan, then the charge will not materialize. If the individual does not follow through, then the police officer can pursue the charges. If eligible criminal charges are present, the charges can be held in abeyance if the individual voluntarily accepts a STEER intervention referral. If no criminal charges are present, the individual can still be referred to STEER in a prevention contact. Both elements of STEER reduce drug use thereby reducing crime. The individual is offered a chance for treatment and help, without entering into the criminal justice system.

A STEER pilot program was launched in March 2016 with a budget of \$90,000 for a case manager and services. The case manager has been very active and participates in rides with police officers to provide assessments and going to emergency rooms when someone has overdoses to engage them into services. STEER has referred approximately 100 individuals to the case manager so far and the trend is continuing upwards as more officers are getting more familiar with the program. Athena noted that all 100 individuals had substance abuse issues with many having co-occurring mental health issues. Mike Subin added that police recruits are now being trained on the STEER program and how to engage an individual to detect if there are issues and deflect them from the system.

The program has received \$300,000 in FY18 funding to continue for another year. The Commission supported Behavioral Health and Crisis Services (BHCS) funding request for STEER. The increase of program funding is for consulting services from the agency in Chicago that developed the STEER model. The program costs also include an evaluation component in addition to the services. In FY19, BHCS expects to put out an RFP that would focus more on services.

Athena acknowledges that it is not easy to identify a Veteran, especially if the individual is under the influence or impaired either through substance abuse or a mental health issue. She noted that one of the detention center assessors that identifies inmates is a Veteran who has shared valuable information with other staff on sensitivity and how to ask the right questions to identify a Veteran. Athena also acknowledged that not all Veterans have access or are eligible for VA services.

The mental health court implementation began in December and is currently being used in both the District and Circuit courts. There are currently 32 active clients between the two courts. Of those, two individuals were eligible for VA benefits and one was not. One of the eligible individuals is very well-connected to VA benefits and is a source of information for staff.

Services are available in the jail when the arrest first happens as well as during re-entry at the end of incarceration. Athena noted that the rate of engagement and compliance has been higher for individuals in the STEER program than for those who did not receive early intervention.

Jim Campbell, Commissioner, asked about services for Veterans who are arrested for violent crimes. Athena said that if it is a crime of violence, then the individual might be eligible for the mental health court and an assessment would be completed of the individuals needs. The case worker then develops a comprehensive plan of wrap-around services. She added that the County currently is running a program titled CORP (Comprehensive Reentry Project) using a Federal grant to provide transitional housing for non-violent offenders with co-occurring disorders. The goal is to divert people with moderate to severe mental health or co-occurring disorders from jail beds and link them to stable community services. Offenders are engaged and identified at the time of booking and screening and receive stabilization services while living at the Pre-Release Center.

Julie Riggs, Serving Together (ST), noted that she is working with Dr. Elspeth Ritchie, MD, MPH, COL (ret) Chief, Mental Health, Community-Based Outpatient Clinics, for the VA to plan the 2017 VA Mental Health Summit. The Summit focus will be on diversion and justice-involved programs for Veterans. Julie invited Athena or a member of her staff to be on the speakers panel.

Athena will share a one page handout about STEER with Betsy as well as data regarding the compliance rate.

VII. Announcements

Stan Siedel, Maryland Veterans Commission, reported that [HB 1466 – State Personnel – Disabled Veterans – Noncompetitive Appointment](#) – has been passed by the House and will be going to the Senate for a vote. The bill would enable Veterans with a 30% VA disability rating to be selected for a skilled or professional service position on a noncompetitive basis under specified circumstances.

Jim Campbell, Commissioner, reported that Montgomery County Chapter of MOAA's next luncheon meeting will be held on April 19th. The luncheon will feature a presentation on cyber security. Jim noted that when he held a Veterans Day program at Aspenwood Senior Retirement Community, five attendees self-identified as WWII Veterans and two attendees identified as widows of WWII Veterans. He suggested putting together a program similar to the Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans program to honor those who served in WWII and Korea.

Octavia Dixon, Commissioner, reported that she is working with VA contacts to develop a formal proposal to present at the next Commission meeting to start a subcommittee that would advocate for the VA to study female fertility issues for OIF/OEF/OND Veterans.

Wayne Miller, Commissioner, reported that due to the Federal hiring freeze the Silver Spring Vet Center has been without an Office Manager for 8 months and it will be several more months before that position can be advertised. Wayne also reported that the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) Montgomery County Veterans Benefits Specialist will be leaving his position on March 31st. The position has been posted by MDVA with a closing date of March 8th. The position is expected to be filled soon. Wayne noted that the SSVC always has a large Veteran attendance on the 2nd and 4th Fridays of the month when the VBS is present on location.

Mike Subin, Commissioner, reported that the Department of Transportation needs the design for the proposed Wheaton Vietnam Memorial from Mike Walsh and a list of names to begin drafting the project. Mike also reported that he has been having discussions with a local hospital to provide immediate stabilization services to Veterans from the STEER program.

Jim Dittbrenner, Montgomery County MOAA Business and Networking Group (BANG), reported that the March meeting was canceled due to inclement weather and rescheduled for April 11th. Mr. William D. Golden, CEO, IntelligenceCareers.com, will discuss the employment picture over the next five years for the Metropolitan area.

Julie Riggs, Serving Together, announced that a course titled “Military Service: A Woman’s Perspective” will be presented by the Montgomery County Center for Continuous Learning and the Montgomery County Veterans Collaborative on April 5th from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. at the Executive Office Building in Rockville. This course will present first-hand information on the experiences of women who have served in the military from the Vietnam Era to the Global War on Terror. There is no cost to attend this event but registration is required. Please contact Julie if you are interested – jriggs@every-mind.org. Julie also announced that Family Services will be hosting a [Veterans Symposium & Ribbon Cutting](#) on Thursday, March 30th in Gaithersburg.

Austin Morris, Representative of Senator Chris Van Hollen, reported that Senator Van Hollen is co-sponsoring two pieces of legislation:

- S.712 that would reform the rights and processes relating to appeals of decisions regarding claims for benefits under the laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.
- S.663 aims to assist with sharing of medical records and reduce confusion of out-of-pocket costs by making the VA the primary payer.

Austin also reported that Congressman John Sarbanes will be hosting a [Veterans Benefits Workshop](#) this Saturday, March 25th in Annapolis.

Bill Gray, former Chair, reported that he attended the interment ceremony of Honorable Edward Chow Jr., former MD Secretary of Veterans Affairs and a Captain in the United States Army, at Arlington National Cemetery today.

Adjournment: 7:30 p.m.

Next Full Commission Meeting: Tuesday, April 18th, 2017 from 6:00 p.m. to 7:15 p.m. at Executive Office Building, 101 Monroe Street, 9th Floor Conference Room, Rockville, MD 20850

Respectfully submitted:

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