



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs  
Meeting Summary Minutes  
May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2017**

**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.

**II. Approval of Minutes**

A motion was made to approve the April 2017 Meeting Summary Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and the April 2017 Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva).

**III. Bikers Against Child Abuse (B.A.C.A.) Maryland – Blue, Representative, BACA**

**Website:** <http://maryland.bacaworld.org/2012/12/10/main/>

Blue noted that he is a Navy Veteran that served 10 years during the Vietnam War. He is also a member of the American Legion.

B.A.C.A. was founded by John Paul “Chief” Lilly, a Licensed Clinical Social Worker who noticed as he was interacting with children professionally that they had a tremendous amount of fear and that traditional means of dealing with that fear were not working. He recalled his own childhood and his father’s association with the motorcycle club Hells Angels. By being acquainted with this group, he felt confident and secure in his life. Chief noted that children who feel safe are more capable of telling the truth because the threats made by an abuser are offset by the presence of dedicated bikers that have now become part of the child’s world. “Chief” started the first chapter in Utah. It has been in existence 22 years now and extends to 48 states and 13 countries.

B.A.C.A. exists with the intent to create a safer environment for abused children. They exist as a body of bikers to empower children to not feel afraid of the world in which they live. They work in conjunction with local and state officials who are already in place to protect children. They desire to send a clear message to all involved with the abused child that this child is part of their organization, and that they are prepared to lend their physical and emotional support to them by affiliation, and their physical presence. They do not condone the use of violence or physical force in any manner, however, if circumstances arise such that they are the only obstacle preventing a child from further abuse, they stand ready to be that obstacle.

B.A.C.A. International, Inc. is organized with a central contact person to receive calls from referring agencies and individuals. A recognized, authorized agency with which the child has had contact determines that the child is still frightened by his or her environment. The agency representative contacts B.A.C.A., or refers the individual to contact B.A.C.A. and the name and address of the child is given to the B.A.C.A./Child Liaison. The Liaison verifies that the case has been reported and the authorities have been contacted, and the case is being processed within the system. The Liaison contacts the family and an initial ride is organized to meet the child at their home or in some other location where the child will feel comfortable. The B.A.C.A. chapter rides to meet the child and he/she is given a vest with a B.A.C.A. patch sewn on the back. The child is free to wear the vest or not, and they support their decision. They also choose their nickname and only the Agency Liaison and the Child Liaison may

know the child's real name. The child is also given bumper stickers, and other gifts that are generally donated by the public. These initial visits generally last about a half an hour.

Following this initial contact, the child is given the name and number of two B.A.C.A. Members residing geographically closest to them, who then become the child's primary contacts. Prior to becoming the primary contacts for the child, the bikers are cleared for participation by passing an extensive background check, have ridden with the Chapter for at least a year, and have received special instructions from the Licensed Mental Health Professional. Anytime the child feels scared and feels the need for the presence of his new B.A.C.A. family, the child may call upon these bikers 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, either on the phone or to go to the child's house and provide the necessary reassurance to feel safe and protected. All phone calls are logged and reviewed by the Executive Board. B.A.C.A. Members and supporters also support the children by: providing escorts for them if they feel scared in their neighborhoods; riding by their homes on a regular basis; supporting the children at court and parole hearings; attending their interviews, and; staying with the children if they are alone and frightened. The B.A.C.A. Members never go to the child's house alone (at least two members must be present) and never without the knowledge or permission of the parents. The mission is to help the children and their families learn how powerful they can be and their presence will be available as long as the child needs them. B.A.C.A. members will also escort the child to another state, if necessary. For example, if the child has a court case in Georgia, a local B.A.C.A. chapter will be contacted there to provide assistance and to escort the child to court.

Members also attend court with the child. The sole purpose for their physical presence is to assist the child in being less intimidated and frightened, and subsequently give an accurate testimony regarding his/her abuse. If the child requests their presence in the courtroom, the parent or guardian for the child must petition the child's attorney, who then will intercede on behalf of the child to the presiding Judge. Absolutely no physical confrontation of the perpetrator will be tolerated by B.A.C.A.

B.A.C.A. International is a tax exempt 501 (C) (3) corporation. All funds received from fundraising efforts or donations are put into the treasury. Funds are used to provide children with a vest, patches, pins, a stuffed B.A.C.A. bear or monkey, a blanket, and toys to give the child a sense of security and belonging. B.A.C.A. also finances a therapy assistance fund to support children's therapy when they are left without resources. Donations may also be used for coffee and other refreshments for those members who are providing round-the-clock watch at a child's house. No B.A.C.A. members draw a salary.

There are three chapters in Maryland – Patapsco Valley Chapter, Maryland Chesapeake Bay Region Chapter, and South Mountain Chapter. Contrary to some motorcycle groups, B.A.C.A. has women members who have equal vote and equal responsibilities. A small percentage of B.A.C.A. members are Veterans. Blue suggested this may be that older Veterans are most likely involved in other motorcycle groups, such as Rolling Thunder. Blue added that B.A.C.A. does not have any criteria for religion, geography, ethnic background or national origin for their members or for the children. All member applicants must attend B.A.C.A. meetings for three months. After those three months, they then must submit to and pass a federal fingerprint background check. If the applicant has any domestic violence or child abuse issues that show up in the background check they are told to leave. Member applicants must attend B.A.C.A. meetings and events during their first year and must be unanimously approved worthy by a Board of Directors. There is no appeal process.

The floor was opened to questions.

It was asked what the maximum age is for children. Children are between the ages of 4 and 18, but they have provided services to young adults that have mental disabilities whose mental age has been medically determined to be much lower and their ability to process their abuse is like that of a child. B.A.C.A. must receive permission from the international organization first to be involved with that child, but they have yet to be rejected on any of these types of cases.

It was asked if they would accept referrals from lawyers, therapists, or teachers. B.A.C.A. does not receive referrals from these types of contacts. They would refer those individuals to social services who can investigate and create a case, if necessary. Lisa Merkin, LCSW-C, Administrator, Child Welfare Services, would then refer these cases to B.A.C.A. Blue noted that the case does not have to go to court in order for them to accept the child.

It was asked how B.A.C.A. maintains contact with the child if they do not have a personal phone. B.A.C.A. requires guardian's permission to be involved and will contact the guardian regularly in order to contact the child and will make regular visits. After the first initial visit, the two primary contacts must follow-up within two weeks and then another follow-up in another two weeks. If members are not getting direct access to the child, then they discuss with the guardian.

It was asked about the ratio of gender for the children. There are more girls than boys. This may be because boys may be more reluctant to talk about their abuse.

#### **V. Update on the Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC):**

To date, all demolition has been done to the interior of the clinic and permits are being applied for to start construction. The CBOC is on track for an opening in December 2017. A workgroup will be meeting with the VA bi-weekly to stay updated and to help where we can in assisting them with advertising and any other issues we can help with.

#### **VI. Chair Report:**

Dan reported that May 26<sup>th</sup> is National Poppy Day. National Poppy Day broadens a tradition that dates back to the American Legion Auxiliary's first National Convention in the early 1920s when the red poppy was adopted as The American Legion Family's memorial flower. Today, it remains a symbol of honor for the sacrifice of our veterans.

American Legion Post 41, American Legion Post 268, and Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 2562 will be hosting a Memorial Day Service on May 29<sup>th</sup> at Wheaton Memorial Park at 11:00 a.m. Lunch will be served.

Dan and Betsy Luecking, Staff, met with Al Roshdieh, Director, Department of Transportation (DOT), to discuss the Vietnam War memorial. Al noted that the Wheaton Veterans Veterans Park located at the intersection of Amherst Avenue and Reedie Drive, which was thought to be moving, will stay at that location and maintenance will be transferred from Montgomery Parks to DOT. As the new downtown Wheaton redevelopment project will not be completed for another two-and-a-half to three years, it was suggested that the Veteran plaque honoring the 131 County residents that died in Vietnam be placed at this current park. This would create a memorial much sooner and would allow for County Executive Ike Leggett to dedicate the memorial before he leaves office. Al will contact Parks to see if the transfer can occur now rather than waiting for the new redevelopment project to be completed. He will also look into the possibility of installing an outdoor, interactive screen on the parking garage wall that is across from the park. Wheaton Veterans Urban Park website: <http://www.montgomeryparks.org/parks-and-trails/wheaton-veterans-urban-park/>.

#### **VII. Announcements**

Mike Subin, Commissioner, reported that he interviewed Senator Van Hollen last month for the County Cable show Home Front. Video:

[https://montgomerycountymd.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view\\_id=148&clip\\_id=13279&embed=1](https://montgomerycountymd.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=148&clip_id=13279&embed=1)

Mike also reported that County Council has introduced [Expedited Bill 13-17 – Taxation – Property Tax Credit for Retired Military Services Members](#), which would expand the property tax credit for military retirees to include a retired member of the uniformed services, the military reserves or the National Guard. It also would generally amend the law relating to property tax credits.

Jamelaah Johnson, Commissioner, reported that she spoke with her uncle, who is retired from IBM, and he would be happy to assist with technical advice regarding the installation of a large, interactive outdoor screen, similar to the screen that is in downtown Silver Spring at United Technologies.

The Kappa Psi Chapter of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity is seeking initiatives for supporting Veterans in Montgomery County in their upcoming calendar year. If you have suggestions, please contact Brian Breaker at [toure.breaker@gmail.com](mailto:toure.breaker@gmail.com).

Julie Riggs, Serving Together, reported that the Takoma Park Independence Day Committee is eager to bring a greater representation of the Veterans community into the annual Independence Day Celebration on July 4<sup>th</sup>. If you or an organization you are a part of may be interested in participating, please contact parade Organizer Tara Egan at 240-863-8837 (V) or tara.marie.egan@gmail.com. You can also learn more about the parade on their website: <http://www.takomapark4th.org/sitecode.fol/pages.fol/tpidchome.aspx>.

Hazel Gross, Elks Lodge #15, reported that Team River Runner is now hosting their free weekly paddling program every Sunday afternoon at Riley's Lock in Poolesville. The program runs from April through October. The Washington Rockville Elks provide a free cookout. Interested participants can contact Lisa Weed at [Lisa.Weed@teamriverrunner.org](mailto:Lisa.Weed@teamriverrunner.org).

Octavia Dixon, Commissioner, noted the following information regarding the Veterans who pass from a non-service-related death and their VA Death Benefit:

“VA will pay up to \$749 toward burial and funeral expenses for deaths on or after October 1, 2016 (if hospitalized by VA at time of death), or \$300 toward burial and funeral expenses (if not hospitalized by VA at time of death), and a \$749 plot-interment allowance (if not buried in a national cemetery). For deaths on or after December 1, 2001, but before October 1, 2011, VA will pay up to \$300 toward burial and funeral expenses and a \$300 plot-interment allowance. For deaths on or after April 1, 1988 but before October 1, 2011, VA will pay \$300 toward burial and funeral expenses (for Veterans hospitalized by VA at the time of death). Website: <http://www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/claims-special-burial.asp>.”

Jim Campbell, Commissioner, asked if the Commission would be interested in receiving State legislative updates from MOAA and if the Commission can advocate on various bills at the State level. The Commission's enabling legislation allows for the Commission to advocate at the State and Federal level, but only if the Office of Intergovernmental Relations approves the effort and ensures there are no conflicts with the County position.

Austin Morris, Representative of Senator Chris Van Hollen, reported that Senator Van Hollen joined Senator John McCain and a bipartisan group of Senators to introduce legislation aimed at combating veteran suicide. The Veterans Overmedication Prevention Act would direct the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to conduct an independent expert study on the deaths of all veterans being treated at the VA who died by suicide or from a drug overdose in the last five years. Octavia noted that a similar study is currently being conducted by the VA out of Canadaga, NY.

**Adjournment:** 7:20 p.m.

**Next Full Commission Meeting:** Tuesday, June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2017 from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at Health & Human Services Building, 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