



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs  
Meeting Summary Minutes  
May 19th, 2020**

**\*\*MEETING WAS HELD VIRTUALLY VIA ZOOM\*\***

**I. Call to Order**

Dan Bullis, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Commission on Veterans Affairs (CVA). Dan asked for all present to say the Pledge of Allegiance. Wayne Miller, Vice-Chair, recognized prisoners of war and asked 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 April 2020 Meeting Summary Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken, and the April 2020 Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva).

**III. Chair and Vice Chair Report**

Dan reported Neil Greenberg, Public Information Office (PIO), issued a press release on the Commission's Fallen Heroes website. [View full press release](#).

Dan also reported he has reached out to the Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic and let them know the Walter Reed Society (WRS) is available to provide monetary assistance to Veterans and family members. Jane asked how she can donate to WRS. Visit <https://www.walterreedsociety.org/> to read more about WRS and how to donate. WRS was planning a Walter Reed Army Medical Center (WRAMC) reunion for anyone with ties to WRAMC (staff, patients, etc.) to be held October 4, 2020. This reunion has been postponed until at least the Fall of 2021.

**IV. Updates / Announcements**

Meredith Bruce, former Commissioner, reported that within the next week the DC VA Medical Center will be transitioning ENT, podiatry and a few other medical services to video connect allowing physicians to talk to patients remotely. She suggested inviting Angela Valentine, Chief Deputy Director, VA, or another staff member to present the new process to the Commission.

Christa Burton, Representative of Congressman Jamie Raskin, reported she has been contacted by a family who lost a Navy Veteran and they would like to obtain an American flag. Mike Subin, Commissioner, suggested they contact the Operations Department at the Naval District Washington. Dan said he and the American Legion can become involved to get them a flag.

Mike Subin, Commissioner, suggested inviting Michael Heimall, DC VA Medical Center, to a Commissioner meeting to address specific mental health issues for Veterans and services offered by the DC VA Medical Center or other locations. Several requests have been made to PIO and County Cable Montgomery to feature Michael Heimall on an episode of Homefront, but those requests have not been answered. Neil said the PIO Director and Assistant Director ultimately make the decisions. Betsy Luecking, Staff, said if Michael Heimall were to speak at our next Commission meeting, she can send the meeting notice to her distribution list to increase awareness and participation. Betsy will also draft an e-mail for Neil to send to Ohene Gyapong, Deputy Director, PIO, asking if we can conduct the Homefront interview using Zoom. Then PIO can edit the episode to air. Joanna Starling, Montgomery College (MC), said the TV producer for MC has been using Zoom

to film episodes for Combat2College. Mike suggested waiting until Friday to hear back from PIO and then moving forward with a different way to tape the episode. Dan asked if PIO is overwhelmed with COVID 19 stories. Neil said that has been the priority.

Jonathan Alfaro, Public, asked if the Commission has used any other media platforms to broadcast Homefront. He suggested using Twitch, a streaming platform that many Veterans currently use to watch users play video games. Many users have created their own Twitch TV channels. The platform will automatically record and offers voice chat. The video can be edited later. Neil said Homefront episodes can be shared via social media. Once the episode is taped it can be shown everywhere. Betsy asked Jonathan to assist the Commission in outreaching to younger Veterans.

Mallary Lass, Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic, said the clinic is open and accepting new clients. Clinic services are available to any person who has served in the U.S. Armed Forces, including the National Guard and Reserves, regardless of role or discharge status, their families, the families of active duty service members, and caregivers. Individual counseling is available for ages 5 and up. They also offer couples and family counseling. Counseling services are currently being provided through Zoom. Mallary reported that phones are answered 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. [Vets4Warriors](#) answers phones after-hours. The Clinic serves all of Maryland, Virginia, and DC. Betsy asked Mallary for a write-up of services and she will send it out to her distribution list. Mike suggested inviting Mallary on the same program as Michael Heimall to provide information about the Cohen Clinic as another avenue for assistance.

Cynthia Macri, Commissioner, reported that Governor Hogan recently announced the launch of the Caregiver Services Corps, a program to support Maryland seniors who have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The Caregiver Services Corps is able to quickly deploy volunteers and other resources to the homes of seniors who need urgent assistance with everyday tasks when their typical caregiver becomes unable to help them due to COVID-19 exposure, illness, or other challenges. Those in need of assistance should call 2-1-1 to be connected with the Caregiver Services Corps help center. Trained staff at the call center will triage the caller's needs and help match them with a volunteer. The call center is available 7 days a week and is capable of taking calls in many languages. Cynthia also reported that the Maryland Living Well Center of Excellence is offering a [Program To Encourage Active And Rewarding Lives](#) (PEARLS), a one-on-one evidence-based program designed to reduce depression in physically impaired and socially isolated individuals. The program is offered in 6 to 8 sessions over a 19-week period by a certified PEARLS counselor. Betsy asked Cynthia to send her more information so she can share it with her distribution list.

Jonathan reported he began volunteering with the Civil Air Patrol at Parkland Middle School two years ago and it has been his goal to merge his Marine leadership skills with his teaching skills to teach kids real life skills. He shared a brief video as an example of the students, or cadets, involved in the Civil Air Patrol taking part of a Minecraft leadership program. The cadets are aged 13 and 14 and are presented with a task to build together and then they give a presentation. The cadets learn real life experience and skills including communication, team building, e-mail, and social media. The program focuses on technology and science. The current program includes 27 students. Jonathan is seeking funding to allow students to participate that are underprivileged or cannot afford the necessary tools needed to complete the project. Jonathan offered the Commission his expertise as a Certified Digital Marketer to look into the efficiency of e-mails sent and ads being used by this Commission.

Bob Norton, Maryland Military Coalition (MMC), reported MMC has sent a letter to the Maryland Speaker of the House of Delegates and the Maryland President of the Senate asking them to continue to work on issues that could not be completed because the session in Annapolis was suspended and then canceled because of COVID 19.

Jameelah Johnson, Commissioner, reported that a farm near where she lives in Virginia was giving produce away for free. Betsy asked for the contact information as ServingTogether has started delivering produce boxes to Veterans and this could be a potential match for that program.

Melissa Barber, Serving Together (ST), reported that Fields for Valor is providing free regular produce box deliver for Veterans and military families. ST has been working with Montgomery County Coalition for the Homeless and Bethesda Cares. Any other interested Veterans or families can contact ST. Melissa reported the Veterans Collaborative will be meeting virtually tomorrow via Zoom. Peer Navigators are still taking calls. Approximately 50% of calls are related to COVID 19. ST covers Montgomery County, Prince George's County, Southern, Maryland, DC, and parts of Northern Virginia. She suggested that any Veteran contact the Peer Navigator for assistance as ST has partnered with organizations in other states and can connect the Veteran in some way.

Joanna reported that the Federal government is planning to release National Guard members from Federal orders on June 24<sup>th</sup> one day before they qualify for VA benefits. National Guard members were activated under Title 32 as they are responding to a national emergency. Joanna has been working with a number of students who are National Guard members that were deployed and are trying to finish their semester. Bob said if a National Guard member serves 90 days of Federal Active Duty they qualify for certain VA benefits, including retirement and education benefits. For more information, view <https://www.benefits.va.gov/BENEFITS/benefits-summary/SummaryofVANationalGuardandReserve.pdf>. At this point, it seems as if the early release is intentional so the National Guard members do not qualify for benefits. Austin Morris, Representative to Senator Chris Van Hollen, said she will ask her legislative colleague to investigate this issue. Christa said she will do the same. Betsy said as County staff she can ask the Office of Intergovernmental Relations to advise Maryland Delegation. Commissioners as private citizens can contact their representatives. It was suggested that Congressman Anthony Brown be notified as he serves on the House Armed Services Committee.

**Adjournment:** 7:00pm

**Next Full Commission Meeting:** Tuesday, June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020 via Zoom from 6pm to 7pm. Please view the agenda for information on how to join the meeting.

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