



**Commission on Veterans Affairs
Meeting Agenda**

**March 18, 2025
6 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.**

**Michael Wilson, Chair
Anneke Vandenbroek, Vice-Chair**

Join the meeting via Zoom
<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/7390017153?omn=85260406037>

Vietnam War Veterans Day, March 29, 2025

If you want to call into the meeting, call 301-715-8592, use Meeting ID 739 001 7153 followed by #.

If a Commissioner would like to speak during the meeting, they can raise their hand if on video and Chair will recognize you or you can use the “hand raise” function under the reactions tab at bottom of page. If connecting via a smart phone, tablet or computer, please click on the middle of the page and the functions will be at the bottom of the page. Use the Zoom app to be able to access all functions, including raising your hand. If you are calling by phone, press *9 to raise your hand. Those calling into the meeting can press *6 to mute or unmute their phone.

6:00 Welcome, Pledge of Allegiance, Moment of Silence & POW/MIA Remembrance, Approval of February 2025 Minutes – Michael Wilson, Chair

6:10 Process of Establishing a Veterans Treatment Court – Charley Jay, Chair, [Baltimore County Commission on Veterans Affairs](#) and Justin McNabb, Mentor Coordinator and Data Specialist for the Baltimore City Veterans Treatment Court

6:45 Chair and Vice Chair Updates – Michael Wilson & Anneke Vandenbroek
Update on HB267 Claim Predators
Re-establishing the Commission's relationship with veteran organizations
FY 26 Operating Budget Testimony for County Council - See testimony for the County Council HHS Committee Hearing from October, 2024 for review

7:20 Updates from Commissioners
Public School Holidays - Veterans' Day and Purples Star Schools - Mike Subin
What Veterans and their families need to know about purchasing a home and or renovation of an existing home – Miguel Sapp and Chris Thomas

7:30 Adjourn

ADA Reasonable Accommodations: Sign language interpreter services and other auxiliary aids or services will be provided upon request with as much advance notice as possible, preferably at least five (5) full business days before the meeting. To request any reasonable accommodation to participate in the meeting, please contact Carly Clem in advance at carly.clem@montgomerycountymd.gov or call 202-853-1109. In all situations, a good faith effort will be made to provide accommodations. For any additional questions or concerns, please contact Betsy Luecking, Staff Liaison at betsy.luecking@montgomerycountymd.gov or please call 240-418-4865, MD Relay 711.

See next page for FY 26 Policy Issues and Duties

**Commission on Veterans Affairs
FY26 Policy Issues
Montgomery County Council HHS Committee**

October 16, 2024
Michael Wilson, Chair
Anneke Vandenbroek, Vice-Chair

Priority 1: Educate Veterans and their families on how to access all federal, state, and county funded programs for Veterans and their families and advocate for any needed programs and services not funded by the federal or state government at the County level.

The U.S. Census Bureau 2023 American Community Survey estimates that there are approximately **36,589 veterans living in Montgomery County, Maryland**. That is an **increase of 5,690 veterans** since last year's census (30,899). The County funds Serving Together which is an information and referral point of contact for Veterans and their families. We recommend the County continue to fund this needed referral resource. The Commission worked with the DC VA Medical Center for four years to convince them to locate the Community Based Outpatient Clinic in Gaithersburg. As a result of the Commission's efforts, the clinic opened in 2018. It is now the primary care facility for nearly 5,000 Veterans. There is a total of 12,622 county veterans enrolled in VA healthcare.

We commend the County for making a priority of the addition of permanent affordable housing for the homeless Veteran population. HUD-VASH is a collaborative program which pairs HUD'S Housing Choice Voucher program with VA case management and supportive services. We recently learned from Senator Van Hollen's office that the County has been awarded an additional 20 VASH vouchers bringing the total to an estimated 118. In partnership with the Commission, Senator Van Hollen's, and Cardin's office the County received 98 VASH vouchers between the years of 2010 - 2016 years and then again in 2024 an additional 20 vouchers, each worth \$13,122 or \$1.5 M total per year in housing subsidies. However, not all Veterans qualify due to receiving less than an honorable discharge and are therefore not eligible for VA programs. The County Council has appropriated \$650,000 per year for homeless veterans, and we recommend that this funding continue. The County is also funding Warrior Canine Connection which is a program that enlists recovering warriors into a therapeutic mission of learning to train service dogs for other veterans. We ask that you assist us to have the State establish a Veterans Home in the County through the VA State Veterans Home Construction Grant Program or other funding source. Maryland Veterans are underserved for state owned and operated nursing home, domiciliary and adult care facilities. Maryland's only Veterans Home is in Charlotte Hall, MD.

Priority 2: Plan and Conduct Education & Community Outreach efforts for programs and services for Veterans and their families.

This includes planning for Veterans Day, National Veteran and Military Families Month, Veteran Suicide Prevention and Awareness, and Memorial Day events. We especially thank the Public Information Office for their strong support in promoting and recognizing the services and sacrifices of our veterans and their families.

- Promote suicide prevention awareness and promote by Advertising Psych Armor and encourage individuals to enroll in the free training.
- Lead the Operation Green Light activities and celebration of Veterans Day.
- Promote social connectedness. and veteran inclusion in County activities.
- Enhance economic opportunities, financial literacy, and entrepreneurship training for veterans.
- Educate the public on the property tax credits for veterans.

Duties of the Commission on Veterans Affairs

The Commission duties include:

1. research, assemble, analyze and disseminate information and educational materials relating to activities and programs that will assist in meeting the needs of veterans and their families;
2. institute and conduct educational and other programs, meetings, and conferences to promote the rights and opportunities for veterans;

3. advise the Executive and the Council on the status of programs and services in the State and County related to the needs of veterans and their families; and
4. assist in planning appropriate public acknowledgement of the contributions made by veterans and assist in planning commemoration activities recognizing the contributions made by veterans.



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Meeting Minutes
March 18, 2025**

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

Call to Order - Welcome, Pledge of Allegiance, Moment of Silence & POW/MIA Remembrance

Michael Wilson, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Commission on Veterans Affairs (CVA). He asked for all present to say the Pledge of Allegiance. He 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.

Approval of February 2025 Meeting Minutes

Due to lack of a quorum, the approval of the February 2025 Meeting Minutes has been tabled until the April meeting. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva.

Process of Establishing a Veterans Treatment Court – Charley Jay, Chair, Baltimore County Commission on Veterans Affairs and Justin McNabb, Mentor Coordinator and Data Specialist for the Baltimore City Veterans Treatment Court

History of Veterans Treatment Courts: <https://bja.ojp.gov/program/veterans-treatment-court-program/overview>

Central Maryland Regional Veterans Treatment Court: <https://uwcm.org/what-we-do/initiatives-and-targeted-offerings/veterans-treatment-court/>

Judge Halee Weinstein, a U.S. Army veteran, founded the Baltimore City Veterans Treatment Court (BCVTC) in October of 2015 as a comprehensive, court-supervised, and voluntary treatment-based program for veterans charged with misdemeanor and concurrent jurisdiction felonies in the District Court. BCVTC was re-launched in November 2024 as the Central Maryland Regional Veterans Treatment Court (CMRVTC) serving Baltimore City, Baltimore County, Carroll County, Harford County and Howard County.

The program provides area veterans the help they need to get back on their feet and become self-sufficient, rather than serve jail time, and avoid a criminal record that could limit future housing and employment options. Because the most common struggles returning veterans face are related to finding and keeping a job, finances, legal matters, substance use, mental health, relationships and homelessness, the CMRVTC provides a coordinated approach to treating veterans, whether they're eligible for VA benefits or not. Participants work with mentors who are also veterans, and who can provide support and guidance for health, employment, legal, financial, counseling, and other services. As veteran participants reach program milestones, they receive "dog tags" recognizing their resilience, honor, courage and dedication during the course of the program.

The CMRVTC is supported by a grant from the Maryland Judiciary's Office of Problem-Solving Courts that funds the operations. Staff salaries are funded by the State and supplemented through funds from the United Way of Central Maryland (UWCM), which operates as the fiscal agent for CMRVTC. UWCM provides additional supports to the Anne Arundel Veterans Treatment Court and the CMRVTC by providing gift cards, transportation and other program needs.

The biggest barrier to establishing a Veterans Treatment Court (VTC) is identifying a motivated judge willing to take on the extra docket as well as identifying State's Attorney's and Public Defenders as there is a large volunteer effort. These courts must raise their own funds and court employees cannot fundraise. Courts

typically start their own 501c3 or connect with an established non-profit. Some state and local court budgets are beginning to include funding for these courts as data has shown there is a need.

The VTC is a voluntary and alternative pathway through the criminal justice system. Identifying veterans going through the system was a significant barrier prior to establishing the VTC. Judge Weinstein instituted procedural changes whereby individuals are asked at two points during the arrest process if they have served in the military – the first during the booking process and the second by an arraignment judge. If an individual is identified as a veteran, their case is reset to go before Judge Weinstein. They will speak with the public defenders about the program details and what to expect. They will then attend the VTC docket to witness the proceedings and make their decision afterwards. If the veteran completes the program they can reduce or dismiss their case. Judge Weinstein has the veteran take an oath before officially entering the VTC to signify the start of their difficult journey and to mirror the oath they took when joining the military.

On the first day, the veteran receives a full wrap-around needs assessment from the case manager. The court currently has one case manager and a second case manager may be assigned as numbers increase. Stable housing and mental health and/or substance use treatment are prioritized. The court works with a number of community providers and can refer to veteran service organizations, treatment agencies and the VA, which is the biggest court partner. The case is the reset for the next docket. The veteran can expect to meet before the judge every two weeks.

The court docket is held four days per month. The CMRVTC docket is reviewed by the entire team prior to the docket starting and they brief the Judge on each case since the veteran's last court appearance. The court team consists of a case manager, an administration coordinator, and Veteran Justice Outreach (VJO) specialist from the VA assigned to act as a liaison to the VA. The VJO sits in court connected to the VA system to review claim statuses and make treatment appointments. This has helped to make the program a success. The court does take non-VA eligible veterans and has access to partners and organizations that are able to serve them. A Veterans Benefits Administration representative also serves on the court to assist with filing claims. Every semester the University of Baltimore School of Law Veterans Advocacy Clinic brings a new group of law students to assist veterans with VA claims, discharge status upgrades and civil legal issues, if needed. The law students work under the supervision of the public defenders and McClain.

Volunteer veterans give their time and energy to create a battle buddy type of relationship. Justin McNabb's role is to recruit and train veterans from the community to fill that role. Mentors are not part of the staff or given briefings about the veteran's case. Mentors operate under a confidentiality agreement that staff cannot operate under which allows veterans to seek help from their mentor or discuss issues that they are not ready to bring to their team yet. Some mentors that have joined have graduated from the CMRVTC. No other problem solving court has a mentor aspect.

CMRVTC is within the Maryland District Court and serves veterans with mostly misdemeanors such as DUIs, simple assaults or homelessness. All court participants are placed on supervised probations. Most participants receive two years of probation but can receive three years if the crime is more serious. If a participant does not keep up with their treatment or does not report for supervision, the judge can pass down a series of sanctions and potentially face jail time. Some individuals will have to serve a period of incarceration prior to participating in the program due to the crime committed.

As veterans begin to get on track and show up for their appointments and treatments, the judge will start to set hearings to once a month. As the veteran gets towards the end of the program, the team works to address the veteran's personal goals including education and employment. Partners include the Maryland Department of Labor (MDL) and the Disabled Veterans Representative from MDL as well as staff from different agencies for treatment.

Judge Weinstein prefers to hold graduation on a case-by-case basis versus only have one or two graduations per year. Although, in November Judge Weinstein will schedule a larger docket and invite outside partners and guests to attend a larger graduation in recognition of Veterans Day.

Data shows the likelihood of self-sabotage is higher when the veteran nears graduation. This could be due to the veteran not having the same support system afterwards. Judge Weinstein has a discussion with each

veteran weeks prior to graduation and some veterans do ask to stay in the program longer or ask to meet more frequently recognizing that they need to retain that accountability.

Upon graduation, veterans receive a certificate and a challenge coin specifically designed for the program. The veterans also receive a challenge coin to be given to their mentor to recognize the role they played in the process. The charge is then either reduced or dismissed. This allows some veterans to retain employment or education because they will not have a charge on their record. If a veteran has a criminal record from previous cases, the Baltimore Law School students and public defenders will review those cases for possible expungement.

The CMRVTC operates with a less than 10% recidivism rate compared to the national VTC recidivism rate of 25%. The national recidivism rate for courts overall averages 60% to 65%.

The floor was opened to questions.

- **What other funding resources are used to support the program and are there any federal funds?** The bulk of funding is from the state level and funds from United Way of Central Maryland. All financial aspects are handled by United Way. They also manage the administration for applying for and receiving grants. Last year, a federal grant was awarded and set to be distributed this year, but they have been notified the funds are currently on hold.
- **Have there been any challenges in encouraging veterans to participate in the program?** The program really needs to be sold to potential veterans. Those who chose the regular pathway have a much easier experience and would not be meeting with a judge every two weeks. It takes a lot on that first day when the potential participant meets with the judge and the CMRVTC team to learn about the services available and to hear the success stories and then to make the decision to join the program. There have been 130 successful graduations since 2015. An alumni group has been established so veterans can stay connect to each other and to the court. One veteran who graduated last year regularly attends court dockets to speak with the veterans give perspective.
- **What are the eligibility requirements?** Judge Weinstein does not take individuals with sex crimes or most domestic violence crimes. There is a domestic violence track within the Baltimore City District Court that is better equipped to handle those types of cases. If the individual has a hefty criminal record the state may recommend that they are not eligible as well. During COVID-19, some cases typically handled by the State's Attorney's Office started to be taken on by the CMRVTC such as hand gun charges. The CMRVTC has been successful with some of the more serious gun charges and national data shows that these cases can be successful in VTC programs. Ultimately, it is the judge's decision and Judge Weinstein wants to help as many people as possible. Judge Weinstein is also open to service eligibility. If a veteran took the oath, signed the paperwork, but was discharged after a week after bootcamp she considers them a veteran.
- **Is participation in the program contingent on the defendant being out on bail?** No, it is not necessary. Some participants have come before the judge for an initial hearing prior to lock up. If the State's Attorney's Office advises a period of incarceration and the individual serves their sentence and is not engaged in the program, they will be brought to court every once in awhile to get familiar with the team and the program. They will also attend treatment while incarcerated when available, but options are limited. Once they are out of jail, they will go before the judge more regularly and start receiving case management.
- **Do participants in the program waive their right to a speedy trial?** Yes.
- **Are languages translation services available to participants?** Individuals who have served in the U.S. military usually have English proficiency, but United Way of Central Maryland does have resources and translation services available.

The Commission was invited to attend a future docket and see the program in action.

Chair and Vice Chair Updates – Michael Wilson

- **Update on HB267 Claim Predators**

The Commission did submit written testimony in support of HB267 Claim Predators. Bob Norton, Maryland Military Coalition, reported that Senator Hershey has put a hold on the bill. If the hold stays, the bill would be dead for this session. If he releases the hold, the Senate can still pass the bill before adjournment. The Maryland General Assembly legislative session ends April 8.

- **Re-Establishing the Commission's Relationship with Veteran Organizations**

No Commissioners had interactions with any veteran service organizations within the last month.

- **FY 26 Operating Budget Testimony for County Council**

The Commission will be providing testimony on April 7 or April 8. Michael will review his calendar to see if he can attend in person. If not written testimony can be submitted. Last year's testimony included support for continued grant funding for Warrior Canine Connection and funding for a contract with ServingTogether provided through the Department of Health and Human Services. It was suggesting including support and a recommendation for a VTC in Montgomery County. Grace Caulfield, Commissioner, reported there is a subcommittee working on gathering information regarding establishing a VTC in the County. Jameelah Johnson, Commissioner, works with the Montgomery County Drug Treatment Court and will try to get some data.

Future Meeting Planning

Niki Falzone, Executive Director, Platoon 22 will be presenting at the Commission's April meeting. She will be sharing the work they have done in terms of suicide prevention. Platoon 22 also worked to establish a joint VTC for Frederick and Washington Counties.

Updates from Commissioners Public School Holidays - Veterans' Day and Purples Star Schools

Prior to the meeting Michael Subin, Commissioner, shared an email from Montgomery County Public Schools which detailed the curriculum given to students in grades 5, 8, and 9 through 11 to learn about veterans, the veterans experience and how we honor veterans in the past and today. The email did not address what is specifically done for Veterans Day. Betsy Luecking, Staff, has sent a follow-up email asking for more information.

The Commission used to have a Speakers Bureau of Commissioners available to speak at schools and events. Bill Gray, former Chair, reported he and former Commissioner Jane McCarthy would speak at elementary, middle, and high schools as well as Catholic University. He and Jane have also spoken at The Siena School, a private school in Silver Spring, for over 10 years. Sienna focuses one month on the Vietnam war.

It was suggested Commissioners offer MCPS to be speakers at schools. This could be part of the Commission's community outreach plan. Part of the role of this Commission is to educate the community about veterans and providing recognition.

The Commission did have a County Cable Montgomery show "Homefront" that was hosted by Mike Subin but he has since retired from County government. Neil Greenberger, Public Information Office, also retired and he was assigned to work on veterans issues and press releases. At this time no staff person has been assigned.

What Veterans and their families need to know about purchasing a home and or renovation of an existing home – Miguel Sapp and Chris Thomas

This item will be on the agenda next month for an update.

Commissioner Updates

Betsy thanked Bob for sharing the letter the Maryland Military Coalition sent to Governor Wes Moore requesting action to protect veterans and the VA from the current administration's terminations and budget cuts.

Dr. Cynthia Macri, former Commissioner, was recently appointed to the Task Force on Responsible Use of Natural Psychedelics by the Maryland Veterans Commission. The Task Force is to study: existing laws, policies, and practices relating to the use of natural psychedelic substances; the best available science and data on public benefits of responsible access to and use of natural psychedelic substances; and opportunities to maximize public benefits of responsible access to and use of natural psychedelic substances. Recommendations by the Task Force will cover any changes to State law, policy, and practices needed to create a Maryland Natural Psychedelic Substance Access Program that enables broad, equitable and affordable access to psychedelic substances. Such changes may involve permitting requirements for education and safety; access to treatment and regulated support; and production of natural psychedelic substances. Dr. Macri suggested inviting Dr. Bob Koffman, former Vice-Chair and primary researcher on this topic, or Sunstone Therapies, to provide an update.

Wayne Miller, former Chair and Director of the Silver Spring Vet Center (SSVC), announced March is National Vietnam War Veterans Month. The SSVC is hosting a celebration "Remembering Vietnam War Veterans" at the Knights of Columbus, 9707 Rosensteel Avenue, Silver Spring on March 27 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Vietnam veterans are invited to attend.

Sam Korper, Liaison from the Commission on People with Disabilities, inquired about his role as liaison to this Commission and if the role was non-voting or voting. He suggested that the Commission include in its budget testimony a request for funding to support an additional staff person within the Boards, Committees and Commissions (BCC) office to manage advertising and appointments of BCCs due to the current delay across the board for all BCCs.

Adjourn - 7:26 p.m.

Attendance

Commissioners Present: Grace Caulfield; Bernard Chesman; Jameelah Johnson; Veronica Pei; Miguel Sapp; Scott Schlesinger; Joanna Starling; Michael Wilson, Chair

Commissioners Absent: Drew Garza; Elwood Gray; Michael Subin; Christopher Thomas; Anneke Vandenbroek, Vice-Chair; Charles Von Goin

Non-Voting Congressional Representatives Present: Joseph Eyong (Congressman Jamie Raskin); Charles Richardson (Senator Chris Van Hollen)

Non-Voting Congressional Representatives Absent: Vikki Garcia (Congressman John Sarbanes)

Commission Liaison: Sam Korper, Commission on People with Disabilities

County Staff: Jen Hodge, Local Behavioral Health Authority, Department of Health and Human Services

Staff Present: Betsy Luecking, Staff Liaison; Carly Clem, Program Specialist II

Public Present: Bill Gray; Wayne Miller, Silver Spring Vet Center; Donny Williams, ServingTogether; Charley Jay, Baltimore County Commission on Veterans Affairs; Justin McNabb, Baltimore City Veterans Treatment Court; Cynthia Macri, Maryland Veterans Commission; Bob Norton, Maryland Military Coalition; Elbridge James; Luis Hernandez; Connor Farney