



Commission on Veterans Affairs



MEETING AGENDA

Tuesday, December 15, 2020

6 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.

**Wayne Miller, Chair – Bob Koffman, Vice-Chair
VIA ZOOM**

PLEASE NOTE: Given the concerns of the corona virus, the Commission on Veterans Affairs will be meeting virtually via Zoom.

Join the meeting via ZOOM <https://zoom.us/j/97906200805>

If you want to call into the meeting, call 301-715-8592, use Meeting ID 979 0620 0805 followed by #.

If an attendee 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 November 2020 Meeting Minutes – Wayne Miller, Chair**

**6:10 Caring for Caregivers of Veterans/Families – Melissa Comeau, Director, Military and
Veteran Caregiver Network Service to the Armed Forces, American Red Cross**

7:00 Sharing Ways We Care for Ourselves and Others – All

7:20 Updates

7:30 Adjourn

If you need a sign language interpreter or any other accommodation to participate in this meeting, please contact Betsy.Luecking@montgomerycountymd.gov.

Montgomery County Veterans Affairs Website – www.montgomerycountymd.gov/veterans
Commission's Website – www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva
Veterans Network Directory – www.montgomerycountymd.gov/vnd



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Meeting Summary Minutes
November 17th, 2020**

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

I. Call to Order

Wayne Miller, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Commission on Veterans Affairs (CVA). Wayne asked for all present to say the Pledge of Allegiance. Wayne 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 October 2020 Meeting Summary Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken, and the October 2020 Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva.

III. Introduction of Miguel Sapp, Veterans Benefits Specialist for Montgomery County – Phil Munley, Director, Veteran Service Program, Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA)

Website: <https://veterans.maryland.gov/>

Phil Munley reported MDVA has hired a full-time Veterans Benefits Specialist (VBS) to serve Montgomery County. Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) Miguel A. Sapp served 28 years of active and reserve duty in the U.S. Army. His military obligations included back to back tours in support of Operation Sea Signal and Operation Uphold Democracy in Guantanamo, Cuba and Haiti respectively. Miguel also served two tours in Iraq.

Miguel can be contacted at 240-567-5405 (V) or e-mail Miguel.Sapp@maryland.gov. He will return messages within 48 hours.

Phil reported that over a year ago MDVA began a partnership with the Maryland Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA) to co-locate VBSs within their offices. MDVA now has co-located VBS at four locations – Glen Burnie, Bel Air, Salisbury, and Hagerstown. He reported that within the next 60 to 90 days the Montgomery County VBS will be relocated from the current Montgomery College location to the MVA Gaithersburg location. The new location will offer more parking. Phil thanked Joanna Starling and Jason Franklin with Montgomery College's Combat2College and the rest of the Montgomery College staff that have worked with the Montgomery County VBSs that have been located there over the last several years.

As Montgomery College is currently closed due to the COVID-19 virus, Miguel has been managing his voicemails and e-mails remotely. He will continue to do so until the MVA location is open. VBSs located within MVA's are currently open to public visitation three days a week by appointment only on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. VBS's notify the state police that manage the front door and they will ensure each Veteran is screened for COVID, including a questionnaire and a temperature check, before they are allowed to enter. Phil will let the Commission know how construction is progressing and when the Gaithersburg MVA office opens.

Michael Wilson, Commissioner, asked how residents will be notified when the new office opens. Phil said typically MDVA will hold a press conference or a ribbon cutting ceremony with the MVA. MDVA will include the information on their website and the MVA also advertises through their local media. Phil clarified that MDVA is not part of the VA. MDVA employees are State of Maryland employees.

Betsy Luecking, Staff, asked if Miguel will still be able to provide outreach hours at the Silver Spring Vet Center (SSVC) twice a month. Betsy also said the Commission will support Miguel in his new role and will keep him

informed on the Commission's goals and work. She often receives calls that she refers to his office. Phil said he spoke to Wayne about MDVA's continued presence at the SSVC when their location opens up to the public again.

Jonathan Alfaro, Commissioner, asked how Commissioners can help let other Veterans know about available services. Phil said Commissioners can refer Veterans or their family members who are seeking information on Veterans benefits to their office. MDVA also has information on Charlotte Hall Veterans Home, cemeteries and memorials, and the Maryland Veterans Trust Fund (MVTF). These programs can be found on their website. www.veterans.maryland.gov

IV. Veteran Institute for Procurement – Barbara Ashe, Executive Vice-President, Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce and Director & Founder at Veteran Institute for Procurement (VIP)

Website: <https://nationalvip.org/>

The Montgomery County Chamber Community Foundation (MCCCF) Veteran Institute for Procurement (VIP) is the first free training program for service-disabled Veteran-owned small businesses and Veteran-owned small businesses. VIP is headquartered in Rockville, Maryland and is co-located within the Montgomery County Chamber of Commerce (MCCC).

VIP was started in 2009 by the MCCCF out of frustration. At that time, the federal government was only at 1% of their service-disabled and Veteran-owned small business goal that was set for 3%. MCCCF began researching if any other agencies had programs that help Veterans win government contracts, but there were no such programs. As Executive Vice President of MCCC, Barbara had experience and familiarity with government contracting. MCCCF founded VIP under the principle to help service-disabled Veteran-owned and Veteran-owned businesses win government contracts and learn how to accelerate their Federal government contracting business skills.

The [VIP START](#) program is first come, first serve and is available to participants who meet the requirements. The program is provided at no cost nationwide for all Veterans in 50 states plus DC, Puerto Rico, and Guam. Participants only cover travel costs to and from the Washington, DC area. Graduations are held at the Bolger Center in Potomac. The program can serve 50 Veterans at a time. Prior to the pandemic, Veterans would receive instruction over the course of three days. During that time, 30 to 40 instructors from government agencies and industry and subject matter experts share best practices and lessons learned from the federal marketplace. Instruction also focuses on how to compete and stay in compliance. Many VIP graduates come back to teach and mentor, creating a natural community of support. Due to COVID-19, VIP programs are now provided virtually. Programs are taught twice a week for an hour and a half on Tuesdays and Thursdays and take three months to complete.

The DC Metro area is the epicenter for government contracting and where the majority of VIP's customers and contractors are located. Lockheed and Northrop Grumman have a significant presence in the area also so it makes sense that a national center for VIP is headquartered in Montgomery County. Since 2009, VIP has graduated 1,490 Veteran-owned small businesses. This year VIP will train 350 companies from around the country. Graduates are surveyed one and two-years after graduation. On average, one year after graduation their businesses grew approximately 64% and grew almost 300% growth after the second year. VIP maintains an online portal of businesses that have completed the VIP program. VIP also offers ten different training sessions for graduates.

In 2012, three years after VIP was formed, the federal government met its 3% goal and every year that percentage has increased. The VIP program had been able to operate through fundraising and was able to train 50 companies per year and cover hotel costs and meals for every participant. MCCCF hosts a golf tournament at Lakewood Country Club every year to help fundraise for the VIP Program. In 2014, VIP received a significant grant from the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) and was able to train over 100 companies. The VIP program then received grants from Lockheed Martin and the Maryland Department of Commerce and can now train 350 companies per year. VIP has graduated over 100 companies located in Montgomery County and almost 500 companies in Maryland. Barbara said Montgomery County is home to two of the most successful Veteran-owned businesses – TISTA Science and Technology Corporation and Alvera & Associates, LLC.

[VIP GROW](#) is designed to help advanced companies sustain and increase their business and contract wins and teaches small businesses how to grow and scale quickly and remain compliant and competitive. The average VIP GROW graduate has 16 employees.

[VIP INTERNATIONAL](#) is a 21 session, 11-week comprehensive certification program designed for Veteran-owned small businesses interested in diversifying or expanding their federal and commercial contracting opportunities overseas. The program also teaches how to maintain international OCONUS (Outside Continental United States) and commercial contracts.

In partnership with Lockheed Martin, [VIP AEROSPACE](#) will be launching in April 2021. VIP AEROSPACE will cover over 20 market-critical topics and help advanced Veteran-owned small businesses build relationships with primes and government, establish a network of national teaming partners in the aerospace industry, and avoid industry landmines to reduce risk to the business, partners, and customers.

The floor was opened to questions.

Jonathan asked when the next class will begin. Barbara said classes are full for January 2021 and they are now enrolling for March 2021 and July 2021. Classes typically fill up six months prior to the class start date. VIP enrolls for classes year-round.

Michael Wilson, Commissioner, asked if a Veteran had to already have a business registered or if a Veteran who was interested in starting a business with an emphasis on procuring federal contracts could attend. Barbara said the VIP program does not teach a Veteran how to start a company as there are already programs available at the county and state levels as well as in the federal government that focus on starting a business. The company has to be in business full-time for at least one year and have a live website in order to participate in the VIP START program. On average, participating companies have been in business for four years and have two employees. VIP GROW participants on average have been in business 8 years and have 17 employees.

Jonathan asked what Barbara has learned since starting the VIP program. Barbara said she had not worked with Veterans prior to the program and she admires their teamwork, leadership, and tenacity to start and grow a business. She said supporting Veteran-owned businesses is the best investment our nation can make.

Stan Siedel, Maryland Veterans Commission, asked if there is an advantage of being a service-disabled Veteran-owned business versus a Veteran-owned business. Barbara said there is a federal government procurement advantage as a service-disabled Veteran-owned business will receive a preference. Many state and local jurisdictions also offer a preference. The federal government has socioeconomic goals to contract with women-owned and minority-owned businesses as well as companies located in historically underutilized business districts. The goal is to have 3% of federal contracts given to Veteran-owned businesses and currently they are averaging over 4% nationwide. Barbara said many Veteran-owned businesses begin as subcontractors while some companies will remain subcontractors because that is the best business model for them.

Commissioners can contact Betsy if they would like to contact Barbara.

V. Promoting Mental and Physical Wellness – Bob Koffman - Presidential Roadmap to Empower Veterans and End a National Tragedy of Suicide (PREVENTS)

Website: www.va.gov/REACH

Bob Koffman, Commissioner, reported that over the last nine months 15% of the population nationwide has been exposed to COVID-19. It is anticipated that the number will double over the next six weeks and a total of 30% of the population will have been exposed. He urged everyone to be cautious as more activities are happening indoors due to the change in weather. He encouraged Commissioners to remain vigilant and to get their flu shots.

October was Suicide Prevention Month. The PREVENTS Executive Order for suicide prevention is an ongoing effort. Veterans are 1.5 times more likely to suffer from suicide. Bob said that the Center for Disease Control's (CDC) Morbidity Mortality Report from July 2020 reported 25% of the population aged 18 to 25 reported having

serious suicidal thoughts in the month previous. The Moments to REACH campaign was launched this November with the goal of inspiring people from all across our nation to REACH by sharing a story about a time they REACHed to provide support to a loved one or when they REACHed to find help for themselves. Individuals are encouraged to record and upload brief videos. [View a video](#) submitted by Ambassador Rear Admiral (RDML) James Hancock, a proud combat Veteran who received a Purple Heart and who is very upfront and transparent about his traumatic brain injury (TBI) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD):. RDML Hancock included his service dog in his video to help break down the stigma of having a service animal and to teach senior leadership that combat has a cost.

Betsy reported there was a Homefront taping this week that focused on resources available to support Veterans. The show featured Dr. Norvell Coots, President and CEO of Holy Cross Health; Dr. Charles Faselis, Chief of Staff of the DC VA Medical Center; Dr. Shea Lott, Lead Clinician of the Silver Spring-based Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic at Easter Seals; and Vietnam Veteran Wayne Miller, LCSW, Director of the Silver Spring Vet Center and current chair of this Commission. [View the show](#).

Betsy reported Bob was recognized this week as a local hero by Congressman Jamie Raskin for his work with Warrior Canine Connection and the PREVENTS pledge. She said his message was very uplifting and his remarks that we should look out for each other. Bob said many people are concerned that if they bring up suicide to someone who is potentially suicidal it could trigger suicidal thoughts, but the overwhelming response is relief that the person felt comfortable enough to talk about it. [View video with Congressman Raskin](#).

VI. Fentanyl Epidemic - Jonathan Alfaro, Commissioner

A recent University of Maryland study found fentanyl tops the list of drugs detected in overdose patients at two Baltimore hospital emergency departments. Jonathan has been working what the Baltimore Police Department and detailed his experiences and encounters with people in Baltimore that are addicted to fentanyl, which is a powerful synthetic opioid analgesic that is similar to morphine but is 50 to 100 times more potent. Jonathan worked with a Baltimore Police Community Outreach Officer that provides outreach to homeless individuals and worked with them to get them assistance and resources. This officer tried to reach out to other counties about an outreach program, but he was not successful.

Jonathan also met several homeless Veterans who wanted to stop doing drugs but who said the system was not helpful to them. Some individuals were from out of state and they came to Baltimore because the drug is cheap to purchase. This drug affects people of all ages. Jonathan noticed during his interactions that the individuals use the substance to escape suicidal thoughts. Unfortunately, the drug induces hallucinations and makes the individuals paranoid and not caring about themselves or their hygiene. Jonathan has concerns about the fentanyl epidemic as Baltimore is only 45 minutes from Montgomery County and it will not take long for the epidemic to spread. He wanted to make the Commission aware of the issue and to discuss ways to help. The officer is ready and willing to train other counties on how to provide outreach to these individuals.

Susan Webman, Commissioner, asked if we could identify at the state or county level how to interact with and provide assistance to these individuals. Bob said the overall objective of PREVENTS is suicide prevention which includes managing triggers or conditions which can lead to suicide, including addiction.

Stan suggested Jonathan connect with two programs located in Baltimore. [Project PLASE](#) (People Lacking Ample Shelter and Employment) offers temporary and permanent affordable housing units to people who are homeless. [Baltimore Station](#) provides therapeutic residential and outpatient treatment program supporting Veterans who are overcoming obstacles to regain self-sufficiency. He also suggested Jonathan reach out to the Baltimore City Veterans Commission. The most successful program Stan has heard of was out of the VA in Delaware. There the VA works with law enforcement who refer Veterans to the VA for treatment rather than putting them in jail. The Maryland Opioid Command Center recently visited the Delaware VA to learn about this program.

VII. Chair and Vice Chair Report

Wayne will be presenting the Commission's top two policy priorities before the County Council Health & Human Services (HHS) Committee tomorrow morning.

The Commission will next meet on Tuesday, December 15th. Joanna suggested inviting Warriors at Ease to present.

VIII. Updates / Announcements

Vikki Garcia, Representative of Congressman John Sarbanes, reported Congressman Sarbanes was re-elected to serve Maryland's 3rd Congressional District.

Bob Norton, President, Maryland Military Coalition (MMC), reported MMC is encouraged Maryland lawmakers to reintroduce or prefile bills supporting Maryland Veterans that did not get acted upon last year. Senator Bryan Simonaire will be submitting a bill that would establish a mental health first aid program that would assist Veterans and caregivers. MMC met with MDVA Secretary Owings in September and in October MMC sent him a letter with their top priorities for the upcoming session. MMC has also been working on their social media outreach. The Maryland's 2021 General Assembly will be meeting virtually this year.

Jameelah Johnson, Commissioner, reported the National Museum of the U.S. Army opened to the public on November 11, 2020. The museum is located in Fort Belvoir, Virginia. Visitors must reserve timed tickets.

Bill Gray, former Chair of the Commission, announced Vietnam Veteran Tom Devlin passed away last week due to COVID-19. Tom served in the Marine Corps from 1966 to 1970. He earned a Purple Heart, a Bronze Star and other awards. Tom also served in the Marine Corps Reserve and the Air National Guard as a medic.

Stan announced the Annapolis Vet Center will be hosting a Veterans wellness virtual event on November 18th. He suggested that the Silver Spring Vet Center host a similar event, especially to help Veterans who are isolated. He also suggested SSVF could partner with Serving Together and the Cohen Clinic. Betsy suggested hosting a forum on health and wellness to include suicide prevention. Wayne said it's hard when counseling Veterans because they've been told for so many years now to get out and socialize, but with the pandemic they're being told to stay home and it's hurting those who are having intrusive thoughts. He said SSVF does provide wellness checks via phone.

Stan reported the MVTF has given out \$90,000 in financial assistance this year. MVTF still has a sizeable amount of funding left. Stan asked Commissioners to share information about MVTF with Veterans they know that may need assistance. There is an income requirement and an applicant's income may not exceed 200% of the federal poverty guidelines. For a single veteran 200% is \$23,760. USDVA benefits, Social Security, and Social Security Disability count as income. Stan will send Betsy an informational one-pager to share with her e-mail distribution list. [More information can be found on the website.](#)

Betsy reported that she and Carly Clem, Staff, completed the Commission's 2020 Annual Report.

Adjournment: 7:30pm

Next Full Commission Meeting: Tuesday, December 15th, 2020 via Zoom from 6pm to 7:30pm. Please view the agenda for information on how to join the meeting.

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

Attendance

Commissioners Present: Jonathan Alfaro; Josephine Bahn; Hannah Dibonge; Elwood Gray; Jameelah Johnson; Robert Koffman; Cynthia Macri; Wayne Miller; Scott Schlesinger; Joanna Starling; Susan Webman; Michael Wilson

Commissioners Absent: Dan Bolling; James Campbell; Reggie Mitchell; Michael Subin

Non-Voting Congressional Representatives Present: Christa Burton (Congressman Jamie Raskin); Vikki Garcia (Congressman John Sarbanes); Ken Reichard (Senator Ben Cardin)

Non-Voting Congressional Representatives Absent: Austin Morris (Senator Chris Van Hollen)

Commission Staff Present: Betsy Luecking, Staff Liaison; Carly Clem, Administrative Specialist I