



Commission on Veterans Affairs October 21, 2025 - Meeting Minutes

Meeting Location

Meeting held virtually via Zoom.

Call To Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m.

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.

Meeting Minutes Agenda Items

1. Discussion on [Homeless Veteran Reintegration Program](#) - Nicholas Feemster, Partnerships & Outreach Manager for the Homeless Veteran Reintegration Program through EasterSeals

Nicholas originally enlisted in the U.S. Army for a position as a rapper with the U.S. Army Military Field Band. He used hip-hop music to connect with both military and civilian audiences, sharing soldiers' stories and dispelling misconceptions about the Army. He created music for suicide prevention training and was a public figure for the Army's hip-hop program.

The Homeless Veteran Reintegration Program (HVRP) is a comprehensive approach to preparing veterans for employment with job search support, resume review, interview prep, and more – including addressing any barriers to employment. HVRP may even pay for job-related training, certifications, transportation, and work clothes. They partner with employers in various industries that are actively looking to hire qualified veterans. Once hired, the program supports the individual in a smooth transition to their new job. HVRP does not directly provide housing, but it is connected with partners that can assist with housing while HVRP provides employment support.

Nicholas [attended an event in Chevy Chase](#) today hosted by the National Auto Body Council (NABC), which provides refurbished vehicles to veterans and military families through their [Recycled Rides Program](#).

HVRP serves veterans in the District of Columbia, Maryland (except the Eastern Shore), and Northern Virginia who meet the following criteria.

1. While the word “homeless” is in the title, HVRP can serve veterans in a variety of circumstances.
 - Extremely low income
 - Recipient of welfare or public assistance
 - Lack of permanent residence within the last 60 days
 - Transitional housing
 - Risk of losing housing or eviction within 21 days
 - Enrollment in programs like HUD-VASH, SSVF, CWT, and other VA programs

- Living in a hotel
- Living with friends or family because of economic hardship
- Transitioning from incarceration
- Fleeing domestic violence

2. Proof of veteran status (DD214)

3. Active-duty service (1 day) and discharge other than dishonorable.

The veteran must also be job ready.

HVRP is 100% funded by the U.S. Department of Labor through awards totaling \$1,000,000.

HVRP staff manage between 20 to 35 veterans and assist several hundred veterans daily. A case manager was hired to specifically work with veterans in Northern Virginia. New veterans are referred all the time.

The floor was opened to questions.

- Is HVRP's funding at jeopardy due to the federal government shutdown? HVRP operates on a three-year grant funded cycle. This is the final year for the current grant cycle. They are in continuous communication with the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) and are fully funded.
- How can the Commission help get the word out? Nicholas is embracing a media approach when it comes to marketing. He is starting an I Am HVRP YouTube series. There is also informational content available to help a veteran understand how to apply. Easterseals offers workforce development market-based trainings. HVRP is looking to partner with other organizations and will be coordinating a coat drive within the next few weeks. HVRP is seeking to make the program more accessible for demographics that have not been traditionally served. HVRP operates a DOL grant that is specifically for women. Every month, HVRP hosts Women Veteran Wednesday, which is a free virtual community-based engagement event where women veterans talk about their issues.
- Does HVRP have a relationship with ServingTogether or Montgomery College Combat2College? Yes, Nicholas works one-on-one with Donny Williams, Regional Manager, ServingTogether. He is not connected to Combat2College and Betsy Luecking will introduce him to Joanna Starling at Montgomery College.

Nicholas asked Commissioners to share events that he could participate in.

2. Chair and Vice-Chair Report

Michael Wilson, Chair, will be presenting the Commission's FY27 top policy priorities to the Montgomery County Council Health & Human Services Committee tomorrow.

3. Commissioner and Staff Updates

Betsy Luecking, Staff, reported that Shameen had sent her an inquiry regarding state income tax relief for 100% disabled veterans. There has been interpretation by some veterans that a 100% disability rating waives their state income tax. Wayne Miller, former Commissioner, reported that he has a 100% disability rating and he is only exempt from property taxes, not state and federal taxes. The VA disability benefit is non-taxable as well. The VA automatically sends that information to the IRS. Wayne noted that not all disabilities are permanent, and the VA can have you re-evaluated and veterans can lose their benefits.

Michael reported that some veterans still choose to pay an attorney to represent them to apply for benefits when there are veteran service organizations that provide that services for free. Some veterans are mistrustful of the government.

The [Maryland Military Coalition has released its 2026 legislative goals.](#)

- Strictly regulate those companies who charge veterans for benefit claims and benefits claims appeals.
- Eliminate the age restriction and tax on military retirement income.
- Expand the eligibility of the Maryland Veterans Trust Fund to include members of the Reserve.
- Expedited professional licensure and certification of spouses of uniformed services members.

Scott reported the Maryland Veterans Trust Fund has been depleted due to the number of new applicants. He noted that the Fund received sixty new applications just this morning. Acting Secretary Ed Rothstein, Maryland Department of Veterans and Military Families, visited Fort Meade and many military active duty members have started to do Uber and DoorDash to make an income during the government shutdown.

Betsy reported the Commission needs to work on its priorities. She is putting together a Speakers Bureau for Commissions to sign up and volunteer to speak at different organizations including American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Betsy asked for two Commissioners to volunteer to interview new Commission applicants. Commissioner Bernard Chesman volunteered. She has not received the packet of applicants yet.

Betsy was contacted by Senator Angela Alsobrook's office who is seeking veterans to interview applicants for the congressional nomination process for the U.S. Military Academy. Interviews will take place on November 17 and November 18 from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Commissioners Michael Wilson, Michael Subin and Jameelah Johnson and former Commissioner Wayne Miller volunteered.

Betsy reported that County Executive Elrich and County Council President Kate Stewart will issue a joint proclamation on November 4 in support of Operation Green Light, a national effort led by the National Association of Counties, encouraging displays of green lights in homes and businesses from November 4 to 11. She also reported that the Montgomery County Department of Transportation will hold a press event on Monday November 10 from 10:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. at Memorial Plaza (101 Monroe Street, Rockville) to unveil a special "Operation Green Light" Ride On bus wrap in tribute to veterans. In addition, 385 Ride On buses will display informational cards with contact information for veterans' services and support resources. [View the list of Veterans Day activities and events happening in and around Montgomery County.](#)

Elwood Gray, Commissioner, reported that the American Veterans Minority Research Project will be joining Glen Haven Elementary School's Purple Star Breakfast Brunch on Tuesday November 11.

4. Other Updates / Public Comment

Shameen Anthanio-Williams reported Mt. Calvary Baptist Church -will be hosting a veteran resource fair on February 16, 2026. They are asking non-profits and government agencies serving veterans to consider coming to the fair. Mt. Calvary Baptist Church will also be working with the Maryland Department of Labor to host an employment fair.

Dr. Cynthia Macri, former Commissioner, reported she spent the last six months on the Governor's Task Force for the Responsible Use of Naturally Occurring Psychedelics. The Task

Force submitted an interim report in July and the final report will be voted on next week to go the state legislature.

Review and Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

A motion was made to approve the September 2025 Meeting Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and the September 2025 Meeting Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday November 18, 2025 from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. It was suggested that the Maryland Military Coalition present at the Commission's next meeting.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 7:25 p.m.

Attendance

Voting Members Present

- Grace Caulfield
- Bernard Chesman
- Elwood Gray
- Miguel Sapp
- Scott Schlesinger
- Michael Subin
- Christopher Thomas, Vice-Chair
- Michael Wilson, Chair

Voting Members Absent

- Drew Garza
- Jameelah Johnson
- Veronica Pei
- Joanna Starling

Non-Voting Congressional Representatives Present

- Joseph Eyong – Representative of Office of U.S. Congressman Jamie Raskin

Non-Voting Congressional Representatives Absent

- Charlise Richardson – Representative of Office of U.S. Senator Chris Van Hollen

Commission Staff Present

- Betsy Luecking, Staff Liaison, Community Outreach Manager
- Carly Clem, Staff Support, Program Specialist II

Other County Staff Present

- Jen Hodge, Local Behavioral Health Authority
- Tara Clemons Johnson, Legislative Analyst, County Council
- Dale Tibbitts, Office of the County Executive

Public Attendees

- Ken Reichard
- Jevina Lindsay, Maryland's Commitment to Veterans
- Donny Williams, ServingTogether
- Gary Palmer, Military Officers Association of America
- Rebecca Patterson
- Bill Gray, former Chair
- Shameen Anthanio-Williams
- Jane McCarthy, former Commissioner
- Cynthia Macri, former Commissioner
- Deshola Adeyemo

Guest Speakers

- John Mendez, Executive Director, Bethesda Cares