



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Meeting Summary Minutes
February 16th, 2016**

I. Call to Order & Introductions

Randy Stone, Vice Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Commission on Veterans Affairs (CVA). Randy 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

Wayne Miller, Commissioner, made a motion to approve the January 2016 Meeting Summary Minutes. Jim Campbell, Commissioner, seconded the motion. A vote was taken and the January 2016 Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva.

III. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs – Veterans Choice Program – Jereme Whiteman, Chief of Business Office, DC VA Medical Center (www.va.gov/opa/choiceact)

Handout: www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/A%26D%20Docs/CVA/VeteransChoiceHandout.pdf

The Veterans Choice Program (VCP) allows a Veteran who is enrolled in the VA health care system to obtain within their own community if they meet one of the criteria listed below:

- A Veteran is told by their local VA medical facility that they will not be able to schedule an appointment for care within 30 days of the date the Veteran's physician determines they need to be seen or within 30 days of the date the Veteran wishes to be seen if there is no specific date from their physician.
- The Veteran lives more than 40 miles driving distance from a VA medical facility with a full-time primary care physician.
- The Veteran faces an unusual or excessive burden in traveling to a VA medical facility based on geographic challenges, environmental factors, a medical condition, the nature of frequency of the care needed, and/or whether an attendant is needed. Staff at the Veteran's local VA medical facility will work with them to determine if they are eligible for any of these reasons.

Two additional eligibility criteria do not apply to Marylanders: There is no full-service VA facility in the State and that the Veteran has to travel by air, boat or ferry to the nearest VA medical facility.

In order to be eligible for VA health care the Veteran must have served in active duty for a minimum of two years and have an honorable or general discharge status. National Guard and Reserve are not eligible unless they were called into active duty and served the entire period. Veterans who were medically separated or received a service connected disability due to service are also eligible.

Veterans must discuss with their primary care provider at their local VA medical facility or Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) if they are interested in receiving care in the community. If the provider agrees they will submit a referral on your behalf. The Veteran can call 1-866-606-8198 to connect with HealthNet, the contractor that is providing services for this program. HealthNet will verify whether or not you are eligible based on your provider's referral or your driving

distance from a VA medical facility. HealthNet will schedule an appointment for you with a provider that is in the network. If you have a primary care provider that you would like to see they will need to sign up with HealthNet, which may take up to 90 days to complete. You can view which providers are already in the HealthNet network by searching via this website: <http://www.va.gov/opa/apps/locator/index.html>.

Veterans must receive a referral from their VA primary care provider for each episode of care they want to receive in the community. For example, if a Veteran is eligible to receive physical therapy in the community they may do so for up to one year. If they have to receive medical care for a separate issue, such as an annual check-up, they need to see their VA primary care provider or request a referral for community care, if eligible. The only exception is if you live more than 40 miles away from a VA medical facility as you are automatically approved for community care.

Prescriptions are handled by the VA. Veterans must submit a prescription to their VA medical facility in person. If a prescription is needed immediately the Choice Program non-VA Provider will issue a prescription with up to a 14 day supply of a National Formulary drug. You may have the 14 day supply prescription filled at any non-VA pharmacy of your choosing and may submit a request for reimbursement to VA. For prescriptions needed past 14 days, please follow standard procedures to fill a prescription at the VA pharmacy. It was asked if the VA could receive fax or e-mailed prescriptions as traveling to the VA pharmacy could be considered a travel burden for those that are eligible for receiving community care. Mr. Whiteman said he will discuss the issue with Brian Hawkins, Director, DC VA Medical Center, and the Chief of Pharmacy. The legislation currently states that the Veteran must submit their prescriptions to their VA medical facility. Ken Reichard, Representative of Senator Ben Cardin, stated that he will be discussing this issue with Mr. Hawkins when he attends a meeting with him in March.

Mr. Whiteman reported that Montgomery County is slated to have a Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) opened in fiscal year 2017. He also reported that the DC VA Medical Center will be renovating their current patient parking garage and adding an additional two floors. Unfortunately the parking garage will be shut down entirely during this renovation and there is currently no alternate parking plan in place. Bill Gray noted that Veterans can also take the Metro to the Catholic University stop and take a shuttle bus from the Metro Station to the DC VA Medical center.

Wayne Miller, Commissioner, asked if dental services were included. While the legislation that was passed does include dental care, the caveat is that the provider must accept Medicare. As most dental providers do not accept Medicare virtually all community dental providers are ineligible for participating in the program.

IV. Joining Forces Project, Maryland Legal Aid – Swapna Yeluri, Esq., Maryland Legal Aid – www.mdlab.org

Maryland Legal Aid's Joining Forces project is a free, statewide legal telephone hotline specifically for low-income Veterans who have served in any branch of the military regardless of discharge status. Callers receive direct and immediate access to legal assistance and brief advice on a wide range of civil legal issues. If the case requires more extensive legal representation they may be referred to a volunteer attorney who may be able to provide further guidance and assistance. Attorneys are able to assist Veterans with benefits claims as well as discharge upgrades. Over 131 volunteer attorneys staff the project. The hotline is available Tuesdays from 3:00 pm to 7:00 pm and Thursdays from 9:30 am to 1:30 pm at 443-863-4040 (V). For income guidelines view: <http://www.mdlab.org/get-help-services/income-guidelines>. If a Veteran does not qualify for Joining Forces based on income they may qualify for Maryland Legal Aid which has a higher income threshold. Joining Forces strives to have a no wrong door policy and assists Veterans in connecting with other resources in the community that they may need.

To date Joining Forces has helped 300 Veterans and currently has 30 active benefits cases. For benefits claims cases they can only provide assistance up to the Board of Veterans Appeals. They are also able to provide assistance with Social Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) claims. The bulk of the calls have been child support and employment cases. Joining Forces works closely with other organizations, such as the Homeless Persons Representation Project to provide services to clients.

They are in the process of recruiting more volunteer attorneys. There is a training offered next Monday on housing and child support as well as training on June 2nd on benefits, Veteran upgrades and discharges, and social security for Veterans. Trainings are also available online. Attorneys can use 38 different scripts written in a yes / no format to assist them on client calls in order to provide brief advice or resources.

Grant funding for the project is until October 1st, but they are actively seeking out further funding to continue the project.

V. Chair and Vice-Chair Report:

Randy Stone, Vice Chair, asked Commissioners for their input and feedback on the text that will be included in the property tax insert that will be mailed out in June to homeowners. He also asked for input on the updated logo. It was asked if the Commission could purchase a url that would shorten the Commission's current url making it easier to include on a logo. Betsy Luecking, Staff, said that there are County government standards for websites and we cannot use outside URLs without approval of the web committee.

VI. New Business: None.

VII. Roundtable:

Jim Campbell, Commissioner, reported that the Montgomery County Chapter of the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) will be hosting their monthly luncheon this Wednesday at Manor Country Club. The cost is \$25.00. The speaker will be James Calderwood, Chair of the Maryland Transportation Commission, and his wife Rear Admiral Joyce Johnson, former Chief Medical Officer and Surgeon General of the Coast Guard, will also be present. Jim also discussed the letter that the Commission received from James A. Carman, Director, Transition Center, MOAA, regarding the Montgomery County Chapter of MOAA starting transitioning services in the County. Jim Dittbrenner, MOAA, explained MOAA will provide transition support services to Veterans and their spouses. Services are available through the transition process and into the first 30 days of their new position. They can also assist with independent contracting / consulting and starting your own business. MOAA offers peer mentors as consultants. Jim Campbell added that 200,000 Veterans are expected to transition from active duty to civilian life over the next four years.

Dan Bolling, Commissioner, reported that the VA recently announced that LinkedIn has expanded its partnership with VA and is now offering Servicemembers and Veterans one year of access to its professional development site, Lynda.com, at no cost.

Julie Riggs, Manager, Serving Together, reported that on Friday, March 4th Phil Munley, Director, Service and Benefits Program, Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs, will be giving a presentation on basic Veterans benefits. The event will be held from 1:00pm to 2:00pm at the Henry M. Jackson Foundation in North Bethesda.

Wayne Miller, Commissioner, reported that the Silver Spring Vet Center Outreach Position has been filled and the new hire is awaiting security clearance. They hope to have the new hire on board in April.

Ken Reichard, Representative of Senator Ben Cardin, reported that he will be attending a meeting in March with Brian Hawkins, Director, DC VA Medical Center, who will give a full report on the progress of the Montgomery County CBOC. Dan Bullis, Betsy Luecking, and Mike Subin will also be in attendance.

Mike Subin, Commissioner, reported that he has sent a memo to the judges involved with the mental health court regarding the great opportunity to establish a Veterans treatment docket within the mental health or behavioral health court negating the need to develop a separate Veterans court. Mike also reported that the mental health court funding is in the budget for fiscal year 2017.

Adjournment: 7:15 p.m.

Next Full Commission Meeting: Tuesday, March 15th, 2016 from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. at Health & Human Services, 401 Hungerford Drive, 1st Floor Large Conference Room, Rockville, MD 20850

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