

Wednesday, April 19, 2023 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

Present Mr. Shawn Hanley, Chair
Ms. Takosha Swan, Vice-Chair
Mr. Joshua Kopsie, Secretary
Mr. Steve Mendez, Member
Mr. Pete Peterson, Member
Ms. Patricia Ross, Commissioner

Visitors:
Present Ms. Shelly-Ann Simpson, Executive Director, Field Operations & Appeals, GDVS
Mr. Mark Bannister, Executive Dir., Health, Memorials, Finance & Development, GDVS
Mr. Kerry Dyer, Chief Operations Officer, GDVS
Ms. Mary Catherine Greaber, Assistant Attorney General, Attorney General's Office
Ms. Belinda Boldoe, VFW Service Officer, Appeals Division, GDVS
Ms. Raven Holstick, GDVS, American Legion Service Officer
Ms. Dylester Scott, Veteran
Mr. Vince Pritchett, Director, Veterans Benefits South Region, GDVS
Mr. Ken Childre, Director, Veterans Benefits North Region, GDVS
Ms. Ramona Roper, Director, Training and Professional Development, GDVS
Ms. Charlotte May, Director, Public Information and External Affairs, GDVS
Mr. Russell Feagin, Director, Health & Memorials Division, GDVS
Ms. Tonya Jarrett, Clinical Director, Health & Memorials Division, GDVS
Mr. Carlton Deese, Executive Director GWVNH, Augusta, GA
Mr. Edwin Berry, Director, Appeals Division, GDVS
Mr. William Wilson, Network Administrator, GDVS
Ms. Camala Ball, Budget Analyst, GDVS
Mr. Bobby Davis, Director, Veterans Education & Training, GDVS
Ms. Shareka Monday-Robinson, Director, Human Resources, GDVS
Mr. Mark Demers, Grant Program Implementation Manager, GDVS
Ms. Monica Dorsey, Communications & Outreach Specialist, GDVS
Ms. Sheenah Thrasher, VFSO 1, Atlanta Office, GDVS
Ms. Julie Hammond, Executive Assistant to the Commissioner, GDVS

On Wednesday, April 19, 2023, the Veterans Service Board meeting was held in person and by video/tele-conference.

Mr. Hanley called the meeting to order at 12:29 p.m. Mr. Kopsie gave the invocation. Mr. Peterson led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

Ms. Swan made a motion to approve the April Agenda. Mr. Peterson seconded the motion. The motion passed.

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Ms. Swan made a motion to approve the March minutes, which were previously distributed for members to review. Mr. Kopsie seconded the motion. There were no objections. The motion passed.

The following reports were submitted for the Board meeting:

Ms. Belinda Boldoe, VFW

- The Department Service Officer attended a Women's History Month Luncheon to recognize women veterans hosted by the American Legion Post 516. The luncheon was held on March 11, 2023, from 1PM - 3PM, at 122 Legion Road, McDonough, GA 30253.
- The Department Service Officer attended a VFW National Veterans Service (NVS) Eastern Region virtual meeting held on March 20, 2023, at 12:30PM. During the meeting we discussed the PACT Act Claims, the Upcoming VFW Training Schedule, the NVS Updates, and the DSO's issues and concerns.
- The Department Service Officer attended a VFW National Veterans Service (NVS) DSO virtual meeting held on April 05, 2023, at 2PM. The purpose of the meeting was to inform the attendees about key changes happening within the VA and VFW NVS that may affect the DSO.
- The Department Service Officer attended the Quarterly Atlanta VAHCS VSO virtual meeting with Director Brown and Staff held on April 11, 2023, at 12:30PM. The purpose of the meeting was to provide an update on VAMC initiative and the VAMC operational status.
- The Department Service Officer attended the CDCE/VAS Quarterly Committee Zoom meeting on April 12, 2023, at 1:30PM. The purpose of the meeting was to provide the VAMC initiative regarding the PACT Act and the VAMC operational status.

Ms. Raven Holstick, GDVS, American Legion Service Officer

- The Assistant Department Service Officer (Ed Kent) assisted 27 veterans with VA benefits related inquiries this month.
- Department service Officer (Raven Holstick) and Assistant Service Officer (Tonjala Moton-Williams) completed DSO School with Bergmann and Moore Vet Lawyers March 23, 2023.
- Monthly Virtual Post service officer training was held for new service officers on April 5, 2023. Training topics were on the roles and responsibilities as a post service officer. This training will continue to be held monthly as new service officers arrive.

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- Department service Officer (Raven Holstick) and Assistant Service Officer (Tonjala Moton-Williams) conducted Training at Annual Spring conference on the PACT Act and Roles and Responsibilities of a service officer March 24- 26.
- PACT Act and Veteran Informational Event will be held April 15th at Post 90. VSO Kevin Gibbs will brief veterans on the PACT Act.
- In person Post Service Officer training for April 15th at Post 90 was cancelled.

Upcoming events:

- Department service officer (Raven Holstick) will meet with Post Commander Walt of Post 29 to discuss future events his post would like to volunteer to sponsor for GDVS to show their appreciation for the department and everything that GDVS does for veterans.

Commissioner Patricia Ross

On Wednesday, March 22, 2023, Commissioner Ross met with Access to discuss the digitalization of the DD214's.

On Thursday, March 23, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended the March Veterans Service Board Meeting. She then watched the SecVA conference on YouTube. She spent the evening celebrating Georgia's Korean Vietnam War Veterans Day at The Korean American Association of Greater Atlanta at the invitation of Mr. Bong Hyun Yeo, President of the Association. Also in attendance was Mr. Kerry Dyer.

On Friday, March 24, 2023, Commissioner Ross held an Open Forum for the Department. She later had a meeting to discuss possible renovations for the 9th floor suite.

On Saturday, March 25, 2023, Commissioner Ross spoke at the Blinded Veterans Association State Convention.

On Monday, March 27, 2023, Commissioner Ross met with DBHDD. The discussion was a follow-up on 988 data. She then met with Unite Us.

On Tuesday, March 28, 2023, Commissioner Ross did a walkthrough at the Georgia International Convention Center in anticipation of the PACT Act event on 3 June with the Warrior Alliance and the VA. She then took part in a grant discussion with Mark Meeks, Carrie Steele and Kerry Dyer.

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On Wednesday, March 29, 2023, Commissioner Ross was a speaker at the Chattooga County Vietnam Ceremony, along with MG Carden. She took part in handing out certificates and pins to Vietnam veterans.

On Thursday, March 30, 2023, Commissioner Ross had a meeting with her leadership team regarding salaries. She then met with Emma Romey from Unite Us.

On Friday, March 31, 2023, Commissioner Ross met with Tiffany Howard, the Military & Veterans Program Coordinator for the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation, to sign an MOU and take photos. She then met with a representative from SurveyMonkey.

On Monday, April 3, 2023, Commissioner Ross held a weekly Director's Meeting. During this meeting, the team discussed the book "Who Moved My Cheese?" She then attended the Unite Us Social Connector and Implementation Meeting. Later in the day she took part in a Fox Grant Update Meeting. Her evening was spent at a welcome dinner for the Transition Advisory Committee.

On Tuesday, April 4, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended the Transition Advisory Committee Meetings in Atlanta. The TAC is a nationally chartered committee tasked with coming up with recommendations to assist servicemembers transitioning out of the military.

On Wednesday, April 5, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended the Veterans Cemetery Grant Program Quarterly Conference Call.

On Thursday, April 6, 2023, Commissioner Ross recognized two employees for their service with the department at the Glennville Cemetery. She also conducted a Waycross Site Visit/Assessment to view property for a potential GDVS skilled healthcare services facility servicing South Georgia along with Russell Feagin.

On Monday, April 10, 2023, Commissioner Ross held a weekly Director's Meeting.

On Tuesday, April 11, 2023, Commissioner Ross had a phone meeting with Scott Johnson of The Warrior Alliance. The remainder of her day was blocked for a visit from SecVA.

On Wednesday, April 12, 2023, Commissioner took part in the Quarterly National State Home Per Diem Conference Call.

On Thursday, April 13, 2023 through Tuesday, April 18, 2023, Commissioner Ross was on leave.

Legislative Highlights:

HB 414, competitive grant program for mental health clinics who provide services to military-affiliated personnel. Will be managed through GDVS.

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HB 175, disabled veterans no longer must accept and display the handicapped license plate to get the Title and Ad Valorem Tax exemption on their primary vehicle.

SB 21, provides for changes in the Veterans Service Foundation. Up to 3-year terms, primarily focused on raising funds, and four of the 7-13 members must be veterans. Will need to appoint new members as per law, and have them approved by the VSB.

Upcoming Events:

SSG Fox grant submission option year 1, due 19 May 2023

Suicide Prevention Symposium – Let’s Connect, 24-25 May 2023, Marietta (KSU)

Women Veterans Gala, 10 June 2023, Macon (Middle Georgia State University)

Our VSOs are receiving a raise from funds within our own budget, of \$1,000 – 1,568. After the state-wide raise of \$2,000 for employees in July, they will all be at the FLSA minimum of \$35,568. This will make them exempt employees and we will be able to look at different work schedules. We have no habitual vacancies like in the past. Our priority for raises is now the cemetery workers. Their pay is low, and retention is difficult.

Ms. Shelly-Ann Simpson, Executive Director, Field Operations and Appeals

GENERAL

- On March 24th joined the Commissioner and Kerry Dyer at the Georgia’s Korean Vietnam War Celebration in Norcross.
- On March 27th, attended the planning meeting for the We Care Veterans Resources Fair. This event will be held August 4-5 at the Cobb Civic Center in Marietta.
- On March 28th, along with the Commissioner and Mr. Childre, conducted a walk-thru at the Georgia International Convention Center in College Park where the next Pact-Act Registration Rally will be held.
- On April 13th, attended the ribbon cutting ceremony at the Pike County Clinic. We had a PACT Act rally there as well. The Griffin office staff came and worked claims.
- We are continuing to plan Annual Training; the dates are June 12-16. We are pleased to announce that our partners at NVLSP will be conducting a training session on Tuesday June 14.
- Department Electronic Claim’s Assistance Processing System (Veterans Benefits) actively serving 274, 914 veterans.

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- **DD 214's and Welcome Home Letters:** 520 Welcome Home Letters were mailed out in March, 2023.

PROJECTED POSITIONS

- Current opening in Columbus.

Ms. Ramona Roper, Training and Professional Development Division:

- March 20, 2023, due to recent changes and requirements from the Department of Veterans Affairs for PIV cards to be issued, new hires must receive TRIP (Training, Responsibility, Involvement, and Preparation of Claim) Training prior to issuance.
- March 21, 2023, the Training Division had a collaboration meeting to discuss implementing TRIP Training.
- April 3-6, 2023, TRIP Modules were downloaded for modification. Modifications included creating a Power Point presentation and making printed materials for training manuals. Manuals were made for the in-person training. The modules were uploaded in the Absorb Training portal, therefore the virtual attendees had access to the training materials. We asked them to print the modules for their own training manuals, to make notes and have them as a guide when taking their tests.
- April 10-12, 2023, the Training Division conducted its first TRIP Training. We had 7 employees in-person and 4 via MS Teams. The southern Training Division members, Sherri Whitfield and Charles Isaac also joined via MS Teams. Glenn Massey, Steven Fay, and Ramona Roper conducted the in-person event at Central Office. All 16 modules of training were covered to prepare employees to take the final exam. All modules had an 80% passing rate. The final as well had an 80% passing rate, with 3 attempts.

Upcoming Events:

- Daily continued ongoing support to the Regional Directors and Veteran Field Service Offices
- Continuation of performing duties as VSO's
- Continuation of Quality Review checks of VSO's work
- Planning the 2023 Annual (Regional) Training Conference

**** RETRO PAYMENTS FOR CLAIMS FILED BY THE TRAINING DIVISION MEMBERS: \$85,969**

Mr. Edwin Berry, Director of Appeals Division

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- The total number of hearings conducted by the Appeals Division for March 2023 was **96**.
- The total number of pre-hearing actions for March 2023 was **318**.
- The total number of post-hearing actions for March 2023 was **59**.
- The total number of correspondence conducted by the Appeals Division (with veterans, BVA/VA employees, and VSO field offices) for the month of March was **1,143**.
- We have **3** new employees since the last board meeting.
- As of **April 1, 2023**, the Atlanta VA Regional Office processed benefits as follows for GDVS and the Service Organizations represented by GDVS.

Types of Claims	Number of Awards	Benefits paid out
Compensation	102,993	\$213,194,442
DIC	3599	\$5,997,433
Survivor Pension	803	\$737,566
Veteran Pension	1,590	\$1,815,990
Grand Total	108,950	\$221,745,431

Mr. Kenneth Childre, Director of North Region

Retro Awards: March 2023-\$1,205,560.37 (We added a retro payment at the end of March for \$60,831).

Director Site Visits/Inspections: 10

Community Involvement:

3 March 2023-Terrance Leggon and Maxine Brock (Conyers)-Town Hall Meeting that was hosted by Rockdale County Chief Judge Clarence Cuthpert Jr. and Conyers GDVS Office. There were about 50 attendees and speakers included Chief Judge Clarence Cuthpert Jr., Commissioner Ross (GDVS), Willard Johnson (DOL), Ronnie Kendrick (Aetna), Humana, United Healthcare, Well Care, DDS, Georgia Vietnam Alliance, DVA and American Legion. The biggest talking points were the benefits that are available to Veterans, PACT Act GDVS mission. The Judge was pleased with the event and asked Conyers Office to start planning for the next one.

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8 March 2023-Matt Williamson (Athens)-Conducted a Veteran Outreach event at Presbyterian Village (local retirement home) for their Veterans group. 17 Veterans attended and the focus was Veterans benefits such as healthcare and how to go about getting hearing aids. VSO did cover disability benefit claims and scheduled 3 appointments.

9 March 2023-Randy Gray (Ft McPherson)-Attended the Atlanta Center for Self Sufficiency Spring Job Fair. We had 5 people stop by the GDVS table to grab flyers. Some that stopped did inquire about whether our organization was hiring.

10 March 2023-Ron Cason (Athens)-Went to SK Battery where he stood with Kim (Military Relations) and greeted workers to find out how many employees were Veterans. Kim had mentioned that there were about 135 Veterans that worked at SK Battery. VSO did share GDVS contact info with 16 Veterans. He explained the GI Bill/OJT programs and gave Kim the SAA contact information.

29 March 2023-Commissioner Ross, Ken Childre (North Area Director), Bill Smith (Lafayette)-Attended Vietnam Veterans Ceremony. Commissioner Ross presented approximately 30 certificates to Vietnam Veterans (BOG and Era).

31 March 2023-Eddie Fontaine and Christine Collins (Blairsville)-Veterans Benefits and Opportunity Seminar that took place at the Butternut Creek Golf Course ballroom and was hosted by the American Legion Ira Weaver Post #121 in Blairsville. Eddie Fontaine spoke about the benefits that are available to Veterans and their families. Many other speakers at the event to include the local VA CBOC Clinic Manager, Miranda Wilson; MSA Supervisor, Lou Ann Hall; PACT Act Coordinator & Toxic Exposure Screening Navigator, Lauren Ruchin; Community Care, Dr. Elizabeth Hollis; Telehealth Coordinators, Burl Whitaker, and Sheree Harris. Many other community resources were on hand as well.

North Georgia Gains/Losses:

Elaine McIntosh-Augusta VAMC

We did conduct interviews for this position on 14 March 2023...8 candidates/3 interviewed.

There will be a We Care Fair on May 18 in Rome at the Civic Center.

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Average Visits Per VFSO							
Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO							
Region:		North					
Month:		March-23					
A	B	C	D	E	D / E	G	G / E
					F	H	
					Average	Total	Average
			Total	Work	Office	Claims	Claims
	Veterans' Field		Monthly	Days	Visits	Submitted	Submitted
	Service Officer (VFSO)		Office	In	Per	To	By VFSOS
Office Name	Last Name	#	Visits	Month	Day	VA	To VA
			Monthly	Month	Day	Monthly	Daily
	Number of VFSOs:	53	16,255	1,072	15.16	3,306	3.08
Number of Offices:	30		Average Visits/Office:		541.83	Average Claims/Office: 110.2	

*Total monthly office visits include: 4,299 In-Person and 11,956 phone calls/emails.

Mr. Vincent M. Pritchett, Director Veterans Benefits South Region

- On March 29, 2023, Melissa Ingle (Americus), Nicole Clark (Dublin), and Sonja Martin (Macon) provided claims assistance for the town hall/claims clinic at American Legion Post 3 in Macon. Veterans Service Representatives and medical personnel screened claimants then referred them to our VSOs, if applicable. At least 300 veterans and family members attended the 4-hour event. GDVS saw about 35 veterans and submitted 10 claims.
- On April 14, 2023, Dennis Boothe (Hinesville) gave a benefit briefing to justice-involved veterans at Long State Prison in Ludowici.
- On April 18, 2023, Miguel Rivera (Savannah) set up an information table to support Hunter Army Air Field's Career Planning and Retirement event.
- South region offices reported lump sum payments of \$230,944.00 since the last board meeting.
- South Region Gains/Losses: N/A
- South Georgia Region Veterans Population: 237,759.

Office Visits for March: South Georgia offices handled 6,523 phone calls and emails.

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Average Visits Per VFSO							
Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO							
Region:		South Region					
Month:		March-23					
A	B	C	D	E	D / E	G	G / E
					F	Total	Average
			Total	Work	Office	Claims	Claims
	Veterans' Field		Monthly	Days	Visits	Submitted	Submitted
	Service Officer (VFSO)		Office	In	Per	To	By VFSOS
Office Name	Last Name	#	Visits	Month	Day	VA	To VA
						Monthly	Daily
	Number of VFSOs:	39	3,593	872	4.12	2,599	2.98
Number of Offices:	24		Average Visits/Office:		149.71	Average Claims/Office: 108.29	

Ms. Veda Brooks, Women Veterans Coordinator (WVC)

- March 17, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in the planning meeting for the June Women Veteran Gala.
- March 20, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in the Unite Us GDVS Social Connector.
- March 21, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in the Connecting Cobb Veterans.
- March 24, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in the American Legion Spring Conference by participating as a SAVE training instructor.
- March 25, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in the Unite Us information table at the American Legion Spring Conference.
- March 28, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in the Hearts to Nourish Hope Woman Veterans Table Talk.
- April 4, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in the PACT Act outreach at KSU.
- April 11, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in the GA VA Women Veteran Program Manager Monthly Community Partnership Call and Atlanta VA Healthcare System VSO Stakeholder Update.
- April 12, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in the South Georgia Women Veterans Business Symposium, Albany, GA.

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- April 15, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in American Legion Post 90, Statesboro event.
- March 18, 2023, Ms. Brooks trained at the Augusta Field office, and visited with possible community partners.
- April 19, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in the April Sexual Assault Awareness month in Dublin.

Current committees:

- Women’s Veterans Health Committee (monthly meetings and joint outreach events)
- Georgia State VFW Homeless Committee
- VA/SAMHSA Governor’s Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families Georgia Team
- Atlanta Advisory Committee on Homeless Veterans
- The Birdwell Foundation Board Member
- Coweta County Race, Equity, and Justice Committee Unite Georgia Community Advisory Committee
- Farmer Street Cemetery Commission

Ms. Calandra Ferguson, Suicide Prevention and Outreach Coordinator (SPOC)

- March 15, 2023, Ms. Ferguson attended AARP “Women, Greater is Here” Seminar.
- March 16, 2023, Ms. Ferguson attended Preventing Violence TF Meeting.
- March 16, 2023, Ms. Ferguson traveled to GDVS Gainesville Office, Meeting with new Suicide Prevention Specialist.
- March 22-23,2023, Ms. Ferguson participated in the SAMHSA Site Visit for the Governor’s Challenge.
- March 21, 2023, Ms. Ferguson conducted the Governor’s Challenge TF Meeting.
- March 24, 2023, Ms. Ferguson taught S.A.V.E. at the Spring Conference of the American Legion.
- March 28, 2023, Ms. Ferguson attended Women Veteran Inclusion Program.
- March 28, 2023, Ms. Ferguson attended the Lethal Means Safety, Governor’s Challenge Priority Group 3 meeting.
- March 28, 2023, Ms. Ferguson attended RAND-Web based Prep Training (Suicide Prevention among Youth).

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- April 3, 2023, Ms. Ferguson attended Talk SPTNG Training.
- April 4, 2023, Ms. Ferguson participated in the PACT ACT Outreach Event.
- April 10-14, 2023, Ms. Ferguson attended the SAMHSA Policy Academy

Organizations:

American Association for Suicide Prevention

Ms. Charlotte May, Director, Public Information & External Affairs

INFORMATION OUTREACH

Division Updates

1. GDVS Newsletter – PID published a monthly newsletter in March. The e-newsletter features top stories from the month and encourages readers to get the full issue at <https://veterans.georgia.gov/newsletter>. The March edition featured a story on the donation of tablets from Greenveterans.com and Samsung, a Vietnam Veterans Day message from the Department, PACT updates on new radiation exposure areas, a featured story on Tuskegee Airman Thomas Bristow, and a VSO highlight on Lafayette office manager Bill Smith.
2. Greenveterans.com and Samsung Donate Technology for Suicide Prevention – coordinated with Chairman Hanley and Samsung North America to develop a news release highlighting the generous donation of tablets to use in implementing the SSG Fox Grant suicide prevention screening survey in GDVS field offices.
3. Let's Connect Summit – PID coordinated with Veda Brooks and Calandra Ferguson to create a topic page on the department's website with information on the upcoming *Let's Connect* suicide prevention summit on May 24-25, 2023. The topic page is featured prominently on the department's main navigation bar to increase visibility of the event.
4. PACT Act updates – PID is continuing to communicate with different groups about the availability of PACT Act benefits. A new flyer for women veterans encouraging and reminding them of their coverage was launched this month, in addition to a road map outlining how to start a PACT Act claim.
 - a. PACT Registration Rallies – shared information on upcoming events, including the event held at KSU on April 4.

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5. Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation – shared information on the new MOU between GDVS and the Reeve Foundation. Georgia’s veterans and their family members with spinal cord injuries or paralysis will be able to use Reeve Foundation resources for support. GDVS will continue to share information on different Reeve Foundation programs.
6. Veterans Benefits Outreach
 - a. Women Veterans Gala – worked with Ms. Brooks to develop a flyer, save the date, and invitation to the 75th Anniversary Gala: Honoring the Past, Present, and Future of Women in Service. PID assisted Ms. Brooks in setting up an Eventbrite website for tickets and donations to the event: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/women-veterans-of-georgia-celebrating-75-years-of-courage-tickets-602794212717>.
 - b. Military Retirement Pay Tax Exemption – shared information on how to claim the exemption, which is new for the 2022 tax period.
 - c. Honoring the Military Enlistee – shared a flyer promoting celebrations for the nation’s newest military servicemembers around the state from Our Community Salutes.

Public Information Division Contacts *(Since December 9, 2022)*

- Replies to VA eBenefits Messages = 205
- Replies to General Questions = approximately 265
- Individual Request for the State Certificate of Honor = approximately 45

GOVERNOR’S (VIETNAM VETERAN) CERTIFICATE of HONOR PROGRAM-

- The latest and most accurate totals (since March 2015) –

State Certificates of Honor issued via GDVS – An estimated **29,825**
(Honors Ceremonies and Central Office Mail Outs)

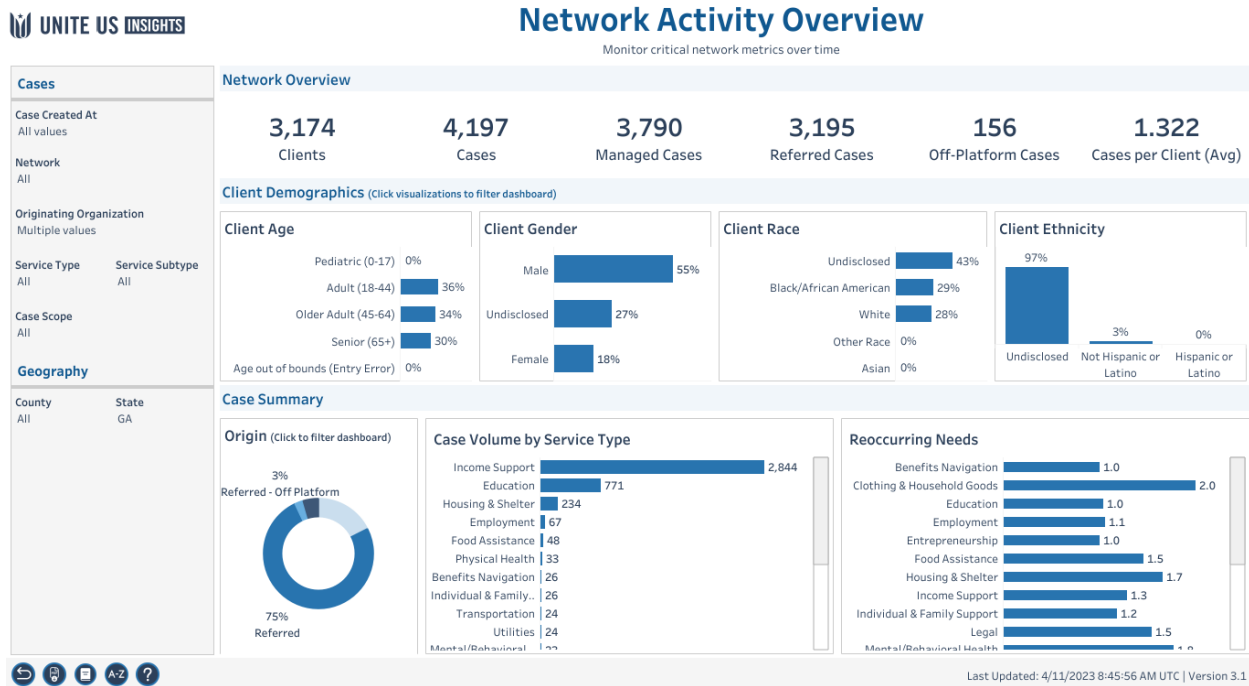
DoD Vietnam Veteran Lapel Pins presented via GDVS – An estimated **23,825**

Honors Ceremonies supported/coordinated by GDVS – **357**

Defense Department’s Vietnam Veteran Surviving Spouse CoH – **291**

Mr. Mark Demers, Grant Program Implementation Manager

- **Unite-Us Grant**- (American Rescue Plan-Negative Impact Grant)- \$6.1m per year effective July 1, 2022:
 - Data ingestion and secure data transfer for the platform and social connector has been slow but we are moving forward. As of April 11, 2023, we have **30,197** in the system. Completed latest SFTP data transfer to Unite Us on April 10, 2023. We have submitted **816** community partners and **313** healthcare partners for inclusion to the platform since August 2022.
 - Below is an activity snapshot from Unite Us Insights:



- Our Warner Robins GDVS office is ranked #6 (1496 Unite Us referrals received during the pilot program) and #8 (1299 Unite Us referrals received from October 25, 2022, to present) in the entire national network.
- Our latest data back from Unite Us on April 3, 2023, containing social needs indicators, via SFTP.
- Grant financial management- payments are 100% up to date since we received the advance.
- Attended Unite Us meeting April 3, 2023.

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- Quarterly reports for both financial and grant were completed April 6, 2023, and transmitted via grant portal on April 10, 2023.
- SSG Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program- (\$747,464 for one year with the possibility to extend two more years).
 - We are in partnership with Kennesaw State University AMES Center to implement the grant. KSU started analyzing data collection and the latest submission to the VA on April 4, 2023.
 - Payment for the Suicide Prevention summit (\$60,000.00) was completed on March 23, 2023. Second quarter funds draw for \$144,803.00 was completed on April 11, 2023, and the KSU invoice was paid on April 12, 2023.
 - Attended SSG Fox Grant meeting on April 3, 2023.
 - Attended Fox Grant Conference on March 27-30, 2023.
 - Calandra Ferguson provided the outreach and training data reports, and we transmitted it to the VA on April 4, 2023.
 - Our first quarterly report is due on April 21, 2023, encompassing the first 6 months of the grant.
 - Fox Grant renewal notice was sent out to all recipients and is due to the VA via UDPaaS on May 19, 2023 (no exceptions).
 - Calandra Ferguson or Veda Brooks will report all the outreach and training events regarding Suicide Prevention under the Fox Grant.

Mr. Bobby Davis, Director, Veterans Education and Training Division (State Approving Agency)

- The approval and compliance surveys of educational institutions, training establishments and training programs approved for veterans training is continuing with no significant problems in any area being noted.
- Approval of new veteran's On-The-Job training sites (OJT) continues to increase. As of this date the State Approving Agency (SAA) has granted approval to 1,824 educational institutions and training establishments where Georgia veterans may attend school or job training and utilize their GI Bill® educational benefits.
- April 5-7, the SAA staff participated in the 2023 Georgia VA Certifying Officials (GAVCO) Conference. Met with over 100 school certifying officials.

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Item *	Number
Approved Educational Institutions	395
Approved Training Establishments	1,429
Veteran Students Enrolled in Educational Institutions	20,635

* Source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration, Education Division, March 2023.

Mr. Russell Feagin, Director, Health & Memorials Division

The FY 2024 Budget includes three bonds for activities involving the Health and Memorials Division (see attached). We will be presenting a resolution during the Board meeting which will need to be signed to accept the following bonds:

- 1) Expansion of the Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery-Glenntown at Glenntown, Georgia. This bond is in the amount of \$510,000. We will submit a grant application to the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) Grant Program for federal dollars for the expansion which is expected to cost about five million dollars. If the application is approved, actual construction would take place sometime in FY 2026.
- 2) Renovations to the Vinson and Wheeler Buildings for ADA compliance and other needed repairs. This bond is in the amount of \$2,005,000. We will submit a grant application to the State Home Construction Program for these improvements. This grant would be approximately \$3,700,000 for a total construction project of about \$5,700,000.
- 3) Paving of roads and parking lots within the Georgia War Veterans Home campus. This bond is for \$1,285,000. This project is not eligible for VA matching funds.

In addition to these new construction projects, we have received funding from NCA for improvements/expansion of the Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Milledgeville. This construction project should take place later this year. Since NCA did not approve our entire request for expansion, we will be submitting another application this year for the additional necessary expansion. If approved, this additional expansion would take place in FY 2026. The matching bond funds for both of these projects were approved in the FY 2023 budget.

Ms. Tonya Jarrett, Clinical Director, Health & Memorials Division

1. Georgia War Veterans Home (GWVH) is COVID-free for veterans and staff. Due to the Baldwin County Transmission rate increasing from moderate to high on 4/7/23, the staff is now utilizing N-95 masks and face shields in all areas of the campus.

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2. Health & Memorials division conducted a TEAMS meeting with Ms. Calandra Ferguson on 4/5/23 to discuss the Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program and how we might incorporate the program at the GWVH. Our team also shared with Ms. Ferguson the Suicide Prevention and Intervention policy, Behavior management policy, PHQ9 Screening Assessment, Initial Suicide Assessment Form, and Suicide Assessment Follow-Up Forms used in our clinical platform at GWVH.
3. We have an onsite meeting scheduled with Ms. Calandra Ferguson and Ms. Veda Brooks on 4/28/23 to tour the GWVH, meet the behavioral team staff members, and continue to review areas that the Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program may be utilized within the clinical framework of the GWVH.
4. Met with the Executive Director of the GWVH to discuss the upcoming *Let's Connect Summit for Suicide Prevention* in May 2023 to identify potential GWVH staff for participation.
5. Health & Memorials continues working with the Georgia Department of Administrative Services (DOAS) to evaluate vendor responses for bidding on the Georgia War Veterans Home contract to become effective on 7/1/23.
6. Status of staffing by Pruitt Health for Subacute Unit- no change from February
 - a. Psychiatrist-Pruitt Health is pursuing a contract with Salveo Integrative Health for psychiatry services with a start date to be determined.
 - b. Neuropsychologist- Pruitt is contracting with consultant Dr. Jeremy Hertz through Integrated Psych Solutions.
 - c. LPN/RN- Pruitt is continuing to recruit.
 - d. OT/PT/SLP- Pruitt is continuing to recruit.
7. Status of staff training and program development
 - a. Ongoing modality training for Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing therapy (EMDR), biofeedback training, and dynavision training for sensory processing.
 - b. Pruitt staff continues to provide patient de-escalation and safety training campus wide.

Mr. Carlton Deese, Executive Director GWVNH, Augusta, GA

EMR is rolling out.

Our protocols will change on May 11 with the end of the Covid national emergency.

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Mr. Kerry Dyer, Chief Operations Officer

On Friday, March 24, 2023, Kerry Dyer attended the Commissioner's Open Forum along with employees from the Department. Later that day he met with Marlon Benjamin, Georgia Building Authority Manager to discuss the renovation of the Common Area. He also met with Ryan Petty, Access Manager to discuss the digitalization of the DD214's.

On Monday, March 27, 2023, Kerry Dyer spoke with Rutledge Davis, Site Manager at the Pike County Multi-Specialty VA Clinic to discuss the attendees for the Ribbon Cutting Ceremony on Thursday, April 13th. Later that day he spoke with Eddie Perez, Transition Assistant Program Manager at Fort Benning to discuss the Field Office relocation. He also posted the Glennville Cemetery Grounds Maintenance Tech 1 vacancy.

On Tuesday, March 28, 2023, Kerry Dyer spoke with Leslie Davis, State Properties Leasing Agent to discuss the Lease Renegotiation Contract for the Albany and Columbus Field Offices. Later that day he spoke with Patrick Bean, Transition Services Manager at Fort Stewart to discuss the opening of a new Field Office at Fort Stewart.

On Wednesday, March 29, 2023, Kerry Dyer was the Guest Speaker at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Ceremony that took place at the Chattahoochee Technical College in Marietta. Later that day he met with Tonya Jarrett, Linda Lavender, Mark Bannister, Mark Meeks, DOAS Procurement Manager and Dan Holtz to discuss the Pre- Negotiation Contract with PruittHealth.

On Thursday, March 30, 2023, Kerry Dyer processed over 95 HR Transactions.

On Friday, March 31, 2023, Kerry Dyer posted the Columbus Field Office vacancy externally and internally. Later that day he met with Tonya Jarrett, Linda Lavender, Mark Bannister Mark Meeks, DOAS Procurement Manager, Tyler Arnold, Chief Development Officer, PruittHealth, Dennis Mize, Executive Director, PruittHealth Dan Holtz to discuss the Negotiation Contract.

On Monday, April 3, 2023, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's meeting. Later that day he submitted the monthly Fleet Management Report to DOAS. He also spoke with Gerald Schaefer, DOAS Director of Audits regarding a \$63,000.00 Construction Bid for the Georgia War Veterans Home.

On Tuesday, April 4, 2023, Kerry Dyer scrubbed the monthly Gains/Loss Roster, Promotion Merit List, Department Alpha Roster, Position numbers Roster and distributed to the Senior Leadership. Later that day he sent 13 candidates for the Columbus Field Office vacancy to the Interviewing Official.

On Wednesday, April 5, 2023, Kerry Dyer along with Mark Meeks, DOAS Procurement Manager, Mark Bannister, Dan Holtz, Tonya Jarrett met the Executive Leadership at PruittHealth to discuss the Revalidation of the Technical Cost for the Georgia War Veterans Home. Later that day he met with Ryan Petty, Access Solutions to discuss the Statement of Work for the DD214's digitalization.

On Monday, April 10, 2023, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's Meeting. Later that day he processed 7 Employee of the 1st Quarter Packets along with Shareka Monday-Robinson. He also met with Mark Meeks, DOAS Procurement Manager to discuss the way ahead for the Request for Proposal for the Georgia War Veterans Home.

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On Tuesday, April 11, 2023, Kerry Dyer along with Mark Demers submitted the Quarterly UniteUs Report to the Office of Planning and Budget. He also met with Jerry Lahr and Ken Childre to discuss the relocation of the Newnan Field Service Office. Later that day he coordinated the delivery of the leased vehicle with AES Transport LLC.

On Wednesday, April 12, 2023, Kerry Dyer spoke with Leslie Davis, DOAS State Properties regarding designated Veteran parking spots for the Gainesville Field Office. Later that day he processed a resignation packet for the Athens Field Office. He also spoke with Mike Johnson, Director Coweta County Facilities Management regarding the relocation of the Newnan Field Office.

Below are the Personnel Actions Kerry Dyer and Shareka Monday-Robinson processed from March 16, 2023- April 16, 2023.

Location	Position	Status	Name	Date
Milledgeville	Grds Maint Tech 1	Terminated	Brain Magourik	03/29/2023
Augusta VAMC	VFSO 1	New Hire	Patrick O'Reilly	04/03/2023
Milledgeville	Grds Maint Tech 1	Resign	Chris Rawlings	04/04/2023
Augusta-Grove Town	VFSO 1	Resign	Winslow Hill	04/14/2023
Augusta-Grove Town	VFSO 1	New Hire	Dkendrick Roebuck	04/17/2023
Milledgeville	Grds Maint Tech 1	New Hire	Aaron Andrews	04/17/2023
Appeals Division	VCAO 1	New Hire	Jasmine Spruill	04/17/2023

On the horizon: Digitalization of the DD214's, New Field Office on Fort Stewart (MOU has been signed), and Relocation of the Newnan Field Office.

Mr. Mark Bannister, Executive Director, Health, Memorials, Finance & Development

FINANCE

Accounting

Routine operations are continuing.

Through accounting procedural guidance and assistance from the State Accounting Shared Services, we continue to work together efficiently as a team to complete required end – of – year budget reports, monthly allotments, and amendments. As we continue with our accounting and budget

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operations, we’re making adjustments and improvements in the areas of better management and oversight of our operating budget, general ledgers, timely submission of invoice payments and processing of purchase orders. We’ve re-established greater communication with our vendors – payments to vendors of our State Veterans Homes.

Budget and General

As of this writing, the 2023 General Assembly legislative session ended on Wednesday, March 29, 2023, and passed the FY 2024 appropriations and budget law; however, the Governor has not signed it into law. Most likely it will be late April to mid-May 2024 before it is signed.

Fund Source	Amount (\$\$)
State General Funds	27,294,616
Other (Daily Fees at war veterans’ homes and construction funds)	3,465,491
Federal Funds	24,210,246
Total Funds	54,970,353

FY 2024

The table below provides a summary of HB 911, (FY 2024G) appropriations and budget for the GDVS awaiting final approval by the Governor.

Approved House & Senate Appropriations Committee versions

Fiscal Program	State/Total Funding	Notes
Administration (DVS)	\$2,031,065 \$54,264 \$9,686 (\$3,910) \$2,091,105	State General funds. Adds: \$2,000 COLA adjustment July 1, 2023. Adjustment in TeamWorks billing. Reduces: DOAS insurance agency premium. Total State Funds.
Cemeteries	\$1,963,155 \$327,896 \$2,291,051	State General funds. Federal Funds Total

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	<p>\$53,989</p> <p>(\$1,000,000)</p> <p>\$2,345,040</p>	<p>Adds: \$2,000 COLA adjustment July 1, 2023.</p> <p>Reduces: Delay in construction of veterans' cemetery.</p> <p>Total State Funds.</p>
Nursing Homes	<p>\$13,340,376</p> <p>\$23,128,424</p> <p><u>\$3,215,491</u></p> <p>\$39,684,291</p> <p>\$513,073</p> <p>\$500,000</p> <p>\$40,697,364</p>	<p>State General funds.</p> <p>Federal funds.</p> <p>Fees, bonds, and services.</p> <p>Total</p> <p>Adds: \$2,000 COLA adjustment July 1, 2023. Funds for retention and recruitment needs. *(Pruitt Healthcare).</p> <p>Total State Funds.</p>
Veterans Benefits	<p>\$8,600,028</p> <p><u>\$753,926</u></p> <p>\$9,353,954</p> <p>\$389,472</p> <p>\$91,850</p> <p>\$1,568</p> <p>\$9,836,844</p>	<p>State General funds.</p> <p>Federal funds (VETD).</p> <p>Total</p> <p>Adds: \$2,000 COLA adjustment July 1, 2023. DOAS insurance agency premium. Merit system assessment billings.</p> <p>Total State Funds.</p>

Total recommended FY 2024 budget = **\$54,970,353 dollars.**

House Resolution 77 - The General Assembly approved as part of the appropriation and budget legislation, state funds in the amount of \$1,000,000.00 dollars to create a state veterans cemetery in Augusta, Richmond County. Although approval of the initial funding for the proposed cemetery paves the way for architectural planning, surveying of the property and purchasing of the land, the next phase in the process will involve securing funding (an annual federal grant) from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and state supported dollars for the purposes of construction of the cemetery, purchasing of equipment, and future hiring of personnel to operate the proposed cemetery.

\$1,000,000 dollars removed (HB 911) will be added to the FY 2024 budget into the Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemeteries program during the new fiscal year.

HEALTH AND MEMORIALS

State Veterans Homes

State Veterans Homes Census (Through April 7, 2023) +

Current Month	Augusta	Milledgeville	Total
Regular Patients	198	114	212
Service Connected *	28	41	69
Total Patients	126	155	281
Last Month			
Regular Patients	98	115	215
Service Connected *	28	39	67
Total Patients	128	154	282

*One hundred percent of the cost of these services is paid by the VA. No state funds are involved.
 +The report to the VSB are total numbers from March 10, 2023, through April 7, 2023.

Georgia War Veterans Nursing Home – Augusta

Routine operations are continuing.

Georgia War Veterans Home – Milledgeville

Routine operations are continuing.

State Veterans Cemeteries

Burial Statistics (through April 7, 2023)+

State Veterans Cemetery	Cumulative Last Month	Cumulative Current Month	Increase
Glennville	2,250	2,268	18
Milledgeville	5,066	5,096	30
Total	7,316	7,364	48

+ The report to the VSB are the total numbers from March 10, 2023, through April 7, 2023.

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery – Glennville

Routine operations are continuing.

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Milledgeville

Routine operations are continuing.

OLD BUSINESS:

There was no old business to discuss.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

There were no announcements.

NEW BUSINESS:

Mr. Mendez made a motion to approve the selling of the bonds for the projects at the homes and cemeteries. Ms. Swan seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

The May 17 Board meeting was scheduled. It will be a combination virtual and in-person meeting, set up at the GDVS.

Mr. Kopsie made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Peterson seconded the motion. There were no objections and the motion passed. The meeting was adjourned at approximately 1:01 p.m.

SIGNED:



Shawn Hanley, Chair

ATTEST:



Joshua Kopsie, Secretary

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The next Veterans Service Board meeting will be held in person at GDVS but will also be available via video/telephone conference call on Wednesday, May 17, 2023, at 12:30 p.m. The Webex link is:
<https://georgiadepartmentofveteransservice.webex.com/georgiadepartmentofveteransservice/j.php?MTID=m5efe98405d386a5106696851cbeaa20b>

Meeting password: **7qVDB4Pcqf2 (77832472 from video systems)**

Or you can call: **1-844-621-3956**

Access Code: **2341 569 6005**