

Tuesday April 23, 2024 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

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

Visitors Present: Ms. Shelly-Ann Simpson, Executive Director, Field Operations & Appeals, GDVS
Mr. Mark Demers, Chief Development Officer, Chief Finance Officer, GDVS
Mr. Russell Feagin, Executive Director, Health & Memorials Division, GDVS
Mr. Kerry Dyer, Chief Operations Officer, GDVS
Ms. Jehae Kim, 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. Tonjala Moton-Williams, American Legion Assistant Service Officer
Ms. Amy Stevens, Georgia Military Women and Vetlanta
Ms. Dylester Scott, AMVETS
Ms. Samantha Brown-Parks, Veterans Service Foundation Board Secretary
Mr. Wyatt Batchelor, Veterans Service Foundation Board Treasurer
Ms. Vivian Greentree, Veterans Service Foundation Board
Mr. Carlton Deese, Executive Director GWVNH, Augusta, GA
Ms. Lily Snyder, Director, Veterans Education & Training, GDVS
Ms. Charlotte May, Director, Public Information and External Affairs, GDVS
Ms. Shareka Monday-Robinson, Director, Human Resources, GDVS
Ms. Ramona Roper, Director, Training Division, GDVS
Ms. Sherri Whitfield, Director, Veterans Benefits South Region, GDVS
Mr. Ken Childre, Director, Veterans Benefits North Region, GDVS
Mr. Edwin Berry, Director, Appeals Division, GDVS
Ms. Veda Brooks, Coordinator, Women & Minority Veterans, GDVS
Ms. Calandra Ferguson, Coordinator, Suicide Prevention & Outreach, GDVS
Mr. William Wilson, Network Administrator, GDVS
Ms. Camala Ball, Budget Analyst, GDVS
Ms. Irene Mackson, Business Support Analyst, GDVS
Ms. Monica Dorsey, Communications & Outreach Specialist, GDVS
Ms. Latika Archie, Administrative Assistant, GDVS

On Tuesday, April 23, 2024, the Veterans Service Board meeting was held in person and by video/tele-conference.

Mr. Kopsie called the meeting to order at 12:30 p.m. Mr. Paslawski gave the invocation. Mr. Kopsie led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

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Mr. Mendez made a motion to approve the April Agenda. Mr. Paslawski seconded the motion. The motion passed.

Mr. Mendez made a motion to approve the March minutes, which were previously distributed for members to review. Mr. Paslawski 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 VSO Roundtable with Al Bocchicchio, VA Southeast District Director virtual meeting held on March 13, 2024, at 1PM - 2PM. We discussed the following:
 - Discussed the VSO's issues and concerns.
 - VBA Update
- The Department Service Officer attended the Monthly VSO/Community Partner PACT Information and Listening meeting hosted by Lauren Ruchin, Atlanta VHA. The virtual meeting was held on March 14, 2023, at 12PM – 1PM.
 - The purpose of the meeting was to share information about the PACT Act and to discuss how our Veterans are being impacted by the PACT Act.
 - We discussed ways to ensure that our Veterans gain access to the healthcare, benefits, and resources they earned and deserve!
 - Provided Veterans' feedback about the PACT Act Outreach initiatives.
 - Discussed upcoming Outreach events.
- The Department Service Officer attended the Atlanta Regional Office Renaming Ceremony. The Regional Office was renamed to the Senator Johnny Isakson VA Atlanta Regional Office. The ceremony was held on March 25, 10AM – 11AM at 1700 Clairmont Road, Decatur, GA 30033.
 - They honored Senator Johnny Isakson for dedication, service, and commitment to Veteran's needs.
 - Honored Guest
 - Hosted a Claims Clinic
- The Department Service Officer attended the Joseph Maxwell Cleland AVAMC VSO meeting hosted by Lovetta Ford, Interim Executive Director, and Staff. The virtual meeting was held on March 25, 2024, at 12PM.

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- Introduction of the new Joseph Maxwell Cleland AVAMC Atlanta, Kai Mentzer, Executive Director.
- The Department Service Officer attended the Maxwell Cleland AVAMC VSO meeting hosted by hosted by Lovetta Ford, Interim Executive Director. The virtual meeting was held on April 03, 2024, at 11AM. Provided an update on the following:
 - MICU
 - Facility flooded.
 - Closed until repairs are done.
 - Using BACU to service patient
 - Bridge to parking deck
 - Closed due to structural damage.
 - Obtain parts for repairs.
 - Shooting Incident
 - Investigation on-going
 - Safety Measures
 - Security Officers
 - Checking ID after hours at both entrances
 - Budget
 - Shortfalls
- The Department Service Officer attended the CDCE/VAS Quarterly Committee hosted by Gwendolyn Ramos, Chief Volunteer Service, and staff. The Zoom meeting was held on April 10, 2024, at 1PM. The purpose for the meeting was to provide the VAMC initiative regarding the PACT Act and the VAMC operational status. The discussion was on the following issues:
 - Leadership - Samuel Miller, Acting
 - Recruiting Event
 - Nine drivers to drive DAV transport van.
 - Drivers are being scheduled for physicals for activation.
 - Volunteer Appreciation week
 - April 22 – April 26, 2024 –
 - Banquet will be held at the American Legion Post 66 in Avondale Estates.
 - 2nd Annual NW Georgia We Care, Forum River Center 301 Tribune St., Rome GA
 - Summer Student Program sponsorship (expecting 20-25 students)

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- Women Veterans Program is May 10, 2024
- The Department Service Officer attended the Monthly VSO/Community Partner PACT Information and Listening meeting hosted by Lauren Ruchin, Atlanta VHA. The virtual meeting was held on March 14, 2023, at 12PM – 1PM.
 - The purpose of the meeting was to share information about the PACT Act and to discuss how our Veterans are being impacted by the PACT Act.
 - We discussed ways to ensure that our Veterans gain access to the healthcare, benefits, and resources they earned and deserve!
 - Provided Veterans’ feedback about the PACT Act Outreach initiatives.
 - Discussed upcoming Outreach events.
- The Department Service Officer attended a VFW National Veterans Service (NVS) Eastern Region virtual meeting held on April 15, 2024, at 2PM – 3PM. We discussed the following:
 - NVS Proficiency Training Conference
 - NVS Policy & Procedure adopted March 2, 2024
 - IVF Federal Register Notice
 - VA updates Disability Rating Schedule for digestive system
 - GI Bill Modernization of Payment System
 - President Biden Fiscal Year 2025 Budget proposes critical investments in veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors.
 - Department of Veterans Affairs announced End to Five-Year Pilot Program, Veteran Employment Through Technology Education Courses (VET TEC)
 - VA Pension SSA Match Overpayment
 - NICS Reporting change under Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2024

Ms. Raven Holstick, GDVS, American Legion Service Officer

- American Legion Spring Conference was held in Duluth GA, March 22-24. Department service officer and Assistant service officers spoke on March 23 on VA updates and Roles and Responsibilities of local Post Service Officers.
- April 11, 2024, Department Service officer attended Monthly PACT Act Information & Listening Sessions for Veteran Service Organizations and Community Partners. During this session Atlanta VAMC shared information about the PACT Act and assisting Veterans in gaining access to the healthcare, benefits, and resources.
- April 4, 2024, Southwest Georgia held a Veteran and Family Alliance event. Local American Legion Bainbridge Post attended.

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- April 13, 2024, Assistant Service officer attended 3rd District Veteran Resource fair. During this event, the Assistant Service office assisted veterans with their VA and State benefits.

Upcoming events:

- Monthly Virtual Post service officer training will be held for new service officers. Training topics will be on the roles and responsibilities as a post service officer. This training will continue to be held monthly as new service officers arrive.
- The National Commander will visit Savannah and Augusta April 22-24.
- Spring Conference June 28-30.

Commissioner Patricia Ross

On Tuesday, March 26, 2024, Commissioner Ross held a Budget Review meeting with her financial team. She then attended the Veterans Service Board Meeting. Afterward, she met with Carrollton Furniture about the office renovation.

On Wednesday, March 27, 2024, Commissioner Ross spoke at the 28th Rosalynn Carter Georgia Mental Health Forum at The Carter Center about efforts related to supporting servicemembers and veterans' mental health in Georgia. There was also a tour of the facility. In the afternoon she had a meeting regarding the Fox Grant.

On Friday, March 29, 2024, Commissioner Ross spoke at the Chattooga County Vietnam Veterans Ceremony in Summerville, where she was awarded a Quilt of Honor.

On Monday, April 1, 2024, Commissioner Ross held a Director's Meeting. She then attended a bi-weekly Unite Us meeting and a Fox Grant Update meeting. She was also contacted about the Legislative Conference Committee changes removing the increase for the War Veterans Homes.

On Tuesday, April 2, 2024, Commissioner Ross and Veda Brooks toured the Housing Helping Center in Atlanta and met with Donell Woodson to discuss how to partner together to serve veterans.

On Wednesday, April 3, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended the Center for Women Veterans National Partners and Stakeholders virtual meeting.

On Thursday, April 4, 2024, Commissioner Ross took part in the SSG Fox Grant Exit Conference.

On Monday, April 8, 2024, Commissioner Ross held a Director's meeting.

On Tuesday, April 9 through Wednesday, April 10, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended the Adult Learner Meeting at Middle Georgia State University. The focus was on military-connected students.

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Later that day, she was contacted by the Director for the Veterans Cemetery Grants program about the award of expansion grants for both the Milledgeville and Glennville cemeteries.

On Wednesday, April 10, 2024, Commissioner Ross visited Macon and Warner Robins as potential sites for Annual Training 2025.

On Thursday, April 11, 2024, Commissioner Ross took part in a discussion with the VA regarding HUD/VASH Vouchers. She also had a meeting regarding the digitalization of DD214s. Later she had meetings regarding the PACT Act and the Fox Grant.

On Friday, April 12, 2024, Commissioner Ross visited field offices in LaGrange, Columbus, Americus, Albany, Tifton, and Valdosta meeting with veteran service officers.

On Monday, April 15, 2024, Commissioner Ross held a Director's meeting focusing on updating state benefits for veterans for the National Association of State Directors website. She then attended a bi-weekly Unite Us meeting and a Fox Grant Update meeting.

On Tuesday, April 16, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended the Georgia Governor's Challenge/Suicide Prevention Task Force Meeting. She then had a meeting to discuss the We CARE Vet Fair at the Cobb County Civic Center.

On Wednesday, April 17, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended the Georgia Joint Defense Commission meeting in Augusta. She then attended a Quarterly Veteran Town Hall.

On Thursday, April 18, 2024, Commissioner Ross and her team attended a meeting with the Unite Us Executive Team. She then took part in the Quarterly EHRM Townhall for VSO/NASDVA/NACVSO virtual meeting.

On Friday, April 19, 2024, Commissioner Ross led the GDVS Leadership Institute class "Managing Change." Afterward, she was interviewed for the TCSG Memorial Day video.

On Saturday, April 20, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended a gala for the Cobb Veterans Memorial in Marietta.

On Monday, April 22, 2024, Commissioner Ross held a Director's meeting.

Upcoming: Outreach event – The Warrior Alliance, Augusta Tech, 26 April
MOPH Annual Convention, 27 April
Legislative breakfast, 29 April (sold out)
Fox grant conference 6 – 9 May, San Antonio
9th floor renovations

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

GENERAL

- The Bainbridge office will be closed officially on May 31, 2024. Ms. Hurst will be retiring. Since there is not a substantial veteran population there, and the Bainbridge office shares the same counties as Thomasville, we made the decision to permanently close the office.
- We have closed the office in Lyons. The VSO in that office has retired and we don't believe that there is a sufficient veteran population to keep that office open. There is also an issue of safety at that particular location.
- Along with the Commissioner and the COO, conducted a site visit for the 2025 Annual Training. We decided to use Central Georgia Technical College in Warner Robins.
- Mr. Chris McKan in our Fort Moore office will be a part of the TAG briefing on Fort Moore on April 19. We hope to attend more of these briefings and introduce ourselves to transitioning military and their families.
- **DD 214's and Welcome Home Letters: 206** Welcome Home Letters were mailed out in March 2024.

PROJECTED POSITIONS

- Current opening in Glennville, Hinesville.

Ms. Ramona Roper, Director of Training Division:

- April 16, 2024, Ms. Ramona Roper attended and briefed the Cresswinds of Lake Lanier Veterans Club in Gainesville, Georgia. This is a group of retired military veterans and spouses. The briefing gave information on recent law changes pertaining to the PACT Act and additional benefits provided by the state of Georgia and the Department of Veterans Affairs.
- April 17-19, 2024, Mr. Charles Isaac conducted new hire training for the new VSO at the Lagrange VFSO. This training consists of an introduction to becoming a VSO, basic rules and responsibilities of a VSO and many other subjects required by the Department of Veterans Affairs.
- April 19, 2024, the Training Division had a collaborative meeting to discuss agenda, class materials, schedules, and attendees for the breakdown of the GDVS Annual Training conference.

Upcoming Events:

- April 27, 2024, Ms. Ramona Roper, and Mr. Charles Isaac will attend the Military Order of the Purple Heart annual conference in Columbus, GA.

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- May 15th and 22nd, 2024, Ms. Ramona Roper will conduct benefits briefings for the annual Lamda Sigma Fraternity.
- Daily continued ongoing support to the Regional Directors and Veteran Field Service Offices
- Continuation of performing duties as VSO's
- Collaboration meetings for 2024 Annual Training conference (bi-weekly meetings)

Mr. Edwin Berry, Director of Appeals Division

- The total number of hearings conducted by the Appeals Division for March 2024 was **51**.
- As of **April 1, 2024**, the Atlanta VA Regional Office processed benefits as follows for GDVS and the Service Organizations represented by GDVS during the month of February 2024:

The grand total of monthly compensation and benefits for the veterans, family members and surviving spouses increased by \$1,697,928.00. The number of awards grew by 534 veterans and family members.

Types of Claims	Number of Awards	Benefits paid	(Change)
Compensation	106,459 (+449)	\$237,261,720.00	(+1,603,525)
DIC	4,058 (+56)	\$6,971,743.00	(+92,716)
Survivor Pension	727 (+4)	\$699,902.00	(+5,994)
<u>Veteran Pension</u>	<u>1,417 (-6)</u>	<u>\$1,680,640.00</u>	<u>(-4,308)</u>
Grand Total	112,661 (+503)	\$246,614,005.00	(+1,697,928)
		\$734,227,094 YTD thru 3/31/2024	

Mr. Kenneth Childre, Director Veterans Benefits North Region

Retro Awards: March 2024-\$1,819,681.61
 Included in the Retro Award were single awards:
 Compensation
 Walker-4788: \$124,483.75 (Barry Hunter-Gainesville)
 Leighton-1230: \$100,025.70 (Sean Seader-Carrollton)

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Director Site Visits/Inspections: 2

Community Involvement:

Mar 7-Rico Johnson (Gainesville)-Attended a Vet to Vet Cafe event coordinated by Northeast Georgia Medical Center at The Phoenix of Braselton. 14 veterans and beneficiaries were in attendance.

Mar 23-Rico Johnson (Gainesville)-Supported a local homeless initiative coordinated by The Edge Church by offering veteran information. The event fed 300+ in Hall County.

Mar 29-William Smith (LaFayette) and Ken Childre (NAD)-Attended Chattooga County Vietnam Veterans Ceremony in Summerville, GA. 14 Vietnam Veterans were recognized with Certificate of Honor and Lapel Pin.

North Area Gains/Losses: 0

Average Visits Per VFSO							
Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO							
Region:		North					
Month:		March-24					
A	B	C	D	E	D / E	G	G / E
					F	Total	Average
			Total	Work	Average	Claims	Claims
	Veterans' Field		Monthly	Days	Office	Submitted	Submitted
	Service Officer (VFSO)		Office	In	Visits	To	By VFSOS
Office Name	Last Name	#	Visits	Month	Per	VA	To VA
			Month	Day	Day	Monthly	Daily
	Number of VFSOs:	52	6,670	20	333.50	1,987	99.35
Number of Offices:	29	Average Visits/Office:		230.00	Average Claims/Office:		68.5172414

*Total monthly office visits include: 4,259 In-Person and 2,411 phone calls/emails.

Ms. Sherri Whitfield, Director Veterans Benefits South Region

- On April 4, 2024, Joycelyn Jones in our Moultrie attended the SW Georgia Veteran Alliance’s Veterans and Family Resource Fair in Bainbridge, GA. She provided information about GDVS and how GDVS provides claims assistance for VA benefits. She provided State benefits books, and she explained how VA’s claim system works. Ms. Jones received glowing feedback from the American Legion community in Bainbridge, stating, “Joycelyn’s service was outstanding; she was compassionate, and an expert in providing information to veterans.” They refer to her as their “new VSO.”
- On April 5, 2024, Mrs. Shannon Daniels resigned from our Hinesville office.

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- On April 16, 2024, Mrs. Debra O'Neal retired from our Lyons office.
- On April 18, 2024, Mr. Robert Jones resigned from our Ft. Stewart office.
- On April 16, 2024, Mr. Joseph White was hired as a new VSO1 for our LaGrange office.
- On April 15, 2024, the Lyons office location was permanently closed.
- On April 13, 2024, Chris McKan volunteered to participate in the Best Ranger Competition at Ft. Moore. This event was hosted by the National Ranger Association, and they needed volunteers for vendor set up, signage, and traffic control.
- On April 13, 2024, Mark Holmes from our Warner Robins office gave a presentation to veterans about GDVS and VA benefits. This event was hosted by AMVETS.
- On April 26, 2024, Joseph Hurndon from our Waynesboro office will be participating in a PACT Act claim filing event at the Augusta Technical College. The Warrior Alliance, in partnership with the Veteran Benefits Administration and GDVS, will be on site to help file PACT Act claims and get updates on previously filed claims.
- South region offices reported lump sum payments since the last board meeting of \$854,231.86 with the highest single amount of \$138,349.50, for a surviving spouse, reported by the Ft. Moore field office.
- South Georgia Region Veterans Population: 237,759.

Ms. Veda Brooks, Women Veterans Coordinator (WVC)

- March 25, 2024, Ms. Brooks conducted a virtual meeting with participants of the 2024 Gwinnett County Homeless Outreach.
- March 27, 2024, Ms. Brooks participated in the Women's History Veteran Luncheon at the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum.
- March 28, 2024, Ms. Brooks attended the Open house at My Home Suite, 10101 Alcovy Road, Covington, Ga 30014, within the 4th Congressional District.
- April 2, 2024, Ms. Brooks attended a meeting with Donell Woodson, Housing Helping Center. Veda attended the SIS Oral History at Spelman College where the students interviewed Retired Colonel Delores Hampton.
- April 4-5, 2024, Ms. Brooks participated in the Governor's Challenge: Georgia Post Academy Site Visit.

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- April 10, 2024, Ms. Brooks visited Rescue Mission Middle Georgia and Brookdale Resource Center.
- April 11, 2024, Ms. Brooks participated in a collaborative HUD/VASH Voucher with VBA and VHA.
- April 16, 2024, Ms. Brooks participated in the Monthly Georgia Governor's Challenge Meeting.
- April 19, 2024, Ms. Brooks participated in the Hearts to Nourish Hope opening house for emergency housing.

Current committees:

- Violence Prevention Task Force
- 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

- March 25 - Ms. Ferguson attended the Gwinnett County Homeless Outreach meeting to plan for the event in May 2024.
- March 26 - Ms. Ferguson attended a Suicide Prevention Event with the Army Reserves@ Ft. Gillem.
- March 27 - Ms. Ferguson presented at the Women History Veteran Luncheon. She set up a display and distributed Suicide Prevention Materials.
- March 28 - Ms. Ferguson attended an Open House event @ a local hotel that will house veterans who are experiencing homelessness. I provided information around identifying the signs of suicide.
- April 3-4 - Ms. Ferguson hosted the SAMHSA Governor's Challenge Implementation Academy.
- April 9 - Ms. Ferguson met with the SW Director of the Girls Scouts of America to provide Suicide Prevention training for their staff.
- April 10 - Ms. Ferguson conducted outreach in Macon. Macon DV Center, Rescue Mission Middle Georgia, Brookdale Resource Center.
- April 11 - Ms. Ferguson conducted training with her Suicide Prevention Specialist.

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- April 16 - Ms. Ferguson conducted her monthly Governor's Challenge Task Force meeting.

Mr. Mark Demers, Chief Development Officer/Chief Financial Officer

Accounting/Procurement:

- Routine operations are continuing. We are continuously working to improve all accounts payable processing, to apply proper coding, accountability, organization of purchase orders, and on time payments.
- We are working with the SAO Shared Services to prepare the procurement and accounting data in Team Works for migration to Workday.
- Camala Ball reviewed the SAO report to identify Concur fees that were set to pay on the next cycle. Noted chart fields and requested correction to avoid expenses being charged incorrectly.
- Kirsten Dennis stated that the department is supplied for the remainder of the year and emergency requests will be filled out of the Central Office supply room on a case-by-case basis.
- Kirsten Dennis stated that Staples shipping and delivery errors resulted in credits received totaling \$2,238.08 back into the supply budget (that must be spent). Supplies were reordered back up supplies for the remainder of the year in order to close out POs prior to fiscal year close.
- The procurement section is preparing for annual close out by cleaning up outstanding PO's, requesting credits if needed, and closing PO balances for unreceived items.
- Purchase Card program at Georgia Department of Veterans Service is active. The latest training with Bank of America (BoA) was on April 2, 4, and 16, 2024, to go over reconciliation.
- All P-Card personnel have access to TeamWorks modules for reconciliation.
- Mark Demers and Irene Mackson completed the PeopleSoft training on April 10-11, 2024.
- Irene Mackson completed additional P-Card Administrator training on April 4, 2024
- Camala Ball and Mark Demers completed ACH Banking verification training on March 27, 2024, from 0900-1100.

Budget:

- Highlights include:

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- AFY2024- (Updated February 20, 2024 (HB 915)) signed by the Governor.
 - Increase salaries (bonus not salary increase) by \$1000.
 - Transfer \$1,000,000 from cemeteries for Mental Health Grant (HB414).
 - Reduce funds for one vacancy in Administration (\$41,269)- Funds not reduced in House, Senate, and Conference Committee (CC) version.
 - Funding to support transition to a new contract for GWVH in Milledgeville (\$200,000).
 - Increase funds for updates to Department Central Office (\$197,986).

- FY2025- (Updated March 28, 2024) Awaiting Senate Version
 - COLA of 4% not to exceed \$3000 for salaries.
 - DOAS adjustments for insurance, increase for GBA, increase for GTA telecommunications, increase for merit systems assessments- this is to compensate for premium and fee increases.
 - Increase for TRS and health insurance premium increases.
 - Reduce funds for one vacancy in Administration (\$41,269)- Funds not reduced in House, Senate, and CC version.
 - Increase funds (\$135,597) for two positions in the new VA Houston County clinic.
 - Reduce funds for vacancies and reduced travel and training (\$94,328). - Funds not reduced in House, Senate and CC version.
 - State funds returned for veterans cemetery in the Augusta area (\$1,000,000). State funds reallocated to FY25 Mental Health Grant in House, Senate and CC version.
 - **Increase funds to address rising cost of healthcare for homes -\$1,022,755 in House and Senate version. This was reduced to \$0 by the CC.**
 - Increase funds for a Homeless Coordinator- \$121,250 in House and Senate version.
 - **Budget is awaiting governors final review and signature.**

- Camala Ball submitted the AFY 2024 amendment to reflect HB915 adjustments and next state fund allotments. Issues Encountered: Delays in approval from OPB on amendments and allotments due to new staff in training and OPB projects that took priority.

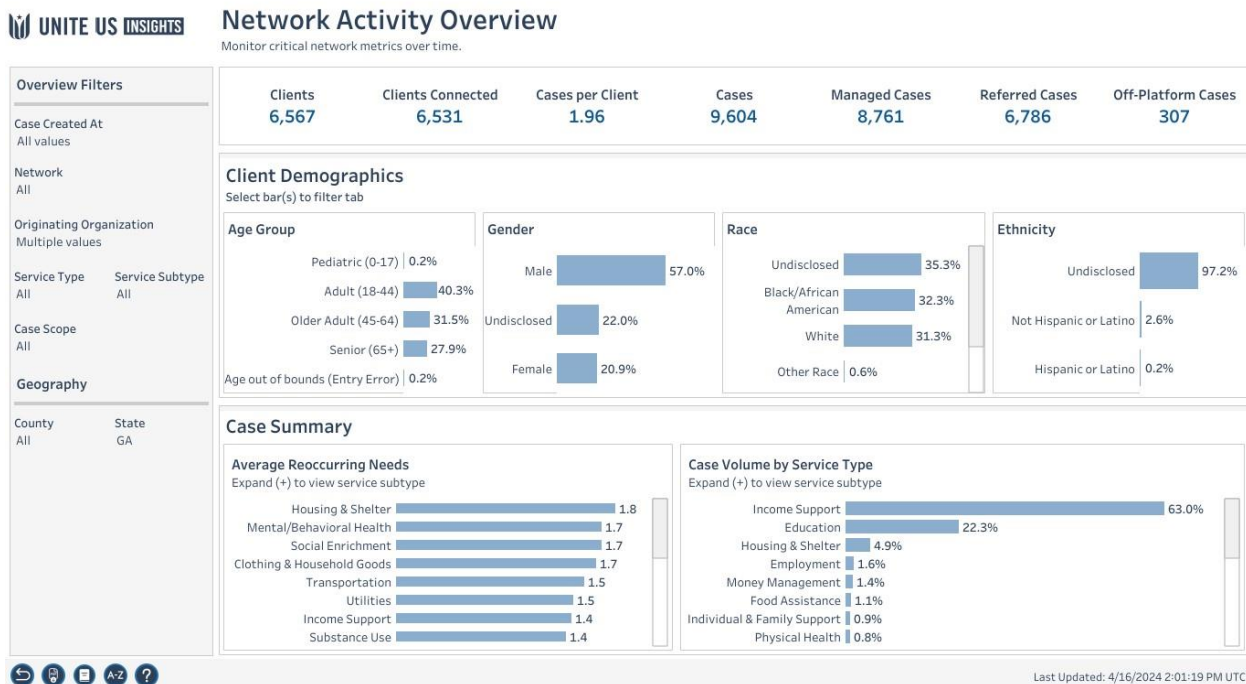
- Camala Ball reviewed budget projections with upper management including suggestions to reallocate upcoming expenditures to ensure we maintain budgetary compliance.

Grant Program:

- SSG Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program- (\$747,464)
 - Irene Mackson completed the latest grant fund draw for \$2,998 on April 4, 2024.
 - Mark Demers and Irene Mackson participated in the SSG Fox exit conference with Auditor Amanda Sifuentes. We are compliant in all areas.
 - Attended VA Grant Manager meeting on April 9, 2024.
 - Irene Mackson and I attended Fox Grant VA National Webinar on April 18, 2024
 - Fox Grant Mandatory Conference will be on May 6-9, 2024, in San Antonio, TX.

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- Mark Demers and Irene Mackson attended Fox Grant State Government workgroup on April 11, 2024. Next meeting will be on May 9, 2024, at 1400.
- The SSG Fox Grant Mid-Year Report is due on April 30, 2024.
- **Unite-Us Grant-** (American Rescue Plan-Negative Impact Grant)- \$6.1m per year (\$18.3m) over the course of 3 years starting July 1, 2022:
 - Data ingestion and secure data transfer for the platform and social connector is moving forward. As of March 19, 2024, we have **268,997** veterans in the system. We have submitted **1,086** community partners and **313** healthcare partners for inclusion to the platform since August 2022.
 - The latest quarterly report was submitted on April 9, 2024, with the next quarterly report due in July 2024.
 - The latest Unite Us grant drawdown was on April 9, 2024, for \$171,800.91 with all reconciliation support documents included.
 - Below is an activity snapshot from Unite Us Insights:



- **Veterans Mental Health Services Program Grant (HB 414)-** Georgia Governor Brian Kemp signed HB 414 on April 25, 2023, with the support of state legislators and the Georgia Department of Veterans Service (GDVS). The bill creates the Veterans Mental Health Services Program, which is a grant program to improve access to mental health services for military service members, veterans, and their families in the state of Georgia. The grant program is funded through state appropriations in

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Fiscal Year 2023. The total grant funding is \$750,000 for FY2023 (executed by no later than 30 June 2023). The grant was awarded to two vendors:

- Aspire (Cohen Veterans Network) for \$650,000.
 - Emory Healthcare for \$100,000.
- The money was allocated to both awardees, and they have received the funds.
 - The latest quarterly reports were received on January 31, 2024, and both agencies are following grant guidelines. The next quarterly report is projected for April 2024.
 - The Governor's budget approved \$1,000,000 for the next grant period with concurrence from the House and Senate.
 - The competitive grant process for year 2 will begin in April 2024.

Veterans Service Foundation:

- The next quarterly board meeting will be on June 6, 2024, at 1000.
- Irene Mackson will be assisting with the foundation breakfast fundraiser on April 29, 2024, and attended the walk though of the venue at the Atlanta Metro Chamber.
- Completed IRS Form 990 for the foundation, and it was submitted to the IRS by Julie Hammond on April 3, 2024.
- Completed the Georgia State Charitable Contributions Program paperwork so the foundation could be listed as a charitable organization eligible for payroll deduction. We just have to wait and see if we are accepted for the 2024-2025 year.

Events:

- Irene Mackson completed training for the Sexual Harassment Investigative Team on March 26, 2024. She is also participating in Homeless Veteran Coordinator meetings.
- Irene Mackson attended the Governor's Challenge Suicide Prevention for Youth event and joined Priority Group 2 (Connectedness) in support of Governor's Challenge.
- Irene Mackson supported Commissioner Ross at the AARP Conference
- Kirsten Dennis and Irene Mackson attended the Women's History Veterans Luncheon at the Carter Presidential Library and Museum on March 27, 2024, at 1100.

Mr. Russell Feagin, Executive Director, Health & Memorials Division, GDVS

Mr. Feagin attended the NCA Conference and met with state and federal cemetery directors.

We were notified last week that funding to expand the cemeteries has been granted. We can start planning now and be ready by September.

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Both cemeteries are up for triennial audit – Milledgeville in October and Glennville in November. We must meet federal standards.

The Homes were disappointed in the loss of funding and are adjusting plans.

State Veterans Homes

State Veterans Homes Census (Through April 5, 2024) +

Current Month	Augusta	Milledgeville	Total
Regular Patients	89	107	196
Service Connected *	31	133	64
Total Patients	120	140	260
Last Month			
Regular Patients	88	107	195
Service Connected *	29	35	64
Total Patients	117	142	259

* One hundred percent of the cost of these services is paid by the VA. No state funds are involved.

+ The numbers reported to the VSB are the total numbers from March 16, 2024, through April 5, 2024.

Normal operations continue at Georgia War Veterans Nursing Home and Georgia War Veterans Home.

We have had an issue with the dam located at Cedar Pond in Milledgeville. This pond is part of 54 acres of property transferred to GDVS from DBHDD in 2016. This property was obtained for the recreational use of residents of the GWVH. Over the past weekend it was discovered that a hole had developed in the dam as a result of the recent heavy rains. Action was taken to lower the water level of the pond to reduce pressure on the dam. However, due to the condition of the dam and no funds, repair is not practical. Other measures are being considered.

State Veterans Cemeteries

Burial Statistics (through April 5, 2024)+

State Veterans Cemetery	Cumulative Last Month	Cumulative Current Month	Increase
Glennville	2,493	2,504	11
Milledgeville	5,412	5,442	30
Total	7,905	7,946	41

+ The report to the VSB is the total numbers from March 16, 2024, through April 5, 2024.

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery – Glennville

We had requested a VA funded grant for expansion of the Glennville cemetery. This expansion would include 1330 pre-placed crypt vaults and additional paving. We expected this to be approved this summer. However, VA funds just became available this year and we will be able to start the construction this fall (2024) as opposed to next fall (2025).

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Milledgeville

We had also requested a VA funded grant for expansion of the Milledgeville cemetery. This expansion would include 1724 pre-placed crypt vaults, 548 in-ground cremation plots, and additional paving. We expected this to be approved this summer. However, VA funds just became available this year and we will be able to start the construction this fall (2024) as opposed to next fall (2025).

Moving these two construction projects up will help reduce the risk of us running out of developed burial space.

Mr. Kerry Dyer, Chief Operations Officer

On Wednesday, March 27, 2024, Kerry Dyer spoke with Tomeika Goard, GTA Customer Success Manager 2, regarding the GDVS email domain change. He also processed 1 Resignation Packet for the Hinesville Field Office and 1 New Hire Packet for the LaGrange Field Office. Later that day he worked on the Bainbridge Office closure along with Terri Hurst and Sherri Whitfield.

On Thursday, March 28, 2024, Kerry Dyer along with Jerry Lahr met virtually with Natasha Simoes, Access Project Manager, to discuss the invoicing for the DD214 digitalization project. He also spoke with Robert Orange regarding the Edge and Canon Copier contract. Later that day he dropped off COL (Retired) Rob Choppa Medal of Honor Citation to GCI.

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On Monday, April 1, 2024, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's Meeting. He also spoke with Alice Aka, Office of Student Achievement Office Manager, regarding temporary workstations. Later that day he attended the UniteUs and Fox Grant bi-weekly meeting.

On Tuesday, April 2, 2024, Kerry Dyer spoke with Brandi Lafayette, Verizon Wireless Client Executive, regarding the activation of 13 new iPhones for the Department and the port process for the 5 lines with AT&T. He also met virtually with John Conners, CWC Account Executive, to discuss the cubicles and furniture for the Central Office. Later that day he submitted the monthly fleet management report to DOAS.

On Wednesday, April 3, 2024 through Friday, April 5, 2024, Kerry Dyer was on Annual Leave.

On Monday, April 8, 2024, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's Meeting. He processed a Retirement Packet for the Lyons Field Office and a Resignation Packet for the Fort Stewart Field Office. Later that day he spoke with Leslie Davis, State Property Leasing Specialist, regarding the Lyons Field Office closure.

On Tuesday, April 9, 2024, Kerry Dyer posted the Homeless Coordinator vacancy externally and internally. He also sent Linda Lavendar 3 Cemetery Tech 1 candidates. Later that day he contacted David Griffin, Department of Natural Resources Program Manager, regarding the leaking Dam located at the Milledgeville Home.

On Wednesday, April 10, 2024, Kerry Dyer contacted Kevin Kitchen, Perry VA clinic Facility Manager, regarding a site visit. He also contacted Russell Feagin to discuss the contract renewal for the Augusta Veterans Home. Later that he traveled to Macon and Warner Robins along with Commissioner Ross and Shelly-Ann Simpson to conduct a site visit of two Conference Centers in preparation for FY25 Annual Training.

On Thursday, April 11, 2024, Kerry Dyer traveled to Lyons, Georgia to conduct a Field Office closure.

On Friday, April 12, 2024, Kerry Dyer contacted Ayoluwa Hill, GBA Facilities Operations, to discuss the replacement of Ceiling Tile and Lights on the 9th floor suite. He also visited the Appeals Division and delivered an iPhone 13 to Ed Berry.

On Monday, April 15, 2024, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's Meeting. He also attended the UniteUs and Fox Grant meeting virtually. Later that day he dropped off the Employee of the Year and Employee of the Quarter Trophies to the designed shop.

On Tuesday, April 16, 2024, Kerry Dyer reviewed 29 resumes for the Homeless Coordinator vacancy. He also submitted a GDVS organization chart to State Properties for the relocation of the Lyons Field Office.

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Below are the Personnel Actions Kerry Dyer and Shareka Monday-Robinson processed from March 16, 2024 – April 16, 2024.

Location	Position	Status	Name	Date
Milledgeville	Cemetery Tech 1	New Hire	Brain Howard	03/18/24
Milledgeville	Cemetery Tech 1	New Hire	Jamarius Kindle	03/18/24
Hinesville	Office Mgr(VFSO 2)	Resigned	Shannon Daniels	04/01/24
Glennville	Cemetery Tech 1	Terminated	Chris Lee	04/15/24
LaGrange	VFSO 1	New Hire	Joseph White	04/16/24
Fort Stewart	Office Mgr (VFSO 2)	Resigned	Robert Jones	04/18/24
Lyons	Sr. Office Mgr	Retire	Debra O’Neal	05/01/24

On the horizon:

- Open a Veterans Field Service Office in the Perry Clinic in May/June 2024 timeframe.
- 9th floor renovation is projected for May
- The DD214 project has been completed and the next step is staff training.

Ms. Lily Snyder, 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 2,145 educational institutions and training establishments where Georgia veterans may attend school or job training and utilize their GI Bill® educational benefits.
- Bobby Davis is retiring effective May 1, 2024.

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Item *	Number
Approved Educational Institutions	440
Approved Training Establishments	1,705
Veteran Students Enrolled in Educational Institutions	19,820

* Source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration, Education Division, Mar. 2024.

Ms. Charlotte May, Director, External Affairs & Communications

INFORMATION OUTREACH

Division Updates

1. GDVS Newsletter – The department’s monthly e-newsletter features top stories from the month at <https://veterans.georgia.gov/newsletter>. The March newsletter encompasses several new developments to help service members, veterans, and their families access benefits. Unite Georgia’s new resource directory and a new loan assistance program for veterans pursuing homeownership from the Department of Community Affairs headlined this month’s issue. Additionally, the newsletter highlighted the newest class of Georgia Military Hall of Fame, a Women’s History Month celebration for women veterans in Dublin, and a feature on Carrollton VSO Veronica Dailey.
2. Website Updates –
 - a. Unite Georgia’s new Public Resource Directory is featured prominently on the GDVS homepage for service members, veterans, and families seeking help with a variety of needs that are not addressed by only the benefits offered by VA or through state resources. The resource directory is searchable by resource type and geolocation to help target users close to home. Users can reach help directly or submit a request to Hub Support if they do not see a resource in their area.
 - b. Let’s Connect Summit – Hosted with our partners at DBHDD and the KSU AMES Research Center, the Let’s Connect Suicide Prevention Summit is now fully promoted on the GDVS website. The event will be hosted from June 24-25, 2024, at Callaway Gardens and is free to attend. Website users can find information on the summit, links to ticket reservations, schedules, notable attendees, and information on what to expect at the event through the main menu bar or through the GDVS online event calendar. See <https://veterans.georgia.gov/lets-connect-summit> for more details.
3. Legislative Breakfast – Working with staff and partners, External Affairs and Communications created information and event listings for the upcoming legislative breakfast hosted by the

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Georgia Veterans Service Foundation. Attendees will be able to speak with and hear from several state legislators on past, current, and upcoming legislation for veterans benefits in Georgia. While tickets are currently sold out, more information on the event is available at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/veterans-legislative-breakfast-tickets-876042395387>.

4. Benefits outreach – External Affairs and Communications continues to work with GDVS staff and partners to educate Georgia’s veterans and families on the availability of benefits and resources.
 - a. Small Business and Entrepreneurship – shared information from our partners at VBOC on an upcoming Boots to Business | Reboot course for veterans small business owners in Atlanta on May 3, 2024. Additionally, we shared information from the Department of Administrative Services on a lesser known program – Georgia’s Business Certification Program for small businesses, including minority, women, or veteran owned businesses.
 - b. Education benefits – VA developed new GI Bill® infographics to explain how to transfer benefits from a deceased family member and how to use Survivors’ and Dependents’ Educational Assistance benefits to cover costs for a variety of programs.
 - c. Month of the Military Child – shared information from the Georgia National Guard’s Family Program with enrichment activities for military children across the state.

Public Information Division Contacts *(Since December 11, 2023)*

- Replies to VA eBenefits Messages = 175
- Replies to General Questions = approximately 405
- Individual Request for the State Certificate of Honor = approximately 45

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APRIL

GEORGIA
VETERANS SERVICE FOUNDATION

VETERANS LEGISLATIVE BREAKFAST

METRO ATLANTA CHAMBER
191 PEACHTREE ST NE #3400,
ATLANTA, GA 30303

8 AM

State Sen. Tonya Anderson

State Sen. Chuck Payne

State Rep. Josh Bonner

Join us for a robust discussion.
You'll learn about new and upcoming legislative changes for veterans and their families from state and federal leaders.

Hosted by the Georgia Veterans Service Foundation.
[HTTPS://GAVETERANSFOUNDATION.ORG/](https://gaveteransfoundation.org/)

QR code with "SCAN ME!" label

SAVE the DATE

2024 LET'S CONNECT Summit

CALLAWAY RESORT & GARDENS
4500 Southern Pine Dr, Pine Mountain, GA 31822

JUNE 24-25, 2024
8:00 AM - 2:30 PM

Staff Sergeant Parker Gordon Fox
SUICIDE PREVENTION GRANT RECIPIENT

Learn more about the Let's Connect Summit [here!](#)



OLD BUSINESS:

There was no old business to discuss.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Commissioner Ross announced that she will be attending the legislative signing on April 24.

The Legislative Breakfast on April 29 is being sponsored by the Foundation Board. It is fully booked, so anyone who wants to attend should let us know. We will discuss legislation that has been passed that benefit veterans. There will be an option for attendees to donate to our Foundation.

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Commissioner Ross announced that a part of the mission of GDVS is to help veterans connect with employment and re-employment, per O.C.G.A.

Mr. Childre announced a We CARE event in Rome on May 16, targeting 15 counties. We are hoping for 3,500 attendees.

Mr. Deese announced that May 12-18 is National Nursing Home Week. *Radiant Memories* is the theme.

NEW BUSINESS:

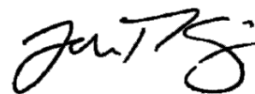
Mr. Kopsie asked how many offices we currently have. There are 52. We are scouting for a new office in the Lyons area and project we will have 54 offices open by the end of the year.

Commissioner Ross provided information on the \$1 million dollar increase that was approved by both chambers but removed in conference committee. Healthcare cost increases are projected at 3% this year and 28% over two years. This will also impact opening the sub-acute unit. The Senate had to balance the budget and we got cut, even though they were supportive. We are working with the Governor and our legislators to try and get the funds in AFY25. The Board members were asked to reach out to their local legislators with their concerns.

Mr. Paslawski made a motion to schedule the next Board meeting for May 21 at 12:30pm. Mr. Mendez seconded the motion. The motion passed. It will be a combination virtual and in-person meeting, set up at the GDVS.

Mr. Paslawski moved to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Mendez seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at approximately 1:21 p.m.

SIGNED:



Joshua Kopsie, Chair

ATTEST:



Steve Mendez, Secretary