

Wednesday, April 16, 2025 at 12:00 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

Present Mr. Joshua Kopsie, Chair
Mr. Tim Paslawski, Vice Chair
Mr. Shawn Hanley, Member
Mr. Pete Peterson, Member
Ms. Takosha Swan, Member
Ms. Patricia Ross, Commissioner

Visitors Present: Mr. Kerry Dyer, Deputy Commissioner, Chief Operations Officer, GDVS
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
Ms. Shelley Seinberg, Assistant Attorney General, Attorney General's Office
Ms. Amy Sillmon, Assistant Attorney General, Attorney General's Office
Ms. Amy Stevens, Georgia Military Women and Vetlanta
Ms. Carolyn Cagle, Georgia American Gold Star Mothers
Mr. Drew Craig, Chief Design Officer, VA Veteran Experience Office
Mr. Joe Higgins, Chair, Veterans Service Foundation Board
Ms. Vivian Greentree, Veterans Service Foundation Board
Mr. Kevin Loncher, Veterans Service Foundation Board
Mr. Bob McMahon, Veterans Service Foundation Board
Mr. Don Layne, VECTR Chief Operating Officer
Mr. William Martin, Visitor
Ms. Lily Snyder, Director, Veterans Education & Training, GDVS
Ms. Charlotte May, Director, Public Information and External Affairs, 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
Ms. Raven Holstick, Transition and Employment Coordinator, GDVS
Mr. William Wilson, Network Administrator, GDVS
Ms. Camala Ball, Budget Analyst, GDVS
Ms. Monica Dorsey, Communications & Outreach Specialist, GDVS
Ms. Irene Mackson, Business Support Analyst, GDVS
Ms. Julie Hammond, Executive Assistant to the Commissioner, GDVS

On Wednesday, April 16, 2025, the Veterans Service Board meeting was held in person and by video/tele-conference.

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Mr. Kopsie called the meeting to order at 12:06 p.m. Mr. Kopsie gave the invocation. Mr. Dyer led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

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

Mr. Paslawski made a motion to approve the March minutes, which were previously distributed for members to review. Mr. Peterson 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 the Monthly VSO/Community Partner PACT Information and Listening virtual meeting hosted by Lauren Ruchin, Atlanta VHA. The virtual meeting was held on March 13, 2025, at 12PM. 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 in the communities.
- The Department Service Officer attended a Georgia Department of Veteran Service (GDVS) Leadership Institute virtual training session held on March 13, 2025, at 8AM. Commissioner Ross gave department updates and updates on the Legislative Session, including:
 - National Guard and Reservist Burial in State Cemeteries
 - HB 266 – Military Retirement Tax Exemption
 - HB 108 "Claim Sharks"
 - New License Plate – Honoring Service
 - GA hosting NASDVA – August 9-13, 2026, Savannah, GA
 - Increase Budget for Military Homes
 - Fund Mental Health Wing at the Milledgeville State Home
- The Department Service Officer attended a VFW National Veterans Service (NVS) March 2025 VFW NVS Update virtual meeting held on April 03, 2025, at 2PM. We discussed the NVS Training Schedule and the Proficiency Training Conference April 27 – 30, 2025.
 - NVS Updates were approved by the National Veterans Service Advisory Committee at its meeting of March 1, 2025, during the VFW Washington Conference.

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- M21-1 Updates. The VA clarifies when to order a medical opinion in PTSD claims based on personal trauma. For More Information: Please visit M21-1, Part VIII, Subpart iv, Chapter 1, Section C. Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists are no longer authorized to sign medical evidence. On March 17, 2025, VA updated the M21-1 manual to remove Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists from the list of approved advanced practice registered nurses that can sign medical evidence.
- GFE Computer Equipment Instructions. The agreement for VA to provide computers for representatives and service office support staff has been reinstated; requests for equipment can be submitted immediately.
- VFW National Commander Testifies Before Congress:
 - VFW National Commander Al Lipphardt testified before a joint hearing of the Senate and House Committees on Veterans' Affairs.
 - The VFW delivered its top legislative priorities of unaddressed toxic exposures, transition from service, alternative PTSD treatments, predatory claims companies, and GI Bill parity.
 - CIC Lipphardt explained that while the benefits afforded to our all-volunteer force may seem generous to those who never served, these benefits are simply the warranty of the service contract each veteran signs before putting on the uniform.
 - "By contract, you must ensure the VA has the resources and staff to provide veterans their full earned benefits," Lipphardt said. "This is not an ask. Honor the contract!"
 - For More Information: Read the testimony or watch the hearing, which begins at the 15:14 mark.
- The Department Service Officer attended a Georgia Department of Veteran Service (GDVS) Leadership Institute virtual training, session held April 04l 2025, at 10AM. We discussed the Leadership Institute Team being a facilitator at annual training. The Leadership Institute will facilitate a class on a journey of where the VSOs currently are and committing to a better way of doing things.
 - As a Facilitator
 - Tell them what you're going to tell them
 - Tell Them
 - Review what you told them to make sure they understand
 - Training Course Topic
 - Self-Care
 - Handling Difficult Veterans
 - Mindset (Do you have a fixed mindset or a growth mindset?)
 - Training Objective

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- Connect
- Communicate
- Cast Vision
- Coaching
- Challenge

Ms. Tonjala Moton-Williams, GDVS, American Legion Service Officer

- April 4, 2025, at 1:00 pm, Commander and his delegation will visit Lake City VA Medical Center 619 South Marion Avenue Lake City, Florida 32025 (Canceled).
- April 26, 2025, at 6:00 pm - 8:00 pm Fundraiser Ball American Legion Post 63- 90 Milledge Road, Augusta, GA.
- April 27 at 9:30 am - 5:00 pm Veteran Homelessness Ride and Benefit – Fundraiser American Legion Post 145, 13141 Veterans Memorial Hwy, Douglasville, GA.

Upcoming events:

- May 5-8, 2025, National Spring Conference, Sheraton City Centre Hotel, 31 West Ohio St, Indianapolis, IN.
- May 14 at 8:30 am - 4:00 pm, Veteran Expo –WT Johnson Center, 1610 Hunter Street, Augusta, GA.
- May 17 at 7:00 am - 12:00 pm 15th Annual - All American 5k/10k Run & Walk – Fundraiser – American Legion Post 50, 201 McIntosh Trail, Peachtree City, GA.
- May 30 - June 1, Willie Pitts Reunion & Banquet – Fundraiser –American Legion 267 (for sign in) and Post 35 (for Ball), 4027 Cusseta Road, Columbus, GA.

Ms. Amy Stevens, Georgia Military Women and Vetlanta

The Woman Veteran of the Year, Ms. Durden, was a founding member of Georgia Military Women in 2012.

Commissioner Ross was selected as one of the national veteran Trail Blazers for the Women Veteran's Center in Washington, D.C. Congratulations to her.

Commissioner Patricia Ross

On Wednesday, March 19, 2025, Commissioner Ross attended the Suicide Mortality Review. She then attended the Veterans Service Board meeting and the VSB Executive Session. Afterward, she went to the Capitol for the briefings on HB 108 (S.A.V.E. Act) and HB 53 (Burial Equity Act).

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On Thursday, March 20, 2025, Commissioner Ross traveled to Milledgeville to tour the home with the Dublin VAMC staff. She discussed with Mr. Feagin the plan for standing up the sub-acute therapy unit (Russell Building) and onboarding staff.

On Friday, March 21, 2025, Commissioner Ross led the Leadership Institute discussion on NASDVA. She then met with Shelly-Ann Simpson about personnel issues. Afterward, she attended the 7th anniversary celebration of the Georgia Korean Vietnam Veterans Day and provided remarks.

On Sunday, March 23, 2025, Commissioner Ross presented a certificate of appreciation at the 75th Royal Lao Army Celebration, assisted with the wreath laying ceremony and provided remarks for this special group who was instrumental in American efforts in Vietnam.

On Monday, March 24, 2025, Commissioner Ross held a Director's Meeting. She also attended the Unite Us bi-weekly meeting. She later met with Matt Scherer to discuss a platform he developed to assist those transitioning from the military.

On Tuesday, March 25, 2025, Commissioner Ross attended the weekly meeting of the Suicide Mortality Review Committee. She then attended the Returning Veterans Task Force meeting and had a meeting with Unite Us.

On Thursday, March 27, 2025, Commissioner Ross attended the luncheon to honor the Woman Veteran of the Year along with other women veterans from GDVS. The event was held in Warner Robins and was "standing room only." She later had a meeting with Shawn Welsh about participating in his veteran-focused podcast.

On Friday, March 28, 2025, Commissioner Ross was a guest speaker at the Chattooga County Vietnam Veterans Ceremony. Also in attendance was Ken Childre, Director of the North Region field offices. That evening she attended a Professional Networking Mixer, which focused on health, wellness and self-care for women veterans, especially as it relates to busy lifestyles, transitioning from the military and work-life balance as entrepreneurs.

On Saturday, March 29, 2025, Commissioner Ross was the keynote speaker at the National Women Veterans Pink & White Empowerment Summit, an event dedicated to supporting women veterans through health, wellness and entrepreneurship resources.

On Monday, March 31, 2025, Commissioner Ross held a Director's meeting. She then traveled, along with Deputy Commissioner Kerry Dyer, to the Open House and Ribbon Cutting for the new Perry VA Community Clinic. She later attended the Fox Grant update meeting.

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On Tuesday, April 1, 2025, Commissioner Ross attended the weekly meeting of the Suicide Mortality Review Committee. She then joined the Veterans Service Organization Communicators Call, which shares VA messages and information and raises awareness of VA programs and priorities.

On Wednesday, April 2, 2025, Commissioner Ross met with DAYSTAR Photography to discuss ways to support veterans and their families. She then met with Shelley Seinberg from the AG's office and with SBA about an upcoming Resources Roundtable. She later attended the Center for Women Veterans (CWV) National Partners and Stakeholders meeting. She then spoke to the Institute for Veterans and Military Families team in preparation for her participation in a Fireside Chat at the Military Entrepreneurship Forum in June.

On Thursday, April 3, 2025, Commissioner Ross attended the Veterans Service Foundation Board meeting. She also spoke to a developer about veteran housing in Milledgeville and reached out to the local team to meet with him about veteran needs.

On Friday, April 4, 2025, Commissioner Ross was a panelist at the SBA Resources Roundtable with Administrator Loeffler. She then attended the in-person session of the Leadership Institute, which focused on managing change. The meeting was held in central Georgia as the leadership cohort is located across the state.

On Monday, April 7, 2025, Commissioner Ross held a Director's Meeting. The team discussed the approved legislation and what bills are still alive for next year. She also met with the Patriot Foundation and attended the Unite Us bi-weekly meeting. She also worked on an issue for a veteran in VISN6 and coordinated a possible relocation of the Savannah VetCenter to Savannah Technical College.

On Tuesday, April 8, 2025, Commissioner Ross attended the weekly meeting of the Suicide Mortality Review Committee. She also met with Russell Feagin and Kerry Dyer to discuss the homes. Later she attended the SSG Fox SPGP Monthly Grant Operations/Program Manager meeting.

On Wednesday, April 9, 2025, Commissioner Ross held an Open Forum for the department. She later met with Jeff Carroll and Tony Dobbins from the VFW to discuss collaboration. She attended the quarterly update for the State Homes program. Later she met with professors from Georgia Tech to discuss potential support for homeless veterans.

On Thursday, April 10, 2025, Commissioner Ross attended the Monthly VSO/Community Partner PACT Act Information and Listening Session. She also attended the SSG Fox Grant meeting and an update meeting on the planning of the Empowerment Gala for Hire Heroes USA.

On Friday, April 11, 2025, Commissioner Ross attended the Georgia Veterans Network Board meeting, then the VA Day activities in Newnan hosted by The Warrior Alliance.

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On Monday, April 14, 2025, Commissioner Ross held a Director's Meeting. She also attended the Fox Grant Update and NextGen meeting. Additionally, she attended a tour with SecVA of the Emory Healthcare Veterans Program.

On Tuesday, April 15, 2025, Commissioner Ross attended the weekly meeting of the Suicide Mortality Review Committee. She also met with Amy Doerman, the new Deputy COO, to brief her on GDVS.

GDVS had both a successful budget and legislative session and thank you to all who assisted!

Commissioner Ross gave an update on the legislative session. House Bill 53, the Burial Equity Act, is awaiting the Governor's signature. It will allow reservists and guardsmen to be buried in our state cemeteries, provided they fulfilled at least one tour of duty. House Bill 266, if signed into law, will exempt \$65,000 of one's military retirement from state taxes. House Bill 108 was tabled by the Senate, but will still be active next year.

Once the new state commanders are elected, we plan to schedule a meeting to try and galvanize the veteran voice and work better together for our veterans. Our collaborative efforts were very valuable during this legislative session, and we want to build on that.

Commissioner Ross met with Secretary of the VA, Doug Collins at the Emory Healthcare Veterans Program this week. Emory works with veterans who have PTSD and TBI. They are receiving a new grant of \$1 million from the State to do PTSD research. Sec. Collins stated that the VA needs to better leverage their state partners.

The ribbon cutting for the sub-acute unit at Milledgeville will be in September.

NASDVA will be hosted by us in Savannah August 8-13, 2026.

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

GENERAL

- On March 26, I attended a walkthrough for the Augusta Veterans Expo that will be held on May 14th in Augusta. GDVS local offices will provide support for a VA Claims clinic.
- On March 27, I along with the women veterans of GDVS attended the Luncheon at the VECTR in Warner Robins where we celebrated the 2025 Georgia Woman Veteran of the Year.
- On March 28 I attended the Discussion on Women Veterans and Resources at Federal and State Levels couch series hosted by the Women Veterans Coordinator at the One Family Resource Center in Douglasville.

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- On April 10th I attended the monthly veteran roundtable hosted by the VA at Goodwill in Decatur.
- On April 11th I participated in the Veteran's Day Pact Event held by the Warrior Alliance in Newnan.
- **DD 214's and Welcome Home Letters: 1,530** Welcome Home Letters were mailed out in February 2025.

Projected Positions:

- 2 openings in Appeals

Ms. Ramona Roper, Director of Training Division:

- March 29, 2025, Mr. Charles Isaac participated in the 28th Eleven Black Men of Liberty County Annual Scholarship Gala. The program is led by military retirees in the Hinesville area. It mentors black male youths not only in education but military service, community and social activities. Mr. Isaac currently serves as the Chief Financial Officer for the past year. The program had 3 graduating seniors that received scholarships to colleges and one to enter the military.
- April 3, 2025, Ms. Ramona Roper met with Sheriff John Williams and his training staff at the Clarke County Sheriff's Department to discuss a Veterans Benefits briefing for the veteran staffers within the sheriff's department. In assisting and advocating for veterans and families in obtaining benefits. Also discussed was the advantage of using accredited representatives such as GDVS. A future date for another briefing will be after June 2025 due to the GDVS Annual Training Conference.
- April 10, 2025, Ms. Ramona Roper will conduct an online mentoring class for employees that would like "refresher" training also, pointers on filing successful claims. The mentoring program also was designed to target employees' learning differences, therefore if modifications to testing or how information is disseminated needs to be addressed, the Training Division can adjust. The pupil completes an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) which defines their own strengths and weaknesses, an interview, then possible modifications will be implemented to assist the VSO achieve success.
- April 10, 11, and 14, 2025, Ms. Sandra Bennett, will conduct new hire training for several new hires throughout South Georgia. Due to the multiple offices having new hires, Ms. Bennett will conduct the training via MS Teams. This training introduces new VSOs to the accredited training processes and procedures to assist veterans and claimants. The Absorb Learning Portal is also introduced. The portal has classes and quizzes to help navigate the vast subjects of filing VA claims.
- April 14-16, 2025, Mr. Steven Fay and Glenn Massey will conduct new hire training at the Jasper CBOC, Jasper, GA, and the Charlie Norwood VAMC, Augusta, GA. This training introduces new VSOs to the accredited training processes and procedures to assist veterans and claimants. The Absorb

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Learning Portal is also introduced. The portal has classes and quizzes to help navigate the vast subjects of filing VA claims.

Upcoming Events:

- Continued ongoing support to the Regional Directors and Veteran Field Service Offices
- Continuation of performing duties as VSO's
- Provide new hire training in North and South Georgia
- Annual Training Conference prep

Mr. Edwin Berry, Director of Appeals Division

- The total number of hearings conducted by the Appeals Division for **March 2025** was **102**.
- Retroactive payments of **\$801,374.48** were paid in February and March to the veterans or family members based on positive outcomes from previous hearings that the Appeals team assisted with.
- As of **March 31, 2025**, the Isakson VA Regional Office processed benefits as follows for GDVS and the Service Organizations represented by GDVS during the month of March 2025:

Types of Claims	Number of Awards	Benefits paid
Compensation	110,202	\$261,984,541
DIC	4,479	\$7,875,898
Survivor Pension	640	\$629,122
<u>Veteran Pension</u>	<u>1,271</u>	<u>\$1,501,021</u>
<u>Grand Total</u>	<u>116,592</u>	<u>\$271,990,643</u>

YTD through 03/31/2025 Total Compensation, Pension and other benefits paid: \$811,177,993 for the veterans that we represent who receive VA benefits.

Mr. Kenneth Childre, Director Veterans Benefits North Region

Retro Awards: \$2,393,633.59

Director Site Visits/Inspections: 9

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Community Involvement:

3/15/2025-Mark Churning (Greensboro) Talked with 3 employees at Allay Hospice about what is required when a Veteran passes away and making sure the proper information is added to/included on the Death Certificate.

3/20/2025-Tanya Rogers & Rico Johnson (Gainesville) Attended the Governors Challenge Site Visit in support of improving processes for suicide prevention.

3/22/2025-Tanya Rogers (Gainesville) Attended a homeless breakfast at Good News to support those in need in Hall County.

3/5, 3/19 & 3/26-Maxine Brock (Conyers) Did Outreach at the Department of Labor.

3/27/2025-Eddie Fontaine & Chris Collins (Blairsville)-Participated in a Resource Fair sponsored by American Legion Post 121. Approximately 87 participants.

The Newnan Vet Fair on April 14 welcomed 420+ veterans. GDVS had 119 communications and filed 68 claims. We have another event coming up in Augusta on May 14.

North Area Gains/Losses:

Shane Robinson-Marietta-New Hire 3/3/25

Robin Harris-Lawrenceville-New Hire 3/17/25

Christina Williams-Gwinnett Technical College (New Office)-Transferred from Lawrenceville 3/17/25

Alex RiveraJusino-Ft Eisenhower (New Office)-Transferred from Augusta VAMC 3/17/25

Average Visits Per VFSO							
Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO							
Region:		North					
Month:		March-25					
A	B	C	D / E		G	G / E	
			D	E	F	H	
			Total	Work	Average	Total	Average
			Monthly	Days	Office	Claims	Claims
			Office	In	Per	Submitted	Submitted
			Visits	Month	Day	To	By VFSOS
Office Name	Veterans' Field Service Officer (VFSO) Last Name	#				VA Monthly	To VA Daily
	Number of VFSOs:	52	6,651	21	316.71	2,470	117.62
Number of Offices:		31	Average Visits/Office:		214.55	Average Claims/Office: 79.6774194	

*Total monthly office visits include: 2,406 In-person and 4,245 phone calls/emails.

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Ms. Sherri Whitfield, Director Veterans Benefits South Region

- On April 1st, Mr. Antrell Hunt relocated to the Perry office from the Macon Office.
- On April 10 – 11, Mr. Dennis Boothe in the Hinesville office gave a benefits briefing to inmates at the Jesup Federal Prison.
- On April 10th, VSOs from the LaGrange and Columbus offices participated in the VA Day/Warrior Alliance Veterans Benefits and Resources Expo in Newnan, GA.
- On April 15th and 17th, interviews were conducted for the Warner Robins and Kings Bay offices, respectively.
- Since the last board meeting, South region offices reported total lump sum payments of \$861,654.02, with the highest single payment of \$73,892.61 reported from the Savannah office.
- South Region Gains/Losses - Effective April 1, 2025, we welcomed the following to GDVS:
 - Elizabeth May – Brunswick
 - Robert Macklin – Albany
 - Jeanette Williams – Ft. Benning
 - Ryshard Clarke – Macon
 - Shanerika Williams – Macon
- South Georgia Region Veterans Population: 239,553.

Ms. Veda Brooks, Women Veterans Coordinator (WVC)

- March 18-19, 2025, Ms. Brooks participated in the Suicide Mortality Review Academy Site Visit.
- March 19, 2025, Ms. Brooks participated in the Women Veteran Town Hall Meeting at the Atlanta VA Hospital.
- March 20, 2025, Ms. Brooks facilitated a planning meeting for the 2025 Georgia Woman Veteran of the Year Luncheon.
- March 21, 2025, Ms. Brooks participated in the Women Veterans Legal Briefing at the Battery, Cobb County.
- March 25, 2025, Ms. Brooks facilitated her monthly virtual Coffee Break. The guest Speaker was well received. Ms. Brooks participated in the RVTF meeting.

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- March 26, 2025, Ms. Brooks participated in the VET Centers Stakeholder Meeting.
- March 27, 2025, Ms. Brooks and the Outreach Team, set up and prepared for the Woman Veteran of the Year Ceremony in Warner Robins at the VECTR. We hosted the 2025 Woman Veteran of the Year, where Raquel Durden won the Woman Veteran of the Year Award, and Anisa Palmer won the Georgia Impact Award. We sold tickets for \$30.00 to pay for food.
- March 28, 2025, Ms. Brooks facilitated the State and Federal Woman Veteran Resource Event. This event was held in Douglasville. The Woman Veteran Program Manager Kathleen O'Loughlin worked in partnership with GDVS to make this a successful event.
- March 29, 2025, Ms. Brooks participated in the "Shelter Woman Veteran Pampering Day." It was held in Riverdale GA, where 30 women received facials and foot reflexology and the opportunity to shop at "Syreeta's Boutique" where they were able to shop with dignity for free. Food was provided and a guest speaker talked about self-care, and the Women left with a gift bag of goodies and a smile.
- April 2, 2025, Ms. Brooks participated in the Center for Women Veterans National Partners and Stakeholders meeting. Ms. Brooks participated in the CVVAMC Outreach Committee meeting. These are the highlights:
 - VA2K is scheduled for May 21. Barb Keating shared that the Medical Center will hold activities on May 21 while additional dates will be set for CBOCs.
 - Whole Health is currently expanding some offerings like the peddler and walking programs, as well as outreach to Oncology patients to offer acupuncture and acupressure services.
 - Victoria Freaney: Partnering with Sarah Harkness for activities in April during Sexual Assault Awareness Month. IPVAP training will be held on April 16th, virtual training from 12 – 1:30pm. CEUs available for those who pre-register.
 - Macon Vet Center: Nathan Neagle: Currently coordinating with American Legion in Fort Valley and Crawford County to plan a resource fair for mid-to-late May.
 - Office of Women's Health is in a communication campaign to increase the need for colon cancer screening among women; has materials to share with any staff upon request.
 - April 14th, 1:00pm - VFW Women Veteran Recognition Ceremony in the Auditorium.
 - June 23rd, 4:30 – 6:30pm - Women Veterans Public Forum highlighting safety and self-defense.
 - June 25th, 4:30pm - Quarterly Focus Group, seeking feedback on the Maternity Care Program. Please refer/invite female veterans to participate in this focus group.
- April 3, 2025, Ms. Brooks participated in the Let's Connect Summit Planning Meeting. Ms. Brooks participated in the Coffee and Conversation at the Southern Crescent College, Griffin.
- April 4, 2025, Ms. Brooks participated in the UniteUs Training.

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- April 7, 2025, Ms. Brooks participated in the Let's Connect Logistic Meeting.
- April 9, 2025, Ms. Brooks participated in the Atlanta Women Veterans Health Committee Monthly Meeting. Highlights:
 - 220 actively pregnant women veterans for case management! Excellent.
 - 216 postpartum mothers for case management! Excellent.
 - 28,000 Women Veterans enrolled at the Atlanta VA
 - The second mammography technician has accepted the tentative job offer. Which should help with scheduling overdue breast screening.
 - Starting in May in person Baby Showers are Back.
 - Just under 23% increase in women mammograms Self scheduling will begin next month.

Current committees:

- Violence Prevention Task Force
- VA/SAMHSA Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families Georgia Team
- The Birdwell Foundation Board Member
- Coweta County Race, Equity, and Justice Committee Unite Georgia Community Advisory Committee
- Operation Ogletree Committee

Ms. Calandra Ferguson, Suicide Prevention and Outreach Coordinator

- March 12, 2025, Ms. Ferguson conduct a collaborative meeting with NAMI representatives.
- March 17-19, 2025, Ms. Ferguson attended the in-person Suicide Mortality Review Committee meeting.
- March 18, 2025, Ms. Ferguson conducted her monthly Governor's Challenge TF Meeting.
- March 20, 2025, Ms. Ferguson hosted an on-sit Governor's Challenge TF Meeting with SAMHSA.
- March 21, 2025, Ms. Ferguson attended a legal briefing for Women Veterans at The Warrior Alliance.
- March 22, 2025, Ms. Ferguson presented S.A.V.E/ LMS Training to Auxiliary 658.
- March 25, 2025, Ms. Ferguson attended the Returning Veterans Task Force Meeting.
- March 27, 2025, Ms. Ferguson co-hosted the Women Veteran of the Year Luncheon.

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- March 28, 2025, Ms. Ferguson co-hosted the Veteran Women Event @ Douglas County CSC.
- April 1, 2025, Ms. Ferguson attended the weekly SMRC Meeting.
- April 4, 2025, Ms. Ferguson Attend the Lethal Means Safety TF Meeting.

Ms. Raven Holstick, Transition and Employment Coordinator

- March 5 –Transition and Employment Coordinator participated in a collaboration meeting with the Department of Juvenile Justice to discuss job openings and employment opportunities for transitioning veterans.
- March 18 – Transition and Employment Coordinator represented the department at the “Spring Into Action” Career Fair, connecting veterans with potential employers and career resources.
- March 19, 2025 Transition and Employment Coordinator did another presentation at Learn and Learn, Dobbins. Delivered a class on veteran transition and employment resources, providing actionable guidance to attendees. Engaged with service members to educate them on career opportunities, resume building, and navigating the civilian job market. Strengthened connections to support successful transition.
- March 31 – Successfully completed the American Legion Certification Class, enhancing capabilities as a certified American Legion Service Officer.

Upcoming events:

- Meeting with Stride Ahead to discuss an upcoming event
- Goodwill Career Fair
- Department of Community Supervision resource fair
- Next Round Career readiness event
- Women Veteran Leadership Cohort

Ms. Jarelle Thompson, Homelessness Coordinator

- March 10, 2025 - I attended OAC to complete my monthly engagement with their homeless population and provided resources and hygiene packets.
- March 13, 2025 - I attended the Veterans Roundtable hosted by Goodwill. The purpose was to engage with external stakeholders and partner with other agencies working with the homeless population.

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- March 25, 2025 - I held a meeting with Georgia State University to discuss how we can partner on events that they will host in the community with the school regarding veterans. They have received a grant to complete research and create interventions in the Metro- Atlanta area.
- March 25-26, 2025 - I attended a two-day summit hosted by Partners for Home where we discussed strategically planning for interventions including current SSVF programs, HUD-VASH and how we can close the gaps and work together to ensure we are maximizing the services we can provide too homeless.
- April 2, 2025 - I participated in a virtual meeting with Center for Women Veterans National Partners and Stakeholders where I was able to learn more about HUD-VASH and how homeless has decreased according to VA. They will be conducting some training and boots on the ground, and I will sign up once the time comes to be able to participate.
- April 9, 2025 - I participated in a Webinar on the Overview of HUD-VASH. This meeting discussed the process for HUD-VASH, what services are provided and how stakeholders work together.
- April 10, 2025 - Will attend a VA resource career fair to provide resources and what GDVS does as an agency.
- Upcoming Events: VA2K Homeless event in Dublin on 5/21.

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

Accounting/Procurement/Compliance:

- 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 continuing to work with the SAO Shared Services to prepare the procurement and accounting data in Team Works for migration to GA@Work.
- Mark Demers and Camala Ball attended the CFO meeting with SAO on March 27, 2025.

GA@Work/NextGen Updates

- Mark Demers attended the NextGen Change Network Meeting on March 25, 2025.
- Mark Demers attended the GA@Work Security Role Mapping session on April 9, 2025 from 0800-1330.
- Mark Demers attended the NextGen Halftime report session on April 11, 2025.

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- Mark Demers attended the NextGen Virtual Town Hall meeting on April 14, 2025.
- Mark Demers attended P-Card Financial/Procurement SIT Testing on March 19-20, 2025, and Employee Reimbursement. All testing tasks were completed on March 25, 2025.
- Kirsten Dennis attended Strategic Sourcing/Bidder Registration on April 1, 2025
- Camala Ball attended Accounts Payable SIT Testing March 21/25/28, 2025; Core Finance SIT Testing March 27, 2025, and Budget SIT Testing April 2-3, 20-25.
- Julie Hammond attended P-Card March 20, 2025, Accounts Payable- March 21/25/28, 2025.
- All of the testing is essential to a solid product by the go-live date on October 1, 2025.

Budget/Travel:

- AFY2025- HB 67 (Final Signed by Governor on March 6, 2025)
 - Reduce funds not utilized for Subacute Therapy Unit Nursing Recruiting – (\$250,000) – Funds returned within the \$2,000,000 final version below
 - Provide one-time funds to support the opening of Subacute Therapy Unit- Final version \$2,000,000
 - Increase funds to address rising costs in healthcare at Homes- Final version \$1,500,000
 - Funds to replace expiring federal funds with state funds to sustain wraparound services- Unite Us- Final version \$1,750,204
- FY2026- (CC version)
 - Adjustment to agency premiums for DOAS administered programs- (\$59,587) across all programs- Final version (\$59,587)
 - Adjustment to TeamWorks billing- \$3,128 across all programs. Final version \$3,128.
 - Increase for TRS and health insurance premium increases- \$63,638 – Final version \$63,638
 - Increase funds to address rising costs of healthcare \$1,556,250- Final version \$1,556,250.
 - Increase funds for 40 additional beds and submit a plan to reach maximum occupancy \$2,120,000- Final version \$2,120,000
 - Addition- Increase funds for research on treatment for PTSD and wraparound services to benefit GA veterans and their families. Final version \$1,000,000.
 - Camala Ball continued daily monitoring of general ledgers, purchase orders, and budget projection updates. She prepared amendments to record revenue collections in PBCS. She also monitored House and Senate appropriation updates.
 - Camala Ball added the AFY 2025 funding to TeamWorks and is working on establishing the FY 2026 budget projections.

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- Mark Demers conducted a Concur travel information and troubleshooting session with the Appeals Division. There has been log in issues since Concur switched to a two-factor email based authentication.

Grant Program:

- **SSG Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program- (\$722,747 year 3)**
 - We submitted draw#3 for year 3 for \$50,653.17 on April 3, 2025.
 - Upcoming: Fox Grant Summit in Savannah, GA on June 8-11, 2025; SSG Fox Fiscal Staff Office meeting on April 16, 2025; SSG Fox April National Webinar on April 17, 2025.
- **Unite-Us Grant- (American Rescue Plan-Negative Impact Grant)- (\$20,047,782.70 total)**
 - Grant extended for a partial year 4. Carrying over \$1,729,196.19 to partial year 4 until expended. Year 4 agreement signed on February 10, 2025, with OPB Grant Management. The remainder of the 4th year will be funded via State Appropriated funds which was just approved on March 6, 2025.
 - Data ingestion and secure data transfer for the platform and social connector are moving forward. As of February 13, 2025, we have **278,383** veterans in the system. The last SFTP data transfer was on March 12, 2025. Next will be April 14, 2025.
 - We currently have **658** community partners on the Unite Georgia network.
 - We received the advance payment request for the entire year on September 16, 2024, for \$6,088,640.28. We continue to pay invoices from this advance until June 2025.
 - Since the Public Resource Directory has gone live on March 22, 2024, there have been 2,239 site visits, 1,490 visitors with 388 distinct programs viewed. The leading search term as of March 7, 2025, was "Housing". There have been 429 Assistance Request Form Submissions (self-referrals) with 91% case resolution.
 - Campaign 8 began March 7, 2025 and is centered on Food Insecurity.
 - The Quarterly Report for the 3rd quarter was submitted via Survey Monkey on April 1, 2025. Next quarterly report will be the year end closeout due in July 2025.
 - Below is an activity snapshot from Unite Us Insights:

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- Veterans Mental Health Services Program Grant (HB 414)-
 - AFY2024- The grant was awarded to two vendors: \$1,000,000
 - Aspire (Cohen Veterans Network) for \$776,132
 - Emory Healthcare for \$212,500
 - The second quarter reporting was completed on January 31, 2025 for both awardees. Next reporting period will be April 2025.
 - This fiscal year's reporting will close on June 30, 2025.
 - FY2025- \$1,000,000 (competitive grant)
 - The grant was awarded to 3 vendors:
 - Cohen Veterans Network - \$776,132
 - KSU-AMES - \$173,868
 - About Face USA - \$40,000
 - The funds for Cohen and About Face were distributed on February 7, 2025. The funds for AMES will follow soon – the agreement is now set; we are awaiting the invoice from KSU.
- VA Suicide Mortality Review Cooperative Agreement - (\$502,124.68)
 - We submitted draw #5 for \$19,092.74 on April 1, 2025.
 - The agreement with DBHDD was completed and we are awaiting the invoice for quarters 1-2.
 - The Suicide Mortality Grant subcontractors are KSU, DPHDD and Dr. Lynn Tison.
 - The first quarterly report was submitted to the VA on January 16, 2025. Next due in April 2025.

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Veterans Service Foundation:

- The next board meeting is on May 1, 2025, at 1000.
- IRS 990 form for the last CY is in progress and must be submitted to the IRS by May 15, 2025.
- New Officers were appointed: CEO- Jarelle Thompson and COO- Raven Holstick.

Events/Other:

- Next Leadership Institute session was held on April 4, 2025, at The VECTR Center-Warner Robins.
Subject: Diversity; Outside the Box- Managing Change.
- Attended Senate Committee on Health and Human Development Subcommittee hearing at Capital 450 on March 18, 2025.
- Attended Senate Committee on Appropriations on March 27, 2025, at 0800 in Capital 341.
- Mark Demers attended the VA Vet Resources Community Network Community of Practice webinar on March 26, 2025, from 1130-1300.
- Irene Mackson completed 17,500 data corrections for the GDAC project.
- Irene Mackson attended the Women Veteran of the Year luncheon at the VECTR Center- Warner Robins on March 27, 2025.
- Upcoming- Leadership Offsite teambuilding at the Georgia War Veterans Home in Milledgeville on May 30, 2025.

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

State Veterans Homes

State Veterans Homes Census (Through April 4, 2025) +

Current Month	Augusta	Milledgeville	Total
Regular Patients	95	114	209
Service Connected *	29	41	70
Total Patients	124	155	279

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Last Month	Augusta	Milledgeville	Total
Regular Patients	89	108	197
Service Connected *	32	43	75
Total Patients	121	151	272

* 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 Mar. 9, 2025 through April 4, 2025.

Georgia War Veterans Nursing Home

Normal operations continue.

Georgia War Veterans Home

The extension for STGI to continue operating the Home for the next fiscal year is in the approval process.

STGI continues to forward with opening the Subacute Unit. This includes starting to advertise for personnel and identification of potential applicants.

Normal operations continue.

State Veterans Cemeteries

Burial Statistics (through April 4, 2025)+

State Veterans Cemetery	Cumulative Last Month	Cumulative Current Month	Increase
Glennville	2,715	2,735	20
Milledgeville	5,767	5,783	16
Total	8,482	8,518	36

+ The report to the VSB is the total numbers from Mar. 9, 2025 through April 4, 2025.

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery – Glennville

Cemetery expansion projects continue with an expected completion in the summer of this year.

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Cemetery operations continue as normal.

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Milledgeville

Cemetery expansion projects continue with an expected completion in the summer of this year.

Cemetery operations continue as normal.

Mr. Kerry Dyer, Deputy Commissioner, Chief Operations Officer

On Thursday, March 20, 2025, Kerry Dyer contacted Duane Tomlinson, DOAS Contract Management Specialist to discuss a Cooperative Agreement with Carahsoft and Tyler Technologies. He also spoke to Scott Duncan, President, Carrollton Furniture about the arrival of the Balcony and VETD furniture. Later that day he contacted Corey Tanner to discuss the Office Manager vacancy position at the Jasper CBOC.

On Friday, March 21, 2025, Kerry Dyer spoke with Elizabeth May, incoming Office Manager for the Brunswick CBOC about changing her start date. He also spoke with Jamie Carlington, Clayton County Crisis Communication Officer regarding the golf tournament. Later that day he contacted Robert Macklin to discuss the vacant VSO1 position at the Albany Tech Field Office.

On Monday, March 24, 2025, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's meeting. He also contacted Leslie Davis, State Property Leasing Specialist to discuss the phone and internet lines for the Gwinnett Tech Field Office. Later that day he contacted Ryshard Clarke to discuss the Office Manager vacancy, position at the Macon Field Office.

On Tuesday, March 25, 2025, Kerry Dyer contacted the Albany electrical and water company to have the utilities for the old Albany Field Office disconnected. He also contacted Donnie Reach to discuss the vacant VSO 1 position at the Augusta VAMC. Later that day he attended the Returning Veterans Task Force meeting along with Commissioner Ross and Charlotte May.

On Wednesday, March 26, 2025, Kerry Dyer processed 3 Employee of the Quarter packets. He also spoke to Jeanette Williams about the vacant Office Manager position at the Fort Benning Field Office. Later that day he spoke to Antrell Hunt regarding the vacant VSO position at the Macon Field Office.

On Thursday, March 27, 2025, Kerry Dyer conducted a site visit at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Savannah in preparation for the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs Training Conference (NASDVA).

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On Friday March 28, 2025, Kerry Dyer processed 1 Suicide Prevention Specialist packet. He also spoke with Marlon Benjamin, GBA Project Manager, about Carpet and Paint invoices. Later that day he disseminated the Performance Management Form to all Directors, Supervisors and Staff Leadership for the period of July 1, 2024, to June 30, 2025.

On Monday, March 31, 2025 – Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Directors meeting. He also along with Commissioner Ross attended the Perry VA Ribbon Cutting Ceremony.

On Tuesday, April 1, 2025, Kerry Dyer attended the System Integration Testing Strategic Sourcing seminar. He also updated the monthly Alpha Roster, Gains/Loss and Promotion Roster and distributed it to the Senior Leadership. Later that day he submitted the monthly Fleet Report to DOAS, Fleet Management Division.

On Wednesday, April 2, 2025, Kerry Dyer contacted GBA to discuss the 2024 Georgia Military Veterans Hall of Fame plaque display at the Capitol. He also contacted Leslie Davis, State Properties Leasing Specialist to discuss additional parking for the Appeals Division employees at the Georgia Public Health Lab located in Decatur, GA. Later that day he processed 3 Suicide Prevention Specialist resignation packets.

On Thursday, April 3, 2025, Kerry Dyer along with Sherri Whitfield conducted a site visit at Southern Regional Technical College in Thomasville, GA for potential office space.

On Friday, April 4, 2025, Kerry along with Commissioner Ross traveled to Warner Robins to attend the Leadership Institute Training.

On Monday, April 7, 2025, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Directors meeting. He also attended the UniteUs bi-weekly meeting along with Commissioner Ross, Mark Demers and Charlotte May. Later that day he spoke to Albert Mendoza, Tyler Technology Contract Specialist regarding a Cooperative Contract for the Veterans Benefit Software.

On Tuesday, April 8, 2025, Kerry Dyer Kerry Dyer contacted GBA Facility Technician to have lights replaced on the 9th floor suite. He also contacted Ansley Cribbs to discuss the final invoice for the Let's Connect Summit at the Savannah Convention Center. Later that day he spoke to Davinder Heslin, Government Account Manager regarding the lease renewal for the Pitney Bowes mail machine.

On Wednesday, April 9, 2025, Kerry Dyer, posted the Suicide Prevention Specialist vacancies externally. He also contacted Monique Jenkins, DOAS Enterprise Talent Manager and Lacy Turner, Work for Warriors Employment Program Manager regarding the Returning Veterans Task Force Meeting. Later that day he registered the 4 new Office Managers into the Sexual Harassment Prevention Training for Manager Course.

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Below are the Personnel Actions Kerry Dyer and Shareka Monday-Robinson processed from March 20, 2025 – April 9, 2025.

Location	Position	Status	Name	Date
Macon	Office Mgr	New Hire	Ryshard Clarke	4/1/2025
Augusta VAMC	VFSO 1	New Hire	Donnie Rench	4/1/2025
Albany Tech	VFSO 1	New Hire	Robert Macklin	4/1/2025
Brunswick	Office Mgr	New Hire	Elizabeth May	4/1/2025
Jasper CBOC	Office Mgr	New Hire	Corey Tanner	4/1/2025
Ft. Benning	Office Mgr	New Hire	Jeanette Williams	4/1/2025
Macon	VFSO 1	New Hire	Shanerika Williams	4/1/2025

On the horizon: We will be meeting to do a demo of VET Pro, a program similar to the Veterans Benefits program we currently use to process claims.

Ms. Lily Snyder, Director, Veterans Education and Training Division (State Approving Agency)

- The approval, risk-based surveys, and supervisory visits 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 2,216 educational institutions and training establishments where Georgia veterans may attend school or job training and utilize their GI Bill® educational benefits.

Item *	Number
Approved Educational Institutions	502
Approved Training Establishments	1,714
VA Education Beneficiaries for February 2025	11,138

* Source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration, Education Division, WEAMS, Salesforce, RCS 20-0259-260

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>.
 - a. The March edition of the department newsletter featured a somber remembrance of the identification of Navy Chief Warrant Officer John Connolly, a Georgia native who was lost during the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. The newsletter also featured the unveiling of the Georgia Military Veterans Hall of Fame Class of 2024, a warning from the Secretary of State to be fraud aware, an introduction to the department’s two new suicide prevention coordinators, and a recap of the 10th annual Women Veterans Legislative Breakfast.
2. Attended the Senate Committee hearing for HB 53 and 108 on Wednesday, March 19, 2025.
3. Attended the quarterly meeting of the Returning Veterans Taskforce on Tuesday, March 25, 2025.
4. Attended and provided support to the Woman Veteran of the Year Luncheon in Warner Robins on Thursday, March 27, 2025.
5. Attended the Veterans Service Foundation board meeting on Thursday, April 3, 2025.
6. Veterans Resource Guidebook – added a notice across the GDVS website to announce the release of the new 2025 guidebook. Visitors can easily find and download a copy of the book if they have not yet had a chance to pick one up at an office or event.
7. 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. Careers and Employment – continued to share information from organizations and partners hosting career readiness events across the state for veterans and their families. Additionally, information on financial readiness and tax services were shared to help prevent veterans from being taken advantage of during tax season.
 - i. The Next Round – collaborated with Raven Holstick to create a flyer for an upcoming Career Readiness and Resilience event on April 26, 2025.
 - b. Suicide Prevention and Awareness – marketing for the Let’s Connect Suicide Prevention Summit in June 2025 has begun in earnest to promote and encourage registration across multiple platforms. The department also shared information from partner organizations to remind veterans and families of the availability of mental health resources.

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- c. Strive for 500 – collaborated with Commissioner Ross and Veda Brooks to begin promoting the Military Women’s Memorial’s registration drive. The Memorial seeks to add 500 women per state in 2025 to their National Digital Repository.



THE NEXT ROUND: BOXING AND CAREER READINESS FOR VETERANS



Join us for an empowering boxing class designed for veterans who are transitioning into the workforce.

Focus on how to build resilience, confidence, and career readiness while engaging in an active and motivating environment.

WHAT TO EXPECT:

- A high-energy boxing class led by professionals
- Career readiness guidelines
- Resources to support veteran employment and career transitions



WHO CAN ATTEND?

Veterans seeking employment and those who have recently transitioned to the civilian workforce



CENTER FOR MOVEMENT CHALLENGE

6667 Vernon Woods Dr. NE, Suite A-16
Sandy Springs, GA 30328



APRIL 26, 2025
11 A.M. – 1 P.M.



Register now to
reserve your spot!

Attendees must
submit their most
recent resume.

Questions? Contact Raven Holstick, GDVS Transition and Employment Coordinator
404-401-8433 | raven.holstick@vsa.ga.gov



HONORING *Our* HEROES

Join us in preserving the history of Georgia's military women.

EVERY STORY COUNTS

We need your help to document the contributions of the millions of women who served in our armed forces.

Every state and territory is working to register at least **500 military women in 2025** to the Military Women's Memorial's National Digital Repository.

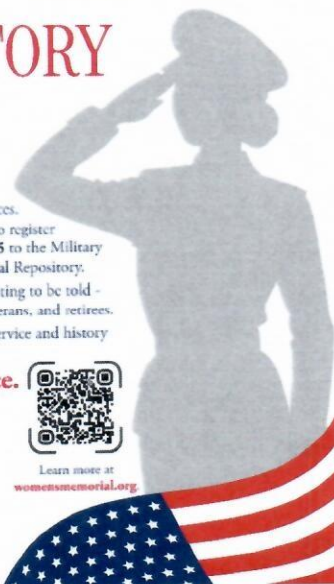
Georgia has **thousands** of stories waiting to be told - from currently serving members, veterans, and retirees. Family members can also share the service and history of a departed loved one.

Share your experience.

Join over 308,500 military women already in the repository. Every woman's history, life, and service matters and should never be forgotten.



Learn more at
womensmemorial.org



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OLD BUSINESS:

There was no old business to discuss.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Mr. Loncher announced the third annual Crawfish Boil fundraiser for homeless veterans. It will be in Columbus on May 17 from 12-5pm. Celebrity chefs include Commissioner Ross, First Lady Marty Kemp and NFL player Jordan Jenkins.

Mr. Kopsie announced that the next meeting will include the approval of new language for entry into the homes and the election of new officers for the Veterans Service Board.

NEW BUSINESS:


The next Board meeting was scheduled for May 21 at 12:30pm. It will be a combination virtual and in-person meeting, set up at the GDVS.

Mr. Paslawski made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Swan seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at approximately 12:42 p.m.

SIGNED:


Joshua Kopsie, Chair

ATTEST:


Steve Mendez, Secretary