

**Thursday, August 25, 2022 at 12:30 p.m.**  
**Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting**  
**Atlanta, Georgia**

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

Visitors:    Ms. Shelly-Ann Simpson, Executive Director, Field Operations & Appeals, GDVS  
Present      Mr. Mark Bannister, Executive Dir., Health, Memorials, Finance & Development, GDVS  
                 Mr. Kerry Dyer, Chief Operations Officer, GDVS  
                 Mr. Matthew O'Brien, Assistant Attorney General, Attorney General's Office  
                 Ms. Monisha Rallapalli, Office of Planning and Budget  
                 Mr. Drew Craig, Veterans Experience Office, VA  
                 Ms. Belinda Boldoe, VFW Service Officer, Appeals Division, GDVS  
                 Mr. Lou Zayas, Jr. Vice Commander, Military Order of the Purple Heart  
                 Mr. Don Layne, VECTR Chief Operating Officer  
                 Ms. Raven Holstick, GDVS, American Legion Service Officer  
                 Mr. Vince Pritchett, Director, Veterans Benefits South Region, GDVS  
                 Mr. Ken Childre, Director, Veterans Benefits North Region, GDVS  
                 Ms. Ramona Roper, Director, Training and Professional Development, GDVS  
                 Ms. Charlotte May, Director, Public Information and External Affairs, GDVS  
                 Mr. Russell Feagin, Director, Health & Memorials Division, GDVS  
                 Ms. Tonya Jarrett, Clinical Director, GWVH, Milledgeville, GA  
                 Mr. Edwin Berry, Director, Appeals Division, GDVS  
                 Mr. DeMario Rucker, Assistant Director, Appeals Division, GDVS  
                 Mr. William Wilson, Network Administrator, GDVS  
                 Ms. Shareka Monday-Robinson, Director, Human Resources, GDVS  
                 Ms. Veda Brooks, Coordinator, Women & Minority Veterans, GDVS  
                 Ms. Calandra Fergerson, Coordinator, Suicide Prevention & Outreach, GDVS  
                 Mr. Carlton Deese, Executive Director GWVH, Milledgeville, GA  
                 Mr. Mark Demers, Grant Program Implementation Manager, GDVS  
                 Ms. Barbara Beedles, Records Management, GDVS  
                 Ms. Julie Hammond, Executive Assistant to the Commissioner, GDVS

On Thursday, August 25, 2022, the Veterans Service Board meeting was held in person and by video/tele-conference.

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

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Mr. Kopsie made a motion to approve the August Agenda. Mr. Paslawski seconded the motion. The motion passed.

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

**Ms. Raven Holstick, GDVS, American Legion Service Officer**

- The Assistant Department Service Officer (Ed Kent) assisted 27 veterans with VA benefits related inquiries this month.
- The Department Service Officer along with the Assistant Department Service Officer attended the monthly meeting with State of Georgia American Legion Adjutant (Mr. Debro) on August 2, 2022, at State of Georgia Department Headquarters. Discussed future events. Confirmed hospital visits and gave an update on Veterans assisted for the previous month.
- Upcoming event: American Legion National Convention on August 26, 2022, through September 1, 2022, in Indianapolis, Indiana .
- Upcoming event: American Legion Post 75 Annual Commanders Banquet September 24, 2022, at 1300, Department Service Officer and Assistant Service Officer will attend
- Upcoming event: Visit to the Atlanta VA Medical Center on September 27, 2022, at 0900
- Upcoming event: Visit to the Atlanta VA Regional office on September 27, 2022, at 1300

**Ms. Belinda Boldoe, VFW**

Ms. Boldoe added that Commander Jim Willis stepped down and Dean Rakoskie is the new State Commander. He is currently in Phoenix but will hopefully be able to join in on next month's meeting.

- The Department Service Officer attended the GA Veteran of Foreign Wars Department Council of Administrative Zoom Meeting on July 08, 2022, at 6PM.
- The Department Service Officer attended the VFW 123rd National Convention held on July 16-21, 2022, in Kansas City, Missouri. I was appointed as a delegate for the Veterans Service Resolution Committee. We reviewed, discussed, and then voted on resolutions to present to Congress regarding VA benefits.



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- The Department Service Officer attended the Veteran of Foreign Wars GA District #3 training session for commanders and staff member held on July 30, 2022, from 10AM – 2PM. I have provided information on VBA and VHA matters that would affect veterans.
- The Department Service Officer attended the VAVS Quarterly Committee Zoom meeting hosted by Dr. Anthony Cooper, Chief, Center for Development & Civic Engagement (CDCE) on August 10, 2022, at 1PM to discussed new initiative for veterans using the VAHS.
- The Department Service Officer attended the Monthly VSO/CMA meeting hosted by Brian Morgan, Change Management Analyst, (CMA) on August 11, 2022, at 10AM. CMA announced the upcoming Quarterly VSO meeting and then we discussed the VSO's concerns.

**Ms. Amy Stevens, Georgia Military Women and VETLANTA**

Hot weather in July and Georgia Military Women (GMW) slowed growth and activities the past month but overall membership has continued to grow. We are at almost 4,600. We switched to a new metric on screening applications to our group to ensure that members are residents of Georgia and are female. This has helped our cohesiveness. Georgia Military Women is a trusted partner with various agencies and corporate friends but more importantly, our Facebook venue is a safe place for our women to gather. Many positive comments are regularly received about the value of the group.

We continued with small meetups across the state. No huge events. Just ladies gathering for sisterhood whether at an outdoor concert or a restaurant. This is common from our experience over the past 10 years that activity lessens as summer activities are now keeping everyone busy again plus COVID has come under control. Planning is underway for several trips and larger activities for the fall. These will include trips to Memphis and Helen as well as collaborating with other organizations for their events. Outreach teams are available for any veteran event. Just let us know you want us to attend!

For VETLANTA Updates, the Q3 Summit in Atlanta is rapidly approaching. It will be on September 14<sup>th</sup> at Clay National Guard in Marietta, GA. The theme is employability and the GA Work for Warriors team from the Guard are our hosts. Among other employers, we are especially pleased that we will have representatives of AMAZON at the event. Additionally, the Q4 VETLANTA has been announced. It will be December 7<sup>th</sup> at the Atlanta History Center. Please save the dates. Registration is at [www.vetlanta.org](http://www.vetlanta.org)

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**Commissioner Patricia Ross**

Commissioner Ross added that she is currently working with the VA and Secretary of State on an MOU regarding state elections and ensuring that veterans have access to voting materials. We would place literature in our field offices. This is a VA initiative to reach more veterans regarding their right to vote.

On Friday, July 15, 2022, Commissioner Ross had a phone meeting with Alfonso Rogers, on the Headstrong Project which assists with veteran mental health. Later that afternoon she met with Jim Seward from Transition Deep Dive, on better supporting the transition for military and justice-involved veterans.

On Monday, January 18 through Thursday, January 21, 2022, Commissioner Ross attended the Department's Annual Training. During Annual Training, she also attended the following: a Unite Us Implementation Meeting and the July Veterans Service Board Meeting. She also spoke at the Capitol for Governor Kemp's announcement of SK Battery America becoming a Work for Warriors partner. SK Battery held a military and veteran-focused hiring fair on July 23<sup>rd</sup> for hiring at the company's Commerce, Georgia facility.

On Thursday, July 21, 2022, Commissioner Ross met virtually regarding the VA Voter Registration Designation with members from the Secretary of State's office.

On Friday, July 22, 2022, Commissioner Ross attended the grand opening ceremony at the Robert S. Poydasheff VA Clinic in Columbus and met with the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, Denis McDonough.

On Monday, July 25, 2022, Commissioner Ross held a weekly Director's Meeting.

On Tuesday, July 26, 2022, Commissioner Ross attended a meeting on Faith Based Support for Mental Health and Inclusivity. She then had a lunch meeting with Board Members Josh Kopsie and Shawn Hanley to meet Michael Wolfe. She ended her day with a meeting regarding the Sub Acute Program Development.

On Wednesday, July 27, 2022, Commissioner Ross held an instructional meeting for the field offices on how to file travel in Concur. She then met with Bobby Davis, Director of SAA.

On Thursday, July 28, 2022, Commissioner Ross Spoke at the Fort Benning MOAA Chapter meeting in Columbus.

On Friday, July 29, 2022, Commissioner Ross and Mark Bannister met to go over the budget priorities for AY23 and FY24.



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On Monday, August 1, 2022, Commissioner Ross met with Shelly-Ann Simpson, incoming Executive Director of Field Operations and Appeals. She then held a weekly Director's Meeting. In the afternoon she met with Monisha Rallapalli from the Office of Planning and Budget. She also met with John Butler and Kim Scofi to discuss the planning for three We Care Fairs in 2023. She ended the day with a discussion on "Ideas to Reduce Veteran Suicide." Also in attendance at this meeting were Calandra Ferguson (Suicide Prevention and Outreach Coordinator at GDVS), Veda Brooks (Women and Minority Veterans Coordinator at GDVS) and Joe Green (President of Whitespace Innovations).

On Tuesday, August 2, 2022, Commissioner Ross met with PruittHealth at the Georgia War Veterans Home in Milledgeville.

On Wednesday, August 3, 2022, Commissioner Ross met with Lauren Curry, Chief Operations Officer, her supervisor in the Governor's office. She then met with Kerry Dyer and William Wilson regarding data from the Department of Drivers Service. She also attended the Unite Us Weekly Implementation Meeting.

On Thursday, August 4, 2022, Commissioner Ross met with Kevin Miller, President of Georgia Veterans Day Association, regarding the events for Saturday, November 12 at the Battery Atlanta and the Freedom Ball in the Oceans Ballroom of the Georgia Aquarium. She also met with Veda Brooks, Calandra Ferguson, Kim Scofi and representatives from Hold My Guns and American Trailhead (an organization affiliated with Hold My Guns) on how the program works to store weapons in a time of crisis, during moves, or deployments. Commissioner Ross ended the day with a kickoff call with the Miner Agency. Also in attendance at this meeting were Charlotte May, Monica Dorsey, and Shelly-Ann Simpson. The discussion included priorities for Q3 and the remainder of 2022, where GDVS needs immediate support, status on logo/vision/ mission rollout, public relations and social media landscape, and upcoming needs and opportunities.

On Friday, August 5, 2022, Commissioner Ross held interviews for the Assistant Director of Appeals. She also visited the GDVS office in Columbus.

On Saturday, August 6, 2022, Commissioner Ross was the keynote speaker at the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Veterans Rally Point in Cumming.

On Monday, August 8, 2022, Commissioner Ross attended the speech by VA Secretary Denis McDonough at the Jewish War Veterans of the USA National Convention in Savannah and met with him afterwards.

On Tuesday, August 9, 2022, Commissioner Ross held a weekly Director's Meeting. She also attended the ESGR Proclamation Signing with Gov. Kemp at the Capitol.

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On Wednesday, August 10, 2022, Commissioner Ross met with Bobby Davis, Director of SAA. She then attended a meeting on POCs for Veterans Home Data with members of the Kentucky VA and representatives from Kennesaw State University. She ended the day with the Unite Us Weekly Implementation Meeting.

On Thursday, August 11, 2022, Commissioner Ross attended a meeting with Helen Searcy, the Veterans Public Outreach Coordinator for Highland Rivers Behavioral Health. Also in attendance for this meeting was Calandra Ferguson. She then met with Thomas Hodges from AMES to give her an update on the needs assessment for state veterans homes. She also met with Director Scott Isaaks from the Ralph H. Johnson VA Health Care System in Charleston, South Carolina. Commissioner Ross ended the day with a Veteran Engagement Team meeting on grant feedback.

On Friday, August 12, 2022, Commissioner Ross held an Open Forum with the field offices.

On Saturday, August 13 through Friday, August 19, 2022, Commissioner Ross attended the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA) conference in Honolulu, Hawaii.

**Highlights:**

The recently signed PACT Act could impact 70% of Georgia's veterans or their survivors (over ~500,000 who served during Vietnam, the Gulf War or Post 9/11)

**On the horizon:**

Budget submission due 1 September

Proposed departmental sponsored legislation due 15 September

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

**GENERAL**

- On August 8<sup>th</sup> I attended the Purple Heart Golf Classic in honor of the late Pete Wheeler and gave the opening welcome and send off for tournament participants.
- We will sunset the use of Vetra Spec on August 19, 2022, and begin using Veterans Benefits (VB) on August 22, 2022.
- DD 214's and Welcome Home Letters:
  - 973 Welcome Home Letters were mailed out in July 2022.
- Department Electronic Claim's Assistance Processing System (Vetra Spec) currently 314,986 entries, this is an increase of 1,220 from July 20, 2022.



## PROJECTED POSITIONS

- Current openings in Atlanta, Marietta and Ft. McPherson.

## Ms. Veda Brooks, Women Veterans Coordinator (WVC)

Ms. Brooks added that she attended the National Association of Women Veteran Coordinators Conference in Virginia and received great ideas. She will have an after action review ready next week.

- July 19, 2022, Ms. Brooks participated in the Georgia Governor's Challenge Suicide Prevention Task Force Meeting.
- July 22, 2022, Ms. Brooks participated in the Georgia Governor's Challenge Lethal Means Safety Group 3.
- July 23, 2022, Ms. Brooks spoke to the "Voices of Women Warriors" of Augusta, GA.
- July 25, 2022, Ms. Brooks participated in BVA Hearings.
- July 26, 2022, Ms. Brooks participated in the Georgia Governor's Challenge Faith Based Initiative for Mental Health Group 4.
- July 29, 2022, Ms. Brooks met with Sparkle Adams to plan the Clayton County Health Department upcoming events.
- July 30, 2022, Ms. Brooks spoke to VFW 3<sup>rd</sup> District Meeting, at VFW Post 5290.
- August 1, 2022, Ms. Brooks conducted Appeals MST Training.
- August 4, 2022, Ms. Brooks participated in the Hold My Guns Discussion.
- August 10, 2022, Ms. Brooks participated in the UniteUs Weekly Meeting and the Women Veterans Health Committee Monthly Meeting.
- August 11, 2022, Ms. Brooks participated in the Highland Rivers CSB: Veteran Outreach virtual meeting.
- August 12, 2022, Ms. Brooks participated in the Georgia Inclusivity Site Visit

## Current committees

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

**Ms. Calandra Ferguson, Suicide Prevention & Outreach Coordinator**

**VIRTUAL EVENTS**

- July 20, 2022, participated in Veterans Service Board Meeting.
- July 22, 2022, participated in the Georgia Governor's Challenge Lethal Means Safety Group 3.
- July 27, 2022, participated in Aide to Dying Veterans meeting.
- July 28, 2022, participated in Veteran Lunch & Learn.
- August 1-3, 2022, participated in the "Innovations Conference" in Alexandria, VA.
- August 1, 2022, participated in a virtual meeting "Ideas to Reduce Veteran Suicide." We were invited to partner with an agency if they received funding.
- August 4, 2022, participated in the Hold My Guns Discussion.
- August 8, 2022, participated in SSVF Shared Geography Meeting.

**IN PERSON EVENTS**

- July 19, 2022, conducted Georgia Governor's Challenge Suicide Prevention Task Force Meeting, Ellenwood, GA.
- July 21-22, 2022, taught Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training Veterans/National Guard Soldiers, Marietta, GA.
- July 26, 2022, participated in the Georgia Governor's Challenge Faith Based Initiative for Mental Health Group 4, Atlanta, GA.
- July 29, 2022, met with Pastor of a Congregation in Jonesboro and Barnesville (Near Gordon College) in reference to Priority 4 Faith Based connections of the Governor's challenge.
- July 30, 2022, conducted Suicide Prevention training to VFW 3<sup>rd</sup> District Meeting, at VFW Post 5290, Conyers, GA.
- August 1-3, 2022, attended/briefed Governor's and Mayor's Challenge to prevent Suicide among SMVF.

**Ms. Ramona Roper, Training and Professional Development Division**

- August 1, 2022, Mark Demers transferred to the Grant Programs Implementation Manager position.
- August 5, 2022, Ramona Roper and Steven Fay conducted a veteran's benefit briefing at the Clarke County Jail in Athens, Georgia. The briefing was conducted for veteran inmates that will transition back into society.
- August 8, 2022, DROP class for VA Burial Benefits was released.
- August 12, 2022, Ramona Roper and Steven Fay made office visits to the Cartersville and Marietta VFSO.



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- August 16, 2022, Sherri Whitfield, (former Office Manager-Albany) was promoted to Trainer 3, South Region.
- August 17, 2022, Steven Fay assisted Ken Childre, North Region Director, with interviews for the vacant Balcony VFSO position.

**Upcoming Events:**

- Daily continued ongoing support to the Regional Directors and Veteran Field Service Offices.
- Development of a Standard Operation Procedure manual for Veteran Field Service Officers.
- Continuation of Field Office visits.
- Continued development of DROP (Departmental Required Operational Procedures) classes.

**Mr. Edwin Berry, Director of Appeals Division**

Mr. Berry added that the Appeals Division is now fully staffed. They have also received panic buttons, something that only VA staff has had in the past.

- The total number of actual hearings conducted by the Appeals Division for July 2022 was **53**.
- The total number of pre-hearing actions for July 2022 was **135**. Post-hearing actions was down to **29**.
- The total number of correspondence conducted by the Appeals Division (with veterans, BVA/VA employees, and VSO field offices) for the month of July was **1,252**.
- As of August 1, 2022, the Atlanta VA Regional Office completed the following claims for the Service Organizations represented by GDVS:

<b>Types of Claims</b>	<b>Number of Awards</b>	<b>Benefits paid out</b>
<b>Compensation</b>	<b>101,137</b>	<b>\$187,546,085</b>
<b>DIC</b>	<b>3250</b>	<b>4,974,454</b>
<b>Survivor Pension</b>	<b>839</b>	<b>\$712362</b>
<b>Veteran Pension</b>	<b>1,705</b>	<b>\$1,864,551</b>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>106,931</b>	<b>\$195,097,453</b>

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**Mr. Ken Childre, Director Veterans Benefits North Region**

Mr. Childre added that he interviewed 1 person for the Atlanta position (4 of 11 accepted to interview but only one showed up). That person was offered the job and declined, citing pay as the reason. Other positions that need to be filled are the Zebulon clinic and the new VECTR Center.

July 2022 total retro awards reported by the North Georgia offices: \$2,365,296

Included in that amount are single awards reported by:

Rico Johnson (Gainesville)  
\$241,788-(McCord-0194)

Glenn Massey (Gainesville)  
\$95,628-(Hohmann-6652)

Director Site Visits/Inspections: 0

2 August-Rob Johnson (Griffin)

Spoke to the Marine Corps League of Macon. Approximately 20 veterans were present, and Rob discussed updates on the Pike County/Zebulon VA Clinic, Compensation/Pension claims, latest Agent Orange presumptive illnesses, how to get Commissary ID Cards, VA Medical Cards and Summary of Benefits letter.

3 August-Kyle Hungarter (Marietta)

Spoke at the Celebration Village in Acworth. Approximately 30 veterans were present, and Kyle discussed compensation and pension benefits.

North Georgia Gains/Losses: 1

Lawrenceville-Otis Bush-Resigned Effective July 15

Lawrenceville-Ronnie Hough-Transferred from Atlanta Balcony Effective July 18



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Average Visits Per VFSO							
Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO							
Region:		North					
Month:		July-22					
A	B	C	D	E	D / E F	G	G / E H
			Total Monthly Office Visits	Work Days In Month	Average Office Visits Per Day	Total Claims Submitted To VA Monthly	Average Claims Submitted By VFSOS To VA Daily
Office Name	Veterans' Field Service Officer (VFSO) Last Name	#	9,836	640	15.37	1,831	2.86
Number of Offices:		26	Average Visits/Office:		378.31	Average Claims/Office: 70.4230769	

\*Total monthly office visits include: 1,925 In-Person and 7,911 phone calls/emails

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

- On July 25, 2022, Melissa Ingle (Americus field office) attended an American Legion meeting at Post 2 in Americus. She is the service officer for the post. During the meeting she briefed the attendees on the updates to case law that were presented at annual training.
- On August 2, 2022, Steve Futch (Saint Marys field office) did a veterans' benefits briefing during a Transition Assistance Program class on Kings Bay submarine base. Approximately 50 service members attended the class.
- On August 3, 2022, Rob Johnson (Griffin field office) had a speaking engagement with the Marine Corps League in Macon. Before he was introduced to speak a veteran stood to talk about the outstanding service he received on his initial claim from Kevin Whitlock in our Milledgeville field office. Rob relayed the information to Ken Childre, who then sent it to me.
- On August 12, 2022, Sandra Bennett (District Manager, Columbus), Sherri Whitfield (District Manager, Albany) and Vincent Pritchett interviewed candidates for the vacant VSO 1 slot in Columbus. The selected candidate will start on September 1, 2022.
- On August 15, 2022, Jason Lane (Manager, Valdosta), Sherri Whitfield (District Manager, Albany) and Vincent Pritchett interviewed candidates for the pending vacancy in Valdosta. The selected candidate will start on September 1, 2022

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- On August 17, 2022, Sherri Whitfield, Corey Ware (Albany field office), and Vincent Pritchett interviewed candidates for the vacant VSO 1 position in Albany. The selected candidate will start on September 1, 2022.
- On August 19, 2022, Stephanie Jordan (Brunswick field office), Debbie O'Neal (District Manager), and Vincent Pritchett interviewed candidates to fill the pending vacancy in Brunswick. The selected candidate will start on September 1, 2022.
- South Region offices reported retroactive payments since the last board meeting totaling \$449,367.00. Of that total, the highest single payment was \$111,708.00 reported by our Milledgeville War Veterans Home Economic Support office. Also included in the total was \$25,600.00 which the War Veterans Home reimbursed to the veteran after his rating went to 70 percent.
- South Region Gains/Losses: Christine Jones left our Warner Robins office on August 1, 2022. Debra Thomas joined our Columbus office on August 1, 2022. Courtney Cleare left our Macon office on August 9, 2022. Sherri Whitfield left the Albany office to join our training team on August 16, 2022. Nakezia Whitehead joined the Warner Robins office on August 16, 2022. Sonja Martin joined our Macon office on August 16, 2022. Quavondo Samuels left our Valdosta office on August 19, 2022.
- South Georgia Region Veterans Population: 242,136.
- Office Visits for July: South Georgia offices handled 4,124 phone calls and emails.

Average Visits Per VFSO							
Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO							
Region:			South Region				
Month:			July-22				
A	B	C	D / E		G / E		
			D	E	F	G	H
					Average	Total	Average
					Office	Claims	Claims
	Veterans' Field		Total	Work	Visits	Submitted	Submitted
	Service Officer (VFSO)		Monthly	Days	Per	To	By VFSOS
Office Name	Last Name	#	Visits	Month	Day	VA	To VA
						Monthly	Daily
	Number of VFSOs:	39	1,788	790	2.26	1,289	1.63
Number of Offices:	23	Average Visits/Office:		77.74	Average Claims/Office:		56.04



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

Ms. May added that she has developed a form on our website so that anyone who wants GDVS to speak or have a presentation at their event can submit that request electronically.

GENERAL

Personnel

- Charlotte May, Director (Speeches, Major News Release Announcements, Digital Media, Websites [External & Internal])
- Monica Dorsey, Communications Specialist (Administrative support in all aspects of the GDVS Public Information mission/function [External & Internal])

INFORMATION OUTREACH

Division Updates

1. Georgia Department of Veterans Service praises signage of PACT Act into Law – PID worked with the Miner Agency, an advertising firm out of Warner Robins, to coordinate a press release and statement from the department on the PACT Act (*Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act*) being signed into law. The release was sent out statewide to media outlets to raise awareness of the new law.
  - a. PACT Act messaging – PID also shared information on the PACT Act via social media. The division created new graphics highlighting key facts and emphasized the department's ability to help navigate the new legislation.
  - b. PACT Act on Absorb training website – PID worked with the Training and Professional Development team to gather resources for the field into a new resource heavy course on the training website. The field now has a repository of resources to help them know the key facts and how to work with veterans who now qualify.
2. Veterans Benefits Outreach –
  - a. Governor Kemp Announces Partnership between Work for Warriors and SK Battery America—shared live coverage and information from the Governor's office of the partnership announcement, as well as when a large military and veteran hiring fair would be held.
  - b. 988 launch – shared graphics and links to announce the change to the national suicide hotline and the updated way to reach the veteran crisis line.

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- c. Columbus CBOC opening – shared news coverage of the CBOC’s opening, in addition to the new services available to veterans in the Columbus area.

**Public Information Division Contacts** *(Since December 10, 2021)*

- Replies to VA eBenefits Messages = 665
- Replies to General Questions = approximately 510
- Individual Request for the State Certificate of Honor = approximately 90

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

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

State Certificates of Honor issued via GDVS – An estimated 29,370  
(Honors Ceremonies and Central Office Mail Outs)

DoD Vietnam Veteran Lapel Pins presented via GDVS – An estimated 23,385

Honors Ceremonies supported/coordinated by GDVS – 353

Defense Department’s Vietnam Veteran Surviving Spouse CoH – 285

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

**VETERANS STATE APPROVING AGENCY**

- The approval and compliance surveys of educational institutions, training establishments and training programs approved for veterans training is continuing with no significant problems in any area being noted.
- Approval of new veteran's On-The-Job training sites (OJT) continues to increase. As of this date the State Approving Agency (SAA) has granted approval to 1,797 educational institutions and training establishments where Georgia veterans may attend school or job training and utilize their GI Bill® educational benefits.
- Attending NASAA Summer Conference and Business Meeting August 20-25, 2022.

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Item *	Number
Approved Educational Institutions	389
Approved Training Establishments	1,408
Veteran Students Enrolled in Educational Institutions	9,909

\* Source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration, Education Division, July 2022

**Mr. Russell Feagin, Director, Health & Memorials Division**

Mr. Feagin stated that the first priority for expansion is the Glennville Cemetery. The second priority are the Wheeler and Vinson Buildings.

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

1. Status of staffing by Pruitt Health for Subacute Unit
  - a. Psychiatrist-three candidates interviewed by Pruitt; No job offers extended currently.
  - b. Neuropsychologist- contracted through Integrated Psych Solutions
  - c. Substance Abuse Coordinator- hired and started in July 2022.
  - d. Behavioral Specialists- two hired and started in July 2022.
  - e. Admissions Director- partner hired and started 5/31/22
  - f. Social Services Director- partner hired and started in June 2022.
  - g. Art therapist interviewed with a job offer to be extended
  - h. LPN/RN- continuing to recruit
  - i. OT/PT/SLP- continuing to recruit
2. Biweekly meetings with Pruitt Health
  - a. Subcommittees developed for program development, marketing, evaluation and assessment tools, treatment pathways, and medication management.
  - b. Current onsite staff are developing policies, procedures, and treatment pathways for program development
  - c. Staff education through trainers, onsite in-services, and computer courses
  - d. Upcoming tour of Dublin VAMC PTSD unit on 8/19/22



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3. COVID Update

Georgia War Veterans Home - Milledgeville, GA										
Wednesday, August 17, 2022										
Category	Population	Positive Cases	Positives % of Population	Deaths	Deaths % of Positives	Deaths % of Population	Recovered	Recovered % of Positives	Currently In Isolation	Positive for current month
Patients	337	177	52.52%	29	16.38%	8.61%	142	80.23%	6	18
Staff	545	197	36.15%	0	0.00%	0.00%	193	97.97%	4	16

Cumulative figures since March 1, 2020.

**Recovered category** - patients/staff who tested positive and subsequently tested negative twice. In December 2021, the CDC changed their time-based criteria again. Patients with no symptoms after 10 days are presumed to have recovered from the virus.

**In Isolation category** includes either self-quarantined, hospital, or COVID-19 unit at GWVH.

**Positive for current month** includes the number of veterans/staff who have tested COVID positive for the current month.

**Mr. Carlton Deese, Executive Director GWVH, Milledgeville, GA**

Covid operations continue. They are working on implementing electronic medical records. The VA survey will be in September. Students are coming back on campus.

**Mr. Kerry Dyer, Chief Operations Officer**

Mr. Dyer mentioned the offices we will soon be opening – Brunswick, Zebulon, Chattanooga Technical Campus, Cobb and Perry. This will increase the total number of field offices to 56. Also, Newnan is relocating soon.

We have added an Employee of the Quarter directive, effective in October. Our Strategic Plan was accepted. E-performance will go live in November. We are working on a standard gift for long-term employees who retire. Seventeen offices received panic buttons in case of emergency. Herbert Ward is retiring after 20 years, and his retirement party is this Friday.

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

**Accounting**

The FY 2022 closeout has been completed and all fiscal programs were closed within budget. Operations, HR, procurement and other selected GDVS staff worked closely together as a team with Accounting

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Shared Services, a division of the State Accounting Office, to successfully complete the FY 2022 fiscal closeout.

We will be returning \$482,335 dollars to the state treasury as state appropriated funds were held towards the end of the 2022 fiscal year due to SAO's concerns with paying vendors, correcting amendments and allotments in OPB and TeamWorks systems, and making sure we had enough existing funds in our bank accounts to avoid overspending.

Through SAO's guidance, we now have established proper procedures going into the new fiscal year and beyond through the correct processes of vendor management and proper coding of state and federal.

The fiscal year officially closed on June 30, 2022; however, the accounting systems took an additional two weeks to completely closeout the fiscal year documentation. All four of the fiscal programs in the GDVS (Administration, Cemeteries, Veterans Benefits and Nursing Homes) closed within the scope of the budget. The FY 2023 budget cycle officially opened doors for business on Monday, July 18, 2022.

**Budget and General**

The GDVS closed-out FY 2022 within budget in accordance with state law. As is the case with all departments of state government, the GDVS was able to make some needed year-end purchases of supplies and equipment items for the benefit of departmental operations using *regular operating monies* that had not been expensed prior to the closeout process.

Capital Outlay requests for projects at both War Veterans Nursing Homes are currently being discussed, planned, and prioritized with 2KM and will be presented in this year's budget request.

**GDVS FY2023 --Annual Operating Budget (AOB) as of July 1, 2022**

Total State General Funds	\$25,934,624
Total Federal Funds	\$24,210,246
Total Other Agency Funds: GSFIC and Fees	\$3,215,491
<b>Total Funds</b>	<b>\$53,360,361</b>
Initial Funds for the proposed Augusta Cemetery	\$1,000,000*

\*One time funding of \$1,000,000 was approved for FY 2023 during the past legislative session.



**Budget Instructions: Amended FY 2023 and FY 2024**

SEE ATTACHMENTS:

AFY 2023 and FY 2024 Budget Instructions

1-AFY 2023—GDVS Enhancement Request for increase by job code 8\_24\_22

2-AFY 2023—Digitization of DD Form 214's 09-01-2022

We have received the AFY 2023, and FY 2024 budget instructions and the Central Office staff has started the budget process to meet the submission deadline of September 1, 2022.

The past three years have brought exceptional challenges to our state and to the Georgia Department of Veterans Service. Our leadership and employees have looked internally at our existing resources to find opportunities to leverage technology and to streamline processes to provide better service to our veteran citizens and their families.

Finding better and more efficient ways to maximize taxpayer dollars remains a cornerstone for GDVS. We've recently opened a new Veterans Field Service Office in Jasper, GA and will soon open our newest field office in Zebulon which fulfills the need of having additional veterans' benefits counselors in those communities and surrounding areas.

We are encouraged by the increasing economic activity, solid growth and consumer demand in our state that will not require budget reductions in the Amended FY2023 and FY2024 budgets. Therefore, Governor Kemp is instructing agencies to submit operational budgets equivalent to their current FY 2023 appropriation for Amended FY 2023 and FY2024.

To meet this requirement, we plan to submit "off-line" requests for items where we feel we need to operate our department in providing greater incentives for our employees and better services for Georgia's veterans.

Items being developed for inclusion in our **AFY 2023** off-line request and **FY 2024 General Budget** include:

- Funds to support a \$5,000 dollar pay adjustment for GDVS employees in job codes LEP (Legal) which includes Veterans Field Service Officers/Veterans Appeals Officers and FET (Ground Maintenance Technicians) cemetery workers.
- Request funding to support the Digitization of DD Form 214s.

**Amended FY 2023 and FY 2024**

Preparations are now underway to develop the Department's FY 2024 Budget Request, which will be officially submitted to the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget (OPB) on September 1, 2022.



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We will provide a detailed briefing about our budget requests submitted to the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget (OPB) during the September 2022 Veterans Service Board meeting.

Our initiative is to meet Governor Kemp's challenge to all agencies:

- Focus on strategic planning for developing and implementing agency goals and objectives.
- Use of technology to streamline business practices and processes.
- Making cyber security a top priority.
- Seek out best practices and implement them.

## HEALTH AND MEMORIALS

### State Veterans Homes

#### State Veterans Homes Census (Through August 12, 2022) +

Current Month	Augusta	Milledgeville	Total
Regular Patients	105	106	211
Service Connected *	21	40	61
Total Patients	126	146	272
Last Month			
Regular Patients	103	107	210
Service Connected *	22	42	64
Total Patients	125	149	274

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

+ The report to the VSB are the total numbers from July 8, 2022, through August 12, 2022.

### State Veterans Cemeteries

#### Burial Statistics (Through August 12, 2022) +

State Veterans Cemetery	Cumulative Last Month	Cumulative Current Month	Increase
Glennville	2,114	2,136	22
Milledgeville	4,796	4,842	46
Total	6,910	6,978	68

+ The report to the VSB are the total numbers from July 8, 2022, through August 12, 2022

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Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery – Glennville

Routine COVID-19 contingency operations are continuing.

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Milledgeville

Routine COVID-19 contingency operations are continuing.

**OPERATIONS**

**Human Resources**

Routine operations are continuing.

**Personnel Actions (Gains / Losses) (July 18, 2022 – August 19, 2022)**

Location	Position	Status	Name	Date
Milledgeville Cemetery	Grounds Maint Tech 1	New Hire	Brian Magourik	07/18/2022
Milledgeville Cemetery	Grounds Maint Tech 1	Resignation	Nathan Jackson	07/25/2022
Warner Robins	VFSO 1	Resignation	Christine Jones	08/01/2022
Glennville Cemetery	Grounds Maint Tech 1	New Hire	Anthony MacNeil	08/01/2022
Milledgeville Cemetery	Grounds Maint Tech 1	New Hire	Tom Ireland	08/01/2022
Columbus	VFSO 1	New Hire	Debra Thomas	08/01/2022
Macon	VFSO 1	Resignation	Courtney Cleare	08/09/2022
Macon	VFSO 1	New Hire	Sonja Martin	08/16/2022
Warner Robins	VFSO 1	New Hire	Nakezia Whitehead	08/16/2022
Valdosta	VFSO 1	Resignation	Quavondo Samuels	08/19/2022

**Information Technology**

Routine operations are continuing.

**Records Management**

Routine operations are continuing.

**Vehicle Management**

Routine service and maintenance are performed as required.

**Veterans Service Foundation Board**

The Chairman of the Foundation Board, Mr. Doug Middleton, will provide his report during the monthly board meeting.

**OLD BUSINESS:**

There was no old business to discuss.

**NEW BUSINESS:**

Mr. Hanley asked about the attendance in these meetings for veterans service organizations leadership. Commissioner Ross announced that she is working on setting up a monthly meeting between herself and these leaders. Mr. Hanley stated that we could offer them two minutes during the board meetings for their announcements and updates.

Mr. Kopsie asked about the \$482,335 of unspent monies. Commissioner Ross stated that this number was across all programs. We had been requesting the status of our funds for many months without an answer. We didn't find out the status of our funds until after the new fiscal year had begun, and were then unable to spend the funds. With the changes in the department, that will not happen again.

The budget request documents were discussed (see attached). Commissioner Ross stated that she wants the Board to advocate for these. Ms. Swan made a motion to approve the two budget submission documents as presented to the Board. Mr. Peterson seconded the motion. The motion passed.

The September 21 board meeting was scheduled. It will be a combination virtual and in-person meeting, set up at the GDVS. Mr. Hanley made a motion for this and there were no objections. The motion passed.

Mr. Kopsie made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Paslawski seconded the motion. There were no objections and the motion passed. The meeting adjourned at approximately 1:23 p.m.



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Atlanta, Georgia

SIGNED:



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Shawn Hanley, Chair

ATI EST:



Joshua Kencie Secretary

The next Veterans Service Board meeting will be held in person at GDVS but will also be available via video/telephone conference call on Wednesday, September 21, 2022, at 12:30 p.m. The Webex link is:  
<https://georgiadepartmentofveteransservice.webex.com/georgiadepartmentofveteransservice/j.php?MTID=m0845dlfc2f5533f07e2dc79aa713448d>

Meeting password: **iHFk9hAmx29 (44359426 from video systems)**

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

Access Code: **2349 460 9165**



**GENERAL BUDGET**  
**PREPARATION PROCEDURES**  
**FOR**  
**PRIORITIZED PROGRAM BUDGET**  
**AMENDED FISCAL YEAR 2023 AND**  
**FISCAL YEAR 2024**

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Brian P. Kemp  
Governor, State of Georgia

Kelly Farr, Director  
Office of Planning and Budget

2 Capitol Square, SW  
Atlanta, Georgia, 30334  
404-656-3820

[opb.georgia.gov](http://opb.georgia.gov)

August 10, 2022



## **I. Introduction**

### **Approach to Budgeting**

Georgia has historically been, and remains, a strong, fiscally conservative state. FY 2022 broke records for economic development and employment, resulting in historically high revenues as well. However, while Georgia's economy remains strong, national economic policies are bringing more significant headwinds to our state as a result of inflation, supply chain disruptions, and increased gas prices that may impact state finances. While we expect state revenues to be sufficient to meet the needs of our growing population, inflationary pressures will be a significant driver in the upcoming budget cycle. Therefore, Governor Kemp is instructing agencies to submit budgets equivalent to their current FY 2023 appropriation for Amended FY 2023 and FY 2024.

### **Budget Laws**

Title 45-12-78 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated provides that the head of each budget unit, with the exception of the General Assembly and the Judiciary, shall submit to the Office of Planning and Budget (OPB) estimates of the financial requirements of the budget unit for the next fiscal year, on the forms and in the manner prescribed by OPB, with such explanatory data as is required by OPB by a date determined by the Director of OPB. The submission shall utilize programs and object classes and be within expenditure parameters as established by the Governor. The head of a budget unit also may submit additional supporting data as necessary. The estimates submitted must bear the approval of the board or commission of each budget unit for which a board or commission is constituted.

The budget estimate for the Legislative and Judicial branches shall be prepared and shall be submitted to the director of the budget at the same time as the other budget estimates and in the format and manner designated by OPB. All data relative to the Legislative and Judicial branches of the government shall be for the information and guidance of the Office of Planning and Budget in estimating the total financial needs of the state for the ensuing period, but none of these estimates shall be subject to revision or review by OPB and must be included in the budget report as prepared by them.

This document contains instructions designed to assist managers in meeting submission requirements of the Budget Laws and the Prioritized Program Budgeting process. Agency budget submissions are due to OPB using the Planning and Budget Cloud Services (PBCS) system by **September 7, 2022**.

## **II. Guidelines for Budget Development**

### **Amended FY 2023 (AFY) and FY 2024 Budgets**

Budget submissions for AFY 2023 and FY 2024 require agencies to submit budgets equivalent to their current FY 2022 appropriations amounts for each fiscal year. Any requests for additional funds in either year will be allowed only for workload or enrollment driven programs as communicated to you by OPB.

Agencies will select their cutoff amendment in PBCS as part of the development process. Detailed training and instructions for selecting a cutoff amendment and entering budget requests are posted to the OPB website.

The budget submission process in PBCS will consist of the steps below:

1. Base Budget (selected by the agency through PBCS)
2. One-Time Deletes (to be communicated by OPB)
3. Redistributions
4. Workload Adjustments (to be communicated by OPB)
5. Other Adjustments

#### **Base Budget**

The base budget should be either the AOB or an approved cut-off amendment which will include Statutory, Fiscal Affairs, or Executive Order amendments to date in PBCS. The same base is used for AFY 2023 and FY 2024 budget requests. Agencies should ensure that the base budget accurately reflects the known or planned expense of federal and other funds for the year; however, one-time federal funding associated with the federal COVID-19 relief funding should not be included in the base budget. Agencies may submit amendments to recognize federal COVID-19 relief funds after they have completed any necessary base budget adjustments for the cutoff amendment.

#### **One-Time Deletes**

One-time deletes are non-recurring items of expenditure that are considered one-time purchases in FY 2023 and are deleted from the base. These will be provided by OPB if appropriate for your agency. These items reduce the budget request submitted to OPB. Agencies must select One-time Delete as the change type for these items.

#### **Redistributions**

Agencies are encouraged to identify savings within their organization that that may be shifted among programs to meet additional needs or provide further improvements to your service delivery model. Types of changes would include a shift of funds between programs or a realignment of fund sources between programs in order to properly meet projected expenditures.



Governor's Office of Planning and Budget  
Amended FY 2023 and FY 2024 Budget Instructions

Agencies are expected to manage their expenditures needs through the flexibility provided in program budgeting. The total of all redistributions and increased funding needs must net to zero. Positions and motor vehicles redistributed from one program to another should be reflected in the position and motor vehicle counts for the programs affected.

Redistribution among object classes and among sub-programs *within a program* should be requested as an amendment to the current budget and should **NOT** be included as part of the agency's budget request. However, requests for redistribution of funds *between programs* must be submitted in PBCS as part of the budget request.

### **Workload Adjustments**

Funding to be included as Workload Adjustments are limited to formula or enrollment driven increases that will be communicated to agencies by OPB prior to budget submission.

### **Other Adjustments**

Funding to be included as Other Adjustments are limited to select items that do not fall within formula or enrollment driven increases. Any items falling within this category will be communicated to agencies by OPB prior to budget submission. **Budget requests that do not adhere to the budget instructions will be rejected in PBCS and returned to the agency.**

Technical guidelines with detailed instructions regarding data entry and submission requirements for PBCS will be available through the OPB website at [opb.georgia.gov](http://opb.georgia.gov).

### **Performance Management**

OPB will continue monitoring ongoing program performance for all budgetary programs and require agencies to provide updates to their program performance measures. Performance information provides crucial information for state decision-makers and establishes the context for the state's annual budget. Measuring results contributes to the analysis of the effectiveness of programs and helps identify where improvements can be made. Quality performance measures should provide decision-makers with data on how the program is operated, how well its customers are being served, and whether the program is achieving its intended outcomes. Agencies should use performance data in developing their budget requests to focus funding on programs with higher returns on state investment.

Agencies will enter performance measures in the Planning and Budget Cloud Services system for FY 2024 budget development. Performance measures and data will be carried forward from last year's data entry and agencies need only add the most recent year's data along with any new performance measures and associated data previously agreed to with your budget division. Measures should be entered and submitted no later than September 7.

Ideally, all programs will have at least three measures, including one for each of the following types and actual results for FY 2019 through FY 2022:



- **Input/Output/Workload:** These basic count type measures can be used to develop efficiency measures and to analyze the impact of different scenarios. *This type of measure answers the question – How much did we do?*
- **Efficiency:** These are measures of productivity. Usually, they involve dividing an output or activity by the cost or staff involved. Efficiency measures may also include measures of quality and backlogs/waiting lists. *This type of measure answers the question – How well did we do?*
- **Effectiveness:** These are outcome measures that indicate the program accomplishments or results that occur as a result of the services provided. *This type of measure answers the question – Is anyone better off?*

It is important that measures are based on reliable data, that agencies document the data sources used, and provide information on any limitations on the measures.

## Strategic Priorities

The Governor has provided his vision, direction, and priorities of the state through the state goals. These priorities steer the development of the agency's strategic plan, which should identify and communicate the specific action plan the agency will implement to meet its core objectives.

In developing the FY 2024 budget requests, agencies should prioritize goals and consider how they support not only the statutory responsibilities of the agency but also statewide initiatives and initiatives within the agency. Existing programs and initiatives, as well as any proposed strategic reductions and redistributions, will be evaluated against state and agency strategic plans during the budget process.

## Capital Outlay Requests

### FY 2024 Bond Planning Amounts

Bond planning amounts have been established for many (but not all) agencies with ongoing capital programs that request capital projects each year. The FY 2024 planning amounts will be communicated directly via correspondence from OPB to those agencies receiving planning amounts. The amounts are established so agencies can prepare funding requests that align with the state's strong debt management plan and the continued receipt of the highest possible bond ratings, thereby realizing the lowest possible debt payments for the state.

The planning amounts are established after careful review of recent appropriations, agency plans, programs and projects underway and proposed, and the current expected overall financial resources of the state. ***The planning amounts for a given agency are not guaranteed, nor are they to be considered absolute maximum amounts.*** A comprehensive evaluation of all funding requests will be conducted. ***Agencies are strongly encouraged to identify and address all critical capital needs and prioritize accordingly within their planning amounts.*** Agencies may also identify needs above the planning

Governor's Office of Planning and Budget  
Amended FY 2023 and FY 2024 Budget Instructions

amounts, however, these will only be considered on a priority basis with other requests within the overall state's financial resources.

Planning amounts were not established for agencies that have smaller and/or infrequent capital project requests. These agencies have been notified that planning amounts were not established and that specific capital requests from the agency will be evaluated on a project by project basis.

## Requirements for Submission

Agencies must submit their Capital Outlay requests and out-year projections to OPB using PBCS.

Due to their relatively high cost and long service lives, the vast majority of Capital Outlay requests are funded by the authorization of general obligation bonds with the debt service funded through state appropriations. The state may also choose to directly fund smaller capital requests using state general funds (Cash) appropriated in the operating budget.

Agencies should follow this general guidance in preparing and submitting capital funding requests:

- Submit project requests for lower cost items ( $\leq \$100,000$ ) with useful service lives of less than five years through **PBCS** as budget redistributions from other funding within an agency's budget. Do not request as additional funding.
- Submit project requests for higher cost capital projects ( $\geq \$100,000$ ) having useful service lives of five years or more through **PBCS** as a capital request item. This includes requests for annual funding allocations for repairs, improvements, and renovations at facilities, and vehicle fleet replacements of 10 or more vehicles.

A funding request should only be submitted once either as an operating budget or capital budget item. If necessary, OPB will make modifications to handle a project if the recommended funding differs from that submitted; do not submit duplicate requests for the same item.

All projects must have a priority ranking in PBCS prior to submitting their request to OPB. It is the state's priority to fund construction for existing projects for which we have already authorized funding for the design. Agency funding requests should explicitly prioritize previous partially funded major projects within their established planning amount per the above guidance before requesting funds to initiate new major capital projects. Agencies should also weigh any additional project funding considerations (urgency, operational importance, expected impact/benefit, and leveraging of state funds) in establishing their priority ranking.

Once project information is entered and confirmed in PBCS for all requested and future projected funding, the agency "submits" the projects to OPB. Agencies should contact their OPB budget analyst if there are questions regarding capital outlay requests and projections or the PBCS web-based submittal process. Agencies must submit their completed capital project information to OPB by September 7.





# Georgia Department of Veterans Service

Floyd Veterans Memorial Building

2 MLK Jr Dr SE, Suite E-970

Atlanta, Georgia 30334-4800

Patricia M. Ross  
Commissioner

(404) 656-2300  
Fax (404) 656-7006  
www.veterans.ga.gov

August 24, 2022

Funds to support a \$5,000 pay adjustment for GDVS employees in job codes LEP (Legal) and \$3,000 for FET (Facilities) based on being below state salary requirements, increased attrition and increased workload due to the passage of the Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act 2022 and increased interments. The PACT Act is projected to increase the number of veterans entitled to VA compensation by 500,000+ (based on the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA's) statistics for those serving during Vietnam, the Gulf War, or Post 9/11).

Georgia Department of Veterans Service increased offices from 50 to 55 in FY23 with no additional personnel; however, to serve Georgia's veterans and their families, retaining highly qualified personnel is the top priority. Georgia Veteran Service Officers are the lowest paid in the country yet account for \$5.863B of the \$8.375B brought into the state's economy, ranking 5th in the nation for VA compensation. Additionally, our cemetery workers experienced a 40% attrition rate with more than a 40% increase in interments as of FY22 which is not anticipated to decline.

FISCAL YEAR: AFY 2023  
PRIORITY RANK: 1  
FUNDING REQUESTED: \$976,820.00  
GDVS FISCAL PROGRAM: GDVS-Wide (All Fiscal Programs)

Fiscal Program	Number of employees eligible for increase	Total Additional Funding*
Milledgeville Cemetery	9	\$45,630.00
Glennville Cemetery	7	\$35,490.00
Field Operations	84	\$802,750.00
Appeals Division	10	\$92,950.00
Total	110	\$976,820.00

\* Estimated totals begin FY 2023 and funds are requested by fiscal program and include the amounts to be added to personal services. (Payroll + Benefits - 69%) are calculated for the number of employees eligible for the increase based on a job code catalog established salary ranges

## BACKGROUND

- FET 71, 72, 73, LEP 60, 61, 70, 71, 72, 73 Authorized positions by fiscal program:

Fiscal Program	Total Authorizations FY 2023	Number of employees in affected job codes
Administration	17	0
Milledgeville Cemetery	9	9
Glennville Cemetery	7	7
Field Operations	105	84
Appeals Division	16	10



Augusta Home	1	0
Milledgeville Home	1	0
Total	155*	110

\* Veterans Education & Training Division (SAA) personnel are not included – 100% federally funded.

Job Code	State Salary Range	Current GDVS Salary Range	Proposed GDVS Salary Range (same as the state)
FET071-Grounds Maintenance Tech 1	\$25,472.39 - \$39,803.06	\$30,500.00 - \$31,520.00	\$25,472.39 - \$39,803.06
FET072-Grounds Maintenance Tech 2	\$29,771.59 - \$48,350.29	\$32,500.00 - \$38,500.00	\$29,771.59 - \$48,350.29
FET073-Grounds Maintenance Tech Spv	\$34,973.63 - \$57,453.85	\$38,500.00 - \$52,817.84	\$34,973.63 - \$57,453.85
LEP060-Vets Claims & Appeals Ofc 1	\$29,771.59 - \$48,350.29	\$35,600.00 - \$41,589.12	\$29,771.59 - \$48,350.29
LEP061-Vets Claims & Appeals Ofc 2	\$37,970.99 - \$62,699.23	\$32,000.00 - \$49,260.00	\$37,970.99 - \$62,699.23
LEP070-Veterans Field Svc Ofc 1	\$27,519.63 - \$43,283.37	\$30,000.00 - \$36,824.00	\$27,519.63 - \$43,283.37
LEP071-Veterans Field Svc Ofc 2	\$32,248.75 - \$52,685.32	\$32,000.00 - \$49,260.00	\$32,248.75 - \$52,685.32
LEP072-Veterans Sr Field Svc Ofc	\$34,973.63 - \$57,453.85	\$37,416.87 - \$53,456.44	\$34,973.63 - \$57,453.85
LEP073-Veterans Field Svc Ofc Spv	\$45,982.94 - \$76,720.15	\$60,000.00 - \$65,000.00	\$45,982.94 - \$76,720.15

#### Georgia Department of Veterans Service (Mission Overview)

The Georgia Department of Veterans Service and the Commissioner are required by state law (O.C.G.A. §§38-4-2, 38-4-7, 38-4-8, 38-4-51 and 38-4-70) to:

- Effectuate and carry out the laws of the state pertaining to veterans
- Furnish information to all veterans of all wars in which the United States has engaged, as to their rights and benefits under federal legislation, state legislation or local ordinances
- Assist all veterans, their dependents and beneficiaries in the preparation and prosecution of claims before appropriate federal governmental departments
- Assist veterans, their families and dependents in the preparation, presentation, proof and establishment of such claims, privileges, rights and other benefits accruing to them under federal, state and local laws
- Establish the Georgia State War Veterans Home (Augusta and Milledgeville), which shall be available for the use and care of disabled war veterans discharged under other than dishonorable condition
- Establish, operate and maintain Georgia veterans cemeteries (Glennville and Milledgeville) in this state.

Fiscal Program	Function	Remarks
Administration	Central Office (Atlanta)	Supports and oversees department operations within all fiscal programs.
Administration	Health & Memorials Division (Milledgeville)	Supervises the operation of the war veterans' home in Milledgeville, the two state veterans cemeteries and agency construction projects for both war veterans' homes and both veterans' cemeteries. A clinical director operating out of the Nursing Homes fiscal program oversees the operation of the new Sub Acute Therapy Unit.
Cemetery	Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery – Glennville and the Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Milledgeville	Provides perpetual care for deceased veterans, as part of the VA's National Cemetery System.
Nursing Homes	Georgia War Veterans Nursing Home in Augusta	Operated for the GDVS through an inter-agency agreement with the Augusta University. One Economic Support Specialist is assigned to the war veterans' home to provide benefits assistance to the veteran patients at each home.

- The Georgia Department of Veterans Service (GDVS) currently operates the following activities across the state to support the missions of the department.

Nursing Homes	Georgia War Veterans Home in Milledgeville.	Operated for the GDVS by a contractor competitively bid every five years. One Economic Support Specialist is assigned to the war veterans' home to provide benefits assistance to the veteran patients at each home. (See Health & Memorials Division under the Administration Program for Sub Acute Therapy Unit information.
Veterans Benefits	Appeals Division (Atlanta)	Co-located with the Atlanta VA Regional Office. Assigned staff members (Veterans Claims & Appeals Officers [VCAO]) assist and represent veterans who are appealing VA decisions on benefits claims.
Veterans Benefits	Field Operations (Across the state)	Staff members (Veterans Field Service Officers [VFSO]) currently operate 53 Veterans Field Service Offices assisting veterans with the preparation and filing of their claims for federal and state earned benefits.
Veterans Benefits	Veterans Education & Training Division (State Approving Agency – SAA) (Atlanta)	Under a VA contract, staff recommends approval of training sites for veterans to obtain VA educational benefits while receiving education and training from colleges, universities, trade schools, apprenticeships, and on-the-job training. Staff members perform compliance inspections of training sites to ensure compliance with VA



		regulations governing educational benefits under the “ <i>GI Bill</i> .”
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- According to the FY 2021 VA GDX Report, GDVS is currently serving Georgia’s 689,274 known veterans in 53 veterans’ field service offices across the state, most of which are 1-2 person offices with a few 3-4 person offices and one 5-person office.
  - According to the State of Georgia 2021 Workforce report, the turnover rate for the department in FY 2021 was 23.5 percent, down from 27 percent in FY 2020. Although we made great strides to decrease our attrition in 2021, unfortunately this progress was short lived as our attrition rate climbed back up to 26 percent in FY 2022. Our attrition is trending higher in FY 2023 as we have already lost 11 employees in the first 2 months due to low salaries (cited as the number one reason during exit interviews).
  - These rates are magnified in our field offices when a vacancy occurs in one- or two-person field offices. The staff of the office is reduced to 50 percent, or 0 percent, of what is needed, causing temporary closure of the office, workload adjustments, sometimes involving temporary staffing augmentation from another office, which places an extra burden on other offices and a decrease in service to our veterans.
  - The average “1-year” retention rate of new employees, according to the FY 2021 Workforce Report from DOAS/HRA, was 76.5 percent, it decreased to 74 percent in FY 2022, and is expected to decline further in FY 2023 because newer employees are continuing to seek higher paying jobs from other local/private, state and federal employers. We continue to lose employees from our Appeals Division to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) whenever they open up claims rating positions at the Atlanta VA Regional Office, usually within 12-18 months after they are hired by the GDVS to work at our Appeals Division. We are also losing our employees to other Veterans Service Organizations such as Disabled American Veterans (DAV) and Wounded Warrior Project (WWP). When the VA or other veterans organizations are hiring, GDVS personnel begin migrating there because of better pay and benefits. We are seeing similar movements in our field office locations where federal facilities, usually military installations and VA Community Based Clinics and hospitals are located.
  - In FY 2022, GDVS suffered the loss of 39 employees (27 were VFSOs and VCAOs), with varying lengths of service, due to resignations and retirements. We lost 5 out of the GDVS Appeals Division in 2022 alone (3 to DAV, 1 to WWP, and 1 to VA) which cut our appeals force in half within a 3-week period.
  - In FY 2021 we lost 31 employees, of which 23 were VFSOs and VCAOs.
- The primary mission of the GDVS is to assist veterans and advocate for them with their claims for federal and state benefits.
  - The VFSOs, who are part of the legal family of jobs in the state’s Human Resources Administration system, must have a working knowledge of Title 38 of the United States Code of Federal Regulations and work at the paralegal level aiding Georgia’s veterans with their earned benefits claims to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and to assist them in obtaining all of the earned state benefits.
  - According to the VA, in FY 2021 approximately 70 percent of all appeals hearings conducted at the Atlanta VA Regional Office (VA and BVA) were completed by GDVS Appeals Officers. Additionally, claims for compensation and pension initiated by GDVS staff members contributed to \$5.863 Billion of the over \$8.375 Billion in tax-free compensation and pension benefits paid to Georgia’s veterans by the VA in 2021 (*Source: FY 21 Geographical Distribution of VA Expenditures (GDX) Report*). These monies are spent by the veterans and their families and bolster the state’s economy,



as those monies circulate throughout the state by private merchants, governmental entities, etc.

- In May-June 2021 the department conducted a survey of other state veterans' affairs agencies through the membership of the *National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs* of which the GDVS is affiliated. We received responses from eight other states, plus one county. In summary, for each level of Veterans Field Service Officers and Veterans Claims and Appeals Officers the annual salaries were below the other states who responded. Of particular note were the neighboring and close proximity states of Alabama (\$44,920.00), Florida (\$40,492.00), South Carolina (\$45,349.00), Tennessee (\$47,000.00) and Mississippi (\$38,120.00).
- In Georgia, Disabled American Veterans (located at the Atlanta VA Regional Office) is currently paying \$48,000.00 for an apprentice and \$56,000.00 once fully trained. Wounded Warrior Project starts their Service Officers at \$56,465.00 per year.
- To be compliant with state standards and competitive with bordering states, our entry level salaries should increase to attract and retain the best qualified employees. The request simply brings salaries up to mid-range based on the job code salary ranges. If GDVS does not act, we will continue to lose trained, quality employees which will degrade support to veterans and their families. Retaining fully trained and accredited VFSOs is imperative from a training and accreditation standpoint. Currently it costs \$19,138.33 to train a new employee within the first 6 months based on the manhours spent on training, background checks, and VA accreditation.
- VFSOs in Georgia are paid at the entry level \$30,000.00 and are preferred to have at least two years of college credit (60 semester hours) at an institution of higher learning (four years of comparable, related experience may be substituted for the two-year college education requirement). To maintain accreditation with the VA, they are required to have 40 hours of legal training and pass an annual comprehensive exam.
- The duties and responsibilities of the VACO's are closely associated with Social Security Claims Adjustors, Adjudication Specialists, VA Claims Adjudication Specialists, VA Benefits Counselors, etc. Currently, the average annual salary for our Veterans Claims and Appeals Officer 1 position in FY 2022 is \$30,600.00. The **Market Average** for their *Statewide Salary Plan Wage Grade G (effective 8/3/2022)* is \$39,060.94.
- According to the *US Bureau of Labor Statistics*, the Median Pay in 2021 for Paralegals and Legal Assistants with a two-year college degree was \$56,230.00 annually.
- When a veteran receives a rating decision from the VA and disagrees with the decision, they can appeal the decision to the VA or Board of Veterans Appeals. These types of claims, to include case preparation and hearings, are handled by the GDVS' Appeals Division who are co-located at the Atlanta VA Regional Office.
  - Veterans Claims and Appeals Officers, working in the GDVS' Appeals Division, whose jobs are part of the legal family of jobs in the state's Human Resources Administration system, must have detailed knowledge of Title 38 of the United States Code of Federal Regulations and work at the senior paralegal level to argue cases on behalf of veterans before VA Hearing Officers or Veterans Law Judges (VLJ) representing the VA Appellate Board System.
  - They have been very successful in applying the federal law to the individual veterans' situations and cases and more often than not the amount of the VA's decisions awarded to the veterans is higher than the amounts in initial rating decisions. In FY22 alone, the Appeals Division accounted for approximately \$6 million dollars in retroactive awards.
  - These 10 VCAOs are paid at the entry level \$30,600.00 and must have a four-year college degree from an institution of higher learning, or eight years of comparable, related experience may be substituted for the four-year college education requirement. These duties and responsibilities are closely associated with Social Security Claims



Adjustors, Adjudication Specialists, VA Claims Adjudication Specialists, VA Benefits Counselors, etc.

- The work performed by these GDVS employees is not social work or counseling, as usually found in other state jobs in agencies, such as at the DBHDD, DCH, DHS, DFCS, etc. However, the salaries of many GDVS employees, especially the lower grade employees, were historically suppressed.
- The GDVS is regularly losing VFSOs and VCAOs to the VA, which is paying 1.5 – 3.0 times the salaries the GDVS is paying for doing similar work. In addition, the GDVS has lost some VFSOs to the VA and other employers who are paying higher wages for doing work of lesser standing, e.g., environmental service technicians (hospital janitors).
  - GDVS is a revenue generating agency! The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs estimated GDVS services generated 70 percent (\$5.863 Billion) of the \$8.375 Billion in income tax free revenue received by veterans in the State of Georgia during FY 2021. The veterans receiving these income tax free VA benefits spend those monies purchasing homes, automobiles, and other goods and services and paying state property and sales taxes in the process. *Those monies enrich the economy of Georgia and much of them came into this state because of the efforts of the GDVS.*
  - While the turnover rate for the department in FY 2021 is 23.5 percent according to the FY 2021 Workforce Report, which is an improvement over FY 2020. The FY 2022 turnover rate has vaulted back up to 26 percent and FY 2023 is not looking any better. So far, we have lost 11 employees in the first two months of the fiscal year. We need to pay our employees' salaries commensurate with what the market is for the same type of work.
  - The GDVS has VFSOs assigned across the State of Georgia. Several of the offices where they work are located in VA medical facilities (medical centers and community clinics) where they come into contact with VA employees who are paid on the federal pay schedules. Many times, the federal workers are paid at higher levels for doing the same type of work as our field service officers, or other types of work that are not as taxing as the kind of work our field service officers perform. The temptation to move from working for the GDVS to another job in one of these VA facilities is great and when openings occur many times our employees do move to the federal side.
  - Likewise, one of the veterans' service organizations, the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) has placed service officers on military installations to assist veterans with claims issues at those locations. They are paying their individuals \$51,060.00, or 1.5 – 2.0 times what the GDVS pays.
  - The GDVS' VCAOs are seeing similar disparities in their salary ranges compared to their VA counterparts working in the same building at the VA's Atlanta Regional Office in Decatur. According to *USA Jobs*, the entry level salary for a Veterans Service Representative (GS-7) is \$47,216.00 and a Rating Veterans Service Representative (GS-9) starts at \$57,755.00.
  - One of the concerns we have is, we need well educated and well-trained personnel to accomplish the functions our employees perform as part of their jobs. Those same knowledges, skills and abilities are requisites for the jobs at the VA and at the veterans' service organizations. Consequently, we are hiring staff members and exposing them to situations where the *grass-is-greener* nearby and hoping to not lose them to the other employers who are looking for the same skill sets and paying more for them.
- Implementation of the PACT Act will not only increase the demand for our Veteran Field Service Officers and Appeals Division, but it has resulted in increased VA hiring which will further impact retention of our trained employees. We anticipate the impact of the increased volume of veteran claims:
  - 323,231 Gulf War/Post 9-11 veterans in Georgia.

- 198,821 Vietnam veterans in Georgia.
- The Georgia Department of Veterans Service (GDVS) currently operates two state veterans' cemeteries, one in Glennville and one in Milledgeville.
  - There are a total of eleven (11) grounds maintenance technicians at these two facilities who are responsible for opening and closing interment sites (graves, columbarium niches, in-ground cremains storage locations), maintaining irrigation systems, maintaining the VA shrine status, maintaining the appearance of the grounds involving mowing of grass, preservation of shrubbery, trees and other plantings and other related issues.
  - These eleven workers, who are highly committed to the workings of the cemeteries (do not include supervisors), are currently receiving a starting annual salary of \$30,500.00, while the Market Average for their *Statewide Salary Plan Wage Grade E* is \$32,637.73. According to the *US Bureau of Labor Statistics*, the average salary for Ground Maintenance workers is \$35,460.00 per year.
  - In FY 2022, GDVS received funding for one new Ground Maintenance Tech 1 (FET 071) position for the state veteran's cemetery program at Milledgeville. Recruiting and hiring efforts for the position is currently underway. The hiring process is becoming a routine challenge mostly because of the low salary being offered and the associated extended manual labor year-round required for the positions. We believe this is in large part due to the fact the starting salary, \$30,500.00 per year, which is nearly \$5,000.00 less than the average salary for this type of work according to the *US Bureau of Labor Statistics*.
  - As the economy across the nation and the state has improved, individuals who might have applied for these positions in recent years (had they been open) are now able to find jobs paying more money, but do not include the hard work associated with year-round work in the outdoors. For example, this past year we lost one employee at the Milledgeville cemetery to a higher paying factory job in the local community.
  - The GDVS needs to be better prepared to retain and attract highly qualified talent to work at these state shrines to Georgia's veterans and competitive salaries can accomplish this.

## FACTORS

- A \$5,000.00/\$3,000.00 dollar pay increase for GDVS employees in the aforementioned job codes would demonstrate our commitment to stem attrition, increase base salaries to be more competitive with surrounding states and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and to invest in the future of GDVS by retaining the best qualified and experienced workers.
- GDVS' budget in all the fiscal programs is very limited and funding for a \$5,000.00/\$3,000.00 dollar pay adjustment is not possible within our existing operational budget or funding.
- GDVS employees are among the lowest paid in Georgia State Government (based on commensurate duties/education), yet accounts for \$5.863 Billion of the \$8.375 Billion in VA related revenue infused into Georgia's economy in 2021 (*VA GDX Report FY 2021*).
- Equitable pay increases at the requested amount of \$5,000.00/\$3,000.00 allows for a higher percentage increase for those making the least amount.

## POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

1. Take no action.
2. Provide the requested funding for a \$5,000.00/\$3,000.00 pay adjustment (which includes salaries and associated benefits) for the department personnel who meet the criteria.



## CONCLUSIONS

1. Take no action.
  - a. The almost 700,000 veterans in Georgia will not have the advocacy required to navigate complex VA systems.
  - b. When opportunities arise for obtaining employment in situations that pay more doing the same or similar work, the likelihood is greater our employees will look seriously at them and in many cases apply for them and likely be hired for them.
  - c. In FY 2021, the annual turnover rate for the GDVS was 23.5 percent but increased to 26 percent in FY 2022 and it is trending higher in FY 2023 as GDVS experienced 11 losses in the first two months of the first quarter. Without definitive action to raise GDVS salaries, we anticipate the higher turnover rate will continue well into the future
  - d. With 22.2 percent of the current employees eligible for retirement, the likelihood of many of them exercising that option is ever present because the salaries in the GDVS are well below market averages in most areas.
2. Provide funds for a \$5,000.00/\$3,000.00 adjustment for salaries and benefits along with associated benefits to the department personnel.
  - a. Approval of the raises will help stem attrition and provide veterans the services they deserve.
  - b. With the anticipated 500,000 veterans now eligible for VA benefits under the PACT Act, retaining highly trained employees should result in an increase of the award of VA compensation and pension positively impacting Georgia's economy.
  - c. Approval of the funds will provide a respectable and needed pay adjustment for these valuable positions.
3. General:
  - a. The focus of the pay adjustments is those personnel in positions currently below state salary standards and the needed pay adjustment would bring the pay of GDVS employees more into line with other employees across the state performing similar duties.
  - b. The turnover rate for the Department of Veterans Service was 23.5 percent in FY 2021 and 26 percent in FY 2022. Due to the size of the agency and dispersal of VFSSOs in 1-5 person locations across the state, the loss of one field service officer in a two-person office is a turnover of 50 percent. This has a major impact on the ability of the offices to adequately perform their mission.
  - c. The cemetery workers are working outdoors 12 months out of the year, regardless of weather conditions, maintaining the cemetery grounds to meet VA shrine status, to include opening and closing crypts during the course of interment of veterans and spouses in their final resting places. These cemeteries provide perpetual care to honor our nation's and state's veterans who are interred there.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recommend the Governor of Georgia include in the Budget Recommendations provisions for a \$5,000.00 pay adjustment for GDVS employees in the LEP job category and \$3,000.00 in the FET job category.

## ATTACHMENT:

Background Information

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE MISSIONS OF THE GEORGIA DEPARTMENT OF  
VETERANS SERVICE (GDVS)

- To be eligible for the range of earned federal (VA) and / or state benefits for Georgia's veterans of our nation's armed services, an individual must have served in the military of our nation and been separated from the service (discharge or retirement) under *other than dishonorable conditions* (plus another ~500,000 individuals who are widows, orphans and / or active duty members eligible for some federal benefits from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs [VA]). If the individual has not served on active duty in the military for other than training that person has not earned any VA benefits, or state benefits *designated for veterans*, and is not entitled to apply for them or receive them.
- Federal benefits from the VA are only provided to veterans who served in the Armed Forces of the United States during peacetime or wartime, as defined by the federal government. These earned benefits may differ depending on the period of time the veteran served on active duty in the military. Depending on the state benefit, they may be provided to any veteran who served, regardless of whether the period of service was during a federally recognized wartime period, e.g., WWII, Korea, Vietnam, Persian Gulf (includes Afghanistan and Iraq), or during a period not recognized by the federal government as a period of wartime. In some cases, state benefits may be provided to members of the Georgia National Guard.
- In all cases where the military service occurred is not an issue, e.g., *boots on the ground*, in a support position in the continental United States, or elsewhere in the world, it is the period of time when the service occurred that matters.
- The range of VA benefits extends from *compensation* benefits related to a service connected disability emanating from an illness or injury that occurred while the veteran was serving in the military service and *pension* benefits provided to eligible veterans and / or their widows / spouses, to nursing home (skilled nursing) care, education benefits, housing and home loans, to perpetual care in cemeteries of the National Cemetery System (of which the two State of Georgia owned cemeteries are a part).





Patricia M. Ross  
Commissioner

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August 24, 2022

## Provide Funding to Support Digitization of DD Form 214's

FISCAL YEAR: FY 2024  
PRIORITY RANK: 2  
FUNDING REQUESTED: \$165,000 - \$240,000  
GDVS FISCAL PROGRAM: Field Operations

Fiscal Program	Additional Funding	Redirected Funding	Comments
Administration	\$165,000.00		Lowest, acceptable bid.
Cemetery	\$0		
Nursing Homes	\$0		
Veterans Benefits	\$0		

### Section 1: Overview of Issue

#### 1. NEED:

GDVS has over five hundred thousand physical DD214 forms archived (Armed Service Report of Discharge). The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2020 supports digital transformation. It requires Department of Defense (DOD) to provide veterans and members of the armed forces with machine readability and electronic transferability of Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty (DD Form 214) by December 31, 2023. DOD mandates move from paper-base to digital, so will GDVS. GDVS will contract out scanning, so the data is searchable by member's name, service or social security number, and date of birth.

The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) requires the Department of Defense (DOD) provide veterans and former members of the Armed Services with a machine readable and electronically transferable Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty (DD Form 214) by December 31, 2023.

Digitizing physical DD Form 214s supports the Governor's goal of leveraging technology to best utilize limited state resources. Currently, GDVS has one full-time person dedicated to pulling the physical form, scanning the document, and sending it to the requesting office. By digitizing the data, this will allow the dedicated administrative assistant to support the Chief Operating Officer as identified in the job description.

#### 2. COST:

Based on three proposals, the estimated one-time cost range is between \$161,000 and \$240,000 dollars.

Vendor	Scope of Work	Estimated Cost
Patterson-Pope Inc.	Scanning, document indexing all identified DD214s, Training & Education Documents, and On-The-Job training records.	\$160,578.15



ARC	Scanning, document indexing all identified DD214s, Training & Education Documents, and On-The-Job training records.	\$180,904.54
Image API, LLC	Scanning, document indexing all identified DD214s only. Does not include Training & Education Documents, or On-The-Job training records.	\$239,646.90

### 3. STRATEGIC IMPACT:

- GDVS must have systems and capabilities available and in place to meet the military service records needs of all of Georgia's veterans.
- Digitization of existing DD Form 214's will reduce the physical paper footprint for GDVS, eliminate the need to maintain and manually store large volumes of paper copies of military service discharge records and provide immediate access to digital DD214s for authorized users.
- Reallocation of needed space.
- Digitization provides security, privacy, and confidentiality of sensitive documents.
- Use of this technology will provide an immediate and sustained operational impact by significantly reducing the time required to locate DD214's by days to mere minutes.

### 4. BENEFITS:

- 1) Digitization of DD214's will enable GDVS to store and manage digital documents in a secure, cloud-based technology platform.
- 2) Authorized GDVS team members will have secure access anytime and anywhere access to digital DD214's.
- 3) Digitizing services will transform the DD214 paper records into a digital document and make them available as searchable and useable documents.
- 4) Risk Management: Digital DD214's reduces the need for physical storage, paper documents, and eliminates the risk of misplacement, fire, water damage, or other natural disasters.
- 5) No annual maintenance fees.

### 5. STAKEHOLDERS:

- a. Describe the stakeholder groups (e.g., board members, advocates/interest groups, service providers, other agencies, other governmental entities) affected by this enhancement and their (anticipated) positions.
  - i. The Armed Services.
  - ii. Defense Manpower Data Center.
  - iii. Federal and State Departments of Veterans Affairs.
  - iv. Veterans Service Board.
  - v. GDVS senior leadership.
  - vi. Servicemembers.
- b. Indicate those groups with whom you have discussed the request.
  - i. Veterans Service Board

- ii. GDVS senior leadership
- iii. Chief Operating Officer, State of Georgia

**6. LEGISLATION:**

- a. Does this request have legislation associated with it? NO.
- b. Does a law need to be passed, eliminated, or changed if it is implemented? NO.

**7. CONCLUSION:**

Provision of one-time additional funding will allow GDVS to leverage technology, better supporting our veteran population by having digital access to separation documents accessible by GDVS personnel. These documents are required to file for VA benefits and compensation, use the VA home loan, or enroll in VA healthcare. We have confirmed through the vendor, there is no annual maintenance fee.

**8. RECOMMENDATION:**

A one-time request for funding be added for regular operating expenses in the Administration program funding base in the amount of \$165,000.00 (to account for any inflation), for GDVS to support the digitization of DD214's.

Attachments:  
Vendor proposals:  
ARC  
Image API, LLC  
Patterson-Pope