

**Wednesday, August 14, 2024 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia**

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

Visitors Ms. Shelly-Ann Simpson, Executive Director, Field Operations & Appeals, GDVS
Present: Mr. Mark Demers, Chief Development Officer, Chief Finance Officer, GDVS
Mr. Russell Feagin, Executive Director, Health & Memorials Division, GDVS
Mr. Kerry Dyer, Chief Operations Officer, GDVS
Ms. Jehae Kim, Assistant Attorney General, Attorney General's Office
Ms. Belinda Boldoe, VFW Service Officer, Appeals Division, GDVS
Ms. Tonjala Moton-Williams, GDVS, American Legion Service Officer
Mr. Jim Fultz, Commander, American Legion
Ms. Amy Stevens, Georgia Military Women and Vetlanta
Mr. Lou Zayas, Jr. Vice Commander, Military Order of the Purple Heart
Mr. Johnny Higdon, National Montford Point Marine Association
Ms. Carolyn Cagle, Georgia American Gold Star Mothers
Mr. Drew Craig, Chief Design Officer, VA Veteran Experience Office
Ms. Meredith Magnus, Veterans Service Foundation Board
Mr. Carlton Deese, Executive Director GWVNH, Augusta, GA
Ms. Charlotte May, Director, Public Information and External Affairs, GDVS
Ms. Shareka Monday-Robinson, Director, Human Resources, GDVS
Ms. Ramona Roper, Director, Training Division, GDVS
Ms. Sherri Whitfield, Director, Veterans Benefits South Region, GDVS
Mr. Ken Childre, Director, Veterans Benefits North Region, GDVS
Ms. Veda Brooks, Coordinator, Women & Minority Veterans, GDVS
Ms. Calandra Fergerson, Coordinator, Suicide Prevention & Outreach, GDVS
Ms. Raven Holstick, Transition and Employment Coordinator, GDVS
Ms. Jarelle Thompson, Homeless Coordinator, GDVS
Mr. William Wilson, Network Administrator, GDVS
Ms. Camala Ball, Budget Analyst, GDVS
Ms. Irene Mackson, Business Support Analyst, GDVS
Ms. Monica Dorsey, Communications & Outreach Specialist, GDVS
Ms. Latoya McCallum, Administrative Assistant, GDVS
Ms. Julie Hammond, Executive Assistant to the Commissioner, GDVS

On Wednesday, August 14, 2024, the Veterans Service Board meeting was held in person and by video/tele-conference.

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

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Mr. Hanley made a motion to approve the August Agenda. Mr. Peterson seconded the motion. The motion passed.

Mr. Hanley made a motion to approve the July 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:

Mr. Johnny Higdon, National Montford Point Marine Association

Mr. Higdon introduced his service organization, a nonprofit organization that seeks to perpetuate the legacy of the first African Americans who entered the US Marine Corps from 1942-1949 and trained at the Montford Point Camp in North Carolina. Atlanta has been chosen to host the 60th national convention in July 2025. More information to follow.

Ms. Belinda Boldoe, VFW

- The Department Service Officer attended a VFW National Veterans Service (NVS) Resolution Staff Advisors and Chairs virtual meeting held on July 23, 2024, at 3:15PM. We discussed the following:
 - The Health Sub-committee had a follow-up meeting to discuss proposed resolution 601-612, 634, 636, 647, and 648 for the upcoming VFW National Convention in Louisville, KY on July 27-August 01, 2024.
 - Duties and responsibilities of the staff advisors, chairmen, and vice chairmen.
 - The resolutions and how the process works.
- The Department Service Officer attended the monthly VSO/CMA meeting hosted by Brian Morgan, Change Management Analyst (CMA). The virtual meeting was held on July 25, 2024, at 10AM. We discussed the VSO's issues and concerns.
- The Department Service Officer attended the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) 125th National Convention held on July 27, 2024 – August 02, 2024 at the at the Kentucky International Convention Center in Louisville, Kentucky.
 - I was appointed as the Chair for the Health Sub-Committee and as a Delegate for the Veterans Service Resolution Committee. We reviewed and discussed the resolutions to be presented before VFW members to adopt on issues regarding Veterans Benefits. The adopted resolutions will be presented to Congress regarding VA benefits.

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- The VFW National Office installed the new Commander-in- Chief Al Lipphardt of Newnan, GA, and Staff for 2024 – 2025.
- The Department Service Officer attended a meeting with GDVS Commissioner Patricia Ross and the VFW Commander-in-Chief Al Lipphardt on August 06, 2024, at 10:30AM. The meeting was held at the Central Office located at the Floyd Veterans Memorial Building Suite E-970, Atlanta, Georgia 30334-4800.
 - Discussed GDVS Legislative initiatives regarding Veterans Benefits.
 - Discussed GDVS Program initiatives in support of GA Veterans.
 - VFW CIC discussed how VFW can support GDVS Legislative and Program initiatives.
- 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 August 08, 2024, at 12PM – 1PM.
 - The purpose of the meeting was to share information about the PACT Act and to discuss how our Veterans are being impacted by the PACT Act.
 - We discussed ways to ensure that our Veterans gain access to the healthcare, benefits, and resources they earned and deserve!
 - Provided Veterans' feedback about the PACT Act Outreach initiatives.
 - Discussed extending the outreach initiatives to the rural areas.

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

- July 26-28, 2024, National Workshop Convention was held in Indianapolis, Indiana for incoming Commander and leadership team. During the convention, the team was updated on goals and changes for 2024-2025 term. The workshop serves as a catalyst for expanding the reach and impact of the American Legion. In doing so, the organization can continue to serve veterans and their communities, creating a stronger, more united America.

Upcoming events:

- August 10, 2024, Organizational Day Meeting is held at Post 594, Warner Robins, Georgia. Additionally, the organizational day will feature a keynote speaker Director Douglas Gullino from Augusta, Georgia.
- August 23-29, 2024, National Convention is held in New Orleans, Louisiana. The key focus is membership growth. In order to achieve this mission, the American Legion has organized workshops, which are essential gatherings for Legionnaires across the nation to learn, share, and strategize on growing numbers.

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- Monthly Virtual Post service officer training will be held for new service officers. Training topics will be on the roles and responsibilities as a post service officer. This training will continue to be held monthly as new service officers arrive.

Commissioner Patricia Ross

On Wednesday, July 24, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended the Veterans Service Board Meeting.

On Thursday, July 25, 2024, Commissioner Ross and her team met with January Parker, Founder of Above the Line Talent Agency, an organization that provides part-time opportunities as film extras for disabled veterans, disadvantaged/homeless veterans, and veteran's families. She then met with Chris Wells, Executive Director of Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency, to discuss how GDVS and GVRA can partner together. The Commissioner also met with Kaitlin Little, Program Analyst at Georgia State Senate Budget and Evaluation Office, to discuss the budget for the GWVNH. She later met with Don Layne, Chief Operating Officer of VECTR, to discuss collaboration on the grant regarding assisting transitioning veterans and their spouses.

On Friday, July 26, 2024, Commissioner Ross held an Open Forum for the entire department. She then met with Cajun Comeau from the VA and Kim Scofi from United Military Care to discuss VA support for the We Care Veterans Fair on 1 Nov. She then met with Hire Heroes USA to discuss a federal grant opportunity. The Commissioner also met with Amber Mack, Budget and Policy Analyst at Georgia General Assembly House of Representatives, and Christine Murdock, Deputy Director at Georgia House of Representatives Budget and Research Office, to discuss the budget for the GWVNH. Afterwards, Commissioner Ross, along with Mark Demers, Camala Ball, Russell Feagin and Kerry Dyer, met with Imane Bassit from the Office of Planning and Budget, to discuss the budget for the GWVNH.

On Monday, July 29, 2024, Commissioner Ross was the keynote speaker at the Jobs for Veteran State Grant (JVSG) Conference at Callaway Gardens. She then met with Jamie Carlington, Office of Resilience and Sustainability, Clayton County Board of Commissioners, to discuss a partnership for the next Veterans Golf Tournament in April 2025. Also in this meeting were Kerry Dyer, Shelly-Ann Simpson, and Raven Holstick. Later in the day she met with Vincent Solomeno, Deputy Commissioner of Veterans Affairs for New Jersey, regarding Unite Us.

On Tuesday, July 30, 2024, Commissioner Ross held a Director's Meeting.

On Wednesday, July 31, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended the Green Vets Donation Announcement in Warner Robins. They donated computers for a military spouse certification program. She then met with William Brown to discuss legislation for tax relief for disabled veterans and their surviving spouses.

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On Thursday, August 1, 2024, Commissioner Ross, along with Kerry Dyer and Ken Childre, attended the Senior Resource Fair and presented on the topic of Veterans Benefits.

On Friday, August 2, 2024, Commissioner Ross met with Hire Heroes USA to discuss partnering together on the transitioning veteran and spouse's grant. She also worked on writing the grant.

On Saturday, August 3, 2024, Commissioner Ross was interviewed on Monica Pearson's TV show "Leading Ladies" regarding her military experience and what GDVS does to assist veterans. It will air in November for Veterans' Day.

On Monday, August 5, 2024, Commissioner Ross held a Director's meeting, attended a Unite Us Bi-weekly Meeting, and a Fox Grant Update Meeting.

On Tuesday, August 6, 2024, Commissioner Ross hosted the VFW leadership at GDVS. She later attended the Behavioral Health and Coordinating Council meeting in Atlanta.

On Wednesday, August 7, 2024, Commissioner Ross hosted a Veteran Engagement Senior Leader meeting.

On Thursday, August 8, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended the quarterly meeting of the Veterans Service Foundation Board. She also attended the Monthly VSO/Community Partner PACT Act Information and Listening Session. She then met with Kelly Grivner-Kelly, Serving Spouses Program Manager at Hire Heroes USA, to explore potential collaboration opportunities.

On Saturday, August 10, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended the military graveside ceremony for PFC Buck Bagley in Fitzgerald, GA.

On Monday, August 12, 2024, Commissioner Ross held a Director's meeting. She also kicked off the new class for the GDVS Leadership Institute with a two-day training session.

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

GENERAL

- On August 1st Ms. Simpson attended a planning meeting for the Annual We Care Fair that will be held at the Cobb County Civic Center on November 1. This year's event will be held on one day from 10am-7pm.
- On August 5th Ms. Simpson gave opening remarks at the Military Order of the Purple Heart's Annual Golf Classic in honor of the late Commissioner Pete Wheeler.

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- On August 7th Ms. Simpson attended the Vetlanta Q3 summit.
- On August 8th Ms. Simpson participated in the Veteran Engagement Senior Leadership meeting that was hosted by Commissioner Ross at the Margaret Mitchell House. The purpose of the meeting was to work with our partners in the veterans' space to create a more efficient and effective way to assist Georgia Veterans.
- **DD 214's and Welcome Home Letters: 759** Welcome Home Letters were mailed out in July 2024.

Projected Positions: One opening in Appeals for an Appeals Officer.

Ms. Ramona Roper, Director of Training Division:

- July 16 and 18, 2024, Mr. Charles Isaac assisted the South Region Director, Ms. Sherri Whitfield, with interviews for the Hinesville and Glennville VFSO vacancies.
- July 17-19, 2024, Mr. Steven Fay and Mr. Glenn Massey conducted in-person training for a new employee at the Augusta War Veterans Nursing Home VFSO. This training was a refresher course and introduction into new policies and procedures for the employee because she is a rehire. Ms. Johnson previously worked for GDVS as a VSO.
- July 26, 2024, Ms. Ramona Roper assisted the Athens VFSO at Vet Fest. Vet Fest was a benefits fair hosted by the Charlie Norwood VA Medical Center. The event assisted veterans with claims, healthcare enrollment, homeless coordinators, caregiver program coordinators, and much more. The Athens VFSO successfully assisted approximately 27-30 veterans and families with electronic claims submissions and questions.
- August 5, 2024, Mr. Charles Isaac participated in the Military Order of the Purple Heart Golf Tournament held in Stone Mountain, Georgia.
- August 5-9, Ms. Ramona Roper conducted a mentoring class. The Mentoring Program is to assist employees that are having issues with certain aspects of subject matter of filing claims. Mentoring sessions are 3 times weekly during the administrative hour for approximately 30-60 days. Usually at the request of a supervisor or Regional Director, but an employee can reach out to any member of the Training Division and self-enroll.
- August 8, 2024, Mr. Charles Isaac conducted the hybrid training for several south region offices. The class covered Standards of Conduct and Basic Eligibility. These are 2 mandated classes the VA requires to maintain accreditations.

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- August 8, 2024, Mr. Steven Fay and Mr. Glenn Massey conducted the hybrid training for several north region offices. The class covered Standards of Conduct and Basic Eligibility. These are 2 mandated classes the VA requires to maintain accreditations.

Upcoming Events:

- Daily continued ongoing support to the Regional Directors and Veteran Field Service Offices
- Continuation of performing duties as VSO's
- Mentoring Sessions for the month of August 2024

Mr. Edwin Berry, Director of Appeals Division

- The total number of hearings conducted by the Appeals Division for July 2024 was **63**. Retroactive payments of **\$664,351** was paid in July to the veterans or family members based on positive outcomes from previous hearings that the Appeals team assisted with.
- As of **August 1, 2024**, the Atlanta VA Regional Office processed benefits as follows for GDVS and the Service Organizations represented by GDVS during the month of July 2024:

| Types of Claims | Number of Awards | Benefits paid |
|------------------------|------------------|----------------------|
| Compensation | 107,755 | \$243,234,869 |
| DIC | 4,210 | \$7,236,006 |
| Survivor Pension | 698 | \$671,237 |
| <u>Veteran Pension</u> | <u>1,350</u> | <u>\$1,601,632</u> |
| <u>Grand Total</u> | <u>114,013</u> | <u>\$252,743,745</u> |

YTD through 07/31/2024 total Compensation, Pension and other benefits paid: \$1,736,208,368 for the veterans that we represent who receive VA benefits.

Mr. Kenneth Childre, Director Veterans Benefits North Region

Retro Awards: July \$1,525,818.28
Of Note: 1 Debt Waiver-\$123,231.00

Director Site Visits/Inspections: 0

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Community Involvement:

July 13-Tanya Rogers (Gainesville)-Served food to the homeless community at Free Chapel.

July 17-Tanya Rogers (Gainesville)-Briefed VA/State benefits to over 30 spouses at a Military Spouses Breakfast.

July 25-Christina Williams (Lawrenceville)-Visited The Mansions Assisted Living Facility in Lawrenceville. Went to assist a 95 year old Veteran with his claim. Ended up giving a presentation on benefits to 20 Veterans/family members that reside in the facility. Assisted with an additional 5 claims.

North Area Gains/Losses: 1

Shaahidah Johnson-Augusta WVH-Started 1 July

| Average Visits Per VFSO | | | | | | | |
|---|------------------------|------------------------|---------|-------|--------|-----------------------------------|-----------|
| Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO | | | | | | | |
| Region: | | | North | | | | |
| Month: | | | July-24 | | | | |
| A | B | C | D / E | | | G / E | |
| | | | D | E | F | G | H |
| | | | Total | | | Total | Average |
| | | | Average | | | Claims | Claims |
| | | | Total | Work | Office | Submitted | Submitted |
| | Veterans' Field | | Monthly | Days | Visits | To | By VFSOS |
| | Service Officer (VFSO) | | Office | In | Per | VA | To VA |
| Office Name | Last Name | # | Visits | Month | Day | Monthly | Daily |
| | Number of VFSOs: | 52 | 7,858 | 22 | 357.18 | 2,373 | 107.86 |
| Number of Offices: | 29 | Average Visits/Office: | | | 270.97 | Average Claims/Office: 81.8275862 | |

*Total monthly office visits include: 2,603 In-person and 5,255 phone calls/emails.

Ms. Sherri Whitfield, Director Veterans Benefits South Region

- On July 26, 2024, the Columbus Field Office participated in a Job and Resource Fair in Columbus, GA. A table was set up with information on state benefits, resources, and information such as

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PACT ACT, VA life insurance, suicide prevention, state war homes and cemeteries. They answered questions and elaborated on the services GDVS provides and provided business cards to contact the office if assistance was needed.

- On August 1, 2024, we welcomed three new hires. Mrs. Tammy Bacon is the new VFSO for the Statesboro Field Office. Mrs. Susan McCormick is the new VFSO Manager for the Glennville Field Office. Mrs. Cora Tomblin is the new VFSO for the Hinesville Field Office.
- On August 3rd and 4th, 2024, the Savannah Field Office participated in a Military and Family Readiness event sponsored by the 165th Airlift Wing in Savannah, GA. A resource table was set up to provide GDVS information, State veteran benefits, and VA benefits. Other briefers were there to present information on the Survivors Benefit Plan, Work for Warriors, and Tricare.
- On August 28, 2024, the Savannah Field Office will participate in a Veterans Resource Fair with State Representative Buddy Carter. Our representative will give a short briefing, and a table will be set up to provide information on veterans' benefits.
- South GA area had three VSOs selected for the GDVS Leadership Institute:
 - Jamaal Lemon in the Albany Field Office
 - Joycelyn Jones in the Moultrie Field Office
 - Denoris Lane in the Valdosta Field Office
- South region offices reported lump sum payments since the last board meeting of 905,875.99, with the highest single amount of \$388,153.72 for a surviving spouse, reported by the Columbus Field Office.
- South Georgia Region Veterans Population: 237,759.

Ms. Veda Brooks, Women Veterans Coordinator (WVC)

- July 17, 2024, Ms. Brooks participated in the Women's Round Table, Hosted by Senator McBeth, at the Gwinnett Commerce Center.
- July 18, 2024, Ms. Brooks met with Southern Crescent Habitat for Humanity.
- July 19, 2024, Ms. Brooks went to the Atlanta Furniture bank to set up furniture pick-up for widow Joann Freeman. Ms. Brooks participated in a home visit to Ms. Freeman's home.

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- July 24, 2024, Ms. Brooks participated in a meeting about constituent Bobby Brown. We are having difficulty reaching him and the concern for his health is increasing. Ms. Brooks went by Mr. Brown's home again and left a written message.
- July 26, 2024, Ms. Brooks participated in the Clayton County Veteran Collaboration with Ms. Ferguson. Ms. Brooks and Ms. Ferguson attended Disability Day in the Park hosted by Families Future Empowerment Coalition.
- August 1, 2024, Ms. Brooks participated in a UGA Veteran Center Visit.
- August 2, 2024, Ms. Brooks and Ms. Ferguson attended a meeting with Warrior Alliance to talk about joining resources to work on sex trafficking awareness. Ms. Brooks and Ms. Ferguson visited Hearts to Nourish Hope and the Riverdale Women's Respite Center to set up classes and event rental for mental health awareness.
- August 7, 2024, Ms. Brooks, participated in the VetCenter Stakeholders Meeting. Ms. Brooks visited the Atlanta Women Veteran Program Manager to talk about a Wellness Day Collaboration and set a date.
- August 8, 2024, Ms. Brooks participated in a meeting with the Center of Influence to talk about next steps and collaboration to provide financial education to transitional veterans and their families.
- August 9-10, 2024, Ms. Brooks participated and presented at the Women Marine National Conference in Atlanta.

Current committees:

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

Ms. Calandra Ferguson, Suicide Prevention and Outreach Coordinator

- July 24, Ms. Ferguson attended the Veterans Service Board Meeting for the month of July.
- August 1, Ms. Ferguson met with the Director of Veterans' Education on the Campus of UGA. The meeting was to establish a partnership with UGA & GDVS to provide services for Veteran-Students.

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- August 1, Ms. Ferguson held a meeting with Volunteers for Safe Houses (Sex Traffic). This meeting was to offer Suicide Prevention Awareness Training for the Staff.
- August 1, Ms. Ferguson met with board member of Women Respite to provide Suicide Prevention Awareness Training for their staff.
- August 1, Ms. Ferguson met with the Director of Hearts to Nourish Hope and partnered with them to put Suicide Prevention materials in the food boxes that they distribute, and I will volunteer with them to hand out the food boxes.
- August 7, Ms. Ferguson attend the VetLanta 3rd Qtr. event held at the College Hall of Fame. The outreach team were present to provide resources and information for Veterans.

Ms. Raven Holstick, Transition and Employment Coordinator

- July 25, 2024, met with the re-entry team for Department of Labor to discuss potentially partnering with them. We conducted introductions and discussed potential avenues for collaboration. The meeting highlighted our mutual interest in supporting workforce reintegration and addressing the challenges faced by individuals re-entering the job market.
- July 26, 2024, Transition and Employment Coordinator and Homeless Coordinator met with Georgia Tech University to discuss potential partnerships, exchange ideas, and explore opportunities for mutual engagement in upcoming events with Georgia Tech.
- July 31, 2024, met with the Department of Community Services Re-entry team to explore joint initiatives that leverage our combined resources and expertise to enhance re-entry programs and improve employment outcomes for returning individuals. We look forward to building a strong partnership that aligns with our shared goals of fostering sustainable employment opportunities and supporting workforce development.
- August 1, 2024, met with the University of Georgia to discuss potential partnerships, exchange ideas, and explore opportunities for mutual engagement in upcoming events with the University.
- August 5, 2024, met with Hire Heroes to learn more about their program and the possibilities of collaboration.

Upcoming events:

- August 6, Meeting with Fulton County Sheriff Office
- August 7, Vetlanta
- August 13, Macon Circuit Employment, Health and General Services Resource Fair

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- August 20, Veteran welcome day event at Georgia Tech
- August 29, Veteran Social at University of Georgia

Ms. Jarelle Thompson, Homelessness Coordinator

- July 26, 2024: Met with ACSS to discuss a partnership of sending individuals that may need their services. I learned about their referral program, what their program offers and how we can use this to help homeless veterans find vocational skills.
- July 30, 2024: Conducted a virtual meeting with Gwinnett Community Services to introduce myself and find out how we can collaborate more. I was informed about standdowns and the services that they provide to homeless veterans in Gwinnett County. As a result of this meeting, we have been invited to attend a standdown event at the Norcross One Stop on Oct. 26th.
- July 31, 2024: Met with GVRA to find more information regarding how we can use their services. This will be a new partnership that the Commissioner is building. GVRA will be able to offer funding for schooling and accommodation for those that may need it in their workplace so that they can work efficiently.
- July 31, 2024: Met with Pleasant Hill Goodwill to discuss future collaborations. We have been invited to attend a Veteran's fair in November. I also inquired about Goodwill being a possible provider of suits or clothing for individuals needing professional attire for work or school. I will be following up.
- August 2, 2024: Conducted a visit with the homeless coordinators from the Atlanta Metro VA hospital. During this meeting we were able to come up with a plan to get homeless veterans directed to services without any time lapse. We are also able to get in contact and set up a meeting with a homeless veteran that has been serviced through both agencies and we are one step closer to getting services. We were also able to connect with a point of contact that will provide us with access to HMIS. As a result, we have been invited to participate in Operation Reveille in September.
- August 6, 2024: Collaboration meeting with cellphones for soldiers to find out how we can get cell phones for homeless individuals to ensure that they have communication with service providers.

Upcoming events:

- August 7, 2024, Outreach team will participate in Vet Atlanta
- August 13, 2024, DCS Resource fair in Macon
- August 13, 2024, Mighty Hero Homes meeting
- August 13, 2024, Meeting with Central OAC

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

Accounting/Procurement:

- Routine operations are continuing. We are continuously working to improve all accounts payable processing, to apply proper coding, accountability, organization of purchase orders, and on time payments.
- We are working with the SAO Shared Services to prepare the procurement and accounting data in Team Works for migration to Workday.
- Kirsten Dennis is in the process of compiling the first large essential supplies order for the year for Field Operations and Appeals.
- Kirsten Dennis is attending the GDVS Leadership Institute and will attend her first session on August 12, 2024.
- Kirsten Dennis is enrolled in the Georgia Certified Procurement Manager (GCPM) certification with her next session starting September 3-5, 2024.
- Mark Demers and Camala Ball attended the National Association of State Auditors, Comptrollers and Treasurers (NASACT) webinar on Overview of Statewide Cost Allocation Plans and Federal Cost Recovery on August 1, 2024.

Budget:

- Camala Ball worked with SAO to review and true-up the budget by funding source. A successful budget year closed with all funding sources are in budgetary compliance with fund balance.
- Camala Ball participated in CaseWare Cloud Training with the Georgia Department of Audits & Accounts System which will assist with the audit process.
- We are working on creating the budget for AFY 2025 and FY 2026.

Grant Program:

- SSG Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program- (\$747,464)
 - Irene Mackson submitted draw-down #8 for \$24,902.15 on August 5, 2024.
 - The SSG Fox Grant Year 3 NOFO was submitted on April 26, 2024, we will find out the results on the second week of September 2024.

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- The SSG Fox Grant Mid-Year Report was submitted on April 30, 2024, the next report will be in October 2024.
- **Unite-Us Grant-** (American Rescue Plan-Negative Impact Grant)- \$6.1m per year (\$18.3m) over the course of 3 years starting July 1, 2022:
 - Data ingestion and secure data transfer for the platform and social connector is moving forward. As of August 8, 2024, we have **272,422** veterans in the system. We have submitted **1088** community partners and **313** healthcare partners for inclusion to the platform since August 2022.
 - Irene Mackson completed address changes for 8100 veterans on the data file.
 - Irene Mackson submitted the advance payment request for the entire year on August 7, 2024, for \$6,088,640.28.
 - Below is an activity snapshot from Unite Us Insights:



- **Veterans Mental Health Services Program Grant (HB 414)-**
 - AFY2023- The grant was awarded to two vendors: \$750,000
 - Aspire (Cohen Veterans Network) for \$650,000.
 - Emory Healthcare for \$100,000.
 - The end of year report for Cohen was received on July 31, 2024, and the report from Emory is still pending.

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- AFY2024- The grant was awarded to two vendors: \$1,000,000
 - Aspire (Cohen Veterans Network) for \$776,132
 - Emory Healthcare for \$212,500
 - GDVS indirect rate awarded by Senate and House \$11,368
 - All monies have been distributed to awardees in May 2024.
- FY2025- \$1,000,000 (competitive grant)
 - The grant is currently in the review stage in Survey Monkey. Only two applications were received:
 - Aspire (Cohen Veterans Network) (asking \$776,132)
 - Sisters 2nd Chance (asking for \$50,000)
 - \$163,868 will be remaining to award.
- VA Suicide Mortality Review Cooperative Agreement - (\$502,124.68)
 - Submitted for consideration on July 24, 2024, we will find out if we are successful in September 2024.

Veterans Service Foundation:

- The next quarterly board meeting will be on September 12, 2024, at 1000. They will be discussing strategic planning for the foundation.
- Completed the Georgia State Charitable Contributions Program paperwork so the foundation could be listed as a charitable organization eligible for payroll deduction. Our application was approved for FY 2025 with open enrollment in November 2024.

Events/Other:

- Irene Mackson attended the Suicide Prevention Training at Clayton County Library on August 8, 2024.
- Irene Mackson will be taking on an additional role of the Leadership Institute Coordinator starting with the first session on August 12, 2024.
- Mr. Demers added that he is doing end of year reporting for the department and the foundation totaling 6-7 reports per week up until January.

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

State Veterans Homes

State Veterans Homes Census (Through August 2, 2024) +

| Current Month | Augusta | Milledgeville | Total |
|---------------------|---------|---------------|-------|
| Regular Patients | 89 | 104 | 193 |
| Service Connected * | 30 | 34 | 64 |
| Total Patients | 119 | 138 | 257 |
| Last Month | | | |
| Regular Patients | 90 | 108 | 198 |
| Service Connected * | 30 | 34 | 64 |
| Total Patients | 128 | 142 | 262 |

* 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 July 13, 2024, through August 2, 2024.

Georgia War Veterans Nursing Home

Normal operations continue

Georgia War Veterans Home

Normal operations and renovation projects continue.

State Veterans Cemeteries

Burial Statistics (through August 2, 2024)+

| State Veterans Cemetery | Cumulative Last Month | Cumulative Current Month | Increase |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|----------|
| Glennville | 2,549 | 2,562 | 13 |
| Milledgeville | 5,525 | 5,548 | 23 |
| Total | 8,074 | 8,110 | 36 |

+ The report to the VSB is the total numbers from July 13, 2024, through August 2, 2024.

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery – Glennville

Cemetery operations continue as normal.

A grant opportunity was provided by the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) to expand the cemetery by adding additional in-ground capacity and renovation of the existing columbaria. An acceptable bid has been received and will be provided to NCA. If all goes well, construction should start after the 1st of October.

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Milledgeville

Cemetery operations continue as normal.

Phase 4 expansion of the cemetery is almost completed. This expansion added additional columbaria (above ground cremated interment) capacity. In addition, it provided renovation of our existing columbaria. We are still waiting on the necessary granite to complete the project.

Milledgeville also received a grant opportunity from the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) to expand the cemetery by adding additional in-ground capacity for both casketed burials and cremated burials. The contract proposal has been opened for bids and we are awaiting the results.

Mr. Kerry Dyer, Chief Operations Officer

On July 25, 2024, Kerry Dyer along with Commissioner Ross, Jarelle Thompson, and Raven Holstick met with January Parker, Executive Movie Producer to discuss Veterans participating in movies as extras. He also met with John Pidgeon CWC, Senior Account Executive regarding the removal of a cubicle wall in the Office of Student Achievement. Later that day he spoke with Tim Saunders, GBA Design Supervisor, about the replacement of the window blinds on the 9th floor suite.

On Friday, July 26, 2024, Kerry Dyer attended the Commissioner's Open Forum. He also processed one resignation packet. Later that day emailed the draft MOU to Angela Gaston, Fort Eisenhower, Transition Service Manager for review.

On Monday July 29, 2024, Kerry Dyer contacted Hiram Lagroon, Chief, Loss Control & Safety Officer to discuss the Certificate of Liability Insurance for the agency. He also reviewed the Data Sharing Agreement between GDVS & GDOL. Later that day he extended the external posting of the Cemetery Tech 1 position on Team Georgia Careers.

On Tuesday, July 30, 2024, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's meeting. Later that day along with Shareka Monday-Robinson attended the NextGen Human Capital Management Agency Session at Atlanta Technical College.

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On Wednesday, July 31, 2024, Kerry Dyer visited the Atlanta VAMC.

On Thursday, August 1, 2024, Kerry Dyer along with Commissioner Ross and Ken Childre attended the Senior Resource Fair at the Church of the Apostles located at 3585 Northside Pkwy, NW, Atlanta, GA 30327. He also contacted John Pidgeon, CWC, Senior Account Executive to discuss the power connection for the two cubicles located at the Office of Student Achievement.

On Friday August 2, 2024, Kerry Dyer contacted Wade Damron, DOAS Risk Management Director, to discuss the Liability Insurance for the Foundation Board Members. He also spoke with Megan Quin, Spalding County Board of Commissioners to discuss the insect problem in the Griffin Field Office. Later that day he contacted Larry Price, Career Support and Retention Life Consultant at Kings Bay to discuss office space for a VSO.

On Monday August 5, 2024, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Directors meeting. He also attended the Bi- Weekly UniteUs meeting along with Commissioner Ross, Mark Demers and Charlotte May. Later that day he spoke with Terese, Davis, GSSDAR Service to Veterans State Chair regarding the Wreath Across America Program scheduled for December 9th.

On Tuesday, August 6, 2024, Kerry Dyer submitted the Space Utilization Form, Organizational Chart and Space Action Form to State Properties requesting a new field office in Bainbridge. He also updated and distributed the Monthly Alpha Roster the Senior Leadership. Later that day along with Commissioner Ross, Mark Demers, ShellyAnn Simpson and Belinda Boldoe met with Al Lipphardt, VFW Commander in Chief and Joe Couch, VFW State Commander.

Below are the Personnel Actions Kerry Dyer and Shareka Monday-Robinson processed from July 16, 2024 – August 8, 2024.

| Location | Position | Status | Name | Date |
|------------|--------------------|----------|------------------|----------|
| Statesboro | VFSO 1 | New Hire | Tammy Bacon | 08/01/24 |
| Glennville | Office Mgr (VFSO2) | New Hire | Susana McCormick | 08/01/24 |
| Appeals | Admin Asst 2 | New Hire | Yvette Pollard | 08/01/24 |
| Hinesville | VFSO 1 | New Hire | Cora Tomblin | 08/01/24 |

On the horizon: Veterans Field Service Office in the Perry VA Clinic and Fort Eisenhower in September/October timeframe.

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 2,186 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 | 479 |
| Approved Training Establishments | 1,707 |
| Veteran Students Enrolled in Educational Institutions - July | 4,063 |

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

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 July edition featured a highlight on the identification of PFC Luther “Buck” Bagley to commemorate his valorous service and life before his interment on August 10, 2024 in Fitzgerald. The newsletter also contained information on how to avoid DBQ scams and bad actors, highlighted the service of a team of airmen from Robins Air Force base to preserve and transfer a WWII Douglas C-47 Skytrain to the Museum of Aviation, and celebrated Savannah Office Manager Miguel Rivera’s dedication to excellence in serving veterans and their families, caretakers, and survivors.
2. GOVChats – attended a virtual webinar hosted by GTA’s Digital Services & Solutions team. The webinar was a moderated conversation with a representative from the state of Colorado and covered their [Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program](#) and how they delivered a user-friendly, easy-to-use application. The conversation also included information on best practices,

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how Colorado encouraged users to adopt the new service/website, and how they capitalized on the program's popularity to grow and refine service delivery.

3. Georgia Veterans Mental Health Service Program – coordinated with the Commissioner and CDO Mark Demers to advertise and administer the third round of grant funding availability. The continuation of grant funding was promoted through social media and targeted email announcements, as well as being boosted publicly by Lt. Governor Burt Jones. Applicants used the GDVS grant portal at <https://gdvsmentalhealthgrant.smapply.io/> to complete and submit applications. Completed applications now move to the review stage for consideration and approval.
4. Benefits outreach – External Affairs and Communications continues to work with GDVS staff and partners to educate Georgia's veterans and families on the availability of benefits and resources. In addition to providing information on hiring fairs, business building programs, and resource fairs, we focused on several key areas for messaging:
 - a. Summer VetFests – shared information from VA partners across the state about upcoming PACT Act and VetFest events. Locations were spread across the entire state, including events in rural and underserved areas.
 - b. We CARE Vet Fair – began advertising the return of the We CARE Vet Fair to Marietta on November 1. Follow up reminders and announcements are anticipated to be shared from Kim Scofi and the United Military Care team in the months ahead.
 - c. Hurricane Debby safety notices – coordinated with teams to communicate the importance of planning for severe weather, the availability of VA services to navigate post-weather events, and the closure of specific GDVS offices.
 - d. Purple Heart Day – shared information on the benefits available to recipients of Purple Heart medals, as well as celebrating their courageous service and sacrifice in uniform.

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

- Replies to VA eBenefits Messages = 285
- Replies to General Questions = approximately 515
- Individual Request for the State Certificate of Honor = approximately 95

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DID YOU SERVE?

Calling **All** Georgia
Veterans,
Active Duty, National
Guard, Reserve,
Families, Caregivers,
and Survivors!



ATTENTION: 1-ON-1 BENEFIT FAIR



3rd Annual

WE CARE VET FAIR™

Friday, 11/01/24 - 9:00 AM - 5:00 PM - Free
Cobb Civic Center, 548 S. Marietta Pkwy., Marietta, 30060

100% FREE Admission, Services & Parking | No Selling or Donation Requests

NEW ARRIVAL

Claim in queue?
There may be a
decision waiting
for you!*

*EOP claims may be eligible for
on-site review

GET 1-ON-1 ASSISTANCE WITH:

| | | |
|---|--|--|
|  <p>Over 100 Agencies & Organizations & Vendors (Local, State, Federal)</p> |  <p>Free haircut, basic health check, vision exam, flu shot, Medicare, Mental Health</p> |  <p>Aid & Attendance, Aging Care, War Veterans Homes, Hospice, Home Care</p> |
|  <p>Submit a VA disability claim. Check the status of your disability claim or appeal.</p> |  <p>Free legal assistance.* Register online for free estate planning, Will, POA.</p> |  <p>Housing Assistance, VA Mortgages, Traditional Mortgages, Financial Asst.</p> |
|  <p>Burial Options, End of Life Planning, Survivor Benefits, War Time Vet Income</p> |  <p>Enroll in VA Health Care, Get VA ID Card, DD214, Toxic Exposure Evaluation</p> |  <p>Free lunch and snacks in the canteen. Free groceries.* Sign up for SNAP, WIC.</p> |
|  <p>Adopt your new best friend. Service Animals.</p> |  <p>Employment, Resume, Volunteer Opportunities, Member Org.'s Transition</p> |  <p>Military vehicles, 6888 BN, Montford Point Marines, ATL History Ctr, Aviation Museum</p> |

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*Claims must be complete with all exams and paperwork received by VA to get an on-site rating percentage. Food and Beverage available first come first serve as supplies last. Legal request register online only.

OLD BUSINESS:

There was no old business to discuss.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

GDVS has received the Staff Sergeant Parker Gordon Fox Suicide Prevention Grant for the third year.

Commissioner Ross, Ms. Brooks and Ms. Ferguson will all be in Indianapolis next week for the joint NASDVA, Annual Women's Conference, and Governor's Challenge conferences.

GDVS' suicide prevention initiatives are garnering interest. The Outreach Team will be sending gun locks to counties with a high ratio of suicide numbers. The locks will go to gun shops with information about our suicide prevention program. Thank you to Green Veterans and Shawn Hanley for donating to our Suicide Prevention programs. Cobb County schools want Ms. Ferguson to provide gun locks to parents. The VFW Commander-in-Chief, Al Lipphardt, met with Commissioner Ross and her team to discuss partnering with GDVS in its suicide prevention activities.

Commissioner Ross announced a Joint Senate and House session to discuss legislation regarding who can file claims for veterans in Georgia. The meeting will be on Sept. 18 at 10:00am at the State Capitol.

NEW BUSINESS:

The department is working on a comprehensive guide for Georgia veterans and the hope is that it will be ready by November. It is estimated to cost less than \$10K for the first printing.

Mr. Mendez discussed targeted outreach via social media posts focusing on suicide prevention and asked if more posts could be made, possible once per week.

There was a discussion regarding funding for the current and future veterans' homes in Georgia. The issue has not been prioritized for Georgia. Mr. Kopsie discussed a two-page document that is being put together with the following points: (1) there has been a decrease in funds for the last ten years which has put us behind where we should be in filling the Milledgeville home; (2) funding for new homes since we only house 13% of the veterans we should be housing; (3) funding to open the sub-acute unit so that we will not have to pay back funds to the VA. Once the document is published, everyone needs to go see their state legislators to have a discussion about the need for funding.


A joint meeting of the Veterans Service Board and the Veterans Service Foundation Board was scheduled for Aug. 30 at 11:00am. The purpose of the meeting is to develop a strategic plan.

The next Board meeting was scheduled for September 25 at 12:30pm. It will be a combination virtual and in-person meeting, set up at the GDVS.

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The meeting was adjourned at approximately 1:24 p.m.

SIGNED:


Joshua Kopsie, Chair

ATTEST:



Steve Mendez, Secretary