

Wednesday, August 20, 2025 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

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

Visitors Mr. Kerry Dyer, Deputy Commissioner, Chief Operations Officer, GDVS
Present: Ms. Shelly-Ann Simpson, Executive Director, Field Operations & Appeals, GDVS
Mr. Mark Demers, Chief Development Officer, Chief Finance Officer, GDVS
Mr. Russell Feagin, Executive Director, Health & Memorials Division, GDVS
Ms. Shelley Seiberg, Assistant Attorney General, Attorney General's Office
Ms. Amy Sillmon, 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
Ms. Carolyn Cagle, Georgia American Gold Star Mothers
Mr. Don Layne, VECTR Chief Operating Officer
Ms. Markisha Steele, Momentum Enrichment
Mr. Eric Brew, Director, Warriors Set Free Georgia
Ms. Samantha Brown-Parks, Veterans Service Foundation Board
Mr. Carlton Deese, Executive Director GWVNH, Augusta, GA
Ms. Lily Snyder, Director, Veterans Education & Training, GDVS
Ms. Charlotte May, Director, Public Information and External Affairs, GDVS
Ms. Shareka Monday-Robinson, Director, Human Resources, GDVS
Mr. Steven Fay, Director, Training Division, GDVS
Ms. Sherri Whitfield, Director, Veterans Benefits South Region, GDVS
Mr. Ken Childre, Director, Veterans Benefits North Region, GDVS
Mr. Edwin Berry, Director, Appeals Division, GDVS
Ms. Veda Brooks, Coordinator, Women & Minority Veterans, GDVS
Mr. William Wilson, Network Administrator, GDVS
Ms. Calandra Ferguson, Coordinator, Suicide Prevention & Outreach, GDVS
Ms. Raven Holstick, Transition and Employment Coordinator, GDVS
Ms. Jarelle Thompson, Homeless Coordinator, GDVS
Ms. Camala Ball, Budget Analyst, GDVS
Ms. Monica Dorsey, Communications & Outreach Specialist, GDVS
Ms. Irene Mackson, Business Support Analyst, GDVS
Ms. Kaitlin Little, Business Support Analyst, GDVS
Ms. Julie Hammond, Executive Assistant to the Commissioner, GDVS

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On Wednesday, August 20, 2025, the Veterans Service Board meeting was held in person and by video/tele-conference.

Mr. Kopsie called the meeting to order at 12:31 p.m. Ms. Simpson gave the invocation. Mr. Dyer led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

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

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

The following reports were submitted for the Board meeting:

Ms. Belinda Boldoe, VFW

- The Department Service Officer attended a virtual meeting hosted by Kai Mentzer, Director regarding AVAHCS Facility Update, VHA. The virtual meeting was held on July 18, 2025, at 1130 AM. The Director discussed the following:
 - Provided update of the West Cobb Community-Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC) temporary closing due to flooding.
 - Leadership indicates veterans were notified of the temporary closing. The facility is working to repair and resolve all damage.
 - Atlanta VA schedulers were converting appointments to virtual interviews or rescheduling as needed.
 - Objective was to minimize impact to patient care, including telephone calls and text messages.
- The Department Service Officer attended a monthly VSO VSC Vet Talk hosted Sharon Thompson, Atlanta Regional Office AVSCM held on July 23, 2025, at 10 AM, at 1700 Clairmont Road, Decatur, GA 30033.
 - To conduct a monthly roundtable informational session in collaboration with Veteran Service Officers (VSOs).
 - This meeting aims to foster an inclusive environment and provide current guidance on administering Compensation Benefits.
 - The primary topic: Favorable Findings, Carrie Garrison, Atlanta RO RQRS.
 - Favorable Findings Definition
 - Different Theories of Service-Connection and their Favorable Findings
 - Examples of Favorable Findings
 - How to document Favorable Findings

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- Binding Nature of Favorable Findings
- The Department Service Officer attended a VFW National Veterans Service (NVS) National Convention Resolution Committee Meeting. The virtual meeting was held on August 06, 2025, at 130 PM. We discussed the following:
 - Healthcare Resolution 600 Series Agenda
 - Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson duties and responsibilities.

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

- July 26, 2025, Organizational Day Meeting was held at Post 594, Warner Robins, Georgia.
- August 7-10, 2025, Membership Workshop Convention was held in Indiana, Indianapolis.

Upcoming events:

- Aug 22 – 28, 2025, The American Legion National Convention 725 S. Harbour Island Blvd., Tampa FL 33602. The key focus is for the delegates to meet each year to approve changes to the Legion's constitution and bylaws, pass programs that determine the course, set membership dues, and elect a national commander and five vice commanders to serve until the next convention.

Mr. Eric Brew, Directo, Warriors Set Free Georgia

Mr. Brew introduced himself and his organization, which focuses specifically on active duty, veterans, first responders, and their families. Georgia is the first state the organization has expanded to from Michigan. The mission is to help our brothers and sisters heal from the past and grow in their faith to win life's battles.

Commissioner Patricia Ross

On Thursday, July 24, 2025, Commissioner Ross traveled to Glennville Cemetery for recognition of the operational excellence award by the National Cemetery Administration. She then attended the Interagency Veterans Advisory Council Quarterly Meeting, which was held virtually. She later attended the NASDVA executive committee meeting.

On Friday, July 25, 2025, Commissioner Ross attended the July Veterans Service Board meeting.

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On Monday, July 28, 2025, Commissioner Ross held a director's meeting. She and her outreach team had a lunch appointment with Lance Robertson to discuss his organization's potential support to veterans via their extended stay hotels. She then met with Amanda Garcia to discuss the upcoming Government Innovation Showcase scheduled for February 2026. She and her outreach team also met with HereNow Help for a launch strategy meeting.

On Tuesday, July 29, 2025, Commissioner Ross and her leadership team met with VFW State Commander Bill Miles to discuss collaboration efforts. She also met with David Puente, the state director from Washington and a member of her VA Data Working Group.

On Wednesday, July 30, 2025, Commissioner Ross joined the VetPro Training session (mini-demo and Q&A). She then attended an Appeal Hearing at DOAS.

On Thursday, July 31, 2025, Commissioner Ross met with Russell Feagin to discuss the Milledgeville Home. She then met with Shelly-Ann Simpson to discuss suicide prevention case management. She also met with Tricia Danskin to discuss the upcoming Financially Fit event for small businesses hosted by Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, at which she will be a panelist. She then met with Alex Craft for a Qualtrics implementation kickoff meeting.

On Friday, August 1, 2025, Commissioner Ross attended and worked at the Veteran Claims event at Savannah State University.

On Monday, August 4, 2025, through Thursday, August 7, 2025, Commissioner Ross attended the Suicide Mortality Review Committee conference in Arlington, Virginia, where she was a guest speaker.

On Thursday, August 7, 2025, Commissioner Ross attended the Veterans Service Foundation Board meeting.

On Friday, August 8, 2025, Commissioner Ross toured the Southwind Plantation in Attapulgus, Georgia, to discuss how veterans can be engaged in their business.

On Monday, August 11, 2025, Commissioner Ross held a director's meeting. This was also the kick-off day for the FY26 Leadership Institute, where she welcomed the new students. It concluded on Tuesday, August 12. She later met with her financial team to discuss the upcoming budget submission.

On Tuesday, August 12, 2025, Commissioner Ross attended a budget meeting with OPB Director Dunn.

On Wednesday, August 13, 2025, Commissioner Ross attended and spoke at the Columbus VECTR Groundbreaking Ceremony. She later met with Cajun Comeau from the VA and Kim Scofi from United Military Care to discuss the next We Care Veterans in Columbus on 12 Sept. She also met with Donna Lowry to discuss the upcoming Financially Fit event where she will talk about veteran entrepreneurship.

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On Thursday, August 14, 2025, Commissioner Ross attended the HereNow Help Launch meeting, along with her outreach team and set the go-live date as 19 August. She then joined Cajun Comeau from the VA and Kim Scofi from United Military Care to discuss the next We Care Veterans Fair in Rome. She and her outreach team then joined Bridge My Return for a kick-off meeting. Later, she and Charlotte May met with Qualtrics for their weekly meeting. She also met with VetScore to discuss their program and offered her support as they conduct a pilot program in Georgia.

On Friday, August 15, 2025, Commissioner Ross attended the GVN Board meeting at the Cobb County Civic Center. Later in the day she met with Samantha Norment, CEO and Founder of the Her HOPE Foundation, which serves unhoused women veterans.

On Saturday, August 16, 2025, Commissioner Ross attended and worked at the AMVETS Veterans Resource and Service Fair.

On Monday, August 18, 2025, Commissioner Ross visited Camp Southern Ground, which hosts various programs for veterans and their families. She also attended the Fox Grant Update meeting.

On Tuesday, August 19, 2025, Commissioner Ross attended and worked at the We Care Veterans Fair in Rome.

Commissioner Ross added to her report that we have launched the HereNow Help app, which is a free mental wellness app for veterans. It can be used to connect veterans to clinical services if needed. She also talked about the flat year budget cycle we are moving in to. We are re-working some numbers to re-submit to OPB and we will be meeting our new budget analyst soon.

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

GENERAL

- On Saturday August 2nd I along with American Legion Department Service Office Tonjala Moton-Williams participated in Old Soldiers Day held at American Legion Post 201 in Alpharetta. We provided guidance to Veterans on the best strategy for filing new or amended Claims and recommendations for local resources that can assist them in developing and filing those Claims.
- On Saturday August 16th along with the Commissioner, and the Waycross and Valdosta offices, we supported AMVETS Post 621's Veterans Resource Fair.
- On Tuesday August 19th the North Area participated in the Rome We Care Veterans Resource Fair sponsored by United Military Care and held at the Rome Forum. There were 1,300 attendees at the event.

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- **DD 214's and Welcome Home Letters: 409** Welcome Home Letters were mailed out in July 2025.

Projected Positions:

- 2 Openings in Appeals
- 1 Opening @ Fort McPherson
- 1 Opening in Bainbridge

Mr. Steven Fay, Director of Training Division

- Continued training on the VetPro platform. Collecting sustain/ improve comments for submission to senior staff for consideration.
- Sandra Bennett attended the Columbus We Care Fair IPR for the South Director.
- Charles Isaac provided support for the Warrior Alliance event in Savannah on 08/01/2025.
- Charles Isaac will be conducting new hire training at Dublin VAMC while Sandra Bennett will conduct new hire training in Bainbridge, GA. Steven and Glenn are currently conducting refresher training at the Marietta locations, Rome and Cedartown service offices. This training introduces new VSOs to the accredited training processes and procedures to assist veterans and claimants. Refresher training is required to train and evaluate the proficiency of VA systems after issuance of their PIV card. The Absorb Learning Portal is also introduced. The portal has classes and quizzes to help navigate the vast subjects of filing VA claims.
- Sandra Bennett is currently attending the Department's Leadership Institute.
- Steven Fay met with Ms. Shelly-Ann Simpson on next year's (AT 2026) site location. I am currently seeking 2 other sites for comps.

Upcoming Events:

- We Care Fair in Rome - Tuesday, August 19, 2025
- We Care Fair in Columbus - Friday, September 12, 2025
- Continued ongoing support to the Regional Directors and Veteran Field Service Offices
- Continuation of performing duties as VSO's
- Provide new hire training in North and South Georgia
- Annual Training Planning 2026

Mr. Edwin Berry, Director of Appeals Division

- The total number of hearings conducted by the Appeals Division for **July 2025** was **94**.
- As of **July 31, 2025**, the Isakson VA Regional Office processed benefits as follows for GDVS and the Service Organizations represented by GDVS during the month of July 2025:

Types of Claims	Number of Awards	Benefits paid
Compensation	111,442	\$270,180,148
DIC	4,581	\$8,069,785
Survivor Pension	628	\$624,312
<u>Veteran Pension</u>	<u>1,232</u>	<u>\$1,441,293</u>
Grand Total	117,883	\$280,315,538

YTD through 07/31/2025 Total Compensation, Pension and other benefits paid: **\$1,919,975,039** for the veterans that we represent who receive VA Compensation or Pension benefits.

Mr. Berry added that the Leadership Institute visited the Regional Office on their first day of class for a tour. The VA leadership took time to meet with them and talk to them.

Mr. Kenneth Childre, Director Veterans Benefits North Region

Retro Awards: \$1,779,508.20

Director Site Visits/Inspections: 1

Community Involvement:

07/14/2025 - Tanya Rogers (Gainesville) attended the Governor's Challenge Site Visit (virtually) in support of improving processes for suicide prevention.

North Area Gains/Losses:

Atlanta VAMC-Jamel Harvey-New Hire 7/1/25
Lawrenceville-DeMarquez Mallard-New Hire 7/1/25
Canton-Melissa Chastain-Terminated-7/14/25

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Average Visits Per VFSO							
Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO							
Region:			North				
Month:			July-25				
A	B	C	D	E	D / E F	G	G / E H
Office Name	Veterans' Field Service Officer (VFSO) Last Name	#	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
	Number of VFSOs:	51	5,774	22	262.45	2,407	109.41
Number of Offices:	31	Average Visits/Office:		186.26	Average Claims/Office: 77.6451613		

*Total monthly office visits include: 2,196 In-person and 3,578 phone calls/emails.

Mr. Childre added to his report that 230 veterans came through the door where claims were being processed at the Rome We Care Fair. There were 147 veterans who spoke with us, and 111 claims were filed.

Ms. Sherri Whitfield, Director Veterans Benefits South Region

- On August 1st, the Warrior Alliance hosted a Veteran Benefits and Resource Expo at Savannah State University. Veterans and family members had the opportunity to meet one-on-one with representatives to file PACT Act claims and get assistance from the VA and Veteran Service Organization resources. Several GDVS VSOs were available to file claims, counsel, and give referrals. Approximately, 250 veterans attended the event. Several of our VSOs received compliments and praises their work.
- On August 12th, Joseph Hurndon from our Waynesboro office attended a “meet and greet” at the American Legion Post 120. He gave a short benefits briefing and answered questions from veterans and family members.
- On August 16th, the AMVETS Post 607 in Waycross, GA sponsored a Veterans Resource and Service Fair. VSOs from Waycross and Valdosta provided support and assisted with claims.
- Since the last board meeting, South region offices reported total lump sum payments of \$979,917.99, with the highest single payment of \$42,847.06, reported from the Milledgeville office.

- South Georgia Region Veterans Population: 239,553.

Ms. Veda Brooks, Women Veterans Coordinator (WVC)

- July 21, 2025, Ms. Brooks traveled to Warner Robins to help three veterans to a higher-level review and file initial claims.
- July 22, 2025, Ms. Brooks opened the monthly Virtual Coffee discussion. Patsey Schreiber is the first Woman Georgia State VFW commander and the first Woman Veteran of Color to hold the position, making VFW history. She participated in the Suicide Mortality Review (SMR) process with case review.
- July 23, 2025, Ms. Brooks provided home visits to veterans that cannot travel. Veda participated in a veteran meet-up in Conyers, GA.
- July 24, 2025, Ms. Brooks participated in Habitat for Humanity Veteran Workshop at the Georgia Department of Labor Covington Career Center. Ms. Brooks facilitated and participated in honoring veterans at an event hosted by Beyond the Bell in Thomaston, GA.
- July 25, 2025, Ms. Brooks traveled to Milledgeville to help five veterans to advise on their initial MST claims.
- July 26, 2025, Ms. Brooks participated in the Music, Munchies & Menopause Forum for women veterans at the Perry CBOC in Perry Ga.
- July 31, 2025, Ms. Brooks participated in an Outreach meeting at Chattahoochee Tech.
- August 4-7, 2025, Ms. Brooks participated and taught at the Suicide Prevention Specialist Training in Grovetown, GA.
- Ms. Brooks added to her report that she had been able to connect 8 veterans to mental health assistance in the past month. She also had a successful clothing event for women on Saturday. There were 78 women who all received clothing that fit them.

Current committees:

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

- Operation Ogletree Committee

Ms. Calandra Fergerson, Suicide Prevention and Outreach Coordinator

- July 15, 2025, Ms. Fergerson conducted her monthly Governor's Challenge TF Meeting.
- July 17, 2025, Ms. Fergerson distributed Suicide Prevention Materials to Macon's VFW.
- July 22, 2025, Ms. Fergerson attended the SMRC Meeting to review cases.
- July 22, 2025, Ms. Fergerson trained the community of Thomaston on the correlation between substance abuse and mental health.
- July 25, 2025, Ms. Fergerson attended an outreach event with the Army Reserves.
- August 4-7, 2025, Ms. Fergerson conducted SP Training with the staff of the Suicide Prevention Team.

Ms. Raven Holstick, Transition and Employment Coordinator

- July 15, 2025, Raven attended a Toastmaster Meeting.
- July 23, 2025, Raven participated in Vet Talk.
- July 24, 2025, Raven attended the Quarterly VSO Meeting.
- July 25, 2025, Raven went to Fort Gillem.
- July 28, 2025, Raven attended the Ga HereNow Help Launch Strategy Meeting.
- July 28, 2025, Raven had Lunch with Lance Robertson.
- July 29, 2025, Raven visited the Trinity House.
- July 31, 2025, Raven participated in the SVA Atlanta Regional Summit.
- August 01-08, Raven went to the SAA Conference.
- August 09-10, Raven participated in the Dibbins Career Fair.

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- August 11-12, Raven conducted the GDVS Leadership Institute.
- Ms. Holstick added to her report that she had toured Camp Southern Ground with Commissioner Ross. She would like to plan an outreach event for younger veterans and is looking into having a Gaming event and someone at the tour is assisting her in the organizational planning of the event.

Ms. Jarelle Thompson, Homelessness Coordinator

- July 1, 2025 – I met with VEO to learn more about their transitional housing program and find out how we could collaborate.
- July 8, 2025 - I met with T2T to discuss their new property and how to get veterans to apply to their program.
- July 17, 2025 - Participated in a Phoenix City standdown. I gave out 20 hygiene packets.
- July 28, 2025 - Met with Natson Hotel group to work out details of a collaboration to house veterans in their extended stay hotels until they are partnered with an agency long-term.
- July 29, 2025 - Completed a walkthrough of a home for a veteran that would be moving there long-term.
- August 14, 2025 - Attended a housing resource fair at Fort McPherson.
- Ms. Thompson added that she is a student in this year's Leadership Institute. She was able to assist 2 homeless veterans during the Rome We Care Fair and handed out 25 hygiene packs.

Upcoming Events:

- Statesboro Standdown - 9/18
- Rome WeCare - 8/19
- Site visit to Resilient housing

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

Accounting/Procurement/Compliance:

- Routine operations are continuing. We are continuously working to improve all accounts payable processing, to apply proper coding, accountability, organization of purchase orders, and on-time payments.

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- We are continuing to work with the SAO Shared Services to prepare the procurement and accounting data in Team Works for migration to GA@Work.
- Mark Demers and Kerry Dyer completed the Sole Source request for Unite Us for FY 2026 on April 25, 2025, it was approved by DOAS and is now being advertised for 15 days. The sole source was protested by Find help. A meeting was set up between GDVS and Find help on June 12, 2025. The protest was denied by DOAS on June 18, 2025. Find help filed an appeal on June 23, 2025, with a request for a hearing, which was scheduled by DOAS for July 30, 2025. We are still awaiting a final response from DOAS.
- Kirsten Dennis processed 5 quotes, 10 purchase orders and 10 invoices in July. She was instrumental in acquiring the new departmental jackets and obtaining socks for homeless veterans via a problem vendor. She is in the process of creating a more detailed ordering process for our field offices and appeals to avoid any miscommunication.
- 23 of 38 end of year reports have been submitted to SAO thus far. The remainder will be completed once the forms open for submission.

GA@Work/NextGen Updates

- Mark Demers attended the NextGen Q&A Session for work tags on July 21, 2025.
- Camala Ball and Mark Demers attended the NCN change network meeting on July 29, 2025, and August 19, 2025.
- Mark Demers attended the NextGen Enterprise User Acceptance Testing on August 6, 2025.
- Camala Ball participated in the NextGen Enterprise User Acceptance Testing for Budget on August 6-8, 2025.
- Mark Demers attended the NextGen NCN half time report on August 8, 2025.
- Mark Demers attended the GA@Work Monthly CFO Meeting on August 15, 2025.
- The GO-Live date for GA@Work was pushed back to April 1, 2025.

Budget/Travel:

- Camala Ball continued daily monitoring of general ledgers, purchase orders, and budget projection updates. She prepared amendments to record revenue collections in PBCS.
- Camala Ball, Mark Demers, Russell Feagin and Robert Orange met on July 30, 2025, from 0900-1500 to go over projections, identified areas of concern, gain insight on upcoming projects and expenditure by subprogram. It was a very productive meeting.

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- Kaitlin Little, Commissioner Ross, and Mark Demers attended budget meeting with OPB on August 12, 2025.
- Kaitlin Little adjusted the budget enhancement requests for staffing requests, sub-acute therapy unit, CPI, and Unite-Us based on meeting with OPB. The budget is due on September 5, 2025.

Strategic Plan/Legislation:

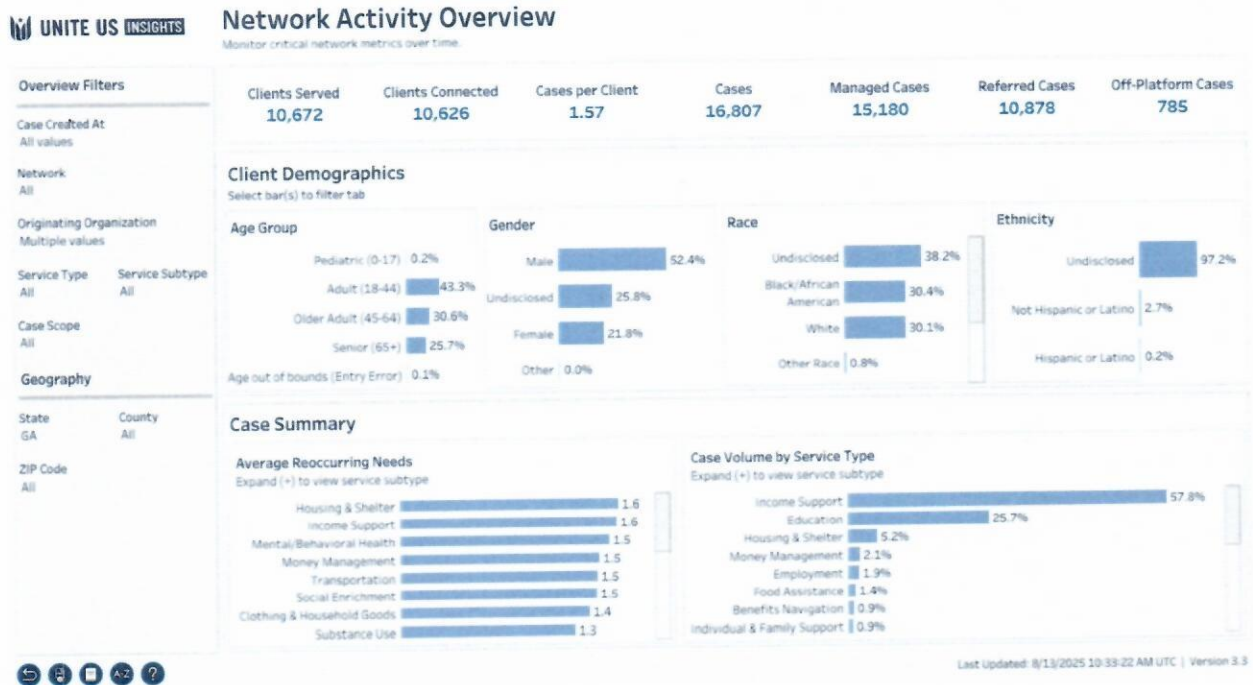
- Kaitlin Little began a review of all last year's legislative change templates and started drafting the 2025 legislative offering which will be finalized by September 2025.

Grant Program:

- SSG Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program- (\$722,747 year 3)
 - We submitted draw #7 for year 3 for \$167,956.18 on August 5, 2025.
 - SSG Fox Grant Notice of Funding Opportunity for FY 2026 was posted on May 8, 2025, with the application due to the VA on July 18, 2025. We are awaiting the VA notification of awardees which we anticipate will be in September 2025.
- Unite-Us Grant- (American Rescue Plan-Negative Impact Grant)- (\$20,047,782.70 total)
 - Grant extended for a partial year 4. Carrying over \$1,729,196.19 to partial year 4 until expended. Year 4 agreement signed on February 10, 2025, with OPB Grant Management. The remainder of the 4th year will be funded via State Appropriated funds which was approved on March 6, 2025. We are awaiting the results of the sole source request in order to proceed- the hearing was on July 30, 2025. The results are set to be released the week of August 22, 2025, at the latest.
 - Data ingestion and secure data transfer for the platform and social connector are moving forward. As of August 5, 2025, we have **281,328** veterans in the system.
 - Since the Public Resource Directory has gone live on March 22, 2024, there have been 3,442 site visits, 2,260 visitors with 609 distinct programs viewed. There were 429 AR submissions in 2024 with a 91% case resolution rate. In 2025 there have been 222 AR submissions in the first two quarters alone with an 89% case resolution rate.
 - Campaign 9 began April 4 and will run through late May 2025 and will also focus on food insecurity. We are awaiting the results in the next Quarterly Review which was delayed.
 - Campaign 10 theme is Summer is for kids. Which will focus on food insecurity of children of veterans during summer months when school free lunches are scarce. This campaign was paused due to the sole source protest.
 - The Quarterly Report for the 4th quarter was submitted via Survey Monkey on July 1, 2025. Next report will be due in October 2025.
 - We submitted all preliminary audit information to the portal and are awaiting the upcoming audit schedule from RSM auditors which is anticipated for late August 2025.
 - **We are awaiting the results of the sole source protest hearing to proceed with communications with Unite Us and to resume campaigns.**

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- Below is an activity snapshot from Unite Us Insights:



- Veterans Mental Health Services Program Grant (HB 414)-**
 - FY2025- \$1,000,000 (competitive grant)
 - The grant was awarded to 3 vendors:
 - Cohen Veterans Network- \$776,132
 - KSU-AMES-\$173,868
 - About Face USA- \$40,000
 - All funds for this grant year have been distributed.
 - The first quarterly report will be due on October 31, 2025.
 - FY2026- \$1,000,000 (competitive grant)
 - The grant opened for applicants on July 1, 2025, and will close on July 31, 2025. The selectees will be announced NLT August 29, 2025.
- VA Suicide Mortality Review Cooperative Agreement - (\$502,124.68) – ends September 30, 2025.**
 - We submitted draw #10 on August 5, 2025, for \$12,485.14.
 - The Suicide Mortality Grant subcontractors are KSU, DPHDD and Dr. Lynn Tison.
 - The third quarterly report was submitted to the VA in July 2025. The final report is due in October 2025.

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- Preliminary audit documentation was submitted to the VA as per the instructions on July 25, 2025.
- Mark Demers attended the SMRC Audit Kick Off call with the Veterans Administration Auditors on August 5, 2025.

Events/Other:

- Leadership Institute in person session was conducted at Central Office on August 11-12, 2025, the session went really. Irene Mackson and Raven Holstick did an excellent job as Leadership Institute Ambassadors. Next session will be conducted via Teams on September 19, 2025, subject: Strategic Planning.
- Mark Demers attended meeting with Emory to discuss framework/process for \$1,000,000 in pass thru funds from the Georgia Senate on July 8, 2025. Awaiting contract to be created and signed in order to execute funds.
- Mark Demers attended meeting with incoming VFW State Commander Bill Miles on July 29, 2025.
- Mark Demers attended the Georgia Mortgage Assistance webinar sponsored by Georgia Community Affairs on July 29, 2025.
- Kaitlin Little and Irene Mackson attended a Grant Management Workshop by Grant Management USA on Decatur GA on July 31-August 1, 2025.

Mr. Demers made the following adjustments to his submitted report:

- 27 of 35 reports have been completed thus far.
- There is an update to the Sole Source protest, which was denied on August 15. The contract with UniteUs was signed on August 16. The protester has the option to go to the Superior Court to file a protest.
- For the appropriated dollars, we have to wait for the approval of the fiscal reserve request, which will not take place until October 2025.
- DOAS approved the purchase order from last fiscal year on August 19.

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

State Veterans Homes

State Veterans Homes Census (Through August 8, 2025) +

Current Month	Augusta	Milledgeville	Total
Regular Patients	94	117	211
Service Connected *	35	47	82
Total Patients	129	164	293
Last Month	Augusta	Milledgeville	Total
Regular Patients	96	115	207
Service Connected *	32	45	72
Total Patients	128	160	279

+ The numbers reported to the VSB are the total numbers from July 5, 2025, through August 8, 2025.

Georgia War Veterans Nursing Home

Normal operations continue.

Georgia War Veterans Home

We opened the Russell building and began putting patients into the building for the first time since 2017.

A dedication ceremony of the Transitional Support Unit has been scheduled for September 2, 2025, at 10:00am. Governor Kemp will be the dedication speaker.

Normal operations continue.

State Veterans Cemeteries

Burial Statistics (through August 8, 2025)+

State Veterans Cemetery	Cumulative Last Month	Cumulative Current Month	Increase
Glennville	2,784	2,803	19
Milledgeville	5,883	5,924	41
Total	8,667	8,727	60

+ The report to the VSB is the total numbers from July 5, 2025 through August 8, 2025.

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery – Glennville

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

Cemetery operations continue as normal.

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Milledgeville

The cemetery expansion project adding additional in-ground interment space continues with an expected completion in the summer of this year.

Cemetery operations continue as normal.

Mr. Kerry Dyer, Deputy Commissioner, Chief Operations Officer

On Monday, July 28, 2025, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's meeting. He also contacted Scott Ducan, CEO & President of Carrollton Furniture to discuss the delivery of the balcony field office chairs and tables. Later that day he emailed 10 resumes to Ken Childre for the Canton field office vacancy.

On Tuesday, July 29, 2025, Kerry Dyer, along with Commissioner Ross, Mark Demers and ShellyAnn Simpson met with the incoming VFW State Commander, Bill Miles to discuss how we can support one another in the future. He also emailed 5 resumes to Sherri Whitfield for the Bainbridge field office vacancy. Later that day he contacted Tiffany Whisehunt, DOAS Learning Management Administrator to discuss the FY26 Sexual Harassment Prevention Training for Managers enrollments for the Department.

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Atlanta, Georgia

On Wednesday, July 30, 2025, Kerry Dyer contacted Mark Meeks, DOAS Procurement Manager to establish recurring weekly meeting for the War Home and Claims Management System Request for Proposal (RFP). He also spoke with Lisa Ross, to discuss the Director & Officer Insurance Policy invoice for the Foundation Board. Later that day he processed an Open Records Request for Retired General Robert Magnus.

On Thursday, July 31, 2025, Kerry Dyer along with Leslie Davis, State Properties Leasing Specialist, Joe Baker, VAMC field office Manager conducted a site visit to Monroe GA to meet with Brandon Watts, CEO of Operation Rally Point to discuss a potential VSO office space. He also emailed Ken Childre 6 resumes for the Athens field office vacancy.

On Friday, August 1, 2025, Kerry Dyer processed an Open Records Request for Retired General Robert Magnus. He also contacted Jeff Bell, COO for STGI regarding the original scope of work and cost proposal for the STGI War Home contract. Later that day he contacted Tonya Jarrett, War Home Clinical Director, to discuss the original documents for the War Home RFP.

On Monday, August 4, 2025, Kerry Dyer emailed 2 resumes to Linda Lavendar for her Cemetery Tech 1 vacancies. He also met virtually with Nelson Rouleau and Rob Smith, VetScore software, to discuss how this platform is able to assist active-duty members with disability claims. Later that day he picked up the individual Panic Buttons for the Central Office employees from John Booker, GBA Supervisor.

On Tuesday, August 5, 2025, Kerry Dyer requested enrollment for Jerry Lahr into the GA@WORK Basic Navigation Training through the Learning Management System. He also spoke with Lakesha Green, Bainbridge incoming Office Manager, regarding her acceptance letter. Later that day he contacted Verizon customer service manager to order 10 additional HotSpot Devices for the field offices.

On Wednesday, August 6, 2025, Kerry Dyer attended the NextGen Project Costing & Billing training. He also contacted Leslie Davis, State Properties Leasing Specialist to discuss the start date for the Bainbridge Lease. Later that day he spoke to Nikki Key, Pete Hackney Parking Deck Manager, regarding parking tickets for the Leadership Institute Candidates.

On Thursday, August 7, 2025, Kerry Dyer attended the monthly Foundation Board meeting. He also contacted Roderick Gray, Fort Stewart Office Manager, to discuss his health and welfare following the active shooter incident. Later that day he contacted Catherine Ice, DOAS Senior Category Manager, to discuss the Document Management Services Solicitation and Contract submission.

On Friday, August 8, 2025, Kerry Dyer met virtually with Mark Meeks, DOAS Procurement Manager, to discuss the Claims Management System RFP. He also attended the NextGen Halftime Report seminar. Later that day he submitted a response to DOAS, Audit Division regarding the Non-Profit Organization Contracts for 2025.

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On Monday, August 11, 2025, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's meeting. He also processed two new hire packets. Later that day he was a guest speaker at the Leadership Institute Training.

On Tuesday, August 12, 2025, Kerry Dyer spoke to Leslie Davis, State Properties Leasing Specialist, to discuss the point of contact at DHS for lease payments. He also cleared the Talent Management System of all the potential candidates for the Canton, Athens, Kings Bay, and Brunswick Field Offices. Later that day he contacted Timothy White, DOAS Risk Management Auto Business Analyst Supervisor, to discuss the two missing vehicles on the Annual Vehicle Detail Report.

On Wednesday, August 13, 2025, Kerry Dyer processed 2 legal letters to the VA and Murphy Law Firm. He also added Terms & Condition for Payment Processing and Invoice Instructions to the Claims Management RFP. Later that day he spoke with Eric Denny, Canon Copier, Senior Manager, regarding the scanner connection on the VETD copier.

Below are the Personnel Actions Kerry Dyer and Shareka Monday-Robinson processed from July 16, 2025 – August 13, 2025.

Location	Position	Status	Name	Date
Bainbridge	Office Manager	New Hire	Lakesha Green	08/18/25
Brunswick	Office Manager	New Hire	Chris Thomas	08/18/25
Canton	VFSO 1	New Hire	Todd Logan	08/18/25
Athens	VFSO 1	New Hire	Mark Warren	08/18/25

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 2,229 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	514
Approved Training Establishments	1,715
VA Education Beneficiaries for July 2025	10,798
VA Education Beneficiaries for June 2025	11,419
VA Education Beneficiaries for May 2025	21,878
VA Education Beneficiaries for April 2025	20,972
VA Education Beneficiaries for March 2025	21,867
VA Education Beneficiaries for February 2025	20,289
VA Education Beneficiaries for January 2025	17,775

* Source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration, Education Division, WEAMS, Salesforce, RCS 20-0259-260, Oracle BI CH33 Enrollment

Ms. Charlotte May, Director, External Affairs & Communications

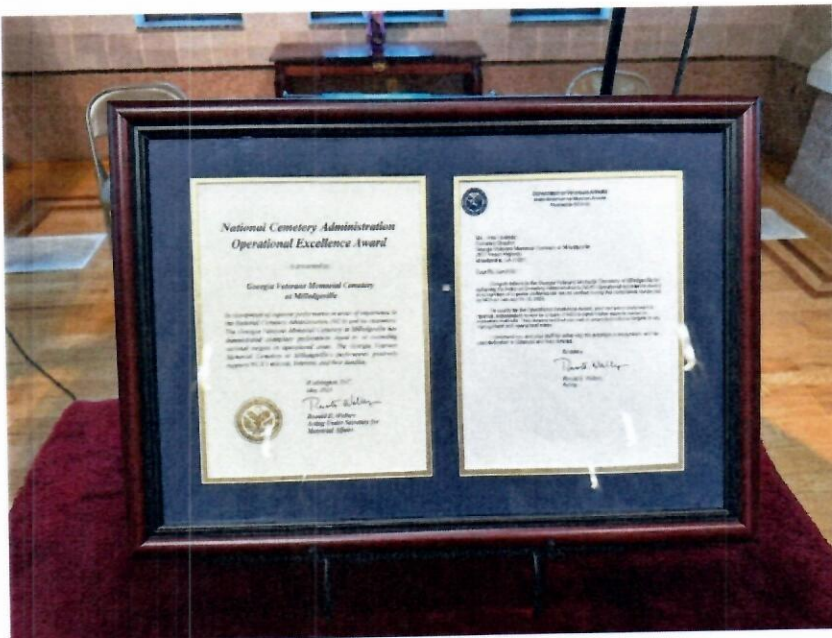
INFORMATION OUTREACH

Division Updates

1. GDVS Newsletter – The department’s monthly e-newsletter features top stories from the month at <https://veterans.georgia.gov/newsletter>. The July edition of the department newsletter celebrated the presentation of NCA Operational Excellence Awards at GVMC Glennville and GVMC Milledgeville. Additional articles highlighted the department’s Employee of the Quarter and the relocation of the Lafayette office to Rock Spring, the identification and memorial of Korean War MIA veteran Corporal Anthony Konze, a highlight on Georgia State University’s dedication to military and veteran friendliness, and a guide to correcting military record errors.
2. Press release – Georgia’s Veteran Cemeteries to be Recognized for Operational Excellence. Coordinated with GVMC Milledgeville and Glennville to distribute a media alert and news release in advance of NCA Director Earp’s visit and presentation of awards to cemetery staff.
3. Attended a Qualtrics implementation meeting on Thursday, July 24, 2025.
4. Briefed the 3rd cohort of the GDVS Leadership Institute on the EAC’s functions and duties on Monday, August 11, 2025.

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5. Veterans Mental Health Services Program Grant – began initial reviews of applicants with Commissioner Ross and CDO Mark Demers. Applications will be sent to reviewers for final determination and grantees will be announced soon.
6. USMC 250th birthday – coordinated with Commissioner Ross to develop a design for a commemorative pin to be distributed at the state's upcoming celebration in November.
7. Constituent Requests – EAC is working with Commissioner Ross to update the department's workflow with existing resources to ensure all requests are tracked and managed.
8. Benefits outreach – External Affairs and Communications continues to work with GDVS staff and partners to educate Georgia's veterans and families on the availability of benefits and resources.
 - a. Careers and Employment – continued to share information from organizations and partners hosting career readiness events across the state for veterans and their families.
 - b. Gold Star Family Day at the National Infantry Museum – shared information on an upcoming event in Columbus on September 6, 2025. The event will also feature the rededication of the Global War on Terrorism Memorial.
 - c. We CARE Veterans Fair – shared periodic updates to promote the upcoming August 19 We CARE fair in Rome at the Rome Forum.
 - d. Women Veterans – shared an invitation to the GDVS monthly virtual coffee break, hosted by Veda Brooks. These monthly chats and check-ins allow veterans to meet and discuss veterans' issues, as well as collaborating on community challenges. July's featured speaker was Patsey Schreiber, a service-connected disabled veteran and small business owner.





Mental wellness, in the palm of your hand.

The GDVS is partnering with **Here Now Help** to engage and empower veterans to better understand and improve their mental well-being through a free, accessible app.

Check in with mental health professionals 24/7, set personal goals, chat with your fellow veterans, and more!

This free tool will be available to Georgia's veterans in **August**.



Learn more at

<https://herenowhelp.com/veterans/>



OLD BUSINESS:

There was no old business to discuss.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Mr. Kopsie announced that the Cobb County Memorial Foundation will meet next Wednesday to approve the last \$1 million they need to build the Cobb County Veterans Memorial, which will be the largest veterans memorial on the East coast.

GDVS is working with the Governor's team to find a date and time to celebrate the 250th birthday of the Marine Corps. More details to follow.

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NEW BUSINESS:

The Board members met a couple of months ago to discuss the language for the admissions application into the Transitional Support Unit. They felt that a change was needed in the language so that veterans who need help can receive it, especially those with mental health issues, PTSD, and those who have been in trouble with the law. They have decided to add in the following highlighted sentence , pending approval.

- d. The Veteran applicant must not have civil or criminal charges pending nor be under a detainer from any court of law or law enforcement agency. A waiver to this restriction for non-violent offenders may be granted by the Commissioner of Veterans Service or their designated representative.

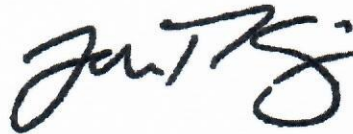
Mr. Peterson made a motion to approve the language on the veterans' home application. Mr. Hanley seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously .

Mr. Paslawski made a motion as follows: I would like to nominate Patricia Ross for another four-year term as the Commissioner of the Georgia Department of Veterans Service. Ms. Swan seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. Mr. Kopsie announced that Commissioner Ross will begin her second term in December 2025, running through 2029.

The next Board meeting was scheduled for September 24 at 12:30pm. It will be a combination virtual and in-person meeting, set up at the GDVS.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 1:23 p.m.

SIGNED:



Joshua Kopsie, Chair

ATTEST:



Steve Mendez, Secretary