

**Tuesday, December 19, 2023 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. John Kubinec, Member  
Mr. Steve Mendez, Member  
Mr. Tim Paslawski, Member  
Mr. Pete Peterson, Member  
Ms. Patricia Ross, Commissioner

**Visitors:** Mr. Russell Feagin, Executive Director, Health & Memorials Division, GDVS  
**Present** Mr. Mark Demers, Chief Development Officer, Chief Finance Officer, GDVS  
Mr. Kerry Dyer, Chief Operations Officer, GDVS  
Ms. Jehae Kim, Assistant Attorney General, Attorney General's Office  
Ms. Tonjala Moton-Williams, American Legion Assistant Service Officer  
Mr. Don Layne, VECTR Chief Operating Officer  
Ms. Amy Stevens, Georgia Military Women and Vetlanta  
Ms. Erica McCrae, Visitor  
Mr. NsWt AkhenAton ShyAAM, Founder & CEO, WT Hope Development, Inc.  
Mr. Joe Higgins, Veterans Service Foundation Board Chair  
Mr. David Goode, Veterans Service Foundation Vice Chair  
Ms. Samantha Brown-Parks, Veterans Service Foundation Board Secretary  
Mr. Wyatt Batchelor, Veterans Service Foundation Board Treasurer  
Mr. Rick White, Veterans Service Foundation Board Member  
Mr. Carlton Deese, Executive Director GWVNH, Augusta, GA  
Mr. Bobby Davis, Director, Veterans Education & Training, GDVS  
Ms. Charlotte May, Director, Public Information and External Affairs, GDVS  
Ms. Shareka Monday-Robinson, Director, Human Resources, GDVS  
Ms. Ramona Roper, Director, Training Division, GDVS  
Ms. Sherri Whitfield, Director, Veterans Benefits South Region, GDVS  
Mr. Ken Childre, Director, Veterans Benefits North Region, GDVS  
Mr. Edwin Berry, Director, Appeals Division, GDVS  
Ms. Veda Brooks, Coordinator, Women & Minority Veterans, GDVS  
Ms. Calandra Ferguson, Coordinator, Suicide Prevention & Outreach, GDVS  
Mr. William Wilson, Network Administrator, GDVS  
Ms. Camala Ball, Budget Analyst, GDVS  
Ms. Irene Mackson, Business Support Analyst, GDVS  
Ms. Julie Hammond, Executive Assistant to the Commissioner, GDVS

On Tuesday, December 19, 2023, the Veterans Service Board meeting was held in person and by video/tele-conference.

**Tuesday, December 19, 2023 at 12:30 p.m.**  
**Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting**  
**Atlanta, Georgia**

Mr. Hanley called the meeting to order at 12:29 p.m. Mr. Kopsie gave the invocation. Mr. Paslawski led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

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

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

The following reports were submitted for the Board meeting:

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

Georgia Military Women continues to have representation at multiple veteran events and contribute to supporting women veterans and assisting them in not being invisible. Significant accomplishments in the past few weeks, in addition to routine on-line social media presence and our in-person meet-ups across the state include:

1. GMW Women Veteran Leadership Retreat in Helen, GA with 18 attendees on Dec 2nd. Women experienced team building, shared successes and challenges, and discussed future opportunities including a proposal for a Gala Conference to be held in Fall 2024.
2. Attended a Women Veterans Roundtable on Dec 6th hosted by Senator Jon Ossoff focusing primarily on his efforts to support increased access to mammography equipment in rural areas.
3. Attended the invitation only Women Veterans Community Support Forum sponsored by the U.S. Department of Veteran Services in Washington, DC on December 11<sup>th</sup>.

**Ms. Belinda Boldoe, VFW**

- The Department Service Officer attended the Monthly VSO/Community Partner PACT Information and Listening meeting hosted by Lauren Ruchin, Atlanta VHA. The virtual meeting was held on November 09, 2023, at 12PM – 1PM.
  - The purpose of the meeting was to share information about the PACT Act and to discuss how our Veterans are being impacted by the PACT Act.
  - We discussed ways to ensure that our Veterans gain access to the healthcare, benefits, and resources they earned and deserve!
  - Provided Veterans' feedback about the PACT Act Outreach initiatives.

**Tuesday, December 19, 2023 at 12:30 p.m.**  
**Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting**  
**Atlanta, Georgia**

- Discussed extending the outreach initiatives to the rural areas.
- The Department Service Officer attended the Joseph Maxwell Cleland Atlanta VA Medical Center (VAMC) 2023 Veterans Day Program Classic Cars, & Motorcycles. The ceremony was held on November 10, 2023, 9AM – 12PM at 1670 Clairmont Road, Decatur, GA 30033, Parking Deck L.
  - They honored all veterans and then veterans from different eras provided a speech about their military career.
  - The VBA conducted Claims and Q&A.
  - Classic Cars and Motorcycles were on display for all to see.
- The Department Service Officer attended the TM Lynch Prayer & Outreach -Women Department Veterans Thanksgiving Mental Health Therapeutic Paint Brunch of Georgia was held on November 10, 2023, at 1AM -2PM. The brunch was held at the American Legion Post 66 located at 38 Covington Road Avondale, GA 30002.
  - Practice relaxing techniques
  - Painting therapy
  - Honoring and recognizing female veterans
- The Department Service Officer attended the Georgia Veterans Day Association, Inc, 2023 Freedom Ball - Celebrating Korean War, Korea Defense, and ROK-US Alliance held on November 11, 2023, 6PM – 10PM. The event was held at the Cobb Galleria Centre, 2 Galleria Parkway SE, Atlanta, GA 30339.
  - They honored all veterans.
  - Recognized Korean War Veterans.
- The Department Service Officer attended a special VSO/Dir meeting hosted by Tony Milons, Director and Brian Morgan, Change Management Analyst, (CMA). The virtual meeting was held on November 29, 2023, at 1PM -2-PM.
  - Discussed the VSO's issues and concerns.
  - VBA Update
  - Update of Building Renovation
- The Department Service Officer attended a VFW National Veterans Service (NVS) Eastern Region virtual meeting held on November 29, 2023, at 2PM – 3PM. We discussed the following:
  - A Message from the VFW Commander-in-Chief on Claim Sharks.
  - Final Rule for Presumptive Service Connection for Rare Respiratory Cancers Due to Exposure to Fine Particulate Matter .

**Tuesday, December 19, 2023 at 12:30 p.m.**  
**Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting**  
**Atlanta, Georgia**

- CAVC determines that veterans may file appeals on decisions that were already appealed provided they are still within the original appeal window.
- Million Veteran Program Welcomes One Millionth Veteran.
- VA to offer new exams to Veterans adversely impacted by exams from former VA neurologist.
- Department of Defense Annual Report on Suicide in the Military.

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

- Department Service officer, NEC Youngblood and members of post 333 visited the Tuskegee VAMC on November 16, 2023. Dr. Farooqi provided a presentation concerning the operations and plans for the hospital and a tour.
- Mr. Melvin Weaver, Commander, Assistant Service Officer, National American Legion Committee, National American Legion President Prospect and Members of District 1 other Legionnaires visited the Augusta VAMC on December 8, 2023. VAMC Dr. Jackson and Mr. Shulfer provided a presentation concerning the operations and plans for the hospital and CBOCs.
- Mr. Melvin Weaver, Commander, Assistant Service Officer, National American Legion Committee, National American Legion President Prospect and Members of District 1 Legionnaires met at the Augusta Georgia War Home on December 9, 2023.

**Upcoming events:**

- Monthly Virtual Post service officer training will be held for new service officers. Training topics will be on the roles and responsibilities of a post service officer. This training will continue to be held monthly as new service officers arrive.
- Service officers will meet on December 18, 2023, to discuss plans for 2024.
- January 9-11 Lake City VA Visit

**Commissioner Patricia Ross**

On Thursday, November 16, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended a special meeting of the Veterans Service Foundation Board to discuss publicizing a request for proposal for fundraising individuals/organizations. She then attended a meeting regarding the progress on the digitization of the DD214's and the need to rescope the key fields.

On Friday, November 17, 2023, Commissioner Ross took part in the GDVS Leadership Institute virtual session on the Foundation and our Outreach programs. She then met with Aniza Brown regarding the Rosie Project which is working to get military spouses into STEM fields. She ended the day meeting on OCGA 48-5-48 concerning possibly simplifying the homestead tax exemption language.

**Tuesday, December 19, 2023 at 12:30 p.m.**  
**Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting**  
**Atlanta, Georgia**

On Monday, November 20, 2023, Commissioner Ross held a Weekly Director's Meeting. She then attended a meeting with the Miner Agency regarding the TMA Social Media Ad Campaign and the target vignettes for suicide prevention. The intent is to run creative content through the holidays.

On Tuesday, November 21, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended a meeting with Jewel Pads. Also in attendance were Veda Brooks, Shelly-Ann Simpson, and Calandra Ferguson. The meeting was about female hygiene products for women veterans in shelters or hospitals. She then met with representatives from Amwell, along with Mark Demers, Shelly-Ann Simpson, and Calandra Ferguson. Amwell is a software system that provides behavioral telehealth for employees. DBHDD is using it for their workforce.

On Monday, November 27, 2023, Commissioner Ross held a Weekly Director's Meeting. She then attended a Unite Us Bi-weekly Meeting and a Fox Grant Update Meeting. Unite Us is reaching out to 500+ veterans with a high social need score in metro counties and those outside military installations via text. Charlotte May is sending a departmental email, so veterans know this is not a scam.

On Tuesday, November 28, 2023, Commissioner Ross met with FindHelp, an organization that builds and manages social service referral networks. She then attended a Bridge My Return Software Demo which matches transitioning military, veterans, their spouses, and caregivers to positions and assists with resume services.

On Wednesday, November 29, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended a meeting on the state purchasing (P-Card) Program. She then met with the Miner Agency to discuss the TMA Social Media Ad Campaign.

On Thursday, November 30, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended the special meeting of the Veterans Service Foundation Board to discuss publicizing a request for proposal for fundraising individuals/organizations. She then had a meeting to discuss the progress of the digitization of the DD214's.

On Friday, December 1, 2023, Commissioner Ross visited the Milledgeville Home, meeting with the care team and two Directors in training.

On Monday, December 4, 2023, Commissioner Ross held a Weekly Director's Meeting. She then attended the Capitol Tree Lighting Ceremony with Gov. Brian Kemp.

On Wednesday, December 6, 2023, Commissioner Ross met with Chery Ewell, the Senior Director of Development at Hire Heroes USA, a national nonprofit organization serving our nation's veterans and military spouses through resume and employment services.

On Thursday, December 7, 2023, Commissioner Ross held an Open Forum with the department. She then attended the quarterly Veterans Service Foundation Board Meeting. The Veteran Service Foundation Board determined their short-term priorities were mental/behavioral health and

**Tuesday, December 19, 2023 at 12:30 p.m.**  
**Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting**  
**Atlanta, Georgia**

homelessness, with a long-term priority of increasing the state's Veterans War Homes. Afterwards, she had a meeting regarding the digitization of the DD214's.

On Friday, December 8, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended Senator Jon Ossoff's Roundtable with Women Veterans and Leaders in Marietta.

On Monday, December 11, 2023, Commissioner Ross held a Weekly Director's Meeting. Afterwards, she was the guest speaker at the Wreaths Across America State House Ceremony at the Capitol. She then attended the Unite Us Bi-weekly Meeting and the Fox Grant Update Meeting.

On Tuesday, December 12, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended the Warrior Alliance's VSO Holiday Breakfast. She was a key speaker on the state's veteran population and the impact of the department.

On Thursday, December 14, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended the Connecting Cobb Veterans fourth quarter meeting at the VECTR in Marietta. She then co-hosted the Women in Leadership Monthly Meeting.

On Friday, December 15, 2023, Commissioner Ross took part in the GDVS Leadership Institute session on Customer Service.

On Monday, December 18, 2023, Commissioner Ross held a Weekly Director's Meeting.

Highlight: Focus on mental/behavioral health and suicide prevention through Unite Us texts for support/resources and social media content through the Miner Agency.

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

**GENERAL**

- On December 4, Ms. Simpson and Ms. Brooks participated in a discovery call with the Atlanta Hawks outreach team. The purpose of the call was to ascertain how we could work together to provide greater reach for them as their corporate sponsors look for veteran initiatives to support.
- On December 8, Ms. Simpson along with the Commissioner and Ms. Brooks participated in a round table with Senator Jon Ossoff to share his recent efforts in the senate to increase healthcare and benefits for women veterans. He listened to our concerns with the Atlanta VAMC, and we discussed what was working and what needs improvement and other ways women veterans needed assistance.
- **DD 214's and Welcome Home Letters: 565** Welcome Home Letters were mailed out in November, 2023.

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

- Ms. Carol Crawford of our Waynesboro Office will be retiring after 16 years with the department on January 31. We will miss Carol and thank her for her many years of service to the department and the veterans and their families in Waynesboro.
- Ms. Linda Williams, Administrative Assistant to the Executive Director for Field Operations and Appeals, will be retiring after 24 years with the state of Georgia. We thank her for her service to the department and know that she will be greatly missed.

## **PROJECTED POSITIONS**

- Current opening in Augusta SWVH and Brunswick.

### **Ms. Ramona Roper, Director of Training Division:**

- November 28, 2023, Mr. Steven Fay and Mr. Glenn Massey conducted in-person Hybrid training for the Appeals Division located at the VA Regional Office. The 2 classes were Appointment of a Veterans Service Organization and Dependency Indemnity Compensation. All participants passed the quiz administered after the class.
- November 29, 2023, Mr. Charles Issac and Ms. Sandra Bennett conducted Hybrid Training via MS Teams to 7 South Georgia offices. All participants passed the quiz administered after the class.
- December 4, 2023, Ms. Ramona Roper and Mr. Steven Fay cross trained with Mrs. Linda Williams on the accreditation process. The Training Division will now assume the responsibility of obtaining the accreditations for all employees, new hires, as well as terminating accreditations for individuals who are no longer employed with GDVS.
- December 11-12, 2023, Mr. Steven Fay assisted Executive Director Shelly-Ann Simpson with interviews for the Administrative Assistant position currently held by Mrs. Linda Williams. Mrs. Williams will be retiring in February 2024.

### **Upcoming Events:**

- Daily continued ongoing support to the Regional Directors and Veteran Field Service Offices
- Continuation of performing duties as VSO's
- Collaboration meetings for 2024 annual Training conference
- Future Hybrid Classes for the Second Quarter

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

- The total number of hearings conducted by the Appeals Division for November 2023 was **31**.
- As of **December 1, 2023**, the Atlanta VA Regional Office processed benefits as follows for GDVS and the Service Organizations represented by GDVS:

Types of Claims	Number of Awards	Benefits Received	(Change)
Compensation	104,888 (+ 160)	\$223,312,286.00	(+ 1,330,698)
DIC	3,909 (+43)	\$6,515,504.00	(+ 76,349)
Survivor Pension	744 (-1)	\$694,537.00	(+ 1033)
Veteran Pension	1,451 (-15)	\$1,673,466.00	(-19,945)
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>110,992 (+187)</b>	<b>\$232,195,792.00</b>	<b>(+ 1,388,135)</b>

\*The grand total of monthly compensation and pension benefits continues to increase by over a million dollars each month. The increase from the end of October 2023 through the end of November 2023 is \$1,388,135.00.

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

**Retro Awards: November 2023: \$1,106,899.00**

**Director Site Visits/Inspections: 0**

**Community Involvement:**

9 November-Ken Childre-Set-up GDVS table at Cobb County's Employee Veterans Recognition Program...100+ Veterans in attendance

11 November-Pablo Cruz (Lawrenceville), Nicole Cruz (Athens) and Ken Childre-Set-up GDVS table at Veterans Day Expo...Rainy/cold day but still had about 40 Veterans stop by the booth.

William Smith (Lafayette)

10 November-Attended Chattooga County Veteran Day Luncheon...50+ Veterans recognized.



**Tuesday, December 19, 2023 at 12:30 p.m.  
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting  
Atlanta, Georgia**

11 November-Set up GDVS table at American Legion Post 339 Veteran Day Concert. 100+ Veterans and families were in attendance.

13 November-Attended Walker County Veterans Dinner...100+ Veterans and their families in attendance

**North Area Gains/Losses:**

31 Oct-Wanda Owens (Resigned from Augusta VAMC. Moved to Virginia)

1 Dec-Joseph Hurndon (Transferred from Grovetown to Augusta VAMC)

1 Dec-Frank Mays (New Hire at Cobb Multispecialty Clinic)

Average Visits Per VFSO							
Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO							
Region:		North					
Month:		November-23					
A	B	C	D / E		G / E		
			D	E	F	G	H
					Average	Total	Average
			Total	Work	Office	Claims	Claims
	Veterans' Field		Monthly	Days	Visits	Submitted	Submitted
Office Name	Service Officer (VFSO)		Office	In	Per	To	By VFSOS
	Last Name	#	Visits	Month	Day	VA	To VA
	Number of VFSOs:	51	8,957	21	426.52	1,811	86.24
Number of Offices:	30		Average Visits/Office:		298.57	Average Claims/Office: 60.3666667	

**Ms. Sherri Whitfield, Director Veterans Benefits South Region**

- On December 16, 2023, Melissa Ingle in our Americus field office participated in the Wreaths Across America ceremony at the Andersonville National Cemetery.
- On December 15, 2023, Mrs. Stephanie Jordan at the Brunswick CBOC field office is retiring.
- South region offices reported lump sum payments since the last board meeting of \$1,153,997.97 with the highest single amount of \$311,721.60 reported by the Brunswick CBOC field office.
- South Georgia Region Veterans Population: 237,759.

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

- November 16, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in the site visit to Callaway Gardens for the SSG Fox Grant, June 24-26 Mental Health Summit.
- November 23, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in the veterans Friendsgiving in Coweta County.
- November 28, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in 988 marketing strategies meeting hosted by DBHDD.
- November 29, 2023, Ms. Brooks meet with Tongela McIntosh Moore, Tristar Outreach Director, to talk about collaborating in the rural areas of Georgia to provide mid-size outreach events that include Benefits and Pension, mental health, nursing home and memorial services as well as basic needs to those veterans.
- November 30, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in providing services at the Resource Empowerment Shelter, Riverdale. Ms. Brooks had a meeting with Dr. Tabatha Russell and her Women Empowerment program and will continue to work with her to see if her current curriculum is something transitioning women veterans could use. Ms. Brooks met with Sharjuan Major of the Steven Cohen Family Center. They are interested in working with Georgia youth at the mental health summit in June of 2024.
- December 4, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in a meeting with Esti Crumbley, and I am a Community Impact Manager with the Atlanta Hawks

**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**

- November 18, Ms. Ferguson participated in a Food Drive at a Faith Based Organization. She distributed Suicide Prevention Material: Know the Signs.
- November 19, Ms. Ferguson conducted Suicide Prevention Training for 2 Faith Based Organizations in Jonesboro & Barnesville.



**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 establishing a Purchase Card program at Georgia Department of Veterans Service. All of the paperwork has been submitted, background checks for the card holders are in progress, and training for all those involved is nearly completed. The last class is for the two Program Administrators and will be in late February 2024. We expect the program to be fully operational in March 2024.
- Mark Demers completed the Primary Governmental Accounting Series (Intro to Government Accounting I, Intro to Governmental Accounting II, and Intermediate Governmental Accounting) on November 19, 2023.
- Mark Demers completed the Purchasing Card CFO training and Purchasing Card Approver training modules on November 27, 2023.

**Tuesday, December 19, 2023 at 12:30 p.m.**  
**Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting**  
**Atlanta, Georgia**

- Irene Mackson completed all but one Purchasing Card training module for the P-Card Administrator role.
- On December 7, 2023, GTA reported to the State Accounting Office (SAO) that they experienced an outage related to print/ mail services, as Xerox is unable to print files sent by agencies. This affected the printing of paper checks for Accounts Payable and Payroll for new employees. On December 11, 2023, GTA/SAO found a solution for the payroll for new employees' issues. Shareka Monday-Robinson adjusted the prenotification function in the payroll system to allow the first employee paycheck to be direct deposited. As of December 12, 2023, Xerox is still in the process of resolving the network issues and resuming print operations. Currently, the networking issue is being remediated, testing and printing will begin as soon as the issue is resolved. (As of the date of the Board meeting, this issue was resolved, and all pending checks have been mailed out).

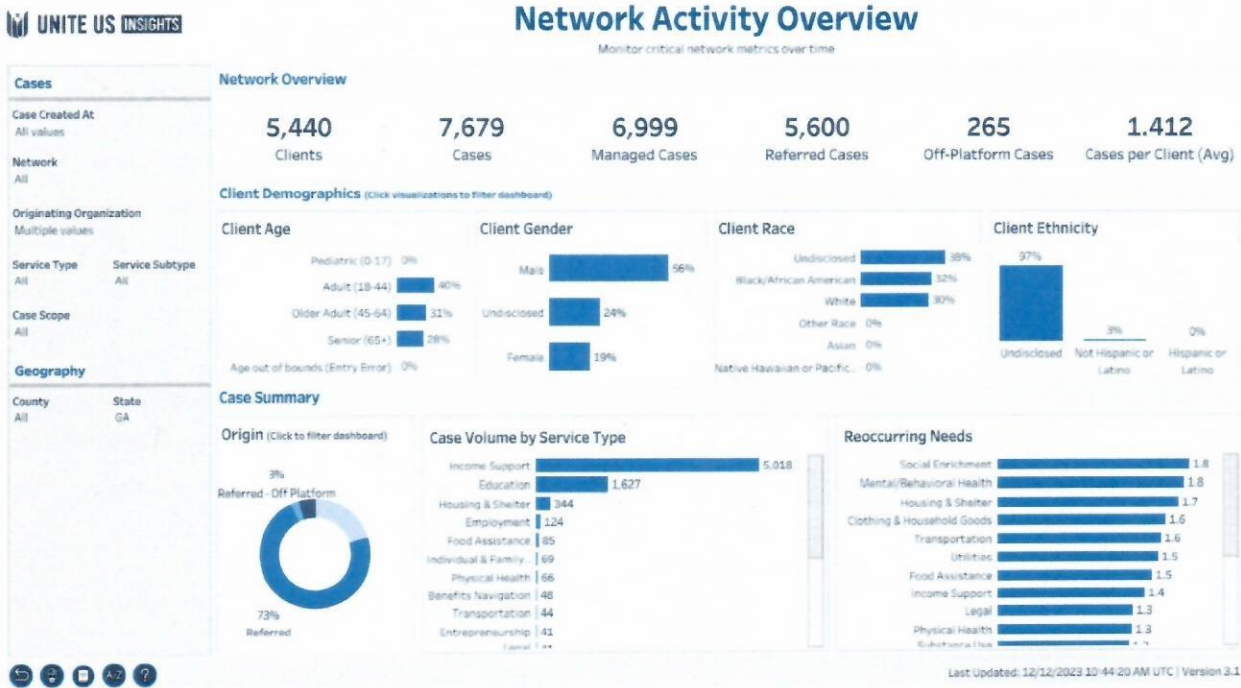
**Budget:**

- We are looking forward to the start of the 2024 Session of the Georgia General Assembly on or about January 8, 2024, as we prepare to present our AFY 2024 and FY 2025 budget request.

**Grant Program:**

- SSG Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program- (\$747,464)
  - We are in partnership with Kennesaw State University AMES Center to implement the grant. The latest data was transmitted to the VA on December 6, 2023.
  - Calandra Ferguson provided the outreach and training data reports, and we transmitted them to the VA on December 6, 2023.
  - Calandra Ferguson or Veda Brooks will report all the outreach and training events regarding Suicide Prevention under the Fox Grant.
  - Irene Mackson attended the Fox Grant In-Person Technical Assistance (TA) / Post Award Conference (PAC) Event for December 4-7, 2023, in Orlando, Florida.
  - The end of year FER/FFR reports are due February 15, 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 December 7, 2023, we have **266,501** veterans in the system. We have submitted **956** community partners and **313** healthcare partners for inclusion to the platform since August 2022.
  - The next quarterly reporting is due January 2024.
  - Below is an activity snapshot from Unite Us Insights:

**Tuesday, December 19, 2023 at 12:30 p.m.  
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting  
Atlanta, Georgia**



- **Veterans Mental Health Services Program Grant (HB 414)**- Georgia Governor Brian Kemp signed HB 414 on April 25, 2023, with the support of state legislators and the Georgia Department of Veterans Service (GDVS). The bill creates the Veterans Mental Health Services Program, which is a grant program to improve access to mental health services for military service members, veterans, and their families in the state of Georgia. The grant program is funded through state appropriations in Fiscal Year 2023. The total grant funding is \$750,000 for FY2023 (executed by no later than 30 June 2023). The grant was awarded to two vendors:
  - Aspire (Cohen Veterans Network) for \$650,000.
  - Emory Healthcare for \$100,000.
- The money was allocated to both awardees, and they have received the funds.
- The first quarterly reports received on October 23, 2023, and both agencies are in compliance with grant guidelines.

**Veterans Service Foundation:**

- The Veterans Service Foundation Board held a special meeting on November 30, 2023, to discuss hiring a fundraising consultant. We are going to use Survey Monkey to select a consultant. The tentative go live date will be January 2, 2024.
- The next special board meeting will be on February 29, 2024, for fundraising.

**Tuesday, December 19, 2023 at 12:30 p.m.  
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting  
Atlanta, Georgia**

- The Veterans Service Foundation Board held its quarterly meeting on December 7, 2023, and discussed immediate and long-term priorities.
  - Immediate Priorities-(1) Mental Health and (2) Veterans Homelessness.
  - Long-term Priorities- Establishment of 4 new War Veterans Homes to be in line with surrounding states.
  
- The next quarterly board meeting will be on March 7, 2024.

**Events:**

- Participated in Leadership Institute’s visit to the GA Veterans War Home and Cemetery in Milledgeville on October 20, 2023. The presentations and tours by Russell, Linda and Ernie were outstanding.
- The team attended the 2023 Veteran’s Day Ceremony at the Capital on November 6, 2023.
- The team attended the 2023 Georgia Capital Tree Lighting Ceremony on December 4, 2023, at 1100.
- Attended the NASACT Webinar: The Need for Professional Skepticism and its Impact on Fraud on December 6, 2023, at 1400.

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

**State Veterans Homes**

**State Veterans Homes Census (Through December 8, 2023) +**

Current Month	Augusta	Milledgeville	Total
<b>Regular Patients</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>199</b>
<b>Service Connected *</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Total Patients</b>	<b>122</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>267</b>
<b>Last Month</b>			
<b>Regular Patients</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>202</b>
<b>Service Connected *</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>63</b>
<b>Total Patients</b>	<b>121</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>265</b>

**Tuesday, December 19, 2023 at 12:30 p.m.  
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting  
Atlanta, Georgia**

\* 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 November 4, 2023, through December 8, 2023.

Construction projects continue at the Georgia War Veterans Home's campus. New projects, including paving and renovations to the Wood Building have started.

The Homes are COVID-19 free.

### **State Veterans Cemeteries**

**Burial Statistics (through December 8, 2023)+**

<b>State Veterans Cemetery</b>	<b>Cumulative Last Month</b>	<b>Cumulative Current Month</b>	<b>Increase</b>
<b>Glennville</b>	<b>2,382</b>	<b>2,416</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Milledgeville</b>	<b>5,262</b>	<b>5,304</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,644</b>	<b>7,720</b>	<b>76</b>

+ The report to the VSB is the total numbers from November 3, 2023, through December 8, 2023.

### **Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery – Glennville**

Will host a Wreaths Across America ceremony on December 16, 2023, starting at 12:00 pm. Everyone is invited to attend. Wreaths are available for all interment sites.

### **Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Milledgeville**

Construction on Phase 4a expansion started this week.

Will host a Wreaths Across America ceremony on December 16, 2023. Wreaths are available for all interment sites.

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

On Friday, November 17, 2023, Kerry Dyer along with Shelly-Ann Simpson attended the coordination meeting for the Veterans Affairs, Atlanta Hawks, and Georgia Power Career Fair.

**Tuesday, December 19, 2023 at 12:30 p.m.**  
**Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting**  
**Atlanta, Georgia**

On Monday, November 20, 2023, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's Meeting. Later that day he took the P-Card Purchasing Principles (TGM100W) course and test.

On Tuesday, November 21, 2023, Kerry Dyer along with Commissioner Ross, Mark Demers, and Irene Mackson attended the P-Card class. Later that day he processed a resignation packet from the Appeals Division and the Brunswick CBOC.

On Monday, November 27, 2023, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's Meeting. Later that day he attended the UniteUs and Fox Grant meetings virtually. He also processed two retirement packets for January 2024.

On Tuesday, November 28, 2023, Kerry Dyer along with Leslie Davis, State Properties Leasing Specialist, conducted a site visit at Johns Creek for a future VSO Field Office. He also took the P- Card Reconciliation Course and Test.

On Wednesday, November 29, 2023, Kerry Dyer submitted a Space Action Form for a New Lease Request, Field Office Organizational Chart and a Space Utilization Questionnaire to State Properties Commission for a Field Office in Johns Creek.

On Thursday, November 30, 2023, Kerry Dyer along with Commissioner Ross, Jerry Lahr and Barbara Beedles, attended a meeting with Access Corporation to discuss the DD214 digitalization Project. Later that day he spoke with Jenelle Moore, Assistant Director Health & Memorials Division, regarding the submission of the Annual Immigration Reporting Requirements for 2023.

On Friday, December 1, 2023, Kerry Dyer spoke with William Moore, Employment Coordinator for the VA, regarding the partnership with the Atlanta Hawks and GDVS for a career fair in February of 2024. He also updated the monthly Alpha Roster and distributed it to the Senior Leadership. Later that day he submitted the monthly Fleet Report to DOAS, Fleet Management.

On Monday, December 4, 2023, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's Meeting. Later that day he attended the Capitol Tree Lighting Ceremony along with Commissioner Ross, Julie Hammond, Mark Demers and Shelly-Ann Simpson. He spoke with Leslie Davis, Leasing Specialist 1, regarding the submission of the Space Utilization Program Report for the Johns Creek Field Office.

On Tuesday December 5, 2023, Kerry Dyer along with Ken Childre met virtually with Brandon Solie, Assistant Director, Career Services & Recruitment at University of Georgia, regarding an internship opportunity for one of his students. He also spoke with Marlon Benjamin, GBA Project Manager, regarding a quote for the carpet replacement and painting of the Central Office. Later that day he locked in a date with CWC furnishing to have the cubicles in the IT and PID areas replaced.

On Wednesday, December 6, 2023, Kerry Dyer met with John McCord, GBA Project Director, to discuss the Georgia Veteran Hall of Fame inductee plaques transfer to the Capitol. He also spoke with Bobby



**Tuesday, December 19, 2023 at 12:30 p.m.**  
**Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting**  
**Atlanta, Georgia**

Arrington, DOAS, Business Analysis III, regarding a vehicle donation to the GWVH. He also emailed four Cemetery Tech 1 candidates to Ernie Cowart, Glennville Cemetery Director.

On Thursday, December 7, 2023, Kerry Dyer attended the quarterly Veterans Service Foundation Board meeting. Later that day along with Commissioner Ross and Jerry Lahr, he met with Natasha Simoes, Access Project Manager, to discuss the DD214 digitalization process.

On Friday, December 8, 2023, Kerry Dyer processed a resignation packet for the Augusta, GWVNH. Later that day along with John McCord, GBA Project Director, he conducted a site visit at the Capitol to discuss the Georgia Veteran Hall of Fame inductee plaques.

On Monday, December 11, 2023, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's meeting. Later that day along with Commissioner Ross and Julie Hammond he attended the Wreaths Across America Ceremony at the Capitol.

On Tuesday, December 12, 2023, Kerry Dyer attended the Veterans Connection Christmas Luncheon at Cobb County Senior Services in Marietta.

Below are the Personnel Actions Kerry Dyer and Shareka Monday-Robinson processed from November 16, 2023- December 16, 2023.

Location	Position	Status	Name	Date
Appeals Division	VCAO 2	Resign	Renee Dubois	11/30/23
Milledgeville	Cemetery Tech 1	New Hire	Jonathon Massey	12/01/23
Glennville	Cemetery Tech 2	Resign	Wallace Brannen	12/01/23
Cobb Clinic	Office Mgr (VFSO2)	New Hire	Frank Mays	12/01/23
Augusta-GWVNH	VFSO 1	Resign	Germani McNeil	12/11/23
Brunswick CBOC	Office Mgr (VFSO2)	Resign	Stephanie Jordan	12/15/23

On the horizon: Open a Veterans Field Service Office in the Perry Clinic in May/June 2024 timeframe.

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

- The approval and compliance surveys of educational institutions, training establishments and training programs approved for veterans training is continuing with no significant problems in any area being noted.
- Approval of new veteran's On-The-Job training sites (OJT) continues to increase. As of this date the State Approving Agency (SAA) has granted approval to 1,826 educational institutions and training

**Tuesday, December 19, 2023 at 12:30 p.m.**  
**Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting**  
**Atlanta, Georgia**

establishments where Georgia veterans may attend school or job training and utilize their GI Bill® educational benefits.

- SAA received a satisfactory rating by VA for our FY23 review.
- SAA received a \$29,499.00 COLA increase to our FY24 Cooperative Agreement. Which brings our operating budget for FY24 to \$951,336.00.

Item *	Number
Approved Educational Institutions	396
Approved Training Establishments	1,430
Veteran Students Enrolled in Educational Institutions	21,173

\* Source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration, Education Division, Nov. 2023.

**Ms. Charlotte May, Director, External Affairs & Communications**

**INFORMATION OUTREACH**

**Division Updates**

1. GDVS Newsletter – PID published a monthly newsletter in November. The e-newsletter features top stories from the month and encourages readers to get the full issue at <https://veterans.georgia.gov/newsletter>. The November edition highlighted Veterans Day celebrations in Georgia , including the ceremony in the State Capitol and message from Commissioner Ross, as well as updating veterans on the availability of services like the National Cemetery Administration’s addition of 5 million veterans to the Veterans Legacy Memorial. The newsletter also reminded veterans and families of the upcoming Wreaths Across America ceremonies in Glennville and Milledgeville and updated them on the department’s participation in a holiday tree festival with a suicide prevention tree.
2. Wreaths Across America – worked with GDVS cemetery directors on programs for their annual wreath ceremonies. External Affairs updated designs and information for the events, then provided final products in a timely manner. Additionally, we have focused on raising awareness and support for the wreaths programs across social media for donations and to spread awareness of the upcoming ceremonies.

**Tuesday, December 19, 2023 at 12:30 p.m.**  
**Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting**  
**Atlanta, Georgia**

3. Suicide Prevention and Awareness Outreach materials – worked collaboratively with Executive Director Simpson, Chief Development Officer Demers, and Suicide Prevention and Outreach Coordinator Ferguson to develop a new line of printed materials targeted on spreading awareness of mental and behavioral health resources for veterans in crisis.

Materials include a retouched version of the resource guide originally produced in October, a series of trading cards also featuring information on the Governor’s Challenge, and half-page flyers to teach how to recognize signs of suicidal thought. These materials will be used at outreach events and distributed to Governor’s Challenge partners across the state.

4. Holiday Loneliness Campaigns –
  - a. Unite Us – working collaboratively on a text and email campaign to raise awareness of resources available to veterans with high social needs scores surrounding military bases and high veteran population areas. The campaign went live on 12/11/23 in a two-pronged approach. Veterans received an email from GDVS and a text message from Unite Us offering assistance. So far, this is the most successful proactive outreach campaign with Unite Us. 39 veterans have requested assistance, and a second outreach attempt will launch on 12/18/23.
  - b. Miner Agency – using Fox Grant funds after the Fox Forum in October, the GDVS is launching a holiday campaign from 12/15/23 to 1/15/24 targeting veterans who may need mental health support during the holiday season. The Miner Agency has developed 6 vignettes or slides for use on Facebook and other media to spread awareness of help to veterans, active duty service members, and their families.

**Public Information Division Contacts** *(Since December 9, 2022)*

- Replies to VA eBenefits Messages = 633
- Replies to General Questions = approximately 1,005
- Individual Request for the State Certificate of Honor = approximately 180

**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 30,030  
(Honors Ceremonies and Central Office Mail Outs)

DoD Vietnam Veteran Lapel Pins presented via GDVS – An estimated 24,010

Honors Ceremonies supported/coordinated by GDVS – 359

Defense Department's Vietnam Veteran Surviving Spouse CoH – 291

**OLD BUSINESS:**

There was no old business to discuss.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

Mr. Peterson announced that he took part in a church event giving away hams and visited an elderly veteran who had been scammed out of some of his savings. We need to talk to these elderly veterans and see what is going on in their lives so that we can help them avoid this type of scenario, which is rampant right now.

Mr. White announced that the Georgia Military Hall of Fame plaques are being relocated from the Floyd building to the Capitol. A formal dedication and unveiling of the 2023 Class should take place early next year.

Mr. Mendez announced that Brunswick is building a Tiny Village and it is in the final stages. The CEO from Nine Line Apparel sponsored the project. Mr. Mendez will visit the site and give more details in a future meeting.

Wreaths Across America took place on Dec. 16. Both cemeteries had ceremonies and plenty of wreaths and volunteers.

**NEW BUSINESS:**

Mr. Hanley gave a brief on the duties and responsibilities of the Board members and officers (see attached). The main objective of the Board is to appoint a Commissioner for GDVS. In the 67 years during the department's existence, there have been 3 Commissioners. There have also been 3 Commissioners for the past 6-7 years. No Board member is to give a directive to any GDVS employee, but should instead go to the Commissioner with any request they have.

Mr. Kubinec, Mr. Kopsie, Ms. Swan and Mr. Mendez all thanked Mr. Hanley for his leadership as Board Chair over the last two years. Then elections were held to fill the positions of Chair, Vice-Chair and Secretary for 2024.

**Tuesday, December 19, 2023 at 12:30 p.m.**  
**Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting**  
**Atlanta, Georgia**

Mr. Hanley made a motion to open the floor for the election of officers and that newly elected board members will begin their term at the next regularly scheduled board meeting. Mr. Kopsie seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Kopsie made a motion that Mr. Paslawski serve as Secretary of the Board. Ms. Swan seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Swan made a motion that Mr. Kopsie serve as Vice-Chair of the Board. Mr. Paslawski seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Paslawski made a motion that Ms. Swan serve as Chair of the Board. Mr. Kubinec seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

The January 24 Board meeting was scheduled. It will be a combination virtual and in-person meeting, set up at the GDVS.

Ms. Swan made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Peterson seconded the motion, which passed. The meeting was adjourned at approximately 1:12 p.m.

SIGNED:



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Shawn Hanley, Chair

ATTEST:



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Joshua Kopsie, Secretary

# Veteran Service Board Responsibilities

The Veteran Service Board (VSB) is covered under GA Code § 38-4. The VSB is primarily advisory in nature. Board members are above all leaders, facilitators, and communicators on veterans' issues.

While not codified in law, the basic responsibilities of board members are:

- **Preparing for board meetings.** Setting the agenda, determining meeting dates, etc.
- **Engaging with the Commissioner.** The board acts as a bridge between the veterans within Georgia and the Commissioner ensuring proper communication.
- **Facilitating Internal Communication.** Board members work together to bring out the best value out of each board member, making sure everyone is heard.
- **Three elected positions:** Chair, Vice-Chair, and Secretary.
  - **Chair:** Calls the meeting to order, determines if a quorum is present, announces when the board arrives at a decision, helps steer the meeting and keep discussions to the point, and enforces rules when needed.
  - **Vice-Chair:** Fills in for the Chair if they are not available.
  - **Secretary:** Ensures the accuracy of the meeting minutes.