

Thursday, December 19, 2024 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. Pete Peterson, Member
 Ms. Takosha Swan, Member
 Ms. Patricia Ross, Commissioner

Visitors Mr. Mark Demers, Chief Development Officer, Chief Finance Officer, GDVS
Present: Mr. Russell Feagin, Executive Director, Health & Memorials Division, GDVS
 Mr. Kerry Dyer, Chief Operations Officer, GDVS
 Mr. Lou Zayas, Jr. Vice Commander, Military Order of the Purple Heart
 Ms. Samantha Brown-Parks, Veterans Service Foundation Board
 Ms. Vivian Greentree, Veterans Service Foundation Board
 Mr. Andy Hilmes, Veterans Service Foundation Board
 Ms. Meredith Magnus, Veterans Service Foundation Board
 Mr. John Paul Burkhalter, Visitor
 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. 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. Calandra Ferguson, Coordinator, Suicide Prevention & Outreach, GDVS
 Ms. Jarelle Thompson, Homeless Coordinator, GDVS
 Ms. Camala Ball, Budget Analyst, GDVS
 Ms. Irene Mackson, Business Support Analyst, GDVS
 Ms. Julie Hammond, Executive Assistant to the Commissioner, GDVS

On Thursday, December 19, 2024, the Veterans Service Board meeting was held in person and by video/tele-conference.

Mr. Kopsie called the meeting to order at 12:32 p.m. Ms. Thompson gave the invocation. Mr. Kopsie led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

Mr. Peterson 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. Ms. Swan seconded the motion. There were no objections. The motion passed.

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The following reports were submitted for the Board meeting:

Ms. Belinda Boldoe, VFW

- The Department Service Officer attended the Monthly VSO/Community Partner PACT Information and Listening virtual meeting hosted by Lauren Ruchin, Atlanta VHA. The virtual meeting was held on November 14, 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 upcoming Outreach events in the communities.
- The Department Service Officer attended a Georgia Department of Veteran Service (GDVS) Leadership Institute virtual training, session held on November 22, 2024, at 8AM – 9AM. The topic was the Georgia Veterans Service Foundation's mission and purpose.
- The Department Service Officer accompanied the VFW Commander-in-Chief to a meet and greet meeting with the Atlanta Regional Office, Executive Director, Tony Milons, and his Staff held on December 04, 2024, from 10AM – 12PM, at 1700 Clairmont Road, Decatur, GA 30033.
 - The VFW CIC received a briefing from the Atlanta Regional Office Staff:
 - Directors Update
 - Veteran Service Center Manager
 - Claims
 - PACT Act
 - Virtual Claims Clinic
 - Vet Talk
 - Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E)
 - Support Service Division
- The Department Service Officer attended a monthly VSO VSC Vet Talk hosted by Brian Starke, AVSCM held on December 05, 2024, at 10AM – 11AM, 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 for today is the Digestive System.

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

- December 5-8, 2024, The Commander, and his delegation visited the Augusta VA Medical Center and Georgia War Veterans Nursing Home in Augusta, Georgia. Dr. Jackson and his Executive Leadership Team presented a briefing on Hurricane Helene, Women's Health, Athens Community-Based Outpatient Clinic, Mental Health, Step Down Unit, Urgent Care (Athens, Uptown) Ambulance Services, Pharmacy Upgrades, Pain Management Program, Chief of Staff Report, Nursing Report, Infrastructure, Renovation and Facility Planning, Medical Research, and a tour of CLC Unit 1E by Richard McKnight, MD Chief of Geriatrics.
- December 14, 2024, at 11:00 am - 12:00 pm: Wreaths Across America

Upcoming events:

- January 9, 2025 at 1 pm–4 pm: The Commander and his delegation will visit Lake City VA Medical Center, 619 South Marion Avenue, Lake City, Florida 30225.
- January 15, 2025 - January 19, 2025: National Commander's Visit.
- January 16, 2025 at 10:00 am: The Commander, National Commander, and delegation will visit Atlanta VA Healthcare System, 1670 Clairmont Road, Decatur, Georgia 30033.
- January 28, 2025 at 7:00 pm-8:30 pm: National Training Tuesdays.
- Monthly Virtual Post Service Officer training will be held for new service officers. Training topics are on roles and responsibilities as a post service officer. This training will continue to be held monthly as new service officers arrive.

Mr. Lou Zayas, Military Order of the Purple Heart

Hapeville became a Purple Heart city on Dec. 3, Alma became a Purple Heart city on Dec. 10 and Macon County became a Purple Heart county on Dec. 17.

Commissioner Patricia Ross

On Wednesday, November 20, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended the Senate Study Committee on Veterans' Mental Health and Housing meeting, which aimed to provide recommendations for bolstering resources and support structures for veterans. She then attended the Veterans Service Board Meeting.

On Thursday, November 21, 2024, Commissioner Ross met with the Veterans Service Board Chair Josh Kopsie. She then met with Shelly-Ann Simpson and Veda Brooks regarding the Women Veteran of the Year application and recommendation process. She later had a phone meeting with Roy Turner concerning veteran homelessness.

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On Friday, November 22, 2024, Commissioner Ross took part in the Leadership Institute session that focused on the Georgia Veterans Service Foundation and the GDVS Outreach Department. She then attended the Georgia DPH/Veteran Collaboration Follow-Up meeting about vital death records needed for suicide mortality reviews.

On Monday, November 25, 2024, Commissioner Ross met with PLAD Homes to discuss their different models of small modular homes and other states who have used their products to provide housing for veterans.

On Monday, December 2, 2024, Commissioner Ross held a Director's Meeting. She also had meetings regarding the SSG Fox Grant and Unite Us.

On Tuesday, December 3, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended the suicide mortality review committee (SMRC) weekly meeting. She also attended the Atlanta Vietnam Veterans Business Association (AVVBA) Meeting in Dunwoody, where she received her Honorary Membership Certificate and spoke to the Board. She also toured the new Vietnam Veteran memorial in Dunwoody. She then spent the afternoon celebrating Mrs. Verna "Bunny" Farmer's 100th birthday. She presented a commendation from the Governor for her service in the Women's Army Corps during WWII.

On Wednesday, December 4, 2024, Commissioner Ross spent the first part of the day at the Georgia Joint Defense Commission Meeting at the Georgia Tech Research Institute. She spent the afternoon and evening at the Vetlanta Q4 Summit at the Home Depot Headquarters in Atlanta meeting with the Assistant Secretary for the Department of Labor – Veterans Employment and Training (DOL-VETS), the Honorable James Rodriguez.

On Thursday, December 5, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended the "Empower Her Health Fair" presented by the Women Veterans Health Program. She then traveled to Dublin, GA to meet with the Carl Vinson VAMC leadership to identify POCs and processes for the Georgia War Veterans home in Milledgeville.

On Friday, December 6, 2024, Commissioner Ross met with Lily Snyder, Director of the Veterans Education and Training Division. She then attended the Veterans Service Foundation Board meeting. After that, she was the featured speaker at the DAR Wreaths Across America Ceremony at the Capitol. Later in the day, she met with Russell Feagin, Bob Houghton and Dan Holtz (AVVBA) to discuss the veterans' homes.

On Sunday, December 8, 2024 through Tuesday, December 10, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended the 34th Biennial Institute for Georgia Legislators in Athens.

On Tuesday, December 10, 2024, Commissioner Ross, Ernie Cowart, Russell Feagin, and Kerry Dyer met with the AG's Office regarding the Glennville Cemetery. She additionally met with Foundation Board member, Destry Rogers, while in Athens.

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On Wednesday, December 11, 2024, Commissioner Ross met with Veterans Service Board Chair Josh Kopsie. She then had a meeting with members of the Alabama VA. Later she met with Bob Hogan from Bridge My Return.

On Thursday, December 12, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended the Returning Veterans Task Force Meeting. Both our Chairs for the House and Senate Committees were present at the meeting. She then attended the Monthly VSO/Community Partner PACT Act Information & Listening Session, the SSG Fox Grant meeting and the Suicide Mortality Review meeting.

On Friday, December 13, 2024, Commissioner Ross took part in the Leadership Institute session that focused on Overcoming Obstacles. She then had a Military Family Childcare/DECAL meeting. She later met with Kim Scofi from United Military Care.

On Monday, December 16, 2024, Commissioner Ross did her annual VA TMS Training. She then held a Director's Meeting. In the afternoon, she took part in the Unite Us Bi-weekly meeting.

On Tuesday, December 17, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended the SMRC Standing Weekly Meeting. She also met with Matt Caprari of Onward Ops to discuss potential opportunities to expand the Onward Ops program into Georgia and to see how GDVS could work together with them.

On Wednesday, December 18, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended the Unite Us/GDVS Quarter 3 meeting. She also attended the VA/SAMHSA Suicide Mortality Review Site Visit.

Commissioner Ross spoke about the upcoming Legislative Session, and our priority being funding for the Homes. This is a flat budget year, but we are very hopeful for the upcoming session.

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

GENERAL

- The field operations and appeals of the Georgia Department of Veterans Service spent the last year servicing veterans and their families. We participated in several event across the state to include Resource Fairs, stand-downs and provide briefings on benefits and classes on suicide prevention as evidenced by our reports throughout the year. We look forward to continuing the mission of the department to serve Georgia's veterans Service members and their families.
- **DD 214's and Welcome Home Letters: 380** Welcome Home Letters were mailed out in November 2024.

Projected Positions: Two openings in Appeals

Ms. Ramona Roper, Director of Training Division:

- November 25, 2024, Mr. Charles Isaac handed out turkeys to families in his community with the 100 Black Men of Liberty County. There were over 500 turkeys donated to needy families.
- November 27, 2024, Ms. Sandra Bennett met with and briefed Ms. Thelma Tyler of the Columbus VFW. The meeting discussed benefits for veterans and dependents.

Upcoming Events:

- Daily continued ongoing support to the Regional Directors and Veteran Field Service Offices
- Continuation of performing duties as VSO's
- Mentoring classes will resume

Mr. Edwin Berry, Director of Appeals Division

- The total number of hearings conducted by the Appeals Division for **November 2024** was **61**. Retroactive payments of **\$323,902.00** were paid in November to the veterans or family members based on positive outcomes from previous hearings that the Appeals team assisted with.
- As of **November 30, 2024**, the Atlanta VA Regional Office processed benefits as follows for GDVS and the Service Organizations represented by GDVS during the month of November 2024:

Types of Claims	Number of Awards	Benefits paid
Compensation	109,288	\$249,890,238
DIC	4,334	\$7,443,603
Survivor Pension	683	\$670,645
<u>Veteran Pension</u>	<u>1,308</u>	<u>\$1,531,693</u>
<u>Grand Total</u>	<u>115,613</u>	<u>\$259,536,179</u>

YTD through 11/30/2024 Total Compensation, Pension and other benefits paid: **\$2,764,468,860** for the veterans that we represent who receive VA benefits.

Mr. Kenneth Childre, Director Veterans Benefits North Region

Retro Awards: \$2,206,741.14

Of Note: 2 Veterans received retroactive pay in excess of \$100k.

G3783-\$100,956.55 (Pablo Cruz-Oakwood)

M7577-\$115,987.69 (Pablo Cruz-Oakwood)

Director Site Visits/Inspections: 1

Canton-Discussed Access to Office/Bathroom areas managed by DDS

Community Involvement:

11/1 & 11/2 2024-Kyle Hungarter, Jessica Hardin, Kareem Reddick, Rita Barnhart, Nick Gavalas, Steven Hungarter, Kristi Jones, Joe Baker, Herman Hammonds, Vanessa Wilson, Shayla Harris, Dawn Donaldson, Christina Williams, Nicole Cruz, Danny Moreno, Bill Smith, Sean Seader, Maxine Brock, Alex RiveraJusino and Ken Childre

Participated in the Cobb County We CARE Fair-Sat down with 188 Veterans/Family members and assisted them with completing 120 claims.

11/4/2024-Randy Gray (Ft McPherson)

Spoke with 14 Veterans at the Atlanta Vet Center. Answered questions about state and Federal benefits.

11/6/2024-Tanya Rogers (Gainesville)

Completed the AMES Lethal Means Course. This class is one of the ones offered by Kennesaw State University towards suicide awareness.

11/8/2024-Maxine Brock (Conyers)

Participated in the Veterans Day Event at the American Legion post in Conyers.

11/9/2024-Terrance Leggon (Conyers)

Participated in the Veterans Day Event in Baxley

11/9/2024-Pablo Cruz (Oakwood) & Nicole Cruz (Lawrenceville)

Attended the Veterans Day event in Midtown Atlanta. Met with 70+ Veteran and passed out information about Federal and State benefits.

11/11/2024-Pablo Cruz (Oakwood)

Participated in the Veterans Day Ceremony in Sugar Hill, GA at the Sugar Hill Veteran's memorial.

11/11/2024-Barry Hunter (Rome)

Participated in the Veterans Day Ceremony at Manor Lake in Hiram. 15 Veterans in attendance with the oldest being 99 years young. Barry spoke on the history of Veterans Day and how the VA had

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changed over the years. 12 of the attendees were in receipt of Pension with/Aid & Attendance to assist with their living costs.

11/12/2024-Rico Johnson (Gainesville)

Visited the University of North Georgia-Dahlonega. Answered VA related questions for the students.

11/13/2024-Kyle Hungarter & Jessica Hardin (Marietta)

Spoke to Veterans at the Senior Center in Cobb County. Discussed health care, claims, burial and state benefits to 10 in attendance.

11/14/2024-Steven Hungarter & Kristi Jones (Cartersville)

Participated in a VFW Veterans Day Ceremony. Talked with 25 Veterans and scheduled 2 appointments for follow-up visits.

11/14/2024-Christine Collins (Blairsville)

Attended the Keys to Progress ceremony. They presented a vehicle to one of Chris' Veterans that lives in the Blue Ridge. The Veteran received a 2022 Toyota Camry with less than 55k miles, 6 months' worth of insurance from Progressive, an extended car warranty for 1 year, gasoline gift cards, tag + title + taxes paid.

11/16 and 11/30 2024-Rico Johnson (Gainesville)

Handed out clothing and food items to the homeless population in Hall County.

North Area Gains/Losses: 2

Fred Young-Ft McPherson-New Hire 1 Nov

April Davenport-Rome-New Hire 1 Nov

Average Visits Per VFSO							
Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO							
Region:		North					
Month:		November-24					
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:	52	6,130	18	340.56	1,989	110.50
Number of Offices:		29	Average Visits/Office:		211.38	Average Claims/Office: 68.5862069	

*Total monthly office visits include: 2,095 In-Person and 4,035 phone calls/emails.

Ms. Sherri Whitfield, Director Veterans Benefits South Region

- On December 2, 2024, the Ft. Stewart office reopened, with Mr. Roderick Gray moving from the Brunswick Field Office.
- Since the last board meeting, South region offices reported total lump sum payments of \$1,231,144.02, with the Columbus Field Office having the highest single lump sum of \$256,529.90 for a surviving spouse.
- South Georgia Region Veterans Population: 239,553.

Ms. Veda Brooks, Women Veterans Coordinator (WVC)

- November 18, 2024, Ms. Brooks and the women of GDVS attended the advance screening of The Six Triple Eight Movie.
- November 19, 2024, Ms. Brooks participated in the CDC's Veterans Day Event. Ms. Brooks participated in the NASWVC Membership Meeting.
- November 20, 2024, Ms. Brooks participated in the Georgia Veterans Network: Lunch and Learn Veteran Mental Health.
- November 21, 2024, Ms. Brooks attended a walkthrough for a woman veteran home repair. She is taking care of 8 kinship foster children.
- November 22, 2024, Ms. Brooks participated in a briefing at the Leadership Institute.
- November 25, 2024, Ms. Brooks delivered Thanksgiving dinner to two veteran families feeding 14 people.
- December 2-4, 2024, Ms. Brooks participated in Faith Based Theology Meets Psychology Mental Wellness Training.
- December 5, 2024, Ms. Brooks participated in the Empower Her Health Fair.
- December 11, 2024, Ms. Brooks participated in the NASWVC Monthly Coffee Talk.

Current committees:

- Violence Prevention Task Force
- VA/SAMHSA Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families Georgia Team

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- 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 13 - Ms. Ferguson attended the Housing authority of Dekalb County Veterans event.
- November 19 - Ms. Ferguson conducted her monthly governor's Challenge TF meeting.
- December 2-4 - Ms. Ferguson hosted The Mental & Spiritual connections workshop at a Faith Based location.
- December 9-11 - Ms. Ferguson hosted The Mental & Spiritual connections workshop at GDVS Headquarters.
- December 13 - Ms. Ferguson attended the Returning Veterans Task Force monthly meeting.
- December 17 - Ms. Ferguson conducted the Governor's Challenge Monthly TF meeting in person and virtually.
- December 17-18 - Ms. Ferguson attended the Suicide Mortality Review Pre-Site visit.

Ms. Raven Holstick, Transition and Employment Coordinator

- November 21, 2024 Transition and Employment Coordinator met with Leadership with Dobbins to discuss collaboration events. During this meeting T&E coordinator dates for 2025 to come out and speak to service members.
- December 4, 2024, Transition and Employment Coordinator attended VETLANTA Q4 Summit at the Home Depot Headquarters. The focus was on Veteran Employment. Assistant Secretary James D. Rodriguez from the U.S. Department of Labor was the guest speaker.
- December 5, 2024, Transition and Employment Coordinator attended OTR Strategy Session. The focus of the session was the upcoming event in Douglas County on January 17, 2025. Transition Service members will be the focus. The T&E Coordinator will be the speaker.
- December 9-11, 2024, Transition and Employment Coordinator attended faith based mental health course.

Upcoming events:

- January 11 - Dobbins Lunch and Learn
- January 17 - Douglasville Transition service member roundtable
- February - National Association of State Approving Agencies FY25 Mid-Winter Business and Training Conference

Ms. Jarelle Thompson, Homelessness Coordinator

- November 13, 2024: I participated in Dekalb's housing authority event. I was able to meet with local council members, community partners and provide an essential housing kit to a veteran.
- November 25, 2024: Conducted a meeting with PLAD HOMES. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss a housing agency that would like to build homes for veterans in the state. They are currently building housing for homeless veterans in Miami. They recently received 48 acres of land in Metro Atl. A follow up meeting is to come.
- December 4, 2024: Conducted a meeting with Don Long from Long Insights LLC to discuss strategies to improve collaboration throughout the state regarding housing issues.
- December 11, 2024: Provided 30 hygiene packets to DAV for their homeless event for veterans that will be held on 12/14.
- December 12, 2024: As of today, I am currently working on three clients being housed through Hope Atl.

Upcoming events:

- A community day to pass out hygiene packets to the homeless during winter.
- Setting up meetings with recipients of Dekalb County's housing grant to assist with evictions and housing needs.

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

Accounting/Procurement/Compliance:

- Routine operations are continuing. We are continuously working to improve all accounts payable processing, to apply proper coding, accountability, organization of purchase orders, and on time payments.
- We are continuing to work with the SAO Shared Services to prepare the procurement and accounting data in Team Works for migration to GA@Work.

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- All 24 end of year reports have been completed as of December 11, 2024.
- Kirsten Dennis continues to monitor Staples and Moore Business invoices, receipting out invoices for payment and tracking purchase orders. 11 invoices this past month.
- Kirsten Dennis will be attending her final course to complete her Georgia Certified Procurement Manager course on December 12, 2024.
- Camala Ball and Mark Demers attended meetings with DOAA auditors relating to the War Home ongoing audits. We are working with the War Home staff and Russell to work through audit requirements in the Case Ware Cloud program.
- Camala Ball assisted with the War Home audits and reviewed budgets with Russell to confirm expenditures and budget projections.
- P-Card Policy was submitted to for review by the state on November 26, 2024. The P-Card Annual Self-Assessment was completed and submitted on November 25, 2024.
- Irene Mackson set-up P-Card refresher training for self-enrollment this month, P-card Administrators, card holders, and approvers must enroll in Purchase Card Principles (6600W) and complete the exam at the end of the course.
- Kirsten Dennis completed her Georgia Certified Procurement Manager course.

Budget/Travel:

- As part of the fall legislative development process, we have responded to multiple inquiries from the Office of Planning and Budget. This is a follow-up regarding the department's budgetary submission with most questions focused on the war home budget.
- The overall budget at the program level is well within spending limits. Currently we have spent 27.38% of the total budget. (Based on the average expected monthly budget percentage of 8.33%, calculated at 24.99% for the 1st quarter, we are very close to that amount spent). Next budget review will be in January 2025.

Grant Program:

- SSG Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program- (\$747,464 year 2 and **\$722,747 year 3**)
 - We submitted draw-down #12 for \$24,788.90 on December 3, 2024. The remaining funds to expend for FY 2024 is \$3,098.

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- The SSG Fox Grant Year 3 NOFO was submitted on April 26, 2024, we received notification that we were one of 8 organizations approved for all 3 years on September 16, 2024. Year 3 will start on January 2, 2025.
- The SSG Fox Grant Mid-Year Report was submitted on October 18, 2024, the next report will be the year 2 audit after closing in January 2025.
- Irene Mackson completed the 4-day Virtual SSG Fox Grant Post Award Conference on December 2-5, 2024. She recommended that the Outreach attend days 1-3 of the meeting via the One Stop document.
- 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 are moving forward. As of November 5, 2024, we have **275,253** veterans in the system. The next SFTP transfer will be on December 17, 2024. We have submitted **1092** community partners and **313** healthcare partners for inclusion to the platform since August 2022.
 - Irene Mackson completed address changes for 11,000 veterans on the data file.
 - We received the advance payment request for the entire year on September 16, 2024, for \$6,088,640.28. We continue to pay invoices from this advance until June 2025.
 - Since the Public Resource Directory has gone live on 3/22/2024 there have been 1,528 site visits, 1,128 visitors with 266 distinct programs viewed.
 - Below is an activity snapshot from Unite Us Insights:



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- 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 was received on September 13, 2024.
 - 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.
 - First quarter reporting will be due on October 31, 2024.
 - FY2025- \$1,000,000 (competitive grant)
 - The grant is currently in the application stage in Survey Monkey.
 - Cohen Veterans Network asking \$776,132
 - Remaining funds to be determined.
- VA Suicide Mortality Review Cooperative Agreement - (\$502,124.68)
 - We submitted our first grant draw for \$24,768.97 on 12/4/2024.
 - The agreement with DBHDD is currently in legal review with the agency.
 - The Suicide Mortality Grant committee is in the process of establishing a research committee. The subcontractors are KSU, DPHDD and Dr. Lynn Tison.
 - Commissioner Ross is working on making connections with the Dekalb County Medical Examiner's Office.

Veterans Service Foundation:

- The next board meeting is on January 2025 at 1000, the exact day TBD.
- Completed the Georgia State Charitable Contributions Program (GSCCP) 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 starting on September 16, 2024, and ending on November 16, 2024. We will find out in early 2025 how we fared with charitable contributions.
- The GSCCP application process will start again in early 2025.

Events/Other:

- Mark Demers attended the Chief Financial Officers meeting on December 5, 2024.
- Next Leadership Institute session will be held on December 13, 2024.

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

State Veterans Homes

State Veterans Homes Census (Through December 6, 2024) +

Current Month	Augusta	Milledgeville	Total
Regular Patients	94	102	196
Service Connected *	29	37	66
Total Patients	123	139	262
Last Month			
Regular Patients	92	104	196
Service Connected *	29	36	65
Total Patients	121	141	261

* 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 Nov. 9 through Dec. 6, 2024.

Georgia War Veterans Nursing Home

Normal operations continue.

Thanksgiving Meal provided for veterans, staff, and family members by Shawn Hanley and the Green Veterans organization. The meal was greatly appreciated and enjoyed by all.

Georgia War Veterans Home

Normal operations continue.

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Thanksgiving Meal provided for veterans, staff, and family members by Shawn Hanley and the Green Veterans organization. The meal was greatly appreciated and enjoyed by all.

State Veterans Cemeteries

Burial Statistics (through December 6, 2024)+

State Veterans Cemetery	Cumulative Last Month	Cumulative Current Month	Increase
Glennville	2,615	2,639	24
Milledgeville	5,639	5,668	29
Total	8,254	8,307	53

+ The report to the VSB is the total numbers from Nov. 8 through Dec. 6, 2024.

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery – Glennville

Cemetery operations continue as normal.

Phase 4b expansion of the cemetery is underway.

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Milledgeville

Cemetery operations continue as normal.

Phase 2 expansion of the cemetery is underway.

Mr. Kerry Dyer, Chief Operations Officer

On Thursday November 21, 2024, Kerry Dyer attended the Georgia Electronic Chain of Custody Form and Scheduling webinar. He also contacted Scott Duncan, President of Carrollton Furniture to discuss the punch list items for the cubicles. Later that day he spoke with Marlon Benjamin, GBA Project Manager regarding the renovation of the Balcony Field Office.

On Friday, November 22, 2024, Kerry Dyer contacted Patrick Bean, Transition Service Manager, USAG Fort Stewart to discuss the internet provider in that area. He also emailed Linda Lavendar four Cemetery Tech 1 resumes. Later that day he contacted DOAS to discuss the Annual Agency Complaint Activity Survey.

On Monday, November 25, 2024, Kerry Dyer distributed the monthly Alpha Roster to the Senior Leadership. He also contacted Ms. Dixie Moss, Gainesville Field Office Landlord to discuss the deficiencies that were noted on the inspection report. Later that day he registered the Brunswick Office Manager for the Sexual Harassment Prevention Training for Managers.

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On Tuesday, November 26, 2024, Kerry Dyer contacted Ryan Petteys, Access Corp Manager to discuss a shredding work order. He also submitted the monthly Fleet Managers Report to DOAS. Later that day he contacted W.T. Standard Automotive to discuss the repairs on the Chevy Uplander.

On Monday, December 2, 2024, Kerry Dyer attended the monthly Director's meeting. He also contacted Mr. Jack Lott, Waycross Landlord to discuss the carpet replacement for the Waycross Field Office. Later that day he registered for the P-Card Administrator Roundtable webinar.

On Tuesday, December 3, 2024, Kerry Dyer along with Will Wilson attended the NextGen Finance/Procurement Security Role Mapping webinar. He also contacted Eric Denny, Edge Copier, Major Accounts Manager to discuss the copier scanning capabilities.

On Wednesday December 4, 2024, Kerry Dyer posted the Administrative Assistant 1 vacancy externally. He also contacted Cheryl Talley, Senior Sales Manager, Hyatt Regency to discuss the accommodations for the FY26 National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA) conference. Later that day he spoke to a representative at W.T. Collision regarding the towing and repairs for the Chevy Uplander.

On Thursday, December 5, 2024, Kerry Dyer along with Julie Hammond attended the Community Partner Holiday Breakfast meeting sponsored by the Warrior Alliance. He contacted Robert Orange to discuss the items listed on the 2024 Management Representation Letter. Later that day he contacted the Georgia State Charitable Contributions Program to discuss the Charitable Contributions to the Foundation Board.

On Friday, December 6, 2024, Kerry Dyer along with Commissioner Ross, Charlotte May and Julie Hammond attended the Annual Daughters of the American Revolution Wreath Ceremony at the Capitol. Later that day he attended the weekly Foundation Board Meeting.

On Monday, December 9, 2024, Kerry Dyer attended the NextGen Asset Management Virtual Webinar. Later that day he attended the P-Card Administrator Roundtable Webinar. He also contacted Angelique McClendon, Department of Driver Services to discuss the Data Sharing Agreement. Later that day he emailed Lily Snyder 15 resumes for the Admin 1 vacancy.

On Tuesday, December 10, 2024, Kerry Dyer spoke with Leslie Davis, State Property Leasing Specialist regarding the Gwinnett Tech Office Space.

On Wednesday, December 11, 2024, Kerry Dyer attended the Work for Warriors Virtual Employment Event. He also attended the Annual Cobb County Senior Center Services Veterans Christmas Luncheon.

On Thursday, December 12, 2024, Kerry Dyer drafted a Code of Conduct for Employee Directives. He also contacted Scott Duncan, President & CEO of Carrollton Furniture to discuss the replacement of one of the desks. Later that day he attended the Returning Veterans Task Force Meeting.

Thursday, December 19, 2024 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

Below are the Personnel Actions Kerry Dyer and Shareka Monday-Robinson processed from November 16, 2024 – December 16, 2024.

Location	Position	Status	Name	Date
Milledgeville	Cemetery Tech 1	Terminated	Darius Marshall	11/15/24

On the Horizon: Additional field offices will be opening in the next quarter – Ft. Eisenhower, Houston County, Gwinnett Tech, Riverside Road VA Clinic in Gwinnett, Atlanta Tech, Albany Tech (relocation). We will revisit offices in Kings Bay and Bainbridge as well.

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 2,202 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	494
Approved Training Establishments	1,708

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

*Source for Veterans Students Enrolled in Educational Institutions has been discontinued due to VA system migration. Will work to find another source.

Ms. Snyder just returned from DC, where she was able to meet with Joe Garcia, the Executive Director of Education Services, and his staff. The VA is being pushed by Congress to modernize so they are decommissioning the Benefits Delivery Network (BDN), the system that pulled the number of veteran students enrolled. This report will not be able to be pulled from the new system because it hasn't been a high priority in the transition from the old program to the new program.

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 November edition celebrated the state’s annual Veterans Day ceremony, held this year on November 7 at the Nathan Deal Justice Center. The newsletter also shared information on commissary benefits for eligible veterans and their caregivers, a new initiative from our partners at KSU to preserve the histories of WWII veterans who also participated in the Civil Rights Movement, the hard work of GDVS field and training division staff at the 3rd Annual We CARE Veterans Fair in Marietta, and a spotlight on Macon VSO Sonja Martin.
2. P-Card Sneak Peek – attended a virtual webinar on December 5 on the upcoming change to the P-Card system as the state transitions to a new procurement and management system. Additional training is anticipated.
3. Daughters of the American Revolution Wreath Laying – accompanied Commissioner Ross, COO Dyer, and GDVS staff at the DAR’s annual Wreaths Across America kickoff and ceremonial wreath laying at the Georgia State Capitol on December 6.
4. Returning Veterans Task Force – attended the quarterly meeting of the RVTF. Division staff provide administrative support to the RVTF.
5. 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. Unite Georgia Wave 7 outreach – division staff have continued to work with partners at Unite Us to contact veterans in a specified pool of candidates. Wave 7 outreach focuses on providing support during the holiday season and connecting veterans and their families with social support services in their local area.
 - b. Educational benefits – promoted the availability of Chapter 1066 benefits for members of the Reserves and National Guard.
 - c. Mortgage and Financial Assistance – spotlighted a program initiative from VA focused on helping veterans manage their home loan obligations, as well as debt management programs.
 - d. Fraud Awareness – continued communicating the importance of cyber awareness, particularly as scammers are known to be more active during the holiday season.

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- e. VA Sign-In changes – shared information from VA on upcoming changes to how veterans can log in to manage their VA accounts beginning in January 2025.

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

- Replies to VA eBenefits Messages = 340
- Replies to General Questions = approximately 585
- Individual Request for the State Certificate of Honor = approximately 112

Ms. May announced that the December newsletter is on the website. The cover feature is Ms. Rita Barnhart, who is retiring from GDVS after serving veterans for 41 years.



OLD BUSINESS:

There was no old business to discuss.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Mr. Childre announced that a few offices in the North Region will be closed next week for the holiday. People should call the office or check the website to see if their local office is closed.

NEW BUSINESS:

Mr. Mendez asked if there were any complaints about the Charleston VA. Commissioner Ross has not had any complaints, only good reports. Mr. Demers had heard that it was a long drive for some veterans. Brunswick once had a van that would take people to the Dublin VA. Commissioner Ross stated that DAV operated this service.

Mr. Feagin and Mr. Deese expressed thanks to Shawn Hanley and Green Veterans for providing Thanksgiving meals for the Homes.


Mr. Kopsie stated that he had sent the strategic priorities and guidance for the Foundation Board to the Board members for their review. He opened the floor for any discussion. There was no discussion. Mr. Hanley made a motion to approve the strategic priorities and guidance as written. Mr. Paslawski seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. Mr. Kopsie will make sure the information is passed to the Foundation Board at their January meeting.

Mr. Kopsie made a recommendation to the Board that Board elections take place in May to align with the Legislative Session and the strategic planning priorities. There was an election in 2024. The guidelines state that there has to be one election per year, so this will meet those guidelines. He opened the floor for any discussion on the recommendation. There was no discussion.

The next Board meeting was scheduled for January 15 at 12:30pm. It will be a combination virtual and in-person meeting, set up at the GDVS.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 1:00 p.m.

SIGNED:



Joshua Kopsie, Chair

ATI EST:



Steve Mendez, Secretary