

Tuesday, February 27, 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. Shawn Hanley, Member
Mr. Pete Peterson, Member
Ms. Patricia Ross, Commissioner

Visitors Present: Ms. Shelly-Ann Simpson, Executive Director, Field Operations & Appeals, GDVS
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
Mr. Lou Zayas, Jr. Vice Commander, Military Order of the Purple Heart
Ms. Belinda Boldoe, VFW Service Officer, Appeals Division, GDVS
Ms. Raven Holstick, GDVS, American Legion Service Officer
Ms. Samantha Brown-Parks, Veterans Service Foundation Board Secretary
Mr. Carlton Deese, Executive Director GVVNH, 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. Monica Dorsey, Communications & Outreach Specialist, GDVS
Ms. Ava Redd, Appeals Division, GDVS
Ms. Julie Hammond, Executive Assistant to the Commissioner, GDVS

On Tuesday, February 27, 2024, the Veterans Service Board meeting was held in person and by video/tele-conference.

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

Mr. Hanley made a motion to approve the February Agenda. Mr. Paslawski seconded the motion. The motion passed.

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Mr. Peterson made a motion to approve the January 23 minutes, which were previously distributed for members to review. Mr. Paslawski 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 participated in the Atlanta Regional Office Vocational Readiness and Employment (VRE) Job Fair. The event was held on January 25, 2024, from 10AM–2PM at the Best Friend Park, 6224 Jimmy Carter Boulevard, Norcross, GA 30071.
 - Discussed VFW Mission:
 - ✓ Our Mission: To foster camaraderie among United States veterans of overseas conflicts. To serve our veterans, the military, and our communities. To advocate on behalf of all veterans.
 - ✓ Our Vision: Ensure that veterans are respected for their service, always receive their earned entitlements, and are recognized for the sacrifices they and their loved ones have made on behalf of this great country.
 - Discussed Core Values. Our Core Values:
 - ✓ Always put the interests of our members first.
 - ✓ Treat donors as partners in our cause.
 - ✓ Promote patriotism.
 - ✓ Honor military service.
 - ✓ Ensure the care of veterans and their families.
 - ✓ Serve our communities.
 - ✓ Promote a positive image of the VFW.
 - ✓ Respect the diversity of veteran opinions.
 - Discussed Veteran Benefit Administration (VBA) and Veteran Health Administration (VHA) Benefits and how accredited Veteran Service Officer will assist veterans in filing for disability compensation, pension and death benefit.
- The Department Service Officer participated in a Veterans Mental Health Seminar and Town Hall. The event was held on January 27, 2024, from 9AM–2PM, at 674 American Legion Road NE Conyers, GA 30012.
 - Participated in Expert Panel Discussion regarding mental health concerns.
 - VA Claims Clinic.
 - Free continental breakfast and lunch.

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- Free tablets to veterans who qualified.
- 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 February 08, 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.
 - Discussed extending the outreach initiatives to the rural areas.
 - VBA provided a briefing on the compensation benefits to include (1) Filing claims for benefits, and (2) Virtual Claims Clinic.
- The Department Service Officer on December 18, 2023, delivered over 50 Christmas care packages to CDCE/VAVS for the men and women in the Atlanta Joseph Maxwell Cleland Atlanta VA hospital. The care packages consisted of the following items:
 - Skull caps,
 - Gloves
 - Socks,
 - Lotion (women)
 - Lip gloss (women)
 - Toothbrush (men)
 - Toothpaste (men)
 - Snacks
 - Christmas Card
- The Department Service Officer attended the GA Veteran of Foreign Wars Department Mid-Winter Conference and Banquet on February 9-11, 2024, held at the Macon Marriott City Center, 240 Coliseum Dr., Macon, GA 31217.
 - Council of Administration Meeting
 - Marketplace
 - Training Classes on Leadership, Adjutant, Quartermaster, Trustee, Chaplain, and Recruiting.
 - Awards Banquet
 - ✓ Voice of Democracy
 - ✓ Patriot Pen
 - ✓ Teacher (Elementary, Middle and High)
 - ✓ Public Safety (Law Enforcement Officer, Fire Fighter, EMT Operator, and 911 Operator)

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- 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 February 20, 2024, at 2PM-3PM. We discussed the VSO's issues and concerns, gave a VBA update and updated on building renovation.

Ms. Raven Holstick, GDVS, American Legion Service Officer

- Department Service officer and Assistant Department Service officer met with American Legion National to discuss new structure, give updates and discuss upcoming schools for 2024.
- Department Service officer and Assistant Service officer completed service officer school with Bergmann & Moore on February 4, 2024. During this course service officer will complete training on an overview of the DSO role and VA accreditation.
- February 6th District service officer training at Post 216. Department Service officer was present.
- February 8th Nationwide DSO call to discuss VA programs and the future of programs and their functions.

Upcoming events:

- Monthly Virtual Post service officer training will be held for new service officers. Training topics are on the roles and responsibilities as a post service officer. This training will continue to be held monthly as new service officers arrive.
- Spring Conference Duluth GA, March 22-24
- March national service office school for DSO/ASO
- March 12, Post Service officer training will be taught virtually by Department Service Officer.

Commissioner Patricia Ross

On Tuesday, January 23, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended a meeting at the Capitol with a delegation from Augusta that is trying to raise funds for a cemetery there. She then attended the January meeting of the Veterans Service Board, along with members of that delegation.

On Wednesday, January 24, 2024, Commissioner Ross and members of her leadership team met with Sean Delgado, our OPB analyst. She also attended the Georgia Veterans Network Executive Council meeting.

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On Thursday, January 25, 2024, Commissioner Ross and Charlotte May met with Martha Cole from Georgia Public Broadcasting to discuss how GPB can help GDVS get our message out. She also attended a meeting regarding the digitization of the DD214s. Later in the day she met with Kim Morris from DCH regarding nursing home reimbursement questions.

On Friday, January 26, 2024, Commissioner Ross and Russell Feagin visited the Colonel Robert L. Howard State Veterans Home in Pell City, AL.

On Monday, January 29, 2024, Commissioner Ross, members of her team, and members of the Foundation Board met with Craig Briscoe of Home Towne Suites. The purpose of the meeting was to introduce Maggie Bohannon, a fundraiser who has had success raising money for 501(c)(3) organizations. She also held a Director's meeting. In the evening, she attended the Albany-Dougherty Reception at the Nathan Deal Judicial Center.

On Wednesday, January 31, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended the Agency Heads Meeting with Gov. Kemp at the Governor's Mansion. She then had a meeting with Granicus, a digital communications company that works with government agencies to modernize their online services. Commissioner Ross met later with Survey Monkey regarding our RFP for Foundation fundraising. She ended her day with a meeting regarding Medical Disability Examinations.

On Monday, February 5, 2024, Commissioner Ross held a Director's meeting. She also attended the Unite Us bi-weekly meeting and the Fox Grant Update Meeting.

On Tuesday, February 6, 2024, Commissioner Ross met with WellSky, a company that offers electronic record keeping for healthcare and community care providers. Also in attendance were representatives from our Health & Memorials Division, as well as STG International, the provider for our War Veterans Home in Milledgeville.

On Wednesday, February 7, 2024, Commissioner Ross briefed the Senate on the amended FY24 budget. She also met with Kelly Dudley from SAO and attended the Center for Women Veterans Stakeholder Meeting.

On Thursday, February 8, 2024, Commissioner Ross met with her leadership team to discuss the FY25 budget and prepare for the briefing to the Appropriations Human Resources Subcommittee. Following this meeting she attended the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program Prospective Applicant Webinar. Then she attended a meeting regarding the digitization of the DD214s. She then took part in the Monthly VSO/Community Partner PACT Act Information and Listening Session. Commissioner Ross then hosted Senator Islam-Parkes for a meeting regarding upcoming legislation for veterans.

On Friday, February 9, 2024, Commissioner Ross and Charlotte May met with Martha Cole from GPB to go over her proposal for radio ads. She also met with Senator Islam-Parkes to discuss upcoming

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legislation for veterans. That afternoon she met with Maura Hahn, Emma Romey and David Balcom for a Unite Us update.

On Monday, February 12, 2024, Commissioner Ross held a Director's meeting. In the afternoon she had a Unite Us bi-weekly meeting. She also worked on the upcoming presentation to the House Appropriations Committee.

On Tuesday, February 13, 2024, Commissioner Ross had a meeting with T-Mobile regarding their government plans. Her afternoon was spent presenting the FY25 budget to the House Appropriations Committee.

On Wednesday, February 14, 2024, Commissioner Ross spent her day with the Fox Grant auditors.

On Thursday, February 15, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended the State Workforce Development Board Meeting. She also supported Senator Islam-Parkes at a legislative hearing.

On Friday, February 16, 2024, Commissioner Ross was the guest speaker at the Troup High School JROTC Military Ball in West Point, Georgia.

On Sunday, February 18 through Friday, February 23, Commissioner Ross attended the NASDVA conference in Washington, D.C.

On Saturday, February 24, Commissioner Ross presented at a veteran's fair in Blue Ridge, GA along with the Blairsville Office Manager, Eddie Fontaine.

On Monday, February 26, 2024, Commissioner Ross held a Director's meeting. She also participated in a SWAR meeting with the State Accounting Office for the Foundation funding. In the afternoon, she had a demonstration on the eCare Vault a technology platform. She ended the day meeting with Robert and Radiah Mallard to discuss veterans.

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

GENERAL

- On January 24, I participated in a Veteran's Roundtable at Good will of Northwest GA where I networked with other veterans' organizations serving veterans.
- On January 25, I participated in the VA's VR&E Job and Resource Fair. We have been working closely with this division of the VA to bring employment and benefits opportunities to veterans and their families.

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- On January 25, I also did a walk-thru for a Warrior Alliance PACT ACT benefits fair at Gwinnett Technical College in Lawrenceville. This event will be held on March 8 at the college.
- **DD 214's and Welcome Home Letters: 739** Welcome Home Letters were mailed out in January, 2024.

PROJECTED POSITIONS

- Current openings in Athens and Appeals.

Ms. Ramona Roper, Director of Training Division:

- February 1, 2024, members of the Training Division did a site visit to Unicoi State Park and Lodge in Helen, Georgia. The location will be the training site for the 2024 Annual Training conference. The annual training event is a week of intense training with several breakout rooms for smaller, intimate training groups, open discussions, and much more to satisfy the training requirements from the Department of Veterans Affairs.
- February 5-8, 2024, Ms. Ramona Roper participated in new hire training at the Atlanta Balcony Field Service Office. Assisted the new hire with accessing the training portal Absorb, navigating interviews and guided her through the resource guide.
- February 8, 2024, Ms. Sandra Bennett and Mr. Charles Issac conducted a hybrid training to several offices in South Georgia. The training was on Compensation. Compensation is a mandatory module required for accreditation with the VA. This training was conducted via MS Teams.
- February 9, 2024, Ms. Sandra Bennett participated in a veteran's symposium at the Fourth Street Baptist Church in Columbus, Georgia. This event assisted veterans with benefits, healthcare and associated issues.
- February 16, 2024, Mr. Steven Fay and Mr. Glenn Massey traveled to the Milledgeville War Veterans Nursing home to deliver a motorized wheelchair and mount. The chair was donated, and the training team members coordinated with the Milledgeville staffers to deliver and receive the chair.
- February 20-23, Ms. Ramona Roper participated in the new hire at the Georgia War Veterans Home in Augusta, Georgia. Assisted the new hire with accessing the training portal Absorb, navigating interviews and guided her through the resource guide.

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 (bi-weekly meetings)

Mr. Edwin Berry, Director of Appeals Division

- The total number of hearings conducted by the Appeals Division for January 2024 was **69**.
- As of **February 1, 2024**, the Atlanta VA Regional Office processed benefits as follows for GDVS and the Service Organizations represented by GDVS: (YTD 2024)

<u>Types of Claims</u>	<u>Number of Awards</u>	<u>Benefits paid out</u>
Compensation	105,493	\$233,482,475
DIC	3,968	\$6,824,468
Survivor Pension	720	\$686,168
<u>Veteran Pension</u>	<u>1,443</u>	<u>\$1,703,632</u>
Grand Total	111,624	\$242,697,012

Mr. Kenneth Childre, Director Veterans Benefits North Region

Retro Awards: January 2024-\$1,841,473.66
Included in the Retro Award was a single award:

Compensation

Davis/2792-\$342,668.76 (80% awarded back to 2007, 100% awarded back to 2022)

Director Site Visits/Inspections: 2

Community Involvement:

5 Jan 24-Mark Churning (Greensboro)- Spoke to Business Office Manager at Savannah Courts of Lake Oconee about the possible closing of the facility. Discussed procedures of Veterans receiving benefits from the VA. Mark left some business cards so they could be given to any Veterans in the facility that needed any VA assistance.

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11 Jan 24-Christina Williams (Lawrenceville)-Attended Job Fair hosted in Norcross. Engaged with approximately 50 Veterans. Scheduled appointments for Veterans local to Lawrenceville Office appointments. Referred other Veterans to their local offices.

31 Jan 24-Rico Johnson (Gainesville)-Hosted an event in Hall County to conduct a head count of homeless individuals in the area. There was a turnout of roughly 160-180 individuals who were provided with information, resources, clothing and food. The aim of the event was to gather important data and to provide assistance to those in need.

North Area Gains/Losses:

Winslow Hill-(Grovetown)-Rehire Effective 16 Jan 24

Average Visits Per VFSO							
Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO							
Region:		North					
Month:		January-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	8,773	21	417.76	1,995	95.00
Number of Offices:		29	Average Visits/Office:		302.52	Average Claims/Office: 68.7931034	

*Total monthly office visits include: 2,194 In-person and 6,579 phone calls/emails.

Ms. Sherri Whitfield, Director Veterans Benefits South Region

- On February 8, 2024, Chris Parrish in our Waycross office attended a homeless program luncheon, hosted by the Okefenokee Alliance for the Homeless (OATH). OATH is a non-profit organization that was created to fill the service gap that exists for homeless families. He was invited to answer questions regarding veterans' benefits.
- On February 8, 2024, Scott Weaver in our St. Mary's office participated in St. Mary's CBOC VET FEST 2024. This was an event to support and educate service members, veterans, and their families on resources available to them in the North Florida / South Georgia area. Participants consisted of M2VA, Caregivers Support, Community Resource Center, NFSG Outreach, IPAVP, Whole Health, LGBTQ, HealtheVet, Jacksonville VET Center, St Mary's Senior Center, Go Works, Mental Health,

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ProMedica Hospice, MOVE program, and Wounded Warriors. This will be an annual event for the St Mary's CBOC.

- On February 9, 2024, the Columbus field office participated in an Annual Veterans Affairs Symposium. A benefits briefing was given, followed by outreach.
- On February 13, 2024, Scott Weaver in our St. Mary's office gave a benefit briefing to veterans who were recently discharged. This briefing was hosted by Fleet and Family Support on Kings Bay Naval Base.
- South region offices reported lump sum payments since the last board meeting of \$1,577,915.85 with the highest single amount of \$223,596.47 for a survivor reported by the Columbus field office.
- South Georgia Region Veterans Population: 237,759.

Ms. Veda Brooks, Women Veterans Coordinator (WVC)

- January 29, 2024, Ms. Brooks participated in the Marietta Vet Center Stakeholders Meeting.
- January 31, 2024, Ms. Brooks participated and facilitated the Hall County Homeless Outreach.
- February 1, 2024, Ms. Brooks had a meeting with Chris Hess to discuss a way to collect data on the homeless.
- February 2, 2024, Ms. Brooks visited a new transitional housing unit for Women veterans leaving incarceration.
- February 3, 2024, Ms. Brooks spoke at the American Legion 5th District meeting.
- February 5-8, 2024, Ms. Brooks participated in the Implementation Academy in Washington DC.
- February 14, 2024, Ms. Brooks participated in the Women Veterans Health Committee Meeting.
- February 15, 2024, Ms. Brooks visited the Women's Trauma Therapy Program @Peachford Hospital. Ms. Brooks met with the housing coordinator in Clayton County. Participated in the pre-set up of the Veterans Health and Awareness Fair.
- February 16, 2024, Ms. Brooks hosted a Veterans Health and Wellness Fair in partnership with

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Willie F. Ash Organization.

- February 18, 2024, Ms. Veda participated in the furniture exchange for a veteran.
- February 19, 2024, Ms. Brooks participated in the Rooms to Go Military Magical Moment Reveal Day.

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

- January 16, Ms. Ferguson conducted the monthly Governor's Challenge TF meeting.
- January 17-18, Ms. Ferguson conducted Suicide Prevention Training for Dare2Dream Volunteers, Police Officers, and Teachers.
- January 24-25, Ms. Ferguson attended/participated in the Capitol Mental Health Day 2024.
- January 26, Ms. Ferguson distributed Suicide Prevention Materials during the "Feed the Homeless" event held at the Arcadia VA Clinic.
- January 31, Ms. Ferguson was a part of the outreach event for those suffering from housing insecurities in Hall County.
- February 5-8, Ms. Ferguson and the Governor's Task Force Priority Group Leads and Co-Leads attended the VA/SAMHSA Implementation Academy in DC.
- February 16, Ms. Ferguson and her Suicide Prevention Team participate in a Wellness fair for Veterans in Clayton County.

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

Accounting/Procurement:

- Routine operations are continuing. We are continuously working to improve all accounts payable processing, to apply proper coding, accountability, organization of purchase orders, and on time payments.
- We are working with the SAO Shared Services to prepare the procurement and accounting data in Team Works for migration to Workday.
- We established a Purchase Card program at Georgia Department of Veterans Service. We received the P-Cards on January 12, 2024, and they are secured. The last mandatory training classes are on February 22, 2024, and February 27, 2024. We expect the program to be fully operational on March 1, 2024.

Budget:

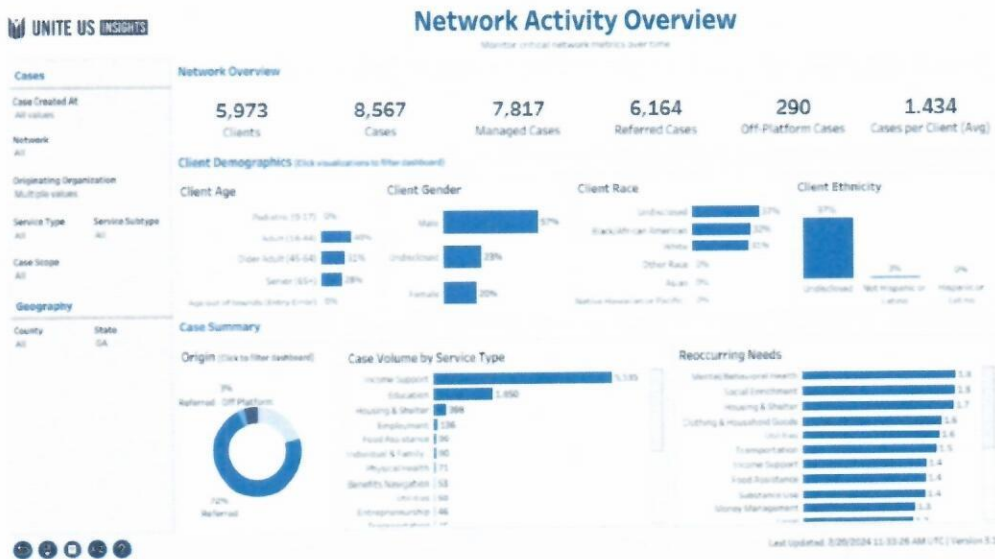
- Highlights include:
 - AFY2024- (**Updated February 20, 2024 [HB 915]**)
 - Increase salaries (bonus not salary increase) by \$1000.
 - Transfer \$1,000,000 from cemeteries for Mental Health Grant (HB414).
 - Reduce funds for one vacancy in Administration (\$41,269)- **Funds not reduced in House and Senate versions.**
 - Funding to support transition to a new contract for GWVH in Milledgeville (\$200,000).
 - **Increase funds for updates to Department Central Office (\$197,986).**
 - FY2025- (**House and Senate version TBD**)
 - COLA of 4% not to exceed \$3000 for salaries.
 - DOAS adjustments for insurance, increase for GBA, increase for GTA telecommunications, increase for merit systems assessments- this is to compensate for premium and fee increases.
 - Increase for TRS and health insurance premium increases.
 - Reduce funds for one vacancy in Administration (\$41,269).
 - Increase funds (\$135,597) for two positions in the new VA Houston County clinic.
 - Reduce funds for vacancies and reduced travel and training (\$94,328).
 - State funds returned for veterans' cemetery in the Augusta area (\$1,000,000).
- Commissioner Ross presented our AFY 2024 to the House Health and Services Subcommittee on January 22, 2024, at 1400, and the Senate Health and Human Development Appropriations Subcommittee on February 7, 2024, at 0700.

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- Commissioner Ross presented our FY 2025 budget to the House Health and Services Subcommittee on February 13, 2024, at 1400.

Grant Program:

- SSG Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program- (\$747,464)
 - Commissioner Ross presented our AFY 2024 to the House Health and Services Subcommittee on January 22, 2024, at 1400, and the Senate Health and Human Development Appropriations Subcommittee on February 7, 2024, at 0700.
 - Commissioner Ross presented our FY 2025 budget to the House Health and Services Subcommittee on February 13, 2024, at 1400.
- 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 February 12, 2024, we have **268,541** veterans in the system. We have submitted **980** community partners and **313** healthcare partners for inclusion to the platform since August 2022.
 - The quarterly report was submitted on January 9, 2024, with the next quarterly report due in April 2024.
 - Below is an activity snapshot from Unite Us Insights:



- 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

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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 latest quarterly reports were received on January 31, 2024, and both agencies are following grant guidelines. The next quarterly report is projected for April 2024.
 - The Governor’s budget approved \$1,000,000 for the next grant period with concurrence from the House and Senate.
 - The competitive grant process for year 2 will begin in April 2024.

Veterans Service Foundation:

- The next special board meeting will be on February 29, 2024, for fundraising.
- The next quarterly board meeting will be on March 7, 2024.

Events:

- Attended House Health and Human Services Appropriations Subcommittee Hearing on January 22, 2024, at 1400.
- Attended Senate Health and Human Development Appropriations Subcommittee Hearing (AFY2024) on February 7, 2024, at 0700.
- Attended House Health and Services Appropriations Subcommittee on February 13, 2024, at 1400.

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

State Veterans Homes

State Veterans Homes Census (Through February 16, 2024) +

Current Month	Augusta	Milledgeville	Total
Regular Patients	87	110	197
Service Connected *	31	37	68
Total Patients	118	147	265

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Last Month			
Regular Patients	91	103	194
Service Connected *	26	39	65
Total Patients	117	142	259

* 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 January 25, 2024, through February 16, 2024.

Georgia War Veterans Nursing Home had another great year with their Pinnacle/Customer Service efforts earning Best in Class in 14/16 categories. Attached are the results of the survey.

Construction projects continue at the Georgia War Veterans Home’s campus. Paving is almost completed, exterior signs and lighting are complete, renovations to the Wood Building for ADA compliance continue.

State Veterans Cemeteries

Burial Statistics (through February 16, 2024)+

State Veterans Cemetery	Cumulative Last Month	Cumulative Current Month	Increase
Glennville	2,436	2,469	33
Milledgeville	5,331	5,381	50
Total	7,767	7,850	83

+ The report to the VSB is the total numbers from January 5, 2024, through February 16, 2024.

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery – Glennville

Cemetery operations continue as normal.

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Milledgeville

Construction on Phase 4a expansion continues. Two new columbaria adding 640 additional niches have been placed and are awaiting the granite sides and tops. Improvements have been made to curbs and gutters to improve both the appearance and efficiency of drainage. New flower vase boxes have been installed.

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Mr. Kerry Dyer, Chief Operations Officer

On Tuesday, January 23, 2024, Kerry Dyer attended the Annual Real Estate Management Advisory Team (REMAT) conference at Georgia Institute of Technology. Later that day he processed 1 Termination Packet.

On Wednesday, January 24, 2024, Kerry Dyer attended a virtual meeting with George Daniel, Account Manager for Global Expansion, to discuss Talent Acquisition for the Department. He also contacted GBA regarding the electrical installation for the new cubicles. Later that day he spoke to Ann Thompson, DOAS Property Program Office, to discuss the Statewide Appraisal Five Year Project Scope.

On Thursday January 25, 2024, Kerry Dyer along with Commissioner Ross and Jerry Lahr met virtually with Natasha Simoes, Access Project Manager, to discuss the DD214 digitalization process. He also met with Ryan Petty, Executive Account Manager for Access Project, regarding the shredding of 6 filing cabinets of material. Later that day he processed 2 Resignation Packets.

On Friday, January 26, 2024, Kerry Dyer drafted a one-year contract extension for the War Home in Milledgeville. He also spoke to Russell regarding the way ahead for the Capitol Assets for both homes and cemeteries. Later that day he posted the Waynesboro Field Office vacancy externally and internally.

On Monday, January 29, 2024, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's Meeting. He also posted the Suicide Prevention Specialist vacancy internally. Later that day he posted the Oakwood CBOC vacancy externally and internally.

On Tuesday, January 30, 2024, Kerry Dyer contacted GBA to pick up 6 filing cabinets and 4 cubicles from the Central Office. He also processed 4 New Hire Packets.

On Wednesday January 31, 2024, Kerry Dyer sent Ken Childre 11 potential candidates for the Augusta VAMC Field Office vacancy. He also contacted GBA regarding the parking pass and ID badge for the Balcony Field Office Manager. Later that day he processed 1 Internal Transfer Packet for the Augusta VAMC.

On Thursday, February 1, 2024, Kerry Dyer processed 1 Internal Transfer Packet for Augusta VAMC Field Office. He also contacted John Pidgeon, Senior Account Executive for CWC furniture, regarding the cubicle installation. Later that day he updated the Department Alpha Roster and distributed it to the Senior Leadership.

On Friday, February 2, 2024, Kerry Dyer met John McCord, GBA Project Director, and Derrick Holden, GBA electrician, regarding the power issue with the cubicles. Later that day he met with Dan Pettway, VP of Installation at CWC furniture, to discuss the installation procedures for the cubicles.

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On Monday, February 5, 2024, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's Meeting. He also submitted the monthly Fleet Management Report to DOAS Fleet Management Department. Later that day he processed a Promotion and Internal Transfer Packet.

On Tuesday, February 6, 2024, Kerry Dyer spoke with Ms. Audrey Eshman, Court Appeals, regarding Medal of Honor Recipient COL Ralph Puckett's Citation placement on the Medal of Honor Recipients Wall of Honor.

On Wednesday, February 7, 2024, Kerry Dyer attended the Senate House brief along with Commissioner Ross, Mark Demers and Camala Ball. He also met virtually with Chris Buchanan to discuss the Department vehicle No Fuel list policy. Later that day along with Shareka Monday-Robinson he attended the NextGen Integrations Kickoff meeting.

On Thursday, February 8, 2024, Kerry Dyer visited the Columbus Field Office located on Fort Moore to drop off supplies.

On Friday, February 9, 2024, Kerry Dyer processed 1 Internal Transfer packet for the Lawrenceville Field Office. He also contacted Marlon Benjamin, GBA Project Manager to discuss the Carpet Replacement and Painting of the 9th floor suite. Later that day he processed a new hire packet for the Augusta GWVNH Field Office.

On Monday, February 12, 2024, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's Meeting. He also attended the UniteUs and Fox Grant Bi-Weekly meeting along with Commissioner Ross, Mark Demers, and Charlotte May. Later that day he spoke to Leslie Davis regarding the relocation of the LaGrange Field Office.

On Tuesday, February 13, 2024, Kerry Dyer spoke with Phyllis, Raines, SAO Financial Reporting Analyst, regarding the FY23, Lessee Lease Agreement and Subscription Based Information Technology Arrangements. Later that day along with Commissioner Ross and Mark Demers he met with Augustin Conde, Senior Account Executive with T-Mobile, to discuss the Agency's cellular and wireless network.

On Wednesday, February 14, 2024, Kerry Dyer along with Commissioner Ross spoke with Mike Rosa, Defense Manpower Data Center, regarding accessing the data from the Transition Assistance Program and the Defense Personnel Records Information Retrieval System. Later that day he contacted Eric Denny, Major Accounts Manager for Canon Copiers, regarding the disconnection process for both copiers.

On Thursday, February 15, 2024, Kerry Dyer submitted the Year End Form for Subscription Based Information Technology Agreement and Lease Agreement Data to SAO. Later that day he spoke to John Conners, CWC Account Executive, regarding the replacement of the 9th floor suite and classroom furniture. He also delivered a conference room chair to the Lawrenceville Field Office.

Tuesday, February 27, 2024 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

On Friday, February 16, 2024, Kerry Dyer processed 1 Resignation Packet. Later that day he contacted Toemeika Goard, GTA Customer Success Manager 2, regarding the email domain change. He also processed 1 Termination Packet.

On Monday, February 19, 2024, Kerry Dyer posted the Athens Field Office vacancy externally. He also spoke Warren Gregory, GBA Technician, regarding the updates on the common area Directory Display. Later that day he contacted Marsha Rich, Executive Assistant to Mr. Manuel Davila, VA Director, regarding the grand opening for the Perry VA clinic.

On Tuesday, February 20, 2024, Kerry Dyer contacted Marlon Benjamin to discuss the renovation of the 9th floor suite. Later that day he coordinated the pick-up of the Georgia Military Veterans Hall of Fame Class 2023 from the Georgia Correctional Institute.

Below are the Personnel Actions Kerry Dyer and Shareka Monday-Robinson processed from January 16, 2024 - February 16, 2024.

Location	Position	Status	Name	Date
Milledgeville	Cemetery Tech 1	Terminated	Zachary Clearwater	01/23/24
Gainesville	VFSO 1	Resign	John Wagenknecht	01/31/24
Augusta-GWVNH	VFSO 1	New Hire	Mary Moore	02/01/24
Atlanta Balcony	VFSO 2 Office Mgr	Resign	Cedric Brant	02/01/24
Glennville	Cemetery Tech 1	New Hire	Christopher Lee	02/01/24
Gainesville	VFSO 1	New Hire	Tanya Rogers	02/01/24
Atlanta Balcony	VFSO 2 Office Mgr	New Hire	Shaunda Mathieu	02/01/24
Milledgeville	Cemetery 1 Tech 1	New Hire	Christopher Rawlings	02/16/24
Oakwood-CBOC	VFSO 1 Office Mgr	Resign	Nicholas Treadway	02/16/24
Augusta-GWVNH	VFSO 1	New Hire	Tyrone McBride	02/16/24
Appeals	VCAO 1	Terminated	Erika McKibben	02/16/24

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 1,828 educational institutions and training establishments where Georgia veterans may attend school or job training and utilize their GI Bill® educational benefits.
- SAA attended the NASAA Mid-Winter Business Meeting February 10-14 in Arlington, VA.

Item *	Number
Approved Educational Institutions	396
Approved Training Establishments	1,432
Veteran Students Enrolled in Educational Institutions	11,877

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

Ms. Charlotte May, Director, External Affairs & Communications

INFORMATION OUTREACH

Division Updates

1. GDVS Newsletter – PID published a monthly newsletter in January. The e-newsletter features top stories from the month and encourages readers to get the full issue at <https://veterans.georgia.gov/newsletter>. The January newsletter featured an infographic overview of the help our department was able to offer to Georgia’s veterans and their families, caregivers, and survivors throughout 2023. The newsletter also shared information on Middle Georgia Honor Flight’s campaign to recruit veteran participants, Carlas Wooden’s selection as Employee of the Quarter, and a round-up of good news notes collected from the public about the outstanding work our veteran service officers perform across the state.
2. 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. The team is continuing to work with partners at KSU on the 2024 Let’s Connect: Suicide Prevention Summit being held in June.

Tuesday, February 27, 2024 at 12:30 p.m.
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- a. Proposed Rule Expanding Presumptive Locations for Agent Orange Exposure: Shared information and updated the department's website to reflect the proposed changes to Agent Orange presumptive locations and time frames for exposure. Veterans can find more information at <https://veterans.georgia.gov/press-releases/2024-02-12/2024-pact-agent-orange-expansion>.
 - b. Career and Employment Fairs – shared information from VETLANTA, Bridge My Return, and Recruit Military for veterans seeking new opportunities for training and employment.
 - c. Mortgage Assistance Program – shared information from Georgia's Department of Community Affairs regarding the availability of funds for homeowners facing hardships or experiencing housing instability caused by impacts from the pandemic. Promoted an upcoming webinar on February 28, 2024.
3. Legislative updates – We are tracking several bills as they move through the legislative process.
- a. [HB 1103](#) and [HB 1161](#) - Income tax; exempt all retirement income received as retirement benefits in the armed forces of the United States or the reserve components
 - b. [HB 1144](#) - Professions and businesses; change certain requirements for issuance of licenses by endorsement for spouses of active or transitioning members of armed forces to conform to federal law
 - c. [SB 375](#) - A BILL to be entitled an Act to amend Code Section 37-2-4 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to the Behavioral Health Coordinating Council, membership, meetings, and obligations, so as to add the commissioner of veterans service as a member of such council; to provide for related matters; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.
 - d. [SB 449](#) - A BILL to be entitled an Act to amend Code Section 31-7-12.8 of the O.C.G.A., relating to certification as nursing aid and employer sponsored training and competency examination program, to amend Article 3 of Chapter 11 of Title 31 of the O.C.G.A., relating to personnel regarding emergency medical services; to amend Article 2 of Chapter 26 of Title 43 of the O.C.G.A
 - e. [SB 451](#) - Veteran Benefits; place certain requirement on the Department of Veterans Service

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

- Replies to VA eBenefits Messages = 85
- Replies to General Questions = approximately 225
- Individual Request for the State Certificate of Honor = approximately 10

GOVERNOR'S (VIETNAM VETERAN) CERTIFICATE of HONOR PROGRAM-

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

Tuesday, February 27, 2024 at 12:30 p.m.
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State Certificates of Honor issued via GDVS – An estimated **30,040**
(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:

Commissioner Ross announced that the Georgia Military Veterans Hall of Fame unveiling ceremony will be on March 12th at the Capitol.

Mr. Davis announced that he will be retiring effective May 1st, but his last day in the office will be March 28th.

Mr. Zayas announced that the City of Riverdale has been named a Purple Heart City.

NEW BUSINESS:

Commissioner Ross discussed the bills we are tracking that will affect veterans if passed. One of the bills pertains to predatory claims.

Ms. May will do a news release regarding the new date for the PACT Act health enrollment. Veterans can now apply for healthcare without first filing a claim if they have been exposed to toxins either overseas or stateside.

Mr. Kopsie will be sending a survey to the board members about changing the time for future Board meetings.

**Tuesday, February 27, 2024 at 12:30 p.m.
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Atlanta, Georgia**

Mr. Kopsie would like to go over some possible locations for future homes from a geographical perspective (where we need them) as opposed to where state properties can accommodate them. Dahlonga was mentioned as a possible future location.

Mr. Kopsie would like to delve into how veterans courts can help veterans with misdemeanor charges as opposed to felonies. This is something that will have to be dealt with from county to county instead of at state level. Commissioner Ross suggested we invite the Council of Accountability Court Judges to a future meeting, and possibly include DBHDD.

The March 26 Board meeting was scheduled. It will be a combination virtual and in-person meeting, set up at the GDVS.

Mr. Peterson made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Paslawski seconded the motion, which passed. The meeting was adjourned at approximately 12:58 p.m.

SIGNED:


Joshua Kopsie, Chair

ATTEST:


Steve Mendez, Secretary



January 31, 2024

To whom it may concern,

Pinnacle Quality Insight - An HCP Company, a nationally recognized customer satisfaction firm, conducted interviews with Georgia War Veterans Nursing Home customers over the past year, assessing satisfaction across multiple service aspects.

From the results of these interviews, Pinnacle has determined that Georgia War Veterans Nursing Home has qualified for a **Pinnacle Customer Experience Award™** in the following service areas:

- Overall Satisfaction**
- Nursing Care**
- Dining Service**
- Quality of Food**
- Cleanliness**
- Laundry Service**
- Communication from Facility**
- Response to Problems**
- Dignity and Respect**
- Recommend to Others**
- Activities**
- Admission Process**
- Safety and Security**
- Overall Customer Experience**

Earning the Pinnacle Customer Experience Award shows that Georgia War Veterans Nursing Home consistently ranks among the top 15% of care providers nationally. This reflects their strong dedication to continuous improvement and exceptional care, securing their position among the top care providers nationwide.

Pinnacle congratulates the staff of Georgia War Veterans Nursing Home for this well-deserved honor.

Bud Meadows
CEO
Home Care Pulse

2024



CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AWARD

Pinnacle Quality Insight
recognizes

GEORGIA WAR VETERANS NURSING HOME

for achieving best-in-class
customer satisfaction standards in

OVERALL SATISFACTION

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "BEM".

BUD MEADOWS, CEO

2024



CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AWARD

Pinnacle Quality Insight
recognizes

GEORGIA WAR VETERANS NURSING HOME

for achieving best-in-class
customer satisfaction standards in

NURSING CARE

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "B Meadows".

BUD MEADOWS, CEO

2024



CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AWARD

Pinnacle Quality Insight
recognizes

GEORGIA WAR VETERANS NURSING HOME

for achieving best-in-class
customer satisfaction standards in

DINING SERVICE

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B Meadows".

BUD MEADOWS, CEO

2024



CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AWARD

Pinnacle Quality Insight
recognizes

GEORGIA WAR VETERANS NURSING HOME

for achieving best-in-class
customer satisfaction standards in

QUALITY OF FOOD

BUD MEADOWS, CEO

2024



CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AWARD

Pinnacle Quality Insight
recognizes

GEORGIA WAR VETERANS NURSING HOME

for achieving best-in-class
customer satisfaction standards in

CLEANLINESS

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B Meadows".

BUD MEADOWS, CEO

2024



CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AWARD

Pinnacle Quality Insight
recognizes

**GEORGIA WAR VETERANS
NURSING HOME**

for achieving best-in-class
customer satisfaction standards in

LAUNDRY SERVICE

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B Meadows".

BUD MEADOWS, CEO

2024



CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AWARD

Pinnacle Quality Insight
recognizes

**GEORGIA WAR VETERANS
NURSING HOME**

for achieving best-in-class
customer satisfaction standards in

**COMMUNICATION FROM
FACILITY**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B Meadows".

BUD MEADOWS, CEO

2024



CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AWARD

Pinnacle Quality Insight
recognizes

GEORGIA WAR VETERANS NURSING HOME

for achieving best-in-class
customer satisfaction standards in

RESPONSE TO PROBLEMS

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bud Meadows".

BUD MEADOWS, CEO

2024



CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AWARD

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recognizes

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customer satisfaction standards in

DIGNITY AND RESPECT

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B Meadows".

BUD MEADOWS, CEO

2024



CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AWARD

Pinnacle Quality Insight
recognizes

GEORGIA WAR VETERANS NURSING HOME

for achieving best-in-class
customer satisfaction standards in

RECOMMEND TO OTHERS

BUD MEADOWS, CEO

2024



CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AWARD

Pinnacle Quality Insight
recognizes

GEORGIA WAR VETERANS NURSING HOME

for achieving best-in-class
customer satisfaction standards in

ACTIVITIES

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B Meadows".

BUD MEADOWS, CEO

2024



CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AWARD

Pinnacle Quality Insight
recognizes

GEORGIA WAR VETERANS NURSING HOME

for achieving best-in-class
customer satisfaction standards in

ADMISSION PROCESS

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B Meadows".

BUD MEADOWS, CEO

2024



CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AWARD

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customer satisfaction standards in

SAFETY AND SECURITY

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B Meadows".

BUD MEADOWS, CEO

2024



CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE AWARD

Pinnacle Quality Insight
recognizes

GEORGIA WAR VETERANS NURSING HOME

for achieving best-in-class
customer satisfaction standards in

OVERALL CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

BUD MEADOWS, CEO