

Thursday, February 20, 2025 at 1:00 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. Pete Peterson, Member
Ms. Patricia Ross, Commissioner

Visitors Present: Mr. Kerry Dyer, Deputy Commissioner, Chief Operations Officer, GDVS
Ms. Shelly-Ann Simpson, Executive Director, Field Operations & Appeals, GDVS
Mr. Mark Demers, Chief Development Officer, Chief Finance Officer, GDVS
Mr. Russell Feagin, Executive Director, Health & Memorials Division, GDVS
Ms. Shelley Seinberg, Assistant Attorney General, Attorney General's Office
Ms. Amy Sillmon, Attorney General's Office
Ms. Belinda Boldoe, VFW Service Officer, Appeals Division, GDVS
Mr. Lou Zayas, Jr. Vice Commander, Military Order of the Purple Heart
Ms. Amy Stevens, Georgia Military Women and Vetlanta
Mr. Kevin Loncher, Veterans Service Foundation Board
Mr. Robert Magnus, 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. 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. Jarelle Thompson, Homeless Coordinator, GDVS
Mr. William Wilson, Network Administrator, GDVS
Ms. Camala Ball, Budget Analyst, GDVS
Ms. Monica Dorsey, Communications & Outreach Specialist, GDVS
Ms. Julie Hammond, Executive Assistant to the Commissioner, GDVS

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

Mr. Kopsie called the meeting to order at 1:02 p.m. Ms. Thompson gave the invocation. Commissioner Ross led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

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

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Mr. Peterson made a motion to approve the January 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 attended the CDCE/VAS Quarterly Committee Zoom meeting held on January 08, 2025, at 1PM. The purpose of the meeting was to provide VAMC operational status and initiatives:
 - Veterans Town Hall Schedule
 - March 28, 2025
 - June 27, 2025
 - September 09, 2025
 - Facility updates.
 - Vaccine Clinic hours of operation
 - My HealtheVet sign-in options change on January 31, 2025
 - Must have a Login.gov or ID.me account.
 - Publishing a Digital Newsletter
 - Save Trip – How to reach the VAMC between appointments.
- The Department Service Officer attended the Atlanta VAMC Quarterly VSO meeting hosted by Atlanta VA Health Care Kai Mentzer, Executive Director, and Staff. The virtual meeting was held on January 14, 2025, at 12PM.
- The Department Service Officer attended a Georgia Department of Veteran Service (GDVS) Leadership Institute virtual training, session held on January 17, 2025, at 8AM. The topic was Problem Solving.
 - Truity Decision Style Test - <https://www.truity.com/test/decision-style-test>.
 - Watch the following video: Stillness is the key
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0hbFgnfChug>
- The Department Service Office participated in the GDVS Transitioning Military Outreach roundtable and provided information on how to apply for compensation benefits and information about the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

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- The Department Service Officer attended a monthly VSO VSC Vet Talk hosted by Brian Starke, AVSCM held on January 23, 2025, 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 was Predetermination Hearings.
- The Department Service Office attended the House Appropriations Committee meeting virtually on January 28, 2025, at 2PM. Commissioner Ross provided a briefing on GDVS' mission on providing resources and service to veterans and funding is needed to continue serving veterans.
- The Department Service Officer attended a VFW National Veterans Service (NVS) Eastern Region virtual meeting held on January 29, 2025, at 2PM. We discussed service animals and DSO concerns.
- 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 February 13, 2025, at 12PM.
 - 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.

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

- Proposed Visit.... February 11 or 12, 2025, 9:00 am - The Commander and his delegation will visit Tuskegee Campus/ Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System 2400 Hospital Rd. Tuskegee, AL 36083. CANCELED
- February 22 - February 26, 20-2025 - National Mid-Winter Conference in Washington, DC.

Upcoming events:

- March 21 - March 23, 2025, Department of Georgia-Spring Conference at Sonesta Place, 1775 Pleasant Hill Rd, Duluth, GA.

Mr. Lou Zayas, Jr. Vice Commander, Military Order of the Purple Heart

The Department Convention will be on the 26th and 27th, with a Gala on the 26th. Commissioner Ross has the paperwork if you are interested in attending.

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Ms. Amy Stevens, Georgia Military Women and Vetlanta

Georgia Military Women has lots of activities taking place. It is social media at its finest. Just a reminder to everyone to be mindful of what you post on social media. We are supporting HB190, free admission to state parks.

Commissioner Patricia Ross

On Wednesday, January 15, 2025, Commissioner Ross attended the Veterans Service Board Meeting.

On Thursday, January 16, 2025, Commissioner Ross attended the State of the State address by Gov. Brian Kemp at the Capitol. She also had a meeting with PLAD Homes and the Department of Community Affairs to discuss a potential partnership. PLAD Homes wants to build tiny homes for homeless veterans and have a potential property location in Barnesville. Afterwards, she attended a budget meeting with Dale Brantley, the Senior Budget Analyst from OPB, Mark Demers and Russell Feagin, to discuss funding for the homes. She later met regarding the Suicide Mortality Review Cooperative Agreement.

On Friday, January 17, 2025, Commissioner Ross taught the Leadership Institute class on the subject of "Problem Solving." She then attended the American Legion Luncheon for the National Commander, where she addressed those in attendance.

On Tuesday, January 21, 2025, Commissioner Ross attended the weekly meeting of the Suicide Mortality Review Committee. She then attended the Governor's Challenge Suicide Prevention Task Force monthly meeting. She later met with Mark Demers, Kerry Dyer, Veda Brooks and Shelly-Ann Simpson to discuss the Woman Veteran of the Year project. She also attended the Unite Us Town Hall meeting and held a meeting to discuss the upcoming snow forecast for Georgia.

On Wednesday, January 22, 2025, Commissioner Ross attended a Senate Appropriations meeting with Kaitlin Little, Mark Demers, Camala Ball and Russell Feagin. She then attended a webinar on Grants. She also met with Kanise Wiggins, Kim Scofi, Shelly-Ann Simpson and Kerry Dyer to discuss the Columbus We Care Vet Fair.

On Thursday, January 23, 2025, Commissioner Ross and Russell Feagin met with STG International, the contractor for the Milledgeville Home. She also reviewed the initial draft of the Georgia Data Analytics Data sharing agreement.

On Friday, January 24, 2025, Commissioner Ross attended a meeting with Kim Scofi and Andy Hilmes regarding the Columbus We Care Veteran Affair event. Additionally, she and Charlotte May worked on the "Spotlight Georgia War Veterans Homes" document.

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On Monday, January 27, 2025, Commissioner Ross held a Director's Meeting. She also attended a meeting regarding AboutFace, an organization that strives to "create an environment for veterans and others to work on whole-health wellness and to address the psychological aftereffects of trauma." She then attended the Unite Us bi-weekly meeting.

On Tuesday, January 28, 2025, Commissioner Ross attended the weekly meeting of the Suicide Mortality Review Committee. She later briefed the House Appropriations Committee at the Capitol on the department's budget request. She then flew to Reno for the Suicide Mortality Review Academy and was there through Thursday, January 30, 2025.

On Friday, January 31, 2025, Commissioner Ross, Kim Scofi and Cajun Comeau met regarding the We Care Vet Fairs in Georgia. She then had a meeting to discuss the Georgia ARPA Project which funds UniteUs. She also attended the Unite Us bi-weekly meeting. She later had her quarterly meeting with Ms. Candy Miller, the Carl Vinson VAMC Director in Dublin.

On Monday, February 3, 2025, Commissioner Ross held a Director's Meeting. She also attended a meeting with DBHDD and Jim Lindenmayer on the COMPACT Act. She also met with Boost Strategy Group, along with Shelly-Ann Simpson and Raven Holstick, to discuss veteran engagement opportunities in Atlanta. Later she attended the Fox Grant Update Meeting.

On Tuesday, February 4, 2025, Commissioner Ross attended the weekly meeting of the Suicide Mortality Review Committee. She also coordinated agency legislation and completed the Senate appropriations AFY25 slides.

On Wednesday, February 5, 2025, Commissioner Ross attended the VA Readjustment Committee meetings, which lasted from 9am-4:30pm. She also attended the Lowndes County Bird Supper that evening at the Georgia Railroad Depot.

On Thursday, February 6, 2025, Commissioner Ross attended the second day of the VA Readjustment Committee meetings. She also attended the Monthly Veterans Service Foundation Board Meeting. Additionally, she met with Senator Rick Williams, a representative from the Lt Governor's office, and Senator Ossoff's office concerning funding for the War Veterans Homes. She later met with Ms. Todd, the President of Columbus Technical College about a VECTR Center in Columbus.

On Monday, February 10, 2025, Commissioner Ross held a Director's Meeting. She also hosted a delegation from Korea in the GDVS offices. She later met with Kelly Dudley, the Chief Financial Officer of SAO, who is getting ready to retire. Ms. Dudley has been instrumental in assisting us with our finances in the past few years. She then supported Senator Drew Echols who introduced the new license plate supporting the foundation. Later she attended the Unite Us Bi-weekly meeting. She also provided talking points for the Burial Equity Legislation HB 53.

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On Tuesday, February 11, 2025, Commissioner Ross attended the Suicide Mortality Review Committee meeting, and had a budget discussion on the Let's Connect Suicide Prevention Summit. That afternoon she briefed the Behavioral Health and Coordinating Council Meeting on Mental Health Initiatives for Veterans in Georgia.

On Wednesday, February 12, 2025, Commissioner Ross briefed the Senate Appropriations Committee on the AFY25 budget. The Atlanta Vietnam Veterans of America, VETLANTA, VFW, Georgia Military Women and other Veteran Service Organizations were in attendance as support. She then hosted the Unite Us/GDVS Quarterly Review and Strategic Planning meeting.

On Thursday, February 13, 2025, Commissioner Ross attended the Monthly VSO/Community Partner PACT Act Information and Listening Session. She also attended the SSG Fox Grant meeting. She then met with VA representative Michael Masoner to discuss Military and PTSD Group Counseling Services. Shelly-Ann Simpson, Calandra Ferguson and Veda Brooks joined her for this meeting.

On Friday, February 14, 2025, Commissioner Ross did a site visit for a location in Milledgeville along with members of the community as a possible solution to serve homeless veterans. She then met with the team at the Georgia War Veterans Home in Milledgeville.

On Monday, February 17, 2025, Commissioner Ross met with BGen Blackstock about the Reserve Component being eligible for the state cemeteries should legislation pass. She then held a Director's Meeting. She also finalized the FY26 slides for the House Appropriations subcommittee.

On Tuesday, February 18, 2025, Commissioner Ross attended the weekly meeting of the Suicide Mortality Review Committee. She then met with Senator Watson (Chair of the Senate appropriations subcommittee). She then met with Shelly Seinberg from the AG's office and later met with Bethany Whetzel from the Office of the State Treasurer to discuss the STABLE program.

On Wednesday, February 19, 2025, after the Veterans Service Board meeting, Commissioner Ross is scheduled to brief the House Appropriations subcommittee on the proposed FY26 budget request.

Commissioner Ross added to her report that this is Day 20 of the Legislative Session. She has briefed the amended budget to both the House and Senate. She has also briefed the FY26 budget to the House, as we continue to request funds for the homes to increase the bed count and also to build a new home. HB53, the Burial Equity Act passed the House unanimously and will cross over to the Senate.

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

GENERAL

- On February 7, on behalf of Commissioner Ross, I attended the monthly meeting of the Georgia Veterans Network. The Georgia Veterans Network is a group where community partners meet monthly to discuss how we can affect change for veterans and their families in the state of Georgia.
- **DD 214's and Welcome Home Letters: 919** Welcome Home Letters were mailed out in January 2025.

Projected Positions:

- 2 Openings in Appeals
- 1 Opening in Brunswick
- 1 Opening at Fort Stewart
- 1 Opening at Fort Moore
- 1 Opening in Albany
- 1 Opening in Macon

Ms. Simpson added to her report that Ms. Ferguson and Ms. Brooks are at a DBHDD Summit today and Ms. Holstick is at a Henry County Job Fair.

Ms. Ramona Roper, Director of Training Division:

- January 21, 2025, The Training Division launched the latest Departmental Required Online Proficiency (DROP) class. The subject for this module was Diabetic Skin conditions. These classes are designed to assist the VSO to potentially maximize veteran's benefits.
- January 27, 2025, Ms. Ramona Roper spoke to the mentoring group, Positive Action Group, at Gaines School Elementary School in Athens, Georgia. This group provides positive influences for children in Clarke County focusing on education and career growth. This program was developed and hosted under the guidance of Dr. Rodney Robinson. This day was focused on military career paths. I was requested to discuss the armed forces, veterans and women in the military.
- January 31, 2025, members of the Training Division traveled to Central Georgia Technical College to visit the 2025 Annual Training Conference location. We met with Police Chief Bob Wilbanks, who guided us through the campus, answered questions and introduced us to the staff that would assist us throughout our training week.

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- February 3, 2025, Ms. Sandra Bennett, was a guest speaker at the First Baptist Church of Columbus. At the breakfast, Ms. Bennett answered questions and advised veterans and families of benefits.

Upcoming Events:

- Daily continued ongoing support to the Regional Directors and Veteran Field Service Offices
- Continuation of performing duties as VSO's
- DROP classes - February 17, 2025

Retro Awards:

- From January 21-February 7, 2025, members of the Training Division assisted veterans obtain \$54,440.59 in retro benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Mr. Edwin Berry, Director of Appeals Division

- The total number of hearings conducted by the Appeals Division for **January 2025** was **66**. Retroactive payments of **\$322,862.00** were paid in January to the veterans or family members based on positive outcomes from previous hearings that the Appeals team assisted with.
- As of **January 31, 2025**, the Atlanta VA Regional Office processed benefits as follows for GDVS and the Service Organizations represented by GDVS during the month of January 2025:

Types of Claims	Number of Awards	Benefits paid
Compensation	109,786	\$258,944,361
DIC	4,409	\$7,754,241
Survivor Pension	658	\$645,856
<u>Veteran Pension</u>	<u>1,284</u>	<u>\$1,520,369</u>
Grand Total	116,137	\$268,864,828

YTD through 1/31/2025 Total Compensation, Pension and other benefits paid: **\$268,864,828** for the veterans that we represent who receive VA benefits.

Mr. Kenneth Childre, Director Veterans Benefits North Region

Retro Awards: \$2,357,059.36

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Director Site Visits/Inspections: 1

Community Involvement:

01/22/2025 - Rico Johnson (Gainesville) Virtually attended the Mental Health Day at the Capitol held by representatives across GA.

01/31/2025—Tanya Rogers (Gainesville) Participated in a local Community Resource Fair at Lanier Tech in Gainesville, GA, to assist veterans and communicate GDVS operations to community partners.

North Area Gains/Losses:

Jessica Hardin-Marietta-Resigned 16 Jan 25

Shayla Harris-Atlanta VAMC-Resigned 24 Jan 25

Average Visits Per VFSO							
Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO							
Region:		North					
Month:		January-25					
A	B	C	D / E		G / E		
			D	E	F	G	H
			Total	Work	Average	Total	Average
	Veterans' Field		Monthly	Days	Office	Claims	Claims
	Service Officer (VFSO)		Office	In	Visits	Submitted	Submitted
Office Name	Last Name	#	Visits	Month	Per	VA	By VFSOS
					Day	Monthly	To VA
	Number of VFSOs:	51	6,391	21	304.33	2,107	100.33
Number of Offices:	29	Average Visits/Office:		220.38	Average Claims/Office:		72.6551724

* Total monthly office visits include: 2,067 In-Person and 4,324 phone calls/emails.

Ms. Sherri Whitfield, Director Veterans Benefits South Region

- On February 11, 2025, Laketta Johnson was a guest speaker at the VFW in Thomasville. She discussed compensation, pension, and survivor benefits. Afterwards, she answered questions.
- On February 15, 2025, Debra Thomas participated in a VA Symposium in Columbus. She provided information about GDVS and benefit information to veterans and family members.

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- On February 24, 2025, Jamaal Lemon will be participating in a Resource Fair at the new Perry Clinic. He will man an information table and be available to answer benefit questions. Effective March 3rd, Mr. Lemon will be the Office Manager of the new Perry CBOC office.
- Since the last board meeting, South region offices reported total lump sum payments of \$1,053,027.10, with the highest single payment of \$74,515.49 reported from the Hinesville CBOC office.
- South Region Gains/Losses:
 - Effective January 31, 2025, Sonja Martin resigned from the Macon office.
 - Effective January 28, 2025, Kaisha Givens resigned from the Brunswick office.
 - Effective February 7, 2025, Chris McKan resigned from the Ft. Moore office.
 - Effective March 31, 2025, John Kevin Gibbs in Statesboro retired.
- South Georgia Region Veterans Population: 239,553.

Average Visits Per VFSO							
Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO							
Region:		SOUTH					
Month:		January-25					
A	B	C	D	E	D / E F	G	G / E H
Office Name	Veterans' Field Service Officer (VFSO) Last Name	#	Total Monthly Office Visits	Work Days In Month	Average Office Visits Per Day	Total Claims Submitted To VA Monthly	Average Claims Submitted By VFSOS To VA Daily
					#DIV/0!		#DIV/0!
					#DIV/0!		#DIV/0!
	Number of VFSOs:	36	1,927	777	2.48	959	1.23
Number of Offices:	22	Average Visits/Office:		87.59	Average Claims/Office:		43.59

Ms. Veda Brooks, Women Veterans Coordinator (WVC)

- January 17, 2025, Ms. Brooks attended the OTR Governors Challenge-Focus on Transitioning for Veterans Event.
- January 18, 2025, Ms. Brooks co-lead the suicide prevention training at VFW Post 660 in Savannah Georgia.

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- January 20, 2025, Ms. Brooks attended the SMRC meeting. Ms. Brooks attended the Georgia Governor's Challenge/Suicide Prevention Task Force.
- January 24, 2025, Ms. Brooks and Ms. Ferguson participated in the "Together We Can Webinar."
- January 26, 2025, Ms. Brooks participated in the Veterans Helping Veterans planning meeting.
- January 27-30, 2025, Ms. Brooks participated in the Suicide Mortality Review Academy in Reno.
- January 31, 2025, Ms. Brooks participated in the Quarterly Veterans Helping Veterans Resource Event.
- February 3, 2025, Ms. Brooks participated in the "Let's Connect Summit 2025" planning meeting. Ms. Brooks participated in the site visit in Savannah Georgia.
- February 4, 2025, Ms. Brooks participated in the weekly SMRC meeting.
- February 5, 2025, Ms. Brooks participated in the CVVAMC Outreach Committee.
- February 6, 2025, Ms. Brooks facilitated the Let's Connect Summit Youth Meeting.
- February 6-7, 2025, Ms. Brooks participated in the Gordon College Suicide Prevention Training.
- February 7, 2025, Ms. Brooks participated in an interview with WCEG Network Veterans Today, Host Anthony Aiken and Herman Anderson.

Current committees:

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

Ms. Calandra Ferguson, Suicide Prevention and Outreach Coordinator

- January 17, 2025, Ms. Ferguson attended the OTR Governors Challenge-Focus on Transitioning for Veterans Event.
- January 18, 2025, Ms. Ferguson presented suicide prevention training at VFW Post 660 in Savannah Georgia.

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- January 20, 2025, Ms. Ferguson conducted the monthly Georgia Governor's Challenge/Suicide Prevention Task Force.
- January 24, 2025, Ms. Ferguson participated in the "Together We Can Webinar."
- January 26, 2025, Ms. Ferguson participated in the Veterans Helping Veterans planning meeting.
- January 27-30, 2025, Ms. Ferguson participated in the Suicide Mortality Review Academy in Reno.
- January 31, 2025, Ms. Ferguson participated in the Quarterly Veterans Helping Veterans Resource Event.
- February 3, 2025, Ms. Ferguson participated in the "Let's Connect Summit 2025" planning meeting. Ms. Ferguson participated in the site visit in Savannah Georgia.
- February 4, 2025, Ms. Ferguson participated in the weekly SMRC meeting.
- February 5, 2025, Ms. Ferguson participated in the CVVAMC Outreach Committee.
- February 6, 2025, Ms. Ferguson attended the Let's Connect Summit Youth Meeting.
- February 6-7, 2025, Ms. Ferguson along with a guest speaker presented Suicide Prevention Training for the Students @Gordon College .

Ms. Raven Holstick, Transition and Employment Coordinator

- January 14, 2025, Transition and Employment Coordinator had a productive meeting with Work for Warriors Georgia to explore collaboration opportunities. We discussed strategies to enhance employment support for transitioning service members and veterans, focusing on job placement, career development, and resource sharing. By aligning our efforts, we aim to expand outreach and provide more comprehensive services to those seeking meaningful employment.
- January 17, 2025, Transition and Employment Coordinator attended an event with Operation Target Recovery held in Douglasville, GA. The focus of this event was Transition Service members. 15 vendors were present to enhance employment and state and federal support for transitioning service members.
- February 3, 2025, Transition and Employment Coordinator met with Boost Legacy Impact Foundation we discussed empowering veterans to pursue business ownership. Explored the

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foundation's training programs, mentorship opportunities, and resources designed to help veterans successfully launch and grow their own businesses.

- February 6-12 Transition and Employment Coordinator attended National Association of State Approving Agencies FY25 Mid-Winter Business & Training Conference. We engaged in discussions on veteran education benefits, program approvals, and policy updates to enhance support for veterans pursuing higher education and career training.

Upcoming events:

- February 18, Perfect Match Job Fair
- February 20, Henry County Veteran Support Group Career Fair
- February 26, Valdosta Veteran Job fair
- March 1, Look and Learn at Dobbins

Ms. Jarelle Thompson, Homelessness Coordinator

- January 30, 2025- Held a meeting with Titan properties management. They are a property management group with three properties that are wanting to rent individual occupancy and single occupancy.
- February 4, 2025- I attended the Cherokee County Homeless Veteran Housing Summit. I provided a program overview on the Veterans War home as well as the homeless program within our agency.
- February 11, 2025- Will attend COA to complete our monthly engagement with their homeless population and provide services. I will provide essential items to veterans.

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.

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- We are continuing to work with the SAO Shared Services to prepare the procurement and accounting data in Team Works for migration to GA@Work. We are planning a Teams brief for all employees this month.
- Kirsten Dennis continues to monitor Staples and Moore Business invoices, receipting out invoices for payment and tracking purchase orders. She created over 50 purchase orders this month totaling over \$1,000,000.
- Kirsten Dennis is in the process of completing the bi-annual bulk supply order to all the field offices and appeals.
- The DOAA single financial audit for the homes/federal funds is now complete and the auditor indicated there were no findings. The official report will follow soon. Kudos to Robert Orange, Russell Feagin, Carlton Deese, and Camala Ball for all their efforts.
- The P-Card policy final draft was submitted to DOAS and is in the approval stage at DOAS.

Budget/Travel:

- Highlights include:
 - AFY2025- (Governor and House version- awaiting Senate)
 - Reduce funds not utilized for Subacute Therapy Unit Nursing Recruiting – (\$250,000) – **Funds returned within the \$1,000,000 in house version. (below)**
 - Provide one-time funds to support the opening of Subacute Therapy Unit- \$1,000,000- **House version**
 - Increase funds to address rising costs in healthcare at Homes- \$1,500,000- **House version**
 - Funds to replace expiring federal funds with state funds to sustain wraparound services- Unite Us- \$1,750,204
 - FY2026- (Governor's version)
 - Adjustment to agency premiums for DOAS administered programs- (\$59,587) across all programs.
 - Adjustment to TeamWorks billing- \$3,128 across all programs.
 - Increase for TRS and health insurance premium increases- \$63,638.
- Camala Ball continued daily monitoring of general ledger, purchase orders, and budget projection updates. She prepared amendments to record revenue collections in PBCS. She also monitored House and Senate appropriation updates.

Grant Program:

- SSG Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program- (\$722,747 year 3)

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- We submitted draw #1 for year 3 for \$33,956.350 on February 3, 2025.
- The year 2 Federal Financial Report (FFR) and Federal Expenditures Report (FER) were submitted on February 5, 2025.
- **Unite-Us Grant-** (American Rescue Plan-Negative Impact Grant)- (\$20,047,782.70 total)
 - Grant extended for a partial year 4. Carrying over \$1,729,196.19 to partial year 4 until expended. Year 4 agreement signed on February 10, 2025, with OPB Grant Management. The remainder of the 4th year will be funded via State Appropriated funds.
 - Data ingestion and secure data transfer for the platform and social connector are moving forward. As of February 13, 2025, we have **276,963** veterans in the system. The last SFTP data transfer was on February 13, 2025.
 - We currently have **658** community partners on the Unite Georgia network.
 - 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 2,928 site visits, 2,167 visitors with 378 distinct programs viewed. There have been 429 Assistance Request Form Submissions (self-referrals) with 91% case resolution.
 - Proactive outreach campaign 7 (loneliness) identified 500 veterans (825 total touchpoints with veterans (2.86 avg touchpoints per veteran), 42 engaged via email and text, 79 veterans engaged via phone. Campaign 7 achieved an 8.4% engagement rate via text, which surpassed Advocata's national average by nearly 4%. Overall Unite Georgia Care Coordination has successfully reached 689 clients across 7 campaigns. Campaign 8 will focus on Food Insecurity
 - The Quarterly Report for the second quarter was submitted via Survey Monkey on January 8, 2025. Next quarterly report will be due in April 2025.
 - Below is an activity snapshot from Unite Us Insights:



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- Veterans Mental Health Services Program Grant (HB 414)-
 - 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.
 - The second quarter reporting was completed on January 31, 2025 for both awardees.
 - The fiscal year reporting will close on June 30, 2025.
 - FY2025- \$1,000,000 (competitive grant)
 - The grant was awarded to 3 vendors:
 - Cohen Veterans Network - \$776,132
 - KSU-AMES - \$173,868
 - About Face USA - \$40,000
 - The funds for Cohen and About Face were distributed on February 7, 2025. The funds for AMES will follow soon – awaiting set up on KSU side.
- VA Suicide Mortality Review Cooperative Agreement - (\$502,124.68)
 - We submitted draw #3 for \$83,394.96 on 2/5/2025.
 - The agreement with DBHDD is currently in legal review with the agency.
 - The Suicide Mortality Grant subcontractors are KSU, DPHDD and Dr. Lynn Tison.
 - The first quarterly report was submitted to the VA on 1/16/2025.

Veterans Service Foundation:

- The next board meeting is on March 6, 2025, at 1000.
- The board is going to determine who will complete the IRS 990 form for last FY.
- Attended the Senate Public Safety Committee Hearing at 450 Capital on February 10, 2025, to support HB76- specialty license plate benefiting the Georgia Veterans Service Foundation.

Events/Other:

- Next Leadership Institute session will be held on February 21, 2025.
- Attended GA House- Appropriations Subcommittee on HR hearing for AFY 2025 on January 28, 2025, at the 506 Coverdell Legislative Office Building (CLOB).
- Attended the Defense and Veterans Affairs Hearing at the 506 CLOB on January 4, 2025, regarding HB107 (Digital Business Licenses) and HB 110 (Pawnbrokers/Auto Payday loans).
- Attended the Defense and Veterans Affairs Hearing at the 506 CLOB on February 11, 2025, regarding the HB108-SAVE Act and HB 53-allowing Reserve and National Guard without active-duty time, burial rights in State Veterans Cemeteries.

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- The Commissioner briefed the Senate Health and Human Services Development Subcommittee for AFY 2025 on February 12, 2025, at the Capital.
- UPCOMING: FY 2026- House- Appropriations subcommittee on HR at 314 Capital on February 19, 2025.

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

State Veterans Homes

State Veterans Homes Census (Through February 7, 2025) +

Current Month	Augusta	Milledgeville	Total
Regular Patients	86	104	190
Service Connected *	34	42	76
Total Patients	120	146	266
Last Month	Augusta	Milledgeville	Total
Regular Patients	91	102	193
Service Connected *	32	40	72
Total Patients	123	142	265

* 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 Jan. 4, 2025 through Feb. 7, 2025.

Georgia War Veterans Nursing Home

Normal operations continue.

The Joint Commission conducted their Triennial survey. The Joint Commission is a United States-based nonprofit tax-exempt 501 organization that accredits more than 22,000 US health care organizations and programs. They review both clinical and non-clinical operations. Based on the survey results. GWVNH sustained their Gold Seal of Approval.

Georgia War Veterans Home

Normal operations continue.

State Veterans Cemeteries

Burial Statistics (through February 7, 2025)+

State Veterans Cemetery	Cumulative Last Month	Cumulative Current Month	Increase
Glennville	2,659	2,695	36
Milledgeville	5,693	5,734	41
Total	8,352	8,429	77

+ The report to the VSB is the total numbers from Jan. 4, 2025 through Feb. 7, 2025.

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery – Glennville

Cemetery operations continue as normal.

Expansion project continues as scheduled. Below is an image of the Glennville worksite.



Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Milledgeville

Cemetery operations continue as normal.

Expansion project continues as scheduled. Below is an image of the Milledgeville worksite.



Mr. Carlton Deese, Executive Director GWVNH, Augusta, GA

The Augusta home just went through a two-day survey and was approved to be Joint Commission Accredited for the next 3 years. It ranks in the top 15% of skilled nursing facilities.

Mr. Kerry Dyer, Deputy Commissioner, Chief Operations Officer

On Thursday, January 16, 2025, Kerry Dyer contacted Ryan Petty, Access Corp Manager to discuss the shredding of the remainder of the DD214 inventory. He also along with Commissioner Ross met

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virtually with the team from PLAD Homes to discuss potential homes in Barnesville GA. Later that day he spoke with Scott Duncan, President & CEO of Carrollton Furniture regarding the delivery of the punch items for the cubicles.

On Friday, January 17, 2025, Kerry Dyer along with Commissioner Ross attended the American Legion, Post 233 luncheon. He also attended the Leadership Institute Problem Solving seminar. Later that day he spoke to Larry Price, Career Support & Retention Supervisor at Kings Bay regarding the site visit for the office space.

On Tuesday, January 21, 2025, Kerry Dyer along with Mark Demers and Shareka Monday-Robinson attend the NextGen Supervisor Organization Seminar. He also met with the Prime Contractors to discuss painting and carpet replacement for the Balcony Field Office. Later that day he posted the Suicide Prevention Specialist vacancy internally.

On Wednesday, January 22, 2025, Kerry Dyer spoke with Kathy Skates, VP of Administration Services, Albany Technical College regarding office space for 1 VSO. He also contacted Kanti Chalasani, Division Director, Georgia Data Analytics to discuss the Data Sharing Agreement. Later that day he contacted DOAS, Agency Sourcing Division to discuss the Veterans Benefits and War Home Contract Extension.

On Thursday, January 23, 2025, Kerry Dyer along with Commissioner Ross and Russell Feagin met virtually with the Senior Leadership from STGI to discuss the opening of the Subacute Transitional Unit. He also emailed Linda Lavendar, Milledgeville Cemetery Director, 9 potential candidates for her Cemetery Tech 2 vacancy. Later that day he processed 1 resignation packet.

On Friday, January 24, 2025, Kerry Dyer contacted Shelly Seinberg, Senior Assistant Attorney General to discuss GDVS Weapons Law Implementation in Department Facilities and Offices. He also contacted Bellamy Strickland Commercial Services Division to discuss the maintenance program on the Chevy Equinox. Later that day he spoke with Leslie Davis, the State Properties Leasing Specialist, to discuss the VSO office space at Gwinnett Technical College.

On Monday, January 27, 2025, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's Meeting. He also attended the Houston VA Multispecialty Clinic bi-weekly meeting. Later that day he attended the UniteUs meeting.

On Tuesday, January 28, 2025, Kerry Dyer attended the Annual Real Estate Managers Conference at the Georgia Department of Public Safety.

On Wednesday, January 29, 2025, Kerry Dyer had the Chevy Equinox Preventive Maintenance Checks conducted at the Bellamy-Strickland Dealership. He also processed 1 resignation packet. Later that day he contacted Major Langford, Capitol Hill police to discuss Active Shooter Response Drill class for the Central Office employees.

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On Thursday, January 30, 2025, Kerry Dyer posted the Brunswick and Macon Field Office vacancies externally and internally. He also contacted Angela Gaston, Fort Eisenhower Transition Service Manager to discuss the Memorandum of Understanding. Later that day he posted Fort Moore and Statesboro vacancies externally and internally.

On Friday, January 31, 2025, Kerry Dyer along with Sherri Whitfield and Scott Weaver conducted a site visit at the office space located on Kings Bay, Naval Base.

On Saturday, February 1, 2025, Kerry Dyer met with the Carrollton Renovation team at the Central Office to discuss the completion of the installment of the punch list items.

On Monday, February 3, 2025, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's Meeting. He also posted the Kings Bay vacancy externally and internally. Later that day he attended the Fox Grant update meeting along with Commissioner Ross, Mark Demers and Charlotte May.

On Tuesday, February 4, 2025, Kerry Dyer contacted DOAS Fleet Management claims division to report the cracked windshield on the Ford Explorer. He also contacted Dayna Mercer, Sales Manager, Savannah Convention Center to discuss the Suicide Summit contract. Later that day he posted the Statesboro vacancy externally and internally.

On Wednesday, February 5, 2025, Kerry Dyer spoke to Kimberly Greer, City Manager for Johns Creek regarding two VSO office spaces. He also attended the NextGen Projects Costing & Billing Seminar. Later that day he contacted Galen Martin, VP, Technology & Operations, Gwinnett Technical College to discuss surplus furniture.

On Thursday, February 6, 2025, Kerry Dyer along with Leslie Davis, State Properties Leasing Specialist, Christina Williams, Lawrenceville Office Manager, Steve Faye and Ramona Roper conducted a site visit at Gwinnett Technical College for potential office space for one VSO. He also attended the monthly Foundation Board meeting. Later that day he processed 1 new hire packet.

On Friday, February 7, 2025, Kerry Dyer processed 1 internal transfer packet and emailed Linda Lavender, 3 Cemetery Tech 1 resumes. He also contacted DOAS, Process Improvement Division, to discuss the Veterans Benefits contract extension. Later that day he coordinated an office visit with Kelly Dudley, SAO CFO, to present her with a Farewell Certificate of Achievement and Department coin.

On Monday, February 10, 2025, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's Meeting. He also along with Commissioner Ross met with the Korean Delegation Committee to discuss future events. Later that day he spoke with Marlon Benjamin, GBA Project Manager, regarding the carpet replacement for the Balcony Field office.

On Tuesday, February 11, 2025, Kerry Dyer spoke with Angela Gaston, Fort Eisenhower, TAP Manager, to discuss a site visit for the new field office. He also spoke with Kim Lockhart, Client Care Specialist,

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regarding the account closure for our Access account. Later that day he contacted Wade Damon, DOAS, Risk Management Service Division to discuss our Certificate of Insurance for the Department.

On Wednesday, February 12, 2025, Kerry Dyer processed 1 retirement packet. He also registered Tammy Bacon, Statesboro Office Manager for the Sexual Harassment Prevention Training for Manager Course (SHPTC). Later that day he contacted DOAS to have 3 employees removed for SHPTC.

On Thursday, February 13, 2025, Kerry Dyer contacted Reganne Hart, Senate Legislative Liaison & Senior Policy Advisor to discuss the process and procedures to host a Veterans Day at the Capitol event. He also spoke to retired COL Rick White about the Georgia Military Veterans Hall of Fame Unveiling Ceremony for the class of 2024. Later that day he spoke with Larry Price, Career Support and Retention Supervisor at the Kings Bay Naval Base regarding a constituent request.

On Friday, February 14, 2025, Kerry Dyer attended the NextGen Halftime Seminar. He also processed 1 retirement packet. Later that day he spoke to Eddie Perez, Fort Moore Transition Service Manager, regarding GDVS OJT Program Manager.

Below are the Personnel Actions Kerry Dyer and Shareka Monday-Robinson processed from January 16, 2025 – February 14, 2025.

Location	Position	Status	Name	Date
Decatur VAMC	VFSO 1	Resign	Shayla Harris	01/24/2025
Brunswick CBOC	Office Manager	Resign	Kaisha Givens	01/28/2025
Macon	Office Manager	Resign	Sonja Martin	01/31/2025
Fort Moore	Office Manager	Resign	Chris McKan	01/31/2025

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 2,208 educational institutions and training establishments where Georgia veterans may attend school or job training and utilize their GI Bill® educational benefits.

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Item *	Number
Approved Educational Institutions	496
Approved Training Establishments	1,712

* 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 added that there were 18,731 Georgia VA beneficiaries for January 2025.

Ms. Charlotte May, Director, External Affairs & Communications

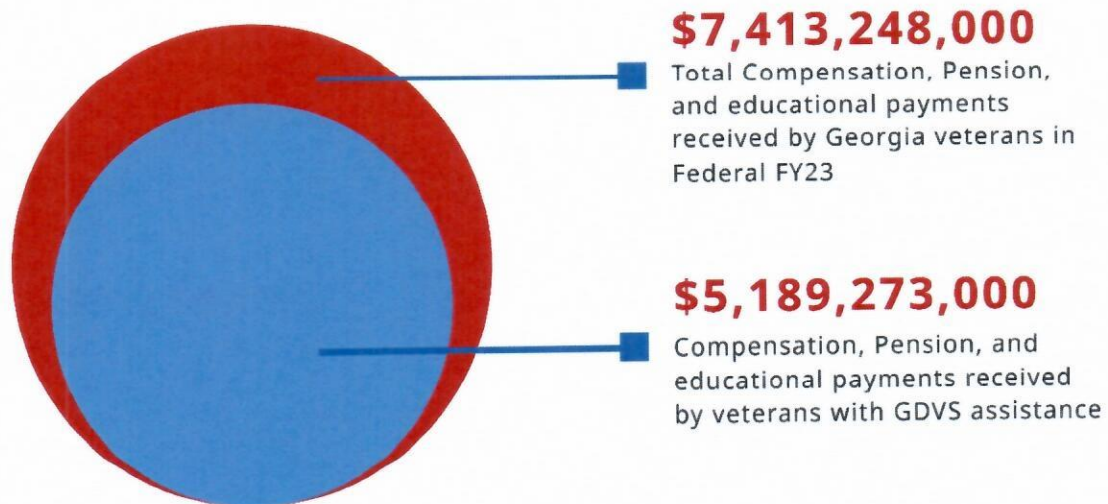
INFORMATION OUTREACH

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 January edition of the department newsletter featured a message from Commissioner Ross with an overall recap of the agency’s assistance to veterans in 2024, information on new presumptive conditions and cancers added to the toxic exposure list, an explanation of the Rudisill decision and its impact on educational benefits, and a spotlight on two outstanding GDVS employees. Rico Johnson, GDVS Gainesville office manager, was featured as the 2024 Employee of the Year. Kristi Jones was featured as the Employee of the Quarter for Q4 2024.
2. Georgia Veterans Mental Health Services Grant Program Announces 2nd Round Grantees – A news release announcing the selection of grant awardees was distributed on February 3, 2025. KSU’s AMES Center and About-Face USA were selected as awardees. Information on their plans to use grant funds to expand mental and behavioral health services to service members, veterans, and families were covered in detail.
3. Legislative Session – EAC assisted Commissioner Ross in preparing for the legislative session. The division offered assistance in preparing slides for presentation to legislative committees, as well as infographic development and a one-page flier on the Georgia War Veteran Homes. Additionally, the division is tracking veteran related legislation as it moves through the General Assembly.
 - a. Accompanied COO Dyer and CDO Demers to a House Defense and Veterans Affairs Committee hearing on Tuesday, February 11, 2025.

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4. Unite Us Quarterly Business Review – joined Commissioner Ross and CDO Demers to discuss the Unite Georgia network’s activity and further opportunities for development. The meeting also included key members of the TCSG and WorkSource team who lead implementation in their programs.
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.
 - a. Careers and Employment – shared information from WorkSource Georgia for a variety of career opportunities, both virtual and in-person, in different areas of the state.
 - b. Woman Veteran of the Year – shared a department request for nominations to ensure a robust group of candidates. The winner will be announced later in 2025.
 - c. Suicide Prevention and Awareness – shared information from partner organizations to remind veterans and families of the availability of mental health resources during a difficult time of year.
 - d. Winter weather – following continued inclement weather events, the GDVS shared information to assist veterans in need of additional help navigating the winter storms. Information on warming shelters and local resources was shared from a variety of sources.
 - e. Housing resources – share information for homeless veterans in different areas in the state, as well as option for veteran homeowners who may be facing instability.



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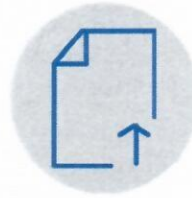
656,509

Veterans living in
Georgia



80,370

Veterans received help
via in office visits



47,849

Claims submitted for
veterans benefits



56

Outreach and Benefits
Enrollment Events



8,352

Veterans and spouses
interred in a Veterans
Memorial Cemetery



262

Veterans receiving
care at a War
Veterans Home



\$23,333,258

Dollars awarded in
retroactive benefits payments

OLD BUSINESS:

There was no old business to discuss.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Ms. Charlotte May received her 10-year service certificate.

We have offices opening at the Perry Clinic in Houston County, Gwinnett Tech and Fort Eisenhower in March. We will then have 53 offices in total. Upcoming office openings will be in Kings Bay, Atlanta Tech and Albany.

The Georgia Military Veterans Hall of Fame unveiling will be on Tuesday, March 18 at 1:00pm in the North Atrium of the Capitol.

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NEW BUSINESS:

The next Board meeting was scheduled for March 19 at 12:30pm. It will be a combination virtual and in-person meeting, set up at the GDVS.

Mr. Paslawski made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Peterson seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at approximately 1:28 p.m.

SIGNED:

ATTEST:



Steve Mendez, Secretary


Joshua Kopsie, Chair