GDVS Slide Presentation Notes

Updated February 2022

Approved for General Use

All VFSOs

Send questions, comments, corrections to gavetsvc@vs.state.ga.us

*NOTES ON USE: This is an in-depth overview of the GDVS. Depending on your talking speed and interruptions for questions, it is an estimated 30-45 minute presentation. If you are invited to speak for a shorter time, or only on a particular topic, plan ahead to trim the presentation down. Throughout the presentation, comments in [brackets] may be considered optional. If you have any questions or need any advice on giving a presentation (particularly if members of the media are involved) please contact the Public Information Division for guidance.*

SLIDE 1: [blank; for use as screen filler until presentation starts]

SLIDE 2: [GDVS seal]

 Hello. Thank you for inviting me to speak before you today and tell you a little about the Georgia Department of Veterans Service. My name is [name], and I am from the [office] of the GDVS.

 Our department is a state government agency established to serve the veterans of Georgia.

SLIDE 3: [mission overview]

 We have several missions serving Georgia’s veterans, and I’ll get to each of those shortly. First, I want to emphasize, across the board, our bottom line is providing quality service to every veteran we work with.

We are here to help you and your families receive the benefits you have earned. If you have questions about your eligibility or want to know more about what the state offers, please reach out to my office at any time.

SLIDE 4: [state population rankings]

 Georgia is home to a little under 700,000 known veterans. The state’s total population is over 10 million, so approximately 7 percent are veterans.

 Overall, Georgia is ranked 9th in the country for veteran residents and the number is projected to grow over the coming years.

SLIDE 5: [state compensation and pension rankings]

 Georgia ranks 5th in the nation in total compensation and pension benefit payments to veterans. Annually, veterans in Georgia receive a total of $4, 383,902,000 – about $4.4 BILLION in benefits assistance.

Remember, Georgia is ranked ninth in veterans population, but we’re fifth in compensation and pension payments, meaning we bring in more money to our veterans than some states who have more veterans.

SLIDE 6: [GDVS missions]

 This is an overview of the major components of our department. I’ll be going over these separately in some detail.

SLIDE 7: [benefits]

 The benefits mission is our busiest and is where we encounter the most veterans. Most of our employees are veterans field service officers who work directly with veterans to assist them in applying for their earned state and federal benefits.

SLIDE 8: [map]

 We have 49 offices that are open full-time, Monday through Friday, with an additional 3 offices open part-time, two or three days a week.

 We do ask that you call or email us before visiting if possible to discuss what help you need and to schedule an appointment.

SLIDE 9: [overview of benefits assistance]

 Whichever Veterans Field Service Office you visit, you can expect the same level of care and attention. And if you ever need to change offices – due to a move, for example – the service officers at your new office will be able to immediately access your file through our electronic claims file management system.

 [Feel free to talk more about specific aspects of benefits assistance, particularly if your speaking engagement calls for it.]

SLIDE 10: [Training and Professional Development Division]

 Every GDVS field service officer is accredited to do our work by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. We work closely with our training and professional development team to make sure we’re up to date on the latest in veterans benefits rules and regulations. We have regular training courses and take an annual exam to ensure we are ready to help you and your families.

SLIDE 11: [women veterans program]

 The GDVS opened a full time Women Veterans Office in 2017. This office aims to address the unique needs of female veterans, who make up around 13% of Georgia’s veteran population.

 This office provides support for all MST claims or appeals that the GDVS receives. The office also hosts women veterans conferences around the state to support Georgia’s women veterans and their families. These conferences cover a variety of topics and help connect veterans with local resources.

SLIDE 12: [appeals]

 Unfortunately, not every claim goes the way the veteran wants.

SLIDE 13: [appeals photo]

 Our Appeals Division is co-located at the VA Regional Office in Atlanta.

SLIDE 14: [appeals overview]

 The Appeals Division is busy, and getting busier all the time. Wherever possible, we attempt to get a favorable outcome for a veteran’s claim without resorting to an appeal. The process can typically take a year or more, and there are some appeals that take several years to resolve. However, if a veteran’s claim needs to be appealed, the GDVS is here to assist through the process.

SLIDE 15: [health and memorials]

 The Health & Memorials Division oversees two important missions, our state war veterans nursing homes and our state veterans memorial cemeteries. We have two of each.

SLIDE 16: [Augusta -- photo]

 This is the Georgia War Veterans Nursing Home in Augusta. [It is affectionately nicknamed the “Blue Goose,” and you can probably guess why.]

SLIDE 17: [Augusta -- text]

 This is the smaller of our two homes, and it is operated through an inter-agency agreement with Augusta University. To be admitted to either home, a veteran must have served during wartime and received an other than dishonorable discharge.

There is also a residency requirement. The applying veteran must have lived here for the past two years, or any five of the past fifteen.

SLIDE 18: [Milledgeville -- photo]

 This is the Georgia War Veterans Home in Milledgeville. This is a bit larger facility, stretching over several buildings with room to grow.

Both of our homes include a Veterans Field Service Office on campus, so veterans who live in the homes (as well as those in the surrounding community) have access to VFSOs to provide veterans benefits assistance.

SLIDE 19: [Milledgeville -- text]

 Our Milledgeville home is operated by a contractor, United Veteran Services. It is also home to a VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic, so veterans in the area can obtain a variety of medical services in this location.

SLIDE 20: [sub-acute rehabilitation unit]

 There is an ever-growing need for specialty care for veterans who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injuries, and other combat injuries. We plan to establish a new unit to address these needs at our war veterans nursing home in Milledgeville.

We have secured all of the funding necessary from the state and are currently writing a proposal for a second federal grant. The unit is scheduled to open in 2022.

SLIDE 21: [cemeteries]

 Our veterans memorial cemeteries are open to most veterans. They follow the same rules as federal veterans cemeteries and are operated to the same “shrine-level” status.

 Veterans may also have their spouse interred with them at the cemetery. All burials at a state cemetery are at no cost to the veteran’s family.

Some things are not covered. Caskets, preparation of the body, and other funeral costs (like transportation, use of a funeral home, minister, etc.) are the responsibility of the veteran.

SLIDE 22: [chapel]

 This is a photo of the chapel at our cemetery in Glennville, but the design is nearly identical to the one in Milledgeville. [The design of these chapels was a favorite feature of the late Commissioner Pete Wheeler. Federal funding for the cemetery called for an open-air design, but Commissioner Wheeler insisted on an enclosed chapel, and he managed to convince state lawmakers to pay for the extra cost.]

SLIDE 23: [Glennville]

 Our Glennville cemetery is the newer of the two, opened in 2007. It sits on a partially wooded lot that was a former farm. Both cemeteries, by the way, offer the same interment options: traditional burial, cremation (in-ground or columbarium), and both include a memorial marker area for veterans whose remains are not available for interment.

SLIDE 24: [ceremonial area]

 This is the ceremonial area at Milledgeville, but there is a similar area in Glennville. These areas are used for ceremonies held at Memorial Day and Veterans Day, and at other special occasions as needed, such as for particularly large funerals, which we have had, for example, an active duty combat death and the repatriated remains of a soldier Missing in Action.

SLIDE 25: [Milledgeville]

 Our Milledgeville cemetery has been open longer, since 2001. We have already had to expand the cemetery twice and are working on plans for a third expansion. Fortunately, there is plenty of room, as this is a fairly large site – it sits on around 142 acres, just south of downtown Milledgeville. We estimate it will take more than 70 years before space becomes an issue here. [The cemetery was created on land acquired for the Georgia Forestry Commission.]

SLIDE 26: [administration]

The administration section of our department oversees several important missions: accounting, human resources, IT, and operations.

SLIDE 27: [administration -- missions]

The administration section manages our budget, provides several areas of support, and supervises a number of special projects.

SLIDE 28: [budget]

 We are one of the smaller agencies in Georgia state government. Our total budget is less than that of some divisions of larger state agencies.

 We receive around $24 million a year in funding from the state to be used in the support of our programs for Georgia’s veterans. We do receive around $18 million in federal funds as well, mostly put to use in our nursing homes, cemeteries, and education and training division.

SLIDE 29: [Vietnam 50th]

 For too long, our Vietnam veterans were not paid the proper respect for their service. The State of Georgia is proud to be a part of the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War and we proudly say “thank you” to those who served during that time. Governor Kemp has been supportive of this partnership, and has been personally involved in several of these events.

 The Vietnam Certificate of Honor program is a state-level program unique to Georgia. We pledged in March 2015 to award the certificate to any veteran with honorable service during Vietnam. Governor Kemp and Commissioner Ross sign the certificates.

If you are a Vietnam veteran or know one, please let them know about the program. We are happy to make sure every Vietnam veteran receives a certificate.

SLIDE 30: [RVTF -- overview]

 The Department also helps chair an interagency task force to help servicemembers transitioning to civilian life.

The Returning Veterans Task Force represents an effort to bring together state agencies to better serve Georgia veterans. Although most state veterans benefits are administered by the GDVS, there are many other agencies who work to assist veterans in other ways. The RVTF is our way of bringing these agencies together to share ideas, resources, and inspiration to better serve our veterans.

SLIDE 31: [education and training]

 The GDVS Veterans Education and Training Division has an important mission related to veterans’ use of their federal education benefits.

SLIDE 32: [education and training -- text]

 Through a contractual relationship with the federal Department of Veterans Affairs, the GDVS serves as the State Approving Agency (SAA) for Georgia, overseeing the approval of learning institutions for students to use veterans education benefits. That includes both universities, colleges, and technical schools, as well as employers where veterans can use their educational benefits in an OJT or apprenticeship role. As you can see from the numbers, the folks in VET-D stay busy approving and inspecting these establishments.

SLIDE 33: [education and training -- more text]

 Most people think of the GI Bill as a means for veterans to go to college. And while the majority of veterans use their VA educational benefits for college, there are other options, such as professional training programs. Veterans may also opt to be trained on the job instead of pursuing a formal education.

SLIDE 34: [public information division]

 Our Public Information Division stays busy keeping veterans and the general public informed about who we are and what we do. [This slideshow, for example.]

SLIDE 35: [public information division explainer]

 The easiest way to connect with us online is to visit **veterans.georgia.gov**. There you can find the latest news about our agency as well as links to all our social media platforms. The site also hosts a digital version of our state benefits book and other useful information.

SLIDE 36: [contact information]

 Any questions?