

Thursday, January 20, 2022 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

Present Ms. Takosha Swan, Vice-Chair
Mr. Shawn Hanley, Secretary
Mr. John Kubinec, Member
Mr. Joshua Kopsie, Member
Mr. Timothy Paslawski, Member
Ms. Patricia Ross, Commissioner

Visitors: Mr. George Canavaggio, Assistant Commissioner, Field Operations & Appeals, GDVS
Present Mr. Mark Bannister, Assistant Commissioner, Administration, Health & Memorials
Mr. Kerry Dyer, Director, Operations Division, GDVS
Mr. Matthew O'Brien, Assistant Attorney General, Attorney General's Office
Ms. Monisha Rallapalli, Office of Planning and Budget
Mr. Doug Middleton, Chair of the Veterans Service Foundation, Inc.
Ms. Amy Stevens, Georgia Military Women and Veterans
Ms. Belinda Boldoe, VFW Service Officer, Appeals Division, GDVS
Mr. Joel Willis, VFW
Mr. Norm DeWalt, VFW
Mr. Drew Kennan, Veterans Coalition
Mr. Leonard Sobieski, President, Reserve Organization of America
Mr. Lou Zayas, Jr. Vice Commander, Military Order of the Purple Heart
Ms. Kim Scofi, United Military Care
Mr. Mark Demers, American Legion Service Office & Trainer at GDVS
Mr. Vince Pritchett, Director, Veterans Benefits South Region, GDVS
Mr. Ken Childre, Director, Veterans Benefits North Region, GDVS
Ms. Ramona Roper, Director, Training and Professional Development, GDVS
Mr. Robert Norman, Training and Professional Development, GDVS
Ms. Charlotte May, Director, Public Information Division, GDVS
Ms. Shelly Ann Simpson, Director, Appeals Division, GDVS
Mr. Ernie Cowart, Director, Glennville Cemetery
Mr. Carlton Deese, Executive Director GWVH, Milledgeville, GA
Mr. Russell Feagin, Director, Health & Memorials Division, GDVS
Mr. Chris Hambright, Director of Accounting, GDVS
Ms. Camala Ball, Budget Analyst, GDVS
Ms. Veda Brooks, Director of Women Veterans Office, GDVS
Mr. Bobby Davis, Director, Veterans Education & Training, GDVS
Mr. Steven Fay, Training & Professional Development Division, GDVS
Ms. Monica Dorsey, Communications & Outreach Specialist, GDVS
Ms. Shareka Monday-Robinson, HR Generalist, GDVS
Ms. Debbie Gregory, Administrative Specialist, GDVS
Ms. Barbara Beedles, Administrative Assistant, GDVS
Ms. Julie Hammond, Confidential Secretary to the Commissioner, GDVS

Thursday, January 20, 2022 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

On Thursday, January 20, 2022, the Veterans Service Board meeting was held in person and by video/tele-conference.

Mr. Hanley called the meeting to order at 12:30 p.m. Mr. Kopsie gave the invocation after recognizing former Board member Mr. Eddie Whitted, who passed away after having served as a Board member for 9 years. Mr. Paslawski led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

Mr. Kopsie made a motion to approve the January Agenda. There were no objections. The motion passed.

Ms. Swan made a motion to approve the December minutes, which were previously distributed for members to review. There were no objections. The motion passed.

Mr. Hanley thanked Commissioner Ross and Mr. Kopsie for representing the department at the funeral services for Mr. Whitted and noted that Mr. Whitted was a passionate advocate for veterans and he will be missed. He then welcomed the visitors present for the board meeting and turned the Board meeting over to Commissioner Ross.

The following reports were submitted from the Veteran Service Organizations:

Mr. Mark Demers, Training Team, GDVS, American Legion Service Officer:

The following information is submitted for this month's board meeting:

- The Assistant Department Service Officer (Ed Kent) assisted 19 veterans with VA benefits related inquiries this month.
- On December 30, 2021, the outgoing Department Service Officer Dawn Thomas handed off the duties and responsibilities to interim Department Service Officer Mark Demers.
- Upcoming events- American Legion Department of Georgia Spring Conference on March 25-27, 2022 at the Sonesta Gwinnett Place, 1775 Pleasant Hill Road, Duluth, Georgia.

Ms. Belinda Boldoe, VFW:

The following information is submitted for this month's board meeting:

Thursday, January 20, 2022 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

- The Department Service Officer attended the GA Veteran of Foreign Wars Department Council of Administrative Meeting and the VFW State Christmas Dinner held at the Carrollton Venue 1625 Bankhead Hwy Carrollton Ga, on December 11, 2021 from 3-5PM. Christmas Dinner started at 6PM with VFW members and family.
- The Department Service Officer hosted a VFW GA Post Service Officer training course via Zoom to the VFW GA Post Service Officers on December 13, 2021 from 6PM-8PM.
- The Department Service Officer attended the Quarterly Atlanta VAHCS VSO virtual meeting with Director Brown and Staff on December 16, 2021 at 1PM. A summary of the meeting was provided to the VFW Commander, Staff, and community.
- The Department Service Officer attended VFW National Veteran Service Zoom meeting on December 21, 2021 at 1PM to discuss the changes within the VA system and how it will affect the veterans in GA. A summary of the meeting was provided to the VFW GA Commander, Staff, and community.
- The Department Service Officer attended a VA Regional Office Monthly VSO/CMA Zoom meeting with Brian Morgan, CMA. During the meeting we discussed the Atlanta RO mask mandate for occupants in building and the RO is resuming maximum teleworking protocols. The meeting was held on January 13, 2022 at 10AM.

Ms. Amy Stevens, Georgia Military Women and VETLANTA:

GMW continues growth and is nearing 4500 members of which about 80% are active on-line within the Facebook group GA Military Women. In-person meet up groups are re-engaging with typically at least 3 events somewhere in the State each weekend. We anticipate that will grow substantially in 2022. We continue to work closely with Veda Brooks and are thankful for the opportunity to engage more women across the state.

Major Activities in the past 30 days have included the Annual GMW Ugly Sweater Party with about 60 attendees, Operation Gift Box with 16 boxes going to Georgia women overseas, a day of service at the USO in Atlanta, Christmas Cards to the CLC at the Atlanta VA, and support to Soldiers Angels, Toys for Tots, and Wreaths across America. Small group meetups have occurred in Greater Atlanta, Athens, Augusta, and Columbus. About 400 posts are made in the on-line Facebook group each month with over 3600 veterans actively participating. The average post is seen by at least 1000 women.

Within the group, the most common activities are general support and education topics related to benefits and access to care. Veterans are struggling with services still being limited at the VA and within the Community due to COVID pandemic issues. We are seeing a significantly increased number

Thursday, January 20, 2022 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

of women reporting that they have contracted COVID. But, more troubling is that we have lost 2 members due to complications of stroke in the past 60 days and at least 2 still in rehab due to stroke. Please, note that these are younger women. The concern is that lack of adequate access to primary care has decreased general healthcare. I am tracking this with the VA but very concerned about it.

Another initiative over the past several months has been to facilitate meetings between the Women Veteran Program Managers at the 3 VA Hospitals in Georgia along with GADVS. This is developing very well. A key outcome is that GMW is able to focus some of our social media outreach on particular topics which the VA would like us to promote such as breast cancer awareness, suicide prevention etc. But also, that we are able to provide them with ready access to a representative diverse pool of women veterans who can be engaged in polls or focus groups for their programs. It also allows me to identify trends to them such as the spike in early stroke as indicated above. Veda Brooks and I fully collaborate on this and I very much appreciate the opportunity.

Regarding VETLANTA, please be aware that we will be more visible in 2022. COVID, lack of in-person events plus website upgrade delays side-lined us quite a bit over the past 2 years but we have regrouped and are back better than ever. VETLANTA is the CVEB for the VA State of Georgia. Lloyd Knight has asked me to take a leadership role with that. While VETLANTA offers our quarterly summits in the Atlanta area, we are known more for a role as networkers. More on this will be coming.

Commissioner Patricia Ross

Commissioner Ross made the following additions to her report:

She had a meeting earlier today with the department's VSO's to go over opportunities for advancement. This will entail additional duties, stipends, and career progression opportunities. The details are still being worked out, but feedback has been positive. This will include two additional American Legion assistants and one additional VFW assistant. Commissioner Ross is working with the service organizations on getting representation in parts of the state other than the Atlanta area.

Commissioner Ross also announced that we are working on rebranding and modernizing the department so that we are distinguishable from the VA and so that we can get the word out about what we do.

Commissioner Ross is in favor of a Commissioner's Advisory Committee and hopes to kick this off soon.

On Wednesday, December 15, 2021, Commissioner Ross held a staff meeting for the Central Office employees. She also had a Zoom call with Ms. Kim Scofi, the President/CEO of United Military Care, Inc. regarding the *We CARE Veterans Resource Fair* on May 13-14, 2022. This event will be for veterans in the Cobb, Cherokee, Paulding and North Fulton areas. Commissioner Ross ended the day with a call

Thursday, January 20, 2022 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

to the Blairsville Field Office employees, Mr. Eddie Fontaine and Ms. Christine Collins. As a result of the call, the WWII statue was relocated to a museum in McDonough, GA.

On Thursday, December 16, 2021, Commissioner Ross was finger-printed for her PIV card. She also attended the retirement festivities for Mr. Dale Bell, the former Director of the North Georgia Region.

On Friday, December 17, 2021, Commissioner Ross met with her supervisor, Ms. Lauren Curry. Afterwards, she began her leave for the Christmas holidays.

On Tuesday, December 28, 2021, Commissioner Ross held an exit interview with Ms. Dawn Thomas, an employee from our Appeals Division. She also met with Ms. Tonya Jarrett, the Clinical Director of the Health and Memorials Division. Commissioner Ross then had a budget discussion with Ms. Monisha Rallapalli from the Office of Planning and Budget.

On Wednesday, December 29, 2021, Commissioner Ross held an exit interview with Ms. Charolette Hamilton, an employee from our Appeals Division. Both Ms. Thomas and Ms. Hamilton raised concerns about training and departmental policies. Both issues were addressed.

On Sunday, January 2, 2022, Commissioner Ross attended the funeral of Lora Ann Cravey, the wife of former Veterans Service Board member Dan Cravey.

On Tuesday, January 4, 2022, Commissioner Ross visited the Savannah and Hinesville Field Offices. She also spent a few hours at the Glennville Cemetery with Director Ernie Cowart. The Commissioner was the speaker at the Women's Veteran Ceremony in Vidalia, Georgia later that evening.

On Wednesday, January 5, 2022, Commissioner Ross visited the Lyons, Statesboro, Waynesboro and Dublin Field Offices. She also had phone appointments with Ms. Margaret Mullins and Senator Raphael Warnock. Both were supportive of the expansion of the Milledgeville cemetery and a new cemetery in Augusta and a higher prioritization by the VA.

On Thursday, January 6, 2022, Commissioner Ross visited the Augusta area offices. Included were the following meetings: Mr. Carlton Deese, the Executive Director of the Georgia War Veterans Nursing Home; GDVS employees at the Augusta Field Office located in the Georgia War Veterans Nursing Home; GDVS employees at the Augusta Field Office located in the VA Medical Center; GDVS employees at the Grovetown Field Office. Commissioner Ross also met with former Augusta Mayor Bob Young regarding the proposed cemetery in Augusta. The state has designated the land, and the city committed to \$1.5M in demolition costs. The \$1M in matching funds is still with the state, allowing up to a \$10M cemetery with matching federal funds.

On Friday, January 7, 2022, Commissioner Ross had a meeting regarding the Appeals Division. Also in attendance for this meeting were: Mr. George Canavaggio, Assistant Commissioner of Field Operations and Appeals; Mr. Ken Childre, North Region Director; Mr. Vince Pritchett, South Region Director, Ms.

Thursday, January 20, 2022 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

Shelly-Ann Simpson, Director of Appeals Division; Mr. Edwin Berry, Assistant Director of Appeals Division; and Mr. Kerry Dyer, Director of Operations Division. Appeals will look for assistance from field offices which will carry a stipend for the additional work. Additionally, permission was granted to local appeals staff outside of Atlanta.

On Friday, January 7, 2022, Commissioner Ross visited the Milledgeville Georgia War Veterans Home. This included a visit with the GDVS employees at the Milledgeville Field Office, as well as an extended visit with Mr. Russell Feagin, Director of Health and Memorials Division and Ms. Tonya Jarrett, Clinical Director of Health and Memorials Division. She finished the day with a visit to the Macon Field Office.

On Monday, January 10, 2022, Commissioner Ross had a weekly Director's Meeting. She then met with both assistant commissioners regarding the legislative session. Commissioner Ross had a meeting with Mr. Gregg Giddens and Mr. Dusty Brown from the Walk of Heroes and has agreed to be the keynote speaker for their event on Veterans Day this year.

On Tuesday, January 11, 2022, Commissioner Ross met with Assistant Commissioner George Canavaggio. She also had a meeting with Mr. Bobby Davis, Director of the Veterans Education and Training Division. The Commissioner's next meeting was with Assistant Commissioner Mark Bannister and Ms. Kaitlin Little, Program Analyst with the Senate Budget and Evaluation Office, to discuss the updated budget. Ms. Little understands the departmental budget priorities and was very supportive. Additionally, the Governor's policy office called to clarify some benefits in preparation for proposed legislation.

On Tuesday, January 11, 2022, Commissioner Ross met with Ms. Chrissy Miner of The Miner Agency and Ms. Charlotte May, Director of our Public Information Division regarding marketing. She then attended a budget webinar with Assistant Commissioner Mark Bannister on a proposed Education and Training bill. She ended the day discussing UniteUs with Ms. Brenna Batchelor.

On Wednesday, January 12, 2022, Commissioner Ross had a meeting with Colonel Jason Baker, Mr. Thomas Meeks, Major Lynette Johnson and Major James Clay of the Georgia Army National Guard Military Family Support Branch. She later met with Mr. Neil Pruitt of PruittHealth.

On Thursday, January 13, 2022, Commissioner Ross along with board member Josh Kopsie attended the funeral for Board Member Charles "Eddie" Whitted. She was asked to speak by his widow, Brenda.

On Tuesday, January 18, 2022, Commissioner Ross had a weekly Director's Meeting. She also attended a monthly Georgia Suicide Prevention Task Force meeting.

On Wednesday, January 19, 2022, Commissioner Ross visited the Veterans Empowerment Organization and was hosted by the Director of Development, Alfonso Rogers.

Thursday, January 20, 2022 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

Highlights:

- GDVS will retain the appointment system in our field offices for the benefit of the employees and the veterans they are meeting with
- Evaluating having Supermarkets once again, only on a smaller scale than before, bringing together less people and making sure they can benefit from the services we offer
- The Women's Veteran Ceremony hosted by Debbie O'Neal in the Lyons Field Office was a success. Ms. Veda Brooks has been tasked with coordinating similar events across the state, more on a senior level
- Will establish the Commissioner's Advisory Committee. Already have a few volunteers

On the horizon:

- Establishing district managers (carries a stipend associated with additional work) to help the regional directors with administrative duties (leave, office closures, etc.) and as a triage team for issues pending a visit by the training team or the regional director
- Working with the American Legion to have assistant AL representatives (carries a stipend for the additional work) in the center and southern part of the state to better serve our veterans. At the moment, one position in Atlanta (currently vacant) supports all the Legion posts. This approach was also discussed with the VFW
- The training team is on the road doing one-on-one training for the field
- Reorganizing the department for effectiveness and efficiency
- Looking to expand the use of technology solutions for leave and reporting
- Supporting the Governor's budget which includes a \$5,000 raise for state employees and the reduction of state taxes on military retirement
- The coalition of Veteran Service Officers would like to invite the VSB members to join them at annual conferences or town halls (more to follow) to hear directly from Georgia veterans.
- Working on a campaign to modernize and re-brand the department

Assistant Commissioner George Canavaggio, Field Operations and Appeals:

Mr. Canavaggio added that he has been working with Commissioner Ross on the career opportunity slides and job descriptions and thinks this reorganization of the department is a great idea, as it will provide opportunities for upward mobility in the department for those who want to step up to the challenge. He has also been working on filling vacancies in the field offices.

GENERAL

- On January 4, 2022, The Annual Legislative Letters were mailed out.
- DD 214's and Welcome Home Letters:

Thursday, January 20, 2022 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

- 8 Welcome Home Letters were mailed out in December 2021.
- Department Electronic Claim's Assistance Processing System (Vetra Spec) currently 309,949 entries, this is an increase of 2508 from December 15, 2021.

PROJECTED POSITIONS

- Current openings in Appeals, Augusta GVWH, Waycross, Decatur CBOC, Newnan, Marietta, Rome, Canton, Cartersville, Carrollton CBOC and the Atlanta Balcony Office
- All positions have been posted.

Veda Brooks, Women Veterans Coordinator (WVC)

Ms. Brooks added that she had the first meeting of the year for the Georgia Suicide Prevention Team. The meeting was a great success and plans are moving forward. She expressed thanks to Commissioner Ross for joining the meeting.

Commissioner Ross added that Ms. Brooks and Ms. Debbie O'Neal of the Lyons field office held a Women's Veteran Celebration, where a dozen women veterans were honored. We are looking to hold more events like this across the state.

Ms. Swan asked Ms. Brooks about the Coweta Veteran Court that she attends. Ms. Brooks answered that she has 3 veterans that she mentors. They have to appear in court each month and she appears with them. They have to report in to her and they talk each week so that she can assist them with doctor appointments, court appearances, and anything else they need.

- December 16, 2021, Ms. Brooks attended the Coweta Veteran Court.
- December 17, 2021, Ms. Brooks Meet with Sean Saintil, Office of U.S. Congresswoman Carolyn Bourdeaux (GA-07).
- December 18, 2021, Ms. Brooks participated in the Coweta County Wreaths across America Ceremony.
- December 20, 2021, Ms. Brooks participated in the National Governor's Challenge call.
- December 21, 2021, Ms. Brooks attended a Coweta County Family Connection to talk about the needs of veterans in Coweta County.
- December 22, 2021, Ms. Brooks collaborated with several agencies to find housing for 4 veterans in the Columbus and Savannah area.

Thursday, January 20, 2022 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

- December 27, 2021, Ms. Brooks meet with Amy Stevens to begin setting the Georgia Military Women's collaborative Calendar for 2022.
- December 29, 2021, Ms. Brooks participated in a Veteran Roundtable discussion for Gwinnett County.
- January 4, 2022, Ms. Brooks participated in the Women Appreciation Pin Ceremony, Hosted by Debbie O'Neal in Vidalia, GA.
- January 6, 2022, Ms. Brooks attended the Coweta Veteran Court.
- January 7, 2022, Ms. Brooks saw 1 client in Lawrenceville Ga.
- January 11, 2022, Ms. Brooks participated in the Georgia Military Women State/VA Collaboration.
- January 13, 2022, Ms. Brooks will be in Macon Ga.

Current committees

- Women's Veterans Health Committee (monthly meetings and joint outreach events)
- Georgia State VFW Homeless Committee
- 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

Ramona Roper, Training and Professional Development Division:

Ms. Roper stated that there are no changes to her report, but shared that the training team will be visiting more field offices to provide in-person training and office critiques, instead of doing the training remotely from the Central Office. She recently spent 3 days in the Dublin office doing training. Ms. Swan asked if this will be the new standard, and Ms. Roper stated that she hopes so. Mr. Paslawski stated that he visited Reggie Lewis and Kevin Gibbs and the feedback on training is "off the charts" and they look forward to additional training.

Ms. Roper added that she has talked with Assistant Commissioner Canavaggio about doing some localized smaller group training sessions. They are also planning to drop classes once a month into our training portal, Absorb.

- December 27-30, 2021, members of the Training and Professional Development Division continued mentoring VSO participants
- January 11-14, 2022, Mark Demers, and Steven Fay assisted Ken Childre, North Region Director, with interviews for the Cartersville, Canton, and Carrollton VFSO vacancies.

Thursday, January 20, 2022 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

- January 11-14, 2022, Ramona Roper visited the Dublin VFSO for in-person training.
- January 19, 2022, members of the Training and Professional Development Division assisted Ken Childre, North Region Director, with interviews for the Marietta VFSO vacancy.

Upcoming Events:

- Daily continued ongoing support to the Regional Directors and Veteran Field Service Offices.
- Site visits and in-person training to several locations throughout the state
- Drop classes in the Absorb portal to continue
- Collaboration on the 2022 Annual Training event

Shelly-Ann Simpson, Director of Appeals Division

Ms. Simpson added that she met with Commissioner Ross, Mr. George Canavaggio, Mr. Edwin Berry, Mr. Kerry Dyer, Mr. Vince Pritchett, and Mr. Ken Childre regarding the path forward for the Appeals Division. She is excited about the proposed changes. Commissioner Ross added that we are planning to have appeals officers in Central and South Georgia so that veterans do not have to travel to Atlanta for their hearings. This will benefit both the Appeals office and the veterans in Georgia.

- The total number of actual hearings conducted by the Appeals Division for December 2021 was **81**.
- The total number of pre-hearing actions for December 2021 was **293**. Post-hearing actions was **98**.
- The total number of correspondence conducted by the Appeals Division (with veterans, BVA/VA employees, and VSO field offices) for the month of December was **1,628**.
- As of January 1, 2022, the Atlanta VA Regional Office completed the following claims for the Service Organizations represented by GDVS:

Types of Claims	Number of Awards	Benefits paid out
Compensation	100,3034	\$171,528,499
DIC	3051	\$4,400,469
Survivor Pension	854	\$673,908
Veteran Pension	1,819	\$1,899,548
Grand Total	105,758	\$178,502,423

Kenneth Childre, Director, North Region

Mr. Childre highlighted the retro awards in his report below. He added that he has been conducting interviews in several locations. A discussion ensued regarding the number of no shows to scheduled interviews and how we narrow down the candidates before scheduling in-person interviews. The issue seems to be salary, and we are hopeful that the Governor's amended budget will pass, which will help in hiring and retention.

On January 5th, Marie Lundquist of Oakwood did a briefing at the American Legion in Sugar Hill, GA. She briefed 29 members on Claims, Appeals and the latest Agent Orange presumptive illnesses.

Dec 2021 total retro awards reported by North Georgia Offices: \$1,938,086.68. Included in that amount are single awards of \$271,505.56 reported by Kelly Johnson of Dalton, 2 singles awards of \$253,438.58 and \$86,433.60 (Rico Johnson).

Director Site Visits/Inspections: 7

North Region Gains/Losses:

Angelica Davis of Newnan

Emily Waters of Cartersville resigned 31 Dec 2021

James Hood of Marietta resigned 31 Dec 2021

Melissa Pritchett of Canton resigned 31 Dec 2021

Nikitia Hall of Carrollton resigned 14 Jan 2022

Latoria Brown of Augusta resigned 14 Feb 2022 ("Terminal Leave" begins 22 Jan 2022)

Conducted Interviews in Newnan (3), Rome (1), Cartersville (4) and Canton (3).

Interviews still waiting to be conducted: Carrollton, Marietta, and Augusta

Thursday, January 20, 2022 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

Average Visits Per VFSO							
Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO							
Region:		North					
Month:		December-21					
A	B	C	D	E	D / E F	G	G / E H
					Average	Total	Average
			Total	Work	Office	Claims	Claims
	Veterans' Field		Monthly	Days	Visits	Submitted	Submitted
	Service Officer (VFSO)		Office	In	Per	To	By VFSOS
Office Name	Last Name	#	Visits	Month	Day	VA	To VA
						Monthly	Daily
	Number of VFSOs:	52	12,060	802	15.05	2,052	2.56
Number of Offices:	28	Average Visits/Office:			430.71	Average Claims/Office: 73.2857143	

* Total Monthly Office Visits include Remote Work: 2,360 in-Person Visits and 9,700 phone calls and emails.

Vincent Pritchett, Director, South Region

Mr. Pritchett stated that he has been conducting interviews. He has been able to hire two for the Warner Robins office and one for the LaGrange office. They will all begin employment on February 1.

- On January 4, 2022, Debra O'Neal (Lyons Field Office) hosted a Women Veterans Ceremony to recognize the women in her area who have served in the military. The event was held in Vidalia. Debbie recruited Vidalia Mayor Roper and Representative Leesa Hagan to present certificates and pins to the honorees. Commissioner Ross was the keynote speaker. Ms. Veda Brooks also assisted with the ceremony. 15 Women were honored on the night.
- On January 4, 2022, All South Region field offices mailed Constituent Letters to their respective state representatives. To date no one has reported receiving any feedback from the letters.
- South Region offices reported retroactive payments since the last board meeting totaling \$104,046.35 with the highest single payment of \$36,744.80 reported by our Tifton field office.
- South Region Gains/Losses: Effective December 16, 2021, Nicole Clark joined our Dublin Field Service Office.
- South Georgia Region Veterans Population: 242,136
- Office Visits for December: South Georgia offices handled 4,940 phone calls and emails.

**Thursday, January 20, 2022 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia**

Average Visits Per VFSSO							
Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSSO							
Region:		South Region					
Month:		December-21					
A	B	C	D	E	D / E F	G	G / E H
Office Name	Veterans' Field Service Officer (VFSSO) 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 VFSSOs To VA Daily
			2,385	684	3.49	1,522	2.23
			Number of VFSSOs:		30		
			Average Visits/Office:		79.50		Average Claims/Office: 50.73
			Number of Offices:		30		

Ms. Charlotte May, Director, Public Information Division

Ms. May announced that we have been highlighting and celebrating our employees using social media posts. She also discussed the re-branding endeavor and provided some early drafts of a new logo for the Board members to see. She is working on a tagline for the department.

GENERAL

Personnel

- Charlotte May, Director (Speeches, Major News Release Announcements, Digital Media, Websites [External & Internal])
- Monica Dorsey, Communications Specialist (Administrative support in all aspects of the GDVS Public Information mission/function [External & Internal])

INFORMATION OUTREACH

News Releases

1. Scott Waters Selected as GDVS Employee of the Quarter – GVMC Glennville Maintenance Supervisor Tommy "Scott" Waters was selected as EOQ for Q3 of 2021. PID shared information on Mr. Waters' commitment to outstanding service to Georgia's veterans and families and his innovative problem solving skills to media in Glennville and the surrounding area.

Social Media Highlights

1. GI Bill Updates – shared information on changes to GI Bill COVID-19 provisions to ensure veterans and families are kept up to date on the latest legislative developments and extensions to benefits. Also shared information on the availability of OJT and Apprenticeship programs available to veterans.
2. Spotlight on GDVS Employees –
 - a. Shared a selection of photos to enhance the announcement of Mr. Waters as the Employee of the Quarter.
 - b. Celebrated Barbara Beedles reaching a 20 year milestone of service to the state and department.
 - c. Kerry Dyer featured in DOAS Fleet Management newsletter – shared an excerpt from DOAS's monthly newsletter. Kerry was chosen by Jazzmin Randall, the Director of the Office of Fleet Management, as December's Spotlight state employee for his great driving record and excellent work coordinating with the Office of Fleet Management.
3. Medal of Honor Recipients with Georgia connections – 3 service members were awarded the Medal of Honor on December 16. All three soldiers trained at or were assigned to one of Georgia's military bases.
4. Women Veteran AppreSHEation Day in Vidalia – shared photos and news coverage of Debbie O'Neal's women veteran celebration in Toombs County. PID provided programs and certificates for the women veterans in attendance. Commissioner Ross and Veda Brooks also supported the ceremony.

Public Information Division Contacts *(Since December 10, 2021)*

- Replies to VA eBenefits Messages = 95
- Replies to General Questions = approximately 85
- Individual Request for the State Certificate of Honor = approximately 5

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

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

State Certificates of Honor issued via GDVS – An estimated 29,240
(Honors Ceremonies and Central Office Mail Outs)

DoD Vietnam Veteran Lapel Pins presented via GDVS – An estimated 23,260

Honors Ceremonies supported/coordinated by GDVS – 350

Defense Department's Vietnam Veteran Surviving Spouse CoH – 285

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

Mr. Davis added that his department received a satisfactory rating, which will keep them operating through September 30.

VETERANS 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 1,790 educational institutions and training establishments where Georgia veterans may attend school or job training and utilize their GI Bill® educational benefits.
- Extension of COVID-19 protocols for schools was signed into law on December 20, 2021 extending protocols until June 1, 2022.

Item *	Number
Approved Educational Institutions	394
Approved Training Establishments	1396
Veteran Students Enrolled in Educational Institutions	16,935

* Source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration, Education Division, December 2021.

Mr. Russell Feagin, Director, Health & Memorials Division

Mr. Feagin announced that the audits which were scheduled for January/February have been postponed until April or later.

He also reported that construction in Milledgeville continues with Phase 3 and the Sub-Acute unit.

Thursday, January 20, 2022 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

Tonya Jarrett, Clinical Director, Health & Memorials Division

COVID Update- Georgia War Veterans Home - Milledgeville, GA										
Friday, December 31, 2021										
Category	Population	Positive Cases	Positives % of Population	Deaths	Deaths % of Positives	Deaths % of Population	Recovered	Recovered % of Positives	Currently In Isolation	Positive for current month
Patients	314	113	35.99%	27	23.89%	8.60%	75	66.37%	11	14
Staff	516	130	25.19%	0	0.00%	0.00%	117	90.00%	13	17

Cumulative figures since March 1, 2020.

Recovered category was initially patients/staff who tested positive and subsequently tested negative twice.

In Isolation category includes either self-quarantined, hospital, or COVID-19 unit at GWVH.

Positive for current month includes the number of veterans/staff who have tested COVID positive for the current month.

Vaccine Update 12/31/21

165 out of 169 patients, 97.6 %, have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine.

255 Pruitt staff out of 258 Pruitt staff, 98.8 %, have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. Three Pruitt staff members have not been vaccinated due to religious exemptions.

Onsite Vaccine Clinics 2021

Onsite Vaccine - Date of Clinic No. 3 - Feb. 23, 2021
 Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 4 - Mar. 12, 2021
 Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 5- April 2, 2021
 Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 6- April 16, 2021
 Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 7- April 30, 2021
 Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 8- May 14, 2021
 Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 9- May 28, 2021
 Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 10- June 11, 2021
 Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 11- June 25, 2021
 Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 12- July 9, 2021
 Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 13- July 23, 2021
 Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 14- August 6, 2021
 Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 15- August 18, 2021

Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 16- August 31, 2021
 Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 17- September 3, 2021
 Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 18- September 15, 2021
 Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No.19- September 17, 2021
 Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 20- September 28, 2021
 Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 21- October 1, 2021
 Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 22 - October 29, 2021
 Onsite Vaccine -Date of Clinic No. 23- November 12, 2021
 Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 24- December 3, 2021
 Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 24- December 9, 2021
 Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 25- December 13, 2021
 Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 25- December 14, 2021
 Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 26- December 16, 2021
 Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 27- December 22, 2021

Mr. Kerry Dyer, Director of Operations, GDVS

Mr. Dyer announced that there have been 6 new hires since last month's Board meeting. Also, he has been working with Mr. Feagin and Mr. Cowart doing inventory and making sure all insurance policies have been updated.

Mr. Dyer also announced the passing of Mr. James Hood, once of our employees who resigned on January 3. He passed on January 13 and will be interred at Canton National Cemetery.

Mr. Mark Bannister, Administration, Health, and Memorials:

Mr. Bannister expressed thanks to Vetlanta, who has donated adult diapers and Kleenex for the homes. Donations are greatly appreciated.

BUDGET

The 2022 Legislative Session convened on January 10, 2022, at 10:00 A.M. On Thursday, January 13, 2022, following Governor Kemp's State of the State Address, we received a copy of the Governor's Amended FY 2022 and FY 2023 budget report.

House and Senate committee meetings will continue to be live-streamed and will also be held in person, as they typically are. House Media Services will also live-stream House sub-committee meetings, provided that such meetings take place in meeting rooms with streaming technology in place. GDVS is prepared to present our Amended FY 2022 and FY 2023 program budget.

FINANCE

Accounting

Routine operations are continuing.

HEALTH AND MEMORIALS

State Veterans Homes

State Veterans Homes Census (through January 7, 2022)+

Current Month	Augusta	Milledgeville	Total
Regular Patients	95	125	220
Service Connected *	22	39	61
Total Patients	117	164	281
Last Month			
Regular Patients	92	129	221
Service Connected *	22	40	62
Total Patients	114	169	283

* One-hundred percent of the cost of these services is paid by the VA. No state funds are involved.

+ The report to the VSB are the total numbers from December 3, 2021, through January 7, 2022.

Georgia War Veterans Nursing Home – Augusta

Routine operations are continuing.

Georgia War Veterans Home – Milledgeville

Routine operations are continuing.

State Veterans Cemeteries,

Burial Statistics (through January 7, 2022)+

State Veterans Cemetery	Cumulative Last Month	Cumulative Current Month	Increase
Glennville	1,987	2,011	24
Milledgeville	4,612	4,641	29
Total	6,599	6,652	53

+ The report to the VSB are the total numbers from December 3, 2021, through January 7, 2022.

Thursday, January 20, 2022 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery – Glennville

Routine COVID-19 contingency operations are continuing.

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Milledgeville

Routine COVID-19 contingency operations are continuing.

OPERATIONS

Human Resources

Routine operations are continuing.

Personnel Actions (Gains / Losses) (December 16, 2021 – January 15, 2022)

Location	Position	Status	Name	Date
Dublin VAMC	VFSO 1	New Hire	<i>Nicole Clark</i>	12/16/2021
Decatur VAMC	VFSO 1	New Hire	<i>Kareem Reddick</i>	12/16/2021
Lawrenceville	VFSO 1	New Hire	<i>Otis Bush</i>	12/16/2021
Appeals	VCAO 2	Resignation	<i>Raphael Castile</i>	12/29/2021
North Region	Regional Director	Retired	<i>Dale Bell</i>	12/31/2021
Canton	VFSO 2	Resignation	<i>Melissa Pritchett</i>	12/31/2021
Appeals	VCAO 1	Resignation	<i>Grace Hooks</i>	12/31/2021
Appeals	VCAO 1	Resignation	<i>Dawn Thomas</i>	13/31/2021
Cartersville	Office Manager	Resignation	<i>Emily Waters</i>	12/31/2021
Marietta	VFSO 2	Resignation	<i>James Hood</i>	01/03/2022
Atlanta	Office Manger	Resignation	<i>Robert Butler</i>	01/13/2022
Carrollton	Office Manager	Resignation	<i>Nikitia Hall</i>	01/14/2022
Appeals	VCAO 1	Resignation	<i>Charlotte Hamilton</i>	01/14/2022
Milledgeville	Grounds Maint Tech 1	Resignation	<i>David Hodges</i>	01/14/2022

Properties

Routine operations are continuing.

Information Technology

Routine operations are continuing.

Records Management

Routine operations are continuing.

Vehicle Management

Routine service and maintenance are performed as required.

Veterans Service Foundation Board

Mr. Doug Middleton, Chairman of the Veterans Service Foundation Board will provide an update.

OLD BUSINESS:

There was no old business to discuss.

NEW BUSINESS:

Mr. Hanley announced that Mr. Kopsie and Mr. Paslawski will act as liaisons to the Veterans Service Foundation Board. A priority is to remodel and upgrade the homes.

Mr. Hanley announced that Mr. Kubinec will be the Board's permanent liaison to the Governor's Office to assure messaging remains uniform.

Mr. Hanley explained the role of the Board. The Board is an oversight body and makes recommendations. They have offered assistance with operations in the last year, which was deemed necessary at the time. They will be falling back to the traditional role of oversight and recommendations.

Mr. Hanley led a discussion regarding the veteran's homes in Georgia, especially the need for a home in the Atlanta area, as well as the need for additional homes in Georgia. Sen. Kirkpatrick will be dropping a bill to form a Senate Study Committee on what we're required to have for long term care for veterans in the state.

Commissioner Ross mentioned a meeting with VISN 7 that she attended with Mr. Russell Feagin and Mr. Mark Bannister. Also in the meeting were directors from Alabama, which has 5 homes and South Carolina, which has 7 homes. We need to up our standard of care regarding infection control. The bill being introduced is the first step of a long-term plan.

Thursday, January 20, 2022 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

Mr. Kubinec noted that we need to reach out to Representative Clark on the House side about the bill that is being dropped in the Senate. Commissioner Ross will show the bill to Rep. Clark.

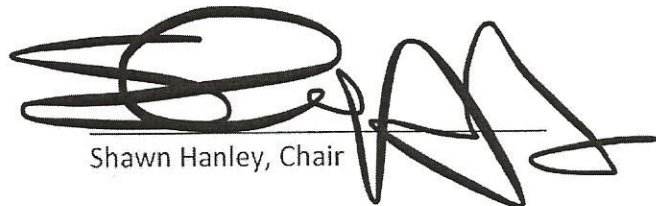
Commissioner Ross went over the budget. She highlighted the fact that the department was snapshotted in June and number of people, not positions, were used in the Governor's amended budget requesting a \$5,000 raise for employees. She stated that we are hoping for funding to "true up" all positions. The salary increase will assist with hiring/retaining people. Our top priority will remain pay raises for our lowest paid employees. The purchase of a bus has been approved for the home.

A snapshot of where the current year's budget stands was reviewed. Several areas are over budget, but Commissioner Ross is not concerned with where we stand fiscally and is looking forward to having our amended budget approved.

The February 16 board meeting was scheduled. It will be a combination virtual and in-person meeting, set up at the GDVS. Mr. Kopsie made a motion for this and there were no objections. The motion passed.

Ms. Swan made a motion to adjourn the meeting. There were no objections. The motion passed. The meeting adjourned at approximately 1:39 p.m.

SIGNED:



Shawn Hanley, Chair

ATTEST:



Joshua Kopsie, Secretary

The next Veterans Service Board meeting will be held in person at GDVS but will also be available via video/telephone conference call on Wednesday, February 16, 2022, at 12:30 p.m.

The Webex link is:

<https://georgiadepartmentofveteransservice.webex.com/georgiadepartmentofveteransservice/j.php?MTID=mc355c35196de0575ba8852122656fd48>

Meeting password: **hZC3znB9Fr3**

Or you can call: **1-844-621-3956**

Access Code: **2334 355 3563**