

**Wednesday, January 25, 2023 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia**

Present Mr. Shawn Hanley, Chair
Ms. Takosha Swan, Vice-Chair
Mr. John Kubinec, Member
Mr. Steve Mendez, Member
Mr. Tim Paslawski, Member
Mr. Pete Peterson, Member
Ms. Patricia Ross, Commissioner

Visitors: Ms. Shelly-Ann Simpson, Executive Director, Field Operations & Appeals, GDVS
Present Mr. Mark Bannister, Executive Dir., Health, Memorials, Finance & Development, GDVS
Mr. Rich McCormick, House of Representatives, 6th District
Mr. Matthew O'Brien, Assistant Attorney General, Attorney General's Office
Ms. Monisha Rallapalli, Office of Planning and Budget
Mr. Dean Rakoskie, State Commander, VFW
Mr. Lou Zayas, Jr. Vice Commander, Military Order of the Purple Heart
Ms. Belinda Boldoe, VFW Service Officer, Appeals Division, GDVS
Ms. Raven Holstick, GDVS, American Legion Service Officer
Mr. Don Layne, VECTR Chief Operating Officer
Ms. Dylester Scott, Veteran
Mr. Craig Ogilvie, Henry County Veterans Treatment Court
Ms. Kefu Aiken, Operation Rally Point, Walton, GA
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
Ms. Charlotte May, Director, Public Information and External Affairs, GDVS
Mr. Russell Feagin, Director, Health & Memorials Division, GDVS
Ms. Tonya Jarrett, Clinical Director, Health & Memorials Division, GDVS
Mr. Edwin Berry, Director, Appeals Division, GDVS
Mr. Bobby Davis, Director, Veterans Education & Training, GDVS
Mr. Mark Demers, Grant Program Implementation Manager, GDVS
Ms. Monica Dorsey, Communications & Outreach Specialist, GDVS
Ms. Barbara Beedles, Records Management, GDVS
Ms. Julie Hammond, Executive Assistant to the Commissioner, GDVS

On Wednesday, January 25, 2023, the Veterans Service Board meeting was held in person and by video/tele-conference.

Mr. Hanley called the meeting to order at 12:36 p.m. Ms. Swan gave the invocation. Mr. Peterson led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

The visitors were welcomed by Mr. Hanley and Commissioner Ross.

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Mr. Peterson made a motion to approve the January Agenda. Ms. Swan seconded the motion. The motion passed.

Ms. Swan made a motion to approve the December minutes, which were previously distributed for members to review. Mr. Mendez 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 Quarterly Atlanta VAHCS VSO virtual meeting with Director Brown and Staff on December 13, 2022, at 1PM. A summary of the meeting was provided to the VFW Commander, Staff, and community.
- The Department Service Officer attended a VFW National Veterans Service (NVS) Eastern Region Zoom meeting on December 15, 2022, at 2PM. The meeting was to discuss the PACT Act Claims, the Upcoming VFW Training Schedule, the NVS Updates, and the Department Service Officer (DSO) concerns.
- The Department Service Officer, the VFW GA Commander, and Staff attended a Unite Us Zoom meeting on December 19, 2022, at 10AM. The purpose for the meeting was an introduction and a training session about the program.
- The Department Service Officer attended a VSO/CMA with the Regional Office IRM (IT) team Zoom meeting on December 20, 2022, at 1PM. The purpose for the meeting was to discuss relocating the VSOs to their new office locations within the Regional Office.
- The Department Service Officer, the VFW GA Commander, and Staff attended a Zoom meeting with Commissioner Ross and Staff on January 10, 2023. The purpose for the meeting was to discuss the VFW Nationals' launch of their PACT Act flyer and the potential impact on the VFW DSO.
- The Department Service Officer attended the CDCE/VAS Quarterly Committee Zoom meeting on January 11, 2023, at 1:30PM. The purpose for the meeting was to provide the VAMC initiative regarding the PACT Act and the VAMC operational status.

Mr. Dean Rakoskie, State Commander, VFW

Mr. Rakoskie stated that VFW National implemented a self-assessment program concerning the PACT Act on January 9. It can be found at pactactinfo.org. The completed self-assessment will be forwarded

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to a service officer in the veteran's state of residence. Also, VFW National has accredited certain law firms to assist those who desire legal assistance regarding the PACT Act. There are certain conditions that were negotiated. This is to protect veterans from law firms that have not been vetted.

Ms. Raven Holstick, GDVS, American Legion Service Officer

- The Assistant Department Service Officer (Ed Kent) assisted 37 veterans with VA benefits related inquiries this month.
- Mr. Will Simmons, Commander, Ms. Pat Morgan, President ALA, Mr. George Gray, Commander SAL, Mr. Randy Goodman, A/NEC, Assistant Service Officer (Ed Kent), visited the Lake City VA Medical Center on January 12, 2023. Hospital provided a presentation concerning the operations, plans and development and a tour of the common areas.
- ACE-SI- Ask, Care, Escort- Suicide Intervention Training was held at Department headquarters post 310. Training was taught by Calandra Ferguson and Veda Brooks. In attendance we had 9 service officers and 1 post commander. Department and Assistant service officers were in attendance.
- Post revitalization was held at Post 163 in Statham, GA on January 13-15.
- Upcoming event: Montgomery VA Medical Center January 25 @ 1:00 (Montgomery, AL)
- Upcoming event: Tuskegee VA Medical Center January 26 @ 9:00 (Tuskegee, AL)

Commissioner Patricia Ross

On Thursday, December 15, 2022, Commissioner Ross held an Open Forum for the department on MS Teams. She then spoke virtually to the Military Affairs representatives at all the University System of Georgia Schools, who were meeting at Middle Georgia State University in Macon. The December Veterans Service Board meeting was in the afternoon. She completed the day at a Women in Leadership Holiday Celebration.

On Friday, December 16, 2022, Commissioner Ross took part in a GDVS-OIG New Case Discussion, the GWVH RFP Discussion, a NASDVA Call and a Military Research Study call.

On Monday, December 19, 2022, Commissioner Ross had a Georgia Veterans Support meeting with Wyatt Batchelor of MBN Brands and Phil Smith of Wells Fargo. She also held a weekly Director's Meeting. In the afternoon, she met with Unite Us and Tyler Technologies for a meeting and spent extra time with Unite Us discussing the GDVS Social Connector and Implementation.

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On Tuesday, December 20, 2022, Commissioner Ross began her holiday leave, which lasted through Thursday, December 29, 2022.

On Friday, December 30, 2022, Commissioner Ross met with Shelly-Ann Simpson and handled other office duties.

On Tuesday, January 3, 2023, Commissioner Ross had surgery and was in the hospital for the week.

On Monday, January 9, 2023, Commissioner Ross held a weekly Director's Meeting. She then attended the Unite Us Social Connector and Implementation meeting. Her final meeting of the day was with Jarrad Turner of The Warrior Alliance and Bianca Motley Broom, Mayor of College Park. The discussion centered around the PACT Act and how to assist veterans in the College Park and surrounding areas. Also in attendance was Shelly-Ann Simpson.

On Tuesday, January 10, 2023, Commissioner Ross began supervisor reviews of her direct reports. She met with Julie Hammond and Charlotte May. Later in the day she attended the meeting with the Miner Agency. She then met with VFW Commander Dean Rakoskie regarding the PACT Act.

On Wednesday, January 11, 2023, Commissioner Ross continued her supervisory reviews. She met with Mark Bannister, Kerry Dyer, Shelly-Ann Simpson and Bobby Davis. She also attended the Returning Veterans Task Force January meeting. She ended the day with a Georgia Veterans Support meeting with Joe Sieve from Papa Johns.

On Thursday, January 12, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended the Inauguration ceremony for Governor Brian Kemp. She then met with Shane Cole from Regard Recovery. The purpose of this meeting was to discuss connecting veterans to treatment options for substance use disorder and mental health.

On Friday, January 13, 2023, Commissioner Ross held an Open Forum for the department. She also took part in the GWVH RFP Discussion meeting.

On Saturday, January 14, 2023, Commissioner Ross took part in Vet-Connect, Clayton County's 2nd Annual County-Wide Veterans Symposium, in Riverdale.

On Tuesday, January 17, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended Day One of ASIST Training, led by Calandra Ferguson. She also met with Ms. Brown, the Director of the Atlanta VA and discussed how to better partner to assist veterans.

On Wednesday, January 18, 2023, Commissioner Ross met with two organizations and provided information about the Georgia Veterans Service Foundation. She listened in to the Georgia War Veterans Home Management and Operations Offer's conference concerning the request for proposals for the Milledgeville contract. She also attended the Unite Us Weekly meeting.

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On Thursday, January 19, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended Day Two of ASIST Training, led by Calandra Ferguson. She also attended the Fulton County Veterans Empowerment Commission with Chairman Hanley. Commissioner Ross briefed the amended FY 23 budget to the House subcommittee which added funds for the digitization of DD-214s and moved the \$1,000,000 state match for the Augusta cemetery out of the account.

On Monday, January 23, 2023, Commissioner Ross held a weekly Director's Meeting. She and Ms. Simpson honored a 100-year-old veteran. Commissioner Ross also attended a Unite Us Social Connector and Implementation meeting. She finished the day in a Fox Grant Update meeting.

Highlights: Budget results

On the horizon: Georgia Veterans Service Foundation Board – gaveteransfoundation.org

Commissioner Ross added the following to her report: The Governor's State of the State address went well. There is a lot of excitement that Georgia is postured well compared to other states. He looks to expand healthcare workers, education, law enforcement and to crack down on violence and crime.

Commissioner Ross highlighted that we are partnering with other organizations to get the word out about the PACT Act. Also, we have received our first donation for the Foundation. We need to convene to decide how to execute the funds.

In the absence of Mr. Kerry Dyer at the meeting, Commissioner Ross announced that the Milledgeville Cemetery is fully manned for the first time in many months. Mr. Dyer is attending a Fleet Management Conference today.

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

GENERAL

- January 9th, along with the Commissioner, met with the Mayor of College Park to discuss the feasibility of a "supermarket" type of event facilitated by the city with assistance from GDVS.
- January 9th, met with the American Legion and Vetlanta at American Legion Post 45 in Canton for a site visit for the Pact Act Registration Rally that was held on January 19. The purpose of this event was to assist veterans and their widowed spouses the opportunity to apply for benefits under the PACT Act. GDVS supported the event by providing 5 VSOs along with the North Area Director to assist with the filing of claims.
- The Returning Veteran's Task Force's (RVTF) quarterly meeting was held on January 11 in the Pete Wheeler Conference room.

- **DD 214's and Welcome Home Letters:**

- 776 Welcome Home Letters were mailed out in December 2022.

PROJECTED POSITIONS

- Current openings in Gainesville, Lawrenceville, Newnan, and St. Mary's.

Ms. Simpson added the following to her report: We are working with outside entities to get word out about the PACT Act. We met with the mayor of College Park recently and did a site visit to KSU for an upcoming PACT Act event. Ms. Simpson stated her appreciation to the VA for the way they have been pushing the PACT Act and contacting people to let them know they may be eligible for benefits.

Ms. Ramona Roper, Director, Training and Professional Development Division

- December 21-23, 2022, Mr. Steven Fay conducted new hire training for the Atlanta Balcony Office, Office Manager.
- January 5 & 6, 2023, Mr. Steven Fay conducted new hire training for the Atlanta Balcony.
- January 12, 2023, Ms. Ramona Roper attended Governor Brian P. Kemp's Inauguration.
- January 17 & 18, 2023, Ms. Sherry Whitfield made a site visit to the Valdosta VFSO.
- January 17 & 18, 2023, Ms. Ramona Roper conducted new hire training in the Cartersville VFSO.
- January 17 & 18, Mr. Steven Fay conducted new hire training in the Augusta GWVH VFSO.
- January 18, 2023, Mr. Charles Isaac conducted new hire training in the Brunswick VFSO.
- January 19 & 20, 2023, Mr. Steven Fay conducted new hire training in the Marietta VFSO.
- January 19 & 20, 2023, Ms. Ramona Roper conducted training in the Fort McPherson VFSO.
- January 19 & 20, 2023, Ms. Sherri Whitfield made a site visit to the Valdosta VFSO.

Upcoming Events:

- Daily continued ongoing support to the Regional Directors and Veteran Field Service Offices

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- Continuation of Quality Review checks of VSO's work
- Continuation of Field Office visits
- Planning the 2023 Annual (Regional) Training Conferences

Ms. Roper added to her report the following: This department trains new hires, mentors the service officers, executes drop classes, files claims, and plans annual training. There are a certain number of hours of accredited courses the VSO's have to take each year. We are happy to add a new trainer to our department to help with the heavy workload.

Mr. Edwin Berry, Director, Appeals Division

The total number of hearings conducted by the Appeals Division for December 2022 was **33**.

- The total number hearings conducted in 2022 was **919**.
- The total number of pre-hearing actions for December 2022 was **84**.
- The total number of post-hearing actions for December 2022 was **23**.
- 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 **186**.
- As of **January 01, 2023**, the Atlanta VA Regional Office processed benefits as follows for GDVS and the Service Organizations represented by GDVS:

Types of Claims	Number of Awards	Benefits paid out
Compensation	102,433	\$209,857,107
DIC	3462	\$5,764,707
Survivor Pension	824	\$750,204
Veteran Pension	1,640	\$1,928,868
Grand Total	108,359	\$218,300,885

Mr. Berry added the following to his report: During 2022 we conducted more than 900 hearings. We recently received the list for 2023 with about 950 veterans on the list. The Board is spreading hearings

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across the country because veterans move from Georgia, but want us to continue as their POA because we provide the best services.

We recently moved into our new offices because the construction/renovation process was completed.

Mr. Ken Childre, Director of North Region

Here are the notes from December for the North Area:

December 2022 total retro awards reported by the North Georgia offices: \$1,373,138.00.

Included in that amount is a single award reported by:
 Glenn Massey (Gainesville)-\$131,109.66 (Lawler-9177)
 Rico Johnson (Gainesville)-\$184,276.89 (Shaw-2182)
 Barry Hunter (Rome)-\$222,901.00 (Watson-6552)

Director Site Visits/Inspections-3

North Georgia Gains/Losses:

- Atlanta Balcony-Williams-Resigned Effective 13 Dec
- Augusta VAMC-Jones-Transferred from Augusta GWVNH Effective 16 Dec
- Lawrenceville-Telon-Resigned Effective 30 Dec

North Georgia Interviews:

- Cartersville-20 Dec-8 candidates/4 interviewed.
- Augusta GWVNH-21 Dec-13 Oct-13 candidates/4 interviewed.

Average Visits Per VFSO							
Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO							
Region:		North					
Month:		December-22					
A	B	C	D	E	D / E F	G	G / E H
Office Name	Veterans' Field Service Officer (VFSO) Last Name	#	Total Monthly Office Visits	Work Days In Month	Average Office Visits Per Day	Total Claims Submitted To VA Monthly	Average Claims Submitted By VFSOS To VA Daily
	Number of VFSOs:	50	11,160	835	13.37	2,147	2.57
Number of Offices:		30	Average Visits/Office:		372.00	Average Claims/Office: 71.5666667	

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*Total monthly office visits include: 2,652 In-Person and 8,508 phone calls/emails.

Mr. Childre added information about a recent event in Canton. We had 4 VSO's on-site and processed 12 claims. The VA had 12 VSO's on site and processed 34 claims. We are planning an event in Rome in May and another in Cobb County in August. We processed a claim for a surviving spouse, since Thailand was added to the list of countries in the PACT Act, and she has received a check for more than \$83,000.

Mr. Vincent M. Pritchett, Director of South Region

- On January 5, 2023, Vincent Pritchett and Debra O'Neal conducted interviews for the St. Marys field office.
- On January 5, 2023, GDVS field service offices sent letters to members of the general assembly detailing the direct compensation and pension payments veterans in their counties received in FY 2021.
- On January 17, 2023, Stephanie Jordan (Brunswick field office) moved full-time into the Brunswick Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC). Since we were only allotted one office in the CBOC, we will continue to staff our office at 11 Judicial Lane as well.
- On January 18, 2023, Vincent Pritchett visited Johnson State Prison in Wrightsville and provided a Justice-Involved Veterans briefing to incarcerated veterans.
- South Region offices reported retroactive payments totaling \$359,878.00 with the highest single payment reported by the Warner Robins field office of \$113,027.00.
- South Region Gains/Losses: Carlas Wooden joined our Dublin field office effective December 16, 2022. Roger (Steve) Futch resigned from the St. Marys field office effective January 16, 2023.
- South Georgia Region Veterans Population: 237,759.
- Office Visits for December: South Georgia offices handled 4,510 phone calls and emails.

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Average Visits Per VFSO								
Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO								
Region:		South Region						
Month:		December-22						
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	Per	Submitted	Submitted	
Office Name	Last Name	#	Visits	Month	Day	To	By VFSOS	
			Office	Month	Per	VA	To VA	
			Visits	Month	Day	Monthly	Daily	
Number of VFSOs:		41	2,384	772	3.09	1,769	2.29	
Number of Offices:		24	Average Visits/Office:		99.33	Average Claims/Office:		73.71

Ms. Veda Brooks, Women Veterans Coordinator (WVC)

- December 6, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in the weekly GDVS/AMES Summit Meeting.
- December 13 to 15, 2022, Ms. Brooks participated in the SSG Fox SPGP Post Award National Seminar.
- December 19, 2022, Ms. Brooks participated in the Governor’s Challenge & Mayor’s Challenge Team Lead Call. Ms. Brooks participated in the Unite Us GDVS Social Connector Implementation Meeting.
- December 20, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in the GDVS & Miner Agency Biweekly Meeting.
- January 4, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in the 2023 Planning Meeting at Saint Philip AME Church.
- January 10, 2023, Ms. Brooks presented mental health updates and women health updates at the Georgia American Legion HQ.
- January 11, 2023, Ms. Brooks presented higher level review mental health claims updates to South Region 1.
- January 12, 2023, Ms. Brooks presented higher level review mental health claims updates to South Region 2.
- January 13, 2023, Ms. Brooks was interviewed by WCEG Network. She answered questions about veteran benefits and how to obtain mental health care at the VHA.

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

Ms. Calandra Ferguson, Suicide Prevention and Outreach Coordinator (SPOC)

- December 13-15, 2022, Ms. Ferguson attended the SSG Fox Grant Post Award Conference.
- December 16, 2022, Ms. Ferguson met with the Lethal Means Safety Priority Group.
- December 17, 2022, Ms. Ferguson partnered with D2J conducted SAVE Training for volunteers.
- December 19, 2022, Ms. Ferguson presented on National Governor's Challenge & Mayor's Challenge Team Lead Call (Topic: Leader Transition).
- January 9, 2023, Ms. Ferguson participated in UNITE US Team meeting.
- Bi-Monthly Ms. Ferguson meets with AMES to plan for 2023 SSG Fox Grant Suicide Prevention Summit.
- January 10, 2023, Ms. Ferguson conducted ACE-SI training for the State HQS for the American Legion in Georgia 2022. Ms. Ferguson attended the SSG Fox Post Award Conference.
- January 11, 2023, Ms. Ferguson conducted S.A.V.E. for VSO's South Region 1.
- January 12, 2023, Ms. Ferguson conducted S.A.V.E. for VSO's South Region 2.
- January 13, 2023, Ms. Ferguson participated in the Open Forum with Commissioner Ross.

Ms. Charlotte May, Director, Public Information & External Affairs

INFORMATION OUTREACH

Division Updates

1. GDVS Newsletter – PID published a monthly newsletter in December. The December newsletter featured a cover story on the Wreaths Across America programs held in Milledgeville and Glennville as they returned to full in-person ceremonies. The newsletter also featured information on the renaming of the Atlanta VA Medical Center and Regional Office for the late Rep. Max Cleland and Sen. Johnny Isakson, information on the new VA life insurance program launching in January 2023, and a 'Get to Know Your VSO' spotlight on Conyers office manager Terrance Leggon. The full newsletter is available online at <https://veterans.georgia.gov/newsletter>.
2. Veterans Benefits Outreach
 - a. PACT Act –
 - i. Participated in the PACT Act Week of Action. Shared resources and information on VA town halls, videos encouraging veterans to find out if they're eligible for care, and promoting the GDVS's ability to help.
 - ii. Registration Rally – highlighted an upcoming VETLANTA event being held January 19 in Canton. GDVS staff will be onsite to offer information on PACT Act and begin the claims process.
 - iii. Fraud awareness – reminded veterans and families to be wary of advertisements promising to get certain benefits or compensation amounts for PACT or Camp LeJeune claims when the GDVS offers assistance for free.
 - b. Wreaths Across America –
 - i. Highlighted the resumption of full, in-person ceremonies at both veterans memorial cemeteries since 2019.
 - ii. Daughters of the American Revolution wreath-laying ceremony at the State Capitol – Highlighted Commissioner Ross's participation and opened Wreaths Across America week.
 - c. Job Fairs and Career Opportunities – shared information on job fairs for military spouses and caregivers and the deadline to apply for VA's partnership with Microsoft Software & Systems Academy.

Ms. May added the following to her report: The drop classes we offer have quizzes attached to them. The level of the quiz is based on the level of the VSO. Also, all courses offered at Annual Training are on the Absorb site for quick reference.

We are getting good feedback on the monthly newsletters. We have started highlighting a VSO in each edition. Ms. Swan suggested highlighting board members as well.

Public Information Division Contacts *(Since December 9, 2022)*

- Replies to VA eBenefits Messages = 40
- Replies to General Questions = approximately 115
- Individual Request for the State Certificate of Honor = approximately 15

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 29,725
(Honors Ceremonies and Central Office Mail Outs)

DoD Vietnam Veteran Lapel Pins presented via GDVS – An estimated 23,725

Honors Ceremonies supported/coordinated by GDVS – 356

Defense Department's Vietnam Veteran Surviving Spouse CoH – 291

Mr. Mark Demers, Grant Program Implementation Manager

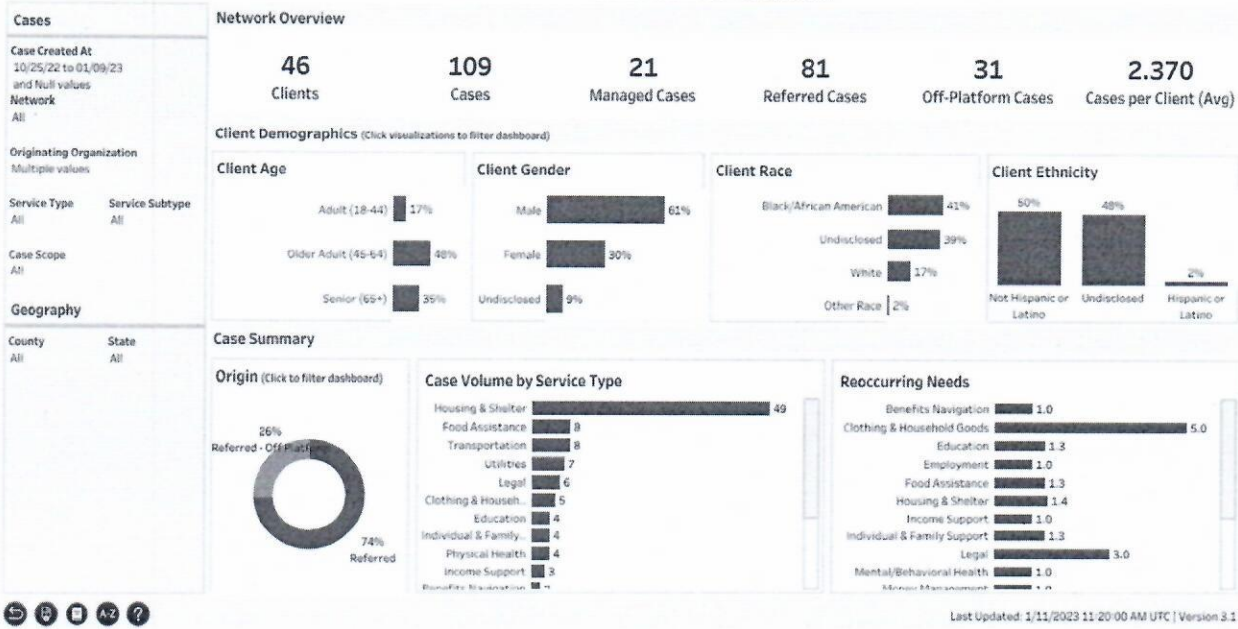
- Unite-Us Grant- (American Rescue Plan-Negative Impact Grant)- \$18.3m (\$6.1m x 3yrs) effective July 1, 2022:
 - Data ingestion and secure data transfer for the platform and social connector has been slow but we are moving forward. As of January 11, 2023 we have **28,380** in the system and growing. Completed latest SFTP data transfer to Unite Us on January 10, 2023. We have submitted **529** community partners and **312** healthcare partners for inclusion to the platform since August 2022, with another **100** to be added by January 13, 2023.
 - Below is an activity snapshot from Unite Us Insights from October 25, 2022 to January 9, 2023:

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Network Activity Overview

Monitor critical network metrics over time



- Grant financial management-vendor management set up, issues with state external auditors (RSM), payments to vendor, and grant reimbursement have been a slow and cumbersome process. We completed our third payment to Unite Us (September) on January 3, 2023 and submitted for reimbursement on January 5, 2023. We are hoping the process moves much quicker going forward.
- Completed SMARTSHEET 2.3.5.1.3.06 GA ARPA NEIT1 DRL Veterans GA-0010886 Audit on December 30, 2022.
- Prepared and submitted quarterly report online via OPB website on January 10, 2023.
- Attended weekly Unite Us meetings.
- **SSG Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program-** (\$747,464 for one year with the possibility to extend two more years).
 - We are in partnership with Kennesaw State University AMES Center to implement the grant. KSU is expected to start analyzing data collection in late January 2023.
 - Our first funds draw from the grant will happen by January 31, 2023.
 - Attended SSG Fox Grant Post Award meeting on January 10, 2023 at 1400.

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- Calandra Ferguson or Veda Brooks will report all the outreach and training events regarding Suicide Prevention under the Fox Grant.
- Completed Georgia Certified Procurement Associate (GCPA) certification on December 28, 2022.

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

- The approval and compliance surveys of educational institutions, training establishments and training programs approved for veterans training is continuing with no significant problems in any area being noted.
- Approval of new veteran's On-The-Job training sites (OJT) continues to increase. As of this date the State Approving Agency (SAA) has granted approval to 1,808 educational institutions and training establishments where Georgia veterans may attend school or job training and utilize their GI Bill® educational benefits.
- SAA received a Satisfactory Rating for FY22 which allows our contract to continue for FY23.
- SAA will be attending the NASAA Mid-Winter Conference in Washington, D.C. 4-8 February 2023.

Item *	Number
Approved Educational Institutions	389
Approved Training Establishments	1,419
Veteran Students Enrolled in Educational Institutions	17,125

* Source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration, Education Division, December 2022.

Mr. Davis added the following to his report: He spoke at Norfolk Southern to a group of veterans and suggested they go to their local field office for benefits assistance.

Mr. Russell Feagin, Director, Health & Memorials Division

The VA inspection in July showed a few deficiencies. We completed the creative action plan and received full accreditation.

The monies being given in the budget are for improvements for Glennville and Milledgeville.

Ms. Tonya Jarrett, Clinical Director, Health & Memorials Division

1. Georgia War Veterans Home has six COVID-positive staff members and one COVID-positive patient.
2. Status of staffing by Pruitt Health for Subacute Unit:
 - a. Psychiatrist-Pruitt Health is pursuing a contract with Salveo Integrative Health for psychiatry services with a start date to be determined.
 - b. Neuropsychologist- Pruitt is currently contracting with consultant Dr. Jeremy Hertzka through Integrated Psych Solutions.
 - c. Facility Executive Director participates in bi-weekly calls with the Pruitt recruitment staff for updates on potential candidates and staffing needs.
 - d. LPN/RN- Pruitt is continuing to recruit.
 - e. OT/PT/SLP- Pruitt is continuing to recruit.
3. Status of staff training and program development:
 - a. The behavior specialist team members are traveling to Augusta, GA, later in January to observe and be trained in assessing behavior, cognitive, and psychological evaluations. Dr. Hertzka will train the team in the correct selection, administration, and scoring of these evaluations.
 - b. Modality training is ongoing for Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing therapy (EMDR), biofeedback training, and dynavision training for sensory processing.
 - c. Subcommittees have been established for program development, marketing, evaluation and assessment tools, treatment pathways, and medication management.
 - d. Onsite staff is developing policies, procedures, and treatment pathways for program development.
 - e. Staff education is provided through trainers, onsite in-services, and computer courses.
 - f. Pruitt staff provided patient de-escalation and safety training campus-wide on 1/18/23 and 1/19/23.

Ms. Jarrett amended her report: They are currently Covid free regarding patients, and have 4 staff members who are Covid positive.

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There was a discussion regarding the younger veterans trying to be admitted to the Homes. There are currently 18 veterans from their 50's to 70's. They are seeing more Parkinson's, organic brain syndrome, etc. It once was the geriatric population needing our services, but that is changing. Post 9/11 and Vietnam veterans are having issues at earlier ages that require care. Ms. Jarrett agreed to provide additional information to Ms. Swan.

Mr. Kerry Dyer, Chief Operations Officer

On Friday, December 16, 2022, Kerry Dyer met virtually with Mark Meeks, DOAS Procurement Manager, Russell Feagin, Tonya Jarrett, Jenelle Moore, Matthew Carter, DOAS Procurement Manager and Dan Holtz to discuss the posting of the Request for Proposal for the GWVH.

On Monday, December 19, 2022, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Directors meeting. Later that day he met virtually with UniteUs and Tyler Technologies to discuss data sharing. He also posted the following Field Office vacancies: Lawrenceville, Marietta, Augusta (GWVNH), Cartersville, and St. Marys.

On Tuesday, December 20, 2022, Kerry Dyer submitted the GDVS Annual Immigration & Reform Collection Report to Department of Audits and Accounts. Later that day he met with Leslie Davis, State Properties Leasing Specialist to discuss the new location for the Newnan Field Office. He also posted the following Field Office vacancies: Augusta (VAMC), Milledgeville Cemetery and Gainesville.

On Thursday, December 22, 2022, Kerry Dyer emailed the potential candidates to the interviewing officials for Lawrenceville, Marietta, Augusta (GWVNH) and Cartersville Field Offices. Later that day, along with Ed Berry and Demario Rucker, he consolidated the Appeals Division Surplus in preparation for turn-in to DOAS, Surplus Property Division.

On Tuesday, January 3, 2023, Kerry Dyer emailed the potential candidates to the interviewing officials for the Milledgeville Cemetery, St. Marys, Augusta (VAMC) and Gainesville Field Office. Later that day he spoke with Rutledge Davis, Zebulon Health Clinic Site Manger to discuss the Ribbon Cutting Ceremony.

On Wednesday, January 4, 2023, Kerry Dyer met virtually with Mark Meeks, DOAS Procurement Manager, Russell Feagin, Tonya Jarrett, Jenelle Moore, Matthew Carter, DOAS Procurement Manager and Dan Holtz to finalize the Request for Proposal for the GWVH. Later that day he spoke with Mike Kelly, Novatech sales manager, to discuss our lease contract.

On Thursday, January 5, 2023, Kerry Dyer processed the resignation packet for Ian Ketterer, Office Manager, Augusta VAMC. Later that day he reposted St. Marys vacancy externally.

On Monday, January 9, 2023, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's meeting. Later that day he posted the Administrative Assistant 2 and Billing Specialist vacancies internally. He also attended the UniteUs Social Connector bi-weekly meeting.

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On Tuesday, January 10, 2023, Kerry Dyer scrubbed the monthly Gains/Loss Roster, Promotion Merit List, Department Alpha Roster, Employee Position numbers Roster and distributed to the Senior Leadership. Later that day he met virtually with Mark Koppen, VHA Facility Planner, to discuss office space in the Charlie Norwood VAMC. He also participated in the DOAS Agency Procurement Officer seminar.

On Thursday, January 12, 2023, Kerry Dyer, along with Commissioner Ross, Shareka Monday-Robinson, Charlotte May, Ramona Roper, Mark Bannister and Shelly-Ann Simpson, attended Governor Kemp's Swearing-In Ceremony at the Georgia State Convocation Center. Later that day Kerry Dyer, along with Shelly-Ann Simpson and Bobby Davis, attended the Inaugural Gala at the State Farm arena.

On Friday, January 13, 2023, Kerry Dyer attended the Open Forum, along with Commissioner Ross. Later that day he spoke with Vicki VanBuren, ARC Solutions, to discuss the digitalization of DD214's.

On Tuesday, January 17, 2023. Kerry Dyer attended the Subcommittee brief along with Commissioner Ross, Mark Demers, Mark Bannister and Charlotte May. Later that day he contacted Michael Carter, Kennesaw State University Research Center to discuss the contract for the Summit Conference.

On Wednesday, January 18, 2023. Kerry Dyer met virtually with Ryan Petty, Access Scanning Project, to discuss the digitalization of DD214's. He also attended the Bidders/Offeror's Conference along with Russell Feagin and the DOAS Procurement Staff.

Below are the Personnel Actions Kerry Dyer and Shareka Monday-Robinson processed from December 15, 2022- January18, 2023.

Location	Position	Status	Name	Date
Lawrenceville	VFSO 1	Resigned	Telon Fiedland	12/30/2022
Marietta	VFSO 1	New Hire	Melvin Taylor	01/03/2023
Augusta (GWVNH)	VFSO 1	New Hire	Valerie Gilchrist	01/03/2023
Augusta (GWVNH)	VFSO 1	New Hire	Wanda Owens	01/03/2023
Cartersville	VFSO 1	New Hire	Kristi Jones	01/03/2023
Central Office	Admin. Asst 2	Resigned	Debbie Harper	01/04/2023
ST. Marys	Office Mgr (VFSO 2)	Resigned	Roger Futch	01/16/2023
Milledgeville	Grds Maint Tech 1	New Hire	Wesley Drawhorn	01/17/2023
Milledgeville	Grds Maint Tech 1	New Hire	Charles Woody	01/17/2023

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Augusta (VAMC)	VFSO 1	New Hire	Elaine McIntosh	01/17/2023
Augusta (VAMC)	Office Mgr (VFSO 2)	Resigned	Ian Ketterer	01/31/2023

On the horizon: Digitization of the DD214's.

Mr. Mark Bannister, Executive Director, Health, Memorials, Finance & Development

FINANCE

Accounting

Routine operations are continuing.

Through accounting procedural guidance and assistance from the State Accounting Shared Services, we continue to work together efficiently as a team to complete required end – of – year budget reports, monthly allotments, and amendments. As we continue with our accounting and budget operations, we're making adjustments and improvements in the areas of better management and oversight of our operating budget, general ledgers, timely submission of invoice payments and processing of purchase orders. We've reestablished greater communication with our vendors – payments to vendors of our State Veterans Homes.

Budget and General

The 2023 Legislative Session convened on Monday, January 9th, 2023, at 10:00 A.M. The General Assembly is on tap for scheduled meetings of the regular session during the period of January 9, 2023, through Wednesday, March 29, 2023.

Governor Kemp announced during his inaugural event speech the budget report would be released. On Friday, January 13, 2023, we received a copy of the Governor's Amended FY 2023 and FY 2024 Budget Report. Our funding remains the same for this budget cycle except we did receive state funds in AFY 2023 for the digitization of DD-214s.

In FY2024, the Governor proposed a \$2,000 increase for all full-time employees beginning July 1, 2023.

Additionally, we are projected to receive funds in the form of General Obligation Bonds to make needed improvements at our state veterans' home and cemeteries. This is great news to the start of the 2023 General Assembly! Keep in mind the budget must pass both chambers and signed into law near the end of the fiscal year. This information may be subject to change, and I will continue to monitor changes (if any) and will keep the Commissioner informed.

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Fiscal Year 2023

Fiscal Program	Amount	Appropriated Funds
Administration	\$160,579	One-time funding to support the digitization of DD 214's.
Cemeteries	(\$1,000,000)	Reduction of funds due to the delay of the Augusta Cemetery.

Fiscal Year 2024

Fiscal Program	Amount	General Obligation Bonds
Cemeteries	\$510,000	Design and construction of Phase II Glennville Cemetery.
Cemeteries	\$1,285,000	Maintenance, renovations, and repairs to parking areas and driveways.
Homes	\$2,005,000	Major maintenance and renovations to improve compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Wheeler and Vinson buildings at Milledgeville.

HEALTH AND MEMORIALS

State Veterans Homes

State Veterans Homes Census (Through January 13, 2023) +

Current Month	Augusta	Milledgeville	Total
Regular Patients	98	105	203
Service Connected *	26	37	63
Total Patients	124	142	266
Last Month			
Regular Patients	97	105	202
Service Connected *	28	39	67
Total Patients	125	144	269

* 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 16, 2022, through January 13, 2023.

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 13,2023) +

State Veterans Cemetery	Cumulative Last Month	Cumulative Current Month	Increase
Glennville	2,193	2,220	27
Milledgeville	4,964	5,006	42
Total	7,157	7,226	69

+ The report to the VSB are the total numbers from December 16, 2022, through January 13, 2023.

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery – Glennville

Routine operations are continuing.

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Milledgeville

Routine operations are continuing.

Veterans Service Foundation Board

The Foundation Board Chairman, Mr. Doug Middleton will provide an update.

OLD BUSINESS:

Mr. Craig Ogilvie, a visitor from the Henry County Veterans Treatment Court, discussed the program. He stated that it follows the drug court model. Veterans facing long-term prison sentences are evaluated for mental health and drug and alcohol disorders. Individuals are able to receive individual treatment

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The next Veterans Service Board meeting will be held in person at GDVS but will also be available via video/telephone conference call on Thursday, February 23, 2023, at 12:30 p.m. The Webex link is:
<https://georgiadepartmentofveteransservice.webex.com/georgiadepartmentofveteransservice/j.php?MTID=mcf34d84011db0f2bd196cb8841f0e801>

Meeting password: **E8AegYVJr54 (38234985 from video systems)**

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

Access Code: **2334 010 4615**

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through state licensed counselors. The VA helps with medical eligibility for these veterans to receive additional treatment and get back on track by dealing with underlying issues. The program is 20 months. Only one-third of Georgia's counties have VTC's.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Mr. Hanley and Mr. Mendez are working on getting Savannah to be the host of the VA Wheelchair Games in 2025.

NEW BUSINESS:

Mr. Rich McCormick, House of Representatives, 6th District, joined the meeting. He is a freshman member of the House, a former marine who has 7 children and served as an ER doctor. He serves on the Armed Services Committee, the Foreign Affairs Committee, and Science Committees. He stated his desire to take care of veterans. The VA has big holes in it. We need to provide better care for veterans. We are sustaining bureaucracy instead of veteran care. We need a top down review of services.

The February 23 Board meeting was scheduled. It will be a combination virtual and in-person meeting, set up at the GDVS.

Mr. Peterson made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Paslawski seconded the motion. There were no objections and the motion passed. The meeting adjourned at approximately 2:11 p.m.

SIGNED:



Shawn Hanley, Chair

ATTEST:



Joshua Kopsie, Secretary