

Tuesday, January 23, 2024 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

Present Mr. Shawn Hanley, Chair
Mr. Joshua Kopsie, Secretary
Mr. Steve Mendez, Member
Mr. Tim Paslawski, Member
Mr. Pete Peterson, Member
Ms. Patricia Ross, Commissioner

Visitors Present: Ms. Shelly-Ann Simpson, Executive Director, Field Operations & Appeals, GDVS
Mr. Russell Feagin, Executive Director, Health & Memorials Division, GDVS
Mr. Mark Demers, Chief Development Officer, Chief Finance Officer, GDVS
Ms. Jehae Kim, Assistant Attorney General, Attorney General's Office
Mr. Melvin Weaver, American Legion Commander
Mr. Leon McLamb, Patriot Guard Riders State Captain
Mr. Jasper Cooke, Patriot Guard Riders
Ms. Belinda Boldoe, VFW Service Officer, Appeals Division, GDVS
Ms. Raven Holstick, GDVS, American Legion Service Officer
Ms. Amy Stevens, Georgia Military Women and Vetlanta
Mr. Donald G. Stephens, Augusta MOAA President
Mr. Bob Willis, VFW Chaplain and Veteran from Augusta
Mr. Joseph Arrington, Disabled American Veterans
Ms. Linda Gary, Disabled American Veterans
Ms. Samantha Brown-Parks, Veterans Service Foundation Board Secretary
Mr. John Phillips, Veterans Service Foundation Board Member
Mr. Rick White, Veterans Service Foundation Board Member
Mr. Eddie Felton, Veteran
Mr. Robert Mallard, Veteran
Ms. Radiah Mallard, Veteran
Mr. Alvin Mason, Augusta Commission Commissioner and Veteran
Mr. Warren Wright, Veteran from Augusta
Mr. Louie McKelvain, Veteran from Augusta
Mr. Melvin Womble, Veteran from Augusta
Mr. Lanzy Williams Sr., Veteran from Augusta
Ms. Trina Williams, Veteran from Augusta
Mr. Tim Moses, Veteran from Augusta
Mr. Reuben L. Peppers, Veteran from Augusta
Mr. Terence Carroll, Veteran from Augusta
Mr. Bryan A. Norvell, Veteran from Augusta
Mr. Derrick A. Griffin, Veteran from Augusta
Mr. Andrew Braithwaite, Veteran from Augusta
Mr. Bob Young, Veteran from Augusta
Mr. Don Clark, Veteran from Augusta
Ms. Velma Lyons, Veteran from Augusta

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Mr. Michael Meeks, Database Architect
Mr. Carlton Deese, Executive Director GWVNH, Augusta, GA
Mr. Bobby Davis, Director, Veterans Education & Training, GDVS
Ms. Charlotte May, Director, Public Information and External Affairs, GDVS
Ms. Ramona Roper, Director, Training Division, GDVS
Ms. Sherri Whitfield, Director, Veterans Benefits South Region, GDVS
Mr. Ken Childre, Director, Veterans Benefits North Region, GDVS
Mr. Edwin Berry, Director, Appeals Division, GDVS
Ms. Veda Brooks, Coordinator, Women & Minority Veterans, GDVS
Mr. William Wilson, Network Administrator, GDVS
Ms. Camala Ball, Budget Analyst, GDVS
Ms. Irene Mackson, Business Support Analyst, GDVS
Ms. Monica Dorsey, Communications & Outreach Specialist, GDVS
Ms. Latoya McCallum, Administrative Assistant, GDVS
Ms. Julie Hammond, Executive Assistant to the Commissioner, GDVS

On Tuesday, January 23, 2024, 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. Mr. Mendez led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

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

Mr. Kopsie made a motion to approve the December 18 and January 4 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. Amy Stevens, Georgia Military Women and Vetlanta

In dealing with veterans, we are finding that they do not know about care giver services and assisted living services. Ms. Stevens made an appeal for VSOs to begin advertising this service to veterans.

Ms. Belinda Boldoe, VFW

- The Department Service Officer attended the Monthly VSO/Community Partner PACT Information and Listening meeting hosted by Lauren Ruchin, Atlanta VHA. The virtual meeting was held on December 14, 2023, at 12PM – 1PM.
 - The purpose of the meeting was to share information about the PACT Act and to discuss how our Veterans are being impacted by the PACT Act.
 - We discussed ways to ensure that our Veterans gain access to the healthcare, benefits, and resources they earned and deserve!
 - Provided Veterans' feedback about the PACT Act Outreach initiatives.
 - Discussed extending the outreach initiatives to the rural areas.
 - VBA provided a briefing the compensation benefits to include:
 - Dependent Indemnity Compensation (DIC)
 - Pension
 - Legacy Life
 - Third Party Authorization
 - Family Caregiver Program
 - Virtual Claims Clinic
- The Department Service Officer on December 18, 2023, delivered over 50 Christmas care packages to CDCE/VAVS for the men and women in the Atlanta Joseph Maxwell Cleland Atlanta VA hospital. The care packages consisted of the following items:
 - Skull caps,
 - Gloves
 - Socks,
 - Lotion (women)
 - Lip gloss (women)
 - Toothbrush (men)
 - Toothpaste (men)
 - Snacks
 - Christmas Card
- The Department Service Officer attended the GA Veteran of Foreign Wars Department Council of Administrative virtual meeting held on December 18, 2023, at 7PM. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the participation in upcoming events in the community.
- The Department Service Officer attended the Atlanta VAMC Quarterly VSO meeting hosted by Daniel Ducker, Interim Executive Director, and Staff. The virtual meeting was held on January 10, 2024, at 12PM. The following staff member provided a briefing:

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- Caregiver Support Overview – Indira Brevick, Coordinator
 - Dental Overview – Karon Holmes, Supervisory Admin Officer
 - Health Administration Service Overview – Acting Chief, Shannon Fisher
 - Mental Health Overview – Deputy Chief, Maghna Patel
 - Police Overview – Chief, Beverly Banks
 - Veteran Experience Overview
- Atlanta VAMC is hosting a Veteran Town Hall meeting on January 27, 2024, 9AM -11AM.
 - The Department Service Officer attended the CDCE/VAS Quarterly Committee Zoom meeting held on January 10, 2024, at 1PM. The purpose for the meeting was to provide the VAMC initiative regarding the PACT Act and the VAMC operational status.
 - The Department Service Officer attended the Monthly VSO/Community Partner PACT Information and Listening meeting hosted by Lauren Ruchin, Atlanta VHA. The virtual meeting was held on January 11, 2024, at 12PM – 1PM.
 - The purpose of the meeting was to share information about the PACT Act and to discuss how our Veterans are being impacted by the PACT Act.
 - VAMC has screened approximately 89,953 veterans for toxic exposure.
 - Beginning in March 2024 toxic exposure screening eligibility will be extended to include other veterans exposed to toxic chemicals.
 - Future PACT Act outreach events will not include doctors and nurses on site.
 - We discussed ways to ensure that our Veterans gain access to the healthcare, benefits, and resources they earned and deserve!
 - Provided Veterans’ feedback about the PACT Act Outreach initiatives.
 - Extending the outreach initiatives to the rural areas.

Ms. Raven Holstick, GDVS, American Legion Service Officer

- Department Service officer and Assistant Department Service officer met on December 19, 2023, to discuss the plans and operations for the upcoming year.
- Department of GA headquarters and local Legionnaires visited the Lake City, FL VAMC on January 11, 2024. Assistant Chief Robert Coon provided a presentation concerning the operations and plans for the hospital and local CBOCs.
- Department Service officer and Assistant Service officer began service officer school with Bergmann & Moore on January 11, 2024. During this course, the service officer completed training on an overview of the DSO role and VA accreditation.

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Upcoming events:

- Monthly Virtual Post service officer training will be held for new service officers. Training topics will be on the roles and responsibilities of a post service officer. This training will continue to be held monthly as new service officers arrive.
- January 24, 2024 American Legion GA Headquarters Meeting
- January 25, 2024, VR&E Hiring event
- January 31, 2024 DSO/ASO National meeting

Commissioner Patricia Ross

On Tuesday, December 19, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended the Georgia Governor's Challenge Suicide Prevention Task Force Monthly Meeting. She also attended the December meeting of the Veterans Service Board.

On Wednesday, January 3, 2024, Commissioner Ross met with Director Rick Dunn, Office of Planning and Budget, for a budget overview.

On Thursday, January 4, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended the Veterans Service Board Special Meeting and the Executive Session of the Veterans Service Board.

On Friday, January 5, 2024, Commissioner Ross joined the Outreach Team to meet with Granicus, a cloud-based technology that helps government leaders across state, federal, national and local agencies. She also attended an event focusing on reducing veterans' involvement in the criminal justice system.

On Monday, January 8, 2024, Commissioner Ross held a Director's Meeting. She also attended a meeting regarding the digitization of the DD214s, a bi-weekly Unite Us meeting, and a Fox Grant Update Meeting.

On Tuesday, January 9, 2024, Commissioner Ross renewed her PIV card. She also attended the National Association of State Directors for Veterans Affairs (NASDVA) Southeast District Meeting.

On Wednesday, January 10, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended the Returning Veterans Task Force Meeting. She also held a Joint Appropriations discussion with her leadership team to prepare for the upcoming legislative session. Afterwards, she met with Sean Delgado, the new OPB budget analyst for GDVS. Also in attendance at this meeting were Mark Demers, Camala Ball, Russell Feagin and Charlotte May. Later in the day she took part in the Quarterly National State Home Per Diem Conference Call.

On Thursday, January 11, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended Gov. Brian Kemp's State of the State Address at the Capitol. She later met with Mr. Ducker, Interim Director at the Atlanta VA Health Care

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System. A permanent Director should be in place by Mar/Apr. The discussion centered around increased collaboration and contacts to assist with healthcare issues.

On Friday, Commissioner Ross spoke with the Director for Kentucky's state veterans' homes to better understand CMS certification and different funding sources. Budget slides were submitted in preparation for the Joint Appropriations Hearing.

On Tuesday, January 16, 2024, Commissioner Ross held a Director's Meeting. She also met with the Senate Budget office to go over the Governor's recommendations. She attended the Georgia Governor's Challenge Suicide Prevention Task Force Monthly Meeting. Afterward, she had a meeting regarding the audit for the Fox Grant (scheduled for 14 Feb).

On Wednesday, January 17, 2024, Commissioner Ross briefed Joint Appropriations on the Governor's recommended budget for GDVS. She then attended the GWVNH Audit Report Meeting. Afterward, she had a call with Steven Simmons of Ecare Vault about their collaboration software. She ended her day at a Quarterly Veteran Town Hall with Central Alabama VA Health Care.

On Thursday, January 18, 2024, Commissioner Ross spoke at a national Unite Us user forum.

On Friday, January 19, 2024, Commissioner Ross led the GDVS Leadership Institute regarding the Legislative Process. She then met with Craig Briscoe of Home Towne Studios regarding their program to transition veterans from active duty. She later met with the House budget office on the Governor's recommended budget.

On Monday, January 22, 2024, Commissioner Ross held a Director's Meeting. She also attended the Unite Us bi-weekly meeting and the Fox Grant Update Meeting.

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

GENERAL

- On January 10th, the Returning Veterans Task Force held their first quarterly meeting for the year. We discussed the upcoming Veterans Readiness and Employment Services Career and Resource Fair hosted by the Isakson VA (Atlanta Regional Office) that will be held at Best Friend Park, 6224 Jimmy Carter Blvd., Norcross, GA. There was also a software demo from Bridge My Return, a company that gives transitioning service members, veterans, and now their spouses and caregivers, real-time matches to jobs with military-ready employers.
- **DD 214's and Welcome Home Letters:** 565 Welcome Home Letters were mailed out in December, 2023.

PROJECTED POSITIONS

- Current opening in Augusta SWVH and Gainesville.

Ms. Ramona Roper, Director of Training Division:

- December 16, 2023, Mr. Charles Isaac participated in the Eleven Black Men of Liberty County annual toy and gift give away. Charles served as the President of this organization for 2023. This year, they provided 5 families with gifts and meals and raffled a 65" television to one family.
- December 18-20, 2023, Mr. Steven Fay and Mr. Glenn Massey provided in-person training for the employees at the Augusta VAMC Veterans Field Service Office. The training primarily focused on real-time observations of the employees in their environment. The trainers provided on the spot advice and redirection, if needed, in situations. Advised on their time management, as well as encouraged them to use the Absorb training portal.
- January 15, 2024, Mr. Charles Isaac, participated in the Annual Liberty County Martin Luther King Jr. parade with the Eleven Black Men of Liberty County mentoring group. This organization currently mentors 12 young men with not only their education and social matters and settings, but also provides positive role models for young black males.
- January 17, 2024, Mr. Charles Isaac and Ms. Sandra Bennett resumed Hybrid Training. The subject for this training covered Compensation claims. This class is mandated for VA accreditation. The training covered guidelines to file proper claims for service-connected disability compensation.
- January 19, 2024, the Training Division conducted a meeting to discuss the 2024 Annual Training Conference in Helen, Georgia. This meeting was a collaboration of ideas on class materials, group breakdowns, and instructors on subjects. All mandated classes, with the exceptions of Pension, Death Pension and Appeals/AMA, have been taught in the Hybrid classes last year and finishing this year, prior to the annual conference.

Upcoming Events:

- Daily continued ongoing support to the Regional Directors and Veteran Field Service Offices
- Continuation of performing duties as VSO's
- Collaboration meetings for 2024 annual Training conference

Mr. Edwin Berry, Director of Appeals Division

- The total number of hearings conducted by the Appeals Division for December 2023 was 20.

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- As of **January 1, 2024**, 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	(Change)
Compensation	105,096 (+208)	\$231,664,007.00	+ 8,351,721
DIC	3,930 (+21)	\$6,755,145.00	+ \$239,621
Survivor Pension	656 (-88)	\$691,538.00	- \$2,999
<u>Veteran Pension</u>	<u>1,447 (-4)</u>	<u>\$1,706,502.00</u>	<u>+ \$33,036</u>
Grand Total	111,129 (+137)	\$240,817,192.00	+ \$8,621,400

Mr. Kenneth Childre, Director Veterans Benefits North Region

Retro Awards-December 2023: \$1,253,609.87

Director Site Visits/Inspections: 0

Community Involvements: 0

North Area Gains/Losses:

Frank Mays (Cobb Multispecialty Clinic)-New Hire Effective 1 Dec 23

Germani McNeill (Augusta War Veterans Home)-Resigned 8 Dec 23

Average Visits Per VFSO							
Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO							
Region:		North					
Month:		December-23					
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:	51	6,752	19	355.37	1,657	87.21
Number of Offices:		30	Average Visits/Office:		225.07	Average Claims/Office: 55.2333333	

*Total monthly office visits include: 1,687 In-person and 5,065 phone call/emails.

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Ms. Sherri Whitfield, Director Veterans Benefits South Region

- On January 16, 2024, Joycelyn Jones in our Moultrie field office gave a benefits briefing at the Moultrie Rotary Club.
- On January 31, 2024, Carol Crawford in our Waynesboro field office will be retiring.
- South region offices reported lump sum payments since the last board meeting of \$1,347,944.03 with the highest single amount of \$222,584.72 reported by the Ft. Moore field office.
- South Georgia Region Veterans Population: 237,759.

Ms. Veda Brooks, Women Veterans Coordinator (WVC)

- December 12, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in the community recon for the 2024 Hall County Homeless Outreach.
- December 14, 2023, Ms. Brooks met with the Cohen Family Foundation about partnering together on outreach and regional events.
- December 18, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in the Roslyn Jones Women Veterans Inclusion Program virtual meeting.
- December 19, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in the Bridging the Gap Homeless briefing.
- December 20, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in the Violence Prevention Task Force Meeting.
- January 2, 2024, Ms. Brooks meet with Dr. Tabatha to talk about the Women Veteran's event in South Carolina.
- January 9, 2024, Ms. Brooks participated in the building walk through for the 2024 Health and Awareness Fair.
- January 11, 2024, Ms. Brooks participated in WOVEN Peer Leader meeting.
- January 12, 2024, Ms. Brooks met the finalist in the Rooms to Go Veteran remodel recipient.
- January 16, 2024, Ms. Brooks received a briefing from ELEVATE Military Couple Relationship Education.

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- January 17, 2024, Ms. Brooks participated in the IPRCE Violence Prevention Task Force Meeting.
- January 19, 2024, Ms. Brooks participated in a site visit in South Carolina for the February Women Veteran Panel

Current committees:

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

Ms. Calandra Ferguson, Suicide Prevention and Outreach Coordinator

- December 12, Ms. Ferguson conducted a Recon of Gainesville, GA for future Outreach events.
- On December 19, Ms. Ferguson conducted the monthly Governor's Challenge Task Force meeting.
- January 9, Ms. Ferguson conducted Suicide Prevention Training for A Wellness Center in Calhoun, GA. The business is Veteran owned, and they treat Veterans.

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

Accounting/Procurement:

- Routine operations are continuing. We are continuously working to improve all accounts payable processing, to apply proper coding, accountability, organization of purchase orders, and on time payments.
- We are establishing a Purchase Card program at Georgia Department of Veterans Service. All of the paperwork has been submitted, background checks for the card holders are in progress, and training for all those involved is nearly completed. The last class is for the two Program Administrators and will be in late February 2024. We received the P-Cards on January 12, 2024, and they are secured. We expect the program to be fully operational on March 1, 2024.

Budget:

- The 2024 Session of the Georgia General Assembly opened on January 8, 2024.

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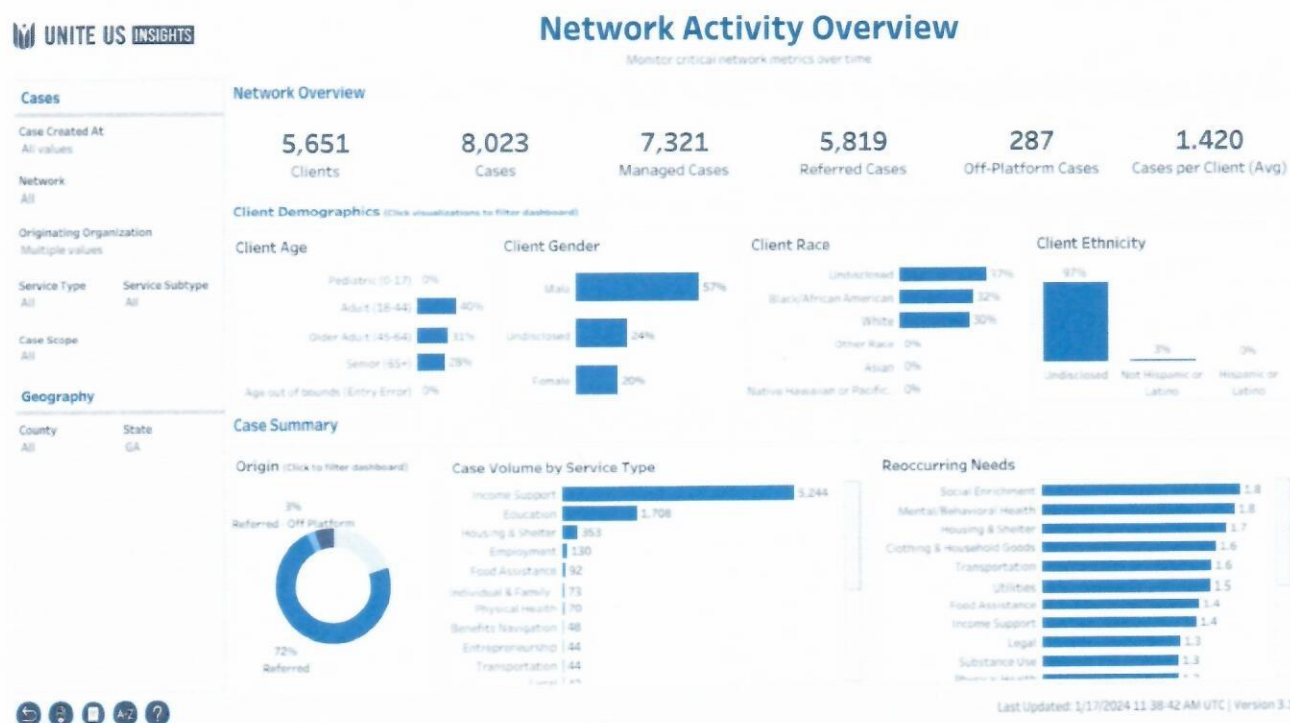
- The Governor's Budget Report was released after the Governor's State of the State address on January 11, 2024.
- Highlights include:
 - AFY2024-
 - Increase salaries (bonus not salary increase) by \$1000.
 - Transfer \$1,000,000 from cemeteries for Mental Health Grant (HB414).
 - Reduce funds for one vacancy in Administration (\$41,269).
 - Funding to support transition to a new contract for GWVH in Milledgeville (\$200,000).
 - FY2025-
 - COLA of 4% not to exceed \$3000 for salaries.
 - DOAS adjustments for insurance, increase for GBA, increase for GTA telecommunications, increase for merit systems assessments- this is to compensate for premium and fee increases.
 - Increase for TRS and health insurance premium increases.
 - Reduce funds for one vacancy in Administration (\$41,269).
 - Increase funds (\$135,597) for two positions in the new VA Houston County clinic.
 - Reduce funds for vacancies and reduced travel and training (\$94,328).
 - State funds returned for veterans' cemetery in the Augusta area (\$1,000,000).
- Commissioner Ross presented our budget at the Joint Appropriations Hearing on January 17, 2024, at 1100. This was the first time GDVS ever presented at the Joint Appropriation Hearing and the brief was well received.
- Attended the House Health and Human Services Subcommittee hearing on January 22, 2024.

Grant Program:

- SSG Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program- (\$747,464)
 - We are in partnership with Kennesaw State University AMES Center to implement the grant. The latest data was transmitted to the VA on December 6, 2023.
 - Calandra Ferguson provided the outreach and training data reports, and we transmitted them to the VA on December 6, 2023.
 - Calandra Ferguson or Veda Brooks will report all the outreach and training events regarding Suicide Prevention under the Fox Grant.
 - The VA Office of Business Oversight-Grant Services Division will audit the first year of the Fox Grant beginning with preliminary document submission on January 17, 2024, and site visit on February 14, 2024.
 - The end of year FER/FFR reports are due February 2024.
 - SSG Fox Grant National Webinar is on January 18, 2024.

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- **Unite-Us Grant- (American Rescue Plan-Negative Impact Grant)- \$6.1m per year (\$18.3m) over the course of 3 years starting July 1, 2022:**
 - Data ingestion and secure data transfer for the platform and social connector is moving forward. As of December 7, 2023, we have **267,670** veterans in the system. We have submitted **956** community partners and **313** healthcare partners for inclusion to the platform since August 2022.
 - The quarterly report was submitted on January 9, 2024.
 - Below is an activity snapshot from Unite Us Insights:



- **Veterans Mental Health Services Program Grant (HB 414)- Georgia Governor Brian Kemp signed HB 414 on April 25, 2023, with the support of state legislators and the Georgia Department of Veterans Service (GDVS). The bill creates the Veterans Mental Health Services Program, which is a grant program to improve access to mental health services for military service members, veterans, and their families in the state of Georgia. The grant program is funded through state appropriations in Fiscal Year 2023. The total grant funding is \$750,000 for FY2023 (executed by no later than 30 June 2023). The grant was awarded to two vendors:**
 - Aspire (Cohen Veterans Network) for \$650,000.
 - Emory Healthcare for \$100,000.
- The money was allocated to both awardees, and they have received the funds.

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- The first quarterly reports received on October 23, 2023, and both agencies are in compliance with grant guidelines.
- The Governor’s budget approved 1,000,000 for the next grant period.

Veterans Service Foundation:

- The Veterans Service Foundation Board held a special meeting on November 30, 2023, to discuss hiring a fundraising consultant. We are going to use Survey Monkey to select a consultant. The go live date was January 2, 2024.
- The next special board meeting will be on February 29, 2024, for fundraising.
- The next quarterly board meeting will be on March 7, 2024.

Events:

- Attended Joint Appropriations Hearing on January 17, 2024 at 1100.

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

State Veterans Homes

State Veterans Homes Census (Through January 5, 2024) +

Current Month	Augusta	Milledgeville	Total
Regular Patients	91	103	194
Service Connected *	26	39	65
Total Patients	117	142	259
Last Month			
Regular Patients	94	105	199
Service Connected *	28	40	68
Total Patients	122	145	267

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

+ The numbers reported to the VSB are the total numbers from December 9, 2023, through January 5, 2024.

Construction projects continue at the Georgia War Veterans Home’s campus including improvements for ADA requirements, paving, improved lighting and external signs.

The Homes are operating under increased infection control protocols to limit the spread of COVID-19, flu, and other infectious diseases.

State Veterans Cemeteries

Burial Statistics (through January 5, 2024)+

State Veterans Cemetery	Cumulative Last Month	Cumulative Current Month	Increase
Glennville	2,416	2,436	30
Milledgeville	5,304	5,331	27
Total	7,720	7,767	57

+ The report to the VSB is the total numbers from December 9, 2023, through January 5, 2024.

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery – Glennville

Hosted a Wreaths Across America Ceremony with over 500 people in attendance. Wreaths were placed on all appropriate sites in the cemetery.

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Milledgeville

Construction on Phase 4a expansion started this week.

Hosted a Wreaths Across America Ceremony with over 500 people in attendance. Wreaths were placed on all appropriate sites in the cemetery.

Mr. Kerry Dyer, Chief Operations Officer

On Wednesday, December 20, 2023, Kerry Dyer along with Johns Conners, CWC Account Executive, coordinated the cubicle transfer from the Office of Student Achievement to GDVS. Later that day he spoke with Natsha Simoes, Access Project Manager to discuss the DD214 digitalization.

On Tuesday, January 2, 2024, Kerry Dyer added 150 line items into the GDVS Capitol Assets Financial System. Later that day he wrote the job announcement for the State Approving Agency Director vacancy. He also sent Ernie Cowart, Glennville Cemetery Director, four candidates for his Cemetery Tech 1 vacancy.

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On Wednesday, January 3, 2024, Kerry Dyer along with Mark Demers, Jerry Lahr and Will Wilson, consolidated GDVS surplus equipment for turn in. Later that day he spoke to Leslie Davis regarding the LaGrange office relocation.

On Thursday, January 4, 2024, Kerry Dyer added an additional 20 line items into the GDVS Capitol Assets Financial System. Later that day he spoke to Russell regarding the naming convention for the Transitional Support Unit, Food Production Kitchen and Memory Support Unit at the War Home in Milledgeville. He also sent Carlton Deese, Augusta Nursing Home Director, an example of the Capitol Asset Excel sheet for the Nursing Home Capitol Asset items.

On Friday, January 5, 2024, Kerry Dyer along with Mark Demers and Will Wilson prepared the Public Information Office for the cubicle installers.

On Monday, January 8, 2024, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's Meeting. Later that day he spoke with Ann Thompson, State Property Insurance Program Officer, regarding the FY2025 Special Property All Risk (SPAR) Coverage insurance and Property Insurance Renewal Coverage Process for Building, Leased, Land and Inventoried Property (BLLIP) System.

On Tuesday January 9, 2024, Kerry Dyer submitted the monthly Fleet Management Report to DOAS Fleet Management Department. He also updated and distributed the Agency Alpha Roster to the Senior Leadership. Later that day he attended the P-Card Administrators class virtually along with Mark Demers, Julie Hammond, Irene Mackson and Charlotte May.

On Wednesday, January 10, 2024, Kerry Dyer attended the Returning Veterans Task Force meeting and the Joint Appropriations Brief discussion along with Commissioner Ross, Mark Demers and ShellyAnn Simpson. He also processed a new hire packet for the Augusta War Nursing Home and the Grovetown Field Office. Later that day he coordinated with Ryan Petteys, Account Executive for Access Solution, to discuss a shredding project.

On Thursday, January 11, 2024, Kerry Dyer added an additional 15 line items to the GDVS Capitol Asset Financial System. He also posted the Gainesville Field Office Vacancy externally and internally. Later that day he attended a budget meeting along with Commissioner Ross, Mark Demers, and Camala Ball.

On Friday January 12, 2024, Kerry Dyer contacted GBA to have the power restored in the cubicles. He also contacted Verizon to order an Orbic Speed 5G UW Mobile Hotspot for the Central Office. Later that day he spoke to Russell regarding an Employee of the Year submission. He also reached out to Kristy Baughman, site Manager for the Little Ocmulgee State Park & Lodge, to discuss dates for Annual Training in FY2025.

On Monday, January 16, 2024, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's Meeting. He also sent Ken Childre 9 candidates for the Gainesville Field Office vacancy. Later that day he escorted Ms. Latoya

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McCallum, Administrative Assistance for Field Ops & Appeals, to GBA to pick up her parking pass and ID badge.

Below are the Personnel Actions Kerry Dyer and Shareka Monday-Robinson processed from December 16, 2023- January 16, 2024.

Location	Position	Status	Name	Date
Central Office	Latoya	Admin	Latoya McCallum	01/16/24
Grovetown	VFSO 2	New Hire	Winslow Hill	01/16/24
Waynesboro	Senior Office Mgr	Retire	Carol Crawford	01/31/24
Central Office	Admin Asst 3	Retire	Linda Williams	01/31/24

On the horizon: Open a Veterans Field Service Office in the Perry Clinic in May/June 2024 timeframe.

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

- The approval and compliance surveys of educational institutions, training establishments and training programs approved for veterans training is continuing with no significant problems in any area being noted.
- Approval of new veteran's On-The-Job training sites (OJT) continues to increase. As of this date the State Approving Agency (SAA) has granted approval to 1,826 educational institutions and training establishments where Georgia veterans may attend school or job training and utilize their GI Bill® educational benefits.
- SAA will attend the NASAA Mid-Winter Business and Training Conference February 10-14 in Arlington, VA.

Item *	Number
Approved Educational Institutions	395
Approved Training Establishments	1,431
Veteran Students Enrolled in Educational Institutions	18,312

* Source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration, Education Division, Dec. 2023.

Ms. Charlotte May, Director, External Affairs & Communications

INFORMATION OUTREACH

Division Updates

1. GDVS Newsletter – PID published a monthly newsletter in November. The e-newsletter features top stories from the month and encourages readers to get the full issue at <https://veterans.georgia.gov/newsletter>. The December newsletter featured coverage of the Wreaths Across America ceremonies in Milledgeville and Glennville, the identification of WWII PVT Hood E. Cole's remains, an update on PACT Act toxic screening numbers, a highlight of VSO John Wagenknecht, and an acknowledgement of longtime VSO Carol Crawford's assistance in obtaining benefits for a veteran and his family.
2. Holiday Loneliness Campaigns –
 - a. Unite Us – working collaboratively on a text, email, and phone campaign to raise awareness of resources available to veterans with high social needs scores surrounding military bases and high veteran population areas. 39 veterans have requested assistance during the first wave on 12/11/2023 and a second email and text outreach attempt launched on 12/18/23. 22 veterans responded to a cold-call from Unite Us from a list of 486 correct numbers. While some veterans elected out of receiving further messages, this is one of the most successful outreach waves.
 - b. Miner Agency – used Fox SPGP funds for a holiday campaign from 12/15/23 to 1/15/24 targeting veterans who are experiencing loneliness and may need support during the holiday season. The Miner Agency developed 6 vignettes on Facebook and other media to spread awareness of help to veterans, active duty service members, and their families and friends. The campaign made a total of 2,082,068 million impressions through 30 days. 56% of those reached were male and most were between 25-55 years old. In veterans over 60, more women saw the ads. The ads were also more likely to be seen on a mobile device.
3. Benefits outreach – External Affairs and Communications continues to work with GDVS staff and partners to educate Georgia's veterans and families on the availability of benefits and resources. Working with partners at KSU, the team developed a concept for the 2024 Let's Connect: Suicide Prevention Summit being held in June. The team also updated the department's briefing slides which summarize the department's goals, programs, and vision for veteran service officers to use at public gatherings. Materials developed for the briefing slides include new graphics summarizing the impact GDVS has on veterans benefits across the state.
 - a. Career and Employment Fairs – shared information from Work for Warriors Georgia and the VECTR Center for veterans seeking new opportunities for training and employment.

- b. VA Veteran Town Halls – promoted the opportunity to provide feedback to the Atlanta VA Health Care System.
- c. Mortgage Assistance Program – shared information from Georgia’s Department of Community Affairs regarding the availability of funds for homeowners facing hardships or experiencing housing instability caused by impacts from the pandemic.

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

- Replies to VA eBenefits Messages = 39
- Replies to General Questions = approximately 110
- 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 30,035
(Honors Ceremonies and Central Office Mail Outs)

DoD Vietnam Veteran Lapel Pins presented via GDVS – An estimated 24,010

Honors Ceremonies supported/coordinated by GDVS – 359

Defense Department’s Vietnam Veteran Surviving Spouse CoH – 291

OLD BUSINESS:

There was no old business to discuss.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

The Employee of the Year for 2023 was announced – Ms. Raven Holstick. Raven serves in two roles at the GDVS – she is an Appeals Officer and shares the position of Georgia’s American Legion Service Officer. She approaches veterans with kindness, an attentive ear, and a keen insight on how to get crucial information for a successful appeal. Her intuitive and courteous approach guarantees the veteran leaves happy and confident they’re in good hands. As part of Raven’s duties as an American Legion Service Officer, she must meet American Legion accreditation requirements. This includes two

Tuesday, January 23, 2024 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

month-long training and litigation courses with in-depth exams in addition to her GDVS and VA certifications. Raven is dedicated to improving her knowledge and capacity to serve our veterans – she’s also enrolled at Chattahoochee Technical College and is part of the inaugural GDVS Leadership Institute. Raven embodies the spirit of community service and approaches every project with dedication and care. She attended over 30 outreach events for the GDVS and American Legion in 2023 alone to support veterans and families seeking help. She volunteers during the week to teach young women how to navigate negative peer pressure at her local YMCA, helps senior citizens veterans, and mentors at risk youth.

This year’s Annual Training will be held on June 3-7 in Helen, Georgia.

Ms. Veda Brooks announced the Hall County Homeless Outreach will be on January 31.

Mr. John Phillips announced that the Vetlanta Q1 Summit will be on February 28 at Clay National Guard Center. Gov. Kemp is the keynote speaker and General Carden will be in attendance. This is the 10th anniversary celebration of Vetlanta and will be a mini job fair. They are expecting 300-400 people. You must register online to attend.

Mr. Rick White announced that nominations are being accepted for the next Georgia Military Veterans Hall of Fame. The Class of ’23 will be unveiled as soon as it can be secured onto Gov. Kemp’s schedule.

Mr. John Phillips announced the event for Armed Forces Day, Thunder Over Evans, on May 18. They expect 15,000 in attendance. The Board members were invited.

NEW BUSINESS:

Commissioner Ross went over some slides that she used in briefing the legislature (see attached). This is the first time GDVS has been invited to brief the Joint Appropriations Committee.

Officer elections were held. Mr. Hanley nominated Mr. Kopsie to serve as Board Chair beginning at the next scheduled meeting for a term of one year. Mr. Mendez seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Hanley nominated Mr. Paslawski to serve as Board Vice Chair beginning at the next scheduled meeting for a term of one year. Mr. Kopsie seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Hanley nominated Mr. Mendez to serve as Board Secretary beginning at the next scheduled meeting for a term of one year. Mr. Kopsie seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Tuesday, January 23, 2024 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

Former Augusta Mayor, Bob Young, addressed the Board concerning a new veterans cemetery in Augusta. They have spent four years seeking a VA grant. Augusta has moved from #22 on the VA's priority list to #35, as the VA believes the Augusta area is well served by the Milledgeville and Fort Jackson cemeteries. Mr. Young requested that Board members, as individuals with relationships with members of the General Assembly, speak to them about funding for this proposed cemetery. The initial cost is estimated at \$12 million.

The February 27 Board meeting was scheduled. It will be a combination virtual and in-person meeting, set up at the GDVS.


Mr. Kopsie made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Peterson seconded the motion, which passed. The meeting was adjourned at approximately 1:19 p.m.

SIGNED:



Shawn Hanley, Chair

ATTEST:



Joshua Kopsie, Secretary



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

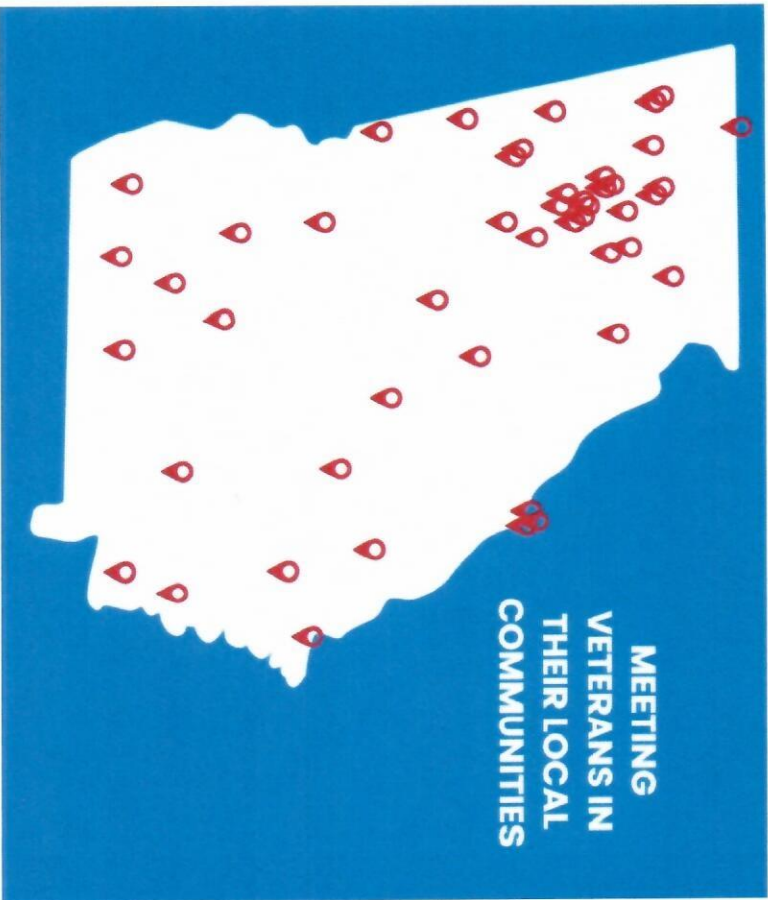
GDD/S 2023



Our agency has been embarking on a journey of community engagement and creating partnerships with constituents, non-profits, and stakeholders across the state. Here's a look at a handful of our accomplishments.

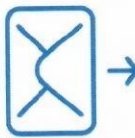


Georgia Department of Veterans Service



1,250+

Veterans began a claim on-site at an event



7,806

Referrals to support services via Unite Us



5,000+

SSG Fox Grant Suicide Prevention screenings completed



Georgia Department of Veterans Service



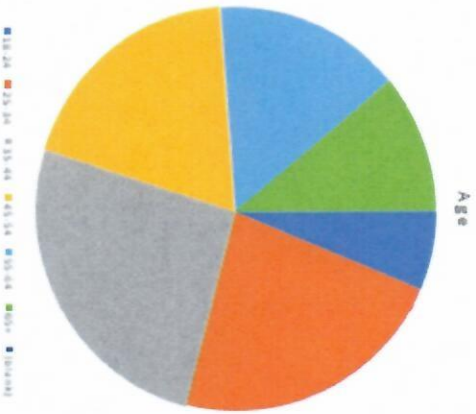


Suicide Prevention Social Media Campaign Dec 2023 – Jan 2024

Reach:
2,082,068

Impressions:
3,720,997

Link Clicks:
3,795



Georgia Department of Veterans Service

Followers veterans, we know the weight you've carried and we understand. We fought together, we can heal together. Reach Out.

WALKED THE SAME PATH

No Battle is Fought Alone

Contact us

Confid Crisis s

1 share

Like Comment Share

Georgia Department of Veterans Service

Your selfless service to our country does not end with your tour of duty. Have the courage to ask for help if you are in crisis, dial

SO DON'T FIGHT ALONE.

Dont Fight Alone

Learn more

Veteran Line

Like Comment Share

Georgia Department of Veterans Service

When the nation called, you answered. We are here to answer your call now.

AS A WOMAN VETERAN

Learn more

1 comment 4 shares

Like Comment Share

