

Monday, July 31, 2023 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

Present Ms. Takosha Swan, Vice 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. Mark Bannister, Executive Dir., Health, Memorials, Finance & Development, GDVS
Mr. Kerry Dyer, Chief Operations Officer, GDVS
Ms. Jehae Kim, Assistant Attorney General, Attorney General's Office
Ms. Kaitlin Little, Senate Budget Office
Ms. Amber Mack, House Budget Office
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. Amy Stevens, Georgia Military Women and Vetlanta
Ms. Kim Scofi, United Military Care, Inc.
Ms. Savannah Potter-Miller, Georgia Association of Women Lawyers
Ms. Dylester Scott, Veteran
Mr. Vince Pritchett, Director, Veterans Benefits South Region, GDVS
Mr. Ken Childre, Director, Veterans Benefits North Region, GDVS
Ms. Ramona Roper, Director, Training Division, 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. William Wilson, Network Administrator, GDVS
Ms. Camala Ball, Budget Analyst, GDVS
Mr. Bobby Davis, Director, Veterans Education & Training, GDVS
Ms. Shareka Monday-Robinson, Director, Human Resources, GDVS
Ms. Veda Brooks, Coordinator, Women & Minority Veterans, GDVS
Ms. Calandra Ferguson, Coordinator, Suicide Prevention & Outreach, GDVS
Mr. Mark Demers, Grant Program Implementation Manager, GDVS
Ms. Sherri Whitfield, Trainer, Training Division, GDVS
Ms. Julie Hammond, Executive Assistant to the Commissioner, GDVS

On Monday, July 31, 2023, the Veterans Service Board meeting was held in person and by video/tele-conference.

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Ms. Swan called the meeting to order at 12:30 p.m. Mr. Kopsie gave the invocation. Ms. Swan led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

Ms. Swan made a motion to approve the July Agenda. Mr. Paslawski seconded the motion. The motion passed.

Mr. Paslawski made a motion to approve the June 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 Department of Georgia VFW and Auxiliary State Convention on June 22-25, 2023, held at the Macon Marriott City Center, 240 Coliseum Dr., Macon, GA 31217.
 - Commissioner Ross was a guest speaker during the business session.
 - The VFW Department of GA installed the new State Commander and Staff for 2023 – 2024, Commander Patsey Schreiber. Commander Schreiber is the first female State Commander in the history of the Department.
- The Department Service Officer attended the VAVS Quarterly Committee Zoom meeting on July 12, 2023, at 1:00 PM. The purpose of 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 July 13, 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. Also, we discussed ways to ensure that our Veterans gain access to the healthcare, benefits, and resources they earned and deserve!
- The Department Service Officer attended the GA Veteran of Foreign Wars Department Council of Administrative Meeting held at the VFW Department of Georgia, 4952 Columbus Rd, Macon GA 31206, on July 15, 2023, from 10AM – 2PM. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the business of the Department for the upcoming term.
- Ms. Boldoe added that she had just returned from the National Convention in Phoenix.

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Ms. Raven Holstick, GDVS, American Legion Service Officer

- The Assistant Department Service Officer (Ed Kent) assisted 28 veterans with VA benefits related inquiries this month.
- Department Realization July 8-9. Department Service Officer Raven Holstick will attend to provide veterans with assistance with claims and appeals and other VA benefits they may need.
- Service officers (Raven Holstick, Tonjala Williams-Moton, Ed Kent) met via Teams to discuss upcoming events (realizations, hospital visits, convention, and national visits) .
- Department Service Officer (Raven Holstick) met to discuss new Leadership team (State Commander and Senior Vice) to discuss plans and operations of upcoming year. Discussed upcoming plans to visit VA hospitals, VA Regional Office and GDVS Central Office.
- Ms. Holstick added that they assisted a veteran who had experienced a house fire and were able to place him, his wife and four children into a home and provide needed supplies.

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.
- June 25th Atlanta CoC Veteran Services and Resources Learning and Training Event. The Department Service Officer will speak.
- August 25th in person service officer training will be held at Post 3 in Macon, GA.

Ms. Amy Stevens, Georgia Military Women and VETLANTA

Vetlanta for the third quarter will be on September 12th at the UPS Headquarters in Sandy Springs. The guest speaker will be Zaneta Adams.

Commissioner Patricia Ross

On Wednesday, June 28, 2023, Commissioner Ross and Mark Demers met virtually with members from the Cohen Veterans Network to discuss grant reporting. Afterwards, Commissioner Ross attended a UniteUs Demo and Discussion meeting. She later attended the Veterans Service Board Meeting. She ended the day with a PACT Act briefing prep call.

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On Thursday, June 29, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended the Annual Training After Action Review. Also in attendance were Kerry Dyer, Shelly-Ann Simpson, all members of the Training Team, Vince Pritchett, Ken Childre, Jerry Lahr, Will Wilson, Charlotte May, Edwin Berry and Julie Hammond. Later in the day she spoke at the Workforce Strategies Initiative Summit, where attendees could speak to tables of experts on solutions to workforce challenges. There were approximately 183 attendees.

On Friday, June 30, 2023, Commissioner Ross had a meeting discussing veterans and military members getting free state park passes. She spent the remainder of the day in GWVH Cost Negotiation meetings.

On Wednesday, July 5, 2023, Commissioner Ross met with representatives of the Royal Thailand Special Forces to receive a plaque thanking GDVS for their service to this organization. She then had a photo op with members downstairs. Afterwards, she worked on the Strategic plan with her leadership team. She was later interviewed by Thomas Hartwell from KSU for an article focusing on the intersectionality of DPH/Fox grants and the work being done with the GA National Guard this summer. The day ended with a Year-End TouchPoint meeting with SAO to discuss the FY23 closeout.

On Thursday, July 6, 2023, Commissioner Ross led the first Veterans Service Foundation Board Meeting, during which officers were elected. She then had a follow-up meeting on the Strategic Plan. Afterwards, she met with Cody Whitlock of OPB.

On Friday, July 7, 2023, Commissioner Ross met with her leadership team and SAO regarding budget projections. Her afternoon was spent dealing with the GWVH cost negotiations.

On Monday, July 10, 2023, Commissioner Ross held a weekly Director's Meeting. She then met with her leadership team regarding the Strategic Plan. In the afternoon she attended the Fox Grant Update meeting. In the evening, she attended the Emory Master in Business for Veterans (MiB-V) launch.

On Tuesday, July 11, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended the Year-End Review meeting with SAO. Her leadership team was also in attendance.

On Wednesday, July 12, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended the Joint GDVS/TCSG Project Team Meeting. Mark Demers and Charlotte May attended with her. She then worked on the GWVH Cost Negotiations.

On Thursday, July 13, 2023, Commissioner Ross met with Kerry Dyer regarding the applicants for the Business Analyst position. She then attended an FY23 Year-End Wrap Up meeting. Afterwards, she attended the Monthly VSO/Community Partner PACT Act Information and Listening Session. She then had a meeting with SAO and her leadership team regarding a year-end purchase order for exterior repairs on the Milledgeville home.

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On Friday, July 14, 2023, Commissioner Ross held an open forum for the department. She also had a meeting to discuss the GWVH Cost Negotiations. Later in the day she met with Shelly-Ann Simpson, Veda Brooks and Calandra Ferguson to make plans for the Women's and Outreach upcoming events. She ended the day on a call with Cody Whitlock from OPB.

On Monday, July 17, 2023, Commissioner Ross had a GWVH discussion with OPB, the Senate Budget Evaluation Office and the House Budget Evaluation Office. She then held a weekly Director's Meeting. Her afternoon was spent interviewing candidates for the South Region Director position.

On Tuesday, July 18, 2023, Commissioner Ross listened in on the Transition Advisory Committee meeting and conferred with the AG's office on the Georgia War Veterans Home's Cost negotiations.

On Wednesday, July 19, 2023, Commissioner Ross visited the Augusta Nursing Home along with members from OPB to discuss both homes, the contracts and future desired capital improvements.

On Thursday, July 20, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended a Veteran's Brunch and spoke at the Flint River Veterans Series in Clayton County. In the evening, she spoke at the American Legion Post 29 to the Georgia Vietnam Veterans Alliance in Marietta.

On Tuesday, July 25, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended a lunch meeting with Jason Rubenbauer (Waycross and Ware County Development Authority) and the Admares Team, a manufacturer of a variety of modular developments throughout the state and county.

On Wednesday, July 26, 2023, Commissioner Ross had an After Action Review meeting regarding the End of Year Close Out to discuss best practices moving forward.

On Thursday, July 27, 2023, Commissioner Ross joined MOAA in the Governor's Office for the Barto Awards ceremony, where Senator Kirkpatrick and Representative Petrea were honored for their sponsorship of the legislation that extended the state income tax exemption for military retired pay. She then had a meeting with Unite Us regarding their payment module.

On Friday, July 28, 2023, Commissioner Ross held interviews for the Business Analyst position.

Highlights:

The Team finished the budget closeout for FY23 strong.

Upcoming Events

We Care Fair, 4 – 5 August (Cobb Civic Center). 3,000 are expected to attend.

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

GENERAL

- On June 29, I along with the North Region Director and employees from Newnan, Carrollton, Decatur, and Griffin attended the PACT Act Rally held by DAV at the Charlie Griswell Senior Center in Clayton County. We assisted Veterans with the filing of claims and provided advice regarding filing under the PACT Act.
- On July 6, I attended Congresswoman Lucy McBath's PACT act Briefing at the Gwinnett County Justice and Administrative Center. I was accompanied by our employees from the Gainesville office who helped me answer questions and assisted veterans with filing claims under the PACT Act.
- On Saturday July 8, I along with the North Region Director and the managers from Carrollton and Zebulon participated in a PACT Act briefing in McDonough, GA.
- On July 21st I attended a site visit for a PACT Act Rally to be held at the Georgia Tech Research Institute on September 26th.
- The final planning session for the We Care Veterans Resources Fair was held on July 27. The event will be held August 4-5 at the Cobb Civic Center in Marietta. The Department will be assisting veterans with the filing of claims and appeals particularly with the PACT Act, as well as provide information on suicide prevention, services provided through UNITE GA and information about our homes and cemeteries. We are looking to serve over 2,000 veterans over a 2-day span.
- Department Electronic Claim's Assistance Processing System (Veterans Benefits) actively serving 306,780 veterans.
- **DD 214's and Welcome Home Letters:** 467 Welcome Home Letters were mailed out in June, 2023.
- Ms. Simpson announced the upcoming retirement of South Region Director Vince Pritchett. Ms. Sherri Whitfield has been hired to take his place. She has 18+ years with the Department.

PROJECTED POSITIONS

- Current opening in Athens, Appeals, Augusta, and Decatur VAMC.

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Ms. Ramona Roper, Director of Training Division:

- July 5-7, 2023, The Training Division prepared classes for Hybrid training. Hybrid training is a new concept to engage our online learning platform. Several Veteran Field Offices in a region will meet twice a month to meet via MS Teams for VA mandated classes. The mandated classes usually take a significant amount of time away from the annual training conference. Therefore, having them completed prior to annual training will allow the Training Division to implement other VA related materials.
- July 19, 2023, Ms. Ramona Roper was the guest presenter for the Oscar J. Dunn Masonic Lodge #238 and their District 19 Military & Veterans Affairs Committee. This group consisted of several states and locations (Republic of Panama), concentrating on veterans' benefits, healthcare, the PACT Act and other VA special programs.
- July 20, 2023, Pilot hybrid class commenced with 5 Field Offices. The class was Standards of Conduct. The participants were engaged in an hour and a half session, which fulfilled the requirements for the VA.
- July – November 2023, Various hybrid classes will be taking place for the first quarter. Standards of Conduct, Basic Eligibility, Compensation, DIC, and POA.
- July 25 & 26, 2023, Ms. Ramona Roper will assist the North Region Director, Mr. Ken Childre with interviews for the Athens and Augusta GWVH interviews.

Upcoming Events:

- Daily continued ongoing support to the Regional Directors and Veteran Field Service Offices
- Continuation of performing duties as VSO's
- Continuation of Quality Review checks of VSO's work
- CONGRATULATIONS to Ms. Sherri Whitfield on her promotion to South Region Director

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DISTRICT 19 MILITARY & VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
PM Pierre Boynton, Co-chair - Bro Rodney Butler, Co-chair

PRESENTS

VETERANS BENEFITS WEBINAR

19 Jul 2023
7:30 PM ET

Join us on Zoom
Meeting ID: 820 5682 7819
Passcode: 522699

DISCUSSIONS AND INSIGHTS

- SERVICE CONNECTED DISABILITY COMPENSATION
- DVA - HEALTHCARE (VHA)
- NON-SERVICE CONNECTED PENSION
- VA BURIAL BENEFITS
- PACT ACT
- A Q&A and much more...

SPEAKERS

Bro. Rodney Butler
U.S. Army Retired
Host

Ms. Ramona Roper
Dir. Training & Professional Dev.
Primary Presenter

More information
470.222.4185

Mr. Edwin Berry, Director of Appeals Division

- The total number of hearings conducted by the Appeals Division for June 2023 was **58**.
- The total number of pre-hearing actions for June 2023 was **121**.
- The total number of post-hearing actions for June 2023 was **28**.
- The total number of correspondence conducted by the Appeals Division (with veterans, BVA/VA employees, and VSO field offices) for the month of June was **857**.
- As of **July 1, 2023**, the Atlanta VA Regional Office processed benefits as follows for GDVS and the Service Organizations represented by GDVS.

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Types of Claims	Number of Awards	Benefits paid out
Compensation	103,735	\$216,980,625
DIC	3,713	\$6,188,681
Survivor Pension	780	\$715,793
Veteran Pension	1,525	\$1,773,594
Grand Total	109,753	\$225,658,693

- Mr. Berry added that on Friday, a claim for \$326,000 in retro pay was awarded.

Mr. Kenneth Childre, Director Veterans Benefits North Region

Retro Awards: June 2023-\$1,160,121.57

Community Involvement:

29 June 2023-Sean Seader (Carrollton), Joe Baker (Atlanta VAMC), Robert Johnson (Griffin), Randy Brown (Griffin), Barbara Serrano (Newnan), Ken Childre (North Area Director), ShellyAnn Simpson (Executive Director) and Jerry Lahr (Tech Support). Participated in PACT Act at Jonesboro Senior Center in conjunction with VA. Assisted over 30 Veterans with claims, benefits, and other questions they may have had dealing with claims.

30 June 2023-Marie Lundquist (Jasper). Attended Pickens Veterans Club meeting where she briefed 36 people about the PACT Act, Camp Lejeune Water Contamination, and the upcoming Vietnam Veteran ceremony in August.

8 July 2023-Sean Seader (Carrollton), Daniel Moreno (Zebulon), Ken Childre (North Area Director) and ShellyAnn Simpson (Executive Director). Attended an event sponsored by the Southern Crescent Veterans Service and ShellyAnn briefed about 25 participants on the PACT Act. VSOs Assisted 10 Veterans with PACT Act and other types of claims.

North Georgia Gains/Losses:

Ronnie Hough (Lawrenceville)-Resigned Effective 1 July
 Valerie Gilchrist (Augusta WVH)-Resigned Effective 7 July

Mr. Childre added that on Friday at the We Care Fair, 11 VSO's are scheduled to work and on Saturday 8 VSO's are scheduled to work. Also, the office in Cedartown has been part-time but is now moving to full-time and the office in Hartwell, with the retirement of its VSO, will be open part-time for the time being.

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Average Visits Per VFSO							
Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO							
Region:		North					
Month:		June-23					
A	B	C	D	E	D / E F	G	G / E H
					Average	Total	Average
	Veterans' Field Service Officer (VFSO)		Total Monthly	Work Days	Office Visits	Submitted To	Claims Submitted
Office Name	Last Name	#	Visits	Month	Per Day	VA Monthly	By VFSOS To VA Daily
	Number of VFSOs:	51	9,328	692	13.48	2,282	3.30
Number of Offices:		30	Average Visits/Office:		310.93	Average Claims/Office: 76.0666667	

*Total monthly office visits include: 2,657 In-Person and 6,671 phone calls/emails.

Mr. Vincent M. Pritchett, Director Veterans Benefits South Region

- On July 13, 2023, Debra O’Neal and Vince Pritchett interviewed candidates to fill the vacant Glennville field office.
- On July 17, 2023, Bobby Hogan and Scott Weaver accepted job offers to fill our vacant Glennville and St. Marys field office positions. Both will start on August 1, 2023.
- South region offices reported lump sum payments since the last board meeting of \$262,081.00 with Warner Robins reporting the highest single amount of \$61,241.00.
- South Region Gains/Losses: Effective July 14, 2023, Brett Kuppler resigned from the St. Marys field office.
- South Georgia Region Veterans Population: 237,759.
- Office Visits for June: South Georgia offices handled 4,497 phone calls and emails.

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Average Visits Per VFSO								
Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO								
Region:		South Region						
Month:		June-23						
A	B	C	D	E	D / E	G	G / E	
					F	Total	Average	
						Claims	Claims	
			Total	Work	Office	Submitted	Submitted	
	Veterans' Field		Monthly	Days	Visits	To	By VFSOS	
	Service Officer (VFSO)		Office	In	Per	VA	To VA	
Office Name	Last Name	#	Visits	Month	Day	Monthly	Daily	
	Number of VFSOs:	39	2,260	764	2.96	1,533	2.01	
Number of Offices:	25	Average Visits/Office:			90.40	Average Claims/Office:		61.32

- Mr. Pritchett added that lump sum payments totaled \$620,218 because of a surviving spouse being awarded \$195,413 from a PACT Act claim.

Ms. Veda Brooks, Women Veterans Coordinator (WVC)

- July 5, 2023, Ms. Brooks spoke at the 2nd Annual Veteran Women in Agriculture Conference.
- July 10-11, 2023, Ms. Brooks supported the Governor’s Challenge: Georgia Post Policy Academy Site Visit.
- July 11, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in the Fox Grant Update Meeting.
- July 12, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in the Women Veteran Health Committee Monthly Meeting.
- July 13, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in the Ask the Question meeting.
- July 17, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in a meeting with Hearts to Nourish Hope.
- Ms. Brooks added that they are making great contacts with homeless shelters that primarily service veterans and taking resources to them. This has been primarily in Atlanta, but they are moving toward Augusta now. When asked by Mr. Kopsie what the biggest ask is, she replied that there are two.
 1. For VSO’s to come to the shelter to assist veterans.

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2. For money from the VA to expand their footprint. Many homeless cycle from being housed to homeless because they can't manage their income from the VA appropriately. They need to be housed and monitored and mentored.

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
- An 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 (SPOC)

- Monthly Ms. Ferguson reports on the events and referral data for the Fox Grant.
- June 22, 2023, Ms. Ferguson met with Peer Support Specialist at the VA Clairmont Office, Alexandria, VA. Presented on the GAPS QR Code.
- June 26, 2023, Ms. Ferguson attended the Governor's and Mayor's Challenge Monthly meeting.
- July 6-8, 2023, Ms. Ferguson participated in the 2nd Annual Veteran Women in Agriculture Conference.
- July 10-11, 2023, Ms. Ferguson hosted the in-person Post Policy Academy Summit. Members from the Governor's Challenge Task Force and priority group members were in attendance. We took our SWOT Analysis and added it to the Logic Model and from there we Developed an Action Plan.
- July 24, 2023, Ms. Ferguson conducted a Suicide Prevention class to over 40 employees of Southern Railway's Veterans. She has been invited back for an event with 300+ veterans.
- July 18, 2023, Ms. Ferguson conducted her monthly Governor's Challenge TF meeting. The meeting was hosted by Priority Group 1, ATQ. It was an in-person and virtual meeting.

Post Policy Academy Summit 2023



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

INFORMATION OUTREACH

Division Updates

1. GDVS Newsletter – PID published a monthly newsletter in June. The e-newsletter features top stories from the month and encourages readers to get the full issue at <https://veterans.georgia.gov/newsletter>. The June edition featured stories on the first annual GDVS Women in Service gala, the selection of Georgia's woman veteran of the year, an overview of annual training, a spotlight on long-time VSO Kelly Johnson, and changes to the student enrollment certification process.
2. Annual Report – coordinated with GDVS divisions to compile updated information, statistics, and photos for the department's annual report. It includes information on how the department assists veterans and their families, significant achievements, and involvement with Georgia's veteran communities. The finished report is available at <https://veterans.georgia.gov/about-us/annual-report>.

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3. Veterans Service Foundation Board – attended the Foundation Board’s first meeting with new membership following the adjustments to the board via SB 21. The Foundation Board voted on leadership positions, discussed possible future charitable aims, and asked GDVS to coordinate with them on establishing financial goals. More information on the board and membership is available at <https://veterans.georgia.gov/about-us/veterans-service-foundation>.
4. Park Discount Card updates – worked with Linda Williams to update the state park discount card for disabled veterans. Ms. Williams helped procure the new Department of Natural Resources Interim Commissioner’s signature to update the card and ensured veterans received a timely response to their application.
5. PACT Act events –
 - a. We CARE Marietta – shared information and registration links to the upcoming We CARE fair in Cobb County. PID worked with Executive Director Simpson to develop new print materials themed to the event to share with veterans and families. PID will continue to promote the event and share details on the services expected during the lead-up period.
 - b. Warrior Alliance Brief and Claims – shared information and resources for an upcoming Warrior Alliance PACT outreach event to be held in September.
 - c. PACT Deadline for Backpay – created a reminder for veterans and families to submit at least an Intent to File by August 9 to be considered for retroactive pay to August 10, 2022.
6. Veterans Benefits Outreach
 - a. VA Updates Student Enrollment Certification Process – worked with SAA to increase awareness of VA’s July 1 change to only accepting Enrollment Manager certifications. PID released information through social channels, as well as posting links to VA webinars.
 - b. Military Consumer Protection month – shared information and resources from the Attorney General’s Office of Consumer Protection to help prevent service members, veterans, and their families from fraud.
 - c. GWVH-Milledgeville Celebrates Resident’s 100th Birthday – shared a local news story with coverage of Robert Rakeshaw’s 100th birthday. He is the last WWII veteran in residence.
 - d. Wheelchair Games – celebrated the achievements of Team Augusta and Team Dublin athletes while attending the National Veteran Wheelchair Games.

Public Information Division Contacts (Since December 9, 2022)

- Replies to VA eBenefits Messages = 415
- Replies to General Questions = approximately 555
- Individual Request for the State Certificate of Honor = approximately 120

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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 **29,955**
(Honors Ceremonies and Central Office Mail Outs)

DoD Vietnam Veteran Lapel Pins presented via GDVS – An estimated **23,955**

Honors Ceremonies supported/coordinated by GDVS – **358**

Defense Department's Vietnam Veteran Surviving Spouse CoH – **291**

UPCOMING EVENT



STAFF SERGEANT FOX FORUM

Join us as we discuss current initiatives and challenges that still need to be addressed to prevent suicide in military service members, veterans, and their families.

*Panelists from HVAC and HASC are expected but not yet confirmed.

10:00 – 2:00
Georgia State Capitol, Room 341
October 5, 2023

GDVS veterans.georgia.gov
GREEN VETERANS greenveterans.com

SHAWN HANLEY
HOST & MODERATOR
CEO, GreenVeterans
Chairman, Georgia
Veterans Service Board

PATRICIA ROSS
FORUM PANELIST
Georgia Commissioner
of Veterans Service

MR. AND MRS. FOX
FORUM OPENING REMARKS
Parents of SSG Parker
Gordon Fox

AARON EAGAN
FORUM PANELIST
Director, Community-Based
Suicide Prevention
VHA Office of Mental Health
and Suicide Prevention

LIZ CLARK
FORUM PANELIST
Director,
Department of Defense
Suicide Prevention
Office

Mr. Mark Demers, Grant Program Implementation Manager

- Unite-Us Grant- (American Rescue Plan-Negative Impact Grant)- \$6.1m per year effective July 1, 2022:
 - Data ingestion and secure data transfer for the platform and social connector is moving forward. As of June 20, 2023, we have **263,597** veterans in the system. We have submitted **956**

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community partners and **313** healthcare partners for inclusion to the platform since August 2022.

- Our Warner Robins GDVS office is ranked #6 (1496 Unite Us referrals received during the pilot program) and #8 (1299 Unite Us referrals received from October 25, 2022, to present) in the entire national network.
- Grant financial management- we are going through the grant audit process with RSM (external auditors) for the year end closeout.
- Application for year 2 and 3 of the grant were submitted on May 4, 2023, and were approved on June 20, 2023, totaling \$12,129,951.73.
- Below is an activity snapshot from Unite Us Insights:



- **SOG 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 analyzing data collection from the Fort Stewart Army Guard event. The latest submission to the VA on June 5, 2023.
 - Calandra Ferguson provided the outreach and training data reports, and we transmitted them to the VA on July 5, 2023.
 - Fox Grant renewal was completed and sent via UDPaaS on May 19, 2023. We will find out if we receive the grant renewal in September 2023.
 - Calandra Ferguson or Veda Brooks will report all the outreach and training events regarding Suicide Prevention under the Fox Grant.
 - Attended the Fox Grant Conference in Austin, TX on July 17-20, 2023.

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- 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.
- The first quarterly report will be received in October 2023.

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 1,822 educational institutions and training establishments where Georgia veterans may attend school or job training and utilize their GI Bill® educational benefits.
- The Team will be going to Vermont for a summer conference.

Item *	Number
Approved Educational Institutions	393
Approved Training Establishments	1,429
Veteran Students Enrolled in Educational Institutions	10,836

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

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

Construction projects are underway. There is a bond for the expansion of the Glennville Cemetery and bond funding for improvements which will provide a chiller.

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

1. Georgia War Veterans Home (GWVH) is COVID-free for veterans and staff.
2. VA survey was conducted from 7/11/23-7/14/23 at the Georgia War Veterans Home in Milledgeville, GA. The recommendations from the report will be emailed to the facility by the Dublin VAMC once they receive them from the office of Geriatrics Extended Care. The process usually takes several weeks from the final survey day.
3. Food facility equipment training is scheduled for Pruitt staff on 7/24/23.
4. Continuing to work with the Department of Administrative Services (DOAS) to secure a contract and vendor for the GWVH.
5. Annual nursing skills fair to be completed by Pruitt Health onsite at the GWVH in August 2023.

Mr. Kerry Dyer, Chief Operations Officer

On Thursday, June 29, 2023, Kerry Dyer along with Commissioner Ross, Shelly-Ann Simpson, Ramona Roper, Ken Childre, Vince Pritchett, and the Training Team conducted an Annual Training After Action Review. Later that day he spoke with Natasha Simoes, Project Manager, Access Corporation regarding the pick-up of the remaining DD214's.

On Friday, June 30, 2023, Kerry Dyer along with Commissioner Ross, Mark Bannister, Russell Feagin, Tonya Jarret, and Mark Meeks (DOAS Procurement Manager) met to discuss the GWVH Cost Negotiation Strategy. Later that day he reviewed 9 potential candidates for the GDVS Leadership Institute. He also spoke with Kelley Dudley, CFO & Deputy State Accounting Officer regarding FY2023 Close Out.

On Wednesday, July 5, 2023, Kerry Dyer along with Commissioner Ross, Mark Demers, Mark Bannister met to discuss the Strategic Plan. Later that day, along with Kirsten Dennis and Julie Hammond, he met with Kelly Dudley to discuss the procedures to close Purchase Orders. He also posted the Business Analyst 1 vacancy internally and externally.

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On Thursday, July 6, 2023, Kerry Dyer along with Commissioner Ross, Mark Demers, and Julie Hammond attended the Veterans Service Foundation Board meeting. He also met with Dr. Hall (DOAS Contract Management Manager) regarding the 2022 Transit Cargo Van that was ordered on May 5, 2022. He also spoke with Madeleine Moghimi (Media Service Office Manager) regarding the reservation of two rooms at the Capitol.

On Friday, July 7, 2023, Kerry Dyer along with Commissioner Ross, Mark Meeks (DOAS Procurement Manager), Matthew Carter (DOAS Procurement Manager), Russell Feagin and Tonya Jarrett met to discuss Negotiation Strategy for the GWVH. Later that day along with Commissioner Ross, Mark Meeks, Russell Feagin, Tonya Jarrett, Matthew Carter met with Tyler Arnold, Chief Development Officer, PruittHealth to discuss Cost Negotiations.

On Monday, July 10, 2023, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's Meeting. He also emailed potential candidates to the North and South Region Directors for the Athens, Glennville, and Augusta vacancies. Later that day he processed a transfer packet for the Lawrenceville Field Office.

On Tuesday, July 11, 2023, Kerry Dyer spoke with Latatia West (DOAS Policy Manager) regarding the FY24 Annual Sexual Harassment Prevention Training for Managers and Supervisors. He also spoke with Scott Duncan (President of Carrollton Office Equipment) regarding quotes for the renovation of the 9th Floor Suite. Later that day he posted the South Region Director vacancy.

On Wednesday, July 12, 2023, Kerry Dyer along with Commissioner Ross, Camala Ball, Julie Hammond, Shareka Monday-Robinson, Kirsten Dennis, Kelly Dudley, and Joi Bryant attended a Budget follow-up meeting. Later that day he attended the GWVH strategy meeting along with Commissioner Ross, Mark Meeks, Mark Bannister, Tonya Jarrett and Russell Feagin.

On Thursday, July 13, 2023, Kerry Dyer met virtually with Mary Chapman, DOAS Director Policy, Training and Outreach regarding the Small Business Liaison Quarterly meeting. Later that day he reviewed 13 resumes along with Commissioner Ross and Mark Demers in preparation for the Business Analyst 1 interviews.

On Friday, July 14, 2023, Kerry Dyer attended the Commissioner's Open Forum along with employees from the Department. He also spoke with Natasha Simones (Access Solutions) to coordinate a date and time to pick up the DD214's. Later that day he spoke with Marlon Benjamin (GBA Project Manager) regarding the removal of the DD214 cabinets.

On Monday, July 17, 2023, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's meeting. Later that day along with Commissioner Ross, Ken Childre and Shelly-Ann Simpson he conducted interviews for the South Region Director vacancy.

On Tuesday, July 18, 2023, Kerry Dyer met virtually with Arnita Dent (HR Manager, Recruitment for Office of Human Resources) and Bianca Thomas to discuss Talent Management, Retention and

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Recruitment challenges. Later that day, along with Kirsten Dennis and Charlotte May he met virtually with Darren Phillips (Power Marketing & Printing Executive) to discuss the printing projects. He also processed the new hire packets for Glennville and St. Mary's field offices.

On Wednesday, July 19, 2023, Kerry Dyer, along with Commissioner Ross, Russell Feagin, Shareka Monday-Robinson, Camala Ball and Robert Orange (SAO Accountant) met to discuss the realignment of the funding for the Economic Support Specialist positions. He also spoke to Mr. Bean, Fort Stewart, Transition Manager, regarding the possibility of opening a Field Office on Fort Gordon.

On Thursday, July 20, 2023, Kerry Dyer met with Bianca Sanon to discuss the dates for GBA to renovate the 9th Floor common area and restrooms. Later that day he spoke with Leslie Davis, State Property Leasing Specialist, regarding the landscape issue with the Bainbridge Field Office, a broken door at the Gainesville Field Office and the inability to make lease payments at the LaGrange Field Office.

On Friday, July 21, 2023, Kerry Dyer met virtually with Natasha Simones to discuss the digitalization timeline for the DD214's. Later that day he spoke with Tiffany Whisenhunt, LMS Administrator, regarding the Sexual Harassment Training for Managers and Supervisors.

Below are the Personnel Actions Kerry Dyer and Shareka Monday-Robinson processed from June 16, 2023-July 16, 2023.

Location	Position	Status	Name	Date
Lawrenceville	Office Mgr (VFSO2)	Resigned	Ronnie Hough	06/30/23
Milledgeville	Grds Maint Tech 1	New Hire	TyRel Carswell	07/03/23
August-GWVNH	VFSO 1	Resign	Valerie Gilchrist	07/07/23
St. Marys	Office Mgr (VFSO2)	Resign	Brett Kuppler	07/14/23
Milledgeville	Grds Maint Tech 1	New Hire	Jamon Waller	07/17/23

When asked by Mr. Kopsie about vacancies, Mr. Dyer explained that attrition has gone down and there is only 1 position vacant at the moment.

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

Accounting and Finance

Routine budget and accounting operations are continuing with the guidance of the State Accounting Office – Accounting Shared Services. The standard scope of services provides accounts payable, processing of purchase orders and non-purchase order vouchers, mailing checks/assuring ACH payments are made, process travel vouchers, handle all vendor management requests, manage federal funds, and will maintain files in accordance with the state's records retention policy.

Budget and the General Assembly

FY23

The department successfully ended the 2023 fiscal year (June 30, 2023) within the budgeted appropriations for the year for each of the four fiscal programs (Administration, Cemetery, Nursing Homes, and Veterans Benefits) to include allowances for any late arriving invoices or reclassifications by the State Accounting Office that may occur during development of the State's Consolidated Accounting and Finance Report (CAFR) that will be published before the end of December 2023. The State Accounting Office conducted several preliminary budget reviews of FY 2023 spending in each of the four fiscal programs with the GDVS staff to ensure this agency was within budget compliance and on track for a successful closeout on Friday, July 14, 2023.

The annual FY closeout process was once again successful. The team members of SAO Accounting Shared Services assisted in the closeout process by training, leading, and instructing members of our budget, operations, human resources, and procurement teams assisting where needed to ensure GDVS did not programmatically overspend our appropriated budget. Our team at GDVS continues to improve and demonstrates their willingness to work as a team to go above and beyond their regular duties by assisting in the closeout process each year. We thank them for their tremendous teamwork efforts.

FY24

The FY 2024 Annual Operating Budget (AOB) for GDVS was successfully submitted to the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget (OPB) on June 3rd, 2023, for approval and entry into the OPB's tracking system, which is used by the OPB and all state agencies for budget and expenditure monitoring and budget compliance. The AOB is based on the FY 2024 appropriation approved by the General Assembly and the Governor.

Preparations are now underway to develop the department's AFY 2024 and FY 2025 budget requests. As of this writing, OPB has not issued the AFY 2024/FY 2025 budget instructions which are the general budget preparation procedures used in preparing agencies amended and proposed budgets for current and upcoming fiscal years. Hopefully we will have the guidance not later than August 1st. The department's AFY 2024 and FY 2025 budget requests are due to OPB on Friday, September 1, 2023. Commissioner Ross submitted the GDVS FY 2023-2026 Strategic Plan to OPB on July 14, 2023.

HEALTH AND MEMORIALS

State Veterans Homes

State Veterans Homes Census (Through July 14, 2023) +

Current Month	Augusta	Milledgeville	Total
Regular Patients	97	105	202
Service Connected *	28	35	63
Total Patients	125	140	265
Last Month			
Regular Patients	97	105	202
Service Connected *	27	37	64
Total Patients	124	142	266

* 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 June 17, 2023, through July 14, 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 June 16, 2023)+

State Veterans Cemetery	Cumulative Last Month	Cumulative Current Month	Increase
Glennville	2,304	2,324	20
Milledgeville	5,159	5,181	22
Total	7,463	7,505	42

+ The report to the VSB are the total numbers from June 17, 2023, through July 14, 2023.

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery – Glennville

Routine operations are continuing.

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Milledgeville

Routine operations are continuing.

OLD BUSINESS:

Ms. Savannah Potter-Miller had questions about veteran treatment courts helping veterans with misdemeanor charges and about students getting the restoration of entitlement when schools go out of business.

Ms. Brooks and Ms. Roper explained that veteran treatment and accountability courts operate at the local level. The question has to be asked on intake forms and by lawyers to find out if someone is a veteran so that the option can be given to them for a veteran treatment court. The disconnect is with public defenders not finding out the client is a veteran.

Mr. Davis explained that students can finish their educational programs even if their school closes down or goes out of business. Mr. Brooks explained that our Appeals Division can handle any educational issues that need to go before a judge on appeal.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Ms. Swan announced that she is receiving the Presidential Lifetime Achievement Award from President Biden. You can RSVP to attend on her website: www.theveterananthem.org

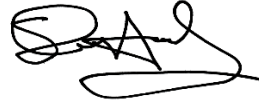
NEW BUSINESS:

The August 22 Board meeting was scheduled. It will be a combination virtual and in-person meeting, set up at the GDVS.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 1:10 p.m.

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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, June 28, 2023, at 12:30 p.m. The Webex link is: <https://georgiadepartmentofveteransservice.webex.com/georgiadepartmentofveteransservice/j.php?MTID=m2ef78913647dae7cb35ebb35811af0d9>

Meeting password: **QDaJY8jca32 (73259852 from video systems)**

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

Access Code: **2337 837 8884**