Wednesday, July 24, 2024 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

Present
Mr. Joshua Kopsie, Chair
Mr. Tim Paslawski, Vice Chair
Mr. Pete Peterson, Member
Ms. Takosha Swan, Member
Ms. Patricia Ross, Commissioner

Visitors Present:
Ms. Shelly-Ann Simpson, Executive Director, Field Operations & Appeals, GDVS
Mr. Mark Demers, Chief Development Officer, Chief Finance Officer, GDVS
Mr. Russell Feagin, Executive Director, Health & Memorials Division, GDVS
Mr. Kerry Dyer, Chief Operations Officer, GDVS
Ms. Jehae Kim, Assistant Attorney General, Attorney General's Office
Ms. Belinda Boldoe, VFW Service Officer, Appeals Division, GDVS
Ms. Tonjala Moton-Williams, GDVS, American Legion Service Officer
Ms. Amy Stevens, Georgia Military Women and Vetlanta
Mr. Lou Zayas, Jr. Vice Commander, Military Order of the Purple Heart
Mr. Johnny Higdon, National Montford Pointe Marine Association
Ms. Lisa Jenkins, Georgia American Gold Star Mothers
Ms. Carolyn Cagle, Georgia American Gold Star Mothers
Ms. Samantha Brown-Parks, Veterans Service Foundation Board Secretary
Ms. Vivian Greentree, Veterans Service Foundation Board
Mr. Rick White, Veterans Service Foundation Board
Mr. Don Layne, VECTR Chief Operating Officer
Mr. Eddie Felton, Veteran
Mr. Wayne Collins, Visitor
Ms. Meredith Magnus, Visitor
Mr. Carlton Deese, Executive Director GWVNH, Augusta, GA
Ms. Lily Snyder, 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
Ms. Calandra Fergerson, Coordinator, Suicide Prevention & Outreach, GDVS
Ms. Raven Holstick, Transition and Employment Coordinator, GDVS
Ms. Jarelle Thompson, Homeless Coordinator, GDVS
Mr. William Wilson, Network Administrator, GDVS
Ms. Camala Ball, Budget Analyst, GDVS
Ms. Irene Mackson, Business Support Analyst, GDVS
Ms. Latoya McCallum, Administrative Assistant, GDVS
Ms. Julie Hammond, Executive Assistant to the Commissioner, GDVS

Wednesday, July 24, 2024 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

On Wednesday, July 24, 2024, the Veterans Service Board meeting was held in person and by video/tele-conference.

Mr. Kopsie called the meeting to order at 12:35 p.m. Ms. Simpson gave the invocation. Mr. Kopsie led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

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

Mr. Peterson made a motion to approve the May minutes, which were previously distributed for members to review. Ms. Swan 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 an Atlanta Regional Office VSO/VSCM meeting hosted by Adrienne Becnet-Taylor, CSM. The virtual meeting was held on May 22, 2024, at 9:30AM-10:30AM.

  1. Discuss the VSO's issues and concerns.
  2. VBA Update

- The Department Service Officer attended the Governor Brian Kemp and First Lady Kemp 2024 State of Georgia Memorial Day Ceremony at the Georgia State Capitol, North Wing on May 23, 2024, at 10AM, to mourn and honor the state's deceased service men and women.

- The Department Service Officer attended the Joseph Maxwell Cleland AVAMC Update meeting hosted by Lovetta Ford, Interim Executive Director, and Staff. The virtual meeting was held on May 28, 2024, at 11AM. The purpose of this meeting was to update the VSO on the issues impacting the Atlanta VAMC and we received an update on the arrival of the Kai Mentzer, new Executive Director.

- The Department Service Officer attended a special VSO/Dir meeting hosted by Tony Milons, Director and Brian Morgan, Change Management Analyst (CMA). The virtual meeting was held on May 31, 2024, at 10:30AM-11:30AM.

  1. Director's Update
  2. PACT Act Claim Status
  3. VBA Update
  4. Updated of Building Renovation
  5. VA Outreach Initiates

6. Discuss the VSO's issues and concerns.

- The Department Service Officer attended the GDVS Annual Training Session held on June 3-6, 2024, at 8AM-4PM. The training was conducted at the Unicoi State Park and Lodge located at 1788 GA-356 Helen, GA 30545. Training Classes were:

  - Combat Related Special Compensation
  - Common Mistakes
  - Debit Management
  - Difficult Clients
  - Incompetency and Firearms
  - Interview Skills
  - PACT Act
  - Protective Ratings
  - Recent Court Decisions
  - Tera and ILER
  - Understanding CRSC and CRDP
  - Wartime Pension
  - Strange Situations
  - Tips and Tricks

- The Department Service Officer attended the Department of Georgia VFW and Auxiliary State Convention on June 6-8, 2024, held at the Macon Marriott City Center, 240 Coliseum Dr., Macon, GA 31217.

  1. VFW National Junior Vice Commander, Al Lipphart, National Representative
  2. Commissioner Ross was a guest speaker during the business session.
  3. The VFW Department of GA installed the new State Commander and Staff for 2024 – 2025, Commander Joe Couch.

- The Department Service Officer attended the Monthly VSO/Community Partner PACT Information and Listening virtual meeting hosted by Lauren Ruchin, Atlanta VHA. The virtual meeting was held on June 13, 2024, at 12PM-1PM.

  1. 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.
  2. We discussed ways to ensure that our Veterans gain access to the healthcare, benefits, and resources they earned and deserve!
  3. Provided Veterans' feedback about the PACT Act Outreach initiatives.
  4. Discussed extending the outreach initiatives to the rural areas.

- The Department Service Officer attended the Farewell Ceremony for Patrick Zondervan, Assistant Director, for the Atlanta Regional Office. The ceremony was held on June 14, 2024, at 12PM at the Atlanta Regional Office, located at 1670 Clairmont Road, Decatur, GA 30033. Patrick Zondervan will be the Executive Director for the Little Rock Regional Office.

- The Department Service Officer attended the GA VFW Department Council of Administrative virtual meeting held on June 24, 2024, at 7PM. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the business of the Department for the upcoming term.

- The Department Service Officer attended the Monthly VSO/Community Partner PACT Information and Listening virtual meeting hosted by Lauren Ruchin, Atlanta VHA. The virtual meeting was held on July 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.
  - 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.

- The Department Service Officer attended a VFW National Veterans Service (NVS) Resolution Staff Advisors and Chairs virtual meeting held on July 11, 2024, at 1PM. We discussed the following:

  - The 600 series resolutions at the upcoming VFW National Convention in Louisville, KY on July 27-August 1, 2024.
  - Duties and responsibilities of the staff advisors, chairmen, and vice chairmen
  - The resolutions, and how the process works.

Ms. Raven Holstick, GDVS, American Legion Service Officer

- June 30, 2024 Annual Convention was held in Duluth, GA. During the convention, the American Legion had the privilege of presenting significant contributions in the form of financial donations to VA hospitals across state. These contributions exemplify our dedication to improving the quality of care and support available to veterans in our community.

  Additionally, the convention featured a keynote address by Senator Ossoff, who provided valuable insights into current federal policies and initiatives affecting veterans. Senator Ossoff's address was both enlightening and motivating, underscoring the importance of advocacy and collaboration in our efforts to better serve those who have served our country. The event was well-attended by members of our organization, community leaders, and stakeholders in veteran affairs, fostering

meaningful discussions and networking opportunities that will undoubtedly enhance our future initiatives.

- July 1, 2024 New state leadership was selected.
  Commander: Jim Fultz
  Senior Vice: Micheal Schwartz
  Adjutant: Lewis Kent
  Department Service Officer: Tonjala Moton Williams

Upcoming events:

- Monthly Virtual Post service officer training will be held for new service officers. Training topics will be on the roles and responsibilities as a post service officer. This training will continue to be held monthly as new service officers arrive.

Commissioner Patricia Ross

On Tuesday, May 21, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended the Veterans Service Board Meeting. She also had a meeting with Unite Us, as well as a meeting regarding the furniture renovations in the Central Office.

On Wednesday, May 22, 2024, Commissioner Ross was part of the interview team that interviewed 8 people for the Transition and Employment Coordinator position. Raven Holstick (Appeals) was selected.

On Thursday, May 23, 2024, Commissioner Ross was a speaker at Gov. Kemp's Memorial Day Celebration ceremony at the Capitol.

On Friday, May 24, 2024, Commissioner Ross was part of the interview team that interviewed 4 people for the Homeless Coordinator position. Jarelle Thompson (JT) was selected.

On Monday, May 27, 2024, Commissioner Ross was the keynote speaker at the Gwinnett County Memorial Day Ceremony at the Gwinnett Fallen Heroes Memorial.

On Tuesday, May 28, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended a Milledgeville site visit, along with representatives from OPB, to provide insight and the need for more operational funding.

On Wednesday, May 29, 2024, Commissioner Ross was the keynote speaker at the IBM Quarter Century Club's Veterans Appreciation event. Later she had a call with LTG Garrett about the Emory Veterans Healthcare Program.

On Thursday, May 30, 2024, Commissioner Ross visited the site of the new Perry Clinic office, along with Kerry Dyer and Shelly-Ann Simpson. They then picked up the new state benefits books in North Georgia.

On Monday, June 3 through Friday, June 7, Commissioner Ross attended the Department's Annual Training and passed her exam.

On Thursday, June 6, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended the Quarterly Meeting of the Veterans Service Foundation Board.

On Friday, June 7, 2024, Commissioner Ross met with Steven Jahng, Vice-President of Hyundai Motor Group on hiring veterans and Georgia Guard. She also had a call with DBHDD Commissioner Tanner to discuss veterans' hospitals contact card background.

On Saturday, June 8, 2024, Commissioner Ross spoke at the VFW State Convention in Macon.

On Monday, June 10, 2024, Commissioner Ross held a Director's meeting. She then attended a Unite Us Bi-weekly Meeting and a Fox Grant Update Meeting. In the evening, she had dinner with Lori Blumn from Air Force Manpower Analysis Agency.

On Tuesday, June 11, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended the Unite Us Quarterly Business Review meeting, along with Mark Demers, Charlotte May and Irene Mackson.

On Wednesday, June 12, 2024, Commissioner Ross met with the Department of Administrative Services and members of her team regarding two open purchase orders for the Milledgeville Home. She then met with Natara Taylor to discuss Senate Bill 449 and nurse licensure. Commissioner Ross then spoke at the Grand Opening of the 84 Lumber Truss Plant in Cartersville. They announced a significant donation to the Fisher House Foundation, which builds comfort homes where military and veteran families can stay free of charge while a loved one is in the hospital. These homes are located at military and VA medical centers around the world.

On Tuesday, June 18, 2024, Commissioner Ross presented to the Senate Committee on Veteran Mental Health and Homelessness at the Capitol. She then had a phone meeting with John Butler, in which he updated her on the new Vietnam War Memorial in Dunwoody, the next AVVBA meeting on July 2, the Senior Resource Fair on August 1, and the We Care Vet Fair at the Cobb Civic Center on November 1. She spent the afternoon working on the Strategic Plan.

On Thursday, June 20, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended the Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission meeting in Warner Robins.

On Friday, June 21, 2024, Commissioner Ross had a meeting to discuss the Strategic Plan. She then met with Joe Dan Banker regarding the Corpsman/Medic Highway to BSN. She ended her day with a Unite Us Renewal Proposal meeting.

On Sunday, June 23, 2024, Commissioner Ross spoke at t the 74th Korean War Commemoration Day in Norcross and presented a proclamation from Governor Kemp.

On Monday, June 24, 2024, Commissioner Ross hosted a private reception with Gov. Brian Kemp and First Lady Marty Kemp to raise funds for the Veterans Service Foundation.

On Monday, June 24 through Tuesday, June 25, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended the Suicide Prevention Summit at Callaway Gardens.

On Tuesday, June 25 through Thursday, June 27, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended the NASDVA SE Regional Meeting in Montgomery, AL.

On June 28, 2024, Commissioner Ross and Ms. Simpson attended the Warrior Alliance's Community Partner Meeting at Truist Park. The new Executive Director for the Atlanta VA Medical Center, Mr. Kai Mentzer, was there to share his vision and action plan for Atlanta's VA Healthcare System.

On Monday, July 1, 2024, Commissioner Ross held a Director's Meeting. She then had a meeting to discuss VetFest 2024, an IVMF's Bunker Labs event, which will be held on July 13 at Truist Park.

On Tuesday, July 2, 2024, Commissioner Ross was interviewed for "The Warrior Alliance Network," a new radio/podcast series. The purpose is to build awareness of programs and services, to drive meaningful information in key veteran subject matters, to highlight veteran success after service, and to inform veterans and military spouses about career pathways available through our corporate partners.

On Monday, July 8, 2024, Commissioner Ross held a Director's meeting. She then attended a Unite Us Bi-weekly Meeting and a Fox Grant Update Meeting.

On Tuesday, July 9, 2024, Commissioner Ross met with her team to review this year's Leadership Institute applications. She then attended the Returning Veterans Task Force meeting and the Year End Review with the State Accounting Office. Commissioner Ross then attended a meeting regarding the Milledgeville War Home contract.

On Wednesday, July 10, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended a GA Veterans Network Executive Council meeting via Zoom. She then spoke at the Veterans Connections meeting at the WellStar Senior Wellness Center in Marietta. That afternoon she attended the Center for Women Veterans quarterly meeting, then the VA's state home per diem quarterly call. She ended the day discussing the upcoming

We Care Veterans Fair in Cobb County with the VA's Office of Public Engagement and their support with raters for the event.

On Thursday, July 11, 2024, Commissioner Ross had a meeting with her team regarding the state benefits magazine. She then attended the Monthly VSO/Community Partner PACT Act Information and Listening Session.

On Friday, July 12, 2024, Commissioner Ross visited VECTR along with members of the Outreach Team.

On Saturday, July 13, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended VetFest 2024 in Cobb County. Hosted by the Institute for Veterans and Military Families/Bunker Labs, the day's focus was on veteran entrepreneurship.

On Monday, July 15, 2024, Commissioner Ross held a Director's Meeting. She then attended the National Center for PTSD Veteran Engagement Team meeting via Teams, met on a potential grant opportunity, and later met with Onward Ops. She also spoke to a former contractor provider for the VA and was provided insights on the DBQ process.

On Tuesday, July 16, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended the VA's budget brief to VSOs. The VA is projecting significant shortfalls in the upcoming fiscal years in compensation and pension, educational benefits, and VA healthcare. She also finished the annual performance evaluations.

On Wednesday, July 17, 2024, Commissioner Ross presented to the joint committee on Veteran mental health and homelessness. She provided an overview of the status of the veteran mental health grant and the need for veteran homeless prevention in the state. Other presenters were the AMES Center, GVRA, Hire Heroes USA, and the Cherokee Homeless Veterans program. Later, she met with members from the San Diego Veterans Coalition on their military transition program and collaborations in California, along with their use of Onward Ops.

On Thursday, July 18, 2024, Commissioner Ross met with Mark Smith (Deputy COO) at the Capitol.

On Monday, July 22, 2024, Commissioner Ross held a Director's Meeting. She then attended a Unite Us Bi-weekly Meeting. She then hosted a delegation of Korean veterans at the Central Office. She then attended the National Veterans Resource Community Network Gathering in Dayton, Ohio through Tuesday, July 23, 2024.

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

GENERAL

- Our Annual Training held in Helen, Georgia June 2-7 was a resounding success. All current

employees are fully accredited.

- We are pleased to announce that Ms. Jarelle Thompson (JT) has joined us as the Homeless Coordinator, and Ms. Raven Holstick, formerly of Appeals, has officially joined us as the Transitional and Employment Coordinator. We are excited to have them with us as we expand our outreach team.

- The Second Annual Let's Connect Summit was held June 24-26 at CallowayGardens.

- On June 28 the Commissioner and I attended a Warrior Alliance Event at Truist Park. Kai Metzer, the new Director for VAMC Decatur, was the keynote speaker.

- On June 12 and July 11th, I attended a planning meeting for the Annual We Care Fair thatwill be held at the Cobb County Civic Center on November 1. This year's event will be held on one day from 10-7.

- Raven Holstick and I attended the VR&E job fair held at the State Farm Arena. We provided benefit information to 50 veterans.

- **DD 214's and Welcome Home Letters: 1,594** Welcome Home Letters were mailed out in May 2024 and **625** were mailed out in June 2024.

Projected Positions: Current opening in Hinesville.

Ms. Ramona Roper, Director of Training Division:

- June 3-7, 2024, the Training Division completed the 2024 GDVS Annual Training Conference in Helen, Georgia. After literally a few bumps and bruises on the travel day, the rest of the week went well. We had a total of 6 different classes. Instead of the learning tiers from past trainings, we combined the knowledge levels together for a different perspective of learning styles. Classes were more open discussion based and not "instructed" in the common way, which gave the participants freedom to openly discuss the topic at hand and be a part of the learning experience. The annual training exam was administered, Friday, June 7th, with nearly 100% success.

- June 10, 2024, Ms. Ramona Roper was the guest speaker for the Women Veterans Recognition Ceremony, American Legion Post 339, Lafayette, Georgia. Mrs. KristiFowler organized the program to recognize Women Veterans Day on June 12th. The evening celebrated several women in the area with gift bags, a barbeque dinner and livemusic.

- June 13, 2024, Mr. Charles Isaac has developed the schedule for hybrid classes for thefirst quarter for the South Region. Ms. Sandra Bennett is working on the second quarterroster.

- June 16 and 18, 2024, Mr. Charles Isaac will assist the South Regional Director, Ms. Sherri Whitfield, with interviews for the vacant positions in the Glennville VFSO and HinesvilleVFSO.

- July 17-18, 2024, Mr. Steven Fay and Mr. Glenn Massey will be training a new VSO at the Augusta War Veterans Home. This training consists of an introduction to becoming an accredited VSO, as well as Standards of Conduct, Training, Responsibility, Involvement, and Preparation of Claims (TRIP) training.

- July 26, 2024, Ms. Ramona Roper will attend the VA Augusta Healthcare System Vet Fest event at the VFW Post 2872, in Athens, Georgia. This is a resource event for the Athens area and surrounding counties to learn about VA benefits, the PACT Act, enroll in VA healthcare, file claims, and more.

Upcoming Events:

- Daily continued ongoing support to the Regional Directors and Veteran Field Service Offices
- Continuation of performing duties as VSO's
- August 5, 2024, Mr. Charles Isaac will participate in the Purple Heart Annual Golf Tournament in Stone Mountain, Georgia.
- Training Division retro awards total: $73,154.45
- Continued development of DROP Classes and training modules for theAbsorb Training Portal

VA Augusta Healthcare System
Presents
SUMMER 2024
VET FEST
COME LEARN WHAT THE VA CAN DO FOR YOU!
Resources Available:
• VBA Claims Assistance
• PACT Act Information
• Toxic Exposure Screenings
• Enrollment to VA healthcare
• Information on Services Offered by VA Augusta Healthcare System
July 26th•9am to 2pm
VFW Post 2872
835 Sunset Drive
Athens, GA

10
JUN
6PM-7PM
American Legion LaFayette
Post 339
WOMEN VETERANS
Recognition Day
Speakers
Music by
Food by
MAYOR ANDY ARNOLD
RAMONA ROPER (GDVS)
MASON THOMPSON
POST 339
Free event. Everyone welcome. Call or text Kristi Fowler at 706-996-4111 if attending to ensure there is enough food and she has account of the women veterans attending for recognition.
209 S. Chattanooga St., LaFayette, GA 30728

Program

Welcome
Opening Prayer
Pledge of Allegiance
Proclamation – Mayor Andy Arnold
Commander Post 339
Guest Speaker – Ramona Roper (GDVS)
Recognize our Women Veterans
Closing Remarks & Prayer
Mason Thompson
Meal provided by Post 339

Mr. Edwin Berry, Director of Appeals Division

- The total number of hearings conducted by the Appeals Division for May 2024 was **62.**
- As of **June 1, 2024**, the Atlanta VA Regional Office processed benefits as follows for GDVS and the Service Organizations represented by GDVS during the month of May 2024:

The grand total of monthly compensation and benefits for the veterans, family members and surviving spouses increased by $1,669,998.00. The number of awards grew by 288 veterans and family members.

Types of Claims	Number of Awards	Benefits paid
Compensation	107,086	$240,490,460
DIC	4,133	$7,102,396
Survivor Pension	715	$689,519
Veteran Pension	1,396	$1,659,239
Grand Total	113,330	$249,941,615
		$1,232,440,326 YTD thru 5/31/2024

- The total number of hearings conducted by the Appeals Division for June 2024 was **46.**
- As of **July 1, 2024**, the Atlanta VA Regional Office processed benefits as follows for GDVS and the Service Organizations represented by GDVS during the month of June 2024:

The grand total of monthly compensation and benefits for the veterans, family members and surviving spouses increased by $1,082,682.00. The number of awards grew by 282 veterans and family members.

Types of Claims	Number of Awards	Benefits paid
Compensation	**107,355**	**$241,533,012**
DIC	**4,177**	**$7,178,761**
Survivor Pension	**704**	**$674,651**
Veteran Pension	**1,376**	**$1,637,872**
Grand Total	**113,612**	**$251,024,297**
		$1,483,464,623 YTD thru 6/30/2024

Mr. Kenneth Childre, Director Veterans Benefits North Region

Retro Awards: May 2024-$1,489,077.85
Included are single awards: Compensation:
Biggers-5239-$113,746.38 (Rico Johnson-Gainesville)
Vandegraft-4206-$120,040.21 (Marie Lundquist-Jasper)

Director Site Visits/Inspections: 0

Community Involvement:
May 2-Rico Johnson (Gainesville)-Attended a Vet to Vet Cafe event coordinated by Northeast Georgia Medical Center at The Phoenix of Braselton.

May 13-Kareem Reddick (VECTR North)-Participated at the Georgia Guard Retiree Appreciation Day ceremony. Briefed 60+ Veterans about our locations and services provided. Talked with 10 Veterans on an individual basis about their current/future claims.

May 13-15-Rico Johnson (Gainesville-Attended the Confess Project Training (Beyond the Barbershop) Trainer course.

May 16-NW Georgia We CARE Event in Rome, GA. Over 1500 Veterans attended the event. GDVS talked with 123 Veterans/family members and completed 83 claims.
Kelly Johnson and Beth Humble (Dalton), Bill Smith (LaFayette), Marie Lundquist (Jasper), Rita Barnhart and Melissa Pritchett (Canton), Barry Hunter and ChanDreas Barkley (Rome), Tomeika Johnson (Cedartown), Steven Hungarter (Cartersville), Sean Seader (Carrollton)

North Area Gains/Losses: 0

Average Visits Per VFSO
Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO

Region: North

Month: May-24

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:	52	7,290	22	331.36	2,200	100.00
Number of Offices:	29		Average Visits/Office:		251.38	Average Claims/Office:	75.862069

*Total monthly office visits include: 2,290 In-Person and 5,000 phone calls/emails.

Retro Awards: Jun 2024-$1,753,783.63

Director Site Visits/Inspections: 0

Community Involvement:
Jun 12-Kareem Reddick (VECTR North) attended a local VFW meeting. Talked about the different services the GDVS has to offer aside from submitting disability claims. Stressed how establishing POA is very detrimental in the process. He spoke about education, appeal support, the nursing homes and cemeteries GDVS owns and maintains and gave a little information about that. He also spoke about the GDVS suicide outreach program and what that team does.

Jun 15-Tanya Rogers (Gainesville) volunteered at StreetExit of Hall County to combat homelessness and support the local populace with accessing resources in their community.

Jun 23-25-Rico Johnson (Gainesville) attended the Let's Connect Summit hosted by KSU and conducted VA SAVE training for the youth participants.

North Area Gains/Losses: 1
Tyrone McBride-Augusta WVH-Resigned 3 Jun

Average Visits Per VFSO
Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO

Region: North

Month: June-24

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	5,516	14	394.00	1,662	118.71
Number of Offices:	29		Average Visits/Office:		190.21	Average Claims/Office:	57.3103448

*Total monthly office visits include: 1,737 In-person and 3,779 phone calls/emails.

Ms. Sherri Whitfield, Director Veterans Benefits South Region

- On June 3 – 7, 2024, All GDVS field offices shut down to attend annual certification training at the Unicoi State Park Lodge in Helen, Ga. As always, the training team did an outstanding job, and the training was well organized and informative.

- On June 18, 2024, Melissa Ingle and Sherri Whitfield attended and participated in the Albany Area Senior Care Coalition. This was an opportunity to network with others providingresources to seniors in our area.

- Sherri Whitfield, Regional Director, attended a VA Resource Fair/VBA Claims Clinic on July 11, 2024, at the American Legion Post 512 in Albany, GA. The event included resources for homeless veterans, mental health information, employment assistance, healthcare enrollment, and VA personnel to complete claims.

- On July 12, 2024, interviews were conducted at the Statesboro field office for the position of Veteran Field Service Officer 1. There were four potential candidates.

- On July 16, 2024, interviews were conducted at the Glennville field office for the position of Veteran Field Service Officer 2/Office Manager. There were four potential candidates.

- On July 18, 2024, interviews were conducted at the Hinesville VA CBOC for the position of Veteran Field Service Officer 1. There were six potential candidates.

- South region offices reported lump sum payments since the last board meeting of$981,514.72 for

the month of June, with the highest single amount of $133,615.56, reported by the Tifton field office.

- A total of $390,291.99 has been reported so far for the month of July, with the highest single amount of $225,702.86 reported by the Milledgeville field office.

- South Georgia Region Veterans Population: 237,759.

Ms. Veda Brooks, Women Veterans Coordinator (WVC)

- May 15, 2024, Ms. Brooks planned, executed and participated in the Lamar County Outreach.

- May 16, 2024, Ms. Brooks participated in the We Care Vet Fair, Rome, Georgia.

- May 18, 2024, Ms. Brooks planned, executed and participated in the Gwinnett County Homeless Outreach at the American Legion Post 232.

- May 23, 2024, Ms. Brooks coordinated and supported Suicide Training at the Riverdale Women's Center.

- May 29, 2024, Ms. Brooks partnered with Fergie to conduct Buddy Checks to GDVS Waynesboro, Augusta (2), and Grovetown Field Offices.

- June 4, 2024, Ms. Brooks attended annual training in person, in Helen, Georgia.

- June 5, 2024, Ms. Brooks prepared, packed, and delivered supplies to AMES for packing and delivery to Callaway Gardens.

- June 6, 2024, Ms. Brooks conducted home visits to a widow in Atlanta, elderly veteran in Atlanta, and participated in a Teams Meeting with Veteran Voices.

- June 7, 2024, Ms. Brooks attended Annual Training online and completed her accreditation testing.

- June 10-13, 2024, Ms. Brooks attended the 2024 Innovations Conference in San Diego as a speaker.

- June 23-26, 2024, Ms. Brooks planned, executed, and participated in the Youth Training during the 2024 Georgia Let's Connect Summit.

- July 2, 2024, Ms. Brooks completed a home visit to Mr. Brown to have him complete the 10-

10ez to get him enrolled in healthcare.

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 Fergerson, Suicide Prevention and Outreach Coordinator

- June 18, Ms. Fergerson conducted the monthly Governor's Challenge Task Force meeting, with emphasis on the 2024 Suicide Prevention Summit.

- June 20, Ms. Fergerson conducted a Mental Health welfare check on a few of the southern VSO offices - LaGrange, Ft. Moore and Columbus.

- June 24-25, Ms. Fergerson, KSU, DBHDD held the Fox Grant 2nd Suicide Prevention Summit.

- July 1-3, Ms. Fergerson attended and completed the Adult Mental Health First Aide (MHFA) Instructor certification course.

- July 15-18, Ms. Fergerson attended the Fox Grant Conference in Portland, Oregon.

Ms. Raven Holstick, Transition and Employment Coordinator

- June 26, 2024, met with the outreach team for Georgia State University. During this meeting we discussed partnership/collaborations and future events that will take place during the rest of the year.

- July 1, 2024, Outreach team met with SC Technical College to introduce ourselves. we and present the proposed plan for the upcoming veterans' event at the college on August 30.

- July 8, 2024, Met with National Incarcerated Association to explore opportunities for collaboration and to outline strategies for future events and support initiatives targeted within the jail communities.

- July 10, 2024, Met with Dekalb County to discuss Veteran Expo taking place in September. During the meeting we discussed the logistics for the event. Meetings will occur monthly.

- July 15, 2024, Met with Onward ops to learn more about their program and the possibilities of collaboration.

- July 17, 2024, Participated in the job fair with VR&E hosted by the Hawks at State Farm Arena. We spoke to over 50 veterans and discussed benefits they are eligible for.

Upcoming events:

- July 23, 2024 Outreach team will visit local Homeless Shelters
- July 26, 2024 Clayton County Veteran Collaboration
- August 1, 2024 Visit to University of Georgia

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 working with the SAO Shared Services to prepare the procurement and accounting data in Team Works for migration to Workday.

- Kirsten Dennis closed out approx. 20 purchase orders (POs), created 7 renovation POs totaling $238,674.15, and 11 POs for War Homes and Cemeteries totaling $207,088.51.

- Kirsten Dennis ordered business cards for the entire department due to a new email domain change totaling $5,053.00 .

- Camala Ball, Kirsten Davis and Mark Demers participated in year-end review with SAO-closing went very well.

- Mark Demers attended the National Association of State Auditors, Comptrollers and Treasurers (NASACT) webinar on GASB 2024 Review on July 11, 2024.

- Camala Ball attended the Integration Design and Budget Upload Details from SAO as part of NextGen.

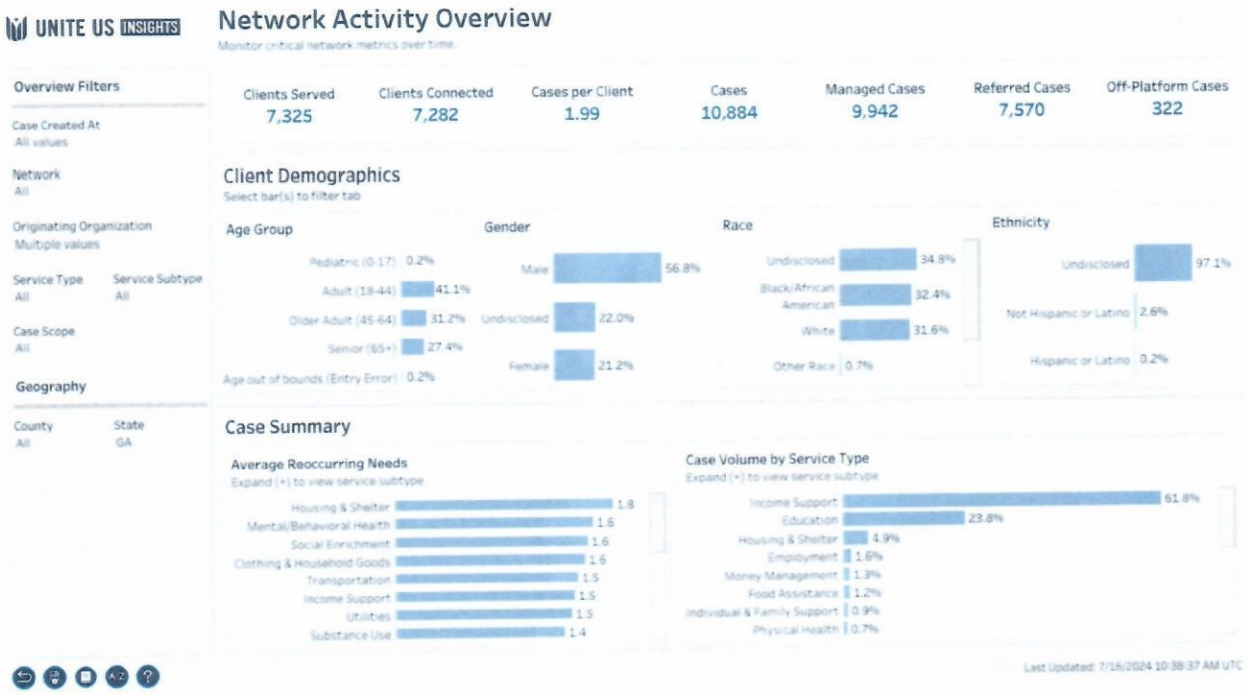
Budget:

- Camala Ball met with SAO weekly for budget updates leading up to close out.
- Camala Ball facilitated the creation of FY24 renovation budget POs and other POs to secure funds.
- We were able to maximize appropriated fund expenditures which minimized surplus at close out.

Grant Program:

- SSG Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program- ($747,464)
    - There have been 3 grant fund draws since the last report: June 4, 2024, for $11,610.54, June 20, 2024, for $214,664.83 and July 2, 2024, for $2,916.93.
    - Irene Mackson and Mark Demers attended Fox Grant VA National Webinar on July 18, 2024.
    - Irene Mackson attended Fox Grant Webinar on July 11, 2024-discussion about how to assist veterans newly released from prison.
    - The SSG Fox Grant Year 3 NOFO was submitted on April 26, 2024, we will find out the results on the second week of September 2024.
    - The SSG Fox Grant Mid-Year Report was submitted on April 30, 2024, the next report will be in October 2024.

- 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 July 8, 2024, we have **272,422** veterans in the system. We have submitted **1,088** community partners and **313** healthcare partners for inclusion to the platform since August 2022.
    - The end of year report was submitted on July 2, 2024, with the ARPA Smartsheet end of year documentation due on July 22, 2024
    - The latest Unite Us grant drawdown was on July 2, 2024, for $19,391.99 with all reconciliation support documents included.
    - The next drawdown will be an advance for the entire 3rd and final year's salary, fringe and invoices.
    - Below is an activity snapshot from Unite Us Insights:



- <u>Veterans Mental Health Services Program Grant (HB 414)-</u>
  - AFY2023- The grant was awarded to two vendors: $750,000
    - Aspire (Cohen Veterans Network) for $650,000.
    - Emory Healthcare for $100,000.
    - The next quarterly report/year end close is due from awardees July 31, 2024
  - AFY2024- The grant was awarded to two vendors: $1,000,000
    - Aspire (Cohen Veterans Network) for $776,132
    - Emory Healthcare for $212,500
    - GDVS indirect rate awarded by Senate and House $11,368
    - All monies have been distributed to awardees in May 2024.
  - FY2025- $1,000,000 (competitive grant)
    - The grant is currently in the application stage in Survey Monkey. All applications are due no later than July 31, 2024.

<u>Veterans Service Foundation:</u>

- The next quarterly board meeting will be on August 8, 2024, at 10:00AM.

- Completed the Georgia State Charitable Contributions Program paperwork so the foundation could be listed as a charitable organization eligible for payroll deduction. Our application was approved for FY 2025.

Events/Other:

- Irene Mackson attended professional development session- significance of spirituality and emotional wellness put on by Faith Based Mental Initiative and DBHDD on July 11, 2024, as well as Nutritional Care for Mental Health via VHA train on July 10, 2024. She passed on all the information to the Outreach Team.

- Irene Mackson will be taking on an additional role of the Leadership Institute Coordinator starting in FY 2025.

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

State Veterans Homes

State Veterans Homes Census (Through July 12, 2024) +

Current Month	Augusta	Milledgeville	Total
Regular Patients	90	108	198
Service Connected *	30	34	64
Total Patients	120	142	262
Last Month			
Regular Patients	88	107	196
Service Connected *	30	34	64
Total Patients	118	142	260

*** 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 May 4, 2024, through July 12, 2024.

Georgia War Veterans Nursing Home

Normal operations continue

Georgia War Veterans Home

Renovation projects continue. Two floors of the Wood Building have had bathrooms renovated to meet ADA standards. Contractors started on the last floor this week. Upon completion of these renovations, thirty-three rooms will have been converted to single bedrooms. While this is an improvement for the veterans, it does result in the Home reducing its bed capacity by thirty-three. New lighting and handrails have been placed throughout the Wood Building.

State Veterans Cemeteries

Burial Statistics (through July 12, 2024)+

State Veterans Cemetery	Cumulative Last Month	Cumulative Current Month	Increase
Glennville	2,515	2,549	34
Milledgeville	5,470	5,525	55
Total	7,985	8,074	89

+ The report to the VSB is the total numbers from May 4, 2024, through July 12, 2024.

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery – Glennville

Cemetery operations continue as normal.

A grant opportunity was provided by the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) to expand the cemetery by adding additional in-ground capacity. This project was released for bid last week. If all goes well, construction should start after the first of October.

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Milledgeville

Cemetery operations continue as normal.

Phase 4 expansion of the cemetery is almost completed. This expansion added additional columbaria (above ground cremated interment) capacity. We are waiting on the necessary granite to complete the project.

Milledgeville also received a grant opportunity from the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) to expand the cemetery by adding additional in-ground capacity for both casketed burials and cremated burials. This project was released for bid last week. If all goes well, construction should start after the first of October.

Mr. Kerry Dyer, Chief Operations Officer

On Thursday, May 22, 2024, Kerry Dyer posted the Hinesville, Glennville and Appeals Division vacancies externally. He also sent Milledgeville one Cemetery Tech 1 candidate and Glennville Cemetery 5 potential candidates. Later that day he contacted Ms. Thompson and Ms. Holstick for follow-up interviews for the Employee & Transition and Homeless Coordinator positions.

On Friday, May 23, 2024, Kerry Dyer spoke with Leslie Davis, State Properties Leasing Specialist, regarding the renegotiation of the Demorest Field Office Lease. He also processed 1 Resignation Packet for the Augusta GWVNH Field Office. Later that day he met with Scott Duncan, President Carrollton Office Equipment, to discuss the cubicle replacement for the Central Office Suite.

On Friday May 24, 2024, Kerry Dyer along with Commissioner Ross, Veda Brooks, and Shelly-Ann Simpson conducted 4 interviews for the Transition and Employee Coordinator position. He also met with Selena Gladman, Project Manager Officer, Unisys, to discuss the GDVS email domain change.

On Tuesday, May 27, 2024, Kerry Dyer met with Bryan Ball, JLJ General Contractor Superintendent, to discuss the lighting, ceiling tile, and sprinkler replacement for the Central Office Suite. He also spoke with Lakethia Tolen, GCI Engraving Project Manager, regarding the Medal of Honor plaque for COL (R) Puckett. Later that day he met with Tim Saunders, GBA Facility Operation Specialist, to discuss the cubicle removal for the Central Office Suite.

On Wednesday, May 28, 2024, Kerry Dyer spoke with Patrick Nelson, Unicoi Lodge Administrative Assistant, regarding the rooms and after hour Shuttle Service during Annual Training. He also sent DOAS Fleet Management the mandatory monthly Fleet Management report.

On Thursday, May 29, 2024, Kerry Dyer posted the Appeals Division Administrative Assistant vacancy externally. He spoke with Jack Walsh, V.P. Sales and Marketing, Air, Land Sea Company, regarding the cubicle removal and disposal for the Central Office Suite.

On Friday May 30, 2024, Kerry Dyer, along with Commissioner Ross and Shelly-Ann Simpson, conducted a site visit at the Houston County VA Multi-Specialty Clinic in Perry, GA. Later that day, along with Commissioner Ross, he met with Dan Sims, GCI Plant Manager in Burford, GA to pick up 15 cases of Veterans Benefit books.

On Friday May 31, 2024, Kerry Dyer met with GBA to discuss the water outage in the Central Office. He also spoke to Andrea Rapowitz, Cobb Senior Services Manager, regarding a department brief in the next Veterans Connect Forum that will take place in July.

On Monday June 3, 2024, Kerry Dyer spoke with Hiram Lagroon, DOAS Chief Loss Control & Safety Office, regarding the 2024 DOAS Comprehensive, Loss Control Program, Self-Evaluation. He also contacted the Bainbridge Office Manager to discuss the turn in of an AT&T modem.

On Tuesday, June 4, 2024, Kerry Dyer along with Will Wilson, Julie Hammond and Shareka Monday-Robinson traveled to Helen, GA to pick up Surplus IT equipment.

On Wednesday, June 5, 2024, Kerry Dyer, along with Calandra Fergerson and Veda Brooks, delivered supplies to Kennesaw State in preparation for the 2024 Summit. He also attended The NextGen Foundation Data Model Information session along with Mark Demers.

On Thursday, June 6, 2024, Kerry Dyer attended the 2024 Virtual ADA Conference for State and Local Governments. He also attended the U.S. Service Academies send off at the Capitol. Later that day he submitted the Employee Assistance Program contract renewal for FY25 to Sharickah Rogers, Account Manager, Acentra Health.

On Friday, June 7, 2024, Kerry Dyer posted the Statesboro Field Office vacancy externally and internally. He also processed 3 Promotions Packets and 1 Transfer Packet. Later that day contacted Melissa Rodil, Unicoi State Park Sales Manager, to discuss the final invoice for Annual Training.

On Monday, June 10, 2024, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's Meeting. He also spoke to Kimberly Bradford, GBA Revenue Manager, regarding the final invoice for the Carpet & Paint Project. Later that day along with Will Wilson he met with Selena Gladman, Project Manager Officer, Unisys, to discuss the GDVS email domain change.

On Tuesday, June 11, 2024, Kerry Dyer along with Latika Archie dropped off the Chevy Highlander at the W. T. Automotive and Collision Repair Shop to have the Semi- Annual Preventive Maintenance Checks & Services done. He also spoke to Ginette Tatem, State Properties Inventory Analyst, regarding the removal of 4 Field Offices out of the Building, Land and Lease Inventory of Property System. Later that day he coordinated the final details for the Flag Day Ceremony along with Mike Sabbagh, Gwinnet Flag Day President.

On Wednesday, June 12, 2024, Kerry Dyer drove the Ford Explorer to Allan Vigil Ford for its Semi-Annual Preventive Maintenance Checks & Services. He also posted Statesboro Field Office vacancy externally and internally.

On Thursday, June 13, 2024, Kerry Dyer processed one new hire packet for Augusta (GWVNH). He also met with Derrick Holden, GBA electrician, to discuss the cubicle power disconnection process.

On Friday, June 14, 2024, Kerry Dyer and Will Wilson conducted an Email Domain change exercise along with Selena Gladman, PMO, Unisys, Information Technology Company.

On Saturday, June 15, 2024, Kerry Dyer presented the Flag Day Proclamation at the Gwinnett County Flag Day Ceremony sponsored by VFW Post 5255.

On Monday, June 17, 2024, Kerry Dyer spoke with Ryan Petty, Access Account Manager, regarding the invoice for the DD214 storage. He also contacted Ginette Tatem, State Property Inventory Analyst, to discuss the removal of two Field Offices out of the Building, Land and Lease Inventory of Property System.

On Thursday, June 20, 2024, Kerry Dyer attended the Georgia Small Business Liaison Meeting along with the DOAS Staff.

On Friday, June 21, 2024, Kerry Dyer contacted Kim Bradford, GBA Revenue Manager, to discuss the amendment contract and invoice for the 9th floor paint project. He also spoke with COL (R) Rick White, Director & Chairman of the Board of Georgia Military Veterans Hall of Fame regarding the presentation of a Vietnam Veteran Lapel Pin & Certificate.

On Sunday, June 23, 2024, Kerry Dyer along with Commissioner Ross, attended the Korean War Ceremony in Norcross, Georgia.

On Monday, June 24, 2024, Kerry Dyer processed one new hire packet for the Augusta Georgia War Veterans Nursing Home. Later that day he contacted Mark Meeks, DOAS Sourcing Manager to discuss the posting of the Behavioral Health Grant on the Georgia Procurement Registry.

On Tuesday, June 25, 2024, Kerry Dyer contacted LaTonya Stewart, Central Georgia Technical College Education Director, to discuss the Central Georgia Technical College Conference Room Reservation for FY25 Annual Training. Later that day he spoke to Mark Meeks, DOAS Sourcing Manager, to discuss the War Home Contract Renewal.

On Wednesday, June 26, 2024, Kerry Dyer contacted the DOAS Georgia Learning Center to coordinate and submit the FY24 Sexual Harassment Prevention Training Counts for Managers to DOAS. He also contacted GBA regarding a quote to have the window blinds replaced for the 9th floor suite.

On Thursday, June 27, 2024, Kerry Dyer discussed the finalized cubicle and furniture purchase for the 9th floor suite with Scott Duncan, President of Carrollton Furniture. He also spoke to George Sartin, Regional Sales Manager for Coral Hospitality, regarding dates for Annual Training in FY26.

On Friday, June 28, 2024, Kalil Smith, State Properties Executive Administrative Assistance, regarding the Insured Asset Value for the contents in two Field Offices in the Building, Land and Lease Inventory

of Property System. He also contacted GBA to discuss the Freight Elevator Access for the 9th floor employees.

On Monday, July 1, 2024, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's Meeting. He also submitted the monthly Fleet Management Report to DOAS. Later that day he emailed a potential Cemetery Tech 1 candidate to Ernie Cowart, Glennville Cemetery Director.

On Tuesday, July 2, 2024, Kerry Dyer contacted Stephanie Jones, Habersham County Health Department Office Manager, regarding the lease payment for the month of June. He also discussed the speaking engagement on Tuesday, July 23rd with Chunghee Park, Executive Advisor for the Korean Veterans Association. Later that day he contacted Andrew Hammer, Director of General Services for Rockdale County, to discuss the broken A/C unit in the Conyers Field Office.

On Monday, July 8, 2024, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's Meeting. He also attended the UniteUs and Fox Grant meetings. Later that day he met with GBA to discuss a quote for the Carpet Replacement in the Balcony Field Office.

On Tuesday, July 9, 2024, Kerry Dyer along with Commissioner Ross, Mark Demers, Shareka Monday-Robinson and Shelly-Ann Simpson, evaluated the Leadership Institute Packets. He also attended the Year-end Review with SAO. Later that day along with Commissioner Ross, Mark Demers, Kirsten Dennis, Russell Feagin, Tonya Jarrett and Mark Meeks, DOAS Sourcing Manager, he attended the War Home Contract Renewal Discussion.

On Wednesday, July 10, 2024, Kerry Dyer along with Shareka Monday-Robinson attended the NextGen Data Validation Kick-Off Session.

On Thursday, July 11, 2024, Kerry Dyer along with Commissioner Ross, Mark Demers, Charlotte May, Jarelle Thompson and Raven Holstick met with Chrissy Minor, COO, Minor Agency, to discuss revision of the GDVS Benefit Book.

On Friday, July 12, 2024, Kerry Dyer spoke with Jamie Carlington, Crisis Communication, Resilience and Sustainability for Clayton County Board of Commissioner, to discuss the 2025 Annual Public Safety Tournament for Veterans. He also updated and distributed the Monthly Alpha Rosters to the Senior Leadership.

On Monday, July 15, 2024, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's Meeting. He also processed one New Hire packet and posted the Houston County, Perry Multi- Specialty VA Clinic vacancy externally and internally. Later that day he spoke with Angela Gaston, Fort Eisenhower Transition Service Manager, regarding an office space for a VSO.

On Tuesday, July 16, 2024, Kerry Dyer along with Shareka Monday-Robinson and Mark Demers attended the NextGen Change Network session. Later that day he processed one termination packet for the Milledgeville Cemetery.

On Wednesday, July 17, 2024, Kerry Dyer along with Shareka Monday-Robinson attended the Workshop for Retirement Answers and Preparation (WRAP) workshop. Later that day he processed one new hire packet for the Glennville Field Office.

Below are the Personnel Actions Kerry Dyer and Shareka Monday-Robinson processed from June 16, 2024 – July 16, 2024.

Location	Position	Status	Name	Date
Augusta GWVNH	VFSO 1	Resign	Tyrone McBride	06/03/24
Central Office	Homeless Coordinator	New Hire	Jarelle Thompson	07/01/24
Augusta GWVNH	VFSO 1	New Hire	Shaahidah Johnson	07/01/24
Glennville	Cemetery Tech 1	New Hire	Kenneth Murphy	07/16/24
Milledgeville	Cemetery Tech 1	Terminated	Jamarius Kindle	07/17/24

On the horizon: Open a Veterans Field Service Office in the Houston County VA Clinic Sept/October 2024 timeframe.

Ms. Lily Snyder, Director, Veterans Education and Training Division (State Approving Agency)

- The approval, risk based surveys, and supervisory visits 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 2,177 educational institutions and training establishments where Georgia veterans may attend school or job training and utilize their GI Bill® educational benefits.

Item *	Number
Approved Educational Institutions	471
Approved Training Establishments	1,706
Veteran Students Enrolled in Educational Institutions	21,296
Veteran Students Enrolled in Educational Institutions	10,112

*** Source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration, Education Division, May & June 2024, WEAMS**

Ms. Charlotte May, Director, External Affairs & Communications

INFORMATION OUTREACH

Division Updates

1. GDVS Newsletter – The department's monthly e-newsletter features top stories from the month at https://veterans.georgia.gov/newsletter.

    a. The May edition featured a highlight on Memorial Day commemorations, including those held at GVMC Glennville and Milledgeville. The edition also contained information on the upcoming renaming of the Hinesville VA Clinic to honor 4 Liberty County men who were killed in action during the Vietnam War, the second round of selections for the Georgia Veterans Mental Health Services Program grant, and a recap of the Georgia Veterans Service Foundation's inaugural Veterans Legislative Update.
    b. June's edition of the GDVS newsletter celebrated staff achievements and updates to VA care. Stories featured information on the successful completion of Annual Training week in Unicoi, the establishment of the new Transition and Employment coordinator position, an update on women veterans seeking and receiving VA care, and the addition of 3 new cancers to the PACT Act presumptive conditions list.

2. Annual training – attended the department's week of annual training from June 3-7, 2024, at Unicoi State Park. External Affairs and Communications offered support through the event to training staff and participants from initial set up and check-ins through the culminating assessment. Support was provided to upload classes, track enrollments, and proctor the exam, as well as capturing photos and sharing information with participants throughout the week. External Affairs also helped monitor and direct requests for help from constituents seeking assistance during the weeklong office closure at central office.

3. Unite Us Quarterly Business Review – met with representatives from Unite Us, Work Source, and TCSG on June 11, 2024, to discuss the ongoing Unite Georgia initiative, usage, and upcoming

changes. Topics covered included past outreach efforts, preparation for the 5th wave of proactive outreach (running from June – July 2024), and overall network health.

4. Let's Connect Suicide Prevention Summit – worked with the Suicide Prevention and Outreach team to develop materials and provide on-site support for the 2nd Let's Connect Suicide Prevention Summit, held this year on June 24-25 at Callaway Gardens. External Affairs and Communications also coordinated with the Unite Us team to support an afternoon panel session focused on connecting veterans with behavioral and mental health resources with representation from GDVS, DBHDD, Unite Us, and TCSG.

5. Georgia Veterans Mental Health Service Program – coordinated with the Commissioner and CDO Mark Demers to announce the third round of grant funding availability. Additionally, an alert banner and updated topic page are available through the GDVS website to ensure visibility and ease of access to the program. The continuation of grant funding was promoted through social media and targeted email announcements. Applicants are welcome at https://gdvsmentalhealthgrant.smapply.io/.

6. Returning Veterans Task Force – hosted a meeting of the RVTF with Executive Director Shelly Simpson on July 9, 2024. The Taskforce discussed past and present initiatives to best serve Georgia's growing veteran population and their families. The group was introduced to the new GDVS Transition and Employment Coordinator Raven Holstick and Homeless Coordinator Jerelle Thompson, as well as the new Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG) team. The group planned further discussions to spread awareness of resources available to transitioning service members and their families and encourage them to settle in Georgia.

7. 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. In addition to providing information on hiring fairs, business building programs, and resource fairs, we focused on several key areas for messaging:

    a. Mental health resources – shared information on upcoming events focused on connecting veterans with mental and behavioral health resources, including the second round of recipients and the opening of applications for the third round of grant funding for the Veterans Mental Health Services grant program. Veterans were also provided with an update from VA removing annual copays from the first 3 outpatient mental health care appointments through 2027.
    b. Memorial Day – provided information on events occurring statewide, as well as recaps of notable events at the Georgia State Capitol and at our Veterans Memorial Cemeteries.
    c. Fraud Alerts – the department was made aware of an attempt to scam veterans and their families into providing personal information over the phone. External Affairs and Communications worked with agency partners to share information and alerts to raise

awareness of the issue and provide veterans with adequate resources if they received a fraudulent call.

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

- Replies to VA eBenefits Messages = 235
- Replies to General Questions = approximately 495
- Individual Request for the State Certificate of Honor = approximately 90

OLD BUSINESS:

There was no old business to discuss.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Commissioner Ross announced that the budget submission is due on Sept. 3rd.

Commissioner Ross announced that she submitted paperwork for a new grant – Suicide Mortality Review Boards. We had some excellent letters of support, including from the Commissioner of the Department of Public Health, the Commissioner of DBHDD, and the Association of State Coroners.

Ms. Fergerson announced that the 2nd Annual Suicide Prevention Summit was a success. The focus was on families, with a special breakout session for youth. The Fox Family was present, as well as attendees from 132 counties. The word most heard about the Summit was "impactful."

Mr. Childre announced an upcoming Pact Act event in Douglasville on Aug. 16 in association with the Warrior Alliance. We will have 10 VSO's present. He also announced that all his positions are filled.

Ms. Holstick announced that she and Ms. Thompson have an upcoming meeting with the Director of Student Veterans Services at Georgia Tech.

Mr. Dyer announced that we will be opening a new office in Perry on Sept. 16 and at Fort Eisenhower on Oct. 1. This will bring us to a total of 55 field offices. We currently have 4 vacancies in the department, with 2 of those at the Milledgeville Cemetery.

Mr. Layne announced that Green Veterans has donated 25 laptops for their Military Spouses Initiative, which will allow these spouses to take beneficial courses.

Ms. Greentree announced an upcoming SVA regional meeting next week and a Military Influencer Conference in Atlanta on Sept. 30 – Oct. 3.

Mr. White announced that the deadline for this year's Hall of Fame applications is July 31st. The Induction Ceremony will be on Saturday, November 2nd in Columbus.

Mr. White announced that there will be a military graveside ceremony for PFC Buck Bagley on August 10th at 10:30am at the Evergreen Cemetery in Fitzgerald, GA. His remains were identified, after almost 80 years, in April 2024.

NEW BUSINESS:

Commissioner Ross introduced Ms. Raven Holstick, the new Veterans Employment and Transition Coordinator, Ms. Jarelle Thompson, the new Homeless Coordinator, and Tonjala Moton-Williams as the new American Legion Service Officer.

Mr. Feagin added that both nursing homes will be undergoing an audit by the VA. They walked into the Milledgeville home on Tuesday and the results should be available at the end of the week. These audits are now contracted out, so we don't know what to expect from the auditors.

Ms. Stevens asked that everyone be mindful of social media posts. Many people can be triggered by what they read, and we want to be sure we have respectful discourse at all times.

Ms. Jenkins, President of the Department of Georgia American Gold Star Mothers, was introduced to the group. They are working on providing coffee and reading materials at the VA clinic in Columbus.

Mr. White relayed that the Georgia Military Veterans Hall of Fame recently gave 19 JROTC students a $4,000 scholarship each for their education.

Commissioner Ross went over the Department's Strategic Plan (see attached).

There was a discussion led by Mr. Kopsie regarding the flat budget and the impact this will have on the homes. The current contractor is over $1 million in the hole. We currently house 262 patients, 13% of what we should be housing. We have a lot of work to do to get to where we need to be.

Mrs. Meredith Magnus was introduced to the group as a possible member of the Veterans Service Foundation Board. She is from the St. Simons Island area and brings a wealth of experience (see attached resume and letters of support). Mr. Paslawski made a motion to confirm Mrs. Magnus to the Foundation Board. Mr. Peterson seconded the motion. The motion passed.

Mr. Veda Brooks was awarded her 10-year Certificate of Service with the department.

The next Board meeting was scheduled for August 14 at 12:30pm. It will be a combination virtual and in-person meeting, set up at the GDVS.

Mr. Paslawski made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Peterson seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at approximately 1:28 p.m.

SIGNED:

Joshua Kopsie, Chair

ATTEST:

Steve Mendez, Secretary

AGENCY COMMENTS

Georgia Department of Veterans Service Strategic Plan FY 2024-FY 2027
Agency Mission: Educate, advise, and assist military veterans and their families on earned benefits and provide to eligible veterans, state operated nursing home care and burial in state cemeteries
Agency Vision: Cultivating community connections – empowering Georgia's veterans and their families to flourish and when necessary, care for them in time of need
Agency Core Values: Integrity, Service, and Excellence in all we do.
Agency Head Comments on Strategic Plan
General comments and additional context that will assist OPB in understanding how this year's strategic plan was developed, how priorities were established, and how the plan will be executed, especially if there are multiple and/or significant changes from the previous year's plan. Any changes in priorities or replacement of objectives from the prior year's plan should be explained here. Furthermore, this section should include how the strategic plan supports or aligns with the Governor's strategic initiatives.

The Georgia Department of Veterans Service (GDVS) strategic plan was developed by evaluating the current organization, establishing goals which will ensure the department best meets the needs of veterans and their families over the next five years in keeping with the departments main statutory requirements as identified in OCGS § 38-4-2 of constructing and operating nursing care homes; and OCGA § 38-4-3 of conducting educational programs and assisting veterans, surviving spouses, and dependents in the preparation and filing of claims for benefits acquainting them with all legal rights and privileges; and § 38-4-70 establish, operate and maintain Georgia veterans cemeteries. All goals were aligned to the Governor's strategic initiatives. In comparing objectives identified in the FY24-FY27 strategic plan, overall, three main objectives were met, and two are in process. Additionally, in scanning the environment and identifying best practices in serving the veteran population from other states, three objectives were carried over from prior year strategic plans. All are identified by objective in the environmental scan. The Department has made a concerted effort to identify internal efficiencies or realign the organization to best meet our statutory requirements and serve our veterans and their families. What is identified in the strategic plan are goals we cannot source or fund internally and would work through the budgetary and legislative process to garner appropriate resources.

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

Georgia Department of Veterans Service Strategic Plan FY 2024-FY 2027

Agency Mission: Educate, advise, and assist military veterans and their families on earned benefits and provide to eligible veterans, state operated nursing home care and burial in state ceme

Agency Vision: Cultivating community connections – empowering Georgia's veterans and their families to flourish and when necessary, care for them in time of need.

Agency Core Values: Integrity, Service, and Excellence in all we do.

External Scan		Internal Scan	
Elastic Factors	Inelastic Factors	Strengths & Weaknesses	Workforce Analysis
Forces and trends in the agency's external environment that affect the agency's core mission and operation and over which it has at least partial influence or control.	*Forces and trends in the agency's external environment that affect the agency's core mission and operations and are outside of its control.*	*Within the agency's organization, what aspects of its core mission does it perform well and what aspects could potentially improve? What internal factors (e.g. structure, culture, policies/procedures) are helpful and which could potentially be re-evaluated?*	*Trends and other information on the agency's workforce whose duties are key to the agency's core mission, such as turnover rates, vacancies, recruitment/retention issues, or employee satisfaction.*
Better serve the needs of the aging veteran population- *Veteran patients present unique needs and diagnoses not addressed in community nursing homes. In 2022-2023, of the GVWH admissions, 23% were aged between 40-49, 29% aged between 70-79, 48% aged between 80-99. Of these admissions, 69% had diagnoses of mental health/substance abuse/dementia (21% mental health/substance abuse, 21% Alzheimer's/dementia, 27% Co-occurring for mental health/substance abuse) and 31% medical only diagnoses. A study completed by the Advancement for Military and Emergency Service (AMES) Research Center at Kennesaw State University identified the need for additional Veterans Homes in both North and South Georgia (Dahlonega and Waycross) and a future need in the Atlanta Metro Area (Cobb or Gwinnett Counties). Based on the statement of work (SOW) set forth in the Request for Proposal released in January 2023 for operations of the Milledgeville War Veterans Home, only one contractor submitted a proposal. The new SOW included for the staffing and operation of the new sub-acute rehabilitation therapy unit. The cost proposal submitted was over $10M in excess of the budgeted amount. The increase in funds will allow for 72 additional patients to be admitted and receive care to reintegrate them into the community or the long-term care facility.* ***Attract, Retain and Grow Talent to ensure Georgia's Veterans and their families are supported by a skilled workforce*** *- In the current environment, attracting and retaining high-quality talent in the department is challenging. With inflation at 3.3%, unemployment at 4%, along with increased job demand, it is has been difficult to recruit and retain career minded employees who are able to grow within the organization as experienced Veteran Field Service Officers, Appeals Officers, Cemetery workers, as well as recruiting and retaining employees with specialized skills and experience in finance, budgeting, and Information technology backgrounds. Although the veteran population in Georgia has decreased slightly, the compensation received by the same veteran population has increased by 18.39% last year and 42.21% over the last five years. Last year alone, the GDVS Veteran Service Officers were responsible for bringing in over $4.8B in compensation and pension to Georgia's veterans and their families. Additionally, the GDVS is expanding our presence on military installations to ensure the gap between military service and applying for benefits is eliminated. Kings Bay NSSB has requested full-time support and while we have expanded services to FT Moore and FT Stewart, we still require a position to support transitioning military at FT Eisenhower. Furthermore, Gwinnett County has one of the highest concentration of veterans in the state (39,556), for this location we have a requirement for 4 personnel (approximately 1 for every 10,000 veterans), yet only have 2 positions. It is the GDVS's goal to have an office within a 50-mile radius of every veteran's home.* ***Connect federal, state, and community-based organizations (CBO's) to holistically serve veterans needs*** *- GDVS in combination with the Technical College*	***Better serve the needs of the aging veteran population*** *- Out of Georgia's 678,304 veteran population, 386,772 (57%) are aged 55 and older (131,862 aged 55-64, 147,535 aged 65-74, and 107,375 aged 75 and older). The current infrastructure at the two Georgia War Veterans Homes only supports a maximum of 567 patients (192 in Augusta, and 375 in Milledgeville) at any given time. This space is inadequate given the number of aging veterans who will require skilled nursing services for care in the future. In comparison, Alabama operates five Veterans Homes with a veteran population of 315,132 (which is less than half of Georgia's veteran population). South Carolina operates five Veterans Homes with a veteran population of 388,404. Tennessee operates four Veterans Homes with a veteran population of 444,482. North Carolina operates five Veterans Homes with a veteran population of 687,364 (this is closest veteran population to Georgia). The only surrounding state that has a higher veteran population and operates more veterans homes is Florida with nine homes supporting 1,450,597 veterans. Every surrounding state operates newer and more modern designed veterans homes than Georgia. GDVS's two veterans cemeteries (in Glennville and Milledgeville) have a total capacity of 21,000 and 100,000 respectively. Based on the age of our veteran population and rate of interment, we could be at full capacity at these facilities in less than 10 years.* ***Attract, Retain and Grow Talent to ensure Georgia's Veterans and their families are supported by a skilled workforce*** *- According to the latest VA GDX report, Georgia's veteran population currently stands at 673,358 and as of 2023, Georgia is ranked ninth in the nation for veteran population. This number doesn't include Active Duty (69,834), Reserves/National Guard (27,431), DOD Civilians (34,735), and countless family members. GDVS has contact with all of these populations in some way through the many services provided within our offices, outreach and veterans events around the state, as well as contacts through social media and public information campaigns. According to the VA PACT Weekly Report, as of March 24, 2024, Georgia ranked 4th in the nation for PACT Act related claims with more than 76,000 submitted since August 2022. GDVS is accredited as a Veteran Service Organization through the Veterans Administration's Office of General Counsel. GDVS Veteran Field Service Officers, Appeals Officers, etc., must obtain and maintain accreditation through a mandatory 40 hours of legal training per year as well as successfully passing a certifying examination. GDVS needs this training to assist veterans with filing claims and appeals and to represent them in hearings before the VA and Board of Veterans Appeals. Failure in this category is not an option as the VA could rescind accreditation and the state would no longer be able to assist veterans in filing for earned federal benefits.* ***Connect federal, state, and community-based organizations (CBO's) to holistically serve veterans needs*** *- In Georgia, approximately 7.0% of veterans live in poverty, which equates to around 42,691*	***Better serve the needs of the aging veteran population-*** *GDVS recognizes this unique patient population's individual needs. GDVS is coordinating with the medical vendor of the GWVH-Milledgeville to establish a plan of action to address the changing trends in veteran patient care. GDVS conducted a site visit to a potential site in Waycross (state property) and it is viable for a new 100-120 bed veterans home using the VA small home construct. Additionally, synergies exist with Coastal Pines Technical College (adjacent) with their Certified Nurse Assistant and Licensed Practical Nurse programs to provide high-quality care to veteran patients. The GDVS was forced to reduce services after funding was lost in a 2020 budget reduction of $1,331,634. This budget reduction was coupled with increased healthcare costs. and the VA's approximately 5% annual increase in daily rates. The reduction in permanent funding resulted in a 25% reduction in patient census, yet Georgia still remains the state with the ninth highest veteran population, but fewest beds to support long-term care needs.* ***Attract, Retain and Grow Talent to ensure Georgia's Veterans and their families are supported by a skilled workforce*** *- Even with cost of living increases over the last several years, GDVS still lags other states and based on analysis by HRA, is undercompensated for the level of skill and training required. Even finding internal efficiences to also raise salaries, GDVS has maintained a 40% attrition rate with exit surveys showing the reason was salary. Using existing resources, GDVS created professional development opportunities which includes supervisor/manager training, created a leadership institute, provided stipends for individuals performing significant duties outside their job code, and through the skillful use of employee surveys and open forums were able to improve communication and transparency throughout the organization. GDVS has realigned positions to increase field offices from 49 to 55 over the last 18 months without increasing the number of VSOs; however, all positions are currently allocated to locations across the state and to support areas with a growing veteran population, new positions are needed.* ***Connect federal, state, and community-based organizations (CBO's) to holistically serve veterans needs*** *- The implementation of the Unite Us platform has been a force multiplier for GDVS, enabling our 55 offices to connect veterans and families in need to community resources such as food support, housing assistance, utility bill payment assistance, income support, transportation, benefits navigation, employment, physical health services, mental and behavioral health services, education, etc. Since our go-live date on October 25, 2022, GDVS has worked 5,192 cases through the platform, serving 4.909 clients in FY24. GDVS has added over 450 community-based organizations to the Unite Georgia network and this list will grow significantly in the coming year. Unite Us Insights has enabled GDVS to geolocate veterans in need based on location and social determinants of health to pinpoint outreach efforts. Our efforts as a SSG Fox Suicide Prevention*	***Better serve the needs of the aging veteran population-*** *The Georgia War Veterans Home in Milledgeville has experienced increased veteran patient applications from younger veterans with significant mental and behavioral health issues over the past 18 months. While the GWVH's mission is to admit and provide treatment to Georgia veterans, we could not accept approximately 25% of applicants in the calendar year 2022/2023 due to a deficiency in mental health staffing and treatment interventions. The data for the 17 denied veteran patients indicate: 53% are between 40-69, 35% are between 70-79, 12% are between 80-89 of which 82% had diagnoses of mental health/substance abuse, 18% had diagnoses of Alzheimer's/dementia. Additional appropriated funds are needed to support GVWH medical vendor's cost for developing and implementing mental health treatment protocols and mental health staff development. The daily rate needs to increase based on Consumer Price Index (based on VA, 5%/year over the last decade). Health care/nursing home costs have continued to rise without a resultant increase in funding for the War Veterans Homes.* ***Attract, Retain and Grow Talent to ensure Georgia's Veterans and their families are supported by a skilled workforce*** *- Our current attrition rate is 40%, and the same as last year. GDVS still has difficulties with employee retention. Based on exit interviews, the main reason for leaving is the low salary. The Veterans Field Service Officer position's current starting salary is $35,568.00. The salary is currently not equal to that of compensation received in surrounding states (GA VSO average is $47,429, FL is $56,703, SC is $56,151, AL is $56,234, TN is $57,956, MS is $58,857 and NC is $58,605). The national average for Veterans Service Officers is $60,003. To improve organizational culture and morale, GDVS eliminated direct appointments and establishing open and transparent hiring was received favorably by department employees. The Commissioner's monthly open forums, where attendance is voluntary, have had an over 90% participation rate amongst department staff and have been received favorably.* ***Connect federal, state, and community-based organizations (CBO's) to holistically serve veterans needs/Adequately resource the department/legal compliance*** *- Due to the expanded nature of outreach and going to where we can reach veterans across the state, adding required functions and personnel would help the GDVS accomplish it's directed mission of supporting the transition and employment of veterans, and assisting with spouse employment. Without additional positions, GDVS does not have the workforce to assist transitioning military from service or incarceration, actively engage on employment and connections to workforce agencies (other than through the Unite Us platform) or engage on spouse support.* ***Renovate GDVS central offices on 9th floor of the east tower in the Floyd building*** *- Except during the height of COVID, employees report to work 5-days a week. Replacing the carpet will reduce the negative health outcomes of current/future*

CRITICAL ISSUE IDENTIFICATION

Georgia Department of Veterans Service Strategic Plan FY 2024-FY 2027		
Agency Mission: Educate, advise, and assist military veterans and their families on earned benefits and provide to eligible veterans, state operated nursing home care and b		
Agency Vision: Cultivating community connections – empowering Georgia's veterans and their families to flourish and when necessary, care for them in time of need		
Agency Core Values: Integrity, Service, and Excellence in all we do		
#	**Critical Issue or Challenge**	**Description**
	Brief statement of issue or challenge, based on results of environmental scan.	*Based on the environmental scan, why is this issue important and what may happen if it is not addressed? How is the issue preventing or hindering the agency from performing key activities or advancing its core mission? How are the agency's customers affected by the issue or challenge?*
1	*Reduction in state funding and no commensurate increases in patient daily rates in keeping with rising healthcare costs and the Consumer Price Index has reduced the Department's ability to care for veterans in the two state nursing homes, has reduced matching federal funds, and reduced staffing and direct patient care. Additionally, the sub-acute therapy unit ($6M in state funds, $11M in federal funds for construction) is still unoccupied due to both the FY23 and FY24 contractors of the Milledgeville Georgia War Veterans Home operating at a loss, which leaves no additional funding to add patients and the appropriate mental and behavioral health staff, occupational, physical and speech therapists, substance use disorder specialist nor the expertise to create policies and procedures for admittance and discharge.*	*Over the last decade the consumer price index has increased for healthcare/nursing homes. Based on these increases, the Department of Veterans Affairs has included a cost of living increase of 5% in the patient daily rate which has not been matched (as required) by state appropriations. In fact, state appropriations have decreased by ~ $2M for the two war veteran's homes due to budget cuts in 2020. This has resulted in reduced patient census (bed count) and a decrease in funding to the contracted agencies. Due to reductions in state funding, staffing has been reduced and ~200 veterans could not receive nursing home care. Additionally, veteran patients present unique needs and diagnoses not addressed in community nursing homes. In 2022, GVWH had 56 admissions, of which 23% were aged between 40-49, 29% aged between 70-79, 48% aged between 80-99. Of these admissions, 69% had diagnoses of mental health/substance abuse/dementia (21% mental health/substance abuse, 21% Alzheimer's/dementia, 27% Co-occurring for mental health/substance abuse) and 31% medical only diagnoses. The Georgia War Veterans Home (GWVH) has experienced increased veteran patient applications from younger veterans with significant mental and behavioral health issues over the past 18 months. While the GWVH's mission is to admit and provide treatment to Georgia veterans, we could not accept approximately 25% of applicants in the calendar year 2022 due to a deficiency of mental health staffing and treatment interventions. The data for the denied veteran patients indicate: a. 53% of applicants were between the ages of 40-69. b. 82% of applicants had diagnoses of mental health issues. c. 18% of applicants had diagnoses of Alzheimer's/Dementia. d. 0% Medical diagnoses only without comorbidities of mental health. A study completed by the Advancement for Military and Emergency Service (AMES) Research Center at Kennesaw State University identified the need for additional Veterans*
2	*Expansion of services based on veteran population need.*	*Georgia Department of Veterans Service has realigned positions to increase field offices from 49 to 55 over the last 18 months; however, all positions are allocated to locations across the state and to support areas with a growing veteran population, new positions are needed. The VA is standing up a multispecialty mega clinic in Perry (Houston County) and they are providing space for two GDVS Veteran Service Officers (VSO). Additionally, GDVS is expanding our presence on military installations to ensure the gap between military service and applying for benefits is eliminated. Kings Bay NSSB has requested full-time support. Additionally, while we have expanded services to FT Moore and FT Stewart, we still require a position to support transitioning military at FT Eisenhower. and Naval Submarine Base, Kings Bay. As Gwinnett county has the highest concentration of veterans in the state, we have a requirement for 4 personnel (1 for every 10,000 veterans), yet only have 2 positions. Request two additional positions. The total requirements to support Georgia's population is six new VSO personnel.*
3	*Expand the number of War Veterans Homes to other regions within Georgia and build to the current, modern standards.*	*Based on a Senate sub-committee and analysis by the Advancement for Military and Emergency Services (AMES) Research Center from Kennesaw State University, the current population of veterans is not sufficiently supported by the two existing War Veterans Homes. The State of Georgia has two homes that currently serve fewer than 400 veterans, only about 20% of the 1,975 approved by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA). Additionally, each of Georgia's neighboring states has more veterans' homes despite Georgia having the third highest veteran population in the region, 709,619. Besides low coverage, no new homes have been built in Georgia in the last 50 years and existing homes are outdated based on new USDVA standards. With only two veterans' homes in the state, Georgia's capacity, and capability to serve veterans' needs are insufficient.*

Note

* Three rows for Critical Issues are provided, but agencies are not required to utilize all three. Additionally, agencies may insert more rows if they identify more than three critical issues.

OBJECTIVES AND ACTION PLANS

Georgia Department of Veterans Service Strategic Plan FY 2024-FY 2027

Agency Mission: Educate, advise, and assist military veterans and their families on earned benefits and provide to eligible veterans, state operated nursing home care and burial in state cemeteries

Agency Vision: Cultivating community connections – empowering Georgia's veterans and their families to flourish and when necessary, care for them in time of need

Agency Core Values: Integrity, Service, and Excellence in all we do

Objective		Action Plan #	Action Items/Tasks	Measurable Outcomes	Resources/Responsibilities	Associated Funding	Completion Dates	Progress Updates from Previous Year
1	Continued from the FY23-26 and FY24-27 strategic plans. **Better serve the needs of the aging veteran population.** Support the needs of Veterans who require skilled nursing care due to decades of deployments and war. According to the VA, Georgia should service 1,975 patients in state veteran nursing homes; however, due to funding we only support 20% of this need. Additionally, a main objective is to open the sub-acute therapy unit to serve the needs of the Veteran population who are experiencing more behavioral health issues at a younger age and currently require more assistance with the activities of daily living, but with treatment and therapy could reintegrate back into their families and communities.	1a	Increase funding to cover new requirements through the state budget process. Increase in funds will allow for 20 additional patients to be admitted and receive care through the sub-acute therapy unit designed to reintegrate them into the community; or, the long-term care facility. The Georgia War Veterans Home (GWVH) has experienced increased veteran patient applications from younger veterans with significant mental and behavioral health issues over the past 24 months. While the GWVH's mission is to admit and provide treatment to Georgia veterans, we could not accept approximately 25% of applicants in the calendar year 2022/2023 due to a deficiency of mental health staffing and treatment interventions. Additionally, we could not open the $17M subacute therapy unit jointly funded by the state and VA due to no increases in operational funding over the last decade.	Open the sub-acute therapy unit by June 2025 and in accordance with the VA funding agreement, add 5 patients per month until the facility is at capacity for patients. Increase patient census in both war veteran homes by 25% over the next year.	Through the Commissioner, the budgetary process and General Assembly, request funding to open the sub-acute therapy unit. Previously, additional funding provided by the Governor and General Assembly combined with operational funding for the GWVH was calculated to be sufficient to open the first of it's kind facility for veteran reintegration. However, due to no operational increases in the last decade and the rising cost of patient care, additional funding is required.	$2.5M in the baseline budget for the War Veterans Homes.	AFY25 budget; FY26 budget and beyond.	CARRYOVER FROM FY25: Based on cost information provided in response to the January 2023 request for proposal, GDVS will need to initiate a new budget request to cover the increasing costs in health care and to begin admitting patients in the new sub-acute therapy unit. The data for the denied veteran patients indicate: a. 53% of applicants were between the ages of 40-69. b. 82% of applicants had diagnoses of mental health issues. c. 18% of applicants had diagnoses of Alzheimer's/Dementia. d. All medical diagnoses had existing comorbidities of mental health. Additional appropriated funds are needed to support the medical vendor's cost for developing and implementing mental health treatment protocols and mental health staff development. Veteran patients present unique needs and diagnoses not addressed in community nursing homes. GDVS recognizes this unique patient population's individual needs. GDVS is coordinating with the medical vendor of the GWVH to establish a plan of action to address the changing trends in veteran patient care.
		1b	Increase the patient daily rate based on Consumer Price Index (based on VA, 5%/year over the last decade). Health care/nursing home costs have continued to rise without a resultant increase in funding for the War Veterans Homes. Additionally, replace funding lost in the 2020 reduction of $1,331,634 and increase permanent funding based on the increased healthcare costs and in keeping with the VA's daily rate. The reduction in permanent funding resulted in a 50% reduction in patient census, yet Georgia still remains the state with the highest veteran population, but fewest beds to support long-term care needs.	The VA increases the daily rate adjusted for CPI and inflation in October of each year. The action is to increase state appropriations in the amended budget with continued support in the baseline budget to correspond with the VA increases to maximize matching federal funding. The outcome is to reinstate prior reductions to the war veteran home's operational funds to increase patient census back to pre-2020 levels of 90% occupancy (400 patients, current census is ~260) as mandated by the VA (matching fund partner).	Through the Commissioner, the budgetary process and General Assembly, request funding for future years contract.	Approximately 5% cost of living increase to state daily fee rate over the FY25 budget for an additional $718,767.65 + $1,331,664 restored from prior year cuts = $2,050,431.65 in operational baseline funding. Both GWVHs operate at a loss event with reducing patient count. This increase will allow the increase of patients to meet the VA's mandate for matching federal funds.	AFY25; FY26 and beyond.	CARRYOVER FROM FY25: Over the last decade state funding has not kept pace with the CPI or VA matching funds. This will need to be a new budget request to increase the daily rate for those veterans who are not 100% covered by the VA (<70% Service Connected Disabled). The previous Commissioner took the bulk of the state cuts in 2020 from the war veterans homes because of a reduction in patients due to COVID-19 and ADA renovations. However, with patient demand increasing, funding is required to match the VA's portion with a requirement for 90% occupancy based on federal grants for renovations.

OBJECTIVES AND ACTION PLANS

		1c	Future War Veterans Home in Waycross, GA based on a Senate committee study.	Receive the 35% match through the AFY25 budget to apply for the next grant cycle in April 2025 for a 65% VA-funded construction grant.	Appropriations of $35M for construction of a new veterans home serving ~110 patients in South Georgia.	Request approval of 35% of construction costs (currently estimated at $35,000,000) through state bonds. Anticipate approval of a grant from the VA to cover the remaining 65% of construction costs ($65,000,000) as Georgia is short ~1,500 patient beds based on VA estimates.	Grant submission deadline to the VA for FY 2026 consideration is not later than April 15, 2025. Pre-design is complete and Capital Outlay Budget submitted in AFY24 and FY25; however, with escalating construction costs, we anticipate a greater cost than what was previously submitted. If the grant request is approved, the VA will pay 65% of the construction cost with the State matching 35% of the cost. Funding must be approved during the AFY 2025 or FY 2026 budget cycle to be considered by the VA grant process. The priority list is normally released after January	CARRYOVER FROM FY25: Conducted a site visit to the Waycross and it is viable for a ~100 bed home using the VA's required small home construct. Additionally, synergies exist with Coastal Pines Technical College (adjacent) with their Certified Nurse Assistant and License Professional Nurse programs. Continue working with State Properties to identify a site in North Georgia. Additionally, working with the VA for their new mega clinic site in Gwinnett County as a possible collocated facility in future years.
2	Continued from the FY23-26 and FY24-27 strategic plans. **Attract, Retain and Grow Talent to ensure Georgia's Veterans and their families are supported by a skilled workforce.**	**2a**	Increase salaries to be within state ranges and competitive with surrounding state veteran's organizations and state job code standards. Despite recent salary increases, attrition is 40% (2022 & 2023) and based on out-going surveys, is solely due to salary. Based on minimum salary ranges for the state, and analysis by HRA, GDVS employees are paid below their job responsibilities in all programs. Increasing the salaries will appropriately compensate employees, reduce attrition and attract talent.	Increase GDVS salaries by 5% bringing them in line with job code classifications and surrounding states. Increase salaries will result in decreased attrition and better support to Veterans.	Through the budget process, GDVS leadership will work to increase salaries by 5%.	Anticipated costs for salary increases and associated fringe: $615,470.44 (includes 70% fringe rate)	FY26, July 2025 and beyond.	ONGOING: Even with cost of living increases over the last few years, attrition remains at 40% since Georgia ranks the lowest in compensation compared to surrounding states. As an example, the lowest paid position, a Veteran Service Officer (VSO) 1, makes $35,568 in Georgia, but $38,541 in Alabama who has half the number of veterans and 30 additional VSOs. Alabama is second to Georgia in the lowest salaries for their State Department of Veterans Affairs.
		2b	Decrease attrition by looking at internal programs to implement at no, low cost to improve employee morale and increase opportunities for promotion.	Attrition in 2022 was 40%, and in 2023 attrition was 40% despite salary increases and internal programs to enhance morale and organizational loyalty. Outcome is to reduce attrition to 25% or less.	GDVS leadership will create professional development opportunities (supervisor/manager training), create a Leadership Institute, and provide stipends for individuals performing significant duties outside of their job code. Additionally, intangible impacts to attrition are improved communication from leadership to the field through a monthly forum. Also, the Commissioner will no longer directly appoint individuals for promotion opportunities but will advertise all open positions and hold transparent and fair interviews, selecting the best candidate.	Funding for travel for the Leadership Institute participants to see areas of GDVS they may not be familiar with (i.e. Georgia War Veterans Homes, Cemeteries, and Central Office) - $5K All other internal programs funded through existing state funds.	Jul-23	ONGOING: Employee surveys indicate an appreciation for professional development and growth opportunities, but still indicate the #1 reason for leaving the department is salary. The Leadership Institute will continue in August 2024 with the second cohort.

OBJECTIVES AND ACTION PLANS

		2c	Adequately resource GDVS to meet growing veterans needs across the state. Based on population shifts and the need for more support, the GDVS needs additional positions to support increasing veteran needs based on expanded disabilities defined in federal legislation (PACT Act). Growth will be based on VA expansion and to appropriately staff counties with the highest density of veterans.	Evaluate VA expansion and request space (no-cost) within federal clinics/hospitals (projecting a large VA clinic in Gwinnett County which is currently under resourced with VSOs, and anticipate an increase of 2 positions. Additionally, there is a need to connect to transitioning military by working with all active duty installations in Georgia. Outcomes are to gain positions for all military installations (FT Eisenhower, Robins AFB, Moody AFB, Albany MCLB, and Kings Bay NSSB) for an additional 5 positions for a total of 7 positions in the next two years. Position are already located at FT Moore and FT Stewart.	Commissioner, Executive Director of Field Operations and Appeals, Chief Development Officer and the Chief Operations Officer to analyze veteran data by locale and work with State Properties and/or the VA for space. Realign positions based on declining veteran population to other high demand areas throughout the state. Request any additional VSO positions through the budgetary process and General Assembly.	Based on analysis of veteran growth across the state (attachment 1) and veteran population (attachment 2), GDVS needs 4 additional personnel over the next 3 years. Gwinnett county has only two VSOs, yet has the third largest population of veterans (39,556). GDVS is looking to expand the total VSOs in Gwinnett to four and is working with county, city, and the VA to find no or low-cost space. Additionally, with the expansion to assist active duty military transitioning and veterans located near military installations, request a VSO for Kings Bay NSSB, and FT Eisenhower.	FY2025 (2xVSOs Gwinnett County; 1 VSO Kings Bay NSSB; 1 VSO FT Eisenhower). Salaries + fringe (70%) for 4 new positions = $155,685.60 in the baseline budget	ONGOING: Georgia Department of Veterans Service has realigned positions to increase field offices from 49 to 55 over the last 18 months to include increasing two positions in Cobb County, one in Pike County, one on FT Moore, and one on FT Stewart; however, all existing positions are allocated. While there are areas in the state decreasing in total veteran population, with the Department's goal to have an office within 50 miles of a veteran, there are no positions to reallocate. Therefore, there is still a need over the next four years to increase the VSO position by six to support areas with a growing veteran population.
3	Continued from the FY23-26 and FY24-27 strategic plans. **Connect federal, state, and community-based organizations (CBO's) to holistically serve veteran's needs.**	**3a**	Sustain the Unite US System across GDVS & TCSG	Obtain baseline funding to sustain the use of the Unite US platform for GDVS & TCSG ($6.1M for both agencies, $3.7M for GDVS alone)	Through the budget process GDVS will request baseline funding to continue the use of Unite US.	For GDVS alone, the cost is $3.725M/year as we used enhanced capabilities, insights, and care coordination. For GDVS and TCSG the cost is $6.1M/year	FY26 and beyond	ONGOING: Over the last year, GDVS has served 4,909 clients through referrals to community partners, identified 6,994 unique needs, had 90% of referrals accepted with a 95% case closure. Additionally with the self-referral process, an additional 335 Veterans were service for a 94% resolution rate. Through targeted outreach campaigns through the Unite US team, we reached 444 clients across 4 distinct campaigns and connected individuals with resources in their area.
		3b	Expand Unite US contract to include financial tracking and outcome data of funding initiatives.	By June 2024, transition to a centralized Unite Us payment platform versus using existing spreadsheets.	Through the Unite Us payment platform, track all foundation deposits and grants to CBOs in support of veteran needs and priorities as identified by the Georgia Veterans Service Foundation Board.	No cost if GDVS renews the current contract with Unite US. The CEO has agreed to allow the use of this enhance product for free.	FY26 and beyond	ONGOING: With the creation of the new Georgia Veterans Foundation and execution of the state Veterans Mental Health Grant, GDVS has a requirement for tracking funds and disseminating them to vetted community based organizations who assist with veteran homelessness, mental/behavioral health, food, and social needs. To ensure outcome data is tracked, GDVS is requesting an additional module added to the current Unite Us contract

OBJECTIVES AND ACTION PLANS

		3c	Expand cooperation with Community Based Organizations (CBOs) to address growing number of suicides, homelessness, and mental/behavioral health issues.	Continue annually increasing the CBOs onboarded by 10%. Based on fundraising by the new Georgia Veterans Service Foundation Board, create a budget and define criteria to distribute funds to CBOs on the platform to fund critical veteran needs, such as homelessness. Expected completion of the framework for foundation grants/funding by Sept 2025.	Through the Chief Development Officer and the Unite Us team, continue to expand CBOs on the platform. Continue to work with TCSG to on-board college and workforce board partner organizations. Through the Foundation board, establish the budget, priorities, and the process for disseminating funds to CBOs on the platform.	Working public/private partnership and via Georgia State Charitable Contributions Program (GASCCP) to raise funds for the foundation to address veteran critical needs. There is no cost is GDVS renews the contract with Unite US	Sep-25	ONGOING: Need to expand community partners and raise foundation funding to help meet veteran needs across the state. In May 2024 our application was approved for the foundation to participate in GASCCP for FY 25 for the first time.
4	Continued from the FY23-26 and FY 24-27 strategic plans. **Adequately resource the department**	**4a**	Create Spousal and Family Outreach Coordinator Position	With 79,363 active duty family members and more than 248,469 veteran spouses within the State of Georgia, the state would benefit from this service. This position should have been established long ago to comply with GA Code 38-4-8 at its inception.	Through the budget process, GDVS leadership will work to provide needed services to military and veteran spouses and family members.	Funding required for dedicated Spouse and Family Outreach Coordinator to connect with the spouses and families who are in transition or have separated from military service. In keeping with our other coordinator salaries ($65K + 70% fringe), estimate $110,500 + an additional $5,000 for travel to military installations and communities throughout the year.	FY 2026 and beyond	NEW: Of the 69,834 active duty service members within the state of Georgia. 36.9% have spouses and 62.6% have children, this equates to approx. 79,363 family members. According to the 2023 VA Geographical Distribution (GDX) report, there are 673,358 veterans in Georgia. If only 36.9% had spouses (not including children) it would equate to 248,469 spouses who could potentially benefit from our employment and education coordination services. This position would further the goal of the Governor to make Georgia the destination of choice for retiring and transitioning service members.
		4b	Create Outreach Director Position	Create a dedicated management position to oversee and advance all outreach programs within the department.	Through the budget process, GDVS leadership will work to provide needed services to veterans, military and veteran spouses, and family members.	Funding required for dedicated Outreach Director to oversee and advance all GDVS outreach program initiatives (Women and Minority Veterans, Suicide Prevention, Transition and Employment, Spousal and Family Outreach). In keeping with our other director salaries ($80K + 70% fringe), estimate $136,000 + $5,000 in travel.	FY 2026	NEW: With multiple outreach programs operating simultaneously, a director dedicated to overseeing and advancing these impactful programs is essential. Programs include women and minority veterans, suicide prevention, transition and employment, and spousal and family outreach. GDVS has ramped up outreach to meet Veterans where they are. It is not feasible for Veterans or their spouses to either travel to Atlanta for support and in some cases, face-to-face engagement is necessary.
		4c	Create Transition and Employment Coordinator Position	This position should have been established long ago to comply with GA Code 38-4-8 at it's inception.	Through the budget process, GDVS leadership will work to analyze the data to target necessary resources to veterans transitioning within and to the State of Georgia.	Funding required for dedicated Transition and Employment Coordinator to provide employment readiness assistance and outreach to transitioning service members, Veterans, and those reentering society after incarceration. In keeping with our other coordinator salaries ($65K + 70% fringe), estimate $110,500.	FY 2026	NEW: According to GA Code 38-4-8 2. Cooperate with information or service agencies and organizations throughout the state in disseminating and furnishing counsel and assistance of benefit to residents of this state who are or have been members of the armed forces, their families, and dependents, which will show the availability of C. Employment and reemployment services. According to the 2023 VA GDX report there are 673,358 veterans within the State of Georgia and 79,363 active duty service members, many of which would benefit from this service. This position would further the goal of the Governor to make Georgia the destination of choice for retiring and transitioning service members.

OBJECTIVES AND ACTION PLANS

5	Continued from the FY 24-27 strategic plan. **Renovate GDVS central offices** on 9th floor of the east tower in the Floyd building- Lighting	**5a**	Working with GBA and state contract, determined the cost to replace carpeting (last replaced in 1980), and replace cubicles (1980). Current office space impacts state employees with allergies (carpet, cubicles from when it was acceptable to smoke in the building), and due to the accumulation of dust/dirt, are unsanitary. Renovating the suite with new ergonomic furniture will reduce fatigue, improve posture, and alleviate backpain. Creating modern workspaces will help attract and retain younger workers.	Contract in place for new workspace furniture and carpet replacement.	GBA, Procurement officer, and Chief Development Officer.	$197,986 in funding allocated in AFY24.	Oct-24	ONGOING: Renovations began shortly after the approval of the AFY24 budget starting with new paint and carpet replacement. Workspace furniture replacement will begin in July and be **completed no later than October 2024.**
		5b	Contract with GBA new carpeting. Carpeting is vastly different than the rest of the building, is significantly stained, and several decades old.	Carpet replaced helping to eliminate allergens.	GBA, Procurement officer, and Chief Development Officer.	$93,929	May-24	COMPLETED: New paint and carpet replacement was completed in May 2024 by GBA.
		5c	Contract with GBA on the replacement of ceiling frames/tiles, lighting, upgrade HVAC duct work and fire suppression system to be in compliance with federal and state guidelines.	Contract with GBA ceiling and associated systems replacement	GBA, Procurement officer, and Chief Development Officer.	$259,230	FY25	ONGOING: GBA has provided a quote for demolition and installing a new ceiling, lights, HVAC and sprinkler heads in June 2024. If funded, estimate the completion in early 2026.

Notes

* Objectives and action plans should be based on the critical issues identified from the environmental scan.

** Three action item rows are provided for each objective, but agencies are not required to use all three. Agencies may also insert more rows if an objective has more than three action items.

Meredith Edge Magnus
20 Hinchinbrooke Circle
St. Simons Island, GA 31522
912-506-3952

Joe Higgins
Chairman, Georgia Veterans Service Foundation
Hand-delivered

June 5, 2024

Dear Mr. Higgins:

As the daughter and wife of military veterans, I want to support those who have served in defense of our nation. In researching nonprofits that deliver aid to Georgia veterans, it became evident the Georgia Veterans Service Foundation (GVSF) has a broad-sweeping impact on services throughout the State. Funds raised and dispensed by the GVSF to the varied frontline organizations are clearly an essential component in providing much-needed assistance to our veterans. Your mission is in complete alignment with my personal aspirations.

With twenty-five years of involvement with non-profit organizations, I believe I can contribute to your efforts and be of benefit to the Foundation and the veterans it serves. Therefore, I would like to be considered as a member of the Georgia Veterans Service Foundation Board of Directors. In addition to my resume, I have included letters of recommendation for your perusal.

Please let me know if you need any addition information in considering my candidacy. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Meredith Magnus

Meredith Edge Magnus
20 Hinchinbrooke Circle
St. Simons Island, Georgia 31522
912.506.3952 (mobile)

As a multi-generation Georgian, whose family members have fought in every war since the American Revolution, Mrs. Magnus has a deep commitment to her home state and its veteran population.

Meredith is a dedicated and passionate advocate for every non-profit she supports. She has represented numerous organizations on their boards of directors, including the following.

- College of Coastal Georgia (CCGA) Foundation ~ Brunswick, GA
- Glynn Academy JROTC Booster Club ~ Brunswick, GA
- Temple Beth Tefilloh ~ Brunswick, GA
- Confederate Air Force Museum ~ Midland, TX
- Ellen Noel Art Museum ~ Odessa, TX
- Odessa College Foundation ~ Odessa, TX
- Kennedy Center Arts Advocacy in Education Network ~ Washington, DC

Her skills in friend- and fund-raising were exemplified while chairing the CCGA Foundation's Events & Outreach Committee. She and her committee planned and executed the Speakers Series, bringing national and international participants to the local community (e.g. MG Robert Scales, US Army (Ret.). American-Israeli author and publisher Murray Greenfield).

Meredith has supported numerous organizations over the last twenty-five years through membership, participation and resources, not limited to the following.

- American Friends of Magen David Adom
- American Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel
- American Technion Society
- Coastal Georgia Area Community Action Authority ~ Brunswick, GA
- Ector County School District Tri-Ethnic Oversight Committee (Federal Court Appointment) ~ Odessa, TX
- Fort Frederica Chapter - Daughters of the American Revolution ~ St. Simons Island, GA
- Friends of the Israel Defense Forces
- Habitat for Humanity
- Jewish Agency for Israel
- Lone Soldier Center ~ Israel
- Marine Corps League
- McIntosh County Teacher of the Year Panel ~ Darien, GA
- National Museum of the Mighty Eighth Air Force ~ Pooler, GA
- Navy League
- Veterans Village of the Golden Isles ~ Brunswick, GA

In her professional career, she was a public servant working both for the State of Georgia (Georgia Department of Corrections; Prosecuting Attorneys Council of Georgia) and the U.S. Government (U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit; U.S. District Court for the Western District of North Carolina; U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Tennessee; U.S. District Court for the Western District of Texas). She retired as a Court Sessions Clerk with the Federal Judicial System.

May 20, 2024

Mr. Joe Higgins
Chairman, Georgia Veterans Service Foundation
c/o Meredith Magnus
20 Hinchinbrooke Circle
St. Simons Island, Georgia 31552

Dear Mr. Higgins:

I am writing to recommend Meredith Magnus for a seat on the GSVF Board of Directors.

I have known Meredith personally for three years. She is a person of high moral character. She cares deeply for those who have served our Country, and is a fighter for fair, equitable treatment of all people. She deals with everyone on an individual basis.

Meredith is extremely intelligent, and she is grounded with great common sense at the same time. She knows what is right and fights for it—for everyone. Persistent in the pursuit of correct solutions, she does not back down in the face of bureaucratic obstacles.

Meredith is a researcher and stickler for details, her memory for which is awesome. She will be the most informed person in any meeting because she will have prepared thoroughly for it. She will be there every time, and she will be on time.

You won't do any better than adding her to the Board.

Sincerely,

Raymond P. Ayres, Jr.
Lieutenant General
U.S. Marine Corps (Retired)
2530 Isles of St Marys Way
St Marys, Georgia 31558

Larry D. Bouts

47 James Pearey Lane

St. Simons Island, Georgia 31522

May 20, 2024

Mr. Joe Higgins

Chairman, Georgia Veterans Service Foundation

Dear Mr. Higgins,

This is a letter of recommendation for Meredith Magnus concerning her desire to join your foundation as a board member. I have known Meredith for a number of years, as she and her husband Bob live near my wife and myself here on St. Simons Island.

I can say without any reservation that I believe that Meredith, if accepted into your organization, will be an outstanding board member. Meredith is a caring person with a nearly unlimited capacity for attention to detail. In addition, she has a long history of being around the active duty military and veterans. Veterans and veteran organizations are a part of her makeup, and I am certain she will serve the Georgia Veterans Service Foundation with great energy and commitment.

As a veteran myself, I am quite pleased to recommend Meredith for this important position.

Sincerely,

Larry D. Bouts

Mobile: 201-803-8661

02June 2024

The Georgia Veterans Service Fund
c/o Meredith Magnus
20 Hinchinbrooke Circle
St. Simons Island, GA 31522

Attention: Joe Higgins, Chairman

RE: Endorsement for Meredith Magnus

I would like to take this opportunity to say what an honor it is to submit an endorsement letter regarding Meredith Magnus' request to be on the board of directors of your wonderful and impacting foundation. I have had the pleasure of serving the United States Government for over 22 years and completed 7 deployments and know the frustrations veterans face.

I have known Meredith for over 7 years and find her to be one of the most community orientated individuals I have been associated with. Her desire to strengthen the community and veteran support goes unmatched. She routinely donates her time, organizational skills, and fund-raising capabilities to provide much needed support throughout the state of Georgia. Her support has provided positive impacts on several groups ranging from art, education, and especially veteran matters. Your organization is a great mechanism to support veterans and Meredith will give you the dedication, support, and leadership to continue GVSF's ability to continue to provide the valuable support to our American service Personnel.

Please contact me if I can provide any additional information in support of this application.

Sincerely,

Joseph L. Briggs

Joseph L. Briggs
Assistant Director (Retired)
Naval Criminal Investigation Service
757 615 0543

20 May 2024

Joe Higgins

Chairman, Georgia Veterans

Service Foundation

c/o Meredith Magnus

20 Hinchinbrooke Circle

St. Simons Island, GA 31522

Dear Mr. Higgins:

I write to recommend Meredith Magnus for a seat on the GVSF Board of Directors and I do so with considerable enthusiasm. I don't think you could find anyone better qualified.

Meredith is actively involved in local and regional civic and governmental affairs. She knows military customs and courtesies far better than most. This is about Meredith and not her husband. But I would be remiss if I did not say her husband is General Bob Magnus (Retired) former Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps. She knows the military far better than do most.

Beyond her professional qualifications, I know her to be a person of deep personal commitment to the highest ideals of our country. She is all in on whatever job she undertakes. She reaches out and brings in people others might think of on the fringe, and she extracts from them a deeper understanding of the project she is working on.

It was my good fortune to accompany Meredith and Bob to the Marine Corps Ball last year. And I can tell you she moved among both officer and enlisted with an ease that is rare indeed. She engaged each group at a level far beyond the usual social conversations. As she left each group, I saw the people in the last group look at each other and nod in approval. She is one of those people you can't help but like, admire, and respect.

I am the author of four military biographies. (www.RobertCoram.com) To research and write these books took nine years. I spent that time in the company of military families and believe I know them rather well. I can tell you that Meredith is one of the most impressive people I met in those nine years.

Regards,

Robert Coram

Robert Coram

Mr. Joe Higgins

May 29, 2024

Chairman, Georgia Veterans Service Foundation

c/o Meredith Magnus

20 Hinchinbrooke Circle

St. Simons Island, GA 31522

Dear Mr. Higgins

I am pleased to recommend Meredith Magnus to join your team leading the Georgia Veterans Service Foundation. I have known and worked with Ms. Magnus for seven years supporting the active, retired and veteran military communities in Southeast Georgia. She and her husband, General Robert Magnus, USMC (Retired) are frequent participants in the Navy League and Military Officers Association of America activities in Camden County.

Meredith's reputation as a champion for our veterans is well earned, including support to local JROTC, Marine Corps League, National Museum of the Mighty Eighth Air Force, Commemorative Air Force, Veterans Village of the Golden Isles and many more. However, her impact is much broader than these focused organizations. Her work with the College of Coastal Georgia is particularly important considering the proactive approach of the college toward veterans. She served on the CCGA Foundation Board of Directors for six years and chaired the Foundation's Events and Outreach Committee. She has been a champion for the Veteran Lounges at both the Glynn and Camden County campuses.

Meredith Magnus is a multi-generational Georgian whose military ties go back to the American Revolution. I have seen, time and again, her passion for the young men and women serving today, and her dedication to those who have served before. It makes no difference which Service or when they served, Merideth Magnus is always there for them. She will be a terrific addition to your leadership team.

Robert S. Dickman

Major General, USAF (Retired)

President, Camden-Kings Bay Council, Navy League of the United States

Second Vice President, Kings Bay Chapter, Military Officers Association of America

UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
MARINE CORPS JUNIOR RESERVE OFFICERS' TRAINING CORPS
GLYNN ACADEMY HIGH SCHOOL
1001 MANSFIELD STREET
BRUNSWICK, GA 31520

5000
CAH
20 MAY 24

From: Major Clint Houchins, Senior Marine Instructor, Glynn Academy Marine Corps Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps
To: Joe Higgins, Chairman, Georgia Veterans Service Foundation

Subj: LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION IN SUPPORT OF MEREDITH MAGNUS

1. It is my distinct pleasure to write this letter of recommendation for Meredith Magnus, as a member of the Board of Directors, Georgia Veterans Service Foundation (GVSF). I have had the privilege of working closely with Meredith for the last three years as she was a member and officer in Cadet/Parent Booster Club for the Glynn Academy Marine Corps JROTC program. In my capacity as Senior Marine Instructor, I am confident that she possesses the intellectual capability, professional acumen, and interpersonal skills necessary to excel as a valuable member of the Board of Directors.

2. From the outset as a supporter of our program, Meredith has demonstrated an unparalleled dedication to our success and growth. Her passion for young people and their success is inspiring. In my 10 years of teaching, I have rarely encountered an individual with such dedication and desire for our organization to be successful. As a member of our Board, she almost single handedly got various civic and professional organizations to come together and support our unit financially leading to the purchase of our Drill Team trailer.

3. A perfect example of her compassion and outstanding character is that at our recent Awards Night she insisted on spending time and getting photographs with one of our seniors whose family did not attend the ceremony. Recognizing the situation and seeing a need she was able to spend a few minutes with the young man and make him feel celebrated and most importantly recognized for his accomplishments. This small gesture touched this young man to the point that he brought it up the other day, over 2 weeks later. This example is just one among many that underscore Meredith's exceptional character and leadership.

Mr. Joe Higgins
Chairman, Georgia Veterans Service Foundation
c/o Meredith Magnus
20 Hichinbrooke Circle
St. Simons Island, GA 31522

Dear Mr. Higgins:

My name is Richard "Dick" James, a West Point Graduate and career Army officer, retiring as a Lieutenant Colonel. I was recently inducted into the Army Ranger Hall of Fame. I became aware of your organization through its website. Your mission of better serving veterans by partnering with trusted resources in the community is a terrific approach, one I fully support.

The purpose of this letter is to recommend a trusted resource who would be a considerable asset as a member of your Board of Directors. Mrs. Meredith Magnus has a career of supporting veterans and is tied into many veteran's organizations in our community of Glynn County, Georgia, and surrounding counties.

Mrs. Magnus is Georgia born as is her family lineage. Her family members have fought in every war since the American Revolution. Meredith's late father was a WWII Marine. Her husband, General Bob Magnus, retired as Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps with forty years of service.

Her professional career consisted of service with the State of Georgia and the U.S. Government from which she retired as a Court Sessions Clerk with the Federal Courts.

The list of her current volunteer efforts is exhaustive and includes support for the Glynn Academy MCJROTC, Coastal Honor Flight, Marine Corps League, Kings Bay Navy League, and Kings Bay Military Officers Association of America.

Additionally, Meredith has been involved with the Jewish Institute for National Affairs in Washington, DC; the Kennedy Center Arts Advocacy in Education Network, Washington, DC; Odessa College Foundation, Odessa, TX; the College of Coastal Georgia, and the Coastal Area Community Action Authority, both in Brunswick, GA.

Meredith is a brilliant, affable, dedicated, well-connected person who brings out the best in others and would be a valued addition to your organization.

Thank you for your consideration.

Dick James
Soldier, United States Army

"Rangers Lead the Way"

Major General James E. Livingston, USMC (Ret.)
MEDAL OF HONOR
365 Cooper River Drive
Mount Pleasant, SC 29464
20 May 2024

The Honorable Joe Higgins, Chairman
Georgia Veterans Service Foundation
c/o Mrs. Meredith Magnus
20 Hinchinbrooke Circle
St. Simon's Island, GA 31522

Dear Joe,

As one of the two of the 61 living Medal of Honor recipients from the state of Georgia, it is my high honor and great privilege to recommend Mrs. Meredith Magnus, a fellow multi-generational Georgian, for selection as a member of the Board of Directors of your fine non-profit organization dedicated to serving veterans in Georgia. As a youngster in McRae, Georgia, I grew up next door to Gov. Talmadge listening to stories from WWI and WWII veterans, sadly many of whom were not in the best financial shape. I have known Meredith and her devoted husband for many years and I can think of no better person for your board. She has a servant's heart as demonstrated by her volunteer work with many Marine Corps family support groups as well as her support of quality education at the high school and college level.

In sum Joe, Meredith would make an excellent addition to your GVSF board and as a member of the Georgia Veterans Hall of Fame, I could not be prouder of her.

Most sincerely, and we are grateful for the good work of the GSVF!

Semper Fi

Jim Livingston

Joe Higgins
Chairman, Georgia Veterans Service Foundation
c/o Meredith Magnus

1 June 2024

Dear Mr. Higgins,

I am submitting this letter of recommendation on behalf of my wife, Meredith Edge Magnus, to the Georgia Veterans Service Foundation Board of Directors. Born in Macon, she is the daughter of the late Oveta Surrency and Homer Edge. Her father, a World War II Marine, died in the Veterans Hospital in Dublin, GA, when she was three years old. It should be no surprise that she has subsequently displayed an enduring interest in our military and veterans' organizations.

As her husband, I have a unique perspective on Meredith's experiences, skills, and meticulous nature. Raised by a working mother who was her role model for principles and caring, she is intelligent and always wants to know the relevant facts prior to making decisions on any matter.

Her resume speaks for itself. However, it will not allow you to discern the personal attention she brings to every task she undertakes. She is often asked to help bring historical, political and environmental information to the American public. Examples of her pro bono assistance include arranging speaking tours for Murray Greenfield who was a crewman on the Exodus ships bringing Holocaust survivors to then British-ruled Palestine; Yair Hirschfeld, an Israeli academic expert on Israel-Arab peace talks who was one of the architects of the Oslo Accords; and world-renowned ornithologist Dr. Yossi Leshem.

Meredith has never met a stranger. She has acquired a broad array of friends from California to Georgia; Washington, DC to New York, and numerous countries throughout the world. Notably, when a California ceremony was being planned to honor our late friend Marine Corps Captain Lou Lenart, who led the first Israel Air Force strike against Arab forces in 1947, she helped the Israel Consul General assemble a large audience in Los Angeles. Most recently, she assisted Steven Pressfield, a California based author of books on leadership and Israel, by having his audio files of over 70 interviews of veterans of the 1967 Arab-Israel War digitized for preservation and then locating a museum to archive them in Jerusalem, Israel.

The list of individuals, organizations and communities she has helped is long. Meredith is dedicated and an absolute " force of nature" to accomplish matters in service to others.

I hope my personal insights into Meredith's character will be taken into consideration as you evaluate her candidacy for your board of directors.

Sincerely and Semper Fidelis,

Robert Magnus
General, U.S. Marine Corps (retired)
30th Assistant Commandant

Linda Sackett

May 26, 2024

Joe Higgins
Chairman, Georgia Veterans Service Foundation
c/o Meredith Magnus
20 Hinchinbrooke Circle
St. Simons Island, GA 31522

Dear Mr. Higgins

It is my pleasure to support the candidacy of Mrs. Meredith Magnus for appointment to the Board of Directors of the Georgia Veterans Service Foundation. My recommendation is based on my professional relationship with Mrs., Magnus while she was a sitting board member of the College of Coastal Georgia Foundation and I was the director of development of the college,

Mrs. Magnus provided valuable services and wisdom to the college and foundation. She successfully designed and accomplished several outstanding programs for community outreach and fundraising. She raised significant resources, provided guidance, oversight and strategic direction to ensure the success of the goals of the college and foundation.

Beyond her knowledge and commitment to the organization and the community, Mrs. Magnus's core characteristics, such as a passion for the cause, her desire to help people, her eagerness to participate and her ability to see the job through, resulted in many positive outcomes. Mrs. Magnus was the leader of a speaker series that reached Glynn, McIntosh and Camden Counties, and introduced numerous individuals living those counties to the college. In addition, Mrs. Magnus successfully lead a number of foundation committees and she was highly respected by her fellow trustees.

Mrs. Magnus actively supported campus and community veterans organizations and she organized a fundraising campaign to purchase a trailer for the Glynn Academy MCJROTC.

It is without reservations that I recommend the appointment of Mrs. Meredith Magnus to the Board of Directors of the Georgia Veterans Service Foundation.

Should you wish further information please contact me at 904.710.8528.

Sincerely,

Linda Sackett

Linda Sackett

DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
3000 MARINE CORPS PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20350-3000

IN REPLY REFER TO
1650
CMC
31 May 24

From: Commandant of the Marine Corps
To: Joe Higgins, Chairman, Georgia Veterans Service Foundation

Subj: LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION ICO MEREDITH MAGNUS FOR APPOINTMENT TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

1. It is with deep pride and total confidence that I recommend Mrs. Meredith Magnus for selection as a member of the Board of Directors for the Georgia Veterans Service Foundation. Meredith is a true professional and enduringly committed to the service of our veterans, active-duty personnel, and their families.

2. As the spouse of our 30th Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps, now retired General Robert Magnus, she possesses a deep understanding of military veterans and the unique challenges that they face after leaving active service. More, with her ingrained experience in Marine Corps life and culture, she would bring an invaluable Marine Corps perspective to the Georgia Veterans Service Foundation.

3. While serving as our 36th Assistant Commandant, I had the distinct pleasure of receiving mentorship from Meredith and her husband Bob on numerous occasions. In many ways, her example shaped the way that my wife Trish and I care for our Marines and veterans in our current duties. The passion, care, and unrelenting selflessness that she displays in her personal and professional life are unmatched, and all who serve the needs of our veterans would benefit from her determination and experience.

4. Meredith speaks "Marine" fluently and would serve as an irreplaceable teammate on the board, especially when serving the Marine veterans of Georgia. She is intimately familiar with the resources, services, and programs that will truly make a difference in the lives of those you serve. Thank you for your consideration and for everything that the Georgia Veterans Service Foundation does every day for our veterans.

5. Should you have any questions regarding this recommendation I would gladly speak further by email at eric.m.smith@usmc.mil or by phone at (703) 614-1718.

E M Smith

Eric M. Smith

Joe Higgins
Chairman, Georgia Veterans Service Foundation

Dear Mr. Higgins,

I am writing you with the utmost enthusiasm in my support of Ms. Meredith Magnus' application to become a member of the George Veterans Service Foundation Board of Directors.

I have known Meredith over these last 15 years, and have found her to be a woman of impeccable character. She is also a person who brings a passionate commitment to those causes she cares about. Right at the top of that list is the welfare and well-being of our veterans. I know that were Meredith to become a member of your Board of Directors, she would be an amazing asset to the most important work that you do on behalf of our veterans.

Please do not hesitate to contact me, if there's anyway further that I could be of help to you.

With gratitude and ongoing blessings for all the work you do on behalf of our veterans,

Sincerely,

Alvin M. Sugarman
Rabbi Emeritus, The Temple, Atlanta, GA
(c) 404-441-1303
(o) 404-873-1731 xt 1145
email: amsugarman@gmail.com
Address: 2660 Peachtree Road NW
37-C
Atlanta, GA 30305-3683

MR JOE HIGGINS
CHAIRMAN: GEORGIA VETERANS SERVICE FOUNDATION

MR HIGGINS,

I WRITE IN SUPPORT OF MEREDITH MAGNUS FOR THE GVSF BOARD OF DIRECTORS.

I CAN THINK OF NO ONE MORE QUALIFIED AND DEDICATED TO SERVE GEORGIA'S VETERANS.

HER WIDE RANGE OF CONTACTS AND HER PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH VETERAN'S ~~AFFAIRS~~ AFFAIRS WOULD SERVE ALL OF GEORGIA WELL.

I ENTHUSIASTICALLY ENDORSE HER FOR THE BOARD.

L. Swan
MAJOR GENERAL USMCR (RET)

Mr. Joe Higgins
Chairman, Georgia Veterans Service Foundation

Re:
Meredith Magnus
20 Hinchinbrooke Cr.
St Simons Island, GA 31522

Dear Mr. Higgins,

My name is James Vivenzio and I am a long time local resident of the Brunswick and St Simons Island, GA area. I'm involved with a number of non-profit organizations to include being the current Vice Chairman of the Veterans Council of the Golden Isles and a board member of Coastal Georgia Honor Flight.

In the time I have known Meredith Magnus several things have been apparent about her. She is very organized, has excellent follow through and among other causes loves any effort to support our veterans.

As we approached a recent Honor Flight we were experiencing difficulty recruiting enough veterans and guardians to be able to carry on with the flight. Upon learning this Meredith started reaching out to her extensive network of contacts and was able to assist in providing contacts that proved to be fruitful in bringing people onto the flight.

I truly believe having Meredith on the board of your foundation would prove to be a wise choice and would allow Meredith's skills to continue to serve our deserving veteran population.

Thank you for allowing me to have input in this process.

Sincerely,

James Vivenzio

James Vivenzio
1colonel@comcast.net
Cell 912-222-1063