

Wednesday, June 28, 2023 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

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

Visitors: Ms. Shelly-Ann Simpson, Executive Director, Field Operations & Appeals, GDVS
Present Mr. Kerry Dyer, Chief Operations Officer, GDVS
Mr. Matthew O'Brien, Assistant Attorney General, Attorney General's Office
Ms. Jehae Kim, Assistant Attorney General, Attorney General's Office
Ms. Tonjala Moton-Williams, American Legion Assistant Service Officer
Ms. Raven Holstick, GDVS, American Legion Service Officer
Mr. Melvin Weaver, State Commander, American Legion
Mr. Jim Fultz, Sr. Vice Commander, American Legion
Ms. Patsey Schreiber, State Commander, VFW
Mr. Don Layne, VECTR Chief Operating Officer
Ms. Amy Stevens, Georgia Military Women and Vetlanta
Ms. Dylester Scott, Veteran
Mr. Vince Pritchett, Director, Veterans Benefits South Region, GDVS
Mr. Ken Childre, Director, Veterans Benefits North Region, GDVS
Ms. Ramona Roper, Director, Training Division, GDVS
Mr. Steven Fay, Assistant Director, Training Division, GDVS
Ms. Charlotte May, Director, Public Information and External Affairs, GDVS
Mr. Russell Feagin, Director, Health & Memorials Division, GDVS
Ms. Tonya Jarrett, Clinical Director, Health & Memorials Division, GDVS
Mr. Edwin Berry, Director, Appeals Division, GDVS
Mr. William Wilson, Network Administrator, GDVS
Ms. Camala Ball, Budget Analyst, GDVS
Mr. Bobby Davis, Director, Veterans Education & Training, GDVS
Ms. Shareka Monday-Robinson, Director, Human Resources, GDVS
Ms. Veda Brooks, Coordinator, Women & Minority Veterans, GDVS
Ms. Calandra Ferguson, Coordinator, Suicide Prevention & Outreach, GDVS
Ms. Kirsten Dennis, Purchasing/Procurement, GDVS
Ms. Julie Hammond, Executive Assistant to the Commissioner, GDVS

On Wednesday, June 28, 2023, the Veterans Service Board meeting was held in person and by video/tele-conference.

Mr. Hanley called the meeting to order at 12:35 p.m. Mr. Peterson gave the invocation. Mr. Paslawski led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

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Mr. Paslawski made a motion to approve the June Agenda. Mr. Kubinec seconded the motion. The motion passed.

Mr. Kubinec made a motion to approve the May minutes, which were previously distributed for members to review. Mr. Paslawski seconded the motion. There were no objections. The motion passed.

The following reports were submitted for the Board meeting:

Ms. Belinda Boldoe, VFW

- The Department Service Officer attended the Monthly VSO/Community Partner PACT Information and Listening meeting hosted by Lauren Ruchin, Atlanta VHA and Bibbian Kipp, Atlanta VBA. The virtual meeting was held on May 11, 2023, at 12PM – 1PM.
 - The purpose of the meeting was to share information about the PACT Act and to discuss how our Veterans are being impacted by the PACT Act. Also, we discussed ways to ensure that our Veterans gain access to the healthcare, benefits, and resources they earned and deserve!
- The Department Service Officer attended a Board of Veterans Appeals (BVA) Hearing Branch VSO & VSCM Panel meeting hosted by the BVA Deputy Chief Presley-Sanders. The virtual meeting was held on May 18, 2023, at 9AM.
 - The Panel Members discussed ways to minimize the BVA hearings regarding: No Shows, Postponements & Cancellations and how the BVA Team can support the VSOs in their daily hearing operations.
- The Department Service Officer attended an unscheduled Atlanta VAHCS VSO virtual meeting with Lovetta O. Ford, Deputy Director, and Staff. The virtual meeting was held on June 02, 2023, at 12:30PM.
 - The purpose of the meeting was to provide an update on VAMC initiatives and the VAMC operational status.
- The Department Service Officer attended a class of the Georgia Department of Veteran Service (GDVS) Annual Training session. The DSO attended the training held on June 12, 2023, from 8AM – 4PM at the Floyd Veterans Memoria Building, located at 2 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive SE, Atlanta, GA 30334.

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- The training was hosted by the National Veterans Legal Service Program (NVLSP). The training consists of information on the following topics: NVLSP mission and goals, PACT Act, National Guard and Reserves Training, Gulf War Illness, Caregiver Program, and Ethics.

Ms. Raven Holstick, GDVS, American Legion Service Officer

- The Assistant Department Service Officer (Ed Kent) assisted 33 veterans with VA benefits related inquiries this month.
- Service officers (Raven Holstick, Tonjala Williams-Moton, Ed Kent) Met to discuss upcoming convention and VA director's guest. In attendance will be Dr. Robin Jackson, Executive Director of VA Augusta Health Care System, Catherine Califf-Dean, Admissions Director Georgia War Home, Ms. Jennifer Gerrib, Assistant Director of the North Florida/South Georgia Veterans Health System, Mr. Keith Griffin Chief, Center for Development & Civic Engagement Carl Vinson VAMC, Mr. Amir Farooqi, Director of Central Alabama Veterans Health Care system.
- Department service officer (Raven Holstick) met with Mr. Debro (Department adjutant) to discuss plans and operations for the upcoming year pending new incoming commander.

Upcoming events:

- Monthly Virtual Post service officer training will be held for new service officers. Training topics will be on the roles and responsibilities of a post service officer. This training will continue to be held monthly as new service officers arrive.
- June 23-25, Department of Georgia Annual convention in Duluth, GA.
- August 25th in person service officer training will be held at Post 3 in Macon, GA.

Ms. Amy Stevens, Georgia Military Women and VETLANTA

The Vetlanta Summit will be September 12 at UPS headquarters in Sandy Springs. The focus will be on women in the military.

Commissioner Patricia Ross

On Tuesday, May 16, 2023, Commissioner Ross held a weekly Director's meeting, attended the Governor's Challenge/Suicide Prevention Task Force meeting, and the Transition Advisory Committee

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meeting. Additionally, Bally Sports interviewed her, Mr. Dyer, and Ms. Simpson for a Memorial Day spotlight with the Atlanta Braves. She also held a budget meeting in preparation for the end of FY 23.

On Wednesday, May 17, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended the Returning Veterans Task Force meeting. She then attended the April Veterans Service Board Meeting. Afterwards, she met with the Governor's Office of Student Achievement, along with Kerry Dyer, regarding furniture for our offices.

On Thursday, May 18, 2023, Commissioner Ross was a speaker at the Georgia Guard Retiree Appreciation Day in Macon, along with MG Carden.

On Friday, May 19, 2023, Commissioner Ross worked with Kennesaw State University (KSU) to submit an application to renew the Fox Grant. She also had a GWVH negotiation strategy meeting. Also in attendance were Kerry Dyer, Russell Feagin, Tonya Jarrett, Mark Bannister, Dan Holtz, Matthew Carter and Mark Meeks.

On Saturday, May 20, 2023, Commissioner Ross was a speaker at the Guard Retiree Appreciation Day in Savannah. She then traveled to Evans, Georgia to speak at the Armed Forces Day ceremony, "Thunder Over Evans."

On Monday, May 22, 2023, Commissioner Ross held a weekly Director's Meeting. She then attended meetings regarding the GWVH contract negotiations. She ended her day with a Unite Us meeting.

On Tuesday, May 23, 2023, Commissioner Ross met with the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget and with the Georgia Department of Administrative Services (DOAS). She later attended a strategic planning session with DOAS on retention strategies for the State Workforce. That evening, she attended a VETLANTA event at the College Football Hall of Fame.

On Wednesday, May 24 and Thursday, May 25, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended the Suicide Prevention Summit at KSU. She also continued negotiations regarding the GWVH during these two days.

On Friday, May 26, 2023, Commissioner Ross met with DOAS and continued negotiations regarding the GWVH contract.

On Tuesday, May 30, 2023, Commissioner Ross held a weekly Director's Meeting. She then met with the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) regarding execution of Senate Bill 87, which allows Georgia taxpayers to donate funds to aid and assist disabled veterans through scholarships to TCSG when filing their tax return.

On Thursday, June 1, 2023, Commissioner Ross was the featured speaker at the IBM 1/4 Century Club meeting. She spoke on the benefits veterans are eligible for and held a Question and Answer session.

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On Tuesday, June 6, 2023, Commissioner Ross met with one of our veteran service officers, had a meeting to discuss plans for Annual Training, and held a weekly Director's Meeting. She then joined the Transition Advisory Committee Meeting via Zoom. Later in the day she had a meeting to discuss the relocation of cubicles in the office. The day ended with a meeting to discuss the GWVH contract negotiations.

On Wednesday, June 7, 2023, Commissioner Ross had meetings to discuss the GWVH contract negotiations. Later she attended a meeting to discuss year-end closeout. Also in attendance were Mark Bannister, Kerry Dyer, Camala Ball, Julie Hammond, and representatives from SAO.

On Thursday, June 8, 2023, Commissioner Ross met with Director Hines in the State Accounting Office. She then took part in the Monthly VSO/Community Partner PACT Act Information and Listening Session. Afterwards, she met with Onward Ops/ETS Sponsorship regarding their program transitioning military personnel to civilian life. She ended the day discussing a possible VECTR in Albany with Gabriel Lord.

On Friday, June 9, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended a meeting to discuss the GWVH contract negotiations/funding. Later in the day she met with OPB regarding GWVH contract funding requirements.

On Saturday, June 10, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended the Women Veterans Gala at the University of Middle Georgia, where she was one of the speakers.

On Monday, June 12, 2023, Commissioner Ross held a weekly Director's Meeting. She then attended a Unite Us Bi-weekly meeting. She ended the day with a Fox Grant Update Meeting.

On Tuesday, June 13 through Thursday, June 15, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended Annual Training, which was held here in Atlanta in the Floyd Veterans Memorial Building.

On Friday, June 16, 2023, Commissioner Ross met with Robert Keown at TCSG about possible additional VECTR centers. She then attended a Cost Negotiation Strategy meeting for the GWVH. Later in the day she had a meeting with OPB and the Senate and House Appropriations Chairs on funding.

On Tuesday, June 20 and Wednesday, June 21, 2023, Commissioner Ross hosted the National Association of State Directors for Veterans Affairs (NASDVA) Southeast Director's meeting in our Conference Room. Represented were Veterans Benefits Administration, Veterans Healthcare Administration, National Cemetery Administration, VA Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, the Virgin Islands, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky and Virginia.

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On Thursday, June 22, 2023, Commissioner Ross participated in the interview process for the Chief Development Officer/Chief Financial Officer. Three candidates were interviewed. She also attended the Military Interstate Child Compact Commission meeting for Georgia.

On Friday, June 23, 2023, Commissioner Ross was a speaker at the VFW Annual Convention at the Macon Marriott City Center.

On Sunday, June 25, 2023, Commissioner Ross spoke at the Korean War Commemorating Ceremony sponsored by the Consulate General of Korea in Atlanta and The Korean American Association of Greater Atlanta.

On Monday, June 26, 2023, Commissioner Ross held a weekly Director's Meeting. She then attended a Unite Us Bi-weekly meeting. She ended the day with a Fox Grant Update Meeting.

On Tuesday, June 27, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended the Business Management Council hosted by the Georgia Technology Administration and the Transition Advisory Committee Meeting.

The HB414 \$750,000 behavioral health grants were awarded to Emory Healthcare Veterans Program and the Aspire Health Cohen Veterans Network. We met with Cohen regarding data and statistics and will meet with Emory regarding the same.

Highlights:

- Under House Bill 414, two grantees were selected for the Veterans Mental Health Grant: Aspire Health/Cohen Veteran's Network and Emory Healthcare.

Upcoming Events

- First Veterans Service Foundation Board meeting on 6 July 2023.

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

GENERAL

- On May 18, I attended the We Care Veterans Resources Fair in Rome, GA. It was a great turnout and we assisted with filing claims and providing advice to veterans and their dependents.
- On May 23, I attended the planning session for the We Care Veterans Resources Fair to be held August 4-5 at the Cobb Civic Center in Marietta. The Department will be assisting veterans with the filing of claims and appeals particularly with the pact act, as well as providing information on suicide prevention, services provided through UNITE GA and information about our homes and cemeteries.

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- On May 23, I participated in the Vetlanta 2nd Quarter Summit held at the College Football Hall of Fame in Atlanta.
- On May 24-25, I participated in the Department's first "Let's Connect" Summit at Kennesaw State University (see report from the Suicide Prevention Specialist).
- On Memorial Day, I gave the keynote address at the Gwinnett County Fallen Heroes Memorial Day Service.
- On Saturday, June 3, I along with 2 VSOs participated in a PACT ACT Rally in John's Creek. We assisted veterans with the filing of claims but mostly gave out information and advice. Also, on that day North Regional Director Ken Childre led a group of VSOs while they participated in the PACT ACT Rally held at the Georgia International Convention Center in College Park.
- On Saturday, June 10, I attended the gala to honor the past, present, and future women veterans at the Middle Georgia State University in Macon. The gala was to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the signing of the Women's Armed Services Integration Act.
- Annual Training was held June 12-16. We had a day of training from our MOU partners NVLSP. On the final day the majority of our senior class participated in a leadership seminar led by a John Maxwell certified instructor.
- Department Electronic Claim's Assistance Processing System (Veterans Benefits) actively serving 230,838 veterans.
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- **DD 214's and Welcome Home Letters: 713** Welcome Home Letters were mailed out in May, 2023.

PROJECTED POSITIONS

- Current opening in Athens, Atlanta Balcony, Appeals, Augusta, and Glennville due to the timing we plan to have those beginning after the new fiscal year.

Ms. Ramona Roper, Director of Training Division:

- June 2, 2023, Ms. Ramona Roper participated with the Charlie Norwood VA Medical Center's Family Caregiver Summit for 2023. The summit discussed the vast areas of the caregiver program. Participants were social workers, care provider networks, and actual participants in the program.

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- June 12-16, 2023, the 2023 Annual Training conference commenced in Atlanta, Georgia.
- June 20-23, 2023, the 2023 Annual Training final exam was administered. The VSO's and Appeals Officers have until the close of business, Friday, June 23, 2023, to complete the exam. 96% of VSOs have completed the exam. We are planning drop classes, a mentoring program for new VSOs, and quarterly regional training. We plan to do VA mandated classes throughout the year.

Upcoming Events:

- Daily continued ongoing support to the Regional Directors and Veteran Field Service Offices.
- Continuation of performing duties as VSO's.
- Continuation of Quality Review checks of VSO's work.
- Ms. Ramona Roper will participate in a veteran's benefits webinar on July 19, 2023, for the Oscar J. Dunn Masonic Lodge #238.
- Meeting on July 10 with Department of Veterans Affairs Alabama.

**** RETRO PAYMENTS FOR CLAIMS FILED BY THE TRAINING DIVISION MEMBERS: \$301,721**

Mr. Edwin Berry, Director of Appeals Division

- The total number of hearings conducted by the Appeals Division for May 2023 was **51**.
- The total number of pre-hearing actions for May 2023 was **179**.
- The total number of post-hearing actions for May 2023 was **175**.
- The total number of correspondence conducted by the Appeals Division (with veterans, BVA/VA employees, and VSO field offices) for the month of April was **854**.
- As of **June 1, 2023**, the Atlanta VA Regional Office processed benefits as follows for GDVS and the Service Organizations represented by GDVS.

Types of Claims	Number of Awards	Benefits paid out
Compensation	103,470	\$215,881,408
DIC	3,678	\$6,127,648
Survivor Pension	783	\$718,437
<u>Veteran Pension</u>	<u>1,548</u>	<u>\$1,805,240</u>
Grand Total	109,479	\$224,532,732

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The number of hearings has decreased because BVA is cleaning up Legacy appeals, and most of Georgia's Legacy appeals have already been closed. We expect the numbers to pick back up at the end of August.

Mr. Kenneth Childre, Director Veterans Benefits North Region

Retro Awards: May 2023-\$1,727,847.39

Director Site Visits/Inspections: 7

Community Involvement:

15 May 2023-Ken Childre (North Area Director) Department of Aging Services Quarterly Meeting. Briefed 31 case workers on what services GDVS provides to our Veterans/surviving spouses and how we (Rome Office) work hand in hand with the Area Agency on Aging in Rome to find the proper benefits for our elderly claimants.

18 May 2023-Barry Hunter and Tomeika Johnson (Rome), William Smith (Lafayette), Kelly Johnson and Beth Humble (Dalton), Steven Hungarter and Kristi Jones (Cartersville), Ken Childre (North Area Director)-Participated in 1st ever We CARE Event in Rome, GA. Assisted over 50 Veterans with claims, benefits, and other questions they may have had. Organizers of the event have already booked a venue for 2024 due to overwhelming success.

19 May 2023-Ken Childre (North Area Director)-Attended Hyundai Construction Equipment North America Veterans of the Korean War Ceremony at the facility in Norcross. Hyundai recognized 21 American Servicemen and 1 Korean Serviceman that served in the Korean Conflict. I was asked to say a few words before the presentation started. Awesome event put on by Hyundai.

3 June 2023-Dawn Donaldson (Atlanta Balcony), Melissa Pritchett (Cobb County VA Clinic), Roderica Stewart (Decatur CBOC), Joe Baker and Kareem Reddick (Atlanta VAMC), Vet Hueitt (Ft McPherson VA Clinic), Kyle Hungarter (Marietta), ChanDreas Barkley (VECTR North), Gerald Lahr (GDVS Tech Support), Veda Brooks (Women Veterans and Diversity Coordinator), Ken Childre (North Area Director). Participated in the Warrior Alliance PACT Act Event at the Georgia International Convention Center. Assisted more than 80 Veterans during the event and filed 61 claims.

3 June 2023-Nick Treadway (Oakwood), Ronnie Hough (Lawrenceville VA Clinic), ShellyAnn Simpson (Executive Director, Field Operations and Appeals). Participated in PACT Act Event hosted by the Johns Creek Veterans Group. Assisted between 10-20 Veterans and filed a few claims.

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North Georgia Gains/Losses:
 Ron Cason-Athens-Resigned Effective 1 June

Average Visits Per VFSO								
Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO								
Region:		North						
Month:		May-23						
A	B	C	D / E			G	G / E	
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:	54	12,931	1,050	12.32	3,253	3.10	
Number of Offices:		30	Average Visits/Office:			431.03	Average Claims/Office: 108.433333	

*Total monthly office visits include: 3,555 In-Person and 9,376 phone calls/emails.

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

- On May 28, 2023, Sonja Martin (Macon) presented certificates at a Memorial Day Dinner and Awards Ceremony at Union Baptist Church in Macon. Sgt. Dan Brown put the event together to honor veterans and their surviving spouses. Congressman Sanford Bishop also had a representative there to help present certificates.
- On May 29, 2023, Melissa Ingle (Americus) attended the repatriation ceremony for Mr. Luther Story, who was killed in combat in Korea on September 1, 1950 and whose remains were recently identified. Mr. Story's remains were interred at Andersonville and his family was presented with the Congressional Medal of Honor.
- On June 5, 2023, Robert Jones transferred from the Savannah office and officially opened our field office at Fort Stewart.
- On June 7, 2023, Debra O'Neal (Lyons) was interviewed by Tony Wardlaw on his radio show. Mr. Wardlaw met Debbie at one of the Women Veterans ceremonies she did and requested she appear on his show to talk about GDVS and the things she's done in Toombs County and her local community.

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- On June 10, 2023, Melissa Ingle (Americus), Melanie Goss (Milledgeville), Sonja Martin (Macon), and Debbie O’Neal (Lyons) helped with the Women Veterans Gala in Macon.
- On June 10, 2023, Amber Haire (Lagrange), supported a Women’s Day celebration in Columbus hosted by Latisha Spikes, CEO of Beyond Boots.
- On June 12 – 16, 2023, all GDVS field offices shut down to attend annual certification training in Atlanta. As always, the training team did an outstanding job, and the training was well organized and informative.
- On June 21, 2023, The Hon. Gil Cisneros, Under Secretary for Defense, presented Chris McKan (Fort Moore) with a coin for his outstanding service to veterans and retirees at Fort Moore.
- South region offices reported lump sum payments since the last board meeting of \$125,392.00 with Americus reporting the highest single amount of \$45,428.00.
- South Region Gains/Losses: Effective June 15, 2023, Ms. Priscilla Prescott resigned from the Glennville field office.
- South Georgia Region Veterans Population: 237,759.
- Office Visits for May: South Georgia offices handled 5,939 phone calls and emails.

Average Visits Per VFSO							
Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO							
Region:		South Region					
Month:		May-23					
A	B	C	D / E			G	G / E
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:		40	3,270	889	3.68	2,241	2.52
Number of Offices:		24	Average Visits/Office:		136.25	Average Claims/Office: 93.38	

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Ms. Veda Brooks, Women Veterans Coordinator (WVC)

- May 19, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in American Legion Newnan's "Be the One" outreach. She also participated in the "Spotlight Georgia: The One Year Anniversary of the 988 Suicide & Crisis Line."
- May 23, 2023, Ms. Brooks Co-Hosted the pre-Summit Dinner in Kennesaw, Ga.
- May 24-25, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in the "Let's Connect" Summit.
- May 30, 2023, Ms. Brooks did a site walk through at Middle Georgia State University in preparation for the Gala.
- June 2, 2023, Ms. Brooks spoke at the Georgia DAV State Conference about staying connected.
- June 3, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in the PACT Act Brief in College Park.
- June 5, 2023, Ms. Brooks spoke at the Women Veterans in Gwinnett County.
- June 6, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in a community outreach meeting with Unite Us.
- June 10, 2023, Ms. Brooks hosted the Women Veteran of Georgia Gala, Celebrating 75 Years of Courage. This event was paid for through donations and ticket sales at \$30.00 (at cost) and we were able to comp tickets for women veterans in the VA Domiciliary Program. We had Jennifer Smith from the Veteran Corner Podcast conducting interviews. We had three sponsors for this event: AARP, AMAZON, and State VFW. Without those organizations the price of the tickets would have been \$60.00 or more. 88 of 100 tickets were sold (gross \$2,040.00 net sales \$1,660.39) .
- June 16, 2023, Ms. Brooks attended and manned a table at the Coweta Diversity and Inclusion Event in the Park.
- June 19, 2023, Ms. Brooks attended an Elite Youth Organization Juneteenth Celebration.
- June 27, 2023, Ms. Brooks held an AAR for the Gala and started planning for 2024.
- We are starting to plan next year's Gala scheduled for June 14 (summit for women in business and entrepreneurship) and June 15 (masked ball), 2024.

Current committees:

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

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

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

- May 8-11,2023, Ms. Ferguson attended the Governor’s Challenge Innovation Summit, Alexandria, VA. Presented on the GAPS QR Code.
- May 12, 2023, Ms. Ferguson attended Priority Group 3, Lethal Means Safety monthly meeting.
- May 16, 2023, Ms. Ferguson conducted her monthly Governor’s Challenge TF meeting.
- May 18, 2023, Ms. Ferguson participated in the Rome, GA We CARE Event. Display table and distributed Suicide Prevention Materials.
- May 19, 2023, Ms. Ferguson participated in American Legion, Newnan, GA “Be the One” Campaign blood drive. Display table and distributed Suicide Prevention Materials.
- May 24-25, 2023, Ms. Ferguson hosted “Let’s Connect” Suicide Prevention Conference on the campus of Kennesaw State University.
- June 2, 2023, Ms. Ferguson attended/presented DAV Georgia Summer Conference Macon, GA. Display table and distributed Suicide Prevention Materials.
- June 11 – 14, 2023, Ms. Ferguson attended Annual Training for the Georgia Army National Guard. Assisted in assessing over 3,000 Soldiers using the GAPS Assessment QR Code, and distributed Suicide Prevention Materials.

Let’s Connect Summit

The “Let’s Connect” Summit was held 24-25 May, 2023 in partnership with Kennesaw State University, AMES Center. The focus was Connectedness within the Governor’s Challenge Organizations.

Some of the keynote speakers were:

Mr. Richard Twist, “A Survivor’s Story,” Our Why

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MG Thomas Carden, The Commanding General for the Georgia Army National Guard “Resiliency within the Guard”

Commissioner Ross, Shelly-Ann Simpson, Veda Brooks, Latika Archie, Rico Johnson, and Charlotte May I attended both days events.

93 Participants

44 Organizations Represented

26 Counties

21 Organizational Exhibits

11 New Priority Group Members for the Governor’s Challenge Task Force



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

INFORMATION OUTREACH

Division Updates

1. GDVS Newsletter – PID published a monthly newsletter in May. The e-newsletter features top stories from the month and encourages readers to get the full issue at <https://veterans.georgia.gov/newsletter>. The May edition featured a special feature on the identification and interment of Medal of Honor recipient CPL Luther Story's remains, a Memorial Day message and photos from GVMC Milledgeville, highlights from the first GDVS and KSU suicide prevention summit, the renaming of Fort Moore, in addition to information on veterans' benefits.
2. GDVS Website Updated to Bloom – attended a webinar hosted by GTA's Digital Services Division regarding the visual update of state websites to the Bloom ecosystem. GDVS's website is part of the second wave of updates and features a newer, refreshed, and more modern design. GTA is still troubleshooting bugs as they deploy the new look – please contact PID if you see an error. Additionally, PID won a contest during the webinar to identify AI generated images.

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3. Let's Connect Summit – PID provided support to at the first *Let's Connect* suicide prevention summit on May 24-25, 2023. The summit featured speakers from state government, VA representatives, and community partners to provide a broad spectrum of support and resources for the suicide prevention community. PID created a slide deck template used to collaborate with KSU for cohesive branding and information, as well as providing photo and media support during the event.
4. Women Veterans Gala – PID coordinated with Veda Brooks and Shelly-Ann Simpson on the *Honoring the Past, Present, and Future of Women in Service* gala held on June 10, 2023 in Macon. The division created invitations and marketing materials for the event, including weekly email blast updates with features on notable women veterans in Georgia. The division also worked with Ms. Brooks to create a short and long format program with a digital flipbook for attendees of the gala. PID provided photo and media support at the event.
5. Memorial Day – PID provided support to the Governor's Memorial Day Remembrance ceremony, GVMC Milledgeville, and GVMC Glennville. The division researched servicemembers lost since May 2022 in Georgia or attached to Georgia units for inclusion in printed programs at memorial ceremonies.
6. Annual Training – the division worked closely with the Training Team to support this year's departmentwide annual training. PID assisted in uploading classes to the department's training website, ensured the test was available to learners following training, and provided photo and media support throughout the week.
7. PACT Act events –
 - a. Shared promotional information, resources, and transportation services for the May 18 We CARE Veterans Resource Fair in Rome. Veterans met with GDVS staff for on-site claims care.
 - b. Warrior Alliance Brief and Claims – shared information and resources for the June 3 Warrior Alliance PACT outreach event.
8. Veterans Benefits Outreach
 - a. VA Travel Pay Reimbursements – VA released an operational update regarding the end of COVID rules for travel pay requests for veterans receiving care at VA facilities.
 - b. PTSD Awareness Month – shared the National Center for PTSD's resource guide, as well as additional resources for those with PTSD and their caregivers.
 - c. Atlanta VA Medical Center Town Hall – provided information on how to register to provide commentary at an upcoming town hall.
 - d. Small Business Webinars – promoted the Secretary of State's webinar series for small businesses in Georgia. Previous webinars are available at <https://sos.ga.gov/financial-literacy-videos>.

Public Information Division Contacts (Since December 9, 2022)

- Replies to VA eBenefits Messages = 335
- Replies to General Questions = approximately 435
- Individual Request for the State Certificate of Honor = approximately 115

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

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

State Certificates of Honor issued via GDVS – An estimated 29,895
(Honors Ceremonies and Central Office Mail Outs)

DoD Vietnam Veteran Lapel Pins presented via GDVS – An estimated 23,855

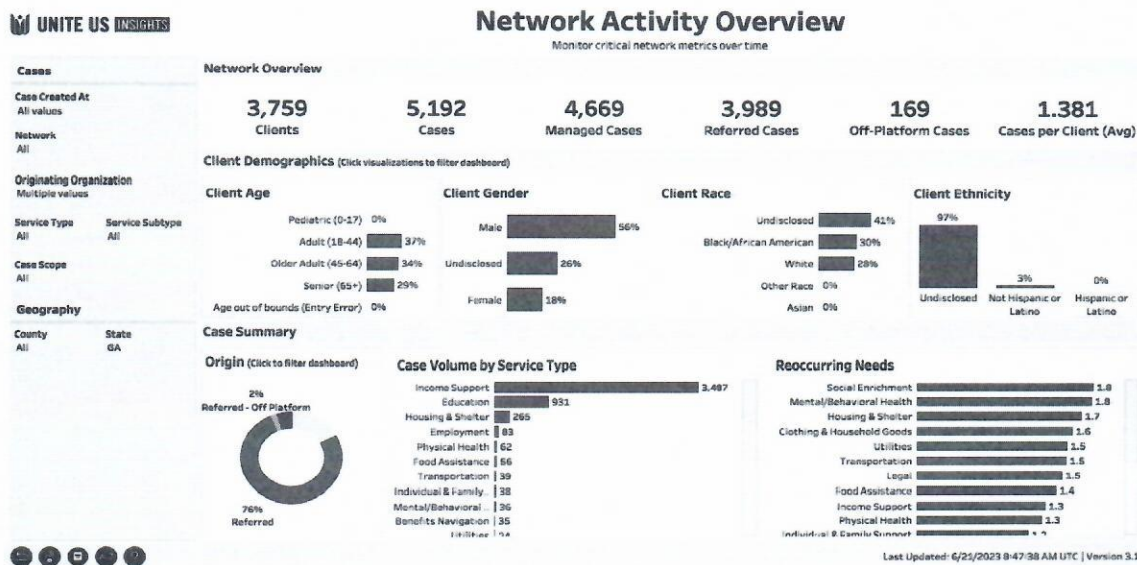
Honors Ceremonies supported/coordinated by GDVS – 357

Defense Department's Vietnam Veteran Surviving Spouse CoH – 291

Mr. Mark Demers, Grant Program Implementation Manager

- Unite-Us Grant- (American Rescue Plan-Negative Impact Grant)- \$6.1m per year effective July 1, 2022:
 - Data ingestion and secure data transfer for the platform and social connector is moving forward. As of June 20, 2023, we have **262,856** veterans in the system. We have submitted **956** community partners and **313** healthcare partners for inclusion to the platform since August 2022.
 - Our Warner Robins GDVS office is ranked #6 (1496 Unite Us referrals received during the pilot program) and #8 (1299 Unite Us referrals received from October 25, 2022, to present) in the entire national network.
 - Grant financial management- we are going through the grant audit process with RSM (external auditors) for the year end closeout.
 - Application for year 2 and 3 of the grant were submitted on May 4, 2023, and were approved on June 20, 2023, totaling \$12,129,951.73.
 - Below is an activity snapshot from Unite Us Insights:

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- SSG Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program- (\$747,464 for one year with the possibility to extend two more years).
 - We are in partnership with Kennesaw State University AMES Center to implement the grant. KSU is analyzing data collection from the Fort Stewart Army Guard event. The latest submission to the VA on June 5, 2023.
 - Calandra Ferguson provided the outreach and training data reports, and we transmitted them to the VA on June 5, 2023.
 - Our next quarterly report is due on July 21, 2023, and we are awaiting detailed instructions from the VA.
 - Fox Grant renewal was completed and sent via UDPaaS on May 19, 2023.
 - Calandra Ferguson or Veda Brooks will report all the outreach and training events regarding Suicide Prevention under the Fox Grant.
- Veterans Mental Health Services Program Grant (HB 414)- Georgia Governor Brian Kemp signed HB 414 on April 25, 2023, with the support of state legislators and the Georgia Department of Veterans Service (GDVS). The bill creates the Veterans Mental Health Services Program, which is a grant program to improve access to mental health services for military service members, veterans, and their families in the state of Georgia.

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The grant program is funded through state appropriations in Fiscal Year 2023. The total grant funding is \$750,000 for FY2023 (executed by no later than 30 June 2023). If multiple applicants are approved for funding, the cumulative total of grant dollars awarded cannot exceed \$750,000.

- The grant was awarded to two vendors:
 - Aspire (Cohen Veterans Network) for \$650,000.
 - Emory Healthcare for \$100,000.
- The money was allocated, but we are waiting on the state to write the checks. All funds must be allocated by June 30, 2023.

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

- The approval and compliance surveys of educational institutions, training establishments and training programs approved for veterans training is continuing with no significant problems in any area being noted.
- Approval of new veteran's On-The-Job training sites (OJT) continues to increase. As of this date the State Approving Agency (SAA) has granted approval to 1,828 educational institutions and training establishments where Georgia veterans may attend school or job training and utilize their GI Bill® educational benefits.
- As of July 1, the VA is no longer accepting paper certifications for veterans enrolling in OJT and Apprenticeship programs. Everyone will have to use the VA's enrollment manager system. We are training everyone who uses paper on the new system.

Item *	Number
Approved Educational Institutions	399
Approved Training Establishments	1,429
Veteran Students Enrolled in Educational Institutions	20,247

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

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

We are in negotiations for the operation of the GWVH in Milledgeville and hope to complete the contract in the next 30 days.

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

1. Georgia War Veterans Home (GWVH) is COVID-free for veterans and staff.
2. We continue working with the Georgia Department of Administrative Services (DOAS) to navigate negotiations to select a potential vendor for the Georgia War Veterans Home medical contract. The contract is scheduled to become effective on 8/1/23. A 30-day extension was granted to from June 30, 2023-July 31, 2023, to complete contract negotiations.
3. Status of staff training and program development
 - a. Ongoing modality training for Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing therapy (EMDR), biofeedback training, and dynavision training for sensory processing.
 - b. Second training for dynavision conducted June 6, 2023, for the Pruitt behavioral health team, rehabilitation team, and activity team.
 - c. Pruitt staff continues to provide patient de-escalation and safety training campus-wide to all Pruitt employees.
 - d. One of Pruitt's behavioral health therapists will be able to apply for her Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) status in August. 2023.
4. the VA survey window is coming in July. Pruitt staff and patients are all COVID free.

Mr. Kerry Dyer, Chief Operations Officer

On Thursday, May 18, 2023, Kerry Dyer spoke with Eric Denny, Edge Leasing Coordinator regarding the delivery of 2 Canon copiers. Later that day he spoke with William Chromik, ACME Leasing Manager, to coordinate the delivery of a Chevy Equinox.

On Friday, May 19, 2023, Kerry Dyer along with Commissioner Ross, Mark Bannister, Russell Feagin, Tonya Jarret, Mark Meeks, DOAS Procurement Manager met to discuss the GWVH Cost Negotiation Strategy. Later that day he met with Angelique McClendon, Attorney at Department of Driver Services (DDS) to discuss the Memorandum of Understanding between GDVS & DDS. He also spoke with Ryan Petteys, Access Company, regarding the 10 boxes of DD214's that need to be digitalized.

On Monday, May 22, 2023, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's meeting. He also spoke to Patrick Bean, Transition Service Manager at Fort Stewart, to discuss the opening of the Field Service Office on June 5, 2023. Later that day he met virtually with Mark Meeks, DOAS Procurement Manager, regarding the Cost Negotiation Strategy. He also sent Linda Lavender a potential candidate for the Grounds Maintenance Tech 1 vacancy.

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On Tuesday, May 23, 2023, Kerry Dyer spoke with William Moore, VA Employment Coordinator, regarding the contract for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Readiness and Employment Career Fair. Later that day, along with Ramona Roper, Shelly-Ann Simpson and Steve Fay, he conducted an Annual Training site visit at the West Tower, 20th floor. He also processed the retirement packet for Vince Pritchett, South Region Director.

On Wednesday, May 24, 2023, Kerry Dyer along with Commissioner Ross, Mark Meeks, DOAS Procurement Manager, Russell Feagin and Tonya Jarrett, met to discuss the Emergency Contract for the GWVH. Later that day Commissioner Ross, along with Russell Feagin and Tonya Jarrett, met virtually with Bruce Hart, Director of Business Development at STGI, regarding an Emergency Contract for the GWVH.

On Thursday, May 25, 2023, Kerry Dyer spoke to Leslie Davis, DOAS Leasing Specialist, regarding the lease renegotiation contracts for the Brunswick, Albany, Rome, Statesboro, Columbus and Griffin Field Offices. Later that day he spoke with Chelsea Bennett, DOAS Financial Reporting Manager, regarding the FY22 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR) that needs to be submitted to SAO.

On Friday, May 26, 2023, Kerry Dyer attended the Veterans Job Fair in McDonough, GA.

On Tuesday, May 30, 2023, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's meeting. Later that day along with Commissioner Ross, Russell Feagin and Tonya Jarrett, he met virtually with a representative from HMR to discuss the emergency contract for the GWVH.

On Wednesday, May 31, 2023, Kerry Dyer spoke to Samantha White, SAO Account Payable Manager, regarding the advance pay for the GDVS employees. Later that day he scrubbed the monthly Gains/Loss Roster, Promotion Merit List, Department Alpha Roster, Position number Roster and distributed it to the Senior Leadership. He also processed the resignation packet for Ron Cason, Athens Field Service Office Manager.

On Thursday, June 1, 2023, Kerry Dyer processed the resignation packet for Priscilla Prescott, Glennville Field Service Office Manager and Ronnie Hough, Lawrenceville Field Service Office Manager. Later that day he visited the United States Postal Office in Atlanta to coordinate the delivery of stamps to GDVS.

On Friday, June 2, 2023, Kerry Dyer contacted Assured Transportation to coordinate the bus contract for the GDVS Gala. Later that day he met with Dr. Moore, Director, Center for the Advancement of Military and Emergency Service (AMES) Research, regarding the pick-up of the tablet stands. He also met with Cody Whitlock and Monisha Rallapalli to discuss the funding for the GWVH.

On Monday, June 5, 2023, Kerry Dyer spoke with Dr. Carl Hall, DOAS contract Management Manager, regarding the 2022 Transit Connect Cargo Van that was ordered on April 28, 2023. Later that day he spoke to Dr. Jordan CVAMC Communications Director, regarding the opening date for the VA Facility that will open in Perry, GA.

On Tuesday, June 6, 2023, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's meeting. Later that day along with Commissioner Ross, Shelly-Ann Simpson and the Training Team, he participated in the Annual Training Rehearsal.

On Wednesday, June 7, 2023, Kerry Dyer along with Commissioner Ross, Mark Bannister, Kirsten Dennis, Camala Ball, Mark Demers, Kelly Dudley, CFO & Deputy State Accounting Officer, to discuss End of Year close-out. Later that day he posted the announcement for a Chief Development Officer internally.

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On Thursday, June 8, 2023, Kerry Dyer coordinated the pick-up of a 15 Passenger Van for Annual Training. Later that day he met with John Pigeon and John Conners, CWC Furniture, regarding the renovation of the 9th Floor Suite. He also spoke with Kelly Dudley, CFO & Deputy State Accounting Officer, regarding the open Purchase Orders.

On Friday, June 9, 2023, Kerry Dyer along with Commissioner Ross, Kirsten Dennis and Kelly Dudley, CFO & Deputy State Accounting Officer, met virtually to discuss End of Year Purchase Order close-out. Later that day he met with Russell to discuss the Cost Negotiation for GWVH.

On Monday, June 12, 2023, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's meeting. He also attended Annual Training from Monday, June 12th through Friday, June 16th.

On Tuesday, June 20, 2023, Kerry Dyer and Julie Hammond assisted Commissioner Ross with the hosting of the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs Southeast Region Conference. Later that day he reviewed 41 resumes for the Glennville, Athens, and Augusta Field Offices.

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

Location	Position	Status	Name	Date
Athens	Office Mgr (VFSO2)	Resigned	Ron Cason	05/31/23
Glennville	Office Mgr (VFSO2)	Resigned	Priscilla Prescott	06/15/23

Highlights: Field Office opened on Fort Stewart on June 5, 2023.

The first phase of the digitalization of DD214s has been completed and we are reviewing them.

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

FINANCE

Accounting

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

Budget and the General Assembly

The Department is currently undergoing the annual fiscal year closeout processes for FY 2023, which ends on June 30th. All systems are on go status and we will complete the fiscal year within budget.

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As is the case each fiscal year, we will have some end of year *fallout* monies that will be spent on purchases of items we need for operational purposes in the various fiscal programs.

Preliminary reviews of the FY 2023 budget and current spending in each of the four fiscal programs (Administration, Cemeteries, Nursing Homes, and Veterans Benefits) indicate is within budget and on track for a successful closeout.

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

We will begin the Amended FY 2024 and FY 2025 budget development process during the month of July. The deadline for the department’s AFY 2023/FY 2024 budget requests submission is due to OPB on Friday, September 1, 2023.

HEALTH AND MEMORIALS

State Veterans Homes

State Veterans Homes Census (Through June 16, 2023) +

Current Month	Augusta	Milledgeville	Total
Regular Patients	97	105	208
Service Connected *	27	37	66
Total Patients	124	142	266
Last Month			
Regular Patients	99	113	212
Service Connected *	30	40	70
Total Patients	129	153	282

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

+ The report to the VSB are the total numbers from May 17, 2023, through June 16, 2023.

Georgia War Veterans Nursing Home – Augusta

Routine operations are continuing.

Georgia War Veterans Home – Milledgeville

Routine operations are continuing.

State Veterans Cemeteries

Burial Statistics (through June 16, 2023)+

State Veterans Cemetery	Cumulative Last Month	Cumulative Current Month	Increase
Glennville	2,285	2,304	19
Milledgeville	5,121	5,159	38
Total	7,406	7,463	57

+ The report to the VSB are the total numbers from May 17, 2023, through June 16, 2023.

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery – Glennville

Routine operations are continuing.

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Milledgeville

Routine operations are continuing.

OLD BUSINESS:

Mr. Hanley expressed thanks to Commissioner Ross and Mr. Demers for their assistance to Fulton County in applying for the Fox Grant.

NEW BUSINESS:

Mr. Melvin Weaver, State Commander, American Legion, Mr. Jim Fultz, Sr. Vice Commander, American Legion, and Ms. Patsey Schreiber, State Commander, VFW were introduced. We look forward to having them at future meetings.

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Matthew O'Brien introduced Jehae Kim, who will be taking his place representing GDVS from the Attorney General's office.

Green Veterans is hosting a suicide prevention forum/town hall in Atlanta the first week of October. We plan to have subject matter experts on the panel, members of Sgt. Fox's family present, and substantial media coverage to get the word out on this subject. It is in the early planning stages.

The July 31 Board meeting was scheduled. It will be a combination virtual and in-person meeting, set up at the GDVS.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 1:17 p.m.

SIGNED:



Shawn Hanley, Chair

ATTEST:



Joshua Kopsie, Secretary

The next Veterans Service Board meeting will be held in person at GDVS but will also be available via video/telephone conference call on Wednesday, June 28, 2023, at 12:30 p.m. The Webex link is: <https://georgiadepartmentofveteransservice.webex.com/georgiadepartmentofveteransservice/j.php?MTID=m2ef78913647dae7cb35ebb35811af0d9>

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

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

Access Code: **2337 837 8884**