

Tuesday, March 15, 2022 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

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

Visitors: Mr. George Canavaggio, Assistant Commissioner, Field Operations & Appeals, GDVS
Present Mr. Mark Bannister, Assistant Commissioner, Administration, Health & Memorials
 Mr. Kerry Dyer, Director, Operations Division, GDVS
 Ms. Monisha Rallapalli, Office of Planning and Budget
 Ms. Amy Stevens, Georgia Military Women and Vetlanta
 Ms. Belinda Boldoe, VFW Service Officer, Appeals Division, GDVS
 Mr. Dan Holtz, Secretary, GMOAA
 Mr. Lou Zayas, Jr. Vice Commander, Military Order of the Purple Heart
 Mr. Mark Demers, American Legion Service Office & Trainer at GDVS
 Mr. Vince Pritchett, Director, Veterans Benefits South Region, GDVS
 Mr. Ken Childre, Director, Veterans Benefits North Region, GDVS
 Ms. Ramona Roper, Director, Training and Professional Development, GDVS
 Ms. Charlotte May, Director, Public Information Division, GDVS
 Ms. Shelly Ann Simpson, Director, Appeals Division, GDVS
 Mr. Ernie Cowart, Director, Glennville Cemetery
 Mr. Carlton Deese, Executive Director GWVH, Milledgeville, GA
 Mr. Russell Feagin, Director, Health & Memorials Division, GDVS
 Ms. Tonya Jarrett, Clinical Director, GWVH, Milledgeville, GA
 Mr. William Wilson, Network Administrator, GDVS
 Ms. Camala Ball, Budget Analyst, GDVS
 Ms. Veda Brooks, Director of Women Veterans Office, GDVS
 Mr. Bobby Davis, Director, Veterans Education & Training, GDVS
 Ms. Shareka Monday-Robinson, HR Generalist, GDVS
 Ms. Monica Dorsey, Communications & Outreach Specialist, GDVS
 Ms. Debbie Gregory, Administrative Specialist, GDVS
 Ms. Julie Hammond, Executive Assistant to the Commissioner, GDVS

On Tuesday, March 15, 2022, the Veterans Service Board meeting was held in person and by video/tele-conference.

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

Tuesday, March 15, 2022 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

Mr. Kopsie made a motion to approve the March Agenda. Mr. Mendez seconded the motion. The motion passed.

Mr. Mendez made a motion to approve the February minutes, which were previously distributed for members to review. Mr. Kopsie seconded the motion. The motion passed.

The following reports were submitted from the Veteran Service Organizations:

Mr. Mark Shreve, State Commander, The American Legion

TOP 10

1. Department Officers attended the Washington Conference virtually to promote our legislative priorities.
2. American Legion Department of Georgia membership is number 1 in the southeastern region and ranks 20 out of the 55 departments nationally.
3. Department Headquarters continues to plan the March Conference, April National Commander's Visit and June Convention.
4. The Blood Donor program has exceeded the stated goal and the American Legion has donated over 1,200 pints to date.
5. Augusta will host American Legion Family Day in April to support the Commander's Project. The banquet is sold out.
6. Commander Shreve has completed 76 out of 100 Post visits throughout the state in 2022. There are 223 American Legion Posts in Georgia.
7. Representatives of the American Legion attended the Decommissioning Ceremony of the Eagles Nest at the Atlanta VA.
8. Commander Shreve spent 10 days in South Georgia visiting veterans in Cordele, Tifton and Valdosta to better understand the needs of veterans in this region.
9. The American Legion Department of Georgia celebrated American Legion Date Night across the state.
10. The Commander's Project is on track in fundraising efforts. The Commander's Project goal is \$100,000.00 and the funds will be allocated and presented at the Department Convention to VAVS programs as well as Volunteer Services at the Georgia War Veterans Home.

Tuesday, March 15, 2022 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

Mr. Mark Demers, Training Team, GDVS, American Legion Service Officer

- The Department Service Officer attended the American Legion Department Adjutant Teleconference on February 17, 2022 at 1930.
- The Department Service Officer attended the American Legion National Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission Meeting on March 5, 2022 at 1000 via Zoom. We heard presentations from Dennis McDonough (Secretary, VA), Dr. Carolyn Clancy (Assistant Under Secretary for Health Discovery, Education & Affiliate Network, Veterans Health Administration), Mr. Michael Frush (Principle Under Secretary for Benefits), and Matthew Quinn (Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs). They discussed health care modernization, toxic exposure and burn pits (to include the proposed new presumptive conditions, improved healthcare for women, Guard and Reserve GI Bill).
 - Secretary McDonough stated that they expect to place 38K homeless veterans into permanent housing by the end of 2022.
 - Secretary McDonough stated that the VA expects at least 2,500 veterans over the next 10 years will be affected by the 14 new burn pit cancer presumptive conditions. They are also working on adding more.
 - Secretary McDonough would like congress to pass the 2022 budget instead of continuing resolutions because it could cause a 1-billion-dollar shortfall.
 - Secretary McDonough stated that there was a 300K backlog of disability exams even though the VA is completing 38K exams per week.
 - Certificates of Eligibility can now be sent instantly to lenders.
 - Secretary McDonough stated that they are now using an automated claims process that can complete claims in 3.5 days.
 - Secretary McDonough stated that the VA is testing automated Notification Letters instead of mailing them.
 - Also discussed were predatory non-accredited claims companies preying on veterans. They are looking for compelling stories they can present to Congress in April 2022.
 - The Asset and Infrastructure Review (AIR) Commission recommendations will be published on March 14, 2022.
 - We are awaiting the presentations from this American Legion event to distribute.
- The Department Service Officer updated, published, and distributed the 2nd Edition of the Post Service Officers Guide (2022) on March 3, 2022 to all Post Service Officers and Commanders within the American Legion Department of Georgia. The document is a 50 page how to, and reference guide for Post Service Officers.

Tuesday, March 15, 2022 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

- The Department Service Officer is attending the American Legion Department Service Officer School on March 7-27, 2022 via online format presented by Bergmann & Moore.
- The Assistant Department Service Officer (Ed Kent) assisted 19 veterans with VA benefits related inquires this month.
- Upcoming event: American Legion Department of Georgia Spring Conference on March 25-27, 2022 at the Sonesta Gwinnett Place, 1775 Pleasant Hill Road, Duluth, Georgia.
- Upcoming event: American Legion Department of Georgia Convention on June 24-26, 2022 at the Sonesta Gwinnett Place, 1775 Pleasant Hill Road, Duluth, Georgia.

Ms. Belinda Boldoe, VFW

- The Department Service Officer attended the GA Veterans of Foreign Wars Department Mid-Winter Conference and Banquet on February 18-20, 2022, held at the Macon Marriott City Center, 240 Coliseum Dr., Macon, GA 31217.
- The Department Service Officer attended an Atlanta VBA Regional Office Directors/VSO Quarterly Zoom meeting with Director Tony Milons, Assistant Directors Angela Seelhammer, Patrick Zondervan, and Staff on the changes within the Veterans Benefit Administration (VBA to include compensation, veteran readiness and employment, loan guaranty and education held on February 22, 2022, at 10AM).
- The Department Service Officer attended the Atlanta VAHCS VSO board teleconference Webinar meeting with Director Brown held on February 23, 2022, at 12:30PM. The Director provided an update on the hospital personnel shortages, celebration ceremony for former residence of the Eagles Nest Community Living Center, the opening of new Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC), the Community Care Program under new management, an update on the Atlanta area Fisher House, the Vet Atlanta Mega Summit, and a mobile Mammography Unit at the Arcadia Clinic. A summary of the meeting was provided to the VFW Commander, Staff, and community.
- The Department Service Officer attended the VFW Post 4706 Award Banquet held on February 26, 2022, at 6PM at 5362 Covington Hwy, Decatur GA 30035. The Post presented awards to the VFW Post Voice of Democracy (VOD) awardee, Patriot's Pen awardee, JROTC awardee, Decatur NAACP Chapter awardee and Post Volunteers awardees. The VOD and Patriot Pen awardees are Middle and High School students.

Ms. Amy Stevens, Georgia Military Women and VETLANTA

Georgia Military Women continued with many activities this past month including in person and online sharing of resources, education, and smiles across the state. This past month included a Mardi Gras bus trip for some members to New Orleans, attendance at events at the Alliance Theatre in Atlanta sponsored by Home Depot, support to Soldiers' Angels food drive and numerous small meetup groups across the state. A women veteran only event at the GA Aquarium will be held March 13-14 sponsored by Life Waters, a national non-profit promoting aquatic recreation.

GMW has also continued to work on outreach activities. This past week, a strategy meeting and luncheon with women veterans was held in Augusta, GA. We are also continuing to have monthly collaboration virtual meetings with the VISN 7 Women Program Managers at the Georgia VA Hospitals. The Charlie Norwood VA WPM has resigned her position and that position is being covered in interim by the Women's Medical Director.

For VETLANTA, we are progressing on emerging from pandemic challenges. We are actively engaging more and more organizations through networking. Our Feb 10th Q1 Summit at the 12 Hotel in Atlanta brought about 200 individuals together. Our Q2 Summit scheduled for May 3rd has been postponed but new plans should be announced in the next week or so. Meanwhile our role with the CVEB expands. Dr. Walker, VISN 7 Director, held a special partnership meeting and covered important topics on suicide prevention and caregivers. This provided opportunities to share resources in the community that the VA was not aware of. An additional topic was training of VSOs on benefits and claims. As these partnership meetings continue, it is expected that there will be greater collaborations throughout the state.

Commissioner Patricia Ross

Commissioner Ross went over the new logo options with the Board and is looking forward to their input.

There was a discussion regarding CRDIRS (Certificate of Release and Discharge Information Reporting System), a program administered by the Defense Manpower Data Center. The program will give us access to DD214's for everyone being discharged from the military and choosing to make their residence in Georgia. We will be able to send them a welcome home letter, along with the contact information for our various services. We will also be able to search for DD214's and retrieve the information provided on the forms.

Commissioner Ross is moving toward a comprehensive list of Georgia's veterans and is working with UniteUs, the VA, DDS, CRDIRS, etc. to develop this database. We should know if the UniteUs grant has been approved within the next couple of weeks.

Tuesday, March 15, 2022 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

Commissioner Ross announced that the VA released information regarding an upcoming grant for suicide prevention. She attended the Georgia Suicide Prevention Task Force monthly meeting earlier today and is looking forward to working with others to apply for the grant. Mr. Mendez asked if there could be a less cumbersome way for veterans to get someone on the line when they are considering suicide, such as a 911 number. Commissioner Ross announced that the number will be 988 and will go into effect on July 1st. Mr. Hanley stated that there are companies creating plans and algorithms to begin reaching out to veterans who may be suicidal. Commissioner Ross stated that UniteUs also does predictive analytics for veterans at risk.

On Thursday, February 17, 2022, Commissioner Ross attended the subcommittee meeting on taxing veteran's retirement pay at the Capitol. She also met virtually with the State Workforce Development Board. The Commissioner then had a meeting with UniteUs and Kaiser Permanente. In the evening, she spoke for the Greater Georgia Black Chamber of Commerce History of Black Business event, along with Ms. Ramona Roper, Director of Training and Professional Development.

On Saturday, February 19, 2022, Commissioner Ross spoke at the evening banquet for the VFW's Mid-Winter Conference, located this year at the Macon Marriott Center. Her remarks were about the changes in the department to include the veterans' driver's license, support military retirement tax exemption and collaboration with other VSOs to better support our state's veterans.

On Sunday, February 20, 2022, Commissioner Ross flew to Washington, D.C. for the NASDVA Mid-Winter Conference. The conference lasted until Wednesday, February 23, 2022. The conference centered around updates from the VA and speakers includes Secretary McDonough, VHA, VBA, DMC, Women Veterans Center, etc.

On Thursday, February 24, 2022, Commissioner Ross met with HRA for a "Compensation Discussion" and HRA will complete a market analysis on GDVS positions. She then briefed the House Appropriations Human Resources Subcommittee regarding the FY23 budget with the four priorities of providing the \$5K increase to vacant positions (1 July 2021) that are now filled, the \$3K raise for employees making less than \$50K, a new position for suicide prevention and outreach, and a grounds maintenance worker for the Glennville Cemetery.

On Friday, February 25, 2022, Commissioner Ross attended the Monthly Food Distribution for Veterans sponsored by Soldiers' Angels and Amazon at the Atlanta VA Arcadia Clinic in Decatur. She helped distribute food to about 200 veterans and their families. Later in the evening, she attended a Veterans Coalition Meeting at Der Biergarten Restaurant.

On Monday, February 28, 2022, Commissioner Ross held a weekly Director's Meeting. She then had a meeting with Jim Seward of the Council on Criminal Justice about his national work on justice involved veterans and initiatives to identify predictors and treatment.

Tuesday, March 15, 2022 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

On Tuesday, March 1, 2022, Commissioner Ross attended the Women Veteran's Legislative Breakfast, along with other women veterans from GDVS. Later that morning, she had a meeting with Veda Brooks, Director of the Women Veterans Office. She spent her afternoon meeting with Secretary Will Grimsley of the South Carolina VA. South Carolina has graciously shared their strategic planning documents as a template for Georgia.

On Wednesday, March 2, 2022, Commissioner Ross attended a meeting at the Georgia War Veterans Home with Assistant Commissioner Mark Bannister, Executive Director of the home Dennis Mize, Clinical Director of the home Tonya Jarrett, and PruittHealth Staff Members: Chief Medical Officer Dr. Rayvelle Stallings, Chief Clinical Officer Fran Ranier, and Area Vice-President Tyler Arnold. The group toured the campus, specifically the 14-bed transition support unit and the Russell Building. Further planning meetings were scheduled as the estimated opening for the transition support unit is 1 July 2022.

On Thursday, March 3, 2022, Commissioner Ross had SHARE training with Trainer Steven Fay. She then had a meeting regarding ADA Title I and FMLA with Stacey Peace. The Commissioner met with William Martin regarding the Augusta, Atlanta and Dublin VA and AIR Commission's plan to be released 14 Mar concerning long-term plans for VA facilities. Her day ended with a follow-up meeting on VISN 7 Virtual VSO Summit with VISN 7's commitment to assist with training, specifically in suicide prevention and mental/behavioral health.

On Friday, March 4, 2022, Commissioner Ross had Mr. Kerry Dyer release the same workforce survey previously sent to the department to provide a baseline. The survey closes out 31 March. She also had a lunch meeting with Veterans Service Board Secretary Josh Kopsie and Dr. Brian Moore, Director of the Center for the Advancement of Military and Emergency Service Research. Based on the tremendous work by Dr. Moore, we are engaging his expertise with the transition support unit (Milledgeville) and our suicide prevention efforts.

On Monday, March 7, 2022, Commissioner Ross held a weekly Director's Meeting. Later that day, she attended a departmental budget meeting, and all programs are in the green financially. Based on the update, the department is pursuing the purchase of a van for IT's use as they travel state-wide delivering equipment and the current van is not dependable. She also attended new VSO training around scheduled meetings.

On Tuesday, March 8, 2022, Commissioner Ross attended new VSO training, and that afternoon attended the first planning meeting on the transition support unit with Pruitt Health, Mr. Feagin and Ms. Jarrett in Norcross. Results from the meeting include senior members of Pruitt Health now having a better understanding of the department's expectations and new working groups to begin planning for staffing and operating the transition support unit.

Tuesday, March 15, 2022 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

On Friday, March 11, 2022, she held a monthly VSO Teams meeting to provide an update on initiatives within the department and to answer questions from the field. Later in the day she met with Mike Wang and General Ni from Taiwan Veterans for Atlanta.

On Sunday, March 13, 2022, Commissioner Ross attended and spoke at an event sponsored by LifeWaters.org in conjunction with the GA Aquarium's Veteran Program, Georgia Military Women and Humble Warriors. The event was a "woman veteran only" dive experience at the Georgia Aquarium. LifeWaters specializes in SCUBA diving training for disabled individuals (veterans, civilians, first responders). Any individual with a VA disability or civilian diagnosed with: Spinal Cord Injuries, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Traumatic Brain Injury, Amputees, Multiple Sclerosis, Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis, Cerebral Palsy, Spina Bifida, and Multiple Traumas and other disabilities may be involved in the scuba training program. The Scuba diving skills are adapted for each disabled diver. They work with Aquariums across the country.

On Monday, March 14, 2022, Commissioner Ross briefed the Senate Appropriations Human Resources Subcommittee regarding the FY23 budget.

Highlights:

- New Logo socialized with the department
- Baseline survey closes 31 March
- Great information and contacts with other states and the VA during the NASDVA conference
- Instituted tracking list for initiatives within the department (discussed weekly)
- Instituted monthly sessions with the field via Teams
- HRA market analysis indicated VSO1 and VSO2 salaries are below market average. Using this data for budget committee briefings

On the horizon:

- Jasper, Cobb, and Zebulon CBOC staffing
- Transitioning to state Time & Labor system 1 June
- Transitioning to state Performance Management System 1 July

Assistant Commissioner George Canavaggio, Field Operations and Appeals

Mr. Canavaggio attended the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee meeting this week and stated that the reception our department received was the best he's ever seen. They asked good questions and paid attention to the requests we were making.

Mr. Canavaggio will be attending the We CARE Veterans Resource Fair meeting this week in Cobb County to work out logistics for the Resource Fair scheduled on May 13-14. We will bring in service officers to explain benefits and file claims. We expect to see 400-1,000 veterans each day of the Fair.

Tuesday, March 15, 2022 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

GENERAL

- February 22, 2022, Assistant Commissioner George Canavaggio attended the VISN 7 Georgia Veteran Service Organizations Virtual Summit. Dr. David Walker, VISN 7 Network Director, hosted the meeting. Topics covered were Suicide Prevention Programs, Caregiver Support Programs, Prosthetics, Mental Health and Homeless.
- February 24, 2022, Assistant Commissioner George Canavaggio, along with Commissioner Trish Ross, Assistant Commissioner Mark Bannister, Director of Operations Kerry Dyer, and Budget Analyst Camala Ball attended the Appropriations Human Resources Subcommittee. Commissioner Ross briefed the committee on our 2023 budget request.
- February 25, 2022, Assistant Commissioner George Canavaggio, Director of Veterans Training and Professional Development Ramona Roper, and Training Team members Steven Fay and Mark Demers conducted interviews for the South Georgia Training position.
- DD 214's and Welcome Home Letters:
 - 3 Welcome Home Letters were mailed out in February 2022.
- Department Electronic Claim's Assistance Processing System (Vetra Spec) currently has 310,529 entries, this is an increase of 133 from February 16, 2022.

PROJECTED POSITIONS

- Current openings in Appeals, Waycross, Hinesville CBOC, Columbus, Statesboro, and Thomasville.

Veda Brooks, Women Veterans Coordinator (WVC)

- February 17, 2022, Ms. Brooks participated in the Veterans Roundtable with Dr. David Walker hosted by Congresswoman Bourdeaux.
- February 18, 2022, Ms. Brooks participated in a Hospice Honor Ceremony and presented the Vietnam Pin and Certificate.
- February 22, 2022, Ms. Brooks participated in the virtual VA Southeast Network Summit. Ms. Brooks participated in Rep. McBath's Veterans Mental Health Webinar.
- February 23, 2022, Ms. Brooks participated in the Atlanta VA Health Care System VSO/Stakeholder Update.
- February 24, 2022, Ms. Brooks attended a Coweta County Family Connection to talk about the needs of veterans in Coweta County.

Tuesday, March 15, 2022 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

- March 1, 2022, Ms. Brooks spoke at the Women Veterans Day Breakfast hosted by Sen. Tonya P. Anderson.
- March 4, 2021, Ms. Brooks led the Task Force Lead Meeting. She also participated in two Hospice Salute Ceremonies.
- March 9, 2022, Ms. Brooks participated in a Women's Program Manager briefing at the Augusta VA Medical Center. Ms. Brooks also had a meet-up with Augusta GMW and briefed them on department changes.
- March 14, 2022, Ms. Brooks attended the Rosses for Veteran Women Dinner in Fayetteville, GA.

Current committees

- Women's Veterans Health Committee (monthly meetings and joint outreach events)
- Georgia State VFW Homeless Committee
- VA/SAMHSA Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families Georgia Team
- Atlanta Advisory Committee on Homeless Veterans
- The Birdwell Foundation Board Member
- Coweta County Race, Equity, and Justice Committee
- Unite Georgia Community Advisory Committee

Ramona Roper, Training and Professional Development Division:

Ms. Roper announced that the new trainer in the South Georgia region, Mr. Charles Isaac, is doing an excellent job and she is excited to have him on board.

- February 17, 2022, Ramona Roper conducted in-person training at the Conyers Veterans Field Service Office.
- February 17, 2022, Ramona Roper attended the Black Chamber of Commerce virtual meeting at 1700 hours.
- February 16-17, Mark Demers conducted in-person training in the Carrollton Veterans Field Service Office.
- February 16-17, 2022, Steven Fay conducted in-person training at the Lawrenceville Veterans Field Service Office.
- February 22, 2022, Ramona Roper assisted Ken Childre (North Region Director) with interviews for Decatur VAMC Veterans Field Service Office.
- February 23, 2022, Ramona Roper assisted Ken Childre (North Region Director) with interviews for the Georgia War Veterans Home Field Service Office-Augusta.

Tuesday, March 15, 2022 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

- February 23-24, Steven Fay conducted in-person training at the Decatur VAMC Veterans Field Service Office.
- February 25 & 28, 2022, members of the Training and Professional Development Division, along with Assistant Commissioner George Canavaggio, conducted interviews for the Trainer 3-South position.
- March 1, 2022, Charles Isaac from the Hinesville Veterans Field Service Office was selected for the Trainer 3-South position.
- March 2, 2022, the new Drop Class, "See Something, Say Something-Bystander Training" was dropped into the Absorb Training Portal.
- March 7-9, 2022, Mark Demers and Steven Fay conducted in-person training with VSO's from the Decatur, Newnan, and Atlanta Veterans Field Service Offices at the Central Office.

Upcoming Events:

- Daily continued ongoing support to the Regional Directors and Veteran Field Service Offices.
- Planning and class development for the 2022 Annual Training event
- Next Drop Class to be available March 16, 2022

Shelly-Ann Simpson, Director of Appeals Division

Ms. Simpson announced that they brought in over one million dollars from December through February. She is extremely proud of her team. She also announced that travel boards will be going away permanently.

- The total number of actual hearings conducted by the Appeals Division for February 2022 was **99**.
- The total number of pre-hearing actions for February 2022 was **290**. Post-hearing actions was **24**.
- The total number of correspondence conducted by the Appeals Division (with veterans, BVA/VA employees, and VSO field offices) for the month of February was **1,522**.
- As of February 1, 2022, the Atlanta VA Regional Office completed the following claims for the Service Organizations represented by GDVS:

Tuesday, March 15, 2022 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

Types of Claims	Number of Awards	Benefits paid out
Compensation	100,262	\$183,057,846
DIC	3104	\$4,739,695
Survivor Pension	841	\$696,149
Veteran Pension	1,796	\$1,989,145
Grand Total	106,003	\$190,482,834

NORTH GA, Ken Childre, North Area Director

Feb. 2022 total retro award reported by North Georgia Offices: \$2,646,928. Included in that amount are single awards of \$294,394 reported by Rico Johnson of Gainesville and 2 single awards of \$180,914 and \$130,653 reported by Glenn Massey of Gainesville.

We had one Debt Waiver (Approval) reported in the amount of \$7,167 reported by William Smith of LaFayette.

Director Site Visits/Inspections: 4 (Cedartown, LaFayette, Dalton, Blairsville)

Picked up Computer Equipment from Dalton (reduction in personnel in office) and Elberton (Itinerate Office that was closed).

North Georgia Gains/Losses:

Cartersville-Chandreas Barkley (Gain-16 Feb)

Carrollton-Veronica Dailey (Gain-16 Feb)

Rome-Tomeika Johnson (Gain-1 Mar)

Decatur VAMC-Cedric Brant (Gain-1 Mar)

GWVNH Augusta-Joel Grice (Gain-1 Mar)

District Managers (1 Mar):

Glenn Massey-Gainesville

Ron Cason-Athens

Ian Ketterer-Augusta VAMC

Tuesday, March 15, 2022 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

Average Visits Per VFSO							
Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO							
Region:		North					
Month:		February-22					
A	B	C	D	E	D / E F	G	G / E H
					Average	Total	Average
			Total	Work	Office	Claims	Claims
	Veterans' Field		Monthly	Days	Visits	Submitted	Submitted
	Service Officer (VFSO)		Office	In	Per	To	By VFSOS
Office Name	Last Name	#	Visits	Month	Day	VA	To VA
	Number of VFSOs:	45	13,177	812	16.23	2,524	3.11
Number of Offices:	25	Average Visits/Office:		527.08	Average Claims/Office:		100.96

*Total Monthly Office Visits include: 2,338 In-Person Visits and 10,839 phone calls/emails.

Vincent Pritchett, Director of South Region

- On February 11, 2022, Sandra Bennett and Yakicia Green (Columbus field office) represented the department at the Tri-City Veterans and Family Symposium hosted by Fourth Street Missionary Baptist Church in Columbus. Participants attended the event via the Zoom platform.
- On February 24, 2022, Debbie O'Neal (Lyons field office) held a follow-up Women's Veterans ceremony to present pins and certificates to the 4 women who couldn't make the original ceremony.
- On February 25, 2022, Vince Pritchett and Miguel Rivera (Savannah field office) interviewed candidates for the vacant Veterans Field Service Officer 1 position in Savannah. Sheri Shellman accepted the employment offer and is scheduled to start on March 16.
- On March 9, 2022, Miguel Rivera (Savannah field office) presented a benefits briefing to transitioning National Guardsmen at Hunter Army Airfield.
- South Region offices reported retroactive payments since the last board meeting totaling \$459,837.00 with the highest single payment of \$313,343.00 reported by our Columbus field office.
- South Region Gains/Losses: None
- South Georgia Region Veterans Population: 242,136
- Office Visits for February: South Georgia offices handled 5,770 phone calls and emails.

Tuesday, March 15, 2022 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

Average Visits Per VFSD							
Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSD							
Region:		South Region					
Month:		February-22					
A	B	C	D	E	D / E	G	G / E
					F	H	
					Average	Total	Average
					Office	Claims	Claims
			Total	Work	Submitted	Submitted	Submitted
	Veterans' Field		Monthly	Days	Visits	To	By VFSOS
	Service Officer (VFSD)		Office	In	Per	VA	To VA
Office Name	Last Name	#	Visits	Month	Day	Monthly	Daily
	Number of VFSDs:	40	2,504	746	3.36	1,817	2.44
Number of Offices:	24	Average Visits/Office:		104.33	Average Claims/Office:		75.71

Ms. Charlotte May, Director, Public Information Division

GENERAL

Personnel

- Charlotte May, Director (Speeches, Major News Release Announcements, Digital Media, Websites [External & Internal])
- Monica Dorsey, Communications Specialist (Administrative support in all aspects of the GDVS Public Information mission/function [External & Internal])

INFORMATION OUTREACH

Website Updates

1. Defining "Veteran" – Adjusted the GDVS definition of "veteran" available in multiple places across the website to be more consistent with the official VA definition for clarity and ease of use for Georgia's veterans and families. The GDVS website also now specifies that NOAA and Public Health Service veterans are qualified to receive certain benefits.

Social Media Highlights

1. Job/career postings –
 - a. Shared federal factsheet on resources for veterans and transitioning service members pursuing careers in the trucking industry. The factsheet rounds up several federal

Tuesday, March 15, 2022 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

initiatives which provide free or low-cost training programs for veterans interested in joining the trucking workforce. PID also shared information on TCSG's training programs for Georgia veterans.

- b. Shared information on an in-person Work for Warriors Boots to Business class. Boots to Business classes are a pathway for entrepreneurship training programs at no cost to service members, veterans, and military spouses.
 - c. Veterans Resource Fair – shared information on an upcoming 2-day information and resource fair being held in Cobb County in May.
2. Burn Pits and Airborne Hazards – provided information on an informational webinar hosted by the VA for veterans who may have been exposed to toxic materials during their military service. VA recently expanded the list of presumptive conditions and are working to identify veterans who may have been exposed but have not filed a claim.
 3. VA Home Loans – shared a playlist of common questions and explanations compiled by the VA with information on how to qualify, apply, and receive a VA home loan after receiving several questions from concerned veterans and families in our general inbox.

Public Information Division Contacts *(Since December 10, 2021)*

- Replies to VA eBenefits Messages = 260
- Replies to General Questions = approximately 225
- Individual Request for the State Certificate of Honor = approximately 25

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 29,305
(Honors Ceremonies and Central Office Mail Outs)

DoD Vietnam Veteran Lapel Pins presented via GDVS – An estimated 23,325

Honors Ceremonies supported/coordinated by GDVS – 353

Defense Department's Vietnam Veteran Surviving Spouse CoH – 285

Tuesday, March 15, 2022 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

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 1,794 educational institutions and training establishments where Georgia veterans may attend school or job training and utilize their GI Bill® educational benefits.
- Extension of COVID-19 protocols for schools was signed into law on December 21, 2021 extending protocols until June 1, 2022.

Item *	Number
Approved Educational Institutions	392
Approved Training Establishments	1,402
Veteran Students Enrolled in Educational Institutions	16,344

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

Mr. Russell Feagin, Director, Health & Memorials Division

Mr. Feagin announced that they have received budget expansion funds for the Milledgeville Cemetery, which will run out of developed space within the next four years. They need to expand, and there is the possibility of expansion in Augusta. They are close to completion of the Wheeler Building and the Transition Support Unit (formerly called the Sub-Acute Unit). The building will be physically ready to admit patients on July 1st. PruittHealth is currently working on the staffing.

Tonya Jarrett, Clinical Director, Health & Memorials Division

Ms. Jarrett discussed the meetings with PruittHealth to work out policies, procedures and staffing requirements. They currently plan to meet every two weeks, alternating between PruittHealth's offices in Norcross and Microsoft Teams.

Ms. Jarrett announced that they have remained Covid free during the month of March. They are currently having to wear surgical masks only because the threat level is moderate. They do respiratory

Tuesday, March 15, 2022 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

checks every 24 hours. There is no testing conducted because there is no active outbreak and no positive cases.

Georgia War Veterans Home - Milledgeville, GA										
Monday, February 28, 2022										
Category	Population	Positive Cases	Positives % of Population	Deaths	Deaths % of Positives	Deaths % of Population	Recovered	Recovered % of Positives	Currently In Isolation	Positive for current month
Patients	320	128	40.00%	28	21.88%	8.75%	99	77.34%	0	6
Staff	522	159	30.46%	0	0.00%	0.00%	159	100.00%	0	3

Cumulative figures since March 1, 2020.

Recovered category includes patients/staff who tested positive and subsequently tested negative twice.

In December 2021, the CDC changed their time-based criteria again. Patients with no symptoms after 10 days are presumed to have recovered from the virus.

In Isolation category includes either self-quarantined, hospital, or COVID-19 unit at GWVH.

Positive for current month includes the number of veterans/staff who have tested COVID positive for the current month.

Mr. Carlton Deese, Executive Director, Georgia War Veterans Nursing Home

Mr. Deese announced that their customer service surveys are in and the results put them at "Best in Class" for 15 of the 16 categories. The accreditation surveys have shown them to be "Deficiency Free."

Mr. Ernie Cowart, Director, Glennville Cemetery

Mr. Cowart stated that the VA Compliance Review showed them to be in compliance. They are awaiting the final report for a comprehensive list of the findings.

Mr. Mark Bannister, Administration, Health, and Memorials

Mr. Bannister announced that today is crossover day in the legislative session. The AFY22 budget has been approved. We are waiting for Governor Kemp to sign off on it. Mr. Bannister then highlighted various budget items on his report, which follows.

FINANCE

Accounting

Our Director of Accounting, Mr. Chris Hambright, briefed GDVS' current annual operating budget (AOB) on Monday, March 7, 2022, to senior staff closing out the 3rd quarter and was advised by our accountant we are in good shape in all fiscal programs as we approach the final quarter of FY 2022. Other routine operations are continuing.

Budget

AMENDED FY 2022

On Tuesday, February 15, 2022, Commissioner Ross presented GDVS' Amended FY 2022 budget to the members of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Human Development.

As of this dated correspondence, the Governor has not signed the Amended FY 2022 appropriations and budget. GDVS requested approval of appropriated funds in AFY 2022 to support COLA adjustments for all vacant positions within our department to address agency recruiting needs. Our request was recommended by the House and approved by the Senate in the AFY 2022 budget as previously omitted in the original bill.

FY 2023

On Thursday, February 24, 2022, Commissioner Ross presented the Governor's Recommended Budget for FY 2023 to the members of the House Appropriations Human Resources Subcommittee.

Commissioner Ross is scheduled to brief our FY 2023 budget to the Senate Appropriations Human Development Subcommittee on Monday, March 14th, 2022, at 10:00 am. This most likely will be the final budget brief to the members of the General Assembly for the 2022 Session before SINE DIE.

As of this writing the House has approved their version of the FY 2023 appropriations and budget, HB 911, and sent their recommendations to the Senate for review. The Senate Appropriations Committee has drafted their version of the approved FY 2023 budget and has not yet released it for executive agencies review. It is anticipated that their Senate Bill will be released on March 10th or 11th following my report.

According to S.R. 382, March 15th, 2022, is designated as legislative day 28 (Crossover). Following Crossover Day, the House of Representatives will convene for the remaining scheduled legislative and committee days for this session until day 40 (SINE DIE) on Monday, April 4th, 2022.

Tuesday, March 15, 2022 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

The table below provides a summary of HB 910, (FY 2022A) appropriations and budget for the GDVS awaiting final approval by the Governor.

Approved House & Senate Versions

Fiscal Program	State/Total Funding	Notes
Administration (DVS)	\$1,849,338 \$78,761 \$80,355 <u>\$1,150</u> \$2,009,604	State General funds. Adds: Funds for retention and recruitment needs. Funds for retirement payout. Funds for GMVHOF (transfer to Capitol).
Cemeteries	\$1,751,988 <u>\$327,896</u> \$2,079,884 \$84,820 (\$1,000,000) * \$1,164,704	State General funds. Federal funds for plot allowances and misc. Adds: Funds for retention and recruitment needs. Reduces: Funds for delay in establishment of a state veteran's cemetery in Augusta. *Funds will be restored in FY 2023 budget.
Nursing Homes	\$12,032,400 \$23,128,424 <u>\$3,215,491</u> \$38,376,315 \$1,135,840* \$150,000 \$39,662,155	State General funds. Federal funds. Fees, bonds, and services. Adds: Funds for retention and recruitment needs. *(Includes Augusta University). Funds for (2) 12-passenger patient transport busses at Milledgeville.
Veterans Benefits	\$7,319,749 <u>\$753,926</u> \$8,073,675 \$610,702 (\$80,355) * \$8,604,022	State General funds. Federal funds (VETD). Adds: Funds for retention and recruitment needs. Reduces: Transfers funds to (Administration) DVS program for retirement payout.

Total recommended AFY 2022 budget = **\$51,440,485 dollars.**

HEALTH AND MEMORIALS

State Veterans Homes

State Veterans Homes Census (Through March 4, 2022)+

Current Month	Augusta	Milledgeville	Total
Regular Patients	97	118	215
Service Connected *	23	40	63
Total Patients	120	158	278
Last Month			
Regular Patients	91	116	207
Service Connected *	18	41	59
Total Patients	109	157	266

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

+ The report to the VSB are the total numbers from February 5, 2022 through March 4, 2022.

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 March 4, 2022)+

State Veterans Cemetery	Cumulative Last Month	Cumulative Current Month	Increase
Glennville	2,033	2,047	14
Milledgeville	4,668	4,691	23
Total	6,701	6,738	37

+ The report to the VSB are the total numbers from February 5, 2022 through March 4, 2022.

Tuesday, March 15, 2022 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery – Glennville

Routine operations are continuing.

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Milledgeville

Routine operations are continuing.

OPERATIONS

Human Resources

Personnel Actions (Gains / Losses)

(March 1, 2022 – March 16, 2022)

Location	Position	Status	Name	Date
Rome	VFSO-1	New Hire	<i>Tomeika Johnson</i>	03/01/2022
Decatur VAMC	VFSO-1	New Hire	<i>Cedric Brant</i>	03/01/2022
Augusta (GWVNH)	VFSO-1	New Hire	<i>Joel Grice</i>	03/01/2022
Decatur VAMC	VFSO-1	New Hire	<i>Nicholas Treadway</i>	03/01/2022
Savannah	VFSO-1	New Hire	<i>Sheri Shellman</i>	03/16/2022
Milledgeville Cemetery	Grounds Maint Tech 1	New Hire	<i>Robert Sparks</i>	03/16/2022
Tifton	Office Manager/VFSO 2	Resignation	<i>Shaun Amy</i>	03/16/2022

Properties

Routine operations are continuing.

Information Technology

Routine operations are continuing.

Records Management

Routine operations are continuing.

Vehicle Management

Routine service and maintenance are performed as required.

Veterans Service Foundation Board

Mr. Doug Middleton, Chairman of the Veterans Service Foundation Board will provide an update.

OLD BUSINESS:

There was no old business to discuss.

NEW BUSINESS:

Mr. Shawn Hanley welcomed new Board Member Mr. Pete Peterson. Mr. Peterson introduced himself and stated that he is excited to join the team and is looking forward to serving.

Ms. Swan congratulated Commissioner Ross and the team for all the good news reported today.

Commissioner Ross announced to the Board that the current survey has a take rate of 60% so far. Once the survey ends on March 31st, the report results and comments will be provided to the Board to review.

Mr. Mendez discussed the "Troops to Teachers" program and if it would be a worthy cause for us to take up. Veterans could be offered alternative certification through the RESA program, which would help veterans, the state and the Governor. We will be adding Education to our new business discussion in upcoming Board meetings to discuss this program and how we can be involved.

Ms. Swan announced that a bill has been filed for the Veteran Anthem to become the state song for veterans. Sen. Brian Strickland and Sen. Butch Miller sponsored the bill.

Mr. Kopsie discussed the status of the Foundation's 501(c)3 application and his plans to get together with Mr. Tim Paslawski, Board Member, and Mr. Matthew O'Brien, Assistant Attorney General, regarding how to use funds for capital projects. Commissioner Ross added that Sen. Kirkpatrick's study committee will assess the veterans homes and locations and the need for more in Georgia.

The April 14 board meeting was scheduled. It will be a combination virtual and in-person meeting, set up at the GDVS. Mr. Hanley made a motion for this and there were no objections. The motion passed.

Ms. Swan made a motion to adjourn the meeting. There were no objections. The motion passed.

Tuesday, March 15, 2022 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

The meeting adjourned at approximately 1:34 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 Thursday, April 14, 2022, at 12:30 p.m. The Webex link is:
<https://georgiadepartmentofveteransservice.webex.com/georgiadepartmentofveteransservice/j.php?MTID=m07f78ef81f65b016f8dd61070d2e4de6>

Meeting password: **xjRZ549w6tS (95795499 from video systems)**
Or you can call: **1-844-621-3956** Access Code: **2345 797 3890**