

Thursday, March 23, 2023 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. Tim Paslawski, Member
Mr. Pete Peterson, Member
Ms. Patricia Ross, Commissioner

Visitors: Ms. Shelly-Ann Simpson, Executive Director, Field Operations & Appeals, GDVS
Present Mr. Mark Bannister, Executive Dir., Health, Memorials, Finance & Development, GDVS
Mr. Kerry Dyer, Chief Operations Officer, GDVS
Ms. Mary Catherine Greaber, Assistant Attorney General, Attorney General's Office
Mr. Dean Rakoskie, State Commander, VFW
Mr. Lou Zayas, Jr. Vice Commander, Military Order of the Purple Heart
Ms. Belinda Boldoe, VFW Service Officer, Appeals Division, GDVS
Ms. Raven Holstick, GDVS, American Legion Service Officer
Ms. Amy Stevens, Georgia Military Women and Vetlanta
Ms. Peggy Beaschoechea, United Military Care
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 and Professional Development, 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. Carlton Deese, Executive Director GWVNH, Augusta, GA
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
Mr. Mark Demers, Grant Program Implementation Manager, GDVS
Ms. Monica Dorsey, Communications & Outreach Specialist, GDVS
Ms. Julie Hammond, Executive Assistant to the Commissioner, GDVS

On Thursday, March 23, 2023, the Veterans Service Board meeting was held in person and by video/tele-conference.

Mr. Hanley called the meeting to order at 12:28 p.m. Mr. Kopsie gave the invocation. Ms. Swan led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

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

Mr. Paslawski made a motion to approve the February minutes, which were previously distributed for members to review. Mr. Peterson 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 GA Veteran of Foreign Wars Department Mid-Winter Conference and Banquet on February 17-19, 2023, held at the Macon Marriott City Center, 240 Coliseum Dr., Macon, GA 31217.
- The Department Service Officer participated in a VA RVSR and VSO mock in-person hearing training video. The event was held on March 7, 2023, at 12PM. The training video will be used by the newly assigned VA Rating Veterans Service Representatives (RVSR) throughout the course of their training.
- The Department Service Officer attended a Webinar hosted by the FDIC on Expanding Consumer Credit Options for Households with Disabilities:
 - The speakers presented information on increasing credit and credit building access for individuals with disabilities in the US.
 - A presentation was made on the banking status of households with a disability to help raise awareness of the unique challenges facing this population.
 - Discussed programs, products, and resources to assist financial institutions and technical assistance providers that want to make their offerings more accessible for people with disabilities.
 - The webinar meeting was held February 21, 2023, from 1PM-2:15PM to provide the information to veterans requesting assistance with financial management.
- The Department Service Officer attended the Monthly VSO/CMA meeting hosted by Brian Morgan, Change Management Analyst (CMA). The meeting was held on March 9, 2023, at 10AM. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss VSO's issues and concerns.

Mr. Dean Rakoskie, State Commander, VFW

We are having Pact Act/Camp Lejeune events at Georgia Southern.

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We did a briefing in Washington, D.C. regarding lawyers charging exorbitant fees to file claims for veterans when we do it for free. The VFW has helped veterans receive billions in funds as a result.

Ms. Raven Holstick, GDVS, American Legion Service Officer

- The Assistant Department Service Officer (Ed Kent) assisted 43 veterans with VA benefits related inquiries this month.
- Department Service officer (Raven Holstick) and American Legion Leadership had a brief with Unite GA on the possibility of getting post on the platform to send and receive.
- Virtual Post service officer training was held for one new service officer on March 13. Training topics were on the roles and responsibilities as a post service officer. This training will continue to be held monthly as new service officers arrive.
- Department service Officer (Raven Holstick), Assistant Service Officer (Tonjala Moton-Williams) conducted one on one training in preparation for the upcoming Spring conference via Teams.
- Post 160 held a brief to discuss the possibility of hosting an event geared towards the PACT ACT.
- Upcoming event: Spring Conference on March 24-26.
- Upcoming event: Post Service Officer Training on April 15.

Ms. Amy Stevens, Georgia Military Women and VETLANTA

Our last update was the December 2022 report, and this report is to let you know that Georgia Military Women continues to grow and thrive. We are now over 4,700 members. Many informal social events are held every month across the State of Georgia. These typically are 20 or less women meeting in small groups. This creates intimate bonds and friendships which is our ultimate goal. Sharing on-line in the Facebook group for GA Military Women is the most active part of our activities in that 1,000 or more ladies participate on most days. This is how we share resources, information about upcoming events, and celebrate each other as well as providing support sometimes.

Looking back on 2022, we lost a higher than normal number of members and family members due to COVID, Long Covid, cancers, heart disease and other health conditions. This is one of the reasons we strongly support the VA and access to healthcare and benefits. GDVS is one of our primary referrals for assisting veterans. We have made an effort to do outreach and let the “invisible” women veterans

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across our state know that they are valued and that resources are available. Look for us at future events. We are glad to be part of the team.

Update on VETLANTA: We just had a highly successful Q1 Summit at the Omni Hotel at Truist Park. About 250 veterans came for PACT ACT registration. We also had another 200+ who enjoyed our main stage program about Veteran Legal Services sponsored by The Warrior Alliance. Please mark your calendar for our next large Q2 Summit which will be held at the GA Football Hall of Fame in downtown Atlanta on May 23rd. The theme will be COURAGEOUS LEADERSHIP. More details TBD.

Met with the Secretary of the VA yesterday regarding the national role model for women veterans. The national mission statement has changed to: "To fulfill President Lincoln's promise to care for those who have served in our nation's military and for their families, caregivers and survivors."

Mr. Lou Zayas, Jr. Vice Commander, Military Order of the Purple Heart

Now through May 6th we are handing out JROTC award certificates for outstanding cadets.

Ms. Peggy Beaschoechea, United Military Care

We will have an event in Rome on May 18, the first time ever in that location. We also have an event in Cobb in August, which will be the second year at this location.

Commissioner Patricia Ross

On Thursday, February 23, 2023, Commissioner Ross met with Sen. Mike Dugan about Amwell, a telemedicine platform. She then met with Jacqueline Hughes from Gwinnett County as a reference check for Unite Us. The Commissioner attended the monthly Veterans Service Board Meeting. Later, she joined a Zoom call with Wells Fargo representatives. She finished the day meeting at the Capitol with Kristyn Long.

On Friday, February 24, 2023, Commissioner Ross toured the Extended Stay America on Clairmont Road, a temporary housing facility. Also on the tour were Shelly-Ann Simpson, Calandra Ferguson and Veda Brooks. The Regional sales manager has agreed to be the main point of contact for any needs across Georgia.

On Monday, February 27, 2023, Commissioner Ross held a weekly Director's Meeting. She then met with Patrick Donohoe (MG, Ret) about establishing a VECTR center in Columbus.

On Tuesday, February 28, 2023, Commissioner Ross held a Supervisor Training Discussion.

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On Wednesday, March 1, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended the Unite Us Social Connector and Implementation meeting.

On Thursday, March 2, 2023, Commissioner Ross met with Marlana Cannata, Executive Director of Journey Pure Emerald Coast. Also in the meeting were Shane Cole of Journey Pure, Shelly-Ann Simpson, Veda Brooks and Calandra Ferguson. She then took part in a VA VEO Consult with Matthew Campbell.

On Friday, March 3, 2023, Commissioner Ross spoke at a Veterans Town Hall Meeting in Conyers. Also participating in the meeting were the American Legion, the Department of Labor and the DAV.

On Monday, March 6, 2023, Commissioner Ross held a weekly Director's Meeting. She then attended the Unite Us Social Connector and Implementation meeting.

On Tuesday, March 7, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended the Women Veterans' Legislative Breakfast at the Georgia Freight Depot Blue Room. She then hosted visitors from the Korean Vietnam Veterans Association. They interviewed the Commissioner, Shelly-Ann Simpson and Kerry Dyer. Later in the day she had a phone meeting with Colonel Gerald Johnson, Executive Director of the Georgia MOAA Foundation.

On Wednesday, March 8, 2023, Commissioner Ross met with her leadership team to discuss the budget and where it stands YTD.

On Thursday, March 9, 2023, Commissioner Ross travelled to KSU to meet with the AMES Center regarding the Fox Grant. Also present for the meeting from GDVS were Calandra Ferguson, Veda Brooks, Mark Demers and Shelly-Ann Simpson. She then briefed the Senate Subcommittee on the FY24 budget.

On Friday, March 10, 2023, Commissioner Ross held an Open Forum for the department on MS Teams. She also met with Kristy Klein Davis of Healthcare Georgia Foundation to discuss healthcare for veterans. She ended the day with a meeting with Kaylyn Macaluso, the marketing and outreach lead for the VA Women's Health Reengagement Training (heaRT), an official program of the VA Office of Women's Health that educates women veterans on the VA healthcare services available to them. Also in attendance for this meeting were Shelly-Ann Simpson, Veda Brooks and Calandra Ferguson.

On Monday, March 13, 2023, Commissioner Ross held a weekly Director's Meeting. She then attended a meeting to discuss the WSI Solutions Expo in June.

On Tuesday, March 14, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended a webinar entitled "Employee Benefit Plan Council and State Personnel Board Meetings." She also participated in the Transition Advisory Committee Meeting #2.

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On Thursday, March 16, 2023, Commissioner Ross took part in a NASDVA call. She then attended a meeting highlighting the Role of Veteran-Serving Nonprofits.

On Saturday, March 18, 2023, Commissioner Ross was the speaker at the GA Chapter of the Vietnam Helicopter Pilots Association monthly meeting.

On Monday, March 20, 2023, Commissioner Ross held a weekly Director's Meeting. She then attended the Unite Us Social Connector and Implementation meeting. She ended the day at a Fox Grant Update Meeting with AMES and GDVS.

On Tuesday, March 21, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended a College Park PACT Act planning meeting. She then attended the Georgia Suicide Prevention Task Force Monthly Meeting.

Upcoming Events

Outreach events: 29 Mar 2023, Macon; 4 April 2023, Marietta (KSU)

SSG Fox grant submission option year 1, due 19 May 2023

Suicide Prevention Symposium – Let's Connect, 24-25 May 2023, Marietta (KSU)

Women Veterans Gala, 10 June 2023, Macon (MGA)

SB21 regarding the Veterans Service Foundation Board has passed and will go into effect on July 1st. We will then add board members.

HB414, which deals with a mental health grant, will be passed through GDVS instead of DBHDD. Up to \$750,000 will be available through this grant.

We have several PACT Act events coming up.

Samsung, through Green Veterans, has donated 60 tablets to our Foundation. These will be used to give veterans in our offices a suicide prevention risk assessment. We have 5 confirmed saves in the last couple of weeks that our VSO's have been a part of.

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

- On February 24th, joined the Commissioner and Ms. Veda Brooks on a site visit to Extended Stay America to see the facilities that would house our veterans in transition.
- On March 7th, we met with members of the Korean Vietnam Veterans Association who extended an invitation to their celebration commemorating the 70th Anniversary of the end of the Korean War to be held on March 23, 2023, in Norcross.

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- On March 9th, along with the Commissioner, Ms. Brooks, Ms. Ferguson and Mr. Demers met with AMES to discuss the next installment of the Fox Grant and our progress with the program so far.
- On March 10th, met with Kaylyn Macaluso, the VA Women's health reengagement coordinator, to discuss the VHA's efforts to bring women veterans back to the VAMC. We spoke about the difficulties here in Metro Atlanta for women veterans seeking care at the VAMC and the lack of follow-up with care coordinators.
- We are continuing to plan Annual Training.
- Department Electronic Claims Assistance Processing System (Veterans Benefits) actively serving 273,914 veterans.
- **DD 214's and Welcome Home Letters:** 627 Welcome Home Letters were mailed out in February 2023.

PROJECTED POSITIONS

- Current openings in Appeals and Augusta.

Ms. Ramona Roper, Training and Professional Development Division:

- February 22-24, Mr. Steven Fay conducted new hire training for Ms. Christina Williams at the Lawrenceville VFSO. Ms. Williams is the new VSO at that location. During new hire training, the GDVS Resource Guide and VSO Guide are introduced, as well as the Absorb Training Portal.
- February 22-24, Mr. Glenn Massey conducted new hire training with Mr. John Wagenknecht at the Gainesville VFSO. Mr. Wagenknecht is the new VSO for that location. During new hire training, the GDVS Resource Guide and VSO Guide are introduced, as well as the Absorb Training Portal.
- February 24-28, 2023, the GDVS Training and Professional Development Division continued support and guidance to the Veteran Field Service Offices throughout the state.
- March 1-2, 2023, Mr. Steven Fay and Mr. Glenn Massey, traveled to the Newnan VFSO to conduct new hire training to Mr. Roger McDonald. Mr. Fay conducted an office inspection with Office Manager, Mrs. Barbara Serrano, while Mr. Massey conducted training with Mr. McDonald. During new hire training, the GDVS Resource Guide and VSO Guide are introduced, as well as the Absorb Training Portal.
- March 6-10, 2023, Mr. Charles Isaac conducted new hire training for Mr. Brett Kuppler of the St. Mary's VFSO. The training was conducted at the Brunswick VFSO because at the present time Mr.

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Kuppler does not have computer access at the computer and Mr. Isaac doesn't have access privileges at that location.

- March 13, 2023, the new DROP Class, SEP – Adding Dependents. This course teaches VSO how to electronically add dependents to a veteran's award electronically via the VA Stakeholder Enterprise Portal (SEP).
- March 14, 2023, Ms. Ramona Roper, assisted Mr. Ken Childre with interviews for the Augusta VAMC vacancy. There were 3 in-person interviews.
- March 15, 2023, Mr. Charles Isaac performed an office inspection at the Hinesville location. He reports the office staff arrived timely and started their work. Offices are clean and inviting to veterans and claimants. Staff members are knowledgeable and professional.
- March 1-15, 2023, the Training and Professional Development Division continues to create content, design, and modify the 2023 GDVS Annual Training Program.

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.
- Planning the 2023 Annual (Regional) Training Conference.
- Next DROP class will commence March 27, 2023. This class will be on Apportionments.

Ms. Roper will be giving a benefits briefing for the BVA in Columbus on Saturday. Trainer Steven Fay was one of the employees involved with saving a veteran's life through suicide prevention.

Mr. Edwin Berry, Director of Appeals Division

- The total number of hearings conducted by the Appeals Division for February 2023 was **79**.
- The total number of pre-hearing actions for February 2023 was **320**.
- The total number of post-hearing actions for February 2023 was **60**.
- 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 **878**.
- As of **March 01, 2023**, the Atlanta VA Regional Office processed benefits as follows for GDVS and the Service Organizations represented by GDVS.

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Types of Claims	Number of Awards	Benefits paid out
Compensation	102,803	\$211,994,74
DIC	3555	\$5,927,282
Survivor Pension	798	\$732,156
<u>Veteran Pension</u>	<u>1,590</u>	<u>\$1,861,769</u>
Grand Total	108,746	\$220,515,949

Appeals employee Raven Holstick was one of the employees who saved a veteran's life through suicide prevention. Also, Belinda Boldoe connected a veteran to the suicide prevention hotline last night.

Mr. Kenneth Childre, Director of North Region

Retro Awards: February 2023-\$1,132,291.00

Included in that amount is a single award reported by:
Rita Barnhart (Canton)-\$102,000 (Vaughn-0206)

Director Site Visits/Inspections: 2

Community Involvement:

4 Feb 2023-Ken Childre (North Area Director)
Presented Certificate to WWII Veteran on his 100th Birthday celebration.

22 Feb 2023-Ken Childre (North Area Director), Kareem Reddick (Decatur VAMC), Kyle Hungarter (Marietta), Raven Holstick (Appeals)
Participated in VETLANTA Pact Act Event at the Omni at the Battery. Provided services to 36 claimants with 11 claims filed.

3 Mar 2023-Terrance Leggon and Maxine Brock (Conyers)
Participated in Rockdale County Town Hall Meeting. Terrance and Maxine briefed around 50 people about the mission of the Conyers GDVS Field Office and the services they are able to provide to those Veterans/family members that are seeking assistance.

North Georgia Gains/Losses:
Gainesville-John Wagenknecht-Effective 1 Feb 2023

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Lawrenceville-Christina Williams-Effective 16 Feb 2023
 Newnan-Roger McDonald-Effective 16 Feb 2023

District Manager Positions:

Central District Manager-Joe Baker (Decatur VAMC)-Effective 16 Feb 2023
 South District Manager-Sean Seader (Carrollton)-Effective 16 Feb 2023

Average Visits Per VFSO							
Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO							
Region:			North				
Month:			February-23				
A	B	C	D / E			G	G / E
			D	E	F		H
			Total	Work	Average	Total	Average
	Veterans' Field		Monthly	Days	Office	Claims	Claims
	Service Officer (VFSO)		Office	In	Visits	Submitted	Submitted
Office Name	Last Name	#	Visits	Month	Per	To	By VFSOS
					Day	VA	To VA
						Monthly	Daily
	Number of VFSOs:	54	13,512	898	15.05	2,623	2.92
Number of Offices:	30	Average Visits/Office:			450.40	Average Claims/Office: 87.4333333	

*Total monthly office visits include: 3,390 In-Person and 10,122 phone calls/emails.

We will be participating in a We Care event in May in Rome, during which time 4 of our offices will be closed and the VSO's will be participating in the event. The same will happen at the upcoming PACT Act event at KSU.

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

- On March 8, 2023, Vincent Pritchett was one of two presenters at a Disabilities Awareness Training session hosted by Paul Allen, the One-Stop Operator Manager for Middle GA Consortium, Inc.
- On March 15, 2023, Terri Hurst (Bainbridge field office) attended a Decatur County Coalition meeting to discuss suicide prevention for veterans and others in the county.
- On March 25, 2023, Sonja Martin (Macon field office) set up an information booth at the Fort Hawkins 217th birthday celebration. Fort Hawkins was established in 1806 by President Thomas Jefferson as a trading settlement. The city of Macon grew out of this settlement.
- On March 29, 2023, South Region offices supported a Town Hall/Claims Clinic put on by the Atlanta Regional office in partnership with the Dublin VA Medical Center.

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- South Region offices reported lump sum payments totaling \$291,204.00 since the last board meeting. The highest single payment of \$48,000.00 was reported by our Milledgeville field service office.
- South Region Gains/Losses: Eric Fowler joined our Milledgeville field office effective March 16. Alise Scott left our Columbus field office effective March 31.
- South Georgia Region Veterans Population: 237,759.
- Office Visits for February: South Georgia offices handled 5,465 phone calls and emails.

Average Visits Per VFSO							
Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO							
Region:		South Region					
Month:		February-23					
A	B	C	D	E	D / E F	G	G / E H
Office Name	Veterans' Field Service Officer (VFSO) Last Name	#	Total Monthly Office Visits	Work Days In Month	Average Office Visits Per Day	Total Claims Submitted To VA Monthly	Average Claims Submitted By VFSOS To VA Daily
Number of VFSOs:		38	2,836	748	3.79	2,091	2.80
Number of Offices:	24	Average Visits/Office:		118.17	Average Claims/Office:		87.13

Thank you to Mr. Paslawski for the letter he sent to Melissa Ingle.

Ms. Veda Brooks, Women Veterans Coordinator (WVC)

- February 22, 2023, Ms. Brooks facilitated GAPS Assessment Training. Ms. Brooks participated in ACE-SI Training North.
- February 23, 2023, Ms. Brooks met with Atlanta Pride to partner with them for an Information Panel
- February 27, 2023, Ms. Brooks attended Virtual PACT Act Kennesaw planning meeting.
- February 28, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in the interview process of 5 candidates for Suicide Prevention Specialist (Fox Grant).

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- March 1, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in the interview process of 4 candidates for Suicide Prevention Specialist (Fox Grant). Ms. Brooks participated in the Unite GA Social Connector Implementation.
- March 2, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in the Coweta County Veteran Court. Ms. Brooks participated in a virtual meeting with Journey Pure Emerald Coast.
- March 3, 2023, Ms. Brooks spoke at Lake Spivey.
- March 7, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in virtual pre-Albany Women Veterans Symposium meeting.
- March 8, 2023, Ms. Brooks was on the Veteran Suicide Prevention Discussion and Resource Roundtable event with Highland Rivers, Fox Grant Recipient.
- March 10, 2023, Ms. Brooks attended a Substance Abuse Summit in Coweta County.
- March 14, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in the GA VA WVPM Monthly meeting. Ms. Brooks participated in the GDVS Summit Conference Meeting.
- March 16, 2023, Ms. Brooks Traveled to Gainesville to conduct training.
- March 17, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in the planning meeting for the June Women Veteran Gala.

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
- Coweta County Race, Equity, and Justice Committee
- Unite Georgia Community Advisory Committee

June 12 is the 75th anniversary of women being allowed to serve in the military. We will be hosting a gala on June 10 at Middle Georgia State University in Macon to commemorate.

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

- February 2023, Ms. Ferguson attends weekly Fox Grant Update Meetings.
- February 2023, Ms. Ferguson attends weekly KSU/AMES meeting to plan for Suicide Prevention Summit in May 2023.
- February 16, 2023, Ms. Ferguson conducted S.A.V.E training for the VSO North office #3.
- February 16, 2023, Ms. Ferguson attended "It Takes a Village" Address Behavioral Health Disparities in the Black Community.
- February 16, 2023, Ms. Ferguson attended Black LGBTQ+ Professional and Visionaries Panel.
- February 17, 2023, Ms. Ferguson attended Lethal Means Safety, Governor's Challenge Priority Group 3 meeting.
- February 17, 2023, Ms. Ferguson met with Johns Creek City Council to address Veterans with food insecurities. They have funding available to deliver hot meals to Veterans in need.
- February 20, 2023, Ms. Ferguson met with American Legion Commander Post 160 to schedule Suicide Prevention Training.
- February 21, 2023, Ms. Ferguson hosted the monthly Governor's Challenge Task Force meeting.
- February 22, 2023, Ms. Ferguson conducted S.A.V.E training for the VSO North office #4.
- February 23, 2023, Ms. Ferguson met with Atlanta Pride to partner with them for an Information Panel.
- February 27, 2023, Ms. Ferguson attended the Virtual Governor's Challenge & Mayor's Challenge Teams Call.
- February 28, 2023, Ms. Ferguson interviewed 5 candidates for Suicide Prevention Specialist (Fox Grant).
- March 1, 2023, Ms. Ferguson interviewed 4 candidates for Suicide Prevention Specialist (Fox Grant).
- March 1, 2023, Ms. Ferguson submitted the monthly Fox Grant outreach report.

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- March 2-3, 2023, Ms. Ferguson taught ASIST to SM in Macon.
- March 8, 2023, Ms. Ferguson was on the Veteran Suicide Prevention Discussion and Resource Roundtable event with Highland Rivers, Fox Grant Recipient.
- March 10, 2023, Ms. Ferguson attended a Substance Abuse Summit in Coweta County.
- March 14, 2023, Ms. Ferguson met with American Legion to provide guidance on using UNITE GA platform to provide resources for SMVF.

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

INFORMATION OUTREACH

Division Updates

1. GDVS Newsletter – PID published a monthly newsletter in February, as well as launching a new e-newsletter format. The e-newsletter features top stories from the month and encourages readers to get the full issue at <https://veterans.georgia.gov/newsletter>. The February edition featured an update on PACT Act claims processing, Blue Water veteran retroactive benefits, GDVS's first Employee of the Year Debra O'Neal, Georgia War's Pinnacle Quality Insight's Customer Experience Awards, and a VCAO spotlight on Appeals Officer Scott Yarbrough.
2. Let's Connect Summit – PID coordinated with Veda Brooks and Calandra Ferguson to create a topic page on the department's website with information on the upcoming *Let's Connect* suicide prevention summit on May 24-25, 2023. The topic page is featured prominently on the department's main navigation bar to increase visibility of the event.
3. PACT Act updates
 - a. PID launched a new event calendar list to track upcoming PACT Act rallies and events across the state. These events are also available on the department website's main calendar. The calendar list is available at <https://veterans.georgia.gov/pact-events>.
 - b. New radiation exposure locations for Vietnam era veterans – developed a new graphic to summarize information on the three new toxic cleanup exposure zones in an easy-to-read format.
4. Legislative updates
 - a. SB 21 Georgia Veterans Service Foundation, Inc.; revise operations – this bill passed the Senate on February 13, passed the House on March 13. The full text of the bill is available at <https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/63656>.

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- b. SB 273 Disabled Veterans; motor vehicle; display a certain license plate in order to qualify for an exemption from ad valorem taxation; remove a requirement – full text of the bill is available at <https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/64925>. The bill was heard by the Senate Committee on Veterans, Military, and Homeland Security on March 14.
 - c. HB 299 Georgia Code; add appropriate references to United States Space Force; provisions – This bill updates the OCGA to add references to the United States Space Force and Space Force Reserves. The bill passed the house on February 22 and has been read twice in the Senate as of March 15. The full text of the bill is available at <https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/64137>.
 - d. HB 414 Mental health; grant program to aid service members, veterans, and their families; provide – This bill creates a grant program to provide behavioral health services to military service members, veterans, and their families through nonprofit mental health clinics or providers. The full text of the bill is available at <https://www.legis.ga.gov/legislation/64374>.
5. Veterans Benefits Outreach
- a. Job Fairs and Career Opportunities – shared information on job fairs for military spouses and caregivers at several locations, including the VECTR Center's March 21 Career Fair.
 - b. Women veteran events – shared information on valuable resources available to women veterans, including a women in business webinar through the SBA and VA's women veteran symposium.
 - c. President's Day – highlighted the military service of 31 presidents, including Georgia's own Navy veteran and 39th President, Jimmy Carter.

Public Information Division Contacts *(Since December 9, 2022)*

- Replies to VA eBenefits Messages = 140
- Replies to General Questions = approximately 220
- Individual Request for the State Certificate of Honor = approximately 35

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 **29,745**
(Honors Ceremonies and Central Office Mail Outs)

DoD Vietnam Veteran Lapel Pins presented via GDVS – An estimated **23,745**

Honors Ceremonies supported/coordinated by GDVS – **356**

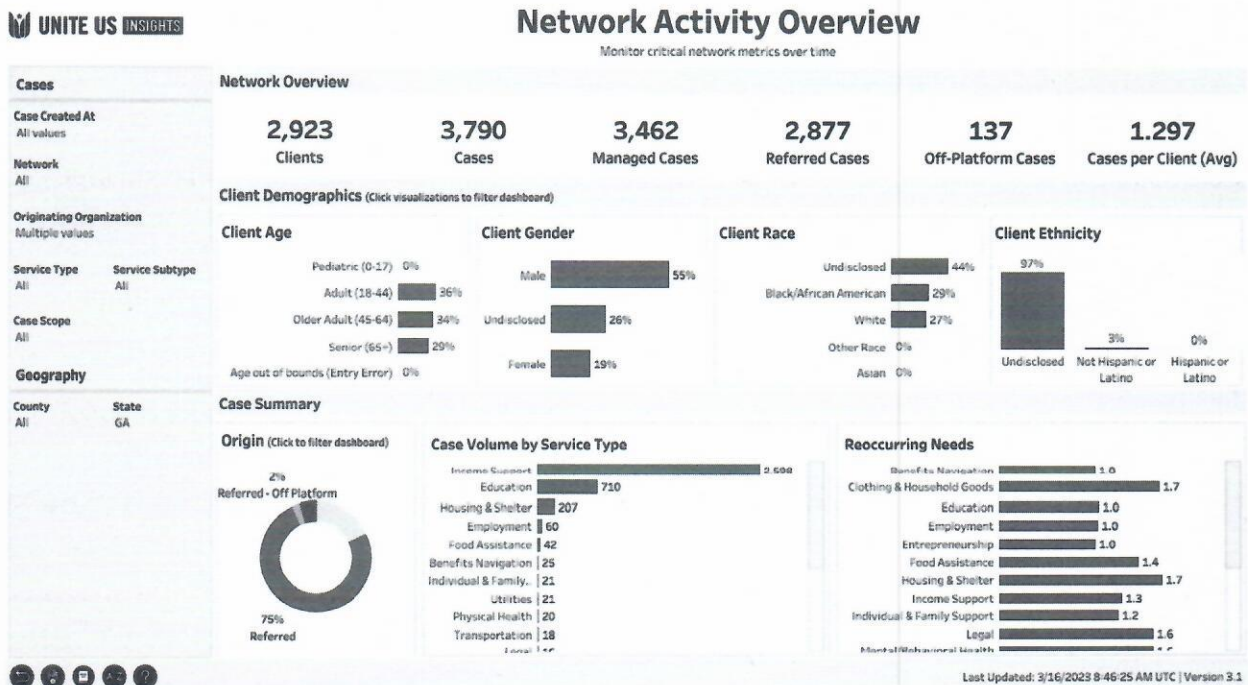
Defense Department's Vietnam Veteran Surviving Spouse CoH – **291**

Upcoming event – March 29, Chattooga County Extension Service Office
(<https://allongeorgia.com/chattooga-local-news/chattooga-county-vietnam-veterans-honor-ceremony-scheduled/>)

National Vietnam Veterans Day is next Wednesday. We will be at an event in Chattooga County. We are happy to provide certificates and pins for anyone who needs them for a Vietnam veteran.

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 has been slow but we are moving forward. As of March 13, 2023, we have **29,473** in the system and growing. Completed latest SFTP data transfer to Unite Us on March 13, 2023. We have submitted **816** community partners and **313** healthcare partners for inclusion to the platform since August 2022.
 - Below is an activity snapshot from Unite Us Insights:



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- Our Warner Robins GDVS office is ranked #6 (1496 Unite Us referrals received during the pilot program) and #10 (1080 Unite Us referrals received from October 25, 2022 to present) in the entire national network.
- We received our first batch of data back from Unite Us on February 16, 2023 containing social needs indicators, via SFTP.
- Grant financial management- vendor management set up, issues with state external auditors (RSM), payments to vendor, and grant reimbursement are 100% up to date since we received the payment advance.
- Attended weekly Unite Us meetings. The next quarterly report is due to the state on April 15, 2023.
- 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 started analyzing data collection and the latest submission to the VA on March 6, 2023.
 - Our first funds draw for \$144,803.00 was completed on February 2, 2023, and the KSU invoice was paid on February 3, 2023. The next draw will occur during the first week of April.
 - Attended SSG Fox Grant meeting on March 16, 2023.
 - Mandatory Fox Grant Conference will be on March 27-30, 2023.
 - Our first quarterly report will be due on April 21, 2023, encompassing the first 6 months of the grant.
 - Fox Grant renewal notice was sent out to all recipients and is due to the VA via UDPaaS on May 19, 2023 (no exceptions).
 - Calandra Ferguson or Veda Brooks will report all the outreach and training events regarding Suicide Prevention under the Fox Grant.
 - Calandra Ferguson provided the outreach and training data reports, and we transmitted it to the VA on March 3, 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 1,820 educational institutions and training establishments where Georgia veterans may attend school or job training and utilize their GI Bill® educational benefits.

Item *	Number
Approved Educational Institutions	394
Approved Training Establishments	1,426
Veteran Students Enrolled in Educational Institutions	18,683

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

Our team will be providing training on April 5-7 with Georgia VA certifying officials in Braselton regarding upcoming changes to the program.

Mr. Russell Feagin, Director, Health & Memorials Division

We continue to have ongoing construction projects as well as projected projects within the Division. There are four projects currently underway at the Georgia War Veterans Home:

- 1) Completion of the SubAcute Therapy Unit which consists of modifications to the Russell and Wheeler Building and new construction of the Transition Support Unit. The renovations and construction are complete. We are currently pending the integration of IT networks and phone systems within these buildings. This should be completed within 30 days.
- 2) Completion of the Food Service Facility. Major construction is complete. We are pending installation of equipment within the facility. Completion is expected to take 30-60 days.
- 3) Completion of the COVID-19 prevention enhancements within facility. This includes sneeze guards, screening devices throughout the building, improvements to the ventilation systems, and enhanced access security throughout the campus. Completion of parts of this project is dependent on completion of the IT network. Anticipated completion is 60-90 days.

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- 4) Installation of sidewalk canopies in connection with the Food Service Facility and Transition Support Unit.

Currently underway at the Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Milledgeville is an expansion of the columbarium facilities. This will increase the number of available above ground spaces for cremated remains. We will be preparing a grant application to request funding to expand the in-ground burial capacity in the cemetery, as well.

State funds have been approved for projects at the Georgia War Veterans Home to make improvements and meet Americans with Disability Act (ADA) requirements. Grant applications are being developed to receive federal funds. These projects will include:

- 1) Renovation of bathrooms in the Wood Building for ADA compliance. While this is an improvement of the facilities, it will result in the loss of thirty-three beds in the building.
- 2) Renovation of the Vinson Building to add sinks and toilets in the patient rooms and convert some three person rooms to two person rooms. This will also result in a loss of bed capacity.
- 3) Funds are in the FY 2024 budget to make ADA modifications to the Wheeler Building and additional needed repairs.
- 4) While not eligible for VA matching grant funds, there is a budget item in the FY 2024 budget to repave the existing parking lots and driveways.

We have requested FY 2024 funds to make a necessary expansion of the Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery-Glenngville. This expansion will increase the number of in-ground burial spaces.

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

1. Georgia War Veterans Home (GWVH) is COVID-free for veterans and staff.
2. Ms. Takosha Swan toured the GWVH and the Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery on 02/24/23.
3. Ms. Swan offered many good suggestions for fundraising to complete short- and long-term projects at the GWVH. Suggestions included developing fundraising packages to name buildings, hallways, wings, etc. Health & Memorials have a meeting with the architect on 03/17/23 to discuss developing cost projections for the following short-term projects:
 - a. Renovation of A & C wings on Wheeler Building 3rd floor.
 - b. Construction of a recreational building to house ceramics and kilns, leather work, etc.
 - c. Renovation of the pavilion at Cedar Pond.

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4. Health & Memorials division is also developing a list of new and renovated construction projects that still require naming.
5. Working with the Georgia Department of Administrative Services (DOAS) to evaluate vendor responses for bidding on the contract on the Georgia War Veterans Home to become effective on 7/1/23.
6. Status of staffing by Pruitt Health for Subacute Unit- no change from February
 - a. Psychiatrist-Pruitt Health is pursuing a contract with Salveo Integrative Health for psychiatry services with a start date to be determined.
 - b. Neuropsychologist- Pruitt is contracting with consultant Dr. Jeremy Hertza through Integrated Psych Solutions.
 - c. LPN/RN- Pruitt is continuing to recruit.
 - d. OT/PT/SLP- Pruitt is continuing to recruit.
7. 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. Pruitt staff continues to provide patient de-escalation and safety training campus wide.

There was a discussion regarding mental health services for patients at the homes, specifically in regard to suicide prevention. Ms. Jarrett described what is available, including standardized screening for patients, counselors, and that there are policies and procedures in place for this.

Mr. Carlton Deese, Executive Director GWVNH, Augusta, GA

There are mental health services across the street here. We have a sharing agreement with the local VA with a mental health partnership. We get every veteran the appropriate assistance. The VA has made it a priority to have these partnerships in place.

We are moving forward with the electronic medical record process. It will go live this summer.

Mr. Kerry Dyer, Chief Operations Officer

On Friday, February 24, 2023, Kerry Dyer met with Marlon Benjamin, Georgia Building Authority Manager to discuss the removal of the DD214 filing cabinets.

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On Monday, February 27, 2023, Kerry Dyer met virtually with Tonya Jarrett, Linda Lavender, Mark Bannister, and Mark Meeks to participate in the Request for Proposal Evaluation for the Georgia War Veterans Home. Later that day he attended the NextGen Finance Workshop along with Shareka Monday-Robinson.

On Tuesday, February 28, 2023, Kerry Dyer along with Shareka Monday-Robinson attended the NextGen Accounting and HCM Teamwork's Workshop. Later that day he scrubbed the monthly Gains/Loss Roster Promotions Merit List, Department Alpha Roster, Position numbers Roster and distributed to the Senior Leadership. He also posted the Glennville Cemetery Grounds Maintenance Tech 1 vacancy.

On Wednesday, March 1, 2023, Kerry Dyer along with Shareka Monday-Robinson attended the NextGen General Ledger, Payroll and Contract Management Workshop. Later that day he met virtually with Unite Us to discuss the Social Connector implementation.

On Thursday, March 2, 2023, Kerry Dyer along with Shareka Monday-Robinson attended the NextGen Planning/Budget/Forecasting and Absence Management Workshop. Later that day he conducted a site visit at the Newnan new Field Office along with Ken Childre, Steve Fay, Glenn Massey, Barbara Serrano and Leslie Davis, State Property Leasing Specialist.

On Friday, March 3, 2023, Kerry Dyer spoke with Teesha Prieto, Sales Manager at Embassy Suites to discuss reservations for 2023 Annual Training. Later that day he submitted the monthly Fleet Management Report to DOAS.

On Monday, March 6, 2023, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Directors meeting. He also met virtually with Tonya Jarrett, Linda Lavender, Mark Bannister, and Mark Meeks to conduct a follow-up on the Request for Proposal Evaluation for the Georgia War Veterans Home. Later that day he attended the Unite Us Social Connector and Fox Grant meeting.

On Tuesday, March 7, 2023, Kerry Dyer along with Commissioner Ross and ShellyAnn Simpson met with Chunghee Park, Korean Vietnam Veterans Association to discuss upcoming ceremonies. Later that day he met with Marlon Benjamin, Georgia Building Authority to discuss the renovation of the 9th floor common area. He also spoke with Patrick Bean, Transition Services Manager at Fort Stewart regarding Office Space for a Veterans Field Service Office.

On Wednesday, March 8, 2023, Kerry Dyer along with Commissioner Ross, Mark Bannister, Shelly-Ann Simpson, Shareka Monday-Robinson, Charlotte May, Gerald Lahr, Will Wilson and Kirsten Dennis, attended the FY23 Budget Expenditures Conference given by Camala Ball, GDVS Budget Analyst. He also processed two new hire packets for the Appeals Division. Later that day he attended the Senate Subcommittee brief along with Commissioner Ross, Mark Bannister.

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On Thursday, March 9, 2023, Kerry Dyer along with Shareka Monday-Robinson processed a resignation packet. Later that day he met with Commissioner Ross to discuss the implementation of the GDVS Leadership Institute.

On Friday, March 9, 2023, Kerry Dyer attended Commissioner Ross' Open Forum virtually along with employees from the Department. Later that day he spoke with Steven Goldsmith, Pope Patterson Inc to discuss the digitalization of the DD214's and Mandatory Contracts vs Convenience Contracts.

On Monday, March 13, 2023, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Directors meeting. Later that day along with Shareka Monday-Robinson he attended the NextGen HCM Recruitment & Workforce Management workshop. He also met with Tonya Jarrett, Linda Lavender, Mark Bannister, and Mark Meeks to participate in the Request for Proposal Evaluation for the Georgia War Veterans Home.

On Tuesday, March 14, 2023, Kerry Dyer processed a resignation packet for the Marietta Field Office. Later that day he spoke with John Conners, CWC Furniture to discuss the renovation of the 9th floor Suite.

On Wednesday March 15, 2023, Kerry Dyer posted the Marietta Office vacancy internally and externally. He also met virtually with Bobby Arrington, DOAS Fleet Manager to discuss the process of leasing a vehicle.

On Thursday, March 16, 2023, Kerry Dyer spoke to Mark Meeks, DOAS Procurement Manager about the Cost and Technical Scoring for the Georgia War Veterans Home. He along with Commissioner Ross, Shareka Monday-Robinson, Mark Bannister, Camala Ball and Shelly-Ann Simpson met to discuss the Leave Conversion Policy. Later that day he met virtually with Amanda Hawkins, Office of Planning and Budget to discuss the Quarterly Reporting Requirements.

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

Location	Position	Status	Name	Date
Marietta	VFSO 1	Resigned	Melvin Taylor	03/15/23
Appeals Division	VCAO 1	New Hire	Erika McKibben	03/16/23
Appeals Division	VCAO 1	New Hire	Pablo Cruz	03/16/23
Appeals Division	VCAO 1	Resigned	Tawana Wiley	03/16/23
Milledgeville	VFSO 1	New Hire	Eric Fowler	03/16/23
Columbus	VFSO 1	Resigned	Alise Scott	03/31/23

Highlights:

On the horizon: Digitalization of the DD214's, New Field Office on Fort Stewart, and Relocation of the Newnan Field Office.

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

FINANCE

Accounting

Routine operations are continuing.

Through accounting procedural guidance and assistance from the State Accounting Shared Services, we continue to work together efficiently as a team to complete required end – of – year budget reports, monthly allotments, and amendments. As we continue with our accounting and budget operations, we're making adjustments and improvements in the areas of better management and oversight of our operating budget, general ledgers, timely submission of invoice payments and processing of purchase orders. We've reestablished greater communication with our vendors – payments to vendors of our State Veterans Homes.

Budget and General

As of this writing, we are at legislative day 33 of the 40 days of the 2023 Legislative Session. The General Assembly has been actively progressing through its scheduled meetings and budget hearings.

FY 2024

On Thursday, March 9, 2023, Commissioner Ross presented GDVS' FY 2024 budget to the members of the Senate Appropriations Health and Human Development Subcommittee. This most likely will be the final budget brief to the members of the General Assembly for the 2023 Session before SINE DIE as projected on Wednesday, March 29, 2023.

AFY 2023

Per notification from OPB, Governor Kemp signed HB 18, the Amended FY 2023, appropriations, and mid-year budget on March 13, 2023. GDVS requested approval of additional funds in both the AFY 2023 and FY 2024 budgets to support COLA adjustments for all vacant, full-time positions within our department to address agency recruiting needs. Our request was recommended by the House and was presented to the Senate in the FY 2024 budget request.

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The table below provides a summary of HB 18, (FY 2023A) appropriations and budget for the GDVS as approved by the Governor.

Approved House & Senate Versions

Fiscal Program	State/Total Funding	Notes
Veterans Service, Department of	\$53,520,940	Total Funds
	\$24,210,246	Federal Funds and Grants.
	\$3,215,491	Other Funds.
	\$26,095,203	State Funds.
Administration (DVS)	\$2,941,644	Total Funds
	\$2,031,065	Previous amount from HB 911.
	\$160,579	One-time funds to digitize DD Form 214's.
	\$750,000	Increase funds for a military families' mental health clinic.
Cemeteries	\$1,291,051	Total Funds
	\$327,896	Federal Funds and Grants.
	\$963,155	State Funds
	(\$1,000,000) *	Reduces funds for delay in establishment of a veteran's cemetery in Augusta. *Funds will be restored in FY 2024 budget.
Nursing Homes	\$39,934,291	Total Funds
	\$23,128,424	Federal Funds.
	\$3,215,491	Fees, bonds, and services.
	\$13,340,376	State Funds.
	\$250,000*	*Increase funds to support recruitment, retention, and training of staff for the sub-acute therapy unit.
Veterans Benefits	\$9,353,954	Total Funds
	\$753,926	Federal Funds and Grants.
	\$8,600,028	State funds.
General Obligation Bonds	\$510,000	Bond #43 (60-months)
	\$2,510,000	Bond #44 (240-months)

HEALTH AND MEMORIALS

State Veterans Homes

State Veterans Homes Census (Through March 10, 2023) +

Current Month	Augusta	Milledgeville	Total
Regular Patients	100	115	215
Service Connected *	28	39	67
Total Patients	128	154	282
Last Month			
Regular Patients	99	101	200
Service Connected *	27	37	64
Total Patients	126	138	264

*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 total numbers from February 13, 2023, through March 10, 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 March 10, 2023)+

State Veterans Cemetery	Cumulative Last Month	Cumulative Current Month	Increase
Glennville	2,240	2,250	10
Milledgeville	5,038	5,066	28
Total	7,278	7,316	38

+ The report to the VSB are the total numbers from February 10, 2023, through March 10, 2023.

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery – Glennville

Routine operations are continuing.

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Milledgeville

Routine operations are continuing.

OLD BUSINESS:

There was no old business to discuss.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

There were no announcements.

NEW BUSINESS:

The April 19 Board meeting was scheduled. It will be a combination virtual and in-person meeting, set up at the GDVS.

Mr. Kopsie made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Paslawski seconded the motion. There were no objections and the motion passed. The meeting adjourned at approximately 1:17 p.m.

SIGNED:



Shawn Hanley, Chair

ATTEST:


Joshua Kopsie, Secretary

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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, April 19, 2023, at 12:30 p.m. The Webex link is:
<https://georgiadepartmentofveteransservice.webex.com/georgiadepartmentofveteransservice/j.php?MTID=m99eab0ebe9ff4f14dd28f477>

Meeting password: **cHMwbh3J4t& (24692435 from video systems)**

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

Access Code: **2342 168 1557**