

**Tuesday March 26, 2024 at 12:30 p.m.**  
**Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting**  
**Atlanta, Georgia**

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

**Visitors** Ms. Shelly-Ann Simpson, Executive Director, Field Operations & Appeals, GDVS  
**Present:** Mr. Mark Demers, Chief Development Officer, Chief Finance Officer, GDVS  
Mr. Russell Feagin, Executive Director, Health & Memorials Division, GDVS  
Mr. Kerry Dyer, Chief Operations Officer, GDVS  
Ms. Jehae Kim, Assistant Attorney General, Attorney General's Office  
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. Samantha Brown-Parks, Veterans Service Foundation Board Secretary  
Mr. Rick White, Veterans Service Foundation Board  
Ms. Vivian Greentree, Veterans Service Foundation Board  
Mr. Don Layne, VECTR Chief Operating Officer  
Mr. Carlton Deese, Executive Director GWVNH, Augusta, GA  
Ms. Linda Lavender, Director, Milledgeville Cemetery  
Mr. Bobby Davis, Director, Veterans Education & Training, GDVS  
Ms. Charlotte May, Director, Public Information and External Affairs, GDVS  
Ms. Shareka Monday-Robinson, Director, Human Resources, GDVS  
Ms. Ramona Roper, Director, Training Division, GDVS  
Ms. Sherri Whitfield, Director, Veterans Benefits South Region, GDVS  
Mr. Ken Childre, Director, Veterans Benefits North Region, GDVS  
Mr. Edwin Berry, Director, Appeals Division, GDVS  
Ms. Veda Brooks, Coordinator, Women & Minority Veterans, GDVS  
Ms. Calandra Ferguson, Coordinator, Suicide Prevention & Outreach, GDVS  
Mr. William Wilson, Network Administrator, GDVS  
Ms. Camala Ball, Budget Analyst, GDVS  
Ms. Irene Mackson, Business Support Analyst, GDVS  
Ms. Monica Dorsey, Communications & Outreach Specialist, GDVS  
Ms. Latoya McCallum, Administrative Assistant, GDVS  
Ms. Latika Archie, Administrative Assistant, GDVS  
Ms. Julie Hammond, Executive Assistant to the Commissioner, GDVS

On Tuesday, March 26, 2024, the Veterans Service Board meeting was held in person and by video/tele-conference.

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Mr. Paslawski called the meeting to order at 12:31 p.m. Mr. Peterson gave the invocation. Commissioner Ross led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

Mr. Peterson 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. 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 a virtual Quarterly VSO/Director's meeting hosted by Director Tony Milons and Brian Morgan, Change Management Analyst (CMA), held on February 28, 2024, at 1PM - 2PM. The following issues were briefed:
  - PACT Act Most Common Granted Disabilities
    - Allergic Rhinitis
    - Hypertensive Vascular Disease
    - Maxillary Sinusitis
    - Bronchial Asthma
    - Malignant Growths of Genitourinary
  - PACT Act Updates
  - Renaming of VA Atlanta Regional Office – Isakson VA Regional Office
    - March 25, 2024, at 10AM
  - Upcoming Outreach Events
  - VBA Update
  - VR&E Job Fair on January 25, 2024, was a success.
    - 404 Job Seekers
    - 43 Employers
- The Department Service Officer attended a VFW National Veterans Service (NVS) Eastern Region virtual meeting held on February 28, 2024, at 1PM – 2PM.
  - We discussed the following:
    - VA Home Loan Guarantee Covid Refund Modification Programs Extended through May 31, 2024
    - DFAS Survivor Benefit Plan Resources
    - VA Undersecretary of Health Issues Key Priorities

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- VA provided free emergency suicide prevention care to nearly 50,000 Veterans and former service members in the first year of new policy.
  - TRICARE Specialty Medication Update
  - VA Issues Statement in response to a Newsweek story on OIT and Cybersecurity
  - VHA aligns with leading health care organizations to ensure trustworthy use of AI.
- 
- The Department Service Officer attended The Atlanta Regional Office Employee Coin Recognition with The Honorable Tanya Bradsher, Deputy Secretary of Veteran Affairs. The event was held on February 29, 2024, at 2PM.
  - The Department Service Officer attended a VSO Roundtable with Al Bocchicchio, VA Southeast District Director virtual meeting held on February 28, 2024, at 1PM - 2PM. We discussed the following:
    - Discussed the VSO's issues and concerns.
    - VBA Update
  - The Department Service Officer attended the Monthly VSO/Community Partner PACT Information and Listening meeting hosted by Lauren Ruchin, Atlanta VHA. The virtual meeting was held on February 08, 2023, at 12PM – 1PM.
    - The purpose of the meeting was to share information about the PACT Act and to discuss how our Veterans are being impacted by the PACT Act.
    - We discussed ways to ensure that our Veterans gain access to the healthcare, benefits, and resources they earned and deserve!
    - Provided Veterans' feedback about the PACT Act Outreach initiatives.
    - Discussed upcoming Outreach events.

**Ms. Raven Holstick, GDVS, American Legion Service Officer**

- March 12, 2024, Department Service officer and Assistant Department Service officer held a virtual Post service officer class. 15 Post service officer attended and learned roles and responsibilities for Post service officers.
- March 14, 2024, Monthly PACT Act Information & Listening Sessions for Veteran Service Organizations and Community Partners. During this session Atlanta VAMC shared information about the PACT Act and assisting Veterans in gaining access to the healthcare, benefits, and resources.
- Department Service officer attended hearing at Coverdell Building to support HB1323 Predatory Claims Bill.

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- American Legion State Commander and Leadership went to National Convention in Washington D.C.

**Upcoming events:**

- Monthly Virtual Post service officer training will be held for new service officers. Training topics will be on the roles and responsibilities as a post service officer. This training will continue to be held monthly as new service officers arrive.
- Spring Conference Duluth GA, March 22-24.
- Department Service Officer will speak on Post Service Officer Roles and Responsibilities and VA updates at Spring Conference on March 23, 2024 @ 2:00.

**Commissioner Patricia Ross**

On Tuesday, February 27, 2024, Commissioner Ross met with her leadership team to discuss the book "The Five Disfunctions of a Team" by Patrick Lencioni. She then attended the Veterans Service Board Meeting. Later in the day she joined Rep. Sandra Scott and the House Committee for Defense & Veterans Affairs to discuss HB 1323, The Fair Business Practices Act.

On Wednesday, February 28, 2024, Commissioner Ross met with Granicus, a digital communications company that works with government agencies to modernize their online services. She then attended a meeting of the Marietta Rotary, where she received a \$5,000 donation check for the Georgia Veterans Service Foundation. She then fielded phone calls regarding the Fair Business Practices Act. She also kicked off a webinar with the Department of Community Affairs for veterans and the state's mortgage assistance program.

On Thursday, February 29, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended the Veterans Service Foundation Board meeting, which dealt with their search for a fundraising consultant. She spent the remainder of the day with the Deputy Secretary of the VA, Tanya Bradsher, touring the Atlanta VA Medical Center and Regional Office.

On Friday, March 1, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended a Teams meeting on Veteran's Legacy Grant Programs. She spent the remainder of the day at the Technical College System of Georgia with her team for a Unite Us Business Review and Planning Session.

On Monday, March 4, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended a Women Veterans Breakfast in Washington, DC, with a small group of other senior VSO representatives. The VA Secretary hosted the breakfast, and it included the Deputy Secretary, the Chief of Staff, and Director of the Center of Women Veterans, among others.

On Tuesday, March 5, 2024, Commissioner Ross held a Director's Meeting.

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On Wednesday, March 6, 2024, Commissioner Ross briefed the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee. Afterwards, she met with Rear Admiral Stuart Satterwhite and his delegation in the GDVS Conference Room. Later she met with Brett Lacy with the Office of Workforce Development to discuss veteran employment initiatives in Fulton County.

On Thursday, March 7, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended the Women's Legislative Breakfast sponsored by Sen. Tonya Anderson and Rep. Sandra Scott, along with other women veterans from GDVS. She also attended the quarterly meeting of the Veterans Service Foundation Board. Following that, she attended a Unite Us Insights Workforce Management meeting and a bi-weekly meeting on the digitization of the DD214's.

On Friday, March 8, 2024, Commissioner Ross spent the day at Gwinnett Tech assisting with an outreach event with The Warrior Alliance, the VA and other veteran service organizations.

On Monday, March 11, Commissioner Ross held a Director's Meeting. She then attended a meeting regarding Section 103 and expanding VA Healthcare. She later had a meeting regarding issues at the LaGrange field office.

On Tuesday, March 12, 2024, Commissioner Ross met with Megan Dyer of the Metro Chamber of Commerce, which will be the venue for a fundraising breakfast for the Veterans Service Foundation on 29 April. She then attended the Georgia Military Veterans Hall of Fame ceremony at the Capitol, as a member of the Class of 2023, where her class was unveiled. Later she met with Robert Persch, Kiewit Corporation's Veteran and Craft Advocate, who works to identify and train people who are leaving the military for work in the construction industry.

On Wednesday, March 13, 2024, Commissioner Ross visited the Georgia Military College where she toured the campus and spoke on Organizational Leadership for almost 300 cadets attending the Leadership & Character Development Course.

On Thursday, March 14, 2024, Commissioner Ross interviewed Ms. Lily Snyder for the position of Director of SAA. She then met with Wesley Myrick with the City of Atlanta to connect with those working homeless issues for the Mayor. The intent is to better integrate into their initiatives to better serve our veterans. Later she met with Phillip Stringfield to discuss programs for veterans.

On Friday, March 15, 2024, Commissioner Ross led the Leadership Institute on the topic of "Changing Landscape" and the budget and legislative process this year. She then attended the retirement luncheon for Bobby Davis, Director of SAA. In the evening, she attended the New American Hero Award Gala, hosted by the American Korean Friendship Society.

On Monday, March 18, 2024, Commissioner Ross held a Director's Meeting. She then had a lunch discussion with Veterans Service Board Chair Josh Kopsie concerning the Veterans Treatment Court in Cobb County. Later she attended the Unite Us bi-weekly meeting and the Fox Grant Update meeting.

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On Tuesday, March 19, 2024, Commissioner Ross visited Chairman Oz Nesbitt in Rockdale County to tour his facility and see what programs he has for veterans. She then met with Sonia Wilson-Westmoreland with the City of Atlanta Office of Workforce Development to better connect veterans needing employment and training. She also had a meeting with Rob LeBeau who is the director of the 7 surrounding metro counties for Workforce Development. She later met with Shelly-Ann Simpson and Veda Brooks on integrating into FT Moore's transition seminar through Child and Youth Services.

On Wednesday, March 20, 2024, Commissioner Ross was the guest speaker at the Tim D. Lee Senior Center. She then hosted a delegation from the Korean Vietnam Veterans Association at GDVS.

On Thursday, March 21, 2024, Commissioner Ross and her leadership team met with Annie Brock regarding the Leader Transition Institute. She then attended the VBA VSO Quarterly Meeting. She also listened to the Senate Budget Hearing.

On Friday, March 22, 2024, Commissioner Ross held an Open Forum for the department. She also was the guest speaker at the American Legion Fall Conference in Duluth. Later that day she and her team visited furniture vendors in preparation for central office renovations.

On Saturday, March 23, 2024, Commissioner Ross was the guest speaker at the Blinded Veterans Association Annual Convention in Warner Robins.

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

- **DD 214's and Welcome Home Letters:** 513 Welcome Home Letters were mailed out in February, 2024.

**PROJECTED POSITIONS**

- Current opening in LaGrange

**Ms. Ramona Roper, Director of Training Division:**

- February 22, 2024, members of the South Georgia Training Division conducted hybrid training via MS Teams. The class was conducted on filing Disability Compensation. Compensation is a mandated subject for accreditation purposes by the Department of Veterans Affairs.
- February 23, 2024, Ms. Ramona Roper conducted a 2024 Annual Training conference meeting. This meeting included members of the Training Division and Field Service Officers selected to assist in selected training modules as Guest Trainers. Serving as Guest Trainers gives these individuals

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opportunities to lead classes and develop training materials. This meeting was also a collaboration of ideas for subjects taught during the conference.

- March 7, 2024, Ms. Ramona Roper attended the Military & Women's Legislative Breakfast hosted by Senator Tonya Anderson. The breakfast celebrated women veterans for Women's History Month.
- March 7, 2024, Mr. Steven Fay and Mr. Glenn Massey conducted hybrid training with the members of the Appeals Division. The class was conducted on filing Disability Compensation. Compensation is a mandated subject for accreditation purposes by the Department of Veterans Affairs.
- March 8, 2024, Ms. Ramona Roper, Mr. Steven Fay and Mr. Glenn Massey participated in the Warrior Alliance Veterans event at Gwinnett Technical College in Lawrenceville, Georgia. This event assisted veterans with applying for benefits like VA healthcare, benefits, caregiver programs, education and many other benefits from multiple organizations that assist veterans and their families.
- March 7 & 14, 2024, Mr. Charles Issac attended the 100 Black Men of Liberty County (Veterans) meetings. This organization, comprised of men and veterans in the community, mentor young black males in education, community service, and career choices. The organization held the annual banquet on Saturday, March 16, 2024. For 2024, Mr. Isaac serves as the Financial Officer. He has also served as the President in previous years.

**Upcoming Events:**

- Daily continued ongoing support to the Regional Directors and Veteran Field Service Offices
- Continuation of performing duties as VSO's
- Collaboration meetings for 2024 Annual Training conference (bi-weekly meetings)

**Mr. Edwin Berry, Director of Appeals Division**

- The total number of hearings conducted by the Appeals Division for February 2024 was **74**.
- As of **March 1, 2024**, the Atlanta VA Regional Office processed benefits as follows for GDVS and the Service Organizations represented by GDVS during the month of February 2024:

**The grand total of monthly compensation and benefits for the veterans, family members and surviving spouses increased by \$1,794,595.00. The number of awards grew by 534 veterans and family members.**

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Types of Claims	Number of Awards	Benefits paid	(Change)
Compensation	106,010 (+517)	\$235,658,195.00	(+2,175,720)
DIC	4,002 (+34)	\$6,879,027.00	(+54,559)
Survivor Pension	723 (+3)	\$693,908.00	(+7,740)
<u>Veteran Pension</u>	<u>1,423 (-20)</u>	<u>\$1,684,948.00</u>	<u>(-18,684)</u>
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>112,624 (+534)</b>	<b>\$244,916,077.00</b>	<b>(+1,794,595)</b>
<b>\$487,613,089 YTD thru 2/29/2024</b>			

**Mr. Kenneth Childre, Director Veterans Benefits North Region**

Retro Awards: February 2024-\$1,545,192.72

Included in the Retro Award was a single award:

Compensation

Linton-3770:\$106,283.76 (Rico Johnson-Gainesville)

Director Site Visits/Inspections: 5

Community Involvement:

Feb 13-Kyle Hungarter (Marietta)-Attended event at Cobb Senior Center. 20 attendees and discussed Claims and Pension benefits along with State level benefits.

Feb 16-Rico Johnson (Gainesville)-Taught VA S.A.V.E. Training in Riverdale, Ga for the Veteran Health and Wellness Fair.

Feb 28-Terrance Leggon (Conyers)-Visited Retreat of Conyers. Provided services to 2 Veterans and 1 Surviving Spouse.

Mar 8-PACT Act Event at Gwinnett Technical College hosted by Warrior Alliance. Assisted over 100 Veterans/family members. Filed 58 claims.

Joe Baker, Herman Hammonds, Vanessa Wilson (Atlanta VAMC), Roderica Stewart (Decatur CBOC), Christina Williams, Nicole Cruz (Lawrenceville CBOC), Tanya Rogers (Gainesville), Pablo Cruz (Oakwood CBOC), Glenn Massey (Training).

North Area Gains/Losses: (Abbreviated version at last Board Meeting)

Atlanta Balcony-Cedric Brant-Resigned Effective 1 Feb 24

Atlanta Balcony-Shaunda Mathieu-New Hire Effective 1 Feb 24

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Augusta War Veterans Home-Mary Moore-New Hire Effective 1 Feb 24  
 Augusta War Veterans Home-Tyrone McBride-New Hire Effective 16 Feb 24  
 Augusta VAMC-Joseph Hurndon-Transferred to Waynesboro Effective 1 Feb 24  
 Augusta VAMC-Sharonica Mitchell-Transferred from Augusta Veterans Effective 12 Feb 24  
 Gainesville-John Wagenknecht-Resigned Effective 31 Jan 24  
 Gainesville-Tanya Rogers-New Hire Effective 1 Feb 24  
 Lawrenceville-Pablo Cruz-Transferred to Oakwood Effective 12 Feb 24  
 Lawrenceville-Nicole Cruz-Transferred from Athens Effective 12 Feb 24  
 Oakwood-Nick Treadway-Resigned Effective 9 Feb 24

Average Visits Per VFSO

Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO

Region:

North

Month:

February-24

A	B	C	D	E	D / E F	G	G / E H
Office Name	Veterans' Field Service Officer (VFSO) Last Name	#	Total Monthly Office Visits	Work Days In Month	Average Office Visits Per Day	Total Claims Submitted To VA Monthly	Average Claims Submitted By VFSOs To VA Daily
Number of VFSOs:		52	8,428	21	401.33	2,063	98.24
Number of Offices:	29	Average Visits/Office:			290.62	Average Claims/Office: 71.137931	

\*Total monthly office visits include: 2,381 In-person and 6,047 phone calls/emails.

**Ms. Sherri Whitfield, Director Veterans Benefits South Region**

- On March 14, 2024, Debbie O'Neal in our Lyons office and Nicole Clark in our Dublin office participated in the annual Women Veteran's Recognition Event at the Carl Vinson VAMC in Dublin. The event was hosted by the VFW. Over 40 female veterans were recognized with certificates and pins.
- On March 22, 2024, Vershawn Moses in our Warner Robins office gave a presentation to a group of veterans at the VECTR. He did this at the request of Judith Foster, HUDVASH Coordinator from the Carl Vinson Medical Center, Dublin, GA. Mr. Moses presented information about GDVS and explained what services we provide.
- On March 23, 2024, Chris McKan in our Ft. Moore office participated in a veterans' workshop. Veterans were provided literature pertaining to VA benefits. Then a consolidated panel held a Q&A session to address any issues or questions veterans may have.

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- South region offices reported lump sum payments since the last board meeting of \$926,491.71 with the highest single amount of \$129,271.32 reported by the Ft. Moore field office.
- South Georgia Region Veterans Population: 237,759.

**Ms. Veda Brooks, Women Veterans Coordinator (WVC)**

- February 21, 2024, Ms. Brooks facilitated the Regional State Women Veteran Coordinators Meeting (North Carolina, Florida, Alabama, and Tennessee were present).
- February 29, 2024, Ms. Brooks participated in a meeting with Elevate. They provide couple counseling and classes that better serve their relationship.
- March 1, 2024, Ms. Brooks participated in a meeting with Ms. Johnson, CYS Parent Central Services, Fort Moore, GA 31905. Ms. Brooks participated in the Military Appreciation Day at the College Park Skyhawks game. GDVS was able to provide 60 free tickets to staff, veterans, and their families. The occasion was enjoyed by all participants.
- March 5, 2024, Ms. Brooks participated in the Military Health Advisory Board Meeting. Ms. Brooks visited the Augusta Rescue Mission, Garden City Rescue Mission and Family Promise.
- March 6, 2024, Ms. Brooks visited the Augusta Center of Hope and the Augusta Dream Center.
- March 7, 2024, Ms. Brooks participated in an outreach at the Community Outreach Resource Empowerment Plus shelter.
- March 8, 2024, Ms. Brooks completed a site visit for the May 18, 2024 Gwinnett Homeless Outreach at the American Legion Post 232, Snellville, GA.
- March 11, 2024, Ms. Brooks participated in the final walkthrough in Callaway Gardens, for the Let's Connect Summit.
- March 13, 2024, Ms. Brooks visited properties in Talbotton, GA.
- March 14, 2024, Ms. Brooks attended the Women Veterans Recognition.

**Current committees:**

- Violence Prevention Task Force
- VA/SAMHSA Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families Georgia Team
- Atlanta Advisory Committee on Homeless Veterans
- The Birdwell Foundation Board Member

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- Coweta County Race, Equity, and Justice Committee Unite Georgia Community Advisory Committee
- Farmer Street Cemetery Commission

**Ms. Calandra Fergerson, Suicide Prevention and Outreach Coordinator**

The Suicide Prevention team is growing, raising awareness, and training.

June 24-25 there will be a conference at Callaway Gardens focusing on "Connecting with Families."

**Mr. Mark Demers, Chief Development Officer/Chief Financial Officer**

**Accounting/Procurement:**

- Routine operations are continuing. We are continuously working to improve all accounts payable processing, to apply proper coding, accountability, organization of purchase orders, and on time payments.
- We are working with the SAO Shared Services to prepare the procurement and accounting data in Team Works for migration to Workday.
- Kirsten Dennis completed the latest office supply purchase (Appeals- \$1933.17, South Region- \$5488.45, North Region- \$4416.51 for a total of \$9904.96). This covers all field offices and appeals until August 2024.
- Staples shipping and delivery errors resulted in credits received totaling \$1321.09 back into field operations budget. Kirsten reordered supplies totaling \$1137.95.
- Purchase Card program at Georgia Department of Veterans Service is active. Latest training with Bank of America (BoA) was on March 19, 2024, the next session is on April 4, 2024, to go over reconciliation step by step.
- We are still pending access to the TeamWorks modules for reconciliation, which should be resolved before the next BoA session.

**Budget:**

- Highlights include:
  - AFY2024- (Updated February 20, 2024 [HB 915]) signed by the Governor.
    - Increase salaries (bonus not salary increase) by \$1000.
    - Transfer \$1,000,000 from cemeteries for Mental Health Grant (HB414).
    - Reduce funds for one vacancy in Administration (\$41,269)- Funds not reduced in House and Senate versions.
    - Funding to support transition to a new contract for GWVH in Milledgeville (\$200,000).
    - Increase funds for updates to Department Central Office (\$197,986).

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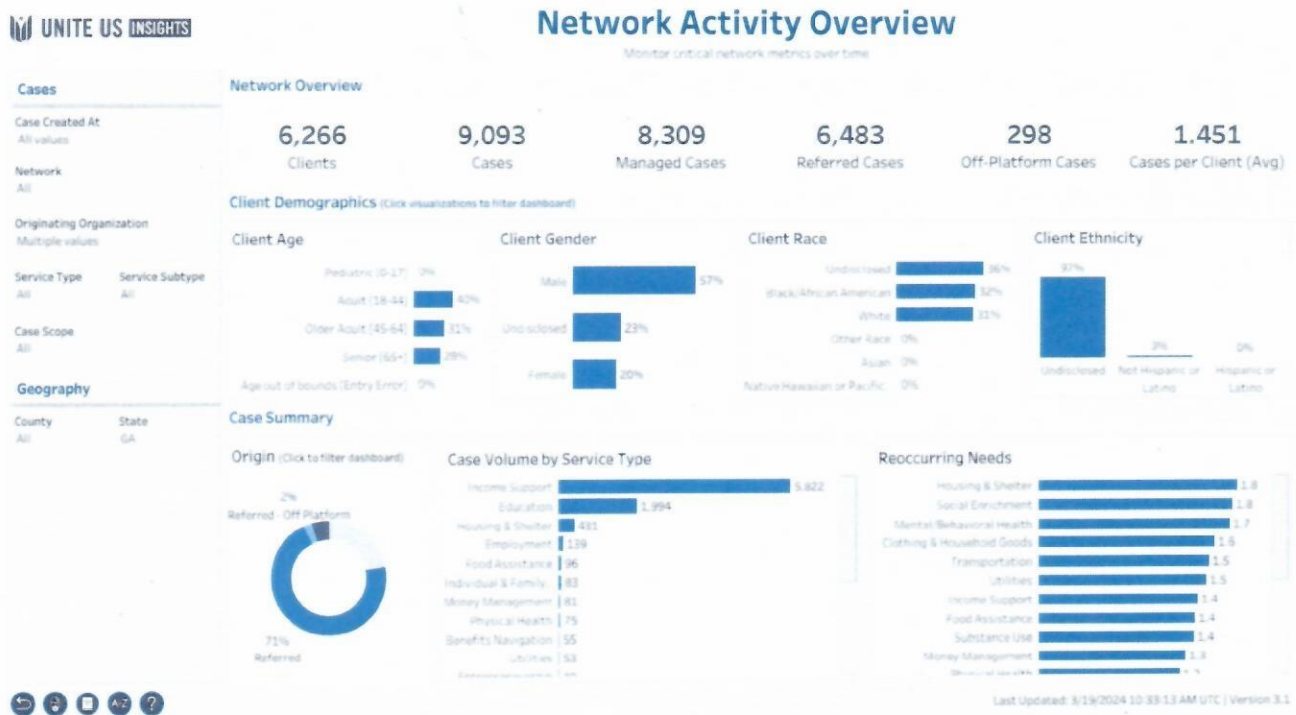
- FY2025- (Updated March 5, 2024) Awaiting Senate Version
  - COLA of 4% not to exceed \$3000 for salaries.
  - DOAS adjustments for insurance, increase for GBA, increase for GTA telecommunications, increase for merit systems assessments- this is to compensate for premium and fee increases.
  - Increase for TRS and health insurance premium increases.
  - Reduce funds for one vacancy in Administration (\$41,269)- Funds not reduced in House version.
  - Increase funds (\$135,597) for two positions in the new VA Houston County clinic.
  - Reduce funds for vacancies and reduced travel and training (\$94,328). - Funds not reduced in House version.
  - State funds returned for veterans cemetery in the Augusta area (\$1,000,000). State funds reallocated to FY25 Mental Health Grant in House version.
  - Increase funds to address rising cost of healthcare for homes -\$1,022,755 in House version.
  - Increase funds for a Homeless Coordinator- \$121,250 in House and Senate versions.
- Commissioner Ross presented our FY2025 to the Senate Health and Human Development Appropriations Subcommittee on March 5, 2024, at 0700.
- Camala Ball reviewed the pending non-budgeted positions reports requested by NextGen and has successfully determined positions that should be listed as budgeted positions as close those that are no longer needed.
- Camala Ball successfully submitted federal and other amendments for OPB to record revenue review. Pending approval is delayed by OPB due to other pressing projects. Once reviewed she will submit the AFY2024 amendments to reflect HB915 adjustments.
- Camala Ball worked on correcting reoccurring budget and general ledger errors in TeamWorks with the assistance of SAO.

**Grant Program:**

- SSG Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program- (\$747,464)
  - The latest grant fund draw was completed on March 1, 2024.
  - Fox Grant Mandatory Conference will be on May 6-9, 2024.
  - The next VA Grant Manager meeting will be April 9, 2024, at 1400.
- Unite-Us Grant- (American Rescue Plan-Negative Impact Grant)- \$6.1m per year (\$18.3m) over the course of 3 years starting July 1, 2022:
  - Data ingestion and secure data transfer for the platform and social connector is moving forward. As of March 19, 2024, we have **268,795** veterans in the system. We have submitted **1,080** community partners and **313** healthcare partners for inclusion to the platform since August 2022.

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- Attended the Unite Us Business Review and Planning Session on March 1, 2024, at TCSG.
- The latest quarterly report was submitted on January 9, 2024, with the next quarterly report due in April 2024.
- Below is an activity snapshot from Unite Us Insights:



- **Veterans Mental Health Services Program Grant (HB 414)**- Georgia Governor Brian Kemp signed HB 414 on April 25, 2023, with the support of state legislators and the Georgia Department of Veterans Service (GDVS). The bill creates the Veterans Mental Health Services Program, which is a grant program to improve access to mental health services for military service members, veterans, and their families in the state of Georgia. The grant program is funded through state appropriations in Fiscal Year 2023. The total grant funding is \$750,000 for FY2023 (executed by no later than 30 June 2023). The grant was awarded to two vendors:
  - Aspire (Cohen Veterans Network) for \$650,000.
  - Emory Healthcare for \$100,000.
- The money was allocated to both awardees, and they have received the funds.
- The latest quarterly reports were received on January 31, 2024, and both agencies are following grant guidelines. The next quarterly report is projected for April 2024.
- The Governor's budget approved \$1,000,000 for the next grant period with concurrence from the House and Senate.

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- The competitive grant process for year 2 will begin in April 2024.

**Veterans Service Foundation:**

- Irene Mackson will be assisting with foundation breakfast fundraiser on April 29, 2024.

**Events:**

- Attended Georgia Mortgage Assistance Veteran Webinar on February 28, 2024, at 1200.
- Attended Senate Health and Human Development Appropriations Subcommittee Hearing (FY2025) on March 6, 2024, at 0700.
- Attended the NASACT Webinar-Federal Funding 2024: Recipient and Single Audit Issues on March 6, 2024, at 1400.
- Irene Mackson attended the Military and Women Veterans Legislative Breakfast on March 7, 2024.
- Attended Georgia Military Veterans Hall of Fame dedication ceremony at the Georgia Capital on March 12, 2024.
- Camala Ball and Mark Demers attended Annual Vendor Liaison Training on March 13, 2024, at 0900 and follow up training on March 20, 2024, at 1000.
- Irene Mackson attended the Cobb Women's Event on March 13, 2024, at 0900.
- Attended NextGen Address discussion as a follow up to our Annual Vendor Liaison on March 20, 2024, at 1000-1130.
- Attended the SAO CFO Meeting on March 21, 2024, at 1000.
- The entire team participated in the "Five Dysfunctions of a Team" discussion with Commissioner Ross.
- Irene Mackson is scheduled to complete training for the Sexual Harassment Investigative Team soon per Leanne Sturgeon. She is also participating in Homeless Veteran Coordinator meetings.

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

**State Veterans Homes**

**State Veterans Homes Census (Through March 15, 2024) +**

Current Month	Augusta	Milledgeville	Total
Regular Patients	88	107	195
Service Connected *	29	35	64
Total Patients	117	142	259

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Regular Patients	87	110	197
Service Connected *	31	37	68
Total Patients	118	147	265

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

+ The numbers reported to the VSB are the total numbers from February 17, 2024, through March 15, 2024.

Normal operations continue at Georgia War Veterans Nursing Home and Georgia War Veterans Home.

### State Veterans Cemeteries

#### Burial Statistics (through March 15, 2024)+

State Veterans Cemetery	Cumulative Last Month	Cumulative Current Month	Increase
Glennville	2,469	2,493	24
Milledgeville	5,381	5,412	31
Total	7,850	7,905	55

+ The report to the VSB is the total numbers from February 17, 2024, through March 15, 2024.

### Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery – Glennville

Cemetery operations continue as normal.

### Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Milledgeville

Construction on Phase 4a expansion continues. Completion is being delayed due to the long lead time for granite tops and endcaps for new and existing columbaria.

### Mr. Kerry Dyer, Chief Operations Officer

On Wednesday, February 28, 2024, Kerry Dyer attended the Social Services Workgroup Quarterly Meeting hosted by Lenora Harris, Executive Assistant to Deputy Commissioner HRA. He also met with Joesph Roger and Tim Saunders, GBA, to discuss the Carpet replacement and Painting on the 9<sup>th</sup> Floor

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Suite. Later that day he spoke to Phyllis Raines, Financial Reporting Analyst, regarding the Annual EZ Lease Report to SAO.

On Thursday, February 29, 2024, Kerry Dyer posted the Cemetery Tech 1 vacancy externally. He also picked up the Georgia Military Hall of Fame Plaques up from GCI. Later that day he spoke with Scott Duncan, President of Carrollton Office Equipment, regarding the cubicles for the 9<sup>th</sup> floor suite.

On Friday March 1, 2024, Kerry Dyer along with Jerry Lahr met virtually with Natasha Simoes, Access Project Manager, to discuss the DD214 digitalization. Later that day along with Jerry Lahr they met with the IT Director at the West Georgia Technical College in LaGrange to discuss the internet and phone connection.

On Monday, March 4, 2024, Kerry Dyer spoke with COL(Retired) Rick White regarding the Georgia Military Veterans Hall of Fame Dedication Ceremony & Unveiling Ceremony for the Class of 2023. He also processed one Cemetery Tech 1 Resignation Packet. Later that day he attended the Bi-Weekly UniteUs meeting along with Mark Demers, Charlotte May and Commissioner Ross.

On Tuesday, March 5, 2024, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's Meeting. He also processed two Cemetery Tech 1 New Hire Packets. Later that day he spoke with Augustin Conde, Senior Account Executive for T-Mobile, regarding a price proposal with T-Mobile.

On Wednesday, March 6, 2024, Kerry Dyer contacted COL (Retired) Rob Choppa to discuss the picture and Medal of Honor Citation for COL (Retired) Ralph Puckett. He also took the Chevy Equinox to the Chevrolet Dealership in McDonough, GA for a semi-annual service. Later that he submitted the monthly Fleet Management Report to DOAS.

On Thursday March 7, 2024, Kerry Dyer spoke with Brandi Lafayette, Client Executive Verizon Business Group, regarding the Equipment and Retention Credit Offer. He also spoke to Mr. Godwin, Bainbridge Landlord, regarding the office closure on June 30, 2024. Later that day he contacted Lori Barmann, Business Fleet Manager of DOAS, to discuss the No Fuel list for the Agency.

On Friday, March 8, 2024, Kerry Dyer along with Commissioner Ross attended the Pact Act event at Gwinnett Technical College.

On Monday, March 11, 2024, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's Meeting. He also contacted GBA regarding the chairs, flags, and Governor's Deputy Press Secretary to discuss the Audio & Visual support for the Georgia Military Veterans Hall of Fame dedication and unveiling ceremony.

On Tuesday, March 12, 2024, Kerry Dyer along with Commissioner Ross, Mark Demers and Charlotte May attended the Georgia Military Veterans Hall of Fame dedication and unveiling ceremony at the State Capitol.

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On Wednesday, March 13, 2024, Kerry Dyer processed 1 Termination Packet and posted the LaGrange Field Office vacancy externally and internally. He also contacted the Office of Inspector General to discuss the process of enrolling employees into the Sexual Harassment Investigator Course. Later that day he met virtually with John Pidgeon to discuss the lobby furniture for the 9<sup>th</sup> floor suite.

On Thursday, March 14, 2024, Kerry Dyer along with Shareka Monday-Robinson attended the NextGen update meeting. He also enrolled Lily Snyder and Amber Haire into the Sexual Harassment Prevention Training for Managers. Later that day along with Commissioner Ross and Will Wilson they met with Carla Goins, Service Assurance Manager, to discuss the email domain change for the Agency.

On Friday, March 15, 2024, Kerry Dyer dis-enrolled Leonard Harris from the Sexual Harassment Prevention Training for Managers Course. He also attended Bobby Davis', Director State Approving Agency, retirement luncheon. Later that evening along with Commissioner Ross he attended the New American Hero Award Gala at the Westin, Atlanta Perimeter North.

On Monday, March 18, 2024, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's Meeting. He also attended the UniteUs and Fox Grant meetings virtually. Later that day he spoke to Brandi Lafayette, Client Executive Verizon Business Group, regarding the contract with AT &T.

On Tuesday, March 19, 2024, Kerry Dyer contacted Dan Moreno, Office Manager of the Zebulon VA clinic, to discuss WWII 526EZ that was submitted to the VA. He also attended the Georgia Governor's Challenge/Suicide Prevention Task Force Meeting.

Below are the Personnel Actions Kerry Dyer and Shareka Monday-Robinson processed from February 16, 2024 - March 16, 2024.

Location	Position	Status	Name	Date
Milledgeville	Cemetery Tech 1	Resigned	Jonathon Massey	03/07/24
LaGrange	VFSO 2 Office Mgr	Terminated	Leonard Harris	03/12/24
Milledgeville	Cemetery Tech 1	New Hire	Brian Howard	03/18/24
Milledgeville	Cemetery Tech 1	New Hire	Jamarius	03/18/24

On the horizon: Open a Veterans Field Service Office in the Perry Clinic in May/June 2024 timeframe.

**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 1,829 educational institutions and training establishments where Georgia veterans may attend school or job training and utilize their GI Bill® educational benefits.
- SAA attended the NASAA Mid-Winter Business Meeting February 10-14 in Arlington, VA.

Item *	Number
Approved Educational Institutions	397
Approved Training Establishments	1,432
Veteran Students Enrolled in Educational Institutions	19,820

\* Source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration, Education Division, Feb. 2024.

**Ms. Charlotte May, Director, External Affairs & Communications**

**INFORMATION OUTREACH**

**Division Updates**

1. GDVS Newsletter – The department's monthly e-newsletter features top stories from the month at <https://veterans.georgia.gov/newsletter>. The February newsletter featured updates on the new changes to the PACT Act – namely, the new eligibility rules for VA health care for veterans with toxic exposures and the expansion of Agent Orange presumptive locations and times. The newsletter also shared a highlight of Raven Holstick's selection as GDVS Employee of the Year for 2023, an overview of the Outreach team's PIT Count in Hall County, Augusta GWVNH's recent award from Pinnacle Quality Assurance, and a recent article in the VFW's national magazine which included photos and remarks from GDVS's Belinda Boldoe.
2. Unite Us Joint Business Review and Planning – External Affairs and Communications joined GDVS leadership, TCSG/Workforce Development, and Unite Us to discuss utilization of the platform since launch and best practices to move forward to increase success in the upcoming year. The

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development and customization of a public facing resource portal was also covered during the meeting. This portal will allow the public to find and request help from resources across the state.

3. Benefits outreach – External Affairs and Communications continues to work with GDVS staff and partners to educate Georgia’s veterans and families on the availability of benefits and resources. The team is continuing to work with partners at KSU on the 2024 Let’s Connect: Suicide Prevention Summit being held in June.
  - a. GovChats - attended the first GovChats, a monthly webinar with other states hosted by the Digital Services team at the Georgia Technology Authority. This virtual discussion with Iowa technology leaders covered best practices for state government websites, commonalities, and the challenges of serving citizens through technology. While the Iowa Department of Veterans Affairs did not participate in the talk, their website is an excellent example of how other states communicate and share benefits information: <https://dva.iowa.gov/>
  - b. Georgia Military Veterans Hall of Fame – attended the unveiling of the class of 2023 at the State Capitol. With help from the Governor’s Office, the event was livestreamed. The well attended event celebrated the inductees and the new location of the Hall of Fame in the Capitol.
4. Legislative updates – We are tracking several bills as they move through the legislative process.
  - a. [HB 871](#) - Ad valorem tax; qualified disabled veterans; clarify applicability of homestead exemption to spouses and minor children. As of 3/08/2024 – Senate Read Second Time
  - b. [HB 880](#) - Professions and businesses; military spouses to use an existing license in good standing from another state; allow. As of 3/14/2024 – Senate Passed/Adopted as Amended
  - c. [HB 1103](#) and [HB 1161](#) - Income tax; exempt all retirement income received as retirement benefits in the armed forces of the United States or the reserve components. No movement.
  - d. [HB 1429](#) - Property; rent increases for seniors and veterans; provide limitations. As of 3/04/2024 – House Second Readers. This was dropped late in the legislative session, but may be seen again next year.
  - e. [SB 449](#) - A BILL to be entitled an Act to amend Code Section 31-7-12.8 of the O.C.G.A., relating to certification as nursing aid and employer sponsored training and competency examination program, to amend Article 3 of Chapter 11 of Title 31 of the O.C.G.A., relating to personnel regarding emergency medical services; to amend Article 2 of Chapter 26 of Title 43 of the O.C.G.A. As of 2/22/2024 - House Second Readers
  - f. [SB 451](#) - ~~Veteran Benefits; place certain requirement on the Department of Veterans Service~~ Amended by substitute in the House. The bill now focuses on providing protections for military personnel against pawnbrokers and title pawns. As of 3/13/2024 – House Committee Favorably Reported by Substitute
  - g. [SB 566](#) - Sales and Use Taxes; sales to or by certain nonprofit organizations that provide home repair assistance to veterans; exempt. This was dropped late in the legislative session, but may be seen again next year.

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

- Replies to VA eBenefits Messages = 125
- Replies to General Questions = approximately 385
- Individual Request for the State Certificate of Honor = approximately 35



**OLD BUSINESS:**

There was no old business to discuss.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

Mr. Childre announced that there will be an event at August Technical College on April 26 where we will be assisting veterans to file claims.

Mr. Childre announced a We Care event in Rome on May 16.

Ms. May announced that we have received a link from Unite Georgia to a public resource directory. Veterans can see what is near them in terms of assistance without coming into one of our field offices. The list is kept up to date with active partners.

Ms. Brooks announced that they were able to house 2 women veterans with domestic violence issues.

Mr. Zayas announced that the Atlanta Chapter of the MOPH will host their annual golf tournament on August 5.

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**NEW BUSINESS:**

Commissioner Ross discussed the upcoming Legislative Breakfast being hosted by the Veterans Service Foundation Board. It will be at the Metro Atlanta Chamber on April 29<sup>th</sup>. Sen. Chuck Payne and Rep. Josh Bonner have been confirmed. Sen. Ossoff may be in attendance as well. They will give an overview of what they are doing to advance legislation for veterans. Up to 100 people will be able to attend. We will not be selling tickets, but will be asking for donations. More information to follow.


Mr. Hanley made a motion to schedule the next Board meeting for April 23. Mr. Mendez seconded the motion. The motion passed. It will be a combination virtual and in-person meeting, set up at the GDVS.

Mr. Paslawski seconded adjourned the meeting at approximately 1:05 p.m.

SIGNED:

  
Joshua Kopsie, Chair

ATTEST:

  
Steve Mendez, Secretary