



Present: Mr. Joe Higgins, Chair
Ms. Samantha Brown-Parks, Secretary
Ms. Vivian Greentree, Member
Mr. Andy Hilmes, Member
Mr. Kevin Loncher, Member
Mr. Destry Rogers, Member
Ms. Patricia Ross, Commissioner
Mr. Pete Peterson, Veterans Service Board, Liaison to Foundation Board
Ms. Shelley Seinberg, Attorney General's Office
Ms. Amy Sillmon, Attorney General's Office
Mr. Mark Demers, Foundation CEO, Chief Development Officer and CFO, GDVS
Mr. Kerry Dyer, Foundation COO, Deputy Commissioner and COO, GDVS
Ms. Julie Hammond, Foundation CFO, Commissioner's Executive Assistant, GDVS
Ms. Charlotte May, Director, Public Information and External Affairs, GDVS
Ms. Camala Ball, Budget Analyst, GDVS
Ms. Jarelle Thompson, Homeless Coordinator, GDVS

On Thursday, March 6, 2025, the Veterans Service Foundation Board meeting was held by video/tele-conference.

The members listed above were present.

Mr. Higgins called the meeting to order at 10:22 a.m.

Mr. Loncher made a motion to approve the minutes from the February meeting, which were previously distributed to members to review. Ms. Brown-Parks seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

OFFICER REPORTS

Mr. Demers had nothing to report.

Mr. Dyer had nothing to report.

Ms. Hammond wasn't present but had sent out the report below for members to review before the meeting.

Thursday, March 6, 2025 at 10:00 a.m.
Minutes - Veterans Service Foundation Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

The funds in the account are allocated as follows:

General Funds	\$41,464.93
Homelessness	\$ 106.21
New Homes	\$ 1,025.00
State Benefit Book Ads	\$12,259.25
Suicide Prevention Hardware	\$ 1,700.00
Suicide Prevention Summit	\$11,380.00
Women & Diversity	\$ 1,124.72
TOTAL	\$69,060.11

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Mr. Loncher did not have anything to report regarding the Gifting Committee, but mentioned that he was contacted by Kim Scofi of the We Care Veterans Fairs. She also contacted Mr. Hilmes. There is a fair coming up in the Fall, and he will share more details with the group in the future about the organizations that will be there in support of Georgia's veterans.

DIRECTOR ACTIVITY REPORTS

There were no director's activity reports.

OLD BUSINESS

There was a discussion regarding having an outside auditor reviewing the Foundation and its finances. Commissioner Ross stated that we do have internal controls, but that it would be up to the Board whether or not to hire an external company. Mr. Higgins stated that there are checks and balances in place and he is satisfied with that. Mr. Phillips checked on a company to do this and they inferred that it would cost more money than the Foundation has to do such an audit, and with so little money in the account it's not something to have an outside company do yet. Mr. Higgins tabled the discussion until more funds are raised.

Mr. Rogers stated that he would prefer the Foundation to be an independent organization and separate from GDVS. We are not on Charity Navigator, which many people look at before donating to organizations to make sure they are a valid organization. Mr. Higgins stated that a change like this would involve changing the law that governs the Foundation. Commissioner Ross explained that other state agencies that have foundations have structured them the way our Foundation is structured. The reason this Foundation was approved by the Legislature was to be able to raise funds in support of the agency.

We do not receive a lot of money, and the Foundation can raise money for programs that aren't funded or for purposes that we can't use appropriated funds for, such as the Suicide Prevention Summit and the Women Veterans events. It would be possible to create an additional 501(c)3 separate from the department to help veterans, but the Veterans Service Foundation is specifically and intentionally tied to the Department.

Mr. Higgins suggested setting a small goal to get a win as an organization. There was a discussion on assisting with burial expenses, which was on the list the Veteran's Service Board sent to Mr. Higgins. Commissioner Ross stated that the list is flexible, and the members of the Board can decide what their projects are. One of the biggest needs we see is for financial assistance as it relates to homelessness (rental assistance, mortgage assistance, utility assistance). Mr. Higgins is going to put together an email to the members for a larger discussion on this issue.

Mr. Rogers asked if it is legal to have an organization build a new home, get it up and running, and then hand it over to us. Commissioner Ross said that we will need more guidance from the AG's Office, and she will try to have an answer before the next meeting.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Commissioner Ross stated that she attended the Governor's signing of the amended FY25 budget this morning. We received the \$1.5 million needed for the cost increases for our homes. This will allow us to keep the current number of beds open as well as grow a few beds. We received \$2 million to open the sub-acute unit and those 73 beds will open. It will take about 6 months to begin admitting patients. We also received funding to extend the Unite Us pilot program for another year.

Mr. Higgins announced that he is looking at the possibility of rejoining the military for 5 more years in order to become a true retiree.

Commissioner Ross announced that the NASDVA Conference August 8-13, 2026 will be held in Savannah, Georgia. Georgia has never sponsored the conference in its 75-year history. About 250 leaders across the 50 states, five territories and DC attend each year. Ms. Greentree noted that she would love to have Fiserv involved, and Commissioner Ross agreed.

Mr. Loncher announced an invitation to an open house on March 18th at 4:00pm to show off renovations at the facility but also in preparation for the annual Crawfish Bowl. Commissioner Ross will be one of the chefs this year at the event in May in Columbus. He is going to forward the invitation to everyone.

Mr. Higgins announced that he is meeting with an NBC affiliate in Savannah to discuss how to make their podcast more veteran friendly.

NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Higgins asked for a motion to allow GDVS to fundraise, sell tickets, etc. for the March 27th Women Veterans program. Ms. Brown-Parks made a motion to allow for this. Mr. Hilmes seconded the motion. There was no discussion and a vote was taken. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Higgins asked for a motion to allow GDVS to fundraise for the Let's Connect Suicide Prevention Summit on June 6th. Mr. Loncher made a motion to allow for this. Mr. Hilmes seconded the motion. There was no discussion and a vote was taken. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Rogers stated that he would like a state-wide email list of veterans in Georgia to share information with them directly. GDVS is working with GDAC to create a database of information from veterans we serve, plus driver's licenses, and those who used DOL for support. We already receive transitioning service members data monthly if they opt in. Mr. Hilmes mentioned having a newsletter that goes out to veterans. Commissioner Ross stated that we have a monthly newsletter that Ms. May does, and offered to post information in it for board members.

Mr. Higgins announced that the next meeting will be on April 3rd at 10:00 a.m.

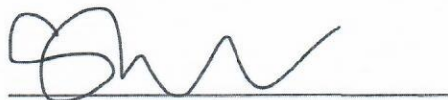
Mr. Higgins adjourned the meeting at approximately 11:10 a.m.

SIGNED:



Joe Higgins, Chair

ATTEST:



Samantha Brown-Parks, Secretary