

Thursday, March 19, 2026, at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

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

Visitors Mr. Kerry Dyer, Deputy Commissioner, Chief Operations Officer, GDVS
Present: Mr. Mark Demers, Chief Development Officer, Chief Finance Officer, GDVS
 Ms. Shelly-Ann Simpson, Executive Director, Field Operations & Appeals, GDVS
 Mr. Russell Feagin, Executive Director Health, Contracting & Facilities, GDVS
 Mr. Ernie Cowart, Executive Director Veterans Cemeteries, GDVS
 Ms. Amy Sillmon, Assistant Attorney General, Attorney General's Office
 Ms. Kathryn Wright, Governor's Office of Planning & Budget
 Ms. Linda Lavender, Director, Milledgeville Cemetery, GDVS
 Ms. Lily Snyder, Director, Veterans Education & Training, GDVS
 Ms. Charlotte May, Director, Public Information and External Affairs, GDVS
 Ms. Shareka Monday-Robinson, Director, Human Resources, GDVS
 Mr. Steven Fay, 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
 Mr. DeMario Rucker, Assistant 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. Raven Holstick, Transition and Employment Coordinator, GDVS
 Ms. Jarelle Thompson, Homeless Coordinator, GDVS
 Ms. Camala Ball, Budget Analyst, GDVS
 Ms. Kirsten Dennis, Purchasing/Procurement, GDVS
 Ms. Monica Dorsey, Communications & Outreach Specialist, GDVS
 Ms. Kaitlin Little, Business Support Analyst, GDVS
 Ms. Julie Hammond, Executive Assistant to the Commissioner, GDVS

On Thursday, March 19, 2026, the Veterans Service Board meeting was held by video/tele-conference.

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

Mr. Paslawski made a motion to approve the March Agenda. Mr. Mendez 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. Mendez seconded the motion. There were no objections. The motion passed.

The following reports were submitted for the Board meeting:

Ms. Belinda Boldoe, GDVS, VFW Service Officer

- The Department Service Officer attended a VFW Commander's briefing hosted by Cory Hawthorne, Acting Executive Director and staff, on February 20, 2026, at 11 AM, held at the Atlanta Regional Office, 1700 Clairmont Road, Decatur, GA 30033.
 - Discuss the VSO's issues and concerns.
 - **650,739** Veterans in Georgia (Census Data Year 2022)
 - **3.7%** of National Veteran Population
 - **16%** of Georgia Veterans are Women
 - The Atlanta Regional Office provides the following services:
 - **Compensation (VSC)**
 - **Veteran Readiness & Employment (VRE)**
 - **Education (EDU)**
 - **Loan Guaranty (LGY)**
 - Staffing
 - **704** employees – **56%** Veterans; **55%** Disabled Veterans
 - Over **\$7.8 billion** in compensation benefits were distributed to Georgia Veterans in FY25
 - Current VBA Priorities:
 - Backlog Reduction
 - From February 18, 2025, to February 18, 2026, the backlog went from 258,080 to 98,578, representing a 61.8% reduction year over year.
 - Current VBA Priorities
 - Completed Claims
 - Nationals - 1,146,206
 - Regional Office – 39,716
 - Number of Claims Pending
 - Nationals – 571,408
 - Regional Office – 5,432
 - Average Days to Complete
 - Nationals - 82.8
 - Regional Office – 83.02
 - Regional Office Virtual Claims Clinics
 - Monthly virtual claims clinic.

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- <https://www.benefits.va.gov/atlanta/>
 - Virtual Appointment Service or call 404-929-6000.
- Tour of the facility
- The Department Service Officer attended the GA Veteran of Foreign Wars Department Mid-Winter Conference and Banquet on February 20-22, 2026, held at the Macon Marriott Center, 240 Coliseum Dr., Macon, GA 31217.
 - Council of Administration Meeting
 - VFW Business Meeting
 - Marketplace
 - Vendors
 - Training Classes
 - Never Stop Learning (SEC)
 - Legislative Information
 - Combat Gaming
 - Women Veterans Forum
 - Medicare 101
 - Fraud Prevention
 - Survivor Checklist
 - Adjutant Tools
 - Quartermaster Tools
 - Recruiting
 - Awards Banquet
 - Voice of Democracy
 - Patriot Pen
 - Teacher
 - Elementary
 - Middle
 - High
- The Department Service Officer attended an Atlanta VA HCS VSO Update meeting hosted by. The virtual meeting was held on February 26, 2026.
 - Medical Issue
 - Legionella Disease Case
- The Department Service Officer attended a virtual training session - VSO Coffee Talk, hosted by the GDVS Training Team. The virtual training session was held on March 02, 2026, at 8 AM. We received a presentation on:

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- GDVS Homeless Coordinator on a refresher training session on the Unite Us partnership program.
- The Department Service Officer attended a VFW Commander's briefing hosted by Kai D. Mentzer, Director, and staff, on March 11, 2026, at 9:30 AM, held at the Atlanta Regional Office, 1700 Clairmont Road, Decatur, GA 30033.

Commissioner Patricia Ross

On Friday, February 27, 2026, Commissioner Ross, Mark Demers, and Kerry Dyer met with Unite Us to discuss the GDVS homelessness grant tracking. Afterwards, Jarelle Thompson and Raven Holstick joined them to follow up on the discussion. The Commissioner then attended the Veterans Service Board Meeting.

On Saturday, February 28 through Wednesday, March 4, 2026, Commissioner Ross attended the NASDVA Mid-Winter Conference in Washington, DC. As part of this conference she heard from VA leadership to include Secretary Collins and was one of a select group invited to lunch with Deputy Secretary Lawrence. She was also re-elected as the Vice-president of the Southeast District. The team looks forward to hosting the next conference in Savannah in August.

On Tuesday, March 3, 2026, Commissioner Ross met with Kerry Dyer and Mark Demers to discuss the funds allocated for homelessness. They were later joined by Jarelle Thompson and Raven Holstick to discuss the issue further.

On Thursday, March 5, 2026, Commissioner Ross had check-in calls with Shelly-Ann Simpson and Charlotte May. She then attended the Veterans Service Foundation Board Meeting. After the meeting, she joined a Review/Rehearse call with the Boys and Girls Clubs of America to prepare for an upcoming event. She later traveled to Kumho Tire USA in Atlanta to meet with them regarding a collaboration with the Veterans Service Foundation. Chairman Joe Higgins also attended the meeting. She then met with OPB to discuss how to move forward with the funds allocated for veteran homelessness.

On Friday, March 6, 2026, Commissioner Ross had a check-in call with Mark Demers. She also met with Camala Ball to discuss budget projections. She later joined the Boys and Girls Clubs of America to celebrate International Women's Day and was interviewed by them. This event was broadcast across the country. She then had her bi-weekly meeting with Jeff Bell, Chief Operating Officer of STG International.

On Monday, March 9, 2026, Commissioner Ross had a check-in call with Mark Demers. She then held a Director's Meeting. Afterwards, Commissioner Ross, Shelly-Ann Simpson, and Raven Holstick met with the Department of Community Affairs to discuss housing and homelessness. She then attended the

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Unite Us bi-weekly meeting. Later she attended the DBHDD/GDVS/AboutFace USA meeting in Cumming.

On Tuesday, March 10 through Wednesday, March 11, 2026, Commissioner Ross attended the VA's Readjustment Committee all day virtual meetings. Additionally, on Wednesday she met with her team to discuss homeless prevention.

On Wednesday, March 11, 2026, Commissioner Ross briefed the Senate on the FY 2027 budget. She also had a meeting to discuss ID.me and the military verification process.

On Thursday, March 12, 2026, Commissioner Ross had check-in calls with Shelly-Ann Simpson and Charlotte May. She met with DOAS and the team on the Milledgeville RFP. She then traveled to Slalom in Atlanta to discuss a possible partnership and then served on the Women Leadership Panel to discuss her perspective on women's empowerment and leadership within state government and GDVS. After returning to the office, Commissioner Ross met with Rep. Mary Ann Santos, the American Legion and the Veterans Support Group to discuss the Unite Us platform and their need for funding to help homeless veterans. She then met with Matt Osucha, a potential Foundation board member. She also met with Phil Kent and Karen Pope to discuss ways to raise money for veteran housing and homelessness. She then participated in the Suicide Mortality Review quarterly call.

On Friday, March 13, 2026, Commissioner Ross attended the Woman Veteran of the Year celebration.

On Monday, March 16, 2026, Commissioner Ross held a Director's meeting. She then had a check-in call with Mark Demers. Afterward, she joined a Presenter Prep Call for the 2026 Suicide Mortality Review Summit. She later joined the Fox Grant Update Meeting. Afterwards she and JT met with Everhome Suites on emergency housing options.

On Tuesday, March 17, 2026, Commissioner Ross connected with Lauren Crotts the Chief of the State Veterans Home program. She also was on leave 17-18 March.

On Wednesday, March 18, 2026, Commissioner Ross participated in the Veteran Suicide Mortality Review Q1 Meeting and attended a meeting with Unite Us.

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

GENERAL

- On Monday March 9. Along with the Commissioner and Ms. Holstick, I met with Department of Community Affairs to discuss collaboration in the fight for homelessness.
- On March 12th I attended the Annual Women Veterans Legislative Breakfast hosted by Representative Tonya Anderson and Sandra Scott.

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- On March 12th I attended the monthly Veterans Roundtable at the Decatur Goodwill Resource Center.
- **DD 214's and Welcome Home Letters: 1,144** Welcome Home Letters were mailed out in February 2026.

Projected Positions:

- 3 Openings in Appeals
- 1 Opening in Macon

Mr. Steven Fay, Director of Training Division

- Charles Isaac- Conducted VA systems for PIV users in Savannah and Glennville.
- Steven Fay and Glenn Massey conducted new hire training at the VA Regional Office Appeals Division, Newnan and Griffin (Zebulon) locations. Conducted Department training on the Fox MH screener and Unite Us. New hire training introduces new VSOs to the accredited training processes and procedures to assist veterans and claimants. Refresher training is required to train and evaluate the proficiency of VA systems after issuance of their PIV card. The Absorb Learning Portal is also introduced. The portal has classes and quizzes to help navigate the vast subjects of filing VA claims.
- Sandra Bennett- Conducted 2 Coffee Talks for February. Leadership Institute training Warner Robins 20th February. Georgia Women virtual coffee break 24th February. Fort Benning visit with Ms. Williams February 27th.
- Total retro from Training Division \$20,823.

Upcoming Events:

- D.R.O.P. class for March
- VSO Coffee Talk March 16
- Continued ongoing support to the Regional Directors and Veteran Field Service Offices including Central Office personnel
- Continuation of performing duties as VSO's

Mr. Edwin Berry, Director of Appeals Division

- The total number of hearings conducted by the Appeals Division for **February 2026** was **62 with 7 reschedules for a later date, and 3 withdrawals.**

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- As of **February 28, 2026**, the Isakson VA Regional Office processed benefits as follows for GDVS and the Service Organizations represented by GDVS during the month of February 2026:

Types of Claims	Number of Awards	Benefits paid
Compensation	113,108 (+163)	\$290,066,477 (+1,650,750)
DIC	4,803 (+30)	\$8,686,420 (+53,714)
Survivor Pension	611	\$627,785 (+166)
<u>Veteran Pension</u>	<u>1,170 (-14)</u>	<u>\$1,426,898 (-11,925)</u>
Grand Total	119,692 (+179)	\$300,807,579 (+1,692,705)

** The numbers inside the parentheses represent the change from the previous month.*

Mr. Kenneth Childre, Director Veterans Benefits North Region

Retro Awards: \$1,829,235.14

Director Site Visits/Inspections: 0

Community Involvement:

02/09/2026-Rico Johnson (Gainesville)-Attended the Dawsonville VVA Chapter meeting and briefed the group and spouses on VA benefits.

02/16/2026-John Giddens (Demorest)-Attended a Vet to Vet Cafe in Toccoa with the Northeast Georgia Medical group.

02/19/2026-Christine Collins (Blairsville)-Met with Veterans in the Blue Ridge at the Kiwanna's Club.

02/20/2026-Christina Williams (Gwinnett Tech) & DeMarquez Mallard (Lawrenceville)-Visited Assisted Living Facility in Suwanee to discuss benefits with 7 Veteran residents of the facility.

02/21/2026-Nick Gavalas & Todd Logan (Canton)-Spoke at the Woodstock Marine Corps League, Detachment 1311. Answered questions from the Marines and have set up 5 appointments from that meeting so far.

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02/27/2026-Tanya Rogers (Gainesville)-Graduated from the Emerging Leader Program through the Military Spouse Network.

North Area Gains/Losses:

Kevin English-Zebulon-New Hire 17 Feb 26 (Will train at Griffin Office until ready to fly solo at the Zebulon Office).

Average Visits Per VFSO Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO							
Region:	North						
Month:	February-26						
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:	54	5,973	20	298.65	2,417	120.85
Number of Offices:	30		Average Visits/Office:		199.10	Average Claims/Office 80.566667	

*Total monthly office visits include: 2,199 In-person and 3,774 phone calls/emails.

Ms. Sherri Whitfield, Director Veterans Benefits South Region

- On March 7th, Mr. Thomas in the Brunswick office supported the Americal Legion Post 9 in a One-Stop Resource Event. Several local veteran support organizations and VA representatives presented information on mental health wellness, healthcare and family services and employment and education assistance.
- On March 20th, GDVS will support a Warrior Alliance WE CARE Event at Savannah State University. A total of 18 VSOs will be on hand to assist with claims and benefit counseling.
- Since the last board meeting, South region offices reported lump sum payments totaling \$179,775.68.
- South Georgia Region Veterans Population: 232,245.

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Average Visits Per VFSO
Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO

Region: SOUTH

Month: February - 2026

# of Offices	# of VFSOs	Total Monthly Office Visits	Workdays in Month	Average Office Visits Per Day	Total Claims Submitted to VA Monthly	Average Claims Submitted by VFSO to VA Daily
26	42	1,939	20	96.95	1,264	63.20

Average Visits/Office	74.58
Average Claims/Office	48.62

Ms. Veda Brooks, Women Veterans Coordinator (WVC)

- March 2, 2026, Ms. Brooks attended the Grant Writing Team meeting. Ms. Brooks attended The Spoon board meeting. Ms. Brooks participated in the Fox Grant Update Meeting.
- March 4, 2026, Ms. Brooks did a home visit to a veteran who is blind and bedridden in Decatur Georgia. Ms. Brooks attended the Women’s Veteran Think Tank meeting.
- March 5, 2026, Ms. Brooks did a site visit in Douglasville to prepare for the March 13, 2026, Woman Veteran of the Year Ceremony.
- March 6, 2026, Ms. Brooks saw veterans in Clayton County.

Current committees:

- Violence Prevention Task Force
- VA/SAMHSA Governor’s Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families Georgia Team
- Sr. Vice President of the National Association of State Women Veteran Coordinators (NASWVC)
- Planning Committee for the annual NASWVC Annual Training Conference

Ms. Calandra Ferguson, Suicide Prevention and Outreach Coordinator

- March 2, 2026, Ms. Ferguson attended the VSO Coffee Talk.

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- March 2, 2026, Ms. Ferguson hosted the Fox Grant semi-monthly meeting.
- March 3, 2026, Ms. Ferguson attended the VSMR semi-monthly meeting.
- March 3, 2026, Ms. Ferguson attended GDVS VSO Training Meeting (QR Codes).
- March 4, 2026, Ms. Ferguson attended the UNITE US SPT training meeting.
- March 5, 2026, Ms. Ferguson attend the Women Veteran of the Year Planning Meeting.
- March 5, 2026, Ms. Ferguson met with a Gold Start Widow in reference to volunteering.
- March 6, 2026, Ms. Ferguson attended the LMS Priority Group 3 monthly meeting.
- March 9, 2026, Ms. Ferguson met with GC from NJ to assist in establishing PG 4: Faith Based Initiative.
- March 9, 2026, Ms. Ferguson attended Unite-US meeting in association with the Fox Grant.
- March 13, 2026, Ms. Ferguson will co-host the WVOTY Luncheon.

Ms. Raven Holstick, Transition and Employment Coordinator

- February 25, 2026 - Transition and Employment Coordinator met with DeKalb County Jail leadership to explore potential collaboration should they receive a Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP) grant, focusing on employment and reentry support for justice-involved veterans.
- February 26, 2026 - Transition and Employment Coordinator met workforce and community partners in planning efforts for a Spring veteran employment event, focused on fostering career opportunities and strengthening employment pathways for veterans.
- February 26, 2026 - Transition and Employment Coordinator attended the 2026 Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP) Prospective Applicant Webinar to gather information on upcoming funding opportunities, program requirements, and potential partnerships aimed at expanding employment services and reintegration support for veterans experiencing or at risk of homelessness.
- February 27, 2026 - Transition and Employment Coordinator met with the GDVS Women Veterans Advisory Board Leadership Pillar Chair to discuss the initial framework and planning priorities for

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the pillar, focusing on developing strategies that support leadership development and engagement opportunities for women veterans across the state.

- March 2, 2026 - Transition and Employment Coordinator Participated in a GDVS grant writing team meeting to collaborate on brainstorming funding opportunities and strengthen internal capacity for developing competitive grant proposals in support of veteran focused programs and initiatives.
- March 4, 2026 - Transition and Employment Coordinator engaged in strategic planning for the Homeless Prevention Initiative.
- March 9, 2026 - Transition and Employment Coordinator attended a meeting with Department of Community Affairs "Connect Housing & Homelessness" to collaborate with partners on housing resources and strategies to address veteran homelessness.
- March 13, 2026 - Transition and Employment Coordinator Delivered remarks at the Women Veterans Luncheon highlighting my role at GDVS and the importance of leadership, service, and continued advocacy for women veterans across Georgia.
- Ms. Holstick informed Mr. Mendez in the meeting that she is working on the information he requested and will give it to him soon.

Ms. Jarelle Thompson, Homelessness Coordinator

2/23- Participated in SPT training for Unite US

2/25- Participated in HVRP Webinar

2/27- Extended stay Hotel Meeting with Cecil Phillips

3/2- Hosted a training on Unite us for VSO's during monthly Coffee Talk.

3/3- Participated in Walkthrough in College Park for a landlord who would like to rent rooms to veterans.

3/3- Participated in walkthrough in Milledgeville for a landlord who would like to rent rooms to veterans.

3/10- Participated in collaboration meeting for new homeless initiative.

3/11- Participated in Unite Us training for Homeless initiative.

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Upcoming Events/Highlights:

- Highlights- Helped 20 veterans with housing resources
- March 20: We Care event in Savannah, GA
- March 21: We Care event in Marietta

Ms. Thompson added during the meeting that a veteran was assisted in receiving bus fare for a trip back home to his family in Florida, along with the help of Warrior Alliance.

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

Accounting/Procurement/Compliance:

- Routine operations are continuing. We are continuously working to improve all accounts payable processing/procurement processing, to apply proper coding, accountability, organization of purchase orders, on-time payments and reconciliations.
- We are continuing to work with the SAO Shared Services to prepare the procurement and accounting data in Team Works for migration to GA@Work.
- Kirsten Dennis processed 6 purchase orders totaling \$64,077.39 as well as 24 invoices and 4 quotes.
- Kirsten Dennis attended the APO/CUPO meeting on February 25, 2026.
- Mark Demers attended the Annual Vendor Management Training on March 12, 2026.

GA@Work/NextGen Updates

- Mark Demers and Camala Ball attended the Cash Conversion Office hours on March 3, 2026.
- Mark Demers attended the NextGen Grants End to End Testing on March 3, 2026.
- Mark Demers and Camala Ball attended the NextGen Change Network Meeting on February 24, 2026.
- Camala Ball and Mark Demers attended the NextGen Budget Kick Off on February 24, 2026.
- Camala Ball attended the Budget Workbook Office hours on March 11, 2026.
- Mark Demers attended the ADP Employment Tax-Maintenance Profile meeting on March 5, 2026.
- Camala Ball attended Q&A Informational session for Bank Registry Workiva Reporting System.

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- Camala Ball attended the Budget EIB Office Hours on March 25-26, 2026.
- The entire organization was sent invitations on March 3, 2026, to complete the GA@WORK Employee Foundational Learning Program (Path). The GA@Work Manager Foundational Learning Program was sent to managers on March 9, 2026.
- Mark Demers attended the NextGen Integrations Deployment Cutover Walkthrough on March 12, 2026.
- Camala Ball and Mark Demers attended the NCN Half-time report on March 13, 2026.
- The GO-Live date for GA@Work was pushed back to July 1, 2026.

Budget/Travel:

- Camala Ball continued daily monitoring of general ledgers, purchase orders, and budget projection updates.
- Camala Ball has reviewed budget projections (Augusta cemetery, plot allowance funds, budget projections for AFY2026 funds with program managers as of the February closing and discussed plans for remaining funds on March 6, 2026.
- Camala Ball attended the Annual Consolidated Financial Reporting (ACFR) meeting.
- Camala Ball met with OPB analyst on multiple occasions this month to discuss budget amendments and projections prior to approval.
- Camala Ball stated that as of February 28, 2026, we have expended 63.78% of the total FY 2026 budget allocated to GDVS. This is currently below the monthly average of 8.33% over the last 8 months. The breakdown is as follows:

Fund	Total Allotment	Expenditures	Remaining Balance	% Spent
State	\$ 33,144,535.00	\$ 19,117,358.09	\$ 13,421,455.51	59.51%
State- Prior Yr Res Funds-Unite Us	\$ 1,750,204.00	\$ 1,750,204.00	\$ 0	100%
Federal	\$ 32,406,626.00	\$ 20,969,736.76	\$ 11,436,889.24	64.71%
ARPA-Unite Us	\$ 1,729,222.34	\$ 1,729,222.34	\$ 0	100%
Other	\$ 4,555,077.00	\$ 2,761,058.63	\$ 1,794,018.37	60.61%
Total Funds	\$ 73,585,665.00	\$ 45,456,622.53	\$ 26,652,363.78	63.78%

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AFY 2026 Budget (HB 973)

Descriptions	Governor's	House	Senate	CC
Baseline Budget (State/Federal)	\$60,820,272	\$60,820,272	\$60,820,272	\$60,820,272
Increase for one time salary supplement \$2k	\$747,091	\$747,091	\$448,094	\$747,091
Reduce funds to reflect employer contribution rate from 29.454% to 20.264%	\$ 0	(\$51,064)	(\$51,064)	(\$102,128)
Transfer funds from GVWH due to delayed implementation of 40 new beds to Augusta Cemetery	\$800,000	\$0	\$0	\$0
Redirect funds from GVWH to Augusta Cemetery	(\$800,000)	\$0	\$0	\$0
Recognize savings from delayed opening of new beds.	\$0	(\$360,000)	(\$360,000)	(\$360,000)
Provide funds for technology platform (Unite Us)-ask was \$3.4m	\$1,729,196	\$ 2,614,598	\$2,614,598	\$2,614,598
Increase funds to provide rehab services for service members with TBI (pass through-Shepard Center)	\$0	\$1,000,000	\$0	\$250,000
Increase funds for additional staffing for Milledgeville Home	\$0	\$0	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000
Funds to create new Augusta veteran's cemetery	\$0	\$ 1,000,000	\$800,000	\$800,000
Increase funds for the Cohen Clinic (pass through	\$0	\$0	\$500,000	\$500,000
Increase funds to eliminate veteran homelessness	\$0	\$0	\$15,000,000	\$5,000,000
Total Budget (State/Federal)	\$ 63,296,559	\$ 65,770,897	\$80,790,739	\$71,254,762

Note: Governor Kemp signed the AFY 2026 budget (HB 973) into law on March 3, 2026.

FY 2027 Budget (HB 974)

Descriptions	Governor's	House	Senate
Baseline Budget (State/Federal)	\$60,820,272	\$60,820,272	
Adjustment telecom (GTA)	(\$21,473)	(\$21,473)	
Adjustment DOAS Insurance programs	\$16,088	\$16,088	
Reduce funds to reflect employer contribution rate from 29.454% to 20.264%	(\$612,769)	(\$612,769)	

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Adjustment for GA@Work Billings	\$5,237	(\$5,237)	
Increase funds for a director for new Augusta Cemetery		\$102,000	
Increase to TRS (GVWNH-Augusta)	\$25,780	\$25,780	
Increase to match increased fed funds to maintain existing bed count at homes	\$455,159	\$455,159	
Increase in funds for FO and Appeals positions to meet minimum salary guidelines	\$258,776	\$258,776	
Increase funds for 1 position at Savannah VECTR	\$60,986	\$60,986	
Increase funds for military/vets TBI and MH		\$1,000,000	
Increase funds for tech platform for referrals		\$1,500,000	
Total Budget (State/Federal)	\$ 61,008,056	\$63,610,056	

Bond Funds

Descriptions	Governor's	House	Senate
Bond#67-Provide \$1,835,000 in 20yr bond to fund improvement at GVWH-Milledgeville	\$169,921	\$169,621	
Bond#68-Provide \$220,000 in 20yr bond to fund elevator repairs for GVWH Milledgeville	\$20,372	\$20,372	
Adjustment DOAS Insurance programs	\$16,088	\$16,088	

Note: Not included in the governor's budget is the \$35m for the new War Home in Albany, GA.

Strategic Plan/Legislation:

- The 2026 Regular session of the Georgia Assembly will be in session from January 12, 2026, to April 2, 2026.
- Kaitlin Little attended the Senate Homeland Security subcommittee hearing on March 2, 2026, at 450 CAP concerning SB 555, War Veterans Home: the admission of eligible nonveteran residents to a Georgia War Veterans' Home under certain circumstances.
- Kaitlin Little attended the Senate Appropriations Hearing on March 11, 2026.

Grant Program:

- SSG Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program- (\$722,747 year 4)
 - We were awarded the grant for a 4th Year.
 - Kaitlin Little, Irene Mackson and Mark Demers working on the Fox Grant Data Conversion Project (approx. 50,000 files).
 - Mark Demers attended the Fox Grant Operations National Call on March 18, 2026.
 - Kaitlin Little attended Fox Grant update meetings on March 2 and March 16, 2026.

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- Veterans Mental Health Services Program Grant (HB 414)-
 - FY2025- \$1,000,000 (competitive grant)
 - The grant was awarded to 3 vendors:
 - Cohen Veterans Network- \$776,132
 - KSU-AMES-\$173,868
 - About Face USA- \$40,000
 - All funds for this grant year have been distributed.
 - The second quarterly report was completed on January 15, 2026. Next quarterly report will be due in April 2026.
 - FY2026- \$1,000,000 (competitive grant)
 - The grant was awarded to the following:
 - Cohen Veterans Network (Centerstone) -\$806,578
 - Selectees are pending for remaining funds.
- PTSD study- Emory (HB 68, line 94.12). \$1,000,000
 - To increase funds for research on treatment of PTSD and wraparound services for veterans and their families.
 - Contract was signed and monies were distributed to Emory on September 30, 2025.
 - First quarterly report was completed on January 15, 2026. The next quarterly report will be due in April 2026.
- Irene Mackson and Kaitlin Little participated in GDVS Grant Writing Team meetings on February 23, 2026, and March 2, 2026.
- Mark Demers, Kaitlin Little and Irene Mackson participated in Unite Us & Spt. Case Management) meetings on March 9, 11, and 18, 2026.

Events/Other:

- Leadership Institute conducted in-person on February 19-20, 2026, at the VECTR Center in Warner Robins, GA. Next session will be conducted via Teams on March 13, 2026.
- Irene Mackson attended the leadership institute session as a facilitator.
- Mark Demers, Kaitlin Little and Irene Mackson attended the VSO Coffee Talk on March 2, 2026, on Unite Us Training- Speaker: JT Thompson.

Mr. Russell Feagin, Executive Director, Health, Contracting & Facilities, GDVS

State Veterans Homes

State Veterans Homes Census (February 28, 2026) +

Current Month	Augusta	Milledgeville	Total
Regular Patients	92	106	198
Service Connected	34	58	92
Total Patients	126	164	290
Last Month	Augusta	Milledgeville	Total
Regular Patients	92	113	205
Service Connected	34	55	89
Total Patients	126	168	294

+ The numbers reported to the VSB are the total numbers as of February 28, 2026.

Georgia War Veterans Nursing Home

Normal operations continue.

Georgia War Veterans Home

Normal operations continue.

There were three COVID-19 cases identified in February. Normal isolation precautions were initiated and there have been no more cases reported.

The Request for Proposal for the Nursing Home Operations contract was posted on December 23, 2025. The Bid Closing date was February 9, 2026. Bids were received and are now being reviewed. The process must be completed by the end of June when the current contract expires.

Mr. Ernie Cowart, Executive Director Veterans Cemeteries, GDVS

State Veterans Cemeteries

Burial Statistics - Through February 28, 2026

State Veterans Cemeteries	Cumulative Through Current Month	Current Month	Year to Date FY2026
Glennville	2,939	18	157
Milledgeville	6,138	30	258
Combined Totals	9,077	48	415

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery – Glennville

Cemetery operations continue as normal. (unchanged from last report)

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery – Milledgeville

Cemetery operations continue as normal. Currently there are two open Cemetery Tech positions. (unchanged from last report)

Augusta Cemetery Project

Cemetery planning is ongoing with building and cemetery layout design being the current focus. The site survey work and site testing are ongoing for the project. (unchanged from last report)

Mr. Kerry Dyer, Deputy Commissioner, Chief Operations Officer

On Monday, March 2, 2026, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Directors Meeting. He also processed 1 resignation packet. Later that day he met with the contractors to discuss the progress of the 9th floor renovation project.

On Tuesday, March 3, 2026, Kerry Dyer processed 1 promotion packet. He also updated and distributed the monthly Alpha Roster to the Senior Leadership. Later that day he posted the Macon Field Office vacancy externally and internally.

**Thursday, March 19, 2026, at 12:30 p.m.
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On Wednesday, March 4, 2026, Kerry Dyer along with Mark Meeks, DOAS Procurement Manager, Carlton Deese, Mark Demers, and Tonya Jarrett conducted the War Home RFP Validation. He also contacted Jeff Walburg, President & CEO of Panoramic Software (VETPro) to discuss the Georgia established Insurance and Bond Guidelines. Later that day he spoke with Precious Davis Owen, Leasing Specialist, Georgia Department of Human Services regarding Supplier Change Request Form, W-9 and Banking account information for Bainbridge Field Office Lease payments.

On Thursday, March 5, 2026, Kerry Dyer submitted Space Action Form, Organizational Chart and a Space Utilization Chart to State Properties to open a new field office in Columbus Technical College, Puckett Center. He also submitted the monthly Fleet Management Report to DOAS, Fleet Division. Later that day he emailed 20 resumes to Sherri Whitfield for her Macon Field Office vacancy.

On Friday, March 6, 2026, Kerry Dyer contacted Corey Woods, COO, The Puckett Center to discuss the date for the Ribbon Cutting Ceremony and start date for our VSO in the new facility. He also registered Kevin English, Zebulon Field Office Manager for the mandatory Sexual Harassment Prevention Training for Managers.

On Monday, March 9, 2026, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Directors Meeting. He also contacted Heather York, Executive Assistant to the State Property Officer to discuss the process of placing a POW/MIA bronze commemorative plaque in the Capitol. Later that day he emailed Linda Lavender a Cemetery Tech 1 resume.

On Tuesday, March 10, 2026, Kerry Dyer registered 5 employees into the GA@WORK mandatory training plan. He also contacted Mark Meeks, DOAS Procurement Manager, to discuss the process for the posting of the Notice of Intent to Award document into Team Works Financials. Later that day he attended the budget brief to Senate given by Commissioner Ross.

On Wednesday, March 11, 2026, Kerry Dyer submitted the System Authorization Access Request Form (SAAR) to Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) on behalf of Julie Hammond. He also spoke to Marlon Benjamin, GBA Project Manager regarding the timeline for the ceiling renovation on the 9th floor suite.

On Thursday, March 12, 2026, Kerry Dyer along with Commissioner Ross, Russell Feagin, Tonya Jarrett and Mark Meeks met to discuss the Cost proposal of the War Home RFP. He also attended the Homeless Prevention meeting along with Commissioner Ross, ShellyAnn Simpson, JT and Raven Holstick. Later that day he contacted Mr. John Lotts to discuss the furniture removal from the Waycross Field Office.

Below are the Personnel Actions Kerry Dyer and Shareka Monday-Robinson processed from

March 2, 2026 – March 12, 2026.

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Location	Position	Status	Name	Date
Macon	Office Manager	Resigned	Ryshard Clarke	3/12/26

Ms. Lily Snyder, Director, Veterans Education and Training Division (State Approving Agency)

- The approval, risk-based surveys, and supervisory visits 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 2,246 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	525
Approved Training Establishments	1,719
Ch. 35 VA Education Beneficiaries for FY26 Q1	14,586
VA Education Beneficiaries for February 2026 CH 33 ONLY*	10,578
VA Education Beneficiaries for January 2026 CH 33 ONLY*	10,098
VA Education Beneficiaries for December 2025 CH 33 ONLY*	10,547
VA Education Beneficiaries for November 2025 CH 33 ONLY*	11,177
VA Education Beneficiaries for October 2025 *CH 33 ONLY*	11,376
VA Education Beneficiaries for September 2025 *CH 33 ONLY*	11,052
VA Education Beneficiaries for August 2025 *CH 33 ONLY*	10,110
VA Education Beneficiaries for July 2025	10,798
VA Education Beneficiaries for June 2025	11,419
VA Education Beneficiaries for May 2025	21,878
VA Education Beneficiaries for April 2025	20,972
VA Education Beneficiaries for March 2025	21,867

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VA Education Beneficiaries for February 2025	20,289
VA Education Beneficiaries for January 2025	17,775

* Source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration, Education Division, WEAMS, Salesforce, Oracle BI CH33 Enrollment

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 edition celebrated GWVNH-Augusta’s recent awards from Activated Insights and ranking in the top 15% of all facilities nationwide. The newsletter also featured a spotlight on Roger McDonald, who recently transitioned from VSO to SAA coordinator. Additionally, the newsletter shared information from VA on the new streamlined path for survivor benefits and the expansion of a tax exemption on funding fees for veterans and families using VA direct home loans.
2. Attended meeting with Unite Us on February 19, February 25, March 4, and March 11 to discuss the implementation of new programs on the platform.
3. Attended a meeting of the Digital Accessibility Working Group on March 4. Discussions focused on preparing to meet new federal digital accessibility regulations in April 2026.
4. Attended a meeting of the Georgia Veterans Service Foundation on March 5.
5. Attended a meeting with LinkedIn for a demonstration of their hiring software on March 9 with Deputy Commissioner Dyer and CDO Demers.
6. EAC will attend the 2026 Woman Veteran of the Year ceremony and luncheon on March 13. EAC has provided support during the planning process to promote nominations and attendance at the ceremony, including Eventbrite event creation and ticket tracking. EAC will provide support for the event, including photos and coverage on GDVS social media and an article in the GDVS newsletter, to recognize and promote the availability of assistance for women veterans throughout the state.
7. Benefits outreach – External Affairs and Communications continue to work with GDVS staff and partners to educate Georgia’s veterans and families on the availability of benefits and resources.

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- a. Woman Veteran of the Year – EAC is working with the Women and Minority Veteran Coordinator to share information about the upcoming Woman Veteran of the Year Awards in March, as well as requesting nominations for a robust selection process.
- b. We CARE Fair – shared information from United Military Care on the first We CARE Resource Fair on March 21 at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta.
- c. Employment support – shared information on job and resource fairs in Savannah and Athens from trusted partners.
- d. Mental and behavioral health – shared supportive resources from VA and upcoming trainings from the AMES Research Center at Kennesaw State University that are free and open to the public as part of the SSG Fox grant.

FOX COMMUNITY Training

The Fox Suicide Prevention Program offers no-cost training opportunities for service members, veterans, and community members connected to the University System of Georgia (USG) and the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG).

Scan the QR code to quickly register for our Trauma and the Body training.

TRAUMA AND THE BODY

- 1 DATE**
Wednesday, April 1, 2026
- 2 TIME**
10:00 AM - 11:00 AM (ET)
- 3 REGISTRATION**
https://bit.ly/TraumaAndTheBody_Apr01

Contact Us! ames@kennesaw.edu

Logos for Kennesaw State, GDYS, and United Military Care are visible at the bottom.

WE CARE VET FAIR
Ebenezer Baptist Church
101 JACKSON ST. NE, ATLANTA, GA 30312

VETERANS, CURRENT MILITARY, FAMILY MEMBERS, & CAREGIVERS

You served. We care.

**SATURDAY
MARCH 21, 2026
10:00 AM - 3:00 PM**

**VETERAN BENEFITS
HEALTHCARE MENTAL HEALTH
COMMUNITY WELLNESS
LEGAL SERVICES**

WECAREVETFAIR.COM | QUESTIONS? (770) 973-0014

The poster features a collage of images including a military eagle, people at a service desk, and a person in a wheelchair.

OLD BUSINESS:

There was no old business to discuss.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Ms. Brooks announced that the Woman Veteran of the Year is Ms. Tracey Lloyd. Ms. May will be posting photos on social media once they are ready and Ms. Lloyd will be featured in the GDVS newsletter. Ms. Lloyd is a graduate of the US Military Academy and works with fellow cadets in a leadership program to help young girls in STEM.

Mr. Dyer announced that we will be opening a new field office in the Col. Ralph Puckett Jr. VECTR Workforce Development Center in June.

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Mr. Dyer announced that RFP for the claims management system is almost complete. If there are no protests in the next few days, we will be announcing the company the contract will be awarded to.

Commissioner Ross announced that Annual Training will be held in Peachtree City on July 20-23 and the Board Members are welcome to hold their monthly board meeting there during that time.

Mr. Feagin announced that he is preparing the pre-application for a home in Albany so that we will be able to request funds from the VA for this project.

NEW BUSINESS:

Commissioner Ross discussed the shooting at the Jasper CBOC this week. We do have a veteran service officer there, but he was on leave that day. We always strive to make sure our veterans and employees are safe.

Mr. Kopsie asked about the bills that made the crossover between the House and Senate. Ms. May dropped the link for the tracking sheet into the chat for everyone.

Mr. Kopsie asked for an update on where the Foundation is regarding their bylaws. Mr. Peterson answered that Mr. Higgins is working on them and will then send them to the other members for input. There have been some pointed questions regarding the process, and he will follow up and report back.

Mr. Hanley made a motion to approve Mr. Matt Osucha to serve a three-year term on the Foundation Board. Mr. Mendez seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

The next Board meeting was scheduled for April 21 at 12:30pm. It will be a virtual meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 1:02 p.m.

SIGNED:


Joshua Kopsie, Chair

ATTEST:



Steve Mendez, Secretary