

Wednesday, September 29, 2021 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia

Present Ms. Patricia Ross, Chair
Ms. Takosha Swan, Vice-Chair
Mr. Shawn Hanley, Secretary
Mr. John Kubinec, Member
Mr. Eddie Whitted, Member
Mr. Joshua Kopsie, Member
Mr. Timothy Paslawski, Member

Visitors: Mr. George Canavaggio, Assistant Commissioner, Field Operations & Appeals, GDVS
Present Mr. Mark Bannister, Assistant Commissioner, Administration, Health & Memorials
Mr. Kerry Dyer, Director, Operations Division, GDVS
Ms. Mary Catherine Greaber, Assistant Attorney General, Attorney General's Office
Mr. Drew Craig, Veterans Experience
Mr. Vince Pritchett, Director, Veterans Benefits South Region, GDVS
Mr. Dale Bell, Director, Veterans Benefits North Region, GDVS
Ms. Ramona Roper, Director, Training and Professional Development, GDVS
Mr. Bob Norman, Training and Professional Development, GDVS
Ms. Charlotte May, Director, Public Information Division, GDVS
Mr. Chris Hambright, Director, Accounting, GDVS
Ms. Shelly Ann Simpson, Director, Appeals Division, GDVS
Ms. Belinda Boldoe, VFW Service Officer, Appeals Division, GDVS
Mr. Ernie Cowart, Director, Glennville Cemetery
Mr. Carlton Deese, Executive Director Georgia War Veterans Nursing Home
Ms. Tonya Jarrett, Clinical Director, GWVH, Milledgeville, GA
Mr. Russell Feagin, Director, Health & Memorials Division, GDVS
Mr. William Wilson, Network Administrator, GDVS
Mr. Jerry Lahr, Network Administrator, GDVS
Mr. Doug Middleton, Georgia Veterans Service Foundation, Inc.
Mr. Rick White, Director, Georgia Military Veterans Hall of Fame
Mr. Mike Hudson, Georgia Veterans Service Foundation, Inc.
Mr. Dan Zachman, Georgia Veterans Service Foundation, Inc.
Mr. Marvin Thomas, Georgia Veterans Service Foundation, Inc.
Mr. Dan Holtz, Secretary, GMOAA
Ms. Amy Stevens, Georgia Military Women and Veterans
Ms. Kim Scofi, United Military Care
Mr. Kevin Hammond, State Commander, VFW, Department of Georgia
Ms. Camala Ball, Budget Analyst, GDVS
Ms. Veda Brooks, Director of Women Veterans Office, GDVS
Mr. Bobby Davis, Director, Veterans Education & Training, GDVS
Ms. Shareka Monday-Robinson, HR Generalist, GDVS
Ms. Dawn Thomas, Appeals Division, GDVS, American Legion Service Officer
Mr. Steven Fay, Training & Professional Development Division, GDVS

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Ms. Monica Dorsey, Communications & Outreach Specialist, GDVS
Ms. Barbara Beedles, Administrative Assistant, GDVS
Ms. Julie Hammond, Confidential Secretary to the Commissioner, GDVS

On Wednesday, September 29, 2021, the Veterans Service Board meeting was held in person and by video/tele-conference.

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

Ms. Ross welcomed the guests and performed a "roll call" of people listed above.

Mr. Hanley made a motion to approve the September Agenda. Ms. Swan seconded the motion. The motion passed by roll call vote.

Mr. Hanley made a motion to approve the August minutes, which were previously distributed for members to review. Ms. Swan seconded the motion. The motion passed.

The following reports were submitted from the Veteran Service Organizations:

Mr. Doug Middleton, Chair of the Veterans Service Foundation Board and MOPH Representative

The Georgia Purple Heart Veterans Foundation will host its annual Purple Heart Golf Tournament on October 11th at the City Club of Marietta. Everyone is invited to participate or become a hole sponsor.

The Georgia Veterans Service Foundation Board will be meeting today. We have completed the IRS Form 1023 for the 501(c)3 application. The bank account and post office box are both open. We now have an EIN and are able to accept donations. It will cost \$650 to submit the paperwork to the IRS. We will be electing new officers at today's meeting.

Mr. Kevin Hammond, State Commander, VFW

The organization is growing. We lost one to suicide this month and are hoping to lose no one else. We are here to assist in any way we can.

Mr. Dan Holtz, GMOAA

Mr. Holtz announced that the newest recipient of the Joseph C. Barto Jr. Award, given to those who notably support veterans, will be awarded to Mr. Russell Feagin this year. Mr. Feagin is the Director of the Health and Memorials Division at GDVS. The award ceremony will take place on October 9th at the National Infantry Museum.

Ms. Amy Stevens, Georgia Military Women and Vetlanta

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this report. GMW continues to grow and provide resources and activities for women veterans across Georgia. We now have over 4,250 members and the average post in our Facebook group is seen by up to 2,000 women. About 3,500 are actively participating in the group online each month. In addition, now that COVID restrictions are lifting, we are having more and more in-person meetings across the state. In the past month these have included: horseback riding, gun range shooting, and a wine-tasting as well as regular restaurant get-togethers. The highlight of the month was a 3-day bus trip for 20 women who went to Washington, DC to see the Military Women's Memorial as well as many other historical sites. A low spot for the group this past month was the grief over the 13 fatalities in Afghanistan during the August 31st withdrawal of troops. Two special Zoom meetings were held online to help process that tragedy. In addition, our GMW Military Chaplain, who is a VA Chaplain as well as Air Force Reserve Chaplain, is now offering a weekly spiritual care and Bible study group. We are gearing up for more activities to support and engage our members. We have entered into a partnership with Kaiser Permanente and Humble Warriors & Yoga to provide some additional activities. We are also working with The Grace Project for a Women Veteran breast cancer survivor project in October and with Lifewaters to have a Georgia Aquarium experience in the spring. Thank you to board members and others for the referrals of women to our group. We are making a difference by connecting women who serve.

Update on VETLANTA activities: Unfortunately, a hard decision was made to postpone our 3rd quarter summit at Mercedes Benz due to the COVID threat. It will be rescheduled next year. We are currently staying virtual until the end of the year. The next summit will be announced soon.

Ms. Stevens added to her report that Lloyd Knight's wife, Suzanne, passed away.

Ms. Dawn Thomas, Appeals Division, GDVS, American Legion Service Officer:

The following information is submitted for this month's board meeting:

- The Department Service Officer attended a Teams Meeting on Sept 9, 2021, conducted by Brian Morgan.
- The Department Service Officer attended a monthly VSO/CMA Meeting on Sept 12, 2021, conducted by Brian Morgan.
- The Department Service Officer attended an Emergency Meeting via Teams with Dr. Brown and Tim Hodge on Sept 20, 2021, in reference to the situation with the mail that was stored in the basement of the hospital.
- The Department Service Office attended a VSO/CMA Meeting on the 26th of August with the new director, Tony Milons.

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- The Department Service Officer received notification from all hospitals and clinics that there will be no hospital tours this year due to COVID and many of the hospitals are on Phase 1.
- The Assistant Department Service Officer (Ed Kent) assisted 00 veterans with VA benefits related inquiries this month. Ed is still recovering from major back surgery.
- American Legion attended the National Convention on August 27, 2021 – September 2, 2021 in Phoenix, Arizona.
- Upcoming events – Sept 25, 2021 Department Service Office will conduct training and fill out forms and check claims for the 9th District.

Ms. Thomas added to her report that items backlogged in the mail did include medical records of veterans. She is following up to get a list of the records that were not duplicated that were in this batch.

Ms. Kim Scofi, United Military Care

United Military Care is a non-profit organization that assists veterans in Georgia. On November 6th they will host a "Give Thanks" event in East Cobb to bring together civilians and veterans in order to show veterans how thankful we are for their service.

Mr. Rick White, Georgia Military Veterans Hall of Fame

Mr. White gave an update on the upcoming Hall of Fame recipients. There are 1 Medal of Honor, 10 Valor, 2 Achievement and 3 Service. Of these, 5 are deceased and 1 is KIA. The 4th female has been selected, Ms. Sparkle Adams. The induction ceremony (banquet) will be on November 6th at 12:00 p.m. at the Saint Luke Ministry Center in Columbus. They are still working toward moving the Hall of Fame to the Capitol. Mr. Hanley asked for clarification on the holdup and it is the committee that has to approve everything that comes into the Capitol for viewing. It is not a question of "if" the move will take place, but "when."

Ms. Belinda Boldoe, VFW:

The following information is submitted for this month's board meeting:

- The Department Service Officer participated with the VFW Post 12180 in the McDonough Meet and Greet Community Parade held on August 21, 2021 at 11AM. After the parade, at Post 12180 booth, I have provided information to veterans and their family members on federal and state benefits.

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- The Department Service Officer attended the Quarterly Atlanta RO VSO/Dir virtual meeting with the Atlanta RO Director Anthony Milons, Angela Seelhammer, Assistant Director, Patrick Zondervan, Assistant Director, Atlanta RO Staff and Brian Morgan, CMA with a Q&A session on the Atlanta VA Benefit System held on August 26, 2021 at 1PM. A summary of the meeting was provided to the VFW Commander, Staff, and community.
- The Department Service Officer attended the Quarterly Atlanta VAHCS VSO virtual meeting with Director Brown and Staff on August 26, 2021 at 3:15PM. A summary of the meeting was provided to the VFW Commander, Staff, and community.
- The Department Service Officer attended a VA HCS Veteran Virtual Town Hall meeting with Director Ann Brown and Staff, Angela Seelhammer, Atlanta RO Assistant Director with a Q&A session on the Atlanta VA HCS on August 26, 2021 from 5PM-630PM.
- The Department Service Officer attended a VA Virtual All Employee Town Hall Webinar hosted by the Denis McDonough, Secretary of Veterans Affairs, and Donald Remy, Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs. The leaders discussed top priorities and responded to employees' questions on a wide range of topics. The webinar replay was held on August 31, 2021.
- The Department Service Officer attended and participated in the Department of Georgia VFW Annual Georgia Leadership Training (GLT) held on September 10-12, 2021 Macon Marriott City Center, 240 Coliseum Dr., Macon, GA 31217. During the training session I provided information to the District and Post Service Officers on "Planning Your Legacy: VA Survivors and Burial Benefits.
- The Department Service Officer attend a virtual VFW NVS Director's Forum on VA Building Access and Policies on September 13, 2021 at 2PM We discussed the major changes to VA's COVID-19 policies including the recent implementation of vaccine attestations for building access and the proposal of several executive orders from the President.
- The Department Service Officer attended the Quarterly Atlanta VAHCS VSO/Stakeholder virtual meeting with Director Brown and Staff on September 20, 2021 at 4:30PM. The emergency meeting was about the Atlanta VAMC mail back log in the media.
- The Department Service Officer attended the FDIC Webinar on Banking Opportunity for Returning Citizens in GA held on September 23, 2021 from 1PM-230PM. The presenters provided information on how citizen who have been incarcerated can obtain banking privileges.

Assistant Commissioner George Canavaggio, Field Operations and Appeals:

Mr. Canavaggio added to his report that the Annual Training will be held on October 25-29 in Peachtree City. The purpose of this training is to maintain accreditation with the V.A.

Mr. Canavaggio also highlighted the Veterans Day Proclamation event, which will be held at the Capitol on November 8th at 10:00 a.m. Invitations to the event are in the board member packets.

Ms. Swan asked for an update on the Retired Veterans Task Force meeting held on September 22nd, which Mr. Canavaggio gave. Ms. Ross interjected that Senator Kirkpatrick may sponsor legislation aimed at veterans.

GENERAL

- On August 28, 2021, Assistant Commissioner George Canavaggio attended a Vietnam Certificate of Honor and Lapel Pin ceremony hosted by the John Houstoun, Chapter of the daughters of the American Revolution. The ceremony was held in Thomaston, Georgia.
- September 4, 2021, Assistant Commissioner George Canavaggio attended the Georgia Governor's Veterans Task Force in partnership with Georgia Veterans RC ride for suicide prevention at the Newnan VFW Post 2667.
- On September 22, 2021, Assistant Commissioner George Canavaggio conducted a WebEx meeting of the Returning Veterans Task Force.
- Welcome Home Letters:
 - 4 Welcome Home Letters were mailed out in August
- Department Electronic Claim's Assistance Processing System (Vetra Spec) currently 308,494 entries, this is an increase of 926 from August 25, 2021.

PROJECTED POSITIONS

- Current openings in, Appeals, Statesboro, Thomasville, Douglas, LaGrange, Augusta VAMC, Dublin VAMC, Hinesville CBOC, Valdosta CBOC and Waycross.

Veda Brooks, Women Veterans Coordinator (WVC)

Ms. Brooks added to her report a briefing on their progress regarding stickers being created for gun shops, that we are waiting for gun locks to come in (which will be free). We are looking to purchase medical boxes to lock up meds, but these are expensive. She needs about 500 and is asking for sponsors to help with the cost. They have checked at Lowe's and Home Depot and are starting to work on grants with pharmaceutical companies and pharmacies.

Ms. Brooks corrected her report below in two areas: (1) On September 16, her participation in Veterans Court was online due to COVID exposure. She was unable to attend the September 18 Coalition of One event.

- August 26, 2021, Ms. Brooks participated in the Tornado Response Meeting Coweta County.
- August 26, 2021, Ms. Brooks participated Women Veterans Health Committee Monthly Meeting.
- August 31, 2021, Ms. Brooks participated in the Tornado Response Mental Health Meeting Coweta County.
- September 1, 2021, Ms. Brooks participated in Center for Women Veterans and the Crisis Intercept Mapping.
- September 2, 2021, Ms. Brooks participated in the Lethal Means Safety Community of Practice Call and participated in Veterans Court.
- September 4, 2021, Ms. Brooks participated in the Coweta Ride 22.
- September 8, 2021, Ms. Brooks SMVF TA & Georgia lead planning meeting.
- September 11, 2021, Ms. Brooks participated in Coweta County 9/11 Remembers Ceremony.
- September 13, 2021, Ms. Brooks participated in the SSVF Shared Geography Meeting.
- September 14 - 15, 2021, Ms. Brooks in the Public Virtual Advisory Committee on Homeless Veterans (ACHV) meeting where she briefed the Advisory Committee and community partners.
- September 14, 2021, Ms. Brooks participated in the Tornado Response Mental Health Meeting Coweta County.
- September 16, 2021, Ms. Brooks participated in Veterans Court.
- September 18, 2021, Ms. Brooks participated in the Coalition of One, Sandy Springs Women Veteran Event.
- September 20, 2021, Ms. Brooks participated in the Coweta County "Scarves for Veterans".
- September 21, 2021, Ms. Brooks participated in the Tornado Response Meeting Coweta County and attended the Coweta County Family Connection Meeting.
- September 22, Ms. Brooks Participated in the (RVTF).
- September 27, 2021, Ms. Brooks participated in the September Governor's Challenge Team Lead Call.
- September 28, 2021, Ms. Brooks participated in the Tornado Response Meeting Coweta County.
- September 21, 2021, Ms. Brooks participated in the Violence Prevention TF Meeting.

Current committees

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

Ramona Roper, Training and Professional Development Division

Ms. Roper added to her report that her division is working to perfect the training and modifying as necessary. There will be three tiers – beginning, intermediate and advanced. There will be office manager training, and also learning games.

- August 17, 2021, Steven Fay and Ramona Roper assisted Mr. Dale Bell and Mr. Chris Kicklighter with interviews at the Lawrenceville CBOC for the vacant VFSO1 position
- August 30, 2021, Mark Demers completed the GDVS VFSO Training Manual and dropped it in the GDVS Absorb Training Portal
- September 16, 2021, GDVS Training and Professional Development Division visited The Peachtree City Hilton Conference Center, site for the 2021 GDVS Annual Training.
- September 18, 2021, Mark Demers attended an American Legion conference in Hampton, GA
- September 21, 2021, GDVS Training and Professional Development Division attended the Returning Veterans Task Force

Upcoming Events:

- Daily continued ongoing support and monthly trainings to the Regional Directors and Veteran Field Service Offices.
- Weekly mentoring to the VFSO's
- Preparations for Annual Training (in-person and possibly virtually)

Shelly-Ann Simpson, Director of Appeals

Ms. Simpson added to her report that on September 15th she had a Zoom call with AARP on the subject of coffee break for caregivers. She has lost one employee to another service organization. She had an employee transfer in from the Decatur office. She expects an official email to be coming to the

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employees in her division regarding the vaccine mandate for federal employees, with a deadline of December 18th to comply. She does anticipate losing some employees over the mandate.

- The total number of actual hearings conducted by the Appeals Division for August 2021 was 157.
- The total number of pre-hearing actions for August 2021 was 299. Post-hearing actions was 155.
- The total number of correspondence conducted by the Appeals Division (with veterans, BVA/VA employees, and VSO field offices) for the month of August was 2237.
- As of September 1, 2021, the Atlanta VA Regional Office completed the following claims for the Service Organizations represented by GDVS:

Types of Claims	Number of Awards	Benefits paid out
Compensation	99,562	\$168,928,804
DIC	2,898	\$4,172,075
Survivor Pension	913	\$678,699
Veteran Pension	1,881	\$1,960,243
Grand Total	105,274	\$175,739,821

NORTH GA, Dale Bell, North Area Director

Mr. Bell summarized his report and highlighted the revenues from August. He stated that we are losing two employees in Augusta, one to DFCS and one to DOL. Ms. Swan asked if he had interviewed anyone yet and Mr. Bell replied that he is interviewing on Thursday, September m30.

- On September 2nd, Bill Smith of LaFayette gave a Benefits Briefing to student veterans at the Walker County Campus of Georgia Northwest Technical College in LaFayette.
- August 2021 total retro awards reported by North Georgia Offices: \$1,254,524.00. Included in that amount is a single award of \$111,855.00 reported by Dawn Perry of Athens.
- Director Site Visits / Inspections: Canton, Carrollton, Cedartown, Ft McPherson, Gainesville, Marietta, Newnan
- North Region Gains/Losses:

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- Renee Jacobs started at Lawrenceville September 2, 2021.
- Sharonica Thomas resigned from Augusta VAMC September 15, 2021.
- North Georgia Region Veteran Population: 443,313
- Office Visits

			Average Visits Per VFSO				
			Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO				
	Region:		North				
	Month:		August-21				

*Total Monthly Office Visits includes Remote Work: 2,886 In-person Office Visits and 11,250 phone calls and emails

SOUTH GA, Vincent Pritchett, South Area Director

Mr. Pritchett had no changes to his report, but did highlight the revenues brought into the state in August.

- On August 26, 2021, Vincent Pritchett, and Leonard Harris (Lagrange Field Office) conducted phone interviews to fill the vacant Veterans Field Service Officer 1 position in Lagrange. We ultimately decided to delay filling the position because the Department of Labor keeps closing the building due to COVID issues.
- On August 28, 2021, Vincent Pritchett, and Asst. Commissioner Canavaggio supported the Vietnam Veteran Certificate and Pin ceremony hosted by the John Houstoun (not a typo) chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution in Thomaston Georgia. Approximately 62 certificates and lapel pins were presented to veterans or their survivors during the ceremony.
- On September 11, 2021, Mark Holmes, and Brandon Miller (Warner Robins field office) supported a 361 Army Reserve Resource Fair. They set up an information table and provided a short benefit briefing to approximately 100 attendees.

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- On September 18, 2021, Vincent Pritchett joined the GA Veterans Education Career Transition Resource Center and the GA Department of Human Services to support an information fair sponsored by Ms. Donica Davis of Stablegold Hospitality.
- South Region offices reported retroactive payments totaling \$650,681.94 with the highest single payment of \$270,594.46 reported by the Saint Marys Field Service Office.
- South Region Gains/Losses: Effective September 1, 2021, Stephanie Jordan joined our Brunswick field office. Effective September 2, 2021, Krickett Bragg left our Glennville field office.
- South Georgia Region Veterans Population: 244,963
- Office Visits for August: South Georgia offices handled 6,358 phone calls and emails.

Average Visits Per VFSO							
Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO							
Region:		South Region					
Month:		August-21					
A	B	C	D	E	D / E F	G	G / E H
			Total	Work	Average	Total	Average
	Veterans' Field		Monthly	Days	Office	Claims	Claims
	Service Officer (VFSO)		Office	In	Visits	Submitted	Submitted
Office Name	Last Name	#	Visits	Month	Per	To	By VFSOS
					Day	VA	To VA
						Monthly	Daily
	Number of VFSOs:	38	2,529	766	3.30	1,880	2.45
Number of Offices:	30	Average Visits/Office:		84.30	Average Claims/Office:		62.67

Ms. Charlotte May, Director, Public Information Division

Ms. May gave an update that the October Vietnam Veterans ceremony has been postponed. She will have more information on the November programs at the next meeting.

GENERAL

Personnel

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

INFORMATION OUTREACH

News Releases –

1. Cemetery Roll of Honor - the Public Information Division continues to update the online Roll of Honor for veterans interred at the Veterans Memorial Cemeteries in Milledgeville and Glennville throughout the COVID-19 outbreak in Georgia.

Facebook Post Highlights –

1. GDVS Selects Q2 Employee of the Quarter – shared information on Rico Johnson's selection as Employee of the Quarter and celebrated his dedication to excellence and selfless attitude in serving Georgia's veterans and families.
2. VA Expands Programs for Women Veterans – shared information on services available for female veterans and the VA's ongoing campaign to raise awareness of those services.
3. POW/MIA Remembrance Day – shared a message from the Office of Governor Brian Kemp honoring those who were held as prisoners of war and those who remain missing in action.
4. Patriot's Day Remembrance – shared a video message from the Office of Governor Brian Kemp and featuring Adjutant General Tom Carden in remembrance of the 20th anniversary of those lost during the attacks on 9/11 and the Georgians who responded.

Public Information Division Contacts (Since January 1, 2020)

- Replies to VA eBenefits Messages = 3,015
 - Service paused as of May 1, 2021. eBenefits services were moved to VA.gov as part of a transition to a single service website. While migrating data and merging systems, the ability to request information from a state veteran's agency or veteran's service organization was broken.
- Replies to General Questions = approximately 1,315
- Individual Request for the State Certificate of Honor = approximately 235

GOVERNOR'S (VIETNAM VETERAN) CERTIFICATE of HONOR PROGRAM-

- The latest and most accurate totals (since March 2015) –

State Certificates of Honor issued via GDVS – An estimated 28,900
(Honors Ceremonies and Central Office Mail Outs)

DoD Vietnam Veteran Lapel Pins presented via GDVS – An estimated 23,185

Honors Ceremonies supported/coordinated by GDVS – 346

Defense Department's Vietnam Veteran Surviving Spouse CoH – 268

EVENTS-

- Daughters of the American Revolution Honor Vietnam Veterans in Thomaston – August 28
 - Assistant Commissioner George Canavaggio and South Regional Director Vince Pritchett presented certificates and pins to over 70 veterans.
- Camden County Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 1137 Honors Vietnam Veterans – ceremony postponed due to COVID-19 precautions.

Mr. Bobby Davis, Director, Veterans Education and Training Division (State Approving Agency):

Mr. David added to his report that he received the FY20 report last Friday. Georgia is 5th in the nation on benefits, with the total being \$495,667,300.00. We are currently first in the nation on job training. He will hold a Zoom meeting with the VA Central Office to determine if COVID restrictions will be lifted in December, if classes will be in person or online, and what the rates will be. The SAA staff falls under the vaccine mandate since they are federally funded, but they need more guidance on this.

VETERANS 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 1,784 educational institutions and training establishments where Georgia veterans may attend school or job training and utilize their GI Bill educational benefits.

Item *	Number
Approved Educational Institutions	394
Approved Training Establishments	1,390
Veteran Students Enrolled in Educational Institutions	9,070

* Source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration, Education Division, August 2021.

Mr. Russell Feagin, Director, Health & Memorials Division

Mr. Feagin added to his report that the Reach Across American program will take place on December 18th. Activity at both cemeteries has increased significantly.

Construction and contracts are on-going. Still no update on the IT grant or the Augusta and Milledgeville cemeteries.

Tonya is submitting a report on COVID-19 statistics and status.

Tonya Jarrett, Clinical Director, Health & Memorials Division

Ms. Jarrett gave an update to her report. 249 of 260 staff members have at least the first vaccine, 6 have been granted a religious exemption, 1 has been granted a medical exemption and 4 will no longer be able to work and will most likely be terminated as of October 1st. She met with PruittHealth about what her staffing needs will be as they move forward.

There are no COVID positive patients or staff at this time.

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Tuesday, August 31, 2021											
Category	Population	Positive Cases	Positives % of Population	Deaths	Deaths % of Positives	Deaths % of Population	Recovered	Recovered % of Positives	Reinfected	Currently In Isolation	Positive for current month
Patients	295	100	33.90%	26	26.00%	8.81%	71	71.00%	12	3	11
Staff	490	118	24.08%	0	0.00%	0.00%	116	98.31%	7	2	8

Cumulative figures since March 1, 2020.

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

In August the CDC changed their criteria to time based. Patients with no symptoms after 14 days are presumed to have recovered from the virus.

Reinfected category is patients/staff who were in the Recovered Category and have since been tested positive again.

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

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

Onsite Vaccine - Date of Clinic No. 1 - Jan. 12-13, 2021
Onsite Vaccine - Date of Clinic No. 2 - Feb. 2-3, 2021
Onsite Vaccine - Date of Clinic No. 3 - Feb. 23, 2021
Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 4 - Mar. 12, 2021
Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 5- April 2, 2021
Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 6- April 16, 2021
Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 7- April 30, 2021
Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 8- May 14, 2021
Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 9- May 28, 2021
Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 10- June 11, 2021
Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 11- June 25, 2021
Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 12- July 9, 2021
Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 13- July 23, 2021
Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 14- August 6, 2021
Onsite Vaccine- Date of Clinic No. 15- August 18, 2021

Updated COVID information for 8/1/21-8/31/21 GWVH- Milledgeville

- **Patient status as of 8/31/21**
 - 11 total positive COVID patients in August 2021
 - 3 COVID positive patients fully recovered.
 - 3 patients remain COVID positive
 - 2 patients are isolated in COVID Unit at GWVH
 - 1 patient is in Navicient Health Baldwin Hospital
 - 5 patients positive with COVID passed away between 8/1/21-8/31/21
 - Patient #1- 95-year-old- Fully Vaccinated- Expired-8/11/21- Wood 2
 - Patient #2- 96-year-old- Fully Vaccinated- Expired- 8/12/21- Wood 3
 - Patient #3- 98-year-old- Unvaccinated- Expired- 8/23/21- Wood 3

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- Patient #4- 75-year-old- Unvaccinated- Expired- 8/24/21- Wood 2
- Patient #5- 77-year-old- Fully Vaccinated- Expired- 8/28/21- Wood 3
- *As of 8/31/21- 172 patients out of 177 patients, 97.1%, have received at least one dose of a COVID vaccine at GWVH*
- **Pruitt Staff status as of 8/31/21**
 - 8 total positive COVID Pruitt Health staff during August 2021
 - 2 staff remain positive
 - 6 staff are recovered
 - *265 Pruitt staff out of 278 staff, 95.3%, have received at least one dose of a COVID vaccination*

Mitigation Strategies

1. Employees are tested twice per week with rapid point of care (POC) tests to review any areas of spread of COVID on the individual units in any of the buildings
2. Veteran patients are tested once per week with rapid POC tests
3. Any positive rapid tests are then followed with a PCR test to ensure results
4. Each week there is an average of 500 facility staff and 170 veterans tested for COVID
5. On 8/9/21-
 - a. Pruitt Health developed a policy requiring all current partners and new hires to have received at least their first COVID vaccine dose no later than 10/01/21
 - b. Exceptions will only be granted for medical reasons or religious exemptions on a case-by-case basis
 - c. Partners not meeting this requirement will not be allowed to continue employment with Pruitt Health beyond 9/30/21
6. A central checkpoint is in place in each building for temperature checks and COVID symptom checks before entry is allowed into the building
7. Staff are assigned to work in specific buildings and are not shared between buildings
8. The facility maintains a level 1 COVID unit, level 2 observation unit, and a level 3 general population unit
9. Wood building is currently on quarantine due to outbreak of COVID cases
 - a. No patient visitation indoor or outdoor- *the only visitation allowed is for hospice patients.*
 - b. No smoke breaks allowed outside
 - c. Patients are served all meals in their rooms or on their units.
 - d. Patients are not allowed to leave the unit unless there is a medical emergency
10. Vinson Building came off quarantine on 8/22/21

- a. Patients must eat in rooms or on units
- b. May have outdoor visitation by appointment only

- 11. Vital oxide is being distributed by Aeroclave machines and backpack foggers in all buildings/rooms as needed
- 12. Staff assigned in buildings on quarantine must wear N95 masks and face shields/goggles in addition to standard personal protective equipment
- 13. Staff assigned in all other buildings must wear surgical masks and face shields/goggles in addition to standard personal protective equipment
- 14. Patient oxygen saturation rates and temperatures are checked at least once per shift- anything below 95% SAT rate, provider is notified and accelerated respiratory protocol is implemented or patient is sent out to ER

Updated COVID information for 9/1/-9/16/21 GWVH- Milledgeville

- **Patient status as of 9/16/21**
 - 4 total positive COVID patients between 9/1-9/16/21
 - 3 COVID positive patients fully recovered.
 - 1 patient remains COVID positive and is on the COVID unit at GWVH
 - No COVID related deaths in September 2021
 - *As of 9/16/21-- 163 patients out of 168 patients, 97.02%, have received at least one dose of a COVID vaccine at GWVH*
- **Pruitt Staff status as of 9/16/21**
 - 2 total positive COVID Pruitt Health staff between 9/1-9/16/21
 - Both staff members have recovered with no active staff cases currently
 - *As of 9/16/21--256 Pruitt staff out of 272 staff, 94.11%, have received at least one dose of a COVID vaccination*
- **Mitigation Strategies as of 9/16/21**
 - Employees are tested twice per week with rapid point of care (POC) tests to review any areas of spread of COVID on the individual units in any of the buildings
 - Any positive rapid tests are then followed with a PCR test to ensure results
 - Each week there is an average of 500 facility staff tested for COVID
 - No patient buildings are currently on quarantine and patients can receive visitors outside at scheduled times and receive video chats
 - Staff must wear face shields or eye goggles, mask, and any other necessary personal protective equipment in the Wood and Vinson buildings. Staff must wear N95 masks in addition to the other outlined PPE on the COVID Unit
 - Meals are still being provided on patient units rather than communal dining

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- Vital oxide continues to be utilized as needed in the buildings
- Facility continues to maintain a level 1 COVID unit, level 2 observation unit, and level 3 general population unit
- PruittHealth has vaccine mandate beginning 10/1/21

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

They are following the State mandates at the moment, so vaccination has not been mandated. They continue to test the unvaccinated. There are currently no COVID positive residents or staff.

A discussion ensued with Mr. Kopsie and Ms. Ross regarding how the VA does not provide oversight in the state homes, even though they fund a portion of their incomes.

Mr. Kerry Dyer, Director of Operations, GDVS

Mr. Dyer noted that we have had 6 resignations and 4 new hires. He is posting to fill the vacant positions. The LaGrange office may have to relocate from the DOL building, which has been closed due to COVID. The Department has raised \$900 in the State Charitable Fund thus far. Ms. Hammond completed the course to become a Procurement Specialist.

Mr. Mark Bannister, Administration, Health, and Memorials:

Mr. Bannister added to his report that August and September have been busy with the submission of the FY22/23 budgets. The priority remains increasing the salaries of those employees who make \$50,000 or less. His department has been clearing up the FY22 financials as we move into FY23. He has been dealing with State Properties regarding GDVS offices leased within VA facilities and updating MOU's. He is standing by for a call from OPB, which usually comes at this time of year.

Ms. Swan asked what was the oldest request on the list. Mr. Bannister said: (1) 15-passenger buses for the Milledgeville Home, (2) VetraSpec funding to cover the annual increases, (3) Director of Outreach Suicide Prevention. He state that he is never given a reason that funding is declined.

FINANCE

Accounting

Routine operations are continuing.

Budget and General

The Chairman of the GA Veterans Service Board approved the AFY 2022 & FY 2023 Budget Request for the GDVS. The budget was submitted to the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget (OPB) on September 1, 2021, in compliance with the Budget Instructions. In addition to FY 2023 budget request items, we submitted eight off-line requests in the AFY 2022 budget.

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We have enclosed eight (8) off-line operational requests for AFY 2022 totaling \$1,183,479. They are in priority order and are as follows:

Priority	Description	Cost
1	Request funds to increase salaries of GDVS personnel earning \$50,000 dollars or less.	\$644,298.30
2	Director, Outreach Suicide Prevention Abuse & Substance Abuse	\$114,500
3	Reclassification of Cemetery Directors and Assistant Directors	\$22,700
4	Funding to support additional position Office Manager – Jasper VA Clinic	\$48,662
5	Provide funding to support increased cost of electronic claims processing (VetraSpec).	\$58,819
6	Funding for the increased cost of mandatory annual certification training	\$100,000
7	Funding to support purchase of two (2) 15-passenger buses for GWVH	\$150,000
8	Funding to support additional Grounds Maintenance Technician-1 at the Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Glennville.	\$44,500

1. The priority in our AFY 2022 offline budget request is for funding to support a \$3,000 dollar pay adjustment for GDVS employees with a gross income of \$50,000 dollars and below (135 positions).

- GDVS Employees are among the **lowest paid in Georgia State Government** (based on commensurate duties/education), yet account for **\$3.6 Billion** of revenue into Georgia's economy annually (per VA Regional office)
- GDVS has done **everything within our existing budget** to provide pay increases.
- Current lower paid employees can easily find entry-level jobs across the state making more than even the proposed increase in salary (\$15/hr or \$31,200 annually)

2. Director, Outreach Suicide Prevention and Substance Abuse Prevention

- The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration or (SAMHSA) has partnered with the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to bring the Governor's and Mayor's challenges to prevent suicide among service members, veterans, and their families to states and communities across the Nation.
- For the *Governor's Challenge*, 35 states, including Georgia are taking part in the challenge and are working to develop and implement state-wide suicide prevention best practices for SMVF, using a public health approach.
- The outreach director will be able to establish regional resources across the state to be able to provide quick first-line assistance to the field offices and the veteran clients.

3. Reclassification & Realignment of Cemetery Directors

- The purpose is to properly align the director's positions with the "correct" job code family according to the state's Job Code Classification and Career Path (JCCP) and state-wide pay structure.
- The "objective" of this request is to reflect the current job responsibilities as facility managers and not as "glorified" Grounds Maintenance Technicians.
- It is appropriate to classify positions commensurate with the duties and responsibilities of the jobs being performed and to recognize the positions correctly. Previously, these positions were not classified properly in accordance with the duties and responsibilities assigned.

4. Office Manager (VFSO 2) VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic Jasper (Pickens County).

- The purpose of having GDVS personnel located in the VA's medical facilities is to provide "one-stop shopping" for veterans who receive their healthcare at VA medical facilities.
- There is no cost to the State of Georgia for the use of VA office space and support equipment and services.
- If this request is not funded, veterans will have to go to one of our other GDVS field service offices located in Marietta, Canton, Decatur, or downtown Atlanta.

5. Request funding to support annual renewal cost of electronic claims (DataSpec/Vetra Spec).

- Digits-to-Digits (D2D) is an electronic claims submission service that will provide a common access point to standardize, centralize, and integrate the collection of Benefits Claim Forms and supporting evidence data.
- The cost of DataSpec/VetraSpec is paid from our annual budget operating funds. Approval of requested appropriated dollars will allow us to support one or more other priorities. The cost **per user** is \$449 dollars.

6. Request funding to support the cost of (mandatory) annual VA benefits training conferences (off-site) for Appeals and Veterans Field Service Officers.

- Annual training has been conducted by the GDVS for decades. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, and over the past seven years, training has been conducted for one week starting on a Monday afternoon and ending at noon on the following Friday. It has been held at the hotel-conference center in Peachtree City because of its proximity to access by Interstate highways leading to ease of travel to and from the conference.
- The cost of the venue in Peachtree City has steadily increased somewhat over the past several years; however, the location is ideal for this conference. It is not too far to travel from all the offices in the state and is close enough to Atlanta for Central Office staff to travel to the venue to meet and work with the attendees on issues of mutual interest.
- The cost of the training conference is paid from our annual budget operating funds. Approval of requested appropriated dollars will allow us to support one or more other priorities.

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- Annual recertification is training is a must! The GDVS has been conducting annual training of its personnel since the beginnings of modern-day operations, dating back to the late 1940s following the end of World War II.

7. Request funds to support the purchase of two (2) 12-passenger patient transport buses for the Georgia War Veterans Home at Milledgeville.

- Two handicap accessible activities buses for the GWVH in Milledgeville to support mandated recreation / activities for nursing home veteran patients. The buses are needed to transport veteran patients to off campus activities throughout the area.
- The current vehicle is over 20 years old and needs maintenance and service which would significantly outweigh the cost of needed repairs.
- In the previous two years the bus has cost the department over \$18,000 in needed repairs. On at least three occasions the bus broke down while away from the campus and loaded with patients from the nursing home.
- Because the requested buses do not carry more than 16 or more passengers, Georgia law does not require for drivers to hold a special license or and are exempt from CDL requirements. Thus, persons with a valid driver's license can legally operate the requested vehicles.

8. Funding to support an additional cemetery worker (Grounds Maintenance Technician 1) at the Milledgeville Cemetery

- The added requirements for documentation are putting a significant burden on the staffs of the cemeteries, as they are in addition to the work already being done to support the 6,370 interments occurring in FY 2021, a number that has been generally increasing since the facilities opened in 2001 and 2007.
- Every time a new interment occurs, a marker is placed and that marker and the ground around it must be maintained by cemetery staff to meet VA standards. That means mowing the grass, edging around the marker to provide a neat and professional appearance for the families and the public.
- Adding one additional Grounds Maintenance Technician to the staff will allow the cemetery staff to redistribute the workload in a manner that will reduce the amount of time each worker will be exposed to the elements of heat and cold throughout the year.
- Keeping the cemeteries' staff all employed by the State of Georgia provides better management control, more and better opportunities for motivation to maintain the high standards of the VA in their Shrine Status program and process.

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Our **FY 2023** budget submission contains eight operational enhancements totaling \$1,193,548. They are listed in priority order and are as follows:

Priority	Description	Cost
1	Funds to support a \$3,000 pay increase for GDVS employees earning \$50,000 dollars and below.	\$644,298.30
2	Director, Outreach Suicide Prevention Abuse & Substance Abuse	\$114,500
3	Reclassification of Cemetery Directors and Assistant Directors	\$22,700
4	Funding to support additional position Office Manager – Jasper VA Clinic	\$53,696
5	Funding to support additional Grounds Maintenance Technician-1 at the Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Glennville.	\$49,535
6	Funding for the increased cost of mandatory annual certification training	\$100,000
7	Provide funding to support increased cost of electronic claims processing (VetraSpec).	\$58,819
8	Funding to support purchase of two (2) 15-passenger buses for GWVH	\$150,000

Administrative note: FY 2023 budget item summaries (1 thru 8) are identical to AFY 2022 requests.

1. The priority in our FY 2023 budget request is for funding to support a \$3,000 dollar pay adjustment for GDVS employees with a gross income of \$50,000 dollars and below (135 positions).
2. Director, Outreach Suicide Prevention and Substance Abuse Prevention.
3. Reclassification & Realignment of Cemetery Directors.
4. Office Manager (VFSO 2) VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic Jasper (Pickens County).
5. Funding to support an additional cemetery worker (Grounds Maintenance Technician 1) at the Milledgeville Cemetery.
6. Request funding to support the cost of (mandatory) annual VA benefits training conferences (off-site) for Appeals and Veterans Field Service Officers.
7. Request funding to support annual renewal cost of electronic claims (DataSpec/Vetra Spec).

8. Request funds to support the purchase of two (2) 12-passenger patient transport buses for the Georgia War Veterans Home at Milledgeville.

HEALTH AND MEMORIALS

State Veterans Homes

State Veterans Homes Census (Through September 17, 2021)+

Current Month	Augusta	Milledgeville	Total
Regular Patients	97	120	217
Service Connected *	18	41	59
Total Patients	115	161	276
Last Month			
Regular Patients	101	128	229
Service Connected *	19	44	63
Total Patients	120	172	292

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

+ The report to the VSB are the total numbers from August 13, 2021, through September 17, 2021.

State Veterans Cemeteries

Burial Statistics (Through September 17, 2021)+

State Veterans Cemetery	Cumulative Last Month	Cumulative Current Month	Increase
Glennville	1,915	1,940	25
Milledgeville	4,479	4,524	45
Total	6,394	6,464	70

+ The report to the VSB are the total numbers from August 13, 2021, through September 17, 2021.

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery – Glennville

Routine COVID-19 contingency operations are continuing.

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Milledgeville

Routine COVID-19 contingency operations are continuing.

FY 2023 Capital Outlay Budget (COBS)

Augusta: Improvements to the existing facility.

Priority#1. Asbestos Abatement (Floors 2 – 5)

Priority#2. Rear entry door (Rehab Gym) and chiller replacement

Priority#3. Clinical training/education room buildout.

Milledgeville: Construction of the Sub Acute Therapy Unit, technology infrastructure upgrades for communications, electronic health records, and patient connectivity.

Priority #1. Phase 4 expansion for Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Milledgeville.

Priority #2. Wood building renovations for ADA compliance.

Priority #3. 14 bed addition to skilled nursing cottage.

Priority #4. 60 bed PTSD & Transitional Center skilled nursing facility.

Priority #5. Vinson building renovations for ADA compliance.

OPERATIONS

Human Resources

Routine operations are continuing.

Personnel Actions (Gains / Losses) (August 16, 2021 – September 16, 2021)

Location	Position	Status	Name	Date
Brunswick	VFSO-1	New Hire	<i>Stephanie Jordan</i>	09/01/2021
Lawrenceville	VFSO-1	New Hire	<i>Andrea Jacobs</i>	09/02/2021
Glennville	VFSO-1	Terminated	<i>Krickett Bragg</i>	09/02/2021
Glennville	Grounds Maint Tech 1	Resignation	<i>Michael Riordan</i>	09/09/2021
Augusta VAMC	VFSO-2	Resignation	<i>Sharonica Thomas</i>	09/15/2021
Milledgeville	Grounds Maint Tech 1	New Hire	<i>David Hodges</i>	09/15/2021
Glennville	Grounds Maint Tech 1	New Hire	<i>Robert West</i>	09/16/2021

Properties

Routine operations are continuing.

Information Technology

Routine operations are continuing.

Records Management

Routine operations are continuing as needed.

Vehicle Management

Routine service and maintenance are performed as required.

Veterans Service Foundation Board

The Chairman of the GA Foundation Board has requested a Foundation Board meeting immediately following the September Veterans Service Board meeting.

The purpose of the meeting is to elect officers for the upcoming year, as well as conduct the required business of the Foundation, to include approval of the IRS 501(c)3 form and 1023 submission. The meeting will also include GDVS staff officers appointed as CEO, COO and CFO.

OLD BUSINESS:

There was no old business to discuss.

NEW BUSINESS:

Mr. Hanley made a motion to move into Executive Session. It was seconded by Mr. Kopsie. The motion carried. The Board went into Executive Session at 1:20 p.m. Assistant Commissioner Bannister was called into the Executive Session at 1:50 p.m. and returned to the public meeting at 2:01 p.m. The Board returned to the conference room at 2:02 p.m.

Mr. Kubinec will be leading the sub-committee process to select the next Commissioner. Also serving on this sub-committee will be Ms. Swan and Mr. Kopsie. Nominations and resumes will be accepted until October 13th. Anyone interested can submit their resume to any Board member and it will go to the sub-committee for review. They will narrow the submissions and then the full Board will interview the finalists. They will have an open session to vote on the next Commissioner. There are no minimum qualifications so that a wide net can be cast initially. The term for the new Commissioner will be four years.

Mr. Kopsie made a motion to appoint Shawn Hanley as the Interim Commissioner until a vote is taken selecting a new Commissioner. Mr. Whitted seconded the motion and the motion passed.

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The October 27 board meeting was scheduled. It will be a combination virtual and in-person meeting, set up at the Hilton Peachtree City Atlanta Hotel & Conference Center at the GDVS Annual Training. Ms. Swan made a motion for this and Mr. Kopsie seconded it. The motion passed.

Ms. Swan made a motion to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. Kopsie. The motion passed by voice vote.

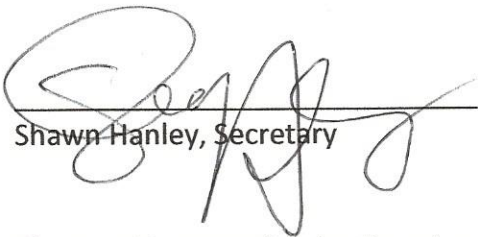
The meeting adjourned at approximately 2:12 p.m.

SIGNED:



Patricia Ross, Chairman

ATTEST:



Shawn Hanley, Secretary

The next Veterans Service Board meeting will be held in person at the Hilton Peachtree City Atlanta Hotel and Conference Center located at 2443 Hwy 54 W, Peachtree City, GA 30269. It will possibly be available via video/telephone conference call on Wednesday, October 27, 2021, at 12:30 p.m. The Webex link is:

<https://georgiadepartmentofveteransservice.webex.com/georgiadepartmentofveteransservice/j.php?MTID=m22c3f682bc55e71696e01f0f9e8b91b0>

Meeting password: **kzFXv3Emm25**

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

Access Code: **2346 528 2870**