

**Wednesday, September 21, 2022 at 12:30 p.m.**  
**Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting**  
**Atlanta, Georgia**

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

**Visitors:** Ms. Shelly-Ann Simpson, Executive Director, Field Operations & Appeals, GDVS  
**Present** Mr. Mark Bannister, Executive Dir., Health, Memorials, Finance & Development, GDVS  
Mr. Kerry Dyer, Chief Operations Officer, GDVS  
Mr. Aaron Eagan, Director of Community Based Interventions in VA Suicide Prevention  
Mr. Doug Middleton, Chair, Veterans Service Foundation Board  
Mr. Lou Zayas, Jr. Vice Commander, Military Order of the Purple Heart  
Ms. Tonjala Moton-Williams, GDVS, American Legion Assistant Service Office  
Ms. Kasey Boyd-Smith, Executive Assistant, VA Suicide Prevention  
Ms. Savannah Potter-Miller, Georgia Association for Women Lawyers  
Mr. Vince Pritchett, Director, Veterans Benefits South Region, GDVS  
Mr. Ken Childre, Director, Veterans Benefits North Region, GDVS  
Ms. Charlotte May, Director, Public Information and External Affairs, GDVS  
Mr. Russell Feagin, Director, Health & Memorials Division, GDVS  
Ms. Tonya Jarrett, Clinical Director, Health & Memorials Division, GDVS  
Ms. Linda Lavender, Director, Milledgeville Cemetery, GDVS  
Mr. Edwin Berry, Director, Appeals Division, GDVS  
Mr. William Wilson, Network Administrator, GDVS  
Ms. Camala Ball, Budget Analyst, GDVS  
Mr. Bobby Davis, Director, Veterans Education & Training, GDVS  
Ms. Shareka Monday-Robinson, Director, Human Resources, GDVS  
Ms. Veda Brooks, Coordinator, Women & Minority Veterans, GDVS  
Ms. Calandra Fergerson, Coordinator, Suicide Prevention & Outreach, GDVS  
Mr. Carlton Deese, Executive Director GWWH, Milledgeville, GA  
Mr. Mark Demers, Grant Program Implementation Manager, GDVS  
Mr. Steven Fay, Assistant Director, Training & Professional Development, GDVS  
Ms. Pat Morgan, Visitor  
Mr. Daniel Devine, Visitor  
Mr. George Gray, Visitor  
Mr. Andre Danzy, Visitor  
Mr. William Miller, Visitor  
Ms. Julie Hammond, Executive Assistant to the Commissioner, GDVS

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On Wednesday, September 21, 2022, the Veterans Service Board meeting was held in person and by video/tele-conference.

Mr. Hanley called the meeting to order at 12:25 p.m. Mr. Kubinec gave the invocation. Ms. Swan led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

Mr. Hanley suggested an amendment to the September agenda to include guest speaker Aaron Eagan. Mr. Kopsie made a motion to approve the agenda as amended. Ms. Swan seconded the motion. The motion passed.

Ms. Swan made a motion to approve the August minutes, which were previously distributed for members to review. Mr. Mendez seconded the motion. There were no objections. The motion passed.

Mr. Hanley introduced Mr. Aaron Eagan, Director of Community Based Interventions in VA Suicide Prevention. He is the subject matter expert of all the things VA Suicide Prevention is doing in communities. Mr. Eagan gave a brief talk followed by a Q&A, with the main points being:

- 60% of veterans who commit suicide haven't been in VA Healthcare in the 2 years preceding their death.
- VA has introduced Suicide Prevention 2.0, which blends clinical work with community work. To be successful we must work within the communities that veterans live in. This program expands clinical care by using telehealth to train providers with evidence based modalities to give access to evidence based treatment to all veterans, regardless of where they live. This program is active in all VISN's.
- VA has a lot of national programs but is looking to increase community level programs through SAMHSA and the Governor's Challenge.
- Statistics show that 71% (80+% in Georgia) of suicides occur as a result of firearms. More focus needs to be put on lethal means safety and safe firearm storage.
- A new position on the State level is the Community Engagement Partnership Coordinator (CEPC). There are currently 6 in Georgia and about 650 total nationwide (with only half the country up and running). Their sole job is to be out in the community to engage in ending veteran suicide.

**Question** from Mr. Hanley: Were there ideas among those awarded the Fox Grant that you had not thought of before?

**Answer:** I stayed removed from the Fox Grant process. Alternate programs were a large focus, such as hunting and fishing groups describing how they would screen and refer veterans into treatment. Training modalities will give good data on what's effective in engaging veterans.



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**Question** from Mr. Kopsie: What are we doing in regard to early intervention and identifying those at risk before they leave the military? Are you working with the DOD to reach them before they become a veteran?

**Answer:** We work closely with the DOD and have made good progress in the last 5 years to improve the transition phase. We have specific programs for those transitioning, one specifically for those with a history of mental health issues. Calls are made to engage the veterans in services we offer to them. We do lose some because we have invalid contact information and don't know where they end up. This is where we need local coalitions to help us find them.

**Question** from Mr. Hanley: Once someone calls in on the crisis hotline or suicide hotline, they are already in crisis and have to choose to pick up the phone. Do we use predictive analytics to determine who is at risk before it is too late?

**Answer:** There is a challenge with predictive analytics, and we will miss a lot of people, but it can be a tool. But how do we use it well? How do we figure out who is really at risk? Suicide attempts are usually made an hour or less from the thought. There are limitations on predictive analytics.

**Question** from Mr. Mendez: Military members are too busy while in the military to commit suicide because they are busy and needed. They do this when they become veterans because they lost their purpose. Is there a way to put more effort into job placement for veterans and give employers incentives to hire veterans?

**Answer:** There needs to be engagement with veteran service organizations within communities. We need to identify the veterans through these organizations and find out which communities they live in.

**Question** from Commissioner Ross: We had our Returning Veterans Task Force Meeting earlier today, which focused on mental health. Can we get data in a timelier manner in order to determine the success of our initiatives? Also, what constitutes a veteran suicide.

**Answer:** Death certificates come from coroners. They then make their way up the chain until they get to the DOD. There is a lot of cross referencing work going into determining who is a veteran and what caused their death. The process does take time. It is less time consuming for you to work on the county and state level to get information on suicide deaths.

**Question** from Mr. Hanley: On the local level, what can a small county or city do?

**Answer:** They can go to gun shops and ask for their help. Engage with VSO's and other community partners and work together.

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

- The Assistant Department Service Officer (Ed Kent) assisted 43 veterans with VA benefits related inquiries this month. Two veterans were provided with financial assistance for rent and utilities by Post 13.
- September 9, 2022 the Department Service Officer attended National Revitalization for District 9 at American Legion Post 201. DSO assisted veterans with benefits and questions on the PACT Act, provided informational handouts concerning the PACT Act, and provided veterans with information on their local GDVS office.
- Upcoming event: District 9 National Revitalization, September 22-24 at American Legion Department Headquarters.
- Upcoming event: American Legion Post 75 Annual Commanders Banquet, September 24, 2022 @1300. Department Service Officer and Assistant Service Officer will attend.
- Upcoming event: Visit to the Atlanta VA Medical Center on September 27, 2022 @0900.
- Upcoming event: Visit to the Atlanta VA Regional office on September 27, 2022 @1300.

**Ms. Belinda Boldoe, VFW**

- The Department Service Officer attended a Suicide Prevention Zoom Meeting. We discussed reaching out to the Faith-Based Community to host Suicide Prevention Seminars and to be included in the communities' Suicide Prevention program. The meeting was held on August 23, 2022, at 10AM.
- The Department Service Officer attended an Atlanta VBA Regional Office Directors/VSO Quarterly Zoom meeting with Director Tony Milons, Assistant Directors Angela Seelhammer, Patrick Zondervan, and Staff on the changes within the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) to include compensation, veteran readiness and employment, loan guaranty and education. In addition, Assistant Director Patrick Zondervan presented information on the PACT Act. The meeting was held on August 23, 2022, at 1PM.
- The Department Service Officer attended an unscheduled Atlanta VAMC Stakeholders meeting with Director Ann Brown and VAMC Staff. The Director informed the Stakeholders of a female veteran that publicly announced on her Facebook Page her disappointment with the Atlanta VA Health Care system after a botched medical procedure. The Director is concerned the incident may be aired by a local news station. The meeting was held on September 12, 2022, at 1:30PM.



**Ms. Amy Stevens, Georgia Military Women and VETLANTA**

Georgia Military Women continues to keep very busy. We are over 4,600 members now and have resumed many of the meetups. A trip to Memphis is upcoming. Small group meetups continue.

Outreach teams are available for any veteran event. Just let us know you want us to attend!

REMINDER: For VETLANTA Updates, the Q3 Summit in Atlanta is rapidly approaching. It will be on September 14<sup>th</sup> at Clay National Guard in Marietta, GA. The theme is employability and the GA Work for Warriors team from the Guard are our hosts. Commissioner Ross will be one of the speakers. Additionally, the Q4 VETLANTA has been announced. It will be December 7<sup>th</sup> at the Atlanta History Center. Please save the dates. Registration is at [www.vetlanta.org](http://www.vetlanta.org).

**Commissioner Patricia Ross**

On Monday, August 22, 2022, Commissioner Ross held a weekly Director's Meeting. She also had budget meetings. Later in the day she met with the Rural Georgia Collaborative Coalition. This coalition links K-12, post-secondary, industry, military, state education agencies, local school districts, non-profits, community organizations, workforce and economic development entities, and other stakeholders in collaborative working and learning to address complex challenges, such as our shortages of diverse talent in jobs in aviation/aerospace and the military.

On Tuesday, August 23, 2022, Commissioner Ross met with Michael Payne from the Marietta VECTR Center about having a full-time person in the new facility. She also had a Sub-Acute Program Development meeting, as well as a Unite Us meeting with GDVS and VECTR.

On Wednesday, August 24, 2022, Commissioner Ross met with Shauna Greene of the Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation. She also had a meeting with Transunion, an organization that could help us build a database of veterans in Georgia. She ended the day with her weekly Unite Us Implementation Meeting.

On Thursday, August 25, 2022, Commissioner Ross met with D.A. Lannom of EDA Management Consulting to determine ways we can assist veterans in Forsyth County. She also had a meeting with Unite Us.

On Friday, August 26, 2022, Commissioner Ross had a meeting with TCSG regarding Unite Us. She then attended the retirement luncheon for Herb Ward. She met with the Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation for dinner that evening regarding women veterans.

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On Monday, August 29, 2022, Commissioner Ross held a weekly Director's Meeting. She then had lunch with Unite Us representatives. She ended the day meeting regarding the Health and Memorials Division at GDVS.

On Tuesday, August 30, 2022, Commissioner Ross met with SAA Director Bobby Davis. She then attended a meeting at the Capitol regarding the VA Voter Registration Designation Pilot Program. The Commissioner attended a Women in Leadership luncheon in the building. She ended the day in a bi-weekly meeting with the Miner Agency.

On Thursday, September 1, 2022, Commissioner Ross visited the Gainesville Field Office. She then attended the Hall County Vietnam Veterans Ceremony sponsored by the Cresswind Veterans Club.

On Tuesday, September 6, 2022, Commissioner Ross held a weekly Director's Meeting. She then spoke at the Atlanta Vietnam Veterans Business Association monthly meeting. The Commissioner attended a follow-up meeting on the VA Voter Registration Program with the Secretary of State's office. Her afternoon included a meeting regarding the Sub-Acute Program Development and travel to an evening event, a Community Social to Welcome WR-ALC Commander at the Museum of Aviation at Robins Air Force Base.

On Wednesday, September 7, 2022, Commissioner Ross met with members of the Korean Consulate. She then met with Team Red, White and Blue and they've committed to being a partner with Unite Us so veterans can participate in recreational events. In the afternoon, she attended the Unite Us Weekly Implementation Meeting.

On Thursday, September 8, 2022, Commissioner Ross met with the Attorney General's Office regarding the Veterans Service Foundation and legislation aligning the VSF and with others in the state. She also had a meeting with her team and DOAS regarding the War Veterans Home request for proposal. She ended her day with a Unite Us Propagation Campaign Discussion.

On Friday, September 9, 2022, Commissioner Ross held an Open Forum with the field offices. She then attended the Sonny Perdue Investiture at the State Capitol.

On Saturday, September 10, 2022, Commissioner Ross was the keynote speaker at the Fleet Reserve Association Branch Meeting in Smyrna.

On Monday, September 12, 2022, Commissioner Ross visited the Lawrenceville and Oakwood Field Offices. She then attended The Georgia Joint Defense Commission, which commenced on Monday evening and went through Tuesday afternoon.

On Tuesday, September 13, 2022, Commissioner Ross attended the biweekly meeting with the Miner Agency and also had a meeting with Mr. Doug Middleton, Chair of the Veterans Service Foundation Board regarding the Foundation.



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On Thursday, September 15, 2022, Commissioner Ross attended a NASDVA All Conference Call. She also held a Legislative Review meeting with Mark Demers and Charlotte May.

**Highlights:**

As an agency, we are proposing 7 different pieces of legislation this cycle. Since they have not been accepted by the State, we are unable to provide information, but if accepted we will let the Board know.

**On the horizon:**

Unite Us roll out on 25 October. If you know of community-based organizations that we should reach out to, please let us know.

We are still pending a date for our Veteran's Day Proclamation ceremony at the Capitol.

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

**GENERAL**

- August 30, I attended a webinar hosted by Kaiser Permanente. I gave a briefing on getting the most out of your benefits. It was mostly an open forum to answer questions that they had regarding VA benefits.
- August 30 and September 6, I sat in on a meeting between the Secretary of State's office and the VA on the VA Voter registration Designation Pilot Program.
- On September 7, The Commissioner, Kerry Dyer, and I met with the Korean Vietnam Veterans Association.
- September 12, I attended the Atlanta VAMC stakeholder meeting.
- September 14, 2022, I attended the Vetlanta Q3 Summit with COO Kerry Dyer, Suicide Outreach and Prevention Coordinator Calandra Ferguson and the Women and Minority Veterans Coordinator.
- **DD 214's and Welcome Home Letters:**
  - 1,240 Welcome Home Letters were mailed out in August 2022.
- Department Electronic Claims Assistance Processing System (Veterans Benefits) currently 315,532; this is an increase of 546 from July 20, 2022.

## PROJECTED POSITIONS

- Current openings in Dublin and Newnan.

### **Ramona Roper, Training and Professional Development Division**

- August 26, 2022, Mr. Charles Isaac made a site visit to the Brunswick VFSO.
- August 30, 2022, Ms. Sherri Whitfield made a site visit to the Macon VFSO.
- August 30, 2022, Mr. Charles Isaac made a site visit to the Thomasville VFSO.
- September 7, 2022, Ms. Sherri Whitfield made a site visit to the Dublin VFSO.
- September 7, 2022, Mr. Charles Isaac made a site visit to the Savannah VFSO.
- September 12, 2022, the new monthly DROP Class will commence.
- September 16, 2022, Mr. Steven Fay will transfer to the Lawrenceville VFSO.
- September 17-22, 2022, Ramona Roper will attend the 2022 VFW National Service Officer training in Annapolis, MD.

### **Upcoming Events:**

- Daily continued ongoing support to the Regional Directors and Veteran Field Service Officers.
- Development of a Standard Operation Procedure manual for Veteran Field Service Officers.
- Continuation of Field Office visits.
- New monthly DROP class will commence in October, 2022

### **Edwin Berry, Director of Appeals**

- The total number of actual hearings conducted by the Appeals Division for August 2022 was **73**.
- The total number of pre-hearing actions for August 2022 was **275**. The total number of post-hearing actions was **28**.
- 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 **937**.
- As of September 1, 2022, the Atlanta VA Regional Office completed the following claims for the Service Organizations represented by GDVS:



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Types of Claims	Number of Awards	Benefits paid out
Compensation	101,137	\$188,558,316
DIC	3,278	\$5,022,207
Survivor Pension	836	\$709,445
Veteran Pension	1,691	\$1,851,043
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>107,178</b>	<b>\$196,141,011</b>

The total benefits awarded to Georgia veterans and their families increased by \$1,043,558.00 during the month of August 2022.

**Ken Childre, Director of North Region**

August 2022 total retro awards reported by the North Georgia offices: \$3,757,464.03.  
Included in that amount are single awards reported by:

Christine Collins (Blairsville)-\$256,098.15 (Hunter-1776)  
Rita Barnhart (Canton)-\$240,466.00 (Moore-4057)  
Steven Hungarter (Cartersville)-\$93,957.45 (Woody-2973)  
Glenn Massey (Gainesville)-\$91,445.00 (Miller-6300)  
Rico Johnson (Gainesville)-\$325,633.32 (Gresham-8261)  
  \$180,682.53 (Kirkpatrick-6127)  
  \$154,105.05 (Habersham-4910)  
  \$119,265.22 (Elliott-2520)

Director Site Visits/Inspections: 24 Offices (Conducted inspections along with District Managers)

5 August-Randy Brown (Griffin)

Spoke to the Veterans Support Group at the Bear Creek Community Center. 35 Veterans in attendance. Randy spoke about State benefits, compensation claims, surviving spouse benefits, women services, presumptive claims, and the new VA Clinic in Zebulon/Pike County.

8 August-Marie Lundquist (Jasper)

Spoke at the Vietnam Veterans Association meeting at the Dawsonville, GA Chapter. 74 Veterans and spouses in attendance. Talked about compensation, pension and DIC. Talked separately with 15 people and made 4 appointments for follow-up visits.

9 August-Christine Collins (Blairsville)

Spoke at the monthly Rabun County Vet-to-Vet Cafe. Did a presentation about GDVS and the services provided to Veterans and their family members. Met with several attendees after the presentation. NOTE: Scott Crane, Rabun County Commissioner is looking for GDVS to increase their

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availability in/around his area. This has been discussed with the Commissioner and we are setting up a schedule to do more visits.

**10 August-Marie Lundquist (Jasper)**

Guest Speaker at the Big Canoe-North Georgia Veterans Group. 56 Veterans and spouses in attendance. Let the group know about the GDVS Office in Jasper. Discussed compensation, pension and DIC. Talked separately with 20 people after the meeting with 9 appointments made. Two dropped by the Jasper office later in the day to have claims processed.

**23 August-Nicholas Treadway (Oakwood)**

Spoke at the VFW in Gainesville for 23 members of the Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter 772 of Northeast Georgia. Provided a 5–7-minute brief about GDVS and the services provided by our department. Members were also briefed on the PACT Act and the potential benefits that could be afforded to them.

**27 August-Kelvin Burford (Lawrenceville)**

Give a 30-minute brief on the services that GDVS offers, locations and procedures. Approximately 85 veterans attended the event to include 2 active-duty Marines. After the presentation, Kelvin opened the floor to questions and received questions concerning the PACT Act, supplemental claims and how to properly file a claim.

**North Georgia Gains/Losses: 0**

Atlanta Balcony-17 August-Conducted interviews for an open position. 11 candidates contacted, 4 scheduled for interviews, 1 candidate interviewed. Candidate was offered position but didn't accept because of salary even though he was told about salary multiple times.

Average Visits Per VFSO							
Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO							
Region:		North					
Month:		August-22					
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 Offices:	27	50	15,002	1,052	14.26	2,747	2.61
Average Visits/Office:			555.63		Average Claims/Office: 101.740741		

\*Total monthly office visits include: 3,126 In-Person and 11,876 phone calls/emails.



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**Vincent Pritchett, Director of South Region**

- On September 6, 2022, Stephanie Jordan (Brunswick field office) opened our new office located in the Brunswick Community Based Outpatient Clinic. The new office will be opened on Tuesdays and Thursdays with plans to increase the days as usership increases.
- On September 12, 2022, Vershawn Moses (Warner Robins field office) met with the principal at Veterans High School and briefed her on the Dependent Education Assistance benefits available to her students. Vershawn explained the certification process for the school and gave her a point of contact with our State Approving Agency. She is going to work with the military liaison for Houston County schools to get all the high schools in Houston County certified.
- South Region offices reported retroactive payments since the last board meeting totaling \$95,840.00. Of that total, the highest single payment was \$80,170.00 reported by our Warner Robins field office.
- South Region Gains/Losses: On September 1, 2022, Jamaal Lemon joined the Albany office, Roderick Gray joined the Brunswick office, Alise Scott joined the Columbus office, and Monisha Chambers joined the Valdosta office. Robert Ehrhart left the Brunswick office effective September 1, 2022. On September 9, 2022, Tara Phillips left the Dublin field office to take a position with the Dublin VA medical center.
- South Georgia Region Veterans Population: 242,13.

Office Visits for August: South Georgia offices handled 6,739 phone calls and emails.

Average Visits Per VFSO							
Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO							
Region:		South Region					
Month:		August-22					
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 Offices:	23	39	2,910	864	3.37	2,035	2.36
Average Visits/Office:			126.52		Average Claims/Office:		
					88.48		

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

- August 21-24, 2022, Ms. Brooks participated in the National Association of State Women Veterans Coordinators.
- September 1, 2022, Ms. Brooks visited City of Refuge, Atlanta, GA.
- September 7, 2022, Ms. Brooks participated in the National Guard Suicide Awareness Event, Clay Army National Guard Center.
- September 13, 2022, Ms. Brooks participated in the S.A.V.E Suicide Prevention Training. She also participated in the Kaiser Permanente Partnership Meeting.
- September 14, 2022, Ms. Brooks participated in the Suicide Prevention Walk. She also participated in the Georgia National Guard and Work for Warriors.
- September 15, 2022, Ms. Brooks participated in the Stand Down for Homeless Veterans Salvation Army Kroc center.

**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
- Unite Georgia Community Advisory Committee

**Calandra Ferguson, Suicide Prevention and Outreach Coordinator**

**VIRTUAL EVENTS**

- August 12, 2022, Ms. Ferguson participated in the Georgia Inclusivity Site visit.
- August 17, 2022, Ms. Ferguson participated in the Implementation Approaches to Improve Housing, Health and Community Functioning for Homeless-Experienced Adults with Serious Mental Illness Georgia Governor's Challenge Lethal Means Safety Group 3.
- September 6, 2022, Ms. Ferguson participated a meeting with Atlanta Pride organization.

**ATTENDED EVENTS**

- August 16, 2022, Ms. Ferguson Conducted Georgia Governor's Challenge Suicide Prevention Task Force Meeting, American Legion, Atlanta, GA.
- August 23, 2022, Ms. Ferguson Conducted Priority 4, Faith Based Initiative meeting American Legion, Atlanta, GA.



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- August 25, 2022, Ms. Ferguson attended the August Veteran Service Board meeting.
- August 26, 2022, Ms. Ferguson Conducted Priority 3 Lethal Means Safety Meeting. Attended/Briefed Governor's, and Mayor's Challenge to prevent Suicide among SMVF.
- September 7, 2022, Ms. Ferguson partnered with the Gorgia Army National Guard for their Suicide Awareness campaign.

**Current committees**

- VA/SAMHSA Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families Georgia Team

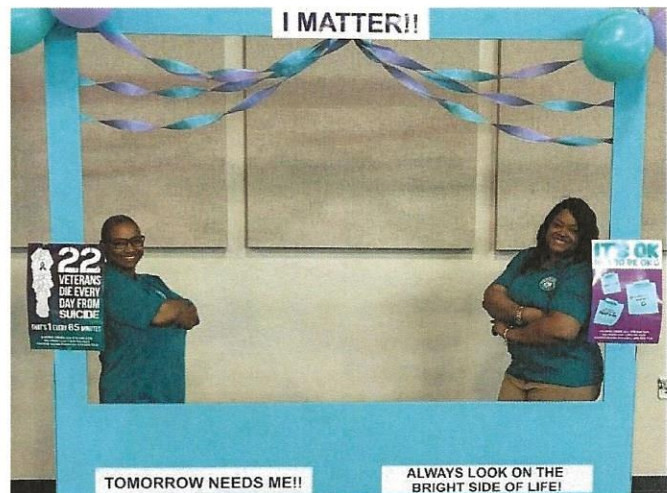
**Georgia Army National Guard Suicide Awareness Campaign**



Calandra Ferguson, SPOC- Ch Watson,  
Co-lead Priority 4 Faith Based Governor's  
Challenge- Veda Brooks  
Women/Diversity & Outreach

Ms. Veda Brooks

Ms. Calandra Ferguson



The Georgia Department of Veteran Services' Suicide Prevention & Outreach Coordinator, and Women & Diversity Coordinator were invited to participate in the Georgia Army National Guard's Suicide Awareness Campaign.

The event was held 7-8 September 2022 at the Clay National Guard Center on Dobbins Air Reserve Base. Over 200 Service Members, Veterans, and their Families participated in the event. Our office provided gun locks, veteran resource list, outreach data and VSO contact information. It was a great event!!

We are partnering with the Georgia National Guard for Yellow Ribbon events. They are going to provide us with suicide statistics for Georgia Guard soldiers and give us contact information for soldiers exiting the Guard in any given 6-month period. We want to have the same collaboration with the Air National Guard.

We will have a booth at the Atlanta Pride event and an executive from that company will be part of the Governor's Challenge. We are also reaching out to the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and others to fulfill our mission to represent all groups.

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

**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**

**Division Updates**

1. August GDVS Newsletter – PID published the monthly GDVS newsletter. This month's edition featured information on the PACT Act's signing into law, the new conditions covered, and who is affected by the new legislation. The newsletter also covered changes in the department's leadership with the departure of Executive Director George Canavaggio, Shelly-Ann Simpson's selection as the new Executive Director of Field Operations and Appeals, and Edwin Berry's appointment to lead the Appeals Division. The full newsletter is available online at <https://veterans.georgia.gov/newsletter>.



2. Chapter 35 Dependent Education Assistance – Following a recommendation and information flyer from the State Approving Agency, PID created a new FAQ webpage with information for veterans with dependents who turn 18 while still in high school without impacting their 36 months of DEA benefits. This benefit is not well known and is not publicized by VA. Veterans and families can now find this information and how to qualify their schools at <https://veterans.georgia.gov/chapter-35>.
3. Standardized flyers for GDVS field offices – PID developed new information flyers for field offices to announce office closings for holidays, sick leave, or annual leave for one person offices. PID also developed a new flyer to help schedule appointments at offices with QR codes and contact information which are anticipated to roll out to the field offices within the next month.
4. Veterans Benefits Outreach
  - a. New Brunswick Office – a new GDVS location in the Brunswick CBOC opened to veterans in September. PID added the new location to the GDVS website and shared the opening on social media and information sent to local media.
  - b. Federal benefits outreach – shared information on a VA Home Loans seminar, information on the hardship suspension deadline expansion, and a warning about a scam targeting veterans in the Dublin VAMC area.
  - c. Job Fairs and Hiring Notice – shared information on career and hiring events around the state, including at the VECTR Center and continuing recruitment drives for the SK Battery and Work for Warriors Georgia partnership.

Public Information Division Contacts (Since December 10, 2021)

- Replies to VA eBenefits Messages = 725
- Replies to General Questions = approximately 585
- Individual Request for the State Certificate of Honor = approximately 145

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

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

State Certificates of Honor issued via GDVS – An estimated 29,425  
(Honors Ceremonies and Central Office Mail Outs)

DoD Vietnam Veteran Lapel Pins presented via GDVS – An estimated 23,440

Honors Ceremonies supported/coordinated by GDVS – 354

Defense Department's Vietnam Veteran Surviving Spouse CoH – 290

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

- The approval and compliance surveys of educational institutions, training establishments and training programs approved for veterans training is continuing with no significant problems in any area being noted.
- Approval of new veteran's On-The-Job training sites (OJT) continues to increase. As of this date the State Approving Agency (SAA) has granted approval to 1,799 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	390
Approved Training Establishments	1,409
Veteran Students Enrolled in Educational Institutions	10,324

\* Source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration, Education Division, August 2022.

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

1. Status of staffing by Pruitt Health for Subacute Unit
  - a. Psychiatrist-three candidates interviewed by Pruitt; No job offers extended currently.
  - b. Neuropsychologist- contracted through Integrated Psych Solutions.
    - i. GWVH staff met with Dr. Hertza onsite on 9/9/22 for program development.
    - ii. Weekly phone meetings and monthly in-person meetings are now established with Dr. Hertza.
  - c. Substance Abuse Coordinator- hired in July 2022.
  - d. Behavioral Specialists- two hired in July 2022.
  - e. Admissions Director- partner hired on 5/31/22
  - f. Social Services Director- partner hired in June 2022.
  - g. Art therapist interviewed with a job offer to be extended
  - h. LPN/RN- continuing to recruit
  - i. OT/PT/SLP- continuing to recruit
2. Biweekly meetings with Pruitt Health
  - a. Subcommittees developed for program development, marketing, evaluation and assessment tools, treatment pathways, and medication management.
  - b. Current onsite staff are developing policies, procedures, and treatment pathways for program development



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- c. Staff education through trainers, onsite in-services, and computer courses
- d. Tour of Dublin VAMC PTSD unit completed on 8/19/22
- e. Tour is being scheduled with Shepherd's Center

**3. COVID Update as of 9/8/22**

Georgia War Veterans Home - Milledgeville, GA										
Thursday, September 8, 2022										
Category	Population	Positive Cases	Positives % of Population	Deaths	Deaths % of Positives	Deaths % of Population	Recovered	Recovered % of Positives	Currently In Isolation	Positive for current month
Patients	340	177	52.06%	29	16.38%	8.53%	148	83.62%	0	0
Staff	549	203	36.98%	0	0.00%	0.00%	202	99.51%	1	1

Cumulative figures since March 1, 2020.

**Mr. Kerry Dyer, Chief Operations Officer**

On Friday, August 26, 2022, Kerry Dyer met virtually with the Technical College System of Georgia (TCSG) regarding UniteUs marketing implementation with GDVS.

On Tuesday, August 30, 2022, Kerry Dyer met virtually with Aniyah Jones to discuss using LinkedIn as a hiring/recruiting tool for GDVS. He later met with Amelia Rivers to discuss his duties as the Agency's Georgia State Charitable Contribution Program Coordinator.

On Wednesday, August 31, 2022, Kerry Dyer attended the UniteUs weekly implementation meeting. Later that day he met with Leslie Davis, State Properties, virtually to start the lease renegotiation for Albany and Moultrie Field Offices for FY 2024.

On Tuesday, September 6, 2022, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's meeting. Later that day he was the guest speaker at the Task Force Tribute at the Clay National Guard Center in Marietta, GA.

On Wednesday, September 7, 2022, Kerry Dyer along with Commissioner Ross and Shelly-Ann Simpson, met with The Korean-Vietnam Veteran Association of Southeast Region, President Kyung Sub Jan, Senior Vice President Song Hyo Nam, and Chairperson, Seok H. Lee. Later that day he attended the UniteUs weekly implementation meeting. He also submitted the monthly Fleet Manager's Report to Department of Administrative Service, Office of Fleet Management.

On Thursday, September 8, 2022, Kerry Dyer and Shareka Monday-Robinson attended the virtual eperformance implementation meeting. Later that day he attended the Georgia War Veterans Home

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Request for Proposal virtual meeting along with Mark Bannister, Mark Demers, Mark Meeks, Russell Feagin, Dan Holtz, Tonya Jarret and Jenelle Coleman.

On Friday, September 9, 2022, Kerry Dyer attended the Commissioner's Open Forum with the Department. He then met with Alex Geist, Novatech Onboarding Manager, regarding the lease agreement and delivery & installation of two new copiers for the Department.

On Monday, September 12, 2022, Kerry Dyer met virtually with the Online Management Consulting Engagement Request Tool to discuss Statewide contracts. Later that day he attended the Atlanta VA Health Care System VSO Stakeholder Update meeting.

On Tuesday, September 13, 2022, Kerry Dyer attended the Annual Fleet Managers Conference on the West Tower, 20<sup>th</sup> Floor. He then notified Department of Audits and Accounts that GDVS has no Non-Profit Contract Data to submit for FY2022.

On Wednesday, September 14, 2022, Kerry Dyer and Shelly-Ann Simpson attended the Work for Warriors GA Civic Leader Flight at the Clay National Guard Center in Marietta, GA.

Below are the Personnel Actions Kerry Dyer and Shareka Monday-Robinson processed from September 1, 2022- September 16, 2022.

Location	Position	Status	Name	Date
Ft. McPherson	Sr. VFSO 2(Office Mgr)	Retired	Herbert Ward	09/01/2022
Central Office	Exec, Dir, Field Ops, & Appeals	Retired	George Canavaggio	09/01/2022
Brunswick	VFSO 2 (Office Mgr)	Resigned	Robert Ehrhart	09/01/2022
Columbus	VFSO 1	New Hire	Scott Alise	09/01/2022
Valdosta	VFSO 1	New Hire	Monisha Chambers	09/01/2022
Albany	VFSO 1	New Hire	Jamal Lemon	09/01/2022
Brunswick	VFSO 1	New Hire	Roderick Gray	09/01/2022
Lawrenceville	VFSO 2 (Office Mgr)	Resigned	Kelvin Burford	09/06/2022
Dublin VAMC	VFSO 2 (Office Mgr)	Resigned	Tara Phillips	09/09/2022
Newnan	VFSO 1	Resigned	Dwight Hackworth	09/09/2022



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Milledgeville	Grounds Maint Tech 1	Terminated	Aaron Runyon	09/12/2022
Zebulon	VFSO 2 (Office Mgr)	New Hire	Daniel Moreno	09/16/2022

**Highlights:**

The Office in the Brunswick CBOC officially opened on Tuesday, September 6, 2022.

**On the horizon:**

The Office in the Zebulon CBOC is projected to open mid-October.

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

**Accounting**

Routine operations are continuing.

**Budget and General**

The Chairman and members of the GA Veterans Service Board approved the AFY 2023 & FY 2024 Budget Request for the GDVS. The budget was submitted to the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget (OPB) on September 1, 2022, in compliance with the Budget Instructions. In addition to FY 2024 budget request items, we submitted two off-line requests in the AFY 2023 budget.

We have enclosed two (2) off-line operational requests for **AFY 2023** totaling \$1,137,398.15 and they are in priority order and are as follows:

Priority	Description	Cost
1	Funds to support a \$5,000 pay adjustment for GDVS employees in job codes LEP (Legal) and \$3,000 for FET (Facilities) based on being below state salary requirements, increased attrition, and increased workload due to the passage of the Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act 2022.	\$976,820.00
2	Provide funding to support digitization of DD Form 214's	\$160,578.15

- 1. The priority in our AFY 2023 offline budget request is for funding to support a \$5,000 pay adjustment for GDVS employees in job codes LEP (Legal) and \$3,000 for FET (Facilities) based on being below state salary pay levels.**

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- GDVS employees are among the **lowest paid in Georgia State Government** (based on commensurate duties/education), yet account for **\$5.863B of the \$8.375B** brought into the state's economy, ranking 5<sup>th</sup> in the nation for VA compensation.
- The PACT Act is projected to increase the number of veterans entitled to VA compensation by 500,000+ (based on the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA's) statistics for those serving during Vietnam, the Gulf War, or Post 9/11).
- GDVS continues to do **everything within our existing budget** to provide pay increases for our lowest paid employees.
- Additionally, our cemetery workers experienced a 40% attrition rate with more than a 40% increase in interments as of FY22 which is not anticipated to decline.

**2. Provide funding to support digitization of DD Form 214's.**

- GDVS has over five hundred thousand physical DD214 forms archived (Armed Service Report of Discharge). The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2020 supports digital transformation.
- The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) requires the Department of Defense (DOD) provide veterans and former members of the Armed Services with a machine readable and electronically transferable Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty (DD Form 214) by December 31, 2023.
- Digitizing physical DD Form 214s supports the Governor's goal of leveraging technology to best utilize limited state resources. Currently, GDVS has one full-time person dedicated to pulling the physical form, scanning the document, and sending it to the requesting office.
- Digitization of existing DD Form 214's will reduce the physical paper footprint for GDVS, eliminate the need to maintain and manually store large volumes of paper copies of military service discharge records and provide immediate access to digital DD214s for authorized users.

Our **FY 2024** budget submission contains three (3) operational enhancements totaling \$2,437,398.15 and they are listed in priority order and are as follows:

Priority	Description	Cost
1	Funds to support a \$5,000 pay adjustment for GDVS employees in job codes LEP (Legal) and \$3,000 for FET (Facilities) based on being below	\$976,820.00



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	state salary requirements, increased attrition, and increased workload due to the passage of the Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act 2022.	
2	Provide funding to support digitization of DD Form 214's	\$160,578.15
3	Provide funding to support the Georgia War Veterans Home	\$1,300,000.00

Administrative note: FY 2024 budget item summaries (1 and 2) are identical to AFY 2023 requests.

**3. Provide funding to support the Georgia War Veterans Home.**

**The Need:**

The Georgia War Veterans Home (GWVH) in Milledgeville, Georgia provides skilled nursing care for Georgia veterans throughout the State. The amount of State funding has not been increased in at least ten years. In addition, the State funds have been reduced during this period due to budgetary restrictions and these funds have not been restored.

As a result of these reductions and the requirement to increase State per diem, the number of patients that can be admitted to the facility has been reduced each year. The facility currently has a capacity of 225 beds but only 165 non-service-connected veterans can be admitted due to funding constraints.

Payment for this care is a combination of Federal Funding, State Funding, and private funding via a daily fee payment. The combined State and daily fee funding must exceed the amount provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs for non-service-connected veterans.

**Strategic Impact:**

- GDVS must provide skilled nursing home care to Georgia veterans. There are over 690,000 veterans in the State and the need for this level of care continues to increase.
- Additional funds are necessary to meet not only the existing requirements but also the increasing needs of our aging population.
- There is currently a study underway further identifying the need to modernize the existing state veterans' homes, including expanding bed capacity, as well as construct new homes.

**Benefits:**

- 1) Increased number of veterans being admitted to the GWVH.

- 2) Improved level of care within the facility.
- 3) Increased number of vendors interested in operating the facility.

## HEALTH AND MEMORIALS

### State Veterans Homes

**State Veterans Homes Census (Through September 9, 2022) +**

Current Month	Augusta	Milledgeville	Total
Regular Patients	100	108	208
Service Connected *	25	40	65
<b>Total Patients</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>273</b>
Last Month			
Regular Patients	105	106	211
Service Connected *	21	40	61
<b>Total Patients</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>272</b>

\* 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 12, 2022, through September 15, 2022.

### State Veterans Cemeteries,

**Burial Statistics (Through September 9, 2022)+**

State Veterans Cemetery	Cumulative Last Month	Cumulative Current Month	Increase
Glennville	2,136	2,149	13
Milledgeville	4,842	4,868	26
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,978</b>	<b>7,017</b>	<b>39</b>

+ The report to the VSB are the total numbers from August 12, 2022, through September 15, 2022.



**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.

**Veterans Service Foundation Board**

The Foundation Board Chairman, Mr. Doug Middleton, will provide his report during the monthly board meeting.

**OLD BUSINESS:**

There was no old business to discuss.

**NEW BUSINESS:**

Announcement: The 41<sup>st</sup> Annual Veterans Day Events will be 12 November and are open to the public. A flyer advertising the event is attached.

Savannah Potter-Miller from the Georgia Association for Women Lawyers spoke concerning the importance of veteran treatment courts for misdemeanors in each county in Georgia. She will write a letter detailing her proposal and a discussion on this topic will be added to next month's agenda.

The October 25 board meeting was scheduled. It will be a combination virtual and in-person meeting, set up at the GDVS. Mr. Hanley made a motion for this and there were no objections. The motion passed.

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

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SIGNED:



Shawn Hanley, Chair

ATTEST:



Joshua Kopsie, Secretary

The next Veterans Service Board meeting will be held in person at GDVS but will also be available via video/telephone conference call on Tuesday, October 25, 2022, at 12:30 p.m. The Webex link is:  
<https://georgiadepartmentofveteransservice.webex.com/georgiadepartmentofveteransservice/j.php?MTID=mc887676ec728dafbc3c45c8eec2a8768>

Meeting password: **ziHqvwfD662 (94478933 from video systems)**

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

Access Code: **2344 820 4598**





Join us on  
12 November 2022



## 41st Annual Veterans Day Events at The Battery Atlanta

Free and Open to the Public

All are invited to join us  
to thank our Nation's Veterans and Military Families

11am

### **Veterans Day Parade**

Windy Ridge Parkway and Battery Avenue near Truist Park

11am-3pm

### **Veterans Festival**

The Battery Atlanta

~12pm

### **Observance Ceremony**

A formal presentation at the Georgia Power Pavilion Stage

The Battery Atlanta

Patriotic musical entertainment provided by the 116th Army Band

*The Georgia Veterans Day Association, Inc., with an all-volunteer membership, is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization founded in 1981. The mission of the GVDA is to honor our Veterans and Active-Duty Military in addition to educating our fellow citizens on the service and sacrifice of our men and women who wear and have worn our Nation's uniform. For additional information please visit [www.GVDA.org](http://www.GVDA.org) or <https://www.facebook.com/georgiaveteransday/>.*