

**Wednesday, September 27, 2023 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. Steve Mendez, Member  
Mr. Tim Paslawski, Member  
Mr. Pete Peterson, Member  
Ms. Patricia Ross, Commissioner

**Visitors:** Ms. Shelly-Ann Simpson, Executive Director, Field Operations & Appeals, GDVS  
**Present** Mr. Mark Demers, Chief Development Officer, Chief Finance Officer, GDVS  
Mr. Russell Feagin, Executive Director, Health & Memorials Division, GDVS  
Mr. Kerry Dyer, Chief Operations Officer, GDVS  
Ms. Jehae Kim, Assistant Attorney General, Attorney General's Office  
Ms. Patsey Schreiber, State Commander, Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)  
Ms. Belinda Boldoe, VFW Service Officer, Appeals Division, GDVS  
Ms. Raven Holstick, GDVS, American Legion Service Officer  
Mr. Don Layne, VECTR Chief Operating Officer  
Ms. Amy Stevens, Georgia Military Women and Vetlanta  
Ms. Tiffani Williams, Georgia Military Women  
Ms. Kim Scofi, United Military Care, Inc.  
Mr. Dan Holtz, Military Officers Association of America (MOAA)  
Mr. Corey Martin, Atlanta's John Marshall Homeless Veterans Legal Clinic  
Ms. Chinyarc Marshall, Atlanta's John Marshall Homeless Veterans Legal Clinic  
Ms. Dylester Scott, Veteran  
Mr. Carlton Deese, Executive Director GWVNH, Augusta, GA  
Ms. Charlotte May, Director, Public Information and External Affairs, GDVS  
Ms. Ramona Roper, Director, Training Division, GDVS  
Ms. Sherri Whitfield, Director, Veterans Benefits South Region, GDVS  
Mr. Ken Childre, Director, Veterans Benefits North Region, GDVS  
Mr. Edwin Berry, Director, Appeals Division, GDVS  
Ms. Veda Brooks, Coordinator, Women & Minority Veterans, GDVS  
Ms. Calandra Ferguson, Coordinator, Suicide Prevention & Outreach, GDVS  
Mr. William Wilson, Network Administrator, GDVS  
Mr. H. Neil Slay, Coordinator, Veterans Education & Training, GDVS  
Ms. Irene Mackson, Business Support Analyst, GDVS  
Ms. Julie Hammond, Executive Assistant to the Commissioner, GDVS

On Wednesday, September 27, 2023, the Veterans Service Board meeting was held in person and by video/tele-conference.

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

Ms. Swan made a motion to approve the September Agenda. Mr. Peterson seconded the motion. The motion passed.

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

The following reports were submitted for the Board meeting:

**Ms. Patsey Schreiber, State Commander, VFW**

VFW is sponsoring a food drive for the homeless. Donations can be mailed to PO Box 3025, Macon, GA 31205. Food can also be donated.

**Ms. Belinda Boldoe, VFW**

- The Department Service Officer (DSO) attended the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Department of Georgia annual Georgia Leadership Training (GLT) held on August 19, 2023. The training was held at Post 5408, located at 4764 Cobb Parkway, Acworth, GA 30101. The Department will be hosting five (5) training sessions this year at different Posts.
  - The training session provided information on the duties and responsibilities of the various leadership positions in the Posts.
  - The session provided the latest updates to policies, procedures, and programs.
  - It allowed time to interact with one another and to share experiences.
- The GDVS Appeals Officer/Department Service Officer participated in the Veterans Expo and Town Hall hosted by the Military and Veterans Coalition of One in celebration with the City of Stockbridge, Mayor Anthony Ford. The Expo was held at the Merle Manders Conference Center, 111 Davis Road, Stockbridge, GA 30281.
  - State Representative Angela Moore House District 91 hosted the breakfast.
  - State Representative Moore was giving away digital tablets w/5yrs of free WIFI.
  - As the GDVS Appeals Officer/VFW DSO I provided information to veterans and their family members about their Federal and State benefits.
  - Participated in the Town Hall as a panel member answering question about VA claims, the claim process, and the VA health care system.



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- The Department Service Officer attended a special VSO/Dir meeting hosted by Brian Morgan, Change Management Analyst, (CMA) on August 31, 2023, at 10AM – 11AM.
  - We met with the Atlanta Regional Officer Assistant Directors, Angela Seelhammer and Patrick Zaondervan. We discussed the plans for a roundtable with the Secretary of the VA.
  - The Secretary of the VA wanted to meet with veterans who are or who have been a victim of fraud. The VSOs were requested to provide the staff with names of veterans to participate in the round table.
- The Department Service Officer attended the Atlanta VA Medical Center (VAMC) Renaming Ceremony. The Renaming Ceremony was hosted by the Atlanta VAMC Director Ann Brown along with the Executive Leadership Team and Staff. The ceremony was held on September 08, 2023, at 1670 Clairmont Road, Decatur, GA 30033, Parking Deck L.
  - The Atlanta VAMC was renamed to the Joseph Maxwell Cleland VAMC.
  - The ceremony is to honor the late Joseph Maxwell Cleland for his contribution to veterans across the nation and the region.
- The Department Service Officer attended the VFW Annual Proficiency Training Conference held at the Doubletree Annapolis, 210 Holiday Court, Annapolis, MD 21401. The training was held from September 09-14, 2023.
  - The VFW annual recertification training provided updated information on VBA matters, the PACT Act, Camp Lejeune Justice Act, and other relevant information.
  - The Department Service Officer participated in the VFW Annual Proficiency Training examination held on September 14, 2023.

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

- The Assistant Department Service Officer (Ed Kent) assisted 23 veterans with VA benefits related inquiries this month.
- Service officers (Raven Holstick, Tonjala Williams-Moton, Ed Kent) met to discuss the Fall conference for October 27-29.
- Department Service Officer (Raven Holstick) assisted AMVETS with their yearly standdown on September 16<sup>th</sup>. DSO advised and assisted 20 veterans who attended with their VA benefits and state resources.

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- Post 127 Sugar Hill will hold a Veteran claim clinic September 22-23. Department Service Officer and Assistant Service Officer will be present to assist veterans and file claims. VBA will be present to file claims.

**Upcoming events:**

- Monthly Virtual Post Service Officer training will be held for new service officers. Training topics will be on the roles and responsibilities of a post service officer. This training will continue to be held monthly as new service officers arrive.
- Atlanta VA Hospital Visit September 26<sup>th</sup> @9:00
- Atlanta VA Regional Office Visit September 26<sup>th</sup> @1:00
- Georgia War Home (Milledgeville) November 1<sup>st</sup> @1:00
- Dublin VA Hospital Visit November 2<sup>nd</sup> @9:00
- Montgomery, AL VA Visit November 15<sup>th</sup> @1:00
- Tuskegee, AL VA Visit November 16<sup>th</sup> @9:00
- Augusta VA Hospital Visit December 8<sup>th</sup> @9:00
- Georgia War Home Visit (Augusta) December 9<sup>th</sup> @9:00
- Lake City VA Visit hospital January 11<sup>th</sup> @1:00

**Commissioner Patricia Ross**

On Tuesday, August 22, 2023, Commissioner Ross held the Leadership Institute class on Public Speaking. She also attended the August Veterans Service Board Meeting.

On Wednesday, August 23, 2023, Commissioner Ross met with Bobby Davis, Director of the Veterans Education and Training Division to discuss his department. She also did extensive budget preparation.

On Thursday, August 24, 2023, Commissioner Ross met with Rep. Mike Collins and gave him an overview of GDVS, shared key insights, gave updates, and discussed how the offices currently work together and can better work together in the future to serve Georgia's veterans and their families. She also had a meeting to discuss the possibility of a VECTR Center in Albany.

On Friday, August 25, 2023, Commissioner Ross spent the day at the Georgia War Veterans Home in Milledgeville. PruittHealth was transitioning out and STG International was transitioning in.

On Monday, August 28, 2023, Commissioner Ross held a weekly Director's Meeting. She then met with GDVS leadership to discuss a possible telework plan for the department. She, along with Shelly-Ann Simpson, then met with Kristopher Rick of DOL VETS to discuss their project specifically focused on how we better inform transitioning servicemembers about state occupational licensure requirements during transition so that they can navigate the requirements to ensure employability when returning to the state.



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On Tuesday, August 29, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended a meeting with Shelly-Ann Simpson, Kerry Dyer, Sherri Whitfield, and Charlotte May regarding an office closure. She also attended the swearing in of Kerry Dyer for the Capitol Arts Standards Commission Board. This was held in Governor Kemp's office.

On Wednesday, August 30, 2023, Commissioner Ross joined MG Carden (TAG) and other members of the military community in Governor Kemp's office for the annual Employer Support to the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) State Proclamation Photo. She then met with Rep. Mike Cameron, Rep. Beck Evans, Commissioner Rabon (DNR) and others to discuss state park passes for veterans.

On Thursday, August 31, 2023, Commissioner Ross spent the day at the Georgia War Veterans Home in Milledgeville. This was PruittHealth's last day as the provider for the Home.

On Tuesday, September 5, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended the Hope Florida Symposium in Orlando.

On Wednesday, September 6, 2023, Commissioner Ross continued working on the AFY24 and FY25 budget along with Mark Bannister, Mark Demers, and Camala Ball.

On Thursday, September 7, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended a meeting regarding the SSG Fox Forum with Charlotte May and Board Chair Shawn Hanley. She also did extensive budget preparation and attended the Unite Us Bi-weekly meeting.

On Friday, September 8, 2023, Commissioner Ross held an Open Forum with the department. Afterwards, she was present for the renaming of the Joseph Maxwell Cleland Atlanta VA Medical Center, attended a meeting with the Regional Office and SecVA Denis McDonough, and participated in a veterans' forum. She worked with Camala Ball to prioritize and submit the budget on schedule.

On Saturday, September 9, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended the ceremony honoring Takosha Swan, Vice Chair of the Veterans Service Board, for her Presidential lifetime achievement award.

On Monday, September 11, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended the Council of Accountability Court Judges Symposium. She also took part in a budget discussion with OPB.

On Tuesday, September 12, 2023, Commissioner Ross met with Martha Pacini and Lynda Cox of the Tunnel 2 Towers organization. She then held a weekly Director's Meeting. Her evening was spent at the UPS Corporate Headquarters with Vetlanta where she was a featured speaker.

On Wednesday, September 13, 2023, Commissioner Ross met with the Assistant Secretary and Deputy for the Intergovernmental Affairs team from the VA. Later that day she met Craig Malcolm of James Magazine. This is an Atlanta based business publication covering Georgia. The readership includes top executives, state legislators and lobbyists. They are doing a feature on veterans for the upcoming Nov/Dec issue and interviewed Commissioner Ross to find out all we do for veterans across the state.



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On Thursday, September 14, 2023, Commissioner Ross spent the day at the Georgia War Veterans Home in Milledgeville. She also attended a webinar hosted by the Cleland Atlanta VAMC about how veterans are identified as having disruptive behavior.

On Friday, September 15, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended the CBMC Prayer Breakfast at the Cobb Energy Center ballroom. The keynote speaker was Mark Whitacre, whose remarkable story is portrayed by Matt Damon in the 2009 movie entitled *The Informant*. She attended as a member of the Honorary Host Committee and was able to attend the VIP reception preceding the breakfast. She later received an enhancement demonstration by the Unite Us team on the additional functionality and granularity of their "insights." Commissioner Ross and Charlotte May then met with the Miner Agency on support to suicide prevention efforts and supporting the SSG Fox forum.

On Saturday, September 16, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended the Robins AFB 76<sup>th</sup> Annual Air Force Ball at the Edgar H. Wilson Convention Center in Macon.

On Monday, September 18, 2023, Commissioner Ross held a weekly Director's Meeting. She then met with Drew Walston and Derek Layne of Mighty Hero Homes, an organization that seeks to "eradicate veteran homelessness in the United States by creating permanent, personal, and affordable housing for homeless US veterans." She then attended the Unite Us Bi-weekly meeting and the Fox Grant Update meeting.

On Tuesday, September 19, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended the Transition Advisory Committee Meeting via Zoom. She also began her State Introductory Governmental Accounting course through the University of Georgia Carl Vinson Institute.

On Wednesday, September 20, 2023, Commissioner Ross visited the Newnan Office. She also assisted in getting a DD-214 for a veteran who passed. Additionally, she met with Russell Feagin, Bobby Davis, and Mark Demers to discuss the impact on the department if the federal government shuts down for up to 30 days, or longer than 30 days. The Office of Planning and Budget requested this information.

On Thursday, September 21, 2023, Commissioner Ross met with the Office of Planning and Budget on the AFY24 and FY25 requests for the department.

On Friday, September 22, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended the GDVS Leadership Institute virtual class on Strategic Planning/Budget.

On Monday, September 25, 2023, Commissioner Ross held a weekly Director's Meeting.

On Tuesday, September 26, 2023, Commissioner Ross attended the PACT Act event at Georgia Tech.



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**Highlights:**

Successful transition of the Georgia War Veterans Home in Milledgeville  
Awarded the SSG Fox suicide prevention grant for FY24

**Upcoming Events:**

Tuskegee 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration and student veteran forum, 29 Sept  
PACT Act event, Augusta Technical College, 30 Sept  
SSG Fox suicide prevention forum, 5 October

The Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities is giving GDVS a \$50,000 sponsorship donation. The funds will assist with the suicide prevention/mental health conference we are hosting in June.

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

**GENERAL**

- On September 8, I attended the Warrior Alliance's PACT ACT event at the Georgia International Convention Center with the North Region Director and 12 VSOs. Jerry Lahr from IT provided assistance, and we provided service to 136 veterans.
- On September 12, we participated in Operation Reveille (Formerly VA Standdown) at the Salvation Army KROC Center in Atlanta. We assisted 25 veterans. Later that night we attended the Vetlanta Q3 - Women Veterans Summit that was held at UPS in Sandy Springs. We provided information about our department and spoke with 30 veterans.
- On September 13, we participated in the We Care Resource Fair in Dekalb County held at Georgia Piedmont College. We assisted 60 veterans with the filing of claims and appeals and giving advice.
- On September 18, I, along with Ms. Ferguson, Ms. Roper, and Ms. Donaldson of the balcony office attended a briefing at Norfolk Southern in Midtown. We gave a briefing on Pact ACT and Suicide Prevention and assisted veterans and provided information on filing claims and appeals.
- On September 22-23, we participated in the American legion Standdown at Post 127 in Sugar Hill with the Gainesville and Oakwood offices. We provided a briefing and assisted veterans with the filing of their claims and appeals.
- On September 26, we participated in the Warrior Alliance's Pact ACT event at Georgia Tech Research Institute with the North Region Director and 11 VSOs.

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- On September 30, I will participate in the Warrior Alliance's Pact ACT event at Augusta Technical College, with the North Region Director and the Augusta area offices.
- **DD 214's and Welcome Home Letters:** 662 Welcome Home Letters were mailed out in August, 2023.

**PROJECTED POSITIONS**

- Current opening in Athens.

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

- August 24, 2023, Ms. Ramona Roper assisted 2 Athens-Clarke County Police Officers with filing disability compensation claims.
- August 29, 2023, Mr. Charles Isaac conducted Hybrid training via MS Teams. The subject for the training was Basic Eligibility.
- August 31, 2023, Mr. Glenn Massey and Mr. Steven Fay conducted Hybrid Training for Basic Eligibility.
- September 6, 2023, new DROP Class initiated. The class was for "Radiation Claims".
- September 7, 2023, Mr. Glenn Massey and Mr. Steven Fay conducted Hybrid Training for the subject Standards of Conduct.
- September 14, 2023, Mr. Glenn Massey and Steven Fay conducted Hybrid Training for the subject Basic Eligibility.
- September 18, 2023, a new DROP Class was initiated. The class was on "Rainbow Herbicides".
- September 18, 2023, Ms. Ramona Roper assisted Executive Director ShellyAnn Simpson and Calandra Ferguson at Norfolk Southern Corporation.
- September 19-21, 2023, members of the Training Division completed new hire training at the Appeals Division at the Atlanta Regional Office.
- September 21, 2023, Mr. Glenn Massey and Mr. Steven Fay conducted Hybrid Training for Basic Eligibility, to include the 2 new Appeals Officers.



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**Upcoming Events:**

- Daily continued ongoing support to the Regional Directors and Veteran Field Service Offices
- Continuation of performing duties as VSO's
- Continuation of Quality Review checks of VSO's work
- RETRO awards: \$163,250
- Glenn Massey worked a DIC claim that resulted in a retro payment of \$122,860 for a widow.

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

- The total number of hearings conducted by the Appeals Division for August 2023 was 63.
- The Appeals Division reviewed **44 favorable** decisions in August.
- As of **August 1, 2023**, the Atlanta VA Regional Office processed benefits as follows for GDVS and the Service Organizations represented by GDVS. Retro payments for Twenty-Three (23) of those decisions are still pending. The remaining 21 favorable decisions yielded the veterans and family members \$1,194,120.24 in a retro- active compensation payments.
- The Appeals Division also reviewed 57 Active Appeals that were Remanded for further development. More than 157 conditions or issues are contained within the remands.

As of **September 1, 2023**, the Atlanta VA Regional Office processed benefits as follows for GDVS and the Service Organizations represented by GDVS.

Types of Claims	Number of Awards	Benefits paid out
Compensation	104,287	\$219,553,624
DIC	3,789	\$6,315,595
Survivor Pension	770	\$710,499
Veteran Pension	1,480	\$1,708,369
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>110,326</b>	<b>\$228,288,087</b>

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

**Retro Awards: August 2023-\$1,202,772.99**

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**Director Site Visits/Inspections: 5**

**Community Involvement:**

Vietnam Veterans Ceremony-15 Aug-(Jasper-Marie Lundquist)- 50 Veterans signed up for the event and 38 Veterans attended and were recognized with certificates.

PACT Act Event: 8 Sep-Over 130 Veterans/family members seen by the Georgia Department of Veterans Service.

Roderica Stewart-Decatur CBOC  
Dawn Donaldson-Atlanta Balcony  
Cedric Brant-Atlanta Balcony  
Vet Hueitt-Ft McPherson  
Randy Gray-Ft McPherson  
Melissa Pritchett-Cobb Clinic  
Marlin Brown-Atlanta VAMC  
Vanessa Wilson-Atlanta VAMC  
Herman Hammonds-Atlanta VAMC

Sean Seader-Carrollton  
Veronica Dailey-Carrollton  
Christina Williams-Lawrenceville  
Pablo Cruz-Lawrenceville  
Ken Childre-North Area Director

We CARE Event: 13 Sep-14 Veterans/family members seen by the Georgia Department of Veterans Service

Terrance Leggon-Conyers  
Joe Baker-Atlanta VAMC  
Vanessa Wilson-Atlanta VAMC  
Kareem Reddick-VECTR North  
Ken Childre-North Area Director

Maxine Brock-Conyers  
Marlin Brown-Atlanta VAMC  
Herman Hammonds-Atlanta VAMC  
Sean Seader-Carrollton

**North Georgia Gains/Losses:**

Herman Hammonds (Atlanta VAMC)-New Hire Effective 16 Aug  
Vanessa Wilson (Atlanta VAMC)-New Hire Effective 16 Aug  
Germani McNeill (Augusta WVH)-New Hire Effective 1 Sep  
Alex Riverajusino (Augusta VAMC)-New Hire Effective 1 Sep



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Average Visits Per VFSO								
Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO								
Region:		North						
Month:		August-23						
A	B	C	D	E	D / E F	G	G / E H	
Office Name	Veterans' Field Service Officer (VFSO) Last Name	#	Total Monthly Office Visits	Work Days In Month	Average Office Visits Per Day	Total Claims Submitted To VA Monthly	Average Claims Submitted By VFSOS To VA Daily	
	Number of VFSOs:	50	10,978	24	457.42	2,862	119.25	
Number of Offices:	30	Average Visits/Office:			365.93	Average Claims/Office:		95.4

\*Total monthly office visits include: 3,022 In-Person and 7,956 phone calls/emails.

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

- On August 23, 2023, Mrs. Amber Haire in our LaGrange office supported an educational and benefits event at the 1177<sup>th</sup> National Guard Transportation Company from 9:00-12 pm. She discussed both VA and State benefits to prior active military members and current duty personnel who will be transitioning out of the National Guard soon.
- On September 18, 2023, Mrs. Nicole Clark in our Dublin office supported a Suicide Prevention Awareness event at the Dublin VAMC.
- On September 19, 2023, Mrs. Tonjala Moton-Williams in our Macon office supported Representative Austin Scott's Mobile Office. His mobile office was at the Riverside Branch Library in Macon, GA. Mrs. Moton-Williams was on hand to answer questions regarding veterans' benefits.
- On September 20, 2023, Mrs. Debra O'Neal in our Lyons office supported Representative Austin Scott's Mobile Office. His mobile office was at the Telfair County Library in McRae, GA. Mrs. O'Neal was on hand to answer questions regarding veterans' benefits.
- South region offices reported lump sum payments since the last board meeting of \$1,286,803.24 with the highest single amount of \$244,712.50 reported by the Waycross field office.
- South Georgia Region Veterans Population: 237,759.

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

- August 25, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated and gave the keynote speech at the Macon VHA Women and Equity Seminar, hosted at Joseph N. Neel Jr., American Legion Post 3, Macon GA.
- August 26, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated and gave the keynote speech at the Unifying One Voice, One Team, for action Hosted by the Military and Veterans Coalition of One in collaboration with the city of Stockbridge, GA. Ms. Brooks taught a class on National Cemetery Administration and available resources after death. The event was hosted by Jerome Butler-Francis C. Battle, American Legion Post 291, Atlanta GA.
- August 30, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in the Forward Coweta Growth Summit, focused on building an informed community engaged in meaningful conversations.
- September 5, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in the 2024 Summit Planning Meeting.
- September 7, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in the Coweta County No One Walks Alone event.
- September 9-14, Ms. Brooks participated in the Annual National Association of Woman Veteran State Coordinators, in Alexandria Virginia.
- September 19, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in Connecting Cobb Veterans at VFW Post 5408. Ms. Brooks participated in a round table discussion about connecting/collaborating with nonprofits. Hosted by Coweta Foundation.
- September 20, 2023, Ms. Brooks participated in the Violence Prevention Task Force Meeting.
- September 21, 2023, Ms. Brooks did outreach and filed claims at the Hearts to Nourish Hope homeless veteran program.

**Current committees:**

- Women's Veterans Health Committee (monthly meetings and joint outreach events)
- Violence Prevention Task Force
- Georgia State VFW Homeless Committee
- VA/SAMHSA Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families Georgia Team
- An Advisory Committee on Homeless Veterans
- The Birdwell Foundation Board Member
- Coweta County Race, Equity, and Justice Committee Unite Georgia Community Advisory Committee
- Farmer Street Cemetery Commission



**Ms. Calandra Ferguson, Suicide Prevention and Outreach Coordinator (SPOC)**

- Monthly Ms. Ferguson submits reports on the events and referral data for the Fox Grant.
- Monthly Ms. Ferguson conducts the Governor's Challenge Task Force meeting.
- September 1, Ms. Ferguson conducted Suicide Prevention Training for Hearts to Nourish Hope.
- September 2, Ms. Ferguson participated in Homeless Veterans Rally Point at American Legion Post 127 in Sugar Hill.
- September 5, Ms. Ferguson, and her Suicide Prevention Team hosted an outreach event at the Floyd Building for Suicide Prevention Awareness Month. We contacted over 100 employees and had 12 people to complete the Suicide Prevention Survey.
- September 5, Ms. Ferguson collaborated with the Georgia Army National Guard for their Suicide Prevention Week Event.
- September 10, Ms. Ferguson joined Kennesaw State University Veteran's Director and students as they held the flag for the opening day of the Atlanta Falcon's Football Team.
- September 12, Ms. Ferguson participated in Q3 Vetlanta Event, Honoring Women Veterans.
- September 13, Ms. Ferguson participated in "We Care". We made contact with 47 Veterans and 14 of them completed the Suicide Prevention Survey. We were able to provide resources to those at risk.
- September 13, Ms. Ferguson's Suicide Prevention Team participated in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Walk-n-Roll Suicide Prevention event, sponsored by the VA.
- September 13, Ms. Ferguson's Suicide Prevention Team participated in the Suicide Prevention Symposium sponsored by Highland Rivers CSB.
- September 18, Ms. Ferguson conducted Suicide Prevention Training for the Veterans of Norfolk Southern Railroad.
- September 20, Ms. Ferguson met with a representative from Church on the Road in Macon, GA to join forces to provide resources for Veterans in their congregation.

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

**Accounting:**

- The FY2023 closeout has been completed and all fiscal programs were closed within budget. With the assistance of SAO Accounting Shared Services, all year end reports have been completed and submitted concluding with the Year-End Questionnaire which was completed and submitted 14 days prior to the deadline on September 15<sup>th</sup>.
- Through SAO's guidance, we now have established proper procedures going into the new fiscal year and beyond through the correct processes of vendor management and proper coding of state and federal funds.
- The FY 2024 budget cycle officially opened doors for business on Monday, July 17, 2023.

**Budget:**

**GDVS FY2024 --Annual Operating Budget (AOB) as of July 1, 2023**

Total State General Funds	\$25,934,624
Total Federal Funds	\$24,210,246
Total Other Agency Funds: GSFIC and Fees	\$3,215,491
<b>Total Funds</b>	<b>\$53,360,361</b>

- The AFY2024, and FY2025 Budget Request, was submitted to the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget (OPB) prior to the submission deadline on Friday, September 8, 2023.
- AFY2024/FY2025 budget highlights includes:
  - One time funding to support improvements and renovations to GDVS Central Office.
  - Funding for GDVS Cemetery Workers based on a classification change that reflects actual duties.
  - Create an additional office with 2 additional positions at the new VA Perry Mega Clinic projected to open on December 1, 2023.
  - Create a Homeless Veteran Coordinator position to assist with homeless veteran issues.



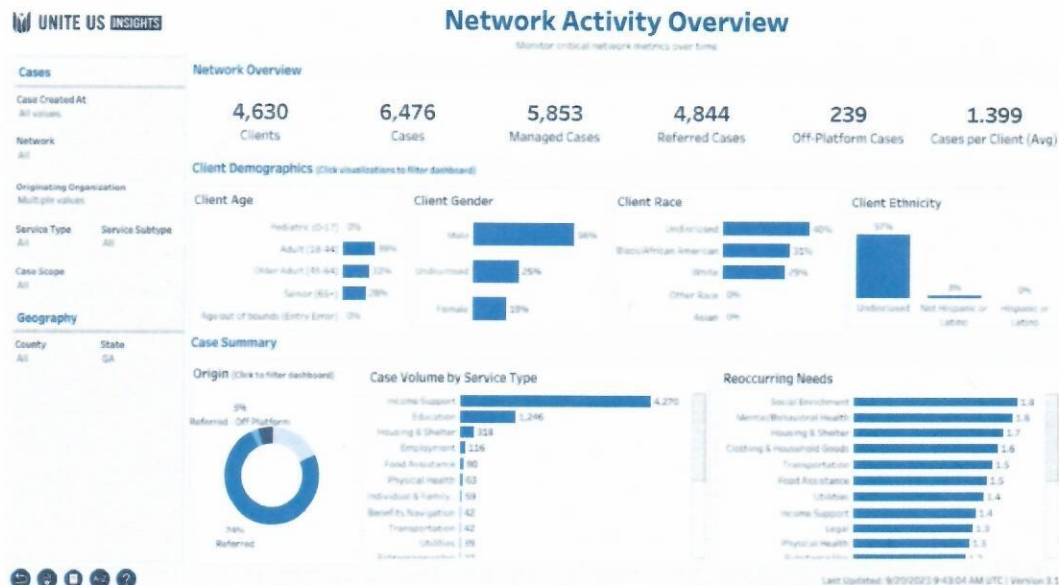
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- Continued funding for the Mental Health Grant, seed money for the Veterans Service Foundation, transition funding for the GVWH in Milledgeville, and matching state funds for a new home in South Georgia.
- Request a Consumer Price Index increase for the Georgia War homes to account for last decade of increase cost without state matching funds. Additionally, request a 5% increase based on rising health care costs and increase VA matching funding.
- All agencies were instructed to demonstrate how they would reduce agency spending by 1% (\$272,946) as well as submit budget enhancement request for up to 3% which equated to \$818,838.

**Grant Program:**

- Unite-Us Grant- (American Rescue Plan-Negative Impact Grant)- \$6.1m per year (\$18.3m) over the course of 3 years starting July 1, 2022:
  - Data ingestion and secure data transfer for the platform and social connector is moving forward. As of September 18, 2023, we have **264,568** veterans in the system. We have submitted **956** community partners and **313** healthcare partners for inclusion to the platform since August 2022.
  - Our Warner Robins GDVS office is ranked #6 with 3826 Unite Us referrals received in the entire national network.
  - Grant financial management- we have closed out year 1 of the grant and are working on year 2. An advance on the grant totaling \$5.8m has been received so we can pay invoices on time. There was a delay due to the fiscal year close out so we could not access grant funds during that time period.
  - Below is an activity snapshot from Unite Us Insights:

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- SSG Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program- (\$747,464)
  - As of September 20, 2023, GDVS was awarded the SSG Fox grant for a second year!
  - We are in partnership with Kennesaw State University AMES Center to implement the grant. KSU is analyzing data collection from the Fort Stewart Army Guard event. The latest submission to the VA on September 5, 2023.
  - Calandra Ferguson provided the outreach and training data reports, and we transmitted them to the VA on September 5, 2023.
  - Calandra Ferguson or Veda Brooks will report all the outreach and training events regarding Suicide Prevention under the Fox Grant.
- Veterans Mental Health Services Program Grant (HB 414)- Georgia Governor Brian Kemp signed HB 414 on April 25, 2023, with the support of state legislators and the Georgia Department of Veterans Service (GDVS). The bill creates the Veterans Mental Health Services Program, which is a grant program to improve access to mental health services for military service members, veterans, and their families in the state of Georgia. The grant program is funded through state appropriations in Fiscal Year 2023. The total grant funding is \$750,000 for FY2023 (executed by no later than 30 June 2023). The grant was awarded to two vendors:
  - Aspire (Cohen Veterans Network) for \$650,000.
  - Emory Healthcare for \$100,000.
- The money was allocated to both awardees, and they have received the funds.
- The first quarterly report will be received in October 2023.



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

State Veterans Homes

**State Veterans Homes Census (Through September 15, 2023) +**

Current Month	Augusta	Milledgeville	Total
Regular Patients	97	105	202
Service Connected *	26	36	62
Total Patients	123	141	264
Last Month			
Regular Patients	102	111	213
Service Connected *	27	36	63
Total Patients	129	147	276

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

+ The report to the VSB is the total numbers from August 12, 2023, through September 15, 2023.

As was mentioned in the last Board meeting, the Georgia War Veterans Home in Milledgeville has undergone a change in contractors effective September 1, 2023. The new company is STG International with its home office located in Arlington, VA. Although provided with a very short window to transition, STGi has been moving forward very quickly to ensure quality care for our veterans continues. They retained over 98% of the existing staff to include the Executive Director and Director of Nursing. They are looking to convert from paper medical records to electronic medical records more quickly than planned, which has everyone excited. Carlton Deese's team has provided invaluable assistance in this process.

The new Food Service Facility on campus was opened on September 1<sup>st</sup> and will be a great benefit for the quality of meals served to the veterans. SGTi would like to hold a ribbon cutting ceremony for this facility on October 12, 2023, with the exact time to be determined. We invite all Board members to attend if they are available.

The Homes are COVID-19 free.

**State Veterans Cemeteries**

**Burial Statistics (through September 15, 2023)+**

State Veterans Cemetery	Cumulative Last Month	Cumulative Current Month	Increase
Glennville	3,335	2,353	18
Milledgeville	5,190	5,218	28
Total	7,525	7,571	46

+ The report to the VSB is the total numbers from August 12, 2023, through September 15, 2023.

**Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery – Glennville**

Routine operations are continuing.

**Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Milledgeville**

Conducted a pre-construction meeting with Dyer Construction on August 5, 2023, for Phase 4 expansion of the cemetery. The expansion will include additional columbaria, renovation of existing columbaria, improved landscaping, and repair of existing irrigation systems. The construction process allows 365 days for completion. Extended construction timeline is due to long lead times for the required granite materials and construction of the columbaria.

**Mr. Carlton Deese, Executive Director GWVNH, Augusta, GA**

There was an increase in Covid over the last 3-4 weeks. We are about 16 days out from the last Covid positive test. We continue testing, handwashing, masks and other Covid protocols. Infection control for all viruses is our focus. We do have beds available and will begin to advertise.

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

On Wednesday, August 23, 2023, Kerry Dyer attended the Agency Procurement Officer meeting. Later that day he also attended the Talent Acquisition webinar.

On Thursday, August 24, 2023, Kerry Dyer along with Commissioner Ross, met with U.S. Representative Mike Collins to discuss Veterans Suicide, Homelessness and Housing. Later that day he contacted



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Madeleine Moghimi, Capitol Media Service Office Manager to reserve Capitol Room 216 and 341 for October 5, 2023. He also met with Benjamin Marlon to discuss the Common Area Renovation Project.

On Friday, August 25, 2023, Kerry Dyer met virtually with Robert Orange, State Accounting Office, to discuss the Department Inventory and & Capital Assets.

On Saturday, August 26, 2023, Kerry Dyer attended the Kabul 13 Memorial Ceremony at Johns Creek Veterans Association. He was also informed by United States Army (Retired) Colonel Rick White, Director & Chairman of the Board of the Georgia Military Veterans Hall of Fame (GMVHOF), that Commissioner Ross will be inducted into the 2023 GMVHOF on Saturday, November 4, 2023.

On Monday August 28, 2023, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's Meeting. Later that day along with Mark Bannister and Mark Demers he met virtually with the State Accounting Office to discuss the Department Year End Form Submission for Investments, Capital Assets and Cash & Deposits.

On Tuesday, August 29, 2023, Kerry Dyer met with GBA to discuss the Suicide Prevention display that will be posted in the Plaza on September 5<sup>th</sup> and September 8<sup>th</sup>. Later that day along with Commissioner Ross, Mark Demers, Mark Bannister, and Sarita Dyer, he attended his Capitol Arts Standards Commission Board Swearing in Ceremony given by Governor Brian Kemp.

On Wednesday, August 30, 2023, Kerry Dyer met virtually with Natasha Simoes, Access Project Manager to discuss the DD214 digitalization progress. Later that day he met with Alonso Renee, Department of Drivers Service IT specialist, regarding the data exchange.

On Thursday, August 31, 2023, Kerry Dyer spoke to Patrick Bean, Fort Stewart Transition Manager regarding the United States Army Garrison Fort Stewart/Hunter Army Airfield and GDVS 2023 Army Community Partnership Award.

On Friday, September 1, 2023, Kerry Dyer, along with Commissioner Ross, traveled to GWVH in Milledgeville to meet with Russell, Tonya and the STGi leadership to discuss PruittHealth and STGi's last day of transition.

On Saturday, September 2, 2023, Kerry Dyer conducted a department brief at the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Veterans Rally Point at the American Legion Post 127 located in Sugar Hill, GA.

On Tuesday, September 5, 2023, Kerry Dyer spoke with Patrick Zondervan, Assistant Director of the Atlanta VA Regional Office, regarding the Honorable Denis McDonough's (Secretary of the VA) visit on Friday September 8, 2023. Later that day he spoke with Robert Orange, SAO Accountant regarding GDVS' capital assets in Teamworks.



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On Wednesday, September 6, 2023, Kerry Dyer, along with Russel Feagin, drafted the Intergovernmental Agreement between GDVS and the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD) for the Georgia War Veterans Home.

On Thursday, September 7, 2023, Kerry Dyer, along with Ernie Cowart and Shareka Monday-Robinson, met virtually with Mary Mesaros, Vault Health Company, regarding the implementation of the Drug Screening Program for the Department. Later that day Kerry Dyer, along with Russell Feagin, spoke to Clark Wong, State Properties Land Manager, regarding Grant Charter License for the Fiber Optic Installation at the Georgia War Home in Milledgeville.

On Friday, September 8, 2023, Kerry Dyer attended the Commissioner's Open Forum. Later that day he contacted Justin Speck, House Media Services, regarding the IT request from Mr. Hanley. He also attended Mark Bannister's retirement luncheon at Mary Mac's restaurant.

On Saturday, September 9, 2023, Kerry Dyer, along with Commissioner Ross, Pete Paslawski and Joshua Kopsie, attended Takosha Swan's Presidential Lifetime Achievement Award Ceremony in Alpharetta, GA.

On Monday, September 11, Kerry Dyer processed Barry Goode's (Veterans Education Training Division Coordinator) resignation packet. Later that day he sent Linda Lavender a resume for her Grounds Maintenance Tech 1 vacancy. He conducted a site visit at room 341 at the Capitol in preparation for the SSG Fox Suicide Prevention Forum.

On Tuesday, September 12, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's Meeting. He also processed two new hire packets for the Veterans Education & Training Division. Later that day he visited the Decatur Field Office and spoke to Joe Baker regarding the onboarding of the two new hires.

On Wednesday, September 13, Kerry Dyer met with Betsy Theroux, Director of House Media Services, to discuss the reservation of Capitol Room 341 and 216. He also spoke to Kristy Baughman, Manager at the Little Ocmulgee State Park & Lodge, regarding the site visit.

On Thursday, September 14, Kerry Dyer spoke with John Connors, Account Executive with CWC Office Furniture, to discuss the replacement of the cubicles in the IT and PID area. Later that day, along with Barbara Beedles, he met virtually with Natasha Simoes, Project Manager at Access Corp, to discuss the DD214 digitalization project.

On Friday, September 15, Kerry Dyer visited the Lawrenceville Field Office and the Riverside VA clinic, along with Steven Fay and Ramona Roper, to discuss office space for an additional VSO.

On Monday, September 18, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director's Meeting. Later that day he attended the SSG Fox Grant and UniteUs meeting along with Commissioner Ross, Mark Demers,



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Charlotte May and Calandra Ferguson. He also spoke to Russell regarding the request for a License Agreement with Spectrum to install Fiber Optics at the GWVH in Milledgeville.

On Tuesday, September 19, Kerry Dyer updated the Promotion and Alpha Roster in preparation for distribution to Commissioner Ross, Camala Ball, Shareka Monday-Robinson and Mark Demers. Later that day he met with Gail Stowers, DOAS State Drug Policy Coordinator, regarding the Department Policy on random drug testing.

Below are the Personnel Actions Kerry Dyer and Shareka Monday-Robinson processed from August 16, 2023-September 16, 2023.

Location	Position	Status	Name	Date
Atlanta RO	VCAO 1	New Hire	Juanita Williams	08/21/23
Milledgeville	Grds Maint Tech 1	Terminated	Jamon Waller	08/31/23
Augusta-GWVNH	VFSO 1	New Hire	Germani McNeil	09/01/23
Augusta-VAMC	VFSO 1	New Hire	Alex Rivera	09/01/23
Milledgeville	Grds Maint Tech 1	New Hire	Altariq Carswell	09/18/23
Athens	VFSO 2	Resign	Dawn Perry	09/20/23

On the horizon: Open a Veterans Field Service Office in the Perry Clinic in spring or summer of next year.

**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 1,821 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	392
Approved Training Establishments	1,429
Veteran Students Enrolled in Educational Institutions	10,751

\* Source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration, Education Division, August 2023.

Ms. Charlotte May, Director, External Affairs & Communications

**INFORMATION OUTREACH**

**Division Updates**

1. GDVS Newsletter – PID published a monthly newsletter in August. The e-newsletter features top stories from the month and encourages readers to get the full issue at <https://veterans.georgia.gov/newsletter>. The August edition featured the launch of the GDVS Leadership Institute, an overview of how the SAA assists veterans and families, coverage of the We CARE Fair in Marietta, Rita Barnhardt's 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of service, and a summary of upcoming events in September for veterans across the state.
2. SSG Fox Forum Resource Guide – developed a 16-page resource guide for active-duty service members, veterans, and their families with assistance from Chairman Hanley, Commissioner Ross, and Suicide Prevention Outreach Coordinator Calandra Ferguson. While developed as part of the upcoming October 5 forum honoring SSG Fox, the resource book will be used at future suicide prevention events. The resources in the book have already been used to provide assistance to a constituent in crisis through a request received by Commissioner Ross.
3. TCSG/Unite Us – External Affairs and Communications is working with TCSG and Unite Us partners on an upcoming narrative and video piece to promote the network of resources we are building across the state for veterans and their families. External Affairs and VSOs are collaborating to identify veterans to be featured in the AJC around Veterans Day and in a longer campaign to promote awareness.
4. Department Directives – worked closely with COO Dyer to proof and format upcoming department directives. Additionally, the division worked with Procurement and Purchasing to create a new, updated supplies form for use at GDVS field offices to streamline requests.
5. Website updates –
  - a. Severe Weather Alerts – provided updates on office closures for veterans and staff in areas impacted by Hurricane Idalia.
  - b. Media Advisory – Fox Forum. Shared media advisory with targeted groups, partners, and media outlets to promote the October 5 forum. The media advisory was also posted on the GDVS website to promote views.
6. Veterans Benefits Outreach



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- a. Special PACT Healthcare Enrollment – shared infographics from VA to inform veterans of the September 30 deadline to enroll if they meet eligibility requirements.
- b. PACT events – shared updates on PACT claims filing events in partnership with the Warrior Alliance in College Park and Augusta.
- c. VETLANTA – share information on VETLANTA's Q3 summit and photos from the event from Executive Director Simpson.
- d. Suicide Prevention Week – assisted the Suicide Prevention Outreach team to promote awareness of resources throughout the week, including an event held at the Floyd Veterans Memorial building and a Walk and Roll in Decatur.

**Public Information Division Contacts** *(Since December 9, 2022)*

- Replies to VA eBenefits Messages = 498
- Replies to General Questions = approximately 740
- Individual Request for the State Certificate of Honor = approximately 135

**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 **29,970**  
(Honors Ceremonies and Central Office Mail Outs)

DoD Vietnam Veteran Lapel Pins presented via GDVS – An estimated **23,970**

Honors Ceremonies supported/coordinated by GDVS – **358**

Defense Department's Vietnam Veteran Surviving Spouse CoH – **291**

**OLD BUSINESS:**

There was no old business to discuss.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

Commissioner Ross will be inducted into the Georgia Military Hall of Fame on November 4 in Columbus, Georgia.

Ms. Swan will be singing at the parade on Saturday, September 30 in Duluth. The event is to celebrate veterans.

Mark Demers announced that he, Commissioner Ross and Julie Hammond completed the state accounting course.

**NEW BUSINESS:**

Mr. Hanley expressed his thanks to Commissioner Ross, Kerry Dyer and Charlotte May for their assistance in setting up the Staff Sergeant Fox Forum being held on October 5.

Ms. Kim Scofi expressed her thanks to GDVS for assisting veterans at the We Care Fairs. Over 5,000 veterans have been helped so far.

Regarding a possible government shutdown, Commissioner Ross announced that the impact to GDVS would be minimal, mainly with delays in reimbursable funds for the grants.

Organizational changes were made with the retirement of Mark Bannister. Mark Demers is now the Chief Development Officer/Chief Finance Officer and Russell Feagin is the Executive Director of Health and Memorials Division. Ms. Irene Mackson was introduced as the newest employee of the GDVS Central Office. She is the new Business Analyst.

Amy Stevens introduced Tiffani Williams, the branding manager for Georgia Military Women.

Mr. Corey Martin from Atlanta's John Marshall Homeless Veterans Legal Clinic explained how their organization assists veterans. They assist veterans with misdemeanor charges, which include drugs related charges, simple battery, family violence, disorderly conduct, assault, obstruction, criminal trespassing, loitering, violation of probation, failure to appear, theft/shoplifting/burglary, forgery, DUI, suspended license, no tag/insurance and eluding/fleeing the police. Mr. Martin can be reached at 404-247-6656.

Mr. Mendez brought up the issue a veteran in Brunswick is facing regarding an injury he sustained in the Air Force. GDVS experts are assisting with this claim.



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The October 25 Board meeting was scheduled. It will be a combination virtual and in-person meeting, set up at the GDVS.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 1:23 p.m.

SIGNED:



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Shawn Hanley, Chair

ATTEST:



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Joshua Kopsie, Secretary