

**Wednesday, September 25, 2024 at 12:30 p.m.
Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting
Atlanta, Georgia**

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

Visitors Present: Ms. Shelly-Ann Simpson, Executive Director, Field Operations & Appeals, GDVS
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
Mr. Don Layne, VECTR Chief Operating Officer
Ms. Raemona Miller, Attorney General's Office
Ms. Meredith Magnus, Veterans Service Foundation Board
Mr. Kevin Loncher, Veterans Service Foundation Board
Mr. Chuck Roberts, Veterans Service Foundation Board
Ms. Courtney Kopsie, Visitor
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
Mr. DeMario Rucker, Assistant Director, Appeals Division, GDVS
Ms. Veda Brooks, Coordinator, Women & Minority Veterans, GDVS
Ms. Calandra Ferguson, Coordinator, Suicide Prevention & Outreach, GDVS
Ms. Raven Holstick, Transition and Employment Coordinator, GDVS
Ms. Jarelle Thompson, Homeless Coordinator, GDVS
Mr. William Wilson, Network Administrator, GDVS
Ms. Camala Ball, Budget Analyst, GDVS
Ms. Monica Dorsey, Communications & Outreach Specialist, GDVS
Ms. Julie Hammond, Executive Assistant to the Commissioner, GDVS

On Wednesday, September 25, 2024, the Veterans Service Board meeting was held in person and by video/tele-conference.

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

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

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Mr. Paslawski made a motion to approve the August minutes and the minutes from the August joint meeting between the Veterans Service Board and the Veterans Service Foundation Board, which were previously distributed for members to review. Mr. Mendez seconded the motion. There were no objections. The motion passed.

The following reports were submitted for the Board meeting:

Ms. Carolyn Cagle, Treasurer, Department of Georgia Goldstar Mothers, Inc.

We are supporting the following 2024 events with donations and attendance:

1. The Honor and Remember Georgia Run for the Fallen, October 4-6, 2024, from Milledgeville to Fort Moore. The facilitator and organizer in Georgia is Candice King, a Goldstar Mother. Information to volunteer can be obtained at Georgia@RunfortheFallen.org.
2. The phone number is: 404-234-8332 and the address is: Georgia Run for the Fallen, C/O Honor and Remember, Inc. PO Box 985, Holly Springs, GA 30142.
3. The Ball Ground Georgia Garden Club Dedication of Memorial Marker at the Ball Ground City Hall on September 28, 2024, at 11:00. The Department of Georgia American Goldstar Mothers will be laying a wreath in honor of Georgia's Fallen. For information contact bgmemorialmarker@gmail.com.
4. The Department of Georgia American Goldstar Mothers, Inc will be providing wreaths for Christmas through Wreaths Across America for the Linwood Cemetery in Columbus, GA. To purchase a wreath please visit our website at <http://georgiaagsm.org>.
5. We will be participating in the Atlanta Veterans Day Parade 2024.
6. We will be donating to and attending the TUFFS Golf Tournament in Hoschton, Georgia.
7. 6. September kicks off the Last Patrol Campaign in which we send Christmas cards to our Veterans in hospice. The Georgia American Goldstar Mothers contributed 5000 Christmas cards.

We are also interested in helping our women Veterans who are in need. You may contact us at departmentofga@americangoldstarmothers.org.

Ms. Belinda Boldoe, VFW

- The Department Service Officer attended a Georgia Department of Veterans Service (GDVS) Leadership Institute Training. Session One was held on August 12-13, 2024, at 08:30AM.
 - Monday, August 12, 2024 (Day One). We discussed the following:

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- Professional Development
- GDVS Organizational Structure
- Overview – Strategic Planning/Budget
- Duties and responsibilities of the staff advisors and directors
 - Field Operation and Appeals
 - Outreach Team Coordinator
 - Human Resource
 - Operations
 - Public Information
 - Appeals Division
- Tuesday, August 13, 2024 (Day Two). We discussed the following:
 - Gallup - Strength Finder Assessment Results
 - Introduction to Public Speaking
- The Department Service Officer attended the monthly VSO/CMA meeting hosted by Brian Morgan, Change Management Analyst, (CMA) the virtual meeting was held on August 22, 2024, at 10:00AM. We discussed the VSO's issues and concerns.
- The Department Service Officer attended a virtual Quarterly VSO/Directors meeting hosted by Tony Milons, Director and Brian Morgan, Change Management Analyst, (CMA) held on August 27, 2024, at 1PM - 2PM. The following issues were briefed:
 - GA PACT Act – Outreach Events
 - Director's Update
 - Character of Discharge
 - Sensitive Records
 - Fraud Prevention
 - Vocational Readiness and Employment (VRE)Bronchial Asthma
 - Digital GI Bill

Ms. Tonjala Moton-Williams, GDVS, American Legion Service Officer

- August 10, 2024, Organizational Day Meeting was held at Post 594, Warner Robins, Georgia. The introduction of the new Commander and staff started the program. The Organizational Day featured keynote speaker Director Douglas Gullino from Augusta, Georgia who spoke about healthcare enterprise committed to helping people live healthier lives and the specialization of Medicaid, Medicare, and Tricare programs. Department Service Officer attended Organizational Day.

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- August 23-29, 2024, National Convention was held in New Orleans, Louisiana. The key focus was membership growth. To achieve this mission, the American Legion organized workshops to train Legionnaires across the country to learn and strategize on growing numbers.

Upcoming events:

- September 21, 2024, Department Chaplains Training is held at Post 594, 1523 Moody Rd., Warner Robins, GA. All Chaplains from Districts, Posts, Auxiliary, SAL, and Legion Riders are to attend. The keynote speaker is Chaplain Clarence Sinkler.
- September 25, 2024, 9:00am- 12:00pm, American Legion Department Commander and his delegation will visit Atlanta VA Healthcare System, 1670 Clairmont Road, Decatur, Georgia 30033. They will get a brief presentation concerning operations and plans for the hospital and a tour of the facility.
- September 25, 2024, 1:00 – 4:00pm, American Legion Department Commander and his delegation will visit Atlanta Regional Office, 1700 Clairmont Road, Decatur, GA 30033. They will get a brief presentation concerning operations and plans and a tour of the facility.
- Monthly Virtual Post service officer training will be held for new service officers. Training topics were on the roles and responsibilities as a post service officer. This training will continue to be held monthly as new service officers arrive.

Commissioner Patricia Ross

On Monday, August 12, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended a meeting held by the VA to learn about the resources VA is providing to prevent utilization of predatory claims actors. She also hosted the second GDVS Leadership Institute in the central office.

On Tuesday, August 13, 2024, Commissioner Ross took part in the Debt Management Center's VSO Stakeholder Call.

On Wednesday, August 14, 2024, Commissioner Ross, Shelly-Ann Simpson, Veda Brooks, Raven Holstick and Mark Demers attended a meeting with Onward Ops to discuss a community partnership. Onward Ops seeks to empower "every transitioning service member with the support and information needed to achieve success as Veterans." She then attended the August Veterans Service Board meeting. Afterwards, she attended a VA led webinar on Medical Disability Examinations.

On Thursday, August 15, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended the August State Workforce Development Board meeting at Kia in LaGrange.

On Friday, August 16, 2024, Commissioner Ross, Kerry Dyer and Mark Demers attended a meeting to discuss an insurance policy for directors and officers of the Foundation Board. Afterward, she attended a meeting with the Miner Agency to discuss a GDVS Resource Guide. Also in attendance

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were Mark Demers, Charlotte May and Camala Ball. Commissioner Ross spent a significant amount of time working on grant submission paperwork.

On Sunday, August 18 through Thursday, August 22, Commissioner Ross attended the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs conference in Indianapolis. 48 of 50 states were represented and conferences for State Women Veterans Coordinators and the Governor's Challenge to prevent suicide occurred concurrently with overlapping sessions to hear from leadership from VHA, VBA and NCA.

On Thursday, August 22, Commissioner Ross submitted the GDVS grant application for the VA's Veteran and Spouse Transitional Assistance Grant Program. Partner organizations are the Technical College System of Georgia and their Office of Workforce Development, the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency, the Georgia VECTR Center, Hire Heroes USA, Onward Ops, and Bridge My Return. We anticipate the grant awards (up to \$500,000 for 8 – 10 organizations) will be announced the end of September.

On Friday, August 23, 2024, Commissioner Ross met with Cajun Comeau and Kim Scofi about supporting the We Care Veterans Fair. She and Charlotte May met with Carter Chapman and Mark Smith from Gov. Kemp's office. Afterward she spoke with Russell Feagin. She also was on leave to attend her daughter's graduation, earning a Doctorate in Occupational Therapy.

On Sunday, August 25 through Tuesday, August 27, Commissioner Ross attended the M85 Convening, the purpose of which was to bring together regional leadership to discuss partnerships between the VA, the state, nonprofits, corporate partners, and other key players in the Veteran care arena across Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina.

On Wednesday, August 28, 2024, Commissioner Ross spoke with potential Foundation Board members. She also held a Director's Meeting.

On Thursday, August 29, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended the GVN Leadership Meeting with Kim Scofi. She also listened in on the First Quarter Hybrid Training held by GDVS, the topic being Standards of Conduct and Basic Eligibility. She then met with Drew McIntyre of Qualtrics, a software company.

On Friday, August 30, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended a joint Veterans Service Board and Veterans Service Foundation Board meeting, to discuss coming up with a strategic plan. Three new members of the Foundation Board were ratified by the VSB – Chuck Roberts, Kevin Loncher, and Bob McMahon. In the evening, she and Kerry Dyer attended the ROC Veterans in Atlanta Dinner hosted by the Consul General and to meet General Chin who was visiting Atlanta.

On Tuesday, September 3, 2024, Commissioner Ross held a Director's Meeting. She then met with the Consul General of the German Consulate. Afterward, she met with OPB to discuss the allocation of construction funds for the home. Also in attendance were Camala Ball, Mark Demers, Jenelle Coleman

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and Russell Feagin. She also hosted Rey Benitez Sen. Ossoff's Chief of Staff, to discuss veteran initiatives.

On Wednesday, September 4 through Saturday, September 7, Commissioner Ross attended the Quadrennial Women Veterans Conference in Washington, DC. Over 1,000 women veterans attended in-person or virtually and learned of the initiatives from the VA and other partners in women's healthcare.

On Wednesday, September 4, Commissioner Ross and Charlotte May met with Tammy Martin from North Carolina to discuss their resource guide for veterans.

On Monday, September 9, 2024, Commissioner Ross held a Director's Meeting. She then took part in the VISN 7 Georgia VA Commissioner introductory meeting with the new acting Director of the Dublin VA Medical Center. Later in the day she met with Charlotte May, Kerry Dyer and the Miner Agency to discuss the resource guide.

On Tuesday, September 10, 2024, Commissioner Ross visited the Newnan office. Later she worked on the upcoming legislation submission with Mark Demers and Charlotte May. She had a phone meeting with Dr. Jackie R. McMorris, Cobb County Manager, to discuss the upcoming Cobb Employee Veterans Program, where Commissioner Ross will be the Guest Speaker.

On Wednesday, September 11, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended the Capitol Ceremony for 9/11. She then worked on the upcoming legislation submission.

On Thursday, September 12, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended the Veterans Service Foundation Board Meeting. She later attended the NewDay USA Leadership Speaker Series featuring the former Secretary of Defense Gen. James N. Mattis, at the Georgia Military College.

On Friday, September 13, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended the Christian Businessmen's Prayer Breakfast and offered a prayer for military and first responders. She later met with Cajun Comeau and Kim Scofi regarding the We Care Veterans Fair. She also met with OPB about the budget and submitted agency legislation.

On Monday, September 16, 2024, Commissioner Ross was on annual leave but still held a Director's meeting.

On Wednesday, September 18, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended the meeting at the Capitol with Rep. Josh Bonner, the Chairman of the Georgia Defense and Veterans Affairs Committee. He hosted a "sensing session" about allowing organizations or individuals not accredited by the VA to charge veterans to assist or counsel them on their claims. She then attended the VA meeting on "information for veterans about VA psychedelics research studies."

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On Thursday, September 19, 2024, Commissioner Ross and Kerry Dyer met with Kevin Miller, President & Chairman of the Georgia Veterans Day Association. She also met with BG Huntley from the VA's Office of Intergovernmental affairs. She then attended the We Care Vet Fair weekly In Progress Review and the Military Influencer Conference's In Progress Review.

On Friday, September 20, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended the GDVS Leadership Institute virtual class – GDVS Strategic Plan and Budget. She met virtually with BG (ret) Andy Hilmes from the Chattahoochee Valley United Way. She also met with Hire Heroes USA about being an inaugural honorary chair for their awards gala in May 2025. Later she met with Dr. Villalabos with Centerstone Military Services about free mental and behavioral health services for military, veterans and their families. She ended the day with an update on the homes and cemeteries.

On Saturday, September 21, 2024, Commissioner Ross attended the Radiant Warrior Retreat, sponsored by Georgia Military Women, She Served and Humble Warrior Wellness & Yoga.

On Monday, September 23, 2024, Commissioner Ross held a Director's Meeting. She also attended the Unite Us Quarterly Business Review at TCSG.

On Tuesday, September 24, 2024, Commissioner Ross met with the HereNow Help team and discussed the rollout of their free mental health applications in Georgia. She then attended the VA's VetResources Community Network of Practice quarterly meeting. Later she met with the agency's policy analyst, the Deputy COO and COO for the state on agency legislation.

Commissioner Ross added the following discussion to her report:

This is a flat budget year, but we presented our offline request last Friday. We will not find out about the status of our request until the Governor's budget comes out in January. In addition, we submitted ten pieces of legislation last week to the Governor's staff and we should know in about 45 days which pieces we can move forward with. We will inform the Board once we know which pieces we are supporting.

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

GENERAL

- On Friday August 16th, I joined VSOs as we participated in the Warrior alliance Outreach event at Ike Owings Recreation Center in Douglasville. We filed over 60 claims and provided advice to over 70 veterans.
- On Saturday August 24th, the outreach team attended the Rescuing Hope Gala. The gala had an auction which raised money to combat Human Trafficking across the United States.

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- On Wednesday August 28th, Raven Holstick and I attended an open house at the Frito Lay Plant in Perry, Georgia. The purpose of the visit was to tour the plant and get an idea of jobs that they had available for veterans. We will be getting monthly job announcements from them that we may pass along to veterans or family members seeking employment.
- September 4-5th, I attended the 2024 Quadrennial Women Veterans Summit with the Commissioner, Ms. Thompson (Homeless Coordinator), Ms. Holstick (Transition and Employment Coordinator), Ms. Brooks (Women and Minority Coordinator) and Ms. Haire (Suicide Prevention Specialist from our LaGrange office).
- On September 12th, I was the featured speaker at American Legion Post 134's lunch and learn. I gave a briefing on GDVS and how we work with the Legion and our other partners.
- On September 17th, the outreach team joined Senator Ossoff's outreach team for lunch at the Senator's Midtown office. We discussed our ongoing working relationship.
- **DD 214's and Welcome Home Letters: 613** Welcome Home Letters were mailed out in August 2024.

Projected Positions: One opening in Fort Stewart.

Ms. Ramona Roper, Director of Training Division:

- August 26, 2024, Mr. Glenn Massey administered a Departmental Required Online Proficiency (DROP) class on Special Monthly Compensation (SMVC) to the Field Service Officers and accredited representatives.
- August 29, 2024, Mr. Charles Isaac and Ms. Sandra Bennett conducted a hybrid training class on Standards of Conduct and Basic Eligibility to the south region Field Service Offices.
- September 5, 2024, Mr. Steven Fay and Glenn Massey conducted a hybrid training class on Standards of Conduct and Basic Eligibility to the north region Field Service Offices.
- September 11, 2024, participated in a VA Benefits briefing at the America Legion Post 189. Ms. Bennett discussed VA benefits, healthcare enrollment, the PACT Act, Toxic Exposure Risk Assessment (TERA), and answered questions.
- September 12, 2024, Ms. Ramona Roper, conducted a VA Benefits briefing at the Athens-Clarke County Police Department. She discussed VA benefits, healthcare enrollment, the PACT Act, TERA, filed claims and answered questions.

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- September 16, 2024, Mr. Charles Isaac administered a DROP class on VA Apportionments, what defines an apportionment, and the proper procedures to assist veterans when an apportionment is issued or how to issue one.
- September 21-27, 2024, Mr. Steven Fay will attend the VFW National Training Conference in Annapolis, Maryland. This annual conference discusses updates to VA law changes and much more. Mr. Fay is the 2024 Humana Scholarship recipient. This scholarship provides a training opportunity with the VFW National Organization and all expenses are fully funded by Humana.
- September 23- 26, Ms. Sandra Bennett will be conducting new hire training for the new VSO in the Macon CBOC Veterans Field Service Office. This training will be an introduction into becoming an accredited service officer.
- September 23- 26, Mr. Glenn Massey will be conducting new hire training for the new VSO in the Decatur VAMC Veterans Field Service Office. This training will be an introduction into becoming an accredited service officer.

Ms. Roper added that on September 30, weather permitting, two members of the Training Team will be participating in the event with the North Region Director and his team

Upcoming Events:

- Daily continued ongoing support to the Regional Directors and Veteran Field Service Offices
- Continuation of performing duties as VSO's

Training Division Retro Award Totals: \$192,009.87

Mr. Edwin Berry, Director of Appeals Division

- The total number of hearings conducted by the Appeals Division for **August 2024** was **50**. Retroactive payments of **\$431,921.00** were paid in August to the veterans or family members based on positive outcomes from previous hearings that the Appeals team assisted with.
- As of **September 1, 2024**, the Atlanta VA Regional Office processed benefits as follows for GDVS and the Service Organizations represented by GDVS during the month of August 2024:

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Types of Claims	Number of Awards	Benefits paid
Compensation	108,175	\$244,972,021
DIC	4,246	\$7,296,369
Survivor Pension	701	\$677,078
<u>Veteran Pension</u>	<u>1,343</u>	<u>\$1,595,994</u>
<u>Grand Total</u>	<u>114,465</u>	<u>\$254,541,462</u>

YTD through 08/31/2024 total Compensation, Pension and other benefits paid: **\$1,990,749,830** for the veterans that we represent who receive VA benefits.

Mr. Kenneth Childre, Director Veterans Benefits North Region

Retro Awards: August \$2,231,273.95

Of Note: Russel-0837-Spouse received \$170,412.78 DIC Retro back to 2014. (William Smith-LaFayette)

Director Site Visits/Inspections: 0

Community Involvement:

1 Aug 2024-Patricia Ross (Commissioner), Kerry Dyer (COO), Ken Childre (NAD) Attended the Senior Resources Fair at the Church of the Apostles. Commissioner Ross did 2 breakout briefings (30+ attendees) to explain the services that GDVS provides. Kerry and I were at the GDVS table briefing patrons on what GDVS does and passing out information about other services we provide. Over 300 attendees in all at the fair.

5 Aug 2024-Left to Right: Kevin Whitlock (Office Manager/South Area District Manager-Milledgeville, Charles Isaac (Purple Heart Recipient)-Trainer-Glenngville, Ken Childre-NAD, Zach Britton-Ken's Son-in-Law. We played in the Purple Heart Memorial Golf Classic @ Stone Mountain Golf Club. We donated \$500 towards the Metro Atlanta Veterans and their families. Placed 10 out of 22 teams.



16 Aug 2024-ShellyAnn Simpson (Executive Director for Field Ops & Appeals), Sean Seader & Veronica Dailey (Carrollton), Roderica Stewart (Decatur CBOC), Joe Baker, Vanessa Wilson & Herman Hammonds (Atlanta VAMC), Kareem Reddick (VECTR North), Vetineet Hueitt & Randy Gray (Ft McPherson) and Shaunda Mathieu and Dawn Donaldson (Atlanta Balcony).

Participated in the Douglasville PACT Act Event. Spoke with 70+ Veterans and filed over 60 claims.

28 Aug 2024-Tanya Rogers (Gainesville)

Briefed VA/State benefits at a Military Spouse breakfast and met with UNG-Dahlonega leadership to facilitate university volunteers supporting a local Assisted Living Facility

North Area Gains/Losses: 1

Marlin Brown-Atlanta VAMC-Resigned 15 Aug

Mr. Childre highlighted the upcoming Veterans Experience Action Center event on September 30. There are about 583 registered for the event. About 20 VSOs will be participating. There is another event on October 5 at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta. November 1-2 will be the big We Care Fair in Cobb County.

Ms. Sherri Whitfield, Director Veterans Benefits South Region

- On September 4, 2024, the Savannah Field Office participated in a Stand Down for Homelessness Resource Fair, hosted by the Savannah VAMC. This annual resource fair brings together agencies/organizations who provide critical support to our unhoused citizens and those experiencing housing instability. Social service programs, health services, legal services, basic

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human services, and more gather in one place at one time bringing synergy, collaboration, networking, and information sharing to the forefront of our collective efforts to reduce the experience of homelessness.

- On September 10, 2024, the Valdosta Field Office participated in a Veteran's Burial Benefits Seminar. This event was sponsored by Music Funeral Services and was held at the Wiregrass Technical College. The seminar featured a panel of experts who discussed various aspects of veterans' burial benefits from their unique perspectives. In attendance were representatives from the National Cemetery, Casualty Affairs, Honor Guard, American Legion, and other invited experts.
- On September 12, 2024, Mr. Kevin Whitlock in the Milledgeville Field Office was a guest speaker at the Morris-Little Post 6 American Legion. Both veterans' and survivors' benefits, including the claim process, were discussed.
- On September 16, 2024, we welcomed a new Veteran Field Service Officer, Mr. Antrell Hunt, to the Macon Field Office.
- On September 26 – 28, 2024, VSOs from the Savannah and Hinesville offices participated in a Veterans Fast-Track Disability Clinic, held in Savannah, GA. This event was hosted by the Department of Veterans Affairs, Atlanta Veteran Benefits Administration (VBA) Regional Office, Georgia Air National Guard, and CBP. VBA, medical disability examinations personnel as well as VA examiners were onsite to process benefits claims, request adjustments to claims, add or remove dependents, conduct onsite C&P exams, Toxic Exposure screenings, VHA enrollment, and help answer any questions veterans may have regarding VA compensation and pension benefits.
- Since the last board meeting, South region offices reported total lump sum payments of \$732,018.53.
- South Georgia Region Veterans Population: 237,759.

Ms. Whitfield added that the South Region was planning to have several people participate in the Civic Claims Clinic, which was to be held in Savannah this weekend. We will no longer be participating due to the weather and the concern for the safety of our employees.

Ms. Veda Brooks, Women Veterans Coordinator (WVC)

- August 18-22, 2024, Ms. Brooks participated and presented at the Annual National Association of State Women Veteran Coordinators in Indianapolis, IN. During the annual business meeting I was nominated and won the Sr. Vice President.

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- August 24, 2024, Ms. Brooks attended the Rescuing Hope Gala at the Cobb Galleria. As the Women Veteran Coordinator, she was able to invite two of Atlanta's VHA MST Teams. This was important because in 2021, DOD had 108 human trafficking cases, with 77 of those cases related to sex trafficking or related incidents.
- August 27, 2024, Ms. Brooks met with Vedia Barnett, CEO and Founder of the Veteran Space to talk about collaborating on outdoor events with Women Veterans. Ms. Brooks also met with Modern Woodmen of America to discuss the Financial Literacy Seminars that will be held in 2024 with two target audiences, women veterans and spouses on campus and women and spouses outside active posts.
- August 28, 2024, Ms. Brooks co-trained S.A.V.E. with Ms. Calandra Ferguson at the VFW Auxiliary Post 12190, in Evans, Georgia.
- August 29-30, 2024, Ms. Brooks assisted Calandra Ferguson in teaching ASIST Suicide Prevention Training.
- August 31, 2024, Ms. Brooks attended the Queen Sisters Chapter 3 Meet and Greet in Stockbridge Georgia.
- September 4-7, 2024, Ms. Brooks attended the 2024 Quadrennial Women Veteran Summit: The Year of Empowerment.
- September 10, 2024, Ms. Brooks participated in the Wellness Day at the Dublin VHA.
- September 11, 2024, Ms. Brooks participated in the Women Veterans Health Committee Monthly Meeting.
- September 12, 2024, Ms. Brooks participated in the DeKalb County Veteran Resource Expo.
- September 15, 2024, Ms. Brooks participated in Family Day at American Legion Post 57, Newnan.
- September 17, 2024, Ms. Brooks and the Outreach Team met with Vedia Barnett of Veteran Space. Ms. Brooks participated in the Governor's Suicide Prevention Task Force meeting.
- September 18, 2024, Ms. Brooks participated in the Atlanta VHA Walk and Roll.
- September 21, 2024, Ms. Brooks participated in the Community Health Fair.
- September 24, 2024, Ms. Brooks presented a Benefits Briefing to CDC.

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- September 26, 2024, Ms. Brooks participated in the Southern Crescent Technical College Veteran Summit.

Ms. Brooks made two corrections to her report. The September 24th event with the CDC was cancelled due to some emergency things they needed to take care of on their end. The September 26th event at Southern Crescent has been cancelled due to the weather.

Current committees:

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

- August 8, Ms. Ferguson attended the Georgia Department of Public Health Suicide Prevention Training, Clayton County Library.
- August 9-10, Ms. Ferguson set up a vendor table at the Women Marine Association Annual Conference.
- August 19-23, Ms. Ferguson attended the NASVDA Governor's Challenge Conference in Indianapolis, IN.
- August 20, Ms. Ferguson held the monthly Governor's Challenge TF Meeting.
- August 28, Ms. Ferguson presented a Suicide Prevention Class to the American Legion Auxiliary in Evans, GA.
- August 29-30, Ms. Ferguson presented Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training ASIST to the Transition Coalition.
- September 10, Ms. Ferguson set up a vendor table with the Dublin VA for Suicide Prevention Awareness Month.
- September 11, Ms. Ferguson met with the Douglasville Community Service Board to collaborate for a Mental Health Round Table discussion.

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- September 12, Ms. Ferguson set up a vendor table at the DeKalb County Veteran's Resource Expo to distribute Suicide Prevention material.

Ms. Ferguson spoke about S.A.D. (Season Affective Disorder). As we get less sunlight it affects our mood, behavior, sleep patterns, etc. Some suggestions to combat the winter blues include:

- ✓ Stay active
- ✓ Eat healthy
- ✓ Stay social/connect with others/don't isolate yourself
- ✓ Get Some Sunlight
- ✓ Have fun – enjoy each day and live life to its fullest
- ✓ Reach out to someone if you feel depressed. Call 988 if you have no one else to talk to.

Ms. Raven Holstick, Transition and Employment Coordinator

- August 27, 2024, Transition and Employment Coordinator met with VA Veteran Justice Program Director and her staff of VJOs. The meeting served as an essential platform for discussing the intersection of veteran reintegration and legal challenges faced by our service members. During the session, we shared insights on best practices for supporting veterans involved in the justice system and explored collaborative strategies to enhance their employment prospects.
- August 28, 2024, Transition and Employment Coordinator attended Frito Lay Open House focused on hiring veterans. This event provided a valuable opportunity to connect with company representatives and learn about their initiatives aimed at supporting veteran employment. Frito Lay is actively seeking to recruit veterans, and we discussed ways to facilitate connections between their hiring team and our veteran community.
- August 29, 2024, Transition and Employment Coordinator attended the University of Georgia's Veteran Social to engage with student veterans and discuss their experiences and challenges. This event fostered a supportive environment for networking and camaraderie among veterans on campus. I emphasized our resources and programs aimed at facilitating their transition to civilian life.
- September 12, 2024, Transition and Employment Coordinator and outreach team attended DeKalb County Veteran Resource Fair. The event provided a platform to connect with veterans and their families, sharing information about our support programs. This Fair was a valuable opportunity to strengthen our outreach and raise awareness of the resources we offer to enhance veterans' transitions to civilian life.
- September 14, 2024, Transition and Employment Coordinator attended Georgia Tech University's Military Appreciation Tailgate. This event provided an excellent opportunity to engage with veterans and their families while raising awareness about our programs and resources. Was able to

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strengthen our connection with the community, showcase our services, and celebrate the valor and dedication of our service members.

- September 16, 2024, Transition and Employment Coordinator collaborated with Dave and Buster's (Marietta) for Military Mondays, which provided a relaxed environment for veterans and their families to connect. The atmosphere encouraged open conversations about the challenges veterans face during their transition to civilian life. Valuable opportunity to promote our programs and strengthen our ties with local service members.

Upcoming events:

- September 20, 2024, Clark Atlanta University and Home Depot Backyard Visit
- October 18, Department of Community Supervision
- October Dave and Busters (reoccurring)

Ms. Jarelle Thompson, Homelessness Coordinator

- September 11, 2024: Met with Family Promise of Athens to discuss a partnership of sending individuals that may need their services. I learned about their referral program, what their program offers, and that they have apartments for families experience homelessness. They can stay in the homes for 3 months. They assist with rental, deposit, and utility assistances. They also have supportive services while someone is in their program.
- September 12, 2024: Participated in Cobb County's Quarterly Meeting. The purpose of this meeting was to collaborate with all agencies that help with ending Veteran homelessness in the state. I was able to network with agencies and build future partnerships. I was able to learn more about how SSVF works, HUDVASH and the Grant Per Diem. I was invited to participate in their Popup food drive and obtain supplies for a veteran that I am currently working with.
- September 16, 2024: Conducted a meeting with Castlin Homes. This organization will be starting a non-profit that will assist with affordable housing in Metro Atlanta. Once they are done with remodeling, we will be able to use them as a resource for homeless veterans.
- September 16, 2024: Met with VOA Southeast. The purpose of this meeting was to establish a partnership to use their SSVF and Grant per Diem program. We will now be able to use them for homeless veterans.
- September 19, 2024: Will be participating in Operation Reveille in Atlanta. This will be an event hosted by VA. This event will provide homeless veterans with an abundance of resources.

Ms. Thompson highlighted that last month they were able to put together 40 hygiene packs for men and women and passed them out at the Operation Reveille event.

Ms. Thompson added that Ms. Joycelyn Jones, one of our VSOs, worked together with her to house a homeless veteran and his fiancé. She is working to house 6 homeless veterans right now. Mr. Kopsie asked if we know how many homeless veterans there are in Georgia. We don't have that count, but VISN 7 is working on a system that will show them in real time how many homeless veterans are in Georgia.

Upcoming events:

- September 23, 2024: Meeting with CSRA
- September 24, 2024: Meeting with VBHCS
- September 28, 2024: AMVETS Resource event

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

Accounting/Procurement:

- Routine operations are continuing. We are continuously working to improve all accounts payable processing, to apply proper coding, accountability, organization of purchase orders, and on time payments.
- We are continuing to work with the SAO Shared Services to prepare the procurement and accounting data in Team Works for migration to GA@Work.
- 20 of 24 end of year reports have been submitted to SAO. The remainder will be completed once the forms open up for submission.
- Kirsten Dennis completed the first large essential supply order totaling \$13,715.80 which is slightly below what was projected.
- Kirsten Dennis is enrolled in the Georgia Certified Procurement Manager (GCPM) certification and completed the RFP class September 3, 6 and 13, 2024 and the exam on September 16, 2024, with an 87%.
- Kirsten Dennis continues to monitor Staples and Moore Business invoices, receipting out invoices for payment and tracking purchase orders.
- Camala Ball and Mark Demers participated in NextGen (GA@Work) and Year End Close out training sessions: Lease and SBITA year end, FDM mapping, SEFA Training SAO GASB lite training.
- Mark Demers attended Vendor Liaison Training on September 19, 2024.

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- Irene Mackson and Mark Demers attended P-Card Admin Roundtable on August 19, 2024.

Budget:

GDVS FY 2025 – Annual Operating Budget (AOB) as of July 1, 2024

Total State General Funds	\$28,461,126
Total Federal Funds	\$24,210,246
Total Other Agency Funds: GSFIC and Fees	\$3,465,491
Total Funds	\$56,136,863

- We were instructed by OPB to maintain FY 2025 spending levels in FY 2026 (essentially a flat budget). However, we could share new or mandatory workload needs.
- Camala Ball submitted budget requests in PBCS and the offline requests to the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget (OPB) by the September 3, 2024, deadline. Ms. Ball added in the meeting that we are on track with the budget spending and everything looks good for the first quarter.
- AFY 2025/FY 2026 budget request highlights include:
 - Requested 10% Consumer Price Increase for war homes in Milledgeville and Augusta for the last two years with the expectation that the future year's increases in state appropriations will correspond with VA's increases. (\$1,437,535) (AFY 2025).
 - Request funds to increase war home bed count and open the sub-acute therapy unit by May 2026. (\$1,000,000) (FY 2026).
 - Request 5% Consumer Price Increase for war homes in Milledgeville and Augusta. (\$718,767.65 added to our baseline budget) (FY 2026).
 - Request funds to increase GDVS salaries by 5% to combat attrition (\$596,004.36 added to our baseline budget) (FY 2026).
 - Request funds to sustain the Unite Us System across GDVS. (\$3,725,000) (FY 2026).

Grant Program:

- SSG Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program- (\$747,464 year 2 and **\$722,747 year 3**)
 - Irene Mackson submitted draw-down #9 for \$141,286.05 on September 3, 2024.
 - The SSG Fox Grant Year 3 NOFO was submitted on April 26, 2024, we received notification that we were one of 8 organizations approved for all 3 years on September 16, 2024.
 - The SSG Fox Grant Mid-Year Report was submitted on April 30, 2024, the next report will be in October 2024.

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- Irene Mackson completed Lethal Means Safety Virtual Training on September 4, 2024.
 Completed Veterans Crisis Line training.
- Attended SSG Fox Grant National Webinar on September 19, 2024.
- 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 10, 2024, we have **273,917** veterans in the system. We have submitted **1,090** community partners and **313** healthcare partners for inclusion to the platform since August 2022.
 - Irene Mackson completed address changes for 10,000 veterans on the data file.
 - We received the advance payment request for the entire year on September 16, 2024, for \$6,088,640.28. All four past due invoices were submitted for payment on September 16, 2024.
 - Below is an activity snapshot from Unite Us Insights:



- Veterans Mental Health Services Program Grant (HB 414)-
 - AFY2023- The grant was awarded to two vendors: \$750,000
 - Aspire (Cohen Veterans Network) for \$650,000.
 - Emory Healthcare for \$100,000.
 - The end of year report for Cohen was received on July 31, 2024, and the report from Emory was received on September 13, 2024.

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- AFY2024- The grant was awarded to two vendors: \$1,000,000
 - Aspire (Cohen Veterans Network) for \$776,132
 - Emory Healthcare for \$212,500
 - GDVS indirect rate awarded by Senate and House \$11,368
 - All monies have been distributed to awardees in May 2024.
 - First quarter reporting will be due in October 2024.
- FY2025- \$1,000,000 (competitive grant)
 - The grant is currently in the review stage in Survey Monkey. Only two applications were received:
 - Aspire (Cohen Veterans Network) (asking \$776,132)
 - Sisters 2nd Chance (asking for \$50,000)
 - \$163,868 will be remaining to award.
- VA Suicide Mortality Review Cooperative Agreement - (\$502,124.68)
 - Submitted for consideration on July 24, 2024, we will find out if we are successful on September 30, 2024.

Veterans Service Foundation:

- The board meeting was on September 12, 2024, at 1000. They will be discussing the strategic plan for the foundation and have set up a training session with Kennesaw State University to put a plan together this month.
- The board voted to have monthly meetings going forward, next meeting date TBD.
- Completed the Georgia State Charitable Contributions Program paperwork so the foundation could be listed as a charitable organization eligible for payroll deduction. Our application was approved for FY 2025 with open enrollment starting on September 16, 2024, and ending on November 16, 2024.
- All state end-of-year reports were submitted to SAO for the Veterans Service Foundation.

Events/Other:

- Kirsten Dennis completed the first session of the GDVS Leadership Institute on August 12, 2024, and the second on September 20, 2024.
- Irene Mackson will be taking on an additional role of the Leadership Institute Coordinator starting with the first session on August 12, 2024, and second on September 20, 2024.
- Attended the photo op with ESGR, Governor and First Lady on behalf of the Commissioner on August 21, 2024.
- Attended Senate/House Joint Committee Meeting on September 18, 2024, at the CLOB.

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

State Veterans Homes

State Veterans Homes Census (Through September 13, 2024) +

Current Month	Augusta	Milledgeville	Total
Regular Patients	92	109	201
Service Connected *	32	35	67
Total Patients	124	144	268
Last Month			
Regular Patients	89	104	193
Service Connected *	30	34	64
Total Patients	119	138	257

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

+ The numbers reported to the VSB are the total numbers from August 2, 2024, through September 13, 2024.

Georgia War Veterans Nursing Home

Normal operations continue

Georgia War Veterans Home

Normal operations and renovation projects continue.

A Veterans Day ceremony will be conducted on November 11, 2024, at 11:00am. The Keynote speaker will be General Robert Magnus, USMC, Retired.

State Veterans Cemeteries

Burial Statistics (through September 13, 2024)+

State Veterans Cemetery	Cumulative Last Month	Cumulative Current Month	Increase
Glennville	2,549	2,562	13
Milledgeville	5,525	5,548	23
Total	8,074	8,110	36

+ The report to the VSB is the total numbers from July 13, 2024, through August 2, 2024.

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery – Glennville

Cemetery operations continue as normal.

A grant for \$3,051,480 was approved by the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) to expand the cemetery by adding additional in-ground capacity and renovation of the existing columbaria. This will add 920 pre-placed crypts, improve the appearance of the columbaria, and add the Space Force seal to the ceremonial area. The expansion should take about one year to complete.

Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Milledgeville

Cemetery operations continue as normal.

Phase 4 expansion of the cemetery is almost completed. This expansion added additional columbaria (above ground cremated interment) capacity. In addition, it provided renovation of our existing columbaria. We are still waiting on the necessary granite to complete the project.

A grant for \$5,135,900 was approved by the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) to expand the cemetery by adding additional in-ground capacity and renovation of the existing columbaria. This will add 1,680 pre-placed crypts, 548 inground burial spaces, and add the Space Force seal to the ceremonial area. The expansion should take about one year to complete.

Mr. Feagin updated his report as follows: The VA annual audit team walked into the Augusta Nursing Home yesterday and will be there the rest of the week. Milledgeville had their audit in July. There were two deficiencies that they were able to correct.

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Mr. Kerry Dyer, Chief Operations Officer

On Thursday August 15, 2024, Kerry Dyer contacted Marlon Benjamin, GBA Project Manager to discuss the quote to replace the window blinds on the 9th floor suite. He also spoke to Ryan Pettey, Access Regional Account Executive regarding the Hard Drive and Cell Phone purge. Later that day he discussed a Risk Management Claim with Greg Strickland, DOAS, Senior Claims Specialist. He also attended the UniteUs meeting along with Mark Demer, Charlotte May and Irene Mackson.

On Friday, August 16, 2024, Kerry Dyer along with Commissioner Ross and Mark Demers met with Heather Rogan, Partners Risk Service, Account Manager to discuss the Directors & Officers Liability Insurance Policy for the Foundation Board. He also processed 1 new hire packet for the Hinesville Field Office.

On Monday August 19, 2024, Kerry Dyer along with Will Wilson attended the NextGen Security Overview & Role Mapping Seminar. He also met with Robert Orange, SAO Senior Accountant, Mark Demers and Russell Feagin to discuss the FY24 SAO year end Capital Asset Report. Later that day he spoke with Robin Herron, Director of Executive Operations regarding the Clark's Christmas Kids Program for the Georgia's Foster Care System.

On Tuesday, August 20, 2024, Kerry Dyer along with Will Wilson, Jerry Lahr met with Gynda Jordan, Supervisor/Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) at GDOL to discuss the data sharing agreement. Later that day along with Mark Demers, Camala Ball and Robert Orange participated in the NextGen Supervisory Organizational Structure seminar.

On Wednesday, August 21, 2024, Kerry Dyer along with Russell Feagin attended the Senate Study Committee on Veterans Mental Health and Housing at the Georgia Military College in Milledgeville.

On Thursday, August 22, 2024, Kerry Dyer processed 2 new hire packets for the Milledgeville Cemetery. He also spoke to Roger Richardson, Carl Vinson VAMC Strategic Planner regarding the grand opening of the Houston VA clinic. Later that day he submitted the Space Action Form, Space Utilization Form and the Agency Organizational Chart to Leslie Davis, State Properties Leasing Specialist to relocate the Albany Field Office.

On Friday August 23, 2024, Kerry Dyer along with Mark Demers and Robert Orange listened to the Subscription- Based Information Technology Arrangement seminar. He also reviewed the Cincinnati Directors & Officers quote for the Agency Foundation Service Board. Later that day he spoke to Patrick Bean, Fort Stewart, Transition Assistance Program Manager regarding employment opportunities for transition veterans.

On Monday August 26, 2024, Kerry Dyer attended the Bi-Monthly Houston VA Clinic meeting. He also processed two new hire packets for the Milledgeville Cemetery. Later that day he contacted Jim Server, DOAS Office of Fleet Management regarding the Fleet Audit Report.

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On Tuesday, August 27, 2024, Kerry Dyer along with Will Wilson attended the NextGen Security Role Mapping workshop. He also attended the P-Card administrators training along with Mark Demers, Charlotte May and Julie Hammond. Later that day he attended the HCM NextGen Organizational chart training.

On Wednesday, August 28, 2024, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Directors meeting. He also attended round 2 of the NextGen Supervisory chart training. Later that day he submitted a reservation request to the Savannah Convention Center for the FY26 National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs (NASDVA) Conference.

On Thursday, August 29, 2024, Kerry Dyer contacted Russell Feagin to discuss the Fleet Management Audit Report. He also processed 1 new hire packet for the Atlanta VAMC. Later that day he submitted the Nonprofit Organization Contract to DOAS.

On Friday, August 30, 2024, Kerry Dyer attended the Veterans Service Board and Foundation Board meeting. He also attended round 3 of the NextGen Supervisory Organization Training. Later that day along with Commissioner he attended the ROC Veterans Guidance Committee Dinner in Duluth GA.

On Tuesday, September 3, 2024, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Directors meeting. He also participated in the Security Role Mapping Session along with Will Wilson. He also submitted the monthly Fleet Report to DOAS Fleet Management Division. Later that day he distributed the monthly Alpha Roster to the Senior Leadership.

On Wednesday, September 4, 2024, Kerry Dyer processed 1 resignation packet and 1 retirement packet. He also posted the Canton and Augusta VAMC vacancy externally. Later that day he spoke to Lori Barmann, DOAS Fleet Management Business Analyst regarding the Agency Wex Clearview Fleet account.

On Thursday, September 5, 2024, Kerry Dyer contacted Sissy Livingston, Westin Savannah Harbor Golf Resort & Spa, Senior Sales Executive to discuss the reservations for FY26 National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs Conference. He also spoke to Leslie Davis, State Properties, Leasing Specialist regarding the availability of the office space located at Albany Technical College.

On Friday, September 6, 2024, Kerry Dyer contacted Dayna Mercer, Savannah Convention Center, Sales Manager to discuss conference room space for the FY26 National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs Conference (NASDVA). He also spoke to Randy Cahow, Veterans Benefit Supervisor regarding the Veterans Benefit Contract.

On Monday, September 9, 2024, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Directors meeting. He also attended the Houston VA Clinic bi-monthly meeting. Later that day he participated in NextGen Townhall and Supervisory Organizational seminar.

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On Tuesday, September 10, 2024, Kerry Dyer attended the NextGen Security Role Mapping Working session. He also submitted 10 Facility Inspection Forms to Leslie Davis, State Property Leasing Specialist in preparation for the Field Office Lease Renegotiations. He also contacted Marlon Benjamin, GBA Project Manager to discuss the Balcony Field Office, Paint, Lighting, and Carpet Quote.

On Wednesday, September 11, 2024, Kerry Dyer conducted a site visit at the Milledgeville Veterans War Home along with Russell Feagin and Meridith Magnus, Foundation Board Member.

On Thursday, September 12, 2024, Kerry Dyer processed 2 resignation Packets. He also spoke to Lauren Tyson, DOAS Property Disposal Specialist regarding the disposal of 141 Electronic items. Later that day he spoke with Cheryl Talley, Hyatt Regency, Senior Sales Manager regarding accommodations for the FY26 (NASDVA) Conference.

On Friday, September 13, Kerry Dyer spoke with Kathleen Skates, Albany Tech, Vice President of Administration to discuss a site visit. He also posted Brunswick Field Office vacancy internally. Later that day contacted Kim Chambless, The Desoto Hotel, Director of Sales & Marketing to discuss accommodations for the FY26(NASDVA) Conference.

On Monday, September 16, 2024, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Directors meeting. He also participated in the NextGen Supervisory Organization Seminar. Later that day he took the GA@Work Basic Navigation Training.

On Tuesday, September 17, 2024, Kerry Dyer processed and approved 141 Electronic items for Disposal. He also processed 1 new hire packet. Later that day he conducted a site visit to the Atlanta VAMC Field Office.

On Wednesday, September 18, 2024, Kerry Dyer met with Timothy White, DOAS IT Business Analyst 3 to discuss the access for the FY24 Comprehensive Loss Control Program and Self-Evaluation Survey. He also submitted responses to the FY24 Fleet Management Audit Report to DOAS.

Below are the Personnel Actions Kerry Dyer and Shareka Monday-Robinson processed from August 16, 2024 – September 16, 2024.

Location	Position	Status	Name	Date
Augusta VAMC	VFSO 1	Resign	Sharonica Mitchell	09/13/24
Milledgeville	Cemetery Tech 1	New Hire	Bobby Jeans	09/16/24
Milledgeville	Cemetery Tech 1	New Hire	Darius Marshall	09/16/24
Macon	VFSO 1	New Hire	Antrell Hunt	09/16/24
Decatur VAMC	VFSO 1	New Hire	Shayla Harris	09/16/24

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Fort Stewart	Office Manager (VFSO 2)	Resign	Bobby Hogan	09/27/24
Milledgeville	Cemetery Tech 1	Resign	Brian Howard	09/27/24

On the horizon: Veterans Field Service Office in the Perry VA Clinic, Fort Eisenhower and Albany Tech.

Mr. Dyer added that we are currently working on adding a Field Office at Atlanta Tech. We are working to relocate the Albany office. Once we have all the upcoming offices opened, this will put us at 58 field offices.

He also added that the MOU with the Department of Labor regarding the data sharing agreement was signed yesterday. Additionally, we have the surplus ready for DOAS to pick up. This includes old computers and typewriters.

Mr. Kopsie asked about vacancies in the department. Mr. Dyer stated that we have 3 vacancies, with 4 new hires who began on September 16 and 2 scheduled to begin on October 1.

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

- The approval, risk-based surveys, and supervisory visits of educational institutions, training establishments and training programs approved for veterans training is continuing with no significant problems in any area being noted.
- Approval of new veteran's On-The-Job training sites (OJT) continues to increase. As of this date the State Approving Agency (SAA) has granted approval to 2,187 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	480
Approved Training Establishments	1,707
Veteran Students Enrolled in Educational Institutions - August	6,088

* Source: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration, Education Division, August 2024, WEAMS

Ms. Charlotte May, Director, External Affairs & Communications

INFORMATION OUTREACH

Division Updates

1. GDVS Newsletter – The department’s monthly e-newsletter features top stories from the month at <https://veterans.georgia.gov/newsletter>.
 - a. The August edition featured a highlight of the VFW’s new national commander, Georgia’s Al Lipphardt. Commissioner Ross and the GDVS were his first official state visit in his new role. The newsletter also featured information on updates to the VA Burn Pit Registry, free training available to veterans interested in agricultural careers through UGA, and spotlights on three outstanding GDVS employees. We celebrated the service of Employee of the Quarter Kevin Whitlock, the hiring of JT Thompson as our Homeless Coordinator, and LaGrange office manager Amber Haire’s selection as a 20 Under 40 by the *LaGrange Daily News*.
2. Press release on September 10: Georgia Department of Veterans Service Receives Grants to Expand State Veteran Memorial Cemeteries – Announced the department’s award of over \$8 million in federal expansion grants for GVMC Glennville and Milledgeville. This is the first expansion of GVMC Glennville and phase 4B at GVMC Milledgeville.
3. GOVChats – Attended two virtual webinars hosted by GTA’s Digital Services & Solutions team. The August 20 webinar focused on new federal ADA regulations for government websites. Additional webinars and training to ensure the GDVS website is fully in compliance are anticipated in upcoming months. The September 17 webinar was a moderated conversation between GTA and a representative from the University System of Georgia on the ethics of AI development and usage at government institutions.
4. Georgia Veterans Guidebook – Continued development on a redesign of the Veterans Benefits in Georgia handbook. GDVS is working with the Miner Agency on a comprehensive reimagining of the guidebook to advise more veterans and their families of the benefits of living, working, and raising a family in Georgia. GDVS met with Tammy Martin, North Carolina Department of Military & Veterans Affairs on September 4 to discuss best practices and how North Carolina develops, prints, and distributes their guidebook.
5. Legislative Proposals – External Affairs and Communications worked closely with Commissioner Ross and CDO Demers on requests for ten legislative changes to benefit Georgia’s veterans and their families. These requests were shared with the Governor’s staff for vetting, research, and potential approval. A meeting is scheduled for September 24 to follow up on these proposals.

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6. Legislative Sensing Session – attended a joint Georgia House and Senate Sensing Session with Commissioner Ross, CFO Demers, and COO Dyer on September 18, 2024. EAC worked with Commissioner Ross and executive staff to develop a presentation to explain the department's functions, outreach, and availability as a free resource for veterans at every stage of need.
7. Benefits outreach – External Affairs and Communications continues to work with GDVS staff and partners to educate Georgia's veterans and families on the availability of benefits and resources. In addition to providing information on hiring fairs, business building programs, and resource fairs, we focused on several key areas for messaging:
 - a. Claims Predators – continued to share periodic reminders to be aware of people seeking to gain a portion of a veteran's benefits payments. VA and partners are proactively providing information and resources to better education and raise awareness to prevent potential victims from being taken advantage of.
 - b. Repayments before benefits – shared information on how or why a veteran may receive a garnishment on compensation payments after separating from the military. Information was shared as clarification after a story from *Stars and Stripes* gained traction and veterans were confused about guidelines.
 - c. Suicide Prevention month – GDVS is participating in Suicide Prevention month in a variety of avenues. Links to various benefits to help veterans or their loved ones are shared on multiple sites and the outreach team is attending many events.
 - d. Military & Veteran Legal Services Clinic – shared information on the upcoming legal clinic at the Military Influencers Conference on October 1. GDVS representatives will also be on site to provide assistance.

Public Information Division Contacts *(Since December 11, 2023)*

- Replies to VA eBenefits Messages = 315
- Replies to General Questions = approximately 545
- Individual Request for the State Certificate of Honor = approximately 100

Ms. May added that we are finalizing a letter to go out to potential sponsors for the guidebook in development. We hope to have the book ready for the upcoming legislative session. Mr. Kopsie asked about the cost of the books. It should be around \$15,000. Also, we are opening up the applications for the Georgia Mental Health Services grant. This will be the second round of applications, as there is about \$200,000 still available.

OLD BUSINESS:

Mr. Kopsie stated that the joint meeting last month between the Veterans Service Board and the Veterans Service Foundation Board went well. We were able to publish the strategic talking points

regarding the war veterans' homes. He then asked Ms. Magnus for a quick update on the Foundation Board. Ms. Magnus gave an update as follows:

She and her husband, Bob, visited the Milledgeville home, and Bob was able to speak to the residents. They toured the facility and the sub-acute unit.

The Foundation Board is getting the word out of what the need is with respect to the funding for the nursing homes, using social media and every way they can think of.

The Foundation Board is compiling a list of potential donors.

The Foundation Board had 2 resignations in the last week due to personal priorities and time constraints. We are moving forward to appoint new Board members.

Our D&O insurance is in place, and we have job descriptions for the Foundation's CEO, COO and CFO.

We are going over the Foundation policies and will get them completed and signed by all Foundation Board members.

The Foundation Board will now be meeting monthly instead of quarterly.

Mr. Kopsie suggested that a list be made of legislative contacts the Board members are making so that we don't duplicate efforts in this area. He asked that the Veterans Service Board members send him a list of their contacts at the end of each month.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

Commissioner Ross announced that with Gov. Kemp issuing a state of emergency for all of Georgia, our department will be teleworking on Thursday and Friday.

Ms. Fergerson announced that GDVS has received the third-year awarding of the Fox Suicide Prevention grant.

Commissioner Ross announced that it is Suicide Awareness Month, and we have been promoting this on social media. We will have the analytics for the next Board meeting.

Commissioner Ross announced that the next "sensing session" led by Sen. Chuck Payne and Rep. Josh Bonner will be held on Oct. 16 at the Museum of Aviation in Warner Robins from 10am-12pm. This is in regard to organizations being able to file claims for veterans and charge for their services.

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Mr. Kopsie announced that the Goldstar Mothers are sponsoring a Run for the Fallen, October 4-6, 2024, from Milledgeville to Fort Moore. The facilitator and organizer in Georgia is Candice King, a Goldstar Mother. Also, the Ball Ground Georgia Garden Club Dedication of Memorial Marker at the Ball Ground City Hall on September 28, 2024, at 11:00. The Department of Georgia American Goldstar Mothers will be laying a wreath in honor of Georgia's Fallen.

Mr. Loncher announced the commemoration the 31st Anniversary of Operation Gothic Serpent with a Virtual Mogadishu Mile Event. This annual commemoration honors the heroic actions of Task Force Ranger and remembers the fallen warriors in Somalia on October 3, 1993. All proceeds directly support active duty and former Rangers, their families, and Ranger Gold Star Families from the US Army's 75th Ranger Regiment, including veterans of affiliated supporting units. Go to rangerrags.com to participate.

Ms. Magnus announced that her husband Bob will be speaking at the Milledgeville Nursing Home on their Veteran's Day Ceremony on Nov. 11 at 11:00am.

NEW BUSINESS:

There were two candidates submitted for approval to be added to the Foundation Board. Mr. Alan Danzig from the Augusta area and Mr. Andy Hilmes from the Columbus area. Their bios and the recommendation from Commissioner Ross were sent to the Board members to review before today's meeting. Mr. Hanley made a motion to approve both for the Foundation Board. Mr. Mendez seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

The next Board meeting was scheduled for October 23 at 12:30pm. It will be a combination virtual and in-person meeting, set up at the GDVS.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 1:19 p.m.

SIGNED:


Joshua Kopsie, Chair

ATTEST:



Steve Mendez, Secretary