**Thursday, September 17, 2026, at 12:30 p.m.**
**Minutes of the Veterans Service Board Meeting**
**Peachtree City, Georgia**

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

Visitors Present:
Mr. Kerry Dyer, Deputy Commissioner, Chief Operations Officer, GDVS
Mr. Mark Demers, Chief Development Officer, Chief Finance Officer, GDVS
Ms. Shelly-Ann Simpson, Executive Director, Field Operations & Appeals, GDVS
Mr. Russell Feagin, Executive Director Health, Contracting & Facilities, GDVS
Mr. Ernie Cowart, Executive Director Veterans Cemeteries, GDVS
Ms. Kathryn Wright, Governor's Office of Planning & Budget
Ms. Belinda Boldoe, VFW Service Officer, Appeals Division, GDVS
Mr. Jonathan Buggs, American Legion Service Officer, Appeals Division, GDVS
Ms. Amy Stevens, Georgia Military Women and Vetlanta
Mr. Don Layne, VECTR Chief Operating Officer
Ms. Rose Gedding, Visitor
Mr. Dennis Boothe, GDVS Leadership Institute Student
Ms. Maxine Brock, GDVS Leadership Institute Student
Mr. Herman Hammonds, GDVS Leadership Institute Student
Ms. Carie Lince, GDVS Leadership Institute Student
Mr. Glenn Massey, GDVS Leadership Institute Student
Mr. Frederick Young, GDVS Leadership Institute Student
Ms. Lily Snyder, Director, Veterans Education & Training, GDVS
Ms. Charlotte May, Director, Public Information and External Affairs, GDVS
Mr. Steven Fay, Director, Training Division, GDVS
Ms. Sherri Whitfield, Director, Veterans Benefits South Region, GDVS
Mr. Edwin Berry, Director, Appeals Division, GDVS
Ms. Calandra Fergerson, Coordinator, Suicide Prevention & Outreach, GDVS
Ms. Raven Holstick, Transition and Employment Coordinator, GDVS
Ms. Jarelle Thompson, Homeless Coordinator, GDVS
Ms. Camala Ball, Budget Analyst, GDVS
Mr. William Wilson, Network Administrator, GDVS
Ms. Monica Dorsey, Communications & Outreach Specialist, GDVS
Ms. Kaitlin Little, Business Support Analyst, GDVS
Ms. Irene Mackson, Business Support Analyst, GDVS
Ms. Julie Hammond, Executive Assistant to the Commissioner, GDVS

On Thursday, September 17, 2026, the Veterans Service Board meeting was held by video/tele-conference.

Mr. Mendez called the meeting to order at 12:34 p.m. Mr. Mendez gave the invocation. Mr. Paslawski led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag. Mr. Mendez welcomed the visitors in the Conference Room.

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

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

The following reports were submitted for the Board meeting:

**Ms. Belinda Boldoe, GDVS, VFW Service Officer**

- The Department Service Officer attended a virtual training session - VSO Coffee Talk, hosted by the GDVS Training Team. The virtual training session was held on August 03, 2026, at 8 AM. **Facilitator:** Jen Loutzenheiser, Whispering Hills Preserve. **Topic:** Natural Burial Options for Veterans.

- The Department Service Officer attended a virtual Quarterly Center for Development and Civic Engagement CDCE/VAVS meeting hosted by Gwendolyn Ramos, which was held on August 12, 2026, at 1 PM. The following issues were briefed:

  - Medical Updates by Ronald Johnson, Interim Atlanta Medical Director on Expanding the Use of Community Care for Primary Care
  - VAVS Annual Joint Review
  - VAVS Budget Report
  - Suicide Walk and Roll at Arcadia CBOC on September 16, 2026 – 11 AM – 2 PM.
  - Summer Student Program - Success
  - VSO Christmas Tree: Stocking, Gift Bags, Turkey donations, Adopt a Veteran
  - Baby Shower Program on August 21, 2026, at American Legion Post 66
  - Recruiting Volunteers: Bedside Chatter, Coffee Stand, Mobile Drivers, Musicians

- The Department Service Officer attended a virtual training session - VSO Coffee Talk- hosted by the GDVS Training Team. The virtual training session was held on August 17, 2026, at 8 AM. **Facilitator:** Glen Massey, Assistant Director for Training. **Topic:** Customer Service and Office Safety.

- The Department Service Officer attended a monthly VSO VSC Vet Talk hosted by Lateisha Howard, Atlanta Regional Office AVSCM (Quality & Training), and the staff held on August 18, 2026, at 10 AM, at 1700 Clairmont Road, Decatur, GA 30033. Purpose: To conduct a monthly roundtable informational session in collaboration with Veteran Service Officers (VSOs). This meeting aims to foster an inclusive environment and provide current guidance on administering Compensation

Benefits. **Facilitator:** James Jenkins. **Topic:** Enhancement and Compensation and Pension (C&P) Exams.

- The Department Service Officer attended a virtual training session - VSO Coffee Talk, hosted by the GDVS Training Team. The virtual training session was held on September 01, 2026, at 8 AM. **Facilitator:** Calendra Fergerson. **Topic:** Suicide Prevention .

**Mr. Jonathan Buggs, GDVS, American Legion Service Officer**

- September 25, 2026, Americal Legion leadership will be touring the Atlanta VA Hospital and Floyd Veteran Memorial Building. During this meeting new issues and concerns will be discussed for action.

Upcoming events:
- 27 September 2026, American Legion Post 258 will be hosting "Women Veterans High Tea" in Jonesboro, GA.
- American Legion Chattanooga Hospital Visits scheduled for 15 October 2026 will be finalized.

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

I am back in GA. I plan to come in person to the next GDVS meeting. GMW remains very active throughout Georgia. We are attending many outreach events and look forward to opportunities to educate others about why it is important to have female-focused events for women who have served. We are available to come to on-site locations to give short presentations about women veterans. An exciting event coming up in 2027, is that we will be partnering with the Atlanta VA and the Atlanta Women's Club for a special Women Veterans one day conference and resource fair in June. The exact day is not confirmed yet and I will provide more details soon. Looking forward to seeing everyone soon.

Ms. Stevens added the following to her report:

I appreciated the question about what to do when trying to assist the homeless. I get calls like that all the time, especially among the community of women, especially single women with children. I want to encourage everyone to know the resources in their own neighborhood. Resource lists can't always be kept up to date. Local community partners are your best bet. So, know the people in your community, in your county, who you can call on for help.

**Commissioner Patricia Ross**

On Wednesday, August 19, 2026, Commissioner Ross met with Kerry Dyer and Ernie Cowart regarding the Augusta Cemetery Director position. She then joined her team for the Unite Us/GDVS Quarterly Meeting. She later attended the Veterans Service Board Meeting. She also met with Scott Johnson from The Warrior Alliance to discuss a women's veteran center.

On Thursday, August 20, 2026, Commissioner Ross attended the State Workforce Development Board meeting in Rome. She later met with the North Region Director and members of the Rome field office.

On Friday, August 21, 2026, Commissioner Ross was on leave.

On Monday, August 24, 2026, Commissioner Ross met with Kerry Dyer, Ernie Cowart and Mark Demers to discuss the Augusta Cemetery budget. She then spoke with Joe Dan Banker about proposed veteran policy changes within the University System of Georgia concerning expanding education benefits. Afterward, she held a Director's meeting. She also spoke with Ms. Chung Hee Park regarding a trip to South Korea. She then met with Unite Us and partner states for the VA Mission Daybreak update.

On Tuesday, August 25, 2026, through Wednesday, August 26, 2026, Commissioner Ross and other members of the team attended the DBHDD Suicide Prevention Summit in Helen. She provided opening remarks and conducted a breakout session on the importance of partnerships and an update of ongoing initiatives in Georgia.

On Thursday, August 27, 2026, Commissioner Ross welcomed the attendees of the Military Veteran Transition Georgia Post-Academy Site Visit here at GDVS. She also met with Lily Snyder, Director of the Veterans Education and Training Division here at GDVS, to discuss her budget. Commissioner Ross also met with the Mission 85 team to address state capabilities as they are working on the regional strategic plan across Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia. She also attended the Orientation to MOU Process for Onward Ops / VA Veteran Sponsorship Initiative / VA Veteran Sponsor Partnership Network. Georgia will roll out the Veteran Sponsorship Initiative at Fort Stewart on 1 October.

On Friday, August 28, 2026, Commissioner Ross scored the Department of Community Affairs veteran housing grant applications and submitted her paperwork. She also met with Dr. Joe Geraci from the VA on the Veterans Sponsorship Initiative. She later met with Dr. Bradley and Dr. Norvel from the Atlanta VA. She then met with Matt Osucha, a member of the Veterans Service Foundation Board, to discuss the attributes necessary in a community when evaluating a location for a new veteran's home.

On Monday, August 31, 2026, Commissioner Ross met with her team to discuss the SSG Fox Grant. She then held a Director's meeting. Afterward, she met with her financial team to discuss the 2026 Transition Briefings due to the Governor's office. She then had a meeting regarding the Georgia

Veterans Mental Health Advisory Network. She also had a meeting to discuss the Scout Pilot program. She later attended the Fox Grant Update Meeting.

On Tuesday, September 1, 2026, Commissioner Ross attended the VSO coffee talk on suicide prevention and met with the Veteran suicide mortality review team for a quick update. Later, she joined Senator Rick Williams for a tour in Milledgeville along with the Scout team as they worked on a plan to create a veterans' village.

On Wednesday, September 2, 2026, Commissioner Ross attended the Center for Women Veterans National Partners and Stakeholders Meeting. She then attended the swearing in ceremony in Gov. Kemp's office for Dr. Vivian Greentree, the newest member of the Veterans Service Board.

On Thursday, September 3, 2026, Commissioner Ross attended the Veterans Service Foundation Board meeting. She and her team then met with the Georgia National Guard to discuss suicide prevention assistance. She also had a meeting with her team and Dekalb County officials. She later hosted members of the HMR transition team here in Atlanta.

On Friday, September 4, 2026, Commissioner Ross was in Milledgeville for the HMR transition.

Monday, September 7, 2026, was a State holiday.

On Tuesday, September 8, 2026, Commissioner Ross held a Director's meeting. She later met with Ernie Cowart and key team members to discuss the groundbreaking scheduled for 13 November. She also attended the Adult National Fatality Review Tableau/dashboard Demonstration for GDVS. She spent the afternoon drafting a Request for Information to respond to questions by the Office of Planning and Budget concerning requests to fund new veteran home construction.

On Wednesday, September 9, 2026, Commissioner Ross led a Unite Us Demo for The Department of Community Health and Department of Human Services as they have a partnership to support caregivers. She and her team then met with a representative from USAA to discuss the legislative and policy initiatives. Later, she and Kerry Dyer met with the Department of Administrative Services to prepare the RFI for release.

On Thursday, September 10, 2026, Commissioner Ross held interviews for the Augusta Cemetery Manager position. She also met with Radiah Mallard from the Farmer Veteran Coalition of Georgia. The RFI was released.

On Friday, September 11, 2026, Commissioner Ross was on leave and also attended the Unite Us bi-weekly meeting.

On Monday, September 14, 2026, Commissioner Ross held a Director's meeting. She later attended the Fox Grant Update meeting. Later that day she prepared for the meeting with the Office and Planning and Budget to discuss off-line budget requests.

On Tuesday, September 15, 2026, Commissioner Ross attended the Georgia Governor's Challenge Suicide Prevention Task Force Monthly Meeting. She also attended the Georgia Veterans Network Executive Committee at Kennesaw State University. She later attended the Veterans on the Hill meeting where Veteran Service Organizations discussed collective priorities for this upcoming year.

On Wednesday, September 16, 2026, Commissioner Ross attended the SSG Fox Progress Report meeting with the VA and her team. She then attended the Returning Veterans Task Force meeting. Commissioner Ross, Mark Demers and Kaitlin Little met with OPB concerning the department's budget requests. She later took part in the NASDVA Excom Meeting.

Commissioner Ross added the following to her report:

We had a robust conversation with the VA team that was here yesterday and spent about four hours with them. They are over the Staff Sergeant Fox Suicide Prevention Grant. Moving forward, we may have to change some things in how we execute that grant and the population that we are serving. The good news is that there will be additional grantees in Georgia helping us with this mission of suicide prevention.

We are having our first Leadership Institute class for class number four. They are here in the room with us, and I extend a welcome to them.

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

**GENERAL**

- September 10th attended class #7 of the Senior Executive Leadership Academy led by the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at UGA.

- **DD 214's and Welcome Home Letters: 154** Welcome Home Letters were mailed out in August 2026.

**Projected Positions:**
- 1 Opening in Appeals-start date 10/1
- 1 Opening in Brunswick-start date 10/1
- 1 Opening in Valdosta-start date 10/1
- 1 Opening in Athens
- 1 Opening in Atlanta

Ms. Simpson added the following to her report:

- We had our final in-person meeting for the We Care Fair scheduled for October 22 in Marietta.
- On September 12th I attended a briefing at New Hope Missionary Baptist Church in Powder Springs. It was a great turnout, and I was able to speak to several veterans and assist them.

**Mr. Steven Fay, Director of Training Division**

- Charles Isaac- Re-hire retraining in Hinesville CBOC and Fort Stewart (BDD site).
- Steven Fay and Glenn Massey conducted PIV validation in Newnan and Griffin. This ensures the VSO has the understanding how to operate and navigate the VA systems. Steven has also been involved with Reframe, our new scheduling system and ongoing support for VetPro. New hire training Introduces new VSOs to the accredited training processes and procedures to assist veterans and claimants. Refresher training is required to train and evaluate the proficiency of VA systems after issuance of their PIV card. The Absorb Learning Portal is also introduced. The portal has classes and quizzes to help navigate the vast subjects of filing VA claims.
- Sandra Bennett- VSO Coffee Talk August 1st and 15th August 2026.
- Total retro from Training Division: $4,282.66

Upcoming Events:
- New hire training North Region, Appeals and South Region
- VSO Coffee Talk September 15th, 2026
- Continued ongoing support to the Regional Directors and Veteran Field Service Offices including Central Office personnel
- Continuation of performing duties as VSO's
- Planning for Annual Training 2027

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

- The total number of hearings conducted by the Appeals Division for **August 2026** was **79.**
- As of **August 31, 2026**, the Isakson VA Regional Office processed benefits as follows for GDVS and the Service Organizations represented by GDVS during the month of August 2026:

| Types of Claims | Number of Awards | Benefits paid |
|---|---|---|
| Compensation | 114,510 (+213) | $301,538,086 (+1,886,620) |
| DIC | 5,003 (+39) | $9,061,635 (+74,068) |
| Survivor Pension | 583 (-1) | $588,406 (-4,462) |
| Veteran Pension | 1,093 (-14) | $1,353,280 (+10,004) |
| Grand Total | 121,189 (+237) | $312,541,406 (+1,946,221) |

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

Total Compensation and Pension benefits awarded January through August 2026: $2,446,400,943.00

Total Hearings assisted with January through August 2026: 638

Mr. Berry added the following to his report:

- We have a new employee starting on October 1st.
- Thank you to Commissioner Ross for sending a certificate of appreciation to Ms. Simone Thompson, the VA employee who provides us with our numbers and stats for the monthly report we provide to the Board. She has accepted another position with the VA at the Southeast District Office in Alpharetta.
- Mr. Berry is looking forward to the Leadership Institute coming to the regional office this afternoon. VA leadership is looking forward to speaking to them.

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

**Retro Awards:** $1,992,682.83

**Site Visits/Inspections:** 2

**Community Involvement:**
8/3/2026-Rico Johnson (Gainesville) Supported About Face USA in Cumming, GA. Assisted 8 veterans/surviving spouses with their VA benefits.

8/17/2026-Tanya Rogers (Gainesville) Briefed 40+ veterans and spouses at Lakewood Baptist Church in Gainesville, GA

8/21/2026-Tanya Rogers (Gainesville) Attended a Hall County Women's Networking Event in Gainesville, GA, to promote GDVS services.

8/26/2026-Tanya Rogers (Gainesville) Represented the Suicide Prevention Outreach Team at the Mental Health Conference in Helen, GA.

8/28/2026-Christine Collins (Blairsville) Picked up a Sit-to-Stand mobility device from a recently deceased Veteran's home and delivered it to another Veteran in need.

8/28/2026-Christine Collins (Blairsville) Visited VFW post#7807 and assisted several Veterans with claims and VA questions.

**North Area Gains/Losses:** 1
Anthony Grant-Augusta WVH-New Hire 1 Sep 26

**Average Visits Per VFSO**
**Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Region:** | North |
| **Month:** | August-26 |

| A | B | C | D | E | D / E F | G | G / E H |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Office Name | Veterans' Field Service Officer (VFSO) Last Name | # | Total Monthly Office Visits | Work Days In Month | Average Office Visits Per Day | Total Claims Submitted To VA Monthly | Average Claims Submitted By VFSOS To VA Daily |
| | Number of VFSOs: | 52 | 6,399 | 21 | 304.71 | 2,496 | 118.86 |
| Number of Offices: | 30 | | Average Visits/Office: | | 213.30 | Average Claims/Office: | 83.2 |

*Total monthly office visits include: 2,553 In-Person and 3,846 phone calls/emails.

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

- On September 1st and 2nd, interviews for the Brunswick and Valdosta office vacancies were conducted. The new hires will report on October 1st. All South GA offices will be at full staff.

- On September 9th, the Savannah office participated in the annual Stand Down for Homelessness Resource and Job Fair. This event was hosted by the Savannah VA Clinic social workers.

- On September 18th, the Statesboro office participated in the annual Stand Down for Homelessness Resource event. The event was hosted the American Legion Dexter Allen Post 90.

- For the month of August 2026, a total of 488 engagements were scheduled via the ReFrame scheduling system.

- Since the last board meeting, South region offices reported lump sum payments totaling $176,952.24.

- South Georgia Region Veterans Population: 232,245.

Average Visits Per VFSO
Average Claims Submitted to VA Per VFSO

Region: SOUTH

Month: AUGUST - 2026

| # of Offices | # of VFSOs | Total Monthly Office Visits | Workdays in Month | Average Office Visits Per Day | Total Claims Submitted to VA Monthly | Average Claims Submitted by VFSO to VA Daily |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 26 | 40 | 2,160 | 21 | 102.86 | 1,954 | 93.05 |

| | |
|---|---|
| Average Visits/Office | 83.08 |
| Average Claims/Office | 75.15 |

The following is an addition to Ms. Whitfield's report:

Mr. Mendez commended Ms. Whitfield on filling the seat in Brunswick in such a timely manner.

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

- August 26, 2026, Ms. Brooks participated in the Women Veteran Monthly Meet-up. Ms. Brooks participated in "The Spoon" board meeting.

- August 27, 2026, Ms. Brooks participated in the Post Academy visit, Military Veteran Transitions.
- September 2, 2026, Ms. Brooks participated and facilitated a Mental Health Seat at the Table Lead by Vedia Barnett, CEO and Founder of "VET Space".
- September 6, 2026, Ms. Brooks attended the Women Veterans Co-Lead Gathering in Conyers GA.
- September 8, 2026, Ms. Brooks attended a partnership meeting at the DSPII Waypoint Veterans Services in LaGrange, GA. Ms. Brooks visited LaGrange College as a possible site for the Women Veteran of the Year Ceremony.
- September 9, 2026, Ms. Brooks participated in Wellness Wednesday in Clayton County. Ms. Brooks participated in the National Association State Women Veteran Directors Business Meeting.
- September 10, 2026, Ms. Brooks participated in and facilitated the GDVS Advisory Board Executive Meeting. Ms. Brooks attended the Avalon Health Alliance Ball.

**Ms. Calandra Fergerson, Suicide Prevention and Outreach Coordinator**

- August 18-21, 2026, Ms. Fergerson attended the Governor's Challenge Innovations Conference Indy, IN.
- August 24-26, 2026, Ms. Fergerson attended DBHDD/GDVS Suicide Prenton Conference.
- August 27-28, 2026, Ms. Fergerson Held the Governor's Challenge Post-Site Visit Atlanta, GA.
- September 3, 2026, Ms. Fergerson Attended VSO Coffee Talk.
- September 3, 2026, Ms. Fergerson attended Fox Grant Update Meeting.
- September 4, 2026, Ms. Fergerson attended the VSMR Board Meeting.
- September 4, 206 Ms. Fergerson attended the Directors Meeting.
- September 4, 2026, Ms. Fergerson attended a meeting with GDVS and Star Behavioral Health.
- September 7, 2026, Ms. Fergerson attended Lethal Means Safety Meeting.
- September 8, 2026, Ms. Fergerson held Suicide Prevention Day at Floyd Building - 36 participants.
- September 9, 2026, Ms. Fergerson attended the Army Reserve Suicide Prevention Day.

- September 10, 2026, Ms. Fergerson attended World Suicide Prevention Day with the National Guard.

- September 16, 2026, Ms. Fergerson will attend the VA Walk N Roll.

Ms. Fergerson added the following to her report:

I want to highlight with this being Suicide Prevention Awareness Month that we had our own event in the Twin Towers. We were also able to support other organizations within the Governor's Challenge Task Force, one being the National Guard and the other is the Army Reserves. Yesterday we supported the VA Suicide Prevention Team and there are several other events scheduled for the rest of the month.

**Ms. Raven Holstick, Transition and Employment Coordinator**

- August 27-28, 2026 – Post Academy site visit: Participated in the SAMHSA Post-Academy Workshop, continuing collaboration and follow up efforts from the Academy. The session focused on maintaining momentum, discussing progress, sharing best practices, and identifying next steps to strengthen veteran-focused initiatives and partnerships.

- September 3, 2026 – Discussion with Dekalb County Participated in discussions with DeKalb County representatives regarding the development and opening of a dedicated Veterans Pod. Discussions focused on opportunities for GDVS collaboration, veteran support services, and connecting justice involved veterans with available benefits, resources, and community based support

- September 9, 2026 – Atlanta Veteran Employment Summit: Transition and Employment Coordinator Attended the Atlanta Veteran Employment Summit, which brought together organizations and professionals focused on strengthening veteran employment initiatives. The summit highlighted veteran hiring best practices, employer engagement strategies, and opportunities to improve meaningful employment outcomes for veterans.

**Ms. Jarelle Thompson, Homelessness Coordinator**

- I participated in bi- weekly Unite Us meetings. This meeting focused on trends that we see using the platform.

- 8/8- 8/14/2026 - I participated in hosting the annual spring conference for NASDVA. I had an opportunity to learn more about how states are addressing homelessness and to present to Directors across states about what we learned and how we can strategically work together.

- 8/19/26 - Participated in partnership meeting with landlord that would like to rent to veterans.

Ms. Thompson added the following to her report:

- Ms. Thompson is having great success in her stand-downs. She interacted with 30 veterans while in Savannah and over 65 in Atlanta.

- Mr. Peterson asked for the quickest way to get help for a homeless veteran, especially one who needs immediate assistance. Mr. Hanley mentioned the VA grants that go out to faith based organizations that must be spent on the homeless and asked if GDVS keeps track of these organizations. Commissioner Ross answered that the first step is to call GDVS. Ms. Thompson keeps a list of every shelter and grantee and starts working it from the top down in her connections to try and meet the need. Helping the homeless is also a priority for our Foundation Board. DCA is having another round of grants next month to award the $5 million in funds provided for veteran homelessness and groups can apply for funding through them.

- Mr. Mendez asked about having a database that has a running inventory of availability. Ms. Thompson answered that she is working on getting access to HMIS, the Housing Management Information System, which is owned by DCA.

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

**Accounting/Procurement/Compliance:**

- Routine daily operations are continuing. We are continuously working to improve all accounts payable and procurement processing, to apply proper coding, accountability, organization of purchase orders, on-time payments and reconciliations.

- The whole team is working with the GA@Work team and SAO Shared Services to ensure all GA@Work post go-live activities and correction of identified defects are completed.

- Kirsten Dennis processed 12 purchase orders totaling $5,896.63 as well as 11 invoices and 2 quotes.

- Financial close out for FY2026 is currently in progress. **34 out of 38** close out reports have been completed.

**GA@Work/NextGen Updates:**

- Camala Ball attended multiple GA@Work Office hours for: Budget Management, Banking, and Adaptive Planning this period.

- Mark Demers attended the GA@Work Monthly Finance Readiness Meeting on August 21, 2026.

- Mark Demers attended the NextGen Change Network meeting on August 25, 2026.
- Kirsten Dennis participated in multiple meetings for GA@Work.
- Mark Demers attended the GA@Work Procurement Huddle Training updates and system metrics on August 26, 2026.
- Camala Ball attended training for Adaptive Budget, Budget Amendments and Actuals during this period.
- GA@Work is now live!

**Budget/Travel:**

- Camala Ball continued daily monitoring of general ledgers, purchase orders, and budget projection updates. She also conducted continual reviews of budget reports in Workday and Adaptive planning.
- Camala Ball is working with GA@Work team and OPB to ensure all post go-live budget requirements are completed in a timely manner.
- The AFY2027 and FY 2028 Budget was submitted to OPB on August 28, 2026.
- Camala Ball stated that as of August 31, 2026, we have expended 16.95% of the total FY 2027 budget allocated to GDVS. The breakdown is as follows:

| Fund | Total Allotment | Expenditures | Remaining Balance | % Spent |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| State | $ 40,336,821 | $ 6,190,332 | $ 34,146,489 | 15.35% |
| Federal | $ 24,210,246 | $ 4,905,033 | $ 20,033,508 | 20.26% |
| Other | $ 3,465,491 | $ 433,052 | $ 3,113,951 | 12.49% |
| Total Funds | $ 68,012,558 | $ 11,528,417 | $ 57,293,948 | 16.95% |

**Strategic Plan/Legislation:**

- Kaitlin Little and Mark Demers attended the GDVS and USAA legislative meeting on September 9, 2026.
- New agency legislation is due to the Governor's office by September 25, 2026.

**Grant Program:**

- SSG Fox Suicide Prevention Grant Program- **($722,747 year 4)**
  - We were awarded the grant for a 4th Year.

- Kaitlin Little and Irene Mackson continue working on Fox Grant Unique Data entry and squares research for Fox recipients.
- Kaitlin Little and Irene Mackson attended Fox Grant conference on August 25-26, 2026, in Helen, Georgia.
- Mark Demers attended the SSG Fox Grant Operation webinar on August 19, 2026.
- Mark Demers and Kaitlin Little participated in the SSG Fox Site visit by the VA on September 16, 2026.
- Kaitlin Little attended all Fox Grant meetings on August 31, September 2, 4, 14 and 16, 2026.
- Mark Demers completed and submitted the FY 2026 Fox Grant extension documents on July 2, 2026. The extension was granted until December 31, 2026.

- Veterans Mental Health Services Program Grant (HB 414)-
  - FY2026- $1,000,000 (competitive grant)
    - The grant was awarded to the following
      - Cohen Veterans Network (Centerstone) -$806,578
      - About Face, Inc.- $62,800
      - Emory- $130,622
    - All contracts have been completed and funds have been distributed.
    - The next quarterly report is due in October 2026.
  - FY2027 - $1,000,000 (competitive grant)
    - The grant opened for applications on July 8, 2026, and closed on August 31, 2026. Selection of grantees is in progress.

- PTSD study- Emory (HB 68, line 94.12). $1,000,000
  - To increase funds for research on treatment of PTSD and wraparound services for veterans and their families.
  - Contract was signed and monies were distributed to Emory on September 30, 2025.
  - The second quarterly report was completed on July 31, 2026. The next quarterly report will be due in October 2026.

- Cohen Clinic- Hinesville (Centerstone), HB 973 (FY2026A) line 368.6, ($500,000) "Increase funds for mental health clinic for military families".
  - Contracts were signed March 26, 2026, and monies distributed to Cohen on April 5, 2026.
  - First quarterly report will be due in October 2026.

- Shepherd Center, House Bill 973 (FY2026A) line 368.4, ($250,000) "Increase funds Increase funds to provide evidence-based rehabilitation services for Georgia military veterans and service members with traumatic brain injuries and mental health concerns".
  - Contracts were signed on April 8, 2026, and monies distributed to Shepherd on April 9, 2026.
  - First quarterly report will be due in October 2026.

**Events/Other:**

- Guidance for Leadership Institute applications for next class were prepared by Irene Mackson and were sent out on July 10, 2026, and are due August 3, 2026. Once the candidates are selected, we will notify the attendees. The first class will be September 17-18, 2026, at Central Office.

- Irene Mackson collaborated with Alexis Wilson and Isa in a discussion about Unite Us referral issues. She will be participation in training on September 22, 2026, to understand the Unite Us onboarding process done by all vendors through the self-service portal.

- Kaitlin Little, Irene Mackson, and Mark Demers participated in Unite Us biweekly check-in.

- Kaitlin Little and Mark Demers attended the Unite Us Demo with DHS, and DCH on September 9, 2026.

- Kaitlin Little participated in a discussion with the Dekalb County Sheriff's Office on September 3, 2026.

- Kaitlin Little attended the Suicide Prevention workflow meeting with Unite Us on September 11, 2026.

- Irene Mackson attended the Governor's Challenge meeting on September 15, 2026.

- Kirsten Dennis and Irene Mackson attended the Woman Veterans Advisory Board Brunch on August 12, 2026.

- Irene Mackson completed the DoD weekly data scrub and preparation.

- Irene Mackson is attending the Data Analytics Course at UGA Gwinnett, the first two classes were completed on September 1-2, 2026.

Mr. Demers added the following to his report:

- Mr. Mendez asked about the PTSD study at Emory. Mr. Demers answered that this is the second year of the study and they are having great results. This grant is a pass through line item in our budget, but we do receive reports and we are audited on how the funds are spent.

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

**State Veterans Homes**

**State Veterans Homes Census (August 31, 2026) +**

| Current Month | Augusta | Milledgeville | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Regular Patients | 88 | 103 | 191 |
| Service Connected | 37 | 57 | 94 |
| Total Patients | 125 | 160 | 285 |
| **Last Month** | **Augusta** | **Milledgeville** | **Total** |
| Regular Patients | 91 | 100 | 191 |
| Service Connected | 39 | 58 | 97 |
| Total Patients | 130 | 158 | 288 |

**+ The numbers reported to the VSB are the total numbers as of August 31, 2026.**

**Georgia War Veterans Nursing Home**

Normal operations continue.

**Georgia War Veterans Home**

Normal operations continue.

Transition activities for the new contractor continue. A job fair is being conducted from September 9th through September 12th for onboarding of current and new employees effective October 1st.

Renovations of restrooms in the Wheeler and Vinson Building are ongoing. Restrooms are being upgraded to meet accessibility standards.

Mr. Feagin added the following to his report:

- We continue the transition from STGi to HMR, which will take effect October 1st. The transition is going well.

- We had the unannounced, but typically scheduled visit by the VA to the Augusta home. They will spend about four days going through and checking everything to make sure we are meeting standards there. We expect a favorable result, but it will be several weeks before we receive the final report.

- Mr. Mendez asked about the timeline for the completion of the renovations for the Wheeler and Vincent building restroom facilities. Mr. Feagin answered that it should be completed by the end of November or beginning of December. The other project involving the elevators is almost completed in Augusta. The elevator repairs in Milledgeville will begin soon and will probably take about a year to complete.

**Mr. Ernie Cowart, Executive Director Veterans Cemeteries, GDVS**

**State Veterans Cemeteries**

**Burial Statistics - Through August 30, 2026**

| State Veterans Cemeteries | Cumulative Through Current Month | Current Month | Year to Date FY2026 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Glennville | 3,066 | 18 | 39 |
| Milledgeville | 6,354 | 30 | 75 |
| Combined Totals | 9,420 | 48 | 114 |

**Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery – Glennville**

Cemetery operations continue as normal.

**Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery – Milledgeville**

Cemetery operations continue as normal. Currently there are two open Cemetery Tech positions and interviews are currently being done to fill the positions.

**Augusta Cemetery Project**

The Augusta cemetery project is awaiting final grant approval from the VA and notice to begin the project should be done by October 1st. Planning for the groundbreaking ceremony is underway. The Cemetery Manager job interviews will be held on September 10th and hopefully a candidate will be selected after that.

Mr. Cowart added the following to his report:

- The Milledgeville Cemetery is in the process of filling one of the open cemetery tech positions. They will have one remaining position to fill after that.

- We hired Ms. Sheree Sinkler for the Augusta Cemetery Manager position. She is retired from the Army and is local to Augusta. She will start on October 1st.

- The grant for the Augusta Cemetery project has been approved by the VA. It will be fully funded in the amount that we requested to cover the construction of the cemetery. The construction company, Dabbs Williams, has already been selected. They should start at the site at the end of October or beginning of November. We are looking forward to the groundbreaking ceremony that will be on November 13th at 10:30am.

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

On Thursday, August 20, 2026, Kerry Dyer posted the Valdosta Field Office vacancy externally. He also contacted Leslie Davis, State Properties Leasing Specialist, to discuss the relocation of the Brunswick Field Office. Later that day posted the Cemetery Manager vacancy externally.

On Friday, August 21, 2026, Kerry Dyer submitted the Annual Non-Profit Organization Contract Report to Department of Audits. He also spoke to Mark Meeks, DOAS Sourcing Manager, regarding HMR Insurance requirements. Later that day he submitted the State Action Form, Organizational Chart and Space Utilization Questionnaire to State Properties for the Brunswick Field Office.

On Monday, August 24, 2026, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Directors meeting. He also contacted Allan Vigil Ford to discuss the semi-annual service for the Ford Explorer. Later that day contacted Mr. Anthony Grant, new hire for the Augusta Field Office, to discuss his in-processing procedures.

On Tuesday, August 25, 2026, Kerry Dyer contacted Element Maintenance Program Manager to add Commissioner Ross as the primary driver for the Chevy Equinox. He also submitted the Annual Surplus Renewal Report to DOAS. Later that day he spoke with Leslie Davis, State Property Leasing Specialist regarding office space at Lanier Technical College.

On Wednesday, August 26, 2026, Kerry Dyer attended the DBHDD/Suicide Prevention Summitt in Helen GA.

On Thursday, August 27, 2026, Kerry Dyer posted the Compl/Auditor/Training & Development (VETD) vacancy internally. He also contacted GBA to discuss the process to replace our current MIA/POW stand. Later that day he processed 1 new hire packet.

On Friday, August 28, 2026, Kerry Dyer contacted GBA maintenance team to repair the broken door on the 9th floor suite. He also processed 1 new hire and resignation packet.

On Monday August 31, 2026, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Director meeting. He also distributed the monthly Alpha Roster to the Senior Leadership. Later that day he spoke with Mr. Rutledge Davis, Site Administrator, East Region Outpatient Clinics regarding the occupation of the office space in Zebulon VA Clinic.

On Tuesday, September 1, 2026, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Directors meeting. He also contacted Clark Wong, State Properties Land Manager, to discuss the Lease Agreement with DVS and Comprehensive Therapeutics. Later that day he processed the closure of Mr. Miller Risk Management Claim.

On Wednesday, September 2, 2026, Kerry Dyer spoke with Ryan Pettey, Access Corp Manager, regarding the pickup of 5 shred bins. He also contacted Verizon Business to discuss the possibility of adding an additional cell phone line. Late that day spoke with Scott Duncan, President & CEO of Carrollton Furniture regarding adding a cubicle office in VETD.

On Thursday, September 3, 2026, Kerry Dyer processed 1 new hire packet and 1 resignation packet. He also contacted Mary Madden, Assistant to the Frist Lady of GA to regarding internship program. Later that day he contacted Lori Barmann, DOAS Fleet Management Division to discuss the maintenance approval process for the Glennville Cemetery.

On Tuesday, September 8, 2026, Kerry Dyer attended the weekly Directors meeting. He also contacted Barbara Burns, DOAS Agency Sourcing Manger to discuss the posting of a Request for Information for a potential War Home in Metro Atlanta GA. Later that day he spoke with Leslie Davis, State Property Leasing Specialist, regarding the lease agreement with Warner Robins VECTR Center.

On Wednesday, September 9, 2026, Kerry Dyer processed 5 packets for the VETD Compliance Specialist vacancy. He also contacted Clark Wong, State Property Land Manager, to discuss the process of initiating a permanent lease for Comprehensive Therapeutics.

On Thursday, September 10, 2026, Kerry Dyer, along with Commissioner Ross and Ernie Cowart, conducted interviews for the Cemetery Manager vacancy at the Augusta Cemetery.

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

August 20, 2026 –September 10, 2026.

| Location | Position | Status | Name | Date |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Augusta WVH | VFSO 1 | New Hire | Anthony Grant | 09/01/26 |
| Augusta WVH | VFSO 2 (Office Mgr) | Resigned | Alicia Stephens | 09/04/26 |

Mr. Dyer added the following to his report:

- We anticipate backfilling the Atlanta Balcony Office position and the Augusta VAMC position mid-October.
- We have locked in a date for the site visit to John's Creek for potential office space. It will be on September 29th.
- The relocation of the Gwinnett field office to the Resource Center is going to take place in the first quarter of 2027.
- This week we posted an RFI that went out to 378 vendors across the state that operate and maintain nursing homes. We are gathering data for a potential home in the Atlanta area. We have received seven responses and the RFI will close out on October 7th.

**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 2,332 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 | 587 |
| Approved Training Establishments | 1,745 |
| VA Education Beneficiaries for August 2026 | 22,102 |
| VA Education Beneficiaries for July 2026 | 12,943 |
| VA Education Beneficiaries for June 2026 | 12,984 |
| VA Education Beneficiaries for May 2026 | 25,757 |
| VA Education Beneficiaries for April 2026 | 24,865 |
| VA Education Beneficiaries for March 2026 CH 33 ONLY* | 11,472 |
| VA Education Beneficiaries for February 2026 CH 33 ONLY* | 10,578 |
| VA Education Beneficiaries for January 2026 CH 33 ONLY* | 10,098 |
| Ch. 35 VA Education Beneficiaries for FY26 Q1 | 14,586 |
| VA Education Beneficiaries for December 2025 CH 33 ONLY* | 10,547 |
| VA Education Beneficiaries for November 2025 CH 33 ONLY* | 11,177 |
| VA Education Beneficiaries for October 2025 *CH 33 ONLY* | 11,376 |
| VA Education Beneficiaries for September 2025 *CH 33 ONLY* | 11,052 |
| VA Education Beneficiaries for August 2025 *CH 33 ONLY* | 10,110 |

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

**Ms. Charlotte May, Director, External Affairs & Communications**

**INFORMATION OUTREACH**

**Division Updates**

1. GDVS Newsletter – The department's monthly e-newsletter features top stories from the month at https://veterans.georgia.gov/newsletter. The August edition shared information the Georgia Veteran Service Foundation's annual legislative breakfast and the department's participation in the NASDVA Summer Conference in Savannah. The newsletter also highlighted changes to VA's policies and procedures for veterans with records damaged in the 1973 NPRC fire, an updated online guide on VA benefits for Guardsmen and Reservists and announced the selection of new contractor at GWVH-Milledgeville. The newsletter also featured a VSO Spotlight on Tabitha Fuller, a VSO in Carrollton.

2. NASDVA Summer Conference – attended the NASDVA summer conference from August 8-13 in Savannah. EAC provided on-site event support, including photography, organization, and printing.

3. Veterans Mental Health Grant Program – continued monitoring the Veterans Mental Health Grant Program application portal for FY27. Applications were accepted through the end of August. The grant applications are currently under review before decisions will be made on awards.

4. GDVS Selects New Contractor for GWVH Milledgeville – a press release was issued on August 6 announcing the selection of HMR Veterans Services, Inc. as the contractor operating the Georgia War Veterans Home in Milledgeville. The release was issued following the competitive procurement process for home operations.

5. Unite Us QBR – attended a quarterly review of the Unite Us and GDVS partnership on August 19. Discussions focused on platform utilization, updates on case closure rates, and how to continue leveraging the platform for Georgia's veterans and their families, as well as transitioning service members.

6. Attended a meeting of the Georgia Veterans Service Foundation on September 3.

7. Legislative support – met with Commissioner Ross, CFO Demers, and Ms. Little to discuss legislative priorities for the next session of the Georgia state legislature. Additionally, the group began working on a document for the transition team for the next Governor and staff.

8. Georgia Veterans Memorial Cemetery – Augusta planning – began meeting with Commissioner Ross, COO Dyer, and Executive Director Cowart to begin planning for the groundbreaking ceremony at GVMC-Augusta.

9. Georgia Veterans Resource Guidebook Volume II – the department received the completed guidebook with updates for 2026 and is in the beginning stages of production with GCI. We anticipate first delivery of a portion of the order in October for outreach events and Veterans Day activities.

10. 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.

Ms. May added the following to her report:

There is an update on the status of Volume Two of the Veteran's Resource Guide. The order has been placed and should be in production now. We anticipate having copies in hand by October 15th.

**OLD BUSINESS:**

There was no old business to discuss.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

Mr. Layne announced that their Veteran Business Outreach Center is expanding and will have an office in Savannah that falls under CGTC as well. The budget will go up a little from the SBA, and they will have someone working at that location. The program is well advertised on social media, and they have their own VBOC podcast.

**NEW BUSINESS**

Mr. Mendez gave a briefing on the recent trip to visit a Veteran's Home in Tennessee:

- The model is self-operated, which means it is not operated by the government. It operates almost like a corporation.

- The biggest takeaway for me is the flexibility of the model. When we talk about care facilities, there are a lot of rules and regulations, and rightly so for the benefit of the patients. They have flexibility and think outside the box a little bit. They asked a veteran what he wanted that day and he said a box of chicken. They talked to his doctor for approval and got the box of chicken for him. That's a big thing. These veterans are elderly and no one wants to be in a nursing home.

- The Tennessee State Veerans Home Board oversees it. They are required to have one medical specialist and one long-term care specialist on the Board. They can only serve two terms, and the terms are three-year terms. They have six veteran homes in their state, and they are not large institutions. They have room for 96 beds. They put them near military bases and where people have easy access. They build with the intention of adding on and having room to grow because the veteran population is growing. Their oldest home was built in 1991.

- Once they target an area, they go to a company called US Stream. US Stream does all the legwork on the cost, and they work back and forth until they get the cost where they want it. They also like to make sure they have 45 days in working capital and reserve.

- They handle their mental health treatment through a private contractor.

- They allow smoking in designated areas.

- Once a month they have a food truck on site, which is paid for. They have coffee, drinks and pastries all day in a sitting area at their disposal. Each quadrant has a kitchen, and a chef will go to that quadrant to prepare whatever meal the veteran orders. There is no scheduled mealtime.

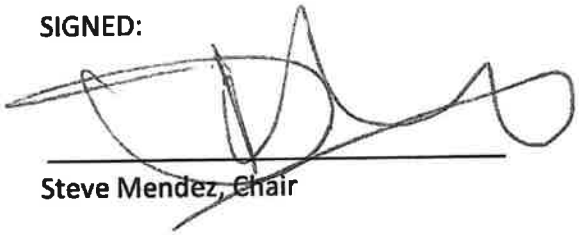
- There are huge windows so there is plenty of natural light and beautiful scenes to view.

- It is my opinion that this is a great model to follow moving forward. Georgia needs to put veterans first. When our Commissioner goes to speak to the Appropriations Committee, I don't want her to be the last one to speak. Our Board members need to implore the politicians to prioritize our Commissioner and make sure she has ample time to speak and present the department's needs.

The next Board meeting was scheduled for October 27 at 12:30pm. It will be a combination virtual and in-person meeting, set up at the GDVS.

Mr. Mendez adjourned the meeting at 1:35 p.m.

SIGNED:



Steve Mendez, Chair

ATTEST:

Pete Peterson

Pete Peterson, Secretary