

Colorado Board of Veterans Affairs Minutes
Friday, December 6, 2019
Arapahoe Community College
5900 S. Santa Fe Drive
Littleton, CO 80120-1801

Members and Guests

Members Present:

Pat Hammon, Vice Chair
Sheila Scanlon, Secretary
Hollie Caldwell, Member
Duane Dailey, Member
Longinos Gonzalez Jr, Member
Norm Steen, Member

DMVA Staff Present:

Greg Dorman, DMVA Interim Deputy Executive Director, Resource Director and Legislative Liaison
Matthew Biniki, DMVA Legislative Liaison
David Callahan, DMVA Strategic Planner
Richard Tremaine, CDVA East Director
Gail Hoagland, CDVA East Grant Administrator
Megan Fraser, CDVA East Administration

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Guests Present:

Pam Arceo
Nick Arceo – Commander of Attachment of Colorado Sons of American Legion
Harry Ciruli - Commander Colorado Sons of American Legion Post 103
Joel Mendelson - American Legion Post 103 Commander
Dominic Pillitteri - Student success facilitator at Arapahoe Community College

Opening

Pat Hammon called the meeting to order at 0903 hours. Proceedings began with a recitation of the pledge of allegiance and a moment of silence for POWs, MIAs, and troops overseas. Mrs. Hammon invited introductions from Board members, staff, and guests.

Approval of Minutes

Norm Steen noted that he was excused for the meeting and that ‘appointment’ should be ‘appointed’ in regards to Colonel Hopkins. Longinos Gonzalez moved to approve as amended, Hollie Caldwell seconded. Unanimous approval.

Public Comments

Mrs. Hammon invited public comments.

Nick Arceo is involved with ‘Volunteers for Hospitalized Veterans’ which sets up a popcorn stand and sells popcorn and other veteran items associated with all branches. Last year they generated \$31,000

for veterans. They concentrate on donating to a locked psych unit of 30 beds. Veterans are supplied with underwear, socks, sleeping bags, and haircuts. In addition, pizza parties and ice cream socials are funded throughout the year and 30 Christmas bags are delivered to the unit on Christmas. Nick Arceo was recently voted 'volunteer of the year' for Sons of the American Legion due to his volunteer work with 'Volunteers for Hospitalized Veterans'. Discussion ensued about the difference between the Sons of the American Legion vs. the American Legion, and the history and requirements for membership for each.

Dominic Pillitteri works to support veteran's success in school and assist with financial difficulties. Some students are in Voc-Rehab. His program operates on 8 keys to veteran's success in college. There is a separate space provided for veterans with card access only. He provides lots of referrals to outside resources when needed. The program is under AmeriCorps but is also connected with Second Mission.

Joel Mendelson shared about American Legion Post 103. Joe Cordova is their VTF grant administrator. Fundraisers are conducted, medical mobility equipment is provided when needed, young men are sponsored to go to Boys State, and college scholarships to grandchildren of members of the post are given annually. Last year they gave out 8 college scholarships. Rich Callan, a retired Navy Chief, has a passion for the Boys State program and will interview anyone anywhere for this program; Post 103 sponsors more men than anyone else although this is not their objective. Joel said they will gladly take all the grant monies they can receive as they get lots of requests for assistance. They have had to establish borders for primary assistance and assist beyond those borders when able to. Post 103 is at 79%-member capacity with WW2, Korean and Vietnam veteran members all active.

Hollie Caldwell inquired of the guests present: If you were to speak with TAG, what are the top two needs to be addressed in the state of Colorado for veterans? Joel Mendelson said his immediate response was service officers and the need for money/assistance but he would like to get back to her with a more solid answer. He suggested that Dean Casey and Will Davis will be good contacts to answer this question as they handle lots of PTSD cases. Nick Arceo's answer was homelessness, education, and the suicide rate; our support groups for veterans are not working, we need to rethink them.

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Unfinished Business

CCI Panel –

Norm Steen educated County Commissioners across the state about how important VSOs are. The perception is that VSOs are being shortchanged. It is not within the legislative authority to direct the County Commissioners so the approach was to educate them i.e.: the funds that are transferred, reimbursement program, best practices, connect, serve, identify and follow-up with vets. Panel was a component of statewide Colorado Counties Inc., conference that met last week. Duane Dailey, Marshall Bosworth, Sheila Scanlon, Longinos Gonzalez, David Callahan and Brian Oney also attended. Board members did not talk to each other.

Data was shared according to the VA GDX. In Colorado we are just under 400,000 veterans that are registered with the VA. VA estimate that 20-30% of veterans are not counted nationwide. Veterans bring in 3.6 billion dollars for compensation, pension, medical care, etc. in the state of Colorado. The vet health index of 2016 shows that veterans vote in higher rates and volunteer in their community more than non-veterans.

Sheila Scanlon recommended supporting Chaz Tedesco, Adams County Commissioner, when he requests to increase VSO hours in counties and accordingly requests a larger reimbursement for funds for VSOs in counties. She will bring a letter to be distributed to County Commissioners and County Treasurers to be approved to the next board meeting. This letter is an explanation of how the financial reimbursement from the state to the county is actually supposed to work for VSOs so that should an increase happen, it reaches the VSOs. Should this letter be approved at the next board meeting it will be passed along to Rich Tremaine for next steps.

Duane Dailey recommended that the Board and the Division office need to get together. El Paso gets \$29,400/year for 7 VSOs plus admin, while Grand County gets \$29,400 for the year as well (only one VSO). Teller County only gets 14k and they have 4 VSOs. The funds going to Mesa County need to be reviewed as well. Mesa County has a Memorandum of Understanding with Moab County, Utah and are funded in part by them. There are six tiers of counties in the state of Colorado, with A,B,C, and D sub-tiers, and the commissioners and Veteran Service Officers are paid off of this table by the state government. Duane Dailey suggested that a presentation at VSO annual training be made and a think tank of the entire Board be formed to suggest improvements on the current pay structure before any further steps are taken to adjust pay to County VSOs. Discussion ensued. Pat Hammon had the think tank placed on the agenda as a work session after the regular session in February 2020.

Bylaw Review/ TAG Task Force-

Pat Hammon gave a brief explanation to guests about the task force that TAG brought to the Board at the last meeting. The subcommittee including Jack Rudder, Norm Steen, Sheila Scanlon and Pat Hammon attempted to meet via phone conference but Pat Hammon was informed they could not have a conference call so she cancelled the meeting. Therefore, she feels the bylaws are antiquated and need to be changed. Leeann Morrill from the Attorney General's offices needs to be reached for consultation. Sheila Scanlon is interested in adjusting from the 7-day notice in the bylaws to the state sunshine-law requirement of 24 hours. Greg Dorman stated that CRS 24-602 is the sunshine law for meetings. The wording is "local public boards" not "state boards" so he wants to check with a lawyer. Any communication is a public meeting.

Sheila Scanlon moved to change the bylaws to read "we need to give public notice 24 hours ahead of time before a meeting." Norm Steen seconded. Duane Dailey amends: "pending legislative liaison office that we are doing this within the law." Discussion ensued as to how the Board can balance letting the veteran community know at least 6 months in advance of their meeting times with also having the need for the Board to be able to conduct business in a variety of formats. Discussion closed. Everyone except Norm Steen voted in favor. Norm Steen abstained.

Pat Hammon requested to have an informational working meeting. She would like members of the Board to have an opportunity to discuss with Leeann Morrill what rules they still need to adhere to in task force meetings. There will be someone to take notes and no decisions will be made.

Greg Dorman shared that any meeting can be public, but the public may not always have input; therefore, a conference call is okay but you need to have call-in capability. He sees no problem with the task force meetings. Greg stated that the DMVA is probably going to end up giving the Board members emails that will then be searchable under the CORA laws.

Pat Hammon stated that both the Subcommittee on By-Laws and the Subcommittee on TAGs Task Force will meet before Christmas.

Pat Hammon requested a working meeting on how we communicate and Sheila Scanlon suggested they receive input from the guests in the room who are leaders of their various veteran agencies. Guests shared about their regular email communication to members and who to reach to have information placed on a statewide email blast to veterans. For the American Legion, Pat Smith is the contact required. Discussion ensued about where Board information is currently posted on the DVA website and what adjustments could be made. Whom to contact at the United Veterans Coalition, the VFW and the CCC system was also discussed. This will be placed on the January agenda to continue discussion.

New Business

Reports:

Greg Dorman reported that he met with Headstrong yesterday and received an overview of their program. They are already operating in Denver and Colorado Springs. Their intent is for care to be within 30 min of the veteran's home. They claim that they cure PTSD. Headstrong does not require a DD214, they take the veterans word. They have a 48-hour response time for primary intake and then get the veteran to a provider to do a secondary intake. One of the first things they do is ask where you are so if they assess that you are emergent they will send an ambulance immediately to that vet. Statistically only 6/24 vets per day that commit suicide are known to the VA. If you are a veteran diagnosed with PTSD getting treated by the VA you are twice as likely to commit suicide as a veteran with PTSD who is not getting helped by the VA. 150 veterans have already been helped in CO; their goal is 500 next year.

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Pat Hammon shared on behalf of Joanne Iglesias that a new cemetery director has been hired. Various groups meet at Western Region OneSource regularly. The hospital has a golf cart that takes people back and forth between facilities. Our state VSO is located in OneSource, there is a veteran intern working with him. Joanne is looking for money from the state to man the front desk and more employees. Recently TAG and the Governor spent an entire day at the OneSource. Hollie Caldwell noted that the property manager resigned. Joanne Iglesias is in the process of rewriting that job description; what is really needed is someone great with people and scheduling skills and experience with nonprofits.

Rich Tremaine shared that there had been two regrettable losses in the department. Myra Dollar moved on to the education arm of department, and has been replaced by Carissa Snyder. He is still having issues filling the VSO positions, as there was only one qualified candidate who applied, they have relisted the position. He will resend out the position to everyone. For the position he is hoping to find a woman veteran in so much as possible under the law.

Mr. Tremaine requested the following funds from the Veterans Trust Fund: DVA West \$30,023, DVA East \$62,000. He explained that the DVA East funds are primarily for the VetraSpec case management system; the double licensing alone exceeds \$30,000. A Statement of Work is being prepared as the Division explores alternatives to VetraSpec. The other funds for DVA East would furnish four offices that need furniture and boost a 110-voltage line that keeps tripping and causing several DVA-E offices to lose power. The office furniture is required to update the configurations in order to provide staff with escape

routes. The voltage line is not covered in the Division's current lease as the lease contains a tenant improvement allowance,

Ms. Hammon asked if training would be provided in the event of changes to cases management and Mr. Tremaine said that is included in the SOW. Mr. Dailey said that he had been previously informed that VetraSpec was what everyone should be using for veterans case management. Mr. Tremaine said that VetraSpec has been a major funder of industry conferences and that there are many other systems available. Dr. Caldwell inquired whether it was allowable for the requests to be funded through VTF. Mr. Tremaine replied in the affirmative and Ms. Hoagland agreed. Funding for the Division is in the statute. Ms. Hoagland said that sufficient funds are available and would leave approximately \$26,600 for possible grant modifications. Mr. Tremaine asked the Board to note that when the Division gained a west office, the budget remained the same and now there are two offices to maintain. The funds for Division West would support acoustical division, artwork, and hanging flags at the Western Region One Source.

Ms. Hammon stipulated in regard to the acoustical difficulties at the WROS. There are acoustical panels in the classroom but the hallways and other rooms are problematic. Light music in the hallway and acoustic panels in the ceiling would reduce overall noise and allow the state veterans service officer leave his office door open when a veteran is in the office. The artwork and hanging flags requested are also for sound acoustics. There is special artwork made on acoustic panels that they can hang in the hallway. Ms. Iglesias has quotes to support her request.

Ms. Hoagland reiterated that there unallocated funds available in the VTF. Mr. Dorman concurred that "costs incurred by the division" is permissible by statute. Mr. Steen wanted to verify that this would not take funds from veterans' programs. Ms. Hoagland stated that sufficient funds would remain for grant modifications and noted that she will probably have some modification requests by January. While some may be other upward modification, others will be downward modification and the current grantees will not use all of the additional funds available. Ms. Hammon said that all of this would help veterans: VetraSpec assists the counties and the Division to serve veterans and improving the One Source will be helpful. Mr. Dorman said that is preferable to spend the funds available than to return it to the Trust unspent.

Ms. Scanlon and Dr. Caldwell suggested to specify that the DVA West funds are for acoustic mitigation. Pat Hammon asked if there was any further discussion, hearing none, a motion was invited.

Ms. Scanlon motioned to approve the DVAs request for a total of \$92,023. Dr. Caldwell seconded. Mr. Dailey amended "artwork and hanging flags" to "acoustic mitigation." Dr. Caldwell, Mr. Dailey, Mr. Gonzalez, Ms. Hammon, and Ms. Scanlon, voted in favor. Mr. Steen opposed. The motion carried.

At 11:17, the Board adjourned for a 13 -minute break

No report was received from Robby Robinson.

Gail Hoagland dispersed a report and asked the Board to note that 100% of new grantees are non-compliant in their paperwork. She has thus far been doing phone monitoring and has not visited them in person. There are currently 14 webinar trainings scheduled in preparation for the next grant year.

Sheila Scanlon and Pat Hammon asked Greg Dorman how National Guard pay would be increased. Greg Dorman said the monies will come from the emergency fund so it has no balance. The bill is not therefore considered to have a fiscal note.

Megan Fraser was tasked with checking on the report to the Governor.

Board Member Remarks

Pat Hammon lifted the two-minute cap.

Hollie Caldwell shared that Centura Health registration committee has requested the National Guard active and reserve added to the Centura Health intake form.

Longinos Gonzalez has been conducting lots of outreach, spoke at Colorado Springs Senior Center on November 8th; on November 11th he attended a flag raising in Fountain. His county approved a Pearl Harbors Proclamation for a remembrance day tomorrow, and is speaking tomorrow night for the VFWs 'Voice of Democracy' and will participate with Wreaths Across America on Dec 14th at Pikes Peak National Cemetery.

Norm Steen met with Aaron Tremaine at the CCI conference and asked for updates. He asked if Aaron would update the board in February 2020. He attended an event on Dec. 2nd and did networking there. He is working separately from the Board on state and federal legislation for transportation funding and spent a half day with Governor Polis on that topic the day before. From Feb. 29th – Mar. 4th he will attend a conference of the National Association of County Counties in DC which Longinos Gonzalez will also attend. Discussion ensued about which topics the board would like promoted at the conference in regards to better caring for veterans, surviving spouses and mental health needs.

Sheila Scanlon is going to Buckley Air Force Base next Wednesday with the One Marine Association to feed everyone and bring Christmas presents. She is doing Wreaths Around America at Ft Logan Cemetery on Dec. 14th. The women veterans license plate has been reviewed by the Dept. of Revenue, it now has to go to two senators and two representatives. She is also working on state legislation for a women veterans program. Starting on 1 January 2020 you can purchase the plate for \$50. A DD214 is required for application and the plate with a random alpha numeric assignment will be mailed to the woman veteran.

Duane Dailey attended a focus group with National Veterans Experience Office at Rocky Mountain Hospital. Rich Tremaine was his guest speaker for Veterans Day. The American Legion Dept. Commander and National Vice-Commander spoke at the American Legion in front of about 375 attendees. There was also a RAF woman speaker, 102 years old and Dawn Thomas who is a Jefferson County administrator spoke about 3 min. He spoke on the positive things that veterans bring to their communities and Duane requested he speak at the January meeting for 5 min.

Pat Hammon did 22 school programs for Veterans Day. Several veterans participated for the first time and said it was the highlight of their year. In high school veterans speak in classrooms, in elementary school the kids prepare presentations. She is participating at Wreaths Across America in Grand Junction on the 14th. Their Blue Star group is growing. They sent off 8 packages to active duty family members for

Christmas. There have been 3 funerals in the last month. She has 4 crisis going on right now, which piqued her interest in Headstrong, she also had one suicide and believes the holidays are really hard. She said there is no housing for the homeless vets which is really difficult with their weather; several vets are living in cars.

Upcoming Meetings

January 3rd at VARO – 2nd floor, Directors Conference Room

February 7th – at Mt. Carmel, Colorado Springs

Two subgroups will meet before the next meeting.

Adjournment

Adjourned at 12:03pm.