

**Colorado Board of Veterans Affairs
December 4, 2020 9am Meeting
WebEx**

Opening

Mr. Rudder called the meeting to order at 9am. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited and a moment of silence was held for POW's, MIA's, those deployed, their families and all those killed in the line of duty.

Members Present

Mr. Rudder, Chair
Ms. Hammon, Vice-Chair
Ms. Scanlon, Secretary
Mr. Steen, Member
Mr. Gonzalez, Member
Ms. Golonka, Member
Mr. Dailey, Member

Staff Present

Mr. Hopkins, DMVA Deputy Executive Director
Ms. Fraser, DVA East Administrator
Mr. Callahan, DMVA Strategic Planner
Ms. Iglesias, DVAAw Director
Ms. Snyder, DVAAe Office Manager
Mr. Tremaine, DVAAe Director
Ms. Hoagland, DMVA Grant Administrator
Ms. Benjamin, DVAAw Property Administrator

Guests

Mr. Robinson, VCLC Commission

Minutes

Mr. Steen moved to approve the minutes from November as presented, Mr. Gonzalez seconded. The Board voted unanimously to approve.

Public Comments

None

Old Business

WROS Funding Amendment – Ms. Iglesias presented the background information. Ms. Hammon motioned to approve the increase of \$7,862 as approved by the legislature, Ms. Scanlon seconded. Mr. Rudder queried if anyone verified that this is legal, Ms. Hoagland reminded the Board that they

previously approved this expenditure, this is just an accounting adjustment to match the amount requested and approved by the JBC. Therefore, this is an acceptable expenditure but it needs to be appropriately adjusted. The Board voted unanimously to approve the adjustment.

New Business

Coronavirus – Ms. Hammon requested that everyone exercise caution and take preventative measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. One of the issues Colorado is having is a lack of staffing. Ms. Hammon stated that one thing people don't understand is that we will all continue to wear masks well into the summer. Ms. Scanlon stated hospitalizations are down a little bit in the last two days but we have not yet seen the effect of decisions over Thanksgiving, then what effects will we have to deal with people's decisions over Christmas and New Year's. High-risk people should no longer go to the grocery store or any other public place. We will only get 40,000 vaccines in the first shipment to our state. Nursing homes are in Tier 1A. Ms. Hammon queried who is paying for the vaccines and Ms. Scanlon did not know.

Mr. Hopkins left the meeting.

Board Reports

VCLC

Mr. Robinson stated staffing is at a critical level. Only Homelake is not having an outbreak. Walsenburg has had four veterans die and twenty-three staff test positive in the last two weeks. Rifle has twenty-four residents that have tested positive, twenty-three staff have tested positive and two residents have died. The VCLCs started this year with twenty-seven million dollars in their cash account, last year the legislature had allocated 2.7 million dollars, and they took that back and had the VCLCs pay for them out of the cash fund. The budget proposal states that 5 million dollars will be transferred to the general fund and once again use the cash fund for the pay raises. Therefore in one year the cash fund will go from 27 million to 6 million dollars. This is dangerously low as this fund is what allows them to operate. All of the homes are currently understaffed and under capacity but they don't have the staff to admit anyone new. The VCLC commission will be making an appeal to the JBC on an emotional level that the veterans, a vulnerable population, are being asked to take on too much of the current financial burden. Ms. Hammon asked to be updated if the Board needs to support the request to not have their funds swept. Board members and staff made inquiries.

The monument that was destroyed earlier in 2020 has yet to be repaired and discussions continue as to when it may be fixed.

Legislative Update

Special session is currently in session, there will be no impact on DMVA. A staffer is meeting with the JBC today and the JBC hearing for the department is scheduled for next week. Ms. Scanlon inquired if any Board members are needed to attend the meeting. Mr. Callahan stated he would check with Mr. Dorman and find out if the Board members should attend in person or virtually.

Veterans Memorial Cemetery

The VMC received a 5 star rating which allows them to continue to have committal services. They will maintain Ft. Logan's standards which allows only five family members to attend plus required staff and the clergy. At this time the honor guard is not allowed because they are all high-risk. Wreaths Across America is still underway and will be conducted on Dec. 18th and 19th. Ms. Ingalls is moving forward with procuring what the Board approved funds for two weeks ago. There had been a vacancy on the grounds crew however that has now been filled by a retired Navy Veteran who will begin on Dec. 21st and formerly worked at Ft. Logan National Cemetery.

WROS

The WROS received a 5 star rating which is also allowing them to stay open. The DEERS Operator and State VSO are currently appointment only however they are allowing veterans to walk in. The HUDVASH program is officially on board and started paying rent on November 16th. They will move people in on December 17th. The WROS received a donation yesterday for \$1,000 from NOAH. Mr. Oney is continuing to provide weekly check-in and training meetings to all western CVSOs. Ms. Iglesias did conduct on-site visits to several counties and helped to identify and acquire headstones for five veterans whose graves had previously been unmarked. She virtually attended a two day winter conference for county commissioners. The midyear training for the western CVSO's is tentatively scheduled for March 9th and 10th. Mr. Tremaine queried as to how the 5 star rating works. Ms. Iglesias stated it was something Mesa County came up with earlier in the pandemic to determine if businesses could be allowed to stay open. To achieve and maintain this rating they are having to follow strict protocols to reduce the risk of the spread with the coronavirus. This allows them to go back on the Covid dial for the county, so while the county is in the red, the WROS is at the orange level.

DVA East

Mr. Tremaine stated that there haven't been many changes in the last two weeks. A state veteran service officer who was in training did resign for personal reasons and the others have seamlessly taken on his responsibilities. All is going well with their regions. There are over fifty DV plates issued. Mr. Tremaine is hopeful that the VAMC in Aurora will receive some of the earlier vaccines.

Grants

Ms. Hoagland stated the application would be on the website next week in addition to the Webinar training schedule. The slowdown that Ms. Hoagland had anticipated has not yet occurred so things are busy with the Grants program. Ms. Scanlon wanted to thank Ms. Hoagland for all her hard work and anticipates that all veterans programs will be quite busy in the new year. Ms. Hoagland stated in the month that the moratorium on evictions was not in place there was a tremendous increase in the requests for rent, utilities and food. Mr. Dailey stated that the reimbursements are coming in a very timely manner this year and thanked Ms. Hoagland for her efforts. Ms. Hoagland stated that this is thanks to having hired an additional person in the accounting department who is helping to process the payments so this labor is not just falling on one person.

Board Member Comments

Ms. Golonka thanked Ms. Scanlon for the information about the vaccine and informed the Board that the National Guard is still working on getting their regular flu shots; they just did their second virtual

monthly drill training. Ms. Scanlon queried if Title 32 got extended for the National Guard. Ms. Golonka does not know.

Ms. Scanlon stated she did sign up for the VA vaccine testing program. The Colorado Women Marine Association has continued to assist veterans in need throughout the pandemic. They are unable to bring the marines and sailors on Buckley AFB breakfast as planned due to Covid, but they will be delivering them gift bags. Ms. Scanlon is continuing to work with the VAMC on their mammogram program and praised the progress made while still asking all present to pay attention if a female veteran ever has a complaint about the process.

Ms. Hammon has been serving on Senator Bennett's panels to select who he will support as candidates to the military academies. The UVC is conducting a silent auction this year for their fundraiser and she will have Ms. Fraser disperse this link to all members of the Board. Her bicycling group is doing a fundraiser for victims of sexual trauma. Fifty-nine percent of female veterans state that navigating this issue is a problem and informed the Board that women are the fastest growing population of homeless veterans in the country. Ms. Hammon reiterated her request to Mr. Tremaine for a Women Veterans Coordinator. Mr. Tremaine expressed his hope that the 2018 statistics are in fact improving and Ms. Hammon stated that it's getting worse. Ms. Scanlon seconded Ms. Hammon's recommendation that there is an immediate need for a Women Veterans Coordinator for the State of Colorado and a need to act now, not wait until the stats are even worse. Ms. Hammon stated should would like to have another grantee sent to her for a non-monitoring site visit, Ms. Scanlon concurred. Ms. Hoagland stated she would do this in January 2021.

Mr. Dailey stated in the last week he has gotten solicitations for a group similar to the DAV for assistance. He stated that all of the groups: American Legion, Purple Heart, etc. all seem to be dying out. Mr. Dailey stressed these groups, for most of the last century, have been at the heart of their communities and he requests once it is safe, that the Board intentionally work on liaising with them much more. Mr. Dailey stated that it has been a herculean effort to sift through who is getting assistance from the fire aftermath and who will not. Mr. Dailey thanked Ms. Hammon's husband for a lifetime of service to others and his country.

Mr. Gonzalez had Covid for the last two weeks and was in quarantine. He did however attend a virtual meeting with the cadets from the Air Force Academy with the discussion focusing on ethics. The commissioners in El Paso did pass their annual Minute 1:06 on Pearl Harbor. **Outreach: 1**

Mr. Steen stated that there are four bills in consideration at the state level that while not veteran specific may impact them. HB 1001 addresses broadband access for Pre-K – 12 education. Mr. Steen is keeping track of whether money going to the schools for broadband can also be used for veterans. Senate Bill 20-002 may be able to provide assistance to veterans needing help with housing. This has already been signed into law by the Governor. Senate Bill 20-003 may be able to provide utility assistance for veterans if signed into law. A Food Pantry assistance grant is covered in HB 20-1003 which is headed to the Governor to sign. Tomorrow Mr. Steen will be on Congressman Lamborn nomination panel. Mr. Steen also now qualifies for TriCare for life. Mr. Rudder thanked Mr. Steen for following the bills under consideration at the legislature. Ms. Scanlon queried regarding HB 1001, she thought it was only for children. Mr. Steen responded in the affirmative but stated that when broadband comes to a community, there is a spill-off. **Outreach: 3**

Mr. Rudder stated he has been quite busy as a VSO covering Rio Grande, Saguache and Alamosa counties. Project Healing Waters just had the awards ceremony and no veteran in Colorado won anything.

Ms. Scanlon welcomed Ms. Hammon back and expressed regret for her loss. **Outreach: 2**

Upcoming Meeting

January 8th at 9am on WebEx

Adjournment

Mr. Steen moved to adjourn. Mr. Dailey seconded. The meeting adjourned at 10:17 am.