

Colorado Board of Veterans Affairs

January 8, 2021

WebEx Meeting

Opening

Mr. Rudder called the meeting to order at 09:00 a.m. 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

Jack Rudder, Chair

Pat Hammon, Vice-Chair

Sheila Scanlon, Secretary

Duane Dailey, Member

Lacey Golonka, Member

Longinos Gonzalez, Member

Norm Steen, Member

Staff Present

David Callahan, DMVA Acting Deputy Director

Greg Dorman, DMVA Legislative Director

Joanne Iglesias, DVAw Director

Richard Tremaine, DVAe Director

Gail Hoagland, DVA Grant Administrator

Heather Benjamin, DVAw Property Administrator

Angela Ingalls, VMC Administrator

Megan Fraser, DVAe Administration

Guests

Amber Guerrero, CVSO Weld County

Megan Gurka, CVSO Larimer County

Gary Harbert, CVSO Prowers County

Tim Hutchinson, CVSO Broomfield County

Sarah Kuhn, CVSO Montezuma County

Duffy Laudick, CVSO Larimer County

Tony Lee, CVSO Mesa County

Glen Marciniak, CVSO Kit Carson County

Joshua Medina, CVSO Arapahoe County

Steve Otero, CVSO Gunnison County

Trisha Reynolds, CVSO Larimer County

Carolyn Schneider, CVSO Eagle County

Jay Scott, CVSO Otero County

Robert Sheetz, CVSO Adams County

Sheldon Smith, CVSO Montrose and Ouray Counties

Raymond Taylor, CVSO Archuleta County

Dennis Tonneslan, Veteran

Linda Wilson, CVSO Delta County

Approval of Minutes

Mr. Steen motioned to approve, Ms. Hammon seconded. The minutes were unanimously approved as presented.

Public Comments

Mr. Smith requested to wait to speak until a specific agenda item was discussed.

Old Business

The SPI Quarterly report was presented by Mrs. Hammon.

SPI 1 – Advocate for State Veterans

1.1 Meeting by Congressional District – This is not possible during Covid. Ms. Hammon queried if the measure should be reworded or a note be made that this is not possible during Covid? Ms. Hammon stated that in an earlier meeting it was discussed that the staff from different Congressional Districts would get invited to each meeting. Ms. Hammon directed Ms. Fraser to add a comment regarding Covid and that Congressional staff will in turn be invited to each meeting. Mr. Dailey stated he feels that it is important for each and every Congressional office be invited to every single CBVA meeting. Mr. Steen stressed that the CBVA primarily discusses state issues, not federal. He believes that representatives from every state department should be present over the attendance of congressional offices and attendance of guests from different congressional districts should be recorded. Discussion ensued. County and State VSOs, Federal Representatives, Individuals from each CO state department will now be invited to every meeting.

1.1 Collecting surveys from each county annually is on track.

1.2 CVSOs consolidate and provide feedback – This measure is redundant for what the JBC does. Ms. Hammon inquired if the Board wants to continue with this project, pointing out this would be a burden to County VSOs. Discussion ensued. This will be discussed further by the SPI Working Group and thoughts presented to the whole Board at the next meeting.

1.3 Mr. Dorman stated that the Board's Annual Report to the Legislature has not yet been turned in.

1.4 Communicate recommended changes to the CO VA Director - Mrs. Hammon inquired of Mr. Callahan if sending the same letter to the VARO Director that gets sent to the Governor and the Legislature. Mr. Steen pointed out that this measure is the actual 'Advocating for Veterans' that the Board is charged with after they have collected the information. This is to be discussed in the SPI Working Group. Mrs. Hammon instructed Ms. Fraser to keep a list of running issues at all future meetings to help with this measure. Mrs. Hammon requested that both the East and West Director gather this information from their CVSOs that directly relates to the VA.

2.1 All first three measures are on hold do to finances and the lack of bandwidth to execute them at this time.

2.1 Fourth measure – Has already been discussed and many more individuals are being invited to attend Board meetings.

2.2 Outreach – we are on track!

2.3 We have a webpage and Ms. Fraser is keeping it updated.

SPI 3 - Grants

3.1 Ms. Hoagland stated the first round of non-monitoring site visits have already been conducted and she is ready to send out round two.

3.2 Ms. Hoagland this is being achieved through various methods: quarterly report feedback, end-of-year survey, and ongoing feedback.

3.3 Ms. Hoagland says this should be indicated as a 'yes'. Best practices are collected and dispersed regularly, in addition to mentors who work with any struggling grantees. Mrs. Hammon requested the Ms. Hoagland contact the Board members who oversee this SPI individually. Mr. Gonzalez verified he can do his site visit virtually.

SPI 4 – Ms. Hammon stated that we are not on target with that and suggested adding a note regarding Covid hampering this effort. Ms. Hammon and Mr. Rudder recommended requesting extra funding despite Covid, to have the request on record. Mr. Steen suggested writing a letter to counties requesting extra funding. Ms. Fraser was instructed to add a SPI 5 that is requesting counties

5.1 Annually contact counties regarding funding for CVSOs and veterans.

5.2 Always have at least one Board member attend the CCI meeting.

Mr. Steen modified this request: change SPI 4 to 'Change to request funding'. SPI 4.3 will write a letter and disperse to counties before they set their budgets in April. SPI 4.4 always have a board member attend the CCI meeting. Ms. Scanlon volunteered to draft the letter to the counties and have it ready for the next meeting. Mr. Smith suggested adding exact numbers of how the VSO is positively impacting the monetary situation in each county. Ms. Hammon thanked everyone for their input and thanked Mr. Callahan for his assistance.

New Business

Women's Veteran Coordinator

Ms. Scanlon stated that more and more women veterans are needing assistance and all that exists is a temporary fix and that it needs a more permanent solution. She would like the Board to take the issue to TAG. Ms. Hammon expressed that she is interested in moving forward with this as well. Mr. Dorman reminded the Board that they are a Type 2 Board and cannot take a position on any legislation. Ms. Scanlon stated that she understands that however this has been before the Board since 2018 and that more needs to actually be done on this topic. Ms. Golonka supported writing the letter and sending it to TAG. Ms. Scanlon stated she would write the letter and bring it to the Board for consideration.

Pandemic Effect on Veterans

Ms. Scanlon is trying to follow all legislation related to veterans and is trying to determine if the non-eviction notice has been extended. Ms. Hammon stated that this changes by city, county and state. Ms. Scanlon is concerned that when lifted, many veterans will be evicted. Mr. Rudder pointed out that this is a trickle-down effect that are causing many issues. There was a day when eviction prohibition lagged

and many veterans were evicted on that day. There are also veterans that are unable to continue with their special agreement and are worried that they will be evicted. Landlords are getting creative with their evictions and kicking people out for alternate reasons that are not payments.

Ms. Hammon highlighted the increase in mental health issues, suicides and related problems in her area.

Board Annual Training

It was decided that the annual training of the Colorado Board Veterans Affairs will be held on February 23 at 1:00 p.m. via WebEx.

Reports

Mr. Dorman said that the calendar of the state legislature continues to change. Currently, the legislature will convene on 13 January to run a few critical bills, and then recess until February. This will delay the legislative cycle, including the timing of TAG's senate confirmation. DMVA's SMART Act hearing before the Military and Veterans Affairs committee will be held virtually on 20 January at 0900. Interested parties were invited to attend remotely. He said that it was recently brought to the department's attentions that a law requiring an automatic sunset of every fund on the state tax checkoff could affect the Military Family Relief Fund next year. This has prompted concern at DMVA and the National Guard, as the fund has been heavily used in recent years. The department is currently in conversations with the governor's office regarding prospective legislation to allow this item to remain on checkoff. The Board was advised that the Veterans Memorial Cemetery is exempt from the sunset requirement and will remain on the checkoff regardless. Ms. Hammon request a link for the SMART meeting and Ms. Fraser agreed to distribute it. Ms. Golonka spoke in support of the relief fund, citing how often it is used in her unit. Ms. Scanlon asked if the department needed any action from the Board. Mr. Dorman said it is not needed at this time.

Ms. Iglesias said that Mesa County is moving back on the COVID dial and that the Veterans Memorial Cemetery has a five-star variance. Still, the cemetery is encouraging clients to utilize direct interments and not to have a volunteer honor guard but to use active duty only. The administrative office is closed to walk-in. Staff members are in the office, making arrangement via phone or when necessary meeting clients outside. In regard to capital construction, she said that the new columbaria are up and the niche covers are on, ready to start interring. The lower pond is complete, the stream side is complete, and work is about to start on the upper pond. A carillon has been installed at the committal shelter; bells begin to toll hymns at 0800 and play every hour, ending at 1700 with Taps. A fourth groundskeeper started at the cemetery this month and that crew is now fully staffed. 4th The cemetery will soon stop faxing reimbursements requests and will transition to direct upload. The cemetery ended the year with a total of 332 interments, close to last year's total of 339. Regarding the WROS, she said that VA's HUD VASH and Social Work teams have moved in and are paying rent. The WROS continues to recruit tenants, with seven offices currently available. The parking project on hold pending Colorado Army National Guard involvement. The current projection for completion is a March-April timeframe. The DEERS office was closed recently due to equipment problems that have now been resolved. The Colorado Fallen Memorial sponsored by Alpine Banks has been installed and it open to the public. The WROS is fully staffed.

Mr. Tremaine said DVAe is proceeding with its plan for regional training, with state veterans service officers reaching out to their regions via webcasts. The trainings will be posted on the division's YouTube channel. Updates for the ECHCS indicates that vaccine distribution in its catchment area has been

difficult. However, the Cheyenne Health Care System has open enrollment and intends to have vaccinations available in Loveland. Kaiser Permanente is another vaccine option, as they have a state contract and can assist non-members. DVAe is working with DMVA procurement on a new claims management system. State VSOs are looking ahead to when they will be able to travel and will be scheduling Town Halls within their respective regions. Town halls being scheduled. A meeting was held with stakeholders from the San Luis Valley on 23 December to alleviate concerns in regard to region assignments and communications. DVAe has one VSO vacancy. Jay Scott asked what criteria was used to establish the DVAe regions. The region his county is in has a mix of geographic areas as well as a mixture of urban and rural concerns. Mr. Tremaine said that veteran population and accreditation of CVSOs was considered when the regions were established, but the division is open to making changes. Ms. Scanlon asked if attendance at the training sessions is tracked and if so that the information be shared with the Board. Mr. Tremaine said that it is tracked and agreed. Mr. Dailey asked for veteran in the catchment area of the ECHCS can get the COVID vaccine if they aren't enrolled in VA health care. Ms. Hammon said that veterans should check with local hospitals with their county health departments.

Ms. Hoagland said new applications have been arriving for the next grant cycle. She has been providing grant application webinars for interested parties and she encouraged all Board members to feel free to attend. Ms. Hammon thanked Ms. Hoagland for her work. Mr. Scott said that he needs to reach out to Ms. Hoagland regarding a change of grant manager at the American Legion post in La Junta. Ms. Hoagland said she is aware of the difficulties at the post. She informed the Board that to date, at least five grantees have had grant managers affected by COVID. She also said that grantees with transportation programs have been impacted as well. Both factors are expected to impact execution rates.

Mr. Rudder shared the report from Robby Robinson. There was no new report on regarding the Tribute to Veterans monument. They are waiting for decisions to be finalized regarding fencing at the park. Community Living Centers have successfully vaccinated patients and staff who want the COVID vaccine.

Remarks

Mr. Steen said that he attended two outreach event on behalf of the Board within the past month. He said that his career took a turn the previous week as he began his first day as a member of the staff for Congressman Doug Lamborn. He said that DMVA leadership is checking to confirm whether he can remain a member of the Board while engaged in this position. Congressional staff are also checking to ensure whether House rules will allow him to remain on the Board. Ms. Hammon congratulated Mr. Steen and thanks him for his service on the Board thus far. Mr. Rudder also thanked Mr. Steen, saying he has been of great benefit to the Board and the hope is that he will be able to remain a member.

Mr. Gonzalez said that due to COVID-related business for the county and the holidays, he had nothing new to report.

Mr. Dailey said that he has no report.

Ms. Hammon said she attended five outreach events on behalf of the Board within the past month. She provided her report from UVC. The banquet has been moved to 27 June in anticipation that it can be perhaps be held in person. HR 7105 was passed in January. This act will address the administration VA programs and benefits for homeless veterans during the pandemic and should benefit woman veterans and other underserved populations. The VA Center for Women has introduced a pilot training for a

Women's Health Transition program. UVC warned of virus and vaccine related scams targeting veterans. She said that Colorado's Occupational Credential Portability Program went into effect on 01 January, allowing military spouses to obtain three-year temporary credentials for any profession or occupation regulated by the state Division of Professions and Occupations if they hold a credential in good standing from another US state or territory among other requirements. Eagle County has been very busy. Local nonprofits have been helping to assist veterans in need.

Ms. Golonka and Ms. Scanlon had both left the meeting due to other engagements.

Mr. Rudder said he attended one event during the past month on behalf of the Board. He has been taking calls for the Alamosa County veterans service office in addition to Rio Grande, but there have been no new claims recently likely due to the holidays. He encouraged everyone wanting the COVID vaccine to get on the list with their county health department. He reminded the Board of annual training on 23 February.

Mr. Smith commented in regard to a state women veterans coordinator. He has heard concern from female veterans who are not comfortable with a male service officer in the position. Mr. Tremaine said the division does not currently have a women veterans coordinator. It has been encompassed in the duties of the Diversity and Inclusion state veterans service officer. The division did not receive any qualified female applicants for the position. Currently the division has a group of female county veterans service officers who are able to assist when a veteran requires a female service officer. Mr. Scott asked if the idea of a state women veterans coordinator could be revisited. Mr. Tremaine said that is a matter of consideration for department leadership.

Upcoming Meetings

The next meeting will be held on 05 February at 0900. Remaining meetings for this fiscal year will be held on:

05 March – training for VTF grant application review
02 April – VTF grant application vote and award decisions
07 May
04 June

Adjournment

There being no further business, Mr. Rudder invited a motion to adjourn. It was so moved by Mr. Gonzalez and seconded by Ms. Hammon. The motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 11:00 a.m.