**Colorado Board of Veterans Affairs**

November 2, 2022

Rocky Mountain Regional VAMC

Aurora, CO 80045

**Opening**

Ms. Hammon called the meeting to order at 1100. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited and a moment of silence was held for POWs, MIAs, those deployed, their families, and all those killed in the line of duty.

**Members Present**

Pat Hammon, Chair

Sheila Scanlon, Vice-Chair

Lacey Golonka, Secretary

Sean Maday, Member

Jasmine Motupalli, Member

Raymond Taylor, Member

**Staff Present**

Michael Bruno, DMVA Deputy Executive Director

David Callahan, CDVA Director

Angela Ingalls, VMC Director

Lisa Stamm, CDVA Grants Administrator

James Poteet, CDVA Appeals Specialist

Eric Moncibais, State Veterans Service Officer – Southeast

DeeDee Salerno, DMVA Strategic Planner

Drew Stem, State Veterans Service Officer – Central

Carissa Snyder, CDVA Program Assistant

**Guests Present**

Ron Brown, Yuma County Veterans Service Officer

Janelle Crow, Kiowa County Veterans Service Officer

John Haynie, Logan County Veterans Service Officer

Duffy Laudick, Larimer County Veterans Service Officer

Chris Maes, Douglas County Veterans Service Officer

Josh Medina, Arapahoe County Veterans Service Officer

Cindy Meyer, Teller County Veterans Service Officer

Charles Militti, Acting Associate Director, RMR VAMC

Ray Odum, Las Animas County Veterans Service Officer

Sheldon Smith, Montrose/Ouray Counties Veterans Service Officer

Roxie Smith, Crowley County Veterans Service Officer

**DMVA Report**

Mr. Bruno said this is his first Board meeting. He has been a member of the DMVA for 31 years, most of it in the National Guard. He has been in his current position for five months. He said on the governor’s budget was submitted to JBC earlier in week. DMVA’s items were restoration of $4 million of swept real estate proceeds, authorizations for two FTEs for the Veterans Memorial Cemetery, a vehicle for the Veterans Memorial Cemetery, and two new FTES for the executive director’s office, specifically a COO and a CFO, and language to increase spending authority for the Veterans Trust Fund. He said that Parker White is DMVA’s new legislative liaison. Ms. Scanlon said the Board may have recommendations for the Department and asked what the best method to submit them is. Mr. Bruno said the DVA Director is the primary point of contact, but it is fine to contact his office directly if needed. The department will begin collecting recommendation for legislative priorities for next year in early 2023 and he asked that any contributions from the Board be submitted by the end of February.

**Approval of Minutes**

Corrections from Ms. Scanlon had been received prior to the meeting. Corrections provided by Mr. Maday were typographical errors under Guests, Address, Special Reports, Reports, and Remarks. Ms. Scanlon moved that the minutes be approved as corrected. Ms. Golonka seconded. The motion carried.

**Address**

Ms. Hammon said that VAMC Director Michael Kilmer was not available to address the Board but that the VAMC was represented by Charles Militti, Acting Associate Director. Mr. Militti extended a welcome on behalf of Mr. Kilmer and his regrets at being unable to attend. The VAMC is interested in collaborating with the Board in support of the needs of Colorado veterans. Ms. Scanlon asked if it would be possible to obtain a briefing on women veteran programs and Mr. Militti said he would supply his card. Ms. Hammon thanked him and said that the Board looks forward to visiting the facility again in the future.

**Public Comments** - None

**Old Business**

Audit Findings: Mr. Callahan said there are six audit findings for DVA that are currently being worked on by Division staff, including VSO training. Ms. Hammon asked that the Board received regular updates on the progress.

DVA Training Curriculum: Mr. Callahan said that the Training Curriculum has been revised and is ready for the Board’s consideration. A slide was provided with the most recent changes. The curriculum itself consists of more than 100 slides. Changes since the last meeting include expectations and responsibilities, response times, samples of forms and DD214s, survivors benefits, and regional resources. Mr. Maday moved that the training curriculum be approved as presented with any modifications relayed to the Board at stated meetings. Ms. Scanlon seconded. The motion carried.

Customer Surveys: Mr. Callahan said the Board members received Ms. Motupalli’s recommendations on survey methods. Qualtrics will be the tool. Surveys will be sent by email twice a year to veterans whose claim profiles with DVA have been active within the past six months. The Division proposes using the Net Promoter and Experience methods. The former will capture general sentiment about services received and the latter would help the Division understand how effective the categories of service offerings are Ms. Hammon asked if this method would provide specific or general feedback. Ms. Motupalli said that both would be possible, depending on the granularity of the prompts. She said she can provide examples of dashboards of survey results and recommended that the Division arrange a Qualtrics demo. Mr. Callahan said he would check into this with Ms. Salerno. Prospective survey questions can be shared at the next Board meeting.

State Payments in Support of County Veterans Service Offices: Mr. Callahan said this year the Division will continue with the current process of full time and part time payments, paid in biannual installments. Full time is 30 or more hours per week, part time is 29 and below. The full time reimbursement amount is $26,000 annually and the amount for part time is $13,000. Prospective changes stemming from audit recommendation would tie future payments to accreditation and certification rather than by hours worked. Counties would receive a set amount for each accredited VSO and a set amount for each certified VSO. Ms. Scanlon asked if hours worked would be considered under that current proposal. Mr. Callahan said that VA’s Office of General Counsel requires that an accredited VSO work at least 1,000 hours per year, but otherwise state funds would be based only on accreditation and certification status. This proposal would require a statutory change and he asked Mr. White to explain that process. Mr. White said that in order for DMVA to support the measure it would have to first be approved by the governor’s office and that request has been submitted. If it is approved by the governor’s office, he will seek legislative sponsorship. Ms. Hammon said if the funds are attributed per VSO it may be less money per county. Mr. Callahan said it would allow for the state reimbursement to be made on a more uniform basis, as currently there is a wide fluctuation in hours worked. Mr. Callahan said any change would be communicated at the earliest possible date due to a possible effect on county budgets. Ms. Scanlon asked who in the Division would monitor the program. Mr. Callahan said the Division has requested an additional FTE and this would fall into that position description. Mr. White reiterated that this is a draft proposal only and is not ready for public dissemination.

Ms. Hammon allowed Mr. White to proceed with his legislative report while he had the floor. He said that DMVA items that are ready to proceed are the removal of DVA from the process for the property tax exemption for qualifying disabled veterans. Mr. Callahan asked Ms. Snyder to clarify that item for the benefit of the Board. Ms. Snyder said that when the original referendum passed, the available method to determine whether a veteran qualified for the exemption was by review of the VA rating decision. It was important to have reviewers who understood those decisions. Now VA provides a Benefits Summary Letter that is easily read and can be understood by county assessors and staff. Removing DVA from the process would make the process more efficient and timely, by reducing a handoff and the number of reviews.

**New Business**

Veterans Trust Fund Grant Application: Ms. Stamm said the recommended adjustments have been made to the 2023-2024 application for the Veterans Trist Fund Grant. This includes modification of the details of the office supplies category, the addition of a single email address for application submission, removal of mention of advance payments, addition of encouragement to grantees to ensure they receive receipt of delivery, and instructions to include the overall agency budget and other program funding. The Attorney General’s office is reviewing the application to see if they have any recommended changes but that feedback has not been received yet. Ms. Scanlon said on Question 8 she would like grantees to provide the amount of money spent on each program listed. Ms. Stamm said she would make that addition. The Board elected to wait to see if feedback is received from the Attorney General’s office by mid-November before approving the application. A special meeting will be called at that time. Application training webinars have been scheduled and that information is posted on the web site.

Veterans Information Clearinghouse: Mr. Callahan said that funding for an FTE to staff the Veterans Information Clearinghouse has been postponed indefinitely.

Veteran Identification-TransUnion: Mr. Callahan said a current challenge is identifying how many veterans are in Colorado and where they are located, since VA’s GDX report only tracks veterans enrolled with VA. Other state Divisions have utilized TransUnion to gather data and information, currently at a cost of $0.41 per record. The cost in Colorado is estimated at $147,000. This may be an item that the Division presents to the Board to be funded by the Veterans Trust Fund. Ms. Scanlon asked whether exiting service members are automatically enrolled in VA. Mr. Callahan said they are not but there is pending legislation for that action. Ms. Hammon asked how TransUnion obtains their information and that was not known. She said that some veteran who are not enrolled in VA do not wish to be identified or contact. Mr. Callahan said he would reach out to the Idaho DVA, as they are known to use this program, to see if they can provide additional details on how it works. Ms. Scanlon asked if the Division still receives DD214s for exiting service members whose home of record is in Colorado. Ms. Snyder said they are sporadic.

Annual Report: Ms. Snyder is collecting information from state departments but has yet to reach out to the national cemeteries. Ms. Hammon asked if she had reached out to the Colorado Department of Human Services and Ms. Snyder said she had not. Ms. Hammon asked her to do so to obtain information on the Community Living Centers and any data on how many veterans use SNAP and LEAP benefits, as well as any issues or recommendation that department would like to report.

**Standing Reports**

DVA: Mr. Callahan said that interviews are being scheduled for the Northeast VSO and the Women’s VSO. The position description for the VSO Supervisor is being revised. The position description for the Division Training Officer is under review by Human Resources. The training curriculum will be implemented under the leadership of Kristy Cunningham to allow VSOs to gain and maintain certification and/or accreditation. Ms. Scanlon asked how many VSOs in Colorado are not veterans. Mr. Callahan said none, but some counties have clerical staff that carry out regular daily functions. Ms. Hammon said she is assist with recruitment and hiring for Garfield and Pitkin Counties. She said there is a new VSO in Rio Blanco County

Central VSO: Mr. Stem said October outreach included the VHA monthly meeting, visits to more than 10 counties, training on Higher Level Review conferences in Adams and Broomfield Counties and Outreach Day at the VA Community Resource and Referral Center. In accomplishments, myhealtheVet will present at an upcoming Wednesday coffee for VSOs, his office is completing 5-10 claims per week, and Broomfield County secured a retroactive payment for a veteran of more $120,000. Opportunities include working county offices in regard to Higher Level Reviews. Issue include transportation difficulties in rural areas and an insufficient number of VSOs in the metro area.

Southwest VSO: Mr. Stem reported on behalf of Ms. Cunningham. He said that October outreach included monthly meeting with the DAV in Durango chairing the Southwest Colorado Veterans Collaborative meeting, a meeting with the New Mexico tribal liaison, and participation in the Ute Tribes Outreach Days. In accomplishments, work with the tribal community including four claims, a successful BVA hearing with a sensitive client, and final work on the training curriculum. Opportunities include potential new partnerships with entities contacted through VA Outreach days and Stand Downs. Issues include gaps in care for veterans with the New Mexico VISN and seasonal work for the San Juan County VSO, necessitating coverage from the Southwest office.

Southwest VSO: Mr. Stem reported on behalf of Mr. Moncibais. He said that October outreach included and Lunch and Learn at the Senior Resource Development Agency in Pueblo, the Pueblo Stand Down, and invitation from CSU to speak at their Veterans Day event, continued radio interviews with CSU, and participation in the Pueblo Veterans Community Wellness forum. Accomplishments include an invitation to join American Legion and gaining accreditation through the American Legion.

Northwest VSO: The report was obtained from the submitted slide. Upcoming outreach will include a Bootcamp BBQ Sendoff at the WROS and officiating the Veterans Day ceremony in Fruita. Accomplishments include training the new VSO in Rio Blanco County, increased rating in 20 of 28 claims, and more than $141,000 in retroactive payments.

WROS: Ms. Hammon referred the Board to the written report. Property Administrator Joanne Iglesias is out on leave and Dan Coulter is serving as the interim administrator. All of the offices are leased and the recurrent activities continue. The parking gate project is complete. An advisory board of tenants has been formed. They received a grant for an outside sign that will list all the tenants.

VMC and Honor Guard Stipend: Ms. Ingalls said the cemetery is now fully staffed. The stucco work funded by the VTF is complete. Federal reimbursements are increasing to $893. This is the highest increase since 2011. The Vet Center brought veterans for a tour and cemetery staff assisted veteran with early registration; this event will recur bimonthly. The VMC participated in the local Stand Down. They are now preparing for Veterans Day. The stipend program had only $2,225 remaining at the end of October.

Grants: Ms. Stamm said that the state grants management office has issued an opinion that the grant administrator cannot perform the desk reviews of reimbursement requests. The Division has now split the duties and Ms. Snyder will input the payments. This has slowed down the payment process. Speed of payment has also been delayed by instruction from the Controller that any documentation with PII needed to remain separate from the state financial system, necessitating an opinion from Attorney general’s office on how to store the PII safely. They are now stored on the DMVA SHARE drive. Ms. Hammon asked if there were any concerns about grantees who have not yet spent funds. Ms. Stamm said not at this time but if they remain underspent at midcycle they will be asked to consider an agreement modification.

**Board Member Remarks**

Ms. Scanlon said that the Women Marines Association continues to see a large number of request for assistance. The Marine Corps birthday is November 10.

Ms. Golonka said that Xcel Energy is assisting with Wreaths Across America at Fort Logan on December 17. They are sponsoring 22 wreaths.

Mr. Maday said he was in Michigan for a Military and Veterans gala and in connection with his work for the Air National Guard. In October he attended Patriot Boot Camp at DAV national headquarters. The three-day event featured mentorship, education, and support for veteran entrepreneurs.

Mr. Taylor said the county has received the information on the PACT Act and the county payments to VSOs. The PACT Act has resulted in a large increase in claims from both veterans and surviving spouses. C&P exams are proving difficult with only one VA contractor in the area. There may be a mobile option for QTC as well. Ms. Hammon said James Poteet may have the contact. The local 8th grade will hold a Veterans Day breakfast; this will be the first time since prior to the pandemic. They are seeing a large amount of grant requests for fuel and utilities. The local cemetery will participate in Wreaths Across America and the event will feature a flyover.

Ms. Motupalli said that she will be the keynote speaker at the Lawnside Historical Society’s Veterans Day event in New Jersey on November 10. She is the first African American woman to attend West Point.

Ms. Hammon said the local VFW has a two-page spread in the VFW magazine on winter activities. The veterans service office has been extremely busy as a result of the PACT Act. Eagle County will also participate in Wreaths Across America. There are 19 Veterans Day events scheduled at local school. There will be county-wide Veterans Day event with a Vietnam veterans as the keynote speaker. President Biden came to Camp Hale to sign the proclamation to make it a national monument. She was able to meet the President and received a presidential coin.

State Veterans Issues: Ms. Hammon said issue captured at the meeting include county veterans service officers learning to perform Higher Level Review conference, difficulties with transportation in rural areas, not enough VSOs in the metro area, high level of claims due to the PACT Act, homelessness and an increasing need for assistance with fuel, gas, utilities, and gaps in health care.

**Upcoming Meetings**

The next stated meeting is scheduled for December 2 at VFW Post 1 in Denver. The January meeting is tentatively scheduled for the VA Regional Office in Lakewood. Ms. Golonka asked if VSOs have any events they would like the Board to attend, to please submit them and Board may be able to arrange a visit in concordance with a meeting.

December 2, VFW Post 1, Denver

January 6, VA Regional Office, Lakewood

**Adjournment**

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 2:02 p.m.