

**Colorado Board of Veterans Affairs**

**09 April 2024**

**Archuleta County**

**398 Lewis Street**

**Pagosa Springs, CO 81147**

**Opening**

Ms. Scanlon called the meeting to order at 1300. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited and a moment of silence was held for POWs, MIAs, those deployed, their families, and those killed in the line of duty.

**Members Present**

Sheila Scanlon, Chair

Sean Maday, Vice Chair

Lacey Golonka, Secretary

Longinos Gonzalez, Member

Jasmine Motupalli, Member

Howard Richards, Member

Raymond Taylor, Member

**Staff Present**

Bruce Cowan, CDVA Director

Angela Ingalls, VMC Director

Darin Collazo, WROS Property Administrator

Emily Currier, WROS Administrative Assistant

Tina O'Dell, WROS Administrative Assistant

Amy Demenge, Women Veterans Service Officer

Glen Marciniak, CDVA Claims and Benefits Manager

Lisa Stamm, CDVA Grants Administrator

Christina Tozzie, CDVA Grants Specialist

Carissa Snyder, CDVA Program Assistant

**Guests Present**

Warren Brown, Archuleta County Board of Commissioners

Mary Cornum, Veterans Coalition of the San Luis Valley  
Renee Franklin, Pueblo County Veterans Service Office Admin  
Travis Gale, Kit Carson County Veterans Service Officer  
Tina Garcia, DAV Legislative Chair  
Pat Hammon, Eagle County Veterans Service Officer, VCLC Board of  
Commissioners

UVC Representative

Joshua Hutson, Assistant County Veterans Service Officer, El Paso County  
Sherry Jenkins, Transition Services Manager, Fort Carson  
Greg Luiker, Navy Veteran, UVC Member  
Ronnie Maez– Archuleta County Board of Commissioners  
Gina McCune, Archuleta County Administrative Assistant  
Veronica Medina, Archuleta County Board of Commissioners, National Association  
of Counties Veterans and Military Service Committee  
Richard Nagley, Veterans Coalition of the San Luis Valley, American Legion Dept  
VSO  
Michaela Naundorff – Army Veteran, Surviving Spouse  
Randi Pierce, Editor, *Pagosa Springs Sun*  
Lynn Weiland, Vice President, Board of Directors, Veterans for Veterans of  
Archuleta County  
Derek Woodman – Archuleta County Manager  
Mussetta Wollenweber – Surviving Spouse

## **Introduction of New Member**

Ms. Scanlon invited Howard Richards to introduce himself. Mr. Richards is a member of the Southern Ute People and lives in Ignacio. He served in Vietnam from 1958 to 1971 and on the island of Oahu in the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry. He retired from Fort Hill, Oklahoma as a Military Policeman after 24 years of service.

Mr. Richards is active in the Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 1431 in Durango, is a lifetime member of the Vietnam Veterans of America, and is Past Vice President of the United Veterans Coalition of Colorado. In the 1980s he cofounded the Budding Veterans Association, designed to assist Veterans obtain the care and benefits which they earned by their service. Mr. Richards said that as a member of the First Nations, he can understand and identify systemic barriers experienced by minority population when interacting with the VA. He is also interested in expanding traditional medicine opportunities to Colorado veterans. Ms. Scanlon thanked Mr. Richards for accepting the appointment and said that his experience will be valuable to the members and stakeholders of the Board

## **Approval of Minutes**

Corrections to the draft of the March 2024 minutes were provided.

Mr. Maday moved that the minutes be approved as corrected. Mr. Gonzalez seconded. The motion carried.

## **Public Comments**

Mr. Weiland said that Veterans for Veterans of Archuleta County (Vets for Vets) has been grateful for the Veterans Assistance Grant. They have assisted veterans with various needs, including auto repairs, firewood and fuel, groceries, home repairs, lodging, obtaining mental health care, transportation, and utilities. The organization also uses their general fund to assist veterans when needed. He said that the organization has appreciated its relationship with County VSO Raymond Taylor and Regional State VSO

Kristy Cunningham. He said that Vets for Vets estimates they are aware of only about 40% of the veteran population in Archuleta County and are working on avenues to offer assistance to veterans who currently may not be aware of the organization.

Ms. Wollenweber said that she is the widow of Army veteran Dan Wollenweber. Mr. Wollenweber had service-connected disabilities presumptive to Agent Orange exposure and had filed a new claim in July 2021, but died before a decision was issued. Ms. Wollenweber has since experienced a series of difficulties being established as a substituted claimant for her husband's pending claim and with her own application for Dependency and Indemnity Compensation, the latter of which has since been resolved. She said that Mr. Taylor has been of great help to her with the subsequent filings with the VA. She has contacted the VA and requested that a supervisor review her pending claim but has not received a response. Ms. Scanlon thanked Ms. Wollenweber for sharing her story with the Board and requested updates on the claim as the process continues.

Ms. Naundorff is an Army veteran and is the widow of Robert Naundorff Jr. Mr. Naundorff served in the Marine Corps from 2001-2005 and in the Army from 2010-2013, with tours in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Ms. Naundorff said that her husband took his own life last year in November. She said that mental health care options made available by the VA were not sufficient for her husband and that he did not receive necessary care. She said that she also experiences difficulties with the VA Health Administration when trying to access Community Care. She said that Mr. Taylor has been of immense assistance to both her and her husband since they moved to Pagosa Springs, but the VA system has been very difficult to navigate. Ms. Scanlon thanked Ms. Naundorff for sharing her experience and said that Mr. Taylor would continue to follow up with the VHA in Albuquerque.

Mr. Luiker said that he has found that he has to be tenacious when it comes to obtaining mental health care through the VA. There is a lack of communication between providers that can make continuity of care challenging. He said that he has found other resources to be much more helpful than the VA in regard to mental health care and that he does not think that VA health care should be so difficult to obtain.

Mr. Nagley asked when and where the DVA Policies and Procedures would be available for review. Ms. Scanlon said that the current document is in effect. Updates are underway and the next version should be available in July.

### **Legislation**

HB24-1273: Mr. Cowan said that an amendment has been proposed to require 50% of the VAG funds to be spent on underserved veteran populations. Mr. White is working with the bill sponsor regarding the amendment.

HB24-1236: Ms. Demenge said that the bill is on the House floor for consideration today.

JBC Budget and Figure Setting: Mr. Cowan said the current recommendations to the governor include a 6.6% overall increase for Veterans Affairs. The VTF recommended funding is a \$267,000 increase and the VAG recommended funding is \$500,000. The recommended appropriation for county veterans service offices is three percent increase over FY24. The recommended funding for the Veterans Memorial Cemetery of Western Colorado is an increase of 7.4% and for the Western Region One Source an increase of 3.3%. Ms. Scanlon said that this budget is tentative until signed by the governor.

## **Transition Assistance Program (TAP)**

Ms. Jenkins said that she has been working in the program for more than nine years. She thanked the veterans and family members present. She presented slides describing the TAP program and what it offers those preparing to exit service.

TAP's mission is to synchronize efforts to successfully transition soldiers from active duty to the civilian by preparing soldiers to be career ready, prepared for education or entrepreneurial opportunities, and by tactically connecting them to opportunities that lead to civilian success. It is congressionally mandated and applies to all soldiers who have been on active duty for 180 continuous days. Ms. Jenkin's presentation detailed NDAA mandated requirements and what is available in the Career Skills Program. Ms. Scanlon asked what the Board, as a state entity, could do to assist transitioning service members. Ms. Jenkins said to continue to refer employers to TAP to help broaden the available opportunities. Many soldiers plan to stay in Colorado but the high cost of living can be a deterrent. Ms. Scanlon asked if TAP helps to address the mental health needs of transitioning service members. Ms. Jenkins said VHA is part of the TAP programs as are VSOs. Dr. Garcia thanked Ms. Jenkins for the information and requested her contact information. Ms. Jenkins said that she would put her contact information in the meeting chat and invited attendees to reach out any time.

## **VCLC Board of Commissioners**

Ms. Hammon said that the new VCLC web pages with online applications have been helping with resident census. Flu and COVID infection rates have declined. Staffing has also improved across the board with fewer agency staff and more employees. Ms. Scanlon asked if there was any prospective legislation affecting the VCLCs and Ms. Hammon said she will inquire at the upcoming meeting.

Ms. Hammon then provided a legislative update from the UVC legislative committee. She said there could still be changes to the current JBC figures in

the Senate, including the additional funding for VAG. She then provided a status on the following legislative issues monitored by the UVC:

- HB24-1076, Purple Star School Program: Currently in Appropriations
- HB24-1093, Peace Officer Provisional Certification Requirements: Has been signed by the governor.
- HB24-1193, Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Supplemental: Has been signed by the governor.
- HB 24-1226, Tuition Assistance for Colorado National Guard & Dependents: Has been amended and is currently in Appropriations

Ms. Scanlon asked when the UVC would start working on legislation for 2025.

Ms. Hammon said the next meeting of the legislative committee would be held on 14 May and discussions for 2025 will begin at that time.

### **Standing Reports**

DVA Director: Mr. Cowan presented slides describing his leadership philosophy and his short and long-term goals. His philosophy is collaborative, intended to create a learning environment of continuous improvement. His short-term goals are to gain understanding of the challenges and opportunities for the Division, ensure that the Division meets the requirements of its governing statutes, confirm that the Division meets and maintains the requirements identified in the 2022 Veterans Services audit, and to listen to team members and stakeholders to understand how the Division is perceived and where it can improve. Long-term goals are to continue to build on the successes of the Division, to improve efficiency and effectiveness of existing services we provide, to increase the services provided to the veteran community, to develop metrics that accurately measure the success of the Division, and to understand the products and services offered by other states' Divisions of Veteran Affairs.

WROS: Mr. Collazo said that the WROS has maintained all its current tenants. Medicare Mentors, which has been a part-time tenant, is now assuming a full-time lease. The facility will be at 100% occupancy. Event attendance has

increased by 10-30 percent across all events. Recent major calendar items included the Vietnam Veterans Day Ceremony at the Western Slope Vietnam Veterans Memorial. More than 75 people attended, and the WROS was able to facilitate recognition for two veterans, helping one to get his name added to the Fruita memorial and another connected to Senator Bennett's office to receive his Purple Heart. April events include a seminar on red flag laws, a Vietnam Veteran pinning, a Stand Down and Resource Fair. Parking lot improvements are pending. DEERS processed 90 ID card requests.

Veterans Services and Training: Ms. Snyder presented slides on behalf of Mr. Winterrowd. For Regional VSOs, events and outreach included VSO Spring Training on 4-5 April with 83 VSOs in attendance, and participation in a VA Senior Leader Symposium on 09 April. Frank Lobue has been hired as the Regional VSO for the Southwest and Hannah Eddings as the Regional VSO for the Northeast; both began work on 01 April. The Appeals Assistant is still vacant and several conferences will be attended by members of the VSO team in April and May, including the Colorado City and County Managers Association, Colorado Counties, Inc., and the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers. The training officer is working on handing off the duties of the Southwest Regional VSO to Frank Lobue and is coordinating end of fiscal year training reports for county veterans service officers. During the month of March, Women Veterans Coordinator Amy Demenge presented at a women veterans meeting in Cañon City, at an Empowering HER conference, and at the Women's Army Corps Veterans' Organization in Colorado Springs. She also participated in a Women Veterans Roundtable with Senator Bennett's Office and had an information table at the Women Veterans Air and Space Symposium. The Veterans Services Liaison has been working on the NACVSO president's reception for the May conference and traveled to western slope to coordinate with VHA, the Western Region One Source, and the Veterans Memorial Cemetery of Western Colorado. In Appeals, there were nine hearings held in the month of March and 63 decisions received. The current average wait time from hearing to decision is 8-12 months.

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VMC: Ms. Ingalls said that federal reimbursements are arriving in a timely manner, usually in four weeks or less. The Military Funeral Honors Stipend has paid out \$40,350.00 to date, with \$29,650.00 remaining for the fiscal year. Planning for Memorial Day events is underway and she invited the Board to attend any or all of the events. Flags will be placed on graves Friday 24 May and the flag retreat and retirement will be Sunday 26 May. Memorial Day services are scheduled for Monday, May 27 at 1000. The donated U.S. Navy ship anchor is currently under restoration and will be dedicated following the Memorial Day services. The cemetery staff has received training in lithograph restoration and will work on the project as time permits. Ms. Scanlon asked that an invitation to the Memorial Day events be sent to the Board and Ms. Ingalls said that it will be sent once ready.

Grants: Ms. Stamm that 57 payments were processed in March. Payments are taking an average of 30-45 days. Accounting has assumed the CORE accounting function for grants. The Grants Office submits a Receiving Report to the Accounting Department to process payments. Office hours were held twice in March. The VCLC Mental Health position was classified as a Program Assistant II. It has been announced and closed on 03 April. Drafts of policies for both grant programs are complete and have been sent to the Board Chair.

*The Board recessed from 1446 to 1500*

## **Old Business**

Bylaws – Ms. Snyder said that the Attorney General’s office has confirmed that the bylaw changes are under review. Ms. Scanlon asked if an executive session would be needed for the bylaw changes. Ms. Snyder said that a session would probably only be required if the AG’s office objected to any of the proposed changes.

Albuquerque VISNs 19 and 22: Mr. Taylor said he has received responses regarding the issues mentioned at the previous meeting. Regarding communication with Community Care and TriWest, telephone communication is the preferred method. There are also monthly meetings with the director of the Albuquerque VAMC to help address individual issues as they arise. Veteran concerns include reauthorizations for primary care and access to referrals for specialty care. Mental health care has been difficult due to a lack of enrolled providers, and VHA is working to help veterans access virtual options for care. The difficulty with pharmacy access is due to a lack of federal contracts. Travel pay delays may be due to either a lack of staff or of FTEs; Mr. Taylor will inquire regarding which is the essential difficulty.

Flyer for Grant Programs: Mr. Maday shared the draft of the VTF Grant flyer. He will address the wording regarding eligible organizations to broaden the description.

Policies and Procedures Committee: Ms. Scanlon said the Board members have the notes from the committee meeting. The Board will request their own chapter in the CDVA Policies and Procedures rather than having Board functions addressed in different places throughout. The Board reviewed the committee changes. The final draft will be forwarded by Ms. Scanlon to the Division.

Women Veterans Committee: Ms. Motupalli said that she, Ms. Golonka, and Ms. Scanlon met with Amy Demenge on 25 March. Ms. Demenge presented findings and recommendations regarding the women veterans assessment,

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with which the committee members concurred. Ms. Scanlon said they committee will next meet with staff from the Women's Program at the Rocky Mountain Region VAMC to discuss holistic coordination of the services available to women veterans.

VAG Review Committee: Ms. Scanlon said that with two members of the Board assigned to the review committee, the number of reviewers became even. She will attend the review but not score the applications to keep an odd number of reviewers. Ms. Stamm said that the current reviewers are herself, Mr. Gonzalez, and the Division Director or designee.

Members Directory: Ms. Snyder said that some members have been unable to use the link and asked if a soft copy to be provided so the missing information can be added manually.

**New Business** - none

### **Board Member Remarks**

Mr. Maday said an issue that recently came to his attention is Inclusion Body Myositis (IBM). This is an incurable progressive disorder affecting the skeletal muscles, primarily arms and legs, causing atrophy, damage, and weakness, with some symptoms similar to those of ALS. Approximately 25,000 people in the U.S. are currently affected, including an estimated 1,700 veterans. He said that while the VBA has recognized ALS as a presumptive service-connected disability, the same presumption does not extend to IBM. He advised the Board and Division to monitor the discussions around this condition with a potential to advocate for presumptive service connection.

Mr. Gonzalez said on 28 March he attended the monthly meeting of the local chamber's Military and Veterans Affairs Committee. The application window for El Paso County's Veteran of the Year Award closed on 01 April will be reviewed later in the month.

Mr. Taylor said that the information shared by veterans and family members during Public Comments was a good representation of the issues faced by the veteran community in Archuleta County.

Ms. Golonka said she met with the Douglas County Veterans Monument Foundation. That organization provides grants financed by organizational fundraising. She shared information on the Veterans Trust Fund Grant and the Veterans Assistance Grant. Her Senate confirmation of her current term on the Board will be held on 18 May.

Ms. Motupalli said Academy School in Arapahoe County has asked student parents who are veterans to assist in the revision of its leadership curriculum has gathered community group of veterans. The middle school grades have shown interest in the work of the Board and how the government supports veterans, and this may lead to outreach opportunities for the Board. She is serving on the grant review committee for the Colorado Technology Hub Development Grant. This program is a state extension of the Federal Fast Forward Program and endeavors to advance Colorado's leadership in key technology areas, grow regional economies, and create new job opportunities for Coloradans.

Mr. Richards had no comments.

Ms. Scanlon said that other than the two Board subcommittees mentioned in the meeting and the monthly meeting of the Women Marines Association, she had no additional report.

### **Veterans Issues**

Issues captured at the meeting include access to and enrollment in VA health care, access to prescription medications, homelessness, IBM and service connection, lithograph issues, mental health services, traditional medicine, transportation, recommendations from the women veterans needs assessment, and veterans aging alone.

## **Upcoming Meetings**

The May meeting will be held on 05 May at JFHQ in Centennial.

Currently scheduled:

05 May – Centennial (VTF Funding Decisions)

07 June – Monte Vista (Homelake)

12 July – Chaffee County (Buena Vista)

02 August – Logan County (Sterling)

## **VTF Grant Application Scoring**

Ms. Stamm presented slides regarding VTF application scoring. This included a program overview, a discussion of the types of programs funded, and a review of the scoring rubric. Examples were provided for each scorable section. She reminded Board members to score each grant completely prior to the grant review and to notify division staff in the event of a conflict of interest. She is available if Board members have any questions during the process.

## **Adjournment**

There being no further business, Mr. Maday moved to adjourn. Mr. Gonzalez seconded. The motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 5:03 p.m.