

Colorado Board of Veterans Affairs

July 7, 2023

Virtual via WebEx

Opening

Ms. Scanlon called the meeting to order at 0900. 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

Frederick Korb, Member

Jasmine Motupalli, Member

Raymond Taylor, Member

Staff Present

Michael Bruno, CDVA Deputy Executive Director

Parker White, DMVA Legislative Liaison

David Callahan, CDVA Director

Darin Collazo, WROS Property Administrator

Angela Ingalls, VMC Director

Lisa Stamm, CDVA Grants Administrator

Amy Demenge, State Women's Veterans Service Officer

James Poteet, CDVA Appeals and Hearings Specialist

Kristy Cunningham, State Veterans Service Officer-Southwest

Glen Marciniak, State Veterans Service Officer-Northeast

Ralph Charlip, CDVA Research Assistant
Carissa Snyder, CDVA Program Assistant
Beth Maxwell, CDVA Administrative Assistant

Guests Present

Marshall Bosworth, El Paso County Veterans Service Officer, CCVSO President, UVC Regional VP
Mary Cornum, Veterans Coalition of the San Luis Valley
Travis Gale, Kit Carson County Veterans Service Officer
Adam Lazaro, Pitkin County Veterans Service Officer
Duffy Laudick, Larimer County Veterans Service Officer
Cindy Meyer, Teller County Veterans Service Officer
Richard Nagley, Veterans Coalition of the San Luis Valley
Steve Otero, Gunnison County Veterans Service Officer
Roxie Smith, Crowley County Veterans Service Officer
Curtis Swanson, Logan County Veterans Service Officer

Approval of Minutes

Corrections to the draft of the June 2023 minutes were provided

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

Public Comments – Mr. Bosworth said that there will be a PACT Act Stand Down event in Colorado Springs August 7-9. The event is a partnership between several counties and the Veterans Benefits Administration.

State VSO Reports

Women’s VSO: Ms. Demenge said that June events and outreach included an appearance on the Veterans Voice Podcast, the annual NACVSO conference, a women veterans’ luncheon at American Legion Post 1, and hosting an event celebrating Women Veterans Day, which recognizes the Women’s Integration Act. Opportunities and training included assessment of

community needs and outreach and training on DMVA's new payroll system. Accomplishments include establishing her new office at the VBA in Colorado Springs. Issues include obtaining sponsorship for her VA PIV card and the length of time needed to receive travel reimbursements from the state.

Southwest VSO: Ms. Cunningham said that June events and outreach included the monthly veteran collaborative and the monthly state-tribal liaison team. Opportunities and training included a PACT Act roundtable with Senator Hickenlooper and planning for the fall VSO training conference. Accomplishments included a Southern Ute Tribal Survey for veterans being distributed to veterans and families in the local area. Issues are state grantees in need of reimbursements, no local DEERS office, and a need for Vet Center counselors.

Northeast VSO: Mr. Marciniak said that June events and outreach included a VA Town Hall in Loveland, the Celebration Summer Outreach Event in Burlington, and a PACT Act presentation in Greeley hosted by VFW and Senator Hickenlooper's office. Opportunities and training included the NACVSO conference and completion of the 90-day training curriculum with the VSO in Kit Carson County. Accomplishments included a meeting with the Lincoln County Commissioners regarding hiring a VSO, the appointment of a new Logan County VSO, and a new FNP and CCN facilitator at the Burlington CBOC. Issues include slow travel reimbursements, difficulties with new VA PIV cards and systems, and VSO vacancies in Washington and Lincoln counties.

Northeast VSO: Mr. Edginton said that June events and outreach included the NACVSO conference, and a PACT Act Stand Down in Moffatt County. Opportunities and training include addition PACT Act Stand Downs and VBMS training for counties. Accomplishments included more VSOs gaining access to VBMS and presentation of a Purple Heart to a Vietnam veteran in Mesa County. Issues are veteran access to VSOs, a need for clarification on VHA's ability to assist with nexus statement issue with GJ VAMC, and more outreach needed to advertise resource tours.

Central VSO: Mr. Stem was absent on leave. He provided an informational slide. June events and outreach included the NACVSO conference, TAP at Buckley SFB, DU's Strengthening Bridges Project, outreach in Broomfield County, the Arapahoe County Stand Down, and a VA Resources Fair. Opportunities and training included onboard the new VSO in Arapahoe County and new initiatives at the Rocky Mountain Regional VAMC for Homeless outreach and pain management. Accomplishments include work with Operation Recognition. Issues are slow travel pay.

Southeast VSO: Mr. Moncibais said that June events and outreach included a July 4 broadcast with Senior Living Radio, continued coverage of Custer County, outreach at the Pars for Patriots Golf Fundraiser. Opportunities included the addition of a Veterans Resource & Community Development Coordinator at Mount Carmel and an increase in contact from county commissioners. Accomplishments included training the new VSO in Mineral County and helping with the selection process for a VSO in Custer County. Issues are lack of knowledge in the veteran community regarding the PACT Act.

Old Business

Albuquerque VAMC: Mr. Taylor said he has been placed back on the VSO call list for Albuquerque. The next call will be on 25 July. Communication is improving also between Albuquerque and the Durango clinic. There are still some difficulties with Community Care referrals. Mr. Callahan said that Mr. Winterrowd and Ms. Cunningham will meet with VA staff from Albuquerque on 28 July.

Strategic Plan: There was no report available on the strategic plan. Ms. Scanlon said the next strategic plan session could be discussed under upcoming meetings, perhaps with the annual training. Mr. Bruno said he would reach out to Board officers in this regard.

Annual Report: Ms. Snyder said that reports have been received from two of the reporting state agencies. Neither addressed whether any issues are experienced by their veteran audiences. She and Ms. Scanlon will work on a follow-up letter to see if any additional information is available.

New Business

Legislative Items FY25: Mr. Callahan said the Division has submitted three decision item requests to DMVA for Fiscal Year 2024-2025. One is for a maintenance technician for the VMC and the WROS, one is for a Program Assistant to assist the Board, and for two additional VSOs. Ms. Scanlon asked if any action is needed from the Board. Mr. Callahan said that no action is needed at this time. Ms. Scanlon said that support of those efforts could be included in the annual report.

VCLC Board of Commissioners: Ms. Scanlon said that Pat Hammon has agreed to represent the Board with the Board of Commissioners for the Veterans Community Living Centers. This would require a vote of the board. Mr. Taylor so moved. Mr. Gonzalez seconded. The motion carried. Mr. Callahan will notify the VCLC Board of Commissioners.

Standing Reports

DVA/DMVA: Mr. Callahan provided an update on audit findings. The Division has addressed deficiencies in six key areas, specifically categorized in six key areas: VSO Training; Accreditation; Data Security; Support Payments to Counties; Deploying Division Resources to Help Ensure Uniform Service; and Strategic Planning and governance. He read a statement on progress that will be sent to the Colorado veterans services community. A copy of that statement is attached to these minutes. He said that the Policies and Procedures manual will be published in July. Ms. Scanlon asked if the Division could brief on women veterans needs assessment. Mr. Callahan recognized Mr. Charlip.

Women Veterans Needs Assessment: Mr. Charlip said that the assessment will be qualitative and will consist of interviews with 10 SMEs from organizations that support or represent Colorado women veterans and interviews with 20 Colorado women veterans, 11 of which are now complete. The assessment is expected to be completed by October. Ms. Scanlon said it is important to include woman veterans who do not belong to any veteran groups. Mr. Charlip said that is a possibility but will depend on who volunteers. Ms. Ingalls said she had a large group of woman veterans who might fit the criteria and Mr. Charlip said he would send her the information.

Veterans ID Project: Mr. Callahan asked if the Board was prepared to entertain the funding request. The Board decided to schedule a special meeting to consider the question since two members were absent. The decision was to poll the full Board to see if a special meeting could be accommodated on 19 July.

Legislative: Ms. Demenge said that more than 20 states recognize Women Veterans Day and she would like the Division to support a like effort in Colorado. Mr. Taylor moved that the Board officially support the proposal. Mr. Maday seconded. The motion carried. Mr. Callahan will work with Ms. Demenge and Mr. White on a resolution. Mr. White said that legislative requests will be submitted to governor's office by 17 July and the response will arrive in September.

WROS: Mr. Collazo said that there have been no changes in tenants since last month. Eight weekly events recur throughout the month and community outreach continues. A candidate has been identified for the DEERS position and the background check is underway. Ms. Scanlon asked if there were any issues to report. Mr. Collazo said hiring the team is the main priority.

CCVSOA: Mr. Bosworth said the general membership meeting will take place in association with the fall training conference. They are accepting nominations for annual awards and for additional board members. There will be a vote on proposed bylaw changes. He also reported on behalf of NACVSO, which will hold its next conference in May 2024 in Denver. NACVSO will hold a claims clinic in conjunction with the conference.

VMC: Ms. Ingalls said the restored torpedo has been returned. The phones at the cemetery are not working. IT is addressing the problem. The NCA data reports are due on 15 July. The flagpole repair is being scheduled, possibly at the end of July. Stipend funds for military honors are available.

Grants: Ms. Stamm said that payments are still a concern. Final payments are due to finance 11 July with the close of the fiscal year. The slow rate of payments is expected to affect the execution rates. Ms. Scanlon asked Mr. Callahan if the Board can assist with the issue. Mr. Callahan that DMVA is trying to resource the issue. One item is the program assistant for the grant program. That position description is currently waiting for approval. Ms. Stamm said all is established to start the new grant year. Kickoff trainings for grantees will take place in July. The sunset review for VAG should be complete in October.

Board Member Remarks

Mr. Taylor said continuing issues are lack of availability for in-person mental health appointments and difficulties due to the current cost of living. The local 4th of July parade was attended by thousands. At a joint meeting of the commissioners from Hinsdale and Archuleta Counties, his parents and his uncle received lifetime achievement awards.

Mr. Gonzalez said that on 22 June he spoke at the second of two ribbon cuttings connected with the Military Access, Mobility, and Safety Program. It was a road improvement on Highway 94. On 6 July he attended the 10th Air Base Wing change of command at the Air Force Academy.

Mr. Maday said that he assisted at DAV's Patriot Boot Camp, which facilitated 200 mentorship sessions for veterans who are interested in entrepreneurship.

Ms. Scanlon said her vacation was shortened due to Covid.

Mr. Korb had no comments.

Veterans Issues

Ms. Scanlon asked Mr. Callahan if there is any action that can be taken to help communicate to veterans regarding the PACT Act. Mr. Callahan said there would be a PACT Act claims event in Alamosa on 28 July and in Colorado Springs 7-9 August. She asked if travel pay reimbursements were being addressed. Mr. Callahan said there was a staff vacancy in accounting that has since been filled. Ms. Scanlon asked if travel reimbursements from the Board need to be handled differently than they have in the past. Mr. Callahan said that DVA operations will send our process steps. He confirmed no action was needed from the Board regarding the pending DEERS hire.

Ms. Scanlon said that the issue captured at the meeting is limited shelter for veterans.

Upcoming Meetings

Ms. Scanlon said that for future scheduling Mr. Callahan suggested connecting meeting locations to the seven regions of the Division and allowing the regional VSO to help facilitate. The next meeting is scheduled for August 4 in Pueblo. She asked if the Board wanted to adopt that schedule now or keep the meetings as they are currently scheduled through December. The Board decided to keep the current schedule. The Regional VSOs can help to secure locations for upcoming meetings.

September 7-8 –Eagle County (Eagle) – retreat	CD 3
October 6 – Mesa County (Grand Junction)	CD 3
November 3 – Denver County (Sobriety House)	CD 1
December 1 – Arapahoe County	CD 4
January – no meeting	

Adjournment

There being no further business, Mr. Maday moved to adjourn. Mr. Taylor seconded. The meeting adjourned at 11:31 a.m.

STATE OF COLORADO

DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY AND VETERANS AFFAIRS

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Jared Polis
Governor

Brigadier General
Laura L. Clellan

July 5, 2023

Members of the Colorado Veterans Community,

It is my pleasure to provide an update on the progress made by the Division of Veterans Affairs in addressing the key findings as outlined in the Veterans Services Performance Audit of September 2022. This audit provided in depth analysis, assessment and recommendations that were categorized in six key areas: VSO Training; Accreditation; Data Security; Support Payments to Counties; Deploying Division Resources to Help Ensure Uniform Service; and Strategic Planning and governance.

The Division's approach in providing training to VSOs was found to be inadequate across the state. In response to this finding, the Division has developed and implemented a 30-60-90-day training plan that has been approved by the Colorado Board of Veterans Affairs. The Division has also developed a training data base to document the training certifications of each VSO and has received legislative authorization to hire a full-time Division Training Officer to manage the Division's training program. Regional VSOs will assist their respective County VSOs in completing their training towards initial certification and annual recertification.

The audit revealed that the Division did not have written policies, procedures and/or rules of what qualified VSOs for accreditation. The Division has outlined division and designee responsibilities in obtaining VA Office of General Counsel accreditation within 180-days of appointment in the Division's Policies and Procedures Manual. VSOs seeking accreditation will submit a VA Form 21 along with proof of state certification, successful completion of VA TRIP training, and an honorable charter of discharge. The Division will also recommend cross-accreditation on designee accreditation with another Veteran Service Organization.

Data security was identified as a concern during the audit, in that the Division did not ensure users of the case management system had appropriate access to the system or complied with Colorado Information Security Policies. The Division has since incorporated Acceptable Use Policy, Rules of Behavior, and Protection of Personal Identifiable Information in the Division's Policies and Procedures Manual. All users of the Division case management system will acknowledge receipt and understanding of their responsibilities in regard to the AUP, ROB and PII protections during initial onboarding and annually thereafter. The Division will also incorporate AUP, ROB and PII training during the Spring and Annual VSO Training Conferences.

The audit found significant differences in the effective hourly rates counties received for their VSOs, ranging from \$8.65 to \$55.38 per hour. Such disparity was a result of the Division having only two pay brackets, full-time and part-time, and awarding only one payment, regardless of the number of VSOs employed by the county. The Division has instituted an hourly pay rate effective July 1, 2023 to correct the pay rate disparity. County commissions, or their designee, will certify the total hours worked by all their VSOs each month as part of the CDVA Monthly Report. The Division will total all hours worked across the state on a semi-annual basis and issue payments in January for the preceding July through December hours worked and in July for the preceding January through June hours worked. The hourly rate will be determined by dividing the total funds appropriated by the General Assembly for each semi-annual pay period by the total hours worked by all county VSOs during the semi-annual pay period.

Review of VSO to Veteran ratio revealed a significant disparity in the ratio of Veterans to state and county VSOs. The Denver Metro Area reported 9,668 Veterans per VSO, which was well above the statewide average of 4,168 Veterans per VSO. The Division requested five additional VSOs to address this disparity and received funding for three VSOs from the General Assembly. One VSO will be serving as the VSO Liaison to fulfill a statutory directive to liaise with and assist all Veteran Service Officers, the VA, and appropriate agencies of the federal government. The Division will be expanding from five to seven regions to reduce the Veteran to VSO ratio in the Denver Metro Area with the creation of the Central East Region (Arapahoe, Elbert, Douglas, El Paso, Teller) and the Central West Region (Park, Jefferson, Summit, Grand, Clear Creek, Gilpin, Broomfield). Division long-term goal is the staff VSO's at a capacity that will sustain appointment scheduling at or below to weeks across the state for all Veterans.

Lack of strategic planning and processes to guide Division operations was found to be detrimental to furthering prompt and efficient services to all Veterans across Colorado on a uniform basis. The Division has since been successful in gaining an additional nine FTE to address identified resource gaps in services (Two additional Regional VSOs, VSO Liaison, Appeals Specialist Program Assistant, Grants Program

Assistant, Division Training Officer, Cemetery Program Assistant, Cemetery Grounds Crew Supervisor and a Mental Health Program Assistant to manage mental health service claims at the state's five Veteran Community Living Centers). The Division was also successful during the most recent legislative session in receiving \$500,000 from the General Assembly to develop and implement a Veterans Information Clearing House during FY 24.

The Division reviewed its mission, vision, values, and conducted a SWOT analysis during its strategic planning summit resulting in a Wildly Important Goal to improve Veteran's satisfaction levels with DMVA services 5% by June 30, 2024. Key measures supporting this WIG include: efforts to increase VSO accreditation and VBMS access across the state; participating in 20 community outreach events that improve Veteran quality of life and services; identify and resolve five gaps in services; and, improve grant execution rates to maximize the allocation of resources in assisting and serving Veterans across a wide spectrum of needs.

We are confident that the Division is better postured and prepared today to move forward in furthering prompt and efficient services to all Veterans across Colorado on a uniform basis. Together we will make a difference in ensuring our Veteran's receive the highest levels of service and assistance. Your voice, partnership and support will be essential to our mission success. I appreciate your efforts in serving our Colorado Veterans and making a difference in each and every life of the Veterans we serve. "One Team! One Fight!"

Respectfully,

David Callahan

David Callahan

Director

Colorado Division of Veterans Affairs

Cc: Chair, Senate State, Military, and Veterans Affairs Committee

Chair, House State, Military, and Veterans Affairs Committee

County Commissioners

Colorado Board of Veterans Affairs

County Veterans Service Officers of Colorado

United Veterans Coalition of Colorado