Colorado Board of Veterans Affairs

07 June 2024 Homelake Veterans Community Living Center 3749 Sherman Ave Monte Vista, CO 81144

Opening

Ms. Scanlon called the meeting to order at 0902. 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 Raymond Taylor, Member

Members Absent

Howard Richards - Excused

Staff Present

Parker White, DMVA Legislative Liaison
Darin Collazo, WROS Property Administrator
Lisa Stamm, CDVA Grants Administrator
Eric Winterrowd, CDVA Veteran Services Supervisor
James Poteet, CDVA Appeals Specialist
Carissa Snyder, CDVA Operations Coordinator
Beth Maxwell, CDVA Operations Program Assistant

Guests Present

Marshall Bosworth, County Veteran Service Officer Association President,

El Paso County Veteran Service officer

Mary Cornum, Veterans Coalition of the San Luis Valley

Trisha Coberly, Cob-Web Creations, Owner

Tina Garcia, DAV Legislative Chair

Pat Hammon, Eagle County Veterans Service Officer, VCLC Board of

Commissioners, UVC Representative

Sarah Kelly, Cob-Web Creations, Software Engineer

Richard Nagley, Veterans Coalition of the San Luis Valley, American Legion VSO

Jack Rudder, Rio Grande Veteran Service officer

Scot Deacon, Rio Grande County Commissioner – District 1

Pamela Self, Homelake Admissions and Marketing Director

Hall Sutcliffe, Veteran

Marsha Unruh, Home Front Military Network

Approval of Minutes

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

Ms. Motupalli moved that the minutes be approved as corrected. Ms. Golonka seconded. The motion carried.

Public Comments

Mr. Rudder said that he is well informed on what is being shared across the San Luis Valley (SLV) as he is working with veterans from Costilla County and Saguache County as well as in Rio Grande. Outreach has helped him stay in contact with the west side of the valley. He attends the VFW post in Del Norte and the VFW post in Monte Visa. Ms. Hammon joined him this morning at the Monte Vista post. The biggest need in the SLV is health care. It takes a long time to get either an appointment or follow up through Community Care,

although there is a Customer Relations Liaison working in the clinic in Alamosa who has been helpful.

Another issue has been applications for VA pension. The current form is difficult, and applicants often do not understand why the form does not include a minimum or maximum salary. The VA does not appear to provide clear guidance as to how much money would be paid to a veteran with the new formula. He said that the county payment stipend amount from the state has also been an issue. He said that it is unclear about how the state is formulating the amount being paid to each county and he would like to have a consistent amount paid each year that is equitable to all the counties.

Another concern is the U.S. Veteran Affairs Office of General Counsel (OGC) requirement to be employed by the county for 1000 hours and obtaining 16 hours of training annually for accreditation. With the VSOs attending the National Association of County Veteran Service Officers (NASCVSO), this was a strain to the county budgets as well as the time not being able to assist veterans. This increased the accumulation of emails and phone calls to return. Mr. Taylor asked which region Alamosa is in (Southeast). Mr. Winterrowd confirmed the 1,000 hours paid by the county are non-negotiable as that is in federal code. In regard to state payment to counties, paid time off can be counted. He said that NASCVO is a national hybrid training so there is a virtual option. Mr. Rudder said that virtual training is not the same, but he is aware that the state's VSO trainings are also hybrid. He said he is unsure if he is willing to attend the trainings in person due to the expense. Mr. Winterrowd confirmed there are options for the training as the state is aware of the expense for each training (hotel, per diem, mileage, registration, etc.) which is why a virtual option is available.

Ms. Motupalli inquired about the community care issues, asking if the difficulties were regarding mental health or to medical concerns. Mr. Rudder said the issue is more with specialty care. The SLV does not have specialty

care options, so those patients need to visit Denver, Pueblo, Colorado Springs, or Salida, which involves time and travel for the appointments. Ms. Motupalli said it is concerning that prospective legislation seems to soften language regarding requirements to serve underserved communities. Mr. Rudder agreed that there appears to be an inequitable amount support between the urban and rural counties. Ms. Hammon said that Community Care is a VA issue. State grant programs can assist with transportation, but Community Care is a national program that is difficult to use anywhere.

Dr. Garcia asked how a representative from the disabled veteran community could be appointed by the Governor to the Board. Ms. Scanlon replied that the Board consists of seven members. Appointments are based on vacancies. An interested applicant would need to apply the next time there is a vacancy. Ms. Scanlon also noted there are two disabled veterans currently serving on the board. Dr. Garcia inquired how to apply. Ms. Motupalli said it is through the Colorado Boards and Commissions website. Ms. Garcia requested the link to the Colorado boards and commissions.

https://www.colorado.gov/governor/boards-commissions. Ms. Motupalli recommended Dr. Garcia to put in her application for any board of interest as she will be notified when vacancies arise. Dr. Garcia thanked Ms. Motupalli for her attendance at the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) meetings. She said that DAV is the largest veteran service organization in Colorado and how it is important for DAV to have more input on the legislative actions in Colorado.

Legislation

Mr. White discussed what passed this legislative cycle. There were three major veteran issues, including two fiscal items and one decision item. The largest bill was Senate Bill 24-004, the County Veterans Service Officer (VSO) bill. This bill was in response to the 2022 Veterans Services audit and requires counties to employ accredited VSOs. The bill also established that the appointed or lead VSO must be a veteran, however other VSOs in the

county are not required to be a veteran. This was a strategic change as it broadens the position to include all social workers in a county for possible employment with veteran services. The bill requires the veteran service officers to be accredited and to meet the required standards to be eligibility for stipend funds. This bill also requires prompt and efficient service which will be defined in rule in two weeks. The largest piece of the bill regards the payment mechanism. The Division of Veterans Affairs (DVA) will meet with a working group of county commissioners to identify who will be taking part in the discussions to determine the payment metrics. Colorado Counties, Inc, (CCI) is gathering letters of interest from county commissioners who would like to participate in this working group. The goal is to a working group which is representative of Colorado as there are small, medium, and large counties in both the rural and urban counties in Colorado as well as diversity of thought. The conversations will be budgetary, focused on ensuring that the system will work for all counties.

The Womens Veterans Appreciation Day Bill allows Colorado join 21 other states marking 12 June as the official date. This bill passed after difficulties with a sponsor and was signed on 5 June 2024. The bill will take effect before the celebration on 12 June 2025. For 2024 the Governor is working on a proclamation and is hopeful this will be the last proclamation for Colorado Women's Veterans Day, as this date will now be recognized in Colorado state law. The Veterans Assistance Grant sunset review passed after an amendment regarding service to underserved veteran populations. Ms. Scanlon asked if grantees would need to track the underrepresented populations. Mr. White said this is contingent on how the bill is implemented and what we can do on our end for the implantation of the grants. If the Department tracked the underrepresented populations, it would be via questionnaires and surveys distributed through the grant programs. DMVA did well with a multitude of items before the Joint Budget Committee. One item was spending authority for an additional \$250,000 already in the

Veterans Trust Fund (VTF). This was due to accruing an excessive amount of capital in the VTF account from returned funds. Ms. Scanlon asked when the board should request legislative actions. Mr. White said that if the action is going though the agency, the process starts in January. As the Governor's office requests for the actions between late June and early July timeframe with a stop in August or September depending on if there is a fiscal requirement or not, Mr. White recommends having the request to the department by August 1.

VCLC Board of Commissioners

Ms. Hammon said that she was happy to be at the board meeting, as Homelake is one of her favorite VCLCs. Normally she has visited the facility via Blackhawk so driving into Homelake was interesting. She reported that the VCLC Commission meets a week after the CBVA meeting. A current report from the VCLCs Director summarizes that census is up. In 2017 the number of residents in the five VCLCs was 374 residents. During COVID it decreased to 263. As of 7 June 2024, the VCLCs are at 280 residents. The increase is welcome as it represents income for the facilities.

The VCLCs have not wanted to incur expenses through agency staffing, causing the Department of Human Services to increase staffing through state personnel. Currently McCandless has zero agency registered nurses (RN) and zero agency Certified Nursing Assistants (CNA). Fitzsimmons has 0 agency RNs and has 11 agency CNAs, which is down by one from last month. Homelake has zero agency RNs and zero agency CNAs and is also searching for new hires. Rifle has zero agency RNs and two agency CNAs, which is a 50% decrease from May. Spanish Peaks has zero agency RNs and three agency CNAs; however, they are awaiting the completion of the current inhouse CNA class so they can hire CNAs once they complete their licensure. Having the CNA training in-house can assist in the hiring process of nonagency staff. This is a trend that is starting to appear across the state as the

CNA classes are highly regulated monitored and certified. There is a new minimum standard of staffing that has been put out for any facility receiving Medicare or Medicaid. All the VCLCs will be subject to the new standards as the facilities are already staffing at levels acceptable for the number of residences they have. The new standards will be difficult as any VCLC can reduce numbers quickly as the number of filled rooms drop and the facility is not able to immediately fill the room. This new standard could lead to short term layoffs.

Ms. Scanlon asked if the board would hear back on the grants issue. Ms. Hammon replied the VCLCs are awaiting a letter from the Board. Ms. Scanlon said she will draft a letter. Ms. Motupalli asked for clarification on this topic. Ms. Hammon said one of the grant requests from a VCLC this year included medical items that are covered by statute. In the previous year the VCLCs have been able to supplement these items from grant requests such as a kiosk, model train, or garden. Ms. Scanlon noticed there were several medical items in a grant request. She asked Ms. Hammon if the VCLC Commission had approved the grant. Ms. Hammon stated that she has not seen the VCLC Commission look at or approve the grant applications, as they operate differently from the CBVA. Due to this Ms. Hammon requested a letter from Ms. Scanlon to request that the VCLC Commission vet the grant requests before the VCLCs submit them to the CBVA to ensure they are following the statute allowances with the grant requests. Ms. Motupalli suggested the VCLCs attend the Grant Office Hours. Ms. Stamm confirmed all grantees including VCLCs are invited and encouraged to attend her office hours and application trainings. Ms. Hammon said that the Board should expect an amendment to the grant from Rifle for equipment in the bath houses. Ms. Stamm is working with them on the request. Ms. Stamm has requested the Board to review the application at the July meeting.

UVC - Ms. Hammon said that the Legislative Committee is requesting goal and wish items for next year. The goals will be reviewed by late August. The goals must be submitted to the committee for final approval. Ms. Hammon has only heard of a couple of organizations that have submitted goals to the UVC for next year's legislation. Dr. Garcia has one of the submissions.

Standing Reports

DVA - Mr. Winterrowd presented on behalf of Director Cowan. Mr. Cowan attended the signing of the Womens Veterans Appreciation Day bill. He also wanted to thank everyone who scored grant applications and participated in the grant process. Mr. Cowan also wanted to publicly thank Ms. Ingalls and the team in Grand Junction for all their hard work on the Memorial Day event. Mr. Cowan attended the Homelessness Initiative with Denver Mayor Johnson Denver has about 53 homeless veterans, their goal is to achieve Functional Zero. Functional Zero is that indicates a community has measurably solved homelessness for a population. When it's achieved, homelessness is rare and brief for that population. This means that the number of people experiencing homelessness at any time does not exceed the community's proven record of housing at least that many people in a month.

The Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Rural Engagement. Highly Rural Transportation Grant (HRTG) has been posted and will close on June 30 for current grantees and July 31 for new applicants. 24 Colorado counties qualify as highly rural. Ms. Scanlon said that applicants need to apply through the VA. Mr. Taylor replied there are many regulations. Archuleta County does not qualify but Mineral, Hinsdale, and Saguache do. An applicant will have to study the regulations for the grant. Ms. Motupalli asked how extensive the application process was. Mr. Taylor replied he is unsure; since his county does not qualify, he did not review the application Mr. Winterrowd agreed, saying that he is not aware of a VSO that could handle the grant application. However, the information was shared with all counties as some may have chya minutes June 2024

grant writers. Ms. Motupalli suggested the application should be templated so the VSOs could input their pertinent information. Mr. Cowan's outreach events were May 21, meeting with Interim Director of the Eastern Colorado VA Medical System, Amir Farooqi; May 26-27, Memorial Celebration at Veteran's Memorial Cemetery; May 28 - 30 CCI Summer Conference; June 3, Denver Mayor's Homelessness Initiative for Veterans. The next iteration of the Policy and Procedures Manual is on track for the release on August 6. It will be updated to align with the effective date of this year's statutory changes.

WROS - Mr. Collazo said the WROS tenants have stayed the same. He thanked Makenzie Tremelling, the new accountant for DMVA, who visited the WROS recently with other DMVA employees. She has been a great help as she has been able to identity a major purchasing order issue the facility's largest tenant. May events included the Veterans Tai Chi class and the Vets for Vets peer support group. The WROS is hoping the attendance will grow with groups meeting each Friday and on Tuesday evenings. Coffee Club is the WROS' largest event with 415 in attendance in May. The RANGE social therapy group is also gaining attendance each month. He said that the WROS is currently less staffed, with Mr. Collazo, Tina O'Dell, and a temporary administrative assistant. Announcements for both the support representative and the DEERS position close today and Mr. Collazo hopes to have both filled in the next couple of weeks. Major calendar items included 03 May, the 75th VA Hospital Anniversary celebration and 04 May, Women's Veteran day. The south parking lot is now completely paved which allows for 30 additional parking spaces. Over Memorial Day, the WROS team joined the Veterans Memorial Cemetery in laying flags and speaking to each gravesite. New signage for the WROS will be installed in June.

Grants - Ms. Stamm said that Grants Assistant Christina Tozzie began on 01 April and has completed 57 payments; she has completely assumed the cbva minutes June 2024

payment process. Office hours were held on 7 May, 14 May, and 28 May. Ms. Stamm worked on the fiscal year (FY) 2024-2025 award process for new grantees as well as some new survey development. Ms. Stamm sent out three surveys in the past month to receive grantee feedback customer satisfaction survey and some feedback in general. She is revising reports and surveys to include the underserved populations.

The VAG grant review took place on May 16. Review members consisted of Mr. Gonzalez, Ms. Snyder (Director Cowan's designee), Ms. Stamm, and Ms. Scanlon. The final VAG review occurred on May 30 and included TAG, Director Cowan, Ms. Snyder, and Ms. Stamm. The VAG received \$2,366,530.72 in requests from 42 applicants with \$1,282,500 available to award. 17 new programs applied for FY 2024-2025. Underserved veteran populations were prioritized for the VAG funds.

Ms. Stamm and Ms. Tozzie attended CORE vendor training on May 20. Interviews for the VCLC Mental Health Coordinator position will take place on June 12. Ms. Stamm has began receiving invoices for this program. The Chief Financial Officer, Nick Severn has been assisting with this until we hire for this position. Ms. Stamm provided seven units of technical assistance to new applicants and current grantees over the reporting period. Technical assistance included training grantees and providing clarification on many topics including underserved veterans, the grant review process, surveys, and reporting.

The current execution rates are VTF at 75% and VAG at 78%. Ms. Stamm and Ms. Tozzie are working hard to get all the payments in by 30 June. Ms. Stam is hopeful the VTF will be closer to 89% once they receive the VCLC request. The VAG is projecting to be at the 90% or above mark. Ms. Motupalli referred to the information from Mr. Rudder about rural communities not receiving specialty care asked whether a mobile medical nonprofit could qualify for a VAG grant. Ms. Stamm said that potentially they could as

medical services not covered by the VA are eligible. Ms. Motupalli said that there are organizations that focus on rural areas but not on veteran care, possibly due to an assumption that the VA takes care of the Veterans. Ms. Scanlon encouraged Ms. Motupalli to work with nonprofits to apply for VAG fund in future years. Mr. Taylor asked when the grant award letters would be sent. Ms. Stamm said that the VTF letters have been sent and the VAG letters should be mailed out this week. Ms. Scanlon thanked Ms. Stamm for all the hard work she has done for the VFT and VAG.

Veterans Services - Mr. Winterrowd said that the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers conference in May was the highlighted event for the team. NACVSO: The Colorado Counties, Inc. conference was also held in May. The annual training conference of the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs will be held in August.

In good news and accomplishments, the Veteran Services Team attended the NACVSO conference and claims clinic. 880 veterans were assisted at the claims clinic. There is new engagement with the Englewood Federal Corrections Institute to assist incarcerated veterans.

Opportunities include an NVLSP project on emergency medical expense reimbursement and exposure for new VSOs at the NACVSO claims clinic. Issues are only three Regional VSOs are at full operational capability, the need for VBMS access across the state, and office space for VSOs,

Fall Training will take place 17-20 September in Colorado Springs. Current training status has been sent to each VSO who attended the NACVSO Conference. Tribal Liaison responsibilities have transferred to the current Southwest Regional VSO.

The vacant Appeals Assistant position was posted on 28 May. May statistics were: 12 hearings, 74 decisions with 13 outright grants. It is generally 8-12 months from hearing until decision.

Ms. Scanlon requested to have the regional VSOs publicize when the board is traveling to each individual region to assist with veteran service groups attending the board meetings.

NACVSO - Mr. Bosworth thanked Mr. Cowan with the work he did for the President's reception. El Paso County also donated \$500 to assist with the payment for the presidential reception and entertainment.

The claims clinic at NASCVSO was a new concept. VSOs across the nation assisted with the claims clinic or assisted in training. Each table had a Colorado VSO present while the VSO assisted the veteran. Out of the 800 veterans, 80% were able to file a claim. 437 of the claims required compensation and pension exams. Mobile buses assisting in the exams.

The Colorado Veteran Service Officers Association is doing well. The Board now has more than four members. Mr. Bosworth clarified the question of VSO hours that qualify for the state stipend. If a VSO takes leave and is paid, they are to report the hours. If they are on leave without pay, then they are not able to claim those hours. VSOs can reach out to Mr. Bosworth to discuss it further.

Mr. Bosworth has requested to view the Division's Policies and Procedures manual before the release on 6 August. He said he has provided feedback on the initial document. Ms. Scanlon asked Mr. Winterrowd if any meetings will be in place to review the notes. Mr. Winterrowd stated Mr. Cowan is scheduling the meetings.

The Board adjourned for a 10-minute break at 10:52.

Old Business

Bylaws

There has been no response yet from the Attorney General's office.

Albuquerque VHA

Mr. Taylor is meeting with a My HealtheVet representative to review My HealtheVet and telehealth communications to assist veterans to use the services. The representative who is meeting with Mr. Taylor has set up telehealth in other counties and states in locations for veterans. This might be one avenue to assist with telehealth opportunities for the veterans.

Mr. Taylor is still working with travel requests for veterans. Some veterans are scheduling in Salida even though the veteran is in New Mexico Veteran Heath Care system. There have been skiers from out of state who broke their leg skiing. When the hospital learns they are a veteran, the veteran is sent to Albuquerque and will be turned away as they are not a part of the New Mexico system. This should not be happening, which is causing more issues. Ms. Hammon confirmed this is happening is other areas as well.

The VA lowered the amount being paid to specialty care by 30% a few years ago and is now lowing the rates another 30%. Specialist are also not being paid timely, and as a result they leave the VA network. Since the Mission Act started the specialty care options have dropped to 2 providers. Mr. Taylor had to request these two providers. There is a new interim Director from North Dakota.

Ms. Scanlon has requested to keep this on old business as the interim Director is assumes the new role.

Mr. Taylor stated this is also affecting the Visiting Angels program as there is a delay in receiving information of being approved and notifying the patient is in the hospital.

Veterans Trust Fund Flyer

There is no update on the flyer this month. Mr. Maday is working with Mr. Winterrowd to include the roles and responsibilities for the VSOs.

Policies and Procedures

Ms. Scanlon is working on the VAG and VFT portion of the Policies and Procedures.

Women Veterans Committee

Ms. Scanlon is working to set up a meeting.

VAG Review Committee

Ms. Stamm asked if there were any questions about the review. There were none. She said that she has been working on revisions to the applications. This will hopefully make it easier for applicants.

Members Directory

With some Board members unable to access the online document, Ms. Snyder will create a new copy.

Veterans Resource Clearinghouse

Ms. Coberly and Ms. Kelly have been contracted to work on the veterans clearing house since the beginning of 2024. The presentation was a preview of the soon to be live website with a launch date in the middle of June 2024.

The clearinghouse website begins with an introduction of what users can expect from using the webpage Ms. Coberly also shared the English and Spanish maps for the website as well as the non-Colorado based resources.

When the user clicks on the English map, a new webpage will open with a map of Colorado. There are just under 1500 resources in Colorado, 1150 resources throughout Colorado, will be shown as dots with various colors to designate the type of resource being offered; for example, black dots indicate more than one service is offered at that location. The remaining resources are without a physical Colorado address and can be found by the user clicking on the link for the pdf labeled "View the Online and Out-of-State Resources – English". The resources are listed alphabetically by category, if the resource

is web-based only it will be notated in the PDF and on the webpage with the map.

The resources on the map can be viewed through the zoom function, through geofencing on mobile devices, or by entering an address on any device. The user would set up a range in which they would like to search for resource. When searching the desired area, the details of the available resources will be on the left. Ms. Motupalli asked if there is a way to filter resources by category. Ms. Coberly replied by using the filter near the search bar, the user can select the categories of services within the area marked. Ms. Motupalli recommended using a faceted search would work better for this. A search reduces the information the users view when searching multiple categories, commonly seen while using shopping websites. Regarding the clearinghouse, it would be used to view the mile radius and category without using the yes/no radio options.

Ms. Kelly is planning to make the website more user friendly, however it will take some time. Mr. Winterrowd stated there will be quarterly check-ins per the contract. Per state law the division needs to have a clearinghouse by the end of FY 2024. The requested updates could be a part of the 2.0 version of the website. The check ins will also assist with ensuring the site is showing current resources.

Ms. Scanlon suggested using veteran feedback as well to determine the best options moving forward. Mr. Winterrowd agreed that would be useful as well as a "click counter" to determine the amount of use and which categories are most frequented resources. With having a breakdown of what resources veterans are frequenting, the division will have a better understanding of current veteran needs in Colorado. Ms. Motupalli wondered how the feedback will be stored as well as how it would look, since it can be anything from a phone call to other nonveteran friendly encounters. Mr. Winterrowd is

planning to work with Ms. Coberly to determine how best to obtain the feedback.

Ms. Hammon asked how new resources would be updated. Mr. Winterrowd state he would be the point of contact for the new resources, and they would be shared with Cob-Web at the quarterly updates. Until there is a process for updating new resources, please contact Mr. Winterrowd though email at eric.winterrowd@dmva.state.co.us. Ms. Scanlon requested an update at the next board meeting.

IBM

There is a law firm that has created a 40-minute documentary that discusses Inclusion Body Myositis. The metrics are showing 10-12 time frequent with veterans. IBM is closer to ALS.

New Business - none

Board Member Remarks

Mr. Gonzales said that on 13 May attended an Armed Forces lunch which recognized the local enlisted winners and the county's veteran of the year. On 27 May he participated in reading the Proclamation at the National Cemetery. On 31 May he attended the farewell dinner celebrating the outgoing Superintendent Lieutenant General Richard Clark. On 04 June, the County Commissions issued a proclamation to commemorate the 80th anniversary of D-Day. On 06 June he attended the Fort Carson 80th anniversary of D-Day.

Mr. Maday said that he attended the American Legion Memorial Day Celebration.

Ms. Golonka said that she partnered with the American Legion for Memorial Day and is working with the VFW Post 1 Foundation Leadership Program.

Mr. Taylor said that he attended the NACVSO conference in May. The Memorial Day commemoration in Archuleta County had 150 people in attendance. The event included a Native American prayer and the laying of 450 flags at the cemetery. 41 war dead in the county cemetery. Received the updates for the payments regarding sick time and leave.

Ms. Motupalli just started her second term and has created a quick proposal for the mobile health care. Has been transitioning into a new role to coach veterans to communicate with

Ms. Scanlon, 14 May attended the UVC general meeting. Attend the TAG VAG grant review and attended a Veterans Ceremony at the University of Notre Dame, last weekend.

Upcoming Meetings

The July meeting will be held on 12 July in Trinidad.

Currently scheduled:

02 August - Logan County (Logan County Courthouse, Sterling)

13 September – Weld County (Windsor Readiness Center)

Adjournment

There being no further business, Ms. Motupalli moved to adjourn. Mr. Taylor seconded. The motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 11:44 a.m.