

Colorado Board of Veterans Affairs

March 3, 2023

VHA Rocky Mountain Health Network VISN 19

Glendale, CO

CD 1

Opening

Ms. Hammon called the meeting to order at 0905. 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, Member

Longinos Gonzalez, Member

Sean Maday, Member

Jasmine Motupalli, Member

Raymond Taylor, Member

Staff Present

David Callahan, CDVA Director

John Hamilton, CDVA Training and Operations

Angela Ingalls, VMC Director

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Lisa Stamm, CDVA Grants Administrator

Joanne Iglesias, WROS Property Administrator

Dan Coulter, WROS Support Assistant

James Poteet, CDVA Appeals and Hearings Specialist

Kristy Cunningham, State Veterans Service Officer-Southwest

Glen Marciniak, State Veterans Service Officer-Northeast

Eric Moncibais, Interim VSO Lead, State Veterans Service Officer-Southeast

Drew Stem, State Veterans Service Officer-Central

Carissa Snyder, CDVA Program Assistant

Beth Maxwell, CDVA Administrative Assistant

Guests Present

Marshall Bosworth, El Paso County Veterans Service Officer, CCVSOA President

Jacki Allen-Benson, Eagle County Veterans Service Officer

Janelle Crow, Kiowa County Veterans Service Officer

Destry DeWolf, Huerfano County Veterans Service Officer

John Haynie, Logan County Veterans Service Officer

James Kliesen, Cheyenne County Veterans Service Officer

Joy Johnson, Lincoln County Veterans Service Officer

Duffy Laudick, Larimer County Veterans Service Officer

Chris Maes, Douglas County Veterans Service Officer

Sasha Mathews, Boulder County Veterans Service Officer

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Josh Medina, Arapahoe County Veterans Service Officer

Cindy Meyer, Teller County Veterans Service Officer

Elizabeth Mullins, Director, Division of Veterans Community Living Centers

Richard Nagley, Veterans Coalition of the San Luis Valley

Roxie Smith, Crowley County Veterans Service Officer

Sheldon Smith, Montrose/Ouray Counties Veterans Service Officer

Adam Sutton, Boulder County Veterans Service Officer

Eric Winterrowd, Arapahoe County Veterans Service Officer

Approval of Minutes

Mr. Taylor provided his corrections in advance of the meeting and they were included in the second draft distributed to the Board members. Mr. Maday corrected typographical errors on pages 2, 3, 4, and 5 and Ms. Scanlon clarified language under Board Member Remarks on page 4. Ms. Scanlon moved that the minutes be approved as corrected. Ms. Motupalli seconded.

Public Comments:

None

Veterans Community Living Centers

Ms. Mullins said that the day before, three new commissioners to VCLC Board were confirmed by the state senate. The commission is anticipating two vacancies. One will be for a veteran and one will be for a representative from the Board of Veterans Affairs. The applications should be available in late March or early April. Fitzsimons has recently onboarded two key staff, an administrator and a director of nursing. The Division can now post for the position of Deputy Director for the Division of Community Living Centers. Several CLCs have submitted applications for Veterans Trust Fund grants. Wearing of masks at the CLCs is based on county transmission rates. Covid testing protocols are less stringent than they were previously and are based on contact tracing. The Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services has recommended

fewer restrictions on visitors and excursions and the CLCs are resuming these enrichment activities. Staff ratios continue to be difficult to maintain.

State VSO Reports

Southwest VSO: Mr. Moncibais reported on behalf of Ms. Cunningham. He said that February outreach included a Ute Veteran Benefit Event, a continuation of the monthly veteran collaborative, the Vets4Vets monthly breakfast meeting in Archuleta County, and the Woman Veteran monthly meeting in Montezuma County. Upcoming in March is the Colorado Commission of Indian Affairs quarterly meeting on March 16 and VSO Spring Training the following week. Opportunities include her recent appointment as DMVA Tribal Liaison, tracking of VSO training in the state Learning Management System, and possibly meeting the director of the Albuquerque VAMC. Mr. Callahan will assist with this communication.

Accomplishments include identifying a Congressional funding opportunity for the Southern Ute Tribe Veteran Center and a prospective survey to send to the veteran community. Continuing issues are the lack of Veteran Directed Care in the region, no DEERS office, limited shelters, transportation for homeless veterans, and a need for a town hall with the Albuquerque VAMC.

Northwest VSO: Mr. Moncibais reported on behalf of Mr. Edginton. He said that February outreach included a CMU Student Veteran Association orientation and that upcoming events include the NGACO conference in April and CCI in May. Opportunities include the appointment of a new VSO in Pitkin County, training the newest VSO in Rio Blanco County, and VBMS training for the VSO in Garfield County, He is also formulating a schedule for quarterly site visits with VSOs. Accomplishments include DAV and VFW representatives attending the spring training and VBMS access for a VSO in Eagle County and for the claims assistant in Mesa County. Issues are access to both VSOs and mental health providers, and difficulty getting nexus statements from VA providers.

Northeast VSO: Mr. Marciniak said that February outreach included the VA ECHCS quarterly town hall, participation in the Veterans Advisory Committee and at local VFW and American Legion meetings, and meeting with staff at Melissa Memorial Hospital. Opportunities include working with VSOs on spring and summer outreach events, weekly regional topic-based training, and training VSOs in Logan and Cheyenne Counties on VetraSpec. Accomplishments include updating the VSO reference guide, hosting a regional VA ECHCS Resource Fair and Town Hall, and receiving a Recognition Award from Director Kilmer. Issues have been

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vacancies in VSO offices. Washington and Kit Carson Counties are still vacant and Mr. Marciniak has been covering Kit Carson County.

Southeast VSO: Mr. Moncibais said that February outreach included refreshed contact with Volunteers of America and an ongoing partnership with Mount Carmel. Opportunities include increased involvement with local veteran programs and establishing a presence at Vet Centers and VA clinics. Accomplishments include teamwork among VSOs in southeastern Colorado and the success of the Pueblo County Homeless Veteran Stand Down. Issues are increasing caseloads and VA rating and award errors.

Central VSO: Mr. Stem said February outreach included visits to Arapahoe, Adams, Broomfield, and El Paso Counties. Opportunities include identifying accredited VSOs and increasing partnerships with VBA Public Contact and the metro area VA clinics. A key accomplishment has been successful PACT Act claims. Issues are caseloads among metro VSOs and a need for more VSOs in the Denver area.

Old Business:

None

New Business

Ms. Hammon said that the VTF Grant application review training would be held after the conclusion of other business.

The Board recessed at 10:40 a.m. and resumed at 10:50 a.m.

Standing Reports

DMVA/DVA/Legislative: Mr. Callahan said that the Department and Division are engaged with the Joint Budget Committee (JBC) regarding the Division's request for additional staff as part of the supplemental budget request process. The Division is requesting five VSOs, a training specialist, a grants specialist, and an appeals specialist. The new positions for the Veteran Memorial Cemetery are part of the initial budget request. Ms. Hammon asked if the support specialist for the WROS was included in either budget request. Mr. Callahan said they were not and that funding for that position is expected to be requested next year. He asked the Board to consider submitting a letter of support to the JBC for the supplemental budget request. UVC is

also submitting a letter of support for that request. Ms. Hammon asked how the five new VSOs would be utilized. Mr. Callahan said intent was that the Central Region would be split into five regions, utilizing four additional VSOs. The fifth VSO would serve as a liaison to veterans service organizations, advocates, and other stakeholders. The other would serve as a VSO liaison to veterans service organizations throughout the state. Ms. Hammon agreed with the need for VSOs in the metro area but asked how the proposed alignment would help other veterans. Mr. Callahan said adjacent counties could be attached to the new regions, leaving additional state support available from current regional VSOs. Mr. Callahan introduced John Hamilton, a new Division employee specializing in Operations and Training. He said the Division has received the resignation of Joanne Iglesias. Her last day will be March 17. The Women's VSO position has been reannounced. Ms. Scanlon said that there is a state provision that an announcement can be made nationwide after more than one failed process. Mr. Callahan said that course of action would be used if needed. Mr. Maday suggested that the Board draft a letter of appreciation for Ms. Iglesias and offered to write the draft. Mr. Callahan said she will receive recognition from the department as well. The VSO Supervisor position will be reannounced next week. He addressed the ongoing conversation regarding eligibility for disabled veteran license plates in Colorado. After consulting the governing statute, the Division will continue to consider the veteran's combined rating when determining eligibility for the benefit. Mr. Callahan said that more than 600 responses have been received to the survey and the baseline score is 39.52. The current goal is a score of at least 50. Ms. Motupalli said that the current score indicates that more customers would recommend the services than not. The scoring scale runs from -100 to +100. The Veterans Benefits administration has provided an update on PACT Act claims in Colorado. As of one week prior, the VA had received 2,728 distinct PACT Act claims from Colorado veterans. Of those, 1,109 are complete with a grant rate of 82.1%. The current net sum of award is \$4.9 million. The honor guard stipend program has received an additional \$10,000 to be spent this fiscal year. Ms. Scanlon suggested that the Division consult legislation regarding access for persons with disabilities, as it affects publicly available meetings such as this.

The Board then considered the proposed letter in support of the supplemental budget request. A draft was provided in hard copy for in-person attendees and a virtual copy elsewhere. Upon discussion the Board rearranged the order of the paragraphs as presented and made some language and grammatical changes. Mr. Gonzalez moved that the letter than be submitted as modified. Ms. Scanlon seconded. The motion carried.

Ms. Hammon asked Mr. Callahan if there is any current discussion regarding the use of VetraSpec as the state's management system for veterans' claims. Mr. Callahan said the state will continue to use VetraSpec. His intent is to find funding for VetraSpec licenses that does not detract from the allocation that the state pays to counties with appointed county veterans service officers. The funding may come from Division Operations or from any additional spending authority granted from the Veterans Trust Fund.

CCVSOA/NACVSO: Mr. Bosworth said that the updated bylaws and policy letters have been signed and are available. The nomination packets for annual awards will be distributed in March. The CCVSOA Board will add five new members, one from each state region. He attended a NACVSO leadership summit in February. It was well attended by VA entities and leadership with the opportunity for county veterans service officers to ask questions and express difficulties. Mr. Bosworth said that the issues with long wait times, VA error rates and nexus statements were discussed with the VA undersecretary at that summit. He said that El Paso County Veterans Services has hired an appeals specialist and that position starts on Monday. They are also adding an additional VSO.

WROS: Both Ms. Iglesias and Mr. Coulter were unavailable and Ms. Hammon referred the Board to the Division's written report.

VMC: Mr. Callahan reported on behalf of Ms. Ingalls. He said that the only addition to the VMC's written report is the information about the additional funding for the honor guard stipend program.

Board Member Remarks

Mr. Taylor said the pressing concern is his area has been transportation, particularly in the winter. The county is providing a great deal of support. He and Ms. Scanlon had their reappointments to the Board confirmed by the state Senate on Thursday. Community Care is also a concern due to a lack of participating facilities. VSOs have been trying to meet with the new director at the Albuquerque VAMC but have not been successful. That facility is also having difficulties with travel claims.

Ms. Scanlon said that she attended and served as MC at an 80th birthday celebration of Women Marines on February 11. She also provided professional military education with women

midshipmen from CU Boulder, which was attended by six members of the Colorado Women Marines Association. The local chapter of the Association did receive additional VAG funds this year. Within a week of receiving the funding they have already spent half.

Ms. Golonka said her new professional role has kept her busy traveling. She is preparing to attend Sergeants Major Academy at Fort Bliss.

Mr. Maday said he volunteered in February with DAV's Patriot Boot Camp. The three-day entrepreneurship training also facilitated 144 hours of mentorship. He said that a local veteran affected by the Marshall Fire in 2021 recently had his land foreclosed because under the terms of a reverse mortgage he could not go more than one year without living there. The hope is that this event serves as a catalyst for legislative change so that persons affected by natural disasters do not have to be concerned that their property ownership could be at risk.

Mr. Gonzalez said the local VFW Post 6461 held a fundraising dinner on February 10 to support a critically wounded police officer and his family. The El Paso Board of County Commissioners has put out a call to residents for nominations for its annual veteran of the year award. On February 19, he attended a 100th birthday celebration for a WWII woman navy veteran.

Ms. Hammon said that she has been working with Bob McLaughlin at Mount Carmel to assemble a central mountain partnership with car dealerships in Garfield County. The partnership will generate a large donation from the dealerships to the western slope veterans coalition, to be used for direct support of veterans service offices. Two new facilities have opened in Eagle County to address mental health. Vail Health provides outpatient support and All Points North provides 60-90 days of inpatient care for substance abuse, anxiety, and depression. Housing continues to be a difficult issue. She attended VA's Research and Development Service and Quality Enhancement Research Initiative National Conference in February, presenting an abstract of a project engaging veterans on the topic of suicide. Hundreds of projects were presented at the conference. The keynote speaker addressed proactively involving veterans in upcoming research projects and engagement boards have been created to advance this process.

Veterans Issues

Ms. Hammon said issues captured at the meeting were shelter needs, particularly in southwestern Colorado, transportation problems statewide, communication difficulties with the Albuquerque

VAMC, access to Community Care, access to housing, and access to mental health providers. There are VSO vacancies and a need for more VSOs in Colorado.

Upcoming Meetings

The next meeting is scheduled for April 5 in Holyoke. There will be a working group for the strategic plan. The May meeting will be VTF grant decisions. The September meeting will be prefaced by Board training in Grand Junction on September 08 and followed by the stated meeting in Moffat County on the following day, with a possible later start time.

April 5 – Holyoke (Phillips County)	CD 4
May 5 – Bill Daniels Center (Denver County)	CD 1
June 2 – Lincoln County	CD 4
<i>July – no meeting</i>	
August 4 – Otero County?	CD 3
September 9 – Moffat County	CD 3
October 6 – Eagle County	CD 1
November 3 – Denver County (tentative: Sobriety House)	CD 1
December 1 – Arapahoe County?	CD 4

Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:55 p.m.

Veterans Trust Fund Grant Application Training

Ms. Stamm presented training on the evaluation and scoring of applications for Veterans Trust Fund grants. Board members were reoriented to the purpose of the funding, the scoring categories, and the scoring matrix. Board members were reminded that reviews and scoring must be completed prior to the Board’s meeting in May. New conflict of interest forms will also be required.