

Colorado Board of Veterans Affairs
08 March 2024
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
Longinos Gonzalez, Member
Jasmine Motupalli, Member
Raymond Taylor, Member

Members Absent

Lacey Golonka, Secretary - excused

Staff Present

Bruce Cowan, Callahan, CDVA Director
Angela Ingalls, VMC Director
Emily Currier, WROS Administrative Assistant
Tina O'Dell, WROS Administrative Assistant
Eric Winterrowd, CDVA Veterans Services Supervisor
Lisa Stamm, CDVA Grants Administrator
Carissa Snyder, CDVA Program Assistant

Guests Present

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

Mary Cornum, Veterans Coalition of the San Luis Valley

Deb Davis, Commander, American Legion Post 206

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

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

Roxie Smith, Crowley County Veterans Service Officer

Approval of Minutes

Corrections to the draft of the February 2023 minutes were provided.

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

Public Comments

Mr. Nagley said that as the audience might be aware, the American Legion of Colorado lost its charter last year and is under the leadership of the national organization. Posts are also under the national organization. Only three American Legion staff represent Colorado veterans and those are the VSOs. That being the case, UVC did not have unanimous support among its membership for SB24-004, since the American Legion did not have representation. He asked when the 2023 annual report would be available and asked that all VSOs remember their obligation to do no harm. Ms. Snyder said that the annual report was submitted on time, but is not yet on the website due to some formatting changes that were needed in order to make the document ADA compliant. The revised document has been submitted to the webmaster and should be available shortly.

cbva minutes March 2024 - final

Legislation

Mr. Winterrowd said that SB24-004, amended, is waiting for a House vote. HB24-1273, Veterans Assistance Grant Sunset, has been routed to the Finance Committee. HB24-1236, Women Veterans Day, has been sent to Appropriations. Ms. Demenge noted the support received for HB24-1236 among woman veterans who came to testify, including Sherry Lafferty from American Legion Post 206, Tanya Harris from Metropolitan State University, and Sheila Scanlon from the CBVA.

VCLC Board of Commissioners

Ms. Hammon said the Board of Commissioners is meeting on the same day as the current CBVA meeting. Staffing continues to be a difficulty for the VCLCs and the agencies continue to work to reduce the number of agency staff utilized. McCandless and Homelake currently have no agency staff. Fitzsimons has 12 CNAs from agencies and Rifle has four. Federal surveys of the facilities are currently underway. There is a COVID outbreak at Fitzsimons and some cases at Florence, but no deaths caused by COVID so far this year. There is an influenza outbreak at Fitzsimons as well. Ms. Hammon suggested either Rifle or Homelake as possible locations for an upcoming Board meeting.

American Legion

Ms. Davis said that the American Legion national commander will present the following legislative priorities to Congress on 13 March:

- Suicide Prevention & Mental Health
- Alternative Treatments
- VA Healthcare Modernization
- PACT Act: Implementation & Oversight
- Safeguard Veteran Benefits
- Concurrent Receipt
- Guard & Reserve GI Bill Parity
- GI Bill for Honorable Service

- Military Quality of Life
- Improving the Military TAP
- Pay the Coast Guard (government shutdown measure)
- Access to Healthcare for Overseas Military and Families
- Protect the American Flag (update U.S. Flag Code)

Ms. Scanlon said that the Board will be interested Congressional reaction to the upcoming presentation.

Other Legislative Reports

UVC: Ms. Hammon said that in addition to HB24-1273 and HB24-1236, UVC supports the following state legislation:

- HB24-1076, Purple Star School Program: would create a program to recognize public schools that provide certain services to military-connected families
- HB24-1093, Peace Officer Provisional Certification Requirements: would grant provisional peace officer certification to a person who was authorized as a peace officer in the armed forces.
- HB24-1110, Employer to Post Veterans' Benefits Availability: would require employers to post in the workplace the benefits that are available to veterans
- HB 24-1226, Tuition Assistance for Colorado National Guard & Dependents: would expands the current program to include spouses and children of members and to pay for fees charged by the institution of higher education
- SB24-074, Jurisdiction over United States Military Property: would permit concurrent legislative jurisdiction between the state of Colorado and the United States over specified United States military installation property.
- SB24-109, Continue Colorado Veterans' Service-to-Career Program: would extend the repeal date for the program from July 1, 2024, to

September 1, 2025, remove the provision permitting the appropriation of money from the marijuana tax cash fund, and allow the General Assembly to appropriate money from the general fund to be used for the program.

UVC is monitoring other state legislation, including HB24-1166, which would increase the amount of the property tax exemption for qualifying disabled veterans, surviving spouse, and Gold Star spouses to 50% of the amount of the actual value.

DAV: Dr. Garcia said that the DAV is tracking recent reports from the office of state comptroller in regard to C.R.S. 24-103-905, regarding service-disabled veteran-owned small businesses. Reports indicate that this program has never met its three-percent goal, and that in 2023 contracts to such businesses totaled less than a tenth of a percent of that goal.

Standing Reports

Veterans Services and Training: Mr. Winterrowd said that for Regional VSOs, events and outreach included Claims and Benefits Manager Glen Marciniak serving as a panel member for a mental health discussion held by Senator Hickenlooper. Upcoming events and outreach include the VSO Spring Training scheduled for 4-5 April and a veterans meeting at the Logan County Courthouse on 02 August, as well as conferences for CCI, CCCMA, and NGACO. Logan Co Courthouse. In good news, Ray Odum was hired as the Southeast Regional VSO. Mr. Marciniak spent the days training in Northwest Region. The Montrose/Ouray County VSO is retiring and his exit will overlap with the onboarding of the new hire for training purposes. In opportunities, the Northwest VSO, South VSO, and Appeals Assistant positions are all vacant. The NACVSO annual conference will be held in Denver in May. Concerns are county VSO vacancies, lack of knowledge of the CVSO position among county leaderships, and only one of six regional VSOs at full operational capacity. In Training, the Training Officer continues to serve at

the acting Regional VSO for the Southwest. Priorities are updating the VSO database and preparing the Spring VSO training conference. The Women Veterans Coordinator testified in support of HB24-1236, was interviewed for Channel 7 news on 7 March, met with reps of Senators Bennett and Hickenlooper at the Fort Carson Career and Resource Fair, and presented at the Women Veterans Town Hall in Grand Junction. The Women Veterans web page is updated monthly and attendance at the Women Veterans informal meet-up has doubled. The Veterans Services Liaison continues to work on the upcoming NACVSO conference, is handing off the central region to the new East and West VSOs, and visited offices on the western slope. In Appeals, the last day for Appeals Assistant Eric Moncibais is 8 March. There were 32 hearings held in February and 27 decisions received.

WROS: Ms. O'Dell said that the current tenants at the WROS have not changed since the previous month. Those include VA HUD-VASH and VA Caregivers, Volunteers of America, Rocky Mountain Human Services, Medicare Mentors, Spectrum Sound, Reserve Component Transition Assistance Advisors, and the VBA. Events included Tai Chi, the Art of Mindfulness, the Vets 4 Vets Peer Support Group, Guitars 4 Vets, the Veterans Coffee Club, a Women's Coffee, the VA Caregiver Support Group: the Cognitive Social Therapy Group, VBA Outreach, and the Gold Star Families and Surviving Spouses Group. Speed of Trust was held on 29 February. Upcoming events include a Survivor's Benefit on 16 March, a Vietnam Veterans Day Ceremony at the Western Slope Vietnam Veterans Memorial on 28 March, and a Veterans Stand Down and Resource Fair on 12 April. A Women's Veteran Retreat will be held at the WROS this spring and parking lot improvements are currently being scheduled. The DEERS office processed 68 ID cards in February alone. Human Resources is reviewing the PD for the vacant DEERS Specialist. The WROS will receive a 2.8% budget increase for FY25.

VMC: Ms. Ingalls said there were 21 interments in February. The current timeline for burial reimbursements is two weeks. An additional work-study student has joined the team to work on the digitization of records. Collin Hillburn is a US Marine Corps veteran majoring in computer science. The Missing in America Project is underway, with the project representative working with cemetery volunteers to confirm the veteran status of 65 unclaimed cremated remains from Glenwood Springs. Volunteers are also cataloging donated military memorabilia, assembling veteran appreciation stars, and caring for Veterans Honor Roses. The cemetery participated in three community outreach events in February and hosted meetings for the Grand Valley Combined Honor Guard and Daughters of the American Revolution. The Military Funeral Honors Stipend has paid out \$36,075.00 with \$33,925.00 remaining. There were 11 participating units for February. A Navy ship anchor has been donated to the cemetery as well as the restoration services required for placing it on display, which is expected to be ready in time for the Memorial Day services in May 2024. Lithograph fading continues to be a concern and a refurbishment training class was held for the grounds staff in February. Still an additional full time staff member will be required, and a legislative request has been submitted for FY26 staffing. The cemetery is now fully staffed and a step increase was granted for all grounds positions effective 01 March.

Women and Marginalized Veterans: Ms. Demenge presented slides with findings and responses to recommendations identified in the recent assessment of the needs of women veterans, which are summarized below:

DMVA Recommendations

R1: Conduct recurring and regular meetings open to women veterans.

These meetings should be held virtually and in person in locations around the state

- Mt. Carmel, Colorado Springs

- WROS, Grand Junction WV Coffee Group
- Women Veterans A.L. Post 206, Denver
- Promoting our Women Warriors, Casper Vet Center • Wounded Warriors, Colorado Springs
- Amy-started up a virtual monthly meet-up for Women Veterans

R2: Expand apprenticeships to include non-trade-oriented apprenticeships

- Need Examples of non-trade apprenticeships
- Over 100 CSP's at Ft. Carson and over 800 nation ide
- Women participated in Skilled Trade Apprenticeships: Welding, Sheet Metal, Mechanics training etc.

R3: Work with the organization responsible for the state's veterans' preference program for state positions

- For Veteran related positions, a DD214 is required

R4: Develop a comprehensive resource guide of services across the state, including the web-based tool

- Currently under development

R5: Encourage and facilitate service officers' participation in base and post-TAP sessions and have a recurring presence at the TAP programs for Guard and Reserve members

- State is represented on all Colorado Military Installations with TAP 6.0 Briefings

R6: Establish a transition navigator office staffed to meet the volume of transitioning services members who wish to live in Colorado

- Every transitioning service member has a counselor as they go through TAP

- USO Path Finder, Mt. Carmel, Wounded Warrior, Home Front Military and numerous other non-profits
- VA has Navigators to assist with a variety of VA Benefits • State and County VSO's are Navigators for their regions

R7: Establish support groups for transitioning service members, including children and family members.

- Non-profits such as Wounded Warriors, Home Front Military, American Legion, VFW's, and DAV are in place

R8: Establish a formal, mandatory, comprehensive training program for county service officers

- Established a formal training program

National Guard Recommendations

R1: Review MST program and ensure women staff are in leadership positions

- Men and LGBTQ populations have MST as well
- Recommend one male and one female staff member

R2: Expand sexual harassment prevention program

- SHARP Program Est. in 2016 Zero Tolerance

VA Recommendations

R1: Explore the viability of having providers travel to rural areas to provide needed services, especially mental health care

- VA manning issue

R2: Speed up referrals to specialty clinics and authorizations for community care

- VA manning and training issue

R3: Ensure that all medical facility leadership (C-suite) and clinic phone lines are answered between 8 AM and 5 PM during the work week to improve communication with partners and patients

- VA manning and training issue

R4: Ensure that all providers do not minimize women's health care issues. There are several examples in this report of providers, particularly mental health providers, minimizing the health care needs of women veterans

- VA provides annual training to all Medical staff annually on Women Veterans Health Concerns
- VA came out with Women's Health heart

R5: Reduce mental health provider turnover to improve continuity of care for patient

- VA manning and training issue

R6: Establish entrances to women's clinics that do not require walking through the main hospital

- Denver has recently opened a new VAMC and there was no separate clinic put in place

- GJ has a plan for a separate WV area; however, that is a five-year plan

R7: Eliminate male providers in women's clinics

- Due to shortage of medical providers, this is nearly impossible. It also crosses into discrimination

CCVSOA/NACVSO: Mr. Bosworth said that NACVSO representatives recently attended a conference in Washington, D.C. They attended interactive briefings and spoke with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, the Undersecretaries of VBA and VHA, and Chairman of the BVA. VSOs were able to discuss with the Undersecretary of the VBA recent frustrations with the number of claims that are not processed properly, due to a combination of new hires, insufficient training, and claim quotas. They were also able to speak in depth with congressional offices about this problem. Congressional conversations also included the conflict between the Guard VA Benefits Act and the PLUS Act, and the former would prevent claims agents from charging veterans to file claims while the PLUS Act authorizes such actions. The CCVSOA has an interim Vice President in place following the departure of Ray Odum and one board member is scheduled to retire. He said that recent changes that affect county VSOs are contributing to VSO vacancies. He asked that CCVSOA be included in efforts to educate county leadership and proactively included on decisions and changes that affect county veterans service officers.

Grants: Ms. Stamm said that payments are taking an average of 30-45 days. Accounting is resuming the accounting function for grants. Four instances of office hours were held in February, focusing on new requirements of the FY25 grant applications. Four application trainings were also held, for a cycle total of 11. Christina Tozzie has accepted the position of Grant Specialist II and

will start on 01 April. The VCLC Mental Health position description is currently under classification review with Human Resources. The grant application cycle closed on 01 March with 48 VAG applications and 23 VTF applications received. Budget modification are being discontinued moving forward. Three VTF grantees have returned funds this cycle, and those funds will be utilized by the VMC and the WROS. Ms. Scanlon then asked for volunteers to serve on the VAG review committee. She and Mr. Gonzalez will serve. Ms. Scanlon then asked for volunteers to serve on the committee for VTF. Mr. Taylor, Ms. Motupalli, and Mr. Maday will serve.

The Board recessed from 1050 to 1100

Old Business

Bylaws – Ms. Snyder said that the recommended changes to bylaws have been referred to the Attorney General’s office for review.

Albuquerque VISNs 19 and 22: Mr. Taylor said there are no formal VISN meetings currently scheduled. He has a recurring monthly meeting with the interim director at Albuquerque as well as regular email communications, which has been of benefits to veterans in need of individual assistance. Ms. Scanlon asked of the item should remain on agenda. Mr. Taylor said yes, as next month there will be veterans present who can give first person accounts.

Flyer for Grant Programs: Mr. Maday said that the VTF flyer should be available in April. The flyer for the Honor Guard stipend is complete.

Members Directory: Ms. Motupalli has provided a fillable form. Several members have not received the link and Ms. Snyder said she would send it a second time.

Policies and Procedures Committee: This committee agreed to meet prior to the April meeting. The members will send their availability to Ms. Snyder for scheduling.

Women Veterans Committee: This committee agreed to meet prior to the April meeting. The members will send their availability to Ms. Snyder for scheduling.

New Business

Ms. Scanlon said that VTF Grant Application training would be held at the April meeting.

Board Member Remarks

Mr. Taylor said just prior to the previous Board meeting one of the volunteer drivers found a veteran client deceased. The veterans remains were abandoned because the family could not cover final expenses, and the VSO office worked with the county to get the veteran interred. The VSO office has seen an increase in incidents with veterans who are aging alone, including one recently found to need propane, electricity, and food. This is complicated by an aging veteran population in the area. With more than 70% of the county's veteran from the Vietnam period or earlier, there are fewer volunteers to provide transportation or other assistance that aging veterans need.

Ms. Motupalli said that she met with Dr. Garcia last month to discuss how to better support small businesses owned by veterans with service connected disabilities. She also serves on the Minority Business Advisory Council and the issue is a concern for that board as well as the CBVA. The Minority Business Office Director has stepped down and she is serving on the hiring committee.

Mr. Maday said that he attended the Air Force Association Symposium on air warfare. The event was held in Denver and had more than 18,000 attendees.

cbva minutes March 2024 - final

He sent CBVA coins and patches to Pat Hammon. Ms. Scanlon asked how to reimburse him for the items. Mr. Maday said that this first batch is his donation.

Mr. Gonzalez said that Mount Carmel founder Jay Cimino died on 24 February. Mr. Gonzalez attended the National Association of Counties Conference's Military Communities Breakfast in Washington, D.C. on 13 February, where he had the opportunity during the Q&A to mention the PFOS and PFOA water contamination issue. On 24 February he attended a reception and dinner in honor of Second Lieutenant Madison March, and Air Force Academy graduate and current Miss America. On 27 February he attended the Home Front Military Network's annual appreciation reception held to thank retiring board members as welcome those joining the board.

Ms. Scanlon said that the new board member has not yet been selected by the Governor's Office of Boards and Commissions. She attended a VAG/VTF application training session. The Women Veterans Conference was held on 11 February with more than 100 in attendance. The event included a Professional Military Education event held in conjunction with the VA that was attended by 53 veterans. The 2025 conference will be chaired by American Legion Post 206. She testified in person in support of HB24-1236 and HB24-1273 on 07 March.

Veterans Issues

Issues captured at the meeting include access to and enrollment in VA health care, access to prescriptions, getting in contact with VSOs, homelessness, lithograph issues, mental health services, transportation, recommendations from the women veterans needs assessment, and veterans aging alone.

Upcoming Meetings

The April meeting will be held on 09 April in Pagosa Springs.

Currently scheduled:

09 April – Pagosa Springs (1:00 p.m.)
cbva minutes March 2024 - final

05 May – Centennial (VTF Funding Decisions)

07 June – Monte Vista (Homelake)

12 July – Logan County?

02 August – Chaffee County?

Adjournment

There being no further business, Mr. Gonzalez moved to adjourn. Mr. Maday seconded. The motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 11:37 a.m.