

Colorado Board of Veterans Affairs

Virtual Via WebEx

29 September 2023

**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

Fred Korb, Member

Jasmine Motupalli, Member

Raymond Taylor, Member

**Staff Present**

Michael Bruno, DMVA Deputy Executive Director

David Callahan, CDVA Director

Darin Collazo, WROS Property Administrator

Angela Ingalls, VMC Director

Eric Winterrowd, CDVA Veterans Services Supervisor

Amy Demenge, CDVA Women's Veterans Service Officer

James Poteet, CDVA Appeals and Hearings Specialist

Lisa Stamm, CDVA Grants Administrator

Ralph Charlip, CDVA Research Assistant

## **Guests Present**

Pedro A, Attendee

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

Mary Cornum, Veterans Coalition of the San Luis Valley

Travis Gale, Kit Carson County Veterans Service Officer

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

Adam Lazaro, Pitkin County Veterans Service Officer

Richard Nagley, Veterans Coalition of the San Luis Valley

Adam Sutton, Boulder County Veterans Service Officer

## **Approval of Minutes**

Corrections to the draft of the September 2023 (31 August) minutes were provided.

Mr. Maday moved that the minutes be approved as corrected. Ms. Golonka and Mr. Korb seconded. The motion carried.

**Public Comments** – Mr. Nagley asked if 8:00 a.m. would now be the standard start time of the meetings. Ms. Scanlon said that 8:00 a.m. is not a set time. The Board will confirm place and time of upcoming meetings at upcoming meetings. He said that the August minutes appear to be more of an outline and asked if an updated version was available. Mr. Maday agreed that the wrong version was posted and it would be corrected. He asked if a link was available for the Division's Policies and Procedures manual. Mr. Callahan said that it is in progress and would be available in the near future.

## **Speakers**

Pat Hammon said that the next meeting of the VCLC Board of Commissioners will be on 13 October. The Walsenburg facility is experiencing a COVID outbreak. Recent hiring efforts have been successful with new staff on board at Fitzsimons and a new admissions director at Rifle. All the facilities are looking forward to next week's visit by TAG, DMVA staff, and Board members and delegates.

## **Veterans Services Report**

Mr. Winterrowd said VSO September events and outreach included the Colorado Commission of Indian Affairs meeting, annual fall training for VSOs, office hours at Buckley SPB, and Stand Downs in Denver, La Plata, and Montezuma Counties. Upcoming opportunities are the visits to the VCLCs, Veterans Day events, and outreach to veterans organizations at colleges and universities. Accomplishments include the appointment of Kristy Cunningham, who has accepted the position of Training Manager effective 11 September, completion of interviews for the Claims and Benefits Manager, interviews scheduled for the VSO Liaison, and the publication of the VSO reference guide. Issues include long wait times for veterans to see VSOs, long wait times for long term care in southwestern Colorado, VSO vacancies, and possible federal furloughs. He reported that the fall training was attended by 65 VSOs, 40 virtually and 25 in person. Presenters included TAG, Mr. Callahan, Regional VSOs, the National Veterans Legal Service Project, and Adams County Commissioners. He said that there were no BVA hearings in September due to the close of the federal fiscal year. 43 BVA decisions were received, 13 grants and 30 remands.

Amy Demenge reported on behalf of women veterans services. She attended the National Conference of State Women Veteran Coordinators in September. 19 states were represented and she was able to connect with various resources. She said that beginning on 01 October, veterans who give birth will have access to VA maternity care from the date they enter care through

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12 months postpartum. The first issue of the Colorado's Women Veterans newsletter will be released today. She said that September 30th is the birthday of Vanessa Guillén, and the state of Texas is recognizing the date as Vanessa Guillén Day. Ms. Guillén was a private first class when she was murdered at Fort Hood by a fellow soldier in 2020. This upcoming weekend Ms. Demenge will have the opportunity to meet Mari Eder, author of *The Girls Who Stepped out of Line*, a nonfiction book about the women of WWII. Ms. Scanlon asked the Board be included in the newsletter distribution.

### **Old Business**

Albuquerque VAMC: Mr. Taylor said a Pact Act town hall in Albuquerque was attended by 92 in person and more than 1600 online. He met the director of the Albuquerque VAMC on 28 July, but that director has since retired. He reached out to the sitting interim director, but she was replaced by a new interim director on 25 September. He is working to re-establish communication again.

Strategic Plan: Ms. Scanlon said Board members should have a copy of the current draft. Mr. Bruno asked if members had been able to review and asked that they give him any corrections. Updated pictures are still needed for page four. Pictures can be sent directly to Mr. Bruno or they can be taken at Joint Forces Headquarters. He asked that Board members provide a one to two sentence bio about their service and background. The Board members reviewed the draft. It was decided to use the term "Key Measures of Success...How We Will Get There" to monitor progress. Mr. Bruno asked what the Board's intent is for Roadmap and Execution. The information in the draft is sample text. Mr. Maday suggested the Board plan a work session to incorporate members' input. Ms. Golonka agreed that collaboration would be valuable. Ms. Scanlon said a work session would be held at the November meeting.

Audit Response: Ms. Scanlon said a response is due to the Office of the State Auditor today in regard to changes to the annual report. She asked the Board if there were changes to the draft response and/ or recommended attachments. Hearing none, she invited a motion to submit the response as drafts. Ms. Golonka so moved. Ms. Motupalli seconded. The motion carried.

Annual Report: Ms. Scanlon said that CDLE has said they will submit their report no later than 23 October. The contributions from other agencies should be complete prior to the November meeting.

VCLC Visits: Mr. Callahan said that the visits are scheduled for 3-4 October, to be confirmed on Monday. There could be restrictions at the Walsenburg facility. Currently scheduled Mr. Maday and Mr. Korb on both days, Ms. Scanlon on 04 October, and Ms. Hammon joining by air on 03 October and then driving to meet the group in Rifle on 04 October. Departure on 03 October is scheduled at 08:00 a.m. from Centennial and the agenda includes the facilities at Florence, Walsenburg, and Homelake. Departure on 04 October will be at 0800 and the agenda and the agenda includes the facilities at Rifle and Fitzsimons. Ms. Motupalli asked if she could be added to the manifest for 03 October and Mr. Maday proffered his seat if necessary.

Payments to Counties: Ms. Scanlon asked Mr. Callahan to brief the Board again on the play for semiannual payments to counties, and to let them know if any concerns were mentioned at the recent training conference. Mr. Callahan said in support of uniformity of payment to counties, payments will be based on an hourly pay rate. The monthly report submitted by counties will document hours worked by accredited service officers, and an application for payment will be submitted semiannually. The hourly rate will be dependent upon the total hours worked and the amount available in the appropriation. One objection has been that this payment method will result in lower payments to some of the smaller counties. Mr. Callahan said this is true but it is considered to be an equitable utilization of resources. There are

currently 13 unaccredited veterans service officers in Colorado counties who are unaccredited because the 38 CFR and VA's Office of General Counsel requires that accredited veterans service officers must not work less than 1,000 hours per year. Ms. Scanlon asked if a county does have an accredited service officer, would that mean the county would receive no money from the state. Mr. Callahan said not this year, as a grace period will be in place until July 2024. That will give counties who do not have accredited veterans service officers time to determine their course of action. If a county cannot support 1,000 hours annually, they have a statutorily-provided option to share a veterans service officer with another county. Alternatively, if the veterans service officer obtains accreditation through another veterans service organization, the state would be able to cross-accredit. Mr. Callahan said the Division hopes to advocate for additional funds in the appropriation to raise the hourly rate. Mr. Taylor said the topic was also discussed by the Colorado County Veterans Service Officers Association, including the possibility of more counties partnering to share a veterans service officer. The concern among some counties is that those with small veteran populations will not be able to support employment at 1,000 hours a year. Mr. Bosworth agreed that there is concern among smaller counties that they will not be able to support sufficient employment hours to maintain an accredited veterans service officer. Ms. Scanlon asked if other state have experienced the same problem. Mr. Callahan said it is a frequent topic at national conferences, and the solution to date has been a shared county veterans service officer or cross-accreditation. Ms. Scanlon asked if this was an effort to correct the payment inequities noted in the 2022 audit. Mr. Callahan said it is. Ms. Scanlon invited a motion from the Board in support of the plan to pay counties for veterans service officers for hours worked. Mr. Korb so moved. Mr. Maday seconded. Ms. Scanlon asked that Mr. Callahan keep the Board informed regarding implementation.

*The Board recessed from 09:08 to 09:18*

## **New Business**

VSO Annual Training: Mr. Taylor said the annual training conference for veteran service officers was held in Denver on 19-22 September. In addition to the continuing education units, VSOs learned about requirements from the Division, including mandatory training on PII and acknowledgement of the Division's Acceptable Use Policy and Rules of Behavior in regard to data security. These trainings are available to VSOs in the state Learning Management System (LMS). These new requirements are in adherence to the 2022 audit. The new issue of interest were the new plan of payments to counties.

Veteran Status of CVSO: Ms. Scanlon asked Mr. Callahan to address the question of whether an assistant county VSO needs to be a veteran. Mr. Callahan said that the qualification set forth in statute states that "the county veterans service officer or assistant" must be a veteran, and there is debate regarding how to interpret the phrase. Ms. Scanlon asked if it would be possible to get a legal opinion prior to further discussion. Mr. Callahan agreed.

UVC Legislative Goals: Ms. Scanlon said that UVC has send letters to members of the assembly regarding their legislative goals. She said that while the Board cannot lobby, they can state whether or not they concur in the annual report. There are four: to continue the Veterans Assistance Grant, to return the swept funds from the Veterans Trust Fund, to establish a Women Veterans Day, and five days of free camping to veterans rated 100% for service-connected disability. Mr. Callahan said that DMVA is partnering on a Women Veterans Day bill with Representative Jennifer Parenti. Ms. Scanlon said Board support could be tabled until the preparation of the annual report or a vote could be taken at the meeting. Mr. Taylor agreed that concurrence could be included in the annual report but recommended that the Board wait on a decision after time to consider. Ms. Scanlon said she is also waiting for a

legal opinion requested by DMVA on how the Board can discuss potential legislation, possibly in executive session.

Logo and Branding: Mr. Maday requests that a Board brand and logo discussion be added to the November agenda.

### **Standing Reports**

DVA/DMVA/Legislative: Mr. Callahan said the Women Veterans Day is the only current legislative update. He said that DVA is collecting feedback on its published Policies and Procedures and will make updates at their 2024 strategic planning session. He encouraged attendees to provide feedback on the document and thanked the Veterans Coalition of the San Luis Valley for its contributions. He said that it includes the requirement for VSOs to review and sign the Acceptable Use Policy and Rules of Behavior. He asked the Board to note Appendix B, the VSO appointment form, which outline the statutory qualifications for county veterans service officers. Ms. Scanlon relayed a chat questions from Ms. Cornum regarding an ETA at Homelake on 03 October. Mr. Callahan said he would look it up and provide it. Ms. Scanlon asked if the Restoration of Honor program was mentioned at the annual VSO training. Mr. Callahan said it was not. She asked that the program be advertised to VSOs.

WROS: Mr. Collazo said that a Stand Down was currently underway at the WROS. September outreach included Don't Wait – Reach Out Volleyball tournament on 09 September, a fundraiser for veteran suicide awareness, a Governor's Listening Tour on 14 September, attended by staff from both the WROS and the VMC, and a Suicide Prevention Self Care Summit on 28 September. The current tenants have all been retained for another year. The WROS has been meeting with community volunteer groups in regard to expanding its events calendar and is considering adding an evening yoga event to the rotation. The DEERS office has received the computers back



from DMDC and is almost ready to open. A second staff members has been hired in customer support and a VA work study is also assisting at the facility.

CCVSOA/NACVSO: Mr. Bosworth said the county association held their membership meeting the previous week. All of the officers were re-elected for another two-year term. The updated bylaws were approved and the executive Board will now include members from each of DVA's five regions. Each region will select their representative and they will be installed in December. The Nardini service award for full-time county VSOs was awarded to Ron Brown from Yuma County and Conroy service award for part-time county VSOs was awarded to Jack Rudder from Rio Grande County. Joy Johnson from Lincoln County received a scholarship to attend Basic Benefits training at NACVSO. Retirement plaques were awarded to John Haynie from Logan County and to Peter Mortaro from Jefferson County. The NACVSO annual conference will be held in Denver in May 2024.

VMC: Ms. Ingalls said interments have increased again with the total just under 6,000. Reimbursements are caught up and are currently timely. A former work study student has returned to the WROS as a volunteer to assist with software updates. The Honor Guard stipend has paid out \$10,675 this year to date. The vacant groundskeeper position closes today. Saluting Branches was attended by more than 70 people and 38 trees were planted. A government shutdown is not expected to affect NCA other than some impact on timeliness of reimbursements. Veterans Day and Wreaths Across America are both upcoming, on 11 November and 16 December respectively. She said that an issue they have is headstones losing lithographs. They are working on a policy to address it and may need a new employee to assist with re-lithographing headstones. NCA will not replace stones for lithograph purposes only. Ms. Scanlon said that the Board can document that need in their annual report.

Women Veterans Needs Assessment: Mr. Charlip said that the assessment with individuals is complete and the report is being reviewed. Interviews are complete for the second assessment and the report should be ready in late October.

Grants: Ms. Stamm said that the draft of 2024-2025 VTF application has been distributed. The only significant change is a request that applicants submit the guidelines by which the organization determines eligibility. This is being asked on VAG application also. She asked that comments on the application be sent to her. The final copy will be ADA compliant for accessibility. Payments are currently taking about 30 days. DMVA is assisting with the classification process of the vacant grants assistant. Grant application trainings will be combined rather than held separately for VTF and VAG. She is working on applicant survey through Qualtrics to collect feedback on the 2024-2025 application process. Emergency financial assistance for housing and utilities have been the biggest need so far this grant year. The draft report for the VAG sunset review has been shared with the Division but cannot be shared publicly at this time. Once the final report is ready it will be distributed. Mr. Maday asked if an online application process would be possible in the future. Ms. Stamm that will be researched over the next year.

### **Board Member Remarks**

Mr. Taylor said Vets for Vets of Archuleta County did a fly-in for 9/11 on 09 and 10 September. There was 9/11 ceremony on the 11<sup>th</sup> featuring an honor guard. Four funerals with military honors were held within the past month. He intends to meet the group at Homelake on 03 October.

Ms. Golonka said she is phasing out from work as she is expecting her baby within the next 2-3 weeks. She hopes to attend the November meeting virtually.

Ms. Motupalli said she completed a blast research study with VA designed to better understand chemical changes caused by blasts and the long-term effects of traumatic brain injury. She also recently completed an eight-week Bunker Labs Breaking Barriers program. Bunker Labs assists veterans in entrepreneurship endeavors.

Mr. Korb had no remarks.

Mr. Maday said Denver's annual start-up week was held in September. He attended a veteran-focused session on navigating the tech world as a military veteran and translating military skills into entrepreneurship.

Ms. Scanlon said on 12 September she attended a meeting of the Aurora Veterans Commission and the UVC executive meeting. She also attended UVC's regular meeting on 26 September. The bylaws committee will probably meet in November as she will be out of the country for most of October.

### **Veterans Issues**

Mr. Taylor said access to prescriptions is a continuing issue. There is a large disparity between costs at hospitals and at pharmacies, causing access problems in rural parts of the state.

### **Upcoming Meetings**

Ms. Scanlon confirmed that the next meeting will be held on November 3 at Sobriety House in Denver. To meet at the WROS in December, flights would be the morning of the 5<sup>th</sup> and the afternoon of the 6<sup>th</sup>. She asked Board members to let Ms. Snyder know their availability. She asked for recommendations for February and said the schedule for the next six months needed to be set no later than December. Ms. Golonka said the Board was waiting to hear about veterans events around the state. Ms. Scanlon said she would follow up with Ms. Snyder for that information.

Currently scheduled:

November 3, Stated Meeting

Denver (Sobriety House)

December 5, Stated Meeting

Grand Junction (WROS)

January – no meeting.

### **Adjournment**

There being no further business, Mr. Maday moved to adjourn. Mr. Taylor seconded. The meeting adjourned at 10:29 a.m.