

Colorado Board of Veterans Affairs Meeting

Date: September 13, 2024

Time: 9:03 AM

Location: Windsor Readiness Center, Windsor, CO

Present: Board members Scanlon (Chair), Maday (Vice Chair), Gonzalez, Montupalli, and Taylor.

Absent: Board members Golonka (Secretary) and Richards - excused.

Staff: Angela Ingalls, Carissa Snyder, Beth Maxwell, Bruce Cowan, Darin Collazo, Eric Winterrowd, Joni Fernandez.

Guests: State Representative Ortiz, Pat Hammon, and Cynthia Meyer.

1. Approval of Minutes

- August 2024 meeting minutes were approved with corrections.

2. Public Comments

- None

3. Legislation

- Discussion on the status of past legislation and future legislative priorities, including the need to work with other veterans' organizations to secure funding for veteran-related initiatives.
- Representative Ortiz emphasized the need to reclaim \$3.3 million owed to the Division from the Fort Logan land sale and allocate it for veteran health and wellness programs; however, there must be

programs in place to utilize the funds.

- The Board discussed strategies for collaborating with legislators and veteran organizations to ensure that proposed bills have the necessary funding and support.

4. Committee and Organization Reports

- Pat Hammon provided updates on the Veteran Community Living Centers (VCLCs) and the United Veterans Coalition (UVC) of Colorado, highlighting efforts to increase VCLC occupancy and the UVC's legislative agenda.
- Director Cowan reported on the Division's focus on county outreach, staff retention, and data-driven decision-making. He also discussed progress on Senate Bill 24-004, efforts to improve support for incarcerated veterans, and plans for facility improvements.
- Eric Winterrowd provided an update on veteran services and training, including upcoming events, staffing changes, and the need to address staff turnover.
 - Issue – Only two of six regionals are fully functional. They are working on some redundancy issues with the current structure.
- Darin Collazo reported on the Western Region One Source (WROS), noting consistent growth in programs and services.
- Angela Ingalls provided an update on the Veteran Memorial Cemetery (VMC), discussing ongoing projects, staffing changes, and the impact of new regulations on cemetery operations.

- The board recommended besides challenge coins; the cemetery should have patches as part of cemetery swag.
- Issue – CO Legislation 29 by Department of Public Health and Environment restricts the use of gas lawnmowers within the State affecting the cemetery. The board recommended both the VMC and WROS apply for more funds, including items such as electric lawnmowers. Mr. Maday made the motion. Mr. Taylor seconded it. The motion was unanimously approved.
- Lisa Stamm reported on the Veterans Assistance Grant (VAG) program, highlighting the efficient processing of payments, the development of a grant complaint and appeal process, and the transition of the Military Honor Stipend program to the VAG program.

5. Old Business

- Discussion on the Veterans Clearinghouse website, support for rural veterans, the availability of DEERS and Veteran ID cards, and the Women Veteran Subcommittee.
- Approval of Mr. Jim Cressman to speak at the November meeting about Inclusion Body Myositis (IBM) and its prevalence in veterans.
- Albuquerque Support to Rural Veterans – Recommended a meeting with their VISN and Board of Veteran Affairs.

6. New Business

- Discussion on the need for more detailed departmental annual reports.

- Discussion on potential changes to the Veteran Trust Fund (VTF) and VAG statutes, including expanding eligibility for VTF funds to include widows and surviving spouses and broadening the definition of family counseling under the VAG statute.
- Unanimous approval of a motion to recommend to the Adjutant General (TAG) that the VAG funding be increased by at least \$500,000 for the next fiscal year. Mr. Gonzalez made the recommendation; Mr. Taylor seconded it.

7. Board Member Remarks

- Board members shared updates on personal and professional activities and discussed their involvement in various veteran-related events and initiatives.

8. Statewide Veteran Issues

- Discussion on improving access to prescriptions for veterans in rural areas, with a plan to draft a letter to Tricare and the VHA addressing this issue.
- Discussion on how to better reach and serve veterans on the fringes, particularly those without access to technology or social media.
- Discussion on addressing veteran homelessness, access to mental health services, and transportation challenges.
- Discussion of a VISN map on the Clearing House website of on vets.colorado.gov.
- Discussion of a division "cheat sheet" for CVSOs of VA contact information to give to veterans.

9. Annual Report

- Discussion on the importance of the annual report in demonstrating the impact of VAG and VTF funds and highlighting key issues facing veterans in Colorado.
- Still waiting for a few departments in the state that support veterans to submit their annual report to the board.

10. Upcoming Meetings

- Review of future meeting dates and locations.

Adjournment: Mr. Maday made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Gonzales seconded it. Board unanimously approved the motion at 1:47 p.m.