



## Commission on Veterans Affairs

December 16, 2025

6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

Michael Wilson, Chair  
Chris Thomas, Vice-Chair

**Virtual Meeting Via Zoom**

[Zoom Meeting Link](#)

**Join by telephone:** *If you want to call into the meeting, call 301-715-8592, use Meeting ID 739 001 7153 followed by #. Those calling into the meeting can press \*6 to mute and unmute their phone. If an attendee would like to speak during the meeting, they must use the "hand raise" function. If connecting via a smart phone, tablet or computer, please click on the Zoom link to be able to access all functions, including raising your hand. If you are calling by phone, press \*9 to raise your hand.*

### Agenda

- 6:00 Call to Order, Welcome, Pledge of Allegiance, Moment of Silence & POW/MIA, Approval of November 2025 Minutes – *Michael Wilson, Chair*
- 6:10 Status of Veteran Homelessness in the County – *Christine Hong, LCSW-C, Chief, Services to End and Prevent Homelessness, Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services*
- 6:40 Chair & Vice Chair Updates – *Michael Wilson and Chris Thomas*
- 6:50 FY 27 Priorities Progress - All
- 7:05 Staff Report
- 7:10 Public Comments
- 7:20 Other Business
- 7:25 Next Meeting Update
- 7:30 Adjournment

**ADA Meeting Accessibility Notice:** Sign language interpreter services and other auxiliary aids or services will be provided upon request with as much advance notice as possible, preferably at least three (3) full business days before the meeting/event. In all situations, a good faith effort (up until the time of the event) will be made to provide accommodations. To request the above or any other reasonable accommodation, please contact Carly Clem at 202- 853-1109 (V) or via MD Relay at 711 or send a request to [Carly.Clem@MontgomeryCountymd.gov](mailto:Carly.Clem@MontgomeryCountymd.gov).

See Next Page for FY 27 Priorities

## **Commission on Veterans Affairs**

Meeting with HHS Committee of County Council on Priorities for FY27

Michael Wilson, Chair - Chris Thomas, Vice-Chair

October 22, 2025

### **1) Communication and Outreach Planning to Promote Programs and Services that Benefit Veterans and Their Families**

**Greater Community Outreach and Education on Veteran Issues** - The Commission will develop a plan to increase communication with the public and other organizations that serve Veterans. There is a need for more face-to-face and real-time and non-real-time virtual interaction. Commission members will be encouraged to visit veteran service organizations such as local American Legions (AL), Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), AMVETS, Disabled American Veterans, Vietnam Veterans of America, Paralyzed Veterans to share information about the work of the Commission and learn from these organizations about what they believe are unmet needs of Veterans and their families.

**Provide Support to the Office of Problem Solving Courts as they Plan and Implement a Veterans Treatment Court in Montgomery County** The Commission is working in collaboration with the Maryland Military Coalition and the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) to provide support as requested from Judge Koch and the Office of Problem-Solving Courts to establish a Veterans Treatment Court in Montgomery County. We would greatly appreciate the Council's support for this important initiative.

**Permanent Supportive Housing Vouchers for Homeless Veterans Including those with Families** - We recommend the County make greater investment in permanent supportive housing which includes case management for homeless Veterans. This includes seeking additional HUD-VASH vouchers from the federal government. HUD-VASH is a collaborative program which pairs HUD's Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) rental assistance with VA case management and supportive services for homeless Veterans. Veterans who have case management along with a voucher have greater success with permanent housing in the community. At this time, there are an estimated 50 homeless Veterans in the county and too often they are placed in emergency shelters. We recommend less investment in emergency shelter response. We ask the Council to continue needed funding for vouchers for Veterans not eligible for Veterans Administration benefits including HUD-VASH vouchers.

### **2) Commission was Established to Recognize the Service of Veterans**

**Planning for Operation Green Light / Veterans Day and Memorial Day**—Commission will plan and participate in Veterans Day and Memorial Day recognition events.

**Websites and Digital Displays to Honor Veterans** On [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/veterans](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/veterans) there are websites created by staff honoring County Veterans for Hometown Fallen Heroes going back to World War I, Vietnam Era Veterans, Women Veterans, Recognition for Veterans for Black History Month, and Thank You to County Veterans for Veterans Day.

**Speakers Bureau** Commission will develop a speaker's bureau to volunteer to speak at schools about Veteran issues and the meaning of Veterans Day and Memorial Day. The Commission publishes an annual report that includes information on the Commission's work and includes extensive data on Veterans. Go to [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva).

Lastly, it is critical for Boards, Committees and Commissions (BCC) to have commissioners appointed in a timely manner so that they can be most effective and also respect the volunteer service of community members who serve. We ask that the County ensure proper staffing for the County Executive's Office for timely recruitment and appointment of BCC members.



## Commission on Veterans Affairs December 16, 2025 - Meeting Minutes

### Meeting Location

Meeting held virtually via Zoom.

### Call To Order

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m.

### Welcome, Pledge of Allegiance, Moment of Silence & POW/MIA Remembrance

Chris Thomas, Vice-Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Commission on Veterans Affairs (CVA). He asked for all present to say the Pledge of Allegiance. He recognized prisoners of war and asked for a moment of silence for all of those who have given their lives and those who have been wounded for our country in the different conflicts in which our country has been engaged.

### Review and Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

A motion was made to approve the November 2025 Meeting Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and the November 2025 Meeting Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva).

### Meeting Minutes Agenda Items

#### 1. Status of Veteran Homelessness in the County – Christine Hong, LCSW-C, Chief, Services to End and Prevent Homelessness, Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services

##### Services to End and Prevent Homelessness (SEPH) Website

Christine clarified data from the County's 2025 Point-in-Time (PIT) count which had identified 50 veterans experiencing homelessness in January 2025. The PIT is a snapshot and does not capture the nuance of the work being done. That number is very concerning as it appears to be a significant increase. She reported that the 18 veterans being served through the Veterans Safe Havens Program were included in the data, but only 7 of those veterans are Montgomery County residents. The other 11 veterans are from Prince George's County or Washington, D.C. as the program serves all three jurisdictions as funding is received from a federal agency.

- The next County PIT count is scheduled for January 28, 2026.

**HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH)** Vouchers come through the public housing authorities if they request them through a partnership with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), which provides case management and clinical services. This is key housing intervention specifically for veterans.

- The **public housing authorities should automatically** be making the request every year. It was suggested that an inquiry could be made by the County Executive or the County Council to ask HOC why they do not request more vouchers.
- Dale Tibbets suggested that the Commission/County Executive form a work group to work with the public housing authorities as well as the Department of Housing & Community Affairs (DHCA).

The VA will be working with HOC for records reconciliation which may find available vouchers due to the veteran being over income, incarcerated, the voucher was ported to another state or the veteran is deceased.

**The VA cannot provide more vouchers if a public housing authority does not request more vouchers.**

Montgomery County's Continuum of Care (CoC) is a coordinated system aimed at reducing homelessness, including veterans, through a range of strategies, including prevention, temporary shelter, outreach, housing assistance, and support services.

The CoC is a public-private partnership guided by the Interagency Commission on Homelessness (ICH), which serves as the system's governing body. The partnership works to help households avoid homelessness when possible and to support those experiencing homelessness in quickly securing stable housing.

A data-driven approach guides planning and service delivery. This includes the use of assessment tools to match individuals and families with appropriate housing and support services.

Montgomery County's Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) plays a central role in providing supportive services through its integrated programs, including behavioral health, aging and disability services, public health, and child and family services. Ongoing efforts focus on improving access to services, identifying gaps, and enhancing coordination to better serve individuals with complex needs.

There is a definite upward trend in evictions leading to people becoming unhoused and then experiencing homelessness. In the past four fiscal years, evictions have increased by 146%. Over the last five fiscal years, overall homelessness has increased by 162%. Many households, including veterans, have struggled to recover from the economic impact of the pandemic.

Prevention work must continue. Housing Stabilization Services (HSS) is the first line of support in trying to reduce the number of people experiencing homelessness in Montgomery County. HSS provides case management and limited financial grants to support residents at-risk of becoming homeless. Services include assessment of need, emergency financial assistance, and case management to help households keep their current housing, obtain new housing, prevent utility shut-off, and restore disconnected utility services. Burial assistance grants are also available. Eviction prevention grants are available to households that meet income guidelines, have received a court judgement for an eviction or "put-out" notice, and have not received an eviction prevention grant in the preceding 12 months. SEPH will also work to connect individuals to natural supports including family members and friends using a limited amount of financial assistance.

SEPH works with our partner agencies that focus on street outreach to engage with individuals who are literally outside and unsheltered.

There are ten emergency shelters operating throughout the County – six serve adults, three serve families and one serves households fleeing domestic violence. Hotel rooms are made available to families if there is overflow at shelters.

Permanent housing is the most important way to end an experience of homelessness. SEPH offers three major types of housing.

- The **Short-term Housing Resolution Program (SHaRP)** provides security deposits, first month's rent and additional rental subsidy to allow households in shelter or on the street to move into housing. This is a rental subsidy program only and does not come with case management. Funds are limited. SHaRP offers landlords financial and support services for Montgomery County households who qualify for this support. SHaRP covers the security deposit (up to double the monthly rental amount) and supportive financial services for up to

12 months. This program is currently targeted to families including those households where the head of the household is a veteran.

- **Rapid Re-Housing (RRH)** is a housing intervention model provided to eligible homeless households in Montgomery County. These households are assessed for services through DHHS and SEPH. RRH services are provided by SEPH directly and through contractors and typically provide a continuum of care. Housing intervention provides a time limited subsidy and supportive services to move homeless households into permanent housing.
- **Permanent Support Housing** program through the public housing authorities Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC) and Rockville Housing Enterprises (RHE) provides subsidized housing, case management, and intensive Services to previously homeless households in nine different programs funded by Montgomery County and HUD. Three-fourths of the units are permanent housing for adults with disabilities, and one-fourth are transitional units for families who remain in the program for up to two years. Households must be homeless and utilizing Services through the County before they are eligible to be referred for the program.
- **Veterans Safe Havens Program**, operated by the Montgomery County Coalition for the Homeless, provides emergency housing to homeless veterans. It is a form of temporary shelter and is not considered permanent housing. It has 18 beds available.

There are currently 20 Montgomery County veterans currently experiencing homelessness reported in the Coordinated Entry System (CES), which provides a streamlined process for individuals and families seeking homeless services. Through multiple access points, CES connects people in housing crisis to the most appropriate support, including permanent supportive housing, rapid re-housing, and transitional housing. All partners engage with veterans to resolve their experience of homelessness and make referrals to available housing programs.

Fatmata Kamara, VA Outreach Social Worker, is alarmed by the data as well as it is the largest number of veterans identified during a PIT. The VA is hoping to bring that number down significantly as the months go by. The VA is working to mobilize resources to house those veterans on the CoC list.

The total number of HUD-VASH vouchers received by Montgomery County is 133. The number of vouchers allotted for the County is based on the request made by the public housing authorities. HOC and RHE must request vouchers from the VA. The VA then reviews data including PIT counts to determine if they can support the public housing authority's request. In the past, the VA has always supported each county with getting more vouchers. Erica Myrtle, VA HUD-VASH Coordinator, reported that leadership within the VA this year have decided not to complete support letters.

Betsy Luecking, Staff, reported that prior to 2010 the County did not receive any HUD-VASH vouchers for 20 years as it was thought Montgomery County was too wealthy. In 2010 HUD began awarding VASH vouchers because of the advocacy of Senator Chris Van Hollen and former Senator Ben Cardin working together with the Commission and through their efforts the County received vouchers:

- 2010 – 25 vouchers
- 2011 – 25 vouchers
- 2012 – 15 vouchers
- 2013 – 15 vouchers
- 2015 – 6 vouchers
- 2016 – 12 vouchers

- 2023 – 20 vouchers

We are not certain of the vouchers awarded between 2017 and 2023

John Mendez, Bethesda Cares, reported the County received 20 vouchers in fiscal year 2024 (October 2023). It has been almost two full years since the County has received any HUD-VASH vouchers. The County needs to finish using those vouchers received from 2023. John reported that upwards of 4,000 federal jobs have been lost in Montgomery County and some of those federal employees are military veterans. If 1% of those 4,000 are at risk of becoming homeless, that is 40 households. The County needs to be prepared.

Kevin Mack, Representative of Senator Angela Alsobrooks, reported that their office is available to support in any way they can and they are working with federal delegation to support their colleagues within the offices of Senator Chris Van Hollen and Congressman Jamie Raskin.

Dale Tibbits, Special Assistance to the County Executive, noted that there should be a system in place to keep track of how many vouchers are available to ensure there is never a gap to the point of running out.

Christine offered to join future Commission meetings or attend collaboration meetings with the VA, HOC and RHE.

Elwood Gray asked why Montgomery County does not have a VA Community Resource and Referral Center (CRRC). CRRCs provide Veterans who are homeless and at risk of homelessness with one-stop access to community-based, multi-agency services. Erica reported the Washington, D.C. CRRC was one of the first pilot sites. It is the home base and covers Montgomery County, Prince George's County, Southern Maryland and Northern Virginia. A team of outreach workers and HUD-VASH workers from the DC CRRC goes to each of those jurisdictions to work. For example, staff work out of the Gaithersburg VA Community-Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC). Staff also have boots on the ground and are pounding the pavement, visiting encampments and other sites daily. They also have scheduled times to visit shelters or day centers. Transportation is available for veterans who need to visit the DC CRRC. The location offers showers and laundry facilities. Veterans can sit down with a social worker to figure out next steps as well as connect them to medical care. The DC VA Medical Center is one mile from the DC CRRC.

Elwood reported he owns one of the rowhouses in Baltimore and that his non-profit American Minority Veterans Research Project (AMVRP) owns two rowhouses in Baltimore as well as several properties in Bethesda. He asked how he can connect these available properties with homeless veterans.

Elwood noted that some veterans who are homeless are hidden in plain view. He asked how to connect those veterans with services. John reported Bethesda Cares their street outreach team goes out into the community every single day, engaging with the population of individuals experiencing homelessness where they live - parks, Metro centers, parking garages, and more. Erica reported that if you encounter a veteran that is homeless, they should be referred to the DC CRRC. Community is key in connecting these homeless veterans to the VA. The DC CRRC will send their outreach team to talk to particular veterans. Staff will do the work to check for eligibility. Some veterans do not identify as veterans. They may be hiding in plain site because of another reason. All veterans who say they are veterans are not veterans and that must be taken into accountability as well. Staff may have already counted the veteran and completed an assessment and triage to find out the person is not eligible for service. Veterans that are continuously homeless is a larger issue. Many times it is a mental health issue and with our current healthcare system they cannot force individuals to make the decision to seek shelter. Staff have encountered veterans several times who have chosen to be street homeless for many years. Staff continue to engage with them, but it is that individual's choice.

John reported that in the past several months he has noticed that some veterans are starting to not identify themselves as veterans given the current political climate and the military being deployed into cities.

Betsy reported that Montgomery County is the only county in the United States that provides vouchers to veterans who do not qualify for HUD-VASH vouchers. In 2015, the Commission on Veterans Affairs met with Councilmember George Leventhal and reported that there were 13 to 15 homeless veterans who did not qualify for the HUD-VASH vouchers as they had received less than an honorable discharge. As part of the County's Fiscal Year 2016 budget, the County Council approved an appropriation in the amount of \$500,000 to provide housing and supportive services to functionally end veteran homelessness in the County. The funding has increased and recurring every year and is available pending adequate funding to veterans who have received less than an honorable discharge and are therefore not eligible for VA programs.

### **Chair & Vice Chair Updates – Michael Wilson and Chris Thomas**

None.

### **FY 27 Priorities Progress**

Grace Caulfield, Commissioner, reported Jenna Davis, Director, Problem Solving Courts, Montgomery County Circuit, said Montgomery County has been selected to have a Veterans Treatment Court (VTC) foundational training in May/June 2026. They are waiting for Judge Koch to decide which dates work for her. They will move forward with planning the structure of the program. Once the needs are identified, the Committee can discuss what needs to be asked of the County Council in terms of funding. Bob Norton, Bob Norton, Military Officers Association of America (MOAA), suggested that Jenna and Judge Koch connect with the state office to begin the formal application process for a VTC. Grace will discuss this with Jenna. Bob sent an email to County Council President Fani-Gonzalez regarding the Council's support for the VTC and included a copy of the Maryland Today piece on the 10-year anniversary of the VTC in Central Maryland. The counties surrounding us have tremendous experience to share. It was noted that if an incarcerated veteran who goes through the VTC process and who is homeless, the court will coordinate and provide support services.

Betsy reported that the property tax credit form for disabled veterans needed to be altered as veterans that are married and file their taxes jointly would be including their non-veteran spouse too often making them ineligible. The form needs to be revised so that was never fixed and some veterans are able to apply for the property tax credit. Dale said he will contact the Department of Finance about this issue.

Chris Thomas is continuing to work on compiling a list of veteran services organizations in Montgomery County for speaker outreach

### **Other Updates**

Betsy reported the Commission will be interviewing applicants next month. She asked that Commissioners whose terms have expired to stay on until they have been replaced.

Betsy announced that Dr. Jameelah Johnson recently earned her doctorate. She was asked to give a summary of her thesis at an upcoming meeting of the Commission regarding veterans receiving care in the private sector versus using the VA.

Dr. Cynthia Macri, former Commissioner, reported the VA will be cutting 35,000 jobs. She also reported that the VA will be relying more on community care providers for gynecology. Providers must accept the Medicare rate of 50% to 60% when becoming a community care provider. There is already a shortage of personnel for gynecology in the civilian sector.

Elwood reported AMVRP will be hosting a Christmas Party at the Count's Pre-Release Center on December 20 for children of incarcerated veterans.

Betsy reported that Eric Rasch will no longer be the Director at the Silver Spring Civic Building. He will be transitioning to a position at Community Public Use of Facilities. The Commission has several bookcases at the SSCB that showcase Buffalo Soldiers and veterans as well as a digital display of County fallen hometown heroes dating back to World War I. Commissioners are encouraged to visit these displays and let staff know of suggestions.

### **Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be held on January 20, 2026 from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

### **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

### **Attendance**

#### **Voting Members Present**

- Bernard Chesman
- Grace Caulfield
- Drew Garza
- Elwood Gray
- Jameelah Johnson
- Miguel Sapp
- Scott Schlesinger
- Michael Subin
- Christopher Thomas, Vice-Chair

#### **Voting Members Absent**

- Veronica Pei
- Joanna Starling
- Michael Wilson, Chair

#### **Non-Voting Congressional Representatives Present**

- Joseph Eyong – Representative of U.S. Congressman Jamie Raskin
- Kathleen Connor - Representative of U.S. Congressman Jamie Raskin
- Charlise Richardson – Representative of U.S. Senator Chris Van Hollen
- Catherine Provost – Representative of U.S. Senator Van Hollen
- Kevin Mack – Representative of U.S. Senator Angela Alsobrooks
- Evan Schalon – Representative of U.S. Senator Angela Alsobrooks

#### **Commission Staff Present**

- Betsy Luecking, Staff Liaison, Community Outreach Manager
- Carly Clem, Staff Support, Program Specialist II

#### **Other County Staff Present**

- Christine Hong, LCSW-C, Chief, Services to End and Prevent Homelessness
- Dale Tibbits, Special Assistant to County Executive Marc Elrich

#### **Public Attendees**

- Wayne Miller, former Chair
- Bill Gray, former Chair
- Dr. Cynthia Macri, former Commissioner
- Michael Theard, Buffalo Soldiers
- Jevina Lindsey MDH

- John Mendez, Bethesda Cares
- Nicholas Feemster, Easterseals
- Bob Norton, Military Officers Association of America
- Erica Myrtle, HUD-VASH Coordinator, Department of Veterans Affairs
- Fatmata Kamara, Outreach Social Worker, Department of Veterans Affairs
- Karishma Sheth, EveryMind
- Jasmine Jones-Edwards
- Diane Eisenstate
- Mike Jadoo