



**Commission on Veterans Affairs
Meeting Agenda**

**February 18, 2025
6 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.**

**Michael Wilson, Chair
Anneke Vandenbroek, Vice-Chair**

Join the meeting via Zoom
<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/7390017153?omn=87260206597>

February is Black History Month

Check out [Black History Month - Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs - Montgomery County, Maryland Department of Health and Human Services](#)

If you want to call into the meeting, call 301-715-8592, use Meeting ID 739 001 7153 followed by #.

If a Commissioner would like to speak during the meeting, they can raise their hand if on video and Chair will recognize you or you can use the “hand raise” function under the reactions tab at bottom of page. If connecting via a smart phone, tablet or computer, please click on the middle of the page and the functions will be at the bottom of the page. Use the Zoom app to be able to access all functions, including raising your hand. If you are calling by phone, press *9 to raise your hand. Those calling into the meeting can press *6 to mute or unmute their phone.

6:00 Welcome, Pledge of Allegiance, Moment of Silence & POW/MIA Remembrance, Approval of January 2025 Minutes – Michael Wilson, Chair

6:10 Overview of the Dole Act - "Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veteran Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act" signed on January 2nd, 2025. What happened to disabled vets here in MD and give a brief update on Veteran Bills in the Maryland General Assembly – Lynn Nash, Communications Director, Maryland Military Coalition, PhD, RN, PHCNS-BC, FAAN

6:40 Follow up Discussion on:

- Working group to identify all resources for housing rehabilitation. Volunteers include Sam Korper, Chris Thomas, Bernie Chesman, and Miguel Sapp.
- Change of Commission Name - Scott Schlesinger indicated that he serves on the State Commission and could reach out to the MD Department of Veterans and Military Families to gather further information on this topic. Perhaps this needs to be the meeting where we take the vote if we are going to move forward with making this recommendation to the County Commissioners.
- Recognition of students who enlist in the military. Staff will contact Montgomery County Schools to see how or if they currently recognize students who enlist in the military.
- Re-establishing the Commission's relationship with veteran organizations.
- Public School Holidays - Veterans' Day and Purples Star Schools – What is MCPS doing for Gold Star and Blue Star Families? Mike Subin

7:10 Chair and Vice Chair Updates – Michael Wilson & Anneke Vandenbroek

7:20 Updates from Commissioners

7:30 Adjourn

ADA Reasonable Accommodation: If you need a sign language interpreter or any other reasonable accommodation to participate in this meeting, please contact carly.clem@montgomerycountymd.gov or call 202-853-1109 or via MD Relay at 711.

Duties of the Commission on Veterans Affairs

The Commission duties include:

1. research, assemble, analyze and disseminate information and educational materials relating to activities and programs that will assist in meeting the needs of veterans and their families;
2. institute and conduct educational and other programs, meetings, and conferences to promote the rights and opportunities for veterans;
3. advise the Executive and the Council on the status of programs and services in the State and County related to the needs of veterans and their families; and
4. assist in planning appropriate public acknowledgement of the contributions made by veterans and assist in planning commemoration activities recognizing the contributions made by veterans.



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Meeting Minutes
February 18, 2025**

****MEETING WAS HELD VIRTUALLY VIA ZOOM****

Call to Order - Welcome, Pledge of Allegiance, Moment of Silence & POW/MIA Remembrance

Michael Wilson, 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.

Approval of January 2025 Meeting Minutes

A motion was made to approve the January 2025 Meeting Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and January 2025 Meeting Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva.

Overview of the Veterans Bills in Maryland General Assembly and "Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veteran Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act" - Lynn Nash, Communications Director, Maryland Military Coalition, PhD, RN, PHCNS-BC, FAAN

Lynn reviewed the [Maryland Military Coalition's PowerPoint presentation](#).

Additional information shared:

- The federal Senator Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act, which was signed into law by President Biden on January, 2, 2025 gives severely ill and aging veterans the choice to convalesce at home by providing their caregivers more increased access to support services. There is concern that the law could become a target by the current administration.
- The Chair of the Health and Government Operations Committee continues to monitor the current administration's stance towards Medicare and Medicaid and has discussed what may happen if those programs are cut.
- A bill has been introduced by the Maryland General Assembly to increase the unemployment weekly payment from \$450 to \$750 for federal workers that were recently terminated from their positions.
- Maryland Department of Veterans and Military Families now has 12 accredited Veteran Benefits Specialists (VBS). Veterans can now have a virtual interview with a VBS within 24 hours of their first inquiry and can meet with a VBS in-person within two weeks.

The floor was opened to questions and comments.

- **In 2009, this Commission worked on the issue of veteran treatment courts.** At the time, there was an unwillingness from the State's Attorney's Office and Circuit Court to create the court due to lack of funding and interest. A drug treatment court currently exists. The Administrative Judge of the Circuit Court would have to make a determination regarding staff and then a Montgomery County judge must file a formal application to Maryland's Problem-Solving Courts in Annapolis and be approved by the Deputy Attorney General.
 - Charles and Montgomery Counties are the only two jurisdictions that are not covered by a veterans treatment court. Over 900 veteran treatment courts have been established throughout the country.

- A judge chairs a Community Advisory Board within the Montgomery County Pre-Release and Re-Entry Services Center that assists inmates with finding employment and other services and resources. It was suggested reaching out to this judge regarding a veterans treatment court.
- The Silver Spring Vet Center provides mental health services, post-traumatic stress care, alcohol and substance abuse care, transition counseling including re-integration from prison to civilian life. SSVVC is available to assist veterans in these treatment courts.
- A motion was made to establish a subcommittee to approach Chief Judge Jim Bonifant, Maryland Circuit Court, and the State's Attorney to investigate the possibility of establishing a veterans court. The motion was seconded. A discussion was held regarding the intent of the subcommittee. It was suggested that the motion be amended to establish a working group to look into the issue of veteran treatment courts in more detail and to establish a formal subcommittee later on this topic, if needed. A motion to accept the amendment was made. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and the motion was unanimously approved. The following Commissioners will be involved with the workgroup: Mike Subin, Grace Caulfield, Scott Schlesinger, and Elwood Gray.
 - Michael asked the workgroup to check in with him prior to the March meeting to discuss their findings.
- It was reported that as of July 1, 2025, the State of Maryland has been mandated to set up assisted outpatient treatment in which a circuit court can order a specified mental health treatment regimen for someone with severe and persistent mental health needs — potentially without their consent.
- **Why are predatory companies targeting veterans not on the radar of the Consumer Protection Division?** In 2020, the federal level removed the ability of the Department of Veterans Affairs to fine these companies. The proposed bill would put back into place the mechanism to fine these companies and any money collected would go to the veterans trust fund. Maryland's Attorney General Anthony Brown, who is a veteran, understands the issue and is supportive of the bill.
 - A Senate hearing is scheduled for February 27. Commissioners are encouraged to attend the hearing as well as submit testimony, especially if they are able to share a story.
- It was suggested that the Commission create a legislative workgroup to work on issues jointly with the Maryland Military Coalition.
- Identified a gap in the language of the predatory bill – companies that offer Nexus letters which is a detailed medical opinion written by a qualified healthcare professional that clearly establishes the link between a veteran's current disability and their military service. These companies do not offer any assistance with the appeal process or assist the veteran in any way.
- Consumer Protection Veterans reported \$350 million in total fraud losses in 2003. Maryland was the 5th highest state that reported fraud. Lynn will share more research with Betsy to forward to Commissioners.

Follow-Up Discussion On:

- **Working group to identify all resources for housing rehabilitation. Volunteers include Sam Korper, Chris Thomas, Bernie Chesman, and Miguel Sapp.**
Miguel has information he can share regarding VA housing assistance including purchasing a loan, refinancing and how to refit a house. It was suggested compiling this information and making it available on the Commission's website. It was also suggested that Miguel make a presentation at the Commission's April meeting on this topic for Fair Housing Month along with Chris who has worked on rehabilitating homes for veterans and their families.
- **Change of Commission Name** - Scott Schlesinger spoke with staff at the Maryland Department of Veterans and Military Families. While the Department changed its name, the Commission remained the Maryland Veterans Commission. A temporary Commission – the Maryland Commission on

Military Families – was created last year and will end in June 2025. It was suggested that the Commission vote on a name change at the March meeting.

Due to time constraints, the following topics were tabled until the next meeting: recognition of students who enlist in the military; re-establishing the Commission's relationship with veteran organizations; and Veterans' Day public school holiday; and Purple Star Schools.

Update – Senator Van Hollen's Office

Charlise Richardson, Representative of Senator Van Hollen reported U.S. Navy Commander Everett Alvarez, Jr. (Ret.), received a Congressional Gold Medal of Honor, which is presented by an Act of Congress and is one of the nation's most prestigious honors, and it is awarded in recognition of extraordinary contributions to the country. Commander Alvarez was the first American aviator taken captive in Vietnam after being shot down near Hanoi. He became the second longest-held U.S. prisoner of war (POW) in U.S. history. Betsy Luecking, Staff, contacted Senator Van Hollen's staff about co-sponsoring bill HR 1097 Everett Alvarez Gold Medal Act of 2023. The bill was passed in December 2024. By the end there were 58 sponsors of the bill. Betsy suggested having Commander Alvarez speak at a future Commission meeting. She is also working with the County Executive's Office to present a proclamation to Commander Alvarez.

Charlise will continue to share information pertinent to veterans with this Commission, especially during this time with the current administration.

Chair and Vice Chair Updates – Michael Wilson & Anneke Vandenbroek

The next Commission meeting is scheduled for March 18, 2025. The Commission will revisit the housing topic as well as veterans treatment courts and renaming of the Commission.

Updates from Commissioners

None.

Adjourn - 7:24 p.m.

Attendance

Commissioners Present: Grace Caulfield; Bernard Chesman; Drew Garza; Elwood Gray; Veronica Pei; Miguel Sapp; Scott Schlesinger; Joanna Starling; Michael Subin; Christopher Thomas; Anneke Vandenbroek, Vice-Chair; Michael Wilson, Chair

Commissioners Absent: Jameelah Johnson; Charles Von Goin

Non-Voting Congressional Representatives Present: Joseph Eyong (Congressman Jamie Raskin); Charles Richardson (Senator Chris Van Hollen)

Non-Voting Congressional Representatives Absent: Vikki Garcia (Congressman John Sarbanes)

Commission Liaison: Sam Korper, Commission on People with Disabilities

County Staff: Jen Hodge, Local Behavioral Health Authority, Department of Health and Human Services

Staff Present: Betsy Luecking, Staff Liaison; Carly Clem, Program Specialist II

Public Present: Lynn Nash, Maryland Military Coalition; Bob Norton, Maryland Military Coalition; Bill Gray; Wayne Miller, Silver Spring Vet Center; Karl Pitt, Committee Evaluation and Review Board; Emily Farnham; Gary Palmer; Ken Reichard; Eniola Arowolo