



Commission on Veterans Affairs



MEETING AGENDA

Tuesday, February 16, 2021

6 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.

Wayne Miller, Chair – Bob Koffman, Vice-Chair

PLEASE NOTE: Given the concerns of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Commission on Veterans Affairs will be meeting virtually via Zoom.

Join the meeting via ZOOM

<https://zoom.us/j/98195657512>

If you want to call into the meeting, call 301-715-8592, use Meeting ID 981 9565 7512 followed by #.

If an attendee 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 2021 Meeting Minutes – Wayne Miller, Chair

6:05 Serving Together – Melissa Barber, Program Manager, Western Maryland
www.servingtogetherproject.org

6:25 The Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic at Easter Seals – Mallary Lass, USAF Ret Outreach Manager, The Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic at Easterseals
www.easterseals.com/DCMDVA/our-programs/cvn-home.html

7:00 Marine for Life Network-MD Area Representative – Gary Deitch, U.S. Marine Major, Marine for Life Representative for Western Maryland
<https://usmc-mccs.org/services/career/marine-for-life-network/>

7:20 Updates

7:30 Adjourn

If you need a sign language interpreter or any other accommodation to participate in this meeting, please contact betsy.luecking@montgomerycountymd.gov.

Commission's Website – www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva
Veterans Network Directory – www.montgomerycountymd.gov/vnd



**Montgomery County Commission on Veterans Affairs
Meeting Summary Minutes
February 16th, 2021**

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

I. Call to Order

Wayne Miller, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Commission on Veterans Affairs (CVA). Wayne asked for all present to say the Pledge of Allegiance. Wayne 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.

II. Approval of Minutes

A motion was made to approve the January 2021 Meeting Summary Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken, and the January 2021 Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva.

III. ServingTogether – Melissa Barber, Program Manager, Western Maryland

Website: www.servingtogetherproject.org

Powerpoint: <https://montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/A%26D%20Docs/CVA/ServingTogetherCVAFeb2021.pdf>

ServingTogether provides education, information, referrals and coordination of resources for Veterans, service members and their families throughout the National Capital Region. They are expanding their service into Greater Baltimore to include Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Howard, and Harford Counties and Baltimore City. Veteran Peer Navigators are available at 1-855-738-7176 to provide connections to resources. ServingTogether has partnered with AmericaServes and Unite Us which offers a coordinated system of public, private, and non-profit organizations working together to serve Veterans, service members, and their families. All providers and organizations within this system or registry are assessed so that peer navigators understand program specifics, eligibility criteria and can make direct referrals. Providers who do not necessarily provide services to Veterans can join the network as well. AmericaServes has coordination centers throughout the country which allows ServingTogether to make referrals to other states. ServingTogether also hosts informal meetings with local collaboratives to bring together providers for networking and sharing information and resources. Collaboratives are based in Frederick and Montgomery Counties in Maryland, Fairfax and Loudoun Counties in Virginia, Fort Belvoir, and Washington, DC.

The floor was opened to questions.

Bob Koffman, Vice-Chair, asked what the criteria is for ServingTogether to resolve a case. Melissa said a case may be resolved if the client begins to receive services or a provider has accepted the case to work with moving forward. The provider also reports back if they were able to resolve the case. Peer Navigators are available to assist for as long as needed and try to address as many needs as possible when they first call. Providers are also vetted prior to the referral to ensure that they have the capacity to meet the needs of the client at that time.

It was asked what the qualifications are to become a Peer Navigator. They are required to have a background in human services and have previously worked in case management. They should be able to build a connection quickly as intake is handled over the phone. All Peer Navigators receive hotline training and will

shadow a senior Peer Navigator before handling their own phone calls. If they are not a Veteran they will receive military culture training.

Betsy Luecking, Staff, reported that this Commission was instrumental in the foundation of ServingTogether. In 2010, former Commissioners Jackie Ogg, Susan Kirk, and Lorrie Knight-Major met with the Robert C. Wood Foundation and applied for a matching grant to fund the cost of a facility that would provide assistance to Veterans and their families. Back then there was no referral pipeline between the military and non-profits. The matching grant provided \$500,000 over four years. The Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services also provided funds and continues to support ServingTogether with a \$150,000 annual contract.

IV. The Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic at Easter Seals – Mallary Lass, USAF Ret, Outreach Manager, The Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic at Easterseals

Website: www.easterseals.com/DCMDVA/our-programs/cvn-home.html

PowerPoint: www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/A&D%20Docs/CVA/2021CohenClinicBrief.pdf

The Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic at Easterseals provides high-quality and accessible behavioral health care to veterans, active duty service members, their families and caregivers. Services are available to any person who has served in the U.S. Armed Forces, including the National Guard and Reserves, regardless of role or discharge status. Our services are available to any person who has served in the U.S. Armed Forces, including the National Guard and Reserves, regardless of role or discharge status. The Cohen Clinic will also help connect veteran families to community resources and services, as necessary.

The Cohen Clinic uses evidence-based practices with a holistic approach to improve the quality of life for veterans and their families. Services are provided by trained and credentialed staff. Veterans and their family members are able to receive services individually and as a family unit at the same place with the same treatment team.

The floor was opened to questions.

Betsy asked if funding for the Cohen Clinic will continue from the Network. The Cohen Clinic was founded when billionaire hedge fund investor Steven A. Cohen pledged \$275 million to create a national network of free mental health clinics for military veterans and their families. His son had served in the Marines Corps. While the Cohen Veterans Network focuses on post-9/11 Veterans, the Easterseals Cohen Clinic sees all Veterans of all eras. Clinics were funded 100% for five years with funding slowly decreasing after but Mr. Cohen will continue to contribute a portion of funding. Easterseals' grant team has been working on identifying additional funding opportunities so that the Cohen Clinic will be able to continue to provide services. The Cohen Clinic has also begun to accept insurance however it will never be a barrier to receiving care.

Wayne asked if the Cohen Clinic could provide counseling services to the Capitol Police. Mallary will discuss this issue with her Director. The Cohen Clinic has provided services to Foreign Service Officers and Public Health Officers.

Jameelah Johnson, Commissioner, asked if the Cohen Clinic provided specific services for Veterans that have been incarcerated. The Easterseals Homeless Veteran Program does work with many incarcerated Veterans. It does not matter how they were discharged or what they did after service. The Cohen Clinic can provide counseling services to them.

Neil Greenberger, Office of Public Information, offered to work with Mallary and the Commission on sending out press releases about the programs and services offered by the Cohen Clinic.

Commissioners can contact Mallary at mlass@eseal.org.

V. Marine for Life Network-MD Area Representative – Gary Deitch, U.S. Marine Major, Marine for Life Representative for Western Maryland

Website: <https://usmc-mccs.org/services/career/marine-for-life-network/>

Gary Deitch served in the U.S. Marine Corps as a ground Commander in Afghanistan and Iraq from 2006 to 2009. He also led recruiting in New England and understands the perspectives of those who enter into the military as well as those exiting service. Gary is currently a Marine Corps Reservist and representative for Marine for Life (M4L) Western Maryland. M4L is a Department of Defense organization under the Marine Corps headquartered in Quantico, Virginia. They are a nationwide resource comprised of four regions that can assist any Veteran in any state including Alaska and Hawaii. The M4L Network connects transitioning Marines and their family members to education resources, employment opportunities, and other Veterans services that aid in their career and life goals outside of military service. M4L continually seeks to connect and collaborate with Veteran-friendly employers and other services to expand their network. As a representative for the Western Region, Gary assists transitioning Marines with local resources to ensure they have a successful civilian life after serving in the military. Gary noted that the program is available to any servicemember that has transitioned at any point in time. Representatives also works with the Department of Veterans Affairs to provide assistance on claims and other issues.

Servicemembers who complete a transitioning program such as TAP or STEPS are given the opportunity to opt into the M4L network. That contact information is then shared with their local representative who will work with that transitioning service member with whatever their needs may be.

Commissioners can reach Gary directly at gadeitch@gmail.com.

The floor was opened to questions.

Cynthia Macri, Commissioner, said many Veterans exiting service did not attend a transition program as it was not offered back then. She asked if M4L would be able to assist those Veterans who left service 20 to 30 years ago. Gary said M4L would absolutely be able to work with those Veterans.

LaMont Nowlin, Public, is a Navy Veteran who served in OIF/OEF. He asked how he could volunteer as a peer specialist and mentor transitioning Veterans. Gary noted www.veterati.com is a free peer networking website which connects servicemembers, Veterans and spouses to volunteer mentors of other Veterans, civilians, CEOs, recruiters, entrepreneurs, and managers. Mentors can post their services and will be linked up with mentees who are looking for assistance on specific issues or experiences. Mentors and mentees can either set their search area to local or nationwide as services can be provided virtually.

LaMont also noted that he has a VA disability rating and has held several government jobs. In his experience, he had a difficult time receiving accommodations within the workplace resulting in him resigning from positions. He asked how accommodation requests can be enforced. Stan Siedel, Maryland Veterans Commission, reported the U.S. Office of Personnel Management has a Veterans representative assigned to each U.S. agency. The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) is also responsible for helping Veterans, especially with accommodations. Individuals having issues can file a complaint with the DOL Veterans Employment Training Service.

VI. Chair and Vice Chair Report

None.

VII. Updates / Announcements

Austin Morris, Representative of Senator Chris Van Hollen, reported Senator Van Hollen voted to confirm Denis McDonough as the new Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs last week. Senator Van Hollen also introduced legislation to award the Congressional Gold Medal to U.S. Capitol Officer Eugene Goodman. Legislation was passed unanimously.

Betsy reported Veterans enrolled in VA healthcare can contact the DC VA Medical Center to schedule a COVID-19 vaccination appointment – 202-745-4342.

Gloria Gardner, Public, reported Howard University is currently providing vaccinations to healthcare workers and D.C. residents age 65 years and older.

Betsy asked Commissioners for presentation ideas for upcoming meetings. For April, Cynthia suggested the National Audubon Society Project for Veterans. It was suggested that March focus on information on COVID-19 vaccinations as there is a lot of confusion about the process, qualification criteria, availability of vaccines and hesitancy to receive the vaccine. Cynthia offered to speak as she reviews COVID-19 research and development articles for her job. She is also a Maryland Reserve Corp volunteer who will be assisting in providing vaccinations. She noted that there are seven vaccines available worldwide but only two are currently available in this country. Johnson & Johnson (J&J) have applied to the FDA for emergency use authorization. The J&J vaccine will be one-shot instead of two. It will also not require subzero temperatures for transport and storage or have the reconstitution issues that Moderna and Pfizer have. Moderna and Pfizer are working on a third booster dose but it is not known when that third dose should be given. There are discussions about having an annual COVID shot just like an annual flu shot. She also noted that individuals vaccinated can be carriers of the native virus as well as new variants. The Maryland Department of Health recommends individuals get on as many waiting lists as possible – whether it's through the state, the VA, primary care, etc. It is also up to the individual to remove themselves from those waiting lists once they have received their first dose. Susan Webman, Commissioner, asked Cynthia to draft language that could be shared with those hesitant to take the vaccine. Cynthia will write up a document to show research peer review as well as real time updates from the CDC and FDA.

Elwood Gray, Commissioner, noted March 29th is National Vietnam Veterans Day. He suggested having the American Minorities Veterans Research Project (AMVRP) present in March. AMVRP has been working with the African American Health Program to assist minorities, especially Veterans, with testing and vaccinations.

Gilchrist's 3rd annual Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day Celebration will be held virtually on Sunday, March 28, 2021 at 3pm. Vietnam Veterans and their families can register now at:
<https://gilchristcares.org/events/welcome-home-celebration/>

Adjournment: 7:40pm

Next Full Commission Meeting: Tuesday, March 16th, 2021 via Zoom from 6pm to 7:30pm. Please view the agenda for information on how to join the meeting. Agenda to be announced.

Respectfully submitted: Carly Clem, Administrative Specialist I; Betsy Luecking, Community Outreach Manager

Attendance

Commissioners Present: Josephine Bahn; Elwood Gray; Jameelah Johnson; Robert Koffman; Cynthia Macri; Wayne Miller; Reggie Mitchell; Joanna Starling; Susan Webman; Michael Wilson

Commissioners Absent: Jonathan Alfaro; Dan Bolling; James Campbell; Hannah Dibonge; Scott Schlesinger; Michael Subin

Non-Voting Congressional Representatives Present: Joseph Eyong (Congressman Jamie Raskin); Vikki Garcia (Congressman John Sarbanes); Austin Morris (Senator Chris Van Hollen)

Non-Voting Congressional Representatives Absent: Ken Reichard (Senator Ben Cardin)

Commission Staff Present: Betsy Luecking, Staff Liaison; Carly Clem, Administrative Specialist I