



Commission on Veterans Affairs



MEETING AGENDA

Tuesday, June 15, 2021

6 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.

Wayne Miller, Chair – Bob Koffman, Vice-Chair

Join the meeting via ZOOM

<https://zoom.us/j/96102945861>

If you want to call into the meeting, call 301-715-8592, use Meeting ID: 961 0294 5861 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 May 2021 Meeting Minutes – Wayne Miller, Chair

6:10 Renormalizing: Updates & Strategy for Mental Wellness Outreach to Veterans/Families
Anneke Vandenbroek, Ph.D., ABPP, Clinic Director & Senior Vice President, The Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic at Easterseals; Wayne Miller, LCSW, Director, Silver Spring Vet Center; Bob Koffman, MD, MPH

7:00 Accessing Veterans Benefits Specialist Services – Miguel Sapp & Phil Munley, MD Department of Veterans Affairs

6:45 County Reopening Discussion – BCCS – Timeline and Discussion of Hybrid Meetings

- The ideal meeting would be a hybrid where members could meet in-person and virtually.
- How large is your BCC? A small BCC may have more of a consensus in their views.
- Issues to Consider: members' age, health, risk assessment, convenience of meeting virtually for other reasons including bad weather, traffic, and other life responsibilities.

7:00 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 Minutes
June 15th, 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 May 2021 Meeting Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken, and the May 2021 Meeting Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva.

III. Renormalizing: Updates & Strategy for Mental Wellness Outreach to Veterans/Families - Anneke Vandebroek, Ph.D., ABPP, Clinic Director & Senior Vice President, The Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic at Easterseals; Wayne Miller, LCSW, Director, Silver Spring Vet Center; Bob Koffman, MD, MPH

Pandemic Impact on Mental Health - PowerPoint: <https://montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/A%26D%20Docs/CVA/PandemicImpactonMentalHealthJune2021.pdf>

Anneke Vandebroek is an Army Veteran who worked at Walter Reed as a Department of Defense (DoD) employee for many years prior to working at the Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic.

Please review PowerPoint for information.

The floor was opened to questions.

Betsy Luecking, Staff, noted she has observed that the impact of the pandemic and the isolation has caused a post-traumatic stress-like situation where some people do not want to leave their homes or are afraid to not use masks. Anneke said many people will slowly come back to normal while 10% to 15% will have persisting anxiety. Some people may benefit from behavioral health support as they make that transition. She added that isolation combined with grief and loss of traditions such as coming together as a support system has also caused issues. Families have not been able to grieve together and have had to use Zoom memorial sessions for the loss of loved ones which do not offer that connection and support.

Wayne said when working with the older generation of Veterans the Silver Spring Vet Center encourages them to create a plan and tells them they are in charge of how close they want a person to get. One doesn't need to run to normalcy, they can walk or crawl. Vietnam Veterans are resilient and some already had mistrust in government and were self-isolating prior to COVID-19. Younger Veterans are more willing to go back to normal. Anneke said for some of her clients with PTSD who had avoided going out prior to the pandemic, the long-term effects have made their symptoms a little bit worse.

Jameelah Johnson, Commissioner, said many of her family members who had COVID either passed away or now have long-term issues included exhaustion, coughing, or lung problems.

Gloria Gardner, Public, served in the Navy as a Nurse in the 1960s and remembers the first wave of Veterans coming into Bethesda Naval Hospital with Agent Orange chemical burns and doctors not believing what caused it. Veterans have a very real fear and not everyone has access to the same resources. There are many things that can trigger anxiety and depression.

Dr. Cynthia Macri, Commissioner, is a vaccinator for Montgomery County. Data shows minority communities have issues accessing to the vaccine for minority communities. Non-native English speakers cannot pre-register because the registration process is English. Some individuals do not have access to the internet and those being left behind in the process are further isolated. Dr. Macri is working with a grant that will provide information and outreach into rural and urban communities that lack that access.

Dr. Macri asked if there is a need more cognitive behavioral therapies and evidence-based programs taught by military peers. For example, training servicemembers to be in this needed workforce. Anneke said there is not a civilian parallel in the military where someone has the level of skills to screen and identify if someone needs more intensive care. There has been a shortage of providers since before the pandemic. She would like to see increased funding for training as well as insurance parity to cover behavioral health access and the costs associated with it.

Dr. Bob Koffman, Vice-Chair, said life expectancy had fallen for the three years leading up to COVID-19 due to “diseases of despair” such as suicide and depression as well as other behavioral consequences including diabetes from obesity, alcoholic liver disease from substance use disorders and opioid addiction. Moving forward this Commission should look at a Veteran’s entire wellness picture including behavioral health related diseases and disorders and not just COVID-related issues.

IV. Accessing Veterans Benefits Specialist Services – Phil Munley, Director, Service and Benefits Program and Miguel Sapp, Veterans Benefits Specialist, Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs

Phil Munley announced the VA plans expansion of benefits for disability claims for three conditions – bladder cancer, hypothyroidism, and Parkinsonism – now presumptively associated with exposure to herbicide agents, more commonly known as Agent Orange. While the law has not been finalized yet; the VA is accepting claims. Vietnam War era Veterans and their survivors who previously filed and were denied benefits for one of these three new presumptive conditions will have their cases automatically reviewed without the need to refile a claim. VA will send letters to impacted Veterans and survivors. If those claims are approved the VA will establish an effective date back to the original date of denial.

On March 17, 2020, the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) with guidance from the State moved to maximum telework posture. All staff at all locations were issued cellphones and laptops in order to continue functioning five days a week. Since February 2021, staff began working in-person at the Baltimore location. At this time, the Baltimore location is at 50% staffing and is accepting appointments by invitation only.

Effective July 6, 2021, staff will be back to normal operations and pre-pandemic hours. Outreach to locations such as the Silver Spring Vet Center will not be re-established as this time. MDVA will work with those outreach locations to determine when that will happen. Some national service organizations, such as American Legion or Veterans of Foreign Wars, who have offices located at the Baltimore location have staff back in-person. Veterans seeking to contact a representative at one of these service organizations can contact Phil for assistance. Veterans seeking assistance should contact their local MDVA representative and allow 48 hours for a callback. Phil can be reached at 410-230-4444 x 6457 or phillip.munley@va.gov.

National Personnel Records Center was shut down during the pandemic. There were many difficulties for Veterans and their families to apply for DD214s or have service for burials verified. The Center is open once again with staff working two shifts a day to clear the backlog of requests.

Please note: Effective July 8, Miguel Sapp is no longer employed by MDVA. Joseph Thornton is temporarily assigned in Gaithersburg until a new full-time staff member can be hired. David Skisano has been hired and he can be reached at 301-987-8412 (V), 301-987-8413 (V), or davidj.skisano@maryland.gov.

V. County Reopening Discussion – Boards, Committees & Commissions (BCC)

The Executive staff that work with all BCCS have told staff that Commissions can decide how to hold meetings going forward. Betsy Luecking, Staff, asked for feedback from Commissioners. Some Commissioners do not feel comfortable meeting in person at this time. Most Commissioners prefer virtual meetings and feel they can be conducted effectively. Virtual meetings also lessen the commute time as well as transportation issues and allow for stakeholders from outside of Montgomery County to easily attend the meetings. Commissioners also agreed that an in-person meeting would be beneficial at some point, perhaps as an annual retreat or goal setting meeting. It was suggested that a hybrid of virtual and in-person be offered. Betsy suggested revisiting this conversation in September.

VI. Chair and Vice Chair Report

Dr. Raymond Crowel, Director, Department of Health and Human Services, is asking BCCs to submit their budget recommendations for FY23 by October 1. Betsy sent last year's budget recommendations out to Commissioners. It was suggested the Commission continue to support Warrior Canine Connection receiving a \$50,000 grant. Betsy suggested holding a special meeting in July for Commissioners to discuss other recommendations. Commissioners can also email Betsy with suggestions. We will vote on the priorities at the September meeting.

VII. Updates / Announcements

Christa Burton, Representative of Congressman Jamie Raskin, reported Congressman Raskin co-sponsored the Act for ALS. Wayne was honored by Congressman Raskin as a Local Hero on Memorial Day weekend: www.youtube.com/watch?v=dD9VEpYgutk.

Austin Morris, Representative of Senator Chris Van Hollen, reported Senator Van Hollen co-sponsored the Military Child Care Expansion Act would equip the Pentagon with new tools and a clear mission to fix the 135 Military Child Development Centers operating in "Poor" or "Failing" condition and eliminate persistent waitlists for child care, which had grown to 9,000 military children with immediate needs, according to the Department of Defense (DoD). Senator Van Hollen also co-sponsored the Servicemember Parental Leave Equity Act that would make sure that all primary and secondary caregivers in the military can access 12 weeks of paid parental leave.

Jameelah said the VA offers a [clothing allowance for Veterans](#) who have a prosthetic or orthopedic device (such as a wheelchair) or who take medicine for a skin condition. Application for Annual Clothing Allowance (VA Form 10-8678) - [download VA Form 10-8678 \(PDF\)](#). Items claimed must be from an approved VA vendor.

Dr. Macri is involved with the Montgomery County Suicide Prevention Coalition. The Coalition was divided into three groups – seniors, youth, and adults - to work on suicide prevention issues. She has suggested that the Coalition hear presentations from the Audubon Naturalist Society and the Montgomery College Combat2College program to learn more about how Veterans are affected by depression or anxiety.

Dr. Macri has been asked to participate in County Cable Montgomery's series is called *Wellness Community Events: Healing and Holding On - One Conversation at a Time for the Community* to discuss resources and programs available to seniors in Montgomery County.

Wayne asked Dr. Macri for assistance in locating an interpreter who speaks Mandarin for a bereavement case. Dr. Macri noted that the Chinese Community and Cultural Center has several trained individuals that are native Mandarin speakers. Wayne suggested adding a category to the Commission's website with resources for language translation and interpreters.

Bill Gray, former Commission Chair, announced the Office of Human Rights will be hosting a Juneteenth program this Saturday June 19 at the BlackRock Center for the Arts in Germantown. Bill will be participating in the program's living history presentation as General Gordon Granger who issued General Order No. 3 on June 19, 1865, in Galveston, Texas, further informing residents of, and enforcing, Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation which set all Confederate states' slaves free on January 1, 1863.

Lynn Nash, Communications Director, Maryland Military Coalition, is working with non-profit organization Care For Your Health that is delivering COVID-19 vaccinations to homebound individuals as well as healthcare home visits. For more information, contact Lesley Palencia at 240-499-6224. Care For Your Health has also organized a low-income vaccine clinic in coordination with the City of Gaithersburg held June 16.

Adjournment: 7:30pm

Next Full Commission Meeting: Tuesday, September 21, 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; Scott Schlesinger; Lisa Schuster; Joanna Starling; Michael Subin; Anneke Vandenbroek; Susan Webman; Steven Willis; Michael Wilson

Commissioners Absent: None

Non-Voting Congressional Representatives Present: Christa Burton (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