



Commission on Veterans Affairs



MEETING AGENDA

Tuesday, June 21, 2022

6 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.

Wayne Miller, Chair – Bob Koffman, Vice-Chair

Join the meeting

via ZOOM

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/84394879404>

If you want to call into the meeting, call 301-715-8592, use Meeting ID 843 9487 9404 followed by #. **If an attendee would like to speak during the meeting**, you 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 2022 Meeting Minutes – Bob Koffman, Vice-Chair

6:10 Memorial Day at Vietnam Veteran Memorial Talk and Message – Jane McCarthy CRNA, PhD, FAAN, former Commissioner

6:40 Updates from Commissioners

7:00 Planning for any budget requests from the County

7:00 Commission Planning for Next Meeting – Bob Koffman

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 betsy.luecking@montgomerycountymd.gov or 240-418-4865.

****See duties on next page**

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 Summary Minutes
June 21, 2022**

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

Call to Order

Dr. Bob Koffman, Vice-Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting of the Commission on Veterans Affairs (CVA). Dr. Koffman 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.

Memorial Day at Vietnam Veteran Memorial Talk and Message – Jane McCarthy, U.S. Army (Ret), CRNA, PhD, FAAN, Former Commissioner

View [Captain McCarthy's speech](#) which was given at the annual Memorial Day ceremony co-hosted by the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund and National Park Service.

[View Captain McCarthy's biography.](#)

Captain Jane McCarthy joined the Army Nurse Corps in 1968. After the six weeks of basic training in Texas, she was stationed at Walter Reed Army Medical Center for ten months in the Recovery Room/Intensive Care Unit. Then, at age 22, with that minimal experience under her belt, she was shipped out to the 95th Evacuation Hospital in DaNang, South Vietnam where she worked in the pre-operative and receiving area as a triage nurse, separating patients based on severity of injuries and what medical treatments were needed.

Captain McCarthy noted that the Vietnam Women's Memorial, which was established in 1993 and dedicated to the nurses and women of the United States who served in the Vietnam War, and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, which was established in 1982 and chronologically lists the names of 58,318 Americans who gave their lives in service to their country, were considered separate memorials. Previously, a candlelight service would be held at the nurses memorial the evening before Memorial Day. She acknowledged that Vietnam nurses have now been invited to speak and be a part of the memorial program. It was an honor for her to be asked to speak at this year's Memorial Day ceremony. When she prepared her speech, she wanted it to be meaningful, to have purpose, and to relate to the audience. In attendance were veterans, gold star mothers and gold star wives. Captain McCarthy has been going to Vietnam Veterans Memorial on Veterans Day for 25 years now and she said she does so to continue to heal. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial is so different from other memorials because it is not about heroes coming home – it is about the high cost of war.

Captain McCarthy began her speech by reciting the names of her friends from Cohasset, Massachusetts who died in Vietnam. She was coming home to a funeral every six months. These friends are the reason why she enlisted in the Army. Recently graduated from Massachusetts General Hospital School of Nursing, she couldn't think of anything with more purpose than to take care of the wounded soldiers in Vietnam. During her speech, she thought why we keep coming back to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. It has meant so much to Vietnam veterans yet it is not easy being there. When it was first installed, veterans were encouraged not to visit it alone because of how painful and yet meaningful it meant to make that visit. That is why these programs continue. During her speech, Captain McCarthy also realized that she never knew a helicopter pilot because their job ended when her job began. She did not talk about missing out on a parade when she came home but the post-traumatic stress she experienced before there was a diagnosis for PTSD. She experienced the classic symptoms including nightmares, depression, weight loss, loss of appetite and numbness. Trauma was not just for the wounded but those who were taking care of those wounded and seeing the atrocities of war.

Captain McCarthy said she continues to share her story because it helps her to heal and maybe it will help someone out there realize that war isn't about heroes coming home to parades, but about lives lost. She said the

Three Soldiers bronze statue, which was installed in 1984 as part of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, look so pensively, thoughtfully and sorrowfully upon the Wall and they too capture what the Wall stands for. When the Women's Vietnam Memorial was installed under the trees it added a healing feeling. Captain McCarthy attended the dedication of the Women's Vietnam Memorial and walked down Pennsylvania Avenue during a parade carrying a banner for the Army hospital where she was stationed. She said every once in awhile you'd hear a Veteran yell out "That's my hospital. You were the one who took care of me." Captain McCarthy said it was healing for both the soldier and the nurse. With the Women's Vietnam Memorial, it was the first time that they were able to acknowledge that they were wounded, too.

After Vietnam, Captain McCarthy entered into the Army Reserves where she made friends with a fellow reservist. Neither realized they had both served in Vietnam until they encountered each other at the dedication of the Women's Vietnam Memorial. Neither talked about their service in Vietnam because that is how they dealt with it. These memorials help them to engage and help them to talk about their service safely.

Captain McCarthy served in the Army for about 10 months. She wanted to attend university and had applied while she was in Vietnam. She had submitted paperwork for an early separation but was told the paperwork had been lost. She ended up writing a letter to her Senator to let him know about her situation. Six days later, the Chief Nurse on staff told Captain McCarthy, who was working in the ER, to pack her bags. She had no written orders but had to find transport to Chu Lai, Vietnam. She was there for three days and then was sent home. Within 8 hours she had exited the Army.

Betsy encouraged Commissioners to also share their stories and to become speakers. Captain McCarthy along with former Commission Chair Bill Gray visit several schools throughout Montgomery County to speak on Memorial Day and Veterans Day

Dr. Koffman said it is such a privilege to hear about Captain McCarthy's service, especially when only 16% of those in service were female during the Vietnam War. He noted that the obvious lack of support that veterans received when they came home, the outright denigration, and the morale of those drafted caused many to self medicate with drugs and alcohol. One of the most significant aspects of Vietnam that helped the VA understand the ideologic developmental of PTSD was servicemembers were deployed alone and returned home alone. It is now understood how the lack of solidarity and unity a veteran has when they deploy and return together is incredibly provocative and ideologic for PTSD. In fact, it's one of the reasons why reservists have higher incidences of PTSD because they deploy alone and return home alone. Dr. Koffman added how that makes Jane's story all the more powerful and compelling.

Discussion – Gun Violence Epidemic and County Council ARPA Relief Funds for Police and Violence Reduction

County Council held a worksession on June 14 on police and violence reduction in Montgomery County. Betsy Luecking, Staff, sent an email to Commissioners with the Council's report, a bulleted list of the outcomes from the worksession and a link to the hearing. This Commission was established to advise the County Council and the County Executive. Betsy is Staff Liaison to the Commission on People with Disabilities and worked with that Commission to provide input on these issues. She asked this Commission to provide input as well.

At the hearing, Council President Gabe Albornoz reported that there were 523 guns confiscated last year in Montgomery County. Within the last six months, 727 guns have been confiscated, of which 105 are privately manufactured firearms (also known as ghost guns). He also reported that there was an incident last year where more than 50 shots were fired from both handguns and a rifle. Two victims were hit as well as multiple storefronts and parked cars.

School Resource Officers (SRO) were removed from schools at the start of this academic school year and were replaced with a community engagement officer program. The program assigns a police officer to school clusters, with each one assigned to a high school and other area schools. [Under a new agreement](#) that was finalized in April 2022, the police officers have assigned office space in each school but are not permanently stationed there. Each school principal has a direct line of contact to their community engagement officer. Before, administrators were directed to not contact the officers directly.

ARPA funds in the amount of \$731,125 were set to provide a targeted emergency response to address an increase in pandemic-associated gun violence, particularly in the Silver Spring area.

- \$471,875 will be used to create a Violent Crime Information Center, with four crime analysts that conduct link analysis, track weapons data, and generate violent crime statistical reports for Command Staff. It includes funding for supplies and training. These efforts will help identify individuals who can participate in group violence prevention initiatives.
- \$156,250 for a Gun Violence Intervention Initiative. This violence prevention best practice requires partnerships with Street Outreach Network in HHS. A portion of this funding is to hire two hospital navigator positions at Suburban Hospital that will help mediate conflicts during gang and violent situations.
- \$37,500 for Youth and Family Violence Prevention. This initiative will allow for much broader advertising and outreach regarding the County's domestic violence 1 American Rescue Plan Update, April 22, 2022, staff report prevention programs. MCPD will coordinate with the Family Justice Center and the Domestic Violence Coordinating Council.
- \$65,500 for the Midnight Madness Activities Program Pilot. The Police Department is attempting to launch a Midnight Madness basketball league with the Montgomery County Recreation Department and Police Foundation to provide a 3 on 3 basketball league at one recreation center. This program will provide a free basketball league to youths ages 14 through 17 on Friday evenings. The participants will have access to other activities available at the recreation center.

Anneke Vandenbroek, Commissioner, reported veterans are more likely to own firearms than the general population and they are more likely to use firearms to commit suicide, which is where the greatest risk lies with firearms in the veteran population. The veteran population is not any more at risk than the general population of committing a mass shooting, which is a difficult thing to predict. It is very rare for a mental health professional to predict a rare event that someone has plotted and that they are not sharing with anyone else. General firearm safety is extremely important and the idea of legal means of restriction when dealing with veterans who may be having suicidal thoughts applies to the general population as well. It also has been found to be one of the most effective ways to prevent someone from killing themselves from a gun. The VA offers free gun locks to veterans. Anneke added that her son's school went into a lockdown this year because a kid reportedly came to school with a gun. She feels very strongly about gun safety for the community in general. Anneke shared a link for [Maryland's red flag laws](#). If an individual is deemed to be at risk for firearm violence against a domestic partner, a group or another individual, the court can be petitioned to issue an order to remove firearms from that person. Red flag laws have been shown to be highly effective in reducing firearm homicides and homicides in general. In most states the police have to petition for the removal. Mental health practitioners are not involved.

Dr. Cynthia Macri, Commissioner, agreed with Anneke and that adding funds into mental health resources is not the only option or answer. One cannot predict who is going to do a mass shooting. The Governor's Commission on Suicide Prevention and the Montgomery County Suicide Prevention Coalition have discussed reducing the risk of suicide by firearms by limiting the access to firearms. Dr. Macri does not agree with arming veterans to patrol schools and act as mercenaries to try and keep kids safe. She also does not agree with arming teachers. She noted that there is no data yet as to whether the community engagement program has been effective. By using big data and analyzing it appropriately, one may be able to determine if an individual is more or less at risk of committing gun violence. Dr. Macri, who was a practicing gynecologist during her service in the U.S. Navy, said she saw domestic violence and fear that women had – not just in the civilian world, but also in the military. Domestic violence does not always mean physical abuse – it can also mean sexual and emotional abuse or controlling behavior. Pregnancy is one way to control the activity of that person. There has been a correlation shown between violence against women at home and violence in the greater community.

A question arose about whether school resource officers should be stationed back in schools. Anneke said there is a place for school resource officers depending on what they are doing. There is value in having someone overseeing security and safety, but she does not know if they should be armed. Big data shows that the higher the rate of firearm ownership, the may more shootings, more homicides and more suicides in states than those with low rates of firearm ownership. If we reduce access to weapons and reduce the rate of gun ownership, then there will be fewer gun deaths. Firearm training alone will not achieve that outcome. Susan Webman, Commissioner, agreed with the rehiring of school resource officers in schools, but they should be there to protect the school and the students, not have authority to punish the students.

Scott Schlesinger, Commissioner, taught at Hebrew Academy where his daughter now teaches preschool and where several grandchildren attend. As someone who is Jewish, they feel vulnerable as they are a targeted community. He finds value in having school resource officers in the school and in practicing active shooter drills. When he was a teacher, he received training on how to defend himself and the classroom which he found very comforting. School resource officers are good especially within a targeted community to make it feel more secure. Dr. Macri agreed as she herself is part of a targeted community and due to the increased random acts of violence against Asian women. Scott added that an armed off duty police officer is also stationed at the synagogue every Saturday morning to provide security and protection. While Scott himself has a carry permit, he does not want members of the synagogue to openly carry their weapons with them. He noted that arming staff or providing armed officers increases insurance liabilities.

Dr. Macri reported she is working on a project with Stan Seidel, Maryland Veterans Commission, Jason Marshall, ServingTogether, and several others with the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs to discuss how to target veterans coming out of the service for employment in the police force to build upon their existing skill sets. It would be beneficial for the state or the county to recruit veterans and provide funding for them to receive that training and to become qualified to fill the growing number of vacant positions. Susan agreed with creating job opportunities for veterans through this route.

Jonathan Alfaro, former Commissioner, said one of the biggest issues at schools currently is lack of security. He would rather be proactive than reactive and at this point it may be more beneficial to have an armed security officer in the schools to provide some form of protection until the larger gun issues can be addressed. He said veterans would work well in these positions due to the amount of responsibility and their understanding and mentality to protect.

Anneke said research has shown that the most effective means of preventing mass shootings is by banning the sale of assault style weapons and large capacity magazines. A ban had been in place for 10 years in the U.S. and mass shootings were significantly lower. When the ban ended, mass shootings went back to the rate that they were prior to the ban. She agreed that schools need to have more resources for mental health, especially since mass shooting exercises and drills are traumatizing to children, even though they are not necessarily effective for preventing mass shootings. She also agreed that resource officers are important for safety reasons, but neither the resource officers nor mental health resources will prevent mass shootings. Research has overwhelmingly shown that restricting access to firearms prevents mass shootings from happening.

Scott said while most AR-15's are banned by name in the law, those with a heavy barrel, or HBARs, are still legal to buy as long as they do not have two of three banned features which are: a flash suppressor at the end of the barrel; a grenade launcher; and a folding stock. He noted that California has one of the toughest gun laws in the country and the military bases sell AR-15s because the gun manufacturers modified the AR-15 to be in compliance with the ban. Banning all AR-15s will not work as gun manufacturers will just manufacture guns that comply with the definition.

Jonathan suggested allowing individuals to purchase an assault rifle but then it is sent to an armory where the individual can check it out to be used at the armory's range and then it must be checked back in. This could deter individuals from taking the assault rifle off armory property as personal information would be available in order to track down that individual. Currently, individuals can purchase firearms and there is no tracking or responsibility.

Dr. Macri also suggested that Maryland implement metal detectors and clear backpacks, which are used at public schools in Washington, DC, Los Angeles, and Dallas suburbs. While some firearms may be undetectable by an x-ray, it could have prevented the shooting at Magruder High School.

Ken Reichard, Representative of Senator Ben Cardin, said Congress is currently reviewing implementation of background checks for all 50 states. It is unclear at this point if background check legislation would include the ability to view sealed records. He also noted that background checks used in Maryland can reveal a lot of information about an individual and would be mandatory when purchasing any kind of firearm. Several states have red flag laws in place, although some states are using these laws for a different purpose than they were designed. Ken suggested that this Commission recommend supporting background checks as well as red flag laws in addition to existing Maryland red flag laws as long as the language is designed that it cannot be used in divorce court situations. Jonathan suggested that a letter of recommendation be required along with a background

check. Dr. Macri said there is open- source data available that could also be used for background checks such as social media or newspapers.

Dr. Koffman reported beginning July 16 the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline can be reached by calling 9-8-8. The new 9-8-8 number is considered the 9-1-1 of mental health and substance use issues. The goal of 9-8-8 is to have 24/7 crisis call centers (someone to talk to), mobile crisis teams (someone to respond to crises), and crisis stabilization programs (somewhere to go). He suggested that this information be included in the list of recommendations.

Approval of Minutes

A motion was made to approve the May 2022 Meeting Summary Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken, and the May 2022 Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva.

Chair and Vice Chair Report

The Commission does not meet in July or August. The next Commission meeting will be held September 20. The meeting will be held virtually and Commissioners will discuss the option of meeting in person at the next meeting.

Some Commissioner terms will end September 30. A vacancy announcement should be posted within the next month or two. Commissioners are asked to continue serving until their position has been filled.

Updates / Announcements

Elwood Gray, Commissioner, reported the American Minority Veterans Research Project is hosting a dance competition event this Saturday June 25. The event will include free COVID-19 vaccinations and free food.

Jonathan is hosting a gaming and veterans event on July 23 at metrobar in DC. He will send information to Betsy. Dr. Macri reported children ages 6 months to 5 years are now eligible for the COVID-19 Pfizer and Moderna vaccines. The Chinese Culture and Community Service Center (CCACC) is hosting a vaccination clinic on July 8. Dr. Macri will be providing vaccinations at the event. She also reported that the Workhouse Arts Center in Lorton, Virginia offers [free art courses for veterans](#). They also offer tuition assistance for other available courses.

Adjournment

7:30pm

Next Full Commission Meeting

Tuesday, September 20, 2022, 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; Robert Koffman; Cynthia Macri; Scott Schlesinger; Joanna Starling; Anneke Vandenbroek; Susan Webman; Michael Wilson

Commissioners Absent: Jameelah Johnson; Wayne Miller, Chair; Reggie Mitchell; Lisa Schuster; Michael Subin

Non-Voting Congressional Representatives Present: Joseph Eyong (Congressman Jamie Raskin); Austin Morris (Senator Chris Van Hollen); Ken Reichard (Senator Ben Cardin)

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

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