



Commission on Veterans Affairs



MEETING AGENDA

Tuesday, June 20, 2023

6 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.

Wayne Miller, Chair – Bob Koffman, Vice-Chair

Join the meeting via Zoom

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/85424051826>

If you want to call into the meeting, call 301-715-8592, use Meeting ID 854 2405 1826 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 2023 Meeting Minutes – Wayne Miller, Chair**

6:05 Update – Veterans Homelessness – John Mendez, Executive Director, Bethesda Cares

**6:30 Maryland General Assembly Key Veteran Bills – Lynn Nash, PhD, RN, PHCNS-BC,
FAAN, Communications Director, Maryland Military Coalition**

7:00 Chair and Vice Chair Updates

7:10 Commissioner Updates

7:20 Commission Planning for Next Meeting – Wayne Miller

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 202-853-1109.

****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 Minutes
June 20, 2023**

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

Call to Order

Wayne Miller, 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 Minutes

Due to lack of a quorum, approval of the May 2023 Meeting Minutes was tabled until the September meeting. Approved minutes are available online at www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva.

Update – Veterans Homelessness – John Mendez, Executive Director, Bethesda Cares

Website: <https://bethesdacares.org/>

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

John reviewed the handout.

In 2010 through 2012, HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program provided the County with 50 HUD-VASH vouchers as a result of the work by this Commission and then Congressman Chris Van Hollen, now Senator. The HUD-VASH program combines HUD's Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) rental assistance for homeless veterans with case management and clinical services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). In 2013/2014, the VA paused providing the County with vouchers and this is where the number of veterans homelessness increased. With Operation Homecoming providing funding to Montgomery County Coalition for the Homeless (MCCH) and the Veterans Rapid and Rehousing Program funded to Bethesda Cares, services were shifted away from an emergency shelter response to permanent housing solutions. This resulted in a significant decline in the number of veterans experiencing homelessness in Montgomery County.

Bethesda Cares maintains an inflow chart of active homeless veterans in the county that is tracked day-to-day or week-to-week. It fluctuates between 15 to 25 homeless veterans at any given time. Approximately half are currently assigned to subsidy programs and are waiting on apartments to become available while the other half have yet to be identified. Some veterans are wary of giving information, but staff continue to try to provide assistance. Housing first needs to remain the focus in order to keep the numbers manageable otherwise the numbers will go up.

The floor was opened to questions.

Sam Korper, Liaison to Commission on People with Disabilities, asked about eligibility criteria and ineligibility based on discharge status. Military servicemembers who have received a dishonorable discharge are not eligible for federal government vouchers. Some local programs can assist although non-veteran service providers sometimes classify bad conduct and other than honorable discharges along with dishonorable discharge. Some cases for bad conduct can be appealed to the VA. Sam also asked if a legal

status can affect homelessness. John said a landlord can conduct criminal background checks and can deny voucher applicants based on the check.

Stan Seidel, Maryland Veterans Commission, asked about trends in homelessness and age of veterans. John reported ten years ago veterans who were in their late 20s and early 30s were returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan. Organizations started to think how long those veterans would be welcomed by their family into their homes and how those family members would help someone who had gone through significant trauma and PTSD. The system is working to make sure supports are in place so that these veterans do not fall through the cracks. Families cannot be expected to manage the situation all the time and the system is evolving in ways to apply rapid rehousing techniques and housing stabilization programs. For example, by providing funding that allows veterans to pay back rent and keep their housing. Many of these types of cases do not require ongoing case management. These types of programs are far more economical than allowing the individual to become homeless.

If a veteran becomes homeless and they visit an emergency shelter, an assessment would be conducted by InterFaith Works or MCCH. Assessments on the street are conducted by Bethesda Cares and EveryMind. Staff at Bethesda Cares on the street every day checking for homeless people and have been taught to check cars and locations where homeless people may congregate such as post offices or Home Depot parking lots. If an individual identifies as a veteran then Bethesda Cares helps them to get services.

Betsy Luecking, Staff, asked how one could make a donation for veterans. John said two organizations operate locally funded programs paid for by County taxpayer dollars – MCCH and Bethesda Cares. Donations can be made to either organization. Bethesda Cares has set aside vouchers that are locally funded and resources for veterans.

John noted that for a number of years emergency shelter-based response system was used and the number of homeless veterans increased. When permanent housing and resources were used instead, the number of homeless veterans declined significantly. A New York Times article was published this morning reporting that several members of congress have publicly stated their disapproval of permanent housing and housing first programs. If funding for these programs is removed, it would significantly damage the progress that has been made to reduce veterans homelessness.

In 2015, \$500,000 in funding appropriated by the Council was used to house 18 homeless veterans and helped the County to provide housing for every identifiable homeless veteran. The majority of veterans that have used the County's funding had been discharged from service due to bad conduct with one or two having dishonorable discharge and are not eligible for VA HUD VASH vouchers. Montgomery County has been the direct recipient of 98 HUD VASH vouchers and an additional 25 ported HUD VASH vouchers from DC and other states. Montgomery County achieved functional zero for veterans experiencing homelessness at the end of December 2015. The County's effort has been recognized by both the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (ISICH) and the Zero: 2016 Campaign.

John noted that this Commission did groundbreaking work and has made a huge difference in the lives of hundreds of veterans.

Maryland General Assembly Key Veteran Bills – Lynn Nash, PhD, RN, PHCNS-BC, FAAN, Communications Director, Maryland Military Coalition (MMC)

Website: www.mdmilcoalition.org

PowerPoint: https://montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/Resources/Files/A%26D%20Docs/CVA/MOCOVeteransCommission_June_20_2023.pdf

Dr. Nash reviewed the PowerPoint presentation.

The floor was opened to questions.

Betsy asked how to prevent seniors and veterans from leaving Maryland due to its taxes on retirement income. Dr. Nash noted that it is especially difficult when you include the cost of living in Maryland. This issue has been raised with legislators. MMC also views hiring veterans as a way to help the economy. The defense industry is in need of filling vacant positions.

Chair and Vice Chair Report

None.

Commission Planning for Next Meeting

The Commission should discuss priorities at the September meeting. Betsy asked Commissioners to think about issues this Commission could work on such as a hiring preference for spouses of veterans or taxes on retirement income. Bill Gray, former Chair, suggested renaming a library after POW U.S. Navy Commander Everett Alvarez, Jr. (Ret.).

Updates / Announcements

Ken Reichard, Representative of Senator Ben Cardin, reported as of April 15 he is officially retired from the U.S. Senate, but will be staying on as Senator Cardin's assistant for the next 1 ½ years. Senator Cardin specifically asked Ken to continue working with this Commission.

Bill Gray, former Chair, reported that the Vietnam Memorial in Rockville is in need of a deep cleaning. He also reported there was trash as well as tables in front of it. Bill washes the Vietnam Wall in DC along with several other members of the Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 641. He offered to wash the Vietnam Memorial in Rockville. Ken and Wayne volunteered to assist. Jameelah Johnson, Commissioner, suggested that the County install a sign to discourage trash dumping at the memorial.

Dr. Cynthia Macri, Commissioner, reported the health subcommittee of the VA's Advisory Committee on Women Veterans held a site visit to the Baltimore VA Medical Center. A report will be issued in the coming months, which she will share with the Commission when it is made available. Dr. Macri also reported that her parents will be interred at Arlington National Cemetery on Monday June 26. Her father was drafted for the Korean War.

Dr. Elwood Gray, Commissioner, reported the American Minority Veterans Research Project (AMVRP) participated in an annual Scotland Juneteenth Heritage celebration held at Cabin John. AMVRP will be hosting an event on November 28 that will highlight letters from POWs in Vietnam. He asked for assistance in identifying local veterans or families that may have letters they would like to present at the event, which will be held at the Silver Spring Civic Building.

Adjournment: 7:20pm

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

Attendance

Commissioners Present: Josephine Bahn; Elwood Gray; Jameelah Johnson; Cynthia Macri; Wayne Miller, Chair; Reggie Mitchell; Scott Schlesinger; Joanna Starling; Anneke Vandenbroek

Commissioners Absent: Bob Koffman; Michael Subin; Susan Webman; Michael Wilson

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

Non-Voting Congressional Representatives Absent: Vikki Garcia (Congressman John Sarbanes); Emilie Mahoney (Senator Chris Van Hollen)

County Staff Present: Odile Brunetto, Chief, Aging & Disability Services, Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS); Jen Hodge, Local Behavioral Health Authority, DHHS

Commission Liaison: Sam Korper, Commission on People with Disabilities

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

Public Present: David Skisano, Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs; Lynn Nash, Maryland Military Coalition; Stan Seidel, Maryland Veterans Commission; Dina Karpf, Maryland's Commitment to Veterans; John Mendez, Bethesda Cares; Bill Gray