



## Commission on Veterans Affairs



### MEETING AGENDA

**Tuesday, May 16, 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/81882975977>

**If you want to call into the meeting**, call 301-715-8592, use Meeting ID 818 8297 5977 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 April 2023 Meeting Minutes – Wayne Miller, Chair**

**6:05 Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs Update – Anthony Woods, Secretary, Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs**

**6:45 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](mailto: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 Summary Minutes  
May 16, 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**

A motion was made to approve the April 2023 Meeting Summary Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and the April 2023 Meeting Summary Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva).

**Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs (MDVA) Update – Anthony Woods, Secretary, MDVA**

**Website:** <https://veterans.maryland.gov/>

**Bio:** <https://veterans.maryland.gov/anthony-woods/>

Secretary Woods provided an overview and updated of MDVA programs and services.

- [Charlotte Hall Veterans Home](#) is a 444-bed facility in St. Mary's County providing assisted living and skilled nursing care for Maryland Veterans and eligible spouses. Veterans from all over Maryland reside there. Due to renovations, the number of available beds is less than reported.
  - On May 10, MDVA signed a new contract with PruittHealth, an organization with more than 50 years of experience providing quality health care. PruittHealth manages more than 105 nursing homes and 6 veterans homes throughout Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, and South Carolina.
  - A second veterans home is estimated to open in Sykesville in Summer 2027.
  - MDVA needs to identify locations for future veterans home to accommodate the number of veterans and their eligible spouses in Maryland.
- There are approximately 50,000 Veteran-Owned Small Businesses (VSBE) in Maryland. [Maryland's VSBE Program](#) provides contracting opportunities on state-funded procurements for qualified veteran-owned small businesses. Designated agencies and departments are directed to spend at least 1% of the dollar value of their procurement contracts with certified VSBE firms.
- MDVA continues to work on employment for military spouses.
- MDVA has been rather successful in identifying veterans that served in the Korean War and Vietnam War but has had a harder time identifying veterans who served in the Gulf War and post 9/11. They are working on other avenues to connect with those veterans.
- [Maryland Veterans Trust Fund](#) current account balance is \$600,000 to \$650,000. The fund is a 501c3 organization designed to assist with non-emergency, temporary financial challenges facing veterans or widows/widowers of veterans who are within 250% of the poverty line or below. The fund's design cannot support chronic, long term financial hardship. It is mostly used to assist with rent/mortgage payments and utility bills. Donations come from individuals, organizations and the Maryland Lottery and Gaming Agency. It is governed by a Board of Trustees and chaired by the

MDVA Secretary. Applications can be approved within 48 hours. Secretary Woods would like to partner with county Commissions to identify veterans in need and assisting with completing applications to make the process better.

- [H.B. 316/S.B. 354: Income Tax Checkoff - Maryland Veterans Trust Fund](#), establishes a certain income tax checkoff for voluntary contributions to the Maryland Veterans Trust Fund.
- [MDVA Service and Benefits Program](#) provides assistance to the men and women who served in the Uniformed Services of the United States, their dependents, and survivors in obtaining benefits from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Department of Defense, State of Maryland and other programs for veterans and their families. The program has a 94% claims acceptance rate. Program staff have participated in four claims clinics so far this year with the most recent clinic in Clarksville.
- [MDVA Cemetery Program](#) offers our veterans, National Guard, Reservists and their eligible dependents a final resting place at one of five state veterans cemeteries located throughout Maryland.
  - H.B. 480/S.B. 286: Department of Veterans Affairs - Burial in State Veterans' Cemeteries - Spouses and Dependents, requires the Department of Veterans Affairs to bury the eligible spouse or dependent of a veteran in a State veterans' cemetery without charge.
- [MDVA Communications, Outreach and Advocacy Program](#) informs Maryland veterans about benefits and services that are available from federal, state, and local organizations and solicit feedback from veterans regarding their requests and needs for additional services. The Program sends out a bi-monthly e-newsletter comprised of notable veteran and military related events across Maryland. Approximately 205,000 are subscribed to the e-newsletter currently. In addition, the Program provides briefings on MDVA programs and benefits available to Maryland Veterans and their families. The Program staffs tables at various community events to provide education and outreach materials pertaining to Maryland benefits and MDVA programs.
- Secretary Woods will be emailing Wayne inviting Commissioners to provide legislation priorities and recommendations for proposed legislation for the 2024 session. Other legislation that passed during the 2023 session:
  - [Keep Our Heroes Home Act](#), increases the military retirement income tax exemption for veterans, spouses, or anyone receiving military pensions in Maryland. The exemption will be increased from \$5,000 to \$12,500 for individuals under the age of 55 and from \$15,000 to \$20,000 for individuals over the age of 55.
  - [Health Care for Heroes Act of 2023](#), establishes the Tricare Premium Reimbursement Program within the Maryland Military Department. The program will provide members of the Maryland National Guard who utilize the DoD-provided Tricare Reserve Select health care plan and the Tricare Dental Program up to \$60 in reimbursements monthly to cover the costs of premiums. This \$60 is enough to cover the full individual costs for health care and dental care.
- Secretary Woods acknowledged that Montgomery County has done an incredible job as it relates to veterans homelessness and reaching a functional zero. Governor Moore is working to end veterans suicide and veterans homelessness is a component of that initiative.

The floor was opened to questions.

Dr. Bob Koffman, Vice-Chair, asked how MDVA shares information with veterans throughout the state. Secretary Woods reported most information is shared via MDVA's bi-monthly newsletter. He it's important to spend more time meeting with county commissions who work closely with veterans, veteran service organizations, and non-profits who can assist with sharing information. MDVA will also be using social media more. MDVA is in the process of purchasing veterans data including phone numbers to send information via text.

Dr. Cynthia Macri, Commissioner, reported she serves on the VA's Advisory Committee on Women Veterans. She would like more focus on comprehensive health care for women veterans. The Baltimore VA Medical Center could be leading the way in women's health care as Maryland has Johns Hopkins Medical School and the University of Maryland Medical Center. Dr. Macri reported the Advisory Committee will be

meeting in person June 12 through 16. Secretary Woods will follow-up with Dr. Macri on how MDVA can help amplify messaging and resources available for women veterans.

Michael Theard, Public, asked for assistance with a veteran who is having trouble accessing health care for cancer. Veterans who turn 65 and do not request to be placed on TriCare Plus lose their access to facilities. Also, in order to be eligible for TriCare for life, veterans must be registered and paying for Medicare Part B. Secretary Woods asked Michael to email him directly.

Wayne asked about VA eBenefits and My HealtheVet being removed and merging into one application that can be used on the computer or mobile phone. Secretary Woods has not heard of any applications being removed and will follow-up on this question.

Stan Siedel, Maryland Veterans Commission, suggested that the Maryland Veterans Trust Fund could share funds with local veteran community organizations that could help assist veterans. Secretary Woods said that the Fund has provided some small grants including equin therapy. He noted there have been challenges such as transportation for veterans in rural areas. MDVA can review recommendations to determine if changes need to be made via legislation or executive action.

Commissioners can contact Secretary Woods directly via email at [secretary.mdva@maryland.gov](mailto:secretary.mdva@maryland.gov).

### **Chair and Vice Chair Report**

Next Commission meeting is June 20 from 6pm to 7:30pm. Wayne suggested inviting Governor Wes Moore. Stan suggested inviting Fields of Valor for an update.

### **Updates / Announcements**

Scott Schlesinger, Commissioner, reported Jewish War Veterans Post 360, American Legion Post 268, and Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 2562 will be hosting a Memorial Day ceremony on Monday May 29 at 11am at Wheaton Veterans Urban Park, 11200 Amherst Avenue, Wheaton, MD 20902. Featuring speaker Major General (Ret) Richard Thomas. Refreshments at American Legion Post 268 after event.

Dr. Macri reported the Japanese American Veterans Association will be hosting their [75<sup>th</sup> Annual Memorial Day service](#) on Sunday May 28 at 10am at Arlington National Cemetery Columbarium.

Sheldon Goldberg, Public, reported Jewish War Veterans Post 692 will be hosting a Memorial Day ceremony on Sunday May 28 at 2:30pm at Bender JCC of Greater Washington, 6125 Montrose Road, Rockville, MD 20852. Keynote speaker is Andrew Friedson, Vice President of the Montgomery County Council. The Ukrainian American Veterans Post 26 are special guests, Voices of Vets will provide entertainment, and there will be light refreshments. Program is free and open to the public.

Dr. Koffman introduced Emilie Mahoney, Representative for Senator Chris Van Hollen, who will be attending meetings moving forward as Austin Morris has accepted a new position as the Maryland Government Affairs Manager for Children's National Hospital.

Carly Clem, Staff, reported the County will be issuing a press release about the Commission's [Fallen Hometown Heroes](#) website the week before Memorial Day.

**Adjournment:** 7:05pm

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

**Attendance on next page.**

**Attendance**

**Commissioners Present:** Elwood Gray; Jameelah Johnson; Robert Koffman, Vice-Chair; Cynthia Macri; Wayne Miller, Chair; Scott Schlesinger; Joanna Starling; Anneke Vandenbroek; Susan Webman; Michael Wilson

**Commissioners Absent:** Josephine Bahn; Reggie Mitchell; Michael Subin

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

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

**County Staff Present:** Odile Brunetto, Chief, Aging & Disability Services, Department of Health and Human Services

**Commission Liaison:** Sam Korper, Commission on People with Disabilities

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

**Public Present:** Secretary Anthony Woods, Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs