



## Commission on Veterans Affairs

February 17, 2026

6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

Michael Wilson, Chair  
Chris Thomas, Vice-Chair

### Virtual Meeting Via Zoom

[Zoom Meeting Link](#)

## AGENDA

**Join by telephone:** *If you want to call into the meeting, call 301-715-8592, use Meeting ID 739 001 7153 followed by #. Those calling into the meeting can press \*6 to mute and unmute their phone. If an attendee would like to speak during the meeting, they must use the “hand raise” function. If connecting via a smart phone, tablet or computer, please click on the Zoom link to be able to access all functions, including raising your hand. If you are calling by phone, press \*9 to raise your hand.*

- 6:00 Call to Order, Welcome, Pledge of Allegiance, Moment of Silence & POW/MIA, Approval of January 2026 Minutes – Michael Wilson, Chair**  
*Recognition of Outgoing Members: Elwood Gray, Bernard Chesman, Scott Schlessinger*
- 6:10 Welcome to Recently Appointed Commissioners – Chris Thomas, Vice Chair**  
**Reappointments – Veteran Representatives: Michael Wilson – 2<sup>nd</sup> full term expiring 10/31/2028; Miguel Sapp – 1<sup>st</sup> full term expiring 10/31/2027. Public Representative: Grace Caulfield – 1<sup>st</sup> full term expiring 10/31/2028.**  
**New Appointments – Veteran Representative: Wayne Miller – Partial term expiring 10/31/2027; Cynthia Macri – 1<sup>st</sup> full term expiring 10/31/2028; David Rhodes – 1<sup>st</sup> full term expiring 10/31/2028; Christina Williams – 1<sup>st</sup> full term expiring 10/31/2028; Christopher Agumon – 1<sup>st</sup> full term expiring 10/31/2028. Public Representative: Angela K. Lee – Partial term expiring 10/31/2026; Carolyn Bauer – Partial term expires 10/31/2027; Dan Salerno – 1<sup>st</sup> full term expiring 10/31/2028.**
- 6:20 Pending Legislation Impacting Veterans – Lynn Nash, PhD, RN, PHCNS-BC, FAAN, CAPT (Ret.) U.S. Public Health Service, Communications Director, Maryland Military Coalition**
- 6:50 Chair & Vice Chair Updates – Michael Wilson and Chris Thomas**  
*Discussion on Possible Renaming of the Commission on Veterans Affairs*
- 7:00 FY 27 Priorities Progress – Updates on Veterans Treatment Court, Community Outreach and Education Plan, etc. See Next Page for FY 27 Priorities**
- 7:20 Public Comments**
- 7:25 Next Meeting Topic**
- 7:30 Adjournment**

**ADA Meeting Accessibility Notice:** Sign language interpreter services and other auxiliary aids or services will be provided upon request with as much advance notice as possible, preferably at least three (3) full business days before the meeting/event. In all situations, a good faith effort (up until the time of the event) will be made to provide accommodations. To request the above or any other reasonable accommodation, please contact Carly Clem at 202- 853-1109 (V) or via MD Relay at 711 or send a request to [Carly.Clem@MontgomeryCountymd.gov](mailto:Carly.Clem@MontgomeryCountymd.gov).



## **Commission on Veterans Affairs**

Meeting with HHS Committee of County Council on Priorities for FY27

Michael Wilson, Chair - Chris Thomas, Vice-Chair

October 22, 2025

### **1) Communication and Outreach Planning to Promote Programs and Services that Benefit Veterans and Their Families**

**Greater Community Outreach and Education on Veteran Issues** - The Commission will develop a plan to increase communication with the public and other organizations that serve Veterans. There is a need for more face-to-face and real-time and non-real-time virtual interaction. Commission members will be encouraged to visit veteran service organizations such as local American Legions (AL), Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), AMVETS, Disabled American Veterans, Vietnam Veterans of America, Paralyzed Veterans to share information about the work of the Commission and learn from these organizations about what they believe are unmet needs of Veterans and their families.

**Provide Support to the Office of Problem Solving Courts as they Plan and Implement a Veterans Treatment Court in Montgomery County** The Commission is working in collaboration with the Maryland Military Coalition and the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) to provide support as requested from Judge Koch and the Office of Problem-Solving Courts to establish a Veterans Treatment Court in Montgomery County. We would greatly appreciate the Council's support for this important initiative.

#### **Permanent Supportive Housing Vouchers for Homeless Veterans Including those with Families -**

We recommend the County make greater investment in permanent supportive housing which includes case management for homeless Veterans. This includes seeking additional HUD-VASH vouchers from the federal government. HUD-VASH is a collaborative program which pairs HUD's Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) rental assistance with VA case management and supportive services for homeless Veterans. Veterans who have case management along with a voucher have greater success with permanent housing in the community. At this time, there are an estimated 50 homeless Veterans in the county and too often they are placed in emergency shelters. We recommend less investment in emergency shelter response. We ask the Council to continue needed funding for vouchers for Veterans not eligible for Veterans Administration benefits including HUD-VASH vouchers.

### **2) Commission was Established to Recognize the Service of Veterans**

**Planning for Operation Green Light / Veterans Day and Memorial Day**—Commission will plan and participate in Veterans Day and Memorial Day recognition events.

**Websites and Digital Displays to Honor Veterans** On [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/veterans](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/veterans) there are websites created by staff honoring County Veterans for Hometown Fallen Heroes going back to World War I, Vietnam Era Veterans, Women Veterans, Recognition for Veterans for Black History Month, and Thank You to County Veterans for Veterans Day.

**Speakers Bureau** Commission will develop a speaker's bureau to volunteer to speak at schools about Veteran issues and the meaning of Veterans Day and Memorial Day. The Commission publishes an annual report that includes information on the Commission's work and includes extensive data on Veterans. Go to [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva).

Lastly, it is critical for Boards, Committees and Commissions (BCC) to have commissioners appointed in a timely manner so that they can be most effective and also respect the volunteer service of community members who serve. We ask that the County ensure proper staffing for the County Executive's Office for timely recruitment and appointment of BCC members.



## **Commission on Veterans Affairs February 17, 2026 - Meeting Minutes**

### **Meeting Location**

Meeting held virtually via Zoom.

### **Call To Order**

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m.

### **Welcome, Pledge of Allegiance, Moment of Silence & POW/MIA Remembrance**

Michael Wilson, 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 spoke of 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.

### **Review and Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes**

A motion was made to approve the January 2026 Meeting Minutes. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and the January 2026 Meeting Minutes were unanimously approved. Approved minutes are available online at [www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/cva).

### **Meeting Minutes Agenda Items**

#### **1. Recognition of Outgoing Members**

Michael thanked outgoing Commission members Elwood Gray, Bernard Chesman, and Scott Schlessinger for their time and service on the Commission. They will be receiving certificates of recognition and appreciation from County Executive Marc Elrich.

#### **2. Reappointments**

Michael reported that the following Commissioners have been reappointed:

*Veteran Representatives:* Michael Wilson - 2nd full term expiring 10/31/2028; Miguel Sapp – 1st full term expiring 10/31/2027.

*Public Representative:* Grace Caulfield – 1st full term expiring 10/31/2028

#### **3. New Appointments**

Michael welcomed new Commission members:

*Veteran Representatives:* Wayne Miller– Partial term expiring 10/31/2027; Cynthia Macri – 1st full term expiring 10/31/2028; David Rhodes – 1st full term expiring 10/31/2028; Christina Williams – 1st full term expiring 10/31/2028; Christopher Agumon – 1st full term expiring 10/31/2028.

*Public Representatives:* Angela K. Lee – Partial term expiring 10/31/2026; Carolyn Bauer – Partial term expires 10/31/2027; Dan Salerno – 1st full term expiring 10/31/2028

#### **4. Discussion – Letter to support Bethesda Cares Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) grant application**

John Mendez, Executive Director, Bethesda Cares, reported that Bethesda Cares is submitting a grant application to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Bethesda Cares is the only organization in Montgomery County applying for these funds. While it is not required for

organizations to have letters of support, John thought it would be beneficial to have one from this Commission.

SSVF provides case management and supportive services to very low-income veterans to prevent the imminent loss of a veteran's home or identify a new, more suitable housing situation for the individual and his or her family; or to rapidly re-house veterans and their families who are homeless and might remain homeless without this assistance. Key elements of Rapid re-housing include:

- Housing navigation: housing search and identification to quickly move Veteran households into permanent housing.
- Temporary Financial Assistance: Covers things like rent, utility assistance, and move-in assistance.
- Case management: Supportive services and housing stabilization support that assists Veteran households connecting to necessary resources to achieve long-term housing stability.

There are currently no organizations in Montgomery County that receive SSVF grant funding. Bethesda Cares can bring a more integrated process to veterans who need these supports. 95% of the board members on Bethesda Cares live in Montgomery County. Current project resources are already aligned for eviction prevention and rental arrear coverage.

Grantees will be notified in October if they have been awarded the grant. 120 households would benefit from the grant. Bethesda Cares has calculated how many veterans in Montgomery County could be at risk of homelessness. There are approximately between 36,000 to 37,000 veterans living in Montgomery County and approximately 13,000 renter-occupied veteran households. Using information regarding the number of eviction filings for the general population, there are 1,100 veteran households at risk of eviction.

The floor was opened to questions.

Michael asked if there is a cash match for the grant and what the time frame is to win the grant. John reported SSVF is a 12-month grant. There is no cash match requirement, however Bethesda Cares will leverage this grant with services currently available including RentSelect, a Bethesda Cares' housing coordination and landlord engagement platform that expands access to the private rental market and reduces barriers for veterans with complex housing histories.

Miguel Sapp, Commissioner, suggested that the Commission includes a memorandum of understanding with the letter. John suggested including language in the letter stating that should the grant be awarded, Bethesda Cares can commit to a greater collaboration with the Commission to support veterans in Montgomery County. Betsy Luecking, Staff, said will be no memorandum of understanding between this Commission and Bethesda Cares as that is not the Commission's role.

David Rhodes, Commissioner, asked if Bethesda Cares has applied for this grant funding before and if they know what makes a successful application. John reported they were asked to apply 12 years ago by Nadim Khan, former Chief of Special Needs Housing (now Services to End and Prevent Homelessness). Bethesda Cares has knowledgeable and experienced staff that work specifically on veterans' issues.

Dr. Cynthia Macri, Commissioner, asked if the Commission can show preference over one private organization over another. Betsy reported that the Office of Intergovernmental Relations has given this Commission approval to send a letter of support. The Commission has not been approached

by any other organization for support. She also noted that our active homeless veteran's population point-in-time counts indicate there are 50 homeless veterans in Montgomery County. This is the highest we've recorded since 2010. We do not want to have those numbers keep increasing. Betsy also reported that Montgomery County has one of the highest cost of living in Maryland.

Carolyn Bauer, Commissioner, said the letter should state that this Commission has made one of its missions and priorities to end homelessness and that this Commission supports Bethesda Cares with their application as they work towards our shared mission. The Commission should also include the data discussed this evening.

A motion was made to send a letter of support for Bethesda Cares. The motion was seconded. A vote was taken and the motion was unanimously approved.

**5. Pending Legislation Impacting Veterans – Lynn Nash, PhD, RN, PHCNS-BC, FAAN, CAPT (Ret.) U.S. Public Health Service, Communications Director, Maryland Military Coalition**

Lynn reviewed a PowerPoint presentation – [Maryland Military Coalition Update on Support to Pending Legislation](#)

The floor was opened to questions.

Michael was asked what the Commission can do to help market the Maryland Veterans Trust Fund. He suggested that the Maryland Tax Assessment website add information on their homepage about the Fund. Lynn will contact the state about adding information.

It was asked how to get past the mindset that some veterans have about paying attorneys to file disability claims or to help them increase their disability rating. Lynn reported the reality is paying an attorney will not get the claim filed faster. Some attorneys refer veterans to private physicians to fill out the DMQ forms and those physicians may be documenting information that is not accurate. The VA will review the facts and if the facts do not match the veteran will not get the rating. The current bill under discussion does include regulation of advertisements. Lynn noted she is tracking a class action lawsuit in Montgomery County that was filed by two veterans who were taken advantage of, but nothing has come of the case yet. The Maryland Department of Veterans and Military Families (MDVMF) has a Veterans Benefits Specialist (VBS) located at the Gaithersburg MVA Office. MDVMF has also guaranteed that a veteran can receive a Zoom appointment within 24 hours and an office appointment within two days. There are plans to increase the number of VBS' throughout the state from 14 to 25.

Christina Williams, Commissioner and MDVMF VBS for Montgomery County, said some veterans think that the VA disability raters are attorneys and that is why they seek out attorneys to assist them with their disability rating claims. She noted that it is important to be careful when filing to increase disability ratings because the VA could always lower the rating instead. She suggested using primary care or specialty care physicians for nexus letters.

Wayne Miller, Commissioner, said the VA keeps changing the rules. The VA sends veterans to see private doctors in the community who do not understand veterans or about the war. Veterans are denied disability when they submit information from their own physician. He also reported that veterans can have their disability rating reviewed at any time. There are efforts underway at the VA to improve the system. Mental health will always be a big issue.

Angela K. Lee, Commissioner, agreed that there are inefficiencies and redundancies within the system. She suggested that short video tutorials outlining steps be created.

## **6. Discussion on Possible Renaming of the Commission on Veterans Affairs**

The Committee Evaluation and Review Board (CERB) included in their final report a recommendation that the Commission on Veterans Affairs “consider expanding the scope of the Commission to include military families and renaming the Commission to reflect this change”.

Betsy reported that this Commission has previously discussed this issue. She noted that she and Carly Clem, Staff Support, only work part-time for the Commission on Veterans Affairs and changing the name as well as the scope would potentially require full-time staff. It was also reported that the Commission does include military families in its mission statement:

“The Commission will 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.”

Grace Caulfield, Commissioner, said that the Commission does include military families and the work the Commission does is all encompassing. Changing the scope moves us away from our mission.

Drew Garza, Commissioner, said at the federal level the VA means serving the veterans community to include spouses, dependents, and caregivers. If assistance is needed, this Commission points those individuals in the right direction.

Carolyn noted that there are many resources available around the state and country for active duty service members. She asked if members in the community know that the Commission serves family members.

Wayne said the definition of ‘family’ changes depending on the culture or the religion. Changing the Commission’s name also changes the Commission’s original mission.

Michael suggested that the Commission provide a response to CERB acknowledging the final report and informing them that at this time the Commission will not be moving forward with a name change.

## **7. FY 27 Priorities Progress**

This agenda item has been tabled until next month. Michael asked that updates on the Veterans Treatment Court and Community Outreach Plan be first on the agenda next month.

### **Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be held on March 17, 2026 from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

### **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:35 p.m.

## **Attendance**

### **Voting Members Present**

- Christophe Aguemon
- Carolyn Bauer
- Grace Caulfield
- Drew Garza
- Dr. Jameelah Johnson
- Angela K. Lee
- Dr. Cynthia Macri
- Wayne Miller
- David Rhodes
- Dan Salerno
- Miguel Sapp
- Michael Subin
- Christopher Thomas, Vice-Chair
- Christina Williams
- Michael Wilson, Chair

### **Voting Members Absent**

- Joanna Starling

### **Non-Voting Congressional Representatives Present**

- Joseph Eyong – Representative of U.S. Congressman Jamie Raskin

### **Non-Voting Congressional Representatives Not Present**

- Charlise Richardson – Representative of U.S. Senator Chris Van Hollen

### **Commission Staff Present**

- Betsy Luecking, Staff Liaison, Community Outreach Manager
- Carly Clem, Staff Support, Program Specialist II

### **Other County Staff Present**

- Dale Tibbitts, Special Assistant to the County Executive

### **Guest Speakers**

- Lynn Nash, Communications Director, Maryland Military Coalition

### **Public Attendees**

- Scott Schlesinger, former Commissioner
- Bill Gray, former Chair
- Ken Reichard, former Commissioner
- Philip Rankin
- John Mendez, Bethesda Cares
- Bob Norton, Military Officers Association of America
- Phillip Perelas