



ANDREW M. CUOMO
Governor

VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMISSION MEETING
CONFERENCE CALL
FEBRUARY 19, 2019

ATTENDEES

Joel Evans DVA
Ben Pomerance DVA
Jason Chakot DVA
Mary Quay DVA
Earl Schmidt
Kent Eiler
John Paddock
Ken Rosenblum
Tonya Nelson-Waller

ABSENT

Gene DiGiacomo
Kevin McKenna

Executive Deputy Director, Joel Evans, opened the meeting thanking everyone for their participation in the Commission meeting.

- Hiring a Director for the Division of Veterans' Affairs was an important issue brought to the table by the Commission. It was recommended for the Commission members to send a letter to the Governor's office to have this accomplished as soon as possible.
- The next National Association of State Directors (NASDVA) meeting is scheduled for next week. Joel Evans and Benjamin Pomerance will be in attendance. This will be the second NASDVA meeting the Division has been able to attend. Funding was not provided for approximately five years for the Division to have the opportunity to travel out-of-state. Mr. Evans and Mr. Pomerance noted the importance of the Division to attend with information shared by the States' Directors, the United States VA Medical Centers, Veterans' Nursing Homes, and many other Veterans' organizations. The NASDVA meetings are scheduled twice a year. The mid-winter NASDVA Conference is in Washington D.C. and the second conference is in the summer where different states have the opportunity to host the meeting/event.
- Blue Water Navy Issue: The Division thanked the Commission for the strong letters that were sent by the members. The Division is urging everyone to review old cases and reopen those claims regarding the Blue Water Navy because the VA could appeal the Decision to the Supreme Court. Spread the word though out your community, Veterans' organizations, etc. to reopen previous claims as soon as possible.
- It was noted that VA Health Administration is changing its rules regarding coverage of community care. Under the VHA's proposed regulations, the VA will cover urgent care, private sector clinics are in agreement with the VA. Co-pay with urgent care will be free to Veterans in Priority Groups 1-6 with

their first three visits within a given year. After their three visits a \$30 co-pay will be issued. Veterans in Priority Groups 7 & 8 would need to pay \$30 per visit under the new regulations.

- The VA is overhauling the old requirements of mileages a Veteran has to travel for a medical appointment. Also, how long it takes for a Veterans to have an appointment with a VA doctor. This information has not been published yet, but when the Division receives this publication the Division will forward to the Commission.
- Class Action Suit – family caregiver dropped from roll. The VA was improperly removing the care giver from the Caregiver Program without any valid reason for doing so. The class action suit was filed in the federal court of claims approximately three weeks. If the commission members know of any caregivers who are being improperly denied care at the VAMC they should let the Division know of this issue.
- Ear Plug Case: A contractor with the Department of Defense issued ear plugs to Veterans over many years that did not properly fit. This is now a Class Action Suit.
- The Veterans Affairs Commission is requested to evaluate with a metrics system all Veterans organizations, not-for-profit, all Veterans affiliated organizations receiving member item monies from the state. A metrics system would be put in place by the Commission to review how and where the money is spent. *The Division will send the Commission members a list of all grantees that are receiving member item monies. Also, a list from a couple of years ago of who is receiving the monies. Along with a list of the counties receiving funding from the Division.* The lists will show details on how the grant money is spent, how should grantee services be measured, and the effectiveness.
- Another issue asked by the Commission is the Dwyer Peer to Peer budget. The Division said it is a “wait and see” because this money goes through the Office of Mental Health and the Governor’s Executive Budget for the new fiscal year has not been finalized yet. If the Division receives any information we will forward to the members.
- The Commission asked if there is or could be a Comprehensive Statewide Guide that is current with resources to refer Veterans and their families to such as legal assistance or any other. It was noted the Red Cross has numerous resources. The Division is cautious as to not endorse one agency/organization over another.
- This summer the Division will have a full-time intern in Central Office. He will be working on legal matters with Jonathan Fishbein and Benjamin Pomerance.
- Surplus equipment is now available to Veterans Owned Small Business free of charge. The Division will forward this federal legislation to Ken William at OGS because he over sees the Disabled Veterans Owned Business. Great information to pass along.
- Meeting adjourned at 11:33 am.
- **NEXT MEETING: TUESDAY, MAY 21, 2019**