



Division of Veterans' Services

KATHY HOCHUL
Governor

VETERANS SERVICES COMMISSION SEPTEMBER 8, 2021

ATTENDEES

Joel Evans DVS
Ben Pomerance DVS
Jason Chakot DVS
Mary Quay DVS

Commission Members:
John Paddock
Tanya Nelson-Waller
Cheryl Dupris
Ken Rosenblum

Joel opened the meeting noting it has been a long time between meetings, primarily because new member(s) needed finalization for appointment to the Commission.

Before the meeting continued Joel requested Commission members to mark their calendars for the next meeting which will take place on December 8, 2021 via teleconference.

A noted accomplishment that took place, which took years to accomplish, was the Sampson Memorial Cemetery located in Seneca County. It was an outstanding achievement for the Veterans in the State of New York.

Another tid bit of information stated by Joel is he has been in the Acting Director position for the past 15 months. With the changes at the Capitol, it does not appear there will be an appointed Director in the near future.

That being said, Ben notified the members of the upcoming Division's Annual Training. This training will take place September 27 through October 1, 2021. Ben stated you are invited to attend all or a portion of the training. There will be many, many informative speakers from different areas of Veterans concerns such as: Veterans Treatment Court, Court of Veterans Appeals, Board of Veterans Appeals, VA Home Loans, Non-Service-Connected Pensions, NYS Veterans Benefits update, and many other topics.

Regarding Veterans Treatment Courts, not every county has this particular court available for Veterans. The Division is in the process of assisting Veterans' cases be transferable to another county with a Veterans Treatment Court. Advocating for this process to happen is in the works.

Ben continued with information regarding the Outdoor Recreation Act. Ben will send a copy of this report to Commission members.

Suicide prevention is the next topic of concern for so many Veterans in New York State. Joel has forward via email the website for the Governor's Prevention Act for your information.

Ben stating there is a training program for Veteran advocates that assist them in determining if a Veteran is possibly considering suicide. Advocates have several questions they can ask the Veteran that will signal a possible suicide attempt.

Ben informed the Commission there is a new ETS Sponsorship which, in the future, will notify the Division of a military person leaving service of their home of record. This information can be sent out six to 10 months in advance of their discharge. This is a pro-active way of knowing where our Veterans are coming home so we can reach out to them and let them know we are there for them with any assistance they may need. This is a project that is working with the Joseph P. Dwyer Program. It is not taking the place of the Dwyer Program.

An ongoing issue for Veterans is food insecurity for them and their families. The Division has a partnership with the "Hello Fresh Program." Over 700,000 meals have been served to New York's Veterans and their families ranging from 25-95 years of age.

Ken Rosenblum brought up the issue of creating a rooster to share with the state bar. Ben noted the Division has an intern working on such a rooster. Ken said he would be a mentor if the need for a coordinator was essential.

Ken also was concerned with the unknown, unidentified Veterans buried in potter's field where they should at least have a flag placed near their numbered stone. He believes the Office of Mental Health personal records center should be able to at least identify if the buried was a Veteran or not. Ben asked Ken where at OMH could that information be obtainable. Ken will forward the name of the employee that can assist.

Ken then complimented Joel and Ben by stated: "They kept the fires burning."

Cheryl Dupris, the newest member of the Commission, stated that September is suicide prevention month. She is frustrated with numerous "not for profit" and the misuse of monies. She stated there should be accountability for each organization of where this money is being placed and how it is helping our Veterans. Ben noted the not-for-profit organizations are being looked at by people in power. There has been a lot of attention focused on these organizations.

Another vital suggestion Cheryl had was for the VA to make their ID Card machine portable to register a Veterans in different locations and/or events so a Veteran does not have to go into the VA to receive said card.

Cheryl mentioned that the VA's patient advocates need to attend to their Veterans better. If they are not, they should be notified of such absence of quality of care. She continued with another

concern where Veterans are turned away mainly by the receptionist at the front desk at the VA or they are filed under file 13. Ben will share this concern with the Division's Veterans Benefits Advisors. He noted that the Division is not the VA, but we are advocates for Veterans who could wrongly be turned away, "Honor our Commitment Act."

Cheryl stated her own PTSD clinic is up and running. At this time, Ben offered to come and speak if she would like him to.

John Paddock noted the Honor Flight Series next flight is September 25 out of Syracuse. Finally, it was not easy, but it is back in flight.

John also noted a concern with an issue he had trying to assist a Veteran in obtaining his benefits. Unfortunately, the Veterans has since passed away, but the issue was the Veteran was on a submarine and the location was not noted. How can a Veterans find information of a location where he was during his deployment? Ben will assist with an answer.

Tanya Nelson-Waller brought up the issue of claims being past their one-year deadline. Ben said to resubmit. The National Inspector General Office is reviewing cases submitted after the one-year deadline.

Tanya was also concerned with Veterans not hearing from their representative. Ben noted it was difficult for many VSOs to reach out to their respected clientele because of not having the resources to work from home, but with assistance from the Division we were able to give the VSO tools to do their respected work from their location. Covid struck hard.

Another issue brought to the table was Veterans who owned their home did not qualify for assistance as the Veterans who rented could have their rent paid. Just another topic brought to light.

Joel then thanked everyone for their participation.

Meeting adjourned:

12:22 pm