

# LOS ANGELES COUNTY VETERANS ADVISORY COMMISSION

1816 S. FIGUEROA STREET  
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90015



Ruth A. Wong  
Director

## MINUTES REGULAR MEETING Wednesday, September 8, 2021

### Present:

#### Commissioners

Tom Lasser  
Joe Leal  
Brittanie Moore  
Patricia Jackson-Kelley  
Jawana McFadden  
Anthony Allman  
Jennifer Campbell  
Marcel Rodarte

### Absent:

#### Commissioners

### County Department

#### **Military and Veterans Affairs**

Ruth Wong, Director  
Stephanie Guerrero, Secretary

### Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance

Acting Chair Tom Lasser called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by John Gutierrez, Veterans America Job Center of California (AJCC).

### Roll Call

There was a total of 8 Commissioners at the time of roll call; quorum present.

### **Approval of Minutes**

Motion made by Commissioner Anthony Allman to accept the Minutes for August 11, 2021 and seconded by Commissioner Joe Leal. With no objections, motion passed.

### **Chairman's Report**

Acting Chair Tom Lasser introduced the new Commissioner Marcel Rodarte, 4<sup>th</sup> District. Tom welcomed back Mr. Rodarte as he formerly served on the Commission. Mr. Rodarte stated that it is good to be back. He is retired from the Air Force Reserve and served four years active duty in the Navy. Mr. Lasser highlighted the Patriot's Day video featuring Hilda Solis, Janice Hahn, and Ruth Wong in remembrance of our fallen soldiers.

### **New Chair Election**

Commissioner Brittanie Moore asked for a roll call of votes for Commissioner Anthony Allman as the Commission Chair. It was confirmed after roll call that there was a total of 7 votes in favor. Therefore, Commissioner Allman will take his seat as the new Chair effective at the next meeting.

### **Public Comments**

Angelica Escalante, TELACU Veterans Upward Bound, joined the meeting to promote the Fall 2021 schedule to all other organizations. She stated that the East LA facility is still closed. Classes will resume for both the Fall 2021 and Winter 2022 sessions via Zoom. Free classes are funded by the U.S. Department of Education and are offered to all veterans and reservists for six weeks. Ms. Escalante explains that TELACU VUB assists veterans in computer skills training and work closely with JVS, VOA, U.S.Vets, MVA, and the VA.

Latia Suttle is a certified Peer Specialist and advocate for women veterans and children. She received an update from Mr. Dimitri DeSilva, Military and Veterans Affairs, at the last meeting in August about the status of properly identifying veterans when cases are open in family court with the Department of Children and Family Services. Ms. Suttle inquired if the updates will be provided on a monthly or quarterly basis so that these issues are not overlooked.

### **Guest Speaker(s)**

Rigoberto (Rigo) Reyes, Executive Director, Office of Immigrant Affairs was introduced by Commissioner Anthony Allman to give a brief presentation about evacuating our Afghan allies and welcoming them into our communities. Mr. Allman hoped to gain a better understanding of what LA County can offer to these Afghan allies. Rigo Reyes stated that the Board of Supervisors passed a motion on Tuesday, August 31, 2021 directing the Office of Immigrant Affairs to work on helping the new arrivals in an effective manner. It is understood that 120,000 Afghan Refugees were evacuated worldwide and about half of that to the United States. There were 1,200 that were evacuated to California with the vast majority resettling in Sacramento County and 73 in LA County. The Board of Supervisors quickly acted in equipping the Office of Immigrant Affairs with straight forward directives on understanding how LA County is going to help. DMVA's role was to assess the needs of returning service members specifically with identifying the available services such as healthcare, housing, public benefits, and education. Due to the sudden evacuation, many of the refugees did not have time to process their immigrant/visa status, therefore were evacuated under humanitarian parolees. As a result, those under that status are not eligible for services as the refugees are. The County will offer Wraparound Services to refugees that include Legal Representation, Healthcare, Housing, Social Services,

Small Business Support, Consumer Protection, Education, and Employment. The creation of the Afghan Refugees Taskforce was developed to help in a quick, strategic manner to develop a plan to expedite service delivery which is made up of the County, State, Federal, and Community-Based Organizations.

Commissioner Allman made a suggestion to add working with an American Legion or VFW to see if they have volunteers who may want to sponsor a family. Mr. Reyes stated that it is a valuable addition and will connect back with the Commission to do an introduction.

Phillip Chaidez, Program Manager, Department of Mental Health was introduced by Anthony Allman to provide a briefing of the Expiration Term of Service Sponsorship Program (ETS-SP). Phillip thanked VAC for allowing him the opportunity to present on the ETS Sponsorship Program. Mr. Chaidez is a Mental Health Clinical Supervisor for the Veterans Peer Access Network (VPAN) and one of three Community Integration Coordinators (CIC) for the ETS-SP. The ETS-SP is modeled after the Permanent Change of Station (PTS) system which is when a Service Member (SM) transitions onto their newly assigned base. During that transition, a SM is matched to a fellow SM and/or a sponsor who is often of a higher rank or has more experience to help them with their transition. This includes and is not limited to connecting them to their unit command, introducing them to their first sergeant, and connecting them to housing; helping to familiarize them with the on base services, such as giving them a tour of the base and giving them a local intel report to the community. ETS-SP was developed as a system to help SM's enter back into society by taking a proactive approach for veterans by eliminating suicide, homelessness, and unemployment by facilitating a personal relationship. Sponsors provide support by sharing their experiences with difficult integration processes and advocate on behalf of veterans in terms of mental health and local Vet Centers for treatment and services. The goal of the Community Integration Services is to provide training, guidance, support, and reassurance throughout the sponsorship community by connecting them to veteran based organizations that provide services that focus on improving their lives.

Liza Rodriguez was the next speaker who is one of the Community Integration Coordinator (CIC) of the ETS Sponsorship Program. As a CIC with ETS-SP, her role is to continue to expand on this network by including other agencies and organizations that contribute to the success of our transitioning SM's and ultimately prevent suicide. Some of the agencies that are a part of the Veteran Peer Access Network (VPAN) vary from Community-based Organizations, to County, and Federal agencies; MVA, USVETS, WDACS, VVA, VA, and VFWC. The CIC's responsibility is to help recruit new sponsors for this completely voluntary program. If anyone is interested in becoming a sponsor, the VA provides virtual training to become certified in a 3-session series (2 ½ hours each session), attending one class once a week, for three consecutive weeks. Once certified, a sponsor will be matched with a transitioning SM. Training for the sponsor will be ongoing provided by DMH and the VA. To become a sponsor, please visit <http://etssponsorship.com>.

The CIC contacts for the ETS-SP are Phillip Chaidez, Liza Rodriguez, and Fernando Salazar. Fernando Salazar is the VA liaison, who is a Social Worker that works in Military to VA Transition Management Care Program.

Gail Soffer, Founder/Executive Director, Mindful Veteran Project was invited and introduced by Jennifer Campbell to give a brief presentation about wellness for veterans and families by teaching them to be free, be well, and be whole. The key is to focus on being mentally present during the experience. Ms. Soffer supports veterans and families by connecting them to service providers who assist with employment and housing. She invites veterans to join the programs workshops and pop-up clinics for wellness on Wednesdays and mindfulness on Saturdays. Commissioner Campbell stated that she will connect with Gail offline to discuss how the County can help.

## **Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Report**

Ruth Wong, Director, provided the following updates:

- Board Approval Funds – Website Redesign; MVA team working on it, being led by PIO Kathleen Piche'. Website will be easier to navigate with the new WaitWhile appointment system, along with a separate page for VAC.
- Board Motion on August 30th – co-authored by Supervisor Hilda Solis and Janice Hahn. MVA along with our partner the VA are looking into what resources we have in the community to identify those items that we can deploy easily enough to support our veterans that will be transitioning back into civilian life as well as assisting families of fallen service members; committee led by Chief Deputy Stephanie Stone.

## **Agenda Items that are Deferred to Next Month's Meeting**

None.

## **Good of the Order**

Commissioner Joe Leal thanked Phillip Chaidez and Fernando Salazar on their presentation of the Expiration Term of Service (ETS) program, which is a part of VPAN. VPAN begins with a phone call to their warmline and then divvied out depending where they live and their need. The clients are issued to a program manager, pushed down to battle buddy/ peer specialist in order to provide services. referred to MVA. VPAN is a huge network that continues to grow while addressing homelessness, food insecurity, and disability claims. Veterans who are experiencing food insecurity are referred to Food to Life and/or Meals on Wheels depending on their needs. In addition, veterans who are interested in filing a disability claim are referred over to MVA to set up an appointment with a VSO. Mr. Leal thanked George Dixon and all VSO's who are under the leadership of General Wong.

Commissioner Patricia Jackson-Kelley stated that the Secretary of the VA appointed her to the National Working Group on Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment Prevention Response.

Commissioner Jawana McFadden stated that she had nothing to add at this time.

Commissioner Jennifer Campbell stated she and Commissioner Anthony Allman were planning to attend a meeting with Rep Lieu's office to go over questions, concerns, and information about the VA Master Plan in Greater Los Angeles.

Commissioner Brittanie Moore stated that she had nothing to add at this time.

Commissioner Marcel Rodarte stated that he had nothing to add at this time.

Commissioner Anthony Allman thanked his colleagues for their support and Commissioner Lasser for his six years of service. He would like to see improvement in communication to the public so that there is greater participation and an opportunity to learn what the needs are from the community. He was intrigued by the Office of Immigrant Affairs presentation because 79 percent of Afghan refugees does not seem insurmountable to provide good comfort in LA County.

Acting Chair Tom Lasser congratulated Commissioner Allman on being elected as Chair.

## **Adjournment**

In memory of the 13 U.S. American service member heroes who lost their lives in Afghanistan recently during the evacuation process.

A total of 32 participants were in attendance. Motion by Commissioner Jennifer Campbell to adjourn the meeting and seconded by Commissioner Marcel Rodarte. With no objections, meeting adjourned at 2:41 p.m.

Stephanie Guerrero  
Secretary  
September 8, 2021