

# LOS ANGELES COUNTY VETERANS ADVISORY COMMISSION

1816 S. FIGUEROA STREET  
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90015



Ruth A. Wong  
Director

## MINUTES REGULAR MEETING Wednesday, April 10, 2019

### Present:

### Absent:

#### Commissioners

#### Commissioners

Thomas O'Shaughnessy  
Joe Leal  
Dennis Tucker  
Fred Flores  
Hector Elizalde  
Tom Lasser  
Michael McDowell

Patricia Jackson-Kelley

#### **County Department**

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

Ruth Wong, Director  
Tatiana Rosas, Executive Secretary

#### **Call to Order, Pledge of Allegiance and Approval of Minutes**

Chair Thomas O'Shaughnessy called the meeting to order at 1:30p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Caitlyn Murphy, U.S. Army and Ashley Chavez, U.S. Navy.

Chair O'Shaughnessy announced that the meeting will start with Public Comments so that everyone that would like to address the Commission has ample opportunity to do so. Chair acknowledged and thanked Ashley Johnson, Program Coordinator, Veterans Resource Center and her staff for hosting the meeting.

#### **Roll Call**

There was a total of 7 Commissioners at the meeting – there was a quorum.

#### **Public Comments: Comments from Audience on Items Not on Agenda (three minutes each):**

Juan Blanco, Vietnam veteran, stated he holds "Coffee for Vets" at Crazy Otto to communicate with veterans and assist them in connecting with the VSOs.

Nestor Vinelli, U.S. veteran, has been homeless and seen many problems with homeless veterans in the area. There needs to be a representative in the area that would assist the homeless and disabled veterans.

Javier Acosta, PATH, a VASH contractor, he states that transportation is an issue and suggests that a contract with Lyft or Uber should be implemented so that those disabled veterans can get to their medical appointments.

Edward Benford, aka: Eddie B., Navy veteran, has been working at the VA for 10 years doing outreach. He goes to where he needs to meet a veteran, like the riverbed. Ge stated there is a problem with resources for veterans in the Antelope Valley.

Keisha Dixon, Army veteran, has child custody issues for nine years after her deployment to Iraq. She stated that help is needed for veterans with child custody issues like her.

Richard Fletcher, thanked the Veteran Center and Harriett otherwise he wouldn't be here. He stated that information and accessibility is crucial and not readily available.

Octavia Brown, Honorable Care Career Center, helps veterans with their transition and she does life coaching. They are a non-profit and do homeless outreach.

Mayra Duarte, U.S. Air Force veteran, stated there are no programs available in the Antelope Valley to address addiction. Everything is available in Sepulveda and not accessible in VA Lancaster. She has been sober for six months and driving is a hardship to Sepulveda or West Los Angeles. Appointments are given one-month out.

Carter Roy, Disable American Veteran, Marine veteran. No honorable discharge because of what happened to him. He is using vocational rehab, a great alternative to the GI Bill. He needs assistance on his living stipend.

Tennel Brady, Vietnam veteran, retired veteran employee of the VA Regional Office is now a VSO for Am Vets. Is here to extend his services to veterans.

Tyler Morris, a VA work-study and stated the biggest problem is communication with the VA education line and healthcare system.

Frank Balcorta, a Navy veteran, is a product of vocational rehab services. He's partnered with Vision-22 and is here to offer his services for free.

Ashley Johnson, Veteran Coordinator, Veteran Resource Center, stated her passion is to connect veterans with the resources they deserve.

Brandon Green, shared a personal experience on being sick with the flu and unable to get to Sepulveda and went to the Lancaster VA and only had a chest x-ray done and was sent home with a fever. He stated that before going to the Army he attended Antelope Valley College and after being discharged he's returned to the College. He stated that the GI Bill should be extended.

Sonia Gibbs, Army veteran, Commander for DAV Chapter 39. She stated that the QTC clinics in the Antelope Valley are not adequate. She tried to get her medical records and was told that they disappeared. Someone needs to investigate these clinics because medical records are difficult to access. If you question the residents, they write in your records that you are aggressive.

Walter Ora, Army veteran, he stated that he is more of be about it don't talk about it. He has a client that is 79years old and was told that he had to be homeless to get benefits. He stated he just spoke to Keith Niesen and he said that he would come to his facility and talk to his clients about services.

Gwendolyn Thornton, Case Management, DVOP, great to see this meeting and its attendance.

Joseph Sibley, Navy veteran retired, inquired if this was a four-year university.

Chair introduced Charles Boswick, Assistant Field Deputy and Roberto Alvarez, Deputy from Supervisor Kathryn Barger's Office. Also, Tracy La Monica from Congresswoman Katie Hill and Bandon Roque, Assemblyman Tom Lackey. Chair thanked them all for attending. They each thanked everyone for attending the meeting and they were here to support the veteran community.

## **Chairman's Report**

Chair Thomas O'Shaughnessy stated that SB 10 (Senator Jim Beall) seeks to establish a peer certification process. A peer certification process to enable people with lived experience of mental illness to help others. Also, it would require the State to amend its Medicaid state plan to enable the use of Federal Medicaid matching reimbursement for these services.

Chair O'Shaughnessy would like to make sure that the money is spent in the community. It is estimated that \$15million will be allocated for housing and \$5million for the Veteran Peer Access Network (VPAN). He requested a motion and motion by Commissioner Hector Elizalde to support SB 10 and it was seconded by Commissioner Michael McDowell. All present were in favor. Motion approved.

Chair O'Shaughnessy stated that AB 653 (Bloom) is for leasing a portion of the West Los Angeles Armory that is not used for military purposes to the County of Los Angeles to build a year-round bridge housing program West Los Angeles Armory Bridge Housing. He asked if there was a motion to endorse this Bill. Commissioner Tom Lasser stated that the armory is usually empty not used Mondays through Fridays, but full on the weekends. He stated that he would vote and support but needs to be cautious. Motion by Commissioner Tom Lasser in support of AB 653 and seconded by Commissioner Dennis Tucker. All present were in favor. Motion approved.

## **Guest Speakers**

Keith Niesen is the County VSO in Lancaster and Joe Sapien is the County VSO in Sepulveda. Keith stated that they are both available to file claims, pensions and benefits, please call or stop by for assistance. They are also working with the local prison in Lancaster and at Edwards Air Force Base. They are veterans that live outside the County but need assistance.

## **Approve VAC Ordinance**

Chair stated that some Commissioners are having difficulty with the meeting hours, therefore effective next month the Commission meeting will start at 12noon – 2pm. County Counsel stated there is no problem with the hour changes.

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

- Guidelines for County Commissions and Other Advisory Bodies – Ruth Wong
- Approve 2019 Meeting Locations
- By-Laws Committee Update

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

Ruth Wong, Director, retired Air Force veteran and flight nurse introduced her staff: George Dixon and Chris Duarte are Veteran Services Supervisor. Keith Niesen, VSO is in Antelope Valley as is Hector Castillo; Joe Sapien is at the Sepulveda VA in building 20 Monday through Friday and takes appointments. Everyone here will assist with claims, appeals, employment, housing and benefits.

Attended the Cal Vet Leadership from April 7<sup>th</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> and the department received many accolades.

The State Annual Report can be found on the website. In 2015 began the driver's license designation and the County of Los Angeles has filed 8,000 applications thus far.

The Pledge Vet Program – we are always looking for veterans to lead the Pledge of Allegiance at the Board of Supervisors Meeting on Tuesdays. Looking into possibly having a Pledge Vet through video teleconferencing from the Antelope Valley this would help with not having the Pledge Vet have to commute to downtown Los Angeles.

Chair O'Shaughnessy asked the dignitaries to introduce themselves:

Tracey La Monica with Congresswoman Katie Hill, 1008 W. Ave M-14, Suite E, Palmdale, CA 93551. She stated that they assist with claims requests, DD214, and all other issues. Feel free to stop by her office, they only ask that a privacy form be filled out.

Chris Ward with Senator Scott Will, representing the 21st Senate District, brings regards from the Senator and to see how the Senator can help at the State level.

Brandon Roque with Tom Lackey, Assemblymember, 36<sup>th</sup> District, stated he is here to help and thanked everyone for attending.

### **Follow-Up on Veteran Issues**

None.

### **Good of the Order**

Commissioner Fred Flores stated that he's worked for Congressman Berman for 20 years and is a member of the American Legion and a Marine. He's the founder of the San Fernando Valley Veteran's Day Parade which he started with his son in 1989 after always driving to Long Beach to participate in their parade.

Commissioner Dennis Tucker stated this has been a fascinating use of Public Comments. "The issues are transportation and that the VA needs fixing." At the 2019 Women's Summit that was in partnership with the Department of Mental Health and the LA Sparks was a success with 500 women veterans in attendance. On June 26<sup>th</sup> LA Metro is hosting a job fair and he stated that the TAP Card Program is \$20 for a month for veterans.

Commissioner Hector Elizalde stated that there is some confusion between who the VA is and the Los Angeles County Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA); "we are here with DMVA and we are taking the meetings into the community. The VA does need fixing – you the audience need to provide more input. Myself, Roberto Alvarez, and others will be at the Alameda Outpatient Clinic meeting this afternoon and I will let them know of the issues that I've heard here today."

Chair Thomas O'Shaughnessy that the Commission listens and take back the issues to Board of Supervisors, the Senate, the House of Representatives, etc... "We are glad to serve, and we have a very proactive group."

Commissioner Michael McDowell stated that he appreciates everyone's honesty and he's taken two-pages worth of notes. He hears that students live in cars, couch-surf and that an Uber ride one-way to the VA is \$100. "You also said that there are approximately 125,000 veterans in Antelope Valley, but statistics show that there 46,000 veterans in the Antelope Valley. We need to be more informed with our facts."

Commissioner Joe Leal thanked everyone for coming; to Ashley and staff thank you for the food and hospitality. He stated this was one of the best meetings the Commission has had and what he heard was to stay in the fight. Looking to have another Suicide Prevention Class here at the College; the last one had 400 people sign-up.

Commissioner Tom Lasser stated this was a very good turn-out. He thanked the College, Ashley and Commissioner Elizalde for coordinating this meeting.

Chair Thomas O'Shaughnessy to Commissioner Elizalde to consider having a Veteran Forum in this area. He gave Congresswoman Grace Napolitano's Veteran Forum flyer of June 29<sup>th</sup> to Tracey La Monica of Congresswoman Katie Hill's office so that she can assist in coordinating a Forum in Antelope Valley.

Commissioner Fred Flores applauded the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and its staff for the great work that they do.

Meeting adjourned at 3:33 p.m.

Tatiana Rosas  
Executive Secretary  
April 10, 2019