

**LOS ANGELES COUNTY
VETERANS ADVISORY COMMISSION**

1816 S. FIGUEROA STREET
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90015



**Ruth A. Wong
Director**

**MINUTES
REGULAR MEETING
Wednesday, February 09, 2022**

Present:

Absent:

Commissioners

Commissioners

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

County Department

Military and Veterans Affairs

Ruth Wong, Director
Stephanie Guerrero, Executive Secretary

Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Anthony Allman called the meeting to order at 1:33 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Commissioner Joe Leal, 1st District.

Roll Call

There was a total of seven Commissioners at the meeting during roll call; quorum present. Commissioner Jennifer Campbell, 3rd District, later joined the meeting at 1:58 p.m., which changed the total to eight Commissioners at the meeting.

Approval of Minutes

Motion made by Commissioner Marcel Rodarte to accept the Minutes for January 12, 2022 and seconded by Commissioner Jawana McFadden; a roll call with no objections and seven yes votes, the motion passed.

Chairman's Report

Chair Anthony Allman stated that MVA has imported their previous stakeholder list and transitioned the notification of the Veterans Advisory Commission meetings to Gov Delivery. The last meeting notice went out on February 3, 2022 at 4:53 p.m. The previous stakeholder list will be imported into Gov Delivery. If you did not receive the meeting notice via Gov Delivery, please check your spam folder. If you are still having trouble, please visit the department website at mva.lacounty.gov and subscribe by selecting the option to stay connected. There has been a change in the registration form to provide public comment where there is a link embedded into the electronic meeting notice that is distributed on Gov Delivery. Chair Allman gave a visual presentation on how to register for public comment using the link provided on the agenda. The Commission wants to start capturing some demographic information, therefore, changes to the public comment form are forthcoming in the future. Last, there was some discussion at the last meeting regarding how to adjourn the meeting; according to County Counsel and Commission Services, it is not required to adjourn with a motion and a second. Chair is open to a discussion as it can be done as a matter of custom and willing to revisit if any Commissioners have questions.

As for Commissioner action items, the website still needs to be updated with each Commissioner's pictures and bios. The Strategic Plan is still pending approval while we wait for the new Commissioner to be seated. MVA has a YouTube channel where a copy of the meeting recordings are made available after each meeting.

Public Comments

Ron Bow is a veteran who spent 25 years in the United States Air Force. He is a public servant for the City of Monterrey Park, who resides in the 1st District. He offered his services as a volunteer. Last, he stated that the registration form for public comment was simple and self-explanatory.

Malcolm Harvey is a Navy veteran who was new to joining VAC meeting. He was curious about what the Commission does and the scope of your practice. In response, Chair Allman stated that public comments generally are about issues facing the veteran community in LA County and it is an opportunity for the public to give them a sense for what's going on. Then as Commissioners, they can agendize these topics for further discussion and potentially raise them to the Board of Supervisors.

Latia Suttle is an advocate for women with children raising awareness about veterans not being properly identified with open cases in family court with DCFS, therefore, veterans are not being connected with their VA benefits and classes ordered by the court. Ms. Suttle stated that some veterans are unemployed and being made to pay for services, such as, see their children on monitored visitations and get a custody evaluation or mental health evaluation. Formerly, there was an Ad Hoc Committee created. In December 2021, the Chair stated that he would catch up on the Family Court and DCFS issue. Ms. Suttle has requested a status update on the issue and if there will be a timeline on what's being done to address the issue of veterans being identified and connected with services. She complimented the electronic public comment form and clarified that she lives in the Second District.

Guest Speaker(s)

Bobby McDonald, Recognition of Black History Month, is a U.S. Navy Vietnam veteran who grew up in Los Angeles. He was invited to the Commission meeting to highlight his aunt Virginia. His aunt grew up in Irwin in Kansas, but she lived here in Los Angeles. She was one of the first 100 black nurses, U.S. Army lieutenants in the U.S. Army. Many were grateful to Mary Bickle Bethune and Oliver Roosevelt for pushing the agenda to get more black nurses. Virginia pursued her education in Kansas, where she went to Officers Canada School in Fort Demoing, Iowa and then wound up going to Fort Huachuca, Arizona. He shared a brief video about his aunt Virginia's stellar nursing career in the U.S. Army. Mr. McDonald invited everyone to attend the Right to Fight WWII exhibit during Black History Month at the Heroes Hall Museum at the Fairgrounds in Orange County on February 19th through September 18th; must RSVP. The exhibit is a loan from the National WWII Museum in New Orleans.

Kenneth Foreman, Division Chief of the Operational Services Division, LA County Department of Beaches and Harbor, was invited today to give a brief overview on what benefits are offered to veterans at Beaches and Harbor. Mr. Foreman stated that LA County owns and operates 19 parking lots along the beaches and 14 in the city of Marina Del Rey. He shared a map of the coastline showing 18 beaches that LA County manages approximately 61 miles of coastline from Nicholas Canyon (Ventura County line) down to Point Fermin (San Pedro area). Out of the 18 beaches, roughly 11 of those locations have public parking lots. For informational purposes, all beach parking lots open at 6:00am and close at 6:00pm during the winter, and at 8:30pm during the summer; with the exception of Venice and the main entrance at Dockweiler at 10:00pm during both seasons. Marina Del Rey is accessible 24 hours each day. In reference to the Beach Ordinance language, there is a parking fee exemption available to veterans during the weekdays who are displaying a special license plate listed on the ordinance, therefore they can access the parking lots for free. However, it does not apply on weekends and holidays, with the exception of Veterans Day. Mr. Foreman shared a list of the parking rates and a visual of plates that Beaches and Harbor lookout for when it pertains to free parking access.

Director Wong was given the opportunity to share about the Veterans Designation on the driver's license. A veteran must show MVA their DD 214 and fill out an application with us, then take the form to the DMV and they will add the veterans' identifier on your driver's license. This is an easier method to prove that you are a veteran, instead of carrying your DD 214 with you.

Eric Faulkner, Veterans Experience Office, was invited to give a briefing on veteran data, a breakdown of gender and ethnic demographics. For any organization looking to acquire veteran data and specifically on the State and County, please visit the VA website for the National Center for veterans analysis statistics. It has state summaries, maps, reports of veteran population, and expenditures utilization surveys. We look at the census from the VA perspective, this is their data resource and quick facts site. The challenge is that the data is not always up to date as the information changes in six months to a year because veterans are not stagnant.

Commissioner Jawana McFadden inquired about retrieving information if there are any efforts in place to get more accurate information on a more frequent basis, rather than annually based off of the Census and the National Center for veterans analysis statistics? She added, are there any suggestions that we, as a Commission can do to support in gathering accurate information? Mr. Faulkner answered that the challenge is getting people to stay on top of updating the information on their sites. He went on to say that many people thought that using the DMV was an opportunity to track veterans because most people try to get a license, however, not every person reports as a veteran.

Jim Zenner, Veterans Peer Access Network (VPAN), was invited to give an update on the program. Mr. Zenner gave a breakdown of their support call line from June 2020. They began the VPAN warmline because a lot of veterans and family members were struggling to connect to support services and as a result of COVID, LA County health care professionals were not able to provide services in person. Through their partnership with the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, VPAN is option 2 when dialing (877) 4LA-VETS. The Warmline receives a lot of calls for VA healthcare benefits, HUD VASH, housing and emergency shelter, and mental health services. Each Supervisorial District receives referrals that go to DMH peer staff and CBO's to request benefits from the MVA. Each rally point is supported by a VSO benefits navigator. The most important service that VPAN provides is peer support connecting veterans to veterans. The vast majority of people that go to them for help, need to be linked to other services, which they couldn't do without all the other providers with the LA Veterans Collaborative, other County departments, and especially the VA. VPAN launched in 2021, and since then it has primarily focused on benefits navigation, income support, employment, and housing. There is a lot of work that goes into a housing application to the Housing Authority. Recently, the support line agents began calling every veteran asking to fill out a survey in which that information is being used for them to learn ways that they can improve. Last, Mr. Zenner stated that Commissioners Jackson-Kelley and McFadden visited the rally point in Compton and got to meet the Program Manager from the CBO. He invited the other Commissioners to come by and visit the rally point and meet the staff in their respective area.

Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Report

Ruth Wong, Director, provided the following updates:

- Veteran Services – veterans service officers continue to take virtual appointments and the majority of them are teleworking. Patriotic Hall headquarters did take walk-ins, however, our office closed at the beginning of the month due to the Omnicron surge. We anticipate reopening back up in March. There were over 3,000 claims filed last month.
- Budget – adding our appropriation for this fiscal year is going to be about \$7,000,000.00. Our budget hearing with the CEO will take place this Friday and we are asking for more positions for veterans services, as I did report out previously about an increase in subvention funding. Therefore, these positions will be revenue offset as well as revenue generating positions.
- Building Operations – has been very busy with a number of maintenance issues, one of which continues with water intrusion in the basement and we sought out and are getting assistance from the CEO.
- Legislation – There is a new Bill 1623 that was set forth by Assembly member James Ramos (40th District) which would waive state income tax for retired members of the uniformed services. This bill has come forward on a number of occasions and hasn't gained enough traction. We are aiming to get the Veterans Advisory Commission behind this bill, as well as our Board of Supervisors. California is one of nine states that continues to fully tax the retirees; it affects approximately 146,000 members. If you hear about this, please let your legislative analyst know that we are in full support of this bill and are working very closely with the County Veteran Service Officers across California.
- Special Announcement – this is my last Veterans Advisory Commission meeting. Will be retiring at the end of this month after 20 years with the County and 9 years as the Director of Military and Veterans Affairs. She thanked everyone for their support of the Department and wished them all well.

The Commission thanked Director Wong for her service to the veterans of Los Angeles County and offered their best wishes for a well-deserved retirement.

Agenda Items that are Deferred to Next Month's Meeting

- LA County CEO's Office – new district boundaries
- Boeing Veterans Portfolio – overview of veterans portfolio
- Northrop Grumman Talent Acquisition – veterans employment in the aerospace industry
- UCLA – overview of veterans services
- NPower Technology Training
- Women History Month – Speaker

Good of the Order

Commissioner Leal stated that this Saturday at the South El Monte Reserve Center. Supervisor Hilda Solis, local community, and Veterans Peer Access Network (VPAN), are planning to welcome home 91 soldiers from deployment specific to Afghan refugees. He invited everyone to come and show their support. We hope to discuss how to prevent many of these soldiers from becoming homeless. He thanked VPAN for their presentation.

Commissioner Jackson-Kelley stated that she wanted to make the Commission aware that they're trying to get enough signatures to bring the congressional gold medal request to the Senate for the Six Triple Eight. As of last week, they received 290 votes that were needed to bring it to the house and hopefully will be voted on very soon. On Monday evening, Hollywood Post hosted a film screening event showing the Six Triple Eight documentary.

Commissioner McFadden wished everyone a Happy New Year. She hopes that anyone who caught the Omicron variant is able to recover and remain healthy.

Commission Chair Allman stated that the public comment registration form will be refined as we move forward. Hopefully it will be in a position that it'll become part of the regular registration process between now and the next meeting. I'll share an updated form with the Commissioners and hopefully get some additional feedback.

Commissioner Gutierrez provided a friendly reminder that there is an upcoming Resource and Employment Job Fair on February 10, 2022 from 10am-1pm at the Chimbole Cultural Center, Palmdale. He will send out the flyer to anyone interested.

Chair Allman put forth a motion to adjourn the meeting in recognition of General Ruth Wong's service to veterans and the County of Los Angeles; with no objections, motion carried.

Stephanie Guerrero
Executive Secretary
February 09, 2022