**LOS ANGELES COUNTY**

**VETERANS ADVISORY COMMISSION**

**1816 S. FIGUEROA STREET**

**LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90015**

** **

 **Jim Zenner**

 **Director**

**MINUTES**

**REGULAR MEETING**

**Wednesday, March 15, 2023**

**Present: Absent:**

**Commissioners Commissioners**

Joe Leal

Jawana McFadden

Patricia Jackson-Kelley

Chi Szeto

Alfonso Noyola

Anthony Allman

Dennis Anderson

John Gutierrez

**County Department**

**Military and Veterans Affairs**

Jim Zenner, Director

Kristine Papazyan, Management Analyst

**Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance**

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Szeto at 1:31 p.m. and the Pledge of Allegiance was led by Commissioner Allman, 3rd District.

**Roll Call**

Seven (7) Commissioners were at the meeting during the roll call; a quorum was present.

**Approval of Minutes**

Motion made by Commissioner Noyola to accept the Minutes of February 15, 2023, seconded by Commissioner Jackson-Kelley; a roll call with unanimous votes, the motion passed.

**Chairman’s Report**

Chair Chi Szeto stated:

1. **GovDelivery Notice of Meeting**
	* 03/10/23
	* From: MVA@subscriptions.lacounty.gov
	* To subscribe, email: info@mva.lacounty.gov or go to <https://mva.lacounty.gov/> and click on the mail icon, in the top right corner
2. **YouTube Channel**
	* “LA County Military and Veterans Affairs”
	* 59 Subscribers
	* Video of previous meetings posted
3. **Recommendations are posted on the website**
4. **Supervisor Horvath’s response to recommendations**
	* Please share with Deputies
5. **Veteran Legislation**
	* AB 45 (tax exemption for retirement and survivor benefits)
	* SB 726 (property tax exemption for 100% disabled)
6. **Administration**
	* Commission Meeting times
	* By-Law Amendments

**Public Comments**

John Edgard Brady, Veteran: not present

Rob Reynolds, Veteran: not present

John Wordin, Service Provider, 3rd District: Ride to Recovery program created in 2009 which led to the creation of Warrior Games. Serving the military veterans, first responders, caregivers, and their families working in mental health and suicide prevention. Current challenges: how to build capacity to connect veterans to each other and to community resources by looking at different demographics and evaluating outcomes and efficiency with the value care approach. “LifeScore” is an app created to measure 6 domains: mental, spiritual, sleep, physical, nutrition, and food health providing peer support, and help improvement platform. The platform allows for predictive instructive analytics and topological data analysis to understand cohorts and what are the relationships, characteristics, and common denominators. Real-time suicide risk prevention capability that’s been validated. Program support by Long Beach VA, the American Legion of OC, and OC VFW. Requesting time to do a full demo and presentation.

Dan Ortiz, Veteran: not present

**Guest Speakers**

Ricky Pal, Associate Governmental Program Analyst, Minority and Underrepresented Veterans Division (MUVD), CALVET: MUVD’s mission is to ensure all veterans have equal access to their earned benefits, regardless of race, ethnic origin, religion, gender, gender identity or sexual orientation. The presenter gave an overview of demographics and assistance to the Tribal Veterans Outreach Program, CALVET LGBTQ Inclusion Program, MUVD Roster, and CALVET Pathway to Citizenship Program.

Demographics: California has 1.6 million veterans. Of which 754,831 (47%) are minority veterans, which does not include LGBTQ veterans.

Assistance provided by MUVD: promoting the use of VA benefits, programs, and services by minority veterans, supporting and initiating activities/events, educating unique needs of minority veterans, targeting outreach efforts through community networks, and advocating on behalf of minority veterans by identifying gaps in services and making recommendations to improve service delivery.

Tribal Veterans Advocacy: 109 federally reorganized tribes in California, natural disaster assistance with CalOES, Tribal Nations Conference hosted by CA Tribal Chairperson’s Association, and the Governor’s Office. The team currently working with the Governor’s office to create a Joint Tribal Veteran Advisory Council which is supported by most tribal leaders. Intend to hold a powwow to inaugurate the actual council.

LGBTQ Veteran Inclusion Program: CALVET believes in building support for LGBTQ veterans and their families that promotes resilience in the face of challenges (program launched in 2014). In 2011, President Obama signed the Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell Repeal Act.

Minority and Underrepresented Veterans Roster: Receive updated information about benefits, programs, services, and resources throughout California. Since its launch, over 12,500 minority and underrepresented veterans have joined. To sign up, go to: <https://calvet.ca.gov/MinorityVets/Pages/Roster.aspx>

CALVET Pathway to Citizenship (PTC) Program: In 2018, CALVET’s Minority and Underrepresented Veterans Division launched the Pathway to Citizenship Program partnering with the Governor’s Office, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), and community immigration services providing free service to veterans and their dependents on expedited naturalization. Since its launch, MUVD hosted 16 workshops and assisted over 650 veterans.

Program Background: Appx. 5,000 non-citizens enlist in the military each year. As of 2018, appx. 94,000 non-citizens veterans do not have U.S. citizenship. In 2019, veterans were denied citizenship at a rate of 5% higher than their civilian counterparts. In the last 9 months of 2020, active service member requests to start naturalization applications were down from appx. 1,500 applications to only 10 due to outreach efforts.

Branch of Service: Army (62.2%), Navy (14.2%), Marines (8.6%), Air Force (7.8%), Coast Guard (0.4%)

Why are veterans deported: not a U.S. citizen, commit an aggravated felony and have Visa problems. Most veterans assume when signing the contract, they are automatically a citizen which is untrue.

Assistance for Deported Veterans: Immigrant Military Members and Veterans Initiative (IMMVETS). The Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the Department of Defense (DoD), and other agencies offer services and resources to assist military members, veterans, and their families. Deported veterans may now submit their case for free-of-cost legal services by going to <https://www.dhs.gov/immvets> and clicking on Complete Registration Form.

In response to Commissioner Anderson’s question on why there is a 5% more rejection of veterans than other applicants, the presenter stated that there is no definite answer. Veterans face unique challenges and some of those challenges are PTSD and the likelihood of getting a DUI, assault, and battery charges, and fights are some factors that play into the rejection.

Penny Lambright, Patriots and Paws: Provide veterans, active duty, and reservists throughout SoCal providing home goods and furnishings at no cost by having the veteran make an appointment to go to their warehouse in Anaheim and get everything they need. Served over 11,044 families, giving away approximately $9 million in products with volunteers putting in over 127,000 hours. On a weekly basis, take a truckload to Camp Pendleton of additional items and as of last year, started delivering home goods and furnishing to Fort Irwin. Currently looking at expanding reach into Las Vegas, Nevada. Looking for a location to create a kennel for veterans to kennel their animals with us while they take care of their personal needs at no cost.

In response to Commissioner Anderson’s question, Patriot to Paws’ area of operation is in Southern California. In the last 5 years, more than half of the veterans we served are from Los Angeles County.

In response to Commissioner McFadden’s question, Patriot to Paws does their pickup in Orange County for strict items needed for your home. Their website includes items they can/cannot take. There is no limit to items veterans can take. Currently, pick up and drop off are in Orange County.

**Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Report**

Thank you to the commission for coming back in person and for your steadfast dedication to our military and veteran community.

Deputy Antonio Chapa on behalf of Supervisor Solis, provided Commission Joe Leal a Certificate of Recognition for his 6 years as a Commissioner on the Veteran Advisory Commission.

Jim Zenner, Director, provided the following updates:

* Congratulations to Rose Bueta for her 35 years of service with Los Angeles County, Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.
* New Administrative (Admin) Deputy – Zuleyda Santana. She comes to our team from the Fire Department where she oversaw several special projects, board communications, contract and grant writing among other assignments.
* New Departmental Human Resources Manager – Kristine Papazyan. She comes to our team from the Department of Mental Health, Veteran Peer Access Network where she oversaw HR functions, marketing, and data analysis among other assignments.
* Updates on Vacancies: Currently 11 vacancies within the Department. Conducted first interviews for VCAs, finalizing second interviews for next week. Looking into leveraging the Homeless Initiative to expedite staff hiring and the needs of the department.
* Department Restructure: The VCA III’s that reported to two supervisors now report to Mr. Zenner. Mr. Dixon, Supervisor, Veterans Claims, retired from the County. Promoted the three VCA III’s in a temporary acting capacity to cover all Supervisorial Districts. Restructured the Admin Deputy position from just doing the military reservist work to covering all financial and HR functions of the Department.
* Sacramento Trip CACVSO: Spoke to CA legislatures on how CVSOs in the county positively affect homelessness and veteran suicide.
* Department entered into an agreement with the Elizabeth Dole Foundation to become a Hidden Heroes County. We have delegated authority from the board from a November 1st Board Motion to help streamline resources for our caregivers in LA County.
* Working on putting together ongoing slides for the Commission to track the number of patrons coming to Bob Hope Patriotic Hall (BHPH), the reason for their visit, the number of claims and fee waivers submitted for feedback and to better strategize in the future.
* Military Veteran Employment Association has a new President, Mr., Patrick Gadut. Mr. Gadut is a longtime Sheriff Deputy with LA County, Sheriff’s Department. The first social mixer will be on April 14th, inviting all veteran and military reservists in the county to speak with Mr. Gadut. Also, working on a report back to the Board with the Department of Human Resources (DHR) to identify all LA County veterans and reservists. As of last quarter, we have 637 reservists, of which, 430 are from the Sheriff’s Department and 63 from the Fire Department. We currently know who our reservists are, but we do not have an accurate count of our veterans.
* SB 783: Spoke to Senator Bob Archuleta. They announced a spot bill. Currently working on a Suicide Prevention Pilot for CVSOs.
* Major issue on service-connected compensation not being exempted from income for consideration on housing. Currently working with the Legislative Team to get it exempted. Currently, service-connected veterans are being penalized and kept out of housing closest to their treatment.
* SkillBridge: Wrapped into the department’s work with the Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO). Officially a SkillBridge participant. Currently working to pilot the first two SkillBridge participants at MVA to work through additional issues and processes to open it up to other County departments. Hoping to fill critical hire needs of different county departments and create a program where transitioning service members have the flexibility to work with the County department they first end up at, they can easily transfer to a different department or use a private option they deem fit.
* VIP: Looking at expanding Veteran Intern eligibility to have more flexibility regarding discharge statuses. Currently with DHR and DEO.
* Veteran Directed Care Pilot Program: Flex funds the VA can make available to veterans and their caregivers to help keep them in their homes and away from assisted living. Working with the Los Angeles County Department of Aging and Disabilities (A&D) and all other county aging departments to help administer the funds.
* Homeless Veteran Emergency: Starting to create a list of all services offered to veterans by different LA County departments. MVA is working with the State and the VA on a report back to the board on recommendations to streamline services in LA County.
* HUD VASH/SSVF: Looking to place two HUD VASH staff at BHPH to make this a one-stop shop for veterans. Engaging with JVS SoCal to bring SSVF to BHPH.
* Showers are now open for homeless veterans at BHPH. Bea’s Closet will be opening up on March 18, 2023, for clothes and supplies.
* Recognition of Chris Cortes, Veteran Intern: Mr. Cortes received a Thank You letter from the daughter of a veteran he assisted. The letter states that for the first time, 93 year-old Korean Veteran opened up about his active war experiences and certain stories that were never shared before. Mr. Cortes helped the veteran share the trauma he kept inside since the war. It was due to Mr. Cortes’ listening skills, empathy, and kindness that helped the veteran to finally open up and express how he felt.
* New MVA Board Deputy for SD 3: Amy Perkins. She is also the Senior Deputy for Housing and Homelessness.
* Update of Recommendation #1: As a result of the recommendation, Mr. Zenner had a conversation with the Department of Beaches and Harbors, the Department of Parks and Recreation, and the Natural History Museum about what benefits veterans have and get currently any kind of flexibility to move in the direction of supporting this recommendation. Offset funding might be available.
* Townhalls: Chief Deputy Stone will reach out to the Commissioners to discuss setting up a town hall in each Supervisorial District.
* Opportunity to honor Sergeant Bill Simonoff, a World War II veteran, at the French consulate. The Government of France through the consulate awarded Sgt. Simonoff the Legion of Valor.

**Agenda Items that are Deferred to a Future Meeting**

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|  | **Agency** | **Topic** | **Commissioner** |
| 1 | Metro | Station Naming | Jackson-Kelly |
| 2 | Commission Services | Cross Commission Cooperation | Szeto |
| 3 | LA Community College District | Student Veteran Homelessness | Allman |
| 4 | VA | SSVF Rideshare Transportation | Leal |
| 5 | California Department of Social Services | In-Home Supportive Services | Leal |
| 6 | LA County Homeless Initiatives | FY23 Funding Strategies | Allman |

**Good of the Order**

Commissioner Leal thanked the Commission. The biggest success in this position is the veterans we serve.

Commissioner Jackson-Kelly went to Washington, DC for a conference. They have real concerns regarding veteran ratings and less percentages than their counterparts. Thank you to CALVET for a feature article on Black History for Black History Month.

Commissioner McFadden joined Commissioner Jackson-Kelly in Washington, DC. The primary focus of the meeting was service-connected benefits, especially around women’s health with the expansion of services for women veterans’ health and discussing the pace and speed of getting care for all veterans.

Commissioner Allman stated that LA Times did a great editorial regarding the campus development at West LA for the 59 units opening for senior veterans and incorporated a lot of information on the AMI issue. Reminder, there is an ongoing podcast by KCRW with NPR regarding veterans called City of Tents.

Commissioner Szeto thanked the Department. On the campus at West LA VA, there is a Federal Advisory Committee that makes recommendations to the Secretary regarding the redevelopment of that campus for housing and services for veterans and they are soliciting board members.

Commissioner Gutierrez thanked Commissioner Leal for what he has done for the commission and for the veteran community.

Commissioner Anderson appreciated Commissioner Leal for his service. He attended the Homes for Families Fundraiser Gala with MVA and Commission presence. Able to raise about $150,000 for veteran home-building projects in Palmdale and North Hollywood.

The meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m.

Kristine Papazyan

Management Analyst

March 15, 2023