

**LOS ANGELES COUNTY  
VETERANS ADVISORY COMMISSION**

1816 S. FIGUEROA STREET  
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90015



**Jim Zenner  
Director**

**MINUTES  
REGULAR MEETING  
Wednesday, May 17, 2023**

**Present:**

**Absent:**

**Commissioners**

**Commissioners**

Hugh E. Crooks Jr.  
Rocio Palmera  
Patricia Jackson-Kelley  
Jawana McFadden  
Anthony Allman  
Chihung Szeto  
Alfonso Noyola  
John Gutierrez  
Dennis Anderson

**County Department**

**Military and Veterans Affairs**

Jim Zenner, Director  
Stephanie Guerrero, Executive Secretary

**Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance**

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Szeto at 1:32 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Commissioner Hugh E. Crooks, Jr, 1<sup>st</sup> District.

**Roll Call**

Nine (9) 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 for May 17, 2023 and seconded by Commissioner Anderson; a roll call with unanimous votes, the motion passed.

**Chairman's Report**

Chair Chi Szeto stated:

**1. GovDelivery Notice of Meeting**

- On Friday there if don't have GovDelivery send an email to MVA subscriptions

- From: [MVA@subscriptions.lacounty.gov](mailto:MVA@subscriptions.lacounty.gov)
  - To subscribe email: [info@mva.lacounty.gov](mailto:info@mva.lacounty.gov)
- 2. YouTube Channel**
    - "LA County Military and Veterans Affairs"
    - 62 Subscribers
  - 3. Meeting with SD3 and Metro**
    - Commissioner Allman, Commissioner Noyola, and Commissioner Szeto were invited; discussion: the artist selection process, the risks that they take on by not re-evaluating artists they use, moral injury Vets that show up for appointments on campus every day, and the trauma that they feel just showing up. Special thanks to the director for helping get the message out and coordinating with the board and metro.
  - 4. Library of Congress AAPI Veteran Interviews**
    - Santa Monica May 19, 20th
    - Alhambra May 22<sup>nd</sup>
  - 5. Admin**
    - Commission meeting times changes notify for discussion so more Commissioners can be present.

### Guest Speakers:

#### Dr. Brenda Threatt, Student Veteran Homelessness

- Information on Veteran Students living unhoused is incomplete due to veterans not self-reporting their homelessness
- Approximately 55,000 Veterans and active-duty Service Members, and dependents are enrolled in California Community Colleges each year
- Veterans are provided information about VA education, financial aid, academic counseling, transfer, and community support but there is little info on housing
- From 2010 to 2022 there was a rise in veteran homelessness
- In 2022, 33,136 Veterans were unhoused
- In 2020, CA reported 11,401 homeless veterans
- In 2022, Los Angeles County reported 3,456 unsheltered veterans
- There are three categories:
  1. Category One - Homeless: don't have fixed, regular, or adequate place housing/shelter, are living in a publicly or privately operated shelter, or living in a place not meant for human habitation
  2. Category Two - Imminent Risk of Homelessness: they will lose housing in 14 days if they don't get income. In turn, this makes them feel shameful, alienated, a failure, and/or helpless, therefore they fail
  3. Category Three - Transitional aged youth and unaccompanied minors and their conditions of homelessness
- Housing instability is traumatic. Due to the inability to pay rent, they are risking eviction and having to stay in hotels, motels, doubling up, using personal vehicles and garages
- Psychological effects: depression, PTSD, frustration, anxiety, stress, panic attacks, paranoia, suicide attempts
- Short-term effects: Can't access healthcare, not getting enough food, trouble staying safe, violence, stress, unsanitary living conditions, and exposure to severe weather (taken from CDC)
- Enrollment for Spring 2023: 18,000 students enrolled of which, 13% are experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity (about 2,340 students) (study by RAND Corporation in Unhoused Veterans in Los Angeles)
- Veterans want to get off the streets, but available housing options do not provide safety, security, and privacy, nor meet their desire for autonomy.
- All community colleges are looking at steps to house veterans, to provide dedicated veteran case managers, mental health support along with housing navigators who can work collaboratively with housing providers and support agencies in acquiring housing for veteran students and/or shelter pending permanent housing to advocate for veterans and family housing at the state and national level.

### Commissioner questions:

- Do you feel there's enough data and research on student Veteran homelessness?  
Brenda: No, I do not think there is enough due to the lack of self-reporting of veterans. There needs to be more visibility on campuses about veteran homelessness.
- Is there housing in any of the approximately 16 California community colleges?  
Brenda: No, El Camino applied for a grant to provide housing but was unsuccessful. They are currently applying for a 24-hour safe parking grant so they can at least designate a portion of their parking lot. There is not enough push to provide housing for community colleges, their president and vice president have been involved in that effort. Having access to housing in community colleges will be a solution.

Johnny Crowder – Founder and CEO, Cope Notes: Mr. Crowder’s reason for working in mental health is that he grew up with severe mental health issues and was resistant to treatment. Cope Notes believes providing peer support is critical. Randomly timed text messages are sent that interrupt negative thought patterns and train the brain to think healthier. Most people do not reach out when they experience something challenging. People are suffering in silence because the lift of therapy, medication, and engaging with care seem intimidating for most. As a society, we have neglected prevention for a long time. Cope Notes serves diagnosed and undiagnosed individuals. Cope Note is not an app; it is anonymous, and no personal data is collected. It is 50 times more likely that people open a text message than an app notification. Data shows that 97% of American adults prefer text messaging to any other communication method. The focus is on accessibility to access digital health resources. Cope Notes are messages that are sent and written by peers with experience, who have an understanding of how what they’re writing about affects their own life and the lives of others. Content is based on health education with psychological principles reviewed by clinicians. Random text messages at random times, they’re not complex, long, or full of jargon. No two people ever get the same text message at the same time.

These randomly timed interruptions train the brain to think in healthier patterns. People can text back any time and speak freely in the journal, to say what they want, whenever they want. It will not be reported to anyone, shared, or published anywhere. If someone is in a situation or crisis it will be escalated but otherwise, it is a private, anonymous, and confidential journal that allows them to feel comfortable. The neuroscience behind Cope Notes is based on proven psychology. There are decades of research around Ecological Momentary Intervention (EMI). Text messages are used as interruptions to negative thought patterns and the brain over time adapts to form new pathways associated with positive thoughts. Qualitative and quantitative studies with the University of South Florida have been done; the most recent quantitative study was published in the Journal of Mental Health about a month ago. People living with moderate to severe depression, anxiety, and stress, saw statistically significant decreases in their symptoms faster than therapy, this was with interacting 30 days with Cope Notes for about 10 seconds a day.

### **Public Comments**

Darren Hendon, Veteran SD2 – Not present

Dan Ortiz, Veteran, SD1 – City of Pico Rivera recently created their Veterans Advisory Committee (VAC). They were presented with a choice and were told “What day do you want to celebrate Veteran’s Day?” This year it falls on a Saturday, so they are having difficulty getting speakers to come to events. Pico Rivera’s VAC suggested having it Friday or Monday, but no choice was provided to have it on Veteran’s Day, November 11<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Hendon continued by asking “Why not have it on Veteran’s Day itself? There’s a significance to the day chosen for Veteran’s Day, it used to be Armistice Day, the 11<sup>th</sup> hour, the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month, it’s historical, and it’s the reason why the Government chose that day to honor Veterans. Do we want to pay the city staff to work on a weekend? Metro, no action on the listening session, they’re moving forward but have they listened to the Veterans? VPAN is doing a great job, great ideas, mistreated in LA.”

Steve Ramirez, Veteran – Not present

LV Raney II, Veteran – Not present

Alfred Chung, Veteran, SD2 – Korean and Vietnam War Veteran, Veteran War fought alongside American Soldiers. The presentation was INAUDIBLE.

### **Bylaws Amendment**

Chairman Chi Szeto: To allow in-person public comments, the process is to sign up before the meeting, adding verbiage if you’re in person and have time you want to sign off, that’s in article 6 and in article 7 and also applies to special meetings that are called Another big change is in Article 8, when recommendations are made to the floor supervisors, instead of having the chair send it forward, the secretary will send forth the recommendations.

Vice Chair Noyola: First issue of quorum, not clear as to what exactly a quorum represents when there are less than ten commissioners seated, requested that staff provide the commission with the originating legislation that created the commission stating how many original seats were called for if there is any language that originated the commission that suggests at any time would in essence change without the board of supervisors changing the composition of the seats. County legal has provided written advice or interpretation as to what a quorum is and has not yet seen it. He wants to see

what legal advice is and was told that it said that it may or may not reflect what state law requires in terms of how to determine what a quorum is of the public body.

The second issue under article four (4) Item D, seems to be that it may or may not have been the process put in place during COVID when there was no public to come in and make comments. If it is not the case, typically public bodies when having meetings where there is a public comment that anybody from the public should be able to come in, fill out a form, and make comments at that meeting according to the agenda topics. If that's the case, what is the purpose of filling out information about what they want to talk about 24 hours in advance? It seems that the bylaws imply that they cannot come to the meeting to make a comment.

Commissioner Allman: There are two new commissioners, bylaws were developed during COVID, and had to adapt under circumstances so people who attended in person can provide public comment. Currently dealing with hybrid setting, some people can do it online and others may come in person to sign up. How do we structure it? Do we have to come in person to provide public comment or virtualize it? Compromise in the newest meeting there is a link to register for public comment and if you want you can sign up for public comment at that time and have the option of coming in person or virtual. There are about 30 minutes in the agenda for public comments, three minutes per speaker, maxed out at 10, seven people registered online only 3 people in person would be allowed.

Vice Chair Noyola: Registering 24hrs ahead of time, virtually or in person, seems limiting and goes against ability of someone who wants to make a comment. If you have a public comment you can raise your hand.

Commissioner Allman: In his opinion, it will be chaotic.

Vice Chair Noyola: The public has the right to come to the commission meetings. Some people don't get the information about the meeting until the day of and they should have the same level of access as those online. The limiting factor is the amount of time set for the public, whether in person or online. Registering ahead of time helps commissioners but not the public. If they don't register and if there is time left, it should be done.

Chair Szeto: Moving forward, the sign-ups should be done in person and virtual. Amend for the third category.

Commissioner Crooks: Can the commission determine what the public is able to comment about, or are they not able to take action unless it is on the agenda; is that correct? It seems unclear.

Chair Szeto: Looks like we need to amend public comments, make new edits, and adopt new bylaws next month.

Commissioner Crooks: This is a forum where members of Los Angeles County can come and address this commission.

The Chair has the discretion to set the agenda. The Chair and Vice Chair will talk to the Director about opportunities to include as many members of the public as possible. The commission meeting time may potentially change to 9:30 am.

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

Jim Zenner, Director, provided the following updates:

Identified two Veteran Claim Assistant II's (VCA II) going through a background check; two VCA II's recently promoted, one Veteran Claims Assistant I (VCA I) and one Veteran Intern Program (VIP); currently interviewing four VCA I entry-level, looking for representation from communities where they will be placed. Recruitment was held in the Antelope Valley and around Sepulveda VA, SD2, and SD4, currently interviewing two Veteran Supervisors, five internal candidates, and four externals; 31 total candidates. Veteran Claims Assistant III will come on board on July 1st. It's a progression, VCA I will be sent through Accreditation Academy Phase I (weeklong basic info). Phase II is more hands on and puts knowledge to practice with experienced staff. VCA IIs are ready to work independently and should be able to handle their own office. VCA IIIs can provide mentorship to other VCAs. VCA IIIs to step up as a supervisor with an out-of-class bonus. Intermediate Typist Clerk, former staff coming back to the department. The Veteran Intern is vacant and will be identified at Supervisor Barger's Memorial Day event on May 27<sup>th</sup> in Arcadia. The Administrative Services Division has been restructured to all positions having been moved under the Admin Deputy, where significant progress has been made.

Successful DC trip with supervisors Hahn, Horvath, and Mitchell last month and spoke to Chief of Staff Retcher, Secretary Hudd, Secretary Fudge, Senator Villa, on the Veteran side covered a lot about Service-Connection being used as a part of the income calculation, dealing with new disabled service-connected veterans out of housing, priority in LA County;

mental health services, VA care do not get special mental health at home, they are expected to travel across the county to get that service, leading to loss of housing. Talking about funding for special mental health to provide in-house healthcare. Represented the Commission and County proudly. Talking with CEO about needs in the department, finished budget 2-3 months ago, CEO is finalizing budget, critical needs looked like not going to get, came up with solutions, a lot of funding available department traditionally not gone after on federal side, limited on state funding, we need support to apply for grants, technical assistance, in addition with working with Senators, working with CEOs office, LA n Sync, an organization that typically drives grant writing, specifically to draw state and federal dollars to come to local government to increase funding for the department and community.

Veteran Orientation was a program done at USC to identify newly transitioned service members, Veterans to connect to other Veterans, employers, approx. Approximately 70 folks in bldg. only 12 Service Members, a lot of service providers, were at DC to rapport building for transitioning service members and were able to meet with people who can really help them. There were 1,305 letters sent out to transitioning service members who live in LA County. It is a priority of the County to invest in veteran homelessness prevention. The CEO met with county departments to plan streamlined services for homeless veterans; will reach out to CALVET and the VA to discuss how they can support the mission.

We provide services as a county for the cities and the cities provide the space and infrastructure, veterans are provided services by the Federal government, but there hasn't been the same engagement at the city and COG level (council government) where the VA and county are showing up offering veteran services to the cities. Working on a report with the CEO to submit for approval, consolidating county services and offering that to the cities as offered to county services and offer resources like Pico Rivera and other cities that have engaged to get services to where Veterans are. Veterans who interact with cities, don't necessarily interact with County. Partners at the VA have committed a housing navigator thru the SSVF program and get rid of the requirement of enrolling someone into HUD-VASH before getting a house. Housing navigators will work on getting housing and worry about the paperwork after.

Veterans Suicide Review Team (VSRT) there has been a development in the Service Members Veteran and Family TA program that established the Mayor's Challenge, was able to convince them to allow LA County and City to be the only county-city pilot, engaging six other states across the country in moving the suicide prevention to learn from other states for best practices to continue here. Stephanie Stone, Chief Deputy, met with the Welfare Commission engaged by the Army Transition Program about the CEO of a homelessness initiative, a public-private partnership.

Kathleen Piche, MVA Communications is a DMH employee. DMH requested her to go back at the end of next month. The CEO was informed about how critical communications are for the department.

Recommendation 1 and 2: No progress on Recommendation 1, not being able to take action to move commissioner's first recommendation forward. Recommendation 2 was productive after a discussion with Metro.

Huge thanks to staff for setting the bar high since they are tasked with a lot of work and are very busy.

Commissioner Allman made a suggestion to get an organizational chart for the supervisorial staff. Director Zenner responded that the department is reorganizing by supervisorial districts.

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

1. Amendment bylaw Change meeting time – Dennis Anderson
2. Veteran legislation at State – Chi Szeto
3. Metro; Station Naming – Jackson-Kelley
4. Commission Services; Cross Commission Cooperation – Chi Szeto
5. LA County Homeless Initiative; FY23 Funding Strategies - Allman
6. Sleep Apnea machine recall; VA briefing – Commissioner Noyola
7. Department of Economic Opportunity; modernization of AJCC program – Commissioner Allman

### **Good of the Order**

Commissioner Brooks stated that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday of July is child prevention. Apply for the county board if interested.

Commissioner Palmero and McFadden both had nothing to add.

Commissioner Jackson-Kelly stated that she attended the renaming of Fort Lee in Virginia where she got to speak to Emma Howard. Lieutenant General Gregg spoke at the event. She visited the museum and future home of 6<sup>th</sup> AAA artifacts.

Commissioner Noyola welcomed the new commissioners. The Director and employees are doing an awesome job in the department.

Commissioner Allman stated that on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, building 205 and 208 opened in West LA VA with 120 units of permanent housing. There are currently 233 units available on the campus. There are three parcels in development and four will be released to developers this year. By the end of 2025d, there will be an additional 530 units on campus. In February, the VA committed approximately 380 million dollars for campus development. Asian Pacific Islander event is on the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>. The Third District event will be held at the West LA VA on May 23<sup>rd</sup>; the deadline for registration is May 19<sup>th</sup>. The department sends info through a newsletter.

Commissioner Anderson stated he wants to thank citizen friends, brothers, and comrades from the Korean ally component. Hi brother Jim Hert, was a Major in medical services with the Republic of Korea.

Commissioner Gutierrez gave a reminder of the 25<sup>th</sup> Annual Tribute to Veterans and their families, on May 27<sup>th</sup>. Shout out to the committee of the Veterans Justice Project for holding an event at Patriotic Hall where good information was provided.

Commissioner Szeto stated that the City of Torrance Armed Forces Day Parade is happening on the 20<sup>th</sup> of May and announced that Commissioner McFadden is retiring after 25 years of service.

A total of nine (9) participants were in attendance. The meeting adjourned at 3:04 p.m.

Stephanie Guerrero  
Executive Secretary  
May 17, 2023