

# LOS ANGELES COUNTY VETERANS ADVISORY COMMISSION

1816 S. FIGUEROA STREET  
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90015



**Jim Zenner**  
Director

## MINUTES REGULAR MEETING Wednesday, August 16, 2023

### **Present:**

#### **Commissioners**

Chi Szeto  
Alfonso Noyola  
Hugh E. Crooks Jr.  
Rocio Palmero  
Jawana McFadden  
Anthony Allman  
John Gutierrez  
Dennis Anderson

### **Absent:**

#### **Commissioners**

Patricia Jackson-Kelley

### **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 1:30 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Commissioner Jawana McFadden, 2<sup>nd</sup> District.

### **Roll Call**

Nine (9) Commissioners were at the meeting during the roll call and a quorum was present.

### **Approval of Minutes**

A motion was made by Commissioner Allman to edit the Minutes for July 19, 2023, and seconded by Chair Szeto to include Commissioner Palmero as she was present for the meeting, but her name was not included. After a roll call was conducted with unanimous votes, the motion passed.

## **Chairman's Report**

Chair Chi Szeto stated the following:

- **GovDelivery Notice of Meeting**
  - 8/11/2023
  - From: [MVA@subscriptions.lacounty.gov](mailto:MVA@subscriptions.lacounty.gov)
  - To subscribe email: [info@mva.lacounty.gov](mailto:info@mva.lacounty.gov)
- **YouTube Channel**
  - "LA County Military and Veterans Affairs"
  - 69 Subscribers
- **Use of County emails and training**
  - Notify if no access to County e-mail, will start using it by the next meeting
  - Mandatory EEO virtual training, Thursday 9/13/2023

## **Guest Speakers**

Margaret Willis, Director, Countywide Benefits Entitlements Service Teams (CBEST) stated:

- What is CBEST?
  - Countywide Entitlement Services Team. Program of Department of Health Services, Housing for Health Division.
  - Assist people Countywide in applying for and securing income through public benefits i.e. SSI, SSDI, retirement benefits, veteran benefits and Cappy.
    - Intake, the medical review process, and partnership with Social Security to verify information.
    - If there are enough medical records to justify a disability, then an application will be started.
    - If an application is denied, the legal team will work with the appeals and hearing process.
  - Support Services – homelessness
  - The main criteria to be eligible for CBEST – must be an LA County resident. Most benefit programs are income-based and have a disability.
  - Client population – housed and unhoused, homeless, at risk of becoming homeless, veterans, youth exiting foster care system, cash assistance for immigrants (Cappy program) reinstatement of benefits for people who are being released after incarceration.
  - Email referrals to: [cbestreferral@dhs.lacounty.gov](mailto:cbestreferral@dhs.lacounty.gov)
- C5, Countywide Veterans benefits advocacy program funding – a decision was made to merge initiatives 4, 5, and 6. SSI program, Countywide Veterans advocacy program, and targeted advocacy for inmates.
  - Veterans are a subpopulation through CBEST
  - Measure H funding (state) along with CBEST- State H Dap funding was used to reallocate measure H funds to other programs
  - Money is used for staff – 120 full-time staff (outreach and intake); legal and social service contractors, Inner City Law Center for Veterans work; 8 social service agencies to cover intensive case management, connection to housing and services that will assist people who need their vital documents in order to get applications done; records retrieval team, medical review team (15 additional full-time staff)
  - CBEST origin – served 33,000 people, and of that 1,500 were veterans which is about 5%. There have been 720 applications submitted for veterans, 347 were approved in a final determination and 22 were denied. There is a high approval rate for veterans, 94% of final determinations are positive. The retro pay is \$1 million dollars for veterans.
  - CBEST results are real income for people. Taking local dollars and translating them into federal dollars goes into people's pockets monthly.

In response to the Commissioner's questions, comments, and concerns, Ms. Willis made the following statements: Inner City Law Center does all that work. DMVA gave training before providers were brought on to do the work and DMVA was critical in launching CBEST in 2017.

- Money goes to DPSS. There are several portions of money allocated for benefits advocacy services. A big portion of funding goes to the Department of Public Social Services (DPSS). CBEST is contracted with DPSS, and the money goes to them there's an agreement that combines several funding sources to generate the overall budget for CBEST. Reductions in measure H funding were intentional because state funding was received through DHCS

to do the H Dap program. Additional state dollars came online and that's what offset the reduction of Measure H funding.

- People will be enrolled for both, if not eligible for one does not preclude being supported by CBEST. Happy to restructure with DMVA to reduce the duplication of services.
- Individuals are still being screened for eligibility and looking for the highest need, most likely to secure benefits. People with low priority are on the waitlist as well.
- Benefits advocacy is not limited to applying or doing a hearing because it incorporates legal pieces of working on discharge status.

Director Zenner supported Ms. Willis by stating that conversations began with CBEST.

Vice Chair Noyola stated the importance of centralizing the delivery of different benefits across the spectrum. County has delivery lines if trying to focus on population base at the State and Federal level and still be able to deliver in other departments oversight to ensure that someone can be directed to the proper place and manage dollars allocated by State and Federal agencies that impact veteran services are not being overseen by Department, question is what is out there, efficiency, the mission is about overseeing and identifying benefits. He is pleased to hear that there are discussions happening and encouraged to continue reviewing Countywide.

The Director stated there has been some work with the board motion to convene all the county departments that assist individuals experiencing homelessness, which will include Veterans. The first recommendation that came from the Commission last year was discounts for parks and beaches, collaboration was held with parks and rec, and beaches and parks, and the Natural History Museum shared some of that information, but undoubtedly there are more services.

Vice Chair Noyola stated that the VA has certain benefits that identify those who do not self-identify. The Commission is willing to support the Department to ensure that oversight needs to come from MVA. The Board of Supervisors intentionally created MVA as the gatekeeper.

### **Recommendation #3: Support for AB 46**

Commissioner Allman provided an overview on Recommendation #3:

Mr. Allman stated that according to bylaws, the process by which a Commissioner can introduce a recommendation, he or she will draft the recommendation and then submit that to the leadership (Chair, Vice Chair, and Secretary) at least two weeks prior to the upcoming meeting. When drafted, it was in response to the briefing from Legislative Affairs, (AB) 46 had not yet received County support. In the role of Commissioners, there's an ability to advise and recommend to the Board of Supervisors pieces of legislation that are crucial to the veteran community. When submitting a recommendation to leadership, the Chair flagged that recommendation specific to a piece of legislation and there's a review process. The Vice Chair had a follow-up call with Legislative Affairs to discuss the process that is not used frequently by commissioners. The last time was in 2019, so it doesn't happen often. The Commission should hold a discussion because amendments may or may not affect the analysis of Legislative Affairs. For example, a draft recommendation asks the Board of Supervisors to direct Legislative Affairs to take a policy position in support of AB 46 but someone can offer an amendment with different offers. When it goes to Legislative Affairs, all edits should be encompassed so Legislative Affairs can give a full analysis, at that point review analysis and determine whether is appropriate to send to the Board of Supervisors. The state legislative calendar does not align, and the Board of Supervisors will not meet until September, which is after the State Legislative Affairs calendar, therefore, there is no pressure to expedite. He recommended reviewing Bylaws and making an amendment to establish a process to draft recommendation reviewed with the commission before it goes to legislation. The County has not taken a position because of the statewide impact financially and there's caution in willingness to support bills. Anticipated \$50 million impact on the budget in 23/24 and \$85 million starting 24/25. With all that said, the Commission will need to take action with the following:

- Vote to send to legislative affairs, table actual vote on recommendation itself for September meeting.
- Protocol: getting Memorandum of Findings from the Legislative Affairs Office.

Vice Chair Noyola made a motion to send edits to Legislative Affairs seconded by Commissioner Gutierrez. After a roll call was done with unanimous votes, the motion passed.

## VAC Logo

The Commissioners discussed several options that they are planning to adopt. This was tabled for a future meeting.

## Public Comments

Dan Hall, U.S. Army Veteran, District 3: With regards to Recommendation #3 for Assembly Bill 46, Military Service Retirement and Surviving Spouse Benefit Payment Act; California has a robust tax system, the analysis of the bill notes that from 2010 to 2021 the Veteran retiree population grew by 17% across the nation. California was one of only five states to see a decrease in military retirees at a rate of 14% reduction in the same period. The Bill's analysis states that most retirees who will benefit from AB46 are enlisted. By supporting this bill, the Commission will be the second County Veterans Commission that has officially taken a position of support in the State, and if the Board of Supervisors escalates the issue, L.A. County will be the second county to officially support it. A huge step in building critical support for the bill as it sits in the Senate Appropriations suspense.

Jay Morales, Vietnam Veteran: Proud of the Director and everything he's doing. The future for the department is looking good. He is requesting to confirm the approval of the minutes for July 2023 where he requested and notified the Commission that the American Legion, Los Angeles Post #8, was seeking National Landmark status for Bob Hope Patriotic Hall. He needs to have an official copy of the minutes to bring to the attention of elected officials at a formal Board of Supervisors meeting on a Tuesday between now and the end of the month of October prior to the month of November. Sometime in the months of August, September, or October, will request Fesia Davenport to speak to the elected officials. Los Angeles is not the most populated city in the United States, New York is, and Chicago is not far behind Los Angeles. Of the 58 counties in the State of California, Los Angeles is not the largest, San Bernardino is. When you talk about buildings, Bob Hope Patriotic Hall represents the last remaining of its type left in the country and is a function that you perform as Commissioners. This County has the 9<sup>th</sup> largest budget in the country out of 50 states. County budget funding comes from taxpayers who are property owners. When you confirm with CALVET and the GI Veterans Administration on GI loans and GI property owners that are Veterans in this county in the 1980s it was one of six, and the budget was 14 million. Right now, you're receiving 6 million out of a \$34 million budget. We can call attention to the fact that this county leads the nation in the homeless Veteran population there are 17 million plus Veterans left. Want to receive a copy of the minutes to make this issue public through advocacy through the American Legion Post because that's the reason the building is still here.

## Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Report

Jim Zenner, Director, provided the following updates:

- Thanked the MVA team and Commission Services
- Veteran Homelessness and benefits
  - 303 Veterans were in the homeless system last year
  - VA Study listed 1,800 homeless veterans
    - 50% on the list do not have service-connected, pension or social security
    - Did not study recipients of Cappie or the other DPSS county benefits
- Veteran Suicide and benefits
  - Suicide Review Academy in White Plains on the 25<sup>th</sup> through 27<sup>th</sup> of last month, seven states and one county, were the one county. Several county departments were involved, representing the Department of Mental Health, Medical Examiner-Coroner, and the Department of Public Health.
  - Talking to crisis responders in the area; 80% of Veteran Crisis calls have a financial nexus. Partnering with the VA mental evaluation team to get connected to the benefits and debt relief, advocacy, and other related services.
  - One piece of legislation that is called "Not Just a Number Act," LA County has not taken a position; proposed by Senator Tester in Montana, mandated the VA to include data around VBA (benefit specific data) in their annual suicide report.
- CVSO Act (HR 984)
  - Allocate \$20 million to states across the country to support VSO work
- Staffing updates
  - Plan for September to kick out some of the new staff to field offices to ensure better access to services.

- Observing new staff (in training); witnessing growth in knowledge, confidence, and ability to counsel veterans. Building a culture of mentorship and support during half a day (admin day) on Fridays.
- Building out a volunteer program
  - Reduce the amount of time staff spend calling and scheduling.
- Quality and Productivity Commission
  - Made proposal to productivity commission, funding USC, CVSO, not looking to veteran impact not looking deep enough into cost, increasing budget, for the entire state, looking at how to get info in hands of decision makers. Did about five county VSOs, willing to increase the budget, and our job as an association to show data for further investment.
- Santa Clarita Arts and Veteran Center Report
  - Wrapping up and getting ready to get it back to the board. Offered by Supervisor Barger and Supervisor Solis
- LATTC November, still looking for additional ideas
  - Partnership with AJCC SoCal, which started the culinary program with 10-15 veterans.
  - Looking for additional ideas from the Commission
- Concierge Desk
  - On hold until the volunteer program is set up
- Townhalls/A and E/One Team/VCOEB
  - SD4 Whittier, City of Lawndale, partners with VHA, VBA, and CALVET rotates through supervisorial districts every five to six months, and engages communities biannually.
  - Engage community, access to engagement with LA Metro Collaborative where there are close to 130 participants.
- October 11th
  - Working with VA, Monica Diaz, who heads up the homeless prevention program for the VA throughout; Dr. Matthew Miller who heads the Suicide Prevention Program, as well as Dr. Keith Harris psych visit, VA leadership to collaborate, hoping for opportunities for pilot initiatives.
- Website
  - \$43,000 in funding to procure a website designer.
- USC will provide an update to the Commission, Dr. Carol Castro, about another study, they finished up data collection and will work on the data release, schedule soon.
- Mental Health and Behavioral Health Directors from the County of San Diego, Orange County, and Los Angeles County to be involved in the making of the survey.
- Vet Day LA
  - The Planning Committee decided to forego the parade and is now looking into having an event at Bob Hope Patriotic Hall with music, and entertainment. Chief Deputy Stephanie Stone is working with Arnold Schwarzenegger.

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

1	LA County Homeless Initiatives	FY23 Funding Strategies	Allman
2	West LA VA Campus	Women Veteran Program	Jackson-Kelley
3	Veterans Healthcare Administration	Medical Devices Recall	Noyola
4	Department of Economic Opportunity	Modernization of AJCC	Allman
5	Commission Services	Cross Commission Cooperation	Szeto
6	Metro	Hiring and Veteran Initiatives	Zenner
7	Department of Public Social Services	Assistance for veterans	Palmero
8	Department of Mental Health	Programs overlapping with MVA	Anderson
9	Department of Military and Veterans Affairs	VSO Brief	Allman

**Good of the Order**

Commissioners Palmero, Crooks, McFadden, Gutierrez, and Noyola had nothing to add.

Commissioner Allman made everyone aware of the flyer for a Post 43 Resource event on August 30<sup>th</sup> from 10:00 am to 5:00 pm.

Commissioner Anderson is planning to attend the Metro Station event to engage with artists. The National Airborne Day recognizes military branches in 1940 commencement of parachute operations.

Commissioner Szeto will provide an update for the 3rd District Commissioner when he has more background. He thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 3:08 p.m.

Stephanie Guerrero  
Executive Secretary  
August 16, 2023