

LOS ANGELES COUNTY VETERANS ADVISORY COMMISSION

1816 S. FIGUEROA STREET
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90015



Jim Zenner
Director

MINUTES REGULAR MEETING Wednesday, May 15, 2024

Present:

Commissioners

Anthony Allman
Dennis Anderson
Hugh Crooks
John Follmer
John Gutierrez
Patricia Jason-Kelley
Jawana McFadden
Alfonso Noyola
Rocio Palmero

Absent:

Commissioners

Chi Szeto

County Department

Military and Veterans Affairs

Zuleyda Santana, Chief Deputy
Stephanie Guerrero, Executive Secretary

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Allman at 1:30 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Allman asked Vice Chair, John Follmer, 3rd District, to lead the Pledge of Allegiance. Vice Chair Follmer proceeded to lead The Pledge of Allegiance.

Roll Call

Nine (9) Commissioners were at the meeting during roll call; a quorum was present. Commissioner Anderson attended the meeting virtually. Commissioner Chi Szeto was absent from the meeting.

Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Commissioner Noyola to accept the Minutes for April 17, 2024, with one edit, seconded by Commissioner Crooks. A roll call was conducted to accept the Minutes and the motion passed with unanimous votes.

Chairman's Report

Chair Allman stated that the notice of meeting was sent out on May 10th at 7:59am via GovDelivery from MVA@subscriptions.lacounty.gov. To subscribe, please visit mva.lacounty.gov and click on the mail icon located on the top right of webpage.

The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (MVA) YouTube channel (@LACMVA) currently has 87 subscribers. All past Commission meetings are posted there and it's highly recommended to subscribe.

Chair Allman stated we have a new Vice Chair, Commissioner Follmer. Chair and Vice Chair positions rotate on an annual basis where each supervisorial district will take turns having Chair positions.

Chair Allman stated that March and April 2023 Veterans Advisory Commission Meetings were not uploaded and would like to have those added. He also stated that the room number of the Commission meeting should be included with the Notice of Meeting in the future.

Public Comments

None.

Guest Speakers

Rakesh "Ricky" Pal, Associate Governmental Programs Analyst, CALVET

Mr. Pal described CALVET's Minority and Underrepresented Veterans Division which ensures all veterans have access to their benefits regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, gender identity or sexual orientation. This will be accomplished by promoting the use of State and Federal benefits, advocating for underrepresented veterans and leading initiatives that educate the public.

Mr. Pal said with 1.6 million veterans in California, 47% could be identified as minority or unrepresented. The Minority and Underrepresented Veterans Division advocates, for example, for Native American Veterans and LGBTQ Veterans by assisting with their specific needs. This involves education, outreach, and assistance with obtaining benefits.

Mr. Pal explained that the CALVET Pathway to Citizenship (PTC) Program helps veterans and current service members become U.S. citizens using sections 3.28 and 3.29 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA). The PTC program launched in 2018 and since has conducted 16 workshops and assisted over 650 veterans with Naturalization.

Mr. Pal explained various reasons a veteran may not have citizenship and why some could even be deported due to not being citizens of the United States. Deported veterans may now submit their case for free-of-cost legal services. The CalVet website has information at www.calvet.ca.gov/minorityvets.

Chair Allman asked about local services providers that are offering help with pathway to citizenship for veterans.

Commissioner Crooks thanked Mr. Pal for his presentation.

Commissioner Palmero asked about discharge upgrades for LGBTQ services members.

Commissioner Anderson asked about a discharge upgrade for a local veteran.

Chair Allman again thanked Mr. Pal for his presentation and thanked Commissioner Crooks for bringing the matter to the attention of the Commission.

Commissioner McFadden motions to adopt logo 3 as the official logo of the Veterans Advisory Commission for the County of Los Angeles. Commissioner Noyola seconds the motion.

VAC Logo Discussion

Chair Allman showed slides and explained the VAC logo options. Options 1, 3, and 5 are commented on by the commissioners and each voted for one logo. A roll call vote was conducted with the majority voting to adopt logo 3. Chair Allman said we have officially adopted a logo that we will use in our notice of meetings and our presentations. Congratulations.

Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Report

Chief Deputy Santana said that out of our 12 locations, the most claims are produced at Bob Hope Patriotic Hall and Santa Clarita/Sepulveda VA. Miscellaneous claims activities and compensation are the top two categories of claims in April. The Justice Involved Program served 58 veterans and filed 12 claims. The 1807 Program continues to grow on referrals and the Indigent Burial Program had 12 referrals from Los Angeles County Medical Examiner. The Homeless Services Division served 80 veterans in April with more coming in the next month.

Chief Deputy Santana said we received 188 referrals from VPAN in April with 104 of the referrals for disability compensation. She said the Aging Veterans Referrals Program had 5 referrals in April, but we are engaging with Aging and Disability to increase the number of referrals.

Chief Deputy Santana said for Administration CEO approved budget for FY2024-2025. The Department applied for Staff Sergeant Fox Suicide Prevention grant and recently received a 300,000 grant from the VA for legal services. She also said in Human Resources we hired a total of 12 new staff to support our Veteran Services Division and one staff to support the Administrative Services Division. She said that since the beginning of the Fiscal Year we promoted 13 internal candidates and continue to focus on creating upward mobility to retain talent.

Chief Deputy Santana said for Building Services Division we tracked over 13,000 visitors this FY with the projected annual total at 16,000. She said veterans benefits and events have the most visitors. She showed a list of events in May at Patriotic Hall and said we have a lot more coming in June. She said we also have a women's veterans event coming up in July.

Chief Deputy Santana said in communication we have reached a significant number of veterans with the most being through LinkedIn. She said we do not have any legislative updates and concluded the presentation. She asked the commission if there were any questions.

Commissioner Jackson-Kelley asked about events in the evening at Patriotic Hall. Chief Deputy Santana replied that there are costs associated but events can and do occur in the evening.

Commissioner Gutierrez asked how visitors are tracked. Chief Deputy Santana said that visitors are going to be tracked by Qualtrics. We track where everyone is going and then compare it to the information other organizations in the building have. This makes the visitor report accurate.

Commissioner Crooks asked about overtime events and getting funds for the coverage. Chief Deputy Santana said Departments should be able to fund themselves, but organizations will assist with recovery from using the building after hours. We only charge recoverable costs to organizations who do not have a nexus with the department. We do not charge veteran organizations.

Commissioner Follmer asked if we are using the kitchen or other facilities in Bob Hope Patriotic Hall for a service to the public. Chief Deputy Santana said we do not have that set up with any organizations currently.

Agenda Items for Future Meetings

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| 1. | National Veterans Mural | National Veterans Mural, preservation | Commissioner Follmer |
| 2. | VA | Master Plan Update | Commissioner Anderson |

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| 3. | CALVET | OTH VA Healthcare Eligibility | Commissioner Follmer |
| 4. | GLA VA | Women Veterans Program | Commissioner Jackson-Kelley |

Good of the Order

Commissioner Crooks, SD 1 – Nothing.

Commissioner Palmero, SD 1 – Said there is a town hall tonight in El Monte and encouraged everyone to be there, if possible.

Commissioner Jackson-Kelly, SD2 – Nothing.

Commissioner McFadden, SD2 – said she attended the 3rd Annual Inglewood Women’s Rock Empowerment Summit, and it was a good way to connect with the community and to have the veteran presence there to speak about women’s issues. She encouraged people in the city of Inglewood to attend. She said also herself and Commissioner Guitierrez attended the military aviation and space flight focus group at Layola Marymount University. She said they are exploring apprenticeship and graduate programs in the field of aviation. She encouraged everyone to keep their eye out for more information about how that will be translated at that school.

Chair Allman, SD3 – Said last Friday Congressman Brad Sherman introduced the Housing Unhoused Disabled Veterans Act. This would remove the calculation of income of VA disability benefits for housing on VA property. He said he believes it a good piece of legislation and would like to have the Commission’s support behind this legislation as a recommendation.

Commissioner John Follmer, SD 3 – Said he thinks veterans services in Los Angeles are not owned by veterans. Said he wants to find veteran owned and operated businesses and is asking these businesses to made themselves known so we can support them.

Commissioner Noyola, SD4 – Thanked the commissioners for agreeing on a logo.

Commissioner Gutierrez, SD5 – Thanked Commissioner McFadden for mentioning the aviation event they attended, and that the following week met with individuals from Edwards Airforce Base and other surrounding businesses and aviation companies that employ veterans. Also, he mentioned, the 26th Annual Tribute to Veterans and Military Families is at Arcadia Park on Saturday May 25th from 10am to 1pm. He also mentioned the Community Picnic at Library Park in Monrovia, Saturday June 1st from 11am to 1pm. He said to be on the lookout in June we will have a Townhall event in Santa Clarita.

Commissioner Anderson, SD5 – Said he was privileged to participated in a military parachute jump that honored the 555th Parachute Infantry Battalion. He said this was the only black airborne unit in operation during WWII. They were organized late in the war and served stateside and innovated smoke jumping. He said they put out forest fires that were started by Japanese incendiary balloon bombs that were floated over on the Jetstream to the Pacific Northwest. They stood up late in the war but performed very hazardous duty, in adversarial conditions, honorably. Said he wished to forward a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors to recognize Sergeant Joe Harris. He said next month in Compton, Sergeant Harris, a beloved citizen of the community, will be honored, at his home, on his 108th birthday.

Commissioner Anderson also said the next commission meeting will likely be his last as his successor has been selected. He thanked the Chairman and the entire commission.

Chair Allman thanked Commissioner Anderson and said he looked forward to hearing what SD5 has in mind with respect to a new commissioner.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:53 p.m.

Todd Tortorici, Management Analyst
Administrative Services Division
May 15, 2024