

Arizona Veterans' Services Advisory Commission
3839 N. 3rd Street, Phoenix, AZ 85012

April 14, 2022

MINUTES

Advisory Commissioners Present

Joan McDermott, Chairwoman (in-person)
Gene Crego, Vice Chair (in-person)
Chris Gibbs, Commissioner (virtual)
Kathryn Gallowitz, Commissioner (virtual)
Edward Logan, Commissioner (virtual)
Kirk Loving, Commissioner (virtual)
Michael Noble, Commissioner (virtual)
Rebecca Villalpando, Commissioner (virtual)

AZ Department of Veterans' Services (ADVS)

Lupita Santellano, Executive Assistant (in-person)
Wanda Wright, Director (in-person)

Guests

Beth Johnson (virtual)
Philip D. Cushman (in-person)

Absent

Jennifer Harris, Legislative Liaison

Call to Order – The Arizona Veterans' Services Advisory Commission (AVSAC) meeting, via Google Meets: meet.google.com/jgq-vm-sc-uux; Dial in: (US)+1 617-675-4444; PIN: 425 562 666 6167#. Chairwoman Joan McDermott called the meeting to order at 10:03 am.

Chairwoman McDermott lead the commission in the pledge of allegiance.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

Chairwoman McDermott called for a motion to approve the AVSAC meeting minutes from March 14, 2022. Vice Chair Crego motioned to accept the meeting minutes, Commissioner Gallowitz second the motion. There being no changes to the minutes or any objections by the Commission, the motion carried unanimously.

Chairwoman McDermott called for a motion to approve the AVSAC subcommittee report from March 23, 2022. Vice Chair Crego motioned to accept the report from the subcommittee, Commissioner Logan second the motion. The report was approved by a unanimous vote from the commission.

Director's Department Update

The department continues to work on the opening of the Arizona State Veteran Home – Yuma (ASVH-Y). The department continues to hire staff at the ASVH-Y; there is staff working on location now. The ASVH-Y is scheduled to open up to twenty veterans on August 1, 2022, in order to receive licensing. There has been a delay in opening the ASVH-Y due to supplies and contracting; therefore, the official opening date was pushed out to August.

Last legislature session the department was granted twelve additional Veteran Benefits Counselors (VBCs). The department has hired eleven of the twelve VBCs, this week the Veteran Services Division will interview to fill the twelfth VBC position. Director Wright thanked the commissioners for their support.

ADVS is part of the Arizona Hires Vets initiative. The initiative is a program the state put together to hire more veterans into state service. Currently, nine percent of state employees are veterans, the state has set a goal to raise that number to fifteen percent by 2025. The department has done public service announcements for current employees who are veterans, they have been asked to speak about how they enjoy their public service. There is a new website for veterans for employment. Hiring events have been held, one was held on March 30, 2022, in person at Wesley Bolin Plaza. There were thirty-five state departments present at the hiring event; eighty veterans showed up to the event. Director Wright states it was a great day and everyone present was enthusiastic. The next hiring event is scheduled on April 28, 2022, in person; click [here](#) for more information. There have also been virtual hiring events held; sixteen veterans showed up to the virtual event.

Director Wright is interested in the data collected from the program. She would like to know how many veterans were interviewed based on the hiring events and how many veterans were hired. She would like to know if there is difficulty within the system to get veterans hired in state employment.

The Military Family Relief Fund (MFRF) received thirty-three applications this month. Director Wright states more veterans are becoming vulnerable because of real-estate issues such as increases in their mortgage or rent and may require money for food or assistance with other resources.

ADVS is part of a large breakthrough project with the State, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Arizona Veteran Housing Coalition, to help homeless veterans with no service connection and with high acuity. These homeless veterans can no longer care for themselves, they do not have the ability to get housing or aid and attendance, and do not meet the eligibility criteria to reside at one of the State Veteran Homes. The program will allow the department to pay for the homeless veteran to go into a VA vetted skilled nursing home for up to 90 days while the department checks their eligibility for service connection, and AHCCCS checks their eligibility for ALTCS.

The pilot will allow the department to measure how long it takes AHCCCS to work the ALTCS application, as well as measure how long it takes the VBCs to work a claim for a prolonged stay in skilled nursing. The departments are currently working on standard work for the pilot. There are currently 15 openings across the state.

All three ADVS Cemeteries are running smoothly. The Arizona State Veteran Home – Phoenix and the Arizona State Veteran Home – Tucson are currently understaffed and under census. The department is having a hard time hiring nursing staff, other departments are experiencing the same issue. The VA is also experiencing the same problem. ADVS is experiencing a hard time due to not being able to pay at market rate. The department is having to pay extra money to agency nurses.

The Public and Intergovernmental Affairs division (PIA) continues to do outreach outside of stores.

Legislative Update

Director Wright gave the legislative update on behalf of Jennifer Harris. She states the legislature has slowed down in preparation for the budget. She highlighted bills that were signed by the Governor, which affected the department. Click [here](#) for the legislative update.

Old Business

Second Letter to the Governor – Chairwoman McDermott asked Lupita to send out a draft of the second letter to the Governor to the commission via email, with paragraphs drafted and submitted by the AVSAC subcommittee. The commission went over changes made to the letter to the Governor. The commission agreed to remove a paragraph suggesting the creation of a Veteran’s ombudsman. Director Wright explained there is a State Ombudsman and ADVS has a comment tracker which the Department replies to within three business days. Commissioner Gallowitz made a suggestion on the verbiage of a paragraph to “broadening healthcare support; military medics to nurses and funding cultural competency training for behavioral healthcare provider.” She suggested the paragraph be broken out into two paragraphs. Changes to verbiage and punctuations were made.

Chairwoman McDermott called for a motion to accept the second letter to the Governor with the amendments discussed. Commissioner Gibbs motioned to approve the second letter to the Governor with the amendments. Commissioner Logan second the motion. The commissioners voted unanimously to approve the second letter to the Governor with the edits mentioned in the AVSAC quarterly meeting.

Strategic Policy Objectives- The commission ran out of time to review the Strategic Policy Objectives. Chairwoman McDermott called for a motion to table the review, edit, and approval of the Strategic Policy Objective until July 14, 2022. Vice Chair Crego motioned to table the review, edit, and approval of the Strategic Policy Objectives to July 14, 2022. Commissioner Gallowitz second the motion. This commission unanimously voted to review, edit, and approve the Strategic Policy Objectives on July 14, 2022.

Operating Guidelines – Chair McDermott with the help of Lupita emailed a draft of the Operating Guidelines to the commission with the edits submitted by the commissioners. The commission read through the updated guidelines section by section highlighting the changes made compared to the previous guidelines. There were additional edit and verbiage suggestions during the AVSAC meeting to include: adding the [Benefits Guide](#) to the guidelines, outreach material for the commission, the addition of the ability to join the commission meetings virtually, and adding verbiage about the executive offboarding of commissioners. Chairwoman McDermott will make the suggested changes.

Chairwoman McDermott called for a motion to approve the Operating Guidelines with the suggested amendments. Vice Chair Crego moved to approve the Operating Guidelines with the suggested amendments, Commissioner Logan second the motion. The Commission voted unanimously to approve the Operating guidelines with suggested amendments.

New Business

Open Floor for Nominations for Chair and Vice Chair – Chairwoman McDermott opened the floor for Chair and Vice Chair nominations. Vice Chair Crego nominated Commissioner Logan for Chair. Commissioner Logan did not accept the nomination; however, he states he is willing to accept Vice Chair. Vice Chair Crego and Commissioner Gibbs officially nominated Commissioner Logan for Vice Chair. Commissioner Logan accepted the nomination. Vice Chair Crego nominated Commissioner Gallowitz as Chairperson. Commissioner Gallowitz accepted the nomination. Nominations will remain open until July 14, 2022.

Outreach Activities for Commission

Vice Chair Crego states he sends out outreach activities constantly via email.

Commissioner Gallowitz gave a shout out to the Arizona Veterans Hall of Fame Society Patriotic Awards Luncheon. She continues to be involved in Southwest Veteran Chamber of Commerce, Mark Kelly's Veterans Advisory Council, and is a supporter of Bunker Labs.

Commissioner Gibbs states he has a few veteran memorials planned in William County. He will provide more information as it arrives. Commissioner Gibbs also asked Director Wright if she could please reach out to the National Guard Armory in the Southern region to find out why it can no longer be used for outreach fairs.

Commissioner Logan states he is involved in planning a big dinner at Luke Airforce base on May 14, 2022, for the Air and Space; AFA.

Commissioner Loving will be attending an ROTC event, ten to twenty Veteran Service Officers will be present.

Commissioner Noble states the Stand Down in Cottonwood, AZ, was successful. The State of Arizona Marine Corp League state convention is coming up June 4, 2022, in Tucson, Arizona.

Commissioner Villalpando attended the first democratic meeting in her region; she spoke about the AVSAC.

Chairwoman McDermott provided her outreach [report](#).

Open Discussion for the Good of the Order

Vice Chair Crego states Johnny Steward will apply to the Commission. He knows him from the UAV (Unified Arizona Veterans) and DAV (Disabled American Veterans).

Joan will send the commission information on how a bill becomes a law in Arizona.

Adjournment

Chairwoman McDermott called for a motion to adjourn the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services Advisory Commission Meeting. Vice Chair Crego motioned to adjourn the meeting, Commissioner Logan second the motion. The motion carried unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 12:04 pm.