

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

December 9, 2022

MINUTES

Advisory Commissioners Present

Kathy Gallowitz, Chairwoman (in-person)
Gene Crego, Commissioner (in-person)
Chris Gibbs, Commissioner (virtual)
Andrew Meshel, Commissioner (virtual)
Matthew Kenney, Commissioner (in-person)
Phil Cushman, Commissioner (in-person)
Kirk Loving, Commissioner (virtual)
Michael Noble, Commissioner (virtual)
Charles Byers, Commissioner (in-person)

AZ Department of Veterans' Services (ADVS)

Wanda A. Wright, Director (in-person)
Jessica Roza, Legislative Liaison (in-person)
Lupita Santellano, Executive Assistant (in-person)
Valen Harris, Administrative Assistant (virtual)

Call to Order – The Arizona Veterans' Services Advisory Commission (AVSAC) meeting, via Google Meets: <https://meet.google.com/nzq-sgpw-hpk>; (US) +1 470-735-3571; PIN: 917 752 256#. Chairwoman Kathy Gallowitz called the meeting to order at 1:30 pm.

Chairwoman Gallowitz led the commission in the pledge of allegiance.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

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

New Member Introductions and Orientation

Director Wright introduced herself to all four new commissioners, Matthew Kenney, Phil Cushman, Charles Byers, and Andrew Meshel. Director Wright briefly went over the Arizona Revised Statute for the Advisory Commission. She also went over Commissioner terms and reminded the commissioners whose terms will expire July of 2023, to reapply. Executive Assistant Santellano will provide the link to the Boards and Commission application packet. Director Wright also provided a brief summary of Open Meeting Law. All four commissioners received their commissioner binder and letter. They will be responsible for reviewing all materials provided.

Director's Department Update

There is a new elected Governor in Arizona and transitioning has begun within the Governor's office. Governor Ducey held a cabinet meeting yesterday, December 8, 2022. Many Directors will be moving on, and others are waiting to hear if they will get to stay. Director Wright will inform the Commissioners if there will be a transition within the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services (ADVS) as well.

Director Wright is currently the President of the National Association of State Directors for Veteran Affairs (NASDVA). She represents all Directors with Departments like ADVS across the United States. She states she has been working with Secretary McDonough in addressing issues she feels are important as well as issues she feels the Directors should work with the VA on. State wise, ADVS is working on a few programs.

The Arizona State Veteran Home -Yuma is open and has a current census of twenty veterans. They are also working on getting the VA recognition survey completed. The Arizona State Veteran Home - Flagstaff is now hiring. Eight staff members have been hired so far. ASVH-F is experiencing difficulty hiring nursing staff due to the minimum wage that is \$3.00 higher than anywhere else in Arizona. Director Wright states she hopes monies from ARPA (federal funding for COVID) can be used to hire staff. The budget office is looking at giving ADVS a 10% increase for the hiring of nursing staff at ASVH-F. ADVS can also apply for supplemental funding to match the difference in October of 2023.

The Arizona State Veteran Home Phoenix (ASVH-P) now has a new permanent administrator, Jeffrey Cook. ASVH-P currently has a census of 80 out of 200 but they continue to work to increase census. There seems to be hesitance in the community to place their loved one in nursing homes because of COVID. Staff is routinely tested for COVID19. Residents are also quarantined when they go out on home visits or appointments. ASVHP and ASVHT were mentioned in the US News Report as Top Homes in America.

Wreaths across American will lay wreaths at all three ADVS cemeteries on December 17, 2022. All three cemeteries have been offered to expand. ADVS is working on writing contracts and solicitations for construction work; however, ADVS is competing against multi-dollar projects. ADVS is struggling with contractors to buy into these solicitations. In addition, all three cemeteries will go through survey in which they will be evaluate by marker lineup, cleanliness/maintenance, and determine if headstones have the correct information on them.

There are now 62 Veteran Benefits Counselors (VBCs). ADVS realized it is more difficult to hire for rural/tribal VBCs. By the end of the year (2022) there should be at least half of the twenty tribal/rural VBCs hired. There were 2.2 million dollars appropriated to fund the hiring of twenty VBCs. ADVS was offered more administration support and will hire two more Administrative Assistants. ADVS is also looking at purchasing new software where people can schedule themselves. Veteran Services Administrative Assistants will be trained to answer simple questions when veterans call in.

Commissioner Cushman asked if the VBC in Parker could see tribal and non-tribal veterans. Director Wright states they can; however, it will be based on their availability. Rural and tribal VBCs will telework; however, ADVS will continue to work on finding an itinerant site location in Parker.

Public and Intergovernmental Affairs (PIA) have been busy with multiple programs and outreach efforts. Today, December 9, 2022, they set up outside Lake Mormon. Director Wright believes this type of outreach is how ADVS reaches new veterans who may not know about ADVS. PIA also makes referrals to navigators.

Commissioner Byers mentioned the Pact ACT event scheduled for December 17, 2022. Chair Gallowitz suggested Commissioners attend the PACT ACT event. Director Wright mentioned VA would like an AAR from our Department regarding the PACT ACT event. She states VBCs will be present at the event and there is a roundtable scheduled for December 12, 2022.

PIA is working on tribal connectivity project, which will allow satellites to be placed on the Apache, Navajo, and Hopi reservations to do telehealth, visit family, and complete/ submit claims in a chapter house or a veteran organization.

ADVS is also involved in a pilot program with VA social workers who refer homeless veterans with low ADLS (activity of daily living skills) to ADVS. The social workers through CRRC are referring these veterans to ADVS to figure out how to get them long term care within a 90-day period. VBCs will work with them in order to file claims on their behalf. Monica Diaz, Housing Department Director, is now looking at long-term care using HUD Vash.

ADVS continues to manage the Military Family Relief Fund (MFRF) and the Veteran Donation Fund (VDF). The large grant will close soon. Evaluation teams will evaluate proposals, make their selections, and notify the winners; checks will be forthcoming. Commissioner Cushman mentioned these awards are big deals for recipients. ADVS will post a press release along with the list of winner on the ADVS website.

Chairwoman Gallowitz asked Director Wright the status of the transportation survey. Director Wright states the survey is complete. Director Wright is discussing the survey with the VA and has met with Josh Jacobs. They looking at making changes with the DAV contract. Director Wright believes VA should help pay for transportation to VA appointments using transportation services such as Uber and Lyft.

Legislative Update

Chairwoman Gallowitz welcomed Jessica Roza to her first meeting. She provided a quick background on previous work experiences and her military experience. She provided a report with her contact information. She states the Inauguration for all statewide officials and Katie Hobbs to be sworn in will be on January 5, 2023. Jessica will email the Commission the time and location as soon as she has that information. Legislative opening session date is Monday, January 9, 2023.

ADVS has selected two proposals to pursue. The first is the amendment of the definition of armed forced in Arizona Revised Statute (ARS) to include space force. The second proposal is to amend statute for burial of Arizona National Guard's man and women in Arizona veteran state cemeteries, as long as their termination was not less than dishonorable. ADVS is currently figuring out whom the bill sponsors will be. Jessica asked the Commission to reach out to her with any suggestions they may have. Jessica gave a brief explanation regarding the request to speak platform. She would like the commission to share this information with the veteran community so their voices are heard when bills start going through session. She also offered her assistance with the annual AVSAC letter to the Governor.

Director Wright explained the reserved act is a federal act, there are no funds put into it. ADVS is not funded to pay for the burials, an appropriation will be requested. ADVS will have to research the cost per burial and that cost should be paid for by the state. Currently, it costs approximately \$1,300 to inter a person; Veterans are fee, dependents cost \$780. ADVS believes the state should pay \$780 for every reservist and guardsman/woman.

Old Business

New Commissioner Onboarding Checklist & Letter Review and Vote

Chairwoman Gallowitz asked the new commissioners to read the material in their binders especially the section on Open Meeting Law. Director Wright provided a brief summary of Open Meeting Law to the commission. The Chair encouraged the new commissioners to schedule a meeting with the Director on their own or with the Director and her. She explained the onboarding checklist is a summary of the pre appointment and post appointment.

New Business

Nominations for Vice Chair (Votes will take place at the next AVSAC meeting)

Edward Logan's term expired. The commission seeks nomination for Vice Chair. The elected Vice Chair will only serve through July 2023. Commissioner Crego nominated Commissioner Phil Cushman. Commissioner Cushman accepted the nomination. Commissioner Gibbs motioned to close nominations, the commissioners unanimously agreed to close the nominations. Motion approved.

AVSAC Meeting Frequency – Discuss & Vote

Pre COVID the commission was active and moved around the state. Over the last three years, AVSAC has met virtually on a quarterly basis due to the pandemic. AVSAC now has a full slate of commissioners. Chairwoman Gallowitz proposed to meet more frequently and potentially consider having guest speakers and meetings in different locations around the state. The Chair recognizes the commission needs to have quorums at the meetings. She proposed a frequency of every other month (bi-monthly). Commissioner Cushman likes the idea; however, he believes it may be a lot of travel for those that live in the outer areas of Arizona. Currently, ADVS has three cemeteries, four state veteran homes, and the headquarters building where meetings could be held. Chair Gallowitz suggested AVSAC could meet at the VA as well. Commissioner Byers suggested meetings could be held at the stand-downs; there are 10 per year. He states the Vietnam Veteran event will take place on March 25, 2023, and the point of contact is Nancy Fastbender.

Commissioner Nobel asked if the Governor could attend an AVSAC meeting. Director Wright mentioned it will be tough to get the newly elected Governor to attend the meeting but the Chair could make the request. The Chair requested a motion from the floor. Commissioner Cushman motioned to increase the meeting frequency to bimonthly. Commissioner Byers seconded the motion. The commission unanimously approved the motion. Motion approved.

Chair Gallowitz mentioned speakers she would like to schedule at future AVSAC meetings. Director Wright will provide the commission a list of speakers and locations to meet. Executive Assistant Santellano will work with Director Wright to finalize the 2023 calendar year AVSAC meetings so that she may be present.

AVSAC Outreach Pamphlet (Draft) – Review & Edits

Commissioners reviewed the AVSAC draft pamphlet. Commissioner Crego mentioned the meeting frequency language must change. Commissioner Cushman suggested information regarding services offered by ADVS should be added to the back of the pamphlet. Chairwoman Gallowitz suggested bullet points be added to the back of the pamphlet. Director Wright suggests benefits guides could be given to commissioners to hand out as well. Chair Gallowitz suggested the VBC appointment line

should be added to the pamphlet. Executive Assistant Santellano will take all AVSAC suggestions back to the PIA team member responsible for updating the pamphlet.

Brainstorm Topics for Annual Letter to the Governor

Chairwoman Gallowitz asked the Director when the letter to the Governor should be completed. Director Wright suggested it should be completed by January 2023, or the first week of February at the latest. The commission determined they would write a letter welcoming the Governor into office, brief her on what the Advisory Commission is about and issues the commission supports. Commissioner Cushman and Chair Gallowitz will work on the letter in a subcommittee. They will present the letter to the Commission by January 12, 2023.

Commissioner Mike Noble suggested a different topic related to the creation of a URL. Chair Gallowitz tabled this topic.

Outreach Activities for Commission

Chair Gallowitz met with VFW commanders, reached out to VBC William Glennon and has not connected with him, she attended Vietnam Veteran event, participating in veterans' caucus recommending work force priorities. Helped support planning of veteran employment forum, attended ASUs veterans Ball. She continues to be part of the Southwest Veteran Chamber of Commerce Patriots Ball, Southwest Valley and North Phoenix foster assistance committee. Supported partisan candidates. Collaborated with bunker labs.

Commissioner Gene Crego was elected to UAV. He attended the Pearl Harbor Day event. He states he continues to work with legislature and US members of congress.

Charles Byer has been working on homeless veteran's issues. He is working on building individual dwelling casitas with the tanner project. He has raised money to start building the casitas (adopt a casita). HUD Vash is being used as well to help get thirty-five veterans off the streets. The casitas are 600 sq. ft. with solar panels and doggy doors. He is also assisting with the building of a community resource center. He asked if ADVS would like to help with that project. He states 700 acres were donate in Taylor, Arizona. He is currently determining what is needed in that part of Arizona and mentioned the possibility of a CBOC.

Commissioner Phil Cushman attended the Veteran stand down in Quartzite on November 19, 2022. He is working with an existing VFW post to help open a new American Legion Post. He would like to invite Director Wright to Quartzite for a visit. He mentioned Dr. Paul Range in Quartzite has a mobile food bank for homeless veterans and is quite successful. Many local grocery stores help donate to his cause. Commissioner Cushman mentioned he is also part of another Veterans Advisory Committee who works with veterans to get them into local government offices. Commissioner Cushman requested to meet with Director Wright on veteran issues brought to him by VSOs. Director Wright suggested Dr. Range apply to VDF for a large or small grant.

Commissioner Matthew Kenney is working on advocacy for afghan adjustment act. He is working on getting refugees relocated to Arizona. He is working on funding and resources. He is a political consultant and lobbyist. Commissioner Kenny works with many lobbyists and individuals in the legislature. He ran the republican legislator's campaign and helped them identify their priority of

veteran and military issues. He plans to focus more on local veteran issues. He has been hired to work on a military education program that will look at improving the joint services transcript. He is trying to get active military the credits for in-service training.

Commissioner Mike Noble celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Marine Corps League. Arizona was recognized for its contributions to Marine Corps league. He distributed the Be connected materials in his region. It is Toys for Tots season, Commissioner Noble believes this year there will be a bigger demand.

Commissioner Chris Gibbs states 528 veterans were represented with American flags at the Field of Honor. This year there were 300 in attendance.

Commissioner Kirk Loving was invited to the Carefree event for Veterans Day. He states the Former Commander of USS Midway was the guest speaker. He asked if anyone on the commission knew when the Maricopa Stand down would be taking place. Jessica Roza stated the website has not been updated yet, as soon as a date is set she will inform the commission.

Commissioner Andrew Meshel is excited to be part of the commission. No other outreach provided.

Open Discussion for the Good of the Order

Commissioner Term Report

Executive Assistant Santellano will send out website for term renewal.

Commissioner Cushman and his wife are beekeepers and gifted Director Wright wild Arizona Honey.

Chairwoman Gallowitz summarized some items before the commission adjourns. She would like the commissioners to attend the Pact Act event on December 17, 2022, if they are able and provide feedback to Director Wright. If able, commissioners should attend the inauguration on January 5, 2022. If able, commissioners should attend the Vietnam Veterans event on March 25, 2022. She suggested the commissioners should read the meeting minutes as they are posted. She emphasized commissioners should make their veteran communities aware of the VDF.

Adjournment

Chairwoman Gallowitz called for a motion to adjourn the Arizona Veterans' Services Advisory Commission Meeting. Commissioner Crego motioned to adjourn the meeting, Commissioner Cushman second the motion. The motion carried unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 3:30 pm.