

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

March 9, 2023

MINUTES

Advisory Commissioners Present

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

AZ Department of Veterans' Services (ADVS)

Dana Allmond Director (in person)
Jessica Roza, Legislative Liaison (in person)
Lupita Santellano, Executive Assistant (in person)
Valen Harris, Administrative Assistant (virtual)

Guest(s)

Michael Zybarth, Phoenix Regional Office Veterans
Services Center Manager

Absent

Chris Gibbs, Commissioner

Call to Order – The Arizona Veterans' Services Advisory Commission (AVSAC) meeting, via Google Meets: <https://meet.google.com/jgq-vm-sc-uux>; Dial-in: (US) +1 475-222-5532 PIN: 275 244 224#
Vice Chair Cushman called the meeting to order at 10:03 am.

Commissioner Crego led the commission in the pledge of allegiance.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

Vice Chairman Cushman called for a motion to approve the AVSAC meeting minutes from March 9, 2023. Commissioner Crego motioned to accept the meeting minutes. Commissioner Byers second the motion. There being no changes to the minutes or any objections by the Commission, the motion carried unanimously.

Guest Speaker(s)

Michael Zybarth, Phoenix Regional Office Veterans Services Center Manager gave a presentation in regards to the PACT Act. He explained that the PACT Act legislation expanded the VA Health Care and benefits for veterans exposed to burn pits, Agent Orange and other toxins. Mr. Zybarth explained that since the PACT Act VA claims have increased with over 6,700 claims being filed. Additionally, 80 percent of those grants have been awarded. Members of the commission inquired about the eligibility requirements as well the screen process. Mr. Zybarth pointed out that VA recently did a mass mailing to veterans where they sent out the fact sheet, on packed act. Mr. Zybarth stated the PACT Act claims would continue to increase as more veterans begin the claims process. He pointed out that outreach is vital to educating veterans about the eligibility requirements.

Director's Department Update

Director Allmond briefly introduced herself to the commission. Director Allmond explained how she is continuing to learn more about the agency's operations. She has begun to touch base with veterans stakeholders as well as touring ADVS facilities to learn more about the work that's being done.

Director Allmond went over the Veterans Donation fund for January and February. ADVS awarded \$30,000 dollars in small grants of \$4,999 dollars or less to Veterans organizations. Additionally, ADVS awarded \$720,000 in large grants to 13 organizations (click [here](#) for newsletter). These organizations included Arizona Warrior Hockey Charities, Ayuda Smiles For Veterans, Brain Injury Alliance, Cochise Serving Veterans, Duet Partners in Health & Aging, EMPACT – Suicide Prevention Center, Fresh Start Women's Foundation, Heard Museum, Justa Center, Law College Association of UofA, Merging Vets and Players, Power Paws Assistance Dogs, & US VETS-Prescott. Funding would not be made possible without the ^{charitable} donations and the funds from the Veteran, Women Veteran and Freedom license plates.

The department continues to work on the opening of the Arizona State Veteran Home – Flagstaff (ASVH-F). ASVH-F plans to admit veterans in late spring or early summer, this is dependent on staffing. Hiring Nursing staff continues to be a challenge. As for Arizona State Veterans Home – Yuma, residents began being admitted in October, the home recently filled its first neighborhood, which is made up of 20 residents. ASVH-Y anticipates opening up the next neighborhood by spring of 2023. At the Arizona State Veteran Home – Phoenix, we had Congressman Ruben Gallego and Greg Stanton come by to visit with residents and give out Valentine's Day cards on Valentine's Day. Phoenix also continues to experience challenges with hiring nursing staff.

Legislative Update

Jessica Roza provided the Advisory Commission her legislative report found [here](#). In this report, she provides information regarding agency proposals to the legislature.

Director Allmond has not yet been added to the Senate Confirmation Committee agenda. Director Allmond has begun to meet with several Senators. If any Advisory Commission members would like to support Director Allmond in her Nomination hearing, they are encouraged to reach out to Jessica Roza or reach out to Keenisha Jackson (KJ), the Policy Advisor to the Governor.

Jessica Roza mentioned the Policy Advisory would like to attend a future Advisory Commission Meeting. Jessica asked the Commission if any of them had received a confirmation or receipt of the Letter to the Governor. Chairwoman Gallowitz nor the rest of the Commission has received any communication regarding receipt. Chairwoman Gallowitz recommended ADVS confirm that the letter was received by the Governor's office.

Old Business

Request to Speak Form-

The commission discussed the request to speak process. Jessica Roza provided information regarding Request to Speak at the last Advisory Commission meeting on January 12, 2023. This program allows the public the chance to stay informed and provide comment, support, or opposition to a bill that directly affects them. The public may register online; however, the account must be activated at a kiosk at the capitol. It was noted that if any member of the Advisory Commission would be speaking in person at Director Allmonds Senate Confirmation hearing, a request to speak would be

required. There is currently no scheduled date for Director Allmond's nomination hearing. As Chair, Kathy Gallowitz requested to submit a letter of support for Director Allmond on behalf of the Advisory Commission. All Commissioners agreed.

Strategic Objective Update Plan–

The Commission wanted to determine if any items from April 2022 Strategic Policy Objectives did not reflect the 2023 Governor's letter. As previously discussed, Commissioner Cushman suggested during the commission meeting that it would be helpful to get an idea of all members' top three concerns they believe are important. Chairwoman Gallowitz requested that Arizona Coalition for Military Families (ACMF) Director, Thomas Winkel, provide the 2021 Veteran community survey results. Commissioner Byers asked that the commission should be reaching out to the Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs), American Legions, and other stakeholders to get an idea of their priorities. Commissioner Byers volunteered to chair the idea of surveying the five main VSO's while coordinating with ADVS. Commissioners Crego, Cushman and Chairwoman Gallowitz volunteered to be a part of the subcommittee with Commissioner Byers. Commissioner Crego suggested reaching out to Rick Kreiberg to gather data.

Chairwoman Gallowitz posed the question to the committee asking what their top three concerns were. Commissioner Byers listed affordable permanent housing, suicide prevention & care of aging veteran population. Commissioner Crego's concerns were homelessness, suicide prevention & Veteran Benefit Counselors. Vice Chair Cushman's concerns were rural veteran access to specialty healthcare, incentives to hire veterans into local government, and more retirement homes / hybrid solutions in rural Arizona. Commissioner Kenney's concerns were veteran suicide prevention, veteran employment and homelessness. Commissioner Meshel listed housing/homelessness, justice and mental health initiatives and veterans' benefits restoration initiatives. Commissioner Nobel's concerns were veterans hiring initiatives, widow's benefits assistance & veteran suicide prevention. Commissioner Loving's concerns were education, housing and suicide prevention. Chairwoman Gallowitz's concerns were veterans' employment, suicide prevention and veterans' court. Chairwoman Gallowitz requested that each commissioner explain in further detail their top three concerns in an email to her

She posed the question to ADVS on how the agency determines its priorities. Jessica Roza explained ADVS has various ways of gathering information; some of the ways include the veterans' survey, data from Arizona state universities as well as from various community partners, such as Be Connected and AZ Coalition for Military Families. ADVS focuses its priorities dependent on its stakeholders as well as the Director's priorities. Chairwoman Gallowitz suggested getting an overview of the agency's priorities that correlate with the Commission. Commissioner Gallowitz suggested meeting Commissioner Byers, Cushman & Crego to refine the ideas discussed in regards to the top three concerns. It was also noted that ADVS would provide a strategic plan to the Governor's office in June of 2023, prior to the Commission submitting their strategic update. The Commission can model their ideas similar to ADVS's strategic planning.

Review and Approve Outreach Product –

The Advisory Commission was provided with an example of the Advisory outreach pamphlet, which outlines the commission's purpose, mission, and meeting information. This product can be found

here. The purpose of these pamphlets were for the Commissioners to hand these out to the public when engaging in outreach activities. In addition, this pamphlet will be available to the public on the Advisory Commissions page. To purchase and print this product funds from the VDF would be needed. Chairwoman Gallowitz and Commission members agreed to request funds towards purchasing 2,500 pamphlets after ADVS requests a quote for the pamphlets. Chairwoman Gallowitz asked the commission if they approved the outreach pamphlet as presented. The Commission unanimously approved of the outreach product.

New Business

May AVSAC Meeting Plan/Discussion (tour/speaker/travel reimbursement) –

Vice Chair Cushman provided an itinerary draft for the May 11, 2023, Commission meeting that would take place at the ASVH - Y. While on site, the Commission would like to conduct outreach and visit some of the facilities in Yuma. Director Allmond will be in attendance, as well as Vice Chair Cushman. In addition, Commissioners Crego, Byers and Kenney will attend. Vice Chair Cushman will coordinate with ADVS and ASVH - Yuma staff to provide logistical support for the Advisory Commission meeting in May.

Strategic Objective: Update Verbiage for Conflict of Interest (edit/review/approve)–

Chairwoman Gallowitz presented the commission with the AVSAC Operating Guidelines to the Conflict of interest form. Instructions state (page 3, section G): *“Members shall complete a conflict-of-interest disclosure, pursuant to Arizona Revised Statute § 38-503, upon appointment, annually in April of each year, and within 30 days of any change that constitutes a conflict or the appearance of a conflict of interest. A special file will be maintained at ADVS offices that contains completed disclosure statements of substantial interests; this file will be available for public inspection. All conflicts identified will be reviewed through ADVS by a conflict-of-interest disclosure committee. Annual independent study video programs will be required and documented”.*

Chairwoman Gallowitz would like to include the following: *“The Director and Chair will serve as the ‘conflict of interest disclosure committee’ reviewing all forms by 1 July of each year to evaluate whether a conflict of interest exists. If one is discovered, this same committee will discuss them with the involved commissioner no later than 1 September and document how it has been remediated. Documentation will be stored with the conflict of interest forms.”*

The Commission is currently 100 percent compliant. Commissioners will be given a new conflict of interest form to be filled out April 2023. Chairwoman Gallowitz requested a motion from the floor. Vice Chair Cushman moved the new conflict of interest verbiage to be adopted into the AVSAC Operating Guidelines. Commissioner Crego second the motion. The commission voted to approve the verbiage unanimously.

Determine location/Commissioner Coordinator for July 2023 meeting-

The Advisory Commission agreed unanimously to conduct their meeting at ADVS headquarters July 2023. The Commission agreed to invite guest speakers to the July 2023 meeting. Judge Donald Watts is currently scheduled to speak with the Commission at the July 13 meeting. ADVS staff recommended Gary Ochoa, Assistant Deputy Director- Veterans Services Division, to speak at the July meeting to discuss VSD Programs and Veteran Benefits. The list of upcoming speakers will be finalized before the July 13 Advisory Commission meeting.

Outreach Activities for Commission

Commissioner Noble - attended the Department of AZ Spring Conference March 3rd and 4th, in Sierra Vista, AZ. Sierra Vista Mayor Clea McCaa welcomed the Veterans in attendance and pledged his support. There were 17 of the 23 detachments in attendance. Both PACK and Be Connected were discussed. Planning is still underway for the [Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans, March 29th through April 2, 2023](#), in Camp Verde, Arizona. A replica of the Vietnam Memorial Wall will be on display. This is the 50th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War and the last display of the Traveling Wall. Veterans and Veteran organizations from across the county, as well as some dignitaries from Washington, D.C. will attend. Verde Valley Marine Corp League Detachment#1176 will have a booth at this event and will be distributing AVA materials.

Commissioner Loving - will be participating for Maricopa County at the Veterans Memorial Coliseum on April 28. Will also be taking JROTC cadets to assist in the event. Additionally will be hosting representatives from Phoenix chapters from Veterans Service Organizations to an awards ceremony for the JROTC program in April of 2023.

Chairwoman Gallowitz, Vice Chair Cushman, and Commissioners Meshel, Kenny, and Byers had no outreach activity to report.

For the Good of the Order

Potential Commissioner Candidates to fill vacancies & Reappointment Status-

Three Advisory Commission members' terms will expire July 1, 2023. Those who will not be reapplying are encouraged to find a predecessor to avoid any vacancies once their term has expired. Commissioner Gibbs' term will expire July 2023; he has completed his term and can no longer reapply. Commissioner Loving states he will not reapply. Commissioner Noble states he will renew his application. Chairwoman Gallowitz states she has already renewed her application but has not heard back from Boards and Commissions.

Open Floor

Chairwoman Gallowitz reminded the Commission of sending their sentences for their top three concerns to her no later than Thursday, March 16, 2023. Additionally, the Commission is encouraged to attend the Vietnam Veterans event on March 25, 2023. Members of the Commission are encouraged to attend the [Arizona Coalition of Military Families Statewide Symposium](#) April 19 & 20, 2023. Chairwoman Gallowitz also encouraged the commissioners to attend [Stand Downs](#) in their area.

Adjournment

Chairwoman Gallowitz called for a motion to adjourn the Arizona Veterans' Services Advisory Commission Meeting. Commissioner Byers motioned to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Crego second the motion. The motion was carried unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 12:06 pm.