

Meeting Minutes  
June 23, 2021

I. Call to Order – Rudy Bourg, Chairman

The June 23, 2021 meeting of the Veterans Affairs Commission was called to order by Chairman Rudy Bourg at 10:03 am. The meeting was held via conference call due to the emergency order in place due to COVID-19. The meeting opened with the pledge of allegiance recited in unison, led by Richard O'Brien. Prayer led by Commissioner Paul Hermann. Roll call of members was conducted by Chairman Bourg.

Commissioners present: Chairman Rudy Bourg, Vice Chairman Richard O'Brien, Paul Hermann, Deron Santiny, Ray Bass, and Sulanda Lonnette.

LDVA Staff: Joey Strickland, Secretary; Julie Baxter-Payer, Deputy Secretary; Dustin Guy, Deputy Chief of Staff; Lisa Bruhl, Deputy Assistant Secretary/Veterans Homes; Cleo Wallace, State Approving Agency (SAA) Director; Holly Talley, Executive Management Officer; Bradley Lemoine, Internal Auditor; Billy Robbins, Incarcerated Veterans Program Director; Ted Krumm, Cemetery Director; Barry Robinson, Training and Development Officer; Stephanie Wade, Chief Financial Officer; Brandee Patrick, Communication Director; Larry Williams, Outreach Director.

II. Introductory Remarks- Secretary Joey Strickland

Secretary Strickland welcomed Commissioners. He gave an overview of the status of the department. LDVA is in good shape. The staff are continuing to meet with veterans one-on-one to ensure that their needs are still met, while following all safety protocols set to ensure the safety of the veterans we serve and out staff. COVID-19 has not made for an easy time, but we are doing it and still serving Louisiana's Veterans.

III. Approval of July 14, 2020 Minutes

The December 9, 2020 meeting minutes were distributed to the Commissioners for review. There were no objections to the minutes. A motion was made by Mr. Hermann, seconded by Mr. Bass, to approve the minutes as distributed. The motion passed unanimously.

IV. Division Reports

Operations and Legislative Update: Julie Baxter Payer gave an overview of operation of LDVA. The department is working well through the challenges with COVID-19 ensuring that we are work for and serving our Veteran's and not simply following procedures in place. Headquarters leadership are on daily/weekly calls within our agency and with state leaders throughout all of this to stay up to date on the things effecting our department and beyond.

Veterans Homes: Lisa Bruhl briefed the Commissioners on the status of each of Louisiana's Veterans Homes. And the various projects going on within the homes. She reviewed the protocols in place to ensure that the residents at each of the homes are safe and taken care of during the guidelines in place.

Veterans Cemeteries: Ted Krumm briefed the Commissioners on the status of each of Louisiana's Veterans Cemeteries. All cemeteries are conducting Committal Services and Military Honors with Social Distancing and masks. Cemeteries participates in Wreaths Across America modified their event to only be wreath placing with no ceremony. Each participating cemetery will be available for visitors to place wreaths from 9a -12p. The expanded window for placing wreaths enables the Cemeteries to still participate but maintain social distancing. Masks will be worn by the staff and will be provided for those who want to place a wreath if they do not have one.

Contact Assistance: Earnest Buckner briefed the Commissioners on the status Contact Assistance. This quarter has brought some changes in key positions in Contact Assistance and Claims. All VAC offices have reopened to the public, with exception to the Veterans Homes offices and the Eunice office. All VAC offices are seeing clients by appointment only. Laptop computers, signature pads, printers have all been purchased to upgrade the equipment in our VAC offices. This move has thrust our VAC offices into the digital age, thus allowing us to serve our veterans in a quicker and efficient manner

Veterans Outreach: Larry Williams briefed the Commissioners on the Veterans Outreach division. LDVA will continue to prioritize ensuring all veterans, support organizations, sister agencies, etc. across the state of Louisiana are fully aware of the services rendered. The focus areas of Veterans Outreach are Louisiana Gold Star Families, Louisiana Blue Star Family support, Veteran Homelessness Prevention, Women Veterans Outreach, Veteran Job Placement/Referrals and LaVetCorp Navigator Program support.

Written reports were submitted to the Commissioners prior to the meeting for their review. The reports were submitted, but staff members did not brief on them during the meeting. Those reports are as follows:

Fiscal- Stephanie Smith  
LaVetCorps- Dr. Nikki Clark  
State Approving Agency- Cleo Wallace  
Human Resources- Sy Wilson  
Incarcerated Veterans- Billy Robbins

Training- Barry Robinson  
MFA/Honor Medals- Holly Talley  
Internal Audit- Bradley Lemoine  
Communication- Brandee Patrick

A motion was made by Mr. Hermann, seconded by Ms. Lonnette to approve all reports as presented and submitted to the Commissioners. The motion passed unanimously.

#### V. Adjournment

There being no further business to be brought before the Veterans Affairs Commission, a motion was made by Mr. Hermann, seconded by Mr. Bass, to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed and the meeting adjourned at 11:34 AM.

Minutes submitted by Holly Talley. Copies of all handouts are filed with the Commission minutes and are available upon request.