



## **VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMISSION**

Meeting Minutes  
September 12, 2017

### **I. Call to Order – Don Beasley, Chairman**

The September 12, 2017, meeting of the Veterans Affairs Commission was called to order by Chairman Don Beasley at 10:02 am. The meeting was held at the Louisiana Department of Veterans Affairs (LDVA) Administrative Office, 602 N. Fifth Street, Baton Rouge. The meeting opened with the pledge of allegiance recited in unison, followed by a short prayer from Commissioner Lobrano. Roll call of members was conducted by the Chairman.

Commissioners present: Don Beasley, Rudy Bourg, Mary Mills, Thomas Green, Carroll Knott, Wyatt Lobrano.

LDVA Staff: Joey Strickland, Secretary; Homer Rodgers, Undersecretary; Julie Baxter-Payer, Executive Counsel; Lisa Bruhl, Deputy Assistant Secretary/Veterans Homes; Alex Juan, Communications Director; Al Leger, Deputy Assistant Secretary/Benefits; Bill Dixon, State Approving Agency (SAA) Director; Holly Talley, Executive Management Officer; English Josey, Internal Auditor; Linda Theriot, Director of Nursing Services; Dustin Guy, Human Resources Director; Billy Robbins, Cemeteries Program Director; Barry Robinson, Capital Area Regional Manager/Training Officer; and Charmagne Scott, Confidential Assistant.

### **II. Introductory Remarks- Secretary Joey Strickland**

Secretary Strickland welcomed Commissioners. Gave an overview of the status of the department. LDVA is closely monitoring Hurricane Harvey as it will effect the War Veterans Home in Jennings and the Parish Service Offices. Discussed remodeling efforts going on at the Veteran's Homes. Pharmacies will be coming back to each of the homes.

Secretary Strickland announced that Al Leger would be retiring in January from the Department. Also, announced the retirement of Chairman Don Beasley from the VA Commission after 28 years of service.

### **III. Approval of February 7, 2017 Minutes**

The May 2, 2017 meeting minutes had been distributed to the Commissioners for review prior to the May 2, 2017 meeting. A motion was made by Mr. Bourg, seconded by Mr. Knott, to approve the minutes as distributed. The motion passed unanimously.

#### **IV. Division Reports**

Human Resources (HR)/Fiscal. The standard handout showing vacancies within the Administrative Program and the five State Veterans' Homes (SVHs) as of August 31, 2017. Vacancies for the Administrative staff total only 3 vacancies. The vacancies were in: Admin-Contact Assistance- 2 VAC's (St. Landry and Calcasieu), offers are in place; Claims- Paralegal, offer in place.. Mr. Guy noted the vacancies at the Veterans Homes in the nursing division are 93% filled. Civil Service Classified Workforce Compensation redesign, effective January 2018. Performance Evaluation System rating/planning period.

A motion was made by Mr. Bourg, seconded by Ms. Mills to accept the Human Resources report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Homer Rodgers gave overview for Fiscal Department, in the absence of Mr. Farlow and Ms. Wade. The budget the Secretary had presented to the Legislature had very few/ if any cuts to the proposed budgets. There are many capitol outlay projects in progress for each of the homes and cemeteries.

A motion was made by Mr. Bourg, seconded by Ms. Mills to accept the Fiscal report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

State Cemeteries. The standard handout concerning the status of the 4 LDVA Cemeteries as of April 17, 2017, was provided to the Commissioners for review prior to the meeting date. Mr. Robbins reported that the Department has been granted the 10% up-front money from the State for two construction projects: 1) The expansion at the Southeast Louisiana Veterans Cemetery in Slidell, basically adding new columbariums; and, 2) the new construction of the cemetery in Jennings.

A motion was made by Mr. Bourg, seconded by Mr. Knott, to accept the State Cemeteries report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

State Veterans Homes (SVHs). Ms. Bruhl briefed on her standard consolidated report that had been provided to the Commissioners for review prior to the meeting. Also, copies of demographic information for all facilities were provided to the Commissioners. Ms. Bruhl highlighted activities at each facility:

Northwest LA Veterans Home/Bossier City

Facility occupancy: 88%

- Replacing Cooling Towers that provide HVAC to the entire facility. Pre-fabrication has begun off-site and project is scheduled to be completed this quarter.
- The Nurse Call system that provides communication between residents who need assistance and staff set to be replaced.

#### Northeast LA Veterans Home/Monroe

- HVAC project is underway with Large Capacity units having been installed by contractors. Smaller units have been delivered to the facility and the facility Maintenance staff is approximately 35% complete with their installation.
- The Wander Guard system is completely installed and operational. The Facility staff is in the process of identifying residents who will benefit from this system and uploading their information into the system.

#### Southwest LA Veterans Home/Jennings

Facility occupancy: 90%

- 2017 Dodge Caravan has been delivered to Baton Rouge and GPS System has been installed in the vehicle. Picked up on Friday July 7, 2017. This new vehicle replaces the current van which had 117,000+ mileage and began needing repairs.
- The Pharmacy permit was received in June and the stock medications were ordered and received. The Go Live date from QS1 which is the pharmacy software is August 1<sup>st</sup>. A letter will be sent to the families in the next few weeks.
- Activities Canopy Project is near completion. Vendor waiting on arrival of material. Installing awning over a newly poured 30 x 40 patio outside the activities building.

#### LA Veterans Home/Jackson

Facility occupancy: 76%

- Wing 1 – Remediation/remodel – Facility Planning and Control has reviewed the Design Development Submittal and has authorized AST Engineers to proceed to the Construction Document phase.
- June 30<sup>th</sup> Veteran Birthday party celebration with 105 year old Veteran and his family.
- Started renovations on Wing III for the new Pharmacy area.

#### Southeast LA Veterans Home/Reserve

Facility occupancy: 97%

- New Administrator effective 6/12/17 – Brian Fremin
- As of 6/30/17, completion of requested order of (78) new electric beds.
- As of 6/30/17, completion & installation of Card Reader project .
- Recreational Activity Building – Fire Marshall Inspection completed 7/6/17 with the Certificate of Occupancy granted.

A motion was made by Mr. Green, seconded by Mr. Bourg, to accept the SVHs report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Contact Assistance/MFA Fund. The standard handout concerning the status of Contact Assistance was provided to the Commissioners for review prior to the meeting date. Mr. Leger reported the Contact Assistance Division has remained healthy although we do have personnel leaving and new personnel being hired. All Parish Service Offices staffed are open. Including the Regional Managers and myself we now have a total of 55 accredited personnel working claims for veterans in the state of Louisiana. The remaining 9 above are working on accreditations. Currently we have no one out on sick leave. They are either new and in training or on the job working for our veterans. We will have another Counselor training class of no less than 7 in the fall. To further expound on the PIV card issue for our counselors to have access to the VA internet. We now have all but the 9 newly hired personnel who have not received their PIV cards. This now puts us at 55 counselors who have access. This is all thanks to the Regional Managers who are on board to make this happen as requested.

A motion was made by Mr. Knott, seconded by Mr. O'Brien, to accept the Contact Assistance report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Talley reviewed the Military Family Assistance (MFA) Fund report, which showed a current balance of \$434,732.36, as of March 28, 2017. Donations to date for this current fiscal year totaled \$18,305.24, and expenditures totaled \$8,971.73. Expenditures were: MFA Need Based \$8,971.73.

A motion was made by Ms. Mills, seconded by Mr. Bourg, to accept the Military Family Assistance Fund report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

State Approving Agency Cleo Wallace reported on SAA. He reported Veterans' SAA, Veterans' Education and Training has completed its 2016-17 FY Contract. The SAA has received a satisfactory rating from the VA and JPRG. This is the highest rating a SAA can receive. LDVA has received this rating for the past 10 years.

A motion was made by Mr. Green, seconded by Mr. O'Brien, to accept the State Approving Agency report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Internal Audit. Mr. Josey discussed the Audit Projects Worked on in 2017: Completed Monthly Audits of the Resident Aging Balances of the Accounts Receivable at each of the five Veterans Homes; Completed the Quarterly Audit Cycle of the Resident Trust Funds at each of the five Veterans Homes; Conducted and completed a review of receivables and collections based on all Contracts for VAC Accommodations and Services (FY 2017); Conducted and completed an audit of the HQ Imprest Fund including the HQ Travel Voucher Program.

A motion was made by Mr. Bourg, seconded by Mr. Green, to accept the Internal Audit report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Executive Counsel Julie Baxter Payer reported that LDVA is working to work on issues that are going on at some of the homes. The Secretary and Undersecretary are not shying away from looking at issues and finding a solution.

A motion was made by Mr. Knott, seconded by Mr. O'Brien, to accept the Contact Assistance report as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Communication/Women Veteran Outreach Ms. Juan has received compliments from across the country on the new website. All feedback has been positive and Veterans really like how user friendly it is. Continuing to work with website developers to improve database capabilities that capture data in the best possible way. LDVA has constant contact capabilities which allows the department to do email blasts, etc.

A motion was made by Mr. Bourg, seconded by Mr. Green, to accept the Communication/\ and Women Veteran Outreach reports as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

## **V. Other Matters**

Secretary Strickland stated that Louisiana is one of 2 states competing to host the 2019 National Conference of state VA Directors. He will be giving a presentation at the next National Conference in the coming months in Boston for LA's bid to host this event.

## **VI. Adjournment**

There being no further business to be brought before the Veterans Affairs Commission, a motion was made by Mr. Bourg, seconded by Mr. Green, to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed and the meeting adjourned at 12:39 pm.

/s/ Don A. Beasley, Chairman

/s/ Joey Strickland, Secretary

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Date of Approval

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