



**Government Office Building  
9830 Patuxent Woods Dr.  
Columbia, MD 21046**

**MINUTES  
Thursday, 04 February 2021**

Meeting Opened        1900 hours  
 Meeting Closed        2038 hours  
 Meeting Location      Virtual (Zoom); due to COVID-19 pandemic

**MEETING SUMMARY:**

J. Greg Jolissaint, Chair, presiding, opened the meeting at 1900 hrs.

**1. Roll Call of Commission Members to Establish a Quorum**

- a. Roll Call: The roll was taken; Eleven commission members present (two vacant). The Chair declared the Commission was in a quorum and brought the meeting to order.

Commissioner	Present	Excused	Absent
J. Greg Jolissaint (Chair)	✓		
Jonathan Branch (Co-Chair)	✓		
Reginald Avery	✓		
Michael Blum	✓		
Steven M. Bolen	✓		
Nafrettifi Griffin	✓		
Michael Griggs	✓		
Kelly Kesler	✓		
Robert Lowell	✓		
Keith McGuire	✓		
Paul Rivers	✓		
(Vacant)			
(Vacant)			

- b. Acknowledgement of Howard County Government Officials in Attendance: Lisa Terry (Manager, Office of Veterans and Military Families), Jennifer Jones (Deputy Chief of Staff, Howard County Executive), Cheryl Mattis (Deputy Director, Department of Community



Resources and Services), Jennifer Corcoran (Coordinated Entry System Manager, DCRS/Howard County Office of Community Partnerships), Lila Boor (Howard County Office of Consumer Protection), and Rohini Gupta (Howard County Library System).

- c. Special Guest(s): Cherron Blakely (Applicant, HCCVMF) and Eric Towns (Applicant, HCCVMF).
- d. Others in Attendance: Ed A. Hall, (Chair, Joint Military Council/Commander, A.L. Post 156), Bob Pelletier (A.L. Post 156/VFW Post 7472), Vikki Garcia (Community Outreach for U.S. Representative John Sarbanes), John Way (CEO, The VA Way), Linda Bergofsky (Coordinator, Veterans Advisory Council, Frederick County), Katie Kilby (Serving Together), and Elizabeth Gargano.

## **2. Meeting Opened by the Chair/Pledge of Allegiance**

- The Chair led the attendees in the Pledge of Allegiance.

## **3. Reminders of Virtual Meeting Etiquette**

- The rules of etiquette for the meeting were distributed in the agenda.

## **4. Consideration of the January 2021 Meeting Minutes**

- Commissioner Blum moved to approve the minutes; Commissioner Avery seconded. The January minutes were approved by unanimous vote.

## **5. Guest Speaker(s)**

Jennifer Corcoran, Coordinated Entry System Manager, DCRS/Howard County Office of Community Partnerships

- Jennifer presented on veterans' homelessness in Howard County. Her office defines homelessness per HUD guidelines. Veterans are considered a vulnerable subpopulation (as defined by HUD).
- HUD requires communities to operate a "coordinated homeless response system." Her office's primary goal is to ensure everyone has equal access to the system and to prioritize the most vulnerable.
- System components include prevention, diversion, outreach, shelter, rapid rehousing, and permanent supportive housing.
- Her office has representation on the Coordinated Entry Committee of the Maryland VA Coalition Board.
- Howard County eligibility to participate in the system requires county residency. Currently, two veterans are in shelter, three require rapid rehousing, and nine families are in permanent supportive housing.
- The Chair commented that every county has a program; additionally, the Maryland VA has homeless voucher and residential homeless programs for veterans.



- Commissioner Blum asked how many veterans in Howard County are homeless. Jennifer said that there are about 800 households in the system at some level.

## 6. Old Business

### a. Update from the Subcommittee on Equity and Racial Justice:

- The Subcommittee has completed the survey. The Subcommittee Chair reviewed the survey.
- The survey is titled “Racial Equity Survey for Howard County Veterans.”
- The survey has a disclaimer that participation is anonymous.
- The survey will go through Howard County government for review and approval before it is released.
- Commissioner Avery asked how long the review will take. Lisa Terry hoped the review would only take about a month.

### b. Update on January Meeting of the Veterans Support Group:

- Eight veterans participated in the February meeting.
- Each month more veterans are participating. Veterans are coming from Howard County, Fort Meade, Prince Georges County, and other locations.
- In the future, there is a possibility that meetings will be held twice per month.
- NAMI is considering hosting the group state-wide.
- John Way shared a positive comment about the group he received from one of the veterans who participated.
- The Chair thanked Commissioner Rivers, John Way, and Topaz Navarro for their hard work to standup the group.
- The Support Group meets the first Monday of the month from 1800 - 1930 hours.
- Register for the Support Group here: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/nami-howard-county-connection-veterans-support-group-tickets-130261512691>.

### c. Feedback on the VAMHCS January Meeting:

- On 16 December, the first dose of the COVID-19 Pfizer vaccine was administered to medical center frontline workers.
- Since mid-December, over 2,500 employees and 450 veterans have received the vaccine in community living centers and congregate living locations.
- 2021 is the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the VA Health Administration (VHA); established in 1946.
- VHA has increased its telehealth by over 1100% since the pandemic started.
- VBA offices remain closed to the public. Baltimore area veterans who need to schedule an appointment should call 410.230.4530; D.C. and Virginia area veterans should call 202.530.9028.
- The Maryland Veterans Trust Fund has issued over \$100K in grants to veterans in need for other than COVID-19 relief.
- The VA is continuing to provide emergency meals to veterans even through the pandemic.



- The first vaccinations to homeless veterans started on 19 January; over 90 veterans have been vaccinated.

d. Update on Veterans Day Presentations in Howard County Schools:

- Commissioner Avery contacted Dr. Karlee Turner-Little, Deputy Superintendent of HCPSS, and Dr. Kim Eggborn, Coordinator for Elementary Social Studies in HCPSS, about participating in HCPSS programs.
- HCPSS wants to encourage veterans to participate in its Simulated Congressional Hearings (SCH) for 5<sup>th</sup> grade students. But it is still considering whether it will conduct the SCH program this year due to the pandemic.
- HCPSS Veterans Day activities are still TBD. But, if the system decides to hold presentations, it would like to work with the Commission to find veterans who want to participate. HCPSS is specifically interested in finding female veterans who could speak during its Veterans Day activities.

e. MHFA Proposal to the FMA Foundation Board:

- John Way said The VA Way is only being allowed to teach the basic module.
- FMA wants MHFA to be taught virtually.
- The VA Way has started offering free online yoga classes to military and veterans on Wednesday nights.
- The VA Way is launching its “Pride Membership” campaign sponsoring 100 ninety-day memberships to Fort Meade personnel.
- More information on The VA Way here: <https://www.vaway.org/>.

f. Update on Regional Veteran Symposium in Lieu of Annual Veteran Resource Fair:

- The Resource Fair is working with Serving Together, Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic, Maryland’s Commitment to Veterans, and other organizations to participate.
- The focus will be on non-traditional therapy such as art therapy, equine therapy, training service dogs, song-writing, etc.
- Lisa Terry said that she is investigating how to conduct the Fair virtually and how to tap into other workshops.

g. Update on Howard County Web-Based Veterans Tribute:

- The Chair stated that the Montgomery County tribute website is focusing on Black veterans since it is Black History Month.
- A form has been designed to enter data about veterans that will be featured on the Howard County website. Lisa Terry will work with the County IT to put it on the website.
- The goal is to have a tribute running for Memorial Day.

**7. Business “On Hold” Due to the Pandemic**

- Columbia Lake Monument Completion. Of note, Ms. Millie Bailey celebrated her 103<sup>rd</sup> birthday on 03 February.
- Howard County School Buddy Program



- Exploratory Committee to Investigate the Feasibility of Building a Veterans Home in Howard County

## 8. New Business

### a. University of Maryland (UMD) Research Study:

- UMD is searching for veterans with PTSD interested in training service dogs for fellow veterans. For more information, contact Deb Taber at [dtaber@maruylnd.edu](mailto:dtaber@maruylnd.edu), 401.706.4233 or 401.706.0659. Participants will be compensated.

### b. Update on the Veterans Day Parade:

- The parade meetings have started; focus for now is on Memorial Day activities.

### c. Statement Released by VSOs Regarding January 6 Events at the National Capital:

- The Chair discussed the release of statements made by various VSOs condemning the activities of veterans who participated in the events at the U.S. Capitol on January 6.

### d. Howard County Joint Military Council (JMC) Significant Items:

- A.L. Post 156 contacted Major Taylor, CAP Howard County Squadron, to provide color guard support during the Squadron's wreath laying ceremony events.
- A.L. Post 156 has created a new recruiter position to assist in recruiting veterans to join the American Legion. Commissioner Griggs will help the Legion contact Howard Community College veterans.
- The next flag retirement ceremony is 17 April at noon; 330 flags were retired at the last ceremony.

### e. Legislative Affairs Update:

- Commissioner Bolen shared four pieces of legislation to track during the 2021 Maryland General Assembly legislative session: HB0604/SB0180, HB0605/SB0164, HB0660/SB0284, and HB0874/SB0656. (Track MD legislation here: <https://legiscan.com/MD>.)

### f. Other Items:

- Commissioner Kesler suggested discussing the COVID-19 vaccinations and how it might impact families. The Chair asked Lisa Terry to put the discussion on next month's agenda.
- Lisa Terry asked the Commission to review the 2020 end-of-year report.

### g. Update on New Commission Members:

- The Chair invited applicants Cherron Blakely and Eric Towns to introduce themselves to the Commission.
- Commissioner Griggs asked if the VA had a plan for vaccinations for veterans. The Chair said that the VA is following CDC priorities.

## 9. Oher Announcements or Dates of Importance



- 01 February: Commission applicant nominees will be read into the Howard County Council legislative record.
- 16 February: Commission applicant nominees to provide testimony to the Howard County Council.
- 01 March: Howard County Council to vote on Commission applicant nominees.
- 06 & 07 February: The Maryland National Guard will hold a COVID-19 walk-in vaccination clinic at the Baltimore Medical Center from 0800 - 1400 hours.
- The University of Alabama is searching for female veterans to participate in a research study addressing the needs of female veterans. More information at: <https://bit.ly/38y975y>.
- For more information on the Serving Together project: <https://servingtogetherproject.org>.

**10. Next Commission Meeting Date(s)**

- The next Commission meeting(s) will be held on 04 March starting at 1900 hours.

**11. ADJOURNMENT:**

- The Chair adjourned the meeting at 2038 hours.

The Commission stands in adjournment until  
**04 March 2021.**

Minutes were taken by Steven M. Bolen.

J. Greg Jolissaint  
Presiding  
Chair, HCCMVF