



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

**MINUTES<sup>1</sup>**

**Thursday, 05 November 2020**

**MEETING SUMMARY:**

Mr. Jonathan Branch, Co-Chair, presiding, opened the meeting at 1900 hrs.

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

- a. Roll Call<sup>2</sup>: Seven commission members present; Mr. Branch declared the Commission was in a quorum and brought the meeting to order.

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

- b. Acknowledgement of Howard County Government Officials in Attendance: Ms. Lisa Terry, Manager, Howard County Office of Veterans and Military Families (HCOVMF), Ms. Jennifer Jones, Deputy Chief of Staff for the County Executive, Ms. Liesele Wood, Howard County Health Department, and Mr. Rodney Oldham, Howard County Health Department.



- c. Special Guest(s): None.
- d. Others in Attendance: Mr. Bob Pelletier (A.L. Post 156/VFW Post 7472), Mr. John Spain (A.L. Post 156), Ms. Linda Bergofsky (Coordinator, Veterans Advisory Council, Frederick County), and Mr. Yale Stenzler.

## **2. Pledge of Allegiance**

Mr. Branch led the attendees in the Pledge of Allegiance.

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

Mr. Branch reviewed the rules of etiquette for the virtual meeting. (See Attachment A.)

## **4. Consideration of the October 2020 Meeting Minutes**

Mr. Branch entered the 01 OCTOBER 2020 Commission minutes onto the table and opened the table for discussion. Hearing none, he asked for motions to approve the minutes. A motion and second were made. Mr. Branch called for a vote; the minutes were approved by unanimous consent.

## **5. Presentation by Invited Guests**

Mr. Branch invited Ms. Jones to introduce herself. Ms. Jones thanked the Commission for letting her join the meeting and said she would pass details of the meeting onto the County Executive. Mr. Branch thanked her for attending.

## **6. Old Business**

- a. Subcommittee on Equity and Racial Justice:

Mr. Branch said that the Subcommittee met last week and created a draft survey to send out to veterans in the community. The goal is to send the survey out before the end of the month.



Ms. Kesler wanted to make sure the survey was sent to underserved veteran populations. She suggested working through organizations and services like *Grassroots* or *Medical Assistance Transportation* who may work with veterans in their programs.

Mr. Blum was concerned that the survey questions led to “negative” answers. The survey should allow someone to have a positive response. He suggested asking questions that would prompt responses that would describe how the underserved veteran’s community could be served better.

Ms. Bergofsky suggested sending the survey to a focus group that is not part of the veteran’s community to determine if the questions made sense, if they were easy to answer, etc.

b. Exploratory Committee to Investigate the Feasibility of Building a Veterans Home in Howard County:

Due to the pandemic, Mr. Branch proposed that this effort be put on hold until after the first of the year. Mr. Blum concurred. The Commission agreed to stand-down until further notice.

c. Veterans Support Group:

Mr. Rivers stated the first meeting was used as a practice meeting. The next meeting is scheduled for 07 December at 1730 hrs at VFW Post 7472.

Ms. Terry said she reached out to the Fort Meade Alliance to share information about the support group and will continue to advertise the meetings in her networks. Ms. Jones said she would help to get information about the group out through the County distribution networks.

Ms. Wood asked if the support group would be virtual. Mr. Rivers said that after the December meeting, the group is considering making some of the meetings in-person. Ms. Wood suggested holding both virtual and in-person meetings.

d. Veterans Day Parade and Ceremony:

Mr. Spain said the 6th annual parade would take place on 08 November. Participants will gather at 0915 hrs. The procession will step off at 1000 hrs. Due to the pandemic, the focus is to keep the group small. About twenty vehicles will participate, representing different organizations. This year, we honor “The Year of the Woman” by highlighting women veterans and military family members. Ms. Jamie Gillette (Howard County Veterans



Foundation) will be the master of ceremonies, and County Executive, Dr. Calvin Ball III, will deliver a speech. Mr. Yale Stenzler was also part of the parade and ceremony planning committee.

e. VAMHCS Meeting:

Mr. Bolen summarized the Veterans Affairs Maryland Health Care System (VAMHCS) Veterans Service Organizations (VSO) and Congressional Stakeholders (CS) meeting held on 21 October 2020.<sup>3</sup> (See Attachment B.)

f. Veterans Day Presentations in HoCo Schools:

Ms. Terry contacted Dr. Kim Eggborn (Howard County Public School System (HCPSS), Director, Elementary Social Studies Coordinator). Dr. Eggborn will share the teacher's resource guide from the state, the local teacher's resource guide, and information about the veteran's day parade with students and colleagues in her network. Ms. Terry said that Mr. Avery has also talked to the Superintendent, HCPSS.

g. MHFA Proposal to the FMA Foundation Board:

No update.

## 7. Business "On Hold"

a. Columbia Lake Monument Completion:

Mr. Branch stated that fundraising for the monument is on hold due to the pandemic.

b. Howard County School Buddy Program:

Mr. Branch stated that the start of the program is on hold due to the pandemic.

## 8. New Business

a. Millie Bailey Park Dedication Ceremony:

Mr. Branch stated that the dedication ceremony was held on 22 October. Several Commissioners were present.



b. NAMI Virtual Forum on Veterans Mental Health:

Mr. Bolen said that on 17 November at 1900 hrs, NAMI Howard County will host a virtual forum on *Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing During the Pandemic*. Guest speakers will include Dr. Sandra Marshall (Chief of Staff, VAMHCS), Dr. Larence Kirby (Key 2 Clarity Counseling), Mr. Paul Rivers (Commissioner, HCCVMF), Mr. Topaz Navarro (Executive Director, Work, Play, Obsession, All In One Foundation), and Mr. John Way (CEO, The VA Way).

c. Mental Health Webinar:

Ms. Kesler said the Howard County Local Health Improvement Coalition (HCLHIC) and the Howard County Bureau of Behavioral Health are partnering with Aetna to host a five-session webinar over the next several months. The first session will focus on accessing services for a variety of populations. A number of featured speakers will talk about access, behavioral health, and special needs. Veterans issues will also be addressed.

d. Howard County Joint Military Council (JMC):

The following are items of interest were reported by the JMC:

- On 07 November, there will be a flag-raising ceremony at St. John's Episcopal Church in Ellicott City.
- On 08 November from 1200 - 1600 hrs, the Associated Gun Club in Marriottsville will host a *Colonel Lou Schott 200 yard Off-Hand Championship*; 20 rounds in 20 minutes for \$20.
- On 10 November, the U.S. Marine Corps turns 245 years old. Celebrations will take place on 08 November.

e. Tribute to Veterans Website:

Ms. Terry said that Montgomery County hosts a website to honor their veterans. She would like to start a similar tribute site for Howard County veterans. She asked for suggestions to develop the site and platform to host it.

f. Other Items of Interest:

Items of interest include:



- 08 November: Howard County 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Veterans Day Parade and Celebration.
- 10 November, 1300 - 1400 hrs: *Virtual Government Agency Expo Webinar: Life as an Older Adult, Three Important Things You Need to Know.*
- 11 November: Veterans eat free at Mission BBQ.
- 12 November, 1100 - 1500 hrs: *Washington, D.C./Baltimore Virtual Career Fair for Veterans.* Prior to the Career Fair, “How to Navigate a Virtual Career Fair,” held on Monday at 1730 hrs and Tuesday at 1200 hrs.
- 03 December, 1000 - 1600 hrs: HiredDC-Metro Virtual Multi-University Alumni Career Fair.
- Others items of interest can be found in the eBulletin distributed by Ms. Terry, Manager, HCOVMF.

g. Legislative Affairs:

Mr. Bolen said he had been in touch with Mr. Brian Smith (Free State Veterans). Mr. Smith said that it is not likely that any bill that requires revenue would be viable this year due to anticipated budget shortfalls caused by the economic downturn caused by the pandemic.

Bills that might be introduced:

- Adding a checkbox to the income tax form for a voluntary contribution to the Maryland State Trust Fund.
- Allowing military spouses to carry their professional credentials to Maryland from out of state when they relocate here.
- Allowing veterans to bring therapy (i.e., comfort) dogs into a courtroom. This is different than service dogs.

h. December Commission Meeting:

The Commission will not hold a December meeting.

i. New Business from Commission Members:



On 11 November at 1200hrs, Ms. Griffin will be singing the National Anthem at the Mission BBQ in Ellicott City.

j. Update on County's Solicitation for New Commission Members:

Ms. Terry reached out to Ms. Pruum. She said there was no update from Ms. Pruum's office. Ms. Jones said that she would look into the status.

**9. Other Announcements or Dates of Importance**

None.

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

The next Commission meeting will be held on 07 January 2021 starting at 1900 hours.

**11. ADJOURNMENT:**

2011 hrs; Mr. Branch asked for a motion to adjourn. Having received a motion and a second, he closed the meeting and directed the Commission to stand in adjournment.

Minutes were drafted by: Mr. Steven M. Bolen.

Mr. Jonathan Branch  
Presiding  
Co-Chair, HCCMVF

**Notes:**

- 1) The meeting was conducted virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 2) Two Commission appointments are currently vacant.



- 3) The VAMHCS VSO & CS meeting is held on the third Wednesday of the month at the VAMHCS facility in Baltimore. (Currently, all meetings are virtual due to the ongoing pandemic.) Please contact Ms. Aimee Saylor, Business Manager, Public & Community Relations at [aimee.saylor@va.gov](mailto:aimee.saylor@va.gov) to connect or for more information.

**Attachments:**

- A) General Matters, Virtual Meeting Rules, and How to Join a WebEx Meeting.
- B) Meeting Notes: VAMHCS VSO & CS Meeting; 21 October 2020.





**ATTACHMENT A**

General Matters, Virtual Meeting Rules,  
and  
How to Join a WebEx Meeting



**Public Meetings of the Commission on Veterans and Military Families  
Howard County, Maryland**

***General Matters, Virtual Meeting Rules, and How to Join a WebEx Meeting***

**General Matters**

The meeting is a public meeting and subject to the requirements of the Maryland Open Meetings Act. The meeting will start with roll call to establish the presence of a quorum. Roll call will be conducted by the Chair, Vice-Chair, or designee. Members of the public are welcome to attend and observe the meeting but may only address the Commission if the Commission invites public input or when such input is otherwise scheduled or authorized by law. Whether input is otherwise authorized by law is subject to the advice of the Office of Law. During a meeting of the Commission, members of the public may only communicate with the Commission when the Chair gives them leave to do so. The meeting may be paused periodically to allow interpreters to switch places. There may be a momentary pause between speakers to allow people to unmute and mute their devices.

**Ground Rules for the Virtual Meeting**

- 1.** Be on time. So that all agenda matters can be appropriately covered. Please log/call in on time. Try to log/call in before the meeting starts to familiarize yourself with the platform. (See instructions below for joining a WebEx meeting.) If you cannot avoid being late, please don't interrupt the meeting by announcing your presence or asking for a review of what has transpired.
- 2.** Be Prepared. Please review the meeting agenda and other relevant documents before the start of the meeting.
- 3.** Be engaged. Commission members are expected to share ideas, ask questions, and contribute to the discussion.
- 4.** Do not use a speakerphone. Speaker phones interfere with the quality of the meeting, so please avoid using that feature on your phone. Use a headset instead.
- 5.** Always mute your device unless you are speaking. Unmuted devices create background noises, echoes, feedback and interfere with the quality of the virtual meeting. Use the mute button



when you are not speaking. This includes call-in users. The host will mute the device of participants who fail to mute their devices.

6. To speak. If you are using the video feature, raise your hand physically; or raise your hand by using the WebEx feature. The Chair will let you know when you may speak. Unmute your phone after you have been given the go-ahead to speak. Please mute your device when you are done speaking.
7. Before speaking, state your name. As a courtesy to all participants, please identify yourself each time before speaking.
8. Speak one at a time. Only one person may speak at a time. Please speak only when you have been given the go-ahead by the Chair.
9. Minimize or eliminate background distractions. As a courtesy to all participants, especially people who rely on visual cues, please minimize or eliminate background distractions. Also, please note that background noise disrupts the meeting for everyone and might prevent participants from hearing what is being said. When possible, choose a quiet location. Mute or turn off background noises.
10. Camera and lighting placement. Position yourself so that you are directly facing the camera and a lamp or other light source. This will ensure that you are clearly visible to other participants. Backlighting (light source behind you) affects the quality of your video and makes it harder for people to see you.
11. Avoid multi-tasking. So as not to be disruptive or distract other participants, please try not to multi-task.
12. Disable your call-waiting feature. If you call into the meeting, please disable your “Call-Waiting” feature. The clicking noise you hear on your phone when another call comes in can also be heard by other participants and will be distracting.
13. Do not put the conference call on “Hold”. Your “Hold” feature may play background music that will disrupt the meeting. If you have to take another call, please hang up and re-join the meeting after you complete your other call.
14. Stick to the agenda. Please stay focused and stick to the agenda so that the meeting does not run over.



15. Avoid side conversations. The process is intended to be openly deliberative, so please try not to “chat” with other participants.
16. Ask for clarification. If you miss something or do not understand, ask for clarification.
17. If you must step away. Please announce if you must leave the meeting.

### Join a WebEx Meeting

- You can join a meeting from your computer, mobile device, phone, or a video system. Pick the one that works best for you. Click the links below for more information about your chosen device.

[Desktop](#)

[Mobile](#)

[Web](#)

[Phone only](#)

- Open your email invite and click Join.
- If this is the first time you're joining a WebEx meeting, WebEx automatically downloads the app. Click the installer file to install the app.
- You can also [download the WebEx Meetings app](#) manually.
- Enter your name and email address and click Next.
- If you're asked for a meeting password, enter the meeting password (it's in your email invitation) and click Next.
- Next, you choose how you want to listen to the meeting.
- Use computer for audio (default): Use your computer with a headset or speakers.
- Call in: If you prefer to use your phone for audio, dial in when the meeting starts. A list of the global call-in numbers is available in your meeting invite. Choose this option if your Internet connection is slow.



- Call me: Enter a phone number and WebEx calls you. Depending on your Webex plan, you may or may not see this option.
- Don't connect audio: Use this option when you need to join a meeting and share content, and don't need audio. For example, you are in a conference room with your team, or are already connected to the meeting from a video device.
- If you're experiencing [bandwidth](#) issues: When you dial into a meeting, you can hear everyone in the meeting, but won't be able to see anyone or what they share during the meeting.



**ATTACHMENT B**

Meeting Notes:

VAMHCS VSO & CS Meeting  
21 October 2020



## Veterans Service Organization (VSO) & Congressional Stakeholders (CS) Meeting

VA Maryland Health Care System (VAMHCS)  
Baltimore VA Medical Center  
Multipurpose Room, 3A-300  
10 North Greene Street  
Baltimore, Maryland 21201

(Via Virtual Meeting due to COVID-19)

21 October 2020

**1100 hrs Mr. Jonathan Eckman, Acting Director VAMHCS, presiding, brought the meeting to order.**

### VAMHCS Update

- 1) Due to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, Mr. Eckman stated that the VSO/CS meetings would continue to be virtual. The next meeting will be conducted via WebEx. Participants will still be able to dial-in.
- 2) Mr. Eckman urged all veterans to get a free flu shot. You can get a shot at a community pharmacy or urgent care provider that is part of the VA network. **This replaces the VA's partnership with Walgreens, which ended in March 2020.** No appointments or referrals are required to get a flu shot. To be eligible for this benefit, you must have received care from the VA or an approved community care referral in the past 24 months.
- 3) Mr. Eckman said that the VA Central Office is in discussions with Health USA and various local elected officials to expand the HELP Veterans Village at the Perry Point location to better serve at-risk and homeless veterans and their families. More details to follow.
- 4) Mr. Eckman thanked the American Legion, Benedict A. Andrew Post 296 in Queenstown, MD, including the Ladies Auxiliary and Sons of the American Legion, for their recent donation of \$12,000. Their generous donation will be used to purchase new equipment, bedside televisions, computers, personal recreation activities, transportation, and complimentary coffee to veteran patients at the Cambridge VA Outpatient Clinic, and the Loch Raven and Perry Point VA Medical Centers.
- 5) The Veterans Health Administration Innovation Ecosystem Team recently received the "Gears of Government Presidential Award." This is the highest level of distinction for a federal



organization. The Team is responsible for curating, funding, and expanding in-house innovations, which include practices to de-scribe unnecessary medicine to veterans, prevent hospital acquired pneumonia, and reduce opioid overdose deaths at VA campuses.

### **VAMHCS Clinical Update**

- 6) Dr. Marshall reminded all veterans to get their flu shot.
- 7) This week is the VAHCS medications' take-back week. It coincides with the National Take-Back Day on 24 October. Dr. Marshall urges all veterans to look through their medications and bring those expired, or those no longer taken, to the VA medical centers for proper disposal. Veterans can also ask their providers to send them a postage-paid envelope that they can use to mail to a VA medical center for disposal.
- 8) The VAHCS is continuing to re-open safely for face-to-face appointments and elective surgeries.
- 9) The VAHCS is providing its provider partners with equipment to expand its telehealthcare programs.
- 10) The VAHCS is partnering with Janssen on its SARS-CoV-2 vaccine trial. The trial is currently on pause, but the VAHCS will be asking for about 250 volunteers to participate in the study when it resumes.

### **VBA Update**

- 11) The Veterans Benefits Administration's (VBA) Baltimore Regional Office and National Capital Office are still operating in Phase 1 re-opening. Phase 2 is expected to begin at the end of November. Phase 2 will allow 50% of their workforce to return to their offices and start in-person contact for appointments.
- 12) Starting 13 October, updates to direct-deposit information will be made through online website services only. Submission via paper forms will no longer be used.
- 13) Nationwide, the total Blue Water Navy claims pending is 35,400. There has been nearly \$677 million paid out in retroactive benefits so far.

### **National Cemetery Administration (NCA) Update**





- 14) Services continue to be limited to 25 people outdoor and ten people under the shelter. Physical distancing and mask-wearing are mandatory.
- 15) The Baltimore National Cemetery, Section D, is undergoing turf renovation and the raise and re-alignment of headstones.
- 16) As of 1 October, Loudon Park National Cemetery had 7,159 heroes interned, Annapolis National Cemetery had 3,005 heroes interned, and Baltimore National Cemetery 47,142 heroes interned.
- 17) Wreaths Across America will take place in December. Due to the pandemic, the event will be modified this year. Volunteers will lay wreaths over several days instead of doing it all in one day. There will also be a virtual ceremony. Anyone interested in volunteering are asked to send an email to [waabaltimore@gmail.com](mailto:waabaltimore@gmail.com).

#### **MyVA Board Update**

- 18) No report.

#### **Overview of Telehealth**

- 19) The VAHCS is expanding its telehealthcare program. Mr. Eckman encouraged everyone to embrace telehealth as the new model for healthcare practice. Mr. Luis Kranwinkel, RN, MSN, gave an overview of the VA telehealth program.

#### **Janssen Clinical Trial**

- 20) The VA Maryland Health Care System is one of 17 systems participating in the Janssen SARS-CoV-2 vaccine trials. The trial will be a placebo study where participants will get either the vaccine or a placebo. The Janssen vaccine is a more traditional platform, a viral-vector vaccine.

#### **Homeless & Veterans Court Update**



- 21) HUD-VASH program received 100 vouchers for FY2021. HUD is going to allow the VA to determine who will get the vouchers. The VA will distribute them to the Counties with the greatest need.

Next meeting: 18 November, 1100 hours, via Virtual Meeting.

**1205 hrs Mr. Eckman adjourned the meeting.**

Notes taken (via dial-in) by: Mr. Steven M. Bolen