

**Arizona Department of Veterans' Services Advisory Commission**  
3839 N. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, Phoenix, AZ 85012

**April 9, 2020**

**MINUTES**

**Advisory Commissioners Present**

Peter Kloeber, Chairperson  
Gene Crego  
Chris Gibbs  
Joan McDermott  
Arlethe Morrison  
Matt Randle  
Carolyn Smith

**AZ Department of Veterans' Services (ADVS)**

Colonel Wanda Wright, Director  
Lupita Santellano, Executive Assistant  
Jennifer Harris, Legislative Liaison  
Catherine Douglas, Auditor General's Office (guest)

**Absent**

Rebecca Villalpando, Vice Chairperson

**Call to Order** – The Arizona Department of Veterans' Services Advisory Commission meeting was held virtually via Google Hangouts, link: <https://meet.google.com/vmk-irvo-rkf?hs=122>, dial in: (US)+1 601-680-7204, PIN: 371 003 888#. Chairman Kloeber called the meeting to order at 10:00 am.

**Approval of Meeting Minutes** – Chairman Kloeber called for a motion to approve the, January 9,2020, Arizona Department of Veterans' Services Advisory Commission Meeting Minutes. There being no changes to the minutes, Commissioner Matt Randle moved to accept the meeting minutes, Commissioner, Joan McDermott second the motion. The motion carried.

**Department Announcements and Updates** – Colonel Wanda Wright, Director, updated the Commission. Col. Wright states that around March 9, 2020, the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services (ADVS) as a department decided to lock down both of the State Veteran Homes, Phoenix and Tucson. Col. Wright states this decision was made due to the vulnerability and morbidity of the population at the Veteran homes. No family or friends are allowed at the Veteran homes at this moment, only staff. There are procedures that were immediately put in place. All staff at the veteran homes are to be assessed, they are to have their temperature taken, and answer questions related to their health and travel; all of these procedures are to be completed before they are allowed in to the building. Vendors and contracted personnel are also to be scanned and assessed. Vendors/contracted personnel deemed non-essential are not allowed in to the Veteran Homes. Any veteran in their final stages of life or on hospital are allowed one family member along with a Chaplain, both whom would also be screened. Veterans who are on dialysis are still allowed to go out to their appointments. Veterans on dialysis are being assessed before they leave to dialysis and upon their return to their facility. Those veterans on dialysis are residing in one area within the facilities due to their contact with the outside community.

Decisions were made on how to allow Veterans to still have time spent outdoors at both Veteran Homes. Veterans that smoke are still allowed to go out to smoke. Veteran/resident temperatures are being taken twice a day to ensure no fevers are spiking. The Arizona Department of Veterans' Services is doing all it can to protect the veterans at both Veteran homes, as well as the staff.

ADVS has built a supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) at both homes. Both facilities are trying to maintain the supply of PPE until it is absolutely necessary to use it. Currently, the Veteran Homes do not have a virus case. Cloth masks are being made and donated to both Veteran Homes by Veteran Service Organizations. The donated masks are being provided to staff and their families. The department is aware staff is traveling between the facility and their homes. Therefore, the department has contracted with a couple of hotels should there be a virus case at either Veteran Home. The staff members who are in direct contact with a veteran with the virus will be allowed to stay at the contracted hotel, versus going home to their families. The Veteran homes have also established a protocol for showering and are allowing nurses to shower in the facility before going home. The ADVS has worked with the state to provide hazardous pay for staff working directly with veterans with the virus. Also, ADVS is working on supplying food for the staff at both Veteran homes.

Chairman, Peter Kloeber commended Col. Wright and the department on their efforts.

Col. Wright continued her update. She states the cemeteries are still open and continue to work. No committal services are being performed at this time. ADVS has placed a limit on the amount of family that can attend a grave side internment. Col. Wright states once all restrictions are lifted, family members will be invited to join in a memorial. The department continues to honor veterans the best way possible under the circumstances. Col. Wright states the Veteran Benefit Counselors (VBC's) are currently teleworking and continue to file claims on behalf of disability and pension. All appointments were called up to eight weeks in advanced and offered the virtual option; eighty percent of the appointments accepted the virtual option. There are few veterans who do not have the technology to meet virtually; a work around will need to be found.

Commissioner, Chris Gibbs asked Col. Wright if she had an idea of how many COVID patients the VA Medical Center currently has. Col. Wright stated, that is a HIPAA related matter and the VA is not releasing any numbers.

Commissioner, Gene Crego, asked Col. Wright if the VBC's have remote access provided by a device they place on their laptop. Col. Wright stated the VBC's have the technology to work remotely. Virtual meetings with clients are being held via Google Hangouts. The VBC's have signature pads, which allow their clients to provide their signature for claims. VBC's are still able to upload claims to the VA.

Commissioner, Matt Randle, asked Col. Wright how many VBC's the department currently has. Col. Wright states ADVS has twenty-eight VBC's and is currently onboarding two VBC's virtually.

Col. Wright states there is a slowdown of applicants for positions. The department continues to make announcements, offer opportunities for virtual interviews, and is onboarding new hires virtually. All Executive Leadership is currently teleworking. Col. Wright requested any and all support be provided to the two veteran homes, such as letters or notes, in an effort to encourage veterans and staff to remain upbeat.

Chairman, Peter Kloeber requested Jennifer Harris, Legislative Liaison, update the commission. Jennifer Harris stated that based on the agenda, she is to speak of her meeting with Representative, Kristen Engle. Jennifer did not meet with Representative, Kristen Engle. Jennifer Harris updated the commission on current legislative matters. Jennifer Harris states upon completing the budget on March 23, 2020, both the House and Senate adjourned until April 13, 2020. The House and Senate passed with a baseline or skinny

budget; a standard operating budget for the State of Arizona. The skinny budget included monies ADVS needs for the two new Veteran homes, which increased the home trust fund including full time equivalence. The budget also included \$50 million dollars for a crisis contingency and safety net fund, which can be used for housing assistance to avoid eviction or foreclosures, money for entities to provide services for homeless persons, and economic assistance to small businesses. This initiative is similar to the CARES Act but on a smaller scale for the state. Jennifer Harris posted a legislative update to the ADVS website on March 27, 2020. The update includes bills that were presented this session that would impact veterans, military, ADVS, and state agencies in general.

Jennifer Harris states the Arizona Senate President, Karen Fann, and House Speaker, Russell Bowers, have decided to continue the recess until the end of April 2020, pending social distancing restrictions are lifted. The Legislature does have the capability to do a full remote Legislature. The question at the moment is if the Legislature is going to reconvene and work on other budget initiatives, such as the Governor's proposed Executive Budget. Jennifer Harris states ADVS had requested six new VBC positions this session. The bills introduced were amended to match ADVS' budget and the Governor's executive proposal.

Jennifer Harris reports there is a Finance Advisory Committee meeting today, April 9, 2020, at 11:00 am, in which the Joint Legislative Budget Committee (JLBC) is going to present the April 2020, revenue and budget update. The Legislative Budget Committee is projecting a 1.1-billion-dollar short fall by the end of FY2021; this projection could be off by \$500 million dollars either direction.

Jennifer Harris also states no significant veteran related bills made it to the Governor's desk, including ADVS' bill on Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS)- Annual Veteran Suicide Report. The bill would have allowed ADVS to add Be Connected information on to that report. The bill is third in line to be read in the senate.

Col. Wright added to Jennifer Harris' update. Col. Wright states the two new state veteran homes were part of the appropriated request in ADVS' budget. ADVS was in discussion with the budget officer at the Governor's office. ADVS' budget was going to be cut by some of the fulltime equivalence, mainly in the nursing and housekeeping departments. However, when the budget passed, ADVS received full contingent for both Veteran Homes, which included additional administrative support such as IT staff, finance staff, and a compliance officer to oversee all four veteran homes.

Chairman, Peter Kloeber, asked Col. Wright the status of the 2019 Veterans Survey. Col. Wright states ADVS met the goal of ten thousand surveys. The total was closer to eleven thousand surveys. Arizona State University (ASU) is compiling the data to produce a report within three or four months. The Coalition has offered to provide data if any data is needed, particularly for agencies who would like to apply for grants.

**Old Business** -Transportation Survey status - Col. Wright states ADVS contracted with the University of Arizona (UofA) to conduct a full state study. ADVS provided UofA all information provided by the - Advisory Commission, as well as county transportation contacts researched by ADVS. UofA will begin work when school resumes in August 2020.

White Paper on Need for VBC's – Chairman, Peter Kloeber requested a white paper for the Commissioners to use to lobby for ADVS. Col. Wright agreed to provide a white paper.

**New Business** – No new business.

**Outreach Activities** - Commissioner, Arlethe Morrison, reports before social distancing she was attending several meetings state wide to check on veterans' issues but also to push the census information. She conducted several presentations in Southern Arizona. She has been able to push the importance of the census information in real time due to current events. She was able to provide real time examples, such as funding or distribution of medical resources by both state and federal entities; both who refer to the census information for decision making.

Commissioner, Matt Randle commended Col. Wright on the department's efforts. He reports limited outreach activities at the moment.

Commissioner, Chris Gibbs reports no outreach activities.

Commissioner, Gene Crego reports he is staying in touch with his VSO contacts, as well as the UAV, Governor's office staff and congress staff. He receives reports daily from a friend on the east coast and forwards any important information to his contacts in order to keep his contacts up to date.

Commissioner, Joan McDermott, provided the commission a report of her outreach activities. Commissioner McDermott expressed her appreciation for the January VSAC meeting at the Tucson Veteran Home. She states Be Connected trainers presented a very well attended training in Lake Havasu City on January 23, 2020. Commissioner McDermott also attended Governor, Doug Ducey's, Western Arizona visit on February 13, 2020. At the last VSAC meeting Commissioner McDermott reported a unique resolve in Lake Havasu City regarding the ban on incinerating worn flags. The ceremony that was to take place on March 21, 2020, was cancelled. All on-site events in the area have been cancelled or postponed. Essential meetings, including County Board and City Council meetings are being conducted using virtual media. Veteran organizations have shuttered their doors, but are working hard to reach out to their at-risk members. Courts, including Veterans Treatment Courts, are being 'creative', as they work to continue administering their intensive services. The VVA/Jerry Ambrose Veterans Council project in Kingman has taken major steps to complete remodeling of the Arnold Plaza facility. The goal is to provide temporary housing for homeless veterans and families with counseling and other services available on site.

Commissioner, Carolyn Smith reports she has joined the newly created Arizona Veterans Assistance and Information League (501c3) that was recently created in direct support of Veterans Court. Commissioner Smith has no other outreach activities to report at this time.

Chairman, Peter Kloeber reports he has met twice with the Northern Arizona Veterans Coalition. The second Coalition meeting held in January 2020, was a joint meeting with the Northern Be Connected Community Network, which had approximately 50 people in attendance. Chairman, Kloeber also states he helped coordinate a Navigator Training session on the 21<sup>st</sup> of February, 2020, with approximately 75 people in attendance. He states seven organizations belonging to the Northern Coalition are now Be Connected partners. He is encouraging eight more of the Coalition organizations to also become Be Connected partners. Chairman Kloeber asked Commissioner McDermott to reach out to the Jerry Ambrose Veterans Council to encourage it to become a partner.

### **Open Discussion for the Good of the Order**

There are nine Commissioner positions, three are approved and their term does not expire this year.

Commissioner, Chris Gibb's first term expires at the end of June 2020. He is free to reapply for a second term. Commissioner Gibb's states he intends to reapply for a second term.

Commissioner, Matt Randle's position is in hold over status according to Boards and Commissions. Commissioner Randle has not heard back in regards to his reappointment from Boards and Commission.

Commissioner, Arlethe Morrison, and Chairman, Peter Kloeber's second terms expires at the end of June 2020. Commissioner Carolyn Smith's first term also expires June 2020; however, she does not plan to reapply. The Commission currently has one vacant position.

Col. Wright updated the Commission on her meeting with Boards and Commissions. She states there was a change in Leadership at Boards and Commissions. One person at Board and Commissions is in charge of 253 Boards and Commissioners, which explains the delay in response to applications. Col. Wright states the Director of Boards and Commissions agreed to take a look at the four Commissioner positions. Col. Wright is unsure as to the status due to the current telework situation.

Commissioner, Chris Gibbs asked Col. Wright if the former Director of Boards and Commissions is no longer with Boards and Commissions. Col. Wright responded the former Director now works for the State Human Resources department.

Chairman, Peter Kloeber states he will reach out to his contact at Board and Commissions.

Commissioner, Gibbs inquired about name tags for the Commissioners. Executive Assistant, Lupita Santellano, responded all name badges would be mailed out today, April 9, 2020. Commissioner, Gibbs also inquired about the next ADVS Advisory Commission Meeting. Chairman, Kloeber responded the next Commission meeting will take place on the second Thursday in July, 2020.

Commissioner, Crego reported the American Legion National Convention has been cancelled. Also, he states Senator McSally has a Town Hall teleconference scheduled today, April 9, 2020, at 3:00 p.m. for those who would like to join. Commissioner Crego also asked if the Commissioners whose terms expires soon could be placed on hold over status in order to have enough Commissioners to hold a quorum. Chairman, Kloeber states he will contact Boards and Commission

This is Carolyn Smith's last Advisory Commission Meeting. Chairman, Kloeber thanked Commissioner Smith for her service.

Chairman, Peter Kloeber requested a motion to adjourn the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services Advisory Commission Meeting. Commissioner, Chris Gribbs moved to adjourn. Commissioner, Matt Randel second the motion. The motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 10:57 a.m.