

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

**January 13, 2022**

**MINUTES**

**Advisory Commissioners Present**

Joan McDermott, Chairwoman (in-person)  
Gene Crego, Vice Chair (in-person)  
Chris Gibbs, Commissioner (virtual)  
Kathryn Gallowitz, Commissioner (virtual)  
Edward Logan, Commissioner (virtual)  
Kirk Loving, Commissioner (virtual)  
Michael Noble, Commissioner (in-person)  
Rebecca Villalpando, Commissioner (virtual)

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

Colonel Wanda Wright, Director (virtual)  
Jennifer Harris, Legislative Liaison (virtual)  
Lupita Santellano, Executive Assistant (in-person)

**Guests**

Tracie Pinkston, Acting Director Veteran Affairs  
Regional Office (virtual)  
Andy Meshel (virtual)  
Danee Garone, Ombudsman's Office  
Adam Metzendorf (virtual)  
Beth Johnson (virtual)  
Angela Tate (virtual)

**Call to Order** – The Arizona Veterans' Services Advisory Commission (AVSAC) meeting at Arizona Department of Veterans' Services, 3839 N. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, Ste. 209, Phoenix, AZ 85012. The meeting was also made available virtually on Google Meets, link: [meet.google.com/jgg-vm-sc-uux](https://meet.google.com/jgg-vm-sc-uux); phone number (US)+1 617-675-4444, PIN: 425 562 6665 6167#. Chairwoman Joan McDermott called the meeting to order at 10:01 am.

Chairwoman McDermott lead the commission in the pledge of allegiance.

**Approval of Meeting Minutes**

Chairwoman McDermott called for a motion to approve the AVSAC meeting minutes from October 14, 2021. Commissioner Gibbs motioned to approve the previous meeting minutes, Commissioner Villalpando second the motion. There being no changes to the minutes or any objections by the Commission, the motion carried unanimously.

**Department Announcements and Updates**

**Department Update** - Director Wanda Wright introduced guest Tracie Pinkston and Monica Cabrera from the Veteran Affairs Regional Office (VARO). She states the Arizona State Veteran Home -Yuma (ASVH-Y) is in its final completion stage. The Arizona Department of Veterans' Services (ADVS) sent out application requests for admittance to the ASVH-Y. ASVH-Y will begin admitting its first twenty resident on March 15, 2022, or April 1, 2022. Once the facility has completed admitting twenty residents, the federal Veterans' Affairs (VA) and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) will conduct a survey of the ASVH-Y for certification. The ASVH-Y must pass survey in order to continue admitting the remaining sixty residents (eighty bed facility). Director Wright is not concerned with admittance to ASVH-Y due to the long

list of people who have asked for information regarding the ASVH-Y. There are people working with the Veteran Benefits Counselors (VBC's) to help increase their disability rating if they are able. The VA will pay a veterans stay at the ASVH-Y if the veteran is 70% service-connected disabled or higher.

The Arizona State Veteran Home – Flagstaff (ASVH-F) will open three months later. ASVH-F is at the substantial completion stage. ADVS is currently staffing for both ASVH-Y and ASVH-F. Director Wright asked the Commission to let the community know ADVS is hiring at both veteran homes.

Be Connected is averaging 15,000 calls a month. The majority of the calls received are financial or mental health related calls. ADVS and Arizona Coalition for Military Families (ACMF) are providing technical support to twenty-seven states that have joined the Mayor and Governor's Challenge.

The VBCs continue to work from home. There are now five itinerate locations where VBCs can meet people in person. However, the department is still being cautious of in person appointments due to the new COVID19 variant, Omicron.

The Arizona Memorial Cemeteries in Marana and Sierra Vista will be expanding their columbarium, expect construction at both sites.

Chairwoman McDermott asked for an update on the Veteran home in Mohave County. Director Wright states ADVS is in the process of completing the contract for the feasibility study but the urgency remains in opening ASVH-Y and ASVH-F. Chairwoman McDermott asked for information on the demographic of the phone calls received by Be Connected. Director Wright will share the monthly report she receives from Be Connected, which indicates where the calls are coming from and the type of calls received. Chairwoman McDermott states the [Transportation Survey](#) is coming to an end on January 31, 2022, those who would like to take the survey can do so before that date.

**Legislative Liaison Update** - Jennifer Harris, Legislative Liaison for ADVS updated the Commission. Legislative session started on Monday, January 10, 2022, with the Governor's State of the State address. The Governor's main announcement for veterans was the institution of a tuition waiver for veteran spouses which would apply at Arizona Community Colleges and Universities. There is no bill language available at this moment. The 2023 Executive budget will be posted tomorrow, January 14, 2022, at 2:00 pm, on [azgovernor.gov](http://azgovernor.gov). There are thirty veteran related bills that were introduced or re-introduced this session.

Ms. Harris brought to the Commissioners attention the property tax exemption bill for veterans. There are two versions of the property tax exemption bill, one bill was introduced by Senator Mesnard and the other bill was introduced by Senator Rogers. Ms. Harris states Senator Mesnard's bill, SB1095, seems to be moving forward and gaining more traction. The companion resolution for SB1095 is SCR1011.

ADVS is also introducing bills or has already introduced bills this session. One of those bills is SB1115, this bill has been introduced; this bill has to do with in-state student status for veterans. ADVS is making changes to state statutes in light of the federal changes that were recently made. Arizona is currently out of compliance with the definition of covered individuals, federal legislation removed the requirement the services member must have been discharged within three years. Arizona is currently on a waiver in order to continue to accept GI Bill students while ADVS works on getting legislation approved.

Another provision made is related to another federal change, which was signed in November 2021, for Chapter 35 students which will grant them immediate classification for in-state student status for tuition purposes. There is an emergency clause on this bill, as soon as it is signed it will go into effect. Senator Borelli is sponsoring this bill for ADVS. The department asks the Commission to support the bill as it makes it through committee.

ADVS went through the Committee of Reference due to the Sunset Audit. The department and the Commission received a favorable recommendation for an additional 8-year continuation. Senator Leach is sponsoring the continuation bill. The bill number has not been provided yet. The department will send out notices for support of this bill.

SB1131 – Expansion of Empowerment Scholarship account. This bill is being introduced by Senator Rogers. This bill adds a child of a parent who is a Veteran of the Armed Forces of the United States to the definition of “Qualified Student” for the purpose of empowerment scholarship eligibility.

Legislative updates will be posted every Friday on [ADVS’s](#) website.

### **Old Business**

**Second Letter to the Governor** – Chairwoman McDermott states the commission will wait until the next commission meeting in April 2022, to see which direction the legislature goes in and address the issues the commission finds most pressing. Chairwoman McDermott summarized some issues suggested by the commission for the second letter to the Governor such as: veteran owned businesses, attracting veteran talent from outside the state to Arizona, housing for veterans, caregivers at the VA, purple star schools - as a way to promote assimilation for academic success for active duty and or guard students in the public school system, and development of a Fisher House in Phoenix.

**Update on Contacting Veteran Owned Businesses** – Chairwoman McDermott is concerned the Veteran owned business list only provides Phoenix businesses. Commissioner Logan asked Chairwoman McDermott to develop a letter to be sent to veteran owned businesses extending the Commissions support and requesting information regarding struggles being faced by veteran business owners. Commissioner Logan will help develop the letter. Commissioner Gallowitz suggested the Commission develop a subcommittee to help develop the letter to the Veteran owned businesses as well as gather information for the second letter to the Governor. Commissioner Logan, Commissioner Gallowitz, and Commissioner Noble have accepted to be part of the subcommittee. Commissioner Logan agreed to chair the subcommittee. The subcommittee would be bound by the Open Meeting Law.

### **New Business**

**Open Meeting Law Presentation-** Danee Garone, Staff Attorney at the Arizona Ombudsman Office provided a presentation/training to the Commission on the [Open Meeting Law](#).

**New Commissioner Orientation** – The Advisory Commission is short one commissioner. There is one veteran who is interested in joining the Commission in Chairwoman McDermott’s region. Two

commissioners will be leaving the commission in July of 2022. Chairwoman McDermott requested the commission suggest new members.

All commissioners have their name tags and business card if they requested business cards; Commissioner Logan requested business cards in today's meeting. The ADVS – Advisory Commission website has been updated. All new commissioners will receive their commissioner binders from ADVS in the mail.

### **Outreach Activities**

Commissioner Crego states the [2022 Arizona Veterans Hall of Fame Patriotic Awards Luncheon](#) is taking place on Friday, April 1, 2022. [AVHOF](#) nominations are now open, visit [Unified Arizona Veterans \(UAV\)](#) website to submit nominations. The last day to submit AVHOF nominations is March 21, 2022. There is a virtual UAV meeting on February 5, 2022, from 1:00 pm– 2:30 pm. Judy Hatch will be honored at a local church in late January 2022, Commissioner Crego will share the information with the commission via email; Her final resting spot is Arlington National Cemetery.

Commissioner Gallowitz states the [Arizona Coalition for Military Families 2022 Statewide Symposium](#) is scheduled on April 20 and 21, 2022.

Commissioner Gibbs has attended normal American Legion and Veteran of Foreign Wars (VFW) parties. He requests upcoming event information provided to the commission to be sent out via email.

Commissioner Logan asked the commission to be aware of the final congressional legislative districts map; the final map is not out yet due to changes. He states he is on Congresswoman Debra Lesko's Veterans Committee and she gave Commissioner Logan a Congressional Recognition for Community Service.

Commissioner Loving, during the holiday break, joined an academy board which selected a few young people for the service academy. He will be attending a VFW meeting in Tolleson, Arizona, next week. On February 10 and 11, 2022, he will join the Military Order of the World Wars (MOWW) at the Maricopa County Stand Down, at the Coliseum.

Commissioner Noble states the Department of Arizona Marine Corps League is holding their spring state wide conference in Glendale, Arizona on February 25, 2022.

Commissioner Villalpando attended a meeting in Black Canyon City, Arizona where she provided the group information on the Advisory Commission.

Chairwoman Joan sent her [report](#).

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

Director Wright thanked the Ombudsman's office for their presentation and appreciates the commissioner's time and support.

Chairwoman McDermott called for a motion to adjourn the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services Advisory Commission Meeting. Commissioner Gibbs motioned to adjourn, Commissioner Villalpando second the motion. The motion carried unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 12:17 pm.