

ARIZONA VETERANS' SERVICE ADVISORY COMMISSION
Director's Conference Room, 3839 N. 3rd St., Suite 209, Phoenix, AZ 85012
Thursday – April 8, 2010

M I N U T E S

Call to Order - The meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.m. by Chairwoman Fulkerson.

Present

Advisory Commissioners

Linda Fulkerson, Chairwoman
Gary Fredricks, Vice Chairman
George Cushing
Larry McKim
Jeffrey Olson
Lionel Sanchez
Terrie Gent
Kenneth Yamanouchi

Arizona Department of Veterans' Services

Joey Strickland, Director
Brad Bridwell, Homeless Veterans Program
Gabe Forsberg, Strategic Planner
Greg Sulzer, State Veterans' Fiduciary

Called to order at 1:00 p.m. The minutes of the March 11 meeting were approved as published.

Communications - A letter was sent to Paul Hollar from the Commission regarding his request to add a link to the American Institute of Philanthropy to the agency website.

Agency Announcements and Updates

Col. Strickland was pleased to announce there are 8 grant applications statewide to deal with homeless veteran issues. Brad Bridwell reported that there will be over 100 beds available to house veterans, if all of the grants are funded. Mr. Bridwell is seeking grant funding for the agency to administer a homeless female veterans program (16 beds). The agency is focusing on female vets with families and is partnering with two highly successful local organizations - Save the Family and UMOM. The grants will be awarded in the next few months. There are also employment grants available for female vets that will be released in the next few weeks.

The YWCA has been working with the Madison Street Veterans Association and received \$125,000 from the Governor's Office on Housing. When that program is fully functioning, 50 veterans can immediately come off the streets.

Mr. Bridwell has been developing a statewide strategic plan with homeless service providers and other stakeholders since joining the agency last December. The Arizona plan will dovetail into the VA's five-year plan to end homelessness among veterans and flesh out strategies. One critical element is homeless veterans living in rural Arizona and Mr. Bridwell is working with the VA on how they distribute and manage cases for their HUD-VASH (US Department of Housing and Urban Development – VA Supportive Housing) program.

Other agency programs of interest to the Advisory Commissioners:

- Col. Strickland is sending Veterans Benefits Counselors (VBCs) to prisons to handle claims there. Incarcerated veterans immediately receive pension upon release.
- He intends to create a new position to serve as the Native American veteran coordinator for the agency.
- The court administrator and presiding judge from the Buffalo veteran court will be in Phoenix this month to share information about how they launched their program and its changes over the past 2 years.
- Legislative changes being monitored: (1) Military Installation Fund which we support will be transferred to another state agency where it can be properly staffed and funded and (2) Military Family Relief Fund eligibility will be broadened so that more families can qualify for funds and the \$1 million cap on tax deductible donations will be doubled.
- The Tucson state veteran home construction has been started and the project is on track for completion December 2011.
- A fence will be built around the Arizona State Veteran Home in Phoenix to discourage VA staff and visitors from parking in the ASVH lot.
- The Arizona Department of Health survey will be conducted in the near future and the agency is confident that it will do well.

Greg Sulzer, State Veterans' Fiduciary, runs the Fiduciary Department and joined the agency in June 2007. While he is an attorney, he is responsible for running the Fiduciary Department and is continually faced with daily inquiries from veterans and their families, officers of the court, and elected officials. The Fiduciary Board recently brought formal charges against the agency and Mr. Sulzer is appealing the judge's decision. Mr. Sulzer is not representing the agency in this matter and does not currently have an attorney doing so. The agency pays \$50,000/year for an Assistant Attorney General, but has not received representation with the Fiduciary Board because of a conflict of interest.

Terrie Gent spent one morning with Mr. Sulzer and was very supportive of his legal analysis and confirmed that the legal issues facing the department were incredibly complex and covered a broad spectrum of legal disciplines.

Gary Fredricks asked how the Commission might be able to assist in this matter and provided some options for consideration. Jeff Olson asked if the Attorney General had actually been informed of the situation; and Mr. Sulzer was doubtful that he knew that his agency was not representing ADVS with the Fiducary Board. Commissioner Gent has been in contact with the Arizona State Bar Ethics Commission and felt there may be other ways that the Advisory Commission can support the agency. The issue will be tabled for a future meeting.

Commissioner Olson managed a Fiduciary Division when he was the director for the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs. Often, the state department is assigned the most difficult cases and the veterans frequently are low income. It could take up to two years before another fiduciary would accept a veteran who was a client of the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs Fiduciary Department.

Legislation

Commissioner Gent reported that the Pay Day loans have been closely monitored and it looks as though it has been defeated.

Enduring Freedom Memorial

Vicechair Fredricks read Executive Order 2007-24 that renamed the Commission responsible for the memorial and indicated that the Commission was “under the direction of the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services.” It has been over a year since the Commission last met and Vicechair Fredricks moved to have Col. Strickland convene a meeting. It was seconded by Commissioner Olson and unanimously supported.

For the Good of the Order

- The Vietnam Remembrance Day (Fall of Saigon) will be held at Wes Bolin Plaza on the 25th of April.
- Commissioner Gent suggested that when regional meetings are held again that the Commission consider holding it on Hopi land.
- Col. Strickland also provided commemorative groundbreaking shovels to Commissioner who weren't able to attend the 3/19/10 ceremony. Chairwoman Fulkerson, Commissioner Olson, and Vicechair Fredricks were both in attendance at the event in Tucson.
- Col. Strickland provided plaques from Governor Janice K. Brewer to Chairwoman Fulkerson and also to Commissioner McKim. Commissioner McKim had also been recognized in Sierra Vista as the Volunteer of the Year by the Unified Veterans Council and a press release was available in the meeting handouts.
- All of the Commissioners expressed their appreciation to Linda Fulkerson for her leadership over the past two years (as both the Vicechair and the Chairwoman) and for her six years of service on the Commission.

Adjournment – Chairwoman Fulkerson adjourned the meeting at 2:30 p.m. The next meeting will be a teleconference meeting at 1:00 p.m. on May 13, in the Director's Conference Room - Suite 209, 3839 N. 3rd Street, Phoenix, AZ 85012.