

Arizona Veterans' Services Advisory Commission
3839 N. 3rd Street, Phoenix, AZ 85012

January 12, 2023

MINUTES

Advisory Commissioners Present

Kathy Gallowitz, Chairwoman (in person)
Gene Crego, Commissioner (in person)
Chris Gibbs, Commissioner (virtual)
Andrew Meshel, Commissioner (virtual)
Matthew Kenney, Commissioner (virtual)
Phil Cushman, Commissioner (in person)
Kirk Loving, Commissioner (in person)
Michael Noble, Commissioner (virtual)
Charles Byers, Commissioner (in person)

AZ Department of Veterans' Services (ADVS)

Wanda A. Wright, Director (in person)
Jessica Roza, Legislative Liaison (in person)
Lupita Santellano, Executive Assistant (in person)
Valen Harris, Administrative Assistant (virtual)
John Scott, Deputy Director (in person)

Guest(s)

Angela Tate (virtual)

Call to Order – The Arizona Veterans' Services Advisory Commission (AVSAC) meeting, via Google Meets: <https://meet.google.com/jgq-vm-sc-uux>; Dial-in: (US) +1 475-222-5532 PIN: 275 244 224#
Chairwoman Kathy Gallowitz called the meeting to order at 10:16 am.

Chairwoman Gallowitz led the commission in the pledge of allegiance.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

Chairwoman Gallowitz called for a motion to approve the AVSAC meeting minutes from December 9, 2022. Commissioner Byers motioned to accept the meeting minutes. Commissioner Crego second the motion. There being no changes to the minutes or any objections by the Commission, the motion carried unanimously with Chairwoman Gallowitz's edits.

Director's Department Update

Over 300 veterans attended the PACT ACT event. Director Wright believes everyone was well prepared. The lines were long; however, staff were assisting veterans quickly. Veterans were diverted to the Veteran Benefits Counselors (VBCs) and VARO staff. There were 40 to 50 intents to files and claims to follow up on. The VA is training medical providers and other staff at the VA on toxic screenings.

The department continues to work on the opening of the Arizona State Veteran Home – Yuma (ASVH-Y). The ASVH-U did not pass the first initial VA Survey; however, they will have a second opportunity at the VA survey the week of January 17, 2023. There are currently sixteen veterans residing at the ASVH-Y, they should be at twenty admissions by VA survey. The Arizona State Veteran Home – Flagstaff (ASVH-F) continue to prepare for their initial March or April 2023 opening. The opening date is uncertain due to flooding in one of the houses/units. Drywall repairs is needed as well as furniture replacement. Staff is now being hired.

All three of the department's cemeteries have been offered funding from the VA to expand. Sierra Vista and Marana are quickly running out of space. The department is in the design process for those funds and in the next 2 to 3 years all those expansions will be complete. The expansion offers more space for veterans, their spouses and dependents at the state cemeteries. There is also a law now that allows reserves and guardsman to be buried at the state cemeteries. One of the legislative proposals the department is working on currently would asking for funding from the state to allow guardsman to be buried at the state cemeteries at no charge to them.

The department continues to work on filling all VBC positions, hiring two administrative assistants, hiring one HR person and an IT person. Director Wright states the department is struggling with admissions at the nursing homes; the homes are behind census currently. The programs division continues to work on initiatives and continue to be creative in filling the gaps to services. ADVS continues to work on Heroes Pathway to Help; it is a system where VA social workers work with veterans who are homeless and of low acuity. The VA place them in a long-term care facility for 90 days or until the department can identify a payer source, whether it is ALTCS or through service connection. ALTCS has been turning applications over within weeks where normally it may take longer.

Commission Byer asked if HUD vouchers were being utilized. Director Wright states HUD vouchers are being utilized; however, they cannot be used for long term care but may be used for assisted living or permanent housing.

Director Wright state she has done her best to bring the department to a point where she believes it is turnkey. She believes staff will be successful as staff moves forward without her.

Commissioner Crego asked if Director Wright would still be part of the VA Women Veterans Committee as well as the National Association of State Directors of Veteran Affairs (NASDVA). Director Wright informed the commission she would still be part of the VA Women Veterans Committee but her presidency through NASDVA would terminate on January 12, 2023.

Chairwoman Gallowitz asked Director Wright how many VBCs were hired all together. Director Wright confirmed 51 or 52 out of 62 positions. Commissioner Chris Gibbs thanked Director Wright for the great work she has for the department.

Legislative Update

Jessica Roza provided the Advisory Commission her legislative report found [here](#). In this report, she provides information regarding agency proposals to the legislature.

The save the date for the Veteran's caucus is going to be January 30, 2023. No start time has been provided. Arizona Coalition for Military Families (ACMF) will be speaking regarding what they do and the state plan.

Director Wright reminded the commission the department works for the Governor, as does the Commission. The department and commission need permission from the Governor's office before being able to speak to sponsors.

Kathy Gallowitz will provide the Commission a list of tentative dates for the Veteran Caucus meetings.

Old Business

Vice Chair elections - The commission has one nominee for Vice Chair, Philp Cushman. Chair Gallowitz opened the floor for any other nominations for Vice Chair of the commission. No other nominees. The commission unanimously voted for Phil Cushman to be the Vice Chair of the commission.

Letter to the Governor – Chairwoman Gallowitz and elected Vice Chair Cushman worked together on the development of a draft letter to the Governor. The objective was to summarize the Strategic Objectives without rewriting them, highlight things yet to be accomplished, and include some of the previous legislative ideas. In particular, language included in the second letter to the Governor written in 2021. There are some typos and structural edits to be made to the draft letter as well as verbiage regarding the Ask the Question legislation.

Director Wright state the department will reintroduce the Ask the Question initiative one more time and hope for the Governor’s Executive Order. If Ask the Question is not picked up by the Governor’s office, Director Wright states the department will have to reach out to legislators to pass the legislation as their own. Ask The Question initiative would make it so that all state departments must include the following verbiage on their employment application or other similar documents “Have you or a family member ever served in the military?” Director Wright states she would like to create a network between state agencies, which will allow those agencies to identify veterans and refer them to ADVS or Be Connected. Jessica Roza will provide Chairwoman Gallowitz with the official language of the Ask the Question initiative.

Chairwoman Gallowitz would like to add employment focused initiatives to the Governor’s letter, which will discuss the expansion of employer education and the creation of an employer lead council. Chairwoman Gallowitz asked the commission if there were any concerns regarding the initial drafted letter to the Governor notwithstanding any typos and including the Ask the Question initiative verbiage. The commission did not have any additional comments. Chairwoman Gallowitz asked the commission if they were opposed to adding information regarding employer education and employer council. See initiative here. The commission had no objections. Chairwoman Gallowitz asked for a motion to approve the letter to the Governor as amended by the commission. Commissioner Chris motioned to approve the letter to the Governor as amended by the commission, Commissioner Kirk Loving second the motion. There was no further discussion or opposition to the motion. The Commission voted unanimously to approve the letter to the Governor as amended by the Commission.

Request to Speak – Jessica Roza provided information regarding Request to Speak. This program allows the public the chance to stay informed and provide comment, support, or opposition to a bill that directly affect them. The public may register online; however, the account must be activated at a kiosk at the capitol. See report [here](#).

Confirmation of 2023 meeting date – The commission voted to meet bi-monthly instead of quarterly at the last commission meeting in December of 2022. The commission confirmed and agreed to the following commission meeting dates:

- Thursday, January 12, 2023
- Thursday, March 9, 2023
- Thursday, May 11, 2023
- Thursday, July 13, 2023
- Thursday, September 14, 2023
- Thursday, November 9, 2023

New Business

AVSAC Meeting Speakers, Locations, and Dates – Director Wright provided the Commission a list of speakers and locations the commissions can meeting during the calendar year. See list [here](#). The commission discussed ideas of where they would like to meet to include the VA, Arizona State Veteran Homes, rural VA clinics. Director Wright states the department could coordinate speakers based on subject matter the Commission is interested in. Vice Chair Cushman states he is interested in having the Commanders of Veteran Organizations speak to the commission regarding the state of the veteran community. Commissioner Crego is interested in discussing veteran education.

The March 2023 meeting will be held at the ADVS headquarter offices. The commission requested guest speaker Chris Norton, Regional Director for the VA Regional Office regarding the PACT ACT, speaker Judge Watts or Judge Kay to speak about Veterans Treatment Courts, and newly appointed Phoenix VA Medical Director, Brian Matthews. The meeting in March will begin at 10:00 am and conclude at 12:30 pm, each speaker will be provided twenty minutes to speak.

Vice Chair Cushman will work on the agenda for the May commission meeting. He will contact speakers and coordinate the May meeting to include a tour of the ASVH-Y. The department will coordinate travel and hotels. The commission is interested in meeting with the Yuma Vet Center and the Commanders from the Marine Corps and/or the Army, or Border Patrol. Vice Chair Cushman will provide a draft agenda for the May meeting at the next commission meeting in March of 2023.

Commissioner Gibbs requested the department determine if the commission is budgeted for travel and determine reimbursement capabilities for travel.

Strategic Policy Objective Discussion – Chairwoman Gallowitz states the Strategic Policy Objective was last updated April 19, 2022. However, the Strategic Policy objective is still out of date and needs to be re-evaluated. The Strategic Policy objective does not reflect the current state of the veteran community post COVID-19. She would like to investigate and ensure that the five pillars are updated and organized. Chairwoman Gallowitz believes the commission needs a subcommittee or task force to describe the current state post pandemic related to suicide, employment, and veteran supportive campus initiative. She proposed the commission should update the document with the support of staff.

Vice Chair Cushman and Legislative Liaison Roza suggested the commission approach the task after July 2023. Chairwoman Gallowitz suggested the commission identify the subcommittee workgroup and begin working on strategy. Commissioner Crego is interested in contributing to the subcommittee regarding the education portion of the Strategic Policy Objective. Jessica Roza suggested ADVS could provide contacts for this project. Commissioner Byers and Chairwoman Gallowitz have volunteered to be part of the subcommittee. Vice Chair Cushman states, he could join the subcommittee later.

Survey the commission and provide top three concerns that can help drive the Strategic Policy Objective.

Outreach Activities for Commission

Kathy Gallowitz attended Governor Katie Hobbs's inauguration. She also continues to participate the Veteran Caucus meetings.

Commissioner Byers plans to be more involved in the legislative process for the commission and as the Legislative Chair for the Unified Arizona Veterans (UAV).

Vice Chair Cushman recognized Commissioner Crego for his help with a veteran issue. There was a veteran in Quartzsite who needed help to move closer to family in Colorado. Commissioner Crego was able to help assist the veteran through his connections.

Commissioner Loving attended the inauguration.

Commissioner Gibb had nothing to report.

Commissioner Noble states the Marine Corps League had a very successful Toy for Tots season. He states the Marines helping Marines program has identified an increase in veterans that are economically stressed. He mentioned Veteran Larry Brown, passed yesterday, January 11, 2023. He was a Silver Star winner and combat veteran.

Andrew Meshel states he had the opportunity to work with Southern Arizona Justice for Veterans Treatment Court. He states there is a first annual charity golf tournament tentatively scheduled on May 20, 2023, in honor of Debra Martinez. There is also an upcoming Veterans resource fair in Tucson on March 25, 2023, at the Brandy Fenton Memorial Park.

Matthew Kenney attended the inauguration and reconnected with political friends. He also connected with American Legion friends; he will share event dates for the year as soon as they are determined. He also met with Cronus SCs who now provide tech training for veterans. They also fund a Defense Alliance in the State. He met with contractors and defense companies that are represented at that coalition

Open Discussion for the Good of the Order

Commissioner Renewal Status – Chairwoman Gallowitz reapplied to the commission. Commissioner Chris Gibbs believes he has exhausted his term and can no longer reapply; the department will verify this information. Commissioner Kirk Loving states he will not reapply to the commission. Commissioner Mike Noble states he plans to reapply to the commission. Chairwoman Gallowitz asked the commissioners who do not plan to renew their term to recruit veterans in their region now who they believe would be suitable candidates to apply to the commission.

Open Floor – Director Wright's celebration to service is scheduled to take place on January 28, 2023, at 1:00 pm, at the American Legion Post 65.

Jessica Roza reminded the commission the Symposium is coming up in April. ADVS does have outreach staff that may attend outreach events upon request. Chairwoman Gallowitz asked for a list of the outreach staff's names and regional assignments. ADVS plans to be present at the Vietnam Veterans event scheduled March of 2023.

Adjournment

Chairwoman Gallowitz called for a motion to adjourn the Arizona Veterans' Services Advisory Commission Meeting. Commissioner Crego motioned to adjourn the meeting, Commissioner Byer second the motion. The motion carried unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 12:25 pm.

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