

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

**May 9, 2024**

**MINUTES**

**Advisory Commissioners Present**

Philip Cushman, Chair (in person)  
Gene Crego, Commissioner (virtual)  
Chris Gibbs, Commissioner (virtual)  
Andrew Meshel, Commissioner (virtual)  
Matthew Kenney, Vice Chair (virtual)

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

Dana Allmond, Cabinet Executive Officer (in person)  
Lupita Santellano, Executive Assistant (in person)  
Valen Harris, Administrative Assistant (virtual)  
Julia Gussee, Legislative Liaison (in person)  
John Scott, Deputy Director (in person)

**Absent:**

Kathy Gallowitz, Commissioner  
Charles Byers, Commissioner

**Guest(s)**

**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#.

Chairman Cushman called the meeting to order at 10:02 am.

Chairman Cushman led the commission in the pledge of allegiance.

**Approval of Meeting Minutes**

Chairman Cushman called for a motion to approve the AVSAC meeting minutes from March 28, 2024. Commissioner Crego motioned to accept the meeting minutes. Commissioner Meshel second the motion. The commission moved to approve the minutes unanimously; none opposed.

**Agency Announcements and Updates**

**CEO Department Update:**

**Arizona State Veteran Homes**

- Staff and residents at our homes in Phoenix, Tucson and Yuma are celebrating Nurses and Nursing Home week this month

**Arizona State Veteran Home-Flagstaff Update**

- Construction repairs are continuing at the home and are on schedule

## Arizona Veterans Memorial Cemeteries

### · **Memorial Day**

- U.S. flag placement on gravesites
  - § Friday, May 24, 2024, at Arizona Veterans' Memorial Cemetery at Marana at 8:00 am (15950 North Lockett Rd.)
  - § Saturday, May 25, 2024, at Southern Arizona Veterans' Memorial Cemetery in Sierra Vista at 8:00 am (1300 S Buffalo Soldier Trail)
- Memorial Day Remembrance Ceremonies
  - § Our three cemeteries will be hosting ceremonies for Memorial Day on Monday, May 27, 2024
  - § Arizona Veterans' Memorial Cemetery at Marana is at 8:00 am
  - § Southern Arizona Veterans' Memorial Cemetery in Sierra Vista is at 8:30 AM
  - § Arizona Veterans' Memorial Cemetery at Camp Navajo is at 1:00 pm (14317 Veterans Drive in Bellemont)

## Online Veteran Benefits Counselor Appointments

- Veterans and their families can now schedule an appointment online!
- In person (<https://calendly.com/d/4yh-xhr-zd4>) and Virtual via phone or video (<https://calendly.com/d/4vv-4hn-z89>)
- Meet with specific counselor or the first available
- Appointments available Monday-Friday from 7:00 am - 4:00 pm

## Veteran Transportation Initiative

ADVS has partnered up with the Mountain Line in Flagstaff and Valley Metro in Phoenix for bus passes. Veterans can come to ADVS HQ in Phoenix or connect with the ADVS Outreach team for a free 30 day pass.

## Upcoming Veteran StandDowns

- High Country StandDown
  - Wednesday, May 15, 2024, 9:00 am - 1:00 pm, at the Flagstaff Armory – 320 N. Thorpe Rd. in Flagstaff, AZ
- Twin Arrows StandDown
  - Thursday, June 27, 2024, 9:00 am - 3:00 pm, at the Dine Event Center – Twin Arrows Navajo Resort, 22181 Resort Blvd., in Flagstaff, AZ

## Missing in America Project

The purpose of the MIA Project is to locate, identify and inter the unclaimed cremated remains of American Veterans through the joint efforts of private, state and federal

organizations. To provide honor and respect to those who have served this country by securing a final resting place for these forgotten heroes.

The Missing in America Veterans Recovery Program (MIAP) (EIN: 20-8408832) is a Federal recognized Non-Profit Veterans Organization for the identification, location, verification, and movement of Veterans and their Dependents.

In April 2024, more than 30 previously unclaimed Veterans received full military honors when they were laid to rest at the Arizona Veterans' Memorial Cemetery at Camp Navajo and Arizona Veterans' Memorial Cemetery at Marana in April.

The Missing In America Project (MIAP) interred 24 Veterans at AVMC-Marana on April 13, 2024, and 10 Veterans, including two MIAP volunteers, on April 18, 2024, at AVMC-Camp Navajo. Now they are Never Forgotten.

CEO Dana Allmond participated in the AVMC-Marana ceremony, respectfully carrying the urn of Army Specialist Stephen Svien to his final resting place.

### Veteran Treatment Court Grant Opportunity

There is a grant opportunity through the 2024 Veterans Treatment Court Discretionary Grant Program sponsored by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. This grant application has a closing date of June 27th, 2024. There is a webinar on May 14, 2024.

[https://bja.ojp.gov/funding/opportunities/o-bja-2024-172098?utm\\_campaign=news\\_from\\_bja&utm\\_content=funding\\_24\\_vtc&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=govdelivery](https://bja.ojp.gov/funding/opportunities/o-bja-2024-172098?utm_campaign=news_from_bja&utm_content=funding_24_vtc&utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery)

### Description

View/print the [Solicitation Overview](#)

*With this solicitation, the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) seeks to provide financial and technical assistance to states, state courts, local courts, units of local government, and federally recognized Indian tribal governments to plan, implement, and enhance the operations of veterans treatment courts (VTC), including service coordination, participant service and supervision coordination, fidelity to the VTC model, and recovery support services.*

*VTCs effectively integrate evidence-based substance use disorder treatment, mental health disorder treatment, treatment for co-occurring disorders, mandatory drug testing, incentives and sanctions, and transitional services in judicially supervised criminal court settings that have jurisdiction over veterans with treatment needs in order to reduce recidivism, increase access to treatment and recovery support, and prevent overdose.*

### **Solicitation Categories:**

- *Category 1: Planning and Implementation*

- *Category 2: Enhancement*
- *Category 3: Statewide*

**Eligible Applicants:**

- *For Category 1 and Category 2, the following entities are eligible to apply:*
  - *State governments*
  - *Special district governments*
  - *City or township governments*
  - *County governments*
  - *Public housing authorities/Indian housing authorities*
  - *Native American tribal governments (federally recognized)*
  - *Other:*
    - *Public or private entities acting on behalf of a single treatment court through agreement with state, city, township, county, or tribal governments*
    - *Units of local government, such as towns, boroughs, parishes, villages, or other general purpose political subdivisions of a state*
- *For Category 3, the following entities are eligible to apply:*
  - *State agencies such as the State Administering Agency, the Administrative Office of the Courts, and the state substance abuse agency*
  - *State criminal justice agencies and other state agencies involved with the provision of substance use and/or mental health services, or related services for court and related criminal justice programming.*

**Legislature Update-**

ADVS Legislative Weekly Updates may be found here:

<https://dvs.az.gov/about/legislative-updates>. As mentioned last month, on the weekly update you will see the migration of bills towards the bottom of the report that will no longer be moving forward this session. There has been no movement the past few weeks on any of the current bills still in consideration. As you all may be aware, the current abortion laws have taken much of our legislator’s discussions.

All legislative bills may be viewed at the AZ Legislative website; <https://www.azleg.gov/bills/>.

Bills signed by Governor Hobbs this session;

- HB2304 Buffalo Soldiers Arizona Territory Monument (Sponsor; Representative Travers)
- HB2548 Military Installations; general plan amendments (Sponsor; Representative Payne)
- HB2246 Purple Star School Designation (Sponsor; Representative Payne)
- HB2818 Service Members; flags at half-staff (Sponsor; Representative Nguyen)

The Veterans Caucus meeting for this month was held on Monday, April 29, 2024, with a presentation from Veterans Affinity, Mr. Rick Kreiberg ([www.veteransaffinity.org](http://www.veteransaffinity.org)). Mr. Kreiberg exposed some of the issues senior veterans are experiencing in getting access to care; claim sharks soliciting veterans in hospitals and assisted living facilities, claimants paying fees for forms and VA applications in advance, claimants receiving check

s from on-set dementia patients, income spend downs. Representative Travers expanded this discussion with her proposed "Shark Bills" and recommended further discussion for future legislation and proposed bills. Representative Travers was the only legislator in attendance.

Chairman Cushman would like the status of the Open Meeting Law bill. Julia will follow up on the bill.

### **New Business**

**Debrief Meeting with the Governor to the Commission** - Commissioner Cushman, Legislative Liaison Julia Gusse, and CEO Allmond met with the Governor's staff and provided the Advisory Commission's recommendations. The Governor's staff was very receptive to the commission's recommendations.

Chairman Cushman stated he requested veterans be included in future Governor speeches. He mentioned one point of interest that the Governor's staff would like the commission to look at is the death and injury of veterans due to firearms. Chairman Cushman suggested the commission should examine and make boundaries of what the commission can cover since this is a very broad topic.

He suggested the commission may look at how to reduce gun violence to veterans by access to firearms. The commission can also research which legislative items are in the works, and provide resources and education for veterans. CEO Allmond suggested the commission invite Thomas Winkel, Director of Arizona Coalition for Military Families (ACMF) to discuss this topic in a future commission meeting. She also suggested Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America speak at a future commission meeting. Julia mentioned the next Legislative session begins January 2025. She also mentioned the suicide mortality rate has increased specifically in women compared to men. She states the commission can look into and provide support for legislation that addresses this issue.

Chairman Cushman asked the commission to come up with ideas on how the commission can help reduce gun violence involving veterans.

**Commission Leadership Position Nominations and Vote** - Chairman Cushman provided the current commissioner names nominated for the Chair and Vice Chair positions. Chairman Cushman was nominated to the Chair position for a second term and Commissioner Byers was nominated for the Vice Chair position. Both commissioners accepted their nominations. No other nominations were brought forth. Chairman Cushman called for a motion to ratify the Chair

nomination and the Vice Chair nomination. Commissioner Gibbs motioned to approve the nominations for both commissioners. Commissioner Meshel second the motion. The commission voted unanimously to keep Chairman Cushman as the Chair for a second term and Commissioner Byers as the Vice Chair; none opposed.

**Discuss ideas for the Annual Letter to the Governor** - Commissioner Cushman opened the floor for ideas for the annual letter to the Governor. Commissioner Meshel would like to address the Advisory commission recruitment issues and application process. He would also like to see gun violence, suicide and homelessness addressed in the letter. He would like to address the continued funding for mental health treatment courts. The commission would also like to include a commission budget for business cards and travel for outreach in the letter.

**Strategic Policy Objective Reassessment** - Commissioner Cushman will edit and format the currently Strategic Policy Objective. He will provide the draft to the Commission for review and further edit at the next Commission meeting on July 11, 2024.

**Commission Fundraising and Awards** - The commission expressed an interest in fundraising and awards at the last advisory commission meeting in March of 2024. The commission would like to recognize extraordinary acts of service to veterans by presenting organizations and businesses with certificates or plaques. Chairman Cushman opened the floor for ideas on fundraising and awards. Commissioner Gibbs asked if it was legal as a department to raise funds for the commission. Julia Gusse will ask the department's legal representative if the commission can raise funds, how the funds can be raised, and if the funds can be used for awards, business cards, and travel for outreach for the commission. As well as determine if the commission can have its own budget.

Commissioner Crego suggested the commission can recognize businesses such as fast food restaurants that provide discounts to veterans. Commissioner Gibbs suggested the commission speak to the larger veteran service organizations about instituting a program to recognize businesses that honor veterans at the stand downs and conduct a presentation for these awards.

Commissioner Crego mentioned he could purchase a plaque to recognize a veteran service organization if needed.

**September Commission Meeting Planning** - Chairman Cushman requested venue ideas in Prescott for the Advisory Commission meeting in September. Commissioner Kenney suggested the Founding Fathers conference venue. Commissioner Crego suggested the museum in Prescott as a meeting venue.

Chairman Cushman asked if the same format should be used for the Prescott commission meeting. The commissioners normally meet with Veteran Service Officer Commanders in the morning for breakfast, they meet for lunch with city and town representatives, and have dinner with dignitaries. The commission agreed. Commissioner Crego suggested the commission invite

surrounding cities to the commission meeting along with local tribal representatives. Commissioner Crego suggested the commission invite a speaker to discuss suicide and veteran courts in the Northern region. Commissioner Gibbs suggested Joan McDermott speak at the meeting in September. CEO Allmond suggested the commission also invite the Judge from Lake Havasu City treatment court to join the meeting as well.

Commissioner Gibbs suggested the commissioners stay at Bucky's Casino for the meeting in September.

### **Old Business**

**Commission Vacancies** - There are currently two vacancies in the commission, one in the Northern region and one in the Southern region. Commissioner Cushman tasked the commissioners with reaching out to veteran service officers they believed would be a great addition to the commission and encouraged them to apply to boards and commissions. Commissioner Gibbs suggested the commission reach out to tribal councils to determine interest in joining the commission.

### **Outreach Activities for Commission**

Commissioner Crego will be attending the Drop Zone in June of 2024, which is an event organized by Andy Biggs. Approximately 400 to 1,500 veterans attend this event. Commissioner Crego was also invited to participate on an interview panel for Senator Sinema.

Commissioner Kenney attended the following events:

- American Council on Education Military Learner Initiative Champions Group Meeting April 25, 2024
- Vet the Vote Tour of the Maricopa County Elections Department April 11, 2024
- We the Veterans one-on-one meeting April 8, 2024
- Met with West Valley Women Veterans Founder April 29, 2024
- 2024 Symposium in Support of Service Members, Veterans & Their Families April 17/18, 2024
- Reconnected with Pat at USAA. Commissioner Kenney will schedule him as a speaker for the July 2024 commission meeting.

Commissioner Gibbs mentioned he tried to attend the Stand Down in Tucson. He states he outreached to the VA and attended local events as well.

Commissioner Meshel mentioned Southern Arizona Justice for Veterans conducted a fundraiser event near the end of April 2024.

No other outreach activity to report.

## **For the Good of the Order**

### **Action Item Recap from Meeting:**

- The commissioners will come up with a list of names of veteran service offices they believe would be a great addition to the commission
- The commissioner will come up with more ideas for the Annual letter to the Governor
- Chairman Cushman will edit and format the strategic policy objectives and provide a draft to the commission
- Julia Gusse will ask the Attorney General's office for answers to the commissions questions regarding fundraising, awards, and commission budget
- Chairman Cushman will draft a memorandum for the September Commission meeting
- Julia will follow up on the status of the Open Meeting Law bill

### **Open Floor for Comments**

None.

### **Executive Session**

The commission went into executive session and returned from executive session at 11:47 am.

### **Adjournment**

Chairman Cushman called for a motion to adjourn the Arizona Veterans' Services Advisory Commission Meeting. Commissioner Gibbs motioned to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Crego second the motion. The motion was carried unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 11:48 a.m.