

Arizona Department of Veterans' Service Advisory Commission
4141 North S. Herrera Way, Phoenix, AZ 85012

November 12, 2015

MINUTES

Advisory Commissioners Present

Brett Rustand
Andrew Griffin
Phillip Hanson
Ron Perkins
David Toliver

Advisory Commissioners Absent

Ryan Peters
Arlenthe Rios
Jill Nelson

AZ Department of Veterans' Services (ADV)

Robert Barnes, Deputy Director
Dave Hampton, PIO/Legislative Liaison
Tera Scherer, Executive Assistant

Invited Guests

Judge Richard (Gregg) Maxon, General (Ret.)
Sergio Chau, Acting Director, VA Regional
Office
Glen Grippen, Interim Director, VA Medical
Center

Call to Order – Chairman Brett Rustand called the meeting to order at 10:10 a.m.

Approval of Meeting Minutes – Chairman Rustand called for the approval of the September 10, 2015 Veterans Advisory Commission Meeting Minutes. There being no changes to the minutes Commissioner Perkins moved to approve the minutes as written. Commissioner Toliver seconded the motion and the motion carried unanimously.

Gregg Maxon –

Judge Richard (Gregg) Maxon, General (Ret.) updated the Commission on the state's veteran court program. Judge Maxon stated there are 200 courts throughout Arizona and only ten of those have veteran court programs. Maricopa County has veterans' court programs in the superior court that is probation only. Over 1,000 veterans have been through the program since it began in January of 2011. Currently there are between 300 and 400 veterans going through the program.

Judge Maxon briefed the Commission on some of the differences in the various programs. For example, Coconino County, that started their veterans' court program three years ago, will plead down a felony charge or even dismiss charges for veterans that complete the program. Pima County has a justice court, but theirs requires eligibility for VA services to participate. Tucson City Court has had over 700 people start their program. Judge Mike Pollard, a former marine, runs that veteran court program; it's the longest running court as it's been in service since 2009. Currently there are 450 veterans in the program there. Phoenix started veteran court in 2012 and in less than 18 months has become the largest single veteran court jurisdiction in the country and has had many positive results with about a two percent recidivist rate. Tucson is seeing about a 14% recidivist rate, which is a truer rate. National average is 50-60% recidivist rate.

Flagstaff started one and one-half years ago; Tempe started about a year ago and has had 220 veterans through the program. Mesa began in February and has 200 veterans. Lake Havasu City started about two and one-half years ago and has 50 in the program. La Paz County is doing a regional court with a combined justice court program and will be working misdemeanor cases. Colorado

River Indian Tribes will also be part of that program. Pinal County started in November. Hopi Tribal Court, Bullhead City and Kingman will also be starting a veteran program.

Majority of cases seen are drug or alcohol-related such as domestic violence, bar fights, criminal damage, etcetera. The purpose is to put them through a treatment program to help them, rather than stick them in jail and fine them. Someone in a criminal case might see the judge twice, once at the beginning of treatment. From there they will go through service providers to assist with housing issues, employment issues, etcetera throughout the whole process; sometimes up to a whole year. A normal court may sentence an individual to so many hours of service where veteran courts look for other issues that may need help such as PTSD, traumatic brain injuries, etcetera and includes counseling for alcohol and drug dependency. The program is graduating people at a fairly quick pace.

Mesa and Tempe courts meet twice a month, but they are getting 10 to 12 new cases each session. Gilbert and Scottsdale would like to have veteran courts but have no VJO (Veterans Justice Outreach) Coordinator services. There is a great unmet need and the veteran courts is another avenue to channel people to the VA but without the needed clinical support people from the VA it makes it difficult.

Sergio Chao

Mr. Chao is the acting director of the Phoenix VA Regional Office. They are hoping to get a permanent director in the March-April time frame. Mr. Chao briefed the Commissioners on their current staffing level of 483 FTEs out of an authorized 508; 67 percent of which are veterans. Most of the vacancies they have are at the service center. Mr. Chao introduced Mike Zybar the new Veteran Service Center Manager. Mike comes to Phoenix from the St. Louis district office. ([Please see presentation here.](#))

Glen Grippen

Dr. Grippen has 11 days left until he retires. The Phoenix VA Medical Center is trying to improve every day. Three years ago they had 650,000 appointments; 950,000 this year. Phoenix currently has the market share of servicing veterans with 38%; Tucson 28%. The workforce has gone up from 2,600 to 3,100 and continues to recruit doctors and nurses every day. A new clinic in the southeast valley was opened and a new clinic in the west valley will be coming to the Glendale area. They are hoping to get swing wards renovated by 2017 and renovations to a new ward each year thereafter. They're expanding the primary care areas. The parking garage is set to open in four weeks time. The remote parking lot is open for usage with shuttle service available. The new emergency department on the southwest corner of the campus is going up now as well as a dental building being constructed. They received funding for a healthcare center for inpatient services such as colonoscopies, etcetera. Lots of outreach has been going on in the community as well. The management team of 33 out of the 38 divisions is being replaced as well as establishing a new deputy director position that should be filled in the next couple of weeks. Despite so many positive things the media continues to find negative stories. Patient access has improved; appointment timing is better. They replaced 200 people in customer service positions and are going into some serious customer service training programs. They're spending a lot more money this year and the year before; Phoenix medical is running in the red as staff is working overtime. They can't expect to go through these major expansions without budgetary issues. Every VA clinic will be opening on Saturdays to get people in quicker. TriWest is helping a lot to get people in for services and have improved coordination between VA and non-VA care.

Agency Announcements and Updates

Mr. Barnes is the Deputy Director of the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services (ADVS). Mr. Barnes stated that Director Wright is unable to attend the meeting because she is visiting the NAU campus for the upcoming women's expo happening there in the spring. Last week at the capitol we, along with the Arizona Coalition for Military Families, held the Veterans Supportive Employers recognition and the Department of Corrections (DOC) and the Department of Economic Security (DES) were among the employers recognized. ADVS is working with the DOC on establishing the Regaining Honor program in Tucson for veteran inmates soon to be released. Later in November the department is hosting the DES DVOP/LVRS luncheon. Internally the department is having a strategy planning

meeting next week to set some new goals and strategies. The Veterans Donation Fund large grant solicitation opened up last week. This year the department is using the eCivis program. The grant solicitation period ends on December 31st. Cemeteries will be finishing up construction soon and the new administrators will be starting next week. The process for the Yuma Home is coming along; phase one of the environmental testing, working with Native Americans, architecture final drawings and interviews of construction teams all in place. Funding for that project will be decided on over the holidays.

Open Discussion for the Good of the Order

Chairman Rustand stated the Commissioners have been very busy over the last week in visiting with the veterans and the VSOs around the state with Veterans Day yesterday. Commissioner Toliver is happy to see some younger faces at the table and thanked those veterans in attendance for their service. Commissioner Griffin thanked everyone for the opportunity to serve on the Advisory Commission and stated that he is resigning his commission effective today to avoid any future conflicts of interest as he has been hired as the Administrator at the Camp Navajo cemetery.

Commissioner Rustand advised that the January meeting will be held at the Arizona State Veteran Home in Tucson. He will be drafting a letter to the governor's office and the ADVS Director on the key points of today's meeting. Commissioner Perkins asked that he encourage the continuance of the VSO meetings with the governor that were held in the past.

Mr. Stephen Cotta stated he was asked to come to the meeting today by a couple of veteran amputees that are unable to attend and is worried the Commission, as an advisory commission to the governor, is not speaking on behalf of the veteran population. Commissioner Rustand stated that the Advisory Commission provides counsel to the Governor and the Director of the Arizona Department of Veterans Services and if he would like to speak regarding VA services, they are federal issues and this is not his platform.

The meeting adjourned at 11:51 a.m. The next Advisory Commission Meeting will be held January 14, 2016, at the Arizona State Veteran Home in Tucson.