

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

**May 1, 2019**

**MINUTES**

**Advisory Commissioners Present**

Peter Kloeber, Chairman  
Chris Gibbs  
Rebecca Villalpando  
Joan McDermott (Via Telephone)  
Carolyn Ann Smith (Via Telephone)  
Gene Crego  
Matthew Randle (Via Telephone 11:05am)

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

Colonel Wanda Wright, Director  
Therisa Billingsley, Administrative Assistant II  
Jennifer Harris, Legislative Liaison

**Absent**

Joseph Brophy  
Arlethe Rios, Co-Chair

**Call to Order** – The Arizona Department of Veterans' Services Advisory Commission meeting was held at the Arizona Department of Veterans' Services headquarters, Phoenix, AZ. Chairman Kloeber called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m.

**Approval of Meeting Minutes** – Chairman Kloeber called for a motion to approve the October 11, 2018, Arizona Veterans' Advisory Commission Meeting Minutes. There being no changes to the minutes, Commissioner Gibbs moved to accept the meeting minutes. The motion carried.

**Introductions** – Chairman Kloeber introduced the newest commissioner, Gene Crego.

Matt Randle's application for his second term is still pending with the Boards and Commissions. Currently, his term is being held over; he is a full commissioner with voting rights. Chairman Kloeber briefly discussed the Boards and Commission application process. Commissioners McDermott and Villalpando stated they have submitted a new application for a second term. There are now nine commissioners and each region is well represented.

**Review/Discuss Updates to AVSAC Operating Guidelines and Strategic Policy Objectives** – Chairman Kloeber called for a motion to accept the proposed changes to the title of the AVSAC Operating Guidelines to the AVSAC General Guidelines. Commissioner Crego moved to accept the changes. The motion carried unanimously.

The Commission requests that the Department make the necessary formatting changes to the Arizona Veterans Service Advisory Commission Operating Guidelines. Director Wright confirmed and requested electronic documents be sent to her.

Chairman Kloeber called for a motion to accept the proposed changes to the Arizona Veterans Service Advisory Commission Strategic Policy Objectives as presented. Commissioner Crego moved to accept the changes. Motion carried.

Commissioner Crego moved to add a review mandate timeframe at the bottom of both documents. Motion carried.

**Department Announcements and Updates** – Colonel Wanda Wright, Director, updated the Commission on the groundbreaking events for Flagstaff on June 1 and Yuma on June 22. In the future, ADVS may look to build a new home in Mohave County and two new cemeteries; one in Mohave County and one in Yuma County.

VBC's are continue to work diligently to file claims, resulting in upwards of \$3M monthly.

Director Wright advised that the veterans survey will be issued sometime in the summer/fall and the road show (launch) for BeConnected will begin later this summer. The Veterans Women's Summit will be held June 14-15, 2019 at Tempe Mission Palms.

Director Wright shared that the Department has asked for \$1.2M in their budget for the suicide prevention program, BeConnected, and provided a general background on the statistics as they pertain to suicide for the state of Arizona. Some of the other initiatives the Department is working on are: the Governors Challenge, affordable housing, the Sunset Audit and how the audit review by the Auditor General affects the Department.

**Legislative Update** – Jennifer Harris, Legislative Liaison, Arizona Department of Veterans' Services, reviewed the following bills that were not listed in the Department Legislative Update handout, [found online here](#):

SB1474 – POW/MIA flag display- Signed by Governor Ducey March 22, 2019

HB2487 – state veterans' home, signed by Governor Ducey April 11, 2019

HB2488 – annual report; veteran suicides, signed by Governor Ducey April 17, 2019

SB1338 – veteran special plates; branch seal, signed by Governor Ducey April 10, 2019 with plates available for purchase October 1, 2019

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

Chairman Kloeber attended the *10<sup>th</sup> Annual Symposium in Support of Service Members, Veterans and Their Families*. Attended the cemetery audit at the Veterans Memorial Cemetery at Camp Navajo with Colonel Wright; the cemetery received a score of 92 out of a possible 100 points. The Northern Arizona Veterans Coalition held a meeting last week. During the symposium all three regions for the Military Veteran Community Networks were represented. As President of the MOAA Council for the state, Chairman Kloeber met with legislative members to discuss Tricare, pay raises for those currently serving and the widow's tax.

Commissioner Villalpando recently retired from Department of Economic Security and is looking forward to becoming more involved with veterans in her community.

Commission discussed the availability of the department's Veteran Benefits Counselors (VBC) to provide services in other areas of the state such as Black Canyon City. Director Wright responded that if the Department is able to get the legislation passed for the 12 additional VBC's, needs throughout the state will be assessed. The goal of placing VBCs is to keep the travel of veterans being served to under one hour to get to their appointment, with enough veterans in the area to offer appointments all day during the work week.

Commissioner Crego shared that on April 13, Congressman Andy Biggs held the "Drop Zone" event in the east valley. Commissioner Crego shared statistical data from ASU regarding veteran student retention. The lowest retention rate among veteran students, including active duty, guard and reserve students, are the first year students and this can be linked to operational obligations experienced among these students. Commissioner Crego also attended the American Legion Conference in D.C., including meeting with members of the Arizona Congressional Delegation and the Secretary of the VA.

Commissioner Randle Attended the memorial ceremony at Piestewa Peak in honor of Lori Piestewa and other fallen military members and POWs. Recently, he met with a lot of different organizations including the president of the Navajo Nation.

Commissioner Smith shared veteran court data, and is working to bring veteran court to the Prescott Valley area. She is also helping to plan a stand down in September.

Commissioner McDermott provided a [handout](#) of her recent outreach activities.

Commissioner Gibbs attended an annual veteran resource fair in Safford with 51 vendors and around 75 veterans in attendance.

Commissioner Gibbs moved to adjourn the meeting. The meeting adjourned at 11:52.

DRAFT

# REPORT TO AVSAC

1 May 2019

1. My focus over the past few months has been to gather information regarding the Community Based Outpatient Clinics (CBOC's) in my region from the perspective of both veterans seeking services and those who provide them. Here is some of the feedback I received:
  - a. Local hospital services – especially for emergency visits – continue to be a problem: Veterans are confused by the bills they receive and the hospitals still seem to have difficulty with billing issues. Billing from outside doctors is an example. The vets find themselves 'fighting' with the hospitals. Recommendation: More government oversight.
  - b. Mission Act: Many components still need clarification. More timely payment to providers – if Medicare can pay timely, why can't the VA? Recommendation: A dedicated source/office to answer questions and intense outreach (especially to physicians and other professionals in the community) and staff training. Explain why a Choice recipient must reapply for services under the Mission Act. Who refers patient? VA (Choice now)?
  - c. Staffing at CBOC's: The mental health provider at the Lake Havasu City CBOC left 3 years ago and hasn't been posted since – Kingman needs an FTE RN – other staff positions unfilled out here. Recommendation: More aggressive effort to staff positions. Consider COLA.
  - d. Sourcing employees for rural communities: How about student loan reimbursement – commit to a few years of VA work. Recommendation: Push for a change in the law!
  - e. Snowbirds: They seem to expect seamless care when they arrive – their regular medical providers, who know them well, are located elsewhere. Ex.: A knee replacement may better be done in their hometown. Recommendation: Education for snowbirds to better understand best practices for their care.
  - f. Expectations of CBOC's: Many vets don't quite understand that the local VA clinic is really like a doctor's office. Ex.: Expecting complicated urgent care to be provided. Recommendation: Education.
  - g. Issues related to the CBOC in Lake Havasu City: Enlarged or relocated CBOC promised for years – measure multiple times, but no progress to resolution. Safety issues still present: No security windows, no bathroom in the lobby, no back door for safe exit in a threat emergency, carpet in the offices (contaminant danger), etc. Recommendation: Decisive action needed now to keep our veterans and staff safe.
  - h. Communication: When Prescott staff visits to the area, veterans don't get the word that a visit is imminent and the CBOC staff don't receive enough notice – or receive none. They all need time to rearrange schedules, think about questions they need answered. Recommendation: Work on improving advance – and wide – notice to the vet community and VA staff.
  - i. Travel time for VA trainings: The process is more complicated and expensive for rural staff when training is in the big urban areas. Recommendation: Look at this issue with employees who may have some creative ideas to resolve the issues.
1. Education and employment for veterans: The State, the VA, and local business and schools are doing a good job of connecting vets with educational opportunities and providing guidance for success. The new vet centers at each of the 3 Mohave Community College campuses are a huge success as places for vet students to gather and work. Students love them and they look great! The local AZ at Work representative with a focus on vets is consistently successful in finding jobs for our vets.
2. Veterans Treatment Courts (VTC): Mohave and La Paz Counties have 4 Courts. Established Courts are working with the newer ones to help them develop processes and resources for success. The Parker Court struggles with the lack of resources for community components that are necessary for success. I've been working with the Bullhead City and Parker staff to initiate efforts to resolve some of their issues. The Lake Havasu VTC was proud to have Congressional Representative Gosar read a statement into the record in April praising its phenomenal success.
3. I keep in touch with our local politicians (State Senator Sonny Borrelli and State Rep. Leo Biasiucci) regularly to get updates on bills and regulations that affect veterans.
4. Vet Center: Needs counselors. The ones we have are great, but there just are not 'enough of them',.
5. The WW I Memorial in Kingman restoration is progressing at an acceptable pace.

Respectfully submitted:

Joan B. McDermott  
Commissioner  
AVSAC  
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