



**Department of Veterans Affairs
State of Connecticut**

**Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes
March 27, 2020**

(Minutes subject to review at next Board Meeting)

I. Convene Meeting:

The Meeting (conducted via Teleconference) was called to order by Chairman Thomas at 3:00 PM.

In attendance were Trustees: John Banks, Paul Barry, Richard Benson, Juan Cruz, Peter Galgano, Steven Harris, Alyssa Kelleher, Frederick Leaf, Sharad Samy, Heather Sandler, Mark Spranzo, Michael Thomas, Sherri Vogt and Dawn Works-Dennis.

Absent Trustes: Phil Cacciola, Richard Dziekan, Patrick Nelligan and Kjell Tollefsen.

In attendance from the DVA: Commissioner Thomas Saadi, Darlene Deschaine, Tammy Marzik, and Leslie Nieves.

Chairman Thomas entertained a motion to approve the minutes of the previous meeting. Motion made by Trustee Leaf and seconded by Trustee Galgano. Motion passed with one abstain from Trustee Benson who requested another copy of January 3rd minutes sent to him. No other corrections or edits to the minutes.

Chairman Thomas stated that this meeting would focus on the DVA response to the COVID-19 health emergency including updates on policies, protocols and procedures to protect the health, safety and welfare of the Veteran Residents, Veterans Patients and DVA Staff. One exception would be to address Trustee Benson's request to discuss the Cemetery Master Plan. Trustee Benson withdrew that request and stated he would approach the issue at a later date. Chairman Thomas then asked Commissioner Thomas Saadi to provide a COVID-19 update.

Commissioner Saadi explained that he remains on active military duty in NY and is subject to DoD travel restrictions, however he is in daily contact with DVA managers and staff, including on weekends, and DVA senior managers and he are on the daily Governor's Unified Command calls and tele-meetings with state and federal agencies to ensure safe and continuous DVA operations.

Commissioner Saadi reported that the DVA has been taking a proactive approach to mitigating the risk of exposure to and transmission of COVID-19 since early March and has implemented a broad range of temporary COVID-19 mitigation protocols. These include restrictions on visitors to the DVA Campus, restrictions on travel by Veterans Residents and Patients, establishing an isolation/quarantine unit in the

Residential Facility, conducting daily health screens of Veterans and restrictions on admissions to the Residential and Healthcare programs. The travel by Veteran Patients is limited to medical appointments and humanitarian circumstances. For any Veterans returning from off Campus hospitalization are subject to enhanced medical screening, verification from the transferring facility that the Veteran has been screened and tested negative for COVID-19, additionally such Veterans are subject to a 14 day isolation. Residential Veteran off Campus passes have been limited to 10 residents per day with a four hour time limit for each pass. Upon the return to Campus the Veteran is subject to inspection of bags and vehicles and an enhanced medical screening. Those Veterans who leave Campus without a pass or who present an increased risk of exposure to COVID-19, are subject to 14 day isolation on Campus. The DVA is providing required personal protective equipment (PPE) to staff and Veterans.

Commissioner Saadi reported that movement on Campus has been restricted and that Residential Veterans may not visit the HCC and vice versa and all off Campus recreational activities have been suspended however, DVA staff is implementing on campus recreation that is social distancing compliant.

Chairman Thomas asked about the inventory of the DVA's PPE to which Commissioner Saadi reported that he DVA has at least a sixty day supply of PPE and, as the burn rate is expected to increase, the DVA is reaching out to current vendors and has submitted requests through WEBEOC for additional supplies to ensure a ninety day supply that is able to handle a COVID-19 surge. Commissioner Saadi reported that he has been in close contact with Federal VA Director Al Montoya and recently had a conference call that included Joseph Danao, Chairman Thomas and Vice-Chairman Nelligan. The call focused on sharing best practices and coordination of efforts in support of Connecticut's Veterans.

Commissioner Saadi reported that while the DVA is responding to COVID-19 regular operations continue including the ADA construction project and other Campus improvements. In closing the Commissioner asked that Trustees help support our Veterans mental health by reaching out to them through email and phone calls, and continue to think outside the box and come up with recreational activities that follow social distancing protocols.

Chairman Thomas asked Trustee Spranzo for his input on the COVID-19 protocols and procedures from the Veteran perspective. Trustee Spranzo stated that his main concern is the mental health of the Veterans with the travel restrictions and suspension of most recreational activities. Commissioner Saadi stated that Director Nieves, Trustee Spranzo and former Veteran Resident President Ron Coveney would work closely together to come up with other recreational activities and travel options.

Chairman Thomas then thanked the DVA staff for their work, energy and continued efforts in keeping up with the challenges during this pandemic.

II. Closing

There being no further business, Chairman Thomas entertained a motion to adjourn. Motion was made and passed unanimously at 3:59 PM.

Respectfully Submitted:



Michael Thomas, Chair
DVA Board of Trustees

Date April 17, 2020