



**Department of Veterans Affairs
State of Connecticut**

**Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes
March 19, 2019**

(Minutes subject to review at next Board Meeting)

I. Convene Meeting:

In the absence of an appointed Chairperson the Meeting was called to order by Commissioner Saadi at 3:34 PM in the DVA Commissioner's conference room.

Pledge of allegiance was led by DVA Residential Director Lesbia Nieves followed by the taking of attendance of Board members.

In attendance: Mark Altieri, Paul Barry, Philip Cacciola, John Banks, Robert Cheslock, Richard Dziekan, Peter Galgano, Frederick Leaf, Patrick Nelligan, and Kjell Tollefsen. Also in attendance from the DVA staff, Commissioner Thomas Saadi, Patrice Olson, Laura Nelson, Ryan McKenna, Joe Danao, Lesbia Nieves, Tammy Marzik and Darlene Deschaine.

Absent: Steven Harris, Alyssa Kelleher, Paul Tarbox, and Michael Thomas.

A motion was entertained and passed by the Board to appoint Board Member Pat Nelligan as the Acting Chairman until such time Governor Lamont appoints a new Chairperson. Acting Chair Nelligan entertained a motion to approve the minutes of the previous meeting. Motion made by Trustee Dziekan and seconded by Trustee Leaf. Motion passed unanimously with no corrections or edits to the minutes.

Commissioner's update: The Commissioner reported on recent events and achievements of the CT DVA. The Commissioner attended many events throughout the state including several Wartime Service Medal. The Commissioner also reported that the DVA hosted several visits and campus tours by state with State Legislators as well as a visit from Representative Carpino assisting school children in the distribution of Valentine's Day cards to veterans at the Healthcare Center. Governor Lamont visited the DVA and met with senior staff and toured the Campus. In a follow up email, the Governor's staff requested additional information regarding the DVA's funding and planned projects. The DVA also hosted a tour with dignitaries from the Ukrainian Delegation, which included the newly appointed Ukrainian Ministry of Veterans Affairs. The Commissioner reported on some of the upcoming events which include the Dedication of Camp Nett on March 25th in Windsor Locks, the Easterseals 32nd Annual Crystal Ball being held on March 30th and the Opening Day game of the Yard Goats on April 5th at which a stadium chair will be donated and dedicated in honor of our country's POWs. The Commissioner reported that he will be participating in several Memorial Day Parades and Memorial Day Events throughout the state.

The Acting Chair recognized Trustees Dziekan and Leaf who questioned the status of the Governor's appointees to the Board of Trustees. The Commissioner reported that there are a total of 18 positions on the Board of Trustees of which the Governor appoints 10 members including the Chairperson. There are currently 6 Legislative Appointments made and a Veteran representative from the Healthcare Center and one from the Residential facility. The Commissioner assured the Board that he has been in contact with the Governor's Office urging the reappointment of those wishing to stay on the Board and to appoint several new trustees with a focus on women Veterans.

II. Old Business

A. DVA Healthcare Center Update (HCC) – License Transition:

Acting Chair Nelligan asked Commissioner Saadi for an update on the Healthcare Transition process who then explained that the DVA continues the process of the transition through internal DVA assets and the support of other state agencies. The Commissioner reported on updates to the B-Clinic (Residential outpatient clinic) which will transition to a regular single shift during the week and a half shift on Saturdays. This approach will provide the level of care needed to Residential Veterans while continuing to work with them to build their capacity to be more independent and self-reliant. The Commissioner reported that Dr. Ramano, attending physician at the HCC, has decided to leave the DVA to join another state agency, however, the DVA a plan in place through a partnership with UConn Health for a Medical Director and multiple attending physicians to provide care at the HCC. As part of the license transition the Commissioner explained that the DVA was able to avoid outsourcing the pharmacy and rehabilitative services departments, while laboratory work will be performed through the expansion of an existing agreement with Quest laboratories. The Commissioner reported that OPM approved many new staff positions which include the hiring of up to 12 additional CNAs, a Director of Nursing, an additional Social Worker and Recreational Rehabilitation staff. Overall this will result in the increase from 3.5 to 4.0 hours of patient care per day.

Trustee Barry voiced his concerns regarding the reduced hours of the B-Clinic and the safety and health of the veterans, especially those veterans that may forget to take their meds or may fall through the cracks. In response Director Nieves assured the Board members that the social workers and the Veteran Residents have been working closely to update their treatment plans to ensure overall health and wellbeing. Trustee Benson asked why the lab work couldn't go the DPH lab that is situated next to the Department of Veterans Affairs. HCC Director Laura Nelson stated that the state laboratory is a forensic lab and does not conduct the testing that DVA requires whereas, Quest Laboratories sends out phlebotomists, does the lab work DVA needs and is a state approved contractor with the State of CT.

B. Fiscal Report:

The Commissioner reported on the Budget and staffing trends stating that the overall recommended 2019-20 budget appropriated funds comes to \$23 million, of which \$500,000 plus goes to Soldiers, Sailors, Marine Fund. The IGW Contribution is \$3 million, with a DVA total budget of \$26 million. The IGW Contribution goes towards the Veterans Therapeutic Program, Pharmaceuticals and other support programs directly for veterans. The Commissioner went on the state that the \$2 million that was removed two years ago was restored last year and is not cut this year. The majority of the money is funded through program fees and spend down. The IGW Contribution funds does not go towards salaries, benefits or capital structure. As pointed out by Acting Chair Nelligan if anyone wants to contribute towards the

State of DVA, the IGW Contribution fund is recommended as it has six donation funds to which anyone may contribute.

C. Projects Update

Commissioner Saadi provided some general information on the water main break which occurred the week of March 18th. Projects and Operations Director Joe Danao provided a general DVA Projects update including the Fire Alarm Project and the Cemetery projects. The cemetery expansion plan is 99% complete and at the moment the appearance project is on a weather hold due to the very wet conditions and will continue once the grounds have dried. Mr. Danao went on to report that the Fire Alarm replacement in Residential is nearly complete and the Healthcare Center replacements have begun.

The Commissioner asked OA&A Director, Ryan McKenna, about the Cemetery Master Plan and the plan to hold informational sessions around the State. Mr. McKenna stated that the ideal plan is to hold a session on the DVA Campus, one in Western CT and one in Eastern CT to get the word out to the public. Mr. Danao stated that to continue with the Cemetery Master Plan an environmental process must go through before proceeding further, delivering this project publically is required. Trustee Barry said that when the informational sessions are scheduled it is important to invite Funeral Directors. Commissioner Saadi stated that the announcements regarding these sessions will be sent out to the Board of Trustees, Statewide Veteran Service Organizations, Municipal Veteran Reps as well as the CT Funeral Directors Association.

III. New Business

A. C-Wing: Semi-private and semi-independent living model.

Acting Chair asked the Commissioner to report on the restructuring plan.

Commissioner Saadi reported that A-Wing renovation has been put on a temporary hold due to financial constraints. The Commissioner then explained that with the input from DVA Residential Staff the DVA has developed an alternate plan to reconfigure C-Wing to provide semi-private/independent living model without the cost of construction. The existing rooms will provide living quarters for two individuals rather than four, with privacy walls, new paint, polished floors, and cleaned lockers. Director Nieves explained that that Veterans would have basic upkeep responsibilities one day per week such as cleaning rooms, common hallway and the bathrooms on their Wing. A DVA staff cleaning crew would perform a deep clean once a week. Director Nieves went on to say that priority would be given to those Veterans that are working or attending school. Director Nieves stated that, overall, she did receive positive feedback from the veterans and a survey will be conducted soon regarding this matter. The goal is to provide a positive more self-reliant environment for our veterans. In response to questions from Trustees the Commissioner explained that this agency cannot legally impose a time limit on residency. The timeframe for this project is to have it in place by June or July.

Acting Chair Nelligan opened the meeting up to questions and further new business. Trustee Benson was concerned that with much of DVA funding going to staffing of the HCC that funding was being denied to other areas of the agency such as Veteran Services Officers. Director McKenna addressed the staffing concerns by stating that the DVA currently has seven Veteran Service Officers assigned to the 5 districts and recently hired a new office assistant for Cemetery and Memorial Services. The Commissioner added that no staffing or projects were being reduced or neglected based on HCC staffing

however, the DVA has been prioritizing the allocation of resources to meet HCC license transition deadlines. Trustee Benson raised a concern brought up at the last Board of Trustees meeting regarding the funding of Wreaths Across America. Director McKenna informed the Board of Trustees that a draft was provided to the former Chairperson but that he does not believe it was mailed to Wreaths Across America. A motion was made by the board and passed that a letter will be written by Acting Chairman Patrick Nelligan and mailed out promptly to Wreaths Across America mainly to find out how the fundraising is done.

The Commissioner reported on the DVA's compilation of a variety of Federal and State mental health resources for Veterans and their employers on the DVA website. The Commissioner also reported that he has reinstated a policy to conduct random inspections of the Veteran's facilities due to the uptick of contraband violations over the previous few months. This was communicated to Veteran Residents at a town hall meeting.

IV. Closing

The Chair stated that the next board meeting will be held on May 1, 2019 at 3:30 pm. There being no further business, Acting Chair Nelligan entertained a motion to adjourn. Motion was made by Trustee Benson and seconded by Trustee Leaf. Motion passed unanimously at 4:56 PM.

Respectfully Submitted:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Patrick Nelligan', written over a horizontal line. The signature is somewhat stylized and loops back.

Patrick Nelligan, Acting Chair
DVA Board of Trustees

Date 1 April 2019