



**Department of Veterans Affairs  
State of Connecticut**

**Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes  
April 10, 2024**

*(Minutes subject to review at next Board Meeting)*

**I. Convene Meeting:**

The Meeting was held in the Commissioner's Conference Room at the Department of Veterans Affairs located at 287 West Street, Rocky Hill, CT.

Trustees in attendance: Paul Barry, Phil Cacciola, Carlita Cotton, Tara Desjardins, Richard Dzieken, Peter Galgano Jr., Professor Moore, Sharad Samy, Heather Sandler, Michael Saylor and Sherri Vogt.

Absent:, Juan Cruz, Richard Harris, Adele Hodges, Alyssa Kelleher, John Lawlor, Frederick Leaf, Patrick Nelligan and Michael Saylor.

DVA Staff in attendance: Commissioner Ronald P. Welch, John Carragher, Lori Conchado, Joseph Danao, Lindsay Jesshop, Adrienne Nails, and Lesbia Nieves.

In the absence of Chair, Patrick Nelligan and Co-Chair John Lawlor, Commissioner Welch called the meeting to order at 3:34 p.m. and offered a motion to accept minutes for the January 31, 2023 meeting, which were accepted by Ms. Vogt and Mr. Galgano.

Action: Motion made, seconded, and carried.

Commissioner asked for a moment of silence to acknowledge the potential of Iran targeting military and government facilities in response to the April 1 Israeli airstrike that killed seven officials in Damascus.

Commissioner Welch provided an overview of DVA achievements for the past quarter to include three highly successful DVA events held on campus in the Gold Star Families Memorial Auditorium. In January the Hall of Fame induction ceremony welcomed 11 new members to a growing list of honorees, in February the agency held its Black History Month celebration with keynote speaker, Dr. Carlita Cotton and in March a Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans ceremony was attended by a record number of Veterans honoring their service to our country.

Commissioner reported on several collaborations with state agencies and private providers working on initiatives to include Governor Lamont's inter-agency collaboration to connect individuals with case managers in hubs statewide to assist with housing, Lt. Governor Bysiewicz's Commission on Women & Children and the induction of female Veterans in the Hall of Fame, Sgt. Fox Suicide Grant, DOL/DAS/DOT initiative to hire Veterans to fill shortages of EMS personnel, Department of Labor grant to provide outreach to Veterans for employment, and the Cohen Network's offering of mental health services.

Commissioner attended a PACT act press conference held at the Federal VA in West Haven with Senator Blumenthal to announce the expansion of PACT Act benefits and attended the National Association of State Department of Veterans Affairs conference in Washington with Secretary McDonough in attendance. The main topic discussed was the new Buy America Build America (BABA) requirement that will affect projects on campus.

The Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services and 211 visited the campus to view Building 50 as a possible temporary site for relocation of staff.

Commissioner Welch visited sites in Winsted and Hartford with private citizens and Legislators to provide support and gain insight into potential locations for Veteran housing. Internally, Easter Seals CT announced they will not renew their lease for on campus housing to Veterans on Levitow Lane as of 5/1. The DVA intends to utilize ARPA funds to renovate the buildings and provide additional housing for families as an extension of the Patriot's Landing program.

Upcoming events include preparations for Memorial Day ceremonies throughout the state and on campus, Salvation Army Band performance, Vet Rep Training and Stand Down 2024 scheduled for September 20<sup>th</sup>.

## **II. Old/Ongoing Business**

### **A. Fiscal Report**

Ms. Adrienne Nails reported the first, second and third quarter allotments are on track and the DVA is planning a balanced budget for 2024.

### **B. Projects & Operations Report**

Deputy Commissioner Danao reported the DVA is looking for additional funding to support the pricing increase to boiler project. DC Danao will be meeting with DEEP on 4/11 to discuss. In response to Trustee Barry's inquiry on the delay of this project, DC Danao explained the lengthy state process for projects including a 6% inflation adjustment which requires additional funding consideration during a period where 51% of our budget is allotted to our utilities due to increases. The design for the boiler is at 100% today and ready to go out for bid. Next steps are the bidding process. Other high priority projects include critical fire safety projects. DC Danao presented a Facility Capitalization Plan for 2022-2026.

### **C. Office of Advocacy & Assistance**

OA&A manager, John Carragher reported working with Human Resources to fill staff vacancies due to staff turnover. A Veteran Services Supervisor and two new VSO's were hired and in place. Ongoing projects include the reorganization of cemetery files in preparation of the upcoming Federal VA cemetery assessment, work with Tyler Tech creating a case management database to track claims and provide empirical data, access for office assistants to view case in the federal PIV card system and leveraging funding in the DOL grant to finalize renovations to building 18 to house OA&A staff. Upcoming events include a Municipal Vet Rep training on 6/14, a ceremony is planned at the state cemetery in Middletown on June 7th for the Repatriated remains of a recently identified WWII Army Veteran from Normandy and Mr. Carragher will be attending the National Cemetery Leadership Conference on April 15 – 19<sup>th</sup>.

D. Legislative Update

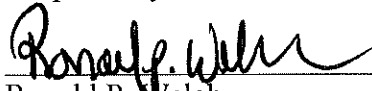
Manager of Community Advocacy, Ms. Jesshop reported that the DVA has not submitted bills for this session but has been tracking all bills related to Veterans and has been contacted by Legislators requesting information. One request was associated with SB 344 “An Act Concerning Federal Veterans’ Benefits and Income Eligibility Determinations for Certain Public Assistance Programs” regarding information on property tax exemptions for 100% Disabled Veterans and the fiscal impact on the state.

**Closing**

Commissioner Welch announced the retirement of Lesbia Nieves, Director of Residential Services effective July 1, 2024 and thanked her for her service and dedication to our Veterans.

There being no further business Commissioner Welch entertained a motion to adjourn which was accepted by Trustee Vogt, seconded by Trustee Barry and the meeting adjourned at 4:35 p.m. The next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, July 10, 2024 at 3:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted:



Ronald P. Welch  
DVA Commissioner

Date: April 17, 2024

