

**Board of Veterans Services
Benefits Committee
Meeting Minutes
December 22, 2014**

A meeting of the Board of Veterans Services (BVS) Benefits Committee was held on Monday, December 22, 2014 at the Virginia War Memorial, 621 S. Belvidere St, Richmond.

Members Present

- Belinda Pinckney, Committee Chairman
- William Nicholas, Committee Vice Chairman
- James Icenhour, Committee Member
- Sandra Love, Committee Member
- Don Kaiserman, BVS Chairman
- Johnny Johnson, BVS Vice Chairman
- Susan Hippen, BVS Secretary
- Jack Hilgers, representing the Veterans Services Foundation (VSF)
- Steven Combs, representing the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations (JLC)
- John L. Newby II, Commissioner, Department of Veterans Services (DVS)

Members Absent

- None

State Officials Present

- Tom Herthel, DVS Director of Benefits Services
- Donna Williams, Eastern District Manager, Benefits Services, DVS

Materials Distributed

- Agenda
- Summary of JLC 2015 Initiatives
- JLC Position Paper 2015-01, DVS Veterans Service Representatives and Benefits Offices
- BVS Position Paper 2015-02, Benefit Services Section

Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance

Chairman Belinda Pinckney called the meeting to order at 10:03 a.m. The members recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Quorum Determination and Agenda Approval

10 members were recorded as present and a quorum was determined.

Mr. James Icenhour made a **motion, seconded** by Mr. William Nicholas, to approve the agenda as presented. The motion carried **unanimously**.

Approve draft Minutes of the June 26, 2013 meeting

Ms. Susan Hippen made a **motion, seconded** by Mr. Icenhour, to approve the minutes of the June 26, 2013 meeting as presented. The motion carried **unanimously**.

Preview of 2015 General Assembly session

Mr. Steven Combs delivered a presentation on some of the budget and legislative proposals that will be addressed during the 2015 General Assembly session. He noted that the full presentation would be delivered at the January 12, 2015 BVS meeting, and that the Department would be seeking the Board's endorsement and support of the legislative and budget issues he addressed, including the creation of Veterans Treatment Courts.

DVS Commissioner John Newby noted that the \$1,750,201 included in the Governor's budget for the Benefits Services section was extremely significant, because most state agencies had level or reduced funding. He added that DVS was one of the few state agencies with new funding, and stated that it was due to the combined advocacy of the BVS, the JLC and the Department, and the support of Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs John C. Harvey, Jr. and Governor Terry McAuliffe.

Commissioner Newby apologized to the committee that he had to leave for another meeting. He asked DVS Benefits Services Director Tom Herthel to serve as his representative for the remainder of the meeting.

Benefit Services Section

Mr. Herthel delivered a presentation on the Benefits Services Section, covering:

- Section history;
- Population served;
- Staffing and organization;
- Services provided;
- Budget and economic impact;
- Budget, staffing, training, process, and facility challenges;
- Remediation – steps taken and planned to address challenges;
- FY16 funding (Governor McAuliffe's introduced budget) and FY17-18 funding.

Mr. Herthel noted that the \$1,750,201 in new funding proposed in Governor McAuliffe's introduced budget would enable DVS to:

- Add five positions at understaffed locations:
 - Veterans Service Representatives (VSRs) at three Benefits Offices (McGuire VAMC, Salem VAMC, Tidewater Area);
 - Veterans Service Administrators (VSAs) at the Fairfax Benefits Office and the Roanoke Center of Excellence (COE);
- Add six new positions:
 - VSRs at two new Benefits Offices (locations to be determined);
 - VSAs at the Henrico and Hampton VAMC Benefits Offices and the two new offices;

Board of Veterans Services Benefits Committee Meeting Minutes
December 22, 2014

- Convert 13 VSAs to VSR Positions;
- Make appropriate salary adjustments;
- Provide annual training;
- Fund office furnishings/signage/relocations;
- Purchase needed IT equipment.

The committee members took a break at 12:10 p.m. A working lunch was served and the meeting resumed at 12:25 p.m.

The committee members asked many questions during Mr. Herthel's presentation. It was the consensus of the committee that the funding included in Governor McAuliffe's introduced budget was absolutely critical to ensuring that Virginia's veterans and the families are served. The committee requested that DVS provide an updated position paper and talking points as soon as possible so that committee members could better advocate for the \$1,750,201 in new funding.

Open discussion

Chairman Pinckney asked each person present if there were any significant items for further discussion. None were raised.

Committee report and preparation for the January 12, 2015 BVS meeting

It was the consensus of the committee that a summary of the information from Mr. Herthel's presentation be brought to the full BVS at the January 12, 2015 meeting. Chairman Pinckney stated that she would prepare the committee's report with a summary of Mr. Herthel's presentation and would present the committee's report at the BVS meeting.

Chairman Pinckney asked Mr. Combs and Mr. Herthel to submit a draft revision of Position Paper BVS 2015-01 for her review and approval, and noted that she would present the revised paper to the full Board for its review and approval.

Chairman Pinckney called for quarterly committee meetings and/or status updates from DVS on the Benefits Services section, to which all committee members agreed.

Adjournment

There being no further business before the committee, Ms. Hippen made a **motion, seconded** by Ms. Sandra Love, that the meeting be adjourned. The motion carried **unanimously** and the meeting adjourned at 1:54 p.m.