



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Department of Veterans Services

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Commissioner

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Virginia Department of Veterans Services (VDVS) Update for the Board of Veterans Services April 16, 2021

As we start the fourth quarter of Commonwealth Fiscal Year (CFY) and the impact of the COVID pandemic starts to decrease, the Virginia Department of Veterans Services (VDVS) is excited about the prospect of serving more veterans and their families.

With declining positivity rates and more Virginians being vaccinated, VDVS is expanding its in-person services. Currently, 32 of 34 VDVS offices are scheduling regular (in-person) office appointments for veterans seeking face-to-face services, instead of essential-only assistance. While Benefits claims are down by 35% over last year, we are seeing an increase in in-person assistance and claims submittals to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

As of April 14, 2021, neither Veterans Care Center has active COVID cases. This is a tremendous accomplishment following outbreaks at both care centers in October and another at Virginia Veterans Care Center (VVCC) in late December. We are actively seeking new admissions at both care centers and we have restarted limited family visitations. Unfortunately, the large increase in costs and the significant reductions in census at both care centers due to COVID greatly impacted revenues from operations, to the point that both care centers forecasted operational deficits, even with CARES Act supplements. Therefore, VDVS requested supplemental funding to cover those deficits, which we expect to persist through CFY 2022. VVCC has seen its census begin to increase and we are hopeful this trend continues, as it will reduce the amount of supplemental funds needed. SBVCC has yet to see a notable improvement in its census despite the efforts of the marketing team. Finally, we anticipate receiving additional funding through the Federal Consolidated Appropriations Act and America Rescue Plan.

Cemeteries had a record month in February as both Horton (Suffolk) and Amelia conducted record numbers of interments, and Dublin exceeded their monthly average. Construction will start on the \$5.2M expansion project in April at the Virginia Veterans Cemetery at Amelia, and will be completed in early calendar year 2022. We have also submitted a grant request to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for columbaria expansion at Southwest Virginia Veterans Cemetery in Dublin. To help cover increased operations and personnel costs, we are increasing spousal burial fees from \$300 to \$400 on July 1, 2021.

The Virginia War Memorial (VWM) is open to visitors and the team continues to offer a wide array of educational opportunities in person and virtually. These offerings included special programming

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during Black History and Women History months, and the recent celebration of K-9 Veterans Day. Additionally, the Virginia War Memorial recently added two names to the Shrine of Memory - one who was killed in 1951 in Korea and one who was killed in the bombing of the US Embassy in Beirut in 1983. Since Memorial Day last year, we added four names to the Shrine of Memory. Finally, we will hold a televised Memorial Day service at VWM.

Virginia Veterans and Family Support (VVFS) is seeing numbers trend upward and 31% of their clients require housing assistance. They are also seeking ways to build capacity and improve resource connections for veterans and families, to include peer support and prevention of suicide among service members, veterans, and families (SMVF). This includes the expansion of Virginia's Identify SMVF, Screen for Suicide Risk, and Refer for Services (VISR) pilot, Crisis Intercept Mapping in conjunction with the VA and DBHDS, and Crisis Intervention Training. Of note, Blacksburg Veteran Peer Specialist and Resource Specialist held a peer support group meeting in person for the first time since the COVID pandemic.

VDVS' Women Veterans Program had a successful Women Veterans Week in March. The week included programming at the Virginia War Memorial and recorded remarks by the Governor, Secretary Hopkins, Deputy Secretary Jabs, Delegate Murphy, and Senator Kiggans. As our Women Veterans Program Manager prepares for the Women Veterans Summit, which will be held virtually again this year in June, she continues to build partnerships with the VA and others who are focused on improving outcomes for women veterans. The agency will build on efforts to make strategic connections that improve advocacy for services unique to Virginia's women veterans.

The Virginia Values Veterans (V3) program now has 1388 certified companies and our V3 Regional Coordinators are constantly building on their networks to generate interest in the program. V3 has distributed all of the \$100,000 allocated for veteran hiring grants in CFY 2021 and will delay awarding future grants until CFY 2022. We added voluntary veteran mental health awareness training for interested V3 companies.

The State Approving Agency (SAA) is one of six states to be part of a pilot for risk-based surveys of GI Bill approved schools. Risk-based surveys focus on veteran outcome and return on investment versus compliance-based surveys which ensure that all GI Bill funds were disbursed to students.

Our Veteran Transition Assistance Program (VTAP) program has seen steady numbers of TSMs looking for assistance. We have recently made great strides in the Tidewater area with briefings to high-level senior enlisted leaders at major Navy commands. Finally, VTAP has an average salary of \$95,000 for its clients (n=21).

Through our Military Education and Workforce Initiative (MEWI), VDVS will distribute 225 laptops to veteran students and military spouses at two central Virginia community colleges. This program was made possible by a partnership with the Veterans Services Foundation (VSF), Altria, Virginia Community College System (VCCS) and a local non-profit.. MEWI is also exploring a similar program in the Tidewater area.

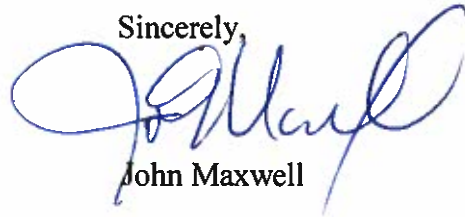
During the 2021 General Assembly Session, reductions from the 2020 General Assembly Special Session regarding Veteran Peer Specialists, Resource Specialists, Veterans Services Administrators, and an Assistant Women Veterans Program Manager were restored. In addition, a Military Spouse Liaison position was added and funded. We also had legislative actions passed that expanded the partner health care systems eligible for inclusion in our Military Medic and Corpsman (MMAC) program; and our comprehensive transition program will now be codified effective 1 July, helping to better define roles

and improve collaboration with the Virginia Employment Commission in hiring transitioning service members and veterans. We are very grateful for the tremendous support and advocacy for the agency.

Finally, we have reviewed the One Virginia plan recently promulgated by Governor Northam. Because of the work we started last year, we are well-positioned to integrate One Virginia into our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity efforts. We have been working closely with a representative from DHRM and our leadership will be part of a pilot of their first training on cultural competence.

Despite the challenges of COVID, we have been able to make headway. We look forward to working with the Board of Veterans Services to refine and achieve our strategic priorities and the Compact with Virginia's veterans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John Maxwell", written in a cursive style.

John Maxwell