

Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations
Meeting Minutes
May 14, 2021

A virtual meeting of the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations (the JLC) was held on May 14, 2021.

Members Present

- Richard Oertel, American Legion
- John Cooper, AMVETS
- Michael Flanagan, Association of the United States Army
- Denice Williams, Disabled American Veterans
- William Ashton, Fleet Reserve Association
- Lauren Augustine, Iraq & Afghanistan Veterans of America
- Robert Herbert, Legion of Valor
- James Barrett, Marine Corps League
- Monti Zimmerman, Military Officers Association of America
- Preston Curry, Paralyzed Veterans of America
- Vernon Peters, Military Order of the World Wars
- James Cuthbertson, Military Order of the Purple Heart
- Vernon Peters, Military Order of the World Wars
- Perry Taylor, Roanoke Valley Veterans Council
- David Sitler, Reserve Officers Association
- Robert Barnette, Virginia Army/Air National Guard Enlisted Association
- Michelle Ramos, Navy Mutual Aid Association
- Michael Flanagan, Association of the United States Army
- Michael Dick, Chairman, Board of Veterans Services
- John Lesinski, Chairman, Veterans Services Foundation
- John Maxwell, Commissioner, Department of Veterans Services

Members Absent

- Thomas Wozniak, Air Force Association
- Tim Whitmore, Korean War Veterans Association
- Daniel Boyer, Veterans of Foreign Wars
- Kevin Hoffman, Virginia National Guard Association
- Judy Reid, Women Marines Association
- John Manning, Fifth Baptist Church Veterans Ministry
- Mike Boyle, Navy Seabee Veterans of America
- Jon Ostrowski, Non Commissioned Officers Association
- David Sitler, Reserve Officers Association
- Charles Montgomery, Vietnam Veterans of America

Alternates Present (representing their VSO)

- Rich Shook, Air Force Association

- Robert Sempek, Association of the United States Army
- Rick Raskin, Veterans of Foreign Wars
- Mark Atchison, Military Order of the Purple Heart

Alternates Present (not representing their VSO)

- Rich Rinaldo, Legion of Valor

Commonwealth of Virginia Officials Present

- Acting Secretary Kathleen Jabs
- Steven Combs, Department of Veterans Services (DVS)
- Annie Walker, DVS
- Tom Herthel, DVS
- Claudia Flores, DVS
- Brandi Jancaitis, DVS
- Ravi Padma, DVS
- Tim Bowden, DVS
- Beverly VanTull, DVS
- Mike Henshaw, DVS
- Martina Murray, DVS
- Nicole Anderson, DVS
- Preston Curry, DVS
- Jim Flaherty, OAG
- Larry Jarrell, DMV
- Walt Mercer, Department of Military Affairs

Items included in the Agenda Packet

- Draft Agenda (Agenda Item III)
- Draft Minutes December 16, 2020 meeting
- BVS Report to JLC
- VSF Report to JLC
- VSF Brief
- VDVS Operational Update
- VDVS Strategic Priorities Brief

Thoughts and meditation

Denise Williams provided opening thoughts, reflecting on the mission and the resolve to stand for the nation and Commonwealth. Chairman Ashton asked for thoughts on those military members deployed to include Secretary Hopkins.

Roll Call of VSOs and Quorum Determination

The roll was called, and 19 of the 24 Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) represented on the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations (the JLC) were recorded as being represented. A quorum was determined.

Approval of the Agenda (Attachment 1)

Chairman Ashton asked for a motion to approve the Agenda. Mr. Mark Atchison made a **motion, seconded** by Mr. Preston Curry, to approve the meeting agenda as presented. The motion carried by unanimous vote. (See Attachment 1).

Approve December 16, 2021 Meeting Minutes

Chairman Ashton asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the December 16, 2020 meeting. Mr. David Sitler made a **motion, seconded** by Ms. Lauren Augustine. The motion carried by unanimous vote.

Old Business

Chairman Ashton reminded those members whose term is ending June 30, 2021 that nomination letters must be submitted with the appointment recommendation.

Chairman Ashton noted his term as Chairman concludes June 30, 2021 along with Denise Williams as Vice Chairman. He noted that Mr. Dan Boyer is the nomination Chair and for those members who are interested in either the Chairman or the Vice Chairman, they should e-mail Mr. Boyer to express their interest.

Chairman Ashton asked for any questions. No questions heard.

Reports / Updates

Chairman Ashton turned the floor over to Chairman Dick from the Board of Veteran Services for his report.

BVS Report (Attachment 2)

Chairman Dick noted that two new members joined the BVS, Jenny Dye and Mario Flores. Chairman Dick commented that the focus of the April BVS meeting was the Virginia Compact with veterans and the VDVS Strategic Priorities. Chairman Dick noted the need to coordinate effort of state agencies to support veterans with VDVS as the primary point of entry. He also noted investment in the VDVS team.

Chairman Dick commented on the measurement of progress, and that BVS will work with VDVS to develop metrics. Chairman Dick noted BVS will work with JLC to support initiatives in line with VDVS strategic priorities.

Chairman Ashton thanked Chairman Dick and turned the floor over to Mr. Lesinski from the VSF for his report.

VSF Report (Attachment 3)

Mr. Lesinski commented that the VSF held a meeting on March 28 and noted Ms. James from Sentara will make \$150K donation to focus on veteran behavioral health and homelessness. He further noted the VSF works with the Virginia Community College system and VDVS to provide laptops, through the Altria Grant Fund, to veterans and / or their spouse.

Mr. Lesinski noted several new board members to the VSF and commented that the next meeting in

planned for June, 2021.

Chairman Ashton thanked Mr. Lesinski and asked for questions. No questions heard.

Chairman Ashton turned the floor over to Acting Secretary Jabs.

Acting Secretary Jabs thanks the JLC and VDVS for their work. She commented that she is retired Navy, the spouse of a retired military member and the mother of an active duty Coast Guard member, so she understands the military from many sides. She also commented that she looks forward to working with the JLC, BVS, and VSF moving forward, and noted May 14 is the National Guard birthday.

Chairman Ashton thanked the Acting Secretary and turned the floor over to Commissioner Maxwell.

VDVS Operational Update (*Attachement 4*)

Commissioner Maxwell provided an operational update. He noted the DVS staff is able return to face-to-face appointment given the decrease of COVID statistics. He commented on new positions for DVS in the next fiscal year. He noted the success of the VISR pilot program and commented on VVFS services. Commissioner Maxwell reported the care centers are COVID-free. He noted the success of the V3 program. He reported the Women Veteran Summit will be virtual this year beginning 23 June. He asked for questions.

Chairman Ashton thanked the Commissioner. Mike Flanagan how folks can volunteer to participate in the VISR program. Commissioner Maxwell noted the Director of VVFS is the point of contact but any of the leadership can put a volunteer in touch with the right person.

Chairman Ashton asked about the training involved for the VISR program. Nicole Anderson from VDVS responded to say the training can be anywhere from a couple of hours to days.

Chairman Ashton asked if VTAP advises others of the Skillbridge program. Commissioner Maxwell confirmed that VTAP makes those connections. Nicole Anderson confirmed the same.

Chairman Ashton explained the program further. Chairman Ashton then asked the Commissioner about the connection between the active component and the state, connecting members to suicide prevention services. Commissioner Maxwell that DoD may not have the authorities to inform the state if a member is struggling, so it really is up to the service member. If the service member comes to VDVS as they transition, then they become aware of the services and are able to seek assistance. The 'hand-off' then is through the transition process.

Chairman Ashton commented on the work between the VSF and VDVS to connect veterans to mental health services.

Commissioner Maxwell thanked the Chairman and noted the importance of screening and the VISR program.

Chairman Ashton turned the floor over to VSF for their brief

VSF Brief

Mr. Lesinski commented that VSF is separate and distinct is separate from DVS but exists to support DVS. VSF supplements funding for DVS programs with donations from corporations, organizations, and individuals. He noted VSF is a state agency and governed / administered by a board of trustees. He commented 100% of donated funds go to support veterans.

Mr. Lesinski gave an overview of programs VSF supports. He noted the MOAA Chapter in Lexington, VA provided a donation of \$16,195 for VVFS. He asked members of the JLC to let him know if VSF can present information to their VSO members.

Mr. Lesinski gave an overview of the VSF Board. MR. Lesinski thanked Chairman Ashton for the opportunity and asked for questions.

Mike Flanagan asked the funding trend for VSF over this past year. Mr. Lesinski said VSF is down in donation, but noted 3 pillars of corporate funding.

Chairman Ashton thanked Mr. Lesinski and echoed the comments encouraging members to make their members aware of the Foundation.

Chairman Ashton turned the floor over to Commissioner Maxwell.

VDVS Strategic Priorities

Commissioner Maxwell discussed VDVS as one of the primary port of entry to veteran services and noted it requires advocacy and partnerships. He commented on knowing the veteran's needs to connect them with resources. He commented on community awareness and highlighted the service lines.

Commissioner Maxwell reviewed the Code mandate to establish a Compact with Veterans. He noted IT enhancements, outreach, and improved quality of life as part of the Compact.

He briefed the Compact summary statement and highlighted the need for IT enhancements to meet requirements. He noted the goal of the Compact is to make Virginia the most veteran-friendly state in the nation. He commented on holistic approach to services.

Commissioner Maxwell discussed the strategic priority of VDVS serving as a Port of Entry. He commented on virtual services and security of software applications.

Commissioner Maxwell briefed the strategic priority of investing in the VDVS team and noted leadership development and diversity management. He noted the strength of inclusion. He further noted compensation packages and IT.

Commissioner Maxwell asked for questions.

Chairman Ashton thanked the Commissioner and asked for questions.

Mike Flanagan asked about the broad band initiative and asked for the Commissioner's thoughts. Commissioner Maxwell noted the VA medical centers control the telehealth capability. He commented that VDVS is building virtual peer support groups.

Chairman Dick of the BVS commented that the strategic priorities seem hard to quantify and asked the Commissioner if there is any effort toward identifying measures.

Commissioner Maxwell noted VDVS established metrics and commented VDVS is working to identify the measures for the strategic priorities. Chairman Dick commented that BVS is looking to assist VDVS in this area. Chairman Ashton commented that a veteran's satisfaction with service is hard to quantify but critical in outreach. Commissioner Maxwell agreed with the importance of satisfaction surveys.

Potential Initiatives for 2022

Chairman Ashton thanks the JLC members for their work during the 2021 General Assembly session contacting legislative members on JLC initiatives.

Chairman Ashton reflected on initiatives that members might consider to include initiatives supporting women veterans, education benefits, and suicide prevention. Chairman Ashton opened the floor.

Monti Zimmerman commented on the low-income veteran JLC initiative and noted the retiree benefit would assist many veterans. He commented MOAA would consider co-sponsoring this initiative again in 2022.

Chairman Ashton asked for papers in time for the July meeting.

Chairman Dick of the BVS commented that the initiatives from 2021 and noted a focus on Virginia's most vulnerable veterans for 2022 initiatives. He further noted from the education, transition, and employment avenue, financial support for veterans to attend such programs would be beneficial and commented on two such programs.

Chairman Dick also proposed the benefits of a requirement for state organizations to report the number of veterans on staff.

Mr. Sitler discussed an initiative for personnel deployed to have their ballots counted and highlighted an initiative to extend the deadline for absentee ballots.

Chairman Ashton thanked Mr. Sitler and reminded the membership that VSO's need to submit the initiatives. He commented financial impact should not stop a VSO from submitting an initiative. Chairman Ashton asked members to canvas their organization and other veteran organizations as well.

Jim Barrett discussed the initiative from the Marine Corps League concerning exemption for VSOs performing funeral honors from paramilitary activities.

Chairman Ashton encouraged members to get their letters ready for the next JLC meeting.

Rick Oertel recommended that members seek Senatorial sponsors for initiatives.
Chairman Ashton asked for any additional comments.

Public Comment

Chairman Ashton asked for public comment.

Mr. Martin said he was looking forward to meeting the JLC members.

Ms. Tracy Voelke, the surviving spouse of Major Paul C. Voelke who was killed in Afghanistan in a vehicle accident on his 5th deployment, asked about the property tax exemption for surviving spouses. Although her husband spent 14 years on active duty, completed multiple combat deployments and was killed in a vehicle accident, she does not currently qualify for property tax exemption according to the qualification requirements written in the Code of Virginia. She commented she would like to see this initiative forwarded again in 2022.

Monti Zimmerman asked for her contact information noting the value of Ms. Voelke to speak to this issue.

Mr. Sitler commented on the VMAC meeting held in March 2022. He summarized the meeting and noted that Oceana is considering a redesign of security around the base with an outer and inner perimeter. This would allow the base to become a more open base.

Rick Oertel commented the same type of initiative at Fort Lee for the public to visit the museums.
Mike Flanagan noted the same with respect to Fort Lee.

Good of the Order

Chairman Ashton noted the possibility of holding the July meeting as an in-person meeting.

Adjourn

Chairman Ashton adjourned the meeting.

ATTACHMENT 1
Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations

ELECTRONIC MEETING

Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations
ELECTRONIC MEETING

May 14, 2021
9:00 a.m. – 11:00 p.m.

AGENDA

- I. Opening & Pledge of Allegiance – *Bill Ashton, JLC Chairman (9:00 – 9:05)*
- II. Opening Thoughts & Meditation, *Kevin Hoffman, JLC Chaplain (9:05 – 9:10)*
- III. Roll call of VSOs, quorum determination, and introduction of guests – *Bill Ashton, JLC Chairman (9:10 – 9:15)*
- IV. Approve Agenda – *Bill Ashton, JLC Chairman (9:15 – 9:17)*
- V. Approve December 16, 2020 meeting minutes – *Bill Ashton, JLC Chairman (9:17 – 9:20)*
- VI. Nomination of new member update – *Bill Ashton, JLC Chairman (9:20 – 9:30)*
- VII. Reports (9:30 – 9:45)
 - a. Board of Veterans Services (BVS) – *Michael Dick, BVS Chairman*
 - b. Veterans Services Foundation (VSF) – *John Lesinski, VSF Chairman*
 - c. Virginia Department of Veterans Services (VDVS) – *John Maxwell, VDVS Commissioner*
- VIII. VSF Brief – *John Lesinski, VSF Chairman (9:45 – 10:00)*
- IX. VDVS Strategic Priorities (10:00 – 10:30) - *John Maxwell, VDVS Commissioner*
- X. Discuss potential initiatives for 2022 consideration, *Bill Ashton, JLC Chairman (1030 – 1045)*
- XI. New Business and Open Discussion, *Bill Ashton JLC Chairman (1045-1050)*
- XII. Public comment period – *Bill Ashton JLC Chairman (1050-1055)*
- XIII. Closing Remarks – *Bill Ashton JLC Chairman (1055 – 1100)*
- XIV. Adjourn (11:00)

ATTACHMENT 2

Board of Veterans Services Report



101 N. 14TH STREET, 17TH FL.
RICHMOND, VA 23219

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA BOARD OF VETERANS SERVICES

REPORT TO THE JOINT LEADERSHIP COUNCIL May 14, 2021

Michael Dick,
Chairman
Tammi Lambert,
Vice Chairman
Victor Angry
Carl Bedell
Senator John Bell
Carl Bess
Paige Cherry
Jenny Dye
Mario Flores
Delegate Buddy Fowler
Delegate Dan Helmer
James O. Icenhour, Jr.
Thuraya Kent
M. Lyla Kohistany
John Lesinski
Senator Mamie Locke
Delegate Kathleen
Murphy
Kathy Owens
Senator Bryce Reeves
Efrain (Frank) Reyes
Delegate Marcus Simon
Julie Waters
William Ashton
Chairman, Joint
Leadership Council of
Veterans Service
Organizations
Jack Lanier
2nd Vice Chair, Veterans
Services Foundation
Linda Schreiner,
Chairman, Virginia
War Memorial
Foundation
John Maxwell,
Commissioner, Virginia
Department of
Veterans Services

The Board of Veterans Services (BVS) held an on-line meeting on April 16, 2021, primarily focused on the Virginia Department of Veterans Services' (VDVS) strategic priorities. We also welcomed two new members to the BVS – Ms. Jenny Dye and Mr. Mario Flores. Ms. Dye is a Licensed Professional Counselor and an Approved Clinical Supervisor in Virginia. In her current position, she coordinates and provides triage services to Virginia Tech Students. Mr. Flores is a U.S. Army combat veteran with experience in the areas of national security and national defense strategies. Selected as one of 23 Army personnel to serve as a Congressional Defense Fellow, he will begin this assignment in May on the staff of a Member of Congress.

During our April meeting, VDVS Commissioner John Maxwell discussed the Compact with Virginia's Veterans and outlined VDVS' strategic priorities. In particular, the Commissioner highlighted the Compact's objectives that are focused on unifying and better coordinating the efforts of state agencies and community partners to provide enhanced support to veterans. The Commissioner also discussed the strategic priority of ensuring VDVS effectively serves as the Primary Port of Entry to veteran-related federal, state and community resources. Finally, the Commissioner underscored the strategic necessity of enhancing the strength of VDVS through employee development, support, and collaboration. During the discussion that followed the Commissioner's presentation, the question of how to measure progress towards achievement of VDVS' strategic priorities was raised. I anticipate that the BVS will work closely with VDVS to assist in the development of appropriate metrics.

As a key stakeholder in the VDVS Strategic Plan, the Board is committed to identifying legislative and budgetary initiatives that will contribute to ensuring Virginia remains the most veteran friendly state in the nation. We look forward to working with the JLC in this regard.

Our next meeting is scheduled for June 23, 2021, during which we plan to focus on our initial review/discussion of legislation and budget initiatives needed to support the strategic priorities of the Compact with Virginia's Veterans as outlined by Commissioner Maxwell. We will also conduct our annual review of BVS Bylaws and hear scheduled POC reports.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael Dick
Chairman

ATTACHMENT 3 Veteran Services Foundation Report



VIRGINIA VETERANS SERVICES FOUNDATION Report to the Joint Leadership Council May 14, 2021

The Veterans Services Foundation (VSF) Board of Trustees held a virtual meeting on March 28, 2021.

The VSF Chairman, John Lesinski welcomed Anna Healey James, Senior Vice President of Public Policy & Government Relations of Sentara Health. Sentara is one of the largest not-for-profit health systems in Virginia. Sentara wanted to continue their strong support with the veteran population, so Ms. James reached out to Secretary Hopkins and VSF Executive Director, Karla Boughney to launch a partnership to help serve the needs of Virginia veterans and their families. Ms. James announced that Sentara would be making a \$150,000 donation to VSF to collaborate and focus on veteran homelessness and behavioral health services. This generous gift from Sentara will make a huge difference in the lives of many Virginia veterans and their family members.

Commissioner Maxwell provided a detailed report on behalf of VDVS. The agency continues to focus on their role as a port of entry for services needed by veterans. The Commissioner reminded everyone that he has served in this position for little over a year and has only operated during COVID-19. He continues to focus on teleworking and providing in person mission essential services. Commissioner Maxwell plans to begin a more robust admission program at the two care centers along with allowing residents to visit with their families. He added that the \$5.2M expansion project at the Amelia Cemetery will begin soon and is expected to be completed in early 2022. The Virginia War Memorial is open to visitors and has expanded their educational programs virtually to include Black History Month and Women's History Month.

Virginia Veteran and Family Support continues to seek ways to improve its 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 and Crisis Intercept Mapping in conjunction with the VA and DBHDS. VVFS will not expend the entire Homeless Fund (\$210K) this year, mostly due to the eviction moratorium and the substantial amount of public funding for housing. Also, VVFS will not expend all funds designated for direct services (\$240K annually) and expects to spend \$140K-\$170K this CFY. This is due the reduced number of veterans and families requiring services during COVID.

Commissioner Maxwell noted the education portion of DVS is an approval agency for those wanting to use the GI Bill. They work with transitioning services and military spouses to find employment. The Altria Grant funding is utilized through a job training program. Originally Altria funding was expended for advanced manufacturing courses, but IT has now been added to the list of courses. DVS worked with VSF and the VCCS to develop a program to provide veterans and spouses with computers also using the Altria grant funding. Students request laptops by submitting an online application to VDVS at the Veteran Education Resource Initiative for Transition, Advising and Success (VERITAS) office at their campus. VDVS will review the application for eligibility and notify VERITAS of approval status. VERITAS will then provide the student a Virginia Department of Veteran Services Veteran Resource Guide to the student, issue the device to the student, and have the student sign a hand receipt.

Overall donations are down for the Foundation in FY21. However, plans were discussed aimed at new fundraising initiatives to take place before the close of the fiscal year on June 30th. Fundraising for many organizations are down as a result of COVID 19.

The Foundation welcomed four new trustees to the board. Lettie Bien, Paula Buckley, Philip Jones, and Laura Schmiegel were sworn in virtually by Secretary Hopkins.

The next Veterans Services Foundation Board of Trustees meeting is scheduled for June 10, 2021. The meeting is currently planned to take place virtually.

Respectfully Submitted,
John Lesinski, Chairman
Veterans Services Foundation

ATTACHMENT 4 **VDVS Report**



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Department of Veterans Services

John Maxwell
Commissioner

Telephone: (804) 786-0220
Fax: (804) 786-0302

Virginia Department of Veterans Services (VDVS) Update for the Joint Leadership Council May 14, 2021

As we begin the fourth quarter of the 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.

During the 2021 General Assembly Session, budget 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; our transition assistance program was codified in legislation, 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.

Currently, 31 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 a daily increase in in-person assistance and claims submittals to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) – total submittals are up 8.3%. We have more than doubled personal contacts since returning to office part time and expect that to increase as we increase the number of available appointments on May 17th. Our policy of no walk-ins will continue for the foreseeable future as a safety measure and we will continue to offer virtual appointments.

The Virginia Veteran and Family Support (VVF8) program is seeing new client numbers trend upward, with 47% requesting housing assistance, followed by behavioral health and benefits assistance. The number of total clients (which captures services to existing/repeat clients) served by VVF8 was 44% higher in April 2021 (351 total clients) than April 2020 (194 total clients). In addition to client services, VVF8 continues to coordinate expansion of

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101 North 14th Street, 17th Floor, Richmond, Virginia 23219
www.dvs.virginia.gov

Virginia's Identify Service Members, Veterans and their Families (SMVF), Screen for Suicide Risk, and Refer for Services (VISR) pilot as part of the Governor's Challenge to Prevent Suicide. VISR 2.0 will kick off in July and run for one year. VISR recruitment is open now for new community partners including VSOs that want to expand their suicide prevention training and suicide risk screening activities. The VVPS East team continues to help the City of Suffolk and Western Tidewater Community Services Board (CSB) on their implementation of crisis services strategic planning (Crisis Intercept Mapping) for SMVF to enhance peer support, care coordination, and care transitions in regional behavioral health services. VVPS is working with the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services and the Department of Medical Assistance Services to expand military cultural competency, and cross referrals with VDVS as part of broader public behavioral health system transformation to enhance community-based clinical and housing supports for SMVF as a gap fill to Federal care.

As of May 14, 2021, neither Veterans Care Center (VCC) 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 family visitations. Construction at both new care centers is on-track (Puller VCC - Fauquier County: March 2022; Jones & Cabacoy VCC - Virginia Beach: August 2022).

The Cemeteries division is observing a rise in the number of interments. Cemeteries had record months in February and March as both Horton (Suffolk) and Amelia conducted record numbers of interments, and Dublin exceeded their monthly average. While April's burial numbers were back to normal, May is looking to be the busiest month the cemeteries have ever experienced. Construction on the \$5.2M expansion project started May 3rd at the Virginia Veterans Cemetery at Amelia, and will be completed in early calendar year 2022.

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 during Black History and Women History months, and the celebration of K-9 Veterans Day in March. The Commonwealth's Memorial Day Ceremony will be held at the VWM on May 31 at 11 a.m. We have partnered with CBS6 (Richmond) to broadcast the ceremony live, and we will also livestream the event. We will be able to accommodate some limited in-person attendance for pre-registered guests (<https://vawarmemorial.org/events/memorialday2021/>).

The unique challenges of transitioning service members, veterans, and military spouses were compounded during the pandemic. Although there are countless challenges which the military community faces when attempting to transition to civilian life, one of the most common is finding employment in the civilian marketplace. Through the VTAP, MMAC, and V3 Programs and the Military Education and Workforce Initiative, Transitioning Service Members, veterans, and military spouses received continued services during a time of economic turmoil.

V3 and VTAP continue their strong presence in the transition space. The average salary of a client receiving services through VTAP increased from \$77,379 in February 2020 at the start of the pandemic to \$94,225 in May of 2021. V3 has strong interest from the business

community and the program expended all of the \$100,000 of grant funding for Fiscal Year 2021. This funding directly supports small and medium sized employers who are hiring and retaining Virginian veterans within five years of separation from active duty.

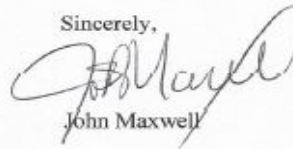
VDVS partnered with the Department of Human Resource Management (DHRM) to discuss veteran recruitment and retention initiatives across the Commonwealth. As a result of this partnership, VDVS and DHRM developed a military compensation comparison chart, allowing for competitive salary compensation to veterans. A state agency military language job-posting sample is now available on the DHRM site for hiring managers.

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), the Altria Group, the Virginia Community College System (VCCS) and Tech4Troops (T4T). MEWI is also exploring a similar program in the Tidewater area.

In partnership with the Virginia Employment Commission, the Women Veterans Program is preparing to co-host the 8th annual Statewide Women Veterans Summit. In continued support of state public safety measures, the summit will be presented virtually for the second year rather than as a live event as in previous years. The theme of the 2021 Summit is "*Empowered: Bold with a Purpose. Finding Clarity Beyond Crisis.*" This year's agenda will include two days filled with a variety of interactive presentations and panel discussions designed to address the needs of women veterans. The focus will include services for women veterans in Virginia, career planning, entrepreneurship, mentorship, financial stewardship, employment opportunities, personal health, wellness and various community resources. The 2021 Summit will honor the growing population of more than 108,000 women veterans who proudly call Virginia home. Our Women Veterans Summit will be held on June 23-24, 2021 this year. Registration is open on our website: <https://www.dvs.virginia.gov/virginia-women-veterans>.

Moving forward, the agency has three strategic priorities: revise and update the Compact with Virginia's Veterans to make Virginia the most veteran-friendly state in the Nation; position the agency as a primary port of entry for veterans to be connected to earned benefits and resources; and to invest in the VDVS team. We are excited to work with the JLC on these priorities and other items most important to Virginia's veterans and their families.

Sincerely,



John Maxwell

