



# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

## *Department of Veterans Services*

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Commissioner

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### **Virginia Department of Veterans Services (VDVS) Operations Update for the Joint Leadership Council December 15, 2021**

Over this past quarter, the Virginia Department of Veterans Services (VDVS) continued balancing virtual offerings with more in-person services. We've also resumed many outreach activities that were regular elements of our work within the community.

The number of total Virginia Veteran and Family Support (VVFS) existing and new clients served was significantly higher in November 2021, increasing by 22% over November 2020. Additionally there was a 29% increase in new clients in just one month from October 2021 to November 2021. For November 2021, 36% of service needs were for housing assistance, 10% for benefits, 6% for homeless assistance, 12% employment, and 7% for Behavioral Health. Over 20% of client referrals come from VDVS Benefits.

The Benefits service line continues both in-person and virtual appointments. The Benefits team serviced 2,480 veterans and family members in-person in November and saw an increase of 1287 in-person contacts. Total contacts for the month of November included 22,490 contacts via phone, email and in-person. This is a 24% increase from November of last year. Virtual service options will continue to enhance access to veterans and their families across the Commonwealth.

The V3 and V3 Transition Programs are working closely with the Virginia Chamber and have planned a robust Hire Vets Now (HVN) Networking Event calendar. There are 23 networking events scheduled on five different military installations. Each HVN event connects 20-25 V3 Certified Employers directly to transitioning service members and their families. V3 Transition Coordinators and V3 Regional Program Managers attend all events to ensure quality customer service to service members and military spouses, and our V3 Certified Employers.

V3 Transition will continue to build on last year's success in servicing 3,135 Transitioning Service Members (TSMs), veterans, and military spouses. We reached over 78,000 in the military community through services like the Virginia Welcome Letter and the Transition Connection Newsletter. The Boots 2 Suits (B2S) service, which provides professional clothing to Transitioning Service Members and military spouses, grew substantially from 171 applications in FY20 to 568 applications in FY21. To date in FY22 there are 270 applications, with over 1,000 Transitioning Service Members who utilized this resource in the past three years. Over 75% of the more than 1,000 Service Members that used Boots 2 Suits services plan to remain in Virginia upon separation.

V3 is building and deploying a core curriculum module for TSMs and their families highlighting all of the services, resources, and benefits that V3T provides. V3 Employer Connect is a virtual event series highlighting V3 Certified employers and connecting TSM and military family clients directly to those employers in a virtual webinar/Q&A setting.

The Military Education & Workforce Initiative (MEWI) partnered with the Veterans Services Foundation, Tech 4 Troops, and Altria Group to provide 50 refurbished laptops to Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). The first delivery (30 computers) is scheduled for January 12. The remaining 20 laptops will be purchased and provided after July 1.

We are nearing completion of a \$5.2M expansion project at the Virginia Veterans Cemetery (Amelia) that will add over 3,000 pre-placed crypts. In conjunction with the community partners, all three state veterans cemeteries will hold special wreath laying events on December 18. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) approved two grant requests for additional columbaria at Amelia and Dublin. The grants total approximately \$1.85M and will provide enough additional niche spaces for about 10 years at each cemetery. A pre-award kick-off meeting is being scheduled for mid-January 2022 with construction expected to begin in late summer/early fall 2022.

VDVS Cemeteries Division is close to completing the transition from analog lines to VOIP soft phones with a toll-free number that will allow for centralized burial scheduling and eligibility determinations. The system is expected to be fully-operational by the end of February 2022 with the switch-over to a 100% VOIP system in early spring 2022.

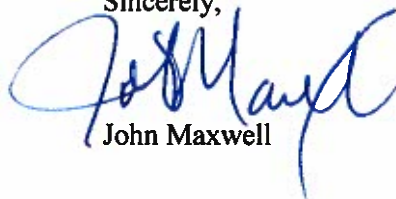
Work continues to move forward on the Jones & Cabacoy Veterans Care Center (Virginia Beach) and the Puller Veterans Care Center (Vint Hill, Fauquier County) as we count down to the planned Summer 2022 opening. Sitter & Barfoot Veterans Care Center was recently ranked #2 among Virginia nursing homes by *Newsweek* magazine.

The 2022 Virginia Women Veteran summit is confirmed for June 15, 2022 at the Richmond Convention Center. The event theme is "*Empowered: Sisters in Arms Inspiring Generations.*" The focus of effort in 2022 is to holistically connect women veterans to services, both internal to VDVS and to external community resources. We want to identify any gaps in services that we can target for enhancement in building partner resources.

The Military Spouse Liaison conducted outreach and advocacy on behalf of military spouses in the Commonwealth. Beginning September 10, 2021, the Liaison met 72 partners and resources at in-person events and virtual meetings. She attended regional Military Spouse Economic Empowerment Zone (MSEEZ) meetings and will assist with the *Advocacy* pillar for the Northern Virginia MSEEZ. The focus of effort in 2022 is to increase military spouse attendance at networking events to include the Hire Vets Now events.

We spent a majority of time in 2021 developing the agency's strategic priorities and identifying goals and objectives for achieving those priorities. We will now turn our focus on ensuring we have the right metrics by which we can continually measure our progress toward achievement of our strategic goals in fulfilling the Compact to Virginia's veterans. We are grateful for our collaboration with the JLC and look forward to working with the JLC in 2022 to continue our mission of service.

Sincerely,



John Maxwell