

**Board of Veterans Services  
Meeting Minutes  
September 21, 2023**

A meeting of the Board of Veterans Services (BVS) was held on September 21, 2023 at the Virginia War Memorial in Richmond.

**Members Present**

- Carl Bedell
- Joe Campa
- Mike Cherry
- Michael Dick
- Robert Eisiminger
- Buddy Fowler
- Vincent Griffith
- Joyce Henderson
- Carlton Kent
- John Lesinski
- Terrence McKnight
- Matthew Miller
- Bryce Reeves
- Melissa Watts
- Kevin Hoffman, Chair, Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations
- Mike Coleman, representing the Veterans Services Foundation
- Daniel Gade, Commissioner, Virginia Department of Veterans Services
- Kathy Owens, Chair, Virginia War Memorial Foundation

**Members Attending Virtually**

- None

**Members Absent**

- Victor Angry
- David Ashe
- Jason Ballard
- John Bell
- Mario Flores
- Jamie Inman
- Mamie Locke
- Kathleen Murphy

### **Commonwealth of Virginia Officials Present**

- Jordan Stewart, Assistant Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs
- James Flaherty, Senior Assistant Attorney General
- Angela Bufano, Department of Veterans Services (DVS)
- Tramaine Carroll-Payne, DVS
- Steven Combs, DVS
- Montwrace Cunningham, DVS (attending virtually)
- Stefani Dawson-Flowers, DVS
- Glendalynn Glover, DVS
- Donna Harrison, DVS
- Eric Johnson, DVS
- Clay Mountcastle, DVS
- Jayla Plymouth, DVS
- Griffin Ramsey, DVS
- Desiree Taylor, DVS (attending virtually)
- James Toczko, DVS

### **Members of the Public**

- Bob Pryor, Office of Congresswoman Jennifer McClellan
- Jack Lanier, former member of the Veterans Services Foundation
- Lacyn Barton, Virginia War Memorial Foundation
- Judy Brown, Virginia War Memorial Foundation
- Stephen Dickinson, Virginia War Memorial Foundation
- John Hekman, Virginia War Memorial Foundation
- Pam Seay, Virginia War Memorial Foundation

### **Materials Distributed as part of the Agenda Packet (sent via e-mail and posted on BVS webpage)**

- Draft Agenda
- Draft Minutes of the June 22, 2023 meeting
- Proposed changes to the BVS ByLaws
- Understanding FOIA Presentation
- DVS Operational Update
- Point of Contact report – Transition and Employment
- Point of Contact report – Housing and Homelessness/Justice Involved Veterans and Veteran Treatment Dockets
- Point of Contact report – Veterans Cemeteries
- Point of Contact report – Education
- Joint Leadership Council (JLC) Report
- Veterans Services Foundation (VSF) Report
- Virginia War Memorial Foundation (VWMF) Report

### **Item I. Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance**

Chairman Michael Dick called the meeting to order at 10:08 a.m. and welcomed all attendees to the meeting. Chairman Dick led the Pledge of Allegiance.

### **Item II. Roll Call and Quorum Determination**

The roll call determined that there were 18 of 26 members present at the meeting site, and a quorum was established.

### **Item III. Approval of Agenda**

Ms. Joyce Henderson made a motion, seconded by Mr. John Lesinski, to amend the agenda by moving Agenda Items XI.a. (ByLaws) and XI.b. (Election of Vice Chair) to Item VII, as Items VII.a. and VII.b. respectively. The FOIA Presentation would become Item VII.c. Item XI. would now consist of only Items XI.a. (Virginia War Memorial Carillon Study) and Item XI.b. (Museum of the Virginia National Guard).

The motion carried unanimously. The approved Agenda is attached to these minutes.

### **Item IV. Introduction of New Members**

New BVS members Vincent Griffith and Robert (Bob) Eisiminger introduced themselves and spoke briefly about their background.

### **Item V. Approval of the Draft Minutes of the June 22, 2023 meeting**

Chairman Dick noted that one change was needed to the draft minutes of the June 22, 2023 minutes: on the first line, changing "April 27, 2023" to "June 22, 2023." He asked if there were any other changes. Hearing none, he asked for approval of the amended minutes of the June 22, 2023 meeting by unanimous agreement. The Board members agreed.

### **Item VI. Introduction of DVS staff and guests**

Commissioner Gade asked DVS staff who were attending a BVS member for the first time to introduce themselves: Eric Johnson, Director of Research and Program Evaluation; James Toczko, Deputy Director of Benefits; and Angela Bufano, Superintendent, Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery introduced themselves.

### **Item VII. BVS Responsibilities**

- a. **BVS ByLaws**: Ms. Joyce Henderson reviewed the proposed changes to the BVS ByLaws, then asked that the changes be approved by unanimous consent. The changes were approved. The changes are attached to these minutes.
- b. **Election of Vice Chair**: Chairman Dick nominated Carl Bedell to serve as the BVS Vice Chairman, replacing Ms. Thurraya Kent. Delegate Mike Cherry seconded the nomination. Chairman Dick asked if there were any other nominations. Hearing none, he called for a vote to elect Carl Bedell BVS Vice Chairman. Mr. Bedell was elected unanimously.

- c. Freedom of Information Act (FOIA): Senior Assistant Attorney General James Flaherty presented the FOIA Overview briefing, answering several questions from the members. Mr. Flaherty's presentation is attached to these minutes.

#### **Item VIII. DVS Strategic Plan and Operational Update**

DVS Commissioner Gade provided an operational update on the strategic planning working group; the Gold Standard Digital Hub (GSDH); upcoming DVS events, including the October 23 Beirut Ceremony at the Virginia War Memorial (VWM), the Virginia War Memorial Veterans Day Ceremony on November 10 (held on the 10<sup>th</sup> because the Richmond Marathon in November 11), and the Grand Opening/Commonwealth's Veterans Day Ceremony on November 11 at the Jones & Cabacoy Veterans Care Center. The Commissioner's report is attached to these minutes.

#### **Item IX. Point of Contact Reports**

- a. Transition and Employment: in the absence of Mr. Angry, Mr. Flores, and Mr. Ashe, Chairman Dick deferred discussion of this report. The report is attached to these minutes.
- b. Housing/Homelessness/Justice Involved Veterans and Veteran Treatment Dockets: Mr. Joe Campa delivered a PPT presentation on Housing and Homelessness. The report is attached to these minutes. The PPT presentation is posted to the BVS webpage.

Chairman Michael Dick delivered the Justice Involved Veterans and Veteran Treatment Dockets. DVS Housing and Criminal Justice Director Donna Harrison briefly reviewed the PPT presentation. The report is attached to these minutes. The PPT presentation is posted to the BVS webpage.

- c. Veterans Cemeteries: Mr. John Lesinski covered the Cemeteries report, which is attached to these minutes. Mr. Lesinski highlighted that the Suffolk cemetery will be out of space in approximately 20 years, and that land will need to be purchased to provide ongoing viability. He noted that land may be available for purchase. The Board members discussed financing, with Senator Reeves highlighting local zoning laws and the necessity of the land being zoned for this. Senator Reeves stated that he would be willing to carry a budget amendment provided there are no conflicts. Mr. Coleman of the VSF noted the possibility of the VSF supporting this, with future payback from the Commonwealth.
- d. Education: Mr. Terrance McKnight covered the Education report, which is attached to these minutes.

#### **Item X. Reports**

- a. Joint Leadership Council (JLC): Chair Kevin Hoffman delivered the JLC report (attached)
- b. Veterans Services Foundation (VSF): Mr. Michael Coleman delivered the VSF report.

- c. Virginia War Memorial Foundation (VWMF): Chair Kathy Owens delivered the VWMF report. She and VWMF President Pam Seay noted that the Memorial's newest "Virginians at War" film – "One Week in October," which focuses on October 1983 and the bombing of Marine Barracks in Lebanon and Operation Urgent Fury in Grenada, will premier the week of October 23, 2023. There will be a special screening on Monday, October 23 at the Hotel Roanoke, and a special panel discussion at the Virginia War Memorial on Wednesday, October 25. Additional details are available on the Memorial's website at <https://vawarmemorial.org/>.

#### **Item XI. New Business**

- a. Virginia War Memorial Carillon Study: DVS Chief Deputy Commissioner Steven Combs delivered a presentation on the Virginia War Memorial Carillon project:
  - o [VWM Carillon Phase 3 planning study - exterior concept video \(note: video only, no audio\)](#)
  - o [VWM Carillon Phase 3 planning study - interior concept video \(note: video only, no audio\)](#)
  - o [Virginia War Memorial Carillon Phase 3 planning study \(PDF\)](#)

He explained that the Department of General Services (DGS) was leading the restoration project, and that Phase 2 would be completed in Summer 2024. DGS has submitted a budget request for Phase 3 for inclusion in the Governor's budget. When complete, the plan is for DVS to operate the Carillon as part of the Virginia War Memorial, to honor the 3,700 Virginians killed in World War I and, as at the Virginia War Memorial, use their examples of service and sacrifice to educate current and future generations. DVS will submit a budget request for operational funding to support a planned November 2025 opening.

Chairman Dick asked if a letter of support from the Board would be helpful, to which Mr. Combs answered in the affirmative. The Board voted unanimously for Chairman Dick to send a letter to DVS Commissioner Gade and Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs Crenshaw expressing the Board's support for this project.

- b. Museum of the Virginia National Guard: there was no one on hand to deliver a presentation on the Museum of the Virginia National Guard (MVaNG).

Virginia War Memorial Foundation (VWMF) Chair Kathy Owens stated that while the VWMF was in full support of the construction of the MVaNG, the members of the VWMF were unanimously and adamantly opposed to the MVaNG being built on the site of the Virginia War Memorial. Chair Owens cited several points, including the incompatibility between the VWM as a site to honor Virginians of all branches who died in service from World War II to the present and a museum build to tell the story of the Virginia National Guard. She also noted the significant engineering challenges of the VWM site, coupled with no room on the VWM site for future expansion.

VWMF Chair Owens said that the VWMF requests that the Guard cease the promoting the VWM site as the future home of the MVaNG and focus on other sites. She asked that the Board of Veterans Services vote to support the VWMF's position.

Senator Bryce Reeves cautioned that he was not prepared to vote on such a proposal without the input of the Adjutant General, Major General James Ring.

Senator Reeves made a motion, seconded by Ms. Henderson, to table the issue until the BVS is able to consider input from General Ring. The motion was adopted unanimously.

**Item XII. Public Comment**

There was no public comment.

**Item XIII. Wrap Up & Adjournment**

Chairman Dick adjourned the meeting at 1:02. p.m.

**Approved Agenda**  
**BOARD OF VETERANS SERVICES**  
**September 21, 2023, 10:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.**  
**Virginia War Memorial - Russell Scott Hall**

- I. Opening and Pledge of Allegiance – *Michael Dick, BVS Chairman* (10:00 – 10:02)
- II. Roll Call and Quorum Determination – *Michael Dick, BVS Chairman* (10:02 – 10:06)
- III. Approval of Agenda – *Michael Dick, BVS Chairman* (10:06 – 10:08)
- IV. Introduction of New Members – *Michael Dick, BVS Chairman* (10:08 – 10:11)
- V. Approval of Minutes of the June 22, 2023 meeting – *Michael Dick, BVS Chairman* (10:11 – 10:12)
- VI. Introduction of DVS staff and guests – *Michael Dick, BVS Chairman* (10:12 – 10:15)
- VII. BVS Responsibilities (10:15 – 10:50)
  - a. ByLaws - *Michael Dick - BVS Chairman*
  - b. Election of Vice Chair - *BVS Chairman*
  - c. Freedom of Information Act – *James Flaherty, OAG*
- VIII. DVS Strategic Plan and Operational Update – *Daniel Gade, DVS Commissioner* (10:50 – 11:05)
- IX. Point of Contact Reports (11:05 – 11:50)
  - a. Transition and Employment – *Victor Angry, Mario Flores, David Ashe, Joyce Henderson*
  - b. Housing / Homelessness /Justice Involved Veterans and Veteran Treatment Dockets – *Mamie Locke, Bryce Reeves, Joe Campa, Michael Dick*
  - c. Veterans Cemeteries – *John Lesinski, Victor Angry*
  - d. Education – *Terry McKnight, Mario Flores*
- X. Reports (11:50 – 12:05)
  - a. Joint Leadership Council – *Kevin Hoffman, JLC Chair*
  - b. Veterans Services Foundation – *Paul Haughton, VSF Chairman*
  - c. Virginia War Memorial Foundation – *Kathy Owens, VWMF Chair*
- XI. New Business: (12:05– 12:25)
  - a. Virginia War Memorial Carillon Study – *CDC Steven Combs*
  - b. Museum of the Virginia National Guard – *Major Andrew Czaplicki*
- XII. Public comment (12:25 – 12:30) – *Michael Dick, BVS Chairman*
- XIII. Wrap Up & Adjourn – *Michael Dick, BVS Chairman* (12:30)

## **BOARD OF VETERANS SERVICES BY-LAWS**

### **Article I – Authority and Statement of Purpose**

1. **Authority:** The authority for the Board of Veterans Services is found in § 2.2-2452 of the Code of Virginia (the Code).
2. **Statement of Purpose:** The Board of Veterans Services (the Board) is a policy board within the meaning of § 2.2-2100, in the executive branch of state government. The Board is responsible for monitoring the welfare of the Virginia Department of Veterans Services (DVS) and setting policies to enhance veteran services across the Commonwealth.

### **Article II – Membership**

1. **Composition and Appointment of Members:** The Board consists of 26 members, including seven legislative members, 15 nonlegislative citizen members and four *ex officio* members. Three members from the Senate are appointed by the Senate Committee on Rules. Four members from the House of Delegates are appointed by the Speaker of the House of Delegates. Nonlegislative citizen members are appointed by the Governor. The Commissioner of the Department of Veterans Services (DVS), the Chairman of the Veterans Services Foundation (VSF), the Chairman of the Virginia War Memorial Foundation (VWMF) Board, and the Chairman of the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations (JLC) serve *ex officio*.
2. **Terms:** Legislative members, the DVS Commissioner, the JLC Chairman, the VSF Chairman, and the VWMF Chairman serve Board terms coinciding with their terms of office. Appointments to fill vacancies, other than by expiration of a term, are for the unexpired terms. All members may be reappointed. However, no House member can serve more than six consecutive two-year terms, no Senate member can serve more than three consecutive four-year terms. Non-legislative citizen members appointed to serve an unexpired term are eligible to serve two consecutive four-year terms immediately succeeding such unexpired term.
3. **Qualifications:** Board members are appointed for the expertise they have regarding the various service lines and programs administered by DVS. This should include at least one board member with experience in best practices in each of the following: benefits claim service; budgets and strategic planning; cemetery operations; education; employment, training, and entrepreneurship, medical and health care management; mental and behavioral health, justice involved veterans and the legal system.



**Article III – Officers**

1. **General:** DVS shall provide staff to assist the Board in their administrative, planning and procedural duties.

The Board will elect a Chair and Vice-Chair from its membership. The DVS Commissioner is not eligible to serve as Chair.

2. **Primary Duties of the Chair:** Preside over all meetings and perform the duties required before, during and after to ensure a smooth, well-run meeting. The Chair will serve as an *ex officio* member of the Veterans Services Foundation (with voting privileges) and the Joint Leadership Council of Veterans Service Organizations (with no voting privileges). The Chair may designate a Board member to represent him/her at these meetings. The Chair shall appoint work groups, as needed, and in such a way as to allow the Board to fulfill its' powers and duties.
3. **Additional Duties of the Chair:** The Chair shall work closely with DVS staff and Board members on pre-meeting planning and preparations. ~~The Chair s~~shall maintain communication with the Commissioner, and other DVS staff, on all budget, policy and strategic planning initiatives put forward by the Board. ~~The Chair s~~shall meet with legislators, as needed, and represent the Board before the Virginia General Assembly. Shall coordinate with DVS on long-term strategic planning and budgetary issues to maintain strong programs and services within DVS for Virginia's veterans. ~~The Chair S~~shall maintain communication with each Board member and assign projects and duties as needed. Upon request of the Commissioner, the Chair shall write letters to communicate policy and budget initiatives affecting DVS and Virginia's veterans to legislators.
4. **Primary Duties of the Vice Chair:** In the absence of the Chair, ~~the Vice Chair shall~~ preside at Board meetings; perform duties as assigned by the Chair; ~~the Vice Chair shall~~ assume the responsibilities of the Chair in the event the Chair can no longer fulfill them; and ~~the Vice Chair shall~~ assume the role of Chair for the remainder of the elected Chair's term, if necessary.
5. **Term of Service:** The Chair and Vice-Chair will serve a two-year term of office. The Chair and Vice-Chair are eligible for re-election, but can serve no more than two consecutive terms. In the event the office of Chair or Vice-Chair is vacated prior to the scheduled completion of that officer's term of office, a Chair or Vice-Chair shall be elected to serve the remainder of the term of office, in which case an election to fill an unexpired term greater than one year shall count as one term toward the two consecutive term limit.
6. **Elections:** Candidates for office may either put their own name forward, or may be nominated by another member. Nominations will be made to the Chair, verbally or in writing, so that the ~~nominations~~ ~~nominations~~ can be conveyed to the full Board at least 14 days prior to the meeting when elections will be held. Elections will be by voice vote during the first regularly scheduled meeting following July 1.

**Article IV – Powers and Duties of Board**

1. Advise the DVS Commissioner upon such matters as may arise in the performance of his/her duties.
2. Advise the DVS Commissioner upon such matters as may arise, upon request of the Commissioner of Veterans Services, or the Governor, related to the provision of care and services to veterans.
3. Advise the DVS Commissioner upon such matters as may arise affecting the welfare of Virginia citizens who are veterans or dependents or survivors of such veterans.
4. Review polices related to the coordinated delivery of veterans services and develop recommendations for policies and procedures related to the efficient and effective delivery of services provided by DVS.
5. Review and advise the DVS Commissioner on the Department’s strategic plan and annual report.
6. Provide recommendations to DVS regarding the acquisition of facilities that may benefit the Commonwealth’s veterans, including, but not limited to, veterans cemeteries and veterans care centers.

**Article V – Work Groups**

1. The Board shall organize itself in such a way as to allow it to fulfill its powers and duties, including work groups, created at the discretion of the Chair.
2. Work groups, on behalf of the entire Board, will perform detailed analytical and investigative work on a specific issue. Work groups will be formed only to deal with policy or procedural issues related the DVS service lines; policy initiatives regarding veterans; researching programs and initiatives currently in place in other states and the possibility of pursuing and implementing similar programs in Virginia; or other projects as requested by the Board Chair and/or DVS Commissioner.
3. Work groups shall form upon the call and discretion of the Chair, and complete their work within 12 consecutive months from the time the Chair nominates and the Board members approve the formation and membership of the work group. Committee members will be selected for their subject matter expertise. The Chair shall name a Committee Chair and at least two additional members. The work group shall work with DVS staff to compile a final report, which they will present to the Chair and Commissioner, and then present to the Board at the first regularly scheduled meeting following the completion of their work.
4. Any Board member may make a request for a work group to the Board Chair.

**Article VI – Service Line Points of Contact (POCs)**

1. The Chair shall appoint Points of Contact (POC) from the membership of the Board with the specific qualifications and experience to best serve each of the DVS Service Line Directors, providing support in developing effective policy recommendations related to the services provided to Virginia’s veterans.
2. Each POC shall provide oversight, counsel and develop recommendations for the Service Line Director and Commissioner on the administration, organization, fiscal operation, expansion and policies for the function of the service line, procedures to ensure compliance with all state and federal requirements, and when applicable, assist in the development of professional competency testing and performance reviews to ensure the highest quality of expertise.
3. When applicable, POCs shall ensure that all relevant policies and hiring and training practices are followed through on by the Director, and Supervisors, if relevant.
4. For Service Line Directors with more than two POCs, all work and meetings shall be in compliance with FOIA and other state regulations regarding Virginia Boards and Commissions.
5. Each POC shall be available to the DVS staff and Commissioner for assistance with the annual review of the operational, financial and organizational policies.
6. The Service Line POCs shall be:
  - Benefits Services
  - Behavioral Health & Housing
  - Cemeteries
  - Communications
  - Education
  - Employment
  - Entrepreneurship
  - Legal & Criminal Justice
  - Policy & Budget
  - Strategic Planning
  - Veterans Care Centers

**Article VII – Meetings and Compensation**

1. Meetings: The Board will meet at least three times a year, or on the call of the Chair.
2. Attendance: Board members shall **physically** attend all or the majority of meetings in each year. If a member is unable to **physically** attend **a meeting and requests to participate in a meeting electronically from a remote location, the provisions of the policy**

concerning meetings held through electronic communication means, as adopted by the Board on September 22, 2022 and incorporated herein as Enclosure 1 to these By-Laws, shall apply. ~~due to an emergency or personal matter and identifies with specificity the nature of the emergency or personal matter to the Chair within 3 days of the meeting, the member shall be allowed to attend the meeting remotely, following all procedures and guidelines laid out in the Code of Virginia, Chapter 37—Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) § 2.2-3708.1 “Participation in meetings in event of emergency or personal matter; certain disabilities; distance from meeting location for certain public bodies.” A copy of the code section is in the member handbook distributed to each member upon appointment to the board. It is the responsibility of each member to read, understand and follow the procedures.~~

- ~~3.~~ 3. Quorum: A majority of the voting members of the Board constitutes a quorum. Meetings conducted remotely require a quorum in order to convene. Electronic meetings are authorized as a means to transact business for this organization. In the absence of a quorum, there must be a ratification by the board.
- ~~4.~~ 4. Compensation and Reimbursement of Expenses: Board members shall be reimbursed for expenses and compensated for Board service as provided for in the Code of Virginia and the current Appropriations Act.
- ~~3.1.~~ 3.1. Compensation and Reimbursement of Expenses: Board members shall be reimbursed for expenses and compensated for Board service as provided for in the Code of Virginia and the current Appropriations Act.

### Article VIII –Miscellaneous Authorities

- ~~1.~~ 1. Quorum: A majority of the voting members of the Board constitutes a quorum.
- ~~2.1.~~ 2.1. Adoption and Amendment of Bylaws: These Bylaws can be amended by a two-thirds vote cast from voting Board members, if prior notice of the vote has been given.
- ~~3.2.~~ 3.2. Parliamentary Authority: The adopted parliamentary authority for Board meetings is the current version of Robert’s Rules of Order, Newly Revised.

# Understanding FOIA



or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Open Government.

- ATTORNEY-CLIENT PRIVILEGE

This presentation is not required to be disclosed under the Freedom of Information Act

Va. Code § 2.2-3705.1(2)



- Please note that this presentation does not constitute an opinion, formal or informal, of the Attorney General. Rather, this presentation contains legal advice, which is the individual view of the staff member providing it.

# If you don't know, now you know

- **§ 2.2-3702. Notice of chapter.**
- Any person elected, reelected, appointed or reappointed to any body not excepted from this chapter shall (i) be furnished by the public body's administrator or legal counsel with a copy of this chapter within two weeks following election, reelection, appointment or reappointment and (ii) read and become familiar with the provisions of this chapter.

# Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)

## Purpose –

By enacting FOIA, the General Assembly ensures the people of the Commonwealth ready access to public records in the custody of a public body or its officers and employees, and free entry to meetings of public bodies wherein the business of the people is being conducted. **The affairs of government are not intended to be conducted in an atmosphere of secrecy since at all times the public is to be the beneficiary of any action taken at any level of government.** Va. Code § 2.2-3700.



# FOIA

How FOIA is to be viewed –

**The provisions of FOIA shall be liberally construed to promote an increased awareness by all persons of governmental activities and afford every opportunity to citizens to witness the operations of government.** Any exemption from public access to records or meetings shall be narrowly construed and no record shall be withheld or meeting closed to the public unless specifically made exempt pursuant to this chapter or other specific provision of law.

# FOIA

The two major pillars of FOIA:

1. Public Records
2. Meetings

# Public records

Except as otherwise specifically provided by law, all public records shall be open to inspection and copying by any citizens of the Commonwealth during the regular office hours of the custodian of such records.

Access to such records shall not be denied to citizens of the Commonwealth. Va. Code § 2.2-3704.

# Public records

What are “public records”?

*"Public records"* means all writings and recordings, however they are stored, and regardless of physical form or characteristics, prepared or owned by, or in the possession of a public body or its officers, employees or agents in the transaction of public business. Va. Code § 2.2-3701.

Minutes, including draft minutes, and all other records of open meetings, including audio or audio/visual records shall be deemed public records and subject to the provisions of this chapter. Va. Code § 2.2-3707(H).

The custodian of such records shall take all necessary precautions for their preservation and safekeeping. Va. Code § 2.2-3704.

# FOIA

How do you respond to a FOIA request?

Any public body that is subject to this chapter and that is the custodian of the requested records shall promptly, but in all cases within five working days of receiving a request, provide the requested records to the requester or make one of the following responses in writing. . . Va. Code § 2.2-3704(B). *See* Va. Code § 2.2-3704(B)(1-4) for permissible responses.

If it is not “practically possible” to produce the requested records in five days, you may secure another seven work-days under certain conditions. Va. Code § 2.2-3704(B)(4).

Generally, no public body shall be required to create a new record if the record does not already exist. Va. Code § 2.2-3704 (D).

Failure to respond to a request for records shall be deemed a denial of the request and shall constitute a violation of this chapter. Va. Code § 2.2-3704(E).

# FOIA

If FOIA is violated –

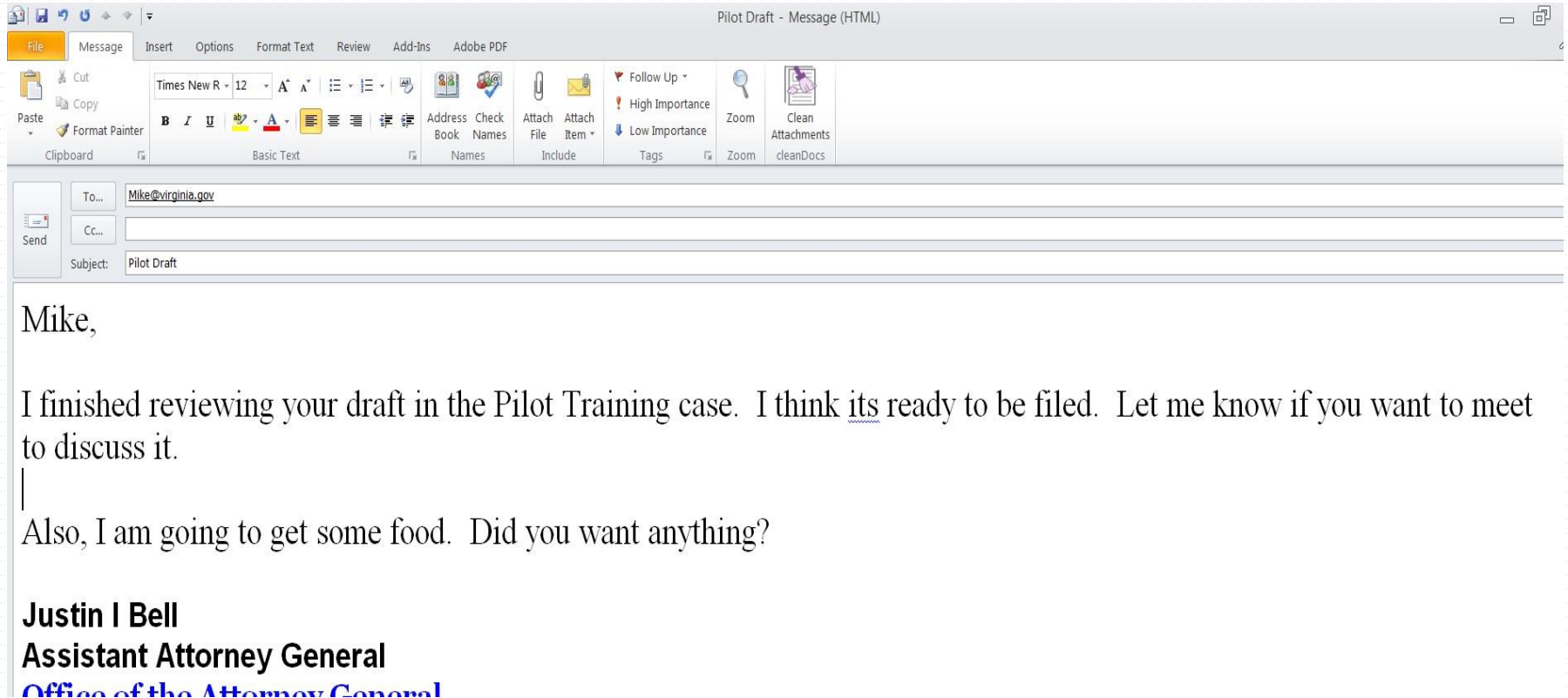
If the court finds the denial to be in violation of FOIA, the petitioner shall be entitled to recover reasonable costs, including costs and reasonable fees for expert witnesses, and attorneys' fees from the public body if the petitioner substantially prevails on the merits of the case . . . Va. Code § 2.2-3713

# FOIA

## If FOIA is violated (cont'd.) – knowing violation

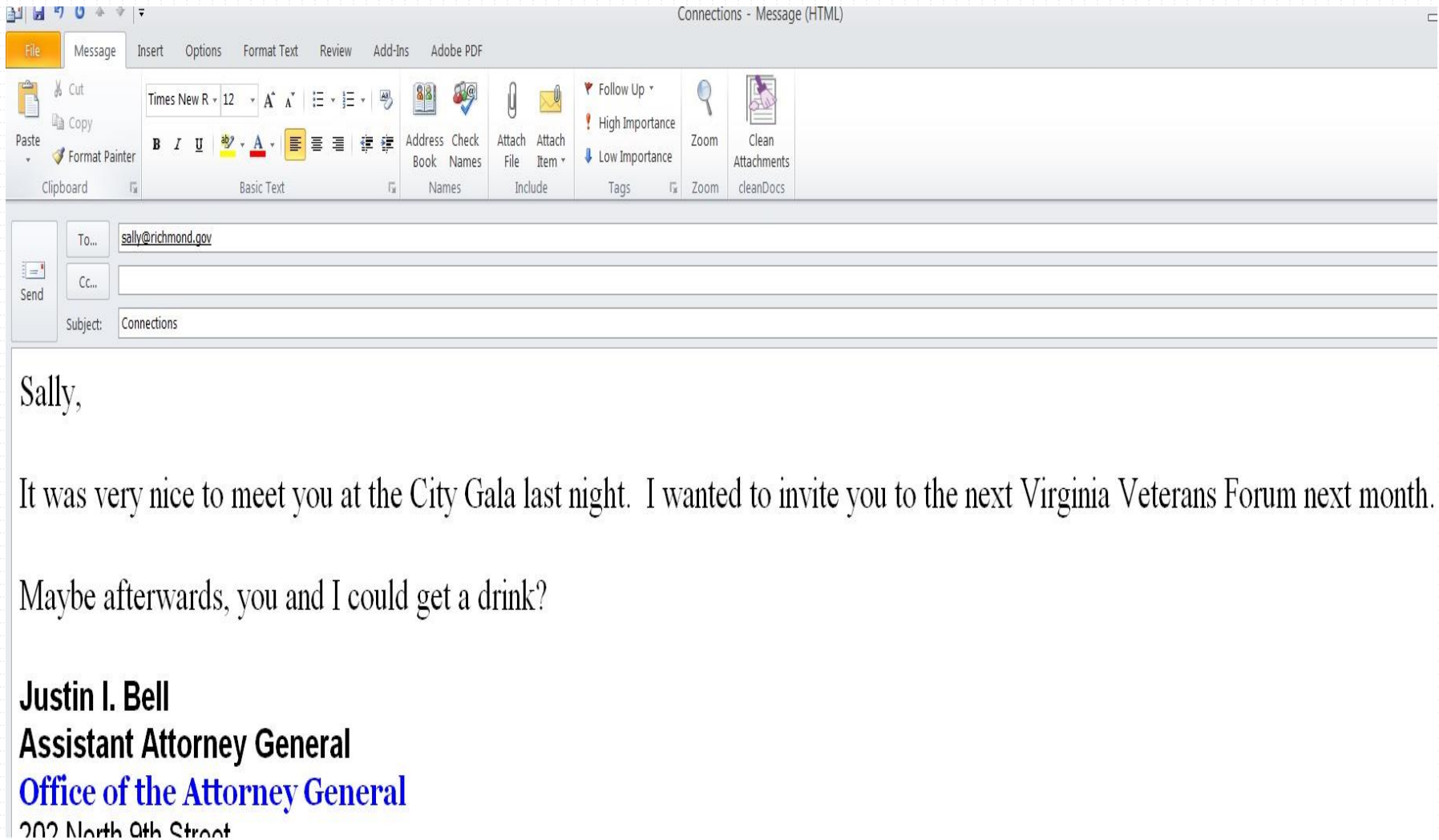
In a proceeding commenced against any officer, employee, or member of a public body under FOIA, the court, if it finds that a violation was willfully and knowingly made, shall impose upon such officer, employee, or member in his individual capacity, whether a writ of mandamus or injunctive relief is awarded or not, a civil penalty of not less than \$ 500 nor more than \$ 2,000. . . For a second or subsequent violation, such civil penalty shall be not less than \$ 2,000 nor more than \$ 5,000. Va. Code § 2.2-3714.

# Be Mindful of What You Put in Email





# Continued...



The screenshot shows an Outlook window titled "Connections - Message (HTML)". The ribbon includes "File", "Message", "Insert", "Options", "Format Text", "Review", "Add-Ins", and "Adobe PDF". The ribbon is currently on the "Message" tab, which includes groups for "Clipboard", "Basic Text", "Names", "Include", "Tags", "Zoom", and "cleanDocs". The "To" field contains "sally@richmond.gov", the "Subject" is "Connections", and the "Cc" field is empty. The email body contains the following text:

Sally,

It was very nice to meet you at the City Gala last night. I wanted to invite you to the next Virginia Veterans Forum next month.

Maybe afterwards, you and I could get a drink?

**Justin I. Bell**  
**Assistant Attorney General**  
**Office of the Attorney General**  
202 North 9th Street

# Takeaways

- When is your email related to this board private?
- When should you not use email?

# FOIA

## Meetings –

All meetings of public bodies shall be open, except as provided by § 2.2-3711. Va. Code § 2.2-3707.

# Subcommittees, private sector members, etc.

"Public body" means any legislative body, authority, **board**, bureau, commission, district or agency of the Commonwealth or of any political subdivision of the Commonwealth . . . ; and other organizations, corporations or agencies in the Commonwealth supported wholly or principally by public funds. It shall include any committee, subcommittee, or other entity however designated, of the public body created to perform delegated functions of the public body or to advise the public body. It shall not exclude any such committee, subcommittee or entity because it has private sector or citizen members. [...] -- Code § 2.2-3701.

# FOIA

When are you having a meeting?

"Meeting" or "meetings" means the meetings including work sessions, when sitting physically, or through telephonic or video equipment pursuant to § 2.2-3708.2 or 2.2-3708.3, as a body or entity, or as an informal assemblage of (i) as many as three members or (ii) a quorum, if less than three, of the constituent membership, wherever held, with or without minutes being taken, whether or not votes are cast, of any public body.

# FOIA

- Hypo: You write an email to all the other members sharing an interview with Adam Driver about the latest Star Wars movie, The Last Skywalker. A fellow member responds all. Yet another member quickly responds all on the same topic.
- Meeting for FOIA purposes?
- How about opening an instant message chat online between three members?
- What if only two?

# FOIA

- What if the topic of discussion was inviting Adam Driver to a meeting to discuss his non-profit, Arts in the Armed Forces?
- Answer: an improper closed meeting occurs where the feature of simultaneity inherent in the term "assemblage" arises; the e-mails involve some sort of back-and-forth exchange of the three required members; the messages generate group conversations or responses with multiple recipients.
- From Hill v. Fairfax County Sch. Bd., 284 Va. 306 (2012).

## Definition cont...(2015)

- Neither the gathering of employees of a public body nor the gathering or attendance of two or more members of a public body at any place or function where **no part of the purpose of such gathering or attendance is the discussion or transaction of any public business**, and such gathering or attendance was not called or prearranged with any purpose of discussing or transacting any business of the public body . . . shall be deemed a "meeting" subject to FOIA.



# Key Requirements for Meetings

- **§ 2.2-3707. Meetings to be public; notice of meetings; recordings; minutes.**
- A. All meetings of public bodies shall be open, except as provided in §§ 2.2-3707.01 and 2.2-3711.
  - § 2.2-3707.01 – Meetings of the General Assembly.
  - § 2.2-3707.01 – Closed meetings. But-there is a set of procedures you must take BEFORE going into closed meeting.
- B. Meetings may be held through electronic means under certain conditions.
  - § 2.2-3708.2 – Meetings held through electronic communication means during declared states of emergency.
  - § 2.2-3708.3 – Meetings held through electronic communication means; situations other than declared states of emergency.

# Electronic Meetings

- During declared states of emergency:
  - Must be declared by Governor or locality where body located.
  - No physical quorum necessary.
  - Give public notice using best available method.
  - Must make arrangements for public access to meeting through electronic communication means.
  - Must provide public with opportunity to comment at meeting.
  - Must record nature of emergency, the fact the meeting was held electronically, and the type of electronic communication means in the minutes.

# Electronic Meetings cont.

- Not during declared states of emergency:
  - Remote participation by a member
    - ✦ Board must adopt a policy allowing remote participation.
    - ✦ Member must notify chair.
    - ✦ Member must have a temporary or permanent physical disability that prevents physical attendance; or
    - ✦ A medical condition of a member or member's family requires member to provide care and prevents physical attendance; or
    - ✦ A member's principal residence is greater than 60 miles away from meeting location; or
    - ✦ A member is unable to attend to due a personal matter and identifies, with specificity, the nature of the personal matter (max 2 times or 25% of meetings per year).

The Board must approve member's remote participation and record in minutes.

# Electronic Meetings cont.

- Not during declared states of emergency cont.:
  - Remote participation by full board
    - ✦ Board must adopt a policy allowing remote participation by full board.
    - ✦ Notice given regarding remote meeting at time meeting is notice for public.
    - ✦ Public has access and the electronic communications means used allow public to hear (and see) all members of board.
    - ✦ A phone number is available to public in event electronic communications fail and board recesses until restored.
    - ✦ A copy of agenda and materials are electronically available to public.
    - ✦ Public is allowed to comment electronically.
    - ✦ No more than 2 board members are together in one remote location unless that location open to the public.

# Electronic Meetings cont.

- Remote participation by full board cont.:
  - If closed session held, electronic communications must resume before board votes to certify closed meeting as required by § 2.2-3712.
  - No more than 2 or 25% all-virtual meetings per year.
  - The fact that meeting was held through electronic means and the type of electronic communications must be recorded in minutes.

Board must vote to approve policy prior to using electronic means.

Board may approve this policy for committees/subcommittees that are performing functions delegated by Board.

# Closed Meeting

- § 2.2-3711. Closed meetings authorized for certain limited purposes.
- A. Public bodies may hold closed meetings only for the following purposes:
  - 7. Consultation with legal counsel and briefings by staff members or consultants pertaining to actual or probable litigation, where such consultation or briefing in open meeting would adversely affect the negotiating or litigating posture of the public body. For the purposes of this subdivision, "probable litigation" means litigation that has been specifically threatened or on which the public body or its legal counsel has a reasonable basis to believe will be commenced by or against a known party. Nothing in this subdivision shall be construed to permit the closure of a meeting merely because an attorney representing the public body is in attendance or is consulted on a matter.
  - 8. Consultation with legal counsel employed or retained by a public body regarding specific legal matters requiring the provision of legal advice by such counsel. Nothing in this subdivision shall be construed to permit the closure of a meeting merely because an attorney representing the public body is in attendance or is consulted on a matter.

# Closed Meeting cont.

- Other reasons:
  - Personnel matters
  - To discuss candidates for employment
  - To discuss contract negotiations
  - 42. Discussion or consideration by the Board of Trustees of the Veterans Services Foundation of information subject to the exclusion in subdivision 28 of § 2.2-3705.7 related to personally identifiable information of donors.

# More Requirements

- C. Every public body shall give notice of the date, time, and location of its meetings by:
  - 1. Posting such notice on its official public government website, if any;
  - 2. Placing such notice in a prominent public location at which notices are regularly posted; and
  - 3. Placing such notice at the office of the clerk of the public body or, in the case of a public body that has no clerk, at the office of the chief administrator.
- All state public bodies subject to the provisions of this chapter shall also post notice of their meetings on a central, publicly available electronic calendar maintained by the Commonwealth. Publication of meeting notices by electronic means by other public bodies shall be encouraged.
- And there are more steps that must be taken in addition to those.



# When meeting always required

- § 2.2-3710. Transaction of public business other than by votes at meetings prohibited.
- A. Unless otherwise specifically provided by law, no vote of any kind of the membership, or any part thereof, of any public body shall be taken to authorize the transaction of any public business, other than a vote taken at a meeting conducted in accordance with the provisions of this chapter.

## But...

- B. Notwithstanding the foregoing, nothing contained herein shall be construed to prohibit (i) separately contacting the membership, or any part thereof, of any public body for the purpose of ascertaining a member's position with respect to the transaction of public business, whether such contact is done in person, by telephone or by electronic communication, provided the contact is done on a basis that does not constitute a meeting as defined in this chapter

# FOIA

- Hypo: At a charity cocktail hour, you see two committee members standing by the bar. You pleasantly greet them as you order a drink. Meeting under FOIA? Can you make plans to go play golf this weekend? Can you reminisce together about the previous meeting?

# FOIA

- What about making decisions by vote over email?
- What prevents this?

# FOIA

- That's right. Code § 2.2-3710 prohibits the transaction of public business other than by votes at meetings.

# RECAP

- 1) can't transact public business without meeting--no voting, no deciding.
- 2) Electronic meetings allowed under certain conditions.
- 3) can "separately" contact members to ascertain position so long as communication doesn't become a meeting. Can't have feature of simultaneity with quorum or three members.

# Best practices

- Remember that what you put in writing is a public record subject to FOIA.
- Think first. If unsure, reach out and ask questions.
- Use a separate account for your public business.
- Pick up the phone.
- If in writing, send emails to staff for distribution.

# FOIA

Questions about FOIA?

Please contact the “Virginia Freedom of Information  
Advisory Counsel”

Toll free: 866-448-4100

Email: [foiacounsel@dls.virginia.gov](mailto:foiacounsel@dls.virginia.gov)





# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

## *Department of Veterans Services*

Daniel M. Gade, PhD  
Commissioner

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

### **Department of Veterans Services (DVS) Operations Update**

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The Strategic Planning Working Group created by House Bill 1759 (Delegate David Reid, 2023 General Assembly) held meetings in July and August. The priorities for the Working Group are centered on the mission to keep veterans and their families in Virginia. Legislative and budgetary goals address pathways to employment for military families, vocational and educational pathways, economic incentives to attract and maintain military families in the Commonwealth, honoring service and sacrifice, housing, and homelessness.

The Suicide Prevention and Opioid Addiction Services (SOS) program, part of the Virginia Veteran and Family Support (VVFS) program, continues to build critical community and research capacity with DVS grants. Twenty-four community grants were awarded totaling \$2.4 million and five research grants will be awarded by September 1<sup>st</sup> totaling \$750,000. Grantees will implement, study, and expand best practices in veteran peer support, suicide prevention training, risk screening, and clinical therapies for Service Members, Veterans, and Families across the Commonwealth. The latest grant applications closed August 31 and applications are under review. The SOS team will host a Suicide Prevention Symposium with grantees and regional partners on September 21<sup>st</sup> for Suicide Prevention Awareness Month at the Virginia War Memorial.

For VVFS direct services delivery in July 2023, there was a 5% increase in clients from July 2022 (137 new clients compared to 131). Veterans and families received assistance with resource connections for housing needs (33%), behavioral health support (17%), benefits assistance (10%), homeless assistance (10%), employment (8%).

DVS Benefits continues to strive to respond to the enactment of the Federal PACT Act in FY23 which drove an increase of 12% in DVS claims production over the last year. Among many efforts to meet the growing demand, the service line is innovating and pursuing new technologies such as Appeals management software, Virtual Contact Center, online digital forms and digital

signatures. Internally we have begun to develop Objectives and Key Results down to the individual level, with the intent of achieving first-in-class claims service to Virginia's veterans. We also continue to support the DVS Transition & Education team in their effort to reach more transitioning military members and their families through Transition Assistance Program (TAP) and other associated programs.

The Virginia State Approving Agency (SAA) celebrated the 79<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the GI Bill virtually on June 22, 2023. This event highlighted SAA staff members who used the GI Bill for themselves and their families and representation from various colleges, universities and vocational facilities. Also, the SAA completed 100% of the assigned Risk-Based Surveys for FFY23. Risk-based surveys are assigned by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs; they utilize risk factors, from accreditation to financials and complaints, to conduct a wholistic review to ensure schools continue to meet approval criteria and help before issues arise to prevent school closures like ITT Technical Institute.

Over the past few months, the Military Education and Workforce Initiative (MEWI) successfully expanded outreach, provided enhanced services, and expanded educational opportunities for active-duty service members, veterans, their spouses, and their dependents. The MEWI Program partnered with the Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program (VMSDEP) to provide laptops to 85 VMSDEP students enrolled at colleges and universities across the Commonwealth. Additionally, the MEWI Program was awarded \$25,000 by Newport News Shipbuilding through the Virginia Veterans Services Foundation. These funds are being used to create credentialing, certification, and training opportunities in the region. A partnership with Tidewater Community College and the Maritime Trades Training Program is being created to facilitate this initiative. Also, the Altria Group awarded the MEWI Program \$75,000 through the Veterans Services Foundation supporting the continuation of credentialing and certification efforts in central Virginia, these funds will also support the technology initiative, by providing laptop computers to military-affiliated students.

The Virginia SkillBridge Program has now approved 87 Virginia SkillBridge Providers who provide over 150 internship opportunities to eligible applicants, with commander approval, up to six months prior to separation. Participation in the Virginia SkillBridge program while still serving in the military allows the service member to gain marketable skills and experiences to enhance civilian career opportunities.

The Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program (VMSDEP) launched a new online application portal on August 5. The portal allows the DVS staff, in conjunction with Virginia's 40 public colleges and universities, and the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV), to administer the program in one system. The system improves customer service, enables school officials to better advise beneficiaries, who can view actions in real time, and generate reports within the system. The system also allows VMSDEP to expand the program above and beyond this year's goal to where we reached 6,120 active participants using the VMSDEP program. Currently, VMSDEP is working on a mailer campaign where over 26,000 potential VMSDEP participants were sent eligibility notifications from contacts received from the

DVS Benefits service line. As of August 21, 2023, 751 contacts responded to the notification, and we've received a 30% increase compared to the same time last year.

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) awarded DVS two grants, totaling \$10.6M, to add additional columbarium niches at the Amelia, Dublin, and Suffolk state veterans cemeteries, part of the phased expansion of the three cemeteries. Construction is underway on the Amelia and Dublin projects, with the Suffolk project starting later this year.

We are ever closer to the "soft opening" of the Jones & Cabacoy Veterans Care Center in Virginia Beach and are planning a "grand opening" ceremony for November 11. Construction delays will push the opening of the Puller Veterans Care Center in Fauquier County into early next year.

A full slate of events is planned for this Fall at the Virginia War Memorial, including the Patriot Day ceremony on September 11, a special ceremony marking the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the bombing of the Marine Barracks in Beirut, Lebanon on October 23, and the Veterans Day ceremony on November 10 (the Richmond Marathon on November 11 will block access to the Memorial). All of the VWM ceremonies begin at 11 a.m. We hope you will join us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dan Gade", written in a cursive style.

Daniel Gade, PhD  
Commissioner

1. Date of Report: September 13, 2023
2. BVS POC(s): Victor Angry, Mario Flores, David Ashe, Joyce Henderson
3. Service Area/Program: Transition and Employment Directorate
4. DVS Director/Program Manager: Acting Deputy Commissioner Patrice Jones
5. Mission of service area/program (i.e., what does it do?): The Transition and Employment Directorate includes four service lines that work together to ensure that every Veteran, Military Spouse, or eligible person has a full and fair opportunity to reach his or her fullest potential through access to transition services, training/licensure/certification, entrepreneurial support and employment.
6. Who does the service area/program serve (i.e., who are the customers)? Veterans, transitioning service members, spouses, dependents, and employers.
7. What are the service line's primary objectives? The Transition and Employment directorate has several primary objectives: 1) To connect military talent to V3 Certified Employers and 2) Assist transitioning service members separating from military service and aid military spouses, veterans, and dependents transition to the next chapter of their life.
8. What are the key results that support the objective(s)? To increase the number of V3 Certified Organizations to 3,500; reach 100 newly approved Virginia SkillBridge Approved V3 Certified Employers; and to increase the number of total V3 Hires by 15,000.
9. What specific objectives has the service line established and what progress has the service line/program made toward achieving the objective(s). The Transition and Employment Directorate underwent a restructure and merger of the V3 Transition Program with the original Virginia Values Veterans (V3) Program. As a result, the V3 Program was also extended to include fifteen new positions. Some of the new roles established addressed bottlenecks, increased return on investment and the alignment of services for employers. This includes dedicated outreach staff to increase the number of enrolled employers, adjusted primary duties that requires employer support staff to provided one-on-one customized support to increase the number of SkillBridge Program approvals and engagement opportunities that will hopefully yield more reported hires.
10. What are some operational highlights from the past year? The V3 Program exceeded the agency goal for the number of new Veteran hires and was a few hundred shy of reaching the agency goal for newly certified employers. However, despite falling short, the V3 Program more than tripled the number of Certified Employers within ten months.
11. What type of outreach did the service line conduct and what are the results? The directorate completed multiple services due to it being composed of four different service lines. As a result, the directorate yielded a wide variety of results. We would be happy to drill down to

provide specific feedback outside of what is mentioned above if the Board provides specific questions of focus on a particular program within the directorate.

12. What, if any, new initiatives / innovative solutions were launched during the past year? The directorate launched multiple initiatives due to it being composed of four different service lines. As noted above, the directorate underwent an entire restructure. We would be happy to drill down to provide specific feedback outside of what is mentioned above if the Board provides specific questions of focus on a particular program within the directorate.
13. What are the biggest challenges facing the service area / program at present? Challenges facing the directorate include access to clients, technology, and inability to improve return on investment for employers. Specifically, the V3 Program needs to establish a portal for employers to share jobs and directly engage with military job seekers. In addition, the program lacks the ability to invest in different opportunities to support all types of employers. Currently small private sector businesses are eligible for the V3 Grant; however, the program does not have a unique support/engagement/funding opportunity for state agencies, local governments, non-profits, medium/large businesses, etc. Moreover, the transition aspect of the V3 Program lacks access to official TAP Briefings on military installations, funds to partner with veteran service organizations that fill service/resource gaps. The Military Medics and Corpsman Program (MMAC) lacks the ability to connect with healthcare veterans to recruit new applicants and access to the entities (hospitals) in which their demographic frequents. Both the Women Veteran Program and Military Spouse liaison also lack access to their demographic, funding to establish peer-to-peer opportunities and/or unique services to provide niche support.
14. How does delivering the service/program help Virginia's veterans? The Transition and Employment Directorate helps Veteran, Military Spouse or eligible person reach his or her fullest potential through access to transition services, training/licensure/certification, entrepreneurial support, and employment. The ultimate resort is helping clients transition to the next chapter in their life (transition to the civilian world, attend school, participate in training program, start a business, or find a job/career). The directorate also supports both local and state economic development by supporting employers.
15. By helping the veteran, how does it help the Commonwealth? All service lines and efforts work together to help military individuals stay, work, and thrive in Virginia.
16. What strategic opportunities are there for the future? The Transition and Employment Directorate is currently compiling goals for the next fiscal year.
17. What else do you want the Board to know about this service area? N/A

## **BVS POC REPORT**

### **HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS**

1. **Date of Report:** September 2023
2. **BVS POC(s):** Senator Mamie Locke, Joe Campa
3. **Service Area/Program:** Housing and Homelessness
4. **VDVS Director/Program Manager:** Housing and Criminal Justice Director-Donna Harrison; Housing and Criminal Justice Coordinator-Desiree Taylor
5. **Mission of service area/program:**

The Virginia Veteran and Family Support Program (VVFS) is operated by the Virginia Department of Veterans Services and provides OUTREACH, CONNECTION and SUPPORT to veterans and their families as they address the challenges of military service, transition, deployments, Post Traumatic Stress, and other behavioral health concerns, as well as Traumatic Brain Injuries and other physical injuries.

**SERVICES THEY PROVIDE:** VVFS provides peer and family support, care coordination, and resource linkages to Service members, veterans, and their families (SMVF). Referrals are coordinated with Community Services Boards, community nonprofits, brain injury service providers, VA medical facilities and other public and private agencies. VVFS also provides outreach and support to justice-involved service members and veterans interfacing with courts, diversion/veteran treatment docket programs, during incarceration in jails and prisons, and while on probation and/or parole supervision.

**In addition, the program also provides specialized outreach and support to homeless services and housing grantees and community providers.**

#### **6. Who does the service area/program serve?**

Veterans of any era (regardless of discharge status) who are Virginia residents; members of the Virginia National Guard and Armed Forces Reserves; and family members and caregivers of those veterans and service members. They work hard to provide a "no wrong door approach", meaning if they can't provide that service within the program, they'll do their best to connect them to a resource/provider that can.

#### **7. What are the service line's primary objectives?**

Provide care coordination, peer and family support services to Service Members, Veterans, and their families (SMVF).

Facilitate access to behavioral health, rehabilitative, and supportive services at the Federal, State, and local levels for SMVF.

**8. What are the key results that support the objectives?**

In FY23 (thru May 2023), VVFS served an average of 322 total clients (new and existing clients) each week. Of these clients, 1,123 were new clients. This included connecting veterans and their family members for resources to approximately 2,523 service needs. These include housing needs (41%), behavioral health support (11%), benefits assistance (10%), employment (7%), and homeless assistance (9%).

**9. What specific objectives has the service line established and what progress has the service line/program made toward achieving the objectives.**

**FY23 Data Overview (thru May 2023):**

- 90% of all new VVFS clients will have a needs assessment completed in 7 days of initial client contact for the purpose of creating a coordinated resource plan **(95% out of 1,302)**
- 90% of veterans with a identified behavioral health need will be connected to an appropriate resource **(100% out of 218)**
- 90% of veterans experiencing literal homelessness will be connected to a shelter/housing resource **(98% out of 195)**
- VVFS and Benefits will screen 95% of new SMVF for suicide risk **(94% out of 17,733)**

**10. What are some operational highlights from the past year?**

**Housing/homeless sub fund:** The homeless sub fund is provided by Veterans Service Foundation (VSF) funds. The fund assists Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF), HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH), and other community providers with rental assistance and homeless prevention funds for veterans and families. In FY23, the program partnered with nine housing providers in conjunction with other community providers and four VA Medical Centers to provide \$239, 256 in funding for 226 veterans needing gap rental assistance and eviction prevention. The highest needs were for rental arrears, security deposits, and first month's rent. The VVFS Housing and Criminal Justice Coordinator manages the homeless sub fund with the assistance of the VVFS Housing and Criminal Justice Director.

**Corporation for Supportive Housing -Housing and Justice Workgroup:**

In addition, the VVFS Housing and Criminal Justice Director and VVFS Housing and Criminal Justice Coordinator joined the Justice and Housing workgroup which is a group based on a grant received by the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH). The Justice and Housing workgroup is a national project with a geographic focus area to explore the need and address challenges for justice-involved individuals to secure housing. In FY23, the group created a Learning Collaborative for property managers and landlords to examine tenant selection plans and help increase housing access for justice-involved individuals.

- Virginia held the **2023 Point-in-Time Count** on the night of January 2023. Based on the PIT count (**please note this is preliminary data until HUD provides the final data in late Fall**) the veterans experiencing homelessness was 386 (284 sheltered, 102 unsheltered). The unsheltered number of veterans increased from 47 (in 2022) to 102 (2023). The PIT count in January 2022 accounted for 395 total homeless veterans. The 2023 count is 2.3% lower than the 2022 count, but there is a substantial increase in unsheltered veterans this year. This is likely due to rising housing costs and increasing inflation rates.
- **Additional 2023 Virginia PIT count preliminary demographic data-**
  - Gender:*
    - 46 female veterans (32 sheltered, 14 unsheltered)
    - 334 male veterans (247 sheltered, 87 unsheltered)
    - 6 Transgender veterans (5 sheltered, 1 unsheltered)
  - Race:*
    - 6 American Indian, Alaska Native, or Indigenous
    - 1 Asian, Asian American
    - 199 Black, African American, or African
    - 1 Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
    - 156 White
    - 23 Multiple races
  - Chronically homeless* (as defined by HUD- “an individual with a disability who has been continuously homeless for one year or more or has experienced at least four episodes of homelessness in the last three years where the combined length of time homeless on those occasions is at least 12 months”):
    - 90 chronically homeless veterans (63 sheltered, 27 unsheltered)

Note: As HUD noted in the 2022 Annual Homelessness Assessment report, there continues to be an overrepresentation of people who identify as Black, African American, or African, as well as Indigenous people (including Native Americans and Pacific Islanders) among the population experiencing homelessness compared to the U.S. Population. In Virginia, Black, African American, or African veterans represented 52% of the homeless veteran population in the January 2023 PIT count (preliminary data), but only makeup 21% of Black veterans of the veteran population overall.



VVFS continues to support housing and homelessness initiatives statewide as well as provide support for direct services to veterans in need.

### **11. What type of outreach did the service line conduct and what are the results?**

VVFS continues to outreach and collaborate with Homeless Continua of Care, the Veterans Affairs Medical Center Homeless Programs, Supportive Services for Veterans Families providers, and other housing/homelessness providers to serve veterans experiencing homelessness or unstably housed. VVFS also represents the agency on several statewide housing workgroups.

In FY23, the VVFS Housing and Criminal Justice Coordinator and Housing and Criminal Justice Director met with a local housing provider in the Richmond area to discuss a possible housing pilot project for veterans being released from incarceration.

In FY23, the VVFS Housing and Criminal Justice Coordinator provided housing information sessions for justice-involved veterans.

The VVFS Housing and Criminal Justice Coordinator is conducting outreach to the Continuum of Care (CoC) Leads to assess housing needs, obtain housing updates, and coordinate information and services related to housing needs for veterans.

### **12. What, if any, new initiatives / innovative solutions were launched during the past year?**

The homeless sub fund assistance timeline was lowered from 3 years to 2 years to address the growing need for rental assistance and eviction prevention funds. This shorter time period will allow VVFS to assist providers with more assistance for veterans that need funds to help them maintain their housing.

### **13. What are the biggest challenges facing the service area / program at present?**

Affordable housing continues to be a challenge as well as the impact on inflation to our clients. Since COVID funding has ended, there have been increases in evictions which is putting a strain on staff and clients. **Statewide rents have increased on average about 24% throughout Virginia and production issues have slowed the development of affordable housing. More than 60% of Virginia's renters have experienced an increase in rent this fiscal year.** Stable housing is a key protective factor for behavioral health and in-turn suicide prevention.

[WHRO - Rent in almost all of Virginia increased in a decade's time](#)

[Rent control remains prohibited in Virginia despite rising rents | 13newsnow.com](#)

[‘Slow yet competitive’: In Virginia, housing prices remain high and supply tight - Virginia Mercury](#)

#### **14. How does delivering the service/program help Virginia’s veterans?**

VVFS helps Service Members, Veterans, and their families access care and support for behavioral health, rehabilitative, and supportive services needs. Often this can prevent a crisis and/or suicide. VVFS staff strive to help SMVF link to services and benefits in federal, state and local systems. In addition, leadership team members serve on statewide advisory committees (on justice, housing, peer support, behavioral health and suicide prevention services) and form strategic partnerships that enhance systems of care for SMVF.

#### **15. By helping the veteran, how does it help the Commonwealth?**

By helping the veteran, it helps the Commonwealth by continuing to ensure Virginia is the most military and veteran friendly state and provides comprehensive and wrap-around services for those residing in Virginia. Ready access to care and supportive services helps veterans and families Stay, Work, and Thrive in Virginia.

#### **16. What strategic opportunities are there for the future?**

The view of housing as healthcare is a continued focus nationally. There are healthcare organizations finding creative ways to address the full wellbeing of individuals by incorporating staff (e.g. patient/community navigators) to help connect their members to housing and other supportive services. Virginia agencies should leverage opportunities to partner with and provide support for healthcare agencies that are focusing on access to healthcare and housing services.

VVFS will continue to collaborate with veteran specific and non-veteran housing and homelessness programs. Housing is the largest need for clients that access VVFS support. This is an important area and as the administration builds out its housing priorities, VVFS is ready to assist.

#### **17. What else do you want the Board to know about this service area?**

- There continues to be a shortage of affordable housing and an eviction crisis (due to the ending of the eviction moratorium) that is affecting housing sustainability.
- Rental increases are placing additional burdens on veterans and families to acquire and maintain housing.
- Some programs that provided supportive services are no longer operating or have not received continued funding (depletion of CARES Act funding).

VVFS assists a range of veterans and their family members with complex needs including criminal justice involvement, caregiver support, homelessness and other housing issues, and

behavioral health needs. VVFS staff are a crucial touchpoint and provide support to navigate through complex systems of care. Housing is a critical component of well-being, is a protective factor for suicide risk, and is essential for veterans and their families to Stay, Work, and Thrive in Virginia.

**Virginia Board of Veterans Services  
Point of Contact Report  
Justice Involved Veterans Program and Veterans Treatment Dockets Update**

1. Date of Report: September 2023
2. BVS POC: Chairman Mike Dick, Senator Bryce Reeves
3. Service Area/Program: Justice Involved Veterans/Justice Involved Services and Veterans Treatment Dockets
4. VDVS Director/Program Manager: Housing and Criminal Justice Director- Donna Harrison; Housing and Criminal Justice Coordinator-Desiree Taylor
5. Mission of service area/program:

The Virginia Veteran and Family Support Program (VVFS) is operated by the Virginia Department of Veterans Services and provides OUTREACH, CONNECTION and SUPPORT to Service Members, Veterans, caregivers, and family members as they address the challenges of military service, transition, deployments, Post Traumatic Stress, and other behavioral health concerns, as well as Traumatic Brain Injuries and other physical injuries. VVFS also provides housing/homeless, and justice services care coordination.

**SERVICES THEY PROVIDE:** VVFS provides peer and family support, care coordination, and resource linkages to Service members, veterans, and their families (SMVF). Referrals are coordinated with Community Services Boards, community nonprofits, brain injury service providers, VA medical facilities and other public and private agencies. **VVFS Justice Involved Services (JIS) program is housed within VVFS and provides outreach and support to justice-involved service members and veterans interfacing with courts, diversion/veteran treatment docket programs, during incarceration in jails and prisons, and while on probation and/or parole supervision.**

6. Who does the service area/program serve?

Veterans of any era (regardless of discharge status) who are Virginia residents; members of the Virginia National Guard and Armed Forces Reserves; and family members and caregivers of those veterans and service members. They work hard to provide a "no wrong door approach", meaning if they can't provide that service within the program, they'll do their best to connect them to a resource/provider that can.

**VVFS Justice Involved Services (JIS) program provides services for veterans in specialty dockets (veteran treatment dockets, drug courts, and behavioral health**

**dockets), incarcerated in jails and prisons, and veterans on probation and/or parole supervision.**

7. What are the service line's primary objectives?

VVFS provides care coordination, peer and family support services to Service Members, Veterans, and their families (SMVF).

VVFS facilitates access to behavioral health, rehabilitative, and supportive services at the Federal, State, and local levels for SMVF.

**The VVFS JIS mission is to provide services and resource connections for justice-involved veterans across the continuum of the criminal justice system from diversion, to incarceration, and on community supervision.**

8. What are the key results that support the objectives?

In FY23 (thru May 2023), VVFS served an average of 322 total clients (new and existing clients) each week. Of these clients, 1,123 were new clients. This included connecting veterans and their family members for resources to approximately 2,523 service needs. These include housing needs (41%), behavioral health support (11%), benefits assistance (10%), employment (7%), and homeless assistance (9%).

**VVFS Justice Involved Services (JIS) program data:** In FY23 (thru June 2023), VVFS served 82 justice-involved veteran clients. The staff serve an average of 35 clients each week.

JIS Program Demographics:

Gender-Males (95%) Females (5%)

Race- White (54%) Black/African American (39%) Asian (1%) Other (1%)

Prefer not to answer (2%) Unknown (3%)

**Homeless/housing assistance needs: 71%**

**National Justice Involved Veteran Data:**

State Prisons: 7.9%

Federal prisons: 5.3%

Total: 107,400 veterans in state and federal prisons

**Justice Involved Veterans in Virginia Data:**

VADOC data as of September 2023

Institutions- 1,519 (6.18% of incarcerated VADOC population)

Community supervision- 2,014 (3.24% of state supervision population)

Jail (state responsible)- 23

Lack of veteran data from other criminal justice system intercept points (jails, courts, law enforcement/arrests, etc.)

9. What specific objective has the service line established and what progress has the service line/program made toward achieving the objectives?

**FY23 Data Overview:**

- 85% of justice-involved veterans with an identified behavioral health need will be connected to an appropriate resource
- **85% of veterans experiencing literal homelessness will be connected to a shelter/housing resource**

10. What are some operational highlights from the past year?

**Veteran Treatment Dockets:** The VVFS Veteran Justice Specialists (VJS) are members of the seven Veteran Treatment Dockets in Virginia. Loudon County started a veteran treatment docket last year. Hampton Veteran Treatment Docket closed in January 2023 due to issues related to eligibility criteria. There are two new pending veteran treatment dockets in Virginia- Chesterfield and Pulaski. There is future interest in Veteran Treatment dockets from Henrico, Va. Beach, and Newport News.

The VVFS VJS continue to participate in the planning for veterans treatment dockets. The VVFS Housing and Criminal Justice Director provides technical assistance to jurisdictions interested in starting veterans treatment dockets along with the Virginia Supreme Court Office of the Executive Secretary.

In FY22, Virginia started the new Virginia Veteran Treatment Docket Implementation Curriculum training. This training is required for all new veteran treatment dockets in Virginia. The Chesterfield County veteran treatment docket team was the first team to complete this training. Loudoun and Pulaski completed the training in FY23.

**VA VJO/HCRV Specialists collaborative meetings:** In FY23, the VVFS Veteran Justice Specialists (VJS) participated in the quarterly collaborative meetings with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Veteran Justice Outreach (VJO) Specialists and Healthcare for Reentry Veterans (HCRV) team. The group discusses program updates, issues related to the justice-involved veteran population, and training opportunities.

**VRSS trainings with local jails:** In collaboration with the Supreme Court of Virginia Office of the Executive Secretary (OES) and the VA, the VVFS Veteran Justice Specialists and VVFS Criminal Justice Director conducted statewide training to local and regional jails on the VA's *Veterans Reentry Search Services* (VRSS) system in order to increase veteran identification in the local jails.

**VVFS Housing and Criminal Justice Coordinator:** A VVFS Housing and Criminal Justice Coordinator position was added to the VVFS team in FY23. Desiree Taylor started with VVFS in September 2022.

**Corporation for Supportive Housing Housing and Justice workgroup:**

The VVFS Housing and Criminal Justice Director and VVFS Housing and Criminal Justice Coordinator joined the Justice and Housing workgroup which is a group based on a grant received by the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH). The Justice and Housing workgroup is a national project with a geographic focus area to explore the need and address challenges for justice-involved individuals to secure housing. In FY23, the group created a Learning Collaborative for property managers and landlords to examine tenant selection plans and help increase housing access for justice-involved individuals.

11. What type of outreach did the service line conduct and what are the results?

Incarcerated veterans outreach-The VVFS Veteran Justice Specialists, Housing and Criminal Justice Coordinator and Housing and Criminal Justice Director continue to provide veteran information sessions for VADOC correctional facilities and local jails. For incarcerated veterans in state prisons (VADOC), the VVFS VJS staff have been conducting intake appointments via phone for needs assessments and re-entry planning. VADOC facility counselors are still available for service coordination and re-entry planning. Phone appointments are coordinated through the VADOC facility counselors.

Intake phone appointments have been more difficult for veterans incarcerated in local and regional jails due to the lack of staff available in the local jails. Most local jails do not have counselors or discharge planning staff to assist with re-entry efforts.

In FY23, the VVFS Housing and Criminal Justice Coordinator conducted housing information sessions for incarcerated veterans and staff at VADOC correctional facilities.

Resource fairs- Resource fairs are slowly picking up in the VADOC facilities and Probation and Parole District offices. The VVFS Veteran Justice Specialists participate in these fairs. They provide **in-reach** to incarcerated veterans and outreach to veterans on community supervision and family members at the resource fairs sponsored by Probation and Parole Districts.

12. What, if any, new initiatives/innovative solutions were launched during the past year?

Additional VJS position: An additional VJS position was added in the North region to provide additional docket coverage and outreach to local jails.

VVFS Housing and Criminal Justice Coordinator: The VVFS Housing and Criminal Justice Coordinator (HCJC) provides housing technical assistance and resources to housing and criminal justice partners. The VVFS HCJC also provides housing case consultation and resources to the VVFS program staff.

VADOC Probation and Parole Districts- The JIS program is partnering with VADOC to provide support to their probation and parole officers as they work with veterans on community supervision. The program met with VADOC to provide information so they could create a community supervision dashboard that captures veteran status and key metrics on health and insurance needs for veterans. The JIS program will be working with VADOC on providing services and resource connections for veterans with certain metrics related to housing/homelessness, behavioral health needs, and insurance benefits.

Incarcerated veterans outreach-The VJS, Housing and Criminal Justice Coordinator, and Housing and Criminal Justice Director provide information sessions to incarcerated veterans and staff in jails and prisons. The Housing and Criminal Justice Coordinator added a housing-focused session to the information sessions to educate staff and veterans on housing resources.

In some cases, due to intermittent COVID-19 precautions, VADOC continues to suspend all in-person visits for individuals in certain state prisons. For incarcerated veterans in state prisons (VADOC), the VVFS VJS staff continue to conduct intake appointments via phone for needs assessments and re-entry planning. VADOC facility counselors are still available for service coordination and re-entry planning. Phone appointments are coordinated through the VADOC facility counselors.

JIS program information was provided to the Virginia Sheriffs' Association's list serv. The VVFS VJS also maintained virtual contact with jail staff contacts about the JIS program and referral process.

C&P exams for incarcerated veterans- In-person Compensation & Pension (C&P) exams for incarcerated veterans have resumed in VADOC facilities. In addition, virtual C&P exams were conducted for individuals with behavioral health claims. Virtual C&P exams for behavioral health claims continue to be an option. The Housing and CJ Director continues to track on all C&P exams for incarcerated veterans in VADOC.

13. What are the biggest challenges facing the service area/program at present?

- ❖ **Justice service needs** – Veteran treatment dockets are expanding in Virginia (7 current dockets, growing to 9 with the addition of Pulaski and Chesterfield). In addition, more capacity needed to outreach to local jails and probation and parole districts.
- ❖ **Housing** continues to be the biggest barrier for this population due to criminal history and lack of financial resources. This need has been exacerbated due to the rise in housing costs and the lack of housing resources in the community. Housing is the number one service request for the JIS program.
- ❖ Recently released individuals from jail and prison continue to have challenges **securing IDs** for housing, employment, and benefits/financial assistance due to



stringent DMV ID requirements and delays in receiving supporting identity documents (birth certificates and Social Security cards).

- ❖ **Re-entry** for veterans being released from incarceration has been especially challenging due to the lack of housing options, program closures, and limited availability of resources.

- ❖ **Local and regional jail discharge planning gaps and veteran identification.** Jails continue to struggle with discharge planning due to limited reentry staff. Most referrals received from the jails are self-referrals from veterans recently released who normally need connections to housing, benefits, and employment. Local jails also have issues with **veteran identification**. Most jails are not using the VA's *Veterans Reentry Search Services* (VRSS) system. There are currently only 11 local and regional jails in Virginia using the VRSS system.

#### **14. How does delivering the service/program help Virginia's veterans?**

VVFS helps Service Members, Veterans, and their families access care and support for behavioral health, rehabilitative, and supportive services needs. Often this can prevent a crisis and/or suicide. VVFS staff strive to help SMVF link to services and benefits in federal, state and local systems. In addition, leadership team members serve on statewide advisory committees (on justice, housing, peer support, behavioral health and suicide prevention services) and form strategic partnerships that enhance systems of care for SMVF.

#### **15. By helping the veteran, how does it help the Commonwealth?**

By helping the veteran, it helps the Commonwealth by continuing to ensure Virginia is the most military and veteran friendly state and provides comprehensive and wrap-around services for those residing in Virginia. Ready access to care and supportive services helps veterans and families Stay, Work, and Thrive in Virginia.

#### **16. What strategic opportunities are there for the future?**

The VJS will be focusing outreach (IOKRs) to local and regional jails and veterans on community supervision (probation/parole).

JIS program-specific strategic opportunities are centered around veteran identification in local and regional jails by marketing and training jail staff on using the VA's Veterans Reentry Search Services (VRSS) system. In addition, the program will be assisting the Virginia Supreme Court Office of the Executive staff on expanding veterans treatment dockets in Virginia and provide the Virginia Veteran Treatment Docket Implementation Curriculum training to interested jurisdictions.

The JIS program and VJS will be partnering with VADOC Probation and Parole Districts to provide support to veterans on community supervision. As of September 2023, VADOC noted there were 2,014 veterans on community supervision. The JIS program is working with VADOC on strategies to support veterans that need assistance and connections to resources.

**17. What else do you want the Board to know about this service area?**

VVFS assists a range of veterans and their family members with complex needs including criminal justice involvement, caregiver support, homelessness and other housing issues, and behavioral health needs. VVFS staff are a crucial touchpoint and provide support to navigate through complex systems of care.

If VVFS Veteran Justice Specialists positions are not expanded this will impact the outreach to jails, services to Veteran Treatment Dockets, and jeopardize support for veterans being supervised by VADOC probation and parole districts.

## **BVS POC REPORT - CEMETERIES**

- Date of Report: September 21, 2023
- BVS POC(s): John Lesinski, Victor Angry
- Service Area/Program: Cemeteries
- DVS Director/Program Manager: Michael Henshaw
- Mission of service area/program (i.e. what does it do?): Provide dignified final resting places in places of honor in perpetuity for Virginia's veterans, eligible family members, and eligible members of the Guard and Reserve and their dependents.
- Who does the service area/program serve (i.e. who are the customers)?
  - Veterans, eligible dependents, eligible members of the Guard and Reserve and their dependents;
  - The veteran community and veterans service organizations;
  - Volunteers and members of the local community; and
  - All Virginians.
- What are the service line's primary objectives?
  - To ensure that cemeteries are maintained as National Shrines;
  - That there is sufficient burial space by anticipating future burial rates; and
  - To treat each customer with compassion, dignity, and respect.
- What are the key results that support the objective(s)?
  - Achieving scores of 97 or higher on the triennial VA inspection and be designated as a National Shrine;
  - Achieve an overall customer satisfaction rate of 97% or higher on the VA's annual Survey of Customer Satisfaction; and
  - Perform extensive, targeted outreach to ensure that veterans and their families are aware of their burial benefits.
- What specific objectives has the service line established and what progress has the service line/program made toward achieving the objective(s).
  - Creating a diverse workforce comprised of at least 20% veterans. Currently Cemeteries are at 13.5% veterans; and
  - Establish in-house honor guard units at Albert G. Horton, Jr. Memorial Veterans Cemetery and the Southwest Virginia Veterans Cemetery (Amelia has a local VSO to provide honors). Dedication dates for both honor guards is estimated to be late 2023/early 2024.
- What are some operational highlights from the past year?
  - Amelia cemetery – \$2.3 million federal grant to add 1,080 additional columbaria niches. Expected completion November 2023;
  - Dublin cemetery – \$1.2 million federal grant to add additional 960 columbaria niches. Expected completion December 2023;

- Suffolk cemetery – \$7.1 million federal grant to add additional 4,800 columbaria niches, 2<sup>nd</sup> committal shelter, and funeral cortege lane. Design complete. Construction will begin late 2023;
  - Virginia General Assembly approved legislation during 2023 session to waive the Spouse/Dependent burial fee (currently \$400) and the Guard/Reserve burial fee (currently \$1,700 - \$2,000), contingent on appropriated funding; and
  - Budget bill passed by General Assembly (2023 Special Session I) and signed by Governor on 09/14 includes \$350,000 General Fund for FY24 that will allow DVS to waive the Spouse/Dependent and Guard/Reserve burials fees.
- What type of outreach did the service line conduct and what are the results?
    - Outreach to the veterans community, veterans service organizations, civic groups, church groups, funeral homes, etc.
    - DVS usually receives several completed “pre-applications” after each outreach event.
  - What, if any, new initiatives / innovative solutions were launched during the past year?
    - Roof-mounted sound systems play patriotic and memorial songs, “To the Colors,” “Retreat,” and other songs/tunes throughout the day.
  - What are the biggest challenges facing the service area / program at present?
    - Lack of columbaria niches – Amelia is currently out of niches, and Suffolk will be depleted by years end. Construction projects underway will rectify that;
    - Road surfaces at Amelia are at/past the end of useful life – cracking, low spots, etc. from 25+ years of use, construction traffic, thousands of visitors a year, etc. Repair and repaving needed.
  - How does delivering the service/program help Virginia’s veterans?
    - Provides an honored and dignified final resting place for those who served our Nation.
  - By helping the veteran, how does it help the Commonwealth?
    - Demonstrates the Commonwealth’s perpetual commitment to honoring those who served.
  - What strategic opportunities are there for the future?
    - The Suffolk cemetery will run out of available in-ground burial spaces (pre-placed outer burial receptacles) in less than four years, and columbaria niches shortly after that. DVS will need to apply for federal grant funding by next summer to “get in line” for federal funding for phased expansion;
    - The Suffolk cemetery will run out of room for future phase expansion in approximately 20 years at projected burial rates. There is land adjacent to the cemetery that may be available for purchase in the next year or so, especially before it if rezoned for commercial and/or residential development.
  - What else do you want the Board to know about this service area?
    - October 19: ceremony at the Suffolk Cemetery to inter the remains of 21 veterans and 1 spouse from the State Anatomical Program;
    - December 16: wreath ceremonies at all three cemeteries.

## **BVS EDUCATION REPORT**

1. Date of Report: 09/21/2023
2. BVS POC(s): Terry McKnight, Mario Flores
3. Service Area/Program: *Education*
4. DVS Director: Tramaine Carroll-Payne, *Deputy Director of Education Programs*
5. Mission of service area/program (i.e. what does it do?):  
*The Virginia Department of Veterans Services (VDVS) Education Service Line encompasses the following programs: the Virginia State Approving Agency (SAA) for Education and Training (i.e., G.I Bill benefits), the Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program benefits (VMSDEP), and Military Education Workforce Initiatives (MEWI).*

*The SAA is responsible for effectively reviewing and monitoring education programs in accordance with the provisions of Title 38 of the United States Code (U.S.C.). The SAA is the sole approval authority in Virginia for approving education institutions and establishments that enroll students in programs involving United States Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) Education Benefits. Educational programs eligible to enroll such students may include state-supported colleges/universities, private and for-profit/non-profit colleges/universities, technical/trade schools, licensing/certification programs, preparatory programs, and OJT/Apprenticeship programs.*

*In addition, the VDVS Education Service Line administers the Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program (VMSDEP), which provides education benefits to spouses and children of military service members killed, missing in action, taken prisoner, or who have been rated by the USDVA as totally and permanently disabled or at least 90 percent permanently disabled as a result of military service. Military service includes service in the United States Armed Forces, United States Armed Forces Reserves, or the Virginia National Guard.*

*The Military Education and Workforce Initiative (MEWI) assists Veterans and service members with their transition from active duty to civilian life. MEWI enhances employment opportunities for Virginians who have served in the United States Military and their spouses by providing a pathway to education, training, certifications, and technology. Within MEWI, there exist two distinct service lines, Military Educational Enhancement Programs, and the Virginia SkillBridge Program. Military Educational Enhancement Programs include our Technology Initiative, where laptops are provided at no cost to veterans, active-duty service members, or their spouses who are enrolled at approved colleges and universities, as well as our Pathways to Careers program, which through a partnership with the Community College Workforce Alliance (CCWA) provides 11 industry leading certifications and credentialing opportunities at no cost to veterans or their spouses. The Virginia SkillBridge Program is VDVS's Department of Defense approved SkillBridge Program which allows for service members who are active duty and 180 days prior to leaving service, to participate in internship at approved providers, gaining the training and work experience necessary to secure good employment after leaving service.*

6. Who does the service area/program serve (i.e. who are the customers)? *Colleges, Universities, GI Bill beneficiaries, Active-Duty Service Members, Veterans, their spouses and children of military service members.*

7. What are the service line's primary objectives?

*-Remove barriers to state and federal education benefits to facilitate the appropriate and timely delivery of education benefits to veterans and entitled dependents*

*-Ensure education programs are administered efficiently and in accordance with controlling law and regulations*

*-Protect the G.I. Bill from Fraud, Waste, and Abuse*

*-Provide training and educational opportunities to active-duty service members, veterans and their spouses to enhance their educational and employment opportunities.*

8. What are the key results that support the objective(s)?

- *The Key results include meeting the requirements of the Cooperative Agreement with the Department of Veteran Affairs (DVA), which the SAA must process approvals for facilities within 30 days of receiving a complete application from facilities. All programs must be approved via the Virginia State Approving Agency in order for facilities to be able to certify it for payment. Also, the SAA uses data to assess risk factors to conduct Risked-Based Surveys to determine if a facility remains approvable for the State Approving Agency. The staff must complete the surveys (audits) and submit written reports to the VA, including findings and reported outcomes. Our OKRs for this objective are:*

- 1) *Process 100% of G.I. Bill approval request within 30 days of receipt, and*

- 2) *Complete 100% of Veterans Affairs assigned compliance visits annually per agreement. This year the cooperative agreement included 42 compliance Surveys.*

- *The Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program seeks to increase awareness of using the Program towards economic self-sufficiency and increase college enrollment for eligible beneficiaries. VMSDEP OKRs are:*

- 1) *VMSDEP will increase the number of active participants to at least 6,000 unique participants during the 2022-23 academic year.*

- *The Military Education and Workforce Initiative seeks to increase program visibility and availability to the military community while providing ever expanding opportunities and exceptional customer service. MEWIs OKR is:*

- 1) *MEWI will increase the number of Virginia SkillBridge Approved Providers to 100 by calendar years end.*

9. What specific objectives (end of FY2022, end of FY2025) has the service line established and what progress has the service line/program made toward achieving the objective(s).

Note: Actions associated with USDVA requirements are measured against the federal fiscal year calendar, not the Virginia fiscal year calendar. The federal fiscal year begins on 1 October and ends on 30 September.

- A. Complete 100% of Veterans Affairs assigned compliance visits annually per the Cooperative Agreement. *As of August 24, 2023, the SAA has completed 42 (100%) of the assigned surveys for the federal fiscal year per the Cooperative Agreement with USDVA.*
- B. VMSDEP will increase active participation to at least 6,000 unique participants during academic year 2022-23. *During academic year 2021-22, the Program had 3,480 unique participants.*
- C. Increase approved On-the-Job Training & Apprenticeship (OJT/APP) active facilities by 5% quarterly. *The SAA has developed an outreach strategy with the Virginia Values Veterans program (V3) in order to create a pathway for approval for V3 companies. In this regard, V3 Regional Program Managers will encourage companies to consider approval to certify employees for the G.I. Bill. After V3 Certification, employers will be encouraged to meet with the SAA to determine eligibility for approval.*

10. What are some operational highlights from the past year?

*The State Approving Agency has met the FY 22 compliance survey contractual requirements with the US Department of Veteran Affairs. The agency was contracted to conduct 56 surveys before August 15, 2022. The amount of funds recovered as a result of the surveys to date is \$76,735.49 in overpayments and \$5,888.95 in underpayments. (Overpayments are amounts that must be repaid to the VA based on errors, underpayments should have been paid out and will be paid to the school and/or the veteran as a result of findings during a compliance survey.)*

*The VMSDEP and the MEWI partnered with Old Dominion University, Radford University, and Northern Virginia Community College to host a VMSDEP/MEWI Open House and Laptop Rollout initiatives at each of the listed institutions. Collectively, the VMSDEP and the MEWI presented programmatic information to approximately 100 attendees, accommodated such attendees with application to VMSDEP benefits and MEWI services, and provided 89 laptops, made possible by a generous grant from the Altria Group, to eligible VMSDEP beneficiaries.*

*MEWI through the Virginia Veterans Service Foundation has received an additional \$25,000 funding grant from Newport News Shipbuilding to replicate the Pathways to Careers Program in the Tidewater region, allowing for the expansion of services to a far greater number of service member, veterans and their families. MEWI through VSF has secured an additional \$75,000 funding grant from the Altria Group to continue funding Pathways to Careers in the Richmond Region and explore other educational and training opportunities. MEWI has added one full time employee who started in September and has added one wage position which will start on May 25<sup>th</sup>.*

11. What type of outreach did the service line conduct and what are the results?

*The MEWI Program has attended Transition Assistance Program (TAP) classes, joined 50 Strong's nationwide employment and SkillBridge program, Secured the Army's Career Skills Program (CSP) program approval and MOU, attended the Hampton Roads Workforce*

*Council's DoD SkillBridge Expos and partnered with the VMSDEP Program to visit Colleges and Universities across the Commonwealth sharing our programs with students, their parents and school faculty.*

12. What, if any, new initiatives / innovative solutions were launched during the past year?

*MEWI has continued to develop new strategies by partnering with Newport News Shipbuilding to bring credentialing and certification opportunities to the Tidewater region.*

13. What are the biggest challenges facing the service area / program at present?

*Visibility of the VMSDEP program*

*Funding expansion efforts to allow MEWI to better serve military communities throughout the different regions of Virginia.*

14. How does delivering the service/program help Virginia's veterans? *The SAA program ensures the timely and accurate delivery of education benefits, helps decrease higher education "predators", and ultimately protects the GI Bill from fraud, waste, and abuse. The VMSDEP provides tuition waivers to eligible beneficiaries. MEWI provides critical technology equipment, educational, and training opportunities.*

15. By helping the veteran, how does it help the Commonwealth? *Education programs provide resources and assistance to help veterans, live, work, and thrive in Virginia. Having access to high-quality education programs is essential for keeping veterans in Virginia.*

16. What strategic opportunities are there for the future? *There is an opportunity to create state grants for veterans, spouses and dependents who may not be eligible for the G.I. Bill or may have used their benefits and need to complete or start their education journey. GAP funding would be great. More specifically, not every veteran who has served is eligible for GI Bill benefits, those who are eligible may have exhausted their benefits before completing their training or education, and others may have become ineligible due to date of service restrictions. Grants would be helpful for such students.*

17. What else do you want the Board to know about this service area?





COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA  
JOINT LEADERSHIP COUNCIL OF  
VETERANS SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS

101 N. 14<sup>TH</sup> ST., 17<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR  
RICHMOND VA 23219

*Air Force Association*  
*Air Force Sergeants Association*  
*American Legion*  
*AMVETS*  
*Association of the United States Army*  
*Disabled American Veterans*  
*Fifth Baptist Church Veterans Ministry*  
*Fleet Reserve Association*  
*Legion of Valor of the U.S., Inc.*  
*Marine Corps League*  
*Military Officers Association of America*  
*Military Order of the Purple Heart*  
*Military Order of the World Wars*  
*Navy Mutual Aid Association*  
*Paralyzed Veterans of America*  
*Reserve Organization of America*  
*Roanoke Valley Veterans Council*  
*Student Veterans of America*  
*Veterans of Foreign Wars*  
*Vietnam Veterans of America*  
*Virginia Army/Air National Guard Enlisted Association*  
*Virginia National Guard Association*  
*Women Marines Association*  
*Wounded Warrior Project*

**JOINT LEADERSHIP COUNCIL**  
**REPORT TO THE BOARD OF VETERANS SERVICES**  
**September 21, 2023**

As the newly elected Chairman of the Joint Leadership Council (JLC) I want to recognize and thank Denice Williams for her faithful service as the JLC Chair from 2021 – 2023. We are fortunate that Ms. Williams continues her service on the JLC as the Disabled Veterans of America (DAV) representative.

The Joint Leadership Council (JLC) met on July 13, 2023 at the Virginia ABC Building Hearing Room in Mechanicsville, VA. We welcomed the Student Veterans of America as the newest Veteran Service Organization (VSO) to the JLC. We look forward to the advocacy of its representative, Katherine Martinez. We also held an election for Vice-Chair, and the JLC voted to re-elect Monti Zimmerman, the JLC representative from the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA).

The interim JLC Legislative Officer, Glenn Yarborough facilitated discussions on the JLC's 2024 legislative priorities. Six proposed initiatives were presented during the meeting. The JLC also resolved to send a letter to the Joint Study Committee of the Virginia General Assembly concerning gaming regulations on VSOs. During the September meeting, the JLC will vote to adopt and prioritize the 2024 initiatives. JLC members have begun their outreach to General Assembly members to advocate for JLC initiatives and will continue this work leading up to the 2024 Session and the JLC Day on the Hill planned for January, 2024.

I am excited to work with you during my term as the JLC Chair as we continue our advocacy to make Virginia the best state in the nation for veterans to live, work, and thrive.

Respectfully submitted,

Kevin Hoffman  
Chairman



**VIRGINIA VETERANS SERVICE FOUNDATION**  
**Report to the Board of Veterans Services**  
**September 221 2023**

The Virginia Veterans Services Foundation (VSF) Board of Trustees held their quarterly meeting on September 7, 2023, at the ABC Headquarters in Richmond, Virginia.

Since the mission of the Foundation is to raise funds to support programs conducted by the Department of Veterans Services which support Virginia Veterans, we must continue to assess are we taking the right steps in our fundraising efforts. The Foundation has recently conducted an assessment and it was recommended the Foundation consider organizational changes and prepare a strategic plan for development/fundraising. Request for Proposal will be posted by the end of September

Financially, the Foundation is on sound footing with a balance at the end of FY 2023 of \$3.4 million. Funds raised for FY23, July 1, 2022, through June 30, 2023, were \$803,423. This is an increase of \$256,600 from last year. The breakdown is as follows:

Business	\$112,114	14%
Charitable Organizations	\$124,844	16%
Grants	\$55,000	7%
Individuals	\$95,982	12%
Trusts	\$374,161	47%
VSO	\$41,323	5%
	<u>\$803,423</u>	

The Foundation received a \$50,000 grant from Walmart to support the Veterans Initiative in Petersburg. This \$50,000 will be used to directly fund the veteran activities of the Partnership for Petersburg. Some of the programs offered include filing claims with the federal Veterans Administration (VA), advocating for veterans with the VA, employment and workforce training assistance, programs for military spouses and families, military transition assistance programs, disabled veterans' assistance, as well as several other programs geared towards providing as much support as possible for Virginia's veterans and their families. All veterans and their family members residing in and around Petersburg will have access to this office and its dedicated staff.

The next VSF Board of Trustees meeting is scheduled for December 7, 2023, at a location to be determined.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Paul Haughton  
Chairman  
Virginia Veterans Services Foundation



### Insider trips to some of Virginia's most remarkable destinations that celebrate and honor our country's military history

A seat on the bus is \$127 and includes lunch, snacks, beer/wine for the bus ride, and a tip for the driver. Insider trips are for adults ages 21 years or older. Space is limited.

Register today at [VaWarMemorial.org/insidertrips](http://VaWarMemorial.org/insidertrips). Contact [awarman@vawarmemorial.org](mailto:awarman@vawarmemorial.org) with questions.

#### WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 9 — Hampton Roads Naval Museum and General MacArthur Memorial

Join us on a trip to Norfolk as we explore the MacArthur Memorial, a museum and research center dedicated to preserving and presenting the story of the life of General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, and receive a guided tour of the Hampton Roads Naval Museum, which celebrates the long, regional history of the U.S. Navy.

#### WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 13 — Fort Monroe

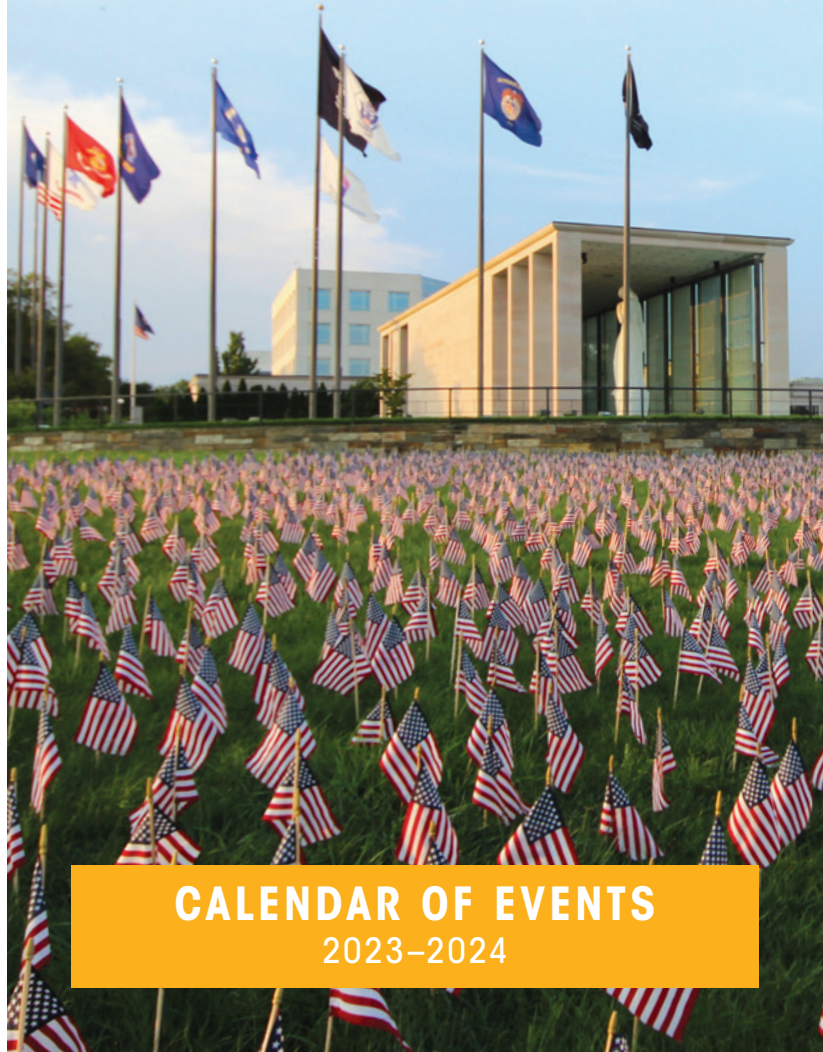
Insiders will be guided through Fort Monroe's Visitor and Education Center and the Casemate Museum, which focuses on the military history at Fort Monroe dating back to the early 1600s.



LEFT: A 2022 trip to Arlington National Cemetery included a visit with the horses of the U.S. Army Caisson Platoon.



## Please Join Us at the Memorial for These Exceptional Events!



### CALENDAR OF EVENTS 2023-2024



## Leadership in America

This lecture series features a wide array of speakers addressing topics of military readiness, economic strength, history, and cultural influence — those things that have positioned the United States as a world superpower.

Tickets are \$25 per person and include a light reception. This event is free for donors who give \$1,000 or more annually.

Find more information at [VaWarMemorial.org/LIA](http://VaWarMemorial.org/LIA). Contact [awarman@vawarmemorial.org](mailto:awarman@vawarmemorial.org) with questions.

**ADMIRAL JAMES ELLIS**  
*Taiwan is not Ukraine (and vice versa)*  
Wednesday, September 27, 2023

Admiral James (Jim) O. Ellis, Jr. completed a distinguished 39-year Navy career in 2004, retiring as a four-star admiral. His final assignment was Commander of the United States Strategic Command during a time of challenge and change. In this role, he was responsible for the global command and control of United States strategic and space forces, reporting directly to the Secretary of Defense. He is a frequent speaker and news commentator on matters of nuclear defense, space exploration and possible "war in space," national security, and national intelligence.

#### NOW ON DISPLAY Veteran's Art Gallery

Painting with Light: Visible and Infrared" features the captivating photography of Retired Navy Captain and Virginia native Rich Davis. Davis's work primarily focuses on landscapes, night images, and infrared photographs. This exhibit shares his unique point of view and how various photographic lighting changes alter an image's perspective. Select pieces on display are for sale and 100% of the proceeds will go directly to the Virginia War Memorial Foundation. Pieces can be purchased online or in person, and will be available for pickup upon the exhibition's close in late October.

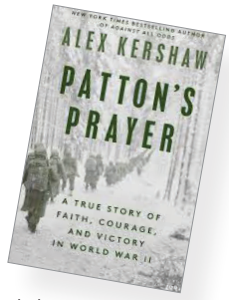


**ONE WEEK IN OCTOBER**  
Join us for a special documentary film screening at the Hotel Roanoke on Monday, October 23.  
Join us at the Virginia War Memorial for a panel lecture and reception on Wednesday, October 25.

October 2023 will be the 40th anniversary of the Beirut bombing, when 241 U.S. Military personnel were killed in the Barracks bombing, including 220 Marines. The incident was the deadliest single-day death toll for the United States Marine Corps since the Battle of Iwo Jima. That same week, citing danger to the U.S. citizens in Grenada, President Ronald Reagan ordered nearly 2,000 U.S. troops onto the island, where they soon found themselves facing opposition from Grenadian armed forces and groups of Cuban military engineers who were in Grenada to repair and expand the island's airport. To commemorate these events, the Virginia War Memorial Foundation will debut our newest documentary, *One Week in October*.

This documentary will air on PBS stations across the Commonwealth. Check your local programming guide.

**ALEX KERSHAW**  
*Patton's Prayer*  
Friday, April 19, 2024



Alex Kershaw is the widely acclaimed, prize-winning, *New York Times* best-selling author of eleven books, including *The Longest Winter* and *The Bedford Boys*. He will return to the Virginia War Memorial to speak on his newest book, *Patton's Prayer* (scheduled for publication in April 2024) on General George S. Patton and his finest hours during the Battle of the Bulge.

#### Virginia Medal of Honor Gallery *Beyond the Call of Duty*

This gallery is the only place in the Commonwealth where you can learn the history of the brave Virginians who have been awarded the nation's highest and most prestigious military honor for valor. Of the more than 25 million men and women who have served and sacrificed in our nation's wars, fewer than 3,600 have received the Medal of Honor. And of those, 50 have been officially attributed to the Commonwealth of Virginia by the Department of Defense. Each of the Virginia recipients is remembered in this gallery with a plaque that bears the recipient's full name, hometown, military unit, a description of the recognized action, and the full text of the citation. Also in the gallery are video stations where honorees can be researched, and additional information about the individuals and the events related to their service can be reviewed.





## Join Us for these Commemorations and Patriotic Observances



**SEPTEMBER 11**

### Commonwealth's Patriot Day Ceremony

**SEPTEMBER 15**

### National POW/MIA Recognition Day

In honor of POW/MIA Day every third Friday in September, we set a Missing Man Table, as a reminder of the loss of loved ones. The table at the Virginia War Memorial is set with a single place setting to remember those who are absent and cannot attend a meal because of their POW or MIA status. The setting uses official Commonwealth of Virginia china, which was presented as a gift to the Memorial exclusively for this purpose from Virginia's Executive Mansion.



- The table is round to show our never-ending concern.
- The cloth is white, symbolizing the purity of their motives when answering the call to serve.
- The single red rose reminds us of the lives of these Americans and their loved ones who keep the faith, while seeking answers.
- The red ribbon symbolizes our continued uncertainty, hope for their return, and determination to account for them.
- A slice of lemon reminds us of the bitter fate of those captured or missing in a foreign land.
- A pinch of salt symbolizes the tears of our missing and their families who long for answers.
- The glass is inverted to symbolize their inability to share a toast.
- The chair is empty because loved ones are still missing.

**NOVEMBER 10**

### Commonwealth's Veterans Day Ceremony

**DECEMBER 7**

### Commonwealth's Pearl Harbor Day Ceremony

**SEPTEMBER 22**

### Sips on the Skyline

Join us for our celebration of Virginia Spirits Month as we say goodbye to summer and welcome fall.

Sips on the Skyline features a band and dance floor, a dinner and dessert buffet, a beer and wine bar, and craft cocktails and spirit tastings presented by Virginia distilleries, including veteran-owned businesses.



# SIPS

ON THE SKYLINE



## Join Us in Remembering

**NOW ON VIEW**

### Fifty Years Beyond: The Vietnam Veteran Experience

There's still time to see The Virginia War Memorial's exhibition "Fifty Years Beyond: The Vietnam Veteran Experience." Professional photographer, Laura Hatcher (U.S. Navy, retired) and videographer Pamela Vines (U.S. Army, retired) traveled the state with Memorial staff to photograph and document the experiences of Virginia's Vietnam Veterans over the past 50 years. Their photographs and footage create a comprehensive experience for viewers of the exhibit and are shared alongside candid photos of 50 of Virginia's Veterans during their time in Vietnam.



### Arms for the Nation

This long-term exhibition tells the story of the resolve, spirit and skills of Virginians who have fought to gain and preserve our freedoms from the American Revolution to the present. The exhibition highlights the Jean H. and Howard P. Hart Collection of U.S. Martial Arms and artifacts.



**COMING IN 2024**

### D+80: The Normandy Invasion

The Virginia War Memorial's upcoming exhibit, D+80: The Normandy Invasion, will mark the 80th anniversary of the Allied invasion of Normandy in World War II. No single action, or single day, remains more recognized or iconic in American military history than the 6th of June, 1944. Virginians played a pivotal role in the invasion, with the 29th Infantry "Blue and Gray" Division leading the first wave assault on Omaha Beach. Virginian units suffered some of the heaviest losses on D-Day, such as the historic 116th Infantry Regiment, which sustained 341 casualties.



Photography: John Henley Photography, Mark Mitchell Photography, Virginia War Memorial, Virginia War Memorial Foundation  
Design: Communication Design, Inc.

### OUR MISSION

We support the Virginia War Memorial in its efforts to preserve the stories of veterans who made the ultimate sacrifice, to honor all veterans and active-duty military, and to inspire love of country through education.

### OUR VISION

A global audience will recognize the valor and sacrifice of Virginia's military veterans in the pursuit of liberty, democracy, justice, and peace for all.

Follow us on social media for the latest news.



[VaWarMemorial.org](http://VaWarMemorial.org)

# NEWS NEWS NEWS



## Commonwealth of Virginia Art and Architectural Review Board Grants Final Approval



### Creating a Public Green Space

**W**e are recognized as the nation's leading state war memorial. We very much want to look the part. Our fallen veterans deserve no less.

The Virginia War Memorial is located on five rolling acres with a beautiful view of the James River and the skyline of downtown Richmond. The names of nearly 12,000 Virginia men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice during World War II and the wars in Korea, Vietnam, and the Persian Gulf are engraved on the Memorial's Shrine of Memory-20th Century. The Memorial's Shrine of Memory-Global War on Terrorism carries the names of Virginians killed in Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon, and other locations around the world.

The setting provides the perfect backdrop for paying tribute to the military veterans whose service is, and has always been, essential to our democracy. We know that scenic beauty, shade, and accessible green space are essential to the soul. Examples of quiet space architecture, such as the Memorial, can be powerful places of connection and contemplation. The creation of a public green space will provide a sense of arrival and better wayfinding.

The plan provides opportunities for special commemorative gardens. The use of native and favorite Virginia plants, shade trees, and pollinators will encourage longer, more comfortable visits.

Visit our website and look for exciting details on our plans and learn how you can help us share the most beautiful view in Richmond.