

ADVISORY BOARD ON VETERANS AFFAIRS



MEETING MINUTES  
Tuesday, 2 May 2017  
11th floor, Suite 1114  
441 4<sup>th</sup> Street NW/One Judiciary Square  
Washington DC 20001  
6:30 – 8:00 p.m.

- 1) Meeting was called to order by Secretary Steve Dalzell at 1846
- 2) Pledge of Allegiance
- 3) Advisory Board Members Roll Call
  - a) Voting Members Present: Adebayo, Curry, Dalzell, Khan, Spangenberg, Sydnor, Tobin, Williams
  - b) Voting Members Absent: Curry, Dier, Grant, Kamara, Lampkin, Locks, Mack, McClendon, Moore, Pridemore (deployed), Scott, White, Wynn
  - c) A quorum was not present when Roll was taken.
- 4) Agenda was reviewed
- 5) Approval of minutes from March and April
  - a) No approval was possible in the absence of a quorum.
  - b) Minutes are online at <http://www.open-dc.gov/meeting/monthly-meeting>
- 6) Special Guests
  - a) None scheduled.
- 7) Director's Report
  - a) The Director thanked the following individuals for specific contributions the past month:
    - i) Mr. White for attending our first Veterans Roundtable.
    - ii) Mr. Spangenberg for filling in for director at The Washington Center's Vet Initiative launch.
    - iii) Mr. Dier for setting up and attending the MOVA/MPD meeting.
    - iv) Mr. Jones for arranging 20 tickets to the National Museum for African American History and Culture for residents of the Armed Forces Retirement home.
  - b) Operations:
    - i) The new office is up and running. Thanks to Carole who quite literally did the heavy lifting.
    - ii) Budget hearing was held on 7 April. Mr. Ross described this as a good chance to talk about board and the vet community. There was great participation and good positive feedback (had been more negative in past hearings). His central theme is outreach and getting word out to vets. He brought those with comments to the office afterward and talked about outreach, drafted them to assist us with grassroots outreach,

- iii) The OVA will be putting together pamphlets about the office and what the DC government does for veterans. It will put them out where vets congregate and make it available electronically. The first version will be simple, but then can build issue-specific editions. Mr. Ross will put together a timetable to share with the board, and would be open to committees supporting the writing of editions on their focus area.
  - iv) Supported AMVETS Because We Care Day at VA Medical Center.
  - v) Supported DC DAV 96th Annual Convention.
  - vi) Supported Travis Manion Foundation's transition workshop.
  - vii) Had a great meeting with the DC Community Collaborative.
  - viii) America Serves meeting went well – no timetable at present. A collaboration might help centralize information and make it seamless for the veteran seeking assistance.
  - ix) Met with Metropolitan Police Department. Looking at ways to work together during a summer focus on mental health, including justice-involved vets
  - x) Great first Veterans Roundtable. Mr. Ross said he got great ideas on how to reach out to lower-economic-status and homeless vets. Participants agreed it was a good experience and should be replicated, and the OVA plans to hold them twice per month, bringing in different community players each time, including our board. If it takes off, could look to do it weekly.
  - xi) The office is collaborating on a new financial literacy tool for veterans, which will go live in about 10 days. They've seen a rash of evictions from HUD voucher-supported housing units. Much of this is "self-inflicted," so could be reduced by helping vets gain financial literacy
  - xii) DDS will be setting up vocational rehabilitation hours in the MOVA office space.
- c) Upcoming Events
  - i) Suicide awareness and prevention event, 3 May 1000-1300.
  - ii) Veterans Town Hall, 4 May, 1900 at the VAMC.
  - iii) Veteran roundtable on 10 May, 1200-1400.
  - iv) MOVA open house on 10 May, 1500-1800.
  - v) Veterans Small Business Bootcamp on 2 June. Has a cap of 25 and interested individuals need to preregister. They have three set up over the calendar year.
  - vi) Veterans Mental Health First Aid Course, 27 June. This free course also has a cap of 25 participants, and will lead to certification for three years.
- d) Updates:
  - i) Hopefully we will be hiring a new staff member in OVA soon – Mr. Ross has interviewed a great candidate.
  - ii) The OVA is also bringing on an intern on Friday, and is working to bring on a Mission Continues Fellow over the summer. The latter will focus on digital engagement, net presence. Their presence may also help move the OVA newsletter to weekly distribution.
- e) Questions for the Director
  - i) Mr. Sydnor asked if the budget hearing included any issues about the resources needed for veterans programs.
    - (1) Mr. Ross said he didn't ask for more, as he feels the office has what is needed.
    - (2) He elaborated that trying replicate the VA would not be a good use of taxpayer money, but that they've laid a strong foundation for success and can shift to programmatic implementation. His focus is on full use of the existing budget.
  - ii) Mr. Spangenberg asked what the current vet unemployment rate is.

- (1) Mr. Ross said the latest survey found it was 5.1%, but two quarters before it was 11%. The statistical sampling size for our population is unreliable, so it's not surprising to see wild swings. Both are informative if not correct.
  - (2) He added that he's seeing a requests for unemployment-related assistance, more than before, so either outreach is working or the problem's getting worse.
  - iii) Mr. Ross concluded that he hopes for resolution on the vacant board chairman's position by next meeting.
- 8) Old Business (Chairman/Director)
  - a) Visits to ward meetings
    - i) Mr. Dalzell and Mr. Spangenberg reported they had gone to the April meeting of the Ward 6B commissioners. The commissioners were particularly interested in homelessness and pointed out the link to DC statehood – "vets without votes."
    - b) Veterans Affairs is seeking individuals to share their stories on the veterans' patient experience. The deadline to sign up is 12 May.
- 9) New Business (Chairman)
  - a) Mr. Spangenberg presented to the board his "Draft 2017 Strategy for Improving Selective Service System (SSS) Registration in DC."
    - i) Among his key points were the following:
      - (1) The High School Registrar Program (<https://www.sss.gov/Volunteers/Selective-Service-Registrar-Program>) is one way to reach out to DC teenagers.
      - (2) The DC Reengagement Center (<https://osse.dc.gov/service/dc-reengagement-center>) has process checklist to help those who didn't go to college but later explore – this could be on the list.
      - (3) DC DMV has opt-out policies, but many may not be hitting that gate. For those who don't enter the DMV system, we could link to registration to the DC One card or other mechanisms.
      - (4) By its nature, the SSS doesn't know who is opting out of registration.
      - (5) To fix the problem, we need to Partner with SSS, DC nonprofits, DC College Access (who has embedded counselors and could get the word out).
    - ii) Mr. Khan noted that he had proposed an opt-in reform before, but didn't get anywhere, DC doesn't want to have a legislative fix, so he likes the many volunteer ideas.
    - iii) Barbara Pitman is the DC director for SSS. Mr. Spangenberg has worked with her as a volunteer, but he's not sure why they can't get traction. The challenge may be that she doesn't have the resources for meet the mission (currently one PT person). Knowing it's an issue means we might consider new approaches.
    - iv) Mr. Spangenberg emphasized the need for a lead official, particularly a fulltime DC government official. The Office of State Superintendent of education has the lead for public and public charter schools, and is chartered to help them look at career options, so we may be able to persuade them to provide the lead.
    - v) Mr. Spangenberg was asked what is the major impact for DC of low registration rates. He said it was a personal impact, not one for the city directly. Additionally, if there ever is a need for a draft, it would need to be fair and equitable. Large numbers avoiding it means would fail to be equitable.
    - vi) Mr. Khan suggested assigning the issue to the Government Affairs Committee.
  - b) Mr. Khan noted that May is Asian-Pacific Islander Month, and he will be giving a talk on veterans from those groups. He will share information with the board by email.
- 10) Committee Reports
  - a) In April meeting, Interim Vice-Chair Dier requested committees develop 30/60/90-day goals for their activity.
  - b) Government Affairs.

- i) The committee is still working on the idea for a DC Veterans Hall of Fame. They have proposed a few ideas and is looking at a partnership with a nonprofit, but is still exploring options.
    - ii) The committee is also planning to develop a guide to the steps for introducing ideas for legislation.
  - c) Board members noted that we need to reestablish the committee membership list and define the missions of them.
    - i) Mr. Ross suggested reviewing assignments and forms next meeting.
    - ii) Several members said they liked the idea of getting outsiders to join committees even if not board members.
- 11) Public Comment (Maximum 2 minute per person). Contact info is available for board members through the secretary.
- a) Anna Townes, a lawyer from Montgomery County, said she represents vets with service-connected disability claims. She said her experience is that we need more advocacy. One little-known fact is that lawyers can't represent vets before the VA until after their first claim has been ruled on.
  - b) Effie Forde, also a lawyer in the area, said she is trying to do more outreach to vets to make them aware of the claims process and how to access services during that process. In her criminal justice practice, she represented vets with a range of issues. She would like to work with veterans mental health programs, and claims issues. She thought the work on SSS registration is a good idea.
    - i) Mr. Khan asked if pro-bono representations, from local law schools for example, is not reaching the need of the vets. Ms. Towns said these are helpful and often get lots of people. The issue is getting the vets there, and educating them about their options.
    - ii) Ms. Townes and Ms. Forde were also asked about the legal fee structure. Ms. Townes said the veteran pays the attorney 20% of the first check in a revised claim.
  - c) Mr. Ariel de Jesus, American Legion
    - i) Mr. de Jesus works in the American Legion's Education Division.
    - ii) He also said there would be a veterans' employment event in July at the Legion headquarters. He said he'd be interested in knowing more about what the board and OVA think the DC vet population needs.
      - (1) Mr. Ross said it would be great to have DCHR at the event with direct-hire ability.
      - (2) He said the board and OVA might also be able to help the Legion find a location with more space.
  - d) Christopher Fletcher was introduced as the prospective Mission Continues fellow
  - e) Joseph Sharpe, American Legion
    - i) The AL is looking to create a Boys State program in DC. Last year none of the participants actually resided in DC, but from the neighboring states.
    - ii) Mr Spangenberg noted that he had met another AL leader and had also discussed the DC Boys State, in particular the link to JROTC.
  - f) Fiona Tomlin, Travis Manion Foundation
    - i) TMF has a Character Does Matter program (<http://www.travismanion.org/cdm/>), which train veterans to go into schools and other venues to share their experience.
    - ii) Mr. Ross noted that My Brother's Keeper also trying to set up a mentoring program, may be some synergism with the Travis Manion programs.
- 12) Upcoming (Events/Meetings/Holidays)
- a) Next board meeting 6 June 2017
  - b) GI Film Festival is coming to DC at the end of the month (<https://gifilmfestival.com/>)
- 13) Meeting was adjourned at 2013 hrs.