



**Department of Veterans Affairs  
State of Connecticut**

**Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes  
March 20, 2018**

*(Minutes subject to review at next Board Meeting)*

**I. Convene Meeting:**

The Meeting was called to order by Chair McDavid at 3:32 PM in the DVA Commissioner's conference room.

Pledge of allegiance was led by Chair McDavid followed by the taking of attendance of Board members.

In attendance: Paul Barry, Richard Benson, Philip Cacciola, Robert Cheslock, Ronald Coveney, Peter Galgano, Christopher McDavid, Paul Tarbox, Michael A. Thomas, and Kjell Tollefsen.

Absent: Amy Donahue, Steven Harris, Brien Horan, Frederick Leaf, Patrick Nelligan, and Tatiana Quinzi

Chair McDavid entertained a motion to approve the minutes of the previous meeting. Motion made by Trustee Tollefsen and seconded by Trustee Thomas. Motion passed unanimously without any corrections or edits to the minutes.

Chair McDavid commented on the challenge our agency is dealing with regarding the budget and congratulated the Commissioner on his confirmation.

**Commissioner's update:** Commissioner Saadi introduced new members of the DVA staff, Office of Advocacy and Assistance (OAA) Manager Ryan McKenna and Executive Secretary, Darlene Deschaine. The Commissioner spoke briefly about budget issues which included public hearings attended by many Veterans from around the state as well as members of the DVA BOT. The Commissioner spoke of recent events that he participated in including Wreaths Across America, the Ground Breaking Ceremony of the State Veterans Cemetery in Middletown, DVA event honoring female WWII Marine Veterans and the DVA Black History Month celebration. The Commissioner reported that he accepted a donation from AT&T and Verizon from the proceeds of the Veterans Day Charity 3 Miler. Commissioner Saadi reported on upcoming events including the Vietnam Memorial Monument Rededication on March 29<sup>th</sup> in Danbury, the AUSA Spring Awards Dinner, the Welcome Home & Freedom Salute Ceremony for CT Air National Guard and a Tree Climbing Competition on May 5<sup>th</sup> at the Rocky Hill Campus.

## **II. Old Business**

### **A. DVA Healthcare Center Update (HCC) – License & Level of Care Review:**

Chair McDavid explained that Trustee Nelligan, Chair of the HCC Sub-committee, had a schedule conflict and could not attend the meeting and asked Commissioner Saadi brief the issue. The Commissioner explained the dual license approach regarding the DVA Healthcare Center and stated that the issue of saving 2 million dollars and changing the license has been decoupled. He reported that OPM, DSS, DPH and DVA team are working on the dual license approach. The Commissioner explained that the intent is to provide Veterans with a continuum of care and to maintain the DVA pharmacy, Laboratory and B-Clinic. He informed the Board that OPM and DSS toured the HCC facility and were very impressed with the Healthcare facility and the pharmacy. The Commissioner emphasized that the essential element of this is to bring on an independent Healthcare Management Consultant to oversee this transition. The Commissioner reported that the DVA Healthcare Director will be leaving the agency soon and that Jeff Lord, the Nursing Director, will serve as Acting Directory.

Trustee Barry spoke of major concerns of Trustees regarding other agencies involved in the licensing process and trying to impose their positions and policies on the DVA. Trustee Benson spoke about the need for the DVA to hire a Healthcare Director with dual licensure experience. The Commissioner addressed the Trustees concerns explaining that other agencies will not dictate staffing and bed numbers to the DVA.

### **B. Program Fee Sub-Committee Report:**

Trustee Barry reported that the sub-committee held three meetings regarding the structure and amount of the DVA Residential Facility Program Fee and discussed several options for changes. Trustee Coveney submitted multiple recommendations suggested by Veteran Residents. Trustee Barry stated that while some Veteran Residents have a relatively higher income many have a small income and that a reasonable argument can be made that thirty percent of income payment is difficult for that group of Veteran Residents. Trustee Barry reported that there should be no change in the Program Fee at this time however the BOT and Commissioner should reconsider the issue in the Fall of 2018 in light of the renovations to A-wing of the Residential Facility. Commissioner Saadi stated that he is open to exploring changes to the Program Fee in the future.

### **C. Budget & Staffing Trends:**

DVA Fiscal Manager Michael Clark provided an update on the DVA budget and staffing trends explaining that the agency will have a fiscal year end budget projections of a \$200,000 surplus due to the many positions that remained vacant for several months. Mr. Clark reported a \$100,000 operating expense deficit in the current quarter and that that FY19 Personnel Salary Budget Projections has a \$2 million deficit based on the current state budget for FY19. Mr. Clark explained that the Commissioner submitted follow-up information to the Legislature's Health and Human Services Sub-committee on details of the DVA budget. Mr. Clark also reported that he agrees with the Commissioner that a dual license approach for the HCC is the right approach for our Veterans.

Trustees Tollefson and Barry asked for clarification on the disbursement of funds from the General Fund to the DVA and how Federal Medicaid billables are handled.

Commissioner Saadi explained that Medicaid and other Federal reimbursements are by law deposited into the State's General Fund. He explained that appropriations to the DVA are not based on federal reimbursements but on the determination by the General Assembly and Governor as to the amount of funding. The Commissioner explained that he testified before multiple Legislative Committees as to the amount of funds generated by the DVA for the General Fund as well as the impact of the proposed cuts to the DVA budget in FY19. Commissioner Saadi also testified that the DVA could not continue to absorb budget cuts and shift expenses to the IGW which will soon be in deficit spending which will eventually erode the corpus of the IGW. The Commissioner also stated that it could be said that our agency is generating more revenue than the appropriations that we receive. Michael Clark then stated that our receipts would exceed our appropriations not including fringe benefits. As stated by the Commissioner, appropriations are cost driven not revenue driven.

#### D. Projects Update

Projects and Operations Director Joe Danao provided a general DVA Projects update including an explanation of the Middletown State Veteran Cemetery Expansion project with a completion date of December 2018, and the Cemetery Appearance project with a completion date of February 2020. These two projects total approximately \$8.6 million in improvements fully funded by the federal Cemetery Grants program.

Director Danao updated the Trustees on other DVA projects and renovations including the Fire Alarm and Suppression System, the Campus Emergency Generator Replacement with an estimated finish date of May 2018 and the Quality of Life Improvements to A Wing of the Residential Facility with a projected construction phase of August to December 2018.

Director Danao reported on the recent bond allocation approvals which included \$500,000 for capital repairs and renovations, \$202,000 for a Cemetery Services Master Plan and \$860,852 for the DVA Fire Alarm and Fire Suppression System.

Trustee Tarbox questioned Director Danao as to how long the generator can power the Campus. Director Danao responded that the generator could operate for up to five days without refilling the 7,500 gallon fuel tank.

### III. New Business

#### A. Legislative Updates:

Commissioner Saadi updated the BOT on multiple legislative initiatives including SB 287, the Definition of Veteran bill that would clarify the definition as currently state agencies used varying interpretations based on the Federal definition of Veteran. The clarified definition would recognize as qualifying service active duty service for training purposes.

Trustee Barry asked the Commissioner how many people employed by the DVA know how to read a DD-214. The Commissioner responded that he couldn't answer that particular question at the moment however he has been working with the DVA admissions team and other staff to ensure that they know how to read a DD-214 and when there are questions he addresses them directly.

Commissioner Saadi reported on legislation as to the name change of the Municipal Veterans' service contact person to "Municipal Veterans Representative." This program is administered by the DVA which provides training for all Municipal Veterans Representatives who are important partners with the DVA in connecting Veterans to programs and services.

Commissioner Saadi reported on a bill that would direct proceeds from sale of property abandoned by Veterans Charitable organizations to the Department's Institutional General Welfare (IGW) fund. This statutory fund is limited to expenditures that directly benefit Veterans, the DVA Veteran Residential Services Facility and DVA Healthcare Center. Therefore the original intent or purpose of the charitable organization and donors of supporting Veterans would be achieved. The Commissioner testified in support of HB 5319.

Commissioner Saadi reported on a SB 284 which will provide benefits to certain veterans diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder or traumatic brain injury or who have experienced military sexual trauma. He explained that the DVA supports the concept but raised concerns with the administration of the process.

#### **B. Cemetery – Saturday Burial Policy:**

Commissioner Saadi reported on his decision to temporarily suspend Saturday burials at the Veterans Cemetery in Middletown as a result of fiscal and staffing constraints. Several Trustees expressed their strong disagreement with this decision and the ongoing cuts to the DVA budget. Commissioner explained that the agency could not continue to cover Saturday burials through the use of overtime and that he is doing all he can to reinstate Saturday burials.

Trustees Benson, Barry, Tollefson, Galgano, and Harris all expressed dismay at this decision. Trustee Benson stated that families and funeral homes would be affected by this decision and that the placing of headstones would be delayed due to this decision. Trustee Tollefson stated that this lowers the respect level for Veterans and should not be a first choice for cuts. Trustee Galgano felt this was the wrong place to cut money. Trustee Harris expressed frustration at this action. Commissioner Saadi explained that this was not the first choice to cut services as the DVA has been under fiscal pressure for several year making changes in order to sustain programs and services such as the census caps in the Residential and HCC, changes the Transportation schedule, not filling Executive and staff positions and updating MOUs savings hundreds of thousands of dollars. He further explained that the options presented by the Trustees will be explored including changing staff schedules consistent with contractual obligations. Charging fees for burials was suggested by Trustee Benson. The Commissioner repeated that the Saturday burials suspension is a temporary policy and he will continue to review options and will update the Board.

Commissioner Saadi then instructed OAA Manager McKenna and Director Danao to report back to him regarding cemetery staffing schedules.

Chair McDavid reviewed meeting dates with the Board and tentatively set the next Board meeting for Tuesday, June 5, 2018 at 3:30pm.

#### **IV. Closing**

There being no further business, Chair McDavid entertained a motion to adjourn. Motion was made by Trustee Harris and seconded by Trustee Tollefsen. Motion passed unanimously at 5:47 PM.

Respectfully Submitted:



\_\_\_\_\_  
Christopher McDavid, Chair  
DVA Board of Trustees

Date May 9, 2018