

Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs



Board of Trustees Annual Report for 2021

Patrick Nelligan
Board Chairperson

Dawn Works-Dennis
Board Vice-Chairperson

Thomas J. Saadi
Commissioner

February 7, 2022



“Serving Those Who Served”



February 7, 2022

Dear Governor Lamont and Members of the Veterans Affairs Committee:

We are pleased to submit this report on behalf of the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) Board of Trustees in accordance with C.G.S. §27-102n(i). The DVA Board of Trustees (Board) continues working hard to serve Connecticut's Veterans through the oversight of and collaboration with the DVA along with local, state and federal agencies, Veteran Service Organizations, community partners and volunteers to ensure the delivery of Veterans programs and benefits in accordance with state and federal law and best practices in a sustainable manner.

The Board operates pursuant to C.G.S. §27-102n, which requires that the DVA provide comprehensive quarterly reports to the Board on more than a dozen areas of DVA operations. In addition to providing these quarterly reports the DVA also provides all Veteran Residents with a semi-annual report on the revenue and expenditures of the DVA Institutional General Welfare Fund and the opportunities to submit suggestions for the use of the IGW.

The Board fulfilled its duties during 2021 through active engagement in the oversight of operational issues, programmatic updates and policy changes at the DVA with regular virtual and in person Board meetings and detailed briefings by DVA Commissioner Thomas J. Saadi and DVA senior staff members. The Board worked closely with Commissioner Saadi and the DVA leadership team to ensure continued regular DVA operations throughout the second year of the pandemic. This included upgrades to the Residential Facility, State Veterans Cemetery, the Campus Auditorium and continued expansion of the Residential Semi-Private Living Program. Commissioner Saadi and the DVA staff expanded COVID-19 mitigation measures including holding multiple vaccine clinics and conducting regular COVID testing and health screenings which minimized the negative impacts of the pandemic on DVA Veterans and staff. The Board took on a new responsibility of administering the DVA's participation in the annual Wreaths Across America program selling more than 12,000 wreaths placed at the State Veterans Cemetery in Middletown.

The close collaboration between the Board and Commissioner Saadi supports a dynamic approach to addressing issues, overcoming challenges and developing new approaches to improve the delivery of programs and services to Veterans.

It is an honor for us to lead the Board of Trustees in service to our brother and sister Veterans across the State of Connecticut.

Respectfully Submitted,

Patrick Nelligan
Chairperson
Veteran, United States Army

Dawn W. Dennis

Dawn Works-Dennis
Vice-Chairperson
Veteran, United States Army

DVA Board of Trustees Annual Report for 2021

Introduction

This report is submitted in accordance with C.G.S. §27-102n(i), which requires, in pertinent part, that the DVA Board of Trustees (Board) report on the progress in fulfilling its mission based on programmatic outcomes and provide recommendations for improving the delivery of services to veterans and the addition of new programs. The Board's statutory mission is to review and comment on the DVA Budget and major policy and programmatic changes and to review agency regulations prior to adoption by the Commissioner relating to:

- a. Residential and Healthcare programs admission, discharge and transfer policies.
- b. Residential Fee schedule for programs, services and benefits.
- c. Participation of eligible family members in programs or services.

Throughout 2021 the Board has fulfilled its statutory mission through active engagement with the DVA leadership and oversight of DVA operations, policies and programs. This year was no exception to the ongoing highly collaborative process consistent with Commissioner Thomas J. Saadi's philosophy of empowerment through transparency and bilateral engagement with the Board related to the full spectrum of DVA programs and operations. This is underscored by regular communications between Board meetings by Commissioner Saadi and DVA staff with the Board on myriad issues including the DVA response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

At the Board's regular quarterly meetings Commissioner Saadi and DVA Senior Staff provided comprehensive and detailed PowerPoint briefing and supporting documentary updates regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, agency budget, staffing, facilities, projects, legislation and policies along with proposals for expanded and additional programs as well as existing and anticipated challenges, fiscal and operational, impacting the DVA and Veterans programs across the State.

In addition to the briefings provided at each Board meeting, the DVA provided quarterly written reports to the Board with information necessary for the Board to fulfill its mission. These reports included, among other things, program and policy updates, data, and performance measures in the following areas:

- (1) Budget revenues and expenditures.
- (2) Staffing levels.
- (3) Facilities and fleet management.
- (4) Current and planned projects.
- (5) Residential Facility and Patriot's Landing Family Housing applications for admission including number of Veterans admitted, reasons for denials or withdrawals of applications for admission and overall monthly occupancy rates in residential programs.
- (6) Summary of voluntary and involuntary discharges from Veterans from the Residential Program and reasons for discharge (e.g. community based transitional housing, independent living, disciplinary actions, etc . . .)
- (7) Summaries of Healthcare Center patient census, clinical services and any incident rates.
- (8) Summary of programs overseen by the Office of Advocacy and Assistance and caseload figures for veterans' service officers.

- (9) Cemetery and Memorial services including burial statistics.
- (10) Results of any federal and/or state inspections.
- (11) Summaries by type, frequency and resolution, of concerns raised by Veteran Residents of the petitions and complaints filed by Veteran Residents and relatives or authorized representatives of such Veteran Residents.
- (12) Additional reports which have included updates on the Bed Bug eradication program, results of client surveys, and the status of transitioning the Healthcare Center to a Skilled Nursing license.

In providing this information the DVA explained the impact of the pandemic on each reporting area particularly as it related to the Residential and Skilled Nursing Programs. The DVA leadership and staff consistently exhibited openness and transparency which contributes greatly to the ability of the Board to effectively perform its statutory mission.

Organizationally, this report summarizes the Board's activities and provides recommendations for each of the DVA's four core functions, addresses whether the DVA implemented previous recommendations and concludes with general recommendations for the DVA overall.

Board Activities and Recommendations for DVA Core Functions

I. Residential Programs and Services

a. Board activities

The Board worked closely with the DVA to implement major program and policy updates during 2021 including the Residential Program. These include continued support for the expansion of the Semi-Private Living Program which the Board assisted in developing in 2019. The Board re-established the Program Fee subcommittee which conducted a detailed review of the Residential Program Fee policy and impact on Veteran Residents. The Program Fee policy was last updated in 2016 and required Veteran residents to pay, starting the fifth month of residency, a monthly fee of 30% of a Veteran's adjusted income. Previous Board reviews of the policy resulted in recommendations not to change the program fee until a majority of Residential Facility Wings were upgraded to the Semi-Private Living Program. With the DVA completing semi-private living upgrades in the majority of wings in 2021 the subcommittee recommended and Board approved with Commissioner Saadi's support, a reduction of the Program Fee from 30% to 25% of adjusted income and also voted to exempt Veterans with a monthly income of \$500 or less from the Program Fee. These changes to the Program Fee have been codified in the DVA's Residential Program Policy.

In 2021 Board members were actively involved with DVA Stand Down, an annual event led by the DVA Residential Program providing Connecticut Veterans with "one stop" access to a broad range of programs and services offered by State and Federal agencies, Veterans Organizations and Community Based Non-profits. Through 2019 Stand Down was held only at the DVA Rocky Hill Campus on a single day, however in 2020 due to Pandemic restrictions on large group activities Commissioner Saadi modified Stand Down to a hybrid multiday format with the first day being online informational sessions and webinars conducted by the DVA and other agencies and community service providers. The second day the DVA coordinated over a hundred government agencies and community based non-profits in providing Veteran programs, benefits and services information and distribution of personal need items at four regional locations at the DVA Rocky Hill Campus and in Danbury, Bridgeport and Norwich.

In 2021 the DVA continued the hybrid Stand Down format expanding the online sessions over two days with additional topics including supportive services for Veterans and their families, Federal VA Benefits, housing and homeless services, state labor/employment and vocational resources, Veteran caregiver support, legal aid and assistance and many more. The DVA, with the support of the Board expanded the in person regional locations to include a fifth site at Quinebaug Community College addressing Board concerns that northeastern Connecticut lacked a Stand Down site in 2020. This new approach to Stand Down has been a great success with more Veterans from across the State able to more easily access the range of programs, benefits and services offer at Stand Down.

b. Implementation of Prior Recommendations:

There were four major recommendations of the Board in its report issued in 2021 and the DVA has successfully achieved each as follows:

1. **Board Recommendation:** Continue the expansion of the Semi-Private Living Program throughout the entire Residential Facility.

DVA Action: The DVA has continued the expansion of the Semi-Private Living Program with two more Residential Facility Wings completed in 2021 leaving one wing to be renovated in 2022.

2. **Board Recommendation:** Apply funds from Quality of Life/Facilities donation fund for upgrades and updates to the Residential Facility, including but not limited to, painting, restoration of Veteran artwork and other quality of life related improvements.

DVA Action: The DVA implemented a comprehensive plan for overall functional and aesthetic improvements to the Residential facility utilizing both Quality of Life donations funds and DVA Operations Expense fund as appropriate. This included cleaning and painting of many common areas throughout the Residential facility, new artwork displays, renovation of Veteran recreation areas, new laminate flooring to replace old carpets in administrative areas and the refinishing of dozens of rocking chairs and benches used by Veterans.

3. **Board Recommendation:** Commensurate with the expansion of the Semi-Private Living Program which includes Veterans participating in the basic upkeep and maintenance of their respective Residential Wings and Common areas, consider a reduction in the monthly program fee.

DVA Action: With the DVA completing semi-private living upgrades in the majority of wings in 2021, the a Board subcommittee recommended and the Board approved with Commissioner Saadi's support, the reduction of the Program Fee from 30% to 25% of adjusted income (a 17% reduction in payment). The Board also voted to exempt Veterans with a monthly income of \$500 or less from the Program Fee. These changes to the Program Fee have been codified in the DVA's Residential Program Policy.

4. **Board Recommendation:** Develop an enhanced marketing plan to provide information about the HCC to Veterans across the state. This may include regular email communications, social media campaigns, traditional media interview and possible print and electronic advertising.

DVA Action: Throughout 2021 the DVA utilized monthly emails, social media and online virtual town hall meetings to communicate information about the DVA programs and services including the Residential Program with Veterans Service Organizations, community based providers and Veteran stakeholders. However, a comprehensive marking plan is needed with a focus on expanding outreach and facilitating greater access to information as to the DVA's programs and services.

c. New Recommendations:

1. The DVA should develop a comprehensive marking plan with a focus on expanding outreach and facilitating greater access to information as to the agencies programs and services. This may be accomplished by re-establishing the position of Communications Director who can work with Directors of Residential and Healthcare programs to develop

marketing materials, including virtual tours of the Residential and Healthcare facilities. The DVA should encourage State and Federal Legislators and Veteran Service Organizations to include DVA program and services information in communications to constituents, organization members and supporters.

2. Continue quality of life, functional and aesthetic improvements to the DVA Residential Facility including the repair and painting of Residential Wings windows, improve indoor and outdoor recreational areas including the construction of pavilions with lighting and renovate or replace existing Veterans Auto-shop garage.
3. The Board is concerned with the stagnation of recreational programing which has a heavy reliance on community based civic and Veteran organizations for support. While such support does provide reasonable recreational opportunities the DVA staff must do better to develop new and dynamic recreational programing on and off campus with a dedicated full time recreational coordinator. Unfortunately Board members have heard from Residential Veterans that the current recreational coordinator lacks motivation and a vision for addressing this important aspect of the overall care plan for Veterans. The DVA may consider engaging a third party contractor with expertise in recreational programing to initiate a new approach and train DVA staff to continue after the end of the contract period.
4. The DVA should expand the Wreaths Across America Program/outreach to ensure that in 2022 there are sufficient wreaths to cover Colonel Gates Cemetery in Rocky Hill which is reserved for Veterans who pass while in the DVA Residential or Healthcare programs.

II. Healthcare Center

a. Board Activities

The Board remained engaged throughout 2021, in monitoring the DVA response to the pandemic in the Sgt, John Levitow Healthcare Center (HCC) through detailed quarterly briefings and written reports, weekly Commissioner COVID-19 updates and telephonic briefings as needed. The Board is impressed with the DVA's effectiveness in mitigating the negative effects of the pandemic on its Veteran Patients through, extensive testing, high vaccination rates among Veterans and staff, proper use of PPE and operating a dedicated negative pressure COVID Isolation and Recovery wing.

Despite all of the challenges of the pandemic the HCC was recently awarded a Five Star rating by U.S. News and World Report in 2021 based, among other things, the quality of direct care, ratio of staff to patients, success in responding to the COVID pandemic, quality of support programs and physical condition of the facility.

b. Implementation of Prior Recommendations:

There were three major recommendations of the Board in its report issued in 2020 and the DVA has successfully achieved each as follows:

1. Develop a marketing plan to provide information about the HCC to Veterans and Veterans supporters across the state which may include regular email communications, social media

campaigns, traditional media interview and possible printed and electronic advertising with the goal of HCC at 90% of capacity by July 1, 2022.

DVA Action: Throughout 2021 the DVA utilized monthly emails, social media and online virtual town hall meetings to communicate information about the DVA programs and services including long-term skilled nursing care at the DVA Healthcare Center. However, as with Residential Services a comprehensive marketing plan is needed with a focus on expanding outreach and facilitating greater access to information as to the DVA's programs and services.

2. **Board Recommendation:** As reported by the Commissioner the HCC is having difficulty with both Community based and Residential Program Veterans navigating the process of apply for and being approved for Medicaid. As the DVA Social workers and Fiscal staff do not have the resources to provide ongoing direct assistance to Veterans throughout the Medicare application process the DVA should consider contracting with a consultant to assist Veterans with the Medicaid process on an as needed basis. Such an approach may be necessary in the short term once the HCC has increased its census.

DVA Action: In 2021 the DVA implemented operational and policy updates to facilitate admissions to the HCC including coordination between HCC and DVA Fiscal staff in tracking the status of Medicare applications with the Department of Social Services (DSS) and engaging with the family or party assisting the Veteran to facilitate completing the application process. Also, until 2021 the DVA would not approve an admission to the HCC unless the Veteran had a verified payor source (e.g. Medicare, Private Pay or 70% or payment covered by VA for 70% or greater Service Connected Disabled Veteran). Commissioner Saadi issue a directive that Medicare applicants may be admitted to the HCC even while their application is pending with DSS as once approved Medicare will provide up to 90 days retroactive payment. This approach has allowed the HCC to admit several Veterans who otherwise would have been denied or delayed admission.

3. **Board Recommendation:** Continue the phasing out of smoking by Veteran Patients with a goal of making the HCC smoke free by July 1, 2022.

DVA Action: The DVA HCC continues to reduce smoking by its Veteran Patients through education, cessation programs and reducing the number of smoking times permitted at the HCC from a high of six times per day two now twice per day. This has resulted in a dramatic reduction in smoking by Veteran Patients. The Commissioner reports that the HCC will not be able to eliminate smoking by July 1, 2022, however the DVA will continue its multifaceted approach to reducing smoking by Veterans.

c. New Recommendations

1. The existing HCC 300 Kilowatt emergency generator, while regulatory complaint at time of installation in 2008, is insufficient to fully power the HCC during a loss of public utility power. This deficiency is particularly problematic during warm weather as the 300 Kilowatt generator cannot power the HCC HVAC chiller resulting in elevated temperatures. This occurred in 2021 in the aftermath of storm Isaias requiring the DVA to request an emergency Generator from Eversource to fully power the HCC.

2. The DVA should develop a comprehensive marketing plan with a focus on expanding outreach and facilitating greater access to information as to the agency's programs and services. This may be accomplished by re-establishing the position of Communications Director who can work with Directors of Residential and Healthcare programs to develop marketing materials, including virtual tours of the Residential and Healthcare facilities. The DVA should encourage State and Federal Legislators and Veteran Service Organizations to include DVA program and services information in communications to constituents, organization members and supporters.
3. After the DVA completed the transition of the HCC from a chronic disease hospital to a licensed skilled nursing facility Board members inquired as to whether the HCC could offer short term rehabilitative services covered by Medicaid. In response the HCC and DVA Fiscal Directors explained that the DVA did not have the structure or staff to implement such a program. The Board recommends that the DVA hire a consultant to assist the HCC with establishing a short term rehabilitative services program and the related structure for billing Medicaid.

III. Office of Advocacy and Assistance

a. Board activities

The Office of Advocacy and Assistance (OA&A) employs Veteran Service Officers (VSO), all combat deployed Veterans, who provide representation to Veterans and eligible dependents in their claims for Federal pensions and benefits and provide assistance in filing for State Veterans programs and benefits. Additionally OA&A is responsible for the following: (1) determining eligibility for the Veteran flag on the state driver's license or identification card; (2) certifying Veteran Owned Micro Businesses for state contract bidding; (3) administering the Municipal Veterans Representative Program; (4) determining Veteran eligibility for pretrial diversionary programs; and (5) issuance of the CT Wartime Service Medal. Two new responsibilities were added in 2021 requiring OA&A to provide administrative support to the Eligibility Qualifying Review Board and to train and support the Department of Motor Vehicles in the administration of the new Veteran Conflict Specific license plate program. The Board's activities related to OA&A in 2021 focused on outreach to Veterans and Veteran Service Organizations across the State as the pandemic continues to negatively impact O&A's ability to connect in person with Veterans across the State. To address this challenge the Board supported OA&A's rollout of virtual monthly Town Hall meetings and increased electronic outreach through email and social media. Despite the outreach limitations OA&A VSOs continue active representation and advocacy for Veterans and eligible dependents via phone, email and virtual meetings and a steady increasing in person meetings and office hours. The DVA has also continually updated its website to provide an increasing amount of information in a user-friendly format to help facilitate connecting Veterans with many available programs and services including mental health services.

b. Implementation of Prior Recommendations:

There was one major recommendation of the Board in its report issued in 2020 which the DVA has addressed as follows:

1. **Board Recommendation:** As pandemic restrictions lift, OA&A should maintain virtual outreach while gradually increasing in person outreach which should include identifying

Veterans events, community activities, organizations and entities where VSO's can connect with Veterans and Veteran supporters. While the outreach should focus on the OA&A mission of representation of Veterans and eligible dependents in obtaining Federal benefits and service, VSO's should regularly distribute in person and through both email and regular mail, DVA's core function brochures for the Healthcare Center, Residential Program and Cemetery and Memorial Services.

DVA Action: Throughout the latter half of 2021 OA&A steady increased in person engagement with Veterans around Connecticut including attending Veteran Coffeehouses, visiting Nursing homes, participating in Legislative and Veteran Service Organization benefit panels and presentations and significantly involved in the planning, execution and participation in Veterans Stand Down 2021.

c. Recommendations

1. Commissioner Saadi should task the new OA&A manger with conducting a review of OA&A operations with the goal of developing a realignment plan adjusting VSO coverage to reflect the Veteran population concentrations in Connecticut which are not balanced as between the Congressional districts to which VSOs are currently assigned. The plan should include the continuation of Commissioner Saadi's effort to increase the number of VSOs which was until recently at a historic low.
2. OA&A must increase outreach efforts pursuant to a standardized annual plan which ensures that: (1) VSOs are engaged with community based Veterans; (2) coordination with state and federal agencies/providers and non-profits to disseminate information to Veterans regarding DVA programs and services; (3) conduct regular Veteran benefits workshops in person and online in conjunction with State and Federal legislators leveraging their ability to communicate directly with constituents.

IV. Cemetery and Memorial Services

a. Board activities

OA&A is responsible for overseeing DVA Cemetery and Memorial Services which administers three state Veterans' cemeteries. The first, and oldest, is located in Darien and closed to new burials in 1980 when reaching capacity; the second is the Colonel Gates Cemetery located in Rocky Hill which is reserved for Veteran Residents and Veteran Patients of the DVA (the DVA receives no federal funds for this cemetery); and the third is the federally recognized State Veterans Cemetery in Middletown for which the DVA receives federal funding for capital improvements.

The Board sub-committee on Cemetery issues has been actively engaged with DVA throughout 2021 in developing solutions to address concerns relating to sustaining maintenance and upkeep of the Cemetery and the need to increase long-term burial/internment capacity at the State Veterans Cemetery in Middletown through property acquisition. These and other issues were identified in the Veterans Cemetery Master Plan report commissioned by the DVA and issued in February 2019. The State Veterans Cemetery will likely reach internment capacity in approximately seven years. In response the DVA has been actively attempting to secure additional abutting property from both public agency and private property owners however, the largest and most advantageous abutting property is owned by Saint Mary's Parish in Middletown and have

rejected the DVA offer of \$350,000 to purchase the property. DAS property division contacted the parish's broker requesting reconsider of their outright rejection and to make a counteroffer. The parish rejected further discussions absent DVA increasing offer arguing that the parish is entertaining offer of \$1 million from private developer. DAS is currently conducting two new appraisals of the property which will be utilized to determine whether the DVA can make a good faith offer in excess of \$350,000. The DVA is also attempting to acquire abutting property owned by the Department of Mental Health and Addition Services (DMHAS). Acquisition of other DMHAS and private lots abutting cemetery or contiguous with DMHAS property totaling 9 acres is being explored.

b. Implementation of Prior Recommendations:

There were three major recommendations of the Board in its report issued in 2020 which the DVA has addressed as follows:

1. **Board Recommendation:** The DVA should continue actively searching for abutting property (public and private) for expansion of the Veterans Cemetery. The recommended course of action is the acquisition of land adjacent to the existing cemetery which will avoid the need for staff to maintain an additional cemetery. Acquisition of the land for the Cemetery will require a financial commitment from the state as federal Cemetery Administration funding is not available for the purchase of land to expand the cemetery.

DVA Action: See narrative in section 'IV. a.' hereinabove.

2. **Board Recommendation:** There should be no fundraising events of any nature held at the Veterans Cemetery unless the proceeds are to be applied to the maintenance and care of the Veterans Cemetery.

DVA Action: In late 2020 Commissioner Saadi issued a directive to prohibiting any such fundraising including that conducted by Civil Air Patrol (CAP) Connecticut Wing in the sale of wreaths as part of the Wreaths Across America program. In response senior leadership of CAP sold the wreaths at cost avoiding the issue of raising money through an event at the Veterans Cemetery. In 2021 new CAP leadership worked closely with the DVA to transfer operational responsibility for the Wreaths Across America program to the DVA and the Board took on the responsibility of administering the sale of wreaths with proceeds deposited in the new Cemetery Perpetual Care and Maintenance trust fund. The 2021 Wreaths Across America program was a great success with more than 12,000 wreaths placed by hundreds of volunteers at the State Veterans Cemetery in Middletown.

3. **Board Recommendation:** The DVA should initiate the planning process for the establishing of an outdoor committal shelter at the Veterans Cemetery.

DVA Action: The DVA initiated the planning process which included reviewing options for constructing a permanent structure at an estimated cost of between \$250,000 to \$350,000. However, due to the need to maximize existing Cemetery property for internment purposes the DVA suspended the planning process pending determination of what property the DVA is likely to acquire for Cemetery expansion which directly impacts the size and location of a committal shelter.

c. Recommendations

1. The DVA should continue with a previously planned consolidation of Cemetery and Memorial Services staff and Cemetery operational and grounds staff at the State Veterans Cemetery. As part of this consolidation, the DVA will need to address IT support services which are currently inadequate in the existing Cemetery Administrative building.
2. The DVA should continue actively searching for abutting property (public and private) for expansion of the Veterans Cemetery. The recommended course of action remains the acquisition of land adjacent to the existing cemetery which will avoid the need for staff to maintain an additional cemetery.
3. In light of the planning concerns with regard to constructing a permanent Committal shelter at this time the DVA should investigate options for a temporary shelter, if such exists, which can be relocated as needed. The planning process for the establishing a permanent outdoor committal shelter should proceed as soon as practicable based on the status of Cemetery property acquisition.

V. COVID-19 Mitigation Efforts

The DVA continues operating pursuant to its COVID-19 Mitigation Protocols across the agency's Core Function areas which has been very effective in mitigating the risk of exposure and spread of the virus to and among Veteran Patients, Residents and staff. Commissioner Saadi provided detailed briefings to the full Board in addition to providing the Board with the DVA COVID-19 weekly update.

The DVA COVID-19 Mitigation Protocols include frequent point prevalence COVID testing of all Veteran Residents, Veteran Patients and Staff regular COVID testing of Veterans and staff, the vaccinating of 99% of Veterans and 89% of DVA staff, maintaining COVID-19 Isolation Recovery Units in the Residential Facility and Healthcare Center and conducting daily health screenings of Veterans and staff. Throughout the pandemic, the DVA has maintained a robust supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) for staff and Veterans and continues to do so in order to handle a COVID-19 surge.

Since the Pandemic began, the DVA has provided direct care for 271 Veteran Residents and Veteran Patients at its Rocky Hill Campus of which 127 tested or retested positive for COVID-19. Of those testing positive, 100 have recovered from the virus, 14 are recovering at the DVA and two are in a community-based hospital or a clinical rehab setting. One Veteran Resident and three Veteran Patients passed away in 2020 due to COVID-19, and one Veteran Patient passed away in January 2021 from COVID-19 complications. One Veteran Patient with COVID-19 passed away in December 2020 from a non-COVID-19 medical occurrence.

Of the 130 DVA staff members contracting or re-contracting COVID-19 since the beginning of the pandemic, 126 have recovered and returned to work. Four staff members are recovering at home and will return to work consistent with DVA clinical protocols. The DVA vaccine rate for staff is 89% having received a first COVID vaccine dose and 80% being fully vaccinated with 46% receiving a booster vaccine,

The Board commends the leadership and staff at the DVA for making the health and safety of our Veterans their first priority and carrying out that priority with great success resulting in a COVID-19 infection, hospitalization and death rate far lower than many other congregant living and skilled nursing facilities for Veterans across the Northeast region.

VI. General Recommendations

In addition to the specific core function recommendations above, the Board previously made four general recommendations as follows:

1. **Board Recommendation:** The DVA Auditorium is a historic venue and while its use was very limited prior to 2020, throughout the pandemic it supported events requiring social distancing including Veteran recreational activities, DVA Staff meetings, DVA Ceremonies, Stand Down activities, COVID-19 testing and COVID-19 vaccine clinics. The DVA auditorium is a very functional space which requires some basic repairs and maintenance to improve the experience for the Veterans and Staff using the venue. We recommend that the DVA apply Quality of Life/Facilities donation funds to update and upgrade the DVA Auditorium with a focus on making it an ADA compliant versatile and operational space for recreational and other activities for Veterans. These improvements should include removing fixed outdated and unsafe seating, repairing damaged flooring, painting, replacing old curtains and other unsafe materials and installing improved lighting.

DVA Action: In August 2021 the DVA completed Phase I of the DVA Auditorium safety and functional improvement plan. This first phase included the removal of outdated and damaged fixed seating, replacing of outdated lighting, stretching and securing of carpeting, repair and refinishing of hardwood flooring, replacing worn curtains that presented a fire hazard with new fire-retardant curtains and replaced the damaged screen and stage back wall with a new wall that functions as a screen. Phase II is planned for 2022 and will include ADA upgrades to the Auditorium lavatory and replacing of the stage curtains which are damaged and no-longer fire retardant. The removal of the fixed seating and improved lighting created a safer and more functional space that is now regularly used for DVA events, briefing visiting groups, recognition and memorial ceremonies and staff training sessions. It is also host to many recreational activities including concerts, holiday parties, bingo and other activities for Veterans. In 2021 several state and federal agencies used the auditorium for training sessions and graduation ceremonies

2. **Board Recommendation:** In the aftermath of Storm Isaias the DVA was without utility power for nearly a week relying on generators for all power on Campus. The DVA has two generators, one for the HCC installed during construction with a 300-Kilowatt capacity and a 1000-kilowatt generator which provides power to the remainder of the Campus. While the 1000-kilowatt generator operated well, the 300-kilowatt generator was insufficient to power the HCC air-conditioning system requiring the DVA to request an emergency 700-Kilowatt generator from Eversource which was provided at no cost to keep the HCC full powered. We recommend that the DVA replace the HCC generator with a system that can fully power all systems in the HCC during a utility outage.

DVA Action: The DVA requires bond funding for the design of the generator in addition to funds for the cost of building the generator. Obtaining these funding in the short term is unlikely due

to the DVA's priority pending request for bonding funds to design boiler replacements which are essential for the DVA to operate campus wide. While the larger capacity generator is needed the boiler replacement takes priority.

3. **Board Recommendation:** The DVA should conduct a review of current energy use and distribution with a focus on implementing energy efficient long-term cost saving solutions for lighting, heating, and cooling of buildings across the Campus.

DVA Action: The DVA is proceeding with an Energy Efficiency Program which will, among other things, help to reduce the DVA's more than \$1,000,000 in yearly utility costs. The DVA is in Phase II of the project which includes a \$270,000 DEEP Grant for sub-metering of buildings. The DVA is currently conducting a survey of the nearly 1,500 steam traps on campus. The cost of this study is 50% reimbursable by the DVA's utility company. The study will allow DVA to apply for another energy efficiency grant to replace all identified failed steam traps which will result in immediate savings of water and gas. The DVA is also reviewing options for Solar Panels on the campus with CT Greenbank that has approved DVA for next steps with costs and project timeline to be set in 2022. The DVA also plans to update lighting controls, refrigeration in the main kitchen, and continue transition to LED and solar lighting as appropriate.

4. **Board Recommendation:** The DVA should consider new partnerships with community based non-profit housing providers to lease vacant DVA buildings for the provision of long-term Veteran housing on the DVA Campus.

DVA Action: In 2021 the DVA engaged several Veteran Service Organizations and Community based non-profits in discussions regarding locating to the newly renovated building 50 on the Campus with other Veteran Service Organizations with the goal of making the Campus a one stop shop hub for Veterans. At least three such organizations are in the process of negotiating lease terms with DAS for space at the DVA Campus. These types of partnerships, including that with Easterseals Veterans Rally Point, have provided for expanded services to DVA Veterans and community-based Veterans with no additional cost to the State.

New General Recommendations

1. The DVA and Board should build on the success of the 2021 Wreaths Across America program to surpass last year's wreath sales with the goal of being able to being able to cover both the State Veterans Cemetery in Middletown and the Col Gates DVA Cemetery in Rocky Hill.
2. The DVA should work with the BOT to develop and "Code of Conduct" for Board members which sets forth rules, duties and responsibilities of Board members.

VII. Board Minutes

Attached hereto are the minutes from each Board's meeting during 2021, which demonstrate the activities of the Board in carrying out its mission and the transparency of the DVA in providing the Board with detailed information regarding operations, programs and services.

Department of Veterans Affairs
Board of Trustees - Meeting Minutes

March 10, 2021

May 5, 2021

June 9, 2021

September 8, 2021

December 15, 2021



**Department of Veterans Affairs
State of Connecticut**

**Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes
March 10, 2021**

(Minutes subject to review at next Board Meeting)

I. Convene Meeting:

The Meeting (conducted via Teams meeting platform) was called to order by Chairman Thomas at 3:35 PM.

In attendance: John Banks, Paul Barry, Phil Cacciola, Juan Cruz, Richard Dziekan, Peter Galgano, Steven Harris, Alyssa Kelleher, Patrick Nelligan, Sharad Samy, Heather Sandler, Michael Thomas, Kjell Tollefsen, Sherri Vogt and Dawn Works-Dennis.

Absent: Richard Benson, Frederick Leaf and Mark Spranzo

In attendance from the DVA: Commissioner Thomas Saadi, Joseph Danao, Darlene Deschaine, Tammy Marzik, Briana Mitchell, Ryan McKenna and Jane Siegel.

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

Chairman Thomas asked Commissioner Saadi to brief on DVA achievements and events.

Commissioner Saadi spoke briefly about the events that took place since December 2020 including the January 25th Ribbon Cutting & dedication of another Quality of Life Improvement Project specifically updated semi-private rooms in D-Wing. On February 3rd the DVA hosted State Senator Cicarella for a briefing on DVA operations and tour of the Campus. During the tour the Senator met with CT National Guard personnel conducting critical training exercises related to chemical, biological radiological, nuclear and explosive response operations. Commissioner Saadi reported that the DVA was at the forefront of coordinating COVID-19 vaccine clinics for DVA Veterans and Staff at the Rocky Hill Campus and that to date more than 90% of DVA Veteran Residents and Patients and over 50% of DVA staff have been vaccinated. On February 25th the DVA hosted its annual ceremony commemorating Black History Month with Keynote Speaker Vanessa Dorantes, Commissioner of the Department of Children and Families (DCF). The ceremony included remarks by Commissioner Saadi, Residential Director Lesbia Nieves and poems and songs by DVA Veterans and staff. The event was held in the DVA auditorium and broadcast via Teams and Zoom.

The upcoming events include DVA Veterans Service Organization Leaders Quarterly Meeting hosted by Commissioner Saadi on March 23rd, DVA Campus ADA and other Residential projects Ribbon Cutting on April 21st, DVA Veteran Memorial Service in the Healing Garden on May 27th, a Gold Star Family Event at a date to be determined and the CT Veterans Hall of Fame inductees for the class of 2020, to be held in July or August.

II. Old/Ongoing Business

A. COVID-19 Response & Recovery

Commissioner Saadi reported DVA point in time testing and positivity data with two hundred and forty-one Veteran Residents and Patients having been tested for COVID-19. Sixty-nine testing positive, with sixty-three having recovered from the virus and no Veterans in the Residential or Healthcare COVID Isolation Units. One Veteran Resident and two Veteran Patients passed away in the spring from COVID-19 complications and two Veteran Patients passed away in December and January. One Veteran Patient with COVID-19 passed in December from a non-COVID-19 medical occurrence.

Commissioner Saadi reported that the DVA has been conducting regular COVID-19 testing all direct care and front-line staff since July, fifty-seven staff members tested COVID-19 positive since the beginning of the pandemic, fifty-six recovered and returned to work consistent with DPH guidelines. One DVA staff member remains out and in physical rehab.

B. Budgeting and Staffing

Chairman Thomas recognized DVA Fiscal Director Briana Mitchell for an update on the budget and staffing trends. She reports that the DVA has a budget of 26.5 million dollars which is flat funding based on the current budget. Ms. Mitchell reported that the DVA billing department celebrated its first and successful Medicare submission and payment since the transition of the Healthcare Center to a Skilled Nursing Facility. These funds from Medicare revenue will be deposited into the State's General Fund. Fiscal year 2021 overtime averages currently higher than previous two fiscal years, COVID-19 Relief Funds have been exhausted and there were some retirement payouts as well. The Fiscal department is performing an in-depth review of all DVA appropriations and expenditures to ensure responsible spending and effective fiscal oversight. Trustee Vogt asked if there was an opportunity to apply for federal dollars to cover expenses incurred due to COVID-19 staffing and Ms. Mitchell responded that the DVA did receive and has exhausted its COVID-19 relief funds.

Chairman Thomas asked Commissioner Saadi to update the board on the IGW (Institutional General Welfare Fund). Commissioner Saadi reported that in working with DVA Fiscal staff he is implementing the realignment of expenditures from the IGW and has also identified areas of savings. A total of \$796,000 of expenditures is to be shifted from the IGW through spending cuts and reallocations. He reported projected savings of \$175,000 by ending consultant support to DVA Healthcare Center, a total of \$540,000 to be shifted Other Expenses (OE) to pay for medical supplies, specialty medical bed rental and laundering service for the Healthcare Center, \$81,000 of varied IGW expenses to be shifted to donations. Commissioner Saadi also reported \$84,000 in projected saved by ending two temporary support services staff contracts. While these steps will not yet achieve long term solvency they will extend IGW solvency concurrent with FY22 and FY23 allowing time to implement additional changes to achieve long-term solvency. The DVA will need to find OE savings to avoid a deficit however, should

the DVA run a deficit the Commissioner will work with OPM and the Financial Advisory Committee (FAC) to cover the DVA obligations.

Trustee Dziekan asked if the 2021 CARES Act funds would benefit the DVA. Commissioner Saadi reported that the CARES Act law allocates several billion dollars to the State of Connecticut however, it is unclear as to how the funds will be distributed and whether the DVA will receive any direct funding.

C. Projects Report

Projects and Operations Director Joe Danao provided a DVA projects update which include the completion of the two Cemetery Projects – expansion and appearance, the abatement projects in building 2, the Cantina and Building 22 at the Middletown State Veterans Cemetery. He also reported completion of the Fire Alarm and Suppression System project and near completion of the ADA upgrades to Buildings 2, 3, and 4. A bond request has been submitted for \$82,000 for a design replacement of the boiler. The DVA Energy Efficiency Project is in Phase II, DEEP grant approved \$270,000 for metering. Commissioner Saadi's directed Residential Facility Quality of Life Improvements are proceeding including the completion of A-Wing Isolation Unit and D-Wing semiprivate living upgrades, planning for another residential Wing to be upgraded, WiFi expansion and upgrades and general repairs and painting.

D. Cemetery Property Acquisition

Commissioner Saadi reported that the DVA has received the appraisals and made an offer of \$350,000 for the 13.6 acres of land abutting the Veterans Cemetery in Middletown which was initially rejected by the parish. The DAS State Property division then contacted the parish and asked for reconsideration of the outright rejection and to make a good faith counteroffer. Unfortunately the parish rejected further discussions absent the DVA increasing its offer. The acquisition of St. Mary's parcel would extend the operational life of the cemetery by decades allowing for the addition of 4,025 standard plots, 7,000 cremation plots and 6,000 columbarium niches. Commissioner Saadi contacted DMHAS Commissioner Delphin-Rittmon regarding an eight-acre parcel on Bow Lane owned by CVH. Commissioner Delphin-Rittmon is agreeable to the transfer of the property to the DVA however the DMHAS legal department advised that the property must remain in CVH inventory until conclusion of ongoing litigation. The next step is possibly increasing the offer to St. Mary's Parish and continue discussions with CVH pending the outcome of litigation. Commissioner Saadi will update the Lt Governor Susan Bysiewicz who is in full support of the DVA acquiring additional property for the Cemetery.

E. Wreaths Across America Ceremony Planning for December 2021

Ryan McKenna, Director of Advocacy and Assistance, reported that approximately 150 people attended the Wreaths Across America Ceremony on December 19, 2020, consistent with the Governor's Executive Orders. This included volunteers from CAP, Patriot Guard Riders, Easterseals, the Middletown Police Department and the Middletown Fire Department. Mr. McKenna reported that he held an After Action Review on February 4th regarding the December, 2020 event which CAP leadership were invited to attend but did not respond. This year's event is planned for December 18th and that there will need to be stakeholder's involvement in the selling of the wreaths. A kickoff meeting will be held in June and bi-weekly meetings will start in mid-September. The stakeholders can discuss fund raising events as well as determining price of the wreaths and profit margin usage.

III. New Business

A. Legislative Update

Commissioner reported on the pending legislation on which he testified in favor of before the General Assembly including expanded benefits for certain Veterans with an Other Than Honorable discharge OTH; Veteran Status question on state forms; recognition of training and skills developed in the military in the issuance of state licenses and registrations; providing certain state Veteran recognitions to members of the Hmong Laotian Special Guerilla Units which supported the U.S. during the Vietnam War; establishing additional registration marker plates for Veterans and members of the Armed forces who served in period of war and an Act concerning workforce development. Commissioner Saadi explained that he testified against a bill which would require the DVA to provide transportation services to Veterans and bill Medicare/Medicaid and Tricare unless the DVA was also provided with funds for a fleet of vehicles and staff to drive them. He explained that the DVA fiscal office would also need additional staff to process billing and that the funds, absent additional legislation, would go to the State's General Fund and not the DVA. Without the additional staff and funds the bill would have a serious negative impact on the direct delivery of current programs and services to our Veterans at our Rocky Hill Campus and across the State. The Commissioner also testified In favor of a task force to study updating the Veterans property tax relief laws and a bill that would direct federal reimbursements for DAV prescription drug purchases to the IGW.

Trustee Barry raised concerns of lack of documentation for Hmong Laotian Veterans and that the DAV would not be able to determine who were bonified Veterans. Commissioner Saadi stated that this was a legislative decision and that the DVA would follow the procedure the Federal National Cemetery Administration follows to determine Hmong Laotian Veterans eligibly for burial in State Veterans Cemeteries.

IV. Closing

Chairman Thomas announced that he is resigning from the Board effective tomorrow due to increased employment obligations and that he recommends that Vice-Chair Nelligan serve as acting Chair and hopes that the Governor will appoint Mr. Nelligan and BOT Chair. Chair Thomas expressed his deep appreciation for the work of the BOT members and highlighted some of the accomplishments especially the close work of the BOT with Commissioner Saadi and the DVA staff throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Per the scheduled dates set by the Board the next meeting is scheduled for June 9th at 3:30, venue to be determined. Motion to adjourn was made and passed unanimously at 5:24 PM.

Respectfully Submitted:



Michael Thomas, Chair
DVA Board of Trustees

Date 3/25/21



**Department of Veterans Affairs
State of Connecticut**

**Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes
Special Organizational Meeting
May 5, 2021**

(Minutes subject to review at next Board Meeting)

I. Convene Meeting:

The Meeting was called to order by Chair Patrick Nelligan at 3:04 PM in the DVA Commissioner's conference room and via TEAMS.

Pledge of Allegiance was led by Chair Patrick Nelligan followed by the taking of attendance of Board members.

In attendance: John Banks, Paul Barry, Philip Cacciola, Juan Cruz, Richard Dziekan, Steven Harris, Adele Hodges, Alyssa Kelleher, Frederick Leaf, Sharad Samy, Heather Sandler, Mark Spranzo, Kjell Tollefsen, Sherri Vogt and Dawn Works-Dennis.

Absent: Richard Benson and Peter Galgano

In attendance from the DVA: Commissioner Thomas Saadi and Darlene Deschaine.

Chair Nelligan thanked the Governor for appointing him as Chair and for his commitment to supporting the DVA Board of Trustees and the goal of making the DVA a first class facility for our Veterans now and in the future. Chair Nelligan stressed the need to spread the word about the services provided to Veterans across the State. Following established Board procedures Chair Nelligan appointed Trustee Dawn Works-Dennis as Vice Chair to which there were no objections.

Chair Nelligan then asked Commissioner Saadi, to administer the oath of office to newly appointed Trustee, Colonel (Ret) Adele Hodges, the first African American Woman to Command U.S. Marine Corps Camp Lejeune.


Chair Nelligan reported that under previous Chair Michael Thomas there were sub-committees that were established regarding the State Veterans Cemetery, Wreaths Across America event and the DVA Healthcare Center. He stated that these Committees will remain in place with Paul Barry continuing to Chair the Cemetery Committee; Sherri Vogt will chair the Wreaths Across America Committee with assistance from Vice-Chair Works-Dennis; and Heather Sandler will Chair the Healthcare Center Committee. Commissioner Saadi explained that the DVA Program Fee Committee was an ad hoc committee and that he will request appointment of a new Ad Hoc Committee in June as he plans to present a proposal to revise the DVA Residential Program Fee structure.

Chair Nelligan stated that the Board will continue to meet utilizing the hybrid in-person and TEAMS approach, with the in person meetings taking place in the Commissioner's Conference Room or the DVA Auditorium. The next quarterly Board meeting is scheduled for June 9th at 3:30.

II. Closing

There being no further business, Chair Nelligan entertained a motion to adjourn. Motion was made by Trustee Sandler, seconded by Trustee Harris and passed unanimously at 3:20 PM.

Respectfully Submitted:



Patrick Nelligan, Chair
DVA Board of Trustees

Date May 18, 2021



**Department of Veterans Affairs
State of Connecticut**

**Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes
June 9, 2021**

(Minutes subject to review at next Board Meeting)

I. Convene Meeting:

The Meeting (conducted via Teams meeting platform and in person) was called to order by Commissioner Saadi through Chairman Nelligan at 3:32 PM.

In attendance: John Banks, Paul Barry, Richard Benson, Phil Cacciola, Richard Dziekan, Peter Galgano, Steven Harris, Frederick Leaf, Patrick Nelligan, Sharad Samy, Heather Sandler, Kjell Tollefsen, Sherri Vogt and Dawn Works-Dennis.

Absent: Juan Cruz and Alyssa Kelleher

In attendance from the DVA: Commissioner Thomas Saadi, Joseph Danao, Darlene Deschaine, Tammy Marzik, Briana Mitchell, and Jane Siegel.

Chairman Nelligan entertained a motion to approve the minutes of the previous meeting. Motion made by Trustee Dziekan and seconded by Trustee Benson. Motion passed unanimously without any corrections or edits to the minutes.

Chairman Nelligan asked Commissioner Saadi to brief on DVA achievements and events.

Commissioner Saadi spoke about recent events including partnering with the Federal VA for a COVID-19 vaccination clinic for Veterans, their spouses and caregivers on April 11th and a ribbon cutting ceremony on April 21st with Governor Ned Lamont marking the completion of two major safety and quality of life improvement projects on campus. Nicky Valluzzo, Jr. of Nicky's Haircutters in Bethel, CT has been volunteering at the DVA Healthcare Center providing much needed free haircuts to Veteran Patients who have been unable to get haircuts due to pandemic restrictions. On May 13th the Department of Veterans Affairs hosted a formal ribbon cutting ceremony marking the completion of two major improvement projects to the grounds of the State Veterans Cemetery in Middletown. Commissioner Saadi informed the Board that he, Mr. Danao and Residential Director Nieves were at eleven different Memorial Day events around the State over the Memorial Day Weekend. On Thursday June 3rd, the Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) hosted a ceremony at our Rocky Hill Campus with the Consul General Ambassador Won-sam Chang of the Republic of Korea during which he presented thousands of face masks and hand sanitizers to be distributed among Korean War Veterans, their families and Veterans in Connecticut.

The upcoming events include several events that will be held on June 12th, the National Iwo Jima Memorial Open House Day and the DVA Team will be participating in the CVLC Bike Ride to raise funds for Veterans legal support. On June 13th the Commissioner will be participating in the Gold Star Monument Parade and Dedication in Stamford. The CT Veterans Hall of Fame inductees for the class of 2020 will be held on July 29th in the CTNG Armory Drill Shed. September 22nd & September 23rd Stand Down will be held as a two-day virtual informational webinars and September 24th will be held in five locations, Rocky Hill, Bridgeport, Danbury, Niantic and possibly Willimantic area.

II. Old/Ongoing Business

A. COVID-19 Response & Recovery

Commissioner Saadi provided a DVA point in time roll up of testing and COVID data with two hundred and forty-nine Veteran Residents and Patients having been tested for COVID-19 since March 2020. Sixty-nine testing positive, with sixty-three having recovered from the virus and no Veterans in the Residential or Healthcare COVID Isolation Units. One Veteran Resident and two Veteran Patients passed away in the spring from COVID-19 complications and two Veteran Patients passed away in December and January. One Veteran Patient with COVID-19 passed in December from a non-COVID-19 medical occurrence. Ninety-nine percent of Veteran Residents and Patients are fully vaccinated.

Commissioner Saadi reported that the DVA has been conducting regular COVID-19 testing of all direct care and front-line staff since July 2020 and that sixty-four staff members tested COVID-19 positive since the beginning of the pandemic, with all staff having recovered and returned to work consistent with DPH guidelines. Sixty-five percent of DVA staff are vaccinated for COVID-19.

B. Budgeting and Staffing

Chairman Nelligan recognized DVA Fiscal Director Briana Mitchell for an update on the budget and staffing trends. She reported that the DVA has a budget of 23.5 million dollars which is flat funding based on the current bi-annual budget. Ms. Mitchell reported that the DVA billing departments submitted an invoice for receipt of the one-time emergency payment to State Veterans Homes (SVHs) for COVID-19 response (CARES act) and an invoice for one-time payment to existing State Extended Care Facilities for Veterans for operational needs for SVHs, (ARP act). CARES act funding was used for COVID-19 related funds such as overtime, personal protective equipment and upgrades to maintenance and food services supplies & equipment. Ms. Mitchell reported that the DVA will finish the fiscal year with a balanced budget. She also reported that OPM released FY21 holdbacks and rescissions to Other Expenses (OE) to assist the DVA with addressing the projected insolvency of the IGW (Institutional General Welfare Fund). The Fiscal department is performing an in-depth review of all DVA appropriations and expenditures to ensure responsible spending and effective fiscal oversight.

Chairman Nelligan asked Ms. Mitchell to update the board on the IGW. Ms. Mitchell reported that a total of \$796,000 of expenditures was cut from or shifted out of the IGW. This was achieved by ending a \$175,000 consultant contract support to DVA Healthcare Center, \$540,000 of expenses for medical supplies, specialty medical bed rentals and laundering service was reallocated to Other Expenses (OE), \$81,000 of minor varied IGW expenses were shifted to donations. While not yet achieving permanent solvency this fiscal adjustments and savings directed by Commissioner Saadi ensures IGW solvency at least through FY 2023 allowing time to implement additional changes to achieve permanent solvency.

C. Projects Report

Projects and Operations Director Joe Danao provided a DVA projects began his remarks by stating that Commissioner Saadi will provide an update regarding State Veteran Cemetery Property Acquisition. Mr. Danao reported that the Rocky Hill campus abatement of building 2 Canteen is complete while Build 5 is ongoing. The Campus Security System for the New Gatehouse is in the planning phase and water improvement project is in the programming phase. A bond request has been submitted for \$82,000 for a design replacement of the boiler. The DVA Energy Efficiency Project is in Phase II, DEEP grant approved \$270,000 for metering. The DVA Auditorium functional and safety upgrades are in the planning stage while the old fixed chairs have been removed. Mr. Danao also reported that Residential Facility Quality of Life Improvements are proceeding including the planning for another residential Wing to be upgraded, WiFi expansion and upgrades is a work in progress and general repairs and painting is ongoing in the Residential Facility.

D. Cemetery Property Acquisition

Commissioner Saadi reported that while discussion with St. Mary's Parish were stalled the broker has reached out to explain that the property is still available however, the DVA offer of \$350,000 for the 13.6 acres is far from the \$1 million sought by the church. Commissioner Saadi then displayed a map of potential available properties, both state owned and privately owned which he explained he is pursuing. The Commissioner stated that his approach is to go after multiple properties and not focus on the Church property. He also emphasized that the \$1 million asked by the church is unreasonable. Commissioner Saadi stated that he is in contact with CVH regarding parcels on Bow Lane and one abutting the cemetery known as Holmes Drive Ext. Commissioner Saadi will update the Lt Governor Susan Bysiewicz who is in full support of the DVA acquiring additional property for the Cemetery.

III. New Business

A. Legislative Update

Commissioner reported on legislation that will be moving forward and which he testified in favor of before the General Assembly including providing state based benefits for certain Veterans with an Other Than Honorable (OTH) discharge characterization (HB5592) which will create the DVA Qualified Condition Review Board. He reported the passage of a bill to providing certain state Veteran recognitions to members of the Hmong Laotian Special Guerilla Units. The recognitions are the CT Wartime Service Medal, Veteran designation on Driver's License and License plate. The Commissioner also testified in favor of legislation which would establish a task force to study updating the Veterans property tax relief laws which passed the house and was pending in the Senate. The Commissioner explained that a bill which directed federal reimbursements for DAV prescription drug purchases to go to the IGW would not move forward this year but would be addressed in the 2022 session.

Commissioner Saadi reported on additional legislation making it easier for military families to enroll their children in school when they move as a result of military orders as well as establish a Purple Star School Program; and a bill requiring the DECD in consultation with the Commissioner of Veterans Affairs to establish a Veterans tourism trail. The Commissioner explained that the DVA does not have the personnel or subject matter experts to accomplish this unfunded mandate and that he would appoint a working group of Veterans, historians, civic leaders and members of the BOT to work with towns, historical societies and other groups to identify battlefields, Veterans Cemeteries, Veterans Monuments

and other related sites for potential inclusion as part of the trail. He explained that this will be a highly involved effort with conflicting ideas of what should and should not be included as part of the trail.

B. Program Fee Reduction Proposal

Commissioner Saadi reported that the current Residential Program Fee is set at 30% of income with deductions for a variety of expenses including for child support and education. Amendments to the current policy have been reviewed by the BOT over the past several years with the BOT deciding to maintain the policy until such time as the Semi-Private Living Program (SPLP) was expanded to the majority of the Residential Facility. As of May 2021, four out of six operational Residential Facility wings have been upgraded to the SPLP with the remaining wings schedule for completion by January 2022.

The Commissioner's proposal the appointment of a BOT Committee to review the following recommendations: reduce the Program Fee from 30% to 25% of income; exempt from the Program Fee Veteran with \$500 or less of monthly income; effective date of any change to be October 1, 2021, (after September BOT meeting) which will be reflected in November Program Fee statement as DVA invoices in subsequent month.

C. Wreaths Across America Ceremony Planning for December 2021

Trustee Vogt reported that this year's event is planned for December 18th and that there will need to be stakeholder's involvement in the selling of the wreaths. Trustee Vogt has set up a website regarding Wreaths Across America as well as a flyer to be handed out. The goal for selling of the wreaths this year is 13,000 total by all parties. The cost of the wreaths will be fifteen dollars each of which five dollars will return to the CT DVA Cemetery Perpetual Care Fund. All money goes directly to Wreaths Across America if purchased through website. Members of the board can accept cash or check that is sent to WAA in Maine. Trustee Vogt asks the board to please try to sell 200 wreaths via the flyer, website, FaceBook page and networking. Please also consider reaching out to all organizations and businesses such as VFW; American Legion; Elks; Rotary; Lions; BSA; Girl Scouts; Police; Fire Departments; Religious groups: church, synagogues, mosques, temples; Chamber of Commerce; Senior Centers and town libraries. A kickoff meeting will be held in June and bi-weekly meetings will start in mid-September. The stakeholders can discuss fund raising events.

IV. Closing

Chairman Nelligan had to excuse himself to attend to work matters, Vice Chair Dennis-Works was present to proceed for the remainder of the meeting.

Per the scheduled dates set by the Board the next meeting is scheduled for September 8th at 3:30, venue to be determined. Motion to adjourn was made and passed unanimously at 5:17 PM.

Respectfully Submitted:



Patrick Nelligan, Chair
DVA Board of Trustees

Date June 24, 2021



**Department of Veterans Affairs
State of Connecticut**

**Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes
September 8, 2021**

(Minutes subject to review at next Board Meeting)

I. Convene Meeting:

The Meeting was called to order by Commissioner Saadi through Chairman Nelligan at 3:30 PM.

In attendance: John Banks, Paul Barry, Richard Benson, Phil Cacciola, Juan Cruz, Richard Dziekan, Peter Galgano, Adele Hodges, Alyssa Kelleher, Frederick Leaf, Patrick Nelligan, Sharad Samy, Heather Sandler, Mark Spranzo and Sherri Vogt.

Absent: Steven Harris and Dawn Works-Dennis.

In attendance from the DVA: Commissioner Thomas Saadi, Joseph Danao, Darlene Deschaine, and Jane Siegel.

Chairman Nelligan entertained a motion to approve the minutes of the previous meeting. Motion made by Trustee Barry and seconded by Trustee Sandler. Motion passed unanimously without any corrections or edits to the minutes.

Chairman Nelligan asked Commissioner Saadi to present recent DVA achievements and events.

Commissioner Saadi spoke about recent events including the 2020 CT Veterans Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony held on July 2021 and the 2nd Company Governor's Horse Guard Graduation held on August 1st. Commissioner Saadi reported of the many events around the state he attended including the West Hartford Korean War Veterans Recognition Ceremony, the VFW Post 149 Danbury Annual Family Picnic, the VFW Brookfield Patriotic Boat Parade, the DVA Veteran Residents Equine "Manes & Motion" therapy Graduation and the dedication of the John DeMello Memorial Veteran's Center in Southington City Hall. The Commissioner also attended the Waterbury Legislative Delegation's Suit Drive with donations going to Save a Suit in Bethel, CT, which will clean and distribute the suits to CT Veterans in need.

Upcoming events include the DVA 9/11 20th Anniversary Memorial Ceremony which will be held at the DVA Main Campus Auditorium, the Waterbury Veterans Tombstones Restoration Project Ceremony and DVA's annual Veterans Stand Down which will be held as informational webinars September 22-24. Stand Down 2021 In-Person Regional sites include Rocky Hill, Norwich, Bridgeport, Danbury and Danielson from 8:00am – 2:00pm. On October 1st the Veteran Unclaimed Cremated Remains Burial

Ceremony with Military Honors will take place at the State Veterans Cemetery in Middletown at 10:30am. The Commissioner is also organizing the October 23rd Beirut Veterans Memorial Monument Dedication in Danbury and will attend various events around the state on Veterans Day, November 11th. In December the Class of 2021 CT Veterans Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony will take place.

II. Old/Ongoing Business

A. COVID-19 Response & Recovery

Commissioner Saadi provided a DVA point in time roll up of testing and COVID data with two hundred and fifty-two Veteran Residents and Patients having been tested for COVID-19 since March 2020. Seventy testing positive, with sixty-three having recovered from the virus, one Veteran in Community based COVID Recovery Unit and no Veterans in the Residential or Healthcare COVID Isolation Units. One Veteran Resident and two Veteran Patients passed away in the spring from COVID-19 complications and two Veteran Patients passed away in December 2020 and January 2021. One Veteran Patient with COVID-19 passed in December from a non-COVID-19 medical occurrence. Ninety-nine percent of Veteran Residents and Patients are fully vaccinated.

Commissioner Saadi reported that the DVA has been conducting regular COVID-19 testing of all direct care and front-line staff since July 2020 and that seventy staff members tested COVID-19 positive since the beginning of the pandemic, with sixty-four staff having recovered and returned to work consistent with DPH guidelines and two remain in recovery. Seventy-six percent of DVA staff are vaccinated for COVID-19.

B. Budgeting and Staffing

Chairman Nelligan recognized Commissioner Saadi to update on the budget and staffing trends in the absence of Fiscal Director Briana Mitchell. He reported that the fiscal year which ended June 30, 2021 closed within available appropriations. Responsible shifts in expenditures from IGW to OE and the targeted application of CARES Act funds to cover COVID-19 related expenses have significantly improved the fiscal stability of the IGW which was previously projected to be insolvent in mid-2022. Preliminary estimates show DVA remains in fiscal balance for this fiscal year and emergency staffing needs in the healthcare facility will be manageable within the Personal Services appropriation. Fiscal Administration is performing an in-depth review of all DVA appropriations and relief funding to ensure responsible spending and effective fiscal oversight.

Chairman Nelligan asked the Commissioner to update the board on the IGW. The Commissioner reported that with implementation of the adjustments briefed at the June meeting totaling \$796,000 and OPMs released of OE and PS holdbacks to the DVA the IGW is no longer projected to be insolvent the third quarter of 2022. While these changes do not yet achieve sustained long-term solvency, this approach does extend IGW solvency beyond FY23 allowing time to implement additional changes to achieve long-term solvency. One remaining legislative item is the reallocation of expenditures for federally reimbursed pharmaceuticals from the IGW to the State's General fund. This would result in a savings of nearly \$300,000 in the IGW and set the fund on a course to long-term sustained solvency. DVA is reasonably confident that this measure will be approved in the 2023 Legislative session.

C. Projects Report

Projects and Operations Director Joe Danao began his remarks by stating that Commissioner Saadi will provide an update regarding State Veteran Cemetery Property Acquisition. Mr. Danao reported that the Rocky Hill campus abatement of building 2 is complete while Building 5 is ongoing. The Campus Security System for the New Gatehouse is in the planning phase and water improvement project is in the programming phase. The DVA Energy Efficiency Project is in Phase II and DEEP grant approved \$270,000 for metering. The DVA Auditorium functional and safety upgrades are complete and the Residential Facility Quality of Life Improvements are proceeding including the preparation phase for G-Wing. The other projects that will need to be addressed will be roof replacement for the Healthcare Center, roof repairs for buildings 1, 2, and Levitow Lane.

Chairman Nelligan asked Trustee Vogt to update the board on Wreaths Across America. Trustee Vogt reported that the goal is to sell at least 9,000 wreaths by Thanksgiving Eve. She is asking every trustee to sell at least 200 wreaths each. The wreaths are purchased online, with a check, or with the QRL code for \$15 each. All proceeds from this initiative will be used for the perpetual care of the CT Veterans Cemetery. DVA Veterans Cemetery has a code location, and there is a code for this specific initiative by the CT DVA BOT. The next Wreaths Planning Meeting is October 8th.

D. Cemetery Property Acquisition

Commissioner Saadi reported that while discussion with St. Mary's Parish were stalled the broker has reached out to explain that the property is still available however, the DVA offer of \$350,000 for the 13.6 acres is far from the \$1 million sought by the parish. The DVA has sent a letter of interest in the property to the bankruptcy Trustee attempting to restart purchase discussions. The DVA contacted CVH regarding 8-acre parcel on Bow Lane which CVH is open to transfer, however, they must maintain this property in the CVH inventory until conclusion of ongoing litigation. There is a private parcel across Bow Lane held in trust with a life estate vesting in one person. The DVA is exploring legal options with entering into purchase discussions regarding that parcel. Acquisition of other CVH and private lots abutting cemetery or contiguous with CVH property totaling 9 acres are being explored. Commissioner Saadi will update the Lt Governor Susan Bysiewicz who is in full support of the DVA acquiring additional property for the Cemetery.

E. Program Fee Review, Committee Report

At the June 9, 2021 BOT meeting Commissioner Saadi proposed that the current Residential Program Fee of 30% of income be reduced from 30% to 25% of Income and exempt from the Program Fee any Veteran with \$500 or less of monthly income to be effective October 1, 2021, which will be reflected in November Program Fee statement. The Chair asked the Sub-Committee to update the board on their recommendations. Trustee Kelleher reported that the subcommittee looked closely at options and how much money residents would have left as their own discretionary funds. One of the main concerns was residents on the lower end of the income paying a flat percentage. Instead, the Subcommittee proposes that the Program Fee be progressive with increasing percentage for those with higher income (like a progressive tax rate approach). Commissioner Saadi explained that the DVA did not currently have the capability to implement such an approach as, to be fair, the various brackets would have to lock percentages with any increased bracket not applying to the dollars subject to the lower bracket. Instead he asked the Board to reduce the Program Fee from 30% to 25% and then reconvene the subcommittee

to further review the possibility of a progressive program fee with the DVA. The board unanimously voted on reducing the Program Fee from 30% to 25% of income reflected in the November Program Fee statement.

III. New Business

A. Stand Down 2021

Commissioner reported on the annual Veterans Stand Down September 22nd -24th that combines two days of online benefits presentations and a day with five regional in-person Veteran resource access sites across Connecticut. All Veterans and currently serving National Guard, Reserve and Active Duty personnel are eligible to attend Stand Down. Stand Down 2021 begins on Wednesday, September 22nd with a kickoff ceremony at 9:00am at the DVA Rocky Hill Campus. Following the ceremony will be a day of online Veterans benefits informational sessions from a variety of federal and state agencies and community service providers on topics including housing and homeless services, State labor/employment and vocational resources, Veteran caregiver support, legal assistance, education resources and more. On Friday, September 24th, there will be five in-person service locations throughout the State in Bridgeport, Danbury, Danielson, Norwich, Rocky Hill. These locations will be open from 8am-2pm and staffed by representatives of the regional Vet Centers, CT Bar Association, the DVA and many Veteran Service Organizations and community based providers to provide benefits information, pro-bono legal services and free COVID-19 testing, vaccines and flu shots by medical professionals.

B. New Laws Affecting Veterans

Commissioner Saadi reported on the new laws affecting veterans which include Public Act 21-79 Veterans' benefits for veterans discharged other than Honorably. The law, combined with PA 18-79, establishes a Board of Review to process applications from Veterans separated with a characterization of Other Than Honorable (OTH) due to PTSD, TBI, MST, sexual orientation, gender identity to determine whether the OTH should be treated as an honorable discharge for purposes of eligibility for state benefits. Public Act 21-51 Veterans recognition for Hmong Laotian Special Guerrilla Units which served in the Kingdom of Laos. The law provides verified SGU members eligibility for a CT Veterans Vehicle Marker Plate, Operators License/Identification cards and the Connecticut Wartime Service Medal. The DVA is working with the DMV to implement the law with the DVA conducting the eligibility review. HB 6481 Special Registration Marker Plates for Veterans and Members of the Armed Forces who served in periods of War. The law authorizes the DMV to issue vehicle marker plates recognizing specific wars or conflicts in which certain Veterans served. These are in addition to the current Connecticut Veterans plate and twelve other specialized Veteran's vehicle marker plates. The DVA is training DMV personnel to be able to determine period of service. Public Act 21-105 Establishing a veterans and Military Tourism trail. The law requires that the DECD in consultation with the Commissioner of Veterans Affairs establish a military and tourism hiking trail linking Veterans' museums, memorials, battleground sites and other historic sites.

C. DPH Healthcare Affidavit

Chairman Nelligan asked Commissioner Saadi to report on the DPH requirements of obtaining Healthcare Affidavits from the Board members. By state law all skilled nursing facilities must obtain Healthcare Affidavits from Board members. The Trustees completed these forms which DVA Attorney Jane Siegel notarized.

IV. Closing

There being no further business, Chairman Nelligan entertained a motion to adjourn. Per the scheduled dates set by the Board the next meeting is scheduled for December 8th at 3:30, venue to be determined. Motion to adjourn was made and passed unanimously at 5:38 PM.

Respectfully Submitted:

Pat Nelligan

Patrick Nelligan, Chair
DVA Board of Trustees

Date 4 OCT 2021



**Department of Veterans Affairs
State of Connecticut**

**Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes
December 15, 2021**

(Minutes subject to review at next Board Meeting)

I. Convene Meeting:

The Meeting was called to order by Vice-Chair Dawn Works-Dennis at 3:33 PM.

In attendance: Paul Barry, Phil Cacciola, Juan Cruz, Richard Dziekan, Peter Galgano, Adele Hodges, Frederick Leaf, Patrick Nelligan, Sherri Vogt and Dawn Works-Dennis.

Absent: John Banks, Richard Benson, Steven Harris, Alyssa Kelleher, Sharad Samy, Heather Sandler and Mark Spranzo.

In attendance from the DVA: Commissioner Thomas Saadi, Joseph Danao, Tammy Marzik, Briana Mitchell and Jane Siegel.

Vice-Chair Works-Dennis entertained a motion to approve the minutes of the previous meeting. Motion made by Trustee Leaf and seconded by Trustee Hodges. Motion passed unanimously without any corrections or edits to the minutes.

Vice-Chair Works-Dennis asked Commissioner Saadi to present recent DVA achievements and events.

Commissioner Saadi spoke about recent events including the DVA 9/11 20th Anniversary Memorial Ceremony at which Lt. Governor Susan Bysiewicz, Federal VA CT Director Al Montoya and CT DESPP Commissioner James Rovella addressed the crowd of more than 125 people, the 2021 Annual Veterans Stand Down which served nearly 1000 Veterans across the state at five regional locations including the DVA Rocky Hill campus and the military funeral held on October 1, 2021 for eight U.S. Veterans' unclaimed cremated remains. Commissioner Saadi also reported on the ceremony he hosted in Danbury to dedicate the Beirut Veterans Monument honoring the U.S. service members who died in the Marine barracks bombing on October 23, 1983. Commissioner Saadi reported of the many events around the state he and other senior DVA leaders attended for Veterans Day including the Coventry Patriot Race, the Enfield Veterans Day Parade, the Immaculate High School (Danbury) Veterans Day program and the Danbury Veterans Day Ceremony. The Commissioner also spoke at the Veterans Day ceremony at the State Veterans Cemetery in Middletown at the DVA main campus ceremony and served as the emcee for the Danbury Exchange Club annual Veterans Recognition Dinner. On December 3rd the DVA, in partnership with the CT Military Department and the Office of Lt. Governor Bysiewicz, hosted the 2021 CT Veterans Hall of Fame induction ceremony and on December 7th Commissioner Saadi served as the

keynote speaker at the Danbury Council of Veterans Pearl Harbor Day 80th Anniversary Remembrance Ceremony.

Upcoming events include the annual Wreaths Across America program on Saturday December 18, 2021 at the State Veterans Cemetery in Middletown and at the COL Gates Veterans Cemetery in Rocky Hill.

Chair Nelligan arrived at 3:50PM.

Old/Ongoing Business

A. COVID-19 Response & Recovery

Commissioner Saadi provided a DVA point in time roll up of testing and COVID data with two hundred and sixty-four Veteran Residents and Patients having been tested for COVID-19 since March 2020. During this time eighty-one Veteran Residents and Patients tested positive, with seventy-six having recovered from the virus, there are no Veterans in Community based COVID Recovery facilities and no Veterans in the Residential or Healthcare COVID Isolation Units. One Veteran Resident and two Veteran Patients passed away in the spring from COVID-19 complications and two Veteran Patients passed away in December 2020 and January 2021. One Veteran Patient with COVID-19 passed in December from a non-COVID-19 medical occurrence. Ninety-nine percent of Veteran Residents and Patients are fully vaccinated.

Commissioner Saadi reported that the DVA has been conducting increased COVID-19 testing of all direct care and front-line staff since October 2021 and that seventy-eight staff members tested COVID-19 positive since the beginning of the pandemic, with seventy-seven staff having recovered and returned to work consistent with DPH guidelines and two remain in recovery. Eighty-nine percent of DVA staff have received the COVID-19 vaccine.

B. Budgeting and Staffing

Chairman Nelligan recognized Fiscal Director Briana Mitchell to update on the budget and staffing trends at the DVA. Ms. Mitchell reported that the projection is for the DVA to close the quarter within available appropriations and expects to do the same for the year subject to the variable of increased spending in response to COVID-19. Responsible shifts in expenditures from IGW to OE and the targeted application of CARES Act funds to cover COVID-19 related expenses continue to improve the fiscal stability of the IGW which was previously projected to be insolvent in mid-2022. Preliminary estimates show DVA remains in fiscal balance for this fiscal year subject to emergency staffing needs in the healthcare facility will be manageable within the Personal Services appropriation. Fiscal Administration is performing an in-depth review of all DVA appropriations and relief funding to ensure responsible spending and effective fiscal oversight. Ms. Mitchell reported that there is a \$600,000 appropriations holdback by OPM.

Trustee Barry asked whether the \$600,000 holdback is used by OPM as a basis for reducing the agency budget in the subsequent year to which Ms. Mitchell and Commissioner Saadi responded in the negative. They also underscored that the DVA has avoided annual budget cuts over the past two years that had been occurring until the last year of the prior administration. Trustee Leaf asked whether the increased Overtime in the Healthcare Center (HCC) was due to staffing shortages. Ms. Mitchell

responded that the OT was driven by the number of vacancies, staff on leave and COVID infections. Commissioner Saadi noted that the DVA has the funds necessary to fully staff however, the hiring/recruitment process can be lengthy and the DVA has lost several good candidates to private providers which pay more than the state or offer generous telework options. Commissioner Saadi explained that the DVA cannot offer the same flexibility for telework as it is a 24/7 direct care agency. As such, DVA staff, particularly facility and Safety and Security personal, are suffering from 'burnout' due to mandating and having to work overtime.

C. Projects Report

Projects and Operations Director Joe Danao began his remarks stating that Commissioner Saadi will provide an update regarding State Veteran Cemetery Property Acquisition separate from the Projects report. Mr. Danao reported that the Rocky Hill campus asbestos abatement of Building 5 is ongoing. The Campus Security System for the New Gatehouse is in the planning phase and water improvement project is in the programming phase. The DVA is proceeding with pre-design and sourcing state and federal funds necessary to build a needed second boiler as the DVA has only one operational boiler with the legally required backup provided through a monthly boiler rental costing \$31k per month. The DVA Energy Efficiency Project is in Phase II and DEEP grant approved \$270,000 for metering. The Residential Facility Quality of Life Improvements in Residential G-Wing are complete and now planning for improvements to F-Wing in early 2022. The WiFi upgrades are 99% complete throughout the Residential Facility. Residential Office flooring abatement and replacement to be completed by December 21, 2021. Three pavilions (13' x 15') are on order for placement at the East and West Residential wings and one possibly at the HCC in the spring of 2022. The DVA has secured a contract for Residential Facility window restoration for Spring 2022. The other projects that will need to be addressed will be roof replacement for the Healthcare Center, roof repairs for buildings 1, 2, and Levitow Lane.

Trustee Barry inquired as to the status of moving the Cemetery and Memorial Services office to the Veterans Cemetery in Middletown. Mr. Danao explained that the move is on hold due to significant IT challenges. Trustee Barry asked whether the DVA has plans to address the poor condition of COL Gates cemetery, particularly the roads and the lack of a sign. Mr. Danao responded that the DVA does not have the operational funds to make the road repairs and will look to obtain bonding funds from the state as part of a larger repair and improvement plan for the cemetery. Trustee Cruz mentioned that there may be an opportunity to have the National Guard or Army Reserve (of which he is a member) make some of the repairs at the Cemetery. Discussion ensued between Mr. Danao, Chair Nelligan and Commissioner Saadi regarding the process for such an approach concluding with Chair Nelligan tasking Trustee Cruz with providing the information for making such a request to Mr. Danao and Commissioner Saadi.

D. Cemetery Property Acquisition

Commissioner Saadi reported that discussions with St. Mary's Parish remain stalled (DVA offer of \$350,000 for the 13.6 acres is far from the \$1 million sought by the parish) and that the private owners of other abutting property are not interested in selling their property to the state. Commissioner Saadi provided a detailed explanation as to discussions between the DVA and DAS Property Division as to

next steps which include having additional appraisals (details not included in these minutes as the information is confidential and exempt from FOIA as it involves strategy related to property acquisition) Acquisition of other CVH and private lots abutting cemetery or contiguous with CVH property totaling 9 acres are being explored.

E. Wreath Across America

Chairman Nelligan asked Commissioner Saadi and Trustee Vogt to update the board on Wreaths Across America. Commissioner Saadi reported that approximately 12,000 wreaths had been sponsored with about 5000 sold through the Board of Trustees page. Commissioner Saadi and Tammy Marzik provided an explanation of the program for the December 18th events which will include Civil Air Patrol cadets providing the color guard and the speaking program will include CAP CT Wing Commander Matt Valleau and Goldstar Mom Lessa Philippon. Trustee Vogt reported that the number of wreaths sponsored exceeded our original goal of 9,000 wreaths. She thanked the Trustees for their support and highlighted by name some of the major sponsors including a CT Girl Scout who raised \$1,500 to sponsor 100 wreaths. The Commissioner explained that proceeds from the wreaths sponsored through the Board's page will be deposited in the Perpetual Care Fund for the State Veterans Cemetery. Commissioner Saadi expressed sincere thanks to Trustee Vogt for her months of work on this effort and for making it a success beyond initial expectations.

II. New Business

A. Staffing updates:

Commissioner Saadi informed the Board that Willis Ballard, Physical Plant Engineer left the DVA in September, that Ryan McKenna, Office of Advocacy & Assistance (OA&A) Manager left the DVA in November and that an OA&A Veteran Services Officer (VSO) from the 2nd District left the DVA the first week of December. He also reported that Darlene Deschaine, his Executive Secretary, would be leaving the DVA at the end of the month. Commissioner Saadi explained that Tammy Marzik is the Acting Manager of OA&A and that while it is difficult to lose experienced staff, that there are many qualified candidates applying to the DVA and that he would use the opportunity to realign and restructure sections of the DVA including expanding the number of VSOs in OA&A to better service Veterans across the State.

B. Program Fee:

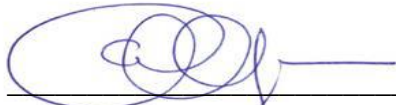
Trustee Barry asked that this item be added to the agenda without objection the item was added. Trustee Barry reported that after the Board approved the proposal to reduce the Residential Program Fee from 30% of income to 25% of Income the Program Fee Subcommittee continues to review income levels of Veteran Residents with a focus on those with little or no income. Trustee Barry explained that the committee identified approximately nine Veterans with income of \$500 or less and that the committee recommends waiving the Program Fee for any Veterans with a monthly income of \$500 or less. Discussion ensued regarding the efforts of DVA to assist Veteran Residents with filing for Social Security and Veteran benefits for a myriad of other programs and services that even Veterans with little or no income receive including personal hygiene, clothing and other items from the DVA through the donations program. The Commissioner expressed his support for the proposal and the board unanimously voted to

eliminate the Program Fee for Veterans with \$500 or less of monthly income beginning in January (February Bill).

III. Closing

There being no further business, Chairman Nelligan entertained a motion to adjourn. Per the scheduled dates set by the Board the next meeting is scheduled for March 9th at 3:30, venue to be determined. Motion to adjourn was made and passed unanimously at 5:08 PM.

Respectfully Submitted:

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several loops and a horizontal line extending to the right, positioned above a horizontal line.

Patrick Nelligan, Chair
DVA Board of Trustees

Date 7 DEC 2022