

New Hampshire Military Leadership Team

*A Meeting to Build Partnerships & Improve Services for
New Hampshire Veterans, Service Members and their Families*

February 22, 2021

10:00am – 12:00pm

Webex Virtual Platform

New Hampshire Military Leadership Team Attendance

A	Major General David Mikolaities, Adjutant General, NH National Guard
X	Warren Perry, Deputy Adjutant General, NH National Guard; MLT Chair
X	Kevin Forrest, Director, Manchester VA Medical Center; MLT Co-Chair
X	Amy Cook, Administrator, Community Based Military Programs, NH DMAVS; MLT Facilitator
X	Jim Adams, Chair, NH State Veterans Council
X	Steve Ahnen, President, NH Hospital Association
X	Matt Albuquerque, Next Step Bionics and Prosthetics
X	Pete Burdett, Civilian Aide to the Secretary of the Army
X	Madeline Dreusicke, NH State Veterans Council
X	Brendan Finn, NH State Veterans Council
A	William Gaudreau, Director, Division of Veteran Services, NH DMAVS
X	Jason Grower, Regional Director of Operations, Dead River Company
X	Margaret LaBrecque, Commandant, NH Veterans Home
X	Paul Lloyd, Chair, State Veterans Advisory Committee
A	Bradley Mayes, Director, VA Regional Benefits Offices in MA, NH & VT
X	Ginger Munson, Family Representative
A	Jeffrey Newman, Administrator, Division of Higher Education, NH Department of Education
A	Dr. Brett Rusch, Director, WRJ VA Medical Center
X	Roger Sevigny, NH Veterans Council
X	Pam Szacik, Employment Service Bureau Director, NH Employment Security
GUESTS IN ATTENDANCE:	
X	Carol Hitchcock, WRJ VA Medical Center
X	Corey Beem, Manchester VA Medical Center
X	Katherin Williams, Berlin Vet Center

Meeting Minutes

I. Welcome

New members and guests were introduced and welcomed to the meeting. Today was the first meeting of new voting members Madeline Dreusicke (Absent), Brendan Finn and Jason Grower. The remainder of the team introductions were completed and the agenda was reviewed.

II. Review of October Minutes—No corrections made to the December minutes. Matt A. moved to accept the minutes as written. Steve A. 2nd, all members approved.

III. Initiative Status Updates

Veteran-Friendly Business Recognition Program Update—Amy Cook

An Advisory Panel consisting of MLT members, representatives from the recognized businesses and other community partners and stakeholders will begin meeting 3/25/21. The Panel will serve to provide feedback and make recommendations about how to grow and further develop the program in the future.

Virtual Living Room—Paul Lloyd

Paul confirmed with Berlin VFW that they are still interested in being a host site for a Virtual Living Room and a new point of contact has been provided. They will be looking into funding possibilities that will assist with the cost of adding a handicap ramp to the building.

Supports for Military Spouses/Families—Ginger Munson & Amy Cook

A 2nd meeting was held with community providers and other interested individuals to talk further about military/Veteran family initiatives. The group narrowed down the long list of identified needs and prioritized what they might like to work on. Another meeting will be held 3/2.

IV. Old Business

Bylaws—a draft of proposed Bylaws were presented to members for review. Paul L. motioned to accept the Bylaws as written and pass them to MG Mikolaities for approval and signature. Margaret L. 2nd the motion. Steve A. noted that the length and format will continue to allow MLT to operate in a flexible manner and not be constrained by rules & regulations that may hinder productivity. All members voted in favor of the motion. The Bylaws will be passed to MG Mikolaities for approval and signature.

V. New Business

None

V. Information Briefs

Dept of Military Affairs & Veterans Services Update—Warren Perry

Federal legislation—National Guardsmen and Reservists have not been eligible for interment in the State Veteran's Cemetery. Congressman Pappas has introduced an Act that will seek to change this.

State Legislation—Warren provided an overview and update on the legislation he has included in the LSR Tracker that has been made available to MLT members. Refer to LSR Tracker for all LSRs that are being tracked and their current status.

TAG has charged Warren and his staff with considering what the Department will look like in 5 years.

i. Division of Veterans Services

219 appts in January—down significantly (6-mo average = 250), not sure why downturn. Continuing to help Veterans with appeals. Scheduled 6 more recently. They are also continuing to do outreach with the Guard. Cross training with victim advocates who address military sexual trauma. Educating those who come off federal orders that they are eligible for benefits.

Carol H.—At WRJ VAMC, they have been seeing increased enrollment for Veterans seeking vaccine. Could use that in outreach efforts.

ii. NH State Veterans Cemetery

Will break all interment records this year by a lot. Last year the number was approx. 920. Will be well over 1,000 for this fiscal year. Since July, exceeded 3-year average every month to date. Director Shawn Buck reported to Warren that they are finally getting back to normal since beginning of COVID. Walkway has been damaged, but will be repaired by May.

iii. Division of Community Based Military Programs

Nothing additional to add—see updates re: Veteran-Friendly Business Recognition Program and Family Initiatives.

VA Updates (Manchester)—Kevin Forrest

New VA Secretary confirmed last month. Priority has been vaccine effort. Subjected to some challenges last week (weather and supply chain). Network Director has vision of VISNs supporting each other and this played out in real time as VISNs shared vaccines and prevented many appointments from having to cancel. Moderna is being distributed at Manchester VAMC. Over 3,500 vaccines (dose #1) have been given to Veterans. There's been a careful balance between continuing quality care and also providing

100% of vaccine supply each week. First walk-in clinic was tested last week—went really well. Administered 600 vaccines on that day. Looking at drive-through clinics. OIG visited virtually in past month—went well, no unexpected findings. Survey of staff indicated that, overall, staff feel safe and supported working at the VAMC with regards to COVID. Face-to-face care and virtual care continue to be utilized in combination. This will continue in the future. New Endocrinologist, Psychiatrist, Neurologist—all started recently. Virtual Town Hall 3pm today.

VA Updates (White River Junction, VT)--Carol Hitchcock

WRJ VAMC in middle of vaccine distribution. Already 1,800 2nd doses given to Veterans (VT & NH) and each weekly supply increases. Gathering info from stakeholders about consolidating teams in CBOCs. Nothing but positive feedback so far. Have held Town Halls and put out surveys to get Veteran input as well and all positive feedback. Will be putting forth a congressional proposal to open a new CBOC. Physical renovations continue at main campus.

VBA Update—no report available

Member Updates & Announcements--

- **Steve Ahnen, NH Hospital Association**—NHHA members are looking forward to when COVID is less present. A positive & hopeful outlook has started with vaccine rolling out. A significant challenge has been managing the pandemic and simultaneously its effect on staff and caregivers.
- **Pam Szacik, NHES**—District offices remain closed. Customers are being served through virtual appointments. They receive 10.5K-11K calls/week for claims. A Re-Employment program will start the 2nd week of March with virtual activities and workshops. There continues to be low activity with Jobs for Veterans State Grant participants.
- **Margaret LaBrecque, NH Veterans Home**—COVID outbreak officially closed on 1/26/21! The Home has been COVID-free since January. Weekly has testing continues to be conducted. With the help of the Governor and the NH National Guard, NHVH started administering the vaccine on 12/23/20 as a closed pod vaccine site. 92% of residents accepted the vaccine; 60%+ of staff also chose to be vaccinated. Only those who did not receive the vaccine will need to continue weekly testing. Recreation staff have begun facilitating socially distant visits with family members and they've been working on some innovative ideas to keep residents connected to family & friends. Connect with the NHVH Facebook page to see what's going on. Side note: the Commission on PTSD & TBI will be re-convening soon.
- **Pete Burdett, Civilian Aide to the Secretary of the Army**—There has been a shift in leadership in Washington D.C.—there is currently an Acting Secretary of the Army. Waiting to hear who the new permanent Secretary will be.
- **Jim Adams, NH State Veterans Council**—The Council continues to communicate with Veterans in New Hampshire. There has been outstanding feedback for the VA's distribution and administering of the vaccine.
- **Matt Albuquerque, Next Step Bionics & Prosthetics**—COVID has altered normal business operations and the company started a Wellness Call program for Veterans. Staff checked in with Veterans they hadn't seen in a while and value beyond the intended care was found in the call. They will continue to operate this program because it provides a method to address social isolation.

- **Jason Grower, Dead River Company**—Dead River Company will continue to participate in the development of the NH Veteran-Friendly Business Recognition Program by participating on the Advisory Panel. The company plans to begin hosting regularly scheduled Veteran employee groups/events in the spring. They invited MG Mikolaities to attend a Veterans Day Luncheon and this was extremely well received by employees.

- **Katherin Williams, Berlin Vet Center**—Katherin shared that she is new to the position and is currently reaching out to various groups like MLT to introduce herself and orient herself to the purpose of the groups. The Vet Center is also working to conduct outreach and successfully engage Veterans. The Berlin Vet Center continues to host monthly meetings of the North Country Veterans Committee—Warren Perry noted that it would be helpful if Katherin could promote the NH Veteran-Friendly Business Recognition program to that committee in the spring.

VI. Next Steps

Next meeting date—**Monday, April 19, 2021; 10am-11:30am***

Location: Webex Virtual Meeting

***The time of the MLT meeting will be changed to 10am-11:30am for all future meetings.**