

# New Hampshire Military Leadership Team

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

October 26, 2021

10:30am – 12:00pm

NH State Veterans Cemetery, Boscawen, NH

## New Hampshire Military Leadership Team Attendance

X	Major General David Mikolaities, Adjutant General, NH National Guard
X	Warren Perry, Deputy Adjutant General, NH National Guard; MLT Co-Chair
A	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
A	Steve Ahnen, President, NH Hospital Association
A	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 (Peggy) LaBrecque, Commandant, NH Veterans Home
X	Paul Lloyd, Chair, State Veterans Advisory Committee
X	Sarah Morrissey, Employment Service Bureau Director, NH Employment Security
X	Ginger Munson, Family Representative
X	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
<b>GUESTS IN ATTENDANCE:</b>	
X	Marcos Lugo-Fontanez, VA Regional Benefits Offices
X	Corey Beem, Manchester VA Medical Center
X	Carol Hitchcock, WRJ VA Medical Center

## Meeting Minutes

### I. Welcome & Introductions

General Mikolaities welcomed all to the meeting at the NH State Veterans Cemetery and provided a brief status update of the NH National Guard. He also encouraged MLT members to focus on the priorities they have identified.

**Review of August Minutes**—No corrections made to the August 2021 minutes. Peggy L. moved to accept the minutes as written. Paul L. 2<sup>nd</sup>, all members approved. The August minutes can be found on the DMAVS—MLT website page: <https://www.dmavs.nh.gov/about-us/councils-and-committees/nh-military-leadership-team>.

### II. Initiative Status Updates

#### **Veteran-Friendly Business Recognition Program Update**—Amy Cook

There are currently 45 NH Veteran-Friendly Businesses that have been recognized by DMAVS and NHES. Revisions to the application are in process and the new application will be available 1/1/22. Currently working with DBEA to promote the program. In process of hiring a full-time staff person in the Division who will take

over facilitation of the network. Looking to spring or early summer for a day of workshops and recognition for new businesses.

#### **Supports for Military Spouses/Families—Ginger Munson**

In process of exploring ideas and opportunities that came to light through speaking recently with Phil Taub. Two military/Veteran podcasts currently exist and we don't want to duplicate, but there may be opportunity and space to partner with one. Plan to test run some video interviews after the holiday season.

### **III. Old Business**

#### **2021 Meeting Schedule—**

An online poll had been sent out to all MLT members to survey members' availability to choose a new meeting date/time for the remainder of 2021 and for the duration of 2022. Meetings will be held on the 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday, every other month from 10:00AM-11:30AM. Locations will vary and there will continue to be a call in number and/or virtual attendance option. Due to the shortened time of meetings, members will need to submit any updates ahead of time for distribution at the meeting and inclusion in the minutes. If time allows, discussion related to updates or additional member updates will be provided at the meeting.

#### **New member recommendations—**

- 1) The Community Behavioral Health Association (CBHA) put forth Edward Drury as a nominee for MLT membership to represent the interests of the CBHA. MLT members reviewed the nominees resume and supporting materials. There is a question about how exactly communication between the two groups will work if Mr. Drury is not attending CBHA meetings or part of the group's leadership. The leadership of CBHA is very limited in the amount of time each can provide to participate in community efforts or organized groups such as MLT, so appointing leadership of their organizations is a common practice. Jason Grower made a motion to recognize Mr. Edward Drury as a voting member of MLT to represent the interests of CBHA and the field of mental health. Paul L. 2<sup>nd</sup> motion. Motion passed.
- 2) DHHS put forth Karen Hebert as a nominee for MLT membership to represent the interests of the Department. Karen is Director of the Division of Economic and Housing Stability at Department of Health and Human Services. She will bring a unique perspective to the team that is currently missing. Specifically, she will have insight into issues related to housing and homelessness. Paul L. made a motion to recognize Ms. Karen Hebert as a voting member of MLT to represent the interests of DHHS. Jason G. 2<sup>nd</sup> the motion. Motion passed.
- 3) Other Discussion regarding membership:
  - Ginger M. recommends that the team consider seeking an additional family member representative so other types of families and branches can also have representation. Members will keep this in mind and consider who might be a good candidate.
  - Pete B. recommends that the MLT invite David Tille from Harbor Care to attend MLT meetings as an advisor related to issues of housing stability and homelessness. Warren P. currently sits on Governor's Commission on Housing Stability. Housing is the most significant, long-term issue facing New Hampshire. Pete B. made a motion to formally invite Mr. David Tille to attend MLT meetings as an advisor for housing issues. Paul L. 2<sup>nd</sup> motion. With one in opposition, motion passed.

### **IV. New Business**

#### **Veteran Initiatives Around the State of New Hampshire**

- 1) Lakes Region Veterans Coalition—Peggy provided an update on this group as she has been participating on their Board. They are in the process of obtaining recognition as a 501(c)(3) and are

engaging community partners in Lakes Region. Focus is on spreading awareness of resources and reducing social isolation.

## V. Information Briefs

### Member Updates & Announcements—

Due to time, members were asked to provide updates ahead of time for distribution at the meeting and inclusion in the minutes. The following was submitted prior to the meeting:

#### VBA

Submitted by: Ena Lima, Assistant Director  
Boston, Manchester, White River Junction  
VA Regional Offices  
[Ena.Lima@va.gov](mailto:Ena.Lima@va.gov)

**Gulf War Presumptive Hiring Initiative:** In August the VA announced that it added 3 presumptive conditions related to toxic exposure: asthma, rhinitis, and sinusitis for military service members that may have been exposed to airborne hazards or contaminants while on active duty in Afghanistan, Djiboutee, Syria and Uzbekistan during the Persian Gulf War from September 19, 2001 to present, or the Southwest Asia theater of operations from August 2, 1990 to present.

To reduce the backlog of existing claims and address the surge of new claims stemming from Toxic Exposure, the Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) initiated recruitment to find qualified team members in multiple locations nation-wide. Positions included: Veterans Service Representatives, Rating Veterans Service Representatives, Legal Administrative Specialists and Senior Veterans Service Representatives.

Job announcements closed on October 4, 2021 and VA Regional Offices are in the process of interviewing and hiring individuals for these positions.

**Closure of Federal Records Centers (FRC):** On September 17, 2021, the Federal Records Center (FRC) announced that it was closing several records facilities and only responding to emergency requests for Veterans files. The closure has caused a backlog of files to accumulate due to safety protocols that allow only a small percentage of the staff into facilities to pull requests. Non-emergency requests will not be serviced until the records centers reopen.

An inquiry can be submitted to email [FRC@NARA.GOV](mailto:FRC@NARA.GOV) to find out the status of an Veteran file request. Please place the reference request number in the email subject line and submit one inquiry per request, as multiple will delay a response.

Closed locations:

- ❖ Atlanta
- ❖ Dayton
- ❖ Fort Worth
- ❖ Kansas City
- ❖ Kingsridge
- ❖ Lees Summit
- ❖ Riverside
- ❖ Seattle

The following FRC facilities have only 20% of their staff available at records locations:

- ❖ Chicago
- ❖ Denver
- ❖ Lenexa
- ❖ Philadelphia
- ❖ Pittsfield
- ❖ San Bruno
- ❖ Washington Nation Records Center

[FRC Operating Status | National Archives](#)

**VA Debt Collection to Resume Effective October 1, 2021:** VA resumed debt collection and the issuance of debt notification letters on October 1, 2021. The 18-month backlog of suspended COVID-19 benefit debts will be collected in cohorts over a 15-month period commencing with the oldest established debts and education debts. Any new benefit debts and medical copayments established after September 30, 2021, resumed the regular collection process on October 1, 2021.

Any debtor experiencing financial hardship can defer action until the end of fiscal year 2022 by request with no justification or documentation required. By simply reaching out to the DMC or VHA’s Health Resource Center, debtors can work with VA to suspend their debt or take advantage of a host of other options such as:

- ❖ Extending the repayment period beyond 36 months
- ❖ Delaying debt repayments to later in the fiscal year
- ❖ Disputing the debt
- ❖ Adjusting the debt amount through compromise
- ❖ Waiving the debt

Debt Management Center: 800-827-0648 (7:30am to 7:00pm ET).

Health Resource Center: 888-827-4817 (8:00am to 8:00pm ET).

**Department of Military Affairs & Veterans Services**

Submitted by: Warren Perry, Deputy Adjutant General

[warren.m.perry.nfg@army.mil](mailto:warren.m.perry.nfg@army.mil)

Continue to refer to the LSR Tracker compiled by Warren and sent out by Warren & Amy. LSRs and resulting bills will be tracked on this spreadsheet and can direct you to legislative activity that may impact your job or military/Veterans in New Hampshire.

**Community Based Military Programs**

- ❖ Ask the Question Technical Assistance Program funded by the Governor’s Commission on Alcohol & Other Drugs began enrolling agencies across the state and will continue for the coming year.
- ❖ The NH Veteran-Friendly Business network now has 45 recognized businesses (19 from 2020 + 26 so far in 2021). Working with Dept of Business & Economic Affairs to promote program. Please continue to seize any opportunity to promote the NH Veteran-Friendly Business recognition— encourage businesses to apply! Info and application on the DMAVS website.
- ❖ Working with DHHS to develop a new, statewide closed loop referral system that will help Veterans and their family members to access services when needed in a more effective & timely manner.
- ❖ 2 of the 3 new, full-time positions have been hired

**Veteran Services**

- ❖ We conducted 358 appointments with veterans in the last 2 months
- ❖ We are in the process of hiring a new VSO. 2 new VSOs are working on their certifications
- ❖ We conducted outreach to 1100 veterans and their families (outside of our regular scheduled appointments) from
- ❖ May through the end of September.
- ❖ Upcoming events include:
  - Homeland Heroes Veteran Luncheon – Salem 11/6/21 (JC & HO)
  - UNH Hockey – Salute the Troops 11/13/21 (PG and JC)
  - Home Health and Hospice – Zoom Meeting 11/16/21 (BG)
  - NH DRA – Training Event 11/17-11/18/21 (BG)

#### Veterans Cemetery

- ❖ Completed the NCA Grants assessment. Noted strengths were customer service, maintenance of the cemetery, and burial operations. Areas noted as needing some improvement were associated with headstone alignment. The cemetery performed very well
- ❖ Preparations are underway for the 25th anniversary of the cemetery
- ❖ Upcoming events:
  - Place Flags at graves for Veterans Day – Wednesday, November 10 @ 1:00 PM.
  - Retrieve flags from graves – Monday, November 15 @ 1:00 PM
  - Wreaths for Boscawen – Saturday, December 4 @ 10:30 AM.
  - Remove Wreaths from Graves – Saturday, January 8th @ 10:30 AM

#### **Council on Housing Stability, Strategic Plan 2021-2024, November 2021 Update**

Submitted by: Warren Perry, Deputy Adjutant General

[warren.m.perry.nfg@army.mil](mailto:warren.m.perry.nfg@army.mil)

#### **Goals:**

- Address housing needs with an increase of 13,500 units of housing by 2030
- Make homelessness rare, brief, and one time

#### **One Year Action Plan Objectives:**

- Promote increased housing stability at the state and local levels by improving crisis response, services infrastructure, and policies that support individuals and families to maintain housing in their community.
- Remove regulatory barriers to affordable housing in order to expand New Hampshire's housing market for all persons with special emphasis on affordable, accessible options and using innovative approaches.
- Increase production of publicly financed affordable housing with supportive services.
- Deploy targeted financial incentives or tax off-sets designed to promote private-market housing production and use of existing structures for rental housing that is affordable to the lowest incomes and households in need of ongoing community support
- Achieve a productive legislative strategy for the 2022 session that supports efforts to increase housing production.
- Integrate and coordinate a housing stability governance structure connecting state government with local communities through needs assessments, strategic initiatives, and data-driven decision-making.

#### **Three-Year Strategic Plan Objectives:**

- Promote increased housing stability at the state and local levels by improving crisis response, services infrastructure and policies that support individuals and families to maintain housing in their community.

- Remove regulatory barriers to affordable housing in order to expand New Hampshire's housing market for all persons with special emphasis on affordable, accessible options and using innovative approaches.

### **Manchester VA Medical Center**

Submitted by: Corey Beem

#### **Personnel**

- Chief of Staff candidates are being interviewed by the panel (upwards of 25 qualified candidates)
- Dr. Melissa Rindge joined Team Manchester
- Walter Davis is acting as our Chief of Connected Care, Nancy Falleur stayed in the VA but went to FL

#### **Items of interest**

- MOA documents an agreement between Manchester VAMC and the Simulation Learning – Evaluation, Assessment, and Research Network (SimLEARN) for the SimLEARN Innovation Cell for Education (SLICE) program
- VA's Debt Management Center resumed sending debt notification letters on October 1, 2021. If you owe money to VA for an overpayment related to VBA benefits, here is what you need to know.
- All Employee Survey Scores are out
  - 75% response rate (VA=69%)
  - 79% data sharing (VA=66%)
  - 55% data use (VA=43%)
  - 72 Best Places To Work (VA=70/100)
- Growth, Workload and Accountability are overall top three areas of interest this year
- This year they measure Diversity, Equality and Inclusion in depth: our scores are aligned or -better than VA overall
- Staff Burnout is also on par or better than VA with, with 55% of our reporting no signs of burnout
- Manchester will begin providing booster vaccines beginning 11/1/21 in the vaccine clinic by appointment only. We will hold 3 Saturday clinics from 8-315pm on 11/6, 11/13 and 11/20 by appointment as well. Do you need more than that?

#### **Construction**

- Clinical Services Building
- New Urgent Care and Mental Health spaces
  - Estimated Opening – Fall 2021
- Mountain Entrance
  - Upgraded entrance with elevator
  - Estimated Opening – Spring 2022
- Women's Health Clinic
  - New spaces for compliant women's healthcare
  - Currently under design, construction projected 2023
  - Planning for use of the old Urgent Care area as a location as a gap fill
- Dental Services
  - Air handling modification; expected October 2021
- Specialty Care Building
  - Upgraded spaces for Ophthalmology, Optometry, and Audiology
  - Currently under design, construction projected 2023

### **VI. Next Steps**

**Next meeting date**—December 28, 2021 10:00AM-11:30AM

**Location:** Edward Cross Training Complex, 722 Riverwood Dr, Pembroke, NH