

New Hampshire Military Leadership Team

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

21 December 2020

9:00am – 11:00am

Webex Virtual Platform

New Hampshire Military Leadership Team Attendance

X	Major General David Mikolaities, Adjutant General, NH National Guard
X	Jim Adams, Chair, NH Veterans Council
X	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	Amy Cook, Administrator, Community Based Military Programs, NH DMAVS; Facilitator
X	Kevin Forrest, Director, Manchester VA Medical Center; Co-Chair
A	William Gaudreau, Director, Division of Veteran Services, NH DMAVS
X	Margaret LaBrecque, Commandant, NH Veterans Home
X	Paul Lloyd, Chair, State Veterans Advisory Committee
X	Bradley Mayes, Director, VA Regional Benefits Offices in MA, NH & VT
X	Ginger Munson, Family Representative
X	Jeffrey Newman, Administrator, Division of Higher Education, NH Department of Education
X	Warren Perry, Deputy Adjutant General, NH National Guard; Chair
A	Dr. Brett Rusch, Director, WRJ VA Medical Center
A	Roger Sevigny, NH Veterans Council
X	Pam Szacik, Employment Service Bureau Director, NH Employment Security
GUESTS IN ATTENDANCE:	
X	Jim Fortin, NH Employment Security

Meeting Minutes

I. Welcome

Introductions were completed and the agenda was reviewed.

- II. Review of October Minutes**—No corrections made to the October minutes. Margaret LaBrecque moved to accept the minutes as written. Steve Ahnen 2nd, all members approved.

III. Comments from General Mikolaities

The NH Veteran-Friendly Recognition Event was held 12/9 and the event was excellent. Thank you to all of those who attended or participated. We are all glad and thankful to hear that the situation at the NH Veterans Home is getting better and the NH National Guard was happy to help. Thank you for your collaboration and drive to produce tangible results this past year. Looking forward—what's the next win in 2021? What's the next thing the MLT is doing? Keep looking forward.

IV. Initiative Status Updates

Veteran-Friendly Business Recognition Program Update—Amy Cook

Nineteen businesses including Next Step Bionics & Prosthetics, Inc and New Hampshire Hospital Association were recognized as NH Veteran-Friendly Businesses. Recognition event took place on 12/9 through a virtual platform with minimal technical difficulties. 75+ people were in attendance to view the event. The student logo design winner attended along with her Graphics Design class at Seacoast School of Technology. A press release went out prior to the event inviting media to attend and after the event

describing what took place, but to date, there doesn't seem to be any coverage. Businesses were encouraged to release their own media announcements if they desired. Businesses have been invited to send a representative to an Advisory Team that will be put together to develop, support and promote the program in 2021. If the number of businesses recognized next year grows, will need to revise the format to stay within a reasonable time limit. For this year's event, feedback was overall positive.

Virtual Living Room—Paul Lloyd

No update. Paul will reach out to parties to see if there is still interest in pursuing. MLT will re-visit in February—if there is not viable interest to pursue by the VFW, MLT will discuss other possibilities such as a local library hosting.

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

Ginger and Amy hosted a virtual meeting on 12/11 with approx. 25 attendees representing a variety of sectors and fields. Professionals, active Service members, Veterans and family members were in attendance. Amy shared a slide that outlined the needs of military & Veteran family members as identified by the meeting participants. The top themes discussed were: affordable and available childcare, navigating and finding services, and affordable housing. Warren shared that he is currently participating on a time-limited Commission established to address homelessness and the lack of affordable housing in NH, so that can be taken into consideration as the group moves forward with strategizing which issues to address. Ginger emphasized that the work needs to focus on the family members of Service members and Veterans. Amy shared that the conversation highlighted for her the need for leaders and policy-makers in NH to create a better way of communicating with military & Veteran families. There's currently no good, consistent, or effective way to reach everyone. When people have information, good things happen—the conversation on 12/11 was a good example of this. During the conversation, Easterseals shared that they had funds available to assist with Veteran needs related to COVID and Servicelink shared that they have a program that can provide equipment to Veterans so that they can participate in telehealth appointments or search for work. Amy was notified by both agencies within days of the meeting that Easterseals had enough referrals to spend the remaining amount of funds and Servicelink had provided technology equipment to two homeless Veterans so they could conduct online employment searches. A smaller work group will begin to meet in January to continued discussing needs and developing ideas and recommendations on how to meet the needs.

V. Old Business

none

VI. New Business

Membership Recommendations

Adjutant General has authority to appoint new members to the NH MLT. The intent of the group is in an advisory capacity—come up with ideas, then delegate and enable others to do the work outside the group. Discussion: Important to add new voices, perspectives, ideas and creativity to team. Will also be important to keep in mind the “category” under which new team members are being added. It will be helpful for new members to understand what role the team is hoping they can add or expand on the team. 2019 Senate Bill 208 outlines duties of NH MLT and outlines the “categories” of representatives for the team.

Recommendation: Jim Adams recommended Jason Grower be considered for membership on the NH MLT. He shared a summary of Jason's military service, the ways in which he has assisted with projects to assist Veterans in the past, and his interest to continue helping Veterans and those transitioning to civilian life. Jim suggested MLT members recommend Jason for membership as a representative of the private sector who has an interest in serving service members, veterans and their families as outlined by TITLE VIII PUBLIC DEFENSE AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS CHAPTER 110-B DEPARTMENT OF MILITARY AFFAIRS AND VETERANS SERVICES; Veteran Services, Section 110-B:90, VI.

<https://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/rsa/html/VIII/110-B/110-B-90.htm>

All members were in agreement.

A recommendation will be made to the Adjutant General to consider appointing Jason Grower as a voting member of the NH Military Leadership Team.

Bylaws

2019 Senate Bill 208 indicates that the NH MLT will create a set of Bylaws. We will do that in 2021.

Warren, Kevin, Amy and anyone else interested will draft a bylaws document for review by members at the February meeting.

Discussion: It will be important that the bylaws provide structure, but remain flexible, enabling and not constrictive or restrictive.

V. Information Briefs

Dept of Military Affairs & Veterans Services Update—Warren Perry

i. Division of Veterans Services

Stats as of end of November: 239 appts with Veterans (up from June, steadily climbed); despite COVID, still able to process claims. Between now and March, scheduled 25 Veteran appeals—this is significant, especially given circumstances of pandemic. 80% of total are scheduled. Most will take place virtually. Working primarily remotely. Some in office, some quarantining (due to exposure, not + results).

ii. NH State Veterans Cemetery

Wreaths for Boscawen (cut ties with Wreaths Across America) placed 3,000 wreaths this season. Cemetery covered in snow right now. Since July have exceeded monthly average each month. Jul & Aug did highest #s in history of Cemetery. March, April, May internments were carried over into later months. August of 2021, five-year assessment will take place.

iii. Division of Community Based Military Programs

As a result of a recommendation submitted by the Joint Military Task Force, funds were approved by the Governor's Commission on Alcohol & Other Drugs for DMAVS to administer an ATQ: Ask, Link Collaborate Technical Assistance Program for up to 40 agencies/organizations/practices that identify, refer, assess and/or treat SUD in Service members and Veterans. This program will not only require the participating agencies to Ask the Question, but will provide technical assistance, education and coaching to operationalize Asking the Question in their practices.

VA Updates (Manchester)—Kevin Forrest

Julie Voss—new Associate Director formerly chief of rehab services. Chief of Staff is being recruited currently.

Trying to do face-face appts as often as possible; 2 days of face-face + 3 days virtual in Primary Care offices to cut down on foot traffic during this high risk time.

Two Town Halls last week—Portsmouth, 35-40 between 2 sessions, re-occupying Portsmouth CBOC.

Will hold off until COVID settles down. Portsmouth is not permanently closed—will re-open. In possession of first vaccine allotment of 600 vaccines as of this morning. Vaccine planning team will be rolling out first does of Moderna vaccine at Manchester VAMC. Initial survey to staff (400+ willing to get vaccine out of 700 staff surveyed). Testing in urgent care symptomatic patients, rate is 25%.

May eventually have home dialysis available in Community Living Center. Clinical trial will be put together with waivers, etc. VA will be closed December 24th.

VBA Update—Brad Mayes

All 3 facilities open, but most are working remotely which has cut down on risk of COVID spread. Open since end of June. By appointment only. Supporting VBA Travel Board appointments. Typically in NH & VT, we don't have a lot of capacity on docket because we're small, so typically given one docket, but given more lately because NH/VT/MA has been able to support video technology for Travel Board

hearings. They can support Veterans in office to do virtual hearings. Won't be doing pre-decision or post-decision hearings in person, but can coordinate those to be done virtually if Veteran is interested. Average processing time nationwide = 146 days; average days pending = 112. Doing claims in 90 days or less pre-pandemic. For a few months, Veterans couldn't get exams done, but they are happening now, so pipeline is now opening up and numbers are starting to come back down. As of 12/21, Manchester office completed 1005 entitlement decisions—this is a better rate than 2019 without the pandemic.

Member Updates & Announcements

Steve Ahnen, NH Hospital Association— Member hospitals have had problems with staffing, VAMC has assisted. Staffing greatest challenge related to COVID. Capacity in hospitals is mostly related to staffing capacity, not whether there is physical space available for the patient. Important lesson out of this—importance and value of partnerships. It takes a community to make sure everyone gets the support and care they need. It's about people and relationships and its what makes it all work.

Pam Szacik, NHES— Offices still closed to public. Virtual appts.

Last week, 4 workshops/day for people losing benefits. 14,000 people were eligible to attend, 5% attended.

Offering individual services to people including Veterans.

Introduced Jim Fortin who will oversee Veteran program. Please encourage employers to register for job fairs. Will be putting together job fair for NH VF Businesses. Primarily focusing on unemployment claims. 10,000 calls/week for unemployment. Anticipate may go up depending on what takes place in DC. 95% of staff working on unemployment. Updated Veterans Guide; will be available soon. If want printed ones, let Pam know.

james.r.fortin@nhes.nh.gov

Margaret LaBrecque, NH Veterans Home--Currently 11 residents + 18 staff members have tested positive for COVID; 43 residents have recovered. On Friday, sent FAQ to all family members and consent forms for vaccine. Signed up for CVS federal pharmacy program, tentative date of 1/3. Gov Office wants them to do sooner, so has call with Director Plummer to talk about a sooner vaccine distribution. May get sometime this week. Shout out to Nat'l Guard for sending soldiers and nurses and VAMC for sending Nurses. VISN and FEMA also sent Nursing staff as well. Still actively recruiting for Nurses (not related to COVID). Need 19 full time LNAs and part-time LNAs, 1 full time and 1 part time LPN, 8 full time RNs and a few part-time RNs. Actively recruiting 34 positions.

Would like more info from Kevin about home dialysis.

Pete Burdett, Civilian Aide to the Secretary of the Army—Pete submits a report 2x/year and in process of drafting one now. Send Pete anything you'd like Secretary to know. Warren will provide .jpg of new DMAVS logo to be included in NH's update.

Jeff Newman, NH Department of Education—DOE working through COVID. A recent death by suicide occurred in the Veteran student population in NH.

VI. Next Steps

Next meeting date—**Monday, February 22, 2021; 9am-11am**

Location: Webex Virtual Meeting