

# **NH STATE VETERANS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES**

**Meeting Date: 6 June 2023**

**Location: ECTC, 722 Riverwood Dr., Pembroke, NH**

## **OFFICERS and VOTING MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS**

**Chairman** - Paul Loyd

**Vice Chair** - Vacant

**Secretary** - Denise DeBlois

**Treasurer** - Kelly Dobens

**Chair Emeritus** - David Kenney

**Chaplain** - Armand Soucy

### **Air Force Association**

Kevin Grady (prim)

Gavin MacAloon (alt)

### **Air Force Sergeants Association**

Richard Dolby (prim)

Martha Gladu (alt)

### **American Legion**

Mike Lopez (prim)

Robert Blais (alt)

### **AUSA - Col. Cross Chapter**

Greg d'Arbonne (prim)

Ed Harrington (alt)

### **Catholic War Veterans**

Denise DeBlois (prim)

Robert Guldner (alt)

Armand Soucy (alt)

### **Combat Veterans Motorcycle Association**

Nate Smith (prim)

### **Disabled American Veterans**

Rick Borrazas (prim)

Robert Guldner (alt)

### **Korean War Veterans**

Mike Lopez (prim)

Conrad Perreault (alt)

**Marine Corps League**

Shawn Carboni (prim)  
Gary Gahan (alt)

**Military Officers Association (MOAA)**

Peter Burdett (prim)  
Robert Jaffin (alt)  
William Luti (alt)  
Laurence Miller (alt)

**Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH)**

Tony Fowler (prim)

**National Guard Association of NH**

Peter Duffy (prim)  
Steve Greco (alt)  
Roy Hunter (alt)  
Mike Horne (alt)

**NH Army Retiree Council**

Frank Musmanno (prim)  
Mike Rice (alt)

**NH National Guard Enlisted Association**

Michael Lestage (prim)  
Mike Rice (alt)  
Jack Howley (alt)

**NH Veterans Association**

Kelly Dobens (prim)  
Mike Young (alt)  
Doug Crocker (alt)

**Patriot Resilient Leader Institute (Camp Resilience)**

Kurt Webber (prim)  
Ed Harrington (alt)  
Steve Veinotte (alt)

**Reserve Officers Association of NH**

David Kenney (prim)  
Mike Horne (alt)  
John Pappas (alt)

**Rolling Thunder**

Bruce Garry (prim)

Robert Brown (alt)

Diane Domenicis (alt)

**Veterans of Foreign Wars**

Leon Rideout (prim)

Paul Lloyd (alt)

Denis Querrad (alt)

**Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA-41)**

Raymond Goulet, Jr. (prim)

Robert Heichlinger (alt)

Alan Grant (alt)

**LEGISLATIVE ADVISORS - non voting**

**Governor's Office** - Trevor McAden

**Senator Maggie Hassan** - Justin Troiano

**Senator Jeanne Shaheen** - Chris Scott

**Congressman Chris Pappas** - Brett Lavasseur

**Congresswoman Annie Kuster** - Molly Small

**LEGISLATIVE MEMBERS**

Rep. Terry Roy

Rep. Tim Lang

Sen. Regina Birdsell

Rep. Linda Massimilla

**COMMITTEE ADVISORS/AGENCIES:**

**VAMC, Manchester, NH** - Kevin Forrest, Director

**NHNG** - Maj. Gen. David Mikolaities, Adjutant General NHNG

Warren Perry, Deputy Adjutant General

**NH Veterans Home** - Kimberly MacKay

Margaret "Peggy" LaBrecque, Sage Emeritus

**Martins Point** - John Reed and Brenda Pennels

**State Veterans Council** - Jim Adams

**Easterseals/Veterans Count** - Andrea Christoffels

**GUESTS:**

Ena Lima - Executive Director of the VBA Regional Office in Boston

Andrew J. Corrow - VFW

Jorg Dreusicke - VFW

Thomas Clough - VFW

Jake Reagan - Maxim Healthcare

Ken Christopher - VA Congressional Liaison

Michael Moffett - Chair House Veterans Committee

Richard Marsh - Run To Home Base

**OPEN MEETING/CALL TO ORDER:**

Paul Lloyd, Chairman, convened meeting at 1700.

**Pledge of Allegiance:** Chairman

**Invocation:** Armand Soucy.

**Welcome - Remarks of the Chair:** None

**Secretary's Report:**

Meeting has a quorum; attendance on file.

The minutes of the last meeting on 2 May 2023 was approved and placed in the record.

**Treasurer's Report:** Account balance is \$652.67.

**Comments from Vice Chair:** Position vacant.

**Comments from Director Emeritus:** David Kenney - None

**Guest Speakers:** None.

## SUPPORTING AGENCY REPORTS:

### Manchester VA Update:

Director Kevin Forrest presented the VAMC Masterplan with current projects and a 10 year look. He shared a slide presentation with SVAC members.

Thank you to all who attended the Memorial Day Ceremony.

Construction: On June 15th, the Eagle Entrance will be shut down for about 3 months. The traffic flow is being re-done and re-engineered. There will be a new flagpole.

Existing conditions are causing floods. The right way is to design renovation projects is to complete gut. Copper/bronze pipes are rusting from flooding. There are infrastructure risks from very little insulation. Utilities need to be replaced. Focus is on floors 2 and 3 right now.

Outlying Specialty Clinics: expansion of the Franklin CBOC at the Easter Seals campus (projected completion 2025-2027) along with the Tilton CBOC.

Combined Somersworth/Portsmouth CBOC with possible ambulatory acute care (projected completion 2027-2029).

#### Overall Campus Project:

Buildings 2, 3, 4, and 5 demolition	Fiscal Year 2025
Loop road utility project	FY 2025
Special care clinics	FY 2026
Women's health clinic	FY 2025
Parking Garage	FY 2028
Building 1 Seismic	FY 2033

Some projects are completely funded. The Manchester VA is located on a fault. There is seismic funding for building 1.

#### Other Projects:

Proposed 30 bed CLC addition	FY 2030
New location for chapel	FY 2027
Radiology, MRI & Ultrasound	Winter of 2023
Whole health area & multi disciplinary clinic	2023

EHRM Project  
(Electronic Health Record Modernization) FY 2028

1st floor - new canteen and store FY 2026  
2nd floor - all clinical  
3rd floor - non clinical, new lab  
4th floor - surgical/endoscopy unit; restore operating suite and PACU - 2023



5th floor - audiology and optometry, proposed open space  
6th floor - proposed oncology suite

Comments from Ena Lima, Executive Director of the VBA Regional Office in Boston:

She provided an update on the PACT Act and Claims processing.

- 6,427 toxic exposure claims filed
- over 1,000 NH claims
- 4.2 million paid in NH
- PACT Act claims until August 10th
- 1.6 million claims nationwide

The VA Regional Office is ahead of schedule, more claims than last year.

They are continuing to hire claims processors.

Full renovation at the Manchester VA Regional Office.

They are partnering with the OIG.

Locations are coming for claims clinics.

**DMAVS Update:** Warren Perry gave an oral report.

NHSVC (Shawn Buck): Memorial Day Ceremony was held on Tuesday, May 30th at 11:00 AM. This years host was the American Legion. It was a great event. The cemetery looks good.

NHOVS (Bill Gaudreau): Up at full strength. They are doing an outreach tonight at Camp Resilience.

Dept. of Military & Veterans Services (Warren Perry): Brenton Frazier is replacing Amy Cook around July 4th.

**NH Veterans Home:** Commandant Kimberly MacKay gave an oral report.

Resident status: 127 veterans (116 men and 11 women). Average age is 82.

Branches of Service: Air Force - 29  
Air National Guard - 1  
Army - 49  
Army National Guard - 1  
Coast Guard - 2  
Marines - 5  
Navy - 40

Covid Update: We have opened our doors and the veterans are very happy.

Upcoming Ceremonies: Schedules are subject to change.

Flag Day Ceremony	6/14/2023	2:30 pm
Victory Over Japan Day "VJ" Ceremony	9/01/2023	2:30 pm
Patriot Day Remembrance Ceremony	9/11/2023	2:30 pm
Veterans Day Ceremony	10/11/2023	2:30 pm
Pearl Harbor Remembrance Ceremony	12/07/2023	11:00 am

Our Recreation Therapy team also holds a Coffee Social every morning at 10:15 am. If ever you would like to visit with our veterans over coffee or tea, feel free to let us know.

New Developments: We have been notified by the VA that our pending 3rd floor addition project has been approved. The original design was completed in 2017 and will need to be reviewed.

Recent News Coverage: There are a couple members of the Executive Council who are posing questions related to our census. I want to reassure this group that I am moving forward with admissions and will continue to admit to a census that is appropriate. Our current nursing staff vacancy is 48% and 44% resident vacancy. These two situations are directly related. We do plan to continue to increase our census to a minimum of 133 and we currently have 4 pending admissions. I am firmly committed to ensuring that we can provide a quality of care to our veterans that they deserve.

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS:** None.

**NEW BUSINESS:**

1. Nominations for Vice-Chair and Treasurer.

Diane Dominicus accepted nomination for Vice-Chair.

Kelly Dovens accepted nomination for Treasurer for a third term.

2. Steve Veinotte - Camp Resilience - he shared information on the 2023 Green Beret With A Mission Challenge Raffle / Rally Up. He shared a flyer. Link is [go.rally.com](http://go.rally.com).

3. Richard Marsh - Run To Home Base (a Red Sox Foundation program) - the goal is to raise funds to help veterans from all eras with PTSD. On Saturday, July 22nd, Richard will walk 13 miles from the NH State Veterans Cemetery to the NH Veterans Home. He is looking for sponsors.

**LEGISLATIVE BRIEFINGS:**

Kevin Grady, Legislative Chair, gave a brief report and update on LSR's.

The status of bills was distributed via email.

HB 163, HB 189, HB 206 and SB 45 - signed by Governor.

HB 330 - waiting on paperwork and Governor's signature.

SB 174 - cleaning up language.

HB 229 - SVAC position not changed - oppose - federal issue, not state.

**LEGISLATIVE ADVISORS:** Written reports attached or emailed separately if submitted to Chair.

**Trevor McAden ((Gov. Chris Sununu):** not present.

**Chris Scott (Senator Shaheen):** brief report.

**Justin Troiano (Senator Hassan):** not present.

**Molly Small (Rep. Annie Kuster):** brief report..

**Brett Levasseur (Rep. Chris Pappas):** brief report. This is his last meeting with SVAC. He will be working with the Wounded Warrior Fellowship Program.

**Upcoming Events:**

SVAC Summer Outing - Sweeney Post - date TBD.

1st Wednesday - Monthly POW/MIA Vigil - 1900 at Veteran's Park, Manchester, NH

4th Tuesday - Monthly POW/MIA Vigil - 1900 at Langdon Park, Portsmouth, NH

Every Thursday - Weekly POW/MIA vigil - 1900 at Hesky Park, Meredith, NH

1st Friday - Monthly POW/MIA vigil - 1900 at Pine Grove Cemetery, Salem, NH

**Next meeting date:** Tuesday, 3 October 2023

**Adjourn Meeting:** 1757.

Respectfully Submitted,

Denise DeBlois, Secretary



## Rep. Pappas DC Actions for Veterans – June 2023

### Sponsored Legislation

- **Cost-of-Living Adjustment Act**
  - **Update:** passed the House on May 22
  - This bill requires the VA to increase the amounts payable for wartime disability compensation, additional compensation for dependents, the clothing allowance for certain disabled veterans, and dependency and indemnity compensation for surviving spouses and children. Specifically, the VA must increase the amounts by the same percentage as the cost-of-living increase in benefits for Social Security recipients that is effective on December 1, 2023.
- **Bring Our Heroes Home Act**
  - Rep. Pappas introduced this bipartisan bill on May 5.
  - This bipartisan, bicameral legislation would expedite and coordinate the process of collecting, declassifying, and making public records of Prisoners of War (POW) and Missing in Action (MIA) service members. Senators Shaheen and Crapo will introduce the companion legislation in the Senate.
  - The Bring Our Heroes Home Act would provide for the creation of the Missing Armed Forces Personnel Records Collection within the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), and require the expeditious transmission and public disclosure of Missing Armed Forces Personnel records to this newly created office.
- **PFAS Registry Act**
  - Rep. Pappas introduced this bipartisan bill on May 11.
  - The legislation would direct the Department of Veterans Affairs to create a national database for service members and veterans with health concerns due to potential exposure to per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS).
- **VA Medical Security Report Act**
  - Rep. Pappas helped introduce this bipartisan bill on May 19.
  - The VA Medical Security Report Act of 2023 aims to increase safety and security at VA Medical facilities by requiring VA leadership to provide reports that accurately detail the health of VA police forces and security at VA Medical Centers. These reports – which will be shared with Congress over the next five years – will detail staffing vacancies, security weakness, and data on criminal activities, training, vacancies, and security weaknesses. Additionally, the bill requires that these reports include input from police leaders on the ground.

### Co-Signed Letters

- Rep. Pappas helped send a letter with the New Hampshire delegation and the Vermont delegation to Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA) Denis R. McDonough, urging the VA to use its expanded authority under the historic PACT Act to extend benefits to veterans stationed in Kosovo from 1999 onwards that were exposed to toxic trash burning.

## HVAC Activity

- 5/16/23: Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs Oversight Hearing
- 5/23/23: Full Committee Oversight Hearing

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Rep. Pappas helped introduce this bipartisan bill on May 19. The VA Medical Security Report Act of 2023 aims to increase safety and security at VA Medical facilities by requiring VA leadership to provide reports that accurately detail the health of VA police forces and security at VA Medical centers. These reports, which will be shared with Congress over the next five years, will detail staffing vacancies, security weaknesses, and data on criminal activities, training, vacancies, and security weaknesses. Additionally, the bill requires that these reports include input from police leaders on the ground.

**Co-Signed Letters**  
Rep. Pappas helped send a letter with the New Hampshire delegation and the Vermont delegation to Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA) Denis R. McDonough, urging the VA to use its expanded authority under the historic FACT Act to extend benefits to veterans affected in Kosovo from 1999 onwards that were exposed to toxic trash burning.

Since the date of the prior SVAC meeting, Senator Shaheen has introduced the below legislation:

- **Afghan Allies Protection Act (Shaheen-Wicker) (S. 1786)**
  - On June 1, this bill was introduced that would increase the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) visa cap by 20,000 and provide for programmatic and process changes to the SIV program as previously recommended in the September 2022 report, to include requiring a strategy for efficient processing, and to establish designated senior special immigrant visa coordinating officials
- **Protecting Service Members and Military Families' Access to Health Care Act (Shaheen) (S. 1610)**
  - On May 16, with 29 original co-sponsors, Senator Shaheen introduced this bill to codify DOD's policy on accessing non-covered reproductive health care through an administrative absence, including letting a spouse or dependent travel with the servicemember and having travel and transportation costs covered.
- **Resolution recognizing the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Department of Defense State Partnership Program (Shaheen-Graham) (S. Res. 220)**
  - On May 11, With Senator Graham, as co-Chairs of the Senate National Guard Caucus, Senator Shaheen introduced a resolution with 33 bipartisan caucus co-sponsors, recognizing the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the DOD's State Partnership Program that the Guard participates in.
- **National Warrior Call Day (Shaheen-Cotton) (S. Res. 208)**
  - On May 11, Senator Shaheen and Senator Cotton introduced this resolution expresses the sense of the Senate that November 12, 2023 should be National Warrior Call Day to encourage people to connect with veterans and members of the Armed Forces as a means of combatting the higher rates of suicide and other mental illness incidents among these populations. In marking a specific day, the hope is that people follow through and connect or reconnect with the veterans and members of the Armed Forces in their lives.
- **Access to Contraception for Servicemembers and Dependents Act (Shaheen- Collins) (S. 1527)**
  - On May 10, Senator Shaheen and Senator Collins re-introduced this bipartisan legislation that would bring service members' access to contraception in line with civilians' access to contraception by ensuring no health insurance co-pay.

**Cosponsored:**



### **Retired Pay Restoration Act (Tester-Murkowski) (S. 1515)**

- On May 10, Senator Shaheen co-sponsored this bill that would eliminate the offset of military retirement pay for all military retirees who receive VA disability compensation. Currently, those who retire after 20 years of military service and have a VA disability rating of 40 percent or less have their military retirement pay offset by the amount of disability compensation they receive from VA. The bill would also eliminate the same offset for Chapter 61 retirees. The rationale for the legislative changes are that these are two different benefits, awarded for different reasons, by two different agencies, and should not be offset.

### **Caring for Survivors Act**

- Senator Shaheen is a co-sponsor of this bill (Senators Tester and Boozman) that would increase the Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) to match the rate of compensation for the survivors of federal civil service retirees, which is 55% of the compensation that a totally disabled veteran receives every month. The bill would also address equity for DIC recipients from another angle. Under current law, DIC restricts benefits for survivors if the veteran was disabled for less than ten years before his or her death. The Caring for Survivors Act would reduce the timeframe a veteran needs to be rated totally disabled from ten to five years—broadening eligibility to more survivors.
- This legislation is supported by Gold Star Wives, Disabled American Veterans and AMVETS among other organizations

### **Overview of the Not Just a Number Act**

- Senator Shaheen is a co-sponsor of this bill (Senators Tester and Boozman) which would require the VA to include findings on veteran suicide related to VA health care usage and VA benefits usage such as GI Bill benefits, home loans and disability compensation. The VA would also be required to work with the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Department of Defense (DOD) to develop a strategy and recommendations for more accurately collecting and analyzing veteran suicide data. This legislation would also require the VA to analyze which VA programs and services have the greatest impact on veteran suicide prevention and to report on recommendations for potential expansion within three years of enactment. The bill would require the VA to work in tandem with the CDC to develop a publicly available toolkit for state and local coroners and medical examiners for accurately identifying and reporting veteran suicide deaths. Lastly, it would require the VA to review the findings of a Government Accountability Office (GAO) report which examines the organizational structure of the VA's Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention and conduct a feasibility study on creating a new VA Suicide Prevention Office at the Secretary level.
- Additionally, Senator Shaheen and Senator Hassan had a call with Secretary McDonough in which the Secretary committed to repairing/renovating the Manchester VA facility.



Below are two bills Congresswoman Kuster has cosponsored:

- **VET PFAS Act – Rep. Kildee**

- o Cosponsored by Reps. DelBene and Fitzpatrick.
- o This bill would require the VA to cover health care services and treatment if conditions linked to PFAS at military installations for veterans and their family members.
- o Supported by the American Legion and Disabled American Veterans.

- **Veteran Entrepreneurship Act – Rep. Schneider (D-IL)**

- o Cosponsored by 4 Dems and 4 Reps including Reps. Kildee, DelBene and Molinaro  
This bill passed the House 418-2 last Congress.
- o This bill would authorize the Boots to Business program, which provides entrepreneurship training to individuals including veterans and active members of the Armed Forces, for five years.



