



# BALTIMORE COUNTY COMMISSION ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS

## Meeting Minutes – March 1, 2023

### **Date / Time**

March 1, 2022 / 6:00pm – 8:00pm

### **Location**

Baltimore County Public Library - Cockeysville Branch  
9833 Greenside Dr, Cockeysville, MD 21030

### **This Meeting was Open to the Public**

### **Call to Order / Roll Call / Quorum**

#### **1. Commissioners in attendance**

- **In Attendance** - Michael Eagle, George White, Charles Jay, Edward Bauer, Danny Blount, Robert Ecbert, Jerlena Rhodes-Cadell, Jeff Bonner, Jay Jacobs, James Hutson, Derrick Little
- **Absent:** David Greer, Richard Chilton, Dennis Cash, Ed Schwartz

#### **2. Commission Chair called the meeting to order and reviewed the Baltimore County Commission on Veteran's Affairs Mission.**

- To advocate for the veterans of Baltimore County and connect them to resources through outreach and education.

#### **3. New Commissioner Appointments and Introductions**

- Jim Hutson- Council District 6
- Dennis Cash- Council District 7

#### **4. Approval of Last Meeting Minutes**

- Commission Chair solicited questions or feedback for the January Meeting Minutes.
- Commission Chair requested motion to approve meeting minutes. Motion provided by Commissioner Eagle; second motion provided by Commissioner Blount.
- Commission Chair moved to vote on the approval of BCVC Meeting Minutes for January 24, 2023
  - In Favor- Ten Commissioners
  - Opposed – None
- BCVC Chair tallied the vote and announced that the January 24, 2023, meeting minutes are approved.



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## Old Business

### 1. Adoption of Bylaws

- The Legal Department of Baltimore County reviewed the Bylaws approved by the BCVC and proposed the addition of an expanded definition for the BCVC mission:
  - The Commission refers to the Baltimore County Commission on Veteran's affairs, which was established to advocate and help enhance the quality of life for Baltimore County Veterans of military service and their family.
- Commission Chair solicited questions or feedback concerning Baltimore County Commission on Veterans' Affairs (BCVC) Bylaws amendment- BCVC Commissioners did not have supplementary input.
- Commission Chair requested motion to vote on the adoption of the bylaws with amendment- motion granted by Commissioner Eagle, Commissioner Jacobs, second- the motion was approved.
- Commissioners voted on bylaws adoption:
  - In Favor- Ten Commissioners
  - Opposed – None
- BCVC Chair tallied the vote and announced that the bylaws are adopted.

### 2. Discussion of Commissioner Business Cards

- What information should BCVC include on the front and back of respective business cards.
- Commission agrees to add VA hotlines to the back of the Commissioner's Business card.
- It is agreed that the front of the cards should contain:
  - Baltimore County Logo
  - Name
  - Commissioner
  - Respective District
  - Contact Information – Chair provided information sheet for commissioner's review and approval. The sheet was reviewed/ updated by all in-person attendees.
    - Email should be standardized, e.g. First initial, last name (no space) "dot" [bcvets@gmail.com](mailto:bcvets@gmail.com).
  - Mr. Ernie Burtnick recommended that the commission consider including the Maryland Department of Veterans affairs', service department benefits line as the first phone number on the back of the card.
  - Mr. Burtnick suggests that the commission omit including the respective district on business cards. All commissioners are appointed as representatives for Baltimore County and are not circumscribed to provide support by district.
  - The back of the card will include critical veteran hotlines numbers.



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- Draft business cards will be submitted to the BCVC for approval before sending to print.
  - Commissioner Charles Jay will send card templates to the commission via email for design feedback.
- 3. **Discussion of Baltimore County Veterans' Commission Website**
  - IT liaison, Commissioner Ecbert, provided an update for the development of the Baltimore County Veterans' Commission Website.
    - Contact with the County IT department is in-progress.
    - Establishing a BCVC Commission website is a top priority for the County Executive's Office.
- 4. **Memorial Day Event**
  - Commission Chair proposed holding a Memorial Day event, on Mon, May 29, 2023, at the County Court House to honor those that served.
    - The commission should consider developing County Executive, Gold Star family replaying ceremony at this event.
    - The Memorial Day event will include the official launch of this commission.
    - Commissioner's attendance is paramount, Commission Chair recommends early planning to ensure maximum commission attendance.
    - The County Executive will provide the declaration of appointment for each member of the commission at this event.
    - There are existing memorial day events the commission should consider to avoid scheduling and attendance conflicts.
- 5. **Veteran's Day Event**
  - Commission Chair proposed:
    - Planning a parade through Towson.
    - Establishing a benefits and resource event to increase veteran engagement and turnout.
    - Commissioners will evaluate the feasibility and scope of this proposal with consideration to all logistical and time constraints before seeking County Executives approval.
- 6. **Commission Monthly Meeting Schedule**
  - Establishment of Monthly Meeting Schedule:
    - Consensus for monthly meeting cadence 4th Wednesday of the month reached.
    - Meeting Format – In Person until virtual resources can be provided.
    - Meeting Location - Baltimore County Public Library until otherwise noted.
      - Next meeting will be held at the Towson Library on March 29th at 6:00pm; Parking is limited.



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## New Business

### 1. Commissioner Roles and Areas of Focus

- Commissioner Charles Jay volunteered to undertake the commission's operational duties and responsibilities as Operations Officer.
  - Individual commissioners have a focus area of veterans relations that can add knowledge and expertise to the Commission.
  - Commissioner White's focus is Veteran homelessness.
  - Commissioner Blount volunteered to serve as Education Secretary.
  - BCVC Chair requests that commissioners follow up with respective areas of expertise that will aid the BCVC mission.

### 2. Honor Flight Maryland

- Saturday, June 17, 2023
  - All-expenses paid hero's journey to Washington DC to visit memorials built to honor veterans.
  - Veterans can sign up at [www.HonorFlightMD.org](http://www.HonorFlightMD.org)

## Agency Partners

1. **Annapolis General Assembly** - Planned briefing on veteran related activities in Annapolis will be rescheduled.
2. **Maryland Veteran's Commission** – Mr. Ernie Burtnick provided an introduction and briefing on Maryland Veteran's Commission activities.
  - The new Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Anthony C. Woods will be sworn in March 2, 2023.
  - Testimonies were provided to the Ways & Means, and the Senate Budget and Taxation Committees to support legislative changes to Veteran's retirement pension.
    - Currently, the first \$15,000 of your retirement is tax free if you are over the age of 55, and if you are under age 55 the first \$5,000 is tax free. As a result, highly skilled retirees are leaving Maryland for states that provide more advantageous tax benefits.
    - The bill that was proposed aims to remove the age restrictions and increase the tax-free amount from \$15,000 to \$25,000 in 2023, and to \$40,000 in 2024.
    - The goal for this Bill is full tax exemption for veteran's pensions in Maryland.
  - A Bill is being proposed to include a checkoff on Maryland tax returns for the Maryland Veterans Trust Fund.
    - The Maryland Veterans Trust Fund is a 501c3 organization designed to assist with non-emergency, temporary financial challenges facing veterans or widows/widowers of veterans.
  - Legislation has been sponsored that if passed, would require the



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Department of Veterans Affairs to bury the eligible spouse or dependent of a veteran in a state veterans' cemetery without charge.

3. **ServingTogether-** Mr. Jason Marshal provided information on ServingTogether, the National Capital Region's first care coordination technology specifically built for the veteran and military community.
  - ServingTogether offers service members, veterans and their family's access to a continuum of providers that support mental health, housing, emergency service providers, employment, financial capabilities, education, volunteering, recreation, and fitness.
  - Veteran coordination happens using a 360-degree referral process for partner providers. This person-centered service delivery system empowers organizations serving active military and veterans to seamlessly create and receive referrals while tracking outcomes to connect military and veterans more efficiently to needed help.
  - There is a monthly collaborative held, commissioners can contact Mr. Marshal to request inclusion on the distribution list.
  - The Department of Veteran's Affairs has been tasked with coordinating the creation of Suicide Collations contact Mr. Marshal for inclusion.
    - Commissioner White asked if Narcan training is offered for providers of ServingTogether. Mr. Marshal stated that training is endorsed as part of the mental health first aid class, but it is not formally provided.
4. **Commission** Chair introduced Mr. Kenny Brown, representative for Maryland State Senator Benjamin T. Brooks, Sr. (D), District 10.
  - Mr. Brown will facilitate communication between Baltimore County Commission on Veterans' Affairs (BCVC) and Senator Brooks.

### **Baltimore County Veterans and Citizens, Open Discussion**

1. Mr. John Donahue, Commander, Post 174 American Legion, shared information about the Wellspring of Life Farm in Monkton, MD.
  - <https://www.wellspringlifefarm.org>
  - The Wellspring Farm has 71 acres of rolling fields and winding woods in Baltimore County, Maryland, dedicated to providing support to active-duty military members, veterans, and first responders, experiencing emotional, cognitive, and physical challenges through equine & canine therapeutic activities.
  - The Farm is Operated and supported solely by volunteers and aims to provide support to as many in need in Baltimore County.
  - Mr. Donahue has offered to host future BCVC meetings at the Wellspring of Life Farm.
2. Mr. Kenny Brown representative for Maryland State Senator Benjamin T. Brooks, Sr. (D), District 10 shared that the commission is off to a tremendous start.



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- It is imperative that the commission outreach activities include veteran's family members. Family members can act as advocates for those veterans unable to do so for themselves.
3. Mr. Andy Gross, Attorney. Veterans Claims Appeals.
- Mr. Gross' firm focuses on disability benefits appeals and elder law for veterans. Key issues are:
    - Identifying a VSO to refer cases to due to a large number of incoming disability appeal inquiries from veterans.
    - Referring clients to the Maryland Department of Veterans affairs is challenging due to a lack of responsiveness from the department.
    - The Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs have mismanaged the cases of over half dozen current clients.
    - Case mismanagement by the department is a consistent occurrence.
    - Can the Baltimore County veterans Commission look into standing up a claims clinic where we bring together the veterans' service center, for example, the folks from Hopkins Plaza downtown with the VSOs to facilitate faster disability claims' adjudication.
3. **Commissioners Comments**
- Outreach should be a top priority for this commission.
  - Mismanagement of disability claims is a recurring theme and should be a focus area.
  - A parade may not be feasible this year, but it is logical to begin planning for subsequent years.
  - What resources and support are needed by the Maryland Department of Veteran's Affairs to improve case management; can this commission investigate and subsequently draft proposals for improvement?
  - The commission is moving at a good pace. A claims clinic is an area this commission should explore.
  - The Baltimore County Department of corrections are looking for veterans who would like to explore employment opportunities with the department. A job fair to connect veterans to employment opportunities in Baltimore County would be value added.
4. **Adjournment**