

## ADVISORY BOARD ON VETERANS SERVICES MINUTES

Teams Audio  
+1 808-829-4853, 127976230# (Dial-in Number)  
**Friday, February 5, 2021**  
9:00 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

### **ATTENDANCE**

Board Members: Ms. Bridget Komine, Chair  
Mr. Blair Suzuki, Vice Chair  
Mr. Harold Bugado  
Mr. Jim Traxler  
Mr. Michael Lilly  
Ms. Mary Kay Hertog  
Ms. Roxanne (Rocky) Bruhn  
Mr. Reyn Kaupiko

OVS Staff: Mr. Ron Han, OVS, Director  
Ms. Yam Yi Lee, Administrative Services Assistant  
Ms. Yolanda Ehere, Secretary

Guests: Dr. Adam Robinson, Director, VAPIHCS  
Ms. Amy Rohlf, Public Affairs Officer, VAPIHCS  
Mr. Sergio Chao, Director, VBA Benefits  
Capt. Shaoyu Lee, Chief Engineering Officer, State of Hawaii  
DOD Engineering  
Mr. Wade Ishii, Asst. Chief Engineering Officer, State of Hawaii DOD  
Engineering  
Mr. Juan Babiak, Veterans Liaison, Yukio Okutsu State Veterans  
Ms. Katherine Korenaga, Community and Project Development Director,  
Department of Human Services  
Mr. Gene Maestas, Public Affairs Specialist, National Cemetery of  
the Pacific  
Mr. Carlos Santana – Senator Mazie Hirono’s Office Representative

Absent: Ms. Ann Greenlee, U.S. Department of Labor, VETS  
Department of Health  
Department of Labor and Industrial Relations

#### **I. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE & CALL TO ORDER – A Moment of Silence**

Roxanne Bruhn led the Pledge of Allegiance. After a moment of silence, Chair Bridget Komine called the meeting to order at 0900 hours.

**II. MINUTES**

The Board reviewed the December 4, 2020 minutes. Michael Lilly motioned to accept seconded by Jim Traxler. Minutes were unanimously accepted by the Board Members.

**III. COMMUNICATIONS**

None

**IV. DEPARTMENT REPORTS**

**Mr. Sergio Chao, Director, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs - Benefits**

Briefed on: VA benefits have opened two offices for face-to-face appointments: Guam and Honolulu. Guam was the first to open about 3 weeks ago. It's going better than expected with all the social distancing requirements. This week (01/05/21) the Honolulu office opened with 90% of the schedule filled. Next week, the Hilo office is scheduled to open by appointment only as well. Still can't fly, so no outreach to the other islands, please utilize the virtual interview process. VA benefits is averaging 622 virtual interviews per month. Hired a Vocational Rehab Counselor (VRC) for the Guam office.

**Questions to Sergio Chao**

1. Mary Kay Hertog asked was there a requirement to modify the office space before you opened to face to face? Sergio answered absolutely. The Plexiglass went up first and there is a screening requirement to anyone that comes in including a temperature check, both staff and clients must be masked, there is PPE on the floors when you come in.
2. Roxanne Bruhn asked how are you reaching out to the older veterans that are not computer savvy? Sergio answered we still have telephone available. The virtual interviews aren't necessarily by video or computer. In fact, most of the virtual interviews are via phone.
3. Chair Bridget Kombine asked how many veterans do you anticipated now that there are 2 VRCs in Guam? Sergio answered I doubt that the 2 VRCs will be strictly for Guam, but for the entire Pacific. I can give you a breakout of the number of veterans in that jurisdiction and I can give you an exact number at the next meeting.
4. Clay Park asked if any of the staff been vaccinated already? Sergio answered I'm not allowed to ask that question to my staff. It's a privacy health issue. Dr. Robinson also answered the VBA employees can get the vaccine. The reason I'm saying that is because VA employees can get the vaccine.

**Dr. Adam Robinson, Director and Ms. Amy Rohlfs, Public Affairs Officer, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs - Pacific Island Health Care System-Medical**

Briefed on: To date, VA has vaccinated 3,358 in Hawaii includes 2,353 veterans and 1,005 staff. 70 and older and any veteran who's an essential worker can now receive the vaccine. Must be registered to receive care a VAPIHCS.

Questions for Dr. Robinson and Amy Rohlfs

1. Roxanne Bruhn asked since the VA will be calling high risk veterans, how do you define high risk? Dr. Robinson answered so high risk is a stratification through CDC and in general anyone with high blood pressure, diabetes etc. If you feel you are high risk, please call 18002141306. Amy answered the flyer she posted helps define what high is.

**Mr. Ron Han, OVS, Director**

Briefed on: Welcome, Rocky!! No face-to-face appointments for OVS yet. Mahalo to Vice Chair Blair Suzuki for volunteering as a Grant Reviewer for Hawaiian State Culture and Arts. Posted the Triennial Report to the website. State legislation has opened, but there are restrictions due to COVID.

**Mr. Wade Ishii, Asst. Chief Engineering Officer, State of Hawaii DOD Engineering**

Briefed on:

- Pacific Fleet Submarine Museum & USS Missouri Memorial Association – Projects are Closed.
- HSVC Upgrades and Improvements – On December 18, 2020 scope and schedule meeting held to review conceptual design of project. Scope of work to include 1,000 double-depth crypts, committal shelter roof, irrigation system, new wash rack, new asphalt pavement in selected areas and a CCTV system.
- Hawaii State Veterans Home – January 2021 Kapolei lease rent negotiations in progress, Construction contract executed on January 21, 2021 and a notice to proceed will be issued once permits are approved. On February 3, 2021, allotment request for release of \$300K for healthcare coordinator to be sent to B&F.
- East Hawaii Veterans Cemetery Upgrade and Improvements – On February 2, 2021, DAGS submitted final photos and as-built drawings to VA in preparation of project closeout.
- Kauai Veterans Cemetery, New Access Road – On January 21, Construction contract executed. On February 1, building permit approved and on February 3, notice to proceed issued to TCG Construction. Notable dates for this project – Authorization to proceed is February 22, 2021, Computed Completion Date is October 19, 2021, and contract amount is \$3,835,000.

- Maui Veteran Cemetery Expansion and Improvements – December 1, 2020  
Change order no. 11 issued to F&H Construction to restart the project. Contract price by \$1.2M and contract time extended 1,279 calendar days to 09/30/21.
- Maui Veterans Cemetery Gravesite Restoration Phase II Project – January 14, 2021 VA approved final statement reimbursement request and requested payment electronically.
- Maui Veterans Cemetery Additional Columbaria Niches – January 26, 2021  
County of Maui approved the Special Use Permit, request for new columbaria improvements to Maui Veterans Cemetery.

**Mr. Juan Babiak, Veterans Liaison, Yukio Okutsu State Veterans**

**Briefed on:** New Administrator was on the call Ms. Kauai Chartrand

**Ms. Katherine Korenaga, Community and Project Development Director,  
Department of Human Services**

**Briefed on:** Benefits and Services: Provide Medicaid & Public Assistance. All services and benefits are open to the public, but the offices are closed. Would like to connect with Director Chao to find out about the preparations for reopening the offices.

**Questions for Katherine Korenaga:**

1. Roxanne Bruhn asked what exactly do you provide to the veterans and how can the advisory board assist you in reaching out to veterans in need of assistance? Katherine answered what we have are those statistics from the homeless program offices. The computerized entry system tracks all the people who come for services and that system it helps to track where they been, where they are going and what they need.

**Ms. Ann Greenlee, U.S. Department of Labor, VETS – Not present, but Chair  
Bridget Komine briefed.**

**Briefed on:** Veteran January Unemployment Rate is 4.9% and the Non-Veteran Rate was 6.3%.

**Mr. Mr. Gene Maestas, Public Affairs Specialist, National Cemetery of the Pacific**

**Briefed on:** In the process of a design and build project for Columbaria court #14. This court will have over 6000 niches. Observing serious guidelines regarding COVID 19 for interments – attendance is limited to 10 or less people but doesn't include military or clergy. No ceremonies are permitted in any VA cemeteries.

**Questions for Gene Maestas:**

1. Clay Park asked how many in-grounds burial sites are available? Gene answered right now we do not have any.

**Mr. Carlos Santana, Senator Mazie Hirono's Office Representative**

Briefed on: The Senator is renewing her efforts to pass a Retired Pay Restoration Act. The Aloha Project will be delayed one month due to the House of Representatives TNI committee is unable to act on the approval until March.

**Department of Health** – Not present. No submitted report.

**Department of Labor and Industrial Relations** - Not present. No submitted report.

**BOARD MEMBER'S REPORTS**

1. Kauai – Ms. Mary Kay Hertog – Report submitted. No additions.
2. Maui – Mr. Michael Lilly - No submitted report.
3. Oahu – Mr. Blair Suzuki, Vice Chair – Report submitted. No additions.
4. Oahu – Ms. Bridget Komine, Chair – No submitted report.
5. Oahu – Ms. Reyn Kaupiko – Report submitted. No additions.
6. Oahu - Ms. Roxanne Bruhn – No submitted report.
7. Big Island – Mr. Harold Bugado – Report submitted. No additions.
8. Big Island – Mr. Jim Traxler – Report submitted. No additions.

**V. COMMITTEE REPORTS**

- A. Legislative Committee
  - There are 7 bills. Ron wrote back to say there's interest in them.
  - Are there bills that the Board is interested in tracking or supporting. Some have been recycled.
- B. By Laws and Procedures
  - No Report.
- C. Recognition and Awards
  - No Report.
- D. Women's Committee
  - No Report.
- E. Project and Events Committee
  - Rededication of the WWII Memorial
    1. Ron thanked Chair Komine for her efforts in securing funding for this project.
    2. NALC will fund the entire memorial. DAGS has been working hard on how the Memorial will be put together.
    3. It's the only Memorial that got a poor rating in the Triennial Report.
  - Maui Veterans Cemetery Blessing/Dedication Event - No Report.

**VI. NEW BUSINESS - None**

**VII. OLD BUSINESS - None**

**VIII. ANNOUNCEMENTS - None**

**IX. WORKING SESSION - OVS / Advisory Board Issues / Ideas**

Ron will send his thoughts and recommendations for each bill to the Board. Next meeting, the Board will decide on what bills to support.

Bill	Board Support
HB1254	
HB709	
SB355	
HB426/SB951	
SB59	Not Recommended
HB577	
SB310	
SB237	

Questions during the session:

Mary Kay Hertog asked Ron is it OVS who crafts the language for the bills? Ron answered no, it does not. In fact, most of the bills are generated from veterans and members of the public.

**X. ADJOURN – 10:59am**

Roxanne Bruhn motioned, and Mary Kay Hertog seconded.

Yolanda Ehere – Recorder  
Attachments – COVID Flyer



# COVID VACCINE INFORMATION

## CURRENT VACCINE PHASE 1Ca

VA Pacific Islands Health Care System employees are working around the clock to distribute the COVID vaccine to all current eligible Veterans. We are currently offering the Moderna vaccine to Veterans who meet the criteria for phase 1c.

### HOW DO I SCHEDULE MY COVID VACCINE?

- 1 Review the four categories of eligibility below to see if you meet any element of the criteria in any one of the defined categories.
- 2 If you are eligible to receive a vaccine, **please call 1-800-214-1306** to schedule an appointment through our vaccine clinic. We are not taking walk-ins at this time.
- 3 if you are **Not** eligible to receive a vaccine at this time, please monitor our website our Facebook site for vaccine phase updates. Site information below.

### PHASE 1Ca ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

#### VETERANS WHO ARE ESSENTIAL WORKERS

*No matter health conditions or age*

- Health Care Employees
- First responders
- Education (to include daycare)
- Food and agriculture
- Manufacturing
- Corrections workers
- U.S. Postal Service workers
- Public transit workers
- Grocery store workers

#### OTHER ELIGIBLE GROUPS

- Caregivers of a Veteran enrolled in the Comprehensive Caregiver Support Program and receiving a monthly allotment from the VA.

#### VETERANS 70+

*No matter health condition*

#### VETERANS WITH A HIGH-RISK MEDICAL CONDITION

*No matter the age*

- Cancer
- Chronic kidney disease
- COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease)
- Down Syndrome
- Heart conditions
- Immunocompromised
- Organ transplant
- Obesity [BMI] of 30 kg/m2 or higher
- Pregnancy
- Sickle cell disease
- Type 1&2 diabetes
- Asthma (moderate-to-severe)
- Cerebrovascular disease
- Guillain-Barre syndrome
- Spinal Cord Injury
- Cystic fibrosis
- Hypertension or high blood pressure
- Bone marrow transplant, immune deficiencies, HIV, use of corticosteroids, or
- Neurologic conditions, such as dementia
- Liver disease
- Pulmonary fibrosis (having damaged or scarred lung tissues)
- Thalassemia (a type of blood disorder)
- Chronic kidney disease
- COPD
- HEMOC

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VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs  
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