

ADVISORY BOARD ON VETERANS SERVICES MINUTES

Teams Audio
+1 808-829-4853, 127976230# (Dial-in Number)
Friday, March 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
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
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: Mr. Michael Lilly
Mr. Juan Babiak, Veterans Liaison, Yukio Okutsu State Veterans
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 February 5, 2021 minutes. Roxanne Bruhn motioned to accept seconded by Harold Bugado. 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: Conducted 59 face to face interviews in the month of February, had to shut down for 4 days due to COVID exposure, virtual benefit workshop for Hawaii – 21 veterans attended.

Questions to Sergio Chao

1. Roxanne Bruhn asked Sergio what has been done or is in the planning stages to address the Office of Inspector General report that VBA doesn't consistently comply with skill certification mandates for compensation and pension claim processors? Sergio answered every office is different and he cannot comment if OIG visited the Hawaii office. The skill certification test is something our employees must take and if they fail, they will be put into a remedial training and then asked to retake the test. If they employee fails the test twice according to the mandate, there would be an administrative action taken.
2. Clay Park asked Sergio if he could give an update on COVID 19 service-connected disability and if they are looking at that? Sergio answered he's not aware of this issue.

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: COVID Vaccine update – just under 8000 for veterans and staff, if you are interested in receiving the vaccine please call 1-800-214-1306. American Samoa, Guam and Saipan are receiving vaccines through the Department of Health.

- March 9th – Homeless Vaccine Event at Barber's Point,
- March 13th – Vaccine event at Keehi Lagoon Memorial Park

Questions for Dr. Robinson and Amy Rohlfs

1. Clay Park asked Dr. Robinson about the Maui vaccine distribution through the VA and Korean War veterans and spouses having challenges registering for the shot? Dr. Robinson answered the rules of eligibility for VA states that it's the

veteran that requires the shot, but I'm sure we can help the veteran spouse get the shot as well. All veterans can call 1-800-214-1306 to schedule an appointment.

2. Clay Park asked Dr. Robinson to clarify if the 1-800 is a local number or national number? Dr. Robinson answered that number is a local number to us in Hawaii.
3. Roxanne Bruhn asked Dr. Robinson if there's a way to reframe spouses as caregivers in order to get the COVID shot? Dr. Robinson answered having a spouse as a caregiver at the last moment may or may not work. I think what we can do is find where spouses can get the vaccine outside of the VA.
4. Mary Kay Hertog asked Dr. Robinson about the difficult time Kauai is having with the Community Care Network. Is there a chance of improving the response times for an approved consult? Is there any progress being made? Dr. Robinson answered he is very well-aware of the CICT and the fact that it is very slow. I'm having a meeting today with medical groups to look at how we are going to do some work arounds. Unfortunately, there are a lot of rule sets that the VA and Care in the Community have to comply with.

Mr. Ron Han, OVS, Director

Briefed on: Working on State budget, there is still a hiring freeze, OVS has some vacancies, No face to face appointments.

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

Briefed on:

- Pacific Aviation Museum (PAM) (Learning Laboratory) - In the process of getting approval for a third (12-month) extension to lapse 6/30/2022.
- Civil Air Patrol (CAP) (GIA) - Final document and report has been submitted. CLOSED
- The 442nd Veterans Club (GIA) – Legacy Center - Last reimbursement for this GIA has been submitted 2/2021. PO is being processed.
- Hawaii State Veterans Cemetery Gravesite Restoration - The Project (FAI No. HI-10-24), with an approved grant pre-application amount of \$3.093M, is ranked #84 on the VA's FY 2021 Priority List of Pending State and Tribal Government Cemetery Construction Grant Pre-Applications.
- HSVC Upgrades and Improvements - February 25, 2021: Based on preliminary construction cost estimates, Base Scope of Work to include crypt-only project with crypt count of about 700, which is about a 4-year supply. Other scope items, i.e., committal shelter roof, irrigation system, new wash rack, etc., will be additive alternates if included.
- Hawaii State Veterans Home, Oahu - February 23, 2021 – Finalizing Right of Entry w/ HHFDC in order to issue Grading and Material Notice to Proceed to Contractor.

- East Hawaii Veterans Cemetery No. 1 and No. 2 Gravesites Restoration (O&M) Projects - Feb. 2021 - Working on updated costs for these two (2) projects for VA update and State match.
- Kauai Veterans Cemetery, Phase 2B (FAI No. HI-10-21 and FAI No. HI-19-34), New Access Road, Expansion and Improvements - Pre-construction meeting scheduled for March 18, 2021, 10:00 a.m. at the Hanapepe Veterans Cemetery pavilion.
- Kauai Veterans Cemetery Gravesite Restoration (O&M) Project - The Project (FAI No. HI-10-23), with an approved grant pre-application amount of \$827K, is ranked #37 on the VA's FY 2021 Priority List and Feb. 2021 - Working on updated costs for this project for VA update and State match.
- Maui Veterans Cemetery Additional Columbaria Niches - February 25, 2021 – DAGS placed order with VA for niche covers. Niche covers will be same as East Hawaii VC #2, West Hawaii VC, Lanai VC, and Molokai VC.

Mr. Juan Babiak, Veterans Liaison, Yukio Okutsu State Veterans - Not present. Report submitted.

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

Briefed on: SNAP benefits – 3% to 5% receiving some type of VA benefits.

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

Briefed on: Veteran Unemployment rate for the month of February was 5.2%, which is up from 4.9% in January. It still less than the national rate.

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

Briefed on: Implementing new guidelines for interment services - increased attendance from 10 to 25, everyone must adhere to the CDC guidelines in terms of social distancing, giving families the option to reschedule interment services when full military honors will be provided, Administration is still closed to the public. March 22nd – Vietnam War Veterans Wreath laying ceremony – Closed to the public, but will be posted on Facebook page.

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

Briefed on: Still tracking the Aloha Project – waiting for the House to approve, Annual Legislative Conferences for various VSOs that will testify in Congress through Zoom.

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 - Report submitted.
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 – No submitted report.
6. Oahu - Ms. Roxanne Bruhn – Report submitted. No additions.
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
 - Report submitted.
- B. By Laws and Procedures
 - No Report.
- C. Recognition and Awards
 - No Report.
- D. Women's Committee
 - Ron Han reported that he's hoping to regenerate the committee. OVS staff member Diane Ramsey (US Army Vet) is our representative.
- E. Project and Events Committee
 - Rededication of the WWII Memorial
 1. National Association Letter Carriers have committed to the cost of the plaque and mounting of the plaque.
 - Maui Veterans Cemetery Blessing/Dedication Event – On Hold

VI. NEW BUSINESS - None

VII. OLD BUSINESS - None

VIII. ANNOUNCEMENTS - None

IX. WORKING SESSION - OVS / Advisory Board Issues / Ideas - None

X. ADJOURN – 10:17am

Mary Kay Hertog motioned, and Harold Bugado seconded.

Yolanda Ehere – Recorder