

Maryland Veterans Commission Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, July 15, 2025
100 Community Place
Crownsville, MD 21032

Chairman Bowers called the meeting to order at 10:30 am

Vice Chairman Moore led the invocation and Pledge of Allegiance.

Commissioner Reuter made a motion to approve October minutes. Motion was seconded and passed.

Chairman Bowers welcomed the Commission and introduced guests attending:

- Acting DVMF Secretary Ross Cohen
- Denise Nooe, Staff to the Commission
- Heather Gerald, DVMF Maryland Trust Fund Executive Director
- Lindsay Livingston, DVMF Director, Veteran & Military Family Programs
- Roslyn Jones, DVMF Women Veterans/Inclusion Program Manager
- Morgan Murphy, DVMF Director, Intergovernmental & Legislative Affairs (Virtual)
- Mike Kerley, DVMF Staff Officer
- Evan Schalon, US Senator Alsobrooks's office
- Nan Mann, US Senator Alsobrook's office, virtual
- Danielle Akwara, US Congresswoman Elfreth's office, virtual
- Jeff Nash, Maryland's Commitment to Veterans
- Stan Seidel, Intergovernmental Subcommittee, VA Deflection Committee
- Jason Marshall, Serving Together
- Dr. Tiffany Daniels, VFW, virtual, guest of Commissioner Davis
- Bruce Edwards VFW Department of MD Commander, virtual, guest of Commissioner Davis
- Audrey Moore, guest of Vice Chairman Moore
- Bernadine Blair, guest of Commissioner Blair

Commissioners absent: Childs, Hartman, Thornton and Wallace

The Chairman called on Acting Secretary Ross Cohen for his presentation:
Deputy Secretary Cohen –

- Good Morning
- Thank you to the Commissioners, Presenters and Guests joining us today

- I will begin by welcoming Chairman Mike Bowers to his new role as Chairman of the Veterans Commission.
- I would also like to acknowledge the service of KT Tyler as Chairman of this Commission for the previous five years. Thank you to KT for his leadership. There are also two new Commissioners who were just appointed:
 - Thomas Ottenwaelder appointed to the At Large seat
 - Michelle Viramontes appointed to the 3rd Congressional seat
 - Please join me in welcoming them
- I will provide an update on the Department and then call on Rory Nolan, who serves as Chief of Staff to Delegate Heather Bagnall for an update on the Maryland Military Women's Memorial and next Heather Geraldine, Executive Director of the Trust for an update on the Maryland Veterans Trust Fund.

Service Program

- In FY 2025 DVMF filed 5,667 claims for Veterans, Dependents & Survivors
- Monetary benefits awarded to Maryland Veterans & family members = \$54,445,746
- These are record breaking numbers in both categories
- The approval rate of claims filed in FY 2025 = 94%
- We have plans to open two new benefits offices at MVA's in Annapolis and Waldorf. No exact date on the openings yet, but we will let you know.

Cemetery & Memorials Program

- Pre-applications have increased for 2025
- Interments for Veterans and Dependents also increased slightly for 2025
- Maryland is home to 1.5% of Veterans in the United States, but we interred 7% of Veterans and family members, when compared to state cemeteries across the nation making Maryland the most active state cemetery program in the US.
 - The increased activity has led to some brief delays in scheduling interments -
 - Up to 21 days at Cheltenham, Garrison Forest & Crownsville
 - Two weeks at Rocky Gap and Eastern Shore
- Unaccompanied Veterans Ceremonies will be held on July 25th at three of the Cemetery locations:
 - Crownsville
 - Garrison Forest
 - Rocky Gap
 - The information on the ceremonies and the names of the Veterans were included in last Friday's edition of the newsletter. Denise can send the information to you, if you missed it.

- The Eastern Shore cemetery will observe the 50th anniversary of being established in 2026.

Charlotte Hall Veterans Home

- Census has been increasing gradually since the Pandemic.
- 2024 Average Occupancy was 57%.
- Average daily census is 272, and currently we have 276 residents.
- 43% of the population is between the ages of 70-79 - the largest age bracket for residents.
- Population includes 13 female Veterans & 30 female spouses.
- 96% of the veteran population served during wartime.
- HVAC system has been replaced in all common areas of the home.
- A new Chair has been elected by the Maryland Home Commission, Ken Streicher.

Communications, Outreach & Advocacy

- During the month of June, Roslyn Jones, Women Veteran/Inclusion Program Manager organized two successful events to recognize Women Veterans and celebrate Women Veterans Recognition Day.
 - The first was held at American Legion Post 136 in Greenbelt. Special thanks to Commission Vice Chairman Mike Moore for his support of the event.
 - Dignitaries attending included Maryland National Guard Adjutant General Janee Birkhead and Jacquelyn Hayes-Byrd Executive Director of the USVA Center for Women Veterans.
 - The second event held for Women Veteran Entrepreneurs at Morgan State University, also included staff from the Governor's Office on Small, Minority and Women Business Affairs.
- Maryland Joins Forces, has grown to over 30 partner organizations and in September will host service projects as part of a Building Community Through Service campaign. If the VSO you belong to would like to partner on these service projects, please contact Lindsay Livingston or Deputy Secretary Dana Burl.
- On August 8th, DVMF will co-host a Mission Strong Summit in partnership with Joint Base Andrews. The first summit of this kind was held at Ft. Meade. These summits bring together community organizations and military service providers to discuss ways to strengthen partnership and problem solve challenges facing our military connected community.
- We have been updating you on plans to redesign and update the DVMF website. That work has been going on behind the scenes for nearly two years. The

design phase is finished and we are now checking content. We will soon be ready to launch the new website.

Q&A:

- Commissioner Davis asked for an update on the USVA processing claims. Response: No formal update. VA employees are very stressed. VA Secretary Collins says frontline health care workers will not be laid-off and this also applies to claims adjudicators.
- Commissioner Reuter asked if the website would be accessible. Response: Yes

Acting Secretary Cohen called on Rory Nolan from Delegate Bagnall's office for a report on the Women's Memorial:

- The Commission made three recommendations for location
 - Place it at the museum/Patriot Place in Charles County
 - Place it in Sykesville at the new Veterans Home location
 - Place it in Havre de Grace
- There is not a formal process in state government to make a decision on the location options
- Funding options are needed for three phases
 - Design process
 - Build process
 - Maintenance process – Note the Maryland Historical Trust does maintain some monuments in the state
 - Patriot Point would be difficult for the state to maintain because it is on private property. A non-profit would have to be established to handle the design process. Capital funding could then be requested from the state
 - Sykesville location would provide state accountability throughout the process. DVMF would have to agree to that location, and the grading of the property may be an issue.
 - Patriot Point is a more straight-forward path, not as dependent on state funding. Who would be responsible for establishing a 501c3?
 - There is no formal process defined by the state, so we could make one up

Q&A

- Commissioner Collins – she has talked with Delegate Bagnall, and the Maryland Military Coalition will take on the responsibility of the 501c3. Then they will work with DVMF to set up a committee. Joan Sabree is the Vice Chair at the Patriots Museum. She is shocked to hear the Patriot Museum is not considered the final

choice. Response: there is not currently a state process to select a location. Currently there is another memorial slated to go on the State House grounds.

- Commissioner Moore – he was the only male member of the Establishment of a Women Veterans Memorial Commission. Suggested a public-private partnership. Response: Rory took the suggestion down for consideration.
- Commissioner Davis – does not understand why it is not being funded by the state and is not on state grounds. We either respect women Veterans or we do not. Response: We did not understand going in that the location had to be on state grounds to receive state funding.
- Commissioner Reuter – how is it linked together with the monument on I-95? The manager there at the travel plaza built the memorial. Response from Penny Collins, who gave overview of the history of the memorial. Denise added it is on state property managed by the Department of Transportation. Commissioner Reuter also asked if land at the WWII Memorial in Annapolis had been considered. No response.
- Commissioner Schlesinger – what can we do as Commissioners to move the process along? Rory replied the supporting groups need to get together. Acting Secretary Cohen added let Denise know if you are interested in attending.
- Commissioner Davis asked who is the ultimate decision maker for the process? Rory replied that the answer depends on which option is selected.
- Chairman Bowers summarized:
 - Legislation
 - Executive Order from Governor
 - Non-profit
- Acting Secretary Cohen added anything involving funding would have to go through the state legislature.
- Commissioner Collins asked is establishing a 501c3 needed to be approved by the Governor. Rory replied: no, first go through the design process then ask for Capital funds. Email address for Delegate Bagnall: heather.bagnall@house.maryland.gov
- The Acting Secretary asked why staffers have the same email as their bosses. Rory – it is difficult to change between the two emails, you have to log in and log out.

The Acting Secretary called on Heather Geraldes for her presentation on the current status of the Trust Fund.

Q&A

- Commissioner Reuter – does the Trust pay for things like ramps and one-time construction? Response: No, not so far. We do refer to other partners for these types of needs. We are considering those requests for the future.
- Commissioner Davis – concerns about focus on Veterans who were laid-off from the federal government. Acting Secretary Cohen replied – we are acutely aware

of the federal employees in this situation. Heather: We currently have 130 applicants on the waiting list, whose applications were pending at the time of the pause. Dana added there are resources for federal employees on the DVMF website. Heather – we have seen an uptick in applications due to job loss.

- Commissioner Davis asked about funds for organizations. Heather replied the current emphasis is on individual applications, because the need is so great right now.
- Chairman Bowers asked about the funding limits on the grants. Heather replied the current funding limits are \$10,000. Utilities limits are \$2,000. There is a waiver process, if we have to go a little higher.
- Commissioner Speigel noted that Reserve personnel are not eligible for the Trust fund. Heather replied we do have a waiver process and will work on the policy side, if there is interest.
- Commissioner Blair – the Marine Corps League also has a Trust Fund. Does receiving funds from the MCL prohibit an individual from also receiving funds from the Maryland Trust Fund. Response : No.
- Commissioner Blair asked if the Trust Fund still received funds from the Lottery. Response: Yes.

The Chairman called on Grace Caulfield to present on Easterseals/the Steven A. Cohen Clinic

Grace discussed the programs serving Active duty Service members and military connected families.

Q&A

Commissioner Reuter asked how close the clinic was to a Metro station. Response: a couple of blocks

The Chairman called on Denise Nooe

Denise took roll of the Commissioners. Four Commissioners were absent: Childs, Hartman, Thornton and Wallace.

- Reminded the Commissioners of the importance of responding to emails and attending meetings.
 - Meetings are always the third Tuesday of the first month of the quarter.
 - Next 4 meetings are listed at the end of the agenda.
- If you have a suggestion for a meeting location or a presentation, please write to the Chairman and copy Denise.

The Chairman invited the Commissioners to begin the round robin portion of the agenda and asked what they thought of the document “Responsibilities of Commissioners”.

- Commissioner Rosas, Agrees with the document. He misses Secretary Owings and his wise counsel. Commissioner Rosas made a \$1,500 donation to the Trust Fund in his memory. After today’s meeting, he will tender his resignation. He is growing his business and doesn’t have the bandwidth right now to continue as a Commissioner. Took his knowledge as a Commissioner and started a similar organization in Puerto Rico. Thanked Denise and Captain Macri for their assistance to him.
- Commissioner Reuter – he juggles representing an organization to the Commission and representing the Governor and the State of Maryland to the public. On Memorial Day he went to Baltimore National Cemetery and read the Governor’s Proclamation.
- Commissioner Blair – was appointed to the Commission in 2012. He had a special relationship with Secretary Owings, as another Marine. He appreciates the information provided at Commission meetings – he takes it out to the community and helps fellow Veterans.
- Commission Collins asked if the Appointments process will change. Response: No. Understands lobbying cannot happen as a Commissioner, but can she lobby as a member of another organization? Response: Yes, if the other organization allows it. It satisfies her to help Veterans. She asked for more specific information about the donations coming into the Trust Fund. It would be awesome if Commissioners could help fundraise. The Deputy Secretary responded: 98% of the donations come from the public sector (Lottery, Casinos) and 1.67% comes from private donations.
- Vice Chairman Moore – There is so much out there, so many organizations that want to help Veterans. We, as a Commission can help Veterans sort this out. The Department provides us with tri-fold, and the information on the website and in the newsletter to use when talking with Veterans.
- Commissioner Davis – write up what you are doing and send to Denise with a photo for the newsletter.
- Acting Secretary Cohen – there are so many resources and what a maze they are to navigate. We now have a constituent services staffer, Mauricio Reyes. He knows as much as any one person about state and federal resources.
- Commissioner Stem – talked about the Traveling Vietnam Wall coming to Carroll County in the fall.
- Commissioner Speigel – Maryland Military Coalition is planning for the legislative session in 2026 and living in a more austere state environment. Organizations will have to fill the need.
- Commissioner Holcombe – currently at the American Legion Convention in Ocean City. He will report at the next Commission meeting.

- Commission Macri – serves on the Governor’s Task Force for prescribing psychedelics. Recreational approval will probably not happen. Report is scheduled to come out in July. They are talking about 4 versions of psychedelics. Veterans are going to Mexico to get it now. She is very concerned about Veteran health.
 - Commissioner Detmer asked about Ibogaine. Macri replied that is the version used in Mexico under very controlled conditions. Not every Veteran has the means to go there and get it. Macri will send her report to the Chair. Also talked about the healing properties of art for Veterans.
- Commissioner Detmer has spoken with Bob Brown of Harford County Veterans Commission. He will follow up with an email.
- Commissioner Foxworth – question about employment centers, how many are transitioning. How many are seeking employment, how many are served? Response: the Department of Labor keeps those numbers. He made a presentation @ College Park on Memorial Day. Thank you to Vice Chairman Moore. He is trying to establish a partnership with the prison in Jessup. TREA is trying to increase their membership. Also, volunteered at HoCo Workforce Center to assist Veterans seeking employment. Made contact with Guard & Reserve Units to discuss transitioning.
- Commissioner Shiffrin – regarding the list of Commissioner responsibilities, it is good to confirm our purpose. MOAA is doing a conference in late October – lots of corporate sponsors with impressive displays.
- Chair compared displays with Modern Day Marine.
- Commissioner Killebrew stated his church has a Veterans program. The have events quarterly. He works with the Tuskegee Airmen Youth program. He missed the last meeting due to a medical issue. For men’s health he is asking that all men know their PSA level.
- Commissioner Sabree – attended a luncheon for VA hospital director, Jonathan Eckman – the event was sponsored by AMVETS. She was a guest speaker at the DAV convention – highlighted the importance of the Veterans Commission in her speech. Attended the AMVETS convention and Denise was there. Also attended the Joint Veterans Committee banquet honoring Dr. Tiffany Daniels. Commissioner Sabree served as the Committee Chair for the banquet.
- Commissioner Collins – held a DAV claims clinic in Bowie, and Commissioner Sabree, the state commander attended. Incarcerated Veterans at Jessup keep sending her mail. VVA Chapter 1135 located at Jessup had a PTSD awareness day and she attended the event. Warrior Canine Connection has a program there at the prison – incarcerated Veterans train the dogs. DAV Chapter 7 in Bowie is hosting a luncheon and Veterans from Charlotte Hall will attend.
- Commissioner Ottenwaelder – Today is his first meeting as a Commissioner. He retired after 29 years in the Coast Guard. Serves as Post Resource Officer for his American Legion Post.

- Commissioner Davis, VFW Commander Edwards plans on attending the October meeting of the Commission.
- Commissioner Reuter – Chair of the Homeless Sub-committee. Looking for members from other parts of the state – he only covers Baltimore City. For the Point in Time Count for Baltimore City, 3% of the Homeless counted were Veterans.
- Commissioner Harris – recommendations: Inform new Commissioners of the sub-committee opportunities when they come on board. Have a mentor for new Commissioners. She attended Maryland Adaptive Day and Lindsay was there. Also attended the Elizabeth Dole Foundation Caregiver's conference. Went to Charlotte Hall Volunteer Appreciation luncheon. She plans to introduce herself to the Charles County Commission.
- Commissioner Schlesinger – apologizes for not RSVPing for the Commission meeting. Thank you for the Proclamations for Memorial Day. Jewish War Veterans is hosting a Dining Out event.
- Commissioner Blair – Marine Corps League National Convention will be held in Dallas this year.
- Vice Chairman Moore mentioned the best speaker at the Peace Cross dedication was Dana.

Vice Chairman Moore led the Benediction and Salute to the Flag.

Chairman Bowers called for a Motion to adjourn. Meeting was adjourned at 1:32 pm.