



NEW MEXICO LEGISLATURE

**MILITARY AND
VETERANS' AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE**

2023 INTERIM FINAL REPORT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SERVICE
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INTERIM SUMMARY

Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee 2023 Interim Summary

The Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee (MVAC) was created by statute for the 2009 interim and then permanently reauthorized during the Forty-Ninth Legislature, Second Session. Pursuant to Section 2-20-2 NMSA 1978, the MVAC holds hearings in several geographically dispersed areas of the state related to military and veterans' issues. The MVAC is also tasked with making legislative recommendations to each session of the legislature and regulatory recommendations to the United States Congress, United States Department of Veterans Affairs and United States Department of Defense.

The MVAC held five meetings during the 2023 interim: two in Santa Fe and one each in Angel Fire, Albuquerque and Truth or Consequences. In June, the MVAC received an update from the Veterans' Services Department, and the MVAC members discussed the committee's work plan for the 2023 interim.

In July, in Angel Fire, the MVAC received presentations that included a brief overview of the budgeting process from the Legislative Finance Committee, an update on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial replica wall project and veteran educational programs at the University of New Mexico-Taos.

At the third meeting, in September, the MVAC met in Albuquerque. The committee received a presentation from the Defense-State Liaison Office of the United States Department of Defense. The presentation included an overview of the office's priorities for the 2024 legislative session, which included military child care and education, justice and safety and representation and access issues. The MVAC additionally received presentations from Kirtland Air Force Base, Navajo Code Talkers Museum Corporation and Elected Officials to Protect America.

The fourth meeting was held in Truth or Consequences in October. The secretary of health provided an overview of the challenges that the New Mexico State Veterans' Home has faced since the pandemic. However, during the 2022 legislative session, funding was secured for the construction of six buildings, and the MVAC received a tour of phase one of the construction. The MVAC also received a presentation from the Mesilla Valley Community of Hope and heard about the efforts to address veteran homelessness and the programming and advocacy behind the military and veterans programs at New Mexico State University.

At the final meeting of the interim, in Santa Fe, the MVAC received presentations on the federal Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act of 2022, the New Mexico Veterans Legacy Program undertaken by Santa Fe Community College in partnership with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs and the New Mexico National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Academy. The committee endorsed legislation that would make an appropriation to the Veterans' Services Department to contract with a veteran, police and first responder posttraumatic stress disorder therapy program.

WORK PLAN AND MEETING SCHEDULE

**2023 APPROVED
WORK PLAN AND MEETING SCHEDULE
for the
MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

Members

Rep. Harry Garcia, Chair
Sen. Harold Pope, Vice Chair
Rep. Eliseo Lee Alcon
Rep. Art De La Cruz

Sen. Brenda G. McKenna
Sen. Shannon D. Pinto
Sen. Joshua A. Sanchez
Rep. Luis M. Terrazas

Advisory Members

Rep. John Block
Sen. Craig W. Brandt
Sen. William F. Burt
Rep. Meredith A. Dixon
Rep. D. Wonda Johnson
Rep. Stefani Lord

Rep. Alan T. Martinez
Sen. Michael Padilla
Rep. Andrea Reeb
Rep. Debra M. Sariñana
Rep. Harlan Vincent

Work Plan

The Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee was first created by statute for the 2009 interim. The committee was permanently reauthorized by statute during the 2010 regular legislative session. The committee has various statutory duties, including making an annual report; recommending any necessary legislation to the next session of the legislature; and requesting necessary action to the United States Congress, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs and the United States Department of Defense. The committee is required to conduct meetings in several geographically dispersed areas of the state and to conduct hearings relating to military issues and veterans' issues.

During the 2023 interim, as time permits, the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee will:

- A. receive updates from New Mexico's military installations;
- B. study issues relating to female veterans;
- C. receive updates regarding college credit for military service from the Higher Education Department and the Veterans' Services Department;
- D. receive testimony regarding jobs and business opportunities for veterans;
- E. study long-term care options for veterans;
- F. study transportation to and from medical providers for veterans, particularly those living in rural areas of the state;

G. receive testimony pertaining to educational opportunities and outreach offered by state educational institutions and public community colleges to veteran students;

H. examine options for the prevention of homelessness and support for homeless veterans in areas throughout the state;

I. receive testimony regarding health care options both within the Veterans Administration system and outside of it, including behavioral health care, suicide prevention and treatment for posttraumatic stress disorder;

J. examine actions New Mexico can take to improve quality of life for military and veteran families;

K. study the creation of veterans' courts in various judicial districts in New Mexico;

L. examine issues relating to New Mexico's active duty, reserve and National Guard military personnel, veterans and military families;

M. examine various issues relating to veterans and taxes;

N. examine the issue of the inspection of public records for military records;

O. examine housing issues near New Mexico's military installations; and

P. receive testimony from the Veterans' Services Department to better define the needs of the department.

**Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee
2023 Approved Meeting Schedule**

| <u>Date</u> | <u>Location</u> |
|--------------|-----------------------|
| June 8 | Santa Fe |
| July 6 | Angel Fire |
| September 6 | Albuquerque |
| October 2 | Truth or Consequences |
| November 6-7 | Santa Fe |

AGENDAS AND MINUTES

**TENTATIVE AGENDA
for the
FIRST MEETING
of the
MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**June 8, 2023
State Capitol, Room 309
Santa Fe**

Thursday, June 8

- 1:30 p.m. (1) [Veterans' Services Department Update](#)
 —Donnie Quintana, Secretary, Veterans' Services Department
- 2:15 p.m. (2) [2023 Work Plan, Meeting Schedule and Itinerary](#)
 —Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee Members
- 3:00 p.m. **Adjourn**

**MINUTES
of the
FIRST MEETING
of the
MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**June 8, 2023
State Capitol, Room 309
Santa Fe**

The first meeting of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee was called to order by Representative Harry Garcia, chair, on June 8, 2023 at 1:32 p.m. in Room 309 of the State Capitol in Santa Fe.

Present

Rep. Harry Garcia, Chair
Rep. Eliseo Lee Alcon
Rep. Art De La Cruz
Sen. Joshua A. Sanchez

Absent

Sen. Harold Pope, Vice Chair
Sen. Brenda G. McKenna
Sen. Shannon D. Pinto
Rep. Luis M. Terrazas

Advisory Members

Rep. D. Wonda Johnson
Rep. Alan T. Martinez
Rep. Andrea Reeb
Rep. Debra M. Sariñana
Rep. Harlan Vincent

Rep. John Block
Sen. Craig W. Brandt
Sen. William F. Burt
Rep. Meredith A. Dixon
Rep. Stefani Lord
Sen. Michael Padilla

Staff

Jeret Fleetwood, Project Coordinator, Legislative Council Service (LCS)
Nancy Martinez, Researcher, LCS

Guests

The guest list is in the meeting file.

Handouts

Handouts and other written testimony are in the meeting file and posted on the legislature's website.

References to Webcast

The time reference noted next to each agenda item in this document is cross-referenced to the webcast of the committee meeting, which can be found at www.nmlegis.gov, under the "Webcast" tab. The presentations made and committee discussions for the agenda items can be found on the recorded webcast for this meeting.

Thursday, June 8

Welcome and Introductions (1:32 p.m.)

Representative Garcia welcomed everyone to the meeting. Members of the committee, staff and audience introduced themselves.

Veterans' Services Department (VSD) Update (1:37 p.m.)

Donnie Quintana, secretary, VSD, gave updates on changes that have occurred at the VSD within the last six months. He said that since November 2022, the department has hired 10 additional veteran service officers (VSOs) for a total of 24 accredited VSOs. Secretary Quintana said that the department is continuing to build strong partnerships with other state agencies.

2023 Proposed Work Plan and Meeting Schedule (2:48 p.m.)

Committee members discussed and made changes to the 2023 interim work plan and meeting schedule. The approved work plan and meeting schedule can be found here:

https://www.nmlegis.gov/Publications/Work_Plans/MVACworkplan23.pdf.

Adjournment

There being no further business before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 3:05 p.m.

Revised: June 30, 2023

**TENTATIVE AGENDA
for the
SECOND MEETING
of the
MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**July 6, 2023
Angel Fire Community Center
15 CS Ranch Rd.
Angel Fire**

Thursday, July 6

- 9:15 a.m. (1) [Welcome/National Veterans Wellness and Healing Center](#)
—Chuck Howe, Board President, National Veterans Wellness and Healing Center
- 9:30 a.m. (2) [Vietnam Veterans Memorial Replica Wall Update](#)
—Edward Mendez, Director, Benefits and Services, Veterans' Services Department
- 10:00 a.m. (3) [New Mexico Veteran Leadership Council](#)
—Martin Gallegos
- 10:45 a.m. (4) [Veterans Integration Centers/Veteran Homelessness](#)
—Brock Wolff, Chief Executive Officer, Veterans Integration Centers
- 11:00 a.m. (5) [New Mexico Budgeting Process](#)
—Jon Courtney, Deputy Director for Program Evaluators, Legislative Finance Committee
- 12:00 noon **Lunch**
- 1:30 p.m. (6) [Veteran Educational Programs — University of New Mexico-Taos Upward Bound Program](#)
—Kelly Fitzpatrick, Program Manager, New Mexico Veterans Upward Bound
- 2:15 p.m. (7) [Veteran Suicide Prevention — Together With Veterans](#)
—Valentina Livingston, Taos Coordinator, Together With Veterans
- 3:00 p.m. (8) [Veteran Well-Being — Not Forgotten Outreach](#)
—Patrick Million, Not Forgotten Outreach
- 3:45 p.m. **Adjourn**

**MINUTES
of the
SECOND MEETING
of the
MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**July 6, 2023
Angel Fire Community Center
15 CS Ranch Road
Angel Fire**

The second meeting of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee was called to order by Representative Harry Garcia, chair, on July 6, 2023 at 9:18 a.m. at the Angel Fire Community Center in Angel Fire.

Present

Rep. Harry Garcia, Chair
Sen. Harold Pope, Vice Chair
Rep. Eliseo Lee Alcon
Rep. Art De La Cruz
Sen. Shannon D. Pinto

Absent

Sen. Brenda G. McKenna
Sen. Joshua A. Sanchez
Rep. Luis M. Terrazas

Advisory Members

Rep. John Block
Rep. Stefani Lord
Sen. Michael Padilla
Rep. Andrea Reeb
Rep. Debra M. Sariñana

Sen. Craig W. Brandt
Sen. William F. Burt
Rep. Meredith A. Dixon
Rep. D. Wonda Johnson
Rep. Alan T. Martinez
Rep. Harlan Vincent

Staff

Jeret Fleetwood, Project Coordinator, Legislative Council Service (LCS)
Nancy Martinez, Researcher, LCS

Guests

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Handouts

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Thursday, July 6

Welcome/National Veterans Wellness and Healing Center (9:19 a.m.)

Representative Garcia welcomed everyone to the meeting. Members of the committee, staff and audience introduced themselves.

Chuck Howe, board president, National Veterans Wellness and Healing Center, told committee members that the center was founded in 2009. The center treats veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder and their partners. The center has treated roughly 900 individuals and works in collaboration with state behavioral staff.

Vietnam Veterans Memorial Replica Wall Update (9:31 a.m.)

Edward Mendez, director, Benefits and Services, Veterans' Services Department, introduced Jake Lopez, president, Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter 996, and gave a briefing on the project. Mr. Mendez said that the project is in the procurement phase. He displayed pictures of the proposed replica. The presentation can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/MVAC%20070623%20Item%202%20Memorial%20Replica%20Wall%20Update.pdf>

Military and Veterans Leadership Council (10:00 a.m.)

Walter Paul, vice chair, Military and Veterans Leadership Council, gave a presentation on the Military and Veterans Leadership Council, a non-partisan umbrella organization covering all of the military and veteran service organizations in New Mexico. Mr. Paul said that the leadership council is focused on three legislative priorities: 1) updating the provisions of House Bill 163 (2022); 2) veterans property tax exemption implementation (House Joint Resolutions 5 and 6 (2023)); and 3) veteran issues such as homelessness and mental health. The presentation can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/MVAC%20070623%20Item%203%20NM%20Veteran%20Leadership%20Council.pdf>

Veterans Integration Centers (VIC)/Veteran Homelessness (10:51 a.m.)

Brock Wolff, chief executive officer, VIC, introduced Gerard "Jerry" Becker, chairperson/director, VIC. Mr. Wolff said that the VIC was established in 2005 and in the last ten years, the VIC has provided services to more than 2,000 veterans. The VIC deals primarily with assisting homeless veterans and securing housing for veterans. In addition, the VIC has a food pantry, a donation center and a downtown shuttle in Albuquerque. The presentation can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/MVAC%20070623%20Item%204%20VIC.pdf>

New Mexico Budgeting Process (11:36 a.m.)

Jon Courtney, deputy director for program evaluators, Legislative Finance Committee, gave an overview of the General Appropriations Act. Mr. Courtney also went over prognostications of revenues. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=MVAC&Date=7/6/2023&ItemNumber=5>.

Veteran Educational Programs — University of New Mexico-Taos Upward Bound Program (1:37 p.m.)

Kelly Fitzpatrick, program manager, New Mexico Veterans Upward Bound, introduced Matthew C. Wohlberg, outreach coordinator and recruiter, New Mexico Veterans Upward Bound. Ms. Fitzpatrick explained that Upward Bound is part of a set of educational programs created by the federal Higher Education Act of 1965. The Veterans Upward Bound program was added in 1972 to address the educational needs of veterans returning from the Vietnam Conflict. The presentation can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/MVAC%20070623%20Item%206%20Upward%20Bound%20Program.pdf>.

Veteran Well-Being — Not Forgotten Outreach (2:16 p.m.)

Patrick Million, executive director, Not Forgotten Outreach, said that Not Forgotten Outreach collaborates with Veterans Upward Bound and Together with Veterans. Mr. Million said that the mission of Not Forgotten Outreach is to provide recreational, therapeutic and farming activities as a pathway to healing from challenges stemming from reintegration into the community following military service. The presentation can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/MVAC%20070623%20Item%208%20Veteran%20Well-Being.pdf>.

Vets for Pets (2:31 p.m.)

Finnie D. Coleman, Ph.D., founder, the Dellsly Group and Vets for Pets, said that the Dellsly Group is an international nonprofit organization dedicated to assisting communities in their efforts to improve health outcomes, foster cultural awareness and achieve community sustainability and autonomy. The presentation can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/MVAC%20070623%20Item%209%20Vets%20for%20Pets.pdf>.

Veteran Suicide Prevention — Together with Veterans (2:53 p.m.)

Valentina Livingston, Taos coordinator, Together with Veterans, introduced Ryan Timmermans, founder, Veterans Off-Grid. Ms. Livingston said that Together with Veterans Taos was established in 2022. The program has received three years' worth of funding from the Office of Rural Health of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs. Ms. Livingston explained that the program's intent is to bring veterans and the community together to work to prevent veteran suicide.

Approval of Minutes (3:13 p.m.)

On a motion duly made and seconded, the committee approved the minutes from the June 8, 2023 meeting.

Adjournment

There being no further business before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 3:13 p.m.

**TENTATIVE AGENDA
for the
THIRD MEETING
of the
MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**September 6, 2023
Salon Ortega Ballroom
National Hispanic Cultural Center
1701 4th Street SW
Albuquerque**

Wednesday, September 6

- 9:00 a.m. (1) [D'Aniello Institute for Veterans and Military Families New Mexico Landscape Assessment](#)
—Vincent DelSignore, Director, Community Services, D'Aniello Institute for Veterans and Military Families
- 9:45 a.m. (2) [Water and Energy Security](#)
—Alex Cornell du Houx, President, Elected Officials to Protect America
- 10:30 a.m. (3) [Navajo Code Talker Museum Update](#)
—Regan Hawthorne, Director, Navajo Code Talkers Museum Corporation
- 11:15 a.m. (4) [Veteran Heroes of the American Southwest Media Project](#)
—David C'de Baca
—Avelino Calabaza
- 12:00 noon **Lunch**
- 1:30 p.m. (5) [The United States Department of Defense's Defense-State Liaison Office](#)
—Kelli May Douglas, Southwest Regional Liaison, Defense-State Liaison Office, United States Department of Defense
- 2:15 p.m. (6) [Kirtland Air Force Base Jet Fuel Cleanup](#)
—Rick Shean, Director, Resource Protection Division, Department of Environment
—Ryan Wortman, Air Force Civil Engineer, Kirtland Air Force Base
- 3:15 p.m. (7) [Santa Fe Community College Veterans Legacy Grant Program](#)
—Steve Martinez, Ph.D., Director, Veterans Legacy Grant Program, Santa Fe Community College
- 4:00 p.m. **Adjourn**

**MINUTES
of the
THIRD MEETING
of the
MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**September 6, 2023
Salon Ortega Ballroom
National Hispanic Cultural Center
1701 4th Street SW
Albuquerque**

The third meeting of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee was called to order by Representative Harry Garcia, chair, on September 6, 2023 at 9:22 a.m. at the Salon Ortega Ballroom of the National Hispanic Cultural Center (NHCC) in Albuquerque.

Present

Rep. Harry Garcia, Chair
Sen. Harold Pope, Vice Chair
Rep. Eliseo Lee Alcon
Rep. Debra M. Sariñana*
Rep. Luis M. Terrazas

Absent

Rep. Art De La Cruz
Sen. Brenda G. McKenna
Sen. Shannon D. Pinto
Sen. Joshua A. Sanchez

Advisory Members

Rep. Stefani Lord
Rep. Alan T. Martinez
Rep. Harlan Vincent

Rep. John Block
Sen. Craig W. Brandt
Sen. William F. Burt
Rep. Meredith A. Dixon
Rep. D. Wonda Johnson
Sen. Michael Padilla
Rep. Andrea Reeb

Guest Legislator

Sen. Daniel A. Ivey-Soto

*Appointed by the speaker of the house of representatives as a voting member for this meeting only.

Staff

Jeret Fleetwood, Project Coordinator, Legislative Council Service (LCS)
Nancy Martinez, Researcher, LCS

Guests

The guest list is in the meeting file.

Handouts

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Wednesday, September 6

Welcome and Introductions (9:22 a.m.)

Representative Garcia introduced John Martinez, chief executive officer and president, NHCC. Mr. Martinez gave welcoming remarks to the members. Representative Garcia allowed Senator Pope to conduct the meeting for the day. Members of the committee introduced themselves.

D'Aniello Institute for Veterans and Military Families New Mexico Landscape (9:28 a.m.)

Vincent DelSignore, director, Community Services, D'Aniello Institute for Veterans and Military Families, said that the institute's mission is to position transitioning service members and their families to thrive in post-service life. In 2022, the legislature allocated funds through Central New Mexico Community College to the institute to conduct a current assessment of New Mexico's veterans services landscape. The presentation can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/MVAC%20090623%20Item%201%20D'Aniello%20Institute%20for%20Veterans%20and%20Military%20Families%20in%20New%20Mexico%20Landscape%20Assessment.pdf>.

Water and Energy Security (10:17 a.m.)

Alex Cornell du Houx, president, Elected Officials to Protect America (EOPA), said that the EOPA is a network of current and former bipartisan elected officials who care about protecting the planet and democracy while working collaboratively to transition the country into a clean energy economy. Mr. Cornell du Houx said that the EOPA works to implement solutions that will help solve the climate crisis and ensure environmental justice.

Veteran Heroes of the American Southwest Media Project (11:26 a.m.)

David C'de Baca introduced Avelino Calabaza and told committee members that the goal of the project is to honor the service and life journeys of veterans from the time of the Civil War to the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts. In addition, the media project hopes to provide local schools with materials so that students learn about local veterans, including those from Indian nations, tribes and pueblos and other underserved communities to which heroes have contributed. Mr. C'de Baca also made legislative recommendations to committee members. The presentation can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/MVAC%20090623%20Item%204%20Veteran%20Heroes%20of%20the%20American%20Southwest%20Media%20Project.pdf>.

Navajo Code Talker Museum Update (1:37 p.m.)

Regan Hawthorne, director, Navajo Code Talkers Museum Corporation, provided an informational update on the museum effort. Mr. Hawthorne outlined the challenges of conflicts arising out of the intra-agency oversight of funds and possible solutions through intra-governmental and constituent-based partnerships. The presentation can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/MVAC%20090623%20Item%203%20Navajo%20Code%20Talker%20Museum%20Update.pdf>.

The United States Department of Defense's Defense-State Liaison Office (DSLO) (2:04 p.m.)

Kelli May Douglas, southwest regional liaison, DSLO, United States Department of Defense; Senator Ivey-Soto; and Representative Sariñana gave a presentation on the mission and recommendations of the DSLO. Ms. Douglas said that since the DSLO was established by the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness in 2004, it has helped state legislatures to enact more than 1,000 bills that cover a wide range of quality-of-life issues that are important to service members and their families. The presentation can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/MVAC%20090623%20Item%205%20US%20DOD.pdf>.

Kirtland Air Force Base (KAFB) Jet Fuel Cleanup (2:27 p.m.)

Rick Shean, director, Resource Protection Division, Department of Environment, and Ryan Wortman, Air Force civil engineer, KAFB, gave a progress report on the KAFB jet fuel cleanup. Mr. Shean said that the cleanup of the KAFB fuel leak is one of the top priorities of the Air Force. The presentation can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/MVAC%20090623%20Item%206%20NMED%20KAFB%20BFF%20Update.pdf>.

Santa Fe Community College (SFCC) Veterans Legacy Grant Program (3:36 p.m.)

Steven Martinez, Ph.D., director, Veterans Legacy Grant Program, SFCC, said that the program at the SFCC is in partnership with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The goal is to commemorate New Mexico veterans through the sharing of their stories. The Veterans Legacy Grant Program at SFCC was one of 16 such programs operated by colleges and universities that applied for a grant from the VA for this year but did not receive funding. The presentation can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/MVAC%20090623%20Item%207%20SFCC%20Veterans%20Legacy%20Grant%20Program.pdf>.

Adjournment

There being no further business before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 3:45 p.m.

**TENTATIVE AGENDA
for the
FOURTH MEETING
of the
MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**October 2, 2023
New Mexico State Veterans' Home
992 South Broadway Street
Truth or Consequences**

Monday, October 2

- 9:30 a.m. **Call to Order and Introductions**
—Representative Harry Garcia, Chair
- 9:32 a.m. **Welcome**
—Kenneth Shull, Administrator, New Mexico State Veterans' Home
- 9:35 a.m. (1) **[Veterans Administration Rollbacks](#)**
—Kelly K. Fajardo
—Lawrence Baker, Jr., Lieutenant Colonel (Retired); Human Resources
Director, Sierra Vista Hospital and Clinics
- 10:15 a.m. (2) **[Mesilla Valley Community of Hope Veterans Programs](#)**
—Nicole Martinez, Executive Director, Mesilla Valley Community of Hope
- 11:00 a.m. (3) **[Veterans' Services Department Update](#)**
—Jamison Herrera, Acting Secretary, Veterans' Services Department
- 12:00 noon **Working Lunch**
(4) **[New Mexico State Veterans' Home](#)**
—Patrick Allen, Secretary, Department of Health
- 1:30 p.m. (5) **[New Mexico State University \(NMSU\) Military and Veterans Programs](#)**
—Hector Sanchez, Director, Military and Veterans Programs, NMSU
- 2:15 p.m. **Committee Tour — New Mexico State Veterans' Home**
- 4:00 p.m. **Adjourn**

**MINUTES
of the
FOURTH MEETING
of the
MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**October 2, 2023
New Mexico State Veterans' Home
992 South Broadway Street
Truth or Consequences**

The fourth meeting of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee was called to order by Representative Harry Garcia, chair, on October 2, 2023 at 9:44 a.m. at the New Mexico State Veterans' Home in Truth or Consequences.

Present

Rep. Harry Garcia, Chair
Sen. Harold Pope, Vice Chair
Rep. Eliseo Lee Alcon
Sen. Shannon D. Pinto
Rep. Luis M. Terrazas

Absent

Rep. Art De La Cruz
Sen. Brenda G. McKenna
Sen. Joshua A. Sanchez

Advisory Members

Rep. John Block
Sen. Michael Padilla
Rep. Debra M. Sariñana
Rep. Harlan Vincent

Sen. Craig W. Brandt
Sen. William F. Burt
Rep. Meredith A. Dixon
Rep. D. Wonda Johnson
Rep. Stefani Lord
Rep. Alan T. Martinez
Rep. Andrea Reeb

Guest Legislators

Rep. Susan K. Herrera
Sen. Linda M. Lopez

Staff

Jeret Fleetwood, Project Coordinator, Legislative Council Service (LCS)
Nancy Martinez, Bill Drafter, LCS

Guests

The guest list is in the meeting file.

Handouts

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Monday, October 2

Welcome and Introductions (9:44 a.m.)

Representative Garcia welcomed everyone to the meeting. Members of the committee, staff and audience introduced themselves.

Welcome (9:53 a.m.)

Kenneth Shull, administrator, New Mexico State Veterans' Home, gave welcoming remarks and an overview of the facility's construction progress and highlighted key issues that the facility is facing.

Veterans Administration Rollbacks (10:20 a.m.)

Kelly K. Fajardo, former state representative, District 7, introduced Lieutenant Colonel Lawrence Baker, Jr., human resources director, Sierra Vista Hospital and Clinics. Ms. Fajardo said that there has been a move by the United States Veterans Administration to roll back reimbursement rates for veterans transported via ambulance or other special modes of transportation. Veterans who use these services would have to pay much of the cost of such transportation out of pocket. Lieutenant Colonel Baker gave an overview of the facility and services of the Sierra Vista Hospital and Clinics. The presentation can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/MVAC%20100223%20Item%201%20Veterans%20Administration%20Rollbacks.pdf>.

Motion to Send a Letter (10:54 a.m.)

On a motion duly made and seconded, and without any objections, the committee voted to send a letter to United States Senators Ben Ray Luján and Martin Heinrich to request that the United States Department of Veterans Affairs rescind its proposed rule to change reimbursement rates in its travel reimbursement program.

Mesilla Valley Community of Hope Veterans Programs (10:55 a.m.)

Katherine McClure, veteran services coordinator, Mesilla Valley Community of Hope, said that the Mesilla Valley Community of Hope's veterans programs offer housing assistance with the collaboration of the Mesilla Valley Public Housing Authority. She said that the biggest challenge that the programs are currently facing is affordable housing. The presentation can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/MVAC%20100223%20Item%202%20MesillaValleyCommunityofHopeVeteransPrograms.pdf>.

Veterans' Services Department (VSD) Update (11:15 a.m.)

Jamison Herrera, acting secretary, VSD, and commissioned officer, New Mexico National Guard, provided updates on the VSD and said that there are 18 counties in the state in which transportation services are not available for veterans. He also said that ground has been broken for the Angel Fire Memorial and that groundskeeping maintenance has been performed at the Historic Fairview Cemetery in Bernalillo County. The presentation can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/MVAC%20100223%20Item%203%20VSD%20Update.pdf>.

Motion to Send a Letter (11:52 a.m.)

On a motion made and duly seconded, with one objection, the committee voted to send a letter to the United States Senate about the delay in confirmation of military promotions.

Veterans Advisory Council (11:59 a.m.)

Sam Trujillo, chair, Veterans Advisory Council, said that the goal of the Veterans Advisory Council is to help veterans by reviewing existing policies and consulting with the veteran community to ensure that veterans and their families receive the resources that they are owed.

New Mexico State Veterans' Home (12:56 p.m.)

Patrick Allen, secretary, Department of Health, gave welcoming remarks and said that the pandemic took a toll on the facility. He said challenges the facility faces include a shortage of staff and the cost of contract staff.

Committee Tour — New Mexico State Veterans' Home (1:00 p.m.)

Committee members and staff took a tour of the new facility for the New Mexico State Veterans' Home.

New Mexico State University (NMSU) Military and Veterans Programs (1:45 p.m.)

Hector Sanchez, director, Military and Veterans Programs, NMSU, said that in 2010, the NMSU Military and Veterans Programming Office was created. The main mission of the office is to provide guidance to veterans from admissions to graduation and employment. The office provides resources that include a computer lab and homework area, priority registration for all military and veteran students and commencement cords in honor of military service and academic accomplishments. The presentation can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/MVAC%20100223%20Item%205%20NMSU%20Military%20and%20Veterans%20Programs.pdf>.

Adjournment

There being no further business before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 2:49 p.m.

Revised: November 2, 2023

**TENTATIVE AGENDA
for the
FIFTH MEETING
of the
MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**November 6, 2023
State Capitol, Room 322
Santa Fe**

Monday, November 6

- 10:00 a.m. **Call to Order and Introductions**
 —Representative Harry Garcia, Chair
- 10:15 a.m. (1) **Veterans' Services Department — Forgotten Heroes Funeral**
 —Edward Mendez, Director, Benefits and Services, Veterans' Services
 Department
- 10:20 a.m. (2) **Healing America's Heroes**
 —Eddie Crain, Founder, Healing America's Heroes
- 11:00 a.m. (3) **Santa Fe Community College New Mexico Veterans Legacy Program**
 —Steve Martinez, Ph.D., Director, Veterans Legacy Grant Program, Santa
 Fe Community College
- 12:00 noon **Lunch**
- 1:30 p.m. (4) **New Mexico National Guard**
 —Brigadier General Miguel Aguilar, Adjutant General, New Mexico
 National Guard
- 2:30 p.m. (5) **Federal Honoring our PACT Act of 2022 Update**
 —Larry Campos, Congressional Liaison, New Mexico VA Health Care
 System
- 3:15 p.m. (6) **Consideration of Legislation for Endorsement**
- 4:00 p.m. **Adjourn**

**MINUTES
of the
FIFTH MEETING
of the
MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**November 6, 2023
State Capitol, Room 322
Santa Fe**

The fifth and final meeting of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee was called to order by Representative Harry Garcia, chair, on November 6, 2023 at 10:12 a.m. in Room 322 of the State Capitol in Santa Fe.

Present

Rep. Harry Garcia, Chair
Sen. Harold Pope, Vice Chair
Rep. Eliseo Lee Alcon
Rep. Art De La Cruz
Sen. Shannon D. Pinto
Rep. Luis M. Terrazas

Absent

Sen. Brenda G. McKenna
Sen. Joshua A. Sanchez

Advisory Members

Sen. Craig W. Brandt
Rep. Stefani Lord
Rep. Alan T. Martinez
Sen. Michael Padilla
Rep. Andrea Reeb
Rep. Harlan Vincent

Rep. John Block
Sen. William F. Burt
Rep. Meredith A. Dixon
Rep. D. Wonda Johnson
Rep. Debra M. Sariñana

Guest Legislator

Sen. Nancy Rodriguez

Staff

Jeret Fleetwood, Project Coordinator, Legislative Council Service (LCS)
Nancy Martinez, Bill Drafter, LCS
Yessica Marquina, Intern, LCS

Minutes Approval

Because the committee will not meet again this year, the minutes for this meeting have not been officially approved by the committee.

Guests

The guest list is in the meeting file.

Handouts

Handouts and other written testimony are in the meeting file and posted on the legislature's website.

References to Webcast

The time reference noted next to each agenda item in this document is cross-referenced to the webcast of the committee meeting, which can be found at www.nmlegis.gov, under the "Webcast" tab. The presentations made and committee discussions for the agenda items can be found on the recorded webcast for this meeting.

Monday, November 6

Welcome and Introductions (10:12 a.m.)

Representative Garcia welcomed members of the committee and audience. Members of the committee and staff introduced themselves.

Veterans' Services Department (VSD) — Forgotten Heroes Funeral (10:18 a.m.)

Edward Mendez, director, Benefits and Services, VSD, introduced Michael Valencia, VSD. Mr. Mendez said that the Forgotten Heroes Funeral program was started 13 years ago in Bernalillo County. Mr. Mendez presented a flag and flag box to Senator Pope in recognition of his participation in this year's ceremony on behalf of the VSD; Jamison Herrera, acting secretary for Veterans' Services; and the veterans of New Mexico.

Healing America's Heroes (10:38 a.m.)

Eddie Crain, founder, Healing America's Heroes, and Bob Wooley, former state representative, District 66, said that Healing America's Heroes was founded in 2014 in response to the large number of suicides of military members returning from combat. Healing America's Heroes helps veterans, first responders and their families to successfully reintegrate into society by providing calming adventure and recreational experiences. The presentation can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/MVAC%20110623%20Item%202%20Healing%20America's%20Heroes.pdf>.

Santa Fe Community College (SFCC) New Mexico Veterans Legacy Program (11:19 a.m.)

Steve Martinez, Ph.D., director, Veterans Legacy Grant Program, SFCC, said that the Veterans Legacy Grant Program, in partnership with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, commemorates New Mexico veterans through the sharing of their stories. The presentation can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/MVAC%20110623%20Item%203%20SFCC%20Veterans%20Legacy%20Program.pdf>.

Approval of Minutes (11:28 a.m.)

On a motion duly made and seconded, the committee approved the minutes of the July 6, 2023, September 6, 2023 and October 2, 2023 meetings.

Letter to United States Senator Tommy Tuberville (11:29 a.m.)

Committee members discussed the letter to be sent to United States Senator Tommy Tuberville regarding military promotions that was adopted at the October 2, 2023 meeting. Committee staff members noted that members who want to sign the letter should notify the staff immediately.

New Mexico National Guard (1:35 p.m.)

Brigadier General Miguel Aguilar, adjutant general, New Mexico National Guard, provided a brief overview of the New Mexico National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Academy and the Job ChalleNGe program. In addition, General Aguilar gave an overview of the National Guard's appropriation request and a budget comparison of fiscal years 2024 and 2025. The presentation can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/MVAC%20110623%20Item%204%20National%20Guard.pdf>.

Federal Honoring our PACT Act of 2022 Update (2:53 p.m.)

Larry Campos, congressional liaison, New Mexico VA Health Care System, said that the federal Honoring our PACT Act, also known as the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act of 2022, was signed into law by President Joe Biden on August 10, 2022. The PACT Act is one of the largest benefits expansions in the history of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs. The law expands benefits and care to generations of veterans who have been exposed to toxic substances and their survivors. The presentation can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/MVAC%20110623%20Item%205%20Federal%20Honoring%20pur%20PACT%20Act%20of%202022%20Update.pdf>.

Public Comment (3:38 p.m.)

A list of individuals making public comment is available in the meeting file.

Consideration of Legislation for Endorsement (3:46 p.m.)

Committee members discussed legislation for endorsement and unanimously endorsed one piece of legislation. The endorsed legislation can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/MVAC%20110623%20Item%206%20Consideration%20of%20Legislation%20for%20Endorsement%20226826.1.pdf>.

Adjournment

There being no further business before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 3:55 p.m.

ENDORSED LEGISLATION

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HOUSE BILL

56TH LEGISLATURE - STATE OF NEW MEXICO - SECOND SESSION, 2024

INTRODUCED BY

DISCUSSION DRAFT

FOR THE MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

AN ACT

MAKING AN APPROPRIATION TO THE VETERANS' SERVICES DEPARTMENT TO
CONTRACT WITH A VETERAN, POLICE AND FIRST RESPONDER
POSTTRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER THERAPY PROGRAM.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF NEW MEXICO:

SECTION 1. APPROPRIATION.--Two million dollars
(\$2,000,000) is appropriated from the general fund to the
veterans' services department for expenditure in fiscal year
2025 to contract with a veteran, police and first responder
posttraumatic stress disorder therapy program. Any unexpended
or unencumbered balance remaining at the end of fiscal year
2025 shall revert to the general fund.

.226826.1

underscoring material = new
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LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SERVICE
SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO