

**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

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, 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.