

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

**November 10, 2011  
Los Amigos Center, Senior Community Services  
Santa Rosa, NM**

The fifth meeting of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee (MVAC) for the 2011 interim was called to order by Representative Thomas A. Garcia, co-chair, on Thursday, November 10, at 9:12 a.m. at the Los Amigos Center, Senior Community Services in Santa Rosa.

**Present**

Rep. Thomas A. Garcia, Co-Chair  
Sen. David Ulibarri, Co-Chair  
Rep. Eliseo Lee Alcon  
Rep. Dianne Miller Hamilton  
Sen. Richard C. Martinez  
Sen. John Pinto

**Absent**

Rep. Bob Wooley

**Advisory Members**

Rep. Thomas A. Anderson  
Rep. George Dodge, Jr.  
Rep. Rodolpho "Rudy" S. Martinez  
Rep. Edward C. Sandoval

Sen. William F. Burt  
Sen. Carlos R. Cisneros  
Sen. Eric G. Griego  
Sen. Mary Jane M. Garcia  
Sen. Clinton D. Harden, Jr.  
Sen. Timothy M. Keller  
Sen. William H. Payne

**Staff**

Pam Stokes, Legislative Council Service (LCS)  
Douglas Carver, LCS  
Rebecca Griego, LCS

**Guest Legislator**

Rep. Richard D. Vigil

**Guests**

The complete guest list is in the meeting file.

**Handouts**

Copies of all handouts and written testimony are in the meeting file.

**Thursday, November 10**

**Welcome and Introduction**

Senator Ulibarri opened the meeting by extending a welcome to the committee, staff and members of the public who were present. He asked all committee members and staff to introduce themselves and then invited members of the audience to introduce themselves as well. The introductions were followed by a moment of silence for Gerald Gonzales, veteran, former chief of staff for then-United States Representative Tom Udall and former Santa Fe County manager. Representative Sandoval said a few words of appreciation for Mr. Gonzales. Senator Ulibarri then turned the chair over to Representative Dodge, as the committee was meeting in his district. In the second half of the meeting, Representative Garcia served as chair, as Santa Rosa is also included in his district.

**Overview of the Current State Capabilities to Provide Long-Term Veteran Care**

Secretary Timothy L. Hale, Veterans' Services Department (VSD), and George Marnell, director, New Mexico VA Health Care System, gave the members of the committee an overview of the situation of long-term care for veterans in the state. Mr. Marnell noted that the goal of long-term care is to keep veterans as independent as possible. He stated that at the Community Living Center (CLC) there are 26 beds with an average daily census of 23 people. He discussed the CLC hospice and palliative care operations, noting the 10-bed hospice palliative care unit. He also discussed home hospice care for veterans and outpatient clinic services, including the geriatric primary care clinic and the outpatient palliative care clinic, as well as the community nursing home program. Mr. Marnell then explained caregiver respite services, which allow relief for veterans' in-home caregivers for up to 30 days a year; the home-based primary care program; and the options for purchased skilled home care, for a homemaker/home health care aide and for contract adult day health care. Mr. Marnell then explained the new program inaugurated under the federal Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010, which provides additional Veterans Administration (VA) services to seriously injured post-9/11 veterans and their family caregivers. Mr. Marnell concluded by describing the new acute geriatric psychiatry unit, a \$5.6 million design-build project that will be constructed on the sixth level of the main hospital building of the Raymond G. Murphy VA Medical Center in Albuquerque, providing 100,000 square feet of space for acute geriatric psychiatric care, including 10 additional beds and support space for acute inpatient geriatric psychiatric care capabilities.

Members of the committee asked whether the services are available for veterans statewide, regionally or out of state. Mr. Marnell replied that services are available for any eligible veteran. He also noted that all of the money for these programs comes from the federal government. Members of the committee expressed the desire that services that are currently available in Albuquerque be available in the rest of New Mexico. Secretary Hale noted the role of service officers who do outreach throughout the state with the goal of informing veterans and their families of the kinds of services that are available. Mr. Marnell noted the role of the primary care provider assigned to a veteran when he or she first gets into the VA system, who then works with a team to ensure the veteran gets the care and benefits needed. Mr. Marnell also

discussed how private insurance relates to veterans' health care and the federal Veterans' Health Care Eligibility Reform Act of 1996. Members of the committee asked for and were given further details regarding the various services that Mr. Marnell had discussed, including the veterans' care facility in Truth or Consequences. Secretary Hale and Mr. Marnell gave further information on the outreach to veterans in rural areas, noting especially the advances in telemetry that enable veterans to utilize VA health services without driving to Albuquerque.

## **Approval of Minutes**

### Motion 1

Senator Martinez made a motion, seconded by Representative Alcon, to approve the minutes of the fourth meeting of the MVAC. The motion passed, with all present voting in favor.

## **Briefing from the New Mexico State Veterans' Home**

Brad McGrath, chief facilities officer, Department of Health, and Donna Deason, assistant administrator, New Mexico State Veterans' Home (NMSVH), gave an update to the members of the committee on the NMSVH. Ms. Deason explained that the NMSVH's mission is to provide integrated services in an atmosphere that promotes the physical, social and emotional well-being of every resident. She noted that the NMSVH, located in Truth or Consequences, was established by statute and is the only fully dedicated home for veterans, their spouses and Gold Star parents. She also noted that Fort Bayard has a 40-bed veterans' unit in Silver City. She discussed the NMSVH's services, which include intermediate (nursing home) care; skilled nursing care; domiciliary care, which is similar to assisted living; and specialty care in its secured Alzheimer's unit. She detailed the available beds and the staffing, as well as other services, such as the NMSVH's accredited laboratory, options for physical therapy or aquatic therapy and its inpatient pharmacy. She noted that all services are provided under the direction of an onsite, full-time medical director, as well as a full-time pharmacist and part-time physician assistant. She then discussed the NMSVH's licensing and finances, noting the NMSVH's annual budget of approximately \$13.5 million and funding sources that include Medicaid, VA per diem and private pay. Ms. Deason explained the NMSVH's daily charges, average daily cost of care and reimbursement rates. She concluded by noting the support that the NMSVH receives from local and statewide veterans' groups, such as the Disabled American Veterans and Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the state military bases.

In answer to questions from members of the committee, Ms. Deason related the in-kind donations that the NMSVH receives. Ms. Deason also noted that the majority of patients at NMSVH are in long-term care and are past their ability to work. Those who are still of working age have a social worker to offer help. Members of the committee wondered about staffing levels at the NMSVH. Ms. Deason stated that the NMSVH is working to increase staffing levels, but, as with other entities, the NMSVH is constrained by the state budget freeze.

## **Senior Community Services, Inc.**

Daniel J. Stoddard, president, Senior Community Services, Inc. (SCS), and Suzette Lindemuth, vice president, gave a presentation to the members of the committee on the SCS facility, which hopes to be able to provide veterans' services for the state. Mr. Stoddard discussed the efforts undertaken to reestablish senior community services in the Santa Rosa community. He explained the services and capabilities available through SCS and how veterans would benefit from a location based in Santa Rosa. He noted that SCS is willing to help the state's veterans in any way, including the use office space for the VA. Members of the committee noted that there is a need for these types of services, recommended that Mr. Stoddard and Ms. Lindemuth discuss possibilities with Secretary Hale and provided suggestions for the type of groundwork that SCS would have to build. Senator Ulibarri suggested that at some point in the future the committee could hear a follow-up report on the progress that SCS is making.

### **Increasing Access to Veteran Services in Grant County**

Armando Y. Armador, Vietnam Veterans Chapter 358, gave a presentation to the committee on the needs of Vietnam veterans, as well as veterans of other wars, in Grant County and throughout New Mexico. He was joined by the following fellow members of Vietnam Veterans Chapter 358: David Pratesi, Paul Madrid, Julian Jacquez and Jose A. Ray, Jr. Mr. Armador discussed the history of his and his colleagues' service in the Vietnam War and the challenges — social as well as physical and psychological — that returning veterans faced. He informed the committee about a waiver of benefits many veterans had signed on their DD 214 discharge form. He told the committee of the formation of local Vietnam Veterans Chapter 358 and of the work the chapter has done to create the Forgotten Veterans Memorial at Bataan Memorial Park. Mr. Armador also detailed the work Chapter 358 had done to develop a federal veterans' center in Grant County and discussed the lack of services for veterans in the county. He told the members of the committee about the growth of new chapters and noted that after the formation of these new chapters in the mid-2000s, and on the strength of their advocacy, New Mexico rose from being thirty-sixth in the nation in awarding disability benefits to being first. Mr. Armador also discussed the unsuccessful efforts by local advocates to move the Silver City outpatient VA clinic to the Fort Bayard complex, as well as recent advocacy for a women veterans' posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and counseling facility at Fort Bayard. Mr. Armador concluded by stressing to the members of the committee that are were unmet needs for the local veteran population. He also had a series of recommendations for the committee involving studies of the unmet needs in services for Grant County veterans.

At the invitation of Representative Garcia, Kathryn Brown, chair, Operation Fort Bayard Task Force, discussed the work of the task force to use Fort Bayard for veterans' services, with a focus on a restorative healing center for veterans suffering from PTSD, a women's therapeutic treatment center, homes for homeless veterans, assisted living, long-term care, a vocational rehabilitation center and a Veterans Green Corps. Ms. Brown stated that a feasibility study had been conducted recently regarding the use of Fort Bayard for veterans' services; however, she did not have a copy of the study to share with the committee. Members of the committee expressed the desire that a facility similar to the one they had visited in Angel Fire be placed in the southern part of the state.

Members of the committee engaged in an extensive discussion with Mr. Armador and his colleagues from Chapter 358 regarding the DD 214 waivers. Mr. Armador said that some outreach had been conducted with the state congressional delegation, but that the interest from the members of the committee is the most substantial engagement obtained to date. Secretary Hale stated that he had sent a letter to the VA inquiring about the issue.

#### Motion 2

Representative Hamilton made a motion, seconded by Representative Alcon, to draft a letter to the members of New Mexico's congressional delegation, asking them to investigate the issues surrounding the DD 214 waiver. The motion passed, with all present voting in favor.

There was further discussion regarding the possibility of funding for a treatment facility at Fort Bayard. Secretary Hale noted that, in the present budget situation, it is unlikely that any money would be forthcoming, but a path could be prepared for a time when such money may become available.

#### Motion 3

Representative Hamilton made a motion, seconded by Senator Ulibarri, to draft a letter to the VA, asking it to investigate the possibility of funding a veterans' wellness center at the Fort Bayard complex. The motion passed, with all present voting in favor.

In addition, Representative Garcia noted that, as there was sufficient interest expressed by the members of the committee, staff should prepare the draft of a bill, for the committee's consideration, calling for funding of a wellness center, along the lines of the bill that was passed for the wellness center in Angel Fire.

#### **Status of Current State Capabilities to Provide Treatment to Veterans for PTSD**

Harrison Kinney, executive manager, Behavioral Health Services Division (BHSD), Human Services Department; Christopher Burmeister, administrator, Presbyterian Medical Services (PMS), Rio Rancho Family Health Center; and Adrian Apodaca, Access To Recovery (ATR) project director, BHSD, gave a presentation updating the members of the committee on the state capabilities to treat PTSD in veterans, focusing on the work of the Interagency Behavioral Health Purchasing Collaborative (IBHPC). Mr. Kinney discussed the importance of addressing PTSD and stated that the IBHPC foresees a coming health care crisis because of the growing number of veterans from recent conflicts reentering civilian life and the tightening of budgets, both on state and national levels. The collaborative's major initiatives are: 1) coordination of state initiatives to treat PTSD; 2) a pilot program in conjunction with PMS to develop best practices to support veterans and their families; 3) training 1,200 behavioral providers in PTSD treatment; 4) implementing a statewide strategy to promote specialty courts to divert veterans with PTSD from jail into treatment; and 5) initiatives to tailor services to Native American veterans. Mr. Burmeister gave an overview of New Mexico veteran and family support services (VFSS), which started in 2007, detailed the contacts that VFSS has with veterans and discussed the planned statewide expansion of VFSS pilot outcomes. Mr. Apodaca discussed the ATR voucher program.

Mr. Kinney gave members of the committee some background on the statewide expansion of veterans specialty courts, noting that the newest of these courts, within the Second Judicial District, held its first session on November 9, 2011. He then provided the members of the committee with more details on the training of civilian behavioral health and primary care providers through the serving our veterans behavioral health certificate program; the planned development of a trauma-informed fidelity tool, adaptable to a wide range of public service environments; a program to certify veterans who experience PTSD as peer specialists to help in the treatment of fellow veterans; and the training of first responders and members of the military and other initiatives to train public behavioral health providers. Mr. Kinney noted that the next steps include the following: 1) identification of best practice services and their integration into a system of care; 2) development of pay-for-performance practices that lead to best outcomes for the amount of available funding; 3) increasing of service capacity and access to meet anticipated need; 4) development of data systems to track indicators for service need, service capacity and performance outcomes; and 5) increasing linkage, coordination and integration with veteran/PTSD stakeholders to accomplish these tasks.

### **Virtual Reality Therapy for PTSD**

Mark D. Wiederhold, M.D., president, Virtual Reality Medical Center (VRMC), gave a presentation concerning a new technique he and his colleagues have developed that uses virtual reality to treat PTSD. Dr. Wiederhold noted that the system provides a continuum of care pre-deployment, in the combat theater and post-deployment. He noted that the VRMC systems have been deployed in various locations in the United States as well as in Iraq, Afghanistan, Poland and Croatia. The pilot study that the VRMC conducted showed an overall 80% success rate of significant reduction in PTSD, with 100% reduction in anxiety and depression, thereby allowing those completing treatment to return to active duty or civilian employment. There were higher success rates for civilian patients treated in VRMC clinics. He noted that there are believed to be 400,000 soldiers in need of PTSD treatment, and while the short-term cost of the VRMC system is similar to usual treatments, the success rates and relapse rates are far better than traditional practices. Dr. Wiederhold showed some sample videos demonstrating the virtual reality environment in which patients are ensconced. He then discussed the idea of a pilot program for a VRMC PTSD mobile system in New Mexico and its potential application as a form of telemedicine, outlining costs, staffing needs and necessary physical infrastructure.

### **Other Business**

#### Motion 4

Senator Ulibarri made a motion, seconded by Representative Alcon, to draft a letter to Secretary Hale making a formal request that his department consider the viability of using the SCS complex for the state's veterans. The motion passed, with all present voting in favor.

### **Public Comment**

Secretary Hale thanked the committee members for the work that they are doing in support of the state's veterans and noted that there are many people and organizations aside from the VSD who are dedicated to the care of veterans.

**Adjournment**

There being no other business before the committee, the committee adjourned at 3:41 p.m.