

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

**June 11, 2018
State Capitol, Room 307
Santa Fe**

The first meeting of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee (MVAC) was called to order by Representative Rodolpho "Rudy" S. Martinez, co-chair, on June 11, 2018 at 1:10 p.m. in Room 307 of the State Capitol in Santa Fe.

Present

Rep. Rodolpho "Rudy" S. Martinez,
Co-Chair
Sen. Bill Tallman, Co-Chair
Rep. Harry Garcia
Sen. Michael Padilla
Rep. Bob Wooley

Absent

Rep. David E. Adkins
Sen. Craig W. Brandt
Sen. William F. Burt

Advisory Members

Rep. George Dodge, Jr.
Sen. John Pinto
Rep. Jane E. Powdrell-Culbert
Rep. Debbie A. Rodella
Rep. Jim R. Trujillo

Rep. Eliseo Lee Alcon
Rep. Cathrynn N. Brown
Sen. Carlos R. Cisneros
Rep. Randal S. Crowder
Rep. Jim Dines
Sen. Richard C. Martinez
Sen. William H. Payne
Rep. Dennis J. Roch
Rep. Debra M. Sariñana

Staff

Jeret Fleetwood, Researcher, Legislative Council Service (LCS)
Peter Kovnat, Staff Attorney, LCS

Guests

The guest list is in the meeting file.

Handouts

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

Monday, June 11

Committee members and staff introduced themselves.

2018 Session Legislation

Mr. Fleetwood noted that four pieces of legislation were endorsed by the committee in the last interim, and all were chaptered in law. House Bill (HB) 47 changed the eligibility requirements for New Mexico National Guard members to receive assistance from income tax refund contributions. HB 67 created the misdemeanor crime of misrepresentation of military service. Senate Bill (SB) 16 changed some ranks and consolidated some duties of the Department of Military Affairs. SB 97 expedited teacher licensure for veterans and spouses of military service members who are licensed to teach in another jurisdiction.

Veterans' Services Department (VSD) Overview

Brigadier General Jack R. Fox, secretary, VSD, thanked the committee for the opportunity to speak and proceeded to introduce the department's staff. Secretary Fox next discussed the outreach by field service officers and said that the VSD is committed to providing assistance and information to all those who served, and to their families, in the state.

Mitchell Lawrence, manager, Healthcare Coordination Program, VSD, updated the committee on the New Mexico State Veterans' Home in Truth or Consequences. The home has a 59-bed memory care unit and is now staffed sufficiently to open. It was of paramount importance to the VSD to reach a threshold number of beds in the unit — a minimum of 21 — to qualify for an accreditation survey by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs. The United States Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services assessed the facility and cited nine findings. In response, the VSD has established a plan to correct those findings.

Edward Mendez, director, Cemetery Program, Rural Veteran Coordination Program, VSD, said that after many years of service, Tom Wagner has retired and has left the program in good hands. Mr. Mendez said that the cemetery in Fort Stanton is fully operational and includes the Merchant Marine Cemetery. The Gallup State Veterans Cemetery is ahead of schedule, and the veterans cemetery in Angel Fire has a finish date in 2020.

Amanda Somerville, director, Women Veterans Program, is new to the team and is a certified veterans' services officer. She comes to the job with a depth and breadth of experience and knowledge and has big plans for outreach efforts to female veterans in New Mexico.

Alan Martinez, deputy secretary, VSD, discussed the department's proposed legislative agenda. The VSD would like the legislature to allow surviving spouses of military members to be eligible to get the military and armed forces veteran vehicle special registration plates available under Section 66-3-419 NMSA 1978. Additional statutory changes being sought by the department include escort protection for veterans' funerals, a state tax break on military retirement earnings and several amendments to the Veterans' Services Department Act.

Secretary Fox and the VSD staff thanked the committee and stood for questions.

In response to a question about the findings at the New Mexico State Veterans' Home, Mr. Lawrence said they were primarily documentation errors. In one case, there was an individual who was refusing care and hydration, but that was not documented as a refusal of care, so it appeared in the paperwork to be failed care. There was also a case regarding a hand-washing directive.

A legislator said that if the New Mexico State Veterans' Home needs to fill job vacancies, there is a job fair on July 19 that typically has tens of thousands of participants. Another committee member asked if the state has considered outsourcing the home to a private contractor. Secretary Fox said that a few states do that, but as of yet, New Mexico has not. He said he would look into it, but it is likely to be more expensive.

A legislator suggested that Ms. Somerville look into partnering with hospitals to provide targeted help for female veterans.

When asked about the different levels of outreach in various areas of the state, Secretary Fox said the VSD is constantly assessing where needs exist, and the department is doing its best to meet those needs.

A legislator was asked about the progress of the Fisher House in Albuquerque and was told that there is no longer a delay on the state side; it is up now to the Fisher House Foundation.

2018 Work Plan, Meeting Schedule and Locations

Suggested additions to the work plan included hearing presentations from veterans' service centers at colleges and universities and a presentation on the Desert Forge Foundation Warrior Farming Project.

Upon a motion properly made and seconded, and without opposition, the committee endorsed the work plan and meeting schedule and locations, as amended.

Adjournment

There being no further business before the committee, the MVAC adjourned at 3:57 p.m.