

## MINUTES

**Meeting of the  
Missouri Veterans Commission  
Veterans Innovation Task Force  
April 18, 2019 — 10:00 AM  
St. Louis Veterans Homes  
10600 Lewis & Clark Boulevard  
St. Louis, MO**

- I. Welcome – Grace Link, Director of the Missouri Veterans Commission, along with Tim Noonan, Chair of the Missouri Veterans Commission, welcomed those Task Force members in attendance.

II. Introductions

Those Task Force members in attendance provided a brief self-introduction.

Task Force members present:

Scotty Allen, Ron Adzell, Steven Beem, Shawn Burnette, Kim Chamberlain, Shams Chughtai, Lowry Finley Jackson, Elaine Gerstenberger, Jennifer Henderson, Jacki Kelley, James Klahr, Jason Klaus, Mike LeBlanc, Grace Link, Tim Noonan, Jim Nugent, Sarah Parsons, Angela Peacock, KC Rafferty, Rusty Ratliff, Jon Sabala, Mike Smith, Adrienne Spadavecchia, Jeff Stewart, Melissa Wilding, Nancy Yohe

Task Force members absent: Elliott Barrowclough, Spencer Bartlett, Todd Cowan, Joe Driskoll, Michael Elmore, Sarah Froese, Karen Gettinger, Betty Gonazales, Adam Gresham, John Hathcock, Jeff Huffman, Terry Jarrett, Tim Woods

In addition, the following attended the meeting to observe: Daniel Bell, Robert Crecelius, Brad Haggard, Jamie Melchert, Roystan Pais, Joshua Perschbacher, David Spadavecchia, Tracy Turner, Charlie Washington,

- III. Adoption of January 25, 2019 Meeting Minutes  
Member Ross made a motion to approve the VITF meeting minutes from January 25, 2019, Member Link seconded the motion. By a voice vote, the motion passed.
- IV. Adoption of VITF Mission Statement  
Member Henderson made a motion to approve the VITF Mission Statement. Member Nugent seconded the motion. BY a voice vote, the motion passed.

*The adopted Mission Statement reads – Through a thorough, fact-based, transparent and inclusive approach, the Veterans Innovation Task Force (VITF) will assess services provided to current and future generations of Missouri Service Members, Veterans and their Families. The VITF will make recommendations to the Governor and the Commission for new and innovative ways to make Missouri the best state in the Nation for Veterans.*

## V. VITF Work Group Reports

Each of the eight Working Groups presented an update of their work to this point:

### A. Improve Access to Veteran Benefits

Scotty Allen, Assistant Attorney General and Chair of this Task Force, provided an update of current recommendations:

- Have a State Contact Person be point of contact on these issues
- Communication with veterans about their benefits. Scotty indicated he has gathered information from University of Central Missouri and Missouri Veterans Commission to develop a comprehensive Power Point presentation covering veteran benefits
- Redesign of Missouri Veterans Commission webpage so there is one icon veterans could use to learn more about benefits
- Agencies should share printed material
- Better communication into rural Missouri – mailers, television, interviews
- Strategic placement of Missouri Veterans Commission - Missouri Benefits and Resource Guides (example – post offices and other public places)
- Create a “real time chat portal” to increase veteran accessibility to resources
- Better publicize information about alternate address options for homeless veterans
- Transportation for homeless veterans
- Develop and publicize how to begin VA eligibility process
- Training programs for Veteran Service Officers, including how to follow-up with veterans after initial contact
- Revision of property tax exemption for veterans

Chairman Noonan thanked Scotty Allen for his summary and encouraged his working group and all working groups to identify what is the “pain” (i.e. what are we trying to address) and what is the “painkiller” (i.e. what will remedy the problem). Once we have identified those two things, how will we measure the impact of the painkiller in addressing the problem? The goal should be to get the highest level impact by identifying those things we can do with the easiest effort.

### B. Improve Employment Opportunities for Veterans

Shams Chughtai, Missouri Division of Workforce Development and Chair, provided an update:

The veteran unemployment rate was 2.7% in February and 2.9% in March.

Scotty Allen shared that Joe Driskill, of the Office of the Missouri Military Advocate, updated Task Force members by telling them the Governor is now sending a letter to all service members detailing those services to veterans available in Missouri. He said 800 letters have gone out so far and the feedback has been positive. There have been 30 contacts in response to the letter and four

of those veterans were referred to a Veteran Service Officer or the Missouri Veterans Commission mobile app. to help them locate the Officer nearest them.

The biggest challenge is that employers are looking for veterans right now but that employment resources in Missouri are decentralized. The goal is to find legitimate career paths for veterans. There was follow-up discussion about making sure disabled veterans are part of this planning and available housing near employment as an important factor. There was also a comment that the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) should be more linked into higher education.

Finally, Task Force members discussed entrepreneurship and how Department of Defense can set up service members for success in this area. An example is for a service member to have an internship in corporate America. Shams Chughtai said that Ft. Leonard Wood is already engaged in this type of program. The commanding officer has to release the service member from the unit to pursue the internship.

#### C. Increase Access to Education and Job Skills Training for Veterans

It was reported that many service members transition from military to school.

Items covered included:

- Schools consolidating services
- Campuses becoming more military friendly
- Gap funding for higher education
- Job skills training – how to make sure that happens throughout the education process

#### D. Decrease Veteran Homelessness

Sarah Parsons of the Missouri Housing Development Commission provided an update:

- Working group discussing the type of data we need to capture on homelessness
- What type of housing do we need to have to address this issue

There was group discussion: There are around 80 homeless veterans in the St. Louis area at any given time. Missouri Veterans Commission will need a full time person to coordinate this issue. While Missouri has a Governor's Committee to End Homelessness, some states have established specific Councils on Veterans' Homelessness.

Mike LeBlanc of the American Legion said that Kansas City has developed 16 small houses in an effort to address homelessness there.

There was also discussion about the idea of women veterans being able to access childcare, such as local churches, to assist them when they search for employment.

E. Increase Access to Behavioral Health and Decrease Veteran Suicide

Jon Sabala, Department of Mental Health and Chair, briefed the Task Force:

Jon indicated there is a lack of professionals in behavioral health. In addition, Missouri's suicide rate is higher than the national average. Ideas to address this issue:

- There is a Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program (Herra Loan Repayment Program) to encourage those to enter certain fields for the public benefit
- Need to identify the disincentives to provide mental health services
- There are no real barriers for credentialing across the State of Missouri
- Florida has a 211 Program – question is how to sustain veteran coordination in that type of system
- Need to get more people trained (for example Veteran Service Officers, law enforcement) on mental health issues

There was discussion about Crisis Intervention Training. The Peace Officers Standards and Training Commission (POST) no longer requires mandatory training. Adrienne Spadavecchia, Missouri National Guard, said the required hours of training have decreased from fifteen hours to four hours.

Jennifer Henderson, Missouri Veterans Commission, said there is a huge barrier between veterans and mental health services. Jim Nugent, Missouri Veterans Commission, said the initial training for Veteran Service Officers includes training on how to listen to the veteran to identify certain mental health issues.

Team Fidelis in Kansas City is a program that engages the veteran at emergency rooms (if the veteran has attempted suicide) and continues to engage them going forward.

F. Enhance Service Member Readiness for Transition into Civilian Life

Steven Beem, Ft. Leonard Wood Transition Assistance Program and Chair of the Working Group, briefed the Task Force:

- Want to increase Veteran Service Officer outreach into Ft. Leonard Wood and Whiteman to reach more service members
- Distribution of materials to service members, including Veteran Service Guides
- Property Tax Exemption – Missouri has 93,000 veterans who have a service connected disability. Texas has graduated tax benefits based on the % of disability

G. Increase Community Coordination Supporting Veterans

Adrienne Spadavecchia, Missouri National Guard and Chair of the Working Group, briefed the Task Force:

- Should be one great agency website for community coordination

- Recognition of cities for veterans – could break that down by large, medium and small cities
- Ranking employers – proactive in hiring of veterans and number of professional jobs for veterans
- Ranking educational institutions – which are most veteran friendly?
- Businesses – which businesses offer veteran discounts?

Chairman Noonan said there might be other tools worth reviewing and adopting. He discussed the idea of public-private partnerships. Jim Nugent said that Adair County (Kirksville) has an Advisory Group. The Joplin Chamber of Commerce has developed “Welcome Home to Joplin” which is a website to attract veterans to consider locating to Joplin.

H. Enhance Coordination of Services for Veterans in the Justice System

Jacki Kelley, Missouri Department of Corrections, Division of Probation & Parole and Chair of the Working Group, briefed the Task Force:

2,500 veterans are currently supervised by Probation & Parole. 347 of those veterans supervised in Jackson County (Kansas City). Jacki said the Working Group has organized itself into four subgroups:

- Identification of veterans as they enter the criminal justice system
  - Peer support and mentors for veterans in the system
  - Statewide standardized training for Crisis Intervention
  - Treatment court review. Missouri has 13 treatment courts. What are the best practices?
- One initiative is to connect Veteran Service Officers to every Probation & Parole office.

VI. Preparation for July 10, 2019 meeting – VITF Work Groups initial recommendations, format and discussion

Melissa Wilding shared the proposed format for Working Groups to use when they present their recommendations at the next Task Force meeting.

VII. Next meeting – Wednesday, July 10, 2019

The next meeting of the VITF is scheduled for July 10, 2019 11:00 am – 2:00 pm at the Gamma Healthcare Conference Center, 727 Ridge Avenue, Poplar Bluff, MO followed by a graduation ceremony of the Veterans Treatment Court. The Task Force meeting was adjourned at 1:00 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Grace Link, Executive Director  
Missouri Veterans Commission