



Virtual Meeting

MINUTES¹

Thursday, 06 August 2020

ATTENDANCE:

Members Present: Mr. J. Greg Jolissaint, Mr. Jonathan K. Branch, Mr. Reginald Avery, Mr. Michael Blum, Mr. Steven M. Bolen, Ms. Nafrettifi Griffin, Ms. Kelly Kesler, Mr. Robert Lowell, Mr. Keith McGuire, and Mr. Paul Rivers.

Members Absent: Mr. Michael Griggs.

Howard County Government Officials in Attendance: Dr. Calvin Ball (Howard County Executive), Ms. Jennifer Jones (Deputy Chief of Staff to the Howard County Executive), Ms. Jackie Scott (Director, Howard County Department of Community Resources and Services), and Ms. Lisa Terry (Manager, Howard County Office of Veterans and Military Families [HCOVMF]).

Special Guest(s): Dr. Calvin Ball (Howard County Executive).

Others in Attendance: Ms. Wanda Riddle (former Commissioner, HCCVMF), Mr. Robert Gillette (former Commissioner, HCCVMF/Howard County Veterans Foundation), Ms. Linda R. Bergofsky (Coordinator, Fredrick County Veterans Advisory Council), Mr. Eduardo Rosas (Commissioner, Maryland Veterans Commission), Mr. John Way (CEO, The VA Way), Mr. Tom Glenn (A.L. Post 156), and Mr. Yale Stenzler.

MEETING SUMMARY:

1. MEETING OPEN

- a. 1900 hours; Mr. J. Greg Jolissaint, Chair, Howard County Commission on Veterans and Military Families (HCCVMF), presiding, opened the meeting by leading the attendees in the Pledge of Allegiance

Mr. Jolissaint noted, "We are all proud of the flags of the military branches we served under, but at the end of the day, the Stars and Stripes is the flag that we all fought under when we deployed."



2. Establishment of Quorum and Recognition of Special Guests

- a. The Roll was taken²: Ten Commission members being in attendance, Mr. Jolissaint declared the Commission was in quorum and brought the meeting to order.
- b. Mr. Jolissaint recognized the attendance of key Commission personnel and special guests: Dr. Calvin Ball, Howard County Executive, Ms. Jennifer Jones, Deputy Chief of Staff to the Howard County Executive, Ms. Lisa Terry, Manager, HCOVMF, Ms. Wanda Riddle, former Co-Chair, HCCVMF, Ms. Jackie Scott, Director, Howard County Department of Community Resources and Services, Mr. Bob Gillette, Howard County Veterans Foundation, Mr. John Way, CEO, The VA Way, Mr. Eduardo Rosas, Commissioner, Maryland Veterans Commission, and Ms. Linda R. Bergofsky, Coordinator, Fredrick County Veterans Advisory Council.

3. Consideration of the June 2020 Meeting Minutes

- a. Mr. Jolissaint entered the 04 JUNE 2020 Commission minutes onto the table and opened the table for discussion. Hearing none, he asked for motions to approve the minutes. A motion and second to the motion were made. Mr. Jolissaint called for a vote, and the minutes were unanimously approved by voice vote.

4. Presentation by Invited Guests

- a. Dr. Calvin Ball, Howard County Executive: Dr. Ball thanked the Commission for their service to our country and our county. He expressed his appreciation to all of the county offices that support the Commission, and he called out Ms. Terry, in particular, for her hard work and dedication to the Commission and veterans in our community.

Dr. Ball extended his condolences to Commissioner Avery and his family for the loss of his father.

Dr. Ball noted that the county, state, and, indeed, the world is going through a difficult time due to the COVID-19 pandemic. He commented that we have not faced a pandemic like this in over 100 years. Because of it, we are facing fiscal challenges that have not been seen since the 1930s. At the same time, we are having a racial conversation that is permeating all other conversations the likes of which we have not seen since the 1960s. And Howard County is engaged at the intersection of all those conversations.



He noted that having heroes, real American heroes, like members of the Commission and others in attendance who served, show us hope and light and remind us of our values, which is extremely important right now.

Dr. Ball reaffirmed his commitment to veterans, their families, and others in our community who are struggling during the pandemic.

Dr. Ball reminded us that while we are trying to be strong for our families that it is OK to ask for help and support for ourselves.

Dr. Ball asked the Commission for help to reach out to veterans to remind them about the various community resources available to them during these tough times.

Mr. Blum and Mr. Lowell thanked Dr. Ball for speaking to the Commission and giving us an uplifting and inspirational speech.

Mr. Jolissaint thanked Dr. Ball on behalf of the Commission for speaking to us. Mr. Jolissaint noted that we do not consider ourselves to be heroes. We are citizens who decided to put on a uniform or decided to serve someone who wore a uniform. The real heroes are the parents, the caregivers, and the people who are sacrificing everything to keep their parents, children, and families safe during this pandemic.

Mr. Jolissaint told Dr. Ball that we are all proud that he selected us to serve on this Commission to have the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of our veterans and their families.

5. June - July Events and Old Business

- a. Subcommittee on Equity and Racial Justice: Mr. Jolissaint noted that the Commission established a subcommittee in June to investigate equity and racial justice in the Howard County veteran's community. Mr. Branch reported on the subcommittee's objectives, activities, and timeline. (Please see attachment A.)

Mr. Branch noted that there has been a lot going on in our community. Along with the pandemic, we have also seen racial unrest triggered by the death of George Floyd, which was seen internationally. He commented that, unfortunately, it took seeing a knee on a man's neck to make the nation and the world aware of the racial disparities that exist in our country and the world today. Mr. Branch stated the Subcommittee's objectives and said that it planned to hold community outreach or "sensing" sessions as part of its investigation.



Mr. Jolissaint stated that he, Mr. Branch, and Ms. Terry have been in contact with Ms. Bergofsky, Coordinator, Frederick County Veterans Advisory Council, who provided them additional material to consider as the Subcommittee holds its sensing sessions.

Ms. Bergofsky commented that the Frederick County Veterans Advisory Council discussed racial equity during their February meeting, and it was noted that other groups are investigating racial equity, too, such as the school system. She commented that in Howard County, there is a program called “Courageous Conversations” created to hold difficult conversations about racial equity in the community. She said that she would pass contact information about this program to Ms. Terry.

Ms. Scott stated that her Office participated in setting up the program and can pass contact information to the Subcommittee.

Ms. Kesler stated that the Howard County Office of Human Rights is starting a dialog series to address racial equity.

Mr. Bolen stated that the Howard County Police Department Citizens Advisory Council (CAC) has invited Maryland State Delegate Vanessa Atterbeary to the CAC’s next meeting in August to hear about her work as Chair of the Maryland House Work Group on Police Reform and Accountability. He and Mr. McGuire will attend the meeting. If police reform, equity, and racial justice pertaining to the veteran’s community is discussed, they will pass the information to the Subcommittee.

Mr. Jolissaint thanked Mr. Branch and the other Subcommittee members for stepping up to participate in this important work. He requested that the Subcommittee identify specific gaps and shortcomings and formulate recommendations that can be presented to the County for consideration.

Mr. Stenzler asked if the Subcommittee will include healthcare services during the COVID-19 pandemic as part of its racial equity investigation. Mr. Jolissaint stated that the Subcommittee is focused on the impact of racial equity on veterans in Howard County and that inequities in the broader healthcare system is outside the Subcommittee's scope at this time.

Subcommittee members: Mr. Branch (Chair), Mr. Avery, Mr. Blum, Mr. Gillette, Ms. Kesler, Mr. Lowell, Mr. Rivers, and Ms. Terry.

- b. Exploratory Committee to Investigate the Feasibility of Building a Veterans Home in Howard County: Mr. Blum stated that he planned to meet with Dr. Ball regarding this project. He commented that there is only one veteran’s home in Maryland which is located in Calvert



County. And it is almost always at capacity or near capacity. He said that a possible location for a veteran's home could be in western Howard County along the Highway 70 corridor.

Mr. Jolissaint stated he knows from his professional work there is a need for long-term care beds in the VA system. He suggested that the Committee reach out to Mr. Rosas, who can give them statistics on the need.

Dr. Ball said that he was interested in hearing more about the project.

- c. Columbia Lake Monument: Mr. Gillette stated the Millie Bailey Park has been completed but that it has not yet been formally transferred to the County.

Since March, due to the pandemic outbreak, there has been no further public feedback on the monument design. He stated that more funds are needed to complete the monument, but the Howard County Veterans Foundation Board³ decided to suspend fundraising until the pandemic emergency was lifted.

- d. Update on Veterans Support Group: Mr. Jolissaint stated that before the pandemic, Ms. Kesler, Mr. Rivers, and Ms. Terry were investigating the stand-up of a veteran's support group in Howard County. Ms. Terry stated that the team had met to discuss the possibility of establishing a support group and decided that it would need trained facilitators. So, they reached out to NAMI for support. Before the outbreak of the pandemic, NAMI was only offering in-person training, but now they are providing training online.

Mr. Rivers stated that he joined NAMI to take their online training, which will start in August. Mr. Rivers said that he also participated in training offered by Grassroots in January and February. NAMI will take the lead in facilitating the support group.

Mr. Rivers stated the team is still looking for a location to hold the support group meetings. Until then, online training is a possibility. They are asking for other volunteers to take the NAMI training. They need at least 3-4 facilitators who can meet twice per month. Contact Mr. Rivers if you want to take the training and help facilitate the support group.

Ms. Terry stated that she has been working with Kolmac, an outpatient recovery program, to see if they could offer their program free-of-charge.

Mr. Jolissaint thanked the team for their hard work to get the support group started. He reiterated their call for volunteers to work with the group.



- e. Feedback on VAMHCS Meeting: Mr. Bolen summarized the Veterans Affairs Maryland Health Care System (VAMHCS) Veterans Service Organizations (VSO) and Congressional Stakeholders (CS) meeting held on 15 July 2020.⁴ (Please see attachment B.)

Mr. Jolissaint added that the VA is handling healthcare via telemedicine links - video and phone calls.

- f. Update on Veterans Day Presentations in HoCo Schools: Mr. Jolissaint stated that the Howard County School System has decided to hold virtual instruction this Fall. So, our initiative will need to be virtual, too.

Ms. Terry stated that Mr. Moore's commission appointment had ended and that he was stepping down from the Commission. So, he will no longer be managing this effort. Mr. Jolissaint called for volunteers to lead this activity.

- g. Update on Joint Activities Calendar: Mr. Jolissaint stated that there is an intent to create a joint calendar for local VSOs to share. Ms. Terry said that there had not been any activity on this effort. Due to the pandemic, there have been no activities to place on the calendar. Mr. Jolissaint asked that the infrastructure for the calendar be completed and to determine what server the calendar will reside.

Mr. Jolissaint stated that the only activity that could happen this year is the Veterans Day Parade. He said that Mr. John Spain (A.L. Post 156) is continuing to plan for the parade.

- h. Update on MHFA Proposal to the FMA Foundation Board: Mr. Way stated that The VA Way is working to transition its eight-hour in-person class to a virtual environment. The virtual course will be about 6 ½ hours long. Two hours of the course will be offline homework. The VA Way is hoping to begin instruction with practice groups this month and eventually start classes with the Fort Meade Alliance (FMA).

Ms. Terry stated that Mr. Way submitted a proposal to the FMA to provide mental healthcare courses to its military members, their families, and youth groups.

Mr. Way stated that, unfortunately, with social isolation and the loss of employment due to the pandemic, suicide and drug addiction among veterans, is on the rise.

- i. Update on the HoCo School Level "Buddy" Program: Ms. Terry stated she was working to pilot a program at Longfellow Elementary School. Due to the pandemic, the program has been placed on hold.



6. New Business

- a. Howard County Joint Military Council (JMC) significant items: No report.
- b. Colonel Lou Schott's 100th birthday "Drive By" parade and celebration: Mr. Rivers stated that on Sunday, 09 August, American Legion Post 233, Sykesville, Maryland, will hold a car parade to celebrate USMC Colonel (retired) Lou Schott's 100th birthday. The parade will kick off at 1230 hours from A.L. Post 233 and will consist of a color guard and bagpipes. At 1300 hours, Howard County Executive, Dr. Calving Ball, will make a special presentation. For more information, please contact Mr. Rivers. All veterans and friends are welcome to attend. [HAPPY BIRTHDAY, COLONEL SCHOTT!]
- c. Commission Appointments/Resignations: Ms. Terry stated that Mr. Moore's commission appointment ended in July and that he opted not to extend his appointment. She also stated that Ms. Anthony is moving out of state and has resigned her appointment.
- d. Fort Meade Education and Resiliency Center and kiosk: Ms. Terry stated that the Fort Meade Alliance Military Family's Committee has raised nearly \$5M to renovate Kuhn Hall to turn it into an education and resiliency center which will serve as a resource hub for the Fort Meade workforce and their families. A virtual wall-breaking has taken place to start the renovation and to build a kiosk.
- e. Virtual Veterans Connections thru Office of Aging and Independence: Ms. Terry met with the Howard County Office on Aging and Independence to investigate starting a virtual veteran's connection. The County already has a program for seniors, but Ms. Terry wants to create a program that is more veteran's focused. She asked for suggestions and comments from the Commission and asked for volunteers to help with the project.

Mr. Jolissaint thought the virtual connection was a good idea and wanted to make sure that we reach out to veterans to make them aware of this program once it gets started.

- f. New business from Commission Members: None.

7. Announcements and Events of Importance

- a. August 8-15: Howard County Fair cancelled due to COVID-19 pandemic.
- b. August 13: Joint County Veterans Commission Meeting, 1300 to 1500 hours
- c. August 15: Willing Warriors, [Warrior Retreat Bull Run](#)
- d. August 18: [DAV/RecruitMilitary Veterans Virtual Job Fair](#), 1100 to 1500 hours.



- e. August 30: Leidos Virtual Chat with Transitioning Service members, Spouses and Veterans, 1300 to 1500 hours.
- f. September 1: [Recruit Military/DAV Virtual Career Fair](#), 1200 to 1600 hours.

8. Additional Items for Discussion

- a. Mr. Jolissaint stated that Ms. Anthony is moving out of state and has resigned her commission appointment. He stated that Mr. Moore has stepped down from the Commission following the expiration of his appointment in July. He asked that Mr. River's term be extended. Ms. Terry affirmed that Mr. River's term will be extended.
- b. Ms. Scott thanked the Commission for inviting her to attend the meeting and affirmed her Office's commitment to supporting the Commission. She thanked Ms. Terry for her hard work and commitment to serving Howard County veterans. Mr. Jolissaint also thanked Ms. Terry for her dedication to serving our community.
- c. Mr. Jolissaint thanked Dr. Ball for his attendance tonight and for his leadership and continued support to our veteran's community.

9. Next Commission Meeting Date(s)

- a. Mr. Jolissaint announced that the next meeting of the Howard County Commission on Veterans and Military Families will be held on Thursday, 03 September 2020, starting at 1900 hours. The meeting will be virtual.

10. ADJOURNMENT:

- b. 2019 hrs; Mr. Jolissaint closed the meeting and directed the Commission to stand in adjournment until 1900 hours on 03 September 2020.

Minutes were drafted by: Mr. Steven M. Bolen.

J. Greg Jolissaint
Chair



Notes:

- 1) The meeting was conducted virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 2) Two Commission members have vacated their appointments.
- 3) More information about the monument and the Howard County Veterans Foundation and how to donate can be found at: <https://www.howardcountyveterans.org/>.
- 4) The VAMHCS VSO & CS meeting is held on the third Wednesday of the month at the VAMHCS facility in Baltimore. (Currently, all meetings are virtual due to the ongoing pandemic.) Please contact Ms. Aimee Saylor, Business Manager, Public & Community Relations at aimee.saylor@va.gov to connect or for more information.

Attachments:

- A) Briefing: Subcommittee on Equity and Racial Justice; 06 August 2020
- B) Meeting Notes: VAMHCS VSO & CS Meeting; 15 July 2020.



ATTACHMENT A

Briefing:

Subcommittee on Equity and Racial Justice

06 August 2020

THE SUB-COMMITTEE

Jonathan Branch Chair

Mike Blum

Bob Lowell

Reg Avery

Kelly Kesler

Paul Rivers

Lisa Terry

Bob Gillette

PURPOSE STATEMENT

HOWARD COUNTY COMMISSION ON VETERANS AND MILITARY FAMILIES SUB-COMMITTEE ON RACIAL JUSTICE AND EQUALITY

PURPOSE STATEMENT

- The Howard County Commission on Veterans and Military Families Subcommittee on Racial Justice and Equality (also referred to as the “subcommittee” focused on understanding and appreciating the current situation for veterans of color residing in Howard County
- The mission of the subcommittee will be to assess whether Howard County has established an equitable culture where veterans of color are treated equally to their white counterparts

PURPOSE STATEMENT

- The subcommittee will also assess whether veterans of color, and their families are treated equally in Howard County
- The subcommittee has been assigned three questions to investigate.

THE QUESTIONS

1. Are Veterans of Color treated fairly and equitably in Howard County with respect to contract opportunities, official appointments, and/ or business opportunities.
2. Are Veterans of Color treated fairly and equitably with respect to employment, housing (ownership or rentals), and equal wages
3. Are Veterans of Color and their family members, treated in a considerate, respectful, and equitable manner by Howard County citizens, merchants, elected officials, law enforcement, etc

GOALS

- The sub-committee will make an assessment of the racial equality as it affects veterans of color in Howard County.
- The results found by the sub-committee will be presented to the commission.
- The end-point of the sub committee is not necessarily to offer solutions, but to make all of us aware of any racial disparities that may still exist in Howard County
- It is inferred that awareness of disparities will lead to sound solutions.

TIMELINE

Howard County Veterans Commission Sub-Committee on Racial Justice and Equality

22 JUL	WEBEX CALL TO REVIEW PURPOSE, TIMELINE QUESTIONS AND GOALS	Establish/ Identify County officials that we can interview with our questions
6 August	PRESENTATION OF PURPOSE, GOALS and TIMELINE to the Commission	
AUGUST	Plan WEBEX Sensing sessions among veterans regarding racial issues. Plan WEBEX interview sessions with county officials that we have identified	
SEPTEMBER sessions	Invite Veterans to the sessions. Invite Howard County officials for WebEx sensing sessions	
OCTOBER	Process information that we have learned from the sensing sessions	
NOVEMBER Commission	Finalize the information that we have received for the January presentation to the Commission	
DECEMBER	CHRISTMAS	
JANUARY	Presentation to the Commission	



ATTACHMENT B

Meeting Notes:

VAMHCS VSO & CS Meeting
15 July 2020



Veterans Service Organization (VSO) & Congressional Stakeholders (CS) Meeting

VA Maryland Health Care System (VAMHCS)
Baltimore VA Medical Center
Multipurpose Room, 3A-300
10 North Greene Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21201

(Via Virtual Meeting due to COVID-19)

15 July 2020

1100 hrs Dr. Adam M. Robison, Director VAMHCS, presiding, brought the meeting to order.

VAMHCS Updates

- 1) Dr. Robinson announced that he will be stepping down as the Director of the VAMHCS effective Friday, 17 July. He will be leading the VA Pacific Health Care System in Honolulu, Hawaii. [Farewell, Dr. Robinson. May you have fair winds and following seas.]

VAMHCS COVID-19 Update

- 3) On Monday, 06 July, the VAMHCS entered Phase 2 of its "Moving Forward Plan." In Phase 1, the VAMHCS expanded limited face-to-face services at the Baltimore and Perry Point VA Medical Centers and the Cambridge VA Outpatient Clinic. Under Phase 2, the remainder of the community-based outpatient clinics, the Baltimore VA Annex, and most other clinical areas throughout the VAMHCS have re-opened with limited face-to-face services.
- 4) The VAMHCS is continuing to encourage virtual care options (telehealth and video appointment) for specialty care, primary care, and mental health services.
- 5) The Perry Point Campus continues to be closed to the public. It is open only to VA employees, urgent care patients, outpatients with scheduled clinic appointments, residential care patients, and HELP Veterans Village residents. To make, change, or confirm an appointment, call 1.410.605.7333 Monday thru Friday, 0730 to 1630 hours.
- 6) Veterans who need medical advice can call the Telephone Care Line at 1.800.865.2441. Veterans in crisis can speak with a specially trained responder at 1.800.273.8255, press 1. Both lines are open 24/7.



- 7) As a reminder, the Emergency Department (ED) at the Baltimore VAMHCS and Urgent Care Clinic at Perry Point are open to receive veterans needing urgent health care.

VBA Update

- 16) VA facilities continue to be closed to the public but are providing teleservices to veterans. The VA Regional Office has entered Phase 1 operating status with essential personnel reporting to work. Phase 2 start will be determined later which will allow about 50% of its employees to return to work with limited face-to-face services offered to the public.
- 17) Compensation and Pension (C&P) exams resumed on 28 May. Over 102,000 veterans have been serviced nationwide to-date.
- 18) As of 07 July, the total Bluewater Navy claims pending is 34,000. So far, there has been nearly \$538 million paid out in retroactive benefits.

National Cemetery Administration (NCA) Update

- 18) Mr. Eric Solomon has been named the incoming Director of the Historical National Cemetery Complex and will start 03 August.
- 19) National cemeteries continue to be open to the public observing CDC and local community COVID-19 guidelines.
- 20) Regular services have resumed limited to 25 guests. Temporary shelters are limited to 10 guests.
- 21) A new committal shelter is expected to be opened by the end of July. A virtual dedication ceremony will take place to commemorate the opening.

Next meeting: 19 August, 1100 hours, via Virtual Meeting.

1135 hrs Dr. Adam M. Robison adjourned the meeting.

Notes taken (via dial-in) by: Mr. Steven M. Bolen.