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**Maine Veterans Coordinating Committee Meeting (MVCC)**

Subject: Minutes from the 6 November 2023 Meeting of the MVCC

From: Brenda Pennels, Secretary

Meeting was conducted virtually via Zoom from 6pm -7:15 pm. Kelley opened the meeting with the pledge of allegiance. Kevin Woodward offered a prayer. Dave Patch introduced guests from Honor Flight Maine.

**ROLL CALL:**

**Executive Board**

* **Chair** – Kelley Wynne - present
* **1st Chair -** Craig Florey - present
* **2nd Chair -** David Patch - present
* **Treasurer:**  Kevin Woodward – present
* **Secretary:** Brenda Pennels – present

**Member Organizations Present:**

* **Military Order of the Purple Heart** - 0
* **AMVETS** – Kelley Wynne
* **VFW –** Kevin Woodward, Mike Blair
* **MOAA** – Dave Patch, Brenda Pennels
* **VVA** – 0
* **DAV** – Craig Florey, Kim Sliniger
* **MCVC –**  Marty Diller, Nancy Hamlin, Paul Loveless,
* **Korean War –** 0
* **MOWW –** Alan Johnston
* **MCL -** 0

**Quorum**: There is a quorum.

**Members-At-Large Present**

* **VA Maine** – Tracye Davis,, Rob McCann, Kylie Higgins
* **VBA** – Mike Brawn, Jennifer Bover
* **MBVS –** Dave Richmond
* **MVH –** Sharon Fusco

**Congressional Staff Present**

* **Senator Collins** – Chuck Mahaleris,
* **Senator King –** Teague Morris,
* **Congresswoman Pingree -** Pam Twinward
* **Congressman Golden –** not represented

**Guests**

* Joy Asuncion – Honor Flight Maine
* Matthew Mank – Honor Flight Maine
* BG Paul Loiselle
* Brenda Blair, VFW AUX
* Eddie Grey Fox Burgess
* Crystal Guerette, Honor Flight Maine
* Dennis Brown – Veterans Forward

**Guest Speaker: Mathew Mank, Honor Flight Maine.** Matt gave an informative and very well-received presentation on the origins of Honor Flight and details of the program including the impact that the trip has on both veterans and chaperones. HFM’s major fundraising event is the telethon on News Center Maine to be held on Thursday November 16th. Slides from the presentation can be viewed at this link.

[Honor Flight Maine presentation (1).pptx](https://1drv.ms/p/s!Aji0WYAh-RblzzAJxI9NWunFhkY_?e=1WAdDf)

Kelley proposed that MVCC give a donation of $1,000 to sponsor one veteran and a guardian. Someone from HFM will submit a grant request. The grant request form indicates that a “typical” grant is $500, but it can be increased.

**Secretary’s report:** Minutes from October 2 meeting were sent out twice via email. Motion made and seconded to approve the minutes; motion carried.

**Treasurer’s report.**  Kevin provided the following information:

* Two organizations paid 2024 $50 dues: MOWW and Amvets. Total balance in checking is $6631.80.

Motion made and seconded to accept the Treasurer’s Report. Motion carried.

**Reports:**

**#1 Senator Collins – Chuck Mahelris**

* Senator Collins has recently visited Israel in a show of solidarity and support.
* Senator Collins joined President Joe Biden, First Lady Jill Biden, Governor Janet Mills, Senator Angus King, and Congresswoman Chellie Pingree in Lewiston on Friday. They visited Just-in-Time Recreation and Schemengees Bar & Grille before meeting with first responders and the families of the 18 shooting victims.
* Last Wednesday, the U.S. Senate passed three government funding bills by an overwhelming vote of 82-15. “These important bills honor our nation’s veterans; support our farmers, ranchers, and rural communities; and improve transportation infrastructure and housing opportunities throughout the United States,” said Senator Collins, who services as Vice Chair of the Appropriations Committee. (See attached)



* FFYSA – please see below guidance on grant write-ups for DCIP (Defense Community Infrastructure Pilot) Program. These grants can be submitted by any community stakeholder that meets the following criteria. Maine has had no recipients of this grant in the past. Examples of approved grants to highlight this can be employed effectively for community support, not just on DOD installations: Eligible community infrastructure projects are any complete and useable transportation project, school, hospital, police, fire, emergency response, community support facility; or water, wastewater, telecommunications, electric, gas, or other utility project that meets the following criteria:

 Supports a military installation or the training of cadets enrolled in an independent program at a covered educational institution; Is located off of a military installation or on property under the jurisdiction of a Secretary of a military department that is subject to a real estate agreement; Will enhance military value, training of cadets enrolled in an independent program at a covered educational institution, military installation resilience, or military family quality of life at the supported military installation; Is endorsed by the installation commander representing the installation benefiting from the proposed project; and, is construction-ready.

Interested parties can review the Notice of Funding for Fiscal Year 2023 (<https://www.grants.gov/web/grants/view-opportunity.html?oppId=346906>)  as a starting point, and prior year applicants are welcome to apply again.

For additional information and program updates on the Defense Community Infrastructure Pilot Program, please visit <https://oldcc.gov/defense-community-infrastructure-program-dcip>.

**#2 VA Maine HCS –Tracye Davis Executive Director VA Maine**

* VA response to Lewiston shootings: Re-opened the Lewiston CBOC once the manhunt was complete and the lockdown was lifted. VA advising that any veteran affected by the shooting be referred to VA Maine, eligibility will be worked out. VA has a new public-facing website that consolidates mental health resources. [Mental Health Resources | VA Maine Health Care | Veterans Affairs](https://www.va.gov/maine-health-care/programs/mental-health-resources/)
* Partnered with 104th Army Reserve Training unit to provide direct support to unit soldiers on Saturday November 4th. (Robert Card’s unit) VA Maine supplied mental health providers and chaplains. There will be an increased mental health presence at the Veterans Day event at Cabellas as well as the Emergency Management trailer, Mobile Vet Center, and other resources in anticipation of an influx of veterans needing support in the wake of the Lewiston shootings.
* There will be a Veterans Day Ceremony at Togus at the flagpole on Saturday at 8am [VA Maine Health Care | Veterans Day Ceremony | Veterans Affairs](https://www.va.gov/maine-health-care/events/50724/)
* Veterans Resource Fair will be Tuesday November 7th from 9am-2pm at Portland CBOC. Hosting clinic tours every hour on the hour. [VA Maine Health Care | Portland CBOC - Open House & Veteran Resource Fair | Veterans Affairs](https://www.va.gov/maine-health-care/events/63072/)
* Fisher House Update: Tracye has been invited into the high-level discussions at the national level regarding the Togus Fisher House. Will have more to share next month.

Comment from Eddie Gray-Fox Burgess: Chaplains will be meeting on November 8th at the Lewiston Congregational Church at noon if the VA chaplains want to meet for the debrief.

**#3 Senator King** – **Teague Morris Outreach Director**

* Extended appreciation gratitude and respect on behalf of Senator King and the entire staff to the VA staff in the wake of the Lewiston shootings.
* Several events had to be rescheduled including a field hearing about Long Term Care that was supposed to held at the University of Maine Augusta. Will be rescheduled. Also meeting about ambulance fee structures had to be rescheduled.
* Senator King attended Welcome Home celebration for Honor Flight Maine at the Portland Jetport.
* As a member of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee the Senator participated in the hearings about VA Research, VA accountability and transparency, and attended a joint meeting of the Veterans Affairs Committee and Armed Services Committee on the topic of military to civilian transition.
* In December the Senator will be part of a hearing on the Vet Centers. If you have had experience with the Vet Centers, please reach out to Teague with thoughts on your experience.
* Senator King has a new veteran legislative correspondent Simon “Sal” Lee. Sal would like to do outreach to student veteran groups.
* Met with National Commander of DAV and American Legion on the topic of transitions, LTC, Pact Act, workforce recruitment, mental health and suicide prevention.

**#4 Veterans Benefits Administration – Jennifer Bover Executive Director**

**Veteran’s Day Events: Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) Presence**

* **November 10,** **2023**– Veterans Day Ceremony, 256 Main St., South Paris, Maine Time: 9:00AM - 10:00AM Open to the Public
* **November 11, 2023**– 2nd Annual Veterans Day Outreach Event, Skowhegan Elks Lodge, 21 Silver St., Skowhegan, Maine Time: 9:00AM - 3:00PM Open to Veterans, Service Members and their families
* **November 11, 2023–**Veterans and Community Connection Expo, Cabela’s, 100 Cabela Blvd, Scarborough, Maine Time: 10:00AM - 1:00PM Open to Veterans, Service Members, and their families. 20 organizations attending. Free Lunch provided by Operation At-Ease.

**Question:** There was a question asked about inventory and timeliness of claims due to the influx of PACT Act claims.

**Answer:** VBA began preparing for the PACT Act well in advance, hiring approximately 2,000 additional employees and continues to hire. VBA is also leveraging technology that summarizes information in a Veteran’s claim folder to allow the decision makers to make faster decisions. Togus is serving as a Pilot Station for Automated Decision Support (ADS). Additionally, employees have been working mandatory and voluntary overtime to ensure service to Veterans does not waiver. VBA also had a record setting year in fiscal year 2023 (October 2022 – September 2023). [VA sets all-time records for care and benefits delivered to Veterans in fiscal year 2023 - VA News](https://news.va.gov/press-room/va-all-time-record-care-benefits-veterans-fy-2023/)

There are two separate public websites that data may be located:

* PACT Act Performance Dashboard: [VA Pact Act | Veterans Affairs](https://www.accesstocare.va.gov/PactAct)
* VBA Administration Reports: [Detailed Claims Data - Veterans Benefits Administration Reports (va.gov)](https://www.benefits.va.gov/reports/detailed_claims_data.asp)

If there is ever a time you have a particular concern about a claim, please feel free to reach out to us. We are happy to assist.

**#5 Congresswoman Chellie Pingree’s Office - Pam Twinward**

* Very light activity month for the House of Representatives as the majority of the time was spent waiting for the Republicans to elect a Speaker. There were no floor votes, no suspensions, no letters, events or meetings.
* Congresswoman Pingree did cosponsor 2 pieces of legislation: H.R. 3651, the **Love Lives on Act** (Rep. Phillips), which would allow surviving spouses of military personnel to retain the Survivor Benefit Plan and Dependency and Indemnity Compensation if they remarry, regardless of age. The bill would also grant surviving spouses who remarry access to Commissary and Exchange benefits and provide them and their children with access to electronic medical records, appointments, referrals, and prescription refills. Also cosponsored H.R. 1045, the **Health Care Fairness for Military Families Act** (Rep. Ryan), which would extend health care coverage to TRICARE beneficiaries who have adult children younger than 26 years old.

Comment from Brenda Pennels that the Love Lives On Act does not include TRICARE for military spouses who remarry. Will send information to Pam.

**#6 Center for Development and Civic Engagement –Chief Veteran Experience Officer Kylie Higgins**

* Updated recruitment flyer for Voluntary Services. Please share with your organizations and email distribution lists!



* Will participate in Veterans Resource Fair at Portland CBOC and Veterans Event at Cabellas.
* Holiday Season is approaching. CDCE will be working with Boothbay Harbor American Legion to bring back Holiday Decorations for CLC residents.
* Will be bringing back a lot of programming/events over the winter months. If organizations are looking at getting involved, contact Kylie.

**#7 Congressman Jared Golden’s Office – Kim Rohn not able to attend.**

**#8 Maine Veterans Homes –Sharon Fusco, CEO**

* In response to Lewistown shooting a nearby MVH’s were put on lockdown until the shelter in place order was lifted.
* Throughout the holidays there will be different events at each home. If people want to get involved or volunteer, please contact the home closest to you.
* Still dealing with COVID outbreaks, good safety protocols allow for daily routines to continue including volunteers.

**#9 Maine Bureau of Veterans Services – Dave Richmond, Director**

* October 24th VSO Summit was a success. Minutes have been distributed and are attached here along with other documents from VA, VBA and MBVS.



* Newsletter will contain a comprehensive list of veterans day activities across the state.
* November 8th – Jennifer Bover will be briefing all the Governor’s Challenge territories on the Veteran Expos conducted in Maine in the last year as an example of a best practice.
* Miane Veterans Art Show at the State House on 11/9 in the Hall of Flags
* Native American Heritage Ceremony at the Pentagon on November 8th. Sarah Sherman will be attending as well as a representative from VBA and two members of the Wabenacki.

**Open Discussion:**

Brenda Pennels: Miliary Officers Association of America luncheon will be held on December 7th at the Maine Miliary Museum. Catered Lunch from Olive Garden. Ann LePage Service to Veterans Award will be awarded to Paul Loveless. $20 per person. Contact Brenda if you would like to attend.

If anyone knows a veteran that needs any help with Medicare during Annual Enrollment contact Brenda.

Dennis Brown, Veterans Forward: PTSD Forum event will be on the 14th. Several organizations have signed up to participate. Kim Sliniger and General Libby will be among the panelists.

Next Meeting will be December 4th at 1500 hours via Zoom. Guest Speaker will be Maggie Catanese from Vet2Vet Maine. [https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84773217133?pwd=dFNhT1dLcHBWOFBVRHNiMXk1cHZLZz09](https://usg02.safelinks.protection.office365.us/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fus02web.zoom.us%2Fj%2F84773217133%3Fpwd%3DdFNhT1dLcHBWOFBVRHNiMXk1cHZLZz09&data=05%7C01%7CBrenda.Pennels%40martinspoint.org%7C0190ff13c05e4ff74b3c08db3374e793%7C92e9cc553b844faf89b40aa4d9244e75%7C0%7C0%7C638160349445997294%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=yI3tazVIEnQrc8Kr5aybgSMH1X95YXeRSsw3KzVxTDo%3D&reserved=0)

Brenda asked if others would be interested in having an additional live meeting before June. Will discuss and possibly vote at the next meeting.

Kevin Woodward offered a closing prayer.

Meeting Adjourned at 1915 hours.