

Kalamazoo County Health & Community Services
Veterans' Affairs Committee
May 11, 2016

- I. Call to Order by Vice Chair, Bill Becker at 8:03 AM

- II. Roll Call
Members Present: Michael Quinn, Bill Becker, Tom Burton, Chad Dillon
Absent: Mike Jones
Others: Beth Ridge, Dr. Gillian Stoltman, Commissioner Mike Seals, Mike Hoss, Lauren King

- III. Review of previous month's minutes
Motion made by C. Dillon to approve the minutes from the meeting on April 13, 2016.
Second by B. Becker. Motion carried by unanimous vote.

- IV. Citizen's Time. Chair M. Quinn opened the floor for citizen's time. G. Stoltman needs to leave at 9:15. No other comment. Citizen's time closed.

- V. Financial Review
M. Hoss covered the county burial benefits. It is remaining slim. We have had people coming in on their own, but we are not receiving them from the funeral homes.

The Trust Fund met the previous day. They are reconsolidating how the Trust Fund is structured.

The last week has been slow regarding county relief. The gas vouchers are very helpful. B. Becker: do you have to be 100% service connected for the VA to cover your travel expenses? M. Hoss: no, it's either 100% service connected or under a certain poverty level. Battle Creek to Ann Arbor is supposed to be covered but it has been reported lately that that is not always the case. The van service, which is an additional option, does not cover all five days. T. Burton: I get travel pay at 40% as long as there is an appointment scheduled on the books. M. Seals: I am at 30% and I do not get travel pay. M. Hoss: has done the research and provides information to veterans that need to get to Battle Creek, there are options.

B. Ridge went over the quarterly report. Let everyone know that there is a good system of checks and balances in place. The new system of tracking vouchers based on dependants has been put into place. It has been working very well and has been enlightening.

B. Ridge has not done the budget amendments because she wants to get them through their training and know the amount that will be used to towards that.

B. Ridge reported that the burial benefit is way down and that money will go back to the county. She doesn't want that to reflect negatively on the millage request. There are still gaps in the needs of indigent veterans and what the trust fund will cover. The millage will be used for things such as utilities partnering with CAA, rent and mortgage partnering with HRI,



furnace and water heater replacement, Meals on Wheels partnering with Senior Services, auto repairs, food subsistence, in home services for senior vets partnering with 3AAA, etc. B. Ridge is actively working on the budget. Statistics are hard to come by because not many programs track veterans. The statistics that exist are not always recorded under the same percentages.

B. Ridge- The flags and markers are in, that line total is complete.

M. Hoss- the flags are purchased by our office for Memorial Day and sent to the City of Kalamazoo, the public cemeteries that participate are charged for the flags and the county is reimbursed. This year we sent a letter to every public cemetery so they have the option of participating. There were a couple of interest calls from cemeteries that may participate next year.

T. Burton- is the provider of the flags the same from year to year or is that re-bid?

M. Hoss went over the bidding process that is county policy.

Move to accept the financial report by C. Dillon, second by B. Becker. Motion carried.

VI. New Business

Veterans Service Office Report

M. Hoss- There are numerous bills in the house and senate that will affect veterans. The ones that are important to us:

-Bill put out to change the Michigan Veterans Trust Fund- trying to change the definition of who can qualify for the Trust Fund. It doesn't look like it's going too far.

-Bill for 100% service connected veteran to waive property taxes, trying to change that to a homestead property tax credit. It would cost the veteran money. It hasn't left the committee; some are saying it is dead in committee, others are saying it is being stored in committee temporarily until the lame duck session. At that time it will be rolled in with an important bill and pushed through. It is the "house tax bill".

B. Ridge ran the statistics on the bill and the largest group it will hurt is the indigent veteran. The way the Homestead bill is written if you have some money you will get the credit, but if you don't you will end up paying the whole property tax amount because you don't qualify for the credit. T. Burton questioned who is leading this.

M. Hoss- it's MAC- Michigan Association of Counties. They are the ones who are supporting this. The amount this tax will bring in per township is roughly \$12,000. M. Seals informed the board that the county has the choice to opt in and currently Kalamazoo County does not.

T. Burton- who do we need to put pressure on to back off and who is sponsoring this bill?



M. Hoss has contacted Brant Iden. M. Seals suggested calling David Matura to get a hold of Iden. M. Hoss let the board know the bill is being sponsored by a politician out of Jackson who is in the pocket of MAC. If the new bill became law the counties and townships would not have the option to opt out. This bill is being watched, but it will help to have as many people sending letters in objection to the bill.

M. Quinn requested more information on the bill.

M. Seals suggested sending a resolution about the bill; M. Hoss will be working on the resolution.

The last bill gone over would change the definition of a veteran to anyone who served at anytime. This one did not go over well and is being killed in committee.

M. Hoss sent a letter to the board regarding Camp Lajune. Camp Lajune is not being handled through regional offices, only through one office. The families of those who were in Camp Lajune have been fighting for the VA to recognize that the chemicals that the veterans were exposed to are causing health issues. There is a good chance that the Marines will succeed in their attempt to get the VA to acknowledge their argument.

M. Hoss stated two congressmen are not going to allow the burn pits in the Gulf to become the Agent Orange of the Gulf War. There are environmental health concerns regarding being exposed to these pits.

The MAC was very beneficial and M. Hoss gathered a lot of information and made several contacts. He will give the board an update on anything he learned that pertains to the board.

M. Hoss has contacted the four farmers markets in Kalamazoo in regards to getting the veterans access to fresh food. It should not be a problem to get involved in these programs.

M. Hoss meeting with Mr. VanHoof, a lawyer working with Judge Lightveot on establishing a Veterans Drug Court. His job is to find mentors for the court.

There is a Veterans Service Officer working South County as a volunteer. He is accredited and trained through the DAV. They have removed his accreditation. He would like to continue working under our office, he still has his certification. G. Stoltman is going to make sure as a volunteer he goes through the county policy. It would be like having another volunteer in our office but working from another location. B. Becker requested some feedback on the volunteer's performance just to ensure he doesn't reflect poorly on our office; however the help is needed in the office.

B. Becker voiced his concerns about needing a clear picture on how the office is performing. B. Ridge offered to look into presenting information in a comparative manner.



G. Stoltman informed the board that each program is going through an evaluation process to improve the quality of their program. Each program has a dashboard that is being worked on. Thoughts on ways to improve programs are always appreciated.

M. Hoss- we have started taking information from each veteran that comes into our office in order to have more of the information that this board would like to see regarding the clients that we serve. We are starting from scratch on our statistics; records were not being kept before I started.

B. Becker questioned what they should be doing as a committee and requested that our offices mission statement be added to the agenda for each meeting.

M. Seals suggested a subcommittee consisting of M. Hoss, B. Ridge and M. Quinn to establish goals of the board and how to get there. B. Ridge requested M. Seals join.

M. Hoss spoke at the West Michigan Cancer Center. They had 1206 new contacts last year, 720 of them were a veteran or the spouse of a veteran. A referral system has been established to assist these veterans. The request to reach out to the community has been put into place, however, it reduces available office time to see veterans. Due to this, M. Hoss is going to put in a request to the board to add an additional Veteran Service Officer. If we want this office to grow, this is happening through these out of office visits and presentations.

M. Hoss informed the board that there is a for profit company offering the same services as the KCVSO at a cost to the veteran. There was discussion on the legalities of that practice. It was suggested by M. Seals that M. Hoss check with Judy Sivak of AAIIIA on sending a letter to the local nursing homes informing residents of their options.

VII. Commissioner's Time

M. Seals talked to the courts about VA drug testing. Judge Bell is going to look into it. The problem between the courts and the VA is communication. When the veterans drug court is up and running some of the testing can be paid for by the county. If we are going to support the veterans court he would suggest supporting that.

HCS looks like it will be moving to Alcott St, but the community services side of HCS may be moving to a different location.

County on track for the building of the new Gull Road court house. Creating a "Justice Complex".

VIII. Adjournment

Motion was made to adjourn the meeting by M. Quinn, seconded by C. Dillon and carried. Chair Quinn adjourned the meeting at 10:48 AM.

