

Kalamazoo County Health & Community Services  
Veterans' Affairs Committee  
March 9, 2016

- I. Call to order by Chair, Michael Quinn at 8:02 AM
  
- II. Roll Call  
Attendance: Bill Becker, Tom Burton, Michael Quinn, Chad Dillon  
Absent: Michael Jones  
Others: Commissioner Michael Seals, Dr. Gillian Stoltman, Beth Ridge, Mike Hoss, Courtney Davis, Don Jarzambek
  
- III. Review of previous month's minutes  
Motion made by B. Becker to approve the minutes from the meeting on February 10, 2016.  
Seconded by T. Burton. Motion carried by unanimous vote.
  
- IV. Citizen's Time. Chair M. Quinn opened the floor for citizen's time. No comment, issue or discussion was brought forward. Citizen's time was closed.
  
- V. Financial Review  
Financial Analyst, Beth Ridge provided an update as to the status of Soldier and Sailors Relief Fund (SSRF) and how this relates to the Burial Fund. She will be transferring \$9000 to \$10,000 from the Burial Fund to cover needs in Relief Fund. This will cause no issues for the Burial Fund balance. The office does not plan to use the \$5000 extra from the general fund at this time, as the funds from the Burial fund will cover this year's needs.

Other updates included an increase to the travel and training line item to ensure both Service Officers can participate in needed trainings; there will be an increase to rent and network charges once the new staff member begins; overall, the budget is on track for the time of the year.

The Service Officers are seeing a number of veterans who have already used their 2 vouchers for the year (SSRF awards shared in board packet); this is causing some alarm as there are still 10 months left in the year for these veterans. Services Officers, M. Hoss and B. Brockway do provide information on other resources in the community, but there are limits there. Immediately there is no needed action, but it is an advisory to the Committee that there may be need for 3<sup>rd</sup> award vouchers which would be the committee's responsibility to approve. The Committee discussed alternative possibilities for providing assistance through vouchers; possibly add an additional 2 to be available for emergency needs and to be paired with some type of education/accountability piece. VSO will put together an outline for a proposed plan to meet this extra need and will share with the committee for approval. Goal is to help now, but also to help veterans plan for the future.



The Committee asked that the office put together or begin to track information on veterans coming into the office including demographics, geographic locations, work status or ability to do so, discharge status and general needs. This information would help future planning and identification of needs. Committee referenced need for continuing to work on a County Veteran's millage and how a County millage would provide more opportunity for the office to enact policies for assistance that are different from State policies to better meet Kalamazoo County Veterans' needs.

Committee and Service Officers also discussed issues and inconsistencies with Veterans' discharge status. This may include: honorable, less than honorable, other than dishonorable, dishonorable & general discharge. All affect a veteran's access to benefits differently.

Service Officer, M. Hoss, and committee discussed what the office could do to address the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> voucher requests and need for assistance within a year's time; M. Hoss shared that those who receive assistance are referred to a budgeting class with the County Community Action Agency, but this is not a requirement so is left up to the Veteran to attend. Committee would like to continue discussion on how to better connect veterans to skills and resources to improve their life situations; some ideas shared included VOC Rehab program and job employment assistance.

M. Hoss confirmed that he and B. Brockway do work to register Veterans who come into the office for every VA benefit that is a possible, but will look into alternate resources as well. The office will look at its partnerships and see where it can and should expand.

## VI. New Business

### *Veterans Service Office Report*

M. Hoss shared that an Administrative Assistance has been hired; Lauren King will start on March 21<sup>st</sup>. In upcoming weeks the office will move to 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, 2<sup>nd</sup> wing of the Nazareth building. Space will be a shared waiting room with Community Action.

The office has been very busy; Monday's are hitting record walk-in numbers. There is a wait for appointments, but we are moving veterans to appointments as quickly as possible. Some cases are beginning to take a lot more time and work, Veteran Service Officers (VSO) are using Fridays to work on these cases. VSO's are beginning home visits when needed for homebound veterans.

The Office presented at the Rotary Club and Kalamazoo Advocates for Senior Issues during the past month. There have been many requests so the office will continue to plan presentation opportunities. Additionally the office would like to get flyers in all of the senior and assisted living homes. Recommendation of the committee was for the office to work with the Area Agency on Aging Ombudsman.

### *Success Stories Shared with the Committee*



One Veteran received a new furnace for his home. Great outcome, the concern is that it took 6 weeks to get approval from the State in the in the middle of winter. M. Hoss commended B. Brockway's persistence in working with the State on this Veteran's behalf.

One Veteran came into the office to seek assistance after his disability had been decreased. B. Brockway advocated and appealed the decrease; the veterans will now receive 100% disability again, including back pay.

One Veteran who had been in jail and had their disability reduce has now been moved back to former level; office is still working with individual as he is having trouble finding a place to rent. Committee advised that the Service Office contact David Artley.

VII. Commissioner's Time.

Commissioner Seals asked the M. Hoss to begin planning for 2017 FY needs; the budget process would begin in a few months.

Update was provided on the Veterans Court grant. Courts are in the planning stage of the 6-month grant. Eventually there will be a need to provide the community with education as to why there is a need for a Veterans' Court and its purpose. Additionally the need for a Veterans' buddy program will be explored.

Courts have been moving into the new building.

VIII. Executive Session.

Motion was made to move into Executive Session by T. Burton. Seconded B. Becker. Carried. Committee Moved into Executive Session.

Attendance: M. Quinn, T. Burton, B. Becker, C. Dillon, Commissioner Seals, B. Ridge

Motion was made to adjourn from Executive Session by T. Burton. Seconded C. Dillon. Carried.

Committee adjourned Executive session.

IX. Adjournment. Motion made to adjourn the meeting. Seconded and Carried. Chair Quinn adjourned the meeting at 10:15 a.m.

