

Kalamazoo County Health & Community Services
Veterans' Affairs Committee
October 12, 2016

- I. Call to Order by Chair, Michael Quinn at 8:04 AM

- II. Roll Call
Members Present: Michael Quinn, Bill Becker, Tom Burton, Chad Dillon, Mike Jones
Absent:
Others: Beth Ridge, Dr. Gillian Stoltman, Commissioner Seals, Mike Hoss, Lauren King, Thom Canney, Commissioner Provancher, Commissioner Gissler, Commissioner Heppler, Representative Hoadley, Commissioner McGraw, Commissioner Wardleman

- III. Review of previous month's minutes
Motion made by M. Jones to approve the minutes from the meeting on September 14, 2016. Second by T. Burton. Motion carried by unanimous vote.

- IV. Citizen's Time. Chair M. Quinn opened the floor for citizen's time.

Marie is here representing Commissioner Julie Rogers. She wants the board to know that Julie is taking these issues very seriously and hopes that an appropriate resolution can be found.

Commissioner John Gissler representing south county. He wants to explain why he voted no on the proposal M. Seals put forward. The salary needs to be discussed before hiring any new staff. If the pay is too low that won't stop the revolving door of Service Officers.

Commissioner Heppler agrees with J. Gissler. A complete study needs to be done to determine what the office needs.

Commissioner Provancher voted in favor of the proposal by M. Seals. Something needs to be done now.

Representative Hoadley thanked the board for letting him be a guest. Veteran's issues are something he wants to make sure we are getting right. If he can be of service on specific issues, let him know.

G. Stoltman wanted to clarify that no veteran that turned up that was eligible for benefits on the walk in Monday was turned away. She also wanted to make it clear that we are not part of the Veterans Administration. We have been down a person in the office but we are close to filling that position. When the office is fully staffed we can reevaluate.

B. Becker said that pay is always a reason for turnover but that is not the only contributing factor.



Chia Geiser is a clinical social worker in Kalamazoo County. She has worked with veterans for a while. She is shocked and disappointed that the funding for this office has not been supported. The outreach in Kalamazoo County is lacking, veterans don't know where to go to get access to their benefits.

Commissioner Seals wanted to add that the office has been underutilized and the support from the county has been the same. It has been under supported and the office is in need. He believes that without a certified staff member in the office that it was closed for two weeks. We have been looking at the numbers for too long, all talk no action. The least served county in this area is Kalamazoo. Action is that only acceptable response.

Commissioner McGraw said we aren't looking at numbers we are looking at process. We are looking at the scope of the committee and the function. It's not all about the numbers.

Commissioner Wardleman came to listen.

C. Dillon wanted to say that M. Hoss and L. King did a great job with the Stand Down and is looking forward to seeing more of the numbers.

T. Burton stated there has been some confusion about what is going on. The committee is asking for more support for the office. What is being perceived is that the office isn't doing its job. Those are two different things and the office is doing a terrific job with what he has- he wants that to be very clear.

Citizens time was closed.

V. Financial Review

Financial Analyst, Beth Ridge

Money from burial benefits has been moved to soldiers and sailors. At this point we are 66.7% through the year and we are 58.5% expended. The relief has been opened up to include rental assistance.

Soldiers and Sailors

This is the first month we have done housing assistance. We had two veterans apply for that assistance. There is two months in this report. You will see that food vouchers and gas cards were distributed in September even though M. Hoss was not in the office for two weeks.

Michigan Veterans Trust Fund

Nothing at this time. There is not trust fund officer until we hire a new officer. Due to the state taking over trust fund applications for Kalamazoo County they are finding that it is more work than anticipated and are anxiously awaiting our new hire.

Burial Benefits

Three veterans applied for burial benefits.



VI. New Business

Veterans Service Office Report

This office is run in accordance with all county veterans service offices in Michigan. We are not run just for indigent veterans. We process claims for veterans of all socioeconomic status. There is no other place for them to go, as you heard, the VA does not and is not allowed to process claims. We provide that same services as all county veteran service offices do.

This office has been adversely affected by the veterans movement happening here. It has increased the call load, added meetings and other duties above what is normally done in our office, pulling M. Hoss away from his job. Any accusation that veterans came in and didn't get what they needed is false.

We are still continuing to take appointments as normal. There have also been appointments added during lunches, between scheduled appointments and after hours if needed. No one is being told that they have to wait for an emergency need.

The Veterans Service Specialist position is in the process of being filled. As soon as the HR process is approved and then an official offer will be made. As soon as the offer is made an accepted M. Quinn will be informed.

This committee has been active in addressing issues. It is understood why it is done. You are doing what you believe to be your roll. Please limit your activity to petitioning and informing. M. Hoss is determined to not go back to the time of dealing with appeals because the initial application was denied instead of getting a first time approval.

Upon being asked by M. Quinn, M. Hoss went over the process of submitting a claim with a high likelihood of getting a first time approval. C. Dillon expressed the importance of a first time approval.

The Stand Down went well. We had a lot of help from HCS staff and there were a lot of community partners present. We can always do better and plans have already started for the next year. We did determine that more needs to be available to female vets, more came in than anticipated.

T. Burton asked what M. Hoss needs for the office. M. Hoss stated that volunteers for events and outreach are an area of need for the office.

This whole situation has been very informational. Motion made to create subcommittees to investigate ideas by T. Burton, seconded by M. Jones. Carried.

VII. Commissioner's Time

Commissioner Heppler was thankful for the information that was brought forward. We need the communication that was provided today to move forward.



Commissioner Provancher spoke of the outreach mentioned by M. Hoss. The more outreach the higher volume of people coming into the office which will further the need of the office.

Commissioner Seals mentioned project connect and encouraged everyone to stop over. He appreciates the comments that M. Hoss has made and that his hands have been full. Nothing that he has said should take away from what M. Hoss has done since he has been in the office, he just wants to get him the help that he needs. We need to do a better job of marketing ourselves so that people know the office exists. There are others that he has heard from that say we are not meeting the needs of some veterans, he continues to believe more is needed for the office.

VIII. Adjournment

Motion was made to adjourn the meeting by C. Dillon, seconded by M. Jones and carried. Chair Quinn adjourned the meeting at 9:52 AM.

