

**ODVS Advisory Committee  
Tuesday, February 24, 2015**

LeRoy Clendenen convened the meeting at 2:45 PM at the Wilmington Municipal Building located at 69 N. South Street Wilmington, Ohio. The meeting was opened with a recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance. The pledge was followed by a moment of silence.

**Roll Call**

**In Attendance:**

Aaron Cunningham, American Legion (non-voting alternate)  
Merle Pratt, AMVETS  
Tamara Puff, Ohio Attorney General  
April Philiopoulos, Advisory Committee on Women Veterans  
Mary A. Janning, Catholic War Veterans  
Paul Haller, County Commissioners Association of Ohio  
William Eberle, Marine Corps League  
Carl Price, Military Order of the Purple Heart  
Victor Wilson, Ohio National Guard Association  
LeRoy Clendenen, Chairman, Veterans of Foreign Wars  
Cliff Riley, Vietnam Veterans of America  
David Ridenour, Ohio State Association of Veterans Service Commissioners

**Visitors:**

Lonnie Scott, Cincinnati VAMC  
Denise Kerr, Cincinnati VAMC  
Michael Hare, Ohio Department of Veterans Services  
Michael Dustman, Office of Senator Rob Portman  
Joe Bengoechea, Ohio Department of Veterans Services  
Ryan Thomson, Ohio Department of Job and Family Services  
Fred Stratmann, Ohio Department of Veterans Services  
Danny Eakins, Ohio Department of Veterans Services  
Jennifer Holdren, Office of the Attorney General  
Ray Autenrieb, Vietnam Veterans of America  
Don Jones, Vietnam Veterans of America

**Absent:**

(All sent notice)  
Suzette Price, American Legion  
Don Jones, Army Navy Union  
Will Davis, Disabled American Veterans  
Saul Laub, Jewish War Veterans  
Ed Zoretic, Korean War Veterans  
Chris Mabe, Labor Organizations  
John McCoy, Military Officers Association of America  
Jon Warmeling, Ohio State Association of County Veterans Service Officers  
Jane Roland, Ohio State Association of County Veterans Service Officers  
Bob Park, Ohio State Association of County Veterans Service Officers

## **Previous Meeting Minutes**

The previous meeting minutes were distributed to the committee for review. After a motion by Carl Price, seconded by Dave Ridenour, they were approved.

## **Agenda**

The working agenda was approved after a change submitted by Merle Pratt.

## **Bills and Communications**

Numerous communications relating to attendance at the special meeting location were sent and received. They will be kept on record.

## **Report of Subcommittees:**

- \*\*Education – No Report, District training begins soon
- \*\*Legal – No Report
- \*\*Rules – No Report
- \*\*JCARR – No Report

## **Guest Introductions**

Guests in attendance were given an opportunity to introduce themselves and make limited comments.

## **New Business**

### **I. VA Choice Cards – Denise Kerr & Lonnie Scott, Cincinnati VAMC**

Denise and Lonnie gave a presentation about the VA Choice Card program. Choice cards were designed to give veterans the option to seek private care in cases where there was a long delay before seeing a VA doctor or the veteran lived more than 40 miles, using straight line distance, from a VA medical facility. After the presentation there was discussion about how the program worked. Several members of the committee and Director Gorrell noted that the rules related to the card were potentially confusing and seemingly complicated. Lonnie and Denise explained the intent of the program and gave the members answers on how the cards should be used. They said they would take the questions and concerns of the committee into consideration. Lonnie and Denise also took questions from the audience members.

### **II. Presumptive Conditions – Cliff Riley**

Cliff Riley spoke to the committee and guests about presumptive conditions for connection to VA disability compensation. He explained that certain conditions are closely related to military service in certain places and times and there is a reduced burden on the veteran to prove service connection for these conditions. Many presumptive conditions are very likely or surely

caused by the use of herbicides, such as Agent Orange, used in Vietnam and other places by the military. Cliff passed out a VVA self-help guide on disability connection related to Agent Orange exposure and the cover page of a Congressional Research Service report on the subject of presumptive conditions. He asked that the committee members look through the guide and find the report when they were able. Next, Cliff shared some personal stories about his struggles with conditions related to Agent Orange exposure and how the services of the VA helped him a great deal. LeRoy Clendenen thanked Cliff for sharing his stories and let him know that he and the rest of the committee appreciated them very much.

### III. Feedback Forum and Director's Comments – Director Tim Gorrell

Director Gorrell began his time by relaying some comments from VA Secretary Robert McDonald from the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs Conference he recently returned from. The Secretary's comments focused on reforms that were taking place at the VA due to recent controversies. He also spoke about efforts to make the VA more responsive to veterans through initiatives such as "My VA." Secretary McDonald also spoke about the changing composition of the nation's veteran population, notably that women veterans would make up an increasingly larger percentage. The Secretary noted that the VA's commitment to veterans and their dependents was long term by stating that there is still a child of a Civil War Veteran receiving benefits, as well as a few hundred Spanish War veteran dependents and a few thousand WWI veteran dependents.

Director Gorrell also passed on the Secretary's comments about the claims situation, noting that they have received many more in recent years. There is also a new region system and Secretary McDonald will continue to make the goal of ending veteran homelessness by the end of the year a priority.

Director Gorrell then moved into his feedback forum. He reminded the attendees that they and their organizations are part of a veteran support network along with ODVS. The feedback and input of the committee is important to ODVS's mission. He would like to hear more about what the organizations are doing and how ODVS can help. Discussion followed on this topic. Merle Pratt said that this discussion tied into his proposed change to the agenda, an inquiry about what ODVS was doing related to veteran homelessness. Director Gorrell addressed this and said that while ODVS maintains awareness of the situation and developments, the responsibility mainly goes to the federal Departments of Housing and Urban Development and Veterans Affairs through the HUD/VASH program. More discussion about veteran homelessness followed.

During the discussion several other topics were covered including VA Group Therapy related to potential problems with composition of the groups, licensure for military education among some others. Director Gorrell thanked the committee and audience members for the discussion.

After the discussion, Director Gorrell had a few more notes for those in attendance. He reminded them that Mick Oppy is the new superintendent for the Ohio Veterans Homes. Mick planned to speak at the day's meeting, but was unable to attend due to other events. Rachael Jones resigned from the department in the previous week and a new legislative liaison would be coming on soon. Daniel Eakins will be the interim. Director Gorrell then introduced Eileen Corson, who was in attendance, to the committee and reminded them that she replaced Mike McKinney. Director Gorrell also noted that Eileen did a great deal of the planning for the day's resource fair and thanked her for her work.

### **Legislative Update – Daniel Eakins**

Daniel Eakins updated the committee and guests in attendance on some recent legislative developments, mainly the budget bill. The moving of the Military Injury Relief Fund to Ohio Department of Veterans Services was discussed. ODVS's budget and the allocations for the organizations will essentially remain the same. The War Orphans Scholarship was proposed to receive a significant increase. Updates to the veteran licensure project, which streamlines the awarding of credit for military training, were proposed as well.

Danny also mentioned that a draft bill proposing new positions on the County Veterans Service Commissions would not be moving forward.

### **Adjournment**

After the Director was done, Summer Moses informed the committee that she would need to brief them on legal requirements for the committee at the next meeting.

The meeting was adjourned after a motion was made and seconded.