

**Veterans’ Service-Related Ailments Task Force
Meeting Minutes
February 28, 2022, 12pm-2pm**

1. Welcome and Introductions

- a. Meeting called to order at 12:03pm by Kourtney Hopkins.
- b. Roll call taken and quorum established with 11 members.
- c. IDVA staff members present: Kourtney Hopkins, Anthony Vaughn, Crystal Womack, Matt Eddington, Melissa Black, Sara Augustinas, Alicia Utterback.
- d. Members introduced themselves to the group.

Senator Wilcox	Present
Representative Kifowit	Present
Representative Swanson	Not Present at role call
Director Prince	Present
COL John Fulk	Not present
Christopher Spears	Not present
Eric Butz	Present
Kimyada Wellington	Present
Michael Iwanicki	Present
Michelle Ramlow	Present
Summer Padoan	Present
Timothy Alexander	Present
William Sutton	Present
VACANT	
VACANT	

2. Review Task Force statutory authority and purpose

- a. Reviewed 20 ILCS 2805/38;
<https://www.ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/ilcs3.asp?ActID=356&ChapterID=5>

3. Training Requirements

- a. The Illinois Department of Veterans’ Affairs (IDVA) Deputy General Counsel Matt Eddington was introduced and explained training requirements.
- b. Matt Eddington-As an executive branch committee, all members are subject to State of Illinois Employee Ethics Act training and the State of Illinois Sexual Harassment Training. Paper training will be distributed for review and digital signature. If members are subject to this training as part of their current position, proof of prior completion can be provided to Kourtney.

4. Task Force Organization (Appointment of Chair or Co-chairs)

- a. The legislation requires the Task Force members to select among themselves a chairperson or co-chairperson at the initial meeting. Roll call vote to establish Chairperson or Co-Chairpersons:

Senator Wilcox	No preference
Representative Kifowit	Co-chair
Representative Swanson	Not present for vote
Director Prince	Co-chair
COL John Fulk	Absent
Christopher Spears	Absent
Eric Butz	Co-chair
Kimyada Wellington	Co-chair
Michael Iwanicki	Co-chair
Michelle Ramlow	Co-chair
Summer Padoan	Co-chair
Timothy Alexander	Co-chair
William Sutton	Co-chair

- b. Majority (9 votes) indicated co-chair preference.
- c. Nomination process reviewed for Co-chairs.
- d. Nominations: Timothy Alexander (self-nomination), William Sutton (nominated by Representative Kifowit, Michael Iwanicki, Eric Butz), Summer Padoan (nominated by William Sutton), Kimyada Wellington (nominated by Eric Butz), Michael Iwanicki (nominated by Senator Wilcox).
- e. Kimyada Wellington and Michael Iwanicki decline their nomination.
- f. Final nominations are Timothy Alexander, William Sutton, Summer Padoan. Nominations are closed.
- g. Representative Kifowit: Can group have more than two co-chairs?
Melissa Black: not known that there's a strict requirement. IDVA is providing administrative functions, but group can be responsible for deciding if 3 co-chairs is appropriate. Bylaws can be annotated as needed. No reservations known.
Matt Eddington: Review of bylaws appears to allow for 3 co-chairs.
- h. Vote for 2 or 3 co-chairs.

Senator Wilcox	No preference
Representative Kifowit	3
Representative Swanson	Not present for vote
Director Prince	2
COL John Fulk	Absent
Christopher Spears	Absent
Eric Butz	3
Kimyada Wellington	3
Michael Iwanicki	2
Michelle Ramlow	3
Summer Padoan	3
Timothy Alexander	3
William Sutton	3

- i. Majority of present (7 votes) votes for 3 co-chairs. No objection from votes for 2 chairs to continue forward with 3 co-chairs.

5. Bylaw Presentation

- a. Article I – no recommended changes.
- b. Article II – no recommended changes.
- c. Article III – Director Prince: Change meeting frequency to “monthly” in by-laws. Representative Kifowit explained allowing flexibility in meeting scheduling by maintaining current definition. Current meeting frequency maintained. No amendment needed.
- d. Article IV – no recommended changes.
- e. Article V – Clarification from Senator Wilcox on quorum. Is quorum based on those present or overall positions on the task force? Melissa Black: may want to amend to say a “quorum of members” if group prefers the number based on positions on the task force or operate on a majority of those present. As written, it is based on number of people present in a meeting. Senator Wilcox added co-chairs may want to encourage people to attend for anything that may be contentious. No amendment needed.
- f. Article VI – no recommended changes.
- g. Article VII – Timothy Alexander: National Service Officer role, will there be a conflict of interest if speaking about subjects that may crossover. Matt Eddington: no need for concern, especially if not identifying that you’re acting in your role as a task force member.
- h. Article VII – no recommended changes.
- i. William Sutton: question on task force dissolution a year after recommendation submission. Melissa Black: post-report, legislators may ask questions and require other interaction with the task force after recommendation submission. No amendment needed.
- j. Vote on adoption of Bylaws:

Senator Wilcox	Approve
Representative Kifowit	Approve
Representative Swanson	Approve
Director Prince	Approve
COL John Fulk	Absent
Christopher Spears	Absent
Eric Butz	Approve
Kimyada Wellington	Approve
Michael Iwanicki	Approve
Michelle Ramlow	Approve
Summer Padaoan	Approve
Timothy Alexander	Approve
William Sutton	Approve

- k. Bylaws approved (11 Aye, 0 Nay, 0 Abstentions)

6. Set CY 2022 meeting schedule- co-chairs, Timothy Alexander, William Sullivan, Summer Padaoan

- a. Alexander: second Monday of the month.
 Sutton: second Monday of the month at 12-2pm.
 Motion: Alexander, Representative Kifowit so moved, second Monday of the month, additional time to the call of the chair.
 Second: Michelle Ramlow.
 Eric Butz: Issue with Monday holiday in October.
 Representative Kifowit- Amend motion second Monday of the month, excluding holidays, additional time to the call of the chair.
 Alexander: if second Monday is a holiday, meeting can be moved to third.
 Representative Kifowit- Amendment to the amended motion adding ability to reschedule to third Monday of the month in the event of a holiday limiting staff availability, additional time to the call of the chair.
 Ramlow confirmed second of twice amended motion.
 Vote on motion – meetings shall be the second Monday of the month for the remainder of the 2022 year, 12-2pm, excluding holidays, with chairs moving conflicting meetings to the third Monday of the month, additional time to the call of the chair.

Senator Wilcox	Aye
Representative Kifowit	Aye
Representative Swanson	Aye
Director Prince	Aye
COL John Fulk	Absent
Christopher Spears	Absent
Eric Butz	Aye
Kimyada Wellington	Aye
Michael Iwanicki	Aye
Michelle Ramlow	Aye
Summer Padaoan	Aye
Timothy Alexander	Aye
William Sutton	Aye

- b. Motion carries, 11 Aye, 0 Nay, 0 Abstentions

7. Illinois Department of Veterans’ Affairs Resources

- a. IDVA will provide administrative support in the form of:
 - i. Creation of the agenda with the Chairperson.
 - ii. Scheduling meetings via WebEx and sending out invites.
- b. IDVA will post the Task Force material on our website at <https://www2.illinois.gov/veterans/> under ‘About Us’ then select ‘Committees and Task Forces’. The website will house the statutory authority, Bylaws, Member info, and meeting schedule, agenda, and minutes.

8. End of Agenda items at 1:12pm

9. Task Force Discussion:

- a. Senator Wilcox emphasized the importance behind the Task Force. Illinois consistently ranks below other states in disability compensation. Senator Wilcox suggested gathering statistics to review at next meeting.
- b. Representative Kifowit echoed Senator Wilcox's statements. Representative Kifowit agrees that claims and appeal rates are low and although the USDVA may not recognize certain ailments today, it is through advocacy that we can motivate them to recognize service-related ailments. It is important to give a voice to our veterans and improve services to the veteran community in Illinois.
- c. Representative Swanson- There is a lot more we can do in carrying the voice of our veterans. We can bring awareness to federal legislators and be the voice and person to help our veterans be known and heard.
- d. Task Force members discussed the areas they should focus on moving forward.
- e. IDVA's Acting Director Prince confirmed that agencies across the nation are pushing similar agendas in advocating for certain conditions to be recognized by the USDVA.
- f. Timothy Alexander shared that Senate Bill 3003 and HR 3967 are both directly related to the healthcare benefits and exposure to toxic substances.
- g. Underlying themes were identified in today's discussion, those being:
 - i. The impact of toxic substances.
 - ii. Bringing awareness to veteran benefits and benefit changes (i.e. benefits for noncombat related conditions; veterans not knowing their resources).
- h. Task Force members discussed the proposed changes to certain service-related ailments, such as Tinnitus which further supported the need to bring awareness to changes in benefits.
- i. Task Force members discussed the Military Veteran Assistance Act and the need for Veteran Assistance Commissions and/or Veteran Service Officers around the state, to include rural areas.
- j. Due outs for the group were established:
 - i. Within your networks, identify conditions that are commonly denied by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. If possible, annotate the reasons why the conditions are being denied.
 - ii. Come prepared with recommendations on how to raise awareness of services within the state that will make a positive impact on the veteran community.

10. Adjournment

- a. Kourtney Hopkins- is there a motion to adjourn
- b. Timothy Alexander-Motion to adjourn
- c. Summer Padoan- Seconds the motion
- d. Meeting adjourned at 2:02pm