

**Veterans’ Service-Related Ailments Task Force  
Meeting Minutes  
June 13, 2022, 12pm-2pm**

**1. Call to Order (12:11pm) and Roll Call**

- a. Meeting called to order by William Sutton
- b. Roll call taken and quorum established with 7 members at roll call
- c. IDVA staff members present: Alicia Utterback

|                        |              |
|------------------------|--------------|
| Senator Wilcox         | Not Present  |
| Representative Kifowit | Joined 12:35 |
| Representative Swanson | Present      |
| Anthony Vaughn         | Present      |
| COL John Fulk          | Not Present  |
| Christopher Spears     | Not Present  |
| Eric Butz              | Present      |
| Kimyada Wellington     | Present      |
| Michael Iwanicki       | Present      |
| Michelle Ramlow        | Present      |
| Summer Padoan          | Not Present  |
| Timothy Alexander      | Not Present  |
| William Sutton         | Present      |
| VACANT                 |              |
| VACANT                 |              |

**2. Reading and Approval of Minutes from May 9, 2022**

- a. Michelle Ramlow confirmed: All present members received and read the copy of minutes.
- b. No discussion/questions. Michael Iwanicki motions to accepts minutes as read, Eric Butz seconded the motion.
- c. Minutes are approved without changes.

**3. Old Business**

- a. Training and Incentives for contracted C&P Examiners- Work Group Volunteers needed
  - i. Butz – question, unsure if this fits the focus of the law as written, unsure of ability of the committee or state level to influence the federal level on how to conduct their business

- ii. William Sutton – agreement, there’s not a lot we can do, but we can try to take a step and create change. This is not the main objective of this committee. We need to figure out ailments that we have been tasked with. It’s difficult to do because everything falls under federal guidelines. It’s difficult to figure out where we can and cannot help.
- iii. Butz - Is there a way for the committee to help push through current federal legislation in congress like HR3967
- iv. Representative Swanson – that’s federal legislation, and I wouldn’t be able to comment on that.
- v. Butz – Ft. McClellan, Alabama’s state legislature did pass an act to push all they can as a voice; wondering if more states in the union can pass that on a state level
- vi. Representative Swanson – I’d want to see what Alabama actually did – resolution or bill? We did a resolution to encourage the VA to provide more dental care for our veterans. This is just a resolution that as a state legislative body we encourage you to do more.
- vii. Butz -That’s what I’m looking for, at least those things that can be done on a state level.
- viii. Sutton – we can gather this evidence and give it to the state representatives to push it up. If you’d (Butz) like to explore getting statements and presumptives, common trends in Ft. McClellan veterans, we can pass that up.
- ix. Ramlow - Review of previous meeting minutes to focus conversation
- x. Michael Iwanicki – I seriously doubt we could have any impact on this particular topic. Better to focus on Illinois. We have the data on Illinois and claims issues. This C&P examiner topic came up during brainstorming – we don’t have a say on the various requirements. But we can encourage Illinois to reach out to Illinois veterans, VSO training, and use that to help veterans get their claims filed and through.
- xi. Sutton – let’s table this one, revisit when Summer Padoan is in attendance to help guide discussion.

#### **4. New Business**

##### **a. Legislation- Unrecognized service-related ailments**

- i. Ramlow – any updates?
- ii. Sutton – Referencing National County VSO Conference Slides - Honoring our Pact Act – adds new presumptive conditions and expands eligibility for locations and new healthcare facilities. Has \$281.5 billion behind it. Reach out to vets that have been previously denied. Creates Ft. McClellan registry. Federal level biggest piece of legislation.
- iii. Representative Kifowit joined 12:35.

iv. Representative Kifowit – no update, being signed by Governor

v. Representative Swanson – state level, things are moving through, but there's little to do on the federal level. Not much faith in the burn pit registry as someone with a burn pit issue and negative experiences.

vi. Representative Kifowit – was Kwame from Duckworth's office included? Will check with Kourtney.

## b. Working Group Updates

i. Re-entry to Illinois Program and ii. Training and Outreach to veterans

- a. Representative Kifowit – background research, there was a veterans' program called Project Sanctuary, they had programs like managing finances, structured childcare/therapy. Background info from programs in other states. We could do a one-day or weekend (Project Sanctuary was 5 days); we could do a weekend program at some place like Starved Rock or a 1-day at a community college.
- b. Sutton – concerns about how we get veterans of Illinois taken care of when they come home. This program seems to be the best way to do it. As soon as they notify VA or put it on DD214 that they're coming to Illinois, if we set it up so different organizations can come meet them all at once and communicate what is going on. All questions can be answered right there and they will not be able to say, "I didn't know."
- c. Representative Swanson – look at it from active duty component, service members are returning back to Illinois in retirement, we also have army reserve and national guard members who don't go through an ATAP or program like that that's mandated for the active component. Those members sometimes struggle, even long-time members, who are eligible for benefits, but they don't know what those benefits are. How do we go about that with the National Guard to mandate or provide some type of a training program so when that soldier is getting closer to retirement we can set up a training on what they're going to receive in medical benefits. They will be interested in, 'What are my medical benefits? What are my college benefits?' It's a broader approach with how we bring this altogether. Mobile training teams to northern, central, and southern armory to catch National Guard members.
- d. Representative Kifowit – Prince suggested to go off of coordinating data through SoS office and those who can get Veteran on their driver's license. 3,500 applications to put veterans on drivers licenses last year. Should we use a different metric or identifier?
- e. Representative Swanson – if we reach out to the guard and air guard, can they provide us an annual manifest of soldiers who have retired? Congress is mandated that we provide a by-name roster of every soldier retiring that is matched in congress. If there's some way we can mandate to IL Guard, it behooves us to say

we're serious about this and we want veterans to get the benefits they have earned and deserve. Those 3500 would be all veterans across the state of IL?

- f. Representative Kifowit – that's veterans who signed up to put veteran on their driver's license. We may need to reach out to some folks who aren't connected to VA to do that. The DoD doesn't want to release that information to the state. There's some confidentiality between national government and releasing that info to the state.
- g. Anthony Vaughn – for the veterans who request veteran be put on the driver's license, we have a data matching agreement with SoS, so they're easy to find. With respect to the active duty component, which is a component that we need to explore, we do have an MOU with DMDC the DoD component whenever individuals do their DD214 an electronic copy is sent to us. Data transfer issues are being resolved within the next 3 months or so, in which case we would be able to capture that info for those who enter Illinois and say that they're coming back to IL and authorize the release of the information to the state.
- h. Representative Swanson – do those data field distinguish what benefits someone would be eligible for? Combat vet, non-compatibility, injury?
- i. Vaughn – yes, all info is contained within the DD214. We'd be looking for the appropriate awards for combat vets, appropriate codes for medical claims, we would be able to sift through all of that info to get an idea of what they may be eligible for
- j. Ramlow – communication avenue, for civilians who work on base, they do periodic retirement seminars we're able to go to at Camp Lincoln. I'm sure if we could get them to send out emails as well to people who are retiring, coming back, they can send out emails telling them to attend this meeting/conference/session to learn about a b c, just another way to communicate
- k. Butz – State work sites don't have veterans' liaison officers, reaching out to veterans that are in state employment, could have training at a CMS level of how we want them to proceed with communication
- l. Vaughn – guard has Yellow Ribbon Program, within that there are also retirement components for those who are allowed to retire from a guard/VA standpoint – these are what your benefits could be
- m. Representative Swanson – looking for a more semi-annual or annual basis to capture people who may slip through current programs and communication strategies
- n. Guard has National Guard Association of Illinois convention, attended by all the leaders, if we could be set up or have a presence there informing the leadership that

we have a program that will train soldiers upon retirement. Grow program of information at the leadership event.

- o. Ramlow – Family Readiness Groups, sometimes those spouses are on top of this a lot more than the service members, maybe we get with the FRGs and get them on board. We can make this service member and spouse/significant other to get these people involved. The service member may feel they know everything, but things change all the time. Trying to connect with family members to say we want you both involved in this so you know what’s coming down the pike.
- p. Sutton – VSOs visit legions, VAs, can this be mandated by the state that they have to take this program?
- q. Representative Kifowit – limited influence on guard from the state level, can research, I don’t know how much authority we have over mandating members to do something. I don’t think legislatively we have that authority.
- r. Ramlow – get ahold of Camp Lincoln leadership and talk with them what’s the best way to go about this.
- s. Representative Swanson – are there other states doing it and who in the states are providing the training and who in state of IL would provide training for program we put together. Is that IL Department of Veterans’ Affairs, is that something internally we do in the national guard?
- t. Vaughn – we want our VSOs to reach out, I think we would still need to flesh out who would provide what and we need to decide what recommendations are we going to make
- u. Representative Swanson – veterans’ senior fair
- v. Kimyada Wellington – training was not present for national guard retirees. Identify those disabilities that aren’t covered or denied. Start listing those to figure out why they’re not covered, can we get them covered and supply explanation to those who have applied.
- w. Sutton – was going to get a list. The PACT Act adds 23 new presumptives and these are exactly what the VSOs have been dealing with, like hypertension from Agent Orange. It’s hard to come up with a list until that act goes through.
- x. Representative Swanson – may be a cost issue bringing on a veterans’ liaison
- y. Butz – EEO officer may be able to have a secondary position as a veterans’ liaison, could it be like how a union president is allowed to have a certain amount of time to address this function.

### iii. Training and Outreach for VHA providers

- a. Sutton – this is in regards to Nexus letters being written and reminding those VHA doctors that they need to fill it out when veteran asks for it. They may be worried about their jobs and they feel like they're writing a letter to go against their employer and nervous about retaliation. We can send out another reminder to these providers that there is no retaliation from your employer. Can that reminder be sent out to DVA network.
- b. Vaughn – I don't know that we have a network to all the VA doctors. I will check with Field Services Manager to see what kind of connection we have to them.
- c. Iwanicki – clients may be seeing notes that could get them upset with them, which is why they send them to another doctor to get the mental health portion done. Hit or miss to get doctors to fill out DBQ – create DBQ clinic at the hospitals, but getting the individual doctors to do it, it's up to the doctor's discretion to do it, and most don't want to do it. Is that what you're finding as well?
- d. Vaughn – if we ask them to do the DBQ what happens if the doctor says no, I don't think this person should be. Just because they're getting treated doesn't mean it's a service-connected issue. That would put doctor against their patient.
- e. Sutton – Update from Vaughn after Field Service Manager connection

## **5. Member Updates**

- a. Sutton-Down to co-chairs, Tim will no longer attend. Recruiting from Tim's organization is happening. If you can't attend a meeting, please let Kourtney or Michelle know.
- b. Iwanicki – got done with caregiver week, there were 8 online seminars, A lot of online discussion. I'll be getting those out to everyone.

## **6. Adjournment**

- a. Iwanicki- Motion to close
- b. Ramlow second
- c. Meeting ended at 1:33pm

**7. Next scheduled Meeting is July 11, 2022, 12:00pm-2:00pm**

**8. Resources provided in chat: none**