

**Veterans’ Service-Related Ailments Task Force
Meeting Minutes
July 11, 2022, 12pm-2pm**

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

- a. Meeting called to order by 12:02pm Michelle Ramlow
- b. Roll call taken and quorum established with 10 members at roll call
- c. IDVA staff members present: Kourtney Hopkins, Crystal Womack
- d. Introductions new member Eric Peterson, group

Senator Wilcox	Absent
Representative Kifowit	Present
Representative Swanson	Present
Director Prince or designee	Present
COL John Fulk	Absent
Christopher Spears	Absent
Eric Butz	Present
Kimyada Wellington	Present
Michael Iwanicki	Present
Michelle Ramlow	Present
Summer Padoan	Present
Eric Peterson	Present
William Sutton	Present
VACANT	
VACANT	

2. Reading and Approval of Minutes from June 13, 2022

- a. Summer Padoan- Questions or corrections from the group? None heard
- b. Padoan- Approved as written

3. Old Business

- a. Training and Incentives for contracted C&P Examiners- Work Group Volunteers needed

- i. Padoan- Still need volunteers for this group. Need recommendations on how to reach the examiners to provide incentives who are private providers. Recognizing that a lot of denials are based on poor C&P exams. Main goal of this working group is to come up with recommendations for the state on how we can get the examiners more training and incentives and additional providers throughout the state. We need a couple of volunteers that would be interested in this working group.

- ii. Eric Butz- can volunteer but I don’t know much about the topic. Maybe we are going off course? I will work with the group and volunteer but would need to learn more

- iii. Eric Peterson- I will volunteer for this work group
 - iv. Padoan- I will volunteer for group as well. Do we have a list of who is in what work group?
 - v. Michelle Ramlow- Looking through previous notes and minutes to confirm work group members.
 - vi. Padoan- three of us fine is for this work group.
 - vii. Padoan- We need to refocus on all of these working groups. How can we put together these recommendations? Main reason commonly denied claims and how we can try to fix it? We need to find the balance what can we do as a state vs federal. As a state, getting involved and getting the veterans the help that they need. Examiners seem to need education on secondary conditions and secondary medical opinions such as sleep apnea commonly denied secondary to mental health or secondary joint conditions to other joint conditions. Finding ways to address those commonly denied issues through those routes.
- b. GDX Data review
- i. Padoan- Mike do you have anything to add to this?
 - ii. Michael Iwanicki- Depends how much you want to know. Goal is to show improvement year to year. It will take awhile to get out of the basement. New numbers should be out by now.

4. New Business

a. Legislation- Unrecognized service-related ailments

- i. Kourtney Hopkins- I want to bring attention back to the requirements of the legislation being to:
 - (1) Review and make recommendations regarding veterans' service-related ailments that are not recognized by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, including exploring why certain service-related ailments are not recognized and determining what may be done to have them recognized.
 - (2) Assess ways the State of Illinois can improve the rate at which disability compensation claims are approved by the federal government and correct the disparity between the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' approval of disability compensation for Illinois veterans and that which is approved for veterans in other states.
- ii. Hopkins- As a Task Force, we need to keep in mind the intent of the legislation and ensure our report/findings address the concerns outlined in the legislation. Additionally, the report and findings are due to the Governor's Office and General Assembly by December 31, 2022, which means we need to have a decent draft by early December.

iii. Hopkins-Work Group Member Recap:

Re-entry:

William Sutton
Representative Kifowit
Michelle Ramlow
Anthony Vaughn
Representative Swanson

Training and Incentives for contracted C&P

Examiners:

Eric Butz
Eric Peterson
Summer Padoan

Training and Outreach VHA providers:

Summer Padoan
William Sutton

Training and Outreach to veterans:

Summer Padoan
William Sutton
Chris Spears
COL John Fulk
Kimyada Wellington
Eric Butz
Michael Iwanicki

b. Working Group Updates

i. Re-entry to Illinois Program

a. Representative Kifowit-no updates. We have not met as a group. We will meet via Zoom in the next couple weeks

b. Representative Swanson-Reached out to GEN Cobetto with the IL NG to identify a way forward on providing training for retirees and guardsman in TAPS or benefits type program so that we can begin to work with leadership and put together a road map for state members as they leave the military. Guard, Air or Army, we could open to all Army Reserve or Veterans who are returning to Illinois.

c. Representative Kifowit- Does he have a framework?

d. Representative Swanson- Not at the moment, planning is at the 30,000 ft level.

e. Representative Kifowit- Newly returning members is key to connect to VSOs. Our goal is the second faction of the legislation and get more approvals for our guys.

f. Representative Swanson- Pick up our guard members in claims that have rotations in theaters that have conditions that result in serving in Iraq and Afghanistan environment. Help get the compensation rolling too.

g. Padoan- Great point too with Guard and Reserve. Having a guard and reserve claims approved typically requires extra work especially if they did not deploy. Success rate is very low.

h. Representative Swanson- Concur

i. Anthony Vaughn- When we look at GDX, GDX is saying that for every veteran who is service connected is getting less than the rest of the states. It is a matter of the VA giving them proper ratings based on information provided in the claims.

j. Representative Kifowit- Great point

k. Padoan- largely are due to C&P exams. Improperly documenting resulting in a lower percentage. Examiners need to have the proper documentation.

l. Butz- I spoke to a VSO in confidence he was complaining a large number of claims are being sent to VA office near Chicago and a lot of denials coming from Chicago, other states have different regional offices and operate differently. Just throwing that one after that might be a factor. Another thing mention was- state providing legal services somehow, DAV, other agencies "that's what we do" are there other ways the state can get involved? Just throwing those two things out there.

m. Representative Kifowit- State does provide appeal process for free. But your point, we need to let more people know that more people need to be aware of that, so people don't walk away from the process.

ii. Training and Outreach to veterans

- a. Padoan- we have not met as a work group. Anyone else want to add anything? Also include Mr. Iwanicki in this group. We will put together a group email. There are 7 of us so we can start brainstorming and get those ideas together. Anybody want to add anything?

iii. Training and Outreach for VHA providers

- a. Padoan- gray area because they fall under federal regulation. As a TF and work group, this may be a smaller focus because of the gray area. VHA providers are also providing care but giving push back with DBQs and nexus letters. Will and I will get together on that.
- b. William Sutton- Absolutely.

5. Member Updates

- a. Vaughn- If I remember correctly- Someone had asked how many veterans work for the state or in each state? Did I hear that correctly from the last meeting?

b. Butz- I threw that out there because there were so many veterans in the hiring system for the state and I was digging for a way for a veteran assistance liaison in each facility or a note on a bulletin board directing the veterans to assistance.

c. Vaughn- veterans must volunteer the information that they are a veteran. Of the 250,000 state employees 7,000 have identified themselves as veterans. A little under 3%. Out of the 96,000 federal employees, 21,000 have identify as veterans (22%), local governments 7,000 identified as veterans of 400,000 employees. When you talk about federal state and local, just under 5% identify themselves as veterans.

d. Butz- that is disturbing. I wonder if downstate contributes more to it. I ran across more than that. Those numbers are much lower than I expected them to be

e. Vaughn-Lower than I expected them to be too.

f. Padoan - Good point. If they don't use veteran preference for hiring. It may be under reported especially if they didn't use their veteran preference. Low ballpark numbers. Maybe that also correlates with veterans that don't recognize themselves as veterans or not understanding that they are veterans, don't understand the term veteran? There can be a misunderstanding of what that term means and how its reported.

g. Hopkins- The Task Force previously voted to invite Kwame Crawford from Senator Duckworth's office to join the Task Force meetings, but he is no longer with Senator Duckworth's office. We do have other representatives from her office, but they are not specific to veteran services.

h. Representative Kifowit- I can reach out to Senator Durbin's office to see if he has a veteran services coordinator that would be interested in attending.

i. Hopkins- I will also be reaching out to those who still need to complete their training requirements for the Task Force.

6. Adjournment

a. Iwanicki-motion to adjourn

b. Butz- Second

c. Meeting adjourned at 1:06pm

7. Next scheduled Meeting is August 8, 2022, 12:00pm-2:00pm

8. Resources provided in chat: N/A