

**Veterans’ Service-Related Ailments Task Force
Meeting Minutes
May 9, 2022, 12pm-2pm**

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

- a. Meeting called to order by Summer Padoan at 12:04
- b. Roll call taken and quorum established with 9 members at roll call
- c. IDVA staff members present: Kourtney Hopkins, Crystal Womack, Sara Augustinas

Senator Wilcox	Not Present
Representative Kifowit	Present
Representative Swanson	Present
Director Prince or designee	Present (Anthony Vaughn)
COL John Fulk	Present
Christopher Spears	Present
Eric Butz	Not Present
Kimyada Wellington	Present
Michael Iwanicki	Not Present
Michelle Ramlow	Present
Summer Padoan	Present
Timothy Alexander	Not Present
William Sutton	Present
VACANT	
VACANT	

2. Reading and Approval of Minutes from April 11, 2022

- a. Summer Padoan- Does everyone have a copy of the meeting minute from our last meeting?
Any questions/corrections/changes/edits needed?
- b. None heard
- c. Padoan- Minutes from April 11, 2022 approved as distributed.

3. Old Business

- a. C&P examiner certification/recertification requirements
 - i. Padoan- Shared VHA Directive 1603 and certification. No mention of recertification requirements. VHA Directive answers the question regarding recertification but as far as the Task Force, what can we do as a state? Maybe purpose the state provide additional incentive but will not directly impact VHA Directive. Any thoughts?
 - ii. William Sutton- The VHA Directive Kourtney sent out mentions recertification?

iii. Kourtney Hopkins- Clarified the recertification addressed in the VHA Directive pertains to the VHA Directive itself, not the training requirements.

b. Analysis of where Illinois currently stands nationally with disability compensation rates

i. Padoan- How can we as a Task Force put together and use the data that is out there? We can talk to Iwanicki a little more on the data. We need to decide as a Task Force if this something we want to put our energy into or use the data that is already available?

ii. Anthony Vaughn- Use the data that is already there? Are we talking about the GDX or the data produced in Annual report? GDX has been used in the past to say that Illinois ranked near the bottom. Is it the GDX data we are talking about?

iii. Padoan - That would make sense to me. It would be smart to use the same data set that we have already been using vs changing data set and manipulating data set.

iv. Vaughn- VA IOG report from 2004 is still relevant that I believe Kourtney sent to cochairs.

v. Kourtney Hopkins- Sent to cochairs and left it up to them to send it out if they found it relevant to the group.

vi. Vaughn- Has it been reviewed by cochairs?

vii. Padoan - Has not reviewed yet.

viii. Hopkins- Do you want me to send to group?

ix. Padoan - Send to whole group for their review.

c. Task Force Vacancies (Senator Wilcox and Representative Kifowit)

i. Representative Kifowit- reached out to Senator Munoz, Senate Chair Veteran Committee couple of times. Also connected with Kwame Crawford in Senator Duckworth's office to be appointed or invited to this Task Force but leave it to the group for that but unable to connect with Senator Munoz. Kwame is very interested in participating in this Task Force.

ii. Hopkins- Defer to Sara on appointment. I am not sure if the legislation allows for him to be an appointed member but he possible could be invited to participate as a non-voting member?

iii. Sara Augustinas-agree invite as guest on an Adhoc basis but will confirm

iv. Hopkins-vote to invite?

v. Padoan - Propose to invite Kwame Crawford as guest to Task Force from Senator Duckworth's office as a participating non-voting member?

vi. Motion-Representative Kifowit; Representative Swanson-second

Senator Wilcox	Not Present
Representative Kifowit	Present-yes
Representative Swanson	Present-yes
Director Prince or designee	Present (Anthony Vaughn)-yes
COL John Fulk	Present-yes
Christopher Spears	Present-yes
Eric Butz	Not Present
Kimyada Wellington	Present-yes
Michael Iwanicki	Not Present
Michelle Ramlow	Present-yes
Summer Padoan	Present-yes
Timothy Alexander	Not Present
William Sutton	Present-yes
VACANT	
VACANT	

vii. Padoan -approved to invite Kwame Crawford as a nonvoting participant

d. Training Requirement Status

i. Ethic officers has Representative Swanson and Representative Kifowit' s training on file

ii. Chris, Michelle and COL Fulk requested resend training

e. Data

i. Padoan – Lets go back to the data. Do we want to motion to review the data?

ii. Michelle Ramlow-please repeat

iii. Padoan - Do we want to continue pursuing data sets or use GDX data that is already available?

iv. Ramlow- Data that we are currently using-is it good data? Is it accurate data? Do we need to explore different data?

vi. Vaughn- I am familiar with data. What we need to do as a Task Force is really decide what it is we want to focus on and figure out where we can get that data from. Historically, it is the numbers from the GDX. As a Task Force, is that the right data? Is there something else out there that can give a more accurate picture and where do we get that data from? Do we explore all of the data that is out there? Or

does the Task Force want to say-this is what we are concerned with and then go find the data to support what we are concerned about?

vii. Padoan -My concern is if we switch the data...December is coming up quickly. If we focus on data before the proposal and switch data, we are referencing but if it is not consistent with GDX we may not have consistent concern.

viii. Vaughn-valid concern. If we change the data, we won't be able to have an apples-to-apples comparison of is that apples the right set of data or should we be looking at oranges rather than apples. What should we be looking at? What is most important to the state? Is it the number of veterans at VA hospitals, is it the amount of money receiving in compensation, is the number of veterans receiving compensation? Where do we want to go? How do we want to say we are either good bad or in the middle?

ix. Sutton- Listening to Mr. Vaughn, you are exactly correct in my opinion. We are looking at it too much as a service officer. Maybe we look at it in a different light? More focused on re-entry to Illinois program? If the program starts, the numbers are going to rise. We have to focus on something. If we focus on a program that will make those numbers change maybe that is where we should start?

x. Vaughn-Proposing it that way, we are proposing it that way we are proposing a solution to a problem that we aren't really sure is a problem. If you are saying the reentry program will help move those numbers than you are saying those numbers are important.

xi. Sutton- we always have room for improvement. There is an opportunity for us to go introduce ourselves and let the veterans know we are here for them, and we can help them. If we are not number one, we already have room for improvement.

xii. Vaughn-Not number one in what?

xiii. Padoan -According to the legislation. Based on the number of veterans receiving any kind of service-connected disability.

xiv. Vaughn-correct. Compared to other states.

xv. Kimyada Wellington - I thought we were looking at the disabilities that had been declined or looking why they were declined and how they can be included in the rating?

xvi. Padoan - correct. The commonly declined claims and how that can increase the service-connected compensation. We need to focus our efforts on those initial legislations. How it is we are tasked to focus on. With that in mind, that is a good lead in to how we have been talking about several things. Re-entry, training and outreach to veterans, training to VA providers, training and incentives to providers, data and collection issues. Service ailments and how we can impact the veterans in Illinois. We talked a little bit last month. Do we want to set subcommittees and focus on individual items and then come back or break it down and address as a group? Thoughts on that?

xvii. Padoan -There are pros and cons to subcommittees. We are a small group as is and whether that would require another chair.

xviii. Ramlow- I think we should leave it as this group. Better brainstorming and different resources with the group. Better to tackle as one big group

xix. Representative Kifowit- Either direction, but I wouldn't go the subcommittee route. We could form smaller working groups for structure and efficiency, or we can stay with the larger group. It is really the prerogative of the chair. Working group vs subcommittees.

xx. Sutton- We need to dial it in more. This month we bring in information for reentry program, following month different topic. Focus on one task for upcoming task and give a whole month to prepare. Working groups can form throughout the month and present to the group, then move on and keep it on task.

xxi. Padoan -Any other input? I like the idea of the working group. That leads us to what we were initially thinking about. We can work with a smaller group then bring it back to the larger group.

xxii. Representative Kifowit-Motion not necessary. It is the prerogative of the chairs.

xxiii. Padoan - Michelle-break down each to the issues addressed. If people want to respond and volunteer themselves into a specific area of interest and develop working groups.

xxiv. Wellington- How will this work on how Will suggested the entire group works on a topic for a month. We are not all working on it? Only if we have an interest?

xxv. Padoan - We will all be working on something based on interest and will work on it throughout the month and then at the next meeting share what the working group is proposing or incentives that we are putting together.

xxvi. Wellington- I want to be involved and provide input in multiple areas.

xxvii. Padoan – The smaller group may be able to have more input to bring to larger group.

xxviii. Wellington- Someone suggested roundtable discussion? I don't want to miss out on a think tank but if we are discussing I want to be able to contribute.

xxix. Sutton- If you want to be a part of every group you can, but everyone will hear about it at the group meeting that way everybody is a part of it but a few people on the smaller scale will do more of the heavy lifting.

xxx. Wellington-Just letting everyone know there are options out there.

xxxi. Padoan -Thoughts feedbacks, concerns? How do we start getting into the solution and how to start moving forward?

4. New Business

a. Re-entry to Illinois Program

- i. William Sutton, Representative Kifowit, Michelle Ramlow, Anthony Vaughn, and Representative Swanson volunteer for Re-entry to Illinois Program Work Group.
- ii. Wellington- Ask that the NG and Reserves be included in that

- iii. Representative Kifowit- I have a direct line to NG. The Working group is going to do the work. We don't need individual directly at the table but pull them in as needed and the individuals. We need to take in account peoples schedules.
- iv. Wellington-Just want to make sure where we are going with this and reach out to my resources and get a think tank there and see what feedback we can get.
- v. COL Fulk-Having done multiple tours overseas one of the biggest issues is getting the soldiers to slow down during demob and listen to the benefits
- vi. Padoan - Get the benefits established a little earlier on before it gets worse.
- vii. Wellington-When an opportunity gets presented after demobilization maybe after
- viii. Michelle- The last time I deployed in 2008-2009, a lot of things have changed but some is the same but when people came in to talk to us during our brief, we are tired, and focus is limited what if VSOs could be there and let's start a claim for you and plant that seed and ask the questions? I don't know if this is realistic?
- ix. Padoan -If it is something that can be built into the program whether county or state and have a rotation to have VSOs present at that program session...
- x. Sutton- If a service officer is there, when I got back, I wasn't trying to hear anybody but if you give us 30 minutes, we could hold your spot for a year with an intent to file. You already know who we are and know who a service officer is and here is our outreach.
- xi. Ramlow-and along with that, have fact sheets available. For example, Desert Storm veteran... they don't know presumptive conditions. It will prompt them thinking. Here is a fact sheet for desert storm, Iraq Afghanistan.
- xii. Padoan - Looking at reentry providing a list of presumptive and or common issues to be included in re-entry program
- xiii. Representative Kifowit- all need a deeper dive. A when, the how...These are the questions the working group will roll up their sleeves and dig into. Great questions, great strategies, and great concerns.
- xiv. Sutton-great questions that can be answered. I would love Rep Kifowit to spear head working group.
- xv. Representative Kifowit- I am happy to do that. If we can find a method through IDVA, legislatively, that all has merit and has huge positives. Get folks moderately engaged and have a small connection we can get. Maybe we do have to offer them a beer and meet them at a bar. Not only those who just returned but those who have not engaged in the VA. Catching the people who have slipped through the cracks. Sending a letter or phone call is not enough- we have to meet them where they are at.

b. Training and Outreach to veterans

- i. Padoan - Who wants to be a part of this working group?
- ii. Summer Padoan, William Sutton, Chris Spears, COL Fulk, and Kimyada Wellington volunteer for the Training and Outreach to Veterans Work Group.
- iii. Focus on developing how we can best reach veterans and what is the best message on how we can get that out to them. Commonly denied issues and how can we propose the state be involved with marketing and outreach.

c. Training and Outreach for VHA providers

- i. Padoan - VHA on federal level. How can we as a Task Force propose the VA be involved with the providers? Is there anything we can propose on the state level?
- ii. VHA Directive 1134 (2)- Good tool for this group.
- iii. Vaughn-Question- is the end result recommendations to the USDVA on what we think should happen or what they should do?
- iv. Padoan -How the state could assist in getting the local VHAs to become more aware of the directive? How can we get this out to the local VHAs to make sure they are aware and following the guidelines from the federal VA?
- v. Sutton-My take from this is- if anything at all, something that VA in Illinois, a friendly email to the Directors of VHAs in Illinois. I am hearing a lot of the doctors are worried about their jobs. Maybe a friendly email to VHA Directors letting doctors know their job is secure if they complete these forms.
- vi. Padoan - Our Superintendent worked with North Chicago. This doesn't always get to the bottom. Direct Line providers are not always aware. What can we do to bring awareness? Maybe a townhall or Zoom meeting and getting this information out to VHA providers? Getting a favorable opinion can be difficult and can make or break a case. Having them be able to do that will have a huge impact.
- vii. Summer Padoan and William Sutton volunteer for Training and Outreach for VHA Providers Work Group.

d. Training and Incentives for contracted C&P Examiners

- i. Padoan -focusing on what we can propose? Can the state provide an incentive?

- ii. Any volunteers for the work group?
 - iii. Representative Kifowit and Ramlow- only can commit to one work group.
 - iv. Vaughn-Will this be sent to other members?
 - v. Padoan- Leave open for now and fill later with other members?
- e. Data collection (County Recorder Offices)
- i. Padoan- Do we need a working group for this?
 - ii. Sutton-no
- f. 1:23 Swanson signed off
- g. Chair discussion
- i. Sutton-there are co-chairs three chairs, only two currently participating. Do we need to vote to drop the third co-chair?
 - ii. Ramlow- Does anybody know the circumstances? We should reach out to his organization to see how he is and if they have a replacement?
 - iii. Vaughn-Let's try to reach out to him. Is him being part of the tri-chair holding up any business?
 - iv. Padoan - Not yet. Having his input or feedback would be helpful but is not holding up business at this point.
 - v. Sutton-Same for Mr. Butz.
 - vi. Hopkins- I will make an attempt to contact both Mr. Butz and Mr. Alexander.

5. Member Updates

a. Representative Kifowit- HB5184 got signed into law on Friday eff date is Jan 1, 2023. It helps all the VACs and mandates that if you are a VAC you must file claims and works out technical challenges in funding.

- i. Padoan - IT really will help all VACs in the state. Getting other VACs to file claims and appeals and do things that should have been done but hasn't been done. Getting VACs in on filing claims will help the number of veterans receiving disability compensation.

b. Padoan - PACT Act had a lot combined. Burn pit legislations and a lot of cancers with burn pits and property tax exemptions for widows. Previously if the veterans had already filed then the widow could get it but now widower can apply regardless of if the veteran filed.

- c. Sutton- 100% permanent ad total you do not have to resubmit every year
- d. Representative Kifowit-another good legislation that helps out veterans'. Sara put down HB 5184 & SB 257. MST gave the NG authority to file order of protection to file in civilian court.
- e. Representative Kifowit-starting a discussion on property tax and the impact on how the program effects certain, concentrated areas from department of revenue.

6. Adjournment

- a. Padoan -shall we make a motion to adjourn?
- b. Sutton-motion to adjourn
- c. Representative Kifowit-second
- d. Adjourned 1:43pm

7. Next scheduled Meeting is June 13, 2022, 12:00pm-2:00pm

8. Resources provided in chat:

Kwame Crawford

Kwame Crawford kwame_crawford@duckworth.senate.gov if you could just add his name to the email list for the meeting?

from COL John Fulk to everyone: 12:42 PM

I recommend 3 top priority items and focus

from Sara Augustinas to everyone: 1:40 PMSB 1975--property tax/additional guidance should be sent out from IDOR (I'll defer to Rep. Kifowit)

from COL John Fulk to everyone: 12:42 PM

I recommend 3 top priority items and focus body have interest in being on this working group?