

**Veterans’ Service-Related Ailments Task Force
Meeting Minutes
February 27, 2023, 12pm-2pm**

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

- a. Meeting called to order by William Sutton at 12:10pm.
- b. Roll call taken and quorum established with 9 members at roll call.
- c. IDVA staff members present: Kourtney Hopkins, Sara Augustinas
- d. Guests: Abbie Holland-Schmidt

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

2. Reading and Approval of Minutes from December 12, 2022

- a. Kimyada Wellington-Motion to approve minutes
- b. Senator Wilcox-Second
- c. All in favor
- d. Sutton-Any opposed? Hearing none. Minutes are approved.

3. Old Business

- a. Feedback on report submission
 - i. Sutton- Has anyone received any feedback?
 - ii. Representative Kifowit-I have not heard anything. I can inquire. No longer the chair of the Veterans Affairs Committee. I can check with the new chair to get a subject matter hearing when I get to Springfield. New chair is Lance Yednock.
 - iii. Sutton-That would be great.

4. New Business

- a. Follow up on VSO to Veteran ratio conversation in conjunction with P.A. 102-0758
 - i. Sutton-Summer I believe this was your topic.

- ii. Padoan- It was sort of. In our report we mentioned the VSO ratio. We talked about using their numbers from the report. I don't know if that report has been completed but we talked about using those numbers.
- iii. Sutton- Any questions about that? I can speak about our organization (IACVAC). A lot of different counties are doing mass hiring right now.
- iv. Padoan-was the other report filed with results?
- v. Sara Augustinas- I want to be mindful that I am participating as IDVA support staff. The public act we are referring to is HB2991 which is subject to appropriation. We are meeting the intent of that bill. Because funds were not appropriated, UIC is doing a study. This will help meet sponsors intent through ongoing study with UIC and study will be shared publicly if that's helpful.

5. Open Discussion

- i. Sutton- Anything for the good of the group? Like the military veteran assistance act getting signed.
- ii. Representative Kifowit-that is a good thing. Getting that trailer bill getting signed. It passed, it's a good bill, unfortunately we will have to wait a little bit. We are all happy about it. Forces Cook County to get in line. I think overall everybody should be pretty excited. Cook County has largest veteran population that was previously funded by a grant and now will get funding.
- iii. Eric Peterson- Project Headspace and Timing (PHAT) is piloting an app. Through PHAT, piloting a veteran crisis app similar to uber in Kankakee County by partnering with local police department, hospitals, and veteran advocates who has been trained in mental health and who can respond and not to provide treatment but to get them connected to mental healthcare. We are starting in Kankakee County.
- iv. Sutton- have you gotten with your VAC?
- v. Peterson-Karen is a chair of the organization.
- vi. Sutton-Summer is trainer for Mental Health First Aid. It sounds like a good program I would gladly support.
- vii. Padoan- before we get to the end I want to go back to the veteran ratio. We have it in our report, if it did get funded, how do we want to address it. How do we as a Task Force want to approach that as a bullet?
- viii. Sutton- I think it would be easier that we reach out at the state level; how many service officers we have and partner with IDVA. Between us and IDVA we can knock out a big chunk of service officers and we can at least help put with that level then look at the governors' reports.
- ix. Padoan- there are lot of data points. How do we consolidate and then how do we compare to other states? Comparative analysis to other states?
- x. Sutton- We have Director Prince right here. Maybe we can reach out to other states?
- xi. Director Prince- Ohio doesn't have their own VSOs. Other states some even contract with VSOs. I have instructed our team to partner with IACVAC to co-list with partners. We are also down 29 VSOs. It's a skillset that needs time to learn. I'm out there talking with other agencies and learning best practices. I am putting some of those into effect as we speak and things we are doing into that

regard. Looking at the report there are some things I cannot do such as hiring examiners but what I can do is share the report with the VSNs and Federal VA office. I do not want the work to go unnoticed. 99% of SMs sit through TAP and just want to get out of class. The VA doesn't talk about the other benefits just talks about compensation. Its on me and all of us to take this report and go to the other states and organizations and tell them we need to be doing this earlier. Its exciting where we are going. When I got to IDVA the phone number was wrong. It rang to a sweepstakes somewhere in the nation. We all know that people in general don't want to call. We are looking at modernizing. They don't have to call. They can literally click. We continue to work with IJF. Smash our organizations as much as I can because at the end of the day the veteran is the one getting the victory. We have to monitor. I wanted to get on this call to let you know I read this report and I am looking forward to the future and providing an update on what other agencies are doing.

- xii. Sutton- Same goes to IACVAC. We have the state VSOs listed as well. Some of us county service officers are going to state level and state level going to county level.
- xiii. Abbie Holland-Schmidt- I had an opportunity to lead a group on MST and so many of women didn't realize their symptoms were caused by MST. I thought is there a place someone can go at 2am to talk to someone like Eric said to become informed on symptoms. Maybe there is something for doing things on demand or developing a repository.
- xiv. Director Prince- welcome home events. Peer-to-peer events. Every experience is different. 4 years vs 25-year separation. Having a peer-to-peer option on an app when the demons that come out at 2 in the morning not 3 in the afternoon. I have talked Secretary McDonough at the VA and they are not calling the hotline because they are afraid, they are going to get tagged. They are afraid that it will affect their security clearance. The welcome to Illinois initiative will draw people to Illinois it will show that Illinois values their Veterans.
- xv. Mike Iwanicki- I've been around, and this group should be very proud of themselves.
- xvi. Representative Swanson- My biggest push right now is trying to get the National Guard into a TAP program right now. We don't have that in the NG. NG members serve additional time after yellow ribbon and I get calls from NG members all the time and they say they are done and then they don't know what to do and benefits have changed. Soldiers don't always report their pains and illnesses when serving on active service time. It's important that we help them understand their benefits. As we help guardsmen with their claims it helps us in Illinois, and this addresses homelessness as well. 20, 30, 50% compensation for homelessness will change the lives for a homeless individual.
- xvii. Sutton-thank you very much. You always bring up a very good point. A lot of us did active duty and you have definitely been a strong voice for the NG population. Maybe while we are waiting for that program to develop, we can bring it up to our organizations we can send our service officers out there to talk to them.

- xviii. Representative Swanson- these aren't always welcome home ceremonies. It could be one hour, one day. NG members could have been serving three days in Chicago riots and didn't realize they were eligible for benefits. Not only those who deploy but those who serve one day for other than training orders.
- xix. Holland-Schmidt-I'm curious if there would be a roster of those who were getting out of Army National Guard, does that exist here in Illinois that we can use to target outreach to let them know that events are happening?
- xx. Representative Swanson- good question for IDVA? That's what we struggle with. If we could do a MOU with Guard and Reserve with IDVA that would be a great step in the right direction.
- xxi. Holland-Schmidt- I worked with Warrior transition with Wisconsin and spoke to generals in Springfield back when I was with IJF. I am pretty sure it was possible. You could send it through the Armory. There might be a couple different ways. Its really going to be the 6 months after they get out.
- xxii. Director Prince- I've got that noted. We struggle getting that from the VA. By leaning into that and getting that information and what information we want to provide to them. Guard and Reserves is what troubles me the most. They often don't come back with a unit. Abbie if you have someone who has worked this issue maybe we can talk some more.
- xxiii. Holland-Schmidt- I spoke before congress on inability for VA and DOD. Army Wounded Warrior and Navy State harbor help warriors return, and they do get them higher ratings. How do we develop that and roll it out to the state? We want to be the state that can champion that.
- xxiv. Sutton- it's all baby steps towards the big goals.
- xxv. Senator Wilcox- question in chat
- xxvi. Padoan- Search a list of agents in each state DAV, VFW, NACVSO, IDVA. Something we can access and use it in that manner. Private people CVAs, that act independently OGC numbers, but I wonder maybe Will and I can look through the OGC and do a quick search
- xxvii. Iwanicki-OGC and look up accredited representatives in the entire state
- xxviii. Senator Wilcox-Lead someone to the path to get the answer than duplicate the work
- xxix. Iwanicki-some hold multiple certificates
- xxx. Padoan-I can get the list and sort in excel or something like that
- xxxi. Padoan- doing right now and does populate into excel
- xxxii. Holland-Schmidt- I have an intern and would be happy to help
- xxxiii. Sutton-any other questions

6. Adjournment

- a. Director Prince-Motion
- b. Padoan-Second
- c. Adjourned-1:01pm
- d. Next meeting April 10, 2023