

Illinois Veterans Advisory Council – Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, March 11, 2025– 10:00am

Illinois Department of Affairs

WebEx

Attendance:

NAME	APPOINTED BY	PRESENT
Bruce Blackmer	Marine Corps League	X
Al Reynolds	Disabled American Veterans	X
Senator Mike Porfirio	President of Senate	
Senator Craig Wilcox	Minority Leader of Senate	X
	Speaker of the House	
Rep. Dan Swanson	Minority Leader of the House	X
Robert Norman	IDVA Director	X
Frank Gutierrez	IDVA Director	X
Kevin Wathen	IDVA Director	X
Vince Long	IDVA Director	X
Bill Wolff	IDVA Director	X
	IDVA Director	
Kevin Little	National Guard	
Elizabeth Roxworthy	Department of Military Affairs	X
Shannon Yount	Attorney General	X
Adam Broshous	IL Secretary of State	X
Jorge Bermudez/Rich Wuthrich	IL Department of Securities	X
Michael Peck	The American Legion	X
Joseph Bartley	AMVETS	
Peggy Arick	Blue Star Mothers of America	
Tim Kennedy	Catholic War Veterans	
Dr. Jerry Field	Jewish War Veterans	X
	Military Order of the Purple Heart	
Lee Lopez	Military Order of the World Wars	X
Ray Dieter	Reserve Officers' Association	
Christa Hammers	IACVAC	X
John "Dutch" DeGroot	Veterans of Foreign Wars	X
Roy Dolgos	Vietnam Veterans of America	
Bob Tyler	MOAA	X

New Members: Larry Miller

Alternates / Guests: Art Dutkovic, Hugh Shown, George Mulvaney, Greg Padovani

Call to Order 10:00am

Roll Call

Pledge of Allegiance

Moment of Silence

Introductions:

IDVA Staff:

Terry Prince, Director

Anthony Vaughn – Assistant Director

Jassen Strokosch, Chief of Staff

Crystal Womack, Senior Programs Manager

Maureen Hartigan, Public Information Officer

Jenny Franklin – Director's Executive Assistant

Angie Simmons – Senior Homes Administrator

Kimberly Yantis – Central Region Field Supervisor

Margo Watson – Women Veterans Program Manager

Stephanie Heckenkamp – Chief Fiscal Officer

Danielle Luevano – Operations & Programs Manager

Approval of December 11th, 2024, minutes

Motion to approve the Minutes by Al Reynolds

Representative Dan Swanson seconded the motion

Motion passed to approve the December 11, 2024 minutes

Chairman Tyler:

Thank you very much. Before we introduce new members I'd like to take just a moment to say congratulations to Representative Swanson. I think it's quite noteworthy that the minority party is chairing the committee for the veterans. Congratulations Representative Swanson.

Representative Swanson:

Thank you Mr. Chair. It's quite an honor, as you said to be given this opportunity to represent veterans across Illinois from in the state capital and extremely honored and grateful to speaker Welch to put his trust in my ability. So thank you everybody.

Chairman Tyler:

I do have an introduction of new members, Adam Broshous from the Secretary of States office and Kevin Little from the Illinois Guard. Let's approve the minutes from the December 11th 2024 meeting.

Al Reynolds DAV makes a motion to approve the minutes. Since those were the minutes that I was elected to and can I say no at this point or is it too late. Okay, is there a second to that motion?

Representative Swanson seconds the motion to approve the minutes. All in favor say "I". Minutes approved.

Hugh Shown:

Just a comment, the minutes are fantastic. Very complete.

Chairman Tyler:

Crystal did a good job at this, thank you Crystal

When it comes next on the agenda is a review and discussion of our statute for the IVAC and its role. When we I looked at it coming into this position I wanted to see what my job was. It looked like what this commission was or this council was originally set up to do, was to, first of all study the transition of veterans and the challenges that they have, and then to advise the Director and receive a report from the IDVA and as well report on our actions to the IDVA and the Governor.

I also looked at the membership of the committee or the council rather, and noted that twenty eight percent of the members represent government agencies. If I include the IDVA people that are part of this council, that's fifty percent of our membership. So while we like to think certainly that we're all just veterans representing veterans, we are, you know, looking at the issues around veterans and those things that impact them and this council becomes a way that we can bring those issues to the Secretary of the State or the Attorney General or the Department of Revenue or the legislature with the four legislative members on the council to be able to take the actions that need to be taken.

And so I looked at that as the membership to make sure that we're not just a consortium of Veteran Service Organizations, but rather this collection of people to try and take awareness of the issues and deal with them in a holistic way that the government can approach from wherever is appropriate. I also noted that when we looked at it, that maybe, you know, I'd like to say that studying the transition and reporting on how we're managing that transition has become OBE because it's been a period of time, but there's a new movie out called Brothers After War that was put together by a doctor that actually grew up and lived in Decatur, which I thought was interesting. Steve Salis provided the funding for it. In that once again we saw the difficulty veterans have in returning to civilian life and finding a job. Finding a job becomes important because if they find a job then that keeps us off of unemployment and all the other things like homelessness and all the way to the beginning to the the suicide stuff. And, you know, so I look at that if that's still a common problem we're having such that movies are being made about it or textbooks that the Director, not a textbook, but a book on Wounding Warriors that the director and I have talked about in the past. Maybe we still need to look at that transition and where it is. Having said all that, we've had a lot of discussion recently in the past few weeks about roles and responsibilities of this and are we in the right place and are we doing the right things. I'd like to open that up for discussion about what it is we need to be doing, you know, that we're not doing, and if it's appropriate, and if we need to change things, then we need to talk with the Representative Swanson and other members of our legislature to to revise our charter and go from there. So with that, I'll open it up, Director, do you have any comments first?

Director Prince:

There was lots of comments and we won't go into the Director's report just yet. I think you're hitting it right on the head of what we do at IDVA and transition being the number one piece. I've asked Danielle to be here and others to be here to talk about some of the things that we do to help with transition, homelessness, suicide prevention, all the areas that we don't talk a lot about are the areas that I think that IVAC needs to zero in on and focus with. How does that then advise the agency of here's where we think that you should do more of or less of whatever.

I just came back from a meeting in DC and went over to the Pentagon to discuss transition and there's some fear in the Pentagon halls that things like Skill Bridge are going to go away and other programs that have proven to be effective in reducing that. When we talk about transition and I think the overarching theme of my thoughts for this meeting was the entire spectrum of veteran which Danielle and I talked about a little bit this morning is in a transition right now. Literally veterans who counted on federal government as an employer for the duration of their lives have been thrown in an up roar in regards to changes that are happening at the federal level. So I think when we talk about transition, that's what this group focuses on, it needs to focus even more across the state and what is IVAC's role in advising myself and others on what we could be doing more of. And so there's a lot of that conversation happening. I'll get into what Secretary Collins said during my other comments when we get to that point. But I think you're right on the money speaking about that because without transition services, we're starting to look at veteran suicide, homelessness, drug use, all of the things, which we, all of us, whether it's in our current role here or in our lives or as part of the IVAC, we spend a majority of our time on the smallest amount of cases, the most difficult things because it usually comes in on a Friday at four o'clock when they walk into 69 West Washington and say I'm homeless, can you help me? And it's not something that just happened that afternoon. So this is exciting time for the IVAC Mr. Chair and Madam Vice Chair, and I think you're right on the money to have kind of people throw in what they feel the role is.

Chairman Tyler:

And I see Mike Peck has his hand up Col Peck, go ahead, sir.

Mike Peck:

Yes sir, I've been on the IVAC for this current IVAC since 2009 when Dan Grant was the Director and when Myron Kirby was Chair and Chapa LaVia was the Director. We started putting in the recommended legislation to affect these problems. And they've done that every year for the past six years. And because the the law says we're to address problems affecting veterans. It's not just limited to IDVA, it's all veterans problems and we have done a great job in the last six years and now we have some legislation that is affecting what we've done in the past. I think we're on course. We've already set the precedence. The annual report that we submit. I'm concerned about it because July first is too late, I think our annual report should be submitted 1 March so that the House Veterans Affairs Committee can act on them. So that's my two cents sir.

Chairman Tyler:

Thanks Mike. Any other comments? Dutch I believe you have your hand up.

Dutch DeGroot:

Basically the things that we've been able to get done of great importance for veterans have been done through legislation lately in our legislative partners. I brag about them every time I go out and speak to people and say, our state is a top state for veteran satisfaction and benefits and our IDVA benefits. Our state benefits are off the chart. But the things we do get done seem to be through legislation and it's a gray area I was talking to Shannon at the AG and she was very nice and it's like where do we balance this, ok? Where we don't get where were political. I think this is a good discussion.

Chairman Tyler:

Thanks, anybody else?

One of the comments that I would make when it comes to legislation is, you know, as I pointed out, thirty percent of the membership minus the IDVA folks, which would bring up to fifty percent of the membership have responsibilities to other agencies and if they go on record of supporting a particular piece of legislation, that has the potential of putting them in opposition with their agency. I think that's putting folks in, you know, in an awkward position. It's one thing for us to discuss and offer to our VSO agencies this legislation that's out there, whether it's appropriate or not, and certainly within our VSO's for us or have a consortium of those to do it. But when I look at the IVAC supporting any particular piece of legislation, I think it puts some of our members in very awkward positions. That's just my read of it, and, you know when I get my crayons out as an old Marine that's kind of the way it comes across to me.

Any comments from Shannon in particular.

Vice Chair Yount:

I feel like I haven't said anything. He's like wait, she's been quiet too long. So just to go off of what everybody is kind of touching on. Going back to when Dr. Tyler and I were voted into be chair and vice chair, the one thing that members did bring up is that less and less representatives who are being appointed to the council is attending these meetings. And so when you're looking at it, you're wondering why. What are they going to bring to the table, right? If it's just discussing legislation, what are those state agencies that have appointed individuals on the council? What are they bringing to the table? Because to their understanding is that they are here to listen in on how they can improve veteran lives, how they can support veterans in the state. It's the core thing that everybody wants to talk about is legislation, then you wonder why people stop coming to the council meetings.

It was asked to us to reintroduced IVAC and what we do. And with doing that, we have new members joining. We have members who want to listen in on the meeting and they recently found out that it's open to the public. Director Prince put it up on the website providing information to call in and you can listen. We want to hear from the veterans and the community. We want to hear from what you guys are having issues with. Veteran Service Organizations from the state of Illinois, they're the ones in the veteran communities. They hear what's going on. They're the ones that most likely will be the first responder to the veterans that need assistance, county resources and what have it. Hearing from them as to what's going on benefits the state agencies. I believe that is why the General Assembly constructed IVAC in the manner it is.

It's a relationship among Veteran Service Organizations and state agencies to address those concerns. I know last year everybody was asking and inquiring about IDES. How can we get the veterans through the system to get those services for employment? We have surviving spouses and independents who have these licensings, right? To be a teacher or whatever but it takes a really long time to get licensing, right? So having those individuals voice what's going on, it wasn't an initiative in IVAC, but it was brought up, right? So, it's not an initiative, but bringing up common trends, right? So as DAV is saying hey we're noticing that veterans are trying to get the disabled plates are having a difficult time getting this document or they have to spend thirty five dollars to get this document. They're sharing the information and we can tell them, hey, if you're going to get claims for service connected and if you try to get a DD214 for a benefit, you go to a recorder's office, you don't have to pay if it's specifically for a claim pertaining to veterans status, right? If you're trying to get a veteran benefit. Now, that's something that could be brought up, that could be something that IVAC is working with IDES. That IDES representative or the secretary of state representative would go back and say how can we make it easier? It may not have to be pushed through legislation, but it brings the agencies in and we get to hear them. We get to build relationships with them and sometimes it doesn't have to be legislation. We want more people to the table and we're thinking this is the best way. It also prevents people from being standoffish because it could negatively affect where they are. You you may put them in a hard spot without noticing it and some people aren't gonna say it.

Chairman Tyler:

Thank you. Frank, I see your hands up.

Frank Gutierrez:

Yes, a couple things. I know you guys were talking about what do we bring to the table? Me being a Chicago Transit employee, one of the things that my veteran employee resource group is really wanting to like hone in on is how can the CTA better service the veteran within the community? And I know at one point you could go to Darien or any station and print off a military service pass. At this time though I don't know when this transitioned, but the only place you could now obtain a military pass is at the headquarters over in the Ventra office on the second floor of CTA's headquarters. What's the fix? Can we put printers back in deeres? Can we bring up Jesse Brown and Hines or perhaps even since the service pass is good for Cook county veterans and its collar counties, is it more appropriate for service passes to be able to be acceptable at each VAC office.

Director Prince:

Are you talking about the actual bus pass or the deers ID card?

Frank Gutierrez:

That's why I'm talking about the military service pass.

Director Prince:

Did they use to print the blue one at the Darien office?

Frank Gutierrez:

At one point they did print that off at other installations.

Director Prince:

We'll have to look at that. That's the first I've heard of it for them, but this is a good segue in the fact that if you didn't know, I just did this for my wife and I, you can actually get your deers card done online. You don't even have to go in anymore. You can literally go in and they'll mail it to you. So if you're dependent or you're retiree ID card is expiring, you can get it redone through deers via the website. Frank, we're gonna have to look and chat more about this. I'm not sure we're understanding what that means as far as the CTA being printed at other locations cause I know when I got mine for CTA I had to go downtown to that office and that was four years ago.

Frank Gutierrez:

I'm talking this program's been around for a while. I'm talking perhaps like over ten years ago. Definitely over ten years ago cause I've already hit my ten year mark here at CTA and I was way before that, time flies.

One other thing that I want to bring up, I don't know if anybody ever heard of Operation Deep Dive. Brown University did a study on veteran suicides and came up with like 2.4 times higher than officially reported. Meaning 40 to 44 suicides per day, and I'm not talking about your traditional suicide. I mean perhaps at risk behaviors, you know, veterans coming from the bar driving, riding their motorcycle 200 miles an hour on 290 or other various at risk behaviors, self medications. It's a lot higher than most of us think or most of us are tracking and when we're looking at 40 veterans passing away per day from very set risk behaviors that are contributed to like mental health disorders or even drug addictions. Or again, these are issues that really need to get addressed.

Chairman Tyler:

Super. Thanks Frank.

Back to our discussion about the roles and responsibilities of the IVAC and what we're supposed to be doing. Certainly we're talking about some of the issues that we ought to be looking at, but organizationally, are we properly doing what we're supposed to be doing. I hear from Shannon a little bit that part of what we need to do is go back to our basic groups and what is there that we've drifted a little bit into the world of just trying to be kind of a legislative review panel which doesn't take into effect all the other stuff. I hear from Col Peck that the desire to be more involved in legislation, and at the same time, I see Mike wants to talk about that a bit more. I noticed Senator Wilcox has joined and welcome sir. I'd sort of like to hear a little bit from our elected officials if they've got an opinion on this discussion so far.

So I guess the senator has dropped off again, so I'll come back to Representative Swanson. Any thoughts kind sir?

Representative Swanson:

Thank you Mr. Chairman. There are very limited members in the house with any type of military experience. Very few of us, and I think I'm the only one that has combat experience. So anything that we can get as far as to help members with their, what does impacts our veterans within the state of Illinois would be very beneficial. Whether that comes from our committee as a whole here or individual Legions, VFW's, whatever the case may be. I want to keep that line of communication with our members open, because it's important that we all understand the impact of the legislation. There are some legislation, it's a great idea, but the impact it has on the veterans may be different than what their good idea is intended to do. Whereas if we have people from the foxhole, people have the experiences, people have lived the life of a veteran today or

people who have military experience can best relate to, what it's like to ward up your field jacket for a pillow. Just to use an example of some people don't have those types of experiences. However we address this, IVAC brings a lot of groups together to help with the ideas. Mr. Chairman, I leave it up to you and Director Prince, but, I guess my point is that there's very few of us in the house, just only a couple on my veterans committee that have any military experience. So, however we can go about this, I think it'd be important to share information with our veterans, and with our committee members. Thank you.

Chairman Tyler:

Thank you sir. Appreciate it. Mike, your hand's still up. Go ahead.

Mike Peck:

Yes sir. Representative Swanson is very unique. I mean, here's a man who has served as superintendent for the Henry County VAC, so he knows from the ground up what it's like to be serving veterans and he's also service. I had the honor of serving in the National Guard with a Representative Swanson. When I returned from Vietnam in 1972, I later went to work for a young man by name Lane Evans, who literally became the Minority Leader of the Congressional House Veterans Affairs Committee. Lane put through the presumption for Agent Orange. He created the veterans Court of Appeals, but this all took grassroots legislation back in his district, which was Rock Island, Kewanee, Peoria, and Galesburg at the time. But he had to have us go to the representatives and tell them what the problems are. Now, in the past, this council has made recommendations and those recommendations were not followed through, so we had to submit legislation. Let me just ask the director, what happened with our recommendation to have a mobile van for Southern Illinois? Has that taken fruit?

Director Prince:

So first of all, the IDVA has its own legislative priorities as do all of the veteran service organizations that are a part of this. The idea is IVAC is designed to hear from trends, for example, what's happening at Secretary of State's office with veteran driver licensing, what's happening at the Attorney General's office and so on and so forth. We have our own priorities that we route in there, they're basically tied to what the governor's office desired and what this organization, IVAC is recommending. So while to answer your question yes, we are familiar with the mobile van, and the concept. But we also look at it from an aspect of vet centers provide mobile vans or other organizations that are providing mobile resources and that's not one of IDVA's core value contributions. The Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs has a number of things that we do and we advise the governor, but our main focus is veterans homes. Veterans service officers, headquarters operations through state approving agency, grant programs, and things of that nature while we advise and we look forward in utilizing the some forty six thousand tax registered organizations that support veterans in some way shape or form. So the IVAC isn't designed in my opinion, to be, Director, here's the legislation, we want you to forward in. That comes from the veteran service organizations that already do that on their own.

Mike Peck:

Exactly. And the example that Colonel Tyler brought up about homeless veterans, when a homeless veteran comes from Chicago and he wants to go to shelter in north Chicago, he has to have a physical first. And they'll show up on Friday but they can't get a physical till Monday morning, so the lake County Veterans assistance Commission puts them up in a hotel until they get their physical Monday morning. This is why we need to support the VAC's because the VAC's pick up that slack. And the only way we

get that support is by making recommendations to the House and Senate Veterans Affairs Committee. Thank you.

Chairman Tyler:

Any other comment? This has been a good discussion. I think as we're looking through it is as we're trying I don't know that we've come to any specific resolution, but it's given us an opportunity once again to look at what our tasking was. To reaffirm that it appears to be still valid and to continue to be this focal point for all the agencies to come together to help advise the director on those issues that are in to figure out the best way to approach those issues and and go from there. Any last comments on this before we move on to the next report?

Vice Chair Yount:

So I know that we have like twenty minutes or so left, if we want to keep it in our hour. I know some people don't like doing public speaking, they wanna look at the statute, they wanna look over the bylaws, they wanna digest what we talked about and then come up with what their thoughts were. And I just want to open the gate of communication. If some time come goes by and after you've looked into it and see what you perceive as your responsibilities or your roles as your delegate or alternate or representative of the agency that you can always send an email to myself or Doctor Tyler expressing your concerns or what you see the future of IVAC. It's not just one or two or possibly three or four individuals. It should be all of us, and I think Doctor Tyler knows how many people are on here better than I do. It should be a group discussion and it should be everybody's thoughts as to what they believe is the roles and purpose of IVAC is. Especially with the new members and the new assigned individuals.

Chairman Tyler:

Thanks. That's a good reminder and please yes the communication to us on the council, and certainly I think even the director would be welcoming any comments as well. I don't want to speak for him.

Director Prince:

Well, the number one item is to, as Mike said, I wanted to look back at that and say, is there something in the statute we're not following. The IVAC is responsible for telling us, hey, there's a statutory thing. is IDVA doing that? That's part of that shared responsibility of a holding us accountable to the things we say where we're going to do. We look forward to getting your ideas and your input, and as you heard Shannon say and I'll say in my own way. Getting more information from some of the other organizations that are a part of this committee, it has typically been the IDVA report for forty five minutes and then five minutes of everything else versus what's happening at these other organizations. What are the trends that you're seeing that I and the chair and the madam vice chair can take these things to the governor's office? And I think Mike made a great point if the annual report is not being done at the right time, we'll look at the statute and adjust it so it gets into the hands of the decision makers before, you know, before they leave town. We're gonna always write that support earlier. You know or change that. See mike? I gave you some love. I got you.

Hugh Shown:

Just real quick. You know, the visibility of the different acts that are going through Congress. You know, we don't have it. Mike Peck has given us a list of different bills that are pending or have been proposed, but most of people don't see those. They don't know what they are, they don't know what they're doing, they don't know if they are good for veterans or maybe not so good. I, you know, that visibility is just not available

unless you know a veterans organization that brings this. Mike kind of watches those kind of things, so that's good. And how do you get that information out?

Director Prince:

I'm a part of the National Associates State directors, and they have a legislative Affairs director. So, with that suggestion, I will share that legislative priorities General Les Beavers, Army general. He tracks every single bill making its way through the federal government. So we do have oversight on what's happening at the federal level and then the same thing at our state level, Sarah Augustinas our in house legislatively liaison is tracking anything that has the word veteran. And if I'm not mistaken, last year there were nearly two thousand bills that had the word veteran in it, in some way shape or form. Sarah will correct me, you know, I went to fish this big, but I don't know if she's on the call today. We are going to be running short on time.

Vice Chair Yount:

But I think for Sarah she would be speaking specifically for legislation for IDVA, so she wouldn't be doing the overview of all of the bills maybe two thousand of them that are entered into the General assembly that the same veterans service members. So I think when Sarah Augustina's talks, it's just specifically on bills that pertain to IDVA

Chairman Tyler:

So, with that director your report.

Director Prince:

I'm gonna let the team do a quick two minute speech. I will start with the Angie Simmons, our senior Homes administrator.

Angie Simmons:

Sure, good morning, this is Angie Simmons. For those of you that are new to the committee, I am the Senior Home Administrator, so I oversee the general operations of the five veterans homes in the state. I am joining from the lovely Chicago home right now. So I just have a, a few quick updates, some big wins that have come up here recently. Currently all the homes are moving forward with increasing our census, so we've got a good momentum going and hopefully gonna continue to do that. Big win is the Quincy, the first phase of the new construction in Quincy, the Quincy domiciliary. We moved in on January twenty eighth, so then the second phase will be moving into the first part of the skilled side and we're hoping to do that in spring of this year. So super excited about that. And then the third phase will be this, the second part of the skill side, which is possibly in the fall of this year. So, very excited, beautiful, state of the art building, all private single rooms, and so it's and then the domiciliary movement went very well. One last thing, I'm finalizing an agreement between Chicago and Dominican University to make Chicago a clinical site for the nursing and CNA programs and any other medical fields. Once that's finalized, all five of the homes will be a clinical site for CNA programs, nursing programs, and then I'm coordinating a visit with our recruitment specialist on the last or final week of those clinicals that she will go in and and present what it's like to work for the state of Illinois and the great things that we have to offer, so it's all part of a retention recruitment and retention program that we have launching this year. So very excited. Lots of good things going on at the homes. So that concludes my brief report and I'll be open to any questions.

Director Prince:

Mr. Chair, can I also add that Angie Simmons is the president of the Illinois Nursing Home Administrator's Association. So we're dialed in with the civilian side and if you

didn't understand or hear what she said, every organization is struggling to hire nurses to begin with and especially nurse aids. And so to establish training programs inside our homes that allow for that upward mobility is a total win. And then of course you've heard me give this piece before. Five hundred million dollars plus is what's been spent on veteran homes between the state and federal government.

Let's move over to the field if you'd like to. Kim if you'd give us a quick overview on the field activities, please.

Kimberly Yantis:

I'm filling in for Mark Patterson. Just some quick numbers. We've got fifty seven full time VSO's. We should have about thirteen postings coming up shortly for some, current positions. We have forty seven active full time offices with twenty itinerant offices. We are working on about six new itinerant offices that should be opening up all over the state with a few in central area. That's that's all the numbers I have right now. If anybody has any questions?

Director Prince:

Pretty amazing opportunity because of people coming out of the federal government who are blowing up our phones looking for the opportunity to serve, and we are as committed to filling those VSO positions and showing the General Assembly and others, here's why we want more. We want to open and open and open. Veteran cases are becoming more and more complex, as you can imagine, and so it takes up more time. And then on the other side of the coin for the board, our VSO's are deployed all over the state. Our annual report covered there are many directors and they're going to different events and signing veterans up for care. So thank you Kim, for the update. Appreciate that.

I'm gonna move into our field headquarters grants all things headquarters Danielle, you're up, please.

Danielle Luevano:

Good morning. My name is Danielle Luevano. I'm the operations and programs manager here at Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs. And just kind of piggybacking off of what you said Chair Tyler, we are doing a great job on working with the transition of the veterans and reaching out to them and trying to be proactive and giving them the information that they require upon their transition so that way they already have it when they make it back to the great State of Illinois. We send them a letter from Director Prince along with a brief overview of all of the benefits that the state of Illinois has to offer. We also will provide contact information to them if they have any questions. We partner with CMS, the veterans outreach program to ensure that the veterans that are coming back to the state of Illinois can get their DD214 certified for state employment, and that's like a one day turnaround now that we've had that process implemented. So the pretty much the same day that they call is the same day that CMS receives that certified DD214. So we're working as quickly as we can to get these veterans employed. Also we work directly with, Department of Employment Security and if the veteran reaches out to us requesting assistance with, finding employment, we will also refer them to Mr. Bermudez at IDES. So I'm doing great work. The team's doing amazing and staying motivated. Lastly, I've recently taken over these veterans cash lottery grants. So doing a pretty heavy review into that as well. So I will be open to any questions and discussion.

Chairman Tyler:

Can you update about the cash grant program and the fact that there won't be any awards for our couple of quarters.

Danielle Luevano:

Yes. So, the Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs had an overwhelming increase of applications for the veterans cash grant. All of us were advertising this grant all the way from the top of the state, all the way to the bottom, and we received an overwhelming amount of applications and over the fiscal year, and because of that, we have awarded all of the funding for this current fiscal year, to the grantees of the state of Illinois. So we will be opening our application period back up in August, so more particularly August 15th is when we will be accepting new applications. So not too long, but this gives us an opportunity to do a great review of our processes and procedures that we have in place and if possible, make any new implementations to make sure that the grantees are getting their money as fast as possible and that they're completely happy with our service.

Chairman Tyler:

Thank you. And I see representative Swanson has his hand up with Go ahead, sir?

Representative Swanson:

Thank you Mr. Chairman. I serve on the task force with the Illinois lottery scratch off tickets, and the scratch off tickets is going through a major overhaul. It appears at my last meeting which was Monday, just yesterday, there are ten organizations within the scratch off tickets who will receive funding. Sounds like those ten groups will be limited and maxed out at a million dollars per year. I bring up at every meeting that we were at one point three to one point four million previously. Now this money is going to be shared equally amongst the ten groups. There is discussion of adding two more tickets. Make it twelve, and that then would, those two additional ones would possibly come in around five hundred thousand dollars for those tickets. But the way it sounds now is we're going to be limited to a million dollars per year with the new structure.

Chairman Tyler:

That's a significant reduction from what we did the last couple of years.

Director Prince:

We're gonna follow up on that.

Chairman Tyler:

That's not good news sir. Thank you.

Director Prince:

Col Swanson will talk about that a little bit more offline sir, if you would before I talk to the lottery program manager.

Representative Swanson:

Yes, no problem. That was the discussion at yesterday's meeting of how this is going to be appropriated between the ten groups. So thank you.

Chairman Tyler:

Frank, I see you have your hand up again. Go ahead sir.

Frank Gutierrez:

Two things on lottery. I'm looking at the actual ticket itself and nowhere does it even show that it helps support veterans.

Danielle Luevano:

It is typically listed on the back of the ticket. So there's a total of nine organizations that are benefiting from this particular ticket now. It's not simply for veterans anymore as of July, I believe it was July first of last year.

Frank Gutierrez:

I'm just tracking, these are the same tickets I would find at the gas stations, liquor stores and various. So if I'm looking to support veterans and I don't see this ticket specifically showing it in the front, I mean, these tickets are in, these tickets are behind glass. I don't have the ability to turn it around and read, oh, who is this funding or who's this gonna support? I mean, I think a little more transparency. We could even have logos of all the all ten organizations on there.

Vice Chair Yount:

So I think we had this conversation last year and anybody from IDVA can chime in. I think they purposely don't put any advertisement in the front of the ticket because those that have advertisements for the veteran, the percentage of the opportunity of winning funds is less and so they don't put it in the part of the ticket. They do eventually like there is pressure releases and material to say, hey, do you want to support veterans? Look for this particular ticket or this is the veteran grant or the cash grants or whatever that goes through the gaming board. But they don't have it on the front of the ticket just because they, it will lessen those that actually like to utilize or purchase the ticket. Is that correct, right?

Danielle Luevano:

That is correct. We do advertise this on our website and then also we urge our grantees in our applicants to either post the ticket in a window somewhere or advertise it on their own as well because like Representative Swanson said all the funding that's coming in is the funding that we're utilizing too award these grants out. So it's the seven times bingo multiplier. We have it on our website. I can also send it to Crystal to distribute to the committee.

Chairman Tyler:

Representative Swanson has his hand up. My guess is he wants to contribute something else to that. Go ahead, Representative Swanson.

Representative Swanson:

I actually just took my hand down because I think they covered it quite well that the lottery has done some research and studying on their marketing scheme and they found where if they leave the markings off the tickets they sell just as well as if they put marketing in it. Last I knew most of the veterans tickets are sold around that November December time frame is when they target the sale of the lot of the veteran scratch off ticket, but that may have changed, but I I'm not aware, but I I know they did remove all labeling from the tickets. Thank you.

Director Prince:

Mr. Chair from an organizational perspective, I wanted to add on to what Danielle said, we also do a photo op with a lottery director, and it goes all over our social media, but one of the things I'm gonna push this year is that we get a different ticket. The bingo ticket is as popular as the regular one because there's a lot of work involved. And in fact, most of the people just scratch the bottom of this ticket, right? Ideally. So much work.

Danielle Luevano:

I believe Mr. DeGroot asked a question about the national Guard members, if they're receiving the transitional information, is that correct, Mr. DeGroot?

Dutch DeGroot:

What it was is if those reservist and national guard who are on title ten orders because we've had quite a few shipping overseas late lately. When these units are coming back, are they getting that information?

Danielle Luevano:

So they do get the tasks course from the federal side of things before they get out. But if if they earn a DD214 and they elect Illinois as their state, then we will be notified and we will send that information to them as well.

Chairman Tyler:

Chicago office has a hand up.

Maureen Hartigan:

Good morning, this is Maureen Hartigan. I'm the communications director, and I just wanted to go back to the discussion regarding the lottery. So when this change occurred, the lottery did provide us all a toolkit to use on social media and our newsletter and website and whatnot, and it's specifically an ad that says it promoted that a portion of these funds would go to veterans, but it would all be images were veterans. So while we were advertising it, at least they could see that the veteran service organizations would benefit from these funds. So that's what we've been doing since this change.

Chairman Tyler:

Col Peck, you had another comment sir?

Mike Peck:

Yeah, just a new business item I wanted to make sure we got it in before we ran out of time.

Director Prince:

Thank you for those that need to drop off, our apologies, we are gonna go a little bit over and that's the nature of it. So from a IDVA perspective, Assistant Director and I are here, certainly after if there are any additional questions. A lot of things that we've done over the last few months Mr. Chair is you heard about the DOM. We've visited all of the veterans homes and the Prince home program in Manteno. In the state of Illinois, we participated in two funerals over two internments. People who were found from World War II. We're also involved with the governor's challenge for suicide and we're also a part of the veterans Homelessness Program, Margo Watson, our women Vets Program Manager, is our leader on that one. We're providing leadership training to Cook County.

We visited the VAC of Lake County. Our agency is in the middle and finishing up our budget and audit. We're a part of the veteran deflection discussion that's going on across the state to divert veterans, deflect veterans from justice and other things. Senator Duckworth and Governor Pritzker visited the Chicago home recently, I mentioned NASDVA. We went to the Al Lynch event in Rockford. Visited the Rose Cran's Behavioral Health Center out there. IDVA is also participating in task force movement, which is a John's program highlighting high level jobs in quantum and aviation and clean energy. There's a new quantum facility that's gonna be working its way up on the south side of the city. We did the Desert Storm program, thanks to Crystal recently, and sadly we had a staff member pass away at Quincy, a long time employee of our fiscal office and our home administrator at Manteno's husband passed away over the last several months as well. So Mr. Chair, that's a quick overview of the IDVA activities over the last three months.

Chairman Tyler:

Thank you director, appreciate that. Any comments from our elected members I think the only one left on, is Representative Swanson. Any other comments or sir? I believe he drop off as well. And I think he's dropped off, ok? And, general discussion then, I know Mike has something he wants to say Mike, go ahead.

Mike Peck:

At this time make under new business, a motion that the Illinois Veterans Advisory Council go on record opposing two bills and recommending eight others to the Illinois General assembly. I furnished this to everybody ahead of time. We've been doing this for the past six years. We began under chairman Kirby with the support of director, Chapa LaVia and I think it's needed. I've been told by both the chair of the house and Veterans affairs Committee that they appreciate our recommendation.

Bill Wolfe:

I second the motion.

Chairman Tyler:

Any discussion?

Vice Chair Yount:

Open for discussion.

Highlighted earlier and I think bringing it to a vote for either opposing or supporting a bill, we've already touched on it. I think there's a difference between bringing a legislation up and saying, hey, be aware of this one among the veteran service organization or bringing up legislation to a representative saying, are you aware of this one? Same with Illinois Attorney General's office. But putting a vote on a bill to oppose it is potentially putting members of this council at odds or against what that state agency stands for. So I would ask that Mr. Peck if he wants to highlight the bills and say, please look over it if you have any questions. I think a summary or synopsis of the bill, to educate the members of the council would suffice and sharing education or information, but bringing it to a vote to oppose or to support a bill and having them vote on a bill that they may not be aware. And as expressed earlier, not everybody's aware of the bills, and they may want to read it. They may want to talk to the representatives that they or the agencies or veteran service organizations they represent before voting on such a bill or an action. So I asked to table it and if Mr. Peck wants to provide a brief on the two bills, I think that would be ok?

Mike Peck:

You have until June first to get your report ready. This is the last meeting you're gonna have before you have to prepare your annual report. If you're a state agency and you feel a conflict and you should abstain. I know that all the veterans service organizations have been educated on this and the purpose of this motion is that next week on March 19th, we have veterans legislative day in Springfield. And I think it's very important that the IDVA council go on record or the Illinois Veterans Advisory Council go on record to support these bills. Thank you.

Director Prince:

This needs to be reviewed by our attorney and the attorney of general's office and IDVA not only abstains, we can't support this. It will have to be tabled until we have such time to review the motion with our legal team.

Chairman Tyler:

Understand, so that being the case, the motion is tabled. Any other discussion for the group?

Mike Peck:

Do you want to vote on the table?

Chairman Tyler:

It's it has to be tabled because the director cannot support it and it has to be reviewed by the attorney General's office and the legal staff. So, it has to be tabled Mike.

Director Prince:

We'll take the motion and now compare it with our bylaws and then they'll give me advice on how to move forward. Thank you.

Chairman Tyler:

Any other business for the general discussion?

Hugh Shown:

Just with respect to Veterans Affairs in Washington D C, I understand there's a huge cut back in staff, and I don't quite understand that process. I just worry about that. There seems like maybe there's a better way to understand what the functions are and and what kind of staff is needed, but just to go in and and whack out staff, it just seems irresponsible.

Director Prince:

Well, I can give you the information from Secretary Collins who met with the senior all the state directors last week in DC. And this is his words, not mine. So, these are the three priorities. Veteran access is his priority and veterans will always be first in line. And then systems, complete systems improvement. The example that he gave and then I'll come to the hiring was that the VA has spent fifteen billion dollars over the last five years on veteran homelessness and suicide and we're in no better position than we were five years ago. The eighty thousand employees that have been mentioned were hired over the last four years. Part of it was part of the Pact Act to ensure and what he said and is shown and I'm sure that Kim can back me up on this claims are taking longer than they've ever taken before. He also assured us that they would be looking at each of these and looking at it from an efficiency, so they're not all going to be cut in the first days. It's over the course of several months as they review. That's kind of the rest of

the story situation, but I think anybody who's a veteran, all of us who've gone to a VA or something or called a number and kind of wondered if I'm ever gonna get in this sort of thing, I think from a perspective of where Secretary Collins is coming from as a veteran himself is saying, look, are you getting the service that you would expect to get as a veteran? And in many cases Dutch and I talked about a Marine, I wanna say Marine or soldier. It was out of town hall that I attended with him where the guy stood up and talked about his Hines Day. When he goes to the veterans, to the hospital at Heinz he has to take another day off just to recover from his experience at the hospital. Now that's one of the nineteen point two million veterans. But we are as an agency and as a state of Illinois advising Governor Pritzker every single day as to what's happening with the federal VA and how it impacts Illinois. For those that are still on the call, we are very concerned of course about health care. We always have been. We're concerned about benefits. The state of Illinois receives two hundred and thirty three million dollars a month in disability and compensation payments to veterans. The list goes on and on with education and so on. So we are tied in completely. I think it's one thing to look at it but I think from a bigger perspective is as you're advising your groups to say to the VA when when you're having those conversations, we need better efficiencies, we want better access. We want to be able to make our call and get an appointment, not to focus on the eighties thousand jobs more to focus on the, what is it that you're going to do better for veterans?

Hugh Shown:

Very good, thank you.

Vice Chair Yount:

And I know if you hear veterans, especially those that are being laid off for concerns with their employment, make sure they have the resources for their counties. So if something were to happen, if they were laid off, if they are, they've already been laid off, that they have the resources. Counties have VAC's, not every single one, so there is unless they can call our help line, but have them reached out to IDVA for resources, have them reach out to Illinois Joining Forces, and to share the information.

Chairman Tyler:

Any other new or old business for the council?

Hugh Shown:

I just mentioned at our last meeting and thank you very much for the mention in the minutes. But the scholarships are available for men and women who are looking in going to college and those scholarships through ROTC. There are many many different military scholarships available for those folks and, so, for veterans organizations to get that word out because I'm afraid the words not getting out through the high schools maybe. There's wonderful opportunities there for these young folks to get to college education, certainly when the finances are at risk and those scholarships can help, those young men and women.

Chairman Tyler:

Well, thank you. You know the directors of administration or admissions at most universities have a list of scholarships that are available to them and I think oftentimes I know that a couple of the universities I've been associated with, they aren't aware of several of these very generous scholarship opportunities from organizations that are out there.

And I see Dutch has his hand up. Dutch your question sir?

Dutch DeGroot:

Not a question just a comment. I want to toot our horn up here in the county that our VAC we have over fifty organizations as part of our VAC for this fiscal year and also we just looked at the first of about one of four branch offices we will be opening up in Cook County. We're growing like crazy. The last thing is my VFW 1337 Centennials coming up April fifth, bring your dancing shoes. Thank you.

Chairman Tyler:

Super, thank you. Any other saved nickels for the last chance?

Vice Chair Yount:

For Illinois Attorney Generals office, we are kicking off our I think it would be a third webinar series. Flyers and stuff will be released out to the email distro. First one is pertaining to a military environments assist. Which is the state statue that creates VACs. That'll be in April, and then after that it'll be in July. And the reason that we have it in July is because it's military consumer month. And we'll highlight scams everybody's aware of. There'll be new stuff on our website in the next six months, so it'll be exciting.

Chairman Tyler:

Super. Thank you. And no hands up.

Next meeting Tuesday June 10th at 10:00am, same time, same place, and I'll entertain a motion to adjourn. Shannon makes a motion, is there a second?

Motion to adjourn made by Shannon Yount

2nd by Al Reynolds

Motion passed