

**Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Benefits Administration
Outreach, Transition and Economic Development
Advisory Committee on Former Prisoners of War (ACFPOW)**



Hybrid Meeting – August 2024 Minutes

Date: Wednesday, August 28, Thursday August 29, and Friday August 30, 2024

Time: 8:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. Eastern Time (ET)

Facilitators: Julian Wright, Designated Federal Officer (DFO), OTED

Attendees:

Earl S. Newsome, III, (Chairman)

Jessica Lynch

Dr. John P. Albano

Norman A. McDaniel

Dr. Joseph Milligan

Dr. Marion Sherman

James Williams

Marion “Tony” Marshall

John “Mike” McGrath

Teresita Smith

Arlene Duncan

Virtual Attendees:

Roy Garland

Dr. Kailyn Bobb

Start Time: 8:00 a.m. ET, meeting is not recorded

Meeting Opening: Mr. Julian Wright, 8:00 a.m. ET

- Mr. Wright opened the meeting by thanking committee members, leadership and provided a brief history of the need for the meeting.
- Mr. Wright acknowledged that there were several ACFPOW members whose terms had ended, and the committee again welcomes the new members; Jessica Lynch, Arlene Duncan, and Teresita Smith.
- Mr. Wright gave a special recognition to Mr. Harry Corre, the 100-year-old WWII Veteran, Lucretia McClenney, James Stokes, Karen Black, Yareli Mendoza, and E. Maquel Marshall who was the former Alternate Designated Federal Officer.
- Introduced Mr. Umar Awan, OTED FPOW Program Manager, currently serving as the Acting Supervisory Program Analyst for Outreach.
- Mr. Wright stated the housekeeping rules of the building, areas the committee members were allowed to access, and the restroom and break areas.
- Mr. Wright turned the meeting over to Chairman Newsome.

Chairman Newsome addresses the committee, states it's his 5th year and he looks back over his tenure and it has been a quest. As he looks back and recognizes the work the committee has help achieve for POWs has been satisfying; meaningful. Chair Newsome states the accomplishments the committee has completed, to the tasks the committee are continuing to work towards achieving. Chairman Newsome gives oversight of the things the committee works with VA to get done, improve, and establish for the committee. He delivers his final opening remarks and prepares for the official Roll Call.

Committee Member Roll Call and Introduction, Julian Wright, 10:29 a.m. ET

Committee Members attending the meeting – Norm McDaniel, James Williams, Jessica Lynch, Dr. Marion Sherman, John Albano, Teresita Smith, John McGrath, Earl Newsome

- Dr. John Albano – Program Director for Robert E. Mitchell Center for POW Studies in Pensacola, Florida.
- Jessica Lynch – new committee member; states it's an honor to be on the committee. POW in 2003 when her unit was ambushed in Nazarene, Iraq. Her unit lost 11 service members that day, and she was one of the six that got to return home. Currently serves as the West Virginia Women Veteran Coordinator.
- John "Mike" McGrath – former Navy Captain, five-year, eight-month POW, and current Historian for NAM-POWs which covers POWs who served in Vietnam and Desert Storm. Has contact with all POWs.
- James W. Williams – Member of the committee since 2018, welcomes the new members, and states he looks forward to working with them.
- Norm McDaniel – Motivational Speaker, 7-year POW, former instructor at Defense Acquisition University, Fort Belvoir, Virginia. North Carolina native and current resident.
- Dr. Marion Sherman – celebrating a birthday, retired VA, welcomes the new committee members.
- Teresita Smith – new committee member. No introduction due to technical error.
- Earl Newsome – ACFPOW Chairman, retired Army Lieutenant Colonel, former Deputy Director, Center for Minority Veterans

Chairman Newsome confirms to Mr. Wright there are enough committee members present for a quorum. Mr. Wright addresses the committee on the current recommendations and ensure the newer members review and vote on those recommendations for them to be presented to SECVA. Mr. Wright discusses the proposed agenda for the committee. Mr. Wright preps the meeting for the first presenter.

Mr. Wright and Chairman Newsome agree since the last ACFPOW meeting (June 2024) was held virtually and having the committee together in person with three new members, to allow the new members to introduce themselves to the rest of the committee.

Ms. Jessica Lynch, Ms. Teresita Smith and Ms. Arlene Duncan introduces themselves to the committee with brief overviews of their background.

Mr. Wright and Chairman Newsome states how the committee members are selected, and the process VBA takes to place members on the committees. Mr. Newsome states why the committees are important, his experiences and the successes, obstacles, and the objectives of serving on committees such as ACFPOW.

The Committee prepares for their first presenter.

VBA Outreach, Transition and Economic Development Executive Director – Melissa Cohen

Ms. Cohen greets the committee and provides them with her introduction and background. Ms. Cohen provides the committee with her vision and goals for VBA OTED. Ms. Cohen details the responsibilities of each business line under the OTED umbrella, and their goals and objectives to serve Veterans and their families.

- Question – Arlene Duncan – What year did you start reaching out to Veterans after they leave the military?
 - Answer – Melissa Cohen – The VA Solid Start (VASS) Program started in 2019. Each year the percentage has increased for successful connections with Veterans. VASS is currently at 73%. DOD will notify VASS if there is a high-priority Veteran, such as a Veteran who needed mental health, and that percentage is 93%. High Priority Veterans are placed to the front to be contacted on VASS' call lists.
- Question – Mike McGrath – If a service member serves 20+ years, retires, has no real medical history, are they still eligible to “join” the VA?
 - Answer – Melissa Cohen – Yes. If you are a Veteran, there are many pathways to receive services from VA. It has been discovered that many Veterans never went through the Transition Assistance Program (TAP). OTED has started a new program called Off Base Transition Training where a Veteran can call and receive an overview of the services provided by VA to them. The program is designed specifically for those Veterans who were not contacted or did not have the opportunity to go through TAP so that their many questions can be answered. It is available to any Veteran, whether they have been out of the military 5 years, 10 years, 15 years.
 - Answer – Chairman Newsome – You will always qualify for National Cemetery benefits. You also qualify for disability once you file a claim. Especially when that disability is service-connected. Once it is determined the disability is service-connected, it is then established which priority group through healthcare that a Veteran qualifies. This is important because as that Veteran seeks care, depending on their priority group, it may determine if the Veteran must make a copayment for care, whether they use Medicare or Medicaid or VA care.

- Question – Mike McGrath – If that is the case, then why doesn't every military person who retires, just come to the VA if everyone qualifies?
 - Answer – Melissa Cohen – (Thank you Mr. Newsome for clarifying about the disability rating). We work hard in the TAP program to determine which programs Veterans may enroll in, and depending on a Veterans qualification they meet, there are certain criteria which must be met, but (VA) tries to give all Veterans the wide array of opportunities that they can apply. Ms. Cohen apologizes for giving a general yes and states she should have given more detail to her answer.
 - Answer – Chairman Newsome – Mr. Newsome gives a detailed explanation and description of what takes place when a Veteran enrolls into the VA and how the process takes place when a military member transitions from the military.
 - Response – Teresita Smith – I would like to provide a statement on the importance of TAP. The TAP program is a needed edge which bridges the military member into the VA.
 - Response – Melissa Cohen – Our slogan for TAP is 'Come Early and Come Often.' We also encourage spouses to come through TAP as well because there are services for them as well.

Ms. Cohen thanks the committee for their time and ends her presentation.

Committee Open Discussion – Chairman Earl Newsome

Committee open discussion on the importance of the OTED business lines mentioned by Ms. Cohen. Ms. Arlene Duncan mentions the importance of VA's Veteran Readiness and Employment Program and discuss the education benefits.

Chairman Newsome states how important it is to also seek into individual state benefits. Mr. Wright provides his personal experience of his transition and discussing the benefit of service members today having an option to seek VA services when they transition.

Ms. Lynch provides insight of her experience and what challenges she faces having not been given the proper guidance and information regarding VA benefits.

- Question – Julian Wright asks the committee's experiences working with VSO(s)?
 - Response – Arlene Duncan – Ms. Duncan gives her experience with DAV and states it was not a conducive experience. She stated she was faced with numerous challenges, felt she did not receive the information she needed, or was supposed to be given, and did not appreciate working with a VSO.
 - Response – Teresita Smith – VSOs in the National Capital Region are "silent warriors." They are usually quiet, and the VSOs are not conducting outreach as the VA is doing. Ms. Smith names several VSOs which VA has trained and certifies, but feels the VSOs are not doing the proper outreach they are supposed to be doing.

- Response – Jessica Lynch – I had no idea for 20 years what a VSO was. The only way I found out what the VSO was, was when I needed a fishing license. I was told to go over to the VSO to get my license signed. I now work for the West Virginia Women’s Commission – but I never knew what a VSO was at all.
- Response – Dr. Marion Sherman – I feel it depends on the VA, what hospital or medical center they’re assigned. When a VSO is assigned a position within the hospital, hopefully the medical center doesn’t place the VSO in an area of the hospital which isn’t convenient to Veterans. Hopefully the VSO is placed in an area where there is a lot of high traffic and intake for the hospital.
- Response – Joe Milligan – Depends on where you live and who the VSO is. Many years after I retired from the Air Force, I had no idea what a VSO was. I was in the Houston Region, in the Audie Murphy Center and was told to go to the 2nd floor and was told by the VSO that I would be taken care of, but the claim I submitted was declined and it was due to the VSO not properly filling out my claim form. There are some excellent VSOs, but it seems there are a lot that do not know what they are doing.

Mr. Wright wraps up the discussion and preps the committee for the next presenter.

Federal Advisory Committee Act – 101 Overview and Advisory Committee Management Office Updates – Jelessa Burney

Ms. Burney addresses the committee and welcomes them to Washington, DC. She apologizes for having to address the committee virtually, usually they come in person, but a last-minute meeting caused them to adjust planning.

The Federal Advisory Committee Administration (FACA) briefing is an annual briefing. The briefing is a requirement the FACA office provides to new and recurring committee members. The FACA Management Office is responsible for the Department of Veterans Affairs Federal Advisory Committee Management Program. FACA acts as the point of contact with NVA regarding the Federal Advisory Committee Management Act, the guidelines, and to provide best practices.

The VA currently has 27 Federal Advisory Committees, and their purpose is to obtain advice and recommendations for the President and the SECVA on issues or policies within the scope of an agency official's responsibilities and to ensure Congress and the public remain informed of the VA’s Federal Advisory Committee’s purpose, membership activities, and related costs.

The Federal Advisory Committee Act is a federal statute that governs the establishment, termination, and management of Federal Advisory Committees (FAC). Enacted to promote the openness and transparency and accountability to regulate the number and duration of FACs.

FACA applies to all groups with at least one non-Federal employee established or utilized by an agency to obtain advice or recommendations, unless an exception applies.

FACA applies every time committee members come together to conduct FACA business. The committee must have a signed charter, which is renewed every two years. The charter is 2-3 pages, 15 paragraphs. The committee is assigned a Designated Federal Officer, and public meetings with agenda announced in Federal Register 15 days in advance of the meeting and an opportunity for public to speak or submit written comments. There must be a balanced membership and records maintained and available for public inspection.

A FAC meeting is a published Federal Register Notice of Meeting (open closed or partially closed). The DFO must be present, and the FACA Committee must meet in-person, virtual, or through tele- / video conference and provides advice or recommendations. A quorum must be established in the Committee's charter or legislation. Meaning more than one half of the committee's authorized members including Ex-Officio members (i.e. 50% plus one). It must also have an approved agenda.

FACs may meet privately and conduct two types of work without a public meeting: preparatory work and administrative work.

Ms. Burney provides more information regarding FACA and FAC meetings and then closes with providing the ACFPOW with best practices.

Ms. Burney thanks the committee for their time and concludes her presentation.

ACFPOW Official Group Photo – DFO

Mr. Wright prepares the group to take their official group photo.

Library of Congress – Liaison Specialist Kerry Ward.

Ms. Kerry Ward, Liaison Specialist with the Library of Congress provides a detailed overview of the Library of Congress, their operation, background of the library, and her role and responsibilities.

- Question – Mike McGrath – I'm the historian for the Vietnam POWs, and we have a website, and we have 200 books written by or about the POWs in Vietnam. I'm wondering if we can link to your oral histories? Do you have an index of the Vietnam POWs I can link to our historical site? We would love to have these oral histories that you have with what we don't have. Is there any way that we can link to our Vietnam POW historical website?
 - Response – Kerry Ward – I'm sure that there is a way. In fact, one of the things that we do is we regularly share collections. One of the ways, one of the organizations you're probably very familiar with is the Vietnam commemoration. We serve as the official archive for them, but they go out

and they do a lot of the oral histories themselves and they have the repository to be able to showcase it. But again, knowing that the Library of Congress has been around since 1800, and we're not planning on going anywhere. We do serve as their official archive. We're happy to share resources as best as possible.

- Question – Teresita Smith – Kerry could you talk how the volunteers are not paid?
 - Response - The volunteers that we work with span everything from students who are aged 15 years of age or older, and we work directly with scouts. This makes a great Eagle Scout project. We also work with some folks who, as I mentioned, the Vietnam commemoration, this is their life's work. It really does run the gamut when it comes to volunteers. We do offer training. In fact, if we have a group of 25 people or more, we work with the oral History Association and the American Folklore Society to offer in person workshops that are approximately 2 hours long that not only go into the history of the project, but also really the oral history best practices. Then we offer virtual training sessions as well, and there's no limitation to that. For anybody who just wants to interview their friend, their neighbor, wants to get started without the training, we have on our website a 9 min video that takes you through the highlights.
- Question – Joe Milligan – If someone has done an oral history and it was sent to the Library of Congress, can it be researched online?
 - Response – Kerry Ward – Yes. In fact, right now I mentioned we have 120,000 collections. You can absolutely enter a name. In fact, we have found some family members while we do receive posthumous submissions in the form of the 20 or the ten, the original journals diaries, unpublished memories photos, and more. Some people want to know a little bit more about what their loved one may have experienced, and so they search people that they know had served right there alongside them or perhaps had served in the same unit as them so that they can better understand what those experience. So yes, on our website there is a search in one of the rotating banners you can search on that, click the little plus sign where it says advanced search, and then name is one of the options to be able to search.
- Question – Dr. Marion Sherman – Can you tell me how many Vietnam FPOWs are listed on your site?
 - Response – Kerry Ward – I can. We do have on our advanced search, you can search specific keywords, you can search for conflicts, and then the prisoner of war is one of the tick boxes that you can search as well. I am running that search right now, and we have 399 collections right now. 335 of those are digitally accessible.

Mr. Wright thanks Ms. Ward for her time and presentation. Ms. Ward thanks Mr. Wright provides regards to the committee members and ends her presentation.

Caregiver Support Program – Director of Communications Joseph Burks and Outreach Coordinator Michael Zeeb

Mr. Burks provides a background history of the VA healthcare system and leads up to how the caregiver program was founded.

Mr. Burks briefs the committee with education, resources, support and services provided by the caregiver support program.

- Question – Teresita Smith – Living family members. Will the caregiver still be there for the spouse when the Veterans passes?
 - Response – Joseph Burks – Great question. The answer is yes. We keep caregivers in the program. Right now, it's 90 days, but we know that grieving doesn't just last 90 days. Sometimes grieving happens even before the death, so yes, we do partner with VA and other programs for care after death. So yes. 90 days officially is what we do, but I, I will tell you that our caregiver support programs locally, they remain in the lives of these caregivers and continue to support them.
- Question – Teresita Smith – If there is no family member as a provider, does VA provide a caregiver to the Veteran?
 - Response – Joseph Burks – No. VA does not provide a caregiver. For the comprehensive program, it is a family care member who must be providing that care. Now, if there's not a family member, then a court appointed individual. VA does not appoint those as the family would work to do that. And sometimes it's the son or the daughter of a veteran who might be providing that care.
- Question – Teresita Smith – Can the court appointed provider work with VA?
 - Response – Joseph Burks – No. A court appointed caregiver.
- Question – Chairman Newsome – Is that the same as a Fiduciary?
 - Response – I would have to look into that as that answer is out of my lane. What I do know is some but not every Veteran will have a family caregiver. If another family member went and got a court order, somebody appointed to take care of the Veteran, then that would be available for them. Mike and I will take that question down and Julian, we'll get that back to you and make sure you get that back to this group here so that we give them the, the official answer.
- Question – Teresita Smith – If two Veterans are 100% disabled, can both be a caregiver to each other?
 - Response – Joseph Burks – Yes and it has been done. A Veteran can be somebody else's Veteran caregiver.
- Question – Chairman Newsome – Is there any VA Medical Center or does your team look at the care and benefits for the FPOWs on site? Does the caregiver program coordinator know about the FPOWs that is in his/her catchment area?
 - Response – Joseph Burks – I cannot answer that question for those coordinators. I would want them to know of the FPOWs in their catchment area. Whatever needs to be done to make that happen, we would want to

do it. The Caregiver Support Program, those team members, they're not multitasked, they are providing the service specifically for those Veterans, but we should implement whatever we need to do to get the information for those FPOWs.

- Response – Chairman Newsome – It would seem that the Caregiver Program would inquire time to time if there are any FPOWs in their area. Many times, the Veteran, specifically FPOWs, them or their spouses do not reach out until it is a crisis. Hopefully when you have your future meetings and discussions at the VISN and medical center level that there's a way someone could pull up the numbers to see who all is enrolled and see if there's any FPOWs that have come into their area.
- Response – Joseph Burks – Absolutely, absolutely. That's 99% of my intent, to get our information out there before they need it. I don't want the crisis. It's not good for anyone. So yeah, we'll reach out to our program managers and make sure. They are doing a lot to get the information put out widely. Thank you, Sir, for that observation.
- Question – Teresita Smith – Recently I found out Guam at the South Pacific Micronesian Island had 45 Veteran defenders for Wake Island during World War II. There's only a few FPOWs still alive on the island. In January 1982, under Public Law 904-90-5202 Congress granted the Guamanian Wake Island Defenders Veteran status under the Navy. They received their POW medal because of that, of that. Do you have services on Micronesia, Polynesia, or maybe even Melanesia?
 - Response – Joseph Burks – We are not everywhere yet, but we are doing a survey right now in the Philippines. There is a presence that comes out of Hawaii too, to some of the islands you mentioned, but we are not full-fledged caregiving. We were recently in Puerto Rico with their caregivers, as we recently spoke on Puerto Rico earlier. We will take this question down, address it to our program and see what we have, what we do not have, and what opportunities there are.

Mr. Wright thanks Mr. Burks and Mr. Zeeb for their time and the presentation concludes.

Committee Open Discussion – Chairman Earl Newsome

Question – Teresita Smith – FPOWs, when they become FPOWs, are they automatically 100% disabled?

Response – Group – No.

Response – Teresita Smith – Comprehensive is 70% and above. That is too high for a FPOW or even a regular Veteran isn't it? Is there a move to make it lower? 50%? However, they cannot get services if they're not 70%. How can we get the percentage lowered to help the FPOW?

Response – Mr. Wright – I think this is a good question. The best answer I can give is the percentage probably will not be lowered. Also, those Veterans would have to apply to get their service connection increased. I'm currently working on a project for Medal of Honor recipients who fall into the same category and are not at the 100% rating. We are working to get them or have them apply. Some have applied years ago and never came back in to look at their claim to get it increased. This is maybe the situation in most FPOWs who are not 100% and the encouragement is to get them to come back in to reapply for an increase.

Response – Teresita Smith – That's fine, they have to apply which is a shame that they have to apply and it not just be automatic. 70% under VA's comprehensive caregiver program. Can VA do something about lowering that number down? Through the VA Office and maybe through our committee, maybe make it a recommendation, because 70% is too high. Just because it is the current law does not mean the law cannot be changed. Right?

Response – Mr. Wright – This would take an act by Congress. The recommendation could be made, but it is a percentage agreed by law.

A discussion takes place on how this can be achieved by the committee members. The committee members are divided on how the law being set at 70% is too high and how to go about getting it lowered.

Discussions continue on the process, the amount of living POWs, POW spouses, and the difficulty it takes to get Congress to move on set laws in place.

The committee is provided a recorded video from SECVA of their charge, thanking them for their service to the committee, to Veterans, and to America.

VBA Compensation Services FPOW Presumptive Conditions – Abigail Werner

Ms. Abigail Werner of VBA Compensation Services delivers a presentation on FPOW Presumptive Conditions. Ms. Werner advises the group she will discuss the principles of service connection, FPOWs, and the presumptive processes.

Question – Teresita Smith – Why does one condition had osteoporosis have 2008 but then on the next slide, it says 2009?

Response – Abigail Werner – Yes, if we go to the conditions for any length of time that was established, if the Veteran is also diagnosed with PTSD in 2008. However, on the next conditions, in 2009, there's no requirement to have the PTSD diagnosis. They're slightly different. The rule changed after 2008. If the Veteran had filed in 2008, the claim would have been denied.

Question – Chairman Newsome – Would it be a reevaluation?

Response – Abigail Werner – It would be a supplemental claim, because it was previously adjudicated.

All FPOWs are recognized as combat Veterans.

With FPOWs, basically any physical or psychological hardship, mal-nutrition or unsanitary condition, VA can accept your written statement of your condition being associated with that in-service event because of the combat status.

There are designated FPOW coordinators at each regional office to oversee the claims process, FPOWs are subject to expedited processing. There are dedicated individuals who will help oversee that process throughout the filing of the claim. A statement from an FPOW relating to injury exposures or disability during captivity are generally accepted as fact. It must go to the Veterans Health Administration, not a contract examiner.

FPOW protocol examination must be completed by VHA. It won't go to a contractor. If there is any question or concern about the medical evidence, VA will request an examination and this threshold is very low.

VA also offers special monthly compensation benefits. There is certain criteria, but VA has these special monthly compensation benefits where (VA) pays out a little bit more money, if the Veteran is confined to their home. Or if the FPOW Veterans require aid and assistance with activities of daily living. VA does have certain criteria about service-connected conditions and disability percentages and such, but VA can award a little bit more money each month. Additionally, if you are a Veteran and have a spouse on your award, if your spouse requires.

An abbreviated history of Presumptive Disabilities from August 1921 Neuropsychiatric disease and Tuberculosis, to the August 2022 PACT Act is presented to the committee. A question is asked about the FPOW population totals, however, the next presentation with National Cemetery Administration has to begin. Parties agree to email their question regarding the FPOW totals.

Mr. Wright thanks Ms. Werner for her time and presentation.

End-of-Life Planning: Veteran and Survivor Benefits – Jennifer Jessup, Chief of Staff – National Cemetery Administration

Ms. Jennifer Jessup introduces herself to the committee and provides them with her background and overview.

Ms. Jessup goes over Survivor Benefits and Memorial Planning which are provided by the NCA.

Mr. Wright and Chairman Newsome thank Ms. Jessup for her time and presentation.

Committee Discussion on Recommendations – DFO Julian Wright and Chairman Newsome

ACFPOW Proposed Recommendations

The following seven recommendations were discussed, voted on, and approved by the ACFPOW Committee Members for the Secretary of Veterans Affairs review.

1. The Department of Veterans Affairs shall establish Cognitive Impairment as a presumptive for Former Prisoners of War (FPOW).

Reasoning: Research “Prisoner of war status, posttraumatic stress disorder, and dementia in older veterans” has shown that FPOW combat Veterans demonstrate increased cognitive impairment as compared to non-FPOW combat Veterans.

Recommendation Completion: By end of 4th Quarter FY2025.

2. The Department of Veterans Affairs shall establish Trauma and Stressor-Related Disorders as a presumptive for Former Prisoners of War (FPOW).

Reasoning: PTSD and other trauma disorders have been reclassified under the category “Trauma and Stressor-Related Disorders”.

Recommendation Completion: By end of 4th Quarter FY2025.

3. The Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Health Administration shall provide timely inpatient or residential care, in a Veterans Affairs medical center or contracted facility, for cognitively impaired Former Prisoners of War (FPOW).

Reasoning: The Department of Veterans Affairs does not have sufficient long-term memory care facilities and staff capacity to meet the need for cognitively impaired (FPOW), a rapidly aging cohort.

Recommendation Completion: By end of 4th Quarter FY2025.

4. Care Management and Social Work Services (12CMSW), Office of Patient Care Services shall develop and implement a web-based assessment tool for compliance with VHA Directive 1650, with quarterly reporting.

Reasoning: VHA Directive 1650 does not require monitoring or measurement of the assigned responsibilities of the Former Prisoners of War Care and Benefit Team. See Minority Veteran Program Coordinator’s report as an example. The desired result is to leverage best practices.

Recommendation Completion: By end of 4th Quarter FY2025.

5. Care Management and Social Work Services (12CMSW), Office of Patient Care Services shall provide VISNs periodic updated listings of Former Prisoners of War (FPOW) in their catchment areas to facilitate implementation of VHA Directive 1650.

Reasoning: To properly manage the program at the local level coordinators need accurate listings of FPOWs in their catchment areas. VACO staff offices are best equipped to secure periodic updates of FPOWs in the VA system.

Recommended Completion: By end of 4th Quarter FY 2025.

6. Care Management and Social Work Services (12CMSW), Office of Patient Care Services shall modify VHA Directive 1650 to include dedicated hours for the Former Prisoners of War (FPOW) Advocate. The number of dedicated hours shall depend on the local VA medical center's FPOW population.

Reasoning: VHA Directive 1650 requires assigned responsibilities for the FPOW Advocate but does not provide the FPOW Advocate with time allotted to accomplish these important FPOW tasks.

Recommendation Completion: By end of 4th Quarter FY2025.

7. The VHA Caregiver Program Manager at each VA medical center will coordinate with the Former Prisoners of War (FPOW) Advocate to ensure that FPOWs and spouses are aware of the benefits and services of the Caregiver Program.

Reasoning: There is a lack of awareness of the Caregiver Program benefits and services in the FPOW community.

Recommendation Completion: By end of 4th Quarter FY2025.

Discussion and Takeaways from Day 1

Mr. Newsome informed the committee that the next phase for the recommendations is to prepare a report to submit to the SECVA's office. Mr. Newsome asked the DFO if the committee could submit a summary, which includes the recommendations and the meeting notes. Mr. Wright indicated that he would follow-up with the ACMO point of contact Jelessa Burney to ask if the summary would suffice or whether a full report is required. Mr. Newsome and Dr. Marion Sherman both stated that the presumptive conditions that affect FPOWs will need to be updated because there are mental health conditions that should be included on the list.

Daily Close-out / Updates / Reminders

Mr. Wright referred the committee to the agenda, and informed them that they will receive a briefings from a representative from the Arlington National Cemetery, the Deputy Under Secretary for Health, National Director of Care Management and Social

Work Services and National Social Work Program Manager for the VHA FPOW Program, and the Under Secretary for Benefits. The committee will have the opportunity to learn about programs and receive updates about benefits and services that affect FPOWs. Mr. Wright reminded the committee that the Thursday meeting will start at 9:00am, so they should leave be at the building between 8:30am and 8:40am. This would allow enough time to clear building security and get settled in the meeting room.

Meeting is in recess until 8:00 a.m. ET, Thursday, August 29
Thursday, August 29
Start time 9:00 a.m. ET

Committee Open Discussion – Chairman Earl Newsome

Mr. Newsome conducts a brief roll call and welcomes the committee to the second day. A brief overview of the second day agenda is discussed.

Overview of Arlington National Cemetery – Norka Rojas, Chief, Interment Services Arlington National Cemetery

Ms. Rojas opens her presentation by greeting the committee members and providing a brief background of her role and responsibilities and the ANC.

Ms. Rojas provides the committee with eligibility criteria, ANC demand, challenges, funeral honors, and the ANC FY23 Year in Review.

ANC sees processes in three phases: pre-scheduling, scheduling, and service. Most families see these phases as one process.

VHA Deputy to the Deputy Under Secretary for Health VA – Dr. Mark Upton

Dr. Upton addresses the committee and provides his background and introduction.

Overview on Care and Benefits Certification – Jennifer Koget, LCSW, National Director, and Jennifer Silva, LCSW-S, VA Care Management and Social Work Services VHA

Ms. Koget and Ms. Silva greet the committee and provide them with their background, roles and responsibilities within VHA.

Care Management and Social Work Services leads the development and implementation of clinical, person-centric interventions, military transitions and programming that emphasize health, wellness and Social Determinants of Health for all Veterans, Service members, their families, caregivers and survivors.

As the nation's largest employer and training organization for social workers, we are innovators in social work professional practice, advocates for equal access to care and resources, and promoters for social justice.

CMSW Programs

- National Social Work Program
 - Fisher House and Family Hospitality Program
 - Intimate Partner Violence Assistance Program (IPVAP)
 - Former Prisoners of War (FPOW) Program
- VA Liaison Program
- Post-9/11 Military2VA Case Management Program
- Decedent Affairs Program (Survivor Assistance and Memorial Support-SAMS)
- Care Coordination/Integrated Care Management Initiative

VA Social Work

- Social work is woven into the fabric of VA health care, providing clinical interventions and services across the VA continuum of care
- VA continues to be a leader in the Social Work profession by employing over 18,800 highly trained, master level social workers
- Facilitate training for over 1,500 social work graduate health profession trainees annually from over 230 graduate schools of social work
- Support the professional community with new innovative programs while sustaining legacy programs and services in creative ways that support leadership development and opportunities for the VA Social Work Community

Ms. Koget and Ms. Silva conclude their presentation and thanks the committee for their time.

Committee Discussion on Recommendations – Chairman Earl Newsome

Committee's final discussion the proposed recommendations

VBA Under Secretary for Benefits, Mr. Joshua Jacobs

Mr. Josh Jacobs addresses the committee and introduces himself and asks for the committee members to provide him with a brief background.

Mr. Jacobs spoke in-depth with the committee and took away the following key points to address:

- Former POW Veterans Outreach Coordinators
 - VBA has FPOW Coordinators at each Regional Office. The Advisory Committee asked us to task these individuals with:
 - Taking the lead to identify all Former POWs in their catchment areas so we can do more proactive outreach and connect them with benefits and care
 - Holding quarterly meetings with the VHA POW outreach colleagues at all VAMCs to provide important updates and solicit input from all FPOWs. The committee is also interested in VHA creating a

reporting tool the FPOW Advocates at VAMCs would use to report their outreach to FPOWs on a quarterly basis.

- Incorporating FPOW data into our outreach tools to drive more targeted engagements
- Annual Check in phone calls to all Former POWs
 - According to VA records, there are approximately 2,000 FPOWs receiving healthcare and benefits from VA. While there is some dispute about the accuracy of these numbers that we will need to address, the FACA suggested an annual call be made by VA staff to all FPOWs to check in and see how they are doing. We have a model in VBA – Solid Start calls all transitioning servicemembers at three points over the first year of leaving the military, that could be a model for us to consider.

Mr. Jacobs thanks the committee for their efforts, dedication and time.

Writing / Preparing SMART Recommendations - Advisory Committee Members

Mr. Wright discussed using the acronym SMART to write the recommendations for the summary report. Mr. Wright stated the recommendations must be Specific/Strategic, Measurable, Actionable, Realistic (Results Oriented), and Time Framed, so he asked the committee if they believe SMART was captured when preparing the recommendations. The committee proposed seven recommendations, so the committee concluded that they have captured the recommendations that are SMART.

Public Comments – DFO Julian Wright

Mr. Wright informed the ACFPOW that he didn't receive any questions from the public. Mr. Wright used the time to discuss potential sites for upcoming ACFPOW meetings. Some of the sites

Committee Open Discussion and Takeaways for Day 2

Dr. Marion Sherman told the committee ensure the social workers provide an update on the new FPOW program manager at the summer meeting in August. Mr. Newsome mentioned that once the summary report is submitted to the SECVA's office.

Teresita Smith mentioned that there are FPOWs from the Pacific (Guam), and she's going to work on getting the Veteran information to Mike McGrath and Umar Awan.

Daily Close-out / Updates / Reminders – DFO Julian Wright

Mr. Wright informed the committee that the start time for the meeting on Friday is 9:00am, so they should leave the hotel between 8:30am and 8:40am to allow for time to clear the building security. Mr. Wright also reminded the committee that the attire for the Friday is travel/casual. Although the committee will receive their financial briefing tomorrow, Mr. Wright reminded the members to get two copies of their hotel bill – provide one copy to him.

Date: Friday, August 30, 2024

Start time 9:00 a.m. ET

Closed session meeting

Julian Wright – DFO, ACFPOW – Mr. Wright gave a detailed financial briefing and discussed financial agreements, Committee Member stipend payments, vendor form, processing timeframe and notifications.

MEETING ADJOURNED - Julian Wright – DFO, ACFPOW closed the meeting with thanks to all.

**/s/Julian Wright, Designated Federal Officer (DFO)
Advisory Committee on Former Prisoners of War (FPOW)**

**/s/Earl S. Newsome, III, Chairman
Advisory Committee on Former Prisoners of War (FPOW) Chairman**