

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA)
VETERANS' ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON REHABILITATION (VACOR)
COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - August 28, 2024

Virtual Meeting
Washington DC

ATTENDEES

Committee Members Present:

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|---------------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Mr. Robert Hines-Chair
Designee | 5. Mr. Lawrence Rhone |
| 2. Dr. John Milam | 6. Mr. Robert Hamilton |
| 3. Mr. Nate Todd | 7. Dr. James McRavian |
| 4. Dr. Franco Santos | |

Ex-Officio Members:

- | | |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| • Ms. Jessica Davis | • Mr. Michael Heaney (absent) |
| • Dr. Kristi Hill | • Mr. Nick Pamperin (absent) |
| • Dr. Lisa Ottomanelli | |

Department of Veterans Affairs Staff Present:

- Ms. Latrese Thompson, Designated Federal Officer (DFO)
- Ms. Kristina Olson, Alternate DFO
- Ms. Veronica Brown, Supervisor of Field Services with Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) Service
- Dr. LaTonya Small, Program Specialist with the Advisory Management Committee Office

Public attendees:

1. Dr. Michelle Peterson
2. Dr. Christiana Dillahunt-Aspillaga
3. Dr. Terri K. Pogoda
4. Ms. Tiffany Drain
5. Ms. Jacqueline Breitenstein
6. Mr. Luis Echeverria Newberry
7. Mr. Evan Heitman from Congressman Chris Smith's Office NJ-04
8. Ms. Katherine Cassell from Veterans of Foreign Wars

Wednesday, August 28, 2024

Welcome:

Ms. Latrese Thompson, DFO called the Committee to order at 11:04 a.m. (EST) with the Rules of Engagement. Mr. Robert Hines, Chair Designee, proceeded with a roll call of members present and a review of the agenda. Ms. Thompson facilitated the Office of General Counsel Ethics Training for Special Government Employees (SGE). Committee members were informed to submit their Annual Recertification and Ethics Training for SGE certificates.

The Committee viewed Mr. Denis McDonough's Secretary of Veteran Affairs (SECVA) Advisory Committee Message <https://youtu.be/G4c9VM5Bwjs>.

VACOR Briefings:

Mr. Bryan Callahan, Change Manager with VR&E Service provided an overview of the Readiness and Employment System (RES). RES is VR&E's new modern case management system to replace CWINRS. Business processes will be updated to increase effectiveness and efficiency. RES will improve the users' experience by increasing automation, streamlining tasks and access to quality data through integrations with other VA systems.

Ms. Lisa Lotts, DFO and the Advisory Committee on Disability Compensation Chairs, Dr. Evelyn Lewis and Mr. Frank LoGalbo provided a committee overview. The Committee advises the SECVA regarding the needs of Veterans with disabilities arising from their service in the Uniformed Services; this is achieved through biennial reports to the Secretary with recommendations regarding VA Disability Compensation Benefits, the maintenance and updates to the VA Schedule for Rating Disabilities and ongoing advice on the needs of Veterans with disability compensation in the future.

- [Federal Register: Schedule for Rating Disabilities: Mental Disorders](#)
- [Veterans Benefits Administration Reports Home \(va.gov\)](#)

Mr. Joshua Mathis, DFO of the Advisory Committee on the Readjustment of Veterans provided a committee overview. The Committee advises SECVA regarding VA benefits to assist Veterans with the readjustment to civilian life, considering the special needs of Veterans who served in combat. The Committee assembles and reviews information related to the needs of Veterans readjusting to civilian life.

Public Comments: None

Ms. Lora Nichols and Ms. Kathryn Upham, Policy Analysts with VR&E Service provided Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 Legislative Proposal (LP) updates. FY 2026 new concept LPs and resubmissions include updates to educational and vocational counseling services and calculating available Chapter 31 entitlement under 38 U.S.C. § 3695. VACOR was invited to submit potential FY 2027 cycle LPs that may improve VR&E benefits.

Committee Discussion:

The status of past recommendations was discussed. SECVA approved all VACOR recommendations before FY 2023. VACOR Charter was renewed on May 20, 2024. The VACOR membership package was submitted and is pending SECVA approval. Recommendations that were drafted last year will be submitted as part of recommendations for FY 2025.

- **Recommendation #1:** All local VR&E office voicemail messages to add (a) the following language and (b) the automated option, “If you are having a medical or mental health emergency, hang up and dial 911. If you are having thoughts of suicide, press 7 now to be connected with the Veterans Crisis Line or you may hang up and dial 988 and then press 1.”
- **Recommendation #2:** Update all VBA contact information on the websites listed on <https://www.benefits.va.gov/benefits/offices.asp> to include correct address, phone number and hours of operation, as well as ensure all internal links go to their intended target webpage. Some web links on the webpage are broken.

Next meeting:

VACOR’s field visit meeting is scheduled for Monday and Tuesday, September 16-17, 2024 at Puget Sound Health Care System and the Seattle Regional Office, in Seattle, Washington.

The Committee adjourned at 2:54 p.m. (EST).

Submitted:

/s/Mr. Robert K. Hines
VACOR Chair

/s/Ms. Latrese Thompson
Designated Federal Officer
09/24/2024