



REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

Tuesday, March 14, 2023 – 6:00 pm

CALL TO ORDER AND WELCOME / President Ikram Mansori

Meeting called to order at 6:10PM.

President Mansori welcomed commissioners and members of the public to the commission's first in-person meeting since March 2020. She noted remote public participation is available for members of the public who cannot attend in person due to disability. Instructions to request a remote link are listed on the meeting agenda.

ROLL CALL

The VAC Secretary called the roll:

PRESENT: President Ikram Mansori, Vice-President Jason Chittavong, Commissioners Joseph Baba, William Barnickel, Douglas Bullard (6:28pm), Hanley Chan, Deborah Dacumos, Courtney Ellington, Stephen Martin-Pinto, Nicholas Rusanoff, Jordan Sun

ABSENT: Commissioners McDonald (absent), Miller (excused)

PRESENTER: Elena Kim, Director Veterans Service Office

STAFF: Mary Murphy, Commission Secretary

Quorum present.

Point of Order called by Commissioner Chan. He noted Pledge of Allegiance was previously recited at start of meetings. President Mansori agreed and said Pledge of Allegiance will be included in next and future meeting agendas.

AGENDA CHANGES

President Mansori called for motion to set agenda.

Motion – Ellington / Second – Rusanoff



All in Favor – Aye: 10, No: 0, Abstain: 0.

Motion passed. Agenda set.

Absent: Bullard, McDonald, Miller

COMMUNICATIONS

Officers' Report:

President:

- Welcome Back to In-Person Meetings
 - President Mansori reviewed in-person meeting requirements. She noted accommodation for members of the public who cannot attend in person due to disability. Instructions about accommodation are included on the meeting agenda and she asked commissioners to raise awareness of meeting attendance rules within veterans community.
- Commission Membership Update / Attendance Requirements
 - New commission administrative code to become official on March 17, 2023. Information about seat assignments will be shared at next month's meeting. Briefly reviewed attendance expectations as outlined in new administrative code and encouraged commissioners to read details.
- Commissioner Liaison for District 2
 - If a commissioner is interested in serving as liaison for District 2, please let commission secretary know.

Vice-President:

- VAC Bylaws Updates
 - Noted changes made to the commission over past few months need to be added to bylaws. VP will revise bylaws and send a draft to commission secretary within next two weeks. Bylaws draft will be emailed to all commissioners to review and discussion of bylaws will be added to April meeting agenda.

Staff Secretary:

- "Spotlight News" feature on VAC website.
 - Displayed VAC website with new feature. Asked commissioners to email information about timely news items helpful to veterans to keep spotlight feature up-to-date and informative.



- Annual Report
 - Thanked all who sent 2022 activities information, photos, etc. If anyone has information to add please send asap. Plan is to post report to VAC website and send to Mayor and BOS by end of March.
- Commission Re-applications
 - Reminded to submit applications to BOS as soon as possible.

CVSO Report:

- Presentation by Elena Kim, Director Veterans Service Office, City & County of San Francisco. Ms. Kim noted slideshow presented tonight included metrics from the CVSO annual report submitted to the Mayor and Board of Supervisors. That report was in compliance with reporting requirements of the ordinance passed last year that put the CVSO position officially under the Human Services Agency (HSA). The ordinance was very specific about what metrics go into a report and metrics shared tonight are in alignment with that. The CVSO is discussing internally which metrics are most useful to present publicly and Ms. Kim said she welcomed input from commissioners.

Highlights of presentation included a review of CVSO services, which help veterans navigate benefits systems at federal, state, and local levels and connect veterans to nonprofit organizations. It was noted claims representatives are trained to offer assistance in applying for disability compensation from the federal government. That is only training received for state accreditation and any other help they provide veterans is on the job training. Ms. Kim reviewed “Walk-in-Wednesdays” at Fort Miley, VA Hospital, where a veteran can walk in, meet with representative and get help applying for VA disability compensation. Goal to eventually add another claims representative there if staffing can be increased.

Total benefits awarded in FY22 (July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022) was \$2.2 million. Ms. Kim noted this total includes VA disability compensation and auxiliary benefits such as college tuition fee waivers and veteran burial reimbursements. She explained claims are tracked through client management system called VetPro. She concluded by reviewing the online appointment booking feature on CVSO website and mentioned the office’s main email in-box is accessible by all employees and checked daily (sfcvso@sfgov.org).

At the conclusion of presentation, Ms. Kim asked for questions or comments. A lengthy discussion followed. Comments included:

- Commissioner Ellington asked if more information can get to claims representatives in advance of scheduled appointments. Ms. Kim responded there is a “memo box” on the online appointment form for additional



information. CVSO can look into adding language to that, such as “Is there anything else you would like us to know prior to your appointment?” Commissioner Ellington further commented \$2.2 million number seemed low given all it includes. Ms. Kim replied by explaining claims tracking process and gave a detailed description about the advantages and challenges of the client management system VetPro. She explained all information must be manually entered into VetPro to generate dollar number of total benefits awarded. System is set up to protect veterans’ privacy, and database is not accessible to VA or even other local county veteran service offices. It is possible total dollar number might be higher but challenge is pulling representatives away from meeting with veterans to do data entry. Noted it is an administrative challenge faced by many counties.

- Commissioner Sun asked if recent economic trends caused an uptick in number of claims filed. Ms. Kim noted there has been an uptick in claim filings, but believes it’s more likely connected to recent passage of the PACT ACT, which opened a huge amount of new possibilities for veterans filing disability claims.
- Commissioner Chan asked if housing can be added to metrics. Ms. Kim replied housing referrals can be tracked by VetPro, but system must be customized for that and a claims representative taught how to use it. Also, VetPro will track number of housing referrals, but will not track dollar amounts.
- President Mansori asked if CVSO serves veterans living out of state. Ms. Kim said yes, office serves veterans out of county, out of state and out of country. She will check with her team and get that number to the commission.
- Commissioner Rusanoff commented CVSO website is very useful and team very responsive. He asked about expanding outreach to schools other than CCSF and having outreach person go to homeless shelters to offer help to veterans there. Further, he mentioned idea of educating healthcare workers or members of fire department on veterans benefits so they are better able to connect veterans with CVSO. Ms. Kim explained office has limited resources and focus is maximizing benefits to veterans who come to the office. An outreach person is a claims representative offline and unavailable for appointments. Regarding crisis intervention for homeless veterans, Commissioner Barnickel noted a program run by SFFD several years ago. Commissioner Martin-Pinto has contact information for person who is looking to re-start program. He will send to Commissioner Barnickel.
- Commissioner Rusanoff asked how commission can communicate with CVSO on connecting veterans to nonprofits. Ms. Kim said she created a “CVSO Partner Spotlight,” where every Wednesday morning at 8:15 she invites any community partner to join virtually and give CVSO an overview



of their organization and how veterans can be referred. VAC can work with CVSO to expand Partner Spotlight.

- Commissioner Barnickel asked about follow-up after a veteran files claim. Ms. Kim said claims are tracked by VetPro and alerts are sent to inbox of claims representative. She noted administrative challenges of managing follow up actions while also managing new claims that keep coming in. She mentioned in her experience one thing that has been helpful is utilization of veteran peer navigators. In some CVSOs follow up, gathering paperwork, etc. is shared with a veteran peer navigator.
- Commissioner Chittavong commented VetPro system can be challenging. He recommended a discussion about peer navigators be added to future meeting agenda. He further asked about CVSO office space and if commission can assist in any way. Ms. Kim responded she is in conversation with War Memorial Building about securing a space there, which will be an easier place for clients to access. Commissioner Ellington said she is currently the commissioner chair at War Memorial Building and offered to meet offline and assist.
- President Mansori asked if present number of veterans living in San Francisco is still about 26,000. Ms. Kim replied there is no entity that counts the number of veterans every year, but most recent projection she has is about 24,000 veterans living in SF not including family members.
- Commissioner Chan offered to work with CVSO on VetPro by doing something with the state.

At conclusion of Q&A, President Mansori recommended any commissioners with specific ideas to help the CVSO contact the VAC executive team. Ms. Kim added she can be reached by email or phone call or text. She said there is a lot of work to be done and she is excited to work with the commission. Commissioners thanked Ms. Kim for her presentation.

Supervisor Liaison Reports

- District 1: Sup. Chan – Commissioner Bullard
 - No report.
- District 2: Sup. Stefani – Vacant due to recent resignation of Commissioner Wong
 - Commission secretary asked commissioners interested in serving as District 2 liaison to submit request by email.
- District 3: Sup. Peskin – Commissioner McDonald
 - Absent – no report.
- District 4: Sup. Engardio – Commissioner Barnickel
 - Supervisor will do his best to support veterans.
- District 5: Sup. Preston – Commissioner Chittavong



- Met with Sup. Preston's staff and provided update on new VAC Administrative Code. Shared about issues on mental health services. Supervisor asked how he can assist. More details at next month's meeting.
- District 6: Sup. Dorsey – Commissioner Rusanoff
 - No report.
- District 7: Sup. Melgar – Commissioner Chan
 - Waiting on report from City Administrator.
- District 8: Sup. Mandelman – Commissioner Dacumos
 - Attended town hall meeting of Sup. Mandelman and was able to connect with him to discuss veterans mental health issues. Will also work on issue of veterans homelessness.
- District 9: Sup. Ronen – Commissioner Miller
 - Excused absence – no report.
- District 10: Sup. Walton – Commissioner Ellington
 - Talked to Supervisor Walton about transportation issues faced by veterans, especially related to car towing fees. Will schedule a meeting soon with the supervisor's team. President Mansori recommended adding this as a separate item to future meeting agenda.
- District 11: Sup. Safai – Commissioner Bullard
 - Supervisor Safai very supportive of veterans.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES

- Call for motion to approve February 14, 2023 regular meeting minutes.
- Motion - Rusanoff/Second - Bullard
- All in Favor – Aye: 11, No: 0, Abstain: 0.
- Motion passed. February 14, 2023 Meeting Minutes approved.

Absent: McDonald, Miller

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

- Commission Support for 1) AB 46 to Exempt Military Retirees' Service Pension from State Income Tax, 2) SB 726 Property Tax Exemption for Disabled Veteran Homeowners [Action/ Vote]
 - As follow up to last month's meeting discussion, Commissioner Chan drafted resolutions to support bills AB 46 and SB 726. Both draft resolutions were included in agenda packet emailed to commissioners several days prior to meeting. Commissioner Chan summarized both bills and there was brief discussion among commissioners before President Mansori called for public comment on this specific item. [NOTE: Since there was only one speaker, speaking time was extended beyond two minute limit and commenter accepted questions from commissioners. After



several minutes, President Mansori concluded Q&A session by emphasizing exception made to public comment rules during tonight's meeting will not happen during future meetings. She thanked public commenter for his time and invited him to a future meeting where he can be added to the agenda as a presenter.] Comments included:

- Speaker introduced himself as person very interested in veterans affairs and veterans rights. He then commented on points he heard during commissioners' discussion by noting AB 46 addresses pension benefits alone and has nothing to do with property tax. He said disability benefits are currently not taxed but pension benefits can be taxed by individual states. Commenter also offered detailed follow up comments to CVSO presentation. Commissioners engaged in question and answers with public commenter prior to a vote to support resolutions.
- Call for motion to support resolutions drafted by Commissioner Chan in support of AB 46 and SB 726.
- Motion – Rusanoff / Seconded – Ellington
- All in Favor – Aye: 11, No: 0, Abstain: 0
- Motion passed. Draft resolutions approved.

Absent: McDonald, Miller

- Setting procedures for member participation outside of forming committees.
 - Follow up to last month's meeting discussion about committee in-person meeting requirements. Instead of creating committees, President Mansori reviewed process of assigning commissioners to take the lead on items discussed during regular meetings and report findings back to commission at the next monthly meeting. After discussion, it was further clarified the commission secretary will serve as point of contact for all information. A commissioner lead will email commission secretary and she will share information with full commission. Commissioners agreed to new structure. President Mansori further reminded that any items commissioners wish to add to upcoming meeting agendas should be emailed to commission secretary at least one week prior to a meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

- Memorial Day events being planned by staff of Golden Gate National Cemetery [Discussion]
 - President Mansori said the executive team will have a call later this week with Golden Gate Cemetery staff. Update on event planning will be shared during next



month's meeting. Commissioner Baba added celebration is not just on the Monday holiday date, there will be opportunities for commissioners to participate in Saturday and Sunday Memorial Day weekend activities as well.

- On former commissioner Raymond Wong's behalf, Commissioner Rusanoff shared news about two upcoming events – on March 29, National Vietnam War Veterans Remembrance Day and on April 15, Bataan Death March Remembrance. Details on both events will be added to VAC website. [NOTE: meeting discussion deviated from New Business to Announcements as discussion continued about various events beyond New Business agenda item of Memorial Day planning. President Mansori reminded commissioners to email event information to commission secretary so details can be posted to VAC website.]

GOOD WELFARE

This is the opportunity for members of the Veterans Affairs Commission to share special thanks and congratulatory remarks for the good welfare taking place in the veteran community.

- Good Welfare Comments included:
 - Commissioner Rusanoff read Mayoral Certificate of Honor presented to deputy public defender Greg Feldman. Certificate cited Mr. Feldman's exceptional work on behalf of veterans in the San Francisco Veterans Justice Court system. The Commission wished Mr. Feldman well as he moves on from the VJC to Probation Department.
 - Commissioner Chan thanked Mitch and his wife for attending tonight's meeting and for their support with veterans legislation.
 - Commissioner Ellington recognized Commissioner Bullard for recent award acknowledging his work with JROTC program.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

An opportunity for commission members to share information on veterans activities or briefly comment on San Francisco veterans related news.

GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT

No Public Comment



HONORS REPORT AND MOMENT OF SILENCE

In memory of American service members in all wars and conflicts who made the ultimate sacrifice. We also remember the passing of homeless veterans, veterans who died while awaiting approval of benefits, and suicides within the veteran and armed service communities.

ADJOURNMENT

President Mansori adjourned the meeting at 8:26pm.

The next regular meeting of the Veterans Affairs Commission will be held in-person at 6:00pm in Room 416 at San Francisco City Hall on Tuesday, April 11, 2023.

Links and meeting documents can be found on the Veterans Affairs Commission website.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Murphy
Commission Secretary
Veterans Affairs Commission

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Veterans Affairs Commission Meetings:

General meetings of the SFVAC are scheduled for 6:00 p.m. on the second Tuesday of every month, with the exception for the month of July, when there is no scheduled SF VAC meeting, and are held in Room 416 in City Hall.



Meeting confirmation, and specific announcement of general meetings are made via public posting of the Meeting Agenda as required by law, at least 72 hours prior to scheduled meetings. Agendas for SFVAC meetings (and archived meeting minutes) are available on the SFVAC Pages of the City of San Francisco website, and are also available for public view and inspection at the 5th Floor Government Information Center at the San Francisco Public Library, at 100 Larkin Street, San Francisco, CA 94102. The documents librarian telephone number is (415) 554-4472.

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**Veterans
Crisis Line**



1-800-273-8255
PRESS 1

If you or a Veteran, you know is in immediate danger to themselves or others, please call 911 or visit your local emergency room.

The Veterans Crisis Line is also available by texting 838255 or by going to their website and chatting with a mental health professional.



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