



## **REGULAR MEETING MINUTES**

Tuesday, August 8, 2023 – 6:00 pm

### CALL TO ORDER AND WELCOME / Vice-President Jason Chittavong

Meeting called to order at 6:02PM.

VP Chittavong welcomed attendees and noted time for public comment during meeting. VAC secretary called roll.

### ROLL CALL

PRESENT: VP Jason Chittavong, Commissioners William Barnickel, Douglas Bullard, Deborah Dacumos, Courtney Ellington, Stephen Martin-Pinto (6:05pm), Courtney Miller, Nicholas Rusanoff

ABSENT: President Mansori (excused), Commissioners Baba (excused), Chan (excused), McDonald (absent), Sun (excused)

STAFF: Mary Murphy, Commission Secretary

Quorum present.

### PRESENTATIONS

Brook Chick, Program Manager, Westside Health Clinic

Elena Kim, Director, County Veterans Service Office

### PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

VP Chittavong led attendees in Pledge of Allegiance.

### SET AGENDA

Motion called to set agenda.

Motion – Rusanoff / Second – Dacumos

All in Favor – Aye: 8, No: 0, Abstain: 0.

Absent: Mansori, Baba, Chan, McDonald, Sun



## PRESENTATION

Westside Health Clinic and Clubhouse Pilot Program. PowerPoint slideshow presented by clinic program manager Brook Chick and William Lebens. PPT posted to VAC website. Following presentation, comments from commissioners included:

- Commissioner Rusanoff asked how veteran status is determined by clinic staff and asked about referral process. Mr. Lebens answered there is a checkbox for veteran status on clinic intake sheet. Mr. Lebens offered to be point of contact for referrals. His contact information will be shared with commissioners.
- Commissioner Barnickel asked if clinic mainly treats homeless individuals. Mr. Lebens replied program assists many clients in need of housing.
- Commissioner Martin-Pinto asked about metrics used by clinic to evaluate progress of program. Mr. Lebens responded metrics are set by City of San Francisco.

## COMMUNICATIONS

### **Officers' Report:**

President (read by VP Chittavong):

- Implementation of a veterans priority in BMR housing lottery. During last month's meeting President Mansori shared update from MOHCD notifying target completion date of implementation project had been pushed out from summer/fall 2023 to undetermined time in 2024. President Mansori sent a letter to Supervisor Melgar alerting her to commission's concern about delay. The Supervisor's office responded by requesting a more detailed timeline from MOHCD and urged for project completion by end of this year. Supervisors will plan to hold a hearing if MOHCD is unable to meet this request. The commission will be updated on progress.
- Follow up to commission secretary's July 24 email about progress of CA AB46 Tax Exclusion for Military Service Retirement and Surviving Spouse Payment Act. Email requested commissioners' assistance to connect with retired veterans affected by state tax. There may be an opportunity to run testimonials on CBS local news. If commissioners have information to share please respond to email asap.
- Commitment of Veteran Support and Outreach Act. Federal bill being considered. Commission will submit letter of support.



Vice-President:

- No report.

Staff Secretary:

- Commission applications / re-applications for seats 3, 4, 5 and 8 pending with BOS Rules Committee. BOS in legislative recess until September 4. Secretary will keep track and notify commission when appointments are added to Rules Committee meeting agenda.
- Reminded about following meeting procedures as outlined in SF City Attorney Good Government Guide. Secretary will re-send link to guide. Noted it is a public document available online. Commission is required to follow guideline rules. Secretary will provide instruction during meeting as needed.

**CVSO Report:**

- Presentation by Elena Kim, Director Veterans Service Office, City & County of San Francisco. [CVSO June Report posted on VAC website and presented during meeting.]

Prior to reviewing June report, Ms. Kim briefly spoke on PACT ACT. Specifically, she provided details about August 9 deadline. She clarified there is no deadline for PACT ACT disability claims. The August 9 deadline is for retro-active payment back to date law was enacted – August 10, 2022. Emphasized that CVSO is working to get word out to veterans not to be discouraged by deadline and move forward with applications.

Ms. Kim reviewed report metrics. She noted especially high number of walk-in clients due to upcoming PACT ACT deadline. She concluded by reviewing upcoming events and asked commissioners to email event information to VAC secretary who will forward to CVSO.

Questions or comments from commissioners:

- Commissioner Ellington asked CVSO to refer veterans interested in participating in September food program to her. Ms. Kim recommended posting sign-in sheet in CVSO office.
- Commissioner Ellington inquired about a pending college tuition fee waiver application. Ms. Kim noted that in addition to PACT ACT claims, CVSO is receiving extremely high number of tuition fee waiver applications. Ms. Kim will check on status of application and follow up with Commissioner Ellington. She added goal is to process applications within 14 days.



- Commissioner Rusanoff asked about PACT ACT application screening. How can he determine if veteran qualifies for PACT ACT. Ms. Kim advised commissioners to encourage veterans to contact CVSO for application assistance.

### **Supervisor Liaison Reports**

District 1: Sup. Chan – Commissioner Bullard

No report.

District 2: Sup. Stefani – Commissioner Chan

No report. (Absent)

District 3: Sup. Peskin – Commissioner McDonald

No report. (Absent)

District 4: Sup. Engardio – Commissioner Barnickel

No report.

District 5: Sup. Preston – Commissioner Chittavong

No report.

District 6: Sup. Dorsey – Commissioner Rusanoff

Supervisor's office will facilitate recognition certificates for Veterans Justice Court. Supervisor Dorsey said he is available to present certificates.

District 7: Sup. Melgar – Commissioner Chan

No report. (Absent)

District 8: Sup. Mandelman – Commissioner Dacumos

Thanked Supervisor Mandelman for work on Committee of Homelessness and Behavioral Health.

District 9: Sup. Ronen – Commissioner Miller

Has been in conversation with Supervisor Ronen about ways to address female veteran issues.

Commissioner Miller putting together talking points for a September 15 meeting with the supervisor.

She welcomed input on topic from all commissioners. Asked commissioners to email ideas to commission secretary.

District 10: Sup. Walton – Commissioner Ellington

Will begin holding veteran town halls the first Wednesday of the month, tentatively set to start in October. Commissioner Ellington will email details to commission secretary.

District 11: Sup. Safai – Commissioner Bullard



No report.

## **APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES**

- Call for motion to approve June 13, 2023 regular meeting minutes.
- Motion – Rusanoff / Second - Ellington
- All in Favor – Aye: 7, No: 0, Abstain: 0.
- Motion passed June 13, 2023 Meeting Minutes approved.

Absent: Mansori, Baba, Chan, McDonald, Miller, Sun

## **UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

Revisions to VAC Bylaws [Discussion / Possible Action]

- Commissioners briefly discussed bylaws. Commissioner Ellington noted bylaw update about VAC providing resources to veteran community. She inquired about list of resources. VP and commission secretary noted resources are posted on VAC website. Commissioners encouraged to send resource ideas to commission secretary.
  - Commissioner Rusanoff stated his disappointment that commission reduced membership from 17 to 13.
  - Commissioner Ellington glad to see a seat assigned to military spouse/partner. That perspective will be helpful to commission's work. Added commission membership number is topic that can be re-visited over time.
- Call for motion to approve revisions to VAC Bylaws.
  - Motion – Rusanoff / Second – Barnickel
  - All in Favor – Aye: 7, No: 0, Abstain: 0.
  - Motion passed. Bylaw updates approved.

Absent: Mansori, Baba, Chan, McDonald, Miller, Sun

## **NEW BUSINESS**

Support for SB58. Resolution recognizing the therapeutic potential of certain hallucinogenic substances for the treatment of veteran mental health issues and urging the passage of SB58. Draft of resolution shared with commissioners prior to meeting. [Discussion / Action]

- Commission secretary noted Commissioner Chan called in prior to meeting to encourage commission's support of resolution for SB58. He attended hearing on bill where it received strong



support from veterans. Commissioners discussed pros and cons of bill. Concern expressed by several commissioners about broad decriminalization and safety of treatment.

- Call for Public Comment:
  - Speaker: Dylan, a Marine Corps veteran. Spoke on his experience dealing with PTSD. Said he has not read bill and encouraged commissioners to read bill. Commented he wanted someone to talk with at VA instead of pharmacy first approached. He liked Clubhouse Pilot Program talked about earlier in tonight's meeting.
- . Call for motion to support draft resolution for SB58.
  - Motion – Rusanoff / Seconded – Barnickel
  - Roll Call Vote:
    - Martin-Pinto: No
    - Rusanoff: Aye
    - Ellington: Abstain
    - Chittavong: No
    - Barnickel: No
    - Dacumos: No
    - Bullard: Aye
  - All in Favor – Aye: 2, No: 4, Abstain: 1.
  - Draft resolution not approved.

Absent: Mansori, Baba, Chan, McDonald, Miller, Sun

Commissioner Miller to discuss creating a working group to address female veterans issues.  
[Discussion / Possible Acton]

- Since Commissioner Miller had to leave meeting early this item was discussed earlier during Supervisor Liaison reports.

## **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.

- Commissioner Rusanoff extended good welfare to Representative Nancy Pelosi, acknowledged her work to pass PACT Act and her support of veterans.



## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

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

- During October Fleet Week the Navy band will play at Veterans Hospital. More details to come from Commissioner Barnickel.
- Commissioner Dacumos noted Blessing of Fleet scheduled for October 9.

## **GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT**

- Jenny Perez spoke on implementation of veterans priority in BMR housing lottery. Requested commissioners reach out to BOS about project timeline delays. Asked that commissioners put this topic top of list to discuss with supervisors. Acknowledged hard work of commission to get this housing legislation passed.
- Speaker Dylan, Marine Corps. Veteran. Commented he supports increase to seats on commission, noting more veterans involved in local politics is a positive step. He re-iterated his support for outpatient hallucinogenic therapy. He said he's received good help from CVSO and thanked the office for their work.

## **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**

Meeting adjourned at 7:39pm.

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, September 12, 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

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immediate danger to themselves or others,  
please call 911 or visit your local emergency room.

Carlton B. Goodlett Place San Francisco, California 94102-4689



Veterans Affairs Commission



City and County of San Francisco

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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