



## **NEVADA LEGISLATURE LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE ON SENIOR CITIZENS, VETERANS AND ADULTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS**

*(Nevada Revised Statutes [NRS] 218E.750)*

### **SUMMARY MINUTES AND ACTION REPORT**

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The first meeting of the Nevada Legislature's Legislative Committee on Senior Citizens, Veterans and Adults with Special Needs was held on Monday, February 22, 2016, at 9 a.m. in Room 4401 of the Grant Sawyer State Office Building, 555 East Washington Avenue, Las Vegas, Nevada. The meeting was videoconferenced to Room 2135 of the Legislative Building, 401 South Carson Street, Carson City, Nevada. A copy of this set of "Summary Minutes and Action Report," including the "Meeting Notice and Agenda" (Exhibit A) and other substantive exhibits, is available on the Nevada Legislature's website at <http://www.leg.state.nv.us/interim/78th2015/committee/>. In addition, copies of the audio or video record are available through the Legislative Counsel Bureau's Publications Office (e-mail: [publications@lcb.state.nv.us](mailto:publications@lcb.state.nv.us); telephone: 775/684-6835) and may be available online at <http://www.leg.state.nv.us/Granicus/>.

#### **COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT IN LAS VEGAS:**

Senator Joseph (Joe) P. Hardy, M.D., Chair  
Senator Mark A. Manendo  
Senator Patricia (Pat) Spearman  
Assemblywoman Ellen B. Spiegel  
Assemblyman Lynn D. Stewart

#### **COMMITTEE MEMBER PRESENT IN CARSON CITY:**

Assemblyman Philip (P.K.) O'Neill, Vice Chair

#### **LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL BUREAU STAFF PRESENT:**

Marsheilah D. Lyons, Chief Principal Research Analyst, Research Division  
Bryan Fernley, Senior Principal Deputy Legislative Counsel, Legal Division  
Eric Robbins, Deputy Legislative Counsel, Legal Division  
Debbie Gleason, Senior Research Secretary, Research Division

*Items taken out of sequence during the meeting have been placed in agenda order.*

## **AGENDA ITEM I—OPENING REMARKS**

Chair Hardy called to order the first meeting of the Legislative Committee on Senior Citizens, Veterans and Adults With Special Needs and asked the Committee members to introduce themselves. He provided general Committee information, public comment guidelines, and acknowledged the passing of Senator Debbie Smith, Senate District No. 13, with a moment of silence.

## **AGENDA ITEM II—PUBLIC COMMENT**

Linda Haigh, Founder, Adopt a Vet Dental Program (AAVD), a collaboration of Northern Nevada Dental Health Programs and Community Health Alliance, provided an overview of the AAVD, which offers vital dental services at minimum or no cost to low-income veterans in northern Nevada who do not qualify for dental services through the VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System (VASNHCS), United States Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA) (Exhibit B).

Debra Koester, Program Supervisor, AAVD, shared statistics regarding the dental services provided, criteria for veteran eligibility, and the use of donations by the AAVD. (Exhibit B).

James Snyder, Veteran Liaison, AAVD, and former Marine, recounted his experience with the AAVD and how it has changed his life. He said he is the recipient of the Veteran of the Month award for August 2015 from the Department of Veterans Services (DVS). Mr. Snyder also acknowledged recent assistance provided by Vice Chair O'Neill, in facilitating dental services for a World War II veteran through the AAVD (Exhibit B).

Vice Chair O'Neill stressed the importance of promoting programs like the AAVD throughout the country.

Donna DePauw, resident, Carson City, Nevada, shared the obstacles she faces regarding the care of her husband who is a veteran with Alzheimer's living in an assisted care facility. Ms. DePauw said she does not qualify for funding or grants to supplement her income to help pay the \$5,000 per month facility cost. She stated care standards could be improved and offered to work with the Committee to make positive changes for residents and businesses.

John A. Yacenda, Ph.D., M.P.H., P.A.H.M., President and Chief Executive Officer, Dreams Foundation, Inc. (Foundation), and President, Nevada Silver Haired Legislative Forum (Forum) (NRS 427A.320), provided an outline (Exhibit C) of the Foundation's activities in relation to veterans and the Forum's activities in relation to senior citizens.

### **AGENDA ITEM III—OVERVIEW OF THE COMMITTEE’S RESPONSIBILITIES AND ACTIVITIES**

**(This agenda item was taken out of order.)**

Marsheilah D. Lyons, previously identified, directed the Committee’s attention to the Interim Committee Brief (Exhibit D), which contained Committee background and staff contact information and lists of selective contacts and acronyms. She encouraged members to reach out to staff should they have any questions. Ms. Lyons also informed the members if they have any requests or topics they wish to be considered for future agendas during the Interim to make them known to Chair Hardy, or to her, and she will forward them to the Chair.

### **AGENDA ITEM IV—PRESENTATION ON CERTAIN SERVICES FOR VETERANS IN NEVADA**

**(This agenda item was taken out of order.)**

On behalf of Katherine Miller, United States Army Colonel (Ret.), Director, DVS, Wendy Simons, Deputy Director of Wellness, DVS, provided a presentation on the DVS (Exhibit E), which covered future initiatives, including the building status of a new veterans’ home in northern Nevada, its history, programs, services, and successes. She clarified that the primary difference between the USDVA and the DVS is the DVS does not issue benefits, but rather it offers support to ensure veterans receive benefits.

Ms. Simons noted that grants from the USDVA for funding new veterans’ facilities are often given a higher priority if structural damage is a concern. She asked the Committee to consider sending a letter to the USDVA requesting it revisit its formula pertaining to the funding of new veterans homes.

Ms. Simons touted a one-year program offered by the College of Southern Nevada to former military medical corps personnel that provides additional training and credentials necessary to become a licensed practical nurse. She referred to a recent online article written about the program titled “Nursing Students Graduate With Assistance From Nevada” published by the *Veterans Reporter News*. Ms. Simons noted that the program’s curriculum was funded by the DVS.

In addition, Ms. Simons requested funding for the following items: (1) additional veteran service officer positions; and (2) a veterans’ information system, which identifies veterans who may not be aware of services available to them through the USDVA.

Michael Musgrove, Vice Chair, Nevada Veterans Services Commission (NVSC), DVS, provided information regarding the challenges and needs facing veterans residing in rural Nevada (Exhibit F). He requested funding and/or assistance in the following areas: (1) overcoming barriers to certification of volunteer drivers for transporting veterans to

medical appointments; (2) persuading more doctors in rural areas to accept veterans using the Veterans Choice Program, USDVA, and Medicare; (3) recruiting doctors and mental health providers; and (4) reinstituting administrative and veteran service officer positions to assist veterans in enrolling for benefits.

Senator Patricia (Pat) Spearman, Senate District No. 1, Former Member, NVSC, DVS, opined that not enough is done for veterans. She referred to a failed measure, Assembly Bill 294 of the 2015 Session, that addressed issues pertaining to suicide prevention among veterans and emphasized the importance of acting on this issue.

Major Christy Hales, Director, Military and Family Support Services Nevada National Guard, Office of the Military, elaborated on a five-step system offered by Work for Warriors (WFW) at no cost to veterans, service members, and their immediate families in gaining employment (Exhibit G). She offered the WFW's goals over the next three to five years, and she said funding for the program sunsets in September 2018, at which time the WFW program will end if it does not receive continued funding.

Major Hales conveyed to the Committee that the WFW works closely and directly with Tesla and Panasonic who are committed to 10 percent of their workforce consisting of veterans. She also provided an overview of coordinated services among the WFW and various institutions under the Nevada System of Higher Education and businesses in educating and training veterans in preparation of employment. Major Hales said she would follow up with Senator Spearman regarding the WFW's coordination with the College of Southern Nevada. In addition, she stated the WFW works closely with other military branches of the reserves in keeping them briefed on the program. Major Hales emphasized the significance of helping nearly 300 veterans and service members in gaining employment through the WFW since its inception in October 2014.

#### ***A. Military Caregivers***

Information concerning military caregivers was included in a presentation (Exhibit E) provided by Ms. Simons.

#### ***B. Employment Assistance***

Roy L. Brown, Veterans' Program Coordinator, Employment Security Division (ESD), Department of Employment, Training and Rehabilitation (DETR), assisted with a presentation concerning the Veterans' Employment Services (VES) and Nevada JobConnect programs (Exhibit H), funded by the Jobs for Veterans State Grant (JVSG) that targets veterans with significant barriers to employment (SBE).

Renee Olson, Administrator, ESD, DETR, continued with the presentation. She clarified the ESD not only assists veterans with significant challenges in securing employment but all veterans are given priority. Ms. Olson also mentioned the Silver State Works Program

operated by the ESD, which incentivizes employers in the hiring and retention of staff, including veterans. She echoed Major Hales' remarks regarding the impact and significance of employment in a person's life.

Mr. Brown fielded questions from members of the Committee. He clarified that the primary factor regarding high unemployment among veterans 18 to 24 years of age is due to employment inexperience in the private sector; therefore, they need additional support in developing skills that will lead to employment. Mr. Brown said veterans within this age range make up a relatively small percent of veterans the ESD serves, while noting many veterans return to school after their service. He also explained all veterans are eligible for services through the VES; however, the JVSG program is restricted to veterans whose military service is over 181 days. Mr. Brown said the employment success rate is 82 percent for veterans receiving SBE services.

### ***C. Access to Mental Health Care and Suicide Prevention***

Cody Phinney, M.P.H., Administrator, Division of Public and Behavioral Health (DPBH), Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), provided brief comments on services provided to veterans by the DPBH.

Kathryn A. Baughman, Deputy Administrator for Clinical Services, DPBH, DHHS, elaborated on DPBH's collaboration with other providers throughout Nevada.

Misty Vaughan Allen, M.A., Suicide Prevention Coordinator of Nevada, Office of Suicide Prevention (OSP), DPBH, DHHS, gave a summary of the OSP's efforts in preventing suicide. She reported on suicide rates among veterans compared to the general population; opportunities for prevention; and the DPBH's participation as a multidisciplinary delegation in several policy academies concerning suicide prevention. Ms. Vaughan Allen stated the DPBH's four suicide prevention strategies presented at the academies resulted in legislation requiring suicide prevention training for behavioral healthcare in Nevada. She suggested opportunities to expand access to other resources and advocated for the development of support system strategies comprising of veterans in recovery who can help newer veterans receive access to care. In closing, Ms. Vaughan Allen opined that service members and veterans do not want to end their lives; they just run out of options on how to keep living.

Chair Hardy requested that Ms. Vaughan Allen submit language for consideration of BDRs.

### ***D. Housing Initiatives***

Sharath Chandra, Deputy Administrator, Housing Division (HD), Department of Business and Industry (DBI), gave an overview of the HD's mission, programs, and initiatives (Exhibit I). Mr. Chandra will follow up with Senator Spearman concerning the following items:

- The locations of the two new senior housing construction developments underway in Las Vegas;
- Whether the HD has considered a program to assist homeowners who are “upside down” concerning the equity in their homes that would result in increased availability of residential property to veterans; and
- Whether the single and family housing units are connected to programs for female veterans with children.

Discussion ensued among Senator Manendo; Assemblywoman Spiegel; Mr. Chandra; and Mike Dang, Chief of Federal and State Programs, HD, DBI, regarding the following: preferences and services for veterans; tax incentives for developers who invest in affordable housing and target low income renters; and the process for reviewing the income level of tenants in affordable housing programs or properties. Mr. Dang commented further on the HD’s opportunities for veterans, which includes the Housing Locator Service (Exhibit I), a free, statewide housing locator website that gives renters, landlords, housing professionals, and social service providers access to rental housing information and listings.

#### **AGENDA ITEM V—PRESENTATION REGARDING HOSPITALS AND OTHER HEALTHCARE FACILITIES IN NEVADA**

**(This agenda item was taken out of order.)**

Lisa M. Howard, Director, VASNHCS, USDVA, summarized the growth and expansion of veterans’ services over the past year and its focus for 2016. She reported on the VASNHCS’s locations and statistics concerning the number of veterans who have received healthcare at the primary hospital site in Reno. Ms. Howard pointed out that services continue to grow with an increasing population.

Ms. Howard touched upon the VASNHCS’s design projects at the main Reno inpatient campus, including a major, five-year construction project (Project) for Fiscal Year 2017 that will provide primary care, audiology, dental, and many other program services. She said the Project is one of only two authorized add-on projects in the country. In addition, Ms. Howard highlighted the VASNHCS’s accomplishments and goals (Exhibit J). She elaborated on federal eligibility requirements; prioritization of services; and private and government organizations, some of which collaborate with the VASNHCS. Ms. Howard noted the VASNHCS serves 35 percent of the local veteran population in providing healthcare and social services.

Vice Chair O’Neill and Ms. Howard discussed the possibility of the VASNHCS assisting the AAVD in regards to the promotion and/or expansion of its services, particularly in the Las Vegas area.

Chair Hardy and Ms. Howard pondered the idea for a BDR that would provide for a State home in northern Nevada to accommodate aging veterans.

Conversation ensued between Assemblyman Stewart and Ms. Howard that covered the VASNHC's method of quality control. Ms. Howard said the VASNHC has a robust tracking program and a responsive veteran engagement team that has been accredited by The Joint Commission.

Regarding the grant to fund the Project, Ms. Howard said the VASNHC was awarded the grant by submitting a very competitive project package, in addition to receiving backing from federal partners who support local projects.

Peggy W. Kearns, Director, VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System (VASNHS), USDVA, gave a presentation of the VASNHS's accomplishments, demographics, eligibility, initiatives, locations, programs, and services (Exhibit K).

Ms. Kearns clarified that not all veterans qualify for the Purchased Skilled Home Care program; eligibility is determined by service connection or income. She reported there are no plans for a second facility in southern Nevada; however, the VASNHS recognizes the impending need as the facility and both clinics are near capacity. She noted she was unaware of any issues pertaining to the transportation of veteran clients to, from, and between facilities reported by the media—pointing out there is a robust transportation system between the three locations. Senator Spearman and Ms. Kearns discussed other forms of transportation as backup for veterans.

Senator Manendo stressed the importance of making plans now for a second facility considering the amount of time it takes such projects to come to fruition.

Ms. Kearns noted the VASNHS has three full-time chaplains who will fulfill important roles when the palliative care program opens. In addition, she said its employees are contracted and undergo background checks.

Ms. Kearns reported on the VASNHS's quality control program; its coordination of burial services with the Nevada State Veterans Home, Boulder City; and the filling of prescription medications.

In closing, Mr. Kearns said there is a great need for long-term health care for dementia and mental health patients; however, that request would go through the USDVA. She stated the VASHNS has a residency program with 48 participants and noted the shortage of physicians in southern Nevada.

## **AGENDA ITEM VI—PRESENTATIONS CONCERNING VETERAN SPECIALTY COURTS IN NEVADA**

**(This agenda item was taken out of order.)**

The Honorable David Barker, Chief District Judge, Eighth Judicial District Court (EJDC), Department 18, Civil and Criminal Division, Clark County, shared a presentation on the benefits, eligibility criteria, history, participant statistics, programs, referrals, resources, and success rates of the Veterans Treatment Court (VTC) (Exhibit L). In addition, the following legislative recommendations were outlined in the presentation for the Committee's consideration:

- Appropriations for a VTC coordinator at the EJDC level;
- Authority to supervise misdemeanants under the jurisdiction of the Specialty Courts by allowing for the transfer of misdemeanants from municipal and justice courts to VTCs; and
- Resolution of statutory conflicts pertaining to domestic violence and driving under the influence offenses.

Discussion ensued among Committee members; Judge Barker; the Honorable Michael L. Douglas, Supreme Court of Nevada; and the Honorable Melissa A. Saragosa, Justice of the Peace, Las Vegas Township Justice Court, Department 4, Clark County, which resulted in identifying specific impediments to the success of VTCs and the program's intended purpose as outlined by the Legislature. Of prominent concern is the legal system's inconsistent treatment of veterans charged with misdemeanor crimes, while not recognizing veterans' unique conditions, such as posttraumatic stress disorder and other mental health issues. The following suggestions were made:

- Address the challenges of recruiting, positioning, and supervising VTC coordinators;
- Allow judges discretion in placing a veteran in a VTC, and the possible dismissal upon successful completion of the program, post adjudication; and
- Coordinate statewide funding and requirements.

Judge Saragosa noted that the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, is contracted to conduct a formal evaluation of VTC programs in order to report to the Legislature their effectiveness.

Chair Hardy suggested the Committee's counsel discuss ideas with the judges that can be presented during the Committee's work session.

## **AGENDA ITEM VII—PUBLIC COMMENT**

Joan S. Hall, R.N., President and Chief Executive Officer, Nevada Rural Hospital Partners (NRHP), spoke in response to comments made concerning the treatment of veterans in Nevada's rural areas, specifically the idea that some veterans are denied treatment. She explained that the outpatient Veterans Choice Program is different from how it was



envisioned in that it requires prior authorization, which causes some confusion for veterans and NRHP members.

The following documents were submitted for the record:

1. Written testimony provided by Jack D. Thrasher, Ph.D., Technical Director, National Toxic Encephalopathy Foundation (NTEF), Las Vegas, Nevada (Exhibit M).
2. Written testimony provided by Angel De Fazio, President and Executive Director, NTEF, Las Vegas, Nevada (Exhibit N).
3. Written testimony provided by Raymond Singer, Ph.D., FACPN, FNAN, FAPS, private citizen (Exhibit O).
4. Written testimony provided by David O. Carpenter, M.D., Director, Institute for Health and the Environment, University at Albany, State University of New York (Exhibit P).
5. Report provided by Wendy Simons, previously identified (Exhibit Q).
6. Written testimony provided by Katherine Miller, previously identified (Exhibit R).

Subsequent to the meeting, the following documents were submitted:

1. Wendy Simons, previously identified, provided a script to accompany the DVS presentation (Exhibit S).
2. Cody Phinney, previously identified; Kathryn A. Baughman, previously identified; and Misty Vaughan Allen, previously identified, provided written testimony (Exhibit T).
3. Misty Vaughan Allen, previously identified, provided the Strategic Action Plan for Ending Suicide (Exhibit U) and the Suicide Prevention Implementation Academy 2014 Plan (Exhibit V).

## **AGENDA ITEM VIII—ADJOURNMENT**

Chair Hardy dedicated the adjournment of the meeting to the memory of Senator Debbie Smith.

There being no further business to come before the Committee, the meeting was adjourned at 2:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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Debbie Gleason  
Senior Research Secretary

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Marsheilah D. Lyons  
Chief Principal Research Analyst

APPROVED BY:

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Senator Joseph (Joe) P. Hardy, M.D., Chair

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## EXHIBITS

EXHIBIT	WITNESS/ENTITY	DESCRIPTION
Exhibit A	Marsheilah D. Lyons, Chief Principal Research Analyst, Research Division, Legislative Counsel Bureau (LCB)	Agenda
Exhibit B	Linda Haigh, Founder, Adopt a Vet Dental Program (AAVD)	Summary of AAVD
Exhibit C	John A. Yacenda, Ph.D., M.P.H., P.A.H.M., President and Chief Executive Officer, Dreams Foundation, Inc. (Foundation), and President, Nevada Silver Haired Legislative Forum	Summary of Foundation
Exhibit D	Marsheilah D. Lyons, Chief Principal Research Analyst, Research Division, LCB	Interim Committee Brief
Exhibit E	Wendy Simons, Deputy Director of Wellness, Department of Veterans Services (DVS)	Microsoft PowerPoint presentation
Exhibit F	Michael Musgrove, Vice Chair, Nevada Veterans Services Commission, DVS	Written testimony
Exhibit G	Major Christy Hales, Director, Military and Family Support Services Nevada National Guard, Office of the Military	Summary of Work for Warriors
Exhibit H	Roy L. Brown, Veterans' Program Coordinator, Employment Security Division (ESD), Department of Employment, Training and Rehabilitation (DETR); and Renee Olson, Administrator, ESD, DETR	Microsoft PowerPoint presentation
Exhibit I	Sharath Chandra, Deputy Administrator, Housing Division (HD), Department of Business and Industry (DBI); and Mike Dang, Chief of Federal and State Programs, HD, DBI	Summary of housing opportunities for veterans
Exhibit J	Lisa M. Howard, Director, VA Sierra Nevada Health Care System (VASNHCS), United States Department of Veterans Affairs (USDVA)	Summary of the VASNHCS

Exhibit K	Peggy W. Kearns, Director, VA Southern Nevada Healthcare System, USDVA	Microsoft PowerPoint presentation
Exhibit L	The Honorable David Barker, Chief District Judge, Eighth Judicial District Court Department 18, Civil and Criminal Division, Clark County	Microsoft PowerPoint presentation
Exhibit M	Jack D. Thrasher, Ph.D., Technical Director, National Toxic Encephalopathy Foundation (NTEF)	Written testimony
Exhibit N	Angel De Fazio, President and Executive Director, NTEF	Written testimony
Exhibit O	Raymond Singer, Ph.D., FACPN, FNAN, FAPS	Written testimony
Exhibit P	David O. Carpenter, M.D., Director, Institute for Health and the Environment, University at Albany, State University of New York	Written testimony
Exhibit Q	Wendy Simons, Deputy Director of Wellness, DVS	Report
Exhibit R	Katherine Miller, United States Army Colonel (Ret.), Director, DVS	Written testimony
Exhibit S	Wendy Simons, Deputy Director of Wellness, DVS	Script
Exhibit T	Cody Phinney, M.P.H., Administrator, Division of Public and Behavioral Health (DPBH), Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS); and Kathryn A. Baughman, Deputy Administrator for Clinical Services, DPBH, DHHS	Summary of veterans' access to mental health care
Exhibit U	Misty Vaughan Allen, M.A., Suicide Prevention Coordinator of Nevada, Office of Suicide Prevention (OSP), DPBH, DHHS	Strategic action plan for ending suicide
Exhibit V	Misty Vaughan Allen, M.A., Suicide Prevention Coordinator of Nevada, OSP, DPBH, DHHS	Suicide Prevention Implementation Academy 2014 Plan

This set of "Summary Minutes and Action Report" is supplied as an informational service. Exhibits in electronic format may not be complete. Copies of the complete exhibits and other materials distributed at the meeting are on file in the Research Library of the Legislative Counsel Bureau, Carson City, Nevada. You may contact the Library online at [www.leg.state.nv.us/lcb/research/library/feedbackmail.cfm](http://www.leg.state.nv.us/lcb/research/library/feedbackmail.cfm) or telephone: (775) 684-6827.