

GOVERNOR'S WORKING GROUP

ON VETERANS, SERVICE MEMBERS, AND THEIR FAMILIES



MAKING NORTH CAROLINA THE STATE OF CHOICE FOR VETERANS

Chair: Secretary Larry Hall

Co-Chairs: Dr. Jason Vogler, NC DMHDDSAS, Jim Prosser, NCDVA,
Will Collins, DOC, Joseph Edger, VA, Mark Bilosz, VBA

July 27, 2017 Minutes

Present: Scott Barker, Archie Barrow, Mark Bilosz, Michael Bishop, Sara Blair, Tuger Boone, Kindra Bradley, Chris Brandenburg, Tony Brown, Brenda Brubaker, Shajn Cabrera, Joel Cartwright, Ken Castille, Will Collins, Cajun Comeau, Roosevelt Conyers, Michael Daniels, Hank Debnam, Lane Dyer, Dr. Li Fang, Shaina Gaines, Moses Gloria, Mark Goldberg, Amado Gonzalez, Diana Graham, Penny Greer-Link, Charles Gross, Secretary Larry Hall, Kim Harrell, Jessica Herrmann, F. Hinton, Andy Jackson, Kelly Jackson, Latina James, Duggy Johnson, Teresa Johnson, Megan Jordan, Terri Kane, Stan Kimer, Cristen Koslik, Dr. Bob Kurtz, Walter Liles, Jr., Dr. Sara McEwen, Anthony McLeod, Megan Miller, Jeff Mobley, Brenda Monforti, Catherine Murphy, Tara Myers, Nyi Myint, Jeff Netznik, Jamie Pendergrass, Mark Philbrick, Toni Pinkston, Jay Price, Jim Prosser, Jean Reaves, Sandra Robinson, Evangeline Schultz, Austen Shearer, Dr. Mark Shelhorse, Craig Shore, Jeff Smith, Jeff Smith, Tony Sowards, Flo Stein, Dr. Sam Strickland III, Nicole Sullivan, Evan Swink, Kurtis Taylor, Mark Teachey, Tiana Terry, Vicki Vitiello, Dr. Jason Vogler, Lucas Vrbsky, Steve Wilkins, Dwight Williams, Kimberly Williams, Martin Woodard, and Jeffrey Wyatt

After introductions of all present, Jean Reaves served as moderator for the discussion on *Services for Incarcerated Veterans*. As a member of Incarcerated Veterans working group, she thanked Cajun Comeau, Lynn Newsom, and Kindra Bradley for their invaluable assistance. She also recognized the many programs that assist with transition for Veterans to the community. She emphasized the importance of Veterans Treatment Courts to divert Veterans from prison into treatment. The focus of their working group is on Veterans and the services that they need while incarcerated. These Veterans still need to be recognized for their service to our Country. "Every Veteran needs to feel that he is a Veteran."

Nicole Sullivan spoke of the NC Department of Public Safety as it relates to reentry and incarcerated Veterans. She noted that Diana Graham will later speak about the Maury Unit, a special dorm, which Veterans requested because they wanted to handle things differently. The facility supported it and is now looking to expand it elsewhere. The department houses about 37,000 inmates in 55 prisons and 2 CRV facilities, and about 34,000 are male. An additional 85,000 are on probation, and about 11,300 are on post-release (being supervised for 9-12 months). Parole ended in 1994. Veterans represent 6-7% or 2200 inmates. They are trying to improve the way they connect people to available community resources through an assessment of needs and matching services with the needs (e.g., behavioral health and medical treatment, housing, education, employment). All facilities partner with community colleges. About 2300 are released annually. The department is also trying to move folks closer to home about a year before discharge so they can connect to local resources. All 55 facilities currently release folks, but the department has identified 18 facilities to be reentry facilities depending on the level of security. They are in the process of figuring out how to best serve each level. For example, the higher custody level needs more assistance in preparing for their return. This represents a monumental shift in transition services—it occurred because the prison population has decreased, making it easier to develop and implement

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programs. The average length of stay is 3-5 years; 90% will be released. Those leaving prison will have issues related to family, housing, education, and employment. The DMV has mobile units that can go into prisons so they are issuing state IDs before they leave prison. Inmates can also complete SNAP applications before they leave so they can immediately access the Food Bank. There are local Reentry Councils based on the community engagement model. Five started in 2013, and they provide assistance with housing, transportation, and employment through a grant. They are planning to expand the program to more areas. The Reentry Councils consist of individuals and organizations providing support. In terms of the opioid crisis, 25% more likely to die of an overdose within 2 weeks of release. They are also trying to build relationships with community health clinics (e.g., SUDs, diabetes, hypertension). DPS is emphasizing collaboration and developing programs to bring providers in to offer services.

Jean noted that their working group is trying to bring specific attention to this population. Dr. Bruce Capehart is also part of the group, and he is assisting in the development of a train the trainers program on behavioral health issues while they are in prison. More trained people are needed to address PTSD and other behavioral health issues in prison.

Lucas Vrbsky is a clinical social worker with the VA. He is the only person in the state who visits all state and federal prisons to ensure that Veterans receive services. This program started in 2009. While most folks have a smooth transition, for some people, the transition is more difficult. They may need readjustment counseling and treatment. It is critical to give them the assistance that they need. In 1986, the first prison dorm for Veterans was in NY. Another one was established in PA for Vietnam Veterans. We can learn from these programs. He also emphasized the importance of assisting Veterans to file claims while they are incarcerated. While they are only paid 10% per month, they will at least have this money upon release. The VSOs need to go into prisons and help the Veterans file claims. This will help Veterans in terms of housing, income, and employment. Veterans need to experience their lives having meaning.

Tuger Boone was an OIF Army combat Veteran in 2009-10. He was released after 3 years even though he had a 32-year sentence. He didn't learn about benefits until after he was released, and he wants to change that for current imprisoned Veterans. He now serves as a peer support specialist. Nicole mentioned that prisons are open, and they want people to come in and offer services (VSOs, churches, peers). He said the Resource Guide, which he received in prison, was very helpful to him.

Diana Graham has met with administration of the Maury Correctional Facility. It has a dorm that only houses Veterans. Veterans have to go through a rigorous process to qualify for the dorm. Lenoir Community College offers resume and interviewing skills class. On the request of the prisons, the Working Group also organized a Veterans Family Day with food, games for children, etc. Wilmington has a program where the prisoners train service dogs while in prison and give them to Veterans. They would like have this program on the unit.

Catherine Murphy's son shot his wife in the face in front of their 6 year old and while she was pregnant. He received no treatment during incarceration, and he continues to deny that he has mental health issues. He is unable to get a job. She emphasized the need for incarcerated people to get what they need.

Jeff Smith said that the VA has announced that Veterans with other than honorable (OTH) discharges are now eligible for up to 90 days of mental health services. These limitations require a

community partnership so there is a seamless transition. They would like to extend services to 120 to 180 days. So far there have only been 4 cases. Jim Prosser receives DD-214s directly. He gets about 10-14 OTHs per month (they are received within 30 days within discharge). He plans to send them a letter, encouraging them to see a VSO and start the recharacterization process.

Jean reiterated that few Veterans request behavioral health treatment. Many don't recognize that they have a problem so requesting services is moot. Peer support specialist or groups are important because Veterans will listen to another Veteran. Veterans need to be willing to reach out repeatedly before they're ready to move forward.

Terri Kane mentioned the NC Serves network of community resources. On August 3, the NC Serves Western will be stood up. Nicole indicated her interest in connecting with the NC Serves network. She also noted that the DPS provides a red folder which contains identification, transcripts, and an aftercare and discharge plan for each Veteran.

Jim Prosser (James.prosser@nc.milvets.gov) announced that a copy of the 2017 Resource Guide may be obtained by calling the local VSO or downloading a copy from the website, www.ncveteransworkinggroup.org. Dr. Jason Vogler also promoted the Resource Guide, saying that Veterans and their family members should take advantage of the supports and services available through federal, state, and local agencies. Will Collins said that the Division of Workforce Solutions offers Stand Downs throughout the State.

On August 16-18, myi VA Piedmont Veterans Coalition will sponsor a Veterans Community Action Center for Veterans and their families in Charlotte (3400 Beatties Ford Road). In addition to a claims clinic, representatives from health care, housing, education, employment, legal services, and other community providers will attend. A Veteran and staff picnic will be held on August 19 from 11:30-3:00 pm (register for this event at <https://veteranpicnic.eventbrite.com>). Read more at [attachment](#).

Jeff Smith of UNC-TV announced that public television will be releasing the new Ken Burns movie on the Vietnam War on September 17-28. They have been working with DHHS to ensure that people can get assistance after the 10-part series. The first screening will occur in Fayetteville. UNC-TV also encourages watchers to view the panel on September 29.

Flo Stien identified another important partnership that the NC DHHS shares with the VA. Known as Treatment Alternatives to Safe Communities, it provides valuable case management services through the program.

Louisburg College is presenting a play, *An Extra Penny*, this weekend and next weekend. It is an original production about the impact of World War I on the families.

Cajun sees Veterans who often have 4 or 5 issues but can be frustrating.

Upcoming meetings, all in the Situation Room of Emergency Management, from 2:00-4:00 pm:

- August 24: State Services for Veterans
- September 28: Suicide Prevention Initiatives
- October 26: Community-based Services for Veterans