

## Veteran Advocate Nominating Committee

Meeting Minutes  
July 5, 2023  
9:00 am - 2:00 pm

Date of meeting: Wednesday, July 5, 2023

Start time: 9:00 am

End time: 2:00 pm

Location: Virtual Meeting (Zoom)

Members participating remotely		Vote I*
1	<b>Daniel Shark</b> ( <i>chair</i> ) – Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS)	X
2	<b>Sean Collins</b> – Board of Trustees of the Holyoke Soldiers' Home	X
3	<b>Brooke Doyle</b> – Department of Mental Health (DMH)	X
4	<b>Jeff Farnsworth</b> – Executive Office of Public Safety and Security (EOPSS)	X
5	<b>Jim C. Fratolillo</b> – American Legion	X
6	<b>Gary W. Keefe</b> – Mass. National Guard	-
7	<b>Bill LeBeau</b> – Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)	X
8	<b>Caitlyn Letourneau</b> – Office of Senator John Velis ( <i>designee of the Senator</i> )	X
9	<b>Tom Lyons</b> – Board of Trustees of the Chelsea Soldiers' Home	X
10	<b>Erik Mayberg</b> – Executive Office of Veterans' Services (EOVS) ( <i>designee of Secretary Santiago</i> )	X
11	<b>Bridget Plouffe</b> – Office of Representative Gerard Cassidy ( <i>designee of the Representative</i> )	X

\* (X) Voted in favor; (O) Opposed; (A) Abstained from vote; (-) Absent from meeting or during vote

### Proceedings

Assistant Secretary Shark called the meeting of the Veteran Advocate Nominating Committee to order at 9:00 am. He welcomed members and explained that the first interviewee was unable to confirm their timeslot with Human Resources in advance of the meeting and would not be able to join as the first interview. He explained that interviewees were notified about the request for a writing sample only after scheduling their interview, so the individual never received the request for a writing sample. He stated that the four other interviewees' written responses were shared with the Committee just before the meeting.

Assistant Secretary Shark proposed that since the first interviewee would not be joining, the Committee should adjourn until the next scheduled interview at 10:00 am.

At 9:30 am, the members adjourned until 9:55 am.

At 9:55 am, Assistant Secretary Shark welcomed back members and reminded the Committee that interviewees would be asked the following three questions:

1. Can you briefly introduce yourself and tell us what specifically in your professional experience has given you the confidence to be successful in serving as the Veteran Advocate?
2. Can you describe a specific example of your leadership style, how did you address a particular challenge or tough decision? What did you do and what was the result?
3. Can you describe how you view the Veteran Advocate's relationship with the Veterans' community, organizations, and other state Veterans' Offices and programs. How would you establish relationships and trust with these organizations and how would you ensure the office engages with veterans' community from different backgrounds?

#### **10:00 am – Interview #1 – Glen Hevy**

Mr. Hevy introduced himself, highlighting his 10-year service in the Army and academic qualifications from Northeastern, Troy University, and Suffolk University in criminal justice and human services. He noted that he currently serves as the Holyoke Soldiers' Home Deputy Superintendent and detailed his previous work with the Department of Youth Services (DYS), the Department of Corrections (DOC), and his 28-year career with the Veterans Administration (VA).

In response to the Committee's question regarding his leadership style, Mr. Hevy explained that he practices a servant leadership style, assessing each situation and engaging with staff to bring the resources needed for them to be successful in their work. He cited his experience as the Chief of Sensory and Physical Rehabilitation at the VA hospital, where despite not having a background in health care, he conducted an assessment to identify areas of improvement. One such area was access to the VA's pool, which was being leased to a private individual for physical therapy services. Mr. Hevy noted that after conducting focus groups, he advocated for not renewing the individual's lease and procuring additional gym equipment, expanding veterans' access to aquatic and physical therapy services.

In response to the Committee's question regarding the Veteran Advocate's relationship with the veterans' community and what he would do to establish relationships and trust with the various stakeholder organizations, particularly with veterans' community from different backgrounds, Mr. Hevy noted that the Office of the Veteran Advocate will need to work in close collaboration with Veterans Service Organizations and that outreach and collaboration with the Executive Office of Veterans' Services and diverse organizations that are not well represented will be critical. He also stated that collaboration with the VA will be important to help veterans navigate any issues with their federal benefits. Mr. Hevy cited his past experience working as the Chief of Rehab Services for the Bedford VA, where he worked closely with VSOs.

In response to a member's question regarding challenges to communicating the OVA's role to veterans, Mr. Hevy noted that communication would have to occur at multiple levels, in addition to establishing a Mass.gov website with helpful information and resources for veterans. In response to a member's question

regarding the OVA connecting with various state and federal agencies that work with veterans, Mr. Hevy noted that he would reach out to all agencies that touch veterans and advocate for improvements in key services such as mental health, substance use, and housing and homelessness. In response to a member's question regarding "quick wins" for the OVA, Mr. Hevy explained that he would focus on communications and outreach to VSOs that represent veterans, as well as Veterans Agents at the local level. In response to a member's question regarding the team the Veteran Advocate would need around them, Mr. Hevy noted that his vision for the OVA would be modeled after the Office of the Child Advocate. He detailed the potential staff he would bring on, as well as their skillsets, which included administrative and legislative staff, a management analyst, and staff with social service and nursing backgrounds to help veterans navigate services.

In response to Mr. Hevy's question regarding the potential for scope creep, given the overlap with OVA, EOVS, and the Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans' Services, Mr. Lyons noted that the intent of the OVA is to reach the areas where existing state and federal agencies do not reach, giving a voice to veterans and their families where they have not necessarily had it.

Assistant Secretary Shark thanked Mr. Hevy and explained that he would be contacted regarding the Committee's decision in the coming weeks.

Assistant Secretary Shark proposed that the Committee briefly adjourn for 15 minutes until the next scheduled interview at 11:00 am.

Adjutant LeBeau joined the meeting at 11:00 am

### **11:00 am – Interview #2 – Robert Notch**

Mr. Notch introduced himself, highlighting his 27-year service in the Army and his volunteer work with the veteran community since 2016. He cited his military experience in the Army and Army Reserves and his work with the Veterans Collaborative as potential assets to the OVA. He highlighted his experience working for the Chief of the Army Reserves and federal agencies, building relationships with stakeholder groups and assessing gaps in services. He cited his 15 years of organizational design and development experience and his Masters in Public Administration from Suffolk University. Mr. Notch detailed the creation of a Slack channel for veterans to connect to services, which is utilized by over 1,200 individuals and 200 organizations.

In response to the Committee's question regarding his leadership style, Mr. Notch explained that he practices a participative and servant leadership style, focusing on collaboration and respect. He noted that his leadership style is situation dependent, but he relies on frequent and effective communication. He cited as an example of his collaborative approach, his advocacy for and involvement in the creation of a local chapter of Onward Ops, an organization focused on suicide prevention among recent veterans. He explained that the organization engages with soldiers 6-12 months before their service ends to link them with services and help address some of the root causes contributing to the high suicide rates among veterans who had recently transitioned from service.

Senator Velis joined the meeting at 11:20 am.

In response to the Committee's question regarding the Veteran Advocate's relationship with the veterans' community and what he would do to establish relationships and trust with the various stakeholder organizations, particularly with veterans' community from different backgrounds, Mr. Notch noted that the Veteran Advocate will need to be collaborative and become a trusted partner for organizations working

with veterans. He stressed the importance of building relationships with veterans of different backgrounds and targeted outreach.

In response to a member's question regarding the team the Veteran Advocate would need around them, Mr. Notch noted that as a generalist, he would surround himself with content experts. He explained that he would hire a policy analyst and explore whether a university internship program could be established, based on the experience of the Office of the Child Advocate.

Mr. Notch stated that his experience working with local and federal agencies would be an asset to the OVA and explained that he would strive to empower local agencies working with veterans, looping in higher level responses when local capacity is exceeded. He highlighted the lack of services for veterans towards the western end of the state and the need to improve access for transitioning service members to housing assistance, employment services, starting businesses, and attending college. Mr. Notch concluded his response noting that veterans navigating the complex transitional period as their service ends may benefit from earlier interventions than those currently offered.

Assistant Secretary Shark thanked Mr. Notch and explained that he would be contacted regarding the Committee's decision in the coming weeks.

Assistant Secretary Shark proposed that the Committee briefly adjourn for 15 minutes until the next scheduled interview at 12:00 pm.

### **12:00 pm – Interview #3 – Chris Shaw**

Mr. Shaw introduced himself, highlighting his 33-year service in the Marines, as a combat marine and lawyer. He noted that as the Veteran Advocate, he would draw on his own experiences and transition to civilian life, as well as his professional experience as a Staff Judge Advocate, balancing the need for accountability and the need for care in working with veterans.

In response to the Committee's question regarding his leadership style, Mr. Shaw explained that during his military service, he faced many difficult decisions, both in combat and as a lawyer. He cited an example of a junior staff member who he worked with to improve her professional skills, noting that investments in staff from leaders and creative thinking are critical for staff development.

In response to the Committee's question regarding the Veteran Advocate's relationship with the veterans' community and what he would do to establish relationships and trust with the various stakeholder organizations, particularly with veterans' community from different backgrounds, Mr. Shaw noted that he would take a collaborative approach, assessing veterans' needs across communities and seek out opportunities to share best practices statewide. He noted that the Veteran Advocate's role focuses on outreach, similar to an ombudsman. Mr. Shaw cited an example of his creative approach to problem solving in addressing the rate of DUIs among soldiers in Okinawa. He explained that his analytical approach to policymaking leads to creative solutions.

In response to a Committee member's question regarding experience connecting veterans to other veteran organizations, Mr. Shaw noted that through his own experiences, he understands the importance of linking veterans up with the appropriate VSO to access their benefits. He explained that veterans accessing their federal benefits takes pressure off the states, as they are less reliant on state services.

In response to a Committee member's question regarding his own transition and the types of information he received, Mr. Shaw noted that while he maintained his Massachusetts residency throughout his military service, he transitioned to Virginia where he currently resides. He explained that wherever veterans transition to, it is critical for them to be linked to the appropriate services and for Massachusetts to be seen as a friendly climate for returning veterans in terms of the housing, academic, and professional opportunities.

In response to a Committee member's question regarding establishing the Office of the Veteran Advocate, Mr. Shaw noted that he would take a collaborative approach, working closely with leadership at EOVS and the Soldiers' Homes. He explained he would reach out to individual veterans, particularly with regard to investigations to get a fuller picture of each situation, but additional information is needed on the role of the OVA in investigations. In response to a Committee member's question regarding the role of the OVA in ensuring accountability without interfering with the work of existing organizations, Mr. Shaw noted that he would work closely with the VA, Soldiers' Homes, and VSOs.

Mr. Shaw noted that additional information on the statute and mission statement of the OVA would be helpful, particularly with regard to the Office's investigative scope.

Assistant Secretary Shark thanked Mr. Shaw and explained that he would be contacted regarding the Committee's decision in the coming weeks.

Assistant Secretary Shark proposed that the Committee briefly adjourn for 15 minutes until the next scheduled interview at 1:00 pm.

#### **1:00 pm – Interview #4 – Susan Kane**

Ms. Kane introduced herself, noting that she currently works as a Regional Director for the Department of Conservation and Recreation and is a retired Lieutenant Colonel in Army. She explained that in her leadership roles, she strives to connect with those with less positional power, citing her experience working with middle school children as the Director of the Outward Bound program at Thompson Island.

In response to the Committee's question regarding her leadership style, Ms. Kane explained that she practices a situational type of leadership, but prioritizes connecting with individuals. She cited an experience in Iraq, where after witnessing risky behavior among her colleagues, she felt compelled to speak out against some of her fellow commanders' practices of sending out patrols in vehicles without sufficient armor. She explained that it was a valuable experience that defines her leadership style.

In response to the Committee's question regarding the Veteran Advocate's relationship with the veterans' community and what she would do to establish relationships and trust with the various stakeholder organizations, particularly with veterans' community from different backgrounds, Ms. Kane noted that she views the Veteran Advocate as someone who can connect the dots, understand services and benefits and the areas where existing services are not reaching. She explained that she sees the role as an opportunity to engage veterans in collaboration and mentoring. In response to a Committee member's question regarding the other organizations that the OVA might need to engage with to be successful, Ms. Kane explained that she would engage with experts in the field to address the wide-ranging needs of the veteran community, from substance abuse and homelessness to financial literacy and educational opportunities.

In response to a Committee member's question regarding the investigatory functions of the Office of the Veteran Advocate, Ms. Shaw noted that as a new role, she would enjoy the problem solving aspect of the work of the OVA and would prioritize the establishment of systems of accountability and recognition.

Adjutant LeBeau noted that the first month of the Veteran Advocate will be focused on establishing the new Office and the work of building out the OVA team.

Assistant Secretary Shark thanked Ms. Kane and explained that she would be contacted regarding the Committee's decision in the coming weeks.

In closing, Assistant Secretary Shark thanked Committee members and explained that staff would be reaching out to schedule the Committee's next meeting. In response to a question from a Committee member, he noted that the individual who was unable to schedule his interview would not be considered out of fairness to the other candidates.

**Vote I to adjourn:**

Assistant Secretary Shark requested a motion to adjourn. Mr. Lyons introduced the motion, which was seconded by Adjutant LeBeau and approved by roll-call vote (see detailed record of votes above).

The meeting was adjourned at 1:55 pm.