

## Statewide Veterans Council Meeting

### Record of Meeting

June 27, 2023

A regular meeting of the Veterans' Homes Council was held on June 27, 2023, by the Executive Office of Veterans' Services. The hybrid meeting was held at Massachusetts Division of Fisheries & Wildlife, 1 Rabbit Hill Road, Westborough, MA 01581.

- I. Call to order and member roll call, Chairman Robert Engell called the meeting to order at 1:00pm. The meeting is being recorded. The roll call vote included the following Council members:

Remote Participation Council Attendees:

Mark Bigda No

Louis Chow No

Ziven Drake Present

Mark Dunford Present

Tony Francis Present

Janet Hale No

Michael Jefferson No

Kevin Jourdain Present

Gary Keefe Present

Jill Landis No

Tom Lyons Present

Ira Novoselsky Present

Carmen Olander Present

Kurt Power Present

Dawn Slaven No

Council In Person Attendees:

Sean Collins Present

Robert Engell Present

Isaac Mass Present

Also, in attendance were: William Bolster, Melanie Acobe, J Lanviere, Sarah Dirks, Deb Foley, Kristine Smith, Haley Pereira, Matt Deacon, Glenn Hevy, Jeff Lenahan, Michael Lazo, Ruth Deras, Kelly Jones, Kathleen Denner, John Couillard

EOVS Updates (Robert Engell)

We have 12 of the 19 members available, which means that we do have a quorum in accordance with the statute.

Played "*First 100 Days Video*" which highlights and provides a summary of the first 100 days and accomplishments of the Executive Office of Veterans Services. A link will be provided.

**Chairman Engell** shared with the group that EOVS hired 50+ people, including legal, human resources, IT etc. and are operating in both 2 floors at 600 Washington street and 1 floor at 100 Cambridge Street. EOVS is working with DCAMM on finding permanent space for the Secretariat.

**Chairman Engell** mentioned Secretary Santiago is focused on serving every veteran in the Commonwealth and is strengthening relationships. He has met with Veterans and Veteran Organizations in every one of the 14 Massachusetts counties. He has been to many affordable housing sites, health service providers, outreach centers, American Legions along with multiple visits to both veteran homes and cemeteries.

**Chairman Engell** shared Secretary Santiago has also been to each of the four VSO regions and listened to how we can best support them, meeting with over 60 VSO's representing 100 cities

and towns. This was a very successful initial campaign to meet, to learn and to share his commitment and future ideas.

In April, the council met to discuss the MQ (job description) for the Chelsea Superintendent position and it has been updated with inputs received. In addition to the internal recruitment efforts, EOVS has supported the Veterans Home at Chelsea to engage a search firm which has significant expertise in long term care and healthcare in Massachusetts. We are working with them to find us a very skilled executive and we have a very aggressive plan in place for them to provide for us an initial group of candidates within 30 days of the engagement and that just started last week. And they have already identified a couple of candidates. We are hopeful to have information quickly to present to the Chelsea Leadership and Tom Lyons and to the working group.

**Sean Collins** asked which firm was engaged in searching for the candidate.

**Chairman Engell** answered that it was Medical Recruitment Specialist.

**Michael Dunford** asked if this Council would have any further participation with process of the search or if it was staying local to Chelsea.

**Chairman Engell** responded that yes, they will have further participation. The language of Chapter 144 is very specific, and it identifies that the candidates will be presented to Board of Trustees of Chelsea. The Chelsea board will review and with their approval make a nomination to this council. The council will have the opportunity to review the candidate and make a recommendation to the Secretary.

**Chairman Engell** also shared that EOVS Homes and Housing is expanding our staff and one of our new hires was JM Sorrell as the ombudsperson at Holyoke and was introduced to the council.

**JM Sorrell** introduced herself and said that she has a background in working with Veterans. She directed a program working with veterans with PTSD. She is from Western Massachusetts and previously ran an ombudsman program for 14 years as part of the MA Executive Office of Elder Affairs ombudsman program. Chairman Engell shared that they are finalizing the recruitment for the Ombudsperson for Chelsea.

He also introduced Gina Bruno who has joined EOVS as the Chief Transformation Officer.

**Gina Bruno** introduced herself and said that she brought a culmination of experiences that are part of twenty years of leading change management efforts, including public sector consulting work with FEMA in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina. For the last ten years she has worked in roles focused on helping to transform nursing homes and worked on programs in palliative care and hospice.

**Chairman Engell** introduced new hire Kristine Smith.

**Kristine Smith** introduced herself and mentioned that she had 15 years of experience in the quality sector. She was last at Shriners, and she was previously at Boston Medical and had the pleasure of working with Secretary Santiago for a brief time in the Emergency Department.

**Chairman Engell** shared that they have Kristine take the lead in the next hire effort and bringing in an RN surveying nurse and quality person within our team as we work to build our capacity of ongoing survey work at each of the two homes.

**Chairman Engell** asked if there were any questions on the new hires.

**Sean Collins** asked if JM was from Western Mass.

**JM Sorrell** replied that she was from Western Mass.

**Chairman Engell** shared other areas of focus such as the mission that Secretary Santiago articulated for all of us and is being led by Ms. Bruno and Ms. Smith and that is the area of policy integration professionalism and standardization. His office is working collaboratively with both homes to standardize a process to ultimately have a single policy framework within EOVS Homes and Housing for each of our homes which will standardize policy and practice for both homes. This will ensure a heightened level of compliance not only with our own policy and procedure and statewide practices but also those of CMS, DPH, the VA and Joint Commission. In addition, EOVS is establishing for looking at our policies and developing overarching policies to drive both of our homes. Policy framework is important and working collaboratively with both homes.

**Mike Dunford** asked about the metrics between the two homes and wanted to know if there was a current consistent view of the metrics reported on.

**Chairman Engell** replied in terms of the quality metrics that this is a goal.

**Chairman Engell** also reported on the process for our homes for their certification and licensure as nursing homes. Chelsea has submitted documents to CMS and the MA DPH. We have also submitted documentation to the MA Determination of Need program for its review and approval. As the new facility is being completed in Chelsea, the process for licensure and certification is proceeding first, to be followed by Holyoke. We have also submitted our documentation to the Determination of Need office for their review and approval, the review is underway.

**Chairman Engell** asked if anyone had questions on licensure certification.

**JM Sorrell** asked if the VA surveys continue.

**Chairman Engell** answered yes. Both Homes are recognized by the US Veterans Administration as State Homes, and as such will continue to have annual surveys. In Chelsea it is anticipated

that the next VA survey will be its initial survey for recognition as a state home and for Holyoke it will be their annual survey.

**Chairman Engell** shared that the Governor's capital improvement plan was publicized. The plan included \$9.4 million for FY24 which will be for the completion of the final steps of the capital project in Chelsea and also included a 5-year \$167 million commitment of state money for Holyoke with recognition of the companion of \$262 million from the VA for the replacement facility. Chairman Engell expressed that we are very pleased and appreciative of the support.

Educational Program: (Kristine Smith and Sara Dirks from Pinnacle Corporation)

**Kristine Smith** introduced Sara Dirks, EVP for Business Development at Pinnacle

**Sara Dirks** Presented the results for our Veterans Homes for the month of June. She explained how to read the report. There are multi facets to the report and she broke it down and explained it thoroughly. Ms. Dirks provided the overall score for our homes. She discussed how our homes compared to the national average and the best in class. She also discussed how we performed compared to prior months reviews. She discussed the key drivers which are the areas that directly impact our residents and family recommending us to others and improvement benchmarks. Sara highlighted our focus area which are those with the largest impact on our overall satisfaction rating and should be our focus for a possible quality improvement project.

Ms. Dirks shared that the way Pinnacle operates is by making personal phone calls to residents and families to receive feedback.

**Janet Hale** asked how many people you have to call to get the number you seek.

**Sara Dirks** replied that they call through the list. They call the residents first and if they don't get them, they call the family. To get one completed response, they probably go through ten calls.

**JM Sorrell** asked if the results of the two homes are separate or if they are merged.

**Sara Dicks** replied that they are separate but could be combined and that they would have value as well.

**Isaac Mass** commented that the Patient Experience Committee in Holyoke reviews these metrics and wanted assurance that Holyoke would be informed if there were to be changes in the metrics as our system aligns our process.

**Kristine Smith** replied yes and that each home would continue to work on identified areas of note or concern toward resolution.

**Janet Hale** asked are we planning to have a corporate roll out with the results that will go to the boards.

**Kristine Smith** replied that she will get together with Robert Engell to confirm the plan if they will be rolled together. Holyoke will still have to have their number and Chelsea will have their

numbers and then have the corporate numbers together. They will present both so that you can view them at a separate level for each home and then combined levels so that both places can be viewed.

**Janet Hale** asked and that will be shared with the local board members as well as the advisory board.

**Kristine Smith** replied yes.

**Chairman Engell** mentioned as we develop and bring things forward, we will have Gina Bruno present on the policy process and how we are moving forward with building our foundation with a focus on quality metrics.

**Chairman Engell** shared findings from the survey of council members related to preference of times for meetings going forward: (See attachment)

Times for meetings showed 11:00 – 6; 1:00 – 5; 3:00 – 4 and 5:00 – 6

Results for location showed Central MA is more convenient than either East or West. Chairman Engell suggested rotating as a strategy which will allow board members to join a particular location experience various site. He also asked the council members to think through what they would like to do going forward in terms of time and location of meeting. He asked if people were comfortable with the Chairman putting out the motion to rotate times and location?

**Isaac Mass** replied that until we have bylaws, it is up to the discretion of the chairman.

**Sean Collins** mentioned that if they start rotating times and locations and that you are adding hours to driving time. Sean asked since we have a lot of people remote would it benefit the council if all the members were remote and take away drive time.

**Janet Hale** replied that she supports this suggestion because some people are present, and some are remote. If everyone is remote all issues will be resolved over time. It works well when remote.

**Chairman Engell** shared the DPH council is exclusively by zoom at this time.

**Chairman Engell** asked if council members were supportive of an entirely remote meeting and there was consensus agreement as no vote was needed.

**Chairman Engell** also mentioned that he would like to schedule times to tour and visit each of the homes. Chairman will work with Holyoke Superintendent to find dates and times for the tour. Chairman also shared that on the results of the survey he had topics of Interest for Education and possible interest in subcommittee.

Voting on minutes:

Chairman mentioned that there were two sets of meetings that need to be voted on.

The first meeting was March 28, 2023.

Isaac Mass motioned to approved minutes.

Ziven Drake seconded the motion.

Chairman did a roll call:

Sean Collins (yes)

Ziven Drake yes (yes)

Mike Dunford (yes)

Robert Engell (yes)

Tony Francis (yes)

Janet Hale (yes)

Kevin Jourdain (yes)

Gary Keefe (no answer)

Tome Lyons (yes)

Isaac Mass (yes)

Ira Novoselsky (yes)

Carmen Ostrander (yes)

Kurt power (yes)

Unanimous acceptance of amended and corrected minutes

Second meeting April 12, 2023, meeting

Isaac Mass Motioned to approve minutes.

Tony Francis second

Chairman did a roll call:

Sean Collins (yes)

Ziven Drake (yes)

Mike Dunford (yes)

Robert Engell (yes)

Tony Francis (yes)

Janet Hale (yes)

Kevin Jourdain (yes)

Gary Keefe (no answer)

Tome Lyons (abstained)

Isaac Mass (abstained)

Ira Novoselsky (yes)

Carmen Ostrander (yes)

Kurt power (yes)

Informational presentation on Budget:

**Melanie Acobe Budget Director (Holyoke) & John Couillard (Chelsea)** showed a presentation on Budget Overview. (See attached)

**Janet Hale** asked if the room rate of \$30.00/day for the new facility will be changed and if they are the same for both homes?

**Chairman Engell** replied yes and that it is \$10.00 / day for the domiciliary. And that they are set by statute and are not set to increase at this time.

**Isaac Mass** mentioned that under previous administration there was a discussion exploring the idea of small regional homes. Mr. Mass asked if this is still under consideration and if there is a budget for exploring these opportunities.

**Chairman Engell** replied yes, the annual budget did include funding language. Such an expansion would be consistent with the statutory charge for the council to evaluate increasing accessibility for high quality care.

**Isaac Mass** replied having an idea of what funds are available and what preliminary plans are out there might be a good educational topic for a future meeting.

**Chairman Engell** agreed.

Tom Lyons replied that the small homes notion was based on the VA's small homes that they were discussed in the previous administration to create smaller homes because they were looking at travel time for veterans' families to drive long distances to the current homes.



Chairman Engell replied that he will bring it back to senior staff and the Secretary and will revisit for council input.

Chairmen Engell asked if there were any other questions regarding budget topic.

Reporting from Holyoke and Chelsea Veterans' Homes, Michael Lazo, Superintendent, Veterans' Home in Holyoke and Robert Engell, Acting Superintendent, Veterans' Home in Chelsea

Holyoke Superintendent Report, Michael Lazo:

- Pinnacle offers employee satisfaction surveys – exploring potential rollout
- Continuing to work with Clay & Associates for CMS survey; with the application resubmitted June 22
- A review of highlighted areas of focus from the QAPI process at the home.
- VA survey was completed in January with the Corrective Action Plan submitted and accepted. The Home has received the VA Accreditation.
- Good hiring for organic staff, including off shifts
- Groundbreaking planned for August 14<sup>th</sup> for the new facility. Working with DCAM for neighborhood information session; meeting \*planned for June 10<sup>th</sup>
- Expecting 2 South (isolation unit) to be open in July
- Full with 107 on wait list

Chelsea Superintendent Report, Acting Superintendent Engell:

- Aligning admissions policy with Holyoke
- Headcount: Hired 73 people, 20 since April. Net 42 increase for the facility
- OT is a focus. Recent report shows OTY as 2.3% of total hours. Well within target.
- Domiciliary transition and campus redevelopment – small group resident meetings with Pennrose and Soldier On
- Transition of residents and staff to the CLC. Chief Transformation Officer taking the lead to focus in on operational readiness. First 20 residents will be able to move once DPH provides approval. Current focus is the certificate of occupancy. Best practices and experiences will be shared with Holyoke.

Adjourn 3:08pm

Respectfully submitted,

Ernestina Sirignano  
Executive Assistant to Secretary Jon Santiago  
Executive Office of Veterans Services

