

Meeting Minutes: Commission on Veterans Quality of Life

Date: 25 August 2025

Time: 1:00pm

Location: Virtual

1. Call to Order/Attendance:

- a. Cory Ahonen, Chair, called the meeting to order at 1:00 pm
- b. Members were reminded that the meeting was being recorded

2. Roll Call:

1. Cory Ahonen, Chair
2. Scott Pitta, OVA Designee
3. Sarah Bateman, Senate President Appointee, working with Veterans
4. Bill Lebeau, Speaker Appointee, working with Veterans
5. Robert Breaker, Senate Minority Leader Appointee, Veteran/family member
6. Ashley Booker, Governor Appointee, Veterans Advocacy
7. Melissa Alden, House Minority Leader Appointee, Attorney

3. Guests:

1. Nicolette Slezak, EOVS Admin
2. Nicholas Charrette, EOVS Deputy Chief Engagement Officer
3. Phoebe Flynn, on behalf of Senator Dylan Fernandes
4. Raymond Carville, Veterans Inc.
5. Matthew Connolly

4. Members Absent:

1. Al Tenorio, Governor Appointee, Veterans Advocacy
2. Senator Dylan Fernandes, Senate President Appointee, working with Veterans
3. Leroy Ashwood, BRAVE for Veterans
4. Sergeant Ryan Puzzo, Senate President Appointee, working with Veterans

7 members present. We do have a quorum.

A. Administrative Matters:

a. Cory Ahonen, Chair addressed Motion to approve the June 23, 2025, minutes. Motion passed unanimously.

B. Open Discussion/New Business:

a. Cory Ahonen, Chair discussed looking into open meeting law requirements and case-law discussions within smaller working groups.

Chair addressed priority topics, emphasizing discussion on Education. Chair opened a conversation on the Massachusetts National Guard Tuition and Fee Waiver. Members recommended a comparative review of tuition and fee waivers across groups, including National Guard members, Reservists, Combat Veterans, and non-veterans. Additional discussion focused on trade schools, the availability of veteran-specific programs, potential partnerships with other state initiatives, and the transferability of academic credits. Members also identified service-related gaps that impact veterans and emphasized the need to further prioritize veterans' educational needs and available support.

Chair addressed priority topic, Employment. Members proposed streamlining employment plans and simplifying the professional licensure process for veterans. A recommendation was made to conduct a comprehensive analysis of procedures across various licensing boards. Chair also highlighted the Executive Office of Veterans Services' VEETS Program (Veteran Education, Employment, and Training Services).

Chair introduced priority topic, Suicide Prevention. Members discussed the importance of mental health services, peer support networks, social connection, and education for family members. Chair provided an overview of the Executive Office of Veterans Services' SAVE Program (Statewide Advocacy for Veterans Empowerment), along with the Lethal Means Safety Initiative and related training's currently being implemented across Massachusetts.

Chair introduced priority topic, Transportation as a critical area of concern. Members noted significant barriers veterans face in accessing local transportation, including cost and eligibility restrictions. There was a call to further investigate the needs of veterans who currently do not qualify for existing transportation services and to identify systemic gaps.

Chair introduced priority topic, Access to Healthcare. Members expressed concerns over veterans being denied services and the complexities of the appeals process. Members suggested developing a system of advocacy to support veterans navigating these challenges.

C. Next Steps/Action Items:

- a. Discuss information gathering on each priority topic assigned
- b. Members are encouraged to add notes to SharePoint working Excel document to expand on topics, priorities and next steps.
- c. Create expanded version of notes
- d. Next meeting is September 22, 1:00pm

D. Public Comments/Questions:

- a. None

E. Adjournment

- a. Meeting adjourned at 2:04pm