

**MINUTES
of the
SECOND MEETING
of the
MILITARY AND VETERANS' AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**July 6, 2023
Angel Fire Community Center
15 CS Ranch Road
Angel Fire**

The second meeting of the Military and Veterans' Affairs Committee was called to order by Representative Harry Garcia, chair, on July 6, 2023 at 9:18 a.m. at the Angel Fire Community Center in Angel Fire.

Present

Rep. Harry Garcia, Chair
Sen. Harold Pope, Vice Chair
Rep. Eliseo Lee Alcon
Rep. Art De La Cruz
Sen. Shannon D. Pinto

Absent

Sen. Brenda G. McKenna
Sen. Joshua A. Sanchez
Rep. Luis M. Terrazas

Advisory Members

Rep. John Block
Rep. Stefani Lord
Sen. Michael Padilla
Rep. Andrea Reeb
Rep. Debra M. Sariñana

Sen. Craig W. Brandt
Sen. William F. Burt
Rep. Meredith A. Dixon
Rep. D. Wonda Johnson
Rep. Alan T. Martinez
Rep. Harlan Vincent

Staff

Jeret Fleetwood, Project Coordinator, Legislative Council Service (LCS)
Nancy Martinez, Researcher, LCS

Guests

The guest list is in the meeting file.

Handouts

Handouts and other written testimony are in the meeting file and posted on the legislature's website.

References to Webcast

The time reference noted next to each agenda item in this document is cross-referenced to the webcast of the committee meeting, which can be found at www.nmlegis.gov, under the "Webcast" tab. The presentations made and committee discussions for the agenda items can be found on the recorded webcast for this meeting.

Thursday, July 6

Welcome/National Veterans Wellness and Healing Center (9:19 a.m.)

Representative Garcia welcomed everyone to the meeting. Members of the committee, staff and audience introduced themselves.

Chuck Howe, board president, National Veterans Wellness and Healing Center, told committee members that the center was founded in 2009. The center treats veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder and their partners. The center has treated roughly 900 individuals and works in collaboration with state behavioral staff.

Vietnam Veterans Memorial Replica Wall Update (9:31 a.m.)

Edward Mendez, director, Benefits and Services, Veterans' Services Department, introduced Jake Lopez, president, Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter 996, and gave a briefing on the project. Mr. Mendez said that the project is in the procurement phase. He displayed pictures of the proposed replica. The presentation can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/MVAC%20070623%20Item%202%20Memorial%20Replica%20Wall%20Update.pdf>

Military and Veterans Leadership Council (10:00 a.m.)

Walter Paul, vice chair, Military and Veterans Leadership Council, gave a presentation on the Military and Veterans Leadership Council, a non-partisan umbrella organization covering all of the military and veteran service organizations in New Mexico. Mr. Paul said that the leadership council is focused on three legislative priorities: 1) updating the provisions of House Bill 163 (2022); 2) veterans property tax exemption implementation (House Joint Resolutions 5 and 6 (2023)); and 3) veteran issues such as homelessness and mental health. The presentation can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/MVAC%20070623%20Item%203%20NM%20Veteran%20Leadership%20Council.pdf>

Veterans Integration Centers (VIC)/Veteran Homelessness (10:51 a.m.)

Brock Wolff, chief executive officer, VIC, introduced Gerard "Jerry" Becker, chairperson/director, VIC. Mr. Wolff said that the VIC was established in 2005 and in the last ten years, the VIC has provided services to more than 2,000 veterans. The VIC deals primarily with assisting homeless veterans and securing housing for veterans. In addition, the VIC has a food pantry, a donation center and a downtown shuttle in Albuquerque. The presentation can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/MVAC%20070623%20Item%204%20VIC.pdf>

New Mexico Budgeting Process (11:36 a.m.)

Jon Courtney, deputy director for program evaluators, Legislative Finance Committee, gave an overview of the General Appropriations Act. Mr. Courtney also went over prognostications of revenues. The presentation materials can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/Committee/Handouts?CommitteeCode=MVAC&Date=7/6/2023&ItemNumber=5>.

Veteran Educational Programs — University of New Mexico-Taos Upward Bound Program (1:37 p.m.)

Kelly Fitzpatrick, program manager, New Mexico Veterans Upward Bound, introduced Matthew C. Wohlberg, outreach coordinator and recruiter, New Mexico Veterans Upward Bound. Ms. Fitzpatrick explained that Upward Bound is part of a set of educational programs created by the federal Higher Education Act of 1965. The Veterans Upward Bound program was added in 1972 to address the educational needs of veterans returning from the Vietnam Conflict. The presentation can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/MVAC%20070623%20Item%206%20Upward%20Bound%20Program.pdf>.

Veteran Well-Being — Not Forgotten Outreach (2:16 p.m.)

Patrick Million, executive director, Not Forgotten Outreach, said that Not Forgotten Outreach collaborates with Veterans Upward Bound and Together with Veterans. Mr. Million said that the mission of Not Forgotten Outreach is to provide recreational, therapeutic and farming activities as a pathway to healing from challenges stemming from reintegration into the community following military service. The presentation can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/MVAC%20070623%20Item%208%20Veteran%20Well-Being.pdf>.

Vets for Pets (2:31 p.m.)

Finnie D. Coleman, Ph.D., founder, the Dellsly Group and Vets for Pets, said that the Dellsly Group is an international nonprofit organization dedicated to assisting communities in their efforts to improve health outcomes, foster cultural awareness and achieve community sustainability and autonomy. The presentation can be found here:

<https://www.nmlegis.gov/handouts/MVAC%20070623%20Item%209%20Vets%20for%20Pets.pdf>.

Veteran Suicide Prevention — Together with Veterans (2:53 p.m.)

Valentina Livingston, Taos coordinator, Together with Veterans, introduced Ryan Timmermans, founder, Veterans Off-Grid. Ms. Livingston said that Together with Veterans Taos was established in 2022. The program has received three years' worth of funding from the Office of Rural Health of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs. Ms. Livingston explained that the program's intent is to bring veterans and the community together to work to prevent veteran suicide.

Approval of Minutes (3:13 p.m.)

On a motion duly made and seconded, the committee approved the minutes from the June 8, 2023 meeting.

Adjournment

There being no further business before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 3:13 p.m.