

New Hampshire
STATE VETERANS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

ANNUAL REPORT
OCTOBER 2018



INTRODUCTION

In accordance with RSA 115-A:8, State Veterans Advisory Committee, this report is issued to the Speaker of the House, Senate President, Governor, Executive Council, Chairs of the Veteran committees and the various veterans' organizations active in the State of New Hampshire. One report is issued in October of each year.

HISTORY

RSA 115-A:8 states that a veterans' advisory committee be formed composed of two Senators appointed by the President of the Senate, two Representatives appointed by the Speaker of the House and members of various veteran organizations. The members shall elect a Chairman, Vice Chairman, and Secretary from the committee membership.

On July 17, 2002, Mr. Ken Leidner, past chairman of the committee's predecessor, called the organizational meeting to order at the Legislative Office Building (LOB) in Concord, NH. The primary purpose was to elect the officers of the new State Veterans Advisory Committee. The initial veteran organization members present were the American Legion (AMLEGION), Disabled American Veterans (DAV), Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA), Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), The Retired Enlisted Association (TREA), The Retired Officers Association (TROA) (now the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA)), and the Reserve Officers Association (ROA). Elections were held in accordance with the governing RSA. The first officers elected were: Dr. Griffin Dalianis, DAV, Chairman, LCDR David Kenney, USNR, Vice - Chairman, and Mr. Edward Granger, TREA, Secretary. Since 2002 the committee has generally met monthly except for a two-month summer recess period. The committee adopted bylaws as of June 8, 2004 to govern management and operation. These bylaws were most recently updated in October of 2014.

During the 2007 Legislative session the Governor signed an amendment to RSA 115-A:8 increasing the voting membership of the SVAC from ten to fourteen veterans' organizations in the state of New Hampshire. In 2008 the authorized number of voting organizations was reached and SB 15, introduced in the 2009 session, was adopted to increase the membership to a maximum of 20 organizations (plus the two legislative members from both the Senate and from the House).

This report contains a summary of the meeting highlights, committee composition, legislative initiatives, and successes the State Veterans Advisory Committee accomplished during this reporting period.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The officers, legislative members and nineteen member organizations are shown below. Each legislative member and organization have one vote.

Chairman – David Kenney – *Reserve Officers Association of NH*

Vice Chairman – Diane Domenicis – *Rolling Thunder*

Secretary – Patti Fowler – *Military Order of the Purple Heart*

Temp Secretary – Mike Horne – *NH National Guard Association*

Chairman Emeritus – Bobby Broneske – *Combat Veterans Motorcycle Association*

Sage Emeritus – Barry Conway

Chaplain – Joseph DiChiaro Jr.

Legislative Members:

- Senator Regina Birdsell
- Senator Bob Guida
- Representative Al Baldasaro
- Representative Robert L. Theberge

Voting Organization Members (as of the date of this report):

- 1 Air Force Association (AFA) (*P – Kevin Grady, A-Austin Kotch*)
- 2 Air Force Sergeants Association (AFSA) (*P – Bob Heichlinger, A – Ray Hayes*)
- 3 American Legion (AMLEGION) (*P –Mike Lopez, A – Robert Blais*)
- 4 AUSA (*P – Greg d’Arbonne, A- Ron Corsetti, A-BG(Ret.) Ed Harrington*)
- 5 Catholic War Veterans (*P – Denise DeBlois, A – Russell Bilodeau*)
- 6 Combat Veterans Motorcycle Association (*P- Bobby Broneske A – Ray Schwendeman, A-Larry Ward*)
- 7 Disabled American Veterans (DAV) (*P –Bob Guldner, A-Ernest Sulloway*)
- 8 Korea War Veterans Association (*P – Conrad Perreault, A – Robert Desmond, A – Richard Moushegian*)
- 9 Marine Corps League (MCL) (*P – Gary A. Gahan, A – Mark Lindsley*)
- 10 Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) (*P – Peter Burdett, A – Joe DiChiaro, A – Warren Coulter*)
- 11 Military Order of Purple Heart (MOPH) (*P – Patti Fowler*)
- 12 National Guard Association of New Hampshire (*P –Peter Duffy, A – LTC Roy Hunter, A – Mike Horne*)
- 13 New Hampshire Army Retiree Council (*P – Frank Musmanno, A – Mike Rice*)
- 14 NHNG Enlisted Association (*P – William Bates, A – Michael Rice, A – Jack Howley*)

- 15 NH Veterans Association (*P – Kelly Dobens, A-Mike Young, A- Doug Crooker*)
- 16 Reserve Officers Association (ROA) (*P – Dave Kenney, A – Mike Horne, A – John Pappas*)
- 17 Rolling Thunder (*P – Bruce Garry, A- Keith Hurrell, A – Diane Domenicis*)
- 18 Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) (*P – Paul Lloyd, A-Bill Ryan, A-Chris Peirce*)
- 19 Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) (*P – Raymond Goulet, Jr., A –Alan Grant, A-Patti Fowler*)

Committee Advisors (Non-voting):

Leadership from various state agencies routinely provide advice to the Committee, including:

- Warren M. Perry, Col., USA (Ret), *Deputy Adjutant General*
- Bill Gaudreau, Director, *Office of Veterans Services*
- Peggy LaBrecque, Commandant, *NH Veterans Home*
- Barry Conway, *Sage Emeritus*
- Michael Horne, Director, *NH State Veterans Cemetery*
- Dr. William Busby, *Regional Manager Northeast Region, Vet Centers*
- Jo A. Moncher, *NH Dept of Health and Human Service, Bureau Chief, Community Based Military Programs*
- Al Montoya, Kevin Forrest & Stella Lareau – *Manchester Veterans Medical Center*
- Peter Burdett – *Civilian Aide to the Secretary of the Army*

Governor’s Representatives:

Jane Hirsch

Representatives of the NH Congressional Delegation

Representatives attend all meetings for information and coordination purposes. Attendees during the reporting period included the following:

Chris Scott, Connor Jennings (Senator Shaheen)
William Bateson, Seth Cooper (Senator Hassan)
Corey Garry, Bobby Graham (Representative McLane-Kuster)
Elise Britton, Patrick Carroll (Representative Carol Shea-Porter)

REGULAR ATTENDEES DURING THE PERIOD OF THIS REPORT:

Jim Adams, State Veterans Council
Ben Kaler, VA Veterans Experience Office
Janet Dineen, Office of Veterans Services
Dan Marcek, VetFlix

Ron Reilly, DAV
Bill Roy, American Legion
John Reed, Martins Point Health Care
LTC Roy Hunter, NHNG Director of Service Member and Family Services
Lisa A. Aldridge, NH Transition Assistance Advisor, (NHTAA)
Wilfred Gagne, VAMC Manchester
Bob Baker, AMVETS Commander, Post 1, Rochester
Andrea Chrisstoffels, Easter Seals Military & Vet Service
Stephanie Higgs, Easter Seals Military & Vet Services
Bill Luti, US Navy (Ret)
Peter Biello, NH Public Radio

OTHER SPEAKERS AND GUESTS DURING THE PERIOD OF THIS REPORT:

- Porter Davis; USS Manchester Commissioning Committee
- Jim Flavin; GM of NH Fisher Cats.
- Al Montoya, Director VAMC Manchester
- Kevin Forest, VAMC Manchester
- Kurt Webber; Camp Resilience update
- Bethie Coverdale/Rep Rollins; 22 Peaks project.
- Bob Tuttle; AA to Veteran outreach
- Melissa Hatfield, Bureau Chief, Bureau of housing Supports, DHHS
- Mandy Reagan, Supportive Services for Veteran Families, Harbor Homes
- Lisa Gravel, Veterans FIRST Grant and Per Diem, Harbor Homes
- Dr. Jennifer Lee, VACO
- Dr. Jennifer McDonald, VACO

COMMITTEE COMMUNICATIONS

Mutual communication is a vital function of this committee. We interpret this function broadly. Meetings are posted on the legislative calendar. Primarily, email is used to distribute agendas, meeting minutes, and other pertinent information to ensure timely delivery to committee members and other interested parties. In addition, press releases and news items of interest are also delivered to the email distribution list as well as posted on the SVAC Facebook page. When SVAC press releases are generated they are sent to all major news outlets in NH.

Members of the Committee often participate in the public dialogue on veterans' issues, either as the representatives of their veterans' organization or as individuals. Committee member organizations further the reach of Committee communications through publication of relevant items in their own newsletters, websites and other media. The Committee strives to quickly disseminate information on events and matters of interest to veterans. Matters brought to the attention of the SVAC can be distributed more expeditiously via the email and newsletters of member organizations, reaching the

approximately 110,000 members of the New Hampshire veteran community, as well as family members and various veteran outreach groups.

The Committee regularly invites speakers and visitors representing a number of organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, to present information to help SVAC members in learning about the broad spectrum of services of importance to veterans. Legislators and their constituents are invited to present their views to inform the SVAC of their perspective on a particular issue or issues.

The Committee encourages and invites all legislators, especially prime sponsors of veteran related legislation, to more frequently participate and exchange views with the members of the SVAC in developing positions on matters important to the veterans of New Hampshire.

The Committee continues to work routinely with the VA, both VAMC's (Manchester and White River Junction) and many of the state agencies who provide some measure of support for the NH veteran population. In addition, we have representation on the PTSD/TBI commission and the Military Leadership Team. We believe it's critical to stay engaged with the various agencies and leaders in the state to obtain an accurate picture of New Hampshire's services to veterans.

COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES THIS PERIOD

The Committee continues to be actively involved in providing guidance and testimony on legislation put forth on behalf of veterans.

The SVAC Chairman provides a letter/email to every legislator early in each legislative session to promote awareness of SVAC activities and to encourage early engagement with the SVAC on proposed legislation.

A legislative committee, chaired by Kevin Grady, monitors legislative activities, drafts proposed testimony, coordinates and leads SVAC testimony and activities with Legislative Committee members Diane Domenicis and Patti Fowler. Bill recommendations are made after discussions and voting involving the full SVAC membership.

Positions on the various bills are determined by majority vote of the full Committee. The Committee position on a bill does not prohibit any member organization from presenting their organizations position to the General Court.

During this period the SVAC took formal positions on 7 bills and followed an additional 2 bills that came through the complete legislative process for 2018. The decision to follow a bill means the SVAC believes the issue in question may not primarily be a veteran's issue but could evolve into an something that does impact veterans or may with amendments evolve to be considered for full support. The status of the bills for which SVAC supported and followed during this session is shown in Table 1 and Table 2 below:

Table 1

Bill	Title
BILLS IN THE 2017-2018 SESSION <u>SUPPORTED</u> BY THE SVAC	
HB-1256	relative to decal fees for multi-use veterans decal plates.
HB-1273	New Title--suspending state licensure laws for physicians and physicians' assistants employed by the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (also SVAC report change) Will move forward as SB-488
HB-1280	relative to bow and arrow hunting licenses for permanently disabled military veterans.
HB-1286	relative to fish and game regulations relative to disabled veterans.
HB-1346	establishing a committee to study the New Hampshire veteran's cemetery.
SB 396	relative to gold star number plates
SB 511	New Title: establishing an optional tax credit for combat service

Table 2

Bill	THE SVAC <u>CONSIDERED</u> THE FOLLOWING BILLS IN THE 2017-2018 SESSION ELECTED TO FOLLOW ONLY
SB 370	adopting the emergency medical services personnel licensure interstate compact
SB 503	relative to increasing the amount of the optional veteran's tax credit (amended by Senate to \$750)

The Committee extends appreciation to all the legislative members who sponsored, co-sponsored and supported the various veteran-related bills during this session. We recognize that in times of fiscal restraint it is not always easy to support legislation that may increase State expenditures, no matter how worthy the purpose. We thank them for their dedication and hard work in support of New Hampshire veterans.

SVAC works closely with legislative committee members to ensure initiatives on behalf of veterans are focused, relevant and are designed to be effective. SVAC also serves as a conduit for communications in support of veterans' interests within the State of New Hampshire.

Change to Annual Report: As of June 2018, HB1273 allowed the change of the SVAC Biannual Report to an Annual Report with a due date of 01 October of each year. This will reduce the administrative requirements and provide a larger format of detail covering the prior legislative session.

The Chairman has continued working over the last several months with a subcommittee including Jo Moncher, Wendi Aultman, Bill Gaudreau and William Sherry (United Way/211) to improve the access to veteran resources via Servicelink website for the state. We are working to develop a better means of searching for veteran services through expanded provider database and specialized search criteria to present more veteran-centric results. We believe this to be one of many facets of improving access to veterans' services by providing a more concise access to information.

Community Partnerships: This session, SVAC broadened its scope of input with regular briefings from Jo Moncher, DHHS Bureau Chief for Veterans Programs. Jo has brought in several guest speakers to provide information on what other state agencies and private partners are doing to expand care of various type to veterans and their families.

VAMC Task Force 2025: Chairman Kenney was selected to serve as Co-Chair of the VA Manchester Vision 2025 Task Force along with Dr. Jennifer McDonald. The Task Force concluded it's work with a final report to the Secretary of VA in March, followed by a briefing to the Special Medical Advisory Group in Orlando, Florida in April 2018. In summary, approximately 29 different points of improvement to the VA were recommended. Director Montoya has actively pursued improvements at the VA since the day he assumed the Director's role, and many of the initiatives he started were in congruence with the Task Force recommendations. Bob Guldner, the DAV representative to SVAC also served on the Task Force. Members of SVAC organizations were consulted and briefed throughout the process providing some of the veteran-centric input the Task Force.

VA Liaison: After January's meeting, Mr. Howie Howe was removed as the VA Liaison to SVAC after an exchange with a representative of the Governor's office. The behavior exhibited was not in keeping with the expected standards of decorum and respect. It was mutually agreed the he should no longer server as liaison. The position will remain unfilled as VA has representatives regularly attending SVAC meetings.

SVAC Spirit Award: A subcommittee lead by Vice Chair Diane Domenicis met and defined the criteria for the new annual Spirit Award (Formerly SVAC Champion Award). This committee solicited for nominees from the committee and supporters. The committee met during the summer to make the choice for this year's awardee, who will

receive the award at the October Meeting. Many thanks to Diane, Jack Domenicis, Dan Marcek and Ray Goulet for volunteering to make this happen.

Recognizing Veterans with Fisher Cats: Chairman Kenney, Greg d'Arbonne (AUSA) and DTAG Warren Perry worked with Jim Flavin of the Fisher Cats to hold a Military & Veteran Recognition night at the Fisher Cats. Tickets were discounted for veterans and family members and the evening was themed to recognize veterans of all services. To cap it all off, the Fisher Cats won with a walk-off home run in the 9th inning!

New SVAC Treasurer Position: This year, SVAC voted to change their bylaws to accommodate the position of Treasurer. Since SVAC is now allowed to accept donations for operations, the committee felt it was a needed step to manage and account for funds received from committee donations and outside sources. Many thanks to Peter Duffy for leading the effort to write the changes to the bylaws to create the position. Kelly Dobens (NHVA) volunteered to take on the role as Treasurer and assist Chairman Kenney with establishing a bank account for the funds left over from last year's Summer Outing. The Treasurer will be responsible for reporting to the committee regularly on the income & expenses from this account along with an annual audit of the account.

USS Manchester Commissioning: Many of the SVAC members were able to witness the rare occasion of a Navy ship commissioning in Portsmouth of the new LCS, USS Manchester.

SVAC Elections: This year the Chairman and Secretary positions were up for election. Chairman Kenney and current Secretary Patti Fowler were both nominated to continue for another term and voted in unanimously at the June meeting.

Summer Outing: This year's social event was held at the NH Veterans Association in Laconia in August. The weather was good, and the food was plentiful. This is an annual opportunity for members and supporters to socialize and interact in an informal setting.



Spirit Award 2018: This year's Spirit Award was presented to SVAC Secretary, Patti Fowler. In addition to performing the Secretarial tasks of SVAC, Patti's tireless efforts in doing for others included bringing comfort and closure to more than 32 families of Vietnam Veterans while seeking out photographs and information on these veterans to include in the Vietnam Veterans memorial. The committee congratulates Patti for this well-deserved recognition for her compassion and her determination to bring comfort to others.



(L-R): Ray Goulet (VVA), Chairman Dave Kenney, Secretary Patti Fowler, Vice Chair Diane Domenicis

CONCLUSION

The SVAC is currently comprised of 19 member organizations. The committee encourages any NH Veteran Service Organization (VSO) to attend our meetings.

A significant number of advisors, guests and representatives from our Congressional Delegation participate in the meetings in recognition of the mutual value of shared communications and collaboration on veteran issues.

We continue to work with members of the NH House and Senate to develop our support and testimony agenda for legislative actions on behalf of veterans. This committee can and will help to develop new legislation for veterans. Legislators are encouraged to review bill language with the committee prior to or during the filing period to ensure the

SVAC understands the intent of the legislation. We can help avoid unintended consequences and clarify technical jargon.

The Committee is focused on our mission of providing a common voice for New Hampshire's veterans and their families. Our meetings provide a forum for announcing legislative or policy changes, veteran healthcare updates, and scheduled events that benefit veterans.

Questions, comments or recommendations are always welcome. The committee chairman can be contacted by calling: 603-232-4210 or email at nhsvac.chair@gmail.com, the committee Vice Chair email nhsvac.vicechair@gmail.com or our Secretary at svacsecretary@gmail.com

Respectfully submitted,



David J. Kenney
Chairman, NH State Veterans Advisory Committee



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