

New Hampshire
STATE VETERANS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

ANNUAL REPORT
OCTOBER 2019



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. (*The assigned members below are as of 10 Sept 2019 in some cases due to elections and organizational changes, assigned members may change mid-term.*)

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

Vice Chairman – Diane Domenicis – *Rolling Thunder*

Secretary – Patti Fowler – *Military Order of the Purple Heart/VVA-41*

Treasurer – Kelly Dobens; *NHVA*

Sage Emeritus – Barry Conway

Chaplain – Joseph DiChiaro Jr.

Legislative Members:

- Senator Regina Birdsell
- Senator Bob Guida
- Representative Al Baldasaro
- Representative Patricia Klee

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

- 1 Air Force Association (AFA) (*P – Kevin Grady, A-Bob Wilson*)
- 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-BG(Ret.) Ed Harrington*)
- 5 Catholic War Veterans (*P – Denise DeBlois, A – Robert Guldner*)
- 6 Combat Veterans Motorcycle Association (*P- Ray Schwendeman, A-Larry Ward*)
- 7 Disabled American Veterans (DAV) (*P-Andrew Patterson A –Bob Guldner*)
- 8 Korea War Veterans Association (*P – Mike Lopez, A – Conrad Perreault*)
- 9 Marine Corps League (MCL) (*P – Shawn Carboni, 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 – 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-Chris Peirce, A-Darwin Beeman*)
- 19 Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA-41) (*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*
- Shawn Buck, Director, *NH State Veterans Cemetery*
- Amy Cook, *NH Dept of Health and Human Service, Bureau Chief, Community Based Military Programs*
- Al Montoya, Kevin Forrest, Corey Beem & Stella Lareau – *Manchester Veterans Medical Center*
- Peter Burdett – *Civilian Aide to the Secretary of the Army*
- Jim Adams – *State Veterans Council*

Governor’s Representative:

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 (Senator Shaheen)
William Bateson, Justin Troiano, Elise Britton (Senator Hassan)
Melanie Spears, Bobby Graham, Tom Giancola (Representative McLane-Kuster)
Elise Britton, Patrick Carroll (Representative Carol Shea-Porter)
Patrick Carroll, Dalton McLaughlin (Representative Chris Pappas)

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
Bill Roy, American Legion
John Reed, Martins Point Health Care

LTC Roy Hunter
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)
Tony Fowler, MoPH
Jen Hopkins, NH Community Loan Fund
Carol Hitchcock, VA White River Jct.

FEATURED SPEAKERS/GUESTS DURING THIS REPORT PERIOD:

- Matthew Wieczhalek-Seiler, Concord for Hometown Heroes Banners
- Barbara Heggie, Staff Attny, Low Income Taxpayer Project
- Robert Baker, New Hampshire Young Veterans Network (NHVYN)
- Rebecca Fracassa, COMCAST Internet Essentials for Veterans
- U.S. Rep. Carol Shea-Porter
- U.S. Rep. Chris Pappas
- Mark Decoteau – Honor & Remember Flag
- Julie Weymouth; Homeland Heroes Foundation
- Jennifer Hopkins, NH Community Loan Fund
- Dave Tille, HUD Regional Administrator & Mandy Reagan from Harbor Homes
- Jeff Tagliaferro, Senior VP Fisher Cats
- Lee Goldberg, VETRN
- Paul Fleming, Living Innovations
- D. Craig Porath, Veterans Camp America, LLC
- Lisa Challender/Bill Ames, Veteran Hospice Volunteers

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.

SVAC scheduled meetings are sent to the House and Senate clerks for posting on their respective House/Senate calendars.

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 sent an 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.

The 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.

SVAC Chairman Kenney and Legislative Chair Kevin Grady were honored to brief the House Committee on Veterans Affairs at the invitation of the new Chair, Rep Tricia Klee. The briefing covered the purpose of SVAC in the legislative process and to entertain any questions by committee members. This was a most welcome invitation that we feel helped to spread the word about SVAC's purpose, especially on legislation related to

veterans and families. We encouraged all members to consider briefing SVAC should they author or become a sponsor on any related bill.

During this period the SVAC took formal positions on 9 bills and followed an additional 2 bills that came through the complete legislative process for 2019. 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 below:

Table 1

Bill	Title
BILLS IN THE 2018-2019 SESSION <u>SUPPORTED</u> BY THE SVAC	
HOUSE BILLS	
HCR2	requesting an investigation on whether benzodiazepines contribute to suicides by veterans (amended)
HB128	relative to a property tax exemption for disabled veterans (amended)
HB130	relative to property tax relief for totally and permanently disabled veterans (amended)
HB225	relative to the National Guard Scholarship Fund (amended)
HB472	relative to special number plates for certain veterans (amended)
HB549	relative to Gold Star number plates (amended)
HB701	relative to bow and arrow hunting for permanently disabled veterans (amended)
SENATE BILLS	
SB56	establishing a committee to study motor vehicle registrations and drivers' licenses of active duty military personnel (amended)
SB186	permitting a qualified veteran to obtain an additional set of special number plates (amended)
SB208	renaming the Adjutant General's department to the Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs (amended)
SB238	relative to the registration of motor vehicles owned by veterans (amended)

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.

Community Partnerships: This session, SVAC continued to bridge the scope of input with regular briefings from Amy Cook, Bureau Chief for Veterans Programs (now under the Dept. of Military and Veterans Services). Amy continues to keep SVAC informed on the major inroads she's made with pulling in resources to combat veterans' suicide, expand veterans and family services in the community, and reach out to North Country to engage them with additional community partnerships.

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 received eight nominees to be considered for this year's award. The committee met during the summer to make the choice for this year's awardee, Ray Goulet (VVA-41) who received the award at the October meeting. We were additionally honored to have Congressman Chris Pappas in attendance to assist with the presentation. Ray Goulet was selected for his countless hours of dedication to helping veterans with rides, organizing blood drives, his leadership role in the Wall of Faces in Washington, and organizing memorial events at the NH State Veterans cemetery among a few of his many community involvements. Congratulations to Ray as this year's recipient! Additional thanks to Diane, Jack Domenicis, Dan Marcek and Ray Goulet for volunteering to determine the awardee each year.



Spirit Award 2019 – (L-R) Cong. Pappas, Ray Goulet, Dan Marcek, Diane Domenicis

Recognizing Veterans with Fisher Cats: Chairman Kenney, Greg d'Arbonne (AUSA) and DTAG Warren Perry continue to partner with the Fisher Cats organization to recognize military, veterans and their families. Fisher Cats hosted 2 games this year with specifically discounted ticket options for veterans and families, provide conspicuous recognition at the open ceremonies of the games,

SVAC Treasurers Report: Kelly Dobens reports that we closed out the year with a balance of \$833.18 in our bank account.

SVAC Elections: This year the Vice Chairman and Treasurer positions were up for election. Vice Chairman Diane Domenicis and Treasurer Kelly Dobens 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 VFW Post on Court St. in Concord. in August, for about 35 members and guests. While the weather was a bit stormy, the VFW proved to be a great venue even in tough weather. Members were able to grill in the detached garage space and food was served inside the post. This is an annual opportunity for members and supporters to socialize and interact in an informal setting. Sincere thanks to Paul Lloyd and the Concord VFW post for donating all the cooked food items, and the post space.

June Meeting at VA Manchester: SVAC was cordially hosted by the Director and staff of VA Manchester for our June 4th meeting. Attendance packed the room and SVAC received a very detailed briefing from the Director on all the major changes and improvements that have been made at VA Manchester. With all the challenges facing VA Manchester since summer of 2017, the progress in expanding services, improving infrastructure, and improving staff/employee satisfaction has been excellent. As a partner in the VA mission, we support any and all improvements at the VA to provide comprehensive health care to our NH Veterans.



SVAC Committee – June 4, 2019

CONCLUSION

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

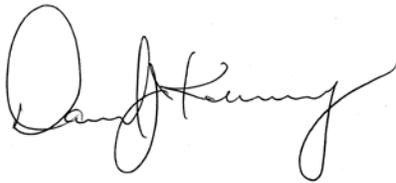
A significant number of advisors, guests and representatives from our Congressional Delegation participate in the meetings in recognition of the mutual value of shared communications and collaboration on veteran issues.

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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