



**ANNE ARUNDEL COUNTY, MARYLAND  
VETERANS AFFAIRS COMMISSION  
2023 ANNUAL REPORT**



Submitted on January 31, 2024

**Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of the Anne Arundel County Veterans Affairs Commission is to advocate and help to enhance the quality of life for veterans of military service and their families who live or work within Anne Arundel County by advising the County Executive and the County Council on the coordination and development of government policies, programs, services, and the allocation of resources for veterans and their families.

**Members**

|                         |                       |   |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|---|
| John Dove Jr.           | Commission Chair      | Executive Committee<br>Membership Committee   |
| Brooks Tucker           | Commission Vice-Chair | Executive Committee<br>Membership Committee<br>Outreach/Quality of Life Interim Chair   |
| Dr. John Wojcik         | Commission Secretary  | Education/Employment Committee  |
| Ron Borro               | Commissioner          | Legal/Legislation Committee   |
| Ethan Dietrich          | Non-voting            | Education/Employment Committee<br>Legal/Legislation Committee                           |
| Curtis Jones            | Commissioner          | Outreach/Quality of Life Committee  |
| Debra L. Luzietti-Myers | Commissioner          | Legal/Legislative Committee Chair<br>Membership Committee<br>Nominating Committee Chair |
| George Matthews         | Commissioner          | Membership Committee<br>Education/Employment Committee                                  |
| Cathy McKinney          | Commissioner          | Outreach/Quality of Life Committee  |
| Dave Myers              | Commissioner          | Legal/Legislation Committee   |
| Kevin Peyatt            | Commissioner          | Outreach/Quality of Life Committee  |
| Matthew Phillips        | Commissioner          | Legal/Legislative Committee Primary   |
| Dr. Krista Roberts      | Commissioner          | Assignments Pending   |
| James Mastrodomenico    | Commissioner          | Outreach/Quality of Life Committee  |
| Kathleen Schorr         | Commissioner          | Education/Employment Committee<br>Membership Committee                                  |
| Vicki Swingle           | Commissioner          | Education/Employment Committee  |

## Meetings

### February 8, 2023

- Welcome to Anthony Woods, new Maryland Secretary of Veterans Affairs
- Presentation of Annual 2022 Report, submitted to County Executive and County Council

### March 8, 2023

- Guest Speaker: Roslyn Jones, Women Veterans/Inclusion Program Manager, Maryland Dept of Veterans Affairs
- Guest Speaker: Denise Robinson, Gold Star Families, Annapolis

### April 12, 2023

- Guest Speaker and Discussion: Purple Star School Program in AA County

### May 10, 2023

- Guest Karissa Kelly, Director, Department of Aging and Disabilities
- Update from Denise Robinson on Legacy of Honor and Gold Star research

### June 14, 2023

- Wrap-up for summer. During summer break, Commissioner Debra Luzietti-Myers will continue to send legislative updates.
- Commissioners requested to consider any ideas to bring to the attention of the County Executive, County Council, or our legislators.

### September 12, 2023

- Presenter: Catherine Hollerbach, COO of AACO Public Library on plans to commemorate Veterans Day and Memorial Day.
- Presenter: Brooks Tucker and Denise Robinson on The Legacy of Honor Project. Joined by Scott Poyer to discuss gaining access to AACO historical records to identify those killed in action and not recognized.
- John Dove, Jr. began initial discussion on the rehabilitation of Crownsville Hospital and Veteran use of the facility.

### October 11, 2023

- Presenter: Dave Dragics, Legislative Director. Maryland Military Coalition Legislative Update for 2024 Session
- Continued Discussion on the rehabilitation of Crownsville Hospital and Veteran use of the facility. Crownsville Advisory Committee membership

### November 8, 2023

- Presenter: LTC Mariah Smith, Board member. No One Left Behind.

## 2023 Areas of Focus

**Anne Arundel Community College (AACC).** There has been significant activity based on the efforts of Commissioner Kat Schorr. Kat submitted a proposal to participate in Operation Green Light on campus and secured approval from AACC to purchase the lighting for the program. AACC also held a Veterans Appreciation Ceremony where Dr. Lindsey read the names of veterans that were submitted by the community. There was a webinar sponsored by the school by Dr. John Wojcik to address the Military to

Civilian transition. AACC staff member, Ryan Trainor, did a presentation to students and veterans on the origin of Veteran's Day. AACC was recognized with a gold-level "Military Friendly" designation for 2023.

**Membership Committee.** A critical part for the sustainability of the VAC is the activity of the Membership Committee. In 2023, Chair Kat Schorr interviewed 11 candidates for several open vacancies. Four voting seats were filled, along with several non-voting seats.

**Library of Congress, Veterans History Project.** The committee is working with Anne Arundel County Public Library system to do more work with veterans and their families. While those efforts are ongoing, Yolanda Rayford, Chapter Director, Baltimore & Chesapeake Region, Blue Star Families, is championing the Veterans History Project with the Library of Congress.

**Veterans Day Activities.** Members of the VAC Commission regularly participate in monthly events acknowledging veterans in the community, particularly on Veterans Day. Examples include the Veterans Day proclamation which was read at Maryland Veterans Cemetery Crownsville. There were programs at American Legion Post 141, and American Legion Post 276. On November 11<sup>th</sup>, there was a Veterans Day program with Delegate Gary Simmons at Park View at Furnace Branch.

**Legacy of Honor.** Former VAC Chair John Church and Brooks Tucker have been partnering with Denise Reynolds in the Legacy of Honor project. The project identifies veterans gravestones and helps ensure they are cleaned and maintained. One legislative change that could help the Legacy of Honor project involves expanding the access to county veterans records.

**Legislative Activities.** VAC Commission members have been influential in crafting legislation to help the county's veterans. Maryland House Bill (HB125) will alter certain provisions of law relating to the recordation and inspection of certain military records kept by the clerk of a circuit court. Maryland Senate Bill (SB159) will alter certain provisions of law relating to the recordation and inspection of certain military records kept by the clerk of a circuit court to authorize the clerk to keep an electronic record instead of a book to record and index the discharge papers of a person who has served in the uniformed services of the United States and require the clerk to deny inspection of the electronic record except under certain circumstances.

There has also been a review of two federal legislative initiatives: the Congressional failure to reauthorize the 2018 SUPPORT Act which provided funding for mental health resources and substance abuse disorder treatment and recovery services, and Local 9-8-8 Response Act of 2023, a bipartisan bill to enhance mental health crisis response through the 9-8-8 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. These issues could have a real impact on support for veterans for substance abuse, mental health issues, and suicide prevention.

**Robert Henson Support Project.** Members of the VAC are supporting fundraising efforts to improve the living conditions of Mr. Robert Henson, veteran and Annapolis resident. Robert Henson, 85, and his daughter Robin Henson, 43, live together in a small home and Social Security and public assistance are their only sources of income. Both require wheelchairs. The VAC has worked with the Hensons, evaluating the home and launching a GoFundMe page for potential repairs.

The home had a makeshift ramp leading up to the front porch and vital spaces inside like the bathroom and kitchen are cramped and incompatible with their needs. Though the family has applied for government assistance, the search for funds has been an uphill battle. Through the GoFundMe

fundraising and a large private donor, the VAC members have helped raise over \$81,000 to improve the living conditions for the Anne Arundel County's veteran.

**Crownsville Hospital.** Dan Tootle, LCDR, USN (Ret) presented on creating a Veterans & Family Center at the Crownsville Hospital Memorial Park in Anne Arundel County. This would be a centrally-located place of information, service, representation, and support for AA County veterans, military members and their families. The concept is similar in concept and operations to Veterans and Military Families offices in Howard, Montgomery and Prince George Counties. The effort is "in step" with Governor Moore and Maryland Department of Veterans and Military Families initiatives aimed at serving veterans and families upon completion of active military service.

The VAC has spent a considerable amount of effort in working with leaders at the Crownsville Hospital Memorial Park and will continue to do so in 2024.

## Considerations for 2024

**Creation of a Women Veterans Committee.** Members of the VAC have expressed interest in researching the need for a group dedicated to focusing on the issues faced by women veterans in our community.

**Supporting Transitioning Veterans.** The Department of Defense SkillBridge program partners with counties across the country to develop internships in county government. The Anne Arundel County VAC could consider developing a direct partnership with the Skillbridge program. This would enable the County Executive to place a transitioning veteran at the facility to help other veterans navigate their way to Anne Arundel County. This program would have no cost to the County, but would improve our efforts to recruit transitioning veterans to live in Anne Arundel County. This position should be located in the new Crownsville facility.

**Veterans Center.** Town hall meetings are happening in each of the seven districts offering an opportunity for the veteran community to endorse the VAC recommendation for a veterans and military family center. The VAC will dedicate additional resources to this effort throughout 2024. The VAC may also reach out to the Maryland National Guard Family Support Centers to see if there's any synergy with that group. Family Support Centers are located throughout the State of Maryland and are tasked with helping service members and their families from all branches of service.

**Advising the County Executive.** The VAC will endeavor to meet with the County Executive on a bi-annual basis to discuss upcoming events, legislation, and current issues impacting our veteran population.

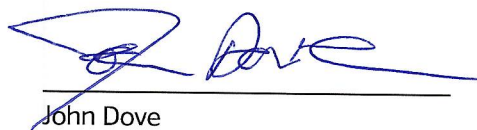
**Legislative Activities.** In May 2023, Governor Wes Moore signed the largest military tax cut for veterans in a generation and highlighted the administration's commitment to strengthening the military and honoring veterans in Maryland. H.B. 554/S.B. 553, Keep Our Heroes Home Act, increases the military retirement income tax exemption for veterans, spouses, or anyone receiving military pensions in Maryland. The exemption will be increased from \$5,000 to \$12,500 for individuals under the age of 55 and from \$15,000 to \$20,000 for individuals over the age of 55. Expected 2024 budget shortfall made it hard for the Governor to get military pay 100% exempted. States near Maryland provide better incentive for retirees by not taxing retirement pay as much and are pulling veterans to live in those states. 38 states totally exempt military pension income from state tax. The VAC would like to see these tax cuts continue for veterans, which includes increasing the exemption levels to much higher numbers.

Dave Dragics, Legislative Director, Maryland Military Coalition, is also looking into steps to make it easier for veterans and spouses to transfer/retire to Maryland by examining the rules for transferring business and professional certification to work in Maryland. The Maryland Military Coalition is advocating for Veterans Auto Education and Improvement Act and wants employers and state agencies to understand how easy it is to accept the portability of licensing.

**Homeless Veterans.** There is interest in researching veteran homelessness in Anne Arundel County and determining if the VAC has a role in coordinating resources for this vulnerable population.

### Special Acknowledgements

- Farewell to Peter Hill, US Army (Ret) and Veterans Affairs Liaison to the County Executive who served with the VAC until April 21, 2023.
- Best wishes to John Church who served as the prior Chair of the Veterans Affairs Commission.
- Thank you to James Kitchin, current Veterans Affairs Liaison to the County Executive.
- Acknowledged support from the State Office of Veterans Affairs including Joseph Belvedere, Dana Burl, Phillip Munley, and Denise Nooe.
- Congratulations to Kat Schorr who received the Outstanding Volunteer Service Award from the County Executive Office. This award recognizes an individual who has strengthened the board/commission's ability to fulfill its mission or planned an initiative that resulted in a tangible positive impact on County residents.



John Dove  
AAC-VAC Chair