



**Anne Arundel County**

**Veterans Affairs Commission**

**2020 Annual Report**

### **Purpose and Objectives**

The purpose of the Veterans Affairs Commission (VAC) 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. Current objectives of the Commission are to work with the Anne Arundel County Community Engagement and Constituent Services office to continue to implement the Veterans Service Coordination Center, broaden the Commission's outreach by engaging with other veterans organizations in Anne Arundel County, and represent the County Executive at commemorative ceremonies during the year.

### **2020 Accomplishments**

The activities of the Commission during the year were significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite this, members of the Commission accomplished the majority of its 2020 initiatives and the following:

- A. Coordinated with the County Executive's staff and Community Engagement and Constituent Services (CECS) to begin implementing the Veterans Service Coordination Center (VSCC). The VSCC was announced by the County Executive on Veterans Day, November 11, 2020. Orientation of the CECS staff towards federal, state, and other county resources available to veterans and their families began in October and will continue during 2021.
- B. In its continuing outreach initiative to other veterans organizations, sponsored a Senior Leadership Conference in January 2020 that brought together senior leaders of those organizations within the county to help identify quality of life issues relevant to the implementation of the VSCC.
- C. Began addressing the issue of homeless veterans with Anne Arundel County and the City of Annapolis staffs. Separately, the Commission was advised that the City of Annapolis applied for and received, for the first time, five vouchers from the US Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) Program. VASH is a collaborative

program between HUD and VA that combines HUD housing vouchers with VA Supportive services to help veterans who are homeless and their families find and sustain permanent housing.

- D. In cooperation with Dr. Daniel Nataf, Director, Center for the Study of Local Issues at Anne Arundel Community College, developed and conducted a survey sent to 1,300 veterans who are students at the college. The survey was designed to assess the quality of life of these students in order to gain information that will help improve veterans support at the college.
- E. Assisted in leading an outreach initiative with the Defense Commissary Agency at Ft. George G. Meade in which volunteers shopped for Department of Defense ID cardholders and retirees affected by COVID-19.
- F. With the Anne Arundel County Department of Aging, sponsored a two-hour virtual telethon featuring the Voices of Vets in September. As of December, the telethon had received approximately \$3,000.
- G. Continued participation in the county's Veterans Court Mentorship Program.
- H. Continued participation with the Maryland Veterans Caucus and the Maryland Military Coalition involved in support of Maryland legislative initiatives pertaining to veterans.
- I. In May, individual members joined with American Legion Post 276, Odenton, to contribute and support District 32 Delegate Michael Rogers' effort to gather and deliver toiletry items for veterans living in the Charlotte Hall Veterans Home.
- J. For Memorial Day, helped arrange for the playing of Taps at the Crownsville Veterans Cemetery and participated with the Mayor of Annapolis in a Memorial Day tribute.
- K. Supported the September 11<sup>th</sup> dedication of the Gold Star Memorial and Heroes Monument in Severna Park in honor of four young residents who gave their lives in service to our country.

### **Current Initiatives for 2021**

In 2021, the Commission will be working and implementing the following:

- A. Continue to work with CECS in the implementation of the VSCC in order to better serve the veterans.
- B. Continue to broaden the Commission's outreach and collaboration with other veterans organizations in and beyond Anne Arundel County at the federal and state level that serve the county's veterans.
- C. Continue participation in the county's Veterans Court Mentorship Program.
- D. Support the Maryland Veterans Caucus and the Maryland Military Coalition and keep the County Executive and CECS advised of legislative initiatives in the Maryland General Assembly pertaining to veterans.

- E. Continue advocating for housing resources for homeless veterans in Anne Arundel County.
- F. Monitor legislation and regulation at the federal level and keep the County Executive and CECS advised of any material changes pertaining to veterans.
- G. If scheduled, support the Hospice of Chesapeake's Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans event when it is held.
- H. Participate in Memorial Day and Veterans Day ceremonies in the county and represent the County Executive as needed.
- I. Participate in Wreaths Across America in December.
- J. Fill voting commissioner vacancies on the Commission with qualified individuals.

### **Meetings of the Commission**

Eight meetings of the Commission were held on the following dates in 2020: February 19<sup>th</sup>, March 18<sup>th</sup>, April 15<sup>th</sup>, May 21<sup>st</sup>, June 10<sup>th</sup>, September 9<sup>th</sup>, October 14<sup>th</sup>, and December 9<sup>th</sup>. Beginning in March, the Commission's meetings were held virtually for the remainder of 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. (As of the end of January 2021, it is not known when the Commission will be able to resume in-person meetings.)

### **Guest Speakers**

During regularly scheduled meetings, the Commission's agenda included presentations by federal and national organizations serving veterans that were useful in educating the Commissioners on resources and legislation that are relevant to county veterans. Details regarding all speakers and related discussions are available as part of the respective minutes for each meeting. Minutes of those meetings can be read at: <https://www.aacounty.org/boards-and-commissions/veterans-affairs-commission/meeting-documents/index.html>

Key guest speakers and dates were:

February 19<sup>th</sup>: Mark Mhley, entrepreneur; Cynthia Gallegos Cavalieri, Executive Director, Baltimore Federal Executive Board

May 21<sup>st</sup>: Brian Smith, consultant to the Maryland Military Coalition; Gloria Dent, Director, Veterans Employment Initiatives, US AbilityOne Commission

June 10<sup>th</sup>: Kassie Sandacz, CEO, Voices of Vets

October 14<sup>th</sup>: Jaelon Moaney, US Senator Chris Van Hollen, Annapolis Office

### **Membership of the Commission**

As of December 31, 2020, the Veterans Affairs Commission has 11 appointed members, seven men and four women, including two members representing the major military installations in Anne Arundel County (Fort George G. Meade and the Naval Support Activity, Annapolis) and one member representing the Anne Arundel Community College (AACC) as a result of the large

veteran student population there. With the exception of the member representing AACC, all current commissioners are voting members, per the County Code and the Commission's by-laws. Four members are U.S. Air Force veterans; three are U.S. Navy veterans; two are U.S. Army veterans; one is a U.S. Marine Corps veteran; and one (the AACC representative) is a non-veteran. The Commission is chaired by John Church; Adger Stokes, Vice Chairman; and Kathy Reents, Secretary. At the end of December 2020, there were three voting vacancies as a result of resignations of three commissioners in the last half of 2020. Current membership of the Commission may be found at: <https://www.aacounty.org/boards-and-commissions/veterans-affairs-commission/members/>.

### **Special Thanks**

The Commission wishes to thank Commissioner Curtis "Gunny" Jones and American Legion Post #141 for active support during the Senior Veterans Leadership Conference in January.

The Commission wishes to thank Mr. Peter Smith, Military and Veterans Affairs Liaison to the County Executive, for his support during the year.

The Commission wishes to thank Ms. Karley Schultze and Ms. Heidi May, both members of the County Executive staff, who helped this Commission at various times throughout the year.

For more information regarding the Anne Arundel County Veterans Affairs Commission, please visit our website at: <https://www.aacounty.org/boards-and-commissions/veterans-affairs-commission/>