

**Fairfax County Veterans and Military Families Commission
Meeting Minutes – Thursday, September 12, 2024, 6:00pm
Virtual Meeting Via Teams**

The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m.

Roll Call/Quorum Determination: Julie Austin (calling from home in Springfield, Va.); Dr. Jennifer Drake Patrick (calling from her home in Alexandria, Va.); Yonas Wondwossen (office in Fairfax County, Va.); Jamie Gaucher (Office in Fairfax, Va); Dr. Natalia Giscombe-Simons (Home in Stafford, Va); Katrina Wayne (Home in Alexandria, Va.); Vonzell Mattocks; Robert Magielnicki (Home in Reston, Va.); Michael S. Donovan (Point Look out, NY); Angela Howard (Home in Fort Belvoir, Va.); Penny Gross (Home in Fairfax, Va.); Julie Shepard (Home in Alexandria, Va.) ; Renee LaHuffman-Jackson (Home in Triangle, Va.); Kelly Tubbs (Home in District of Columbia); Julie Austin; Micheal Halligan (Home in Fairfax Station, Va.), Gerald “Jerry” Krueger (Home in Fairfax, Va.)

Absent: La Toya Sivells; Kevin Gaddis; Jamie Hurd

Guest(s)/Staff: Ashley Whitaker, Service Member, Veterans, and Families Regional Navigator (Region 2) Northern Virginia Regional Projects Office

Virtual Meeting Protocol:

Chairman Gross passed the virtual gavel to Secretary Julie Shepard (in the absence of the Vice Chair La Toya Sivells) and made a motion that the Veterans and Military Families Commission certify for the record that each member’s voice is adequately heard by each other member of this Board. The Motion was seconded by Jamie Gaucher. The motion carried and the virtual gavel was passed back to Chairman Gross.

Chairman Gross briefed that this meeting is being held electronically via Teams under the All-Virtual Meeting Policy, adopted by the Veterans and Military Families Commission in July 2024. If at any time a member of the public indicates that they are unable to hear any member of the Board, the Veterans and Military Families Commission will take a recess until public access is restored. Additionally, the public can call 571.567.2158 to report any problems accessing the meeting.

Public Comment Period: No Comments Presented

Approval of July 11th Meeting Minutes:

Chairman Gross asked for a motion to approve the July 11, 2024, meeting minutes as written; the motion was made by Bob Magielnicki and seconded by Michael Donovan. The motion carried with one (1) abstention from Renee LaHuffman Jackson.

Remarks by the Chair:

- Our first and last meeting, which was very comprehensive, and commission members laid out their concerns about the commission focus and put them all together into various buckets.
- Wants to distill the concerns down to very brief commentary. Mentioned that economic mobility could take lot of forms but decided to place economic mobility in a bucket under economics for further discussion later.
- Difficult to address all issues so Chairman Gross would like to take the 12 or 15 veteran and family issues and trim the list down to five (5) that the commission can address
- Several underlying principles that identified so far including dignity, security, the need to ensure a “warm hand off” from our veterans and families to available resources, and the need to be strategic and disciplined in what the commission decides to address.

Old Business

- Kelly Tubbs introduction, D.C VA Medical Center, Community Engagement Partnership Coordinator/Athletic Veterans Coalition briefing
 - Covers Washington D.C, Northern Virginia, and Southern Maryland with main role is to establish coalitions to address veteran suicide
 - Data highlights the high correlation between veterans who died by suicide that weren’t connected with the VA. Since the VA is in the community, the VA has prioritized connecting with agencies, community members, and community leaders.
 - After meeting Chris Pulley, he shared his idea of establishing a coalition focused on sports and athletic programming that would enhance connectedness for veterans and transitioning service members in a family-oriented event to bring together resources, caregivers, and community partners at an athletic event to service the military community using the event as the platform by establishing specific programming for the military community through sports and recreation departments
 - Wants to implement the model in Fairfax and if successful, take the model to other jurisdictions in the DMV
 - Chairman Gross mentioned opportunities to work with Commission and perhaps connect with some of the events that the Department of Neighborhood and community Services and the Park Authority already have around sports event such as soccer, softball, or pickleball.
 - Chairman Gross directed Chris Pulley to put a pin in this idea and it should not be too difficult to connect with existing events as to not reinvent to wheel.
 - Chairman Gross wants to explore a bit more with the possibility of this endeavor being a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors.
- Chairman Review of Bucket Items Analysis
 - Chairman Gross reviewed the identified buckets of economics, education, family, health, housing and justice to narrow down the commission focus. Several issues

may fall under different buckets and different buckets may share the same issue(s).

- Economics included: economics, economic mobility, connecting resources, translating military skills through civilian resumes, HR issues and spouse employment.
- Education included: Purple Star schools, PTA's involved impact aid issues, peer LED student transition teams, and teacher development at George Mason University.
- Family included: accessible childcare, the comment that "it was easy for military families to get lost in Fairfax County."
- Health included: sexual trauma for women veterans, veteran suicide and mental health
- Housing included: Data on homelessness, CSV docket vets housing, new vs. older homeless vets, housing allowances don't cover utilities and deposits.
- Justice included: CSV veteran's docket.
- Discussed the need for a needs assessment; no details regarding how or what should be included.
- Concern that too much outreach can result in too much information; a lot of services may be available but unknown to the people who need them.
- Note that we've been appointed by the Board of Supervisors to explore and make recommendations about what we can do in the county and not address the federal issues or the state issues. May be Commission items put to the Board of supervisors for a legislative package toward the end of the year, for the next General Assembly session and for the next congressional session. Can also make recommendations to the board officially, or unofficially, on ways to address state rules and federal rules.
- The Commission's main mission is to review, question, and look at all potential challenges for veterans and military families in Fairfax County and what we as the county could do either through agencies policies.
- Chris Pulley reminded everyone that the chat function cannot be used to convey information during virtual meetings.
- Julie Shepard: Childcare belongs in both buckets because spouse employment issues are hand in hand with the childcare conversation.
- Chairman Gross: Childcare could fall under housing, family, or economics.

Employment

- Jamie Gaucher: Need clarity around translating skills to civilian resumes and the dynamic, the needs, the requirements, and the problems that need to be solved.
- Natalia Giscombe Simon: Clarified high military leadership position definitions or job class may not translate easily to the civilian sector. It is difficult for people to understand on a resume when translating military terms to the civilian sector.
- Jamie Gaucher: Is there a way to place the burden to understand on the private sector?
- Chairman Gross: Perhaps a guidebook for HR to understand how military skills translate to civilian life

- Mike Halligan: Working at the Pentagon with experience as a manpower and personnel officer for 25 years, perhaps the connections should be made with the military unit since members go through Transition Readiness Seminar (TRS) formerly known as TAPS. Potential partnership could be made between business organizations and HR firms in Fairfax County with the bases station units
- Jerry Kruger: Amplify leadership and problem-solving skills with transitioning service members. Data shows that not enough of the people who are eligible for a one-year transitionary term participate in it.
- Chairman Gross: Directed Chris Pulley to ask Fairfax County's HR Director to present at the November 14th, 2024, Commission meeting
- Yonas Wondwossen: Excused from the remainder of the meeting due to room conflict
- Angela Howard: Two questions –
 - Within the county is a repository or a registry of military spouses that are currently seeking work but need guidance to navigate all the different job seeking areas possible? Employers and job seekers can match skills.
 - Can the county get cost of living (COLA) data for the area specific to where the kids are located, so they have to be districted? How much does it cost to live there so your kids can go to school? Perhaps something the Commission could present in the future to make the DoD aware of the conditions in Fairfax County?
- Chairman Gross: The county has consistent data updates. having a list of jobs in the county was performed with the Northern Virginia Regional Commission within the past few years. Asked Vonzell Mattocks to follow up
- Julie Shepard: DoD gave COLA to the region for one year and removed thereafter. A lot of resources are pumped into job seeking and it can be confusing. I suggest keeping a list of these organizations that service this region to put on our Commission website.
- Chairman Gross: List of V3 companies already exist and could add to the Commission website
- Bob Magielnicki: Follow up on what are the resources that are already out and how can the Commission capitalize on them, advertise, augment them. Suggested, the Virginia Department of Veteran Services resource guide could be promoted to Veterans and Military Families Commission
- Vonzell Mattocks: Support mechanism for transitioning service members is called Skill Bridge (individual gets to step out of their work while still drawing pay as service members and get OJT transitional experience in their industry). The Commission should lean into systems that are in place with the V3 modeling, which educates employers on what to look for and how to hire service members.

Education

- Chairman Gross: It's my understanding that nearly every school in Fairfax County will be a Purple Star School. Lack of publicity, PTAs need to be more involved. Impact aid is difficult because people were not filling out the forms at the beginning of the school year. Need more information on that. Discussed peer lead student transition teams that would be at the middle and high school.

- Renee LaHuffman Jackson: FCPS is releasing some information next week during Blue Star family week around the goal for FCPS to become a Purple Star division by school year 2026-2027. The three-year goal is to have all 200 schools and centers purple star. (currently 69 schools). There is an application process to become a Purple Star School. Professionals review each application throughout the state to determine qualifications to become Purple Star School.
- Chairman Gross: Directed Dr. Jackson to send that information to Chris Pulley to distribute to the Commission when it comes out. Directed Dr. Jackson to have someone in the school system give the commission a couple of paragraphs on impact aid issues.
- Angela Howard: You cannot vote for the 12-member school board unless you are a Fairfax resident, and this affects transitioning service members. Could an exception be made for one member of the school board to represent military-connected families?
- Chairman Gross: Must be a resident and registered voter. Better to identify board members to advocate. Chairman Gross will follow up with Dr. Ricardi Anderson of the Mason District on this

Family

- Chairman Gross: Accessible childcare is an issue being looked at the regional and national level. Folks in the General Assembly do not want to expand funding for childcare. Part of the reason the Commission was formed was to address the notion that “it’s easy for military families to get lost in Fairfax County”.
- Jerry Krueger: Congressional testimony last year highlighted some of the veteran service organizations concerning military families with two military members, both on active duty, one is deployed and one taking care of the children or divorce or divorce pending or separation. Quality of life suffers because of bills. Cook for Vets was born out of assisting families with food insecurity.
- Jennifer Drake-Patrick – Offered to broker introduction to Ann Holton (staff at George Mason)
- Chairman Gross: Not at this time but will revisit
- Michael Halligan: To Angela’s Howards point – statutory/regulatory/policy issue government officials could pursue with the state with no cost. Sends the message that we want our military families to have a voice with the school board members. The Commission should look at regulatory policy and processes as possible solutions for some of the Commission challenges
- Julie Shepard: Stafford County addressed the representation issue by forming an advisory committee of veterans and military families that advise the school board.
- Dr. Jackson: FCPS is in the process of creating a military advisory council with Superintendent Dr. Michelle Reid.

Health

- Chairman Gross: Sexual trauma for women vets, veterans’ suicide and mental health is an issue. Need more information about trauma for women’s Vets. Mental health is a bucket of its own. The Commission should put a pin in health due to capacity limits at

this time. May seek a presentation on homelessness or information from the Community Service Board.

- Jerry Krueger: VFW was approached by the non-profit safer country around suicide prevention. Military members should safely own and operate guns to help prevent suicide
- Chairman Gross: Could speak with Fairfax Police Chief Davis for educational pieces about proper handling or the Issac Walton League

Housing

- Chairman Gross: We wanted to have data on homeless veterans, CSP docket on veterans housing, and the new versus older homeless vets. Noted that housing allowances don't cover utilities and deposits. Need more information from Jamie Hurd on the Veterans treatment docket for additional discussion.

Additional Comments

- Chairman Gross: May need to connect with the Department of Family Services for how to conduct a proper needs assessment
- Dr. Drake-Patrick: Met with Chris Pulley earlier in the semester with Dr. Keith Renshaw to think about how we could develop a survey. Identified general demographic data such as gender, race, ethnicity, income, location in Fairfax County, education level and then military specific data (status of active or veteran/spouse and rank or branch with buckets of healthcare, employment status, spouse/partner employment status, legal, judicial area, childcare status and needs, food/housing security, and mental health status needs. Connected with experts across the university who may have already had some surveys developed in these areas to send us questions. Chris is collecting samples of questions to pull together a database of questions. We can then start to sketch out a needs assessment in collaboration with Chris to bring back to the Commission for feedback. Additional questions include: How would this survey be distributed, who keeps the data, and who's analyzing that data
- Chairman Gross: Directed Chris Pulley to place on the agenda for the next meeting to look at possible questions. How do we eliminate duplicative data?
- Jennifer Drake Patrick: Mason can offer the survey development at no cost. Can offer to a Mason student for the survey development experience along with Mason staff.
- Chairman Gross: The survey should have space for veterans to shared lived experiences, and ranking of what's most important to them, not just yes/no questions. Ensure we capture responses from active duty as well as vets.
- Julie Shepard: Blue Star Families has data for the National Capital Region, but not specific to Fairfax County.
- Chairman Gross: Would like a template by the next meeting. Get a template to Chris by the end of September for Commission review.
- Julie Shepard: November is Military Family Appreciation Month. It might be an opportunity to have a press release that we are developing a survey for the military families.

- Chairman Gross: I'll talk with Chris Pulley and possibly work with Supervisor Walkinshaw to do a board matter for the November 19th meeting to highlight the survey development along with some of the work the Commission is doing and connect to Military Family Appreciation Month through the county Office of Public Affairs to get buy-in.
- Dr. Drake-Patrick: Wants to be included in the discussion process to stay on track as the development process includes several key steps. To make sure that this survey is validated, cognitive interviews around some of the questions will have to be done to make sure that we're getting the right information for survey development.

Member Report-outs

- Julie Shepard: National Capital Region military spouses are partnering with Blue Star families during their welcome week. Doing a military families welcome on Thursday, September 26th at Burke Center Library from 7:00 to 9:00pm along with a nonpartisan voter registration drive and we're working with Secure Families initiative. Vet Jobs will also be present
- Jerry Krueger: September 11, 2024, we scrubbed all 4229 veteran's tombstones at the Alexandria National Cemetery. Will scrub the Vietnam Veterans Memorial wall in Washington on the National Mall on November 10th, the day before veteran's day, at 6:30a.m
- Dr. Drake Patrick: Two (2) announcements –
 - The Fairfax County military process action team was given the Pete Taylor Partnership of Excellence Award for support to Fairfax Military families. Will send the link to Chris to share
 - Mason was named a 2024-2025 military friendly school. For Veterans Day, Mason is hosting a panel discussion with alumni and veterans and inviting businesses to participate with our student body about the military experience, whether they are or are not military connected. Also, military appreciation night at the Basketball game. Tickets are available on vet ticks.
- Chairman Gross: We can build this news around George Mason in the board matter as well
- Bob Magielnicki: Can the Virginia Department of Veteran Services Rep brief us at our next meeting around some of the identified bucket items?
- Chairman Gross: Directed Vonzell Mattocks to connect with Chris Pulley about a possible rep to invite to the November 14th meeting for a 10-minute presentation and a 5-minute Q&A
- Chairman Gross: Important to remember that a big challenge in starting a commission from scratch is taking all the issues and making them manageable.

Meeting adjourned at 7:46p.m.