TEXAS VETERANS COMMISSION
SECOND QUARTER COMMISSION MEETING (FY 2025)
Thursday, February 13, 2025, 09:00 a.m.
George HW Bush Bldg, 1801 Congress Ave, 4.300 Conference room, Austin, TX 78701

MINUTES

I. OPENING

A. Chairwoman Laura Koerner calls the meeting to order at 09:00 a.m.
B. Roll call:

Secretary Kevin Barber informs Chairwoman Koerner that there is a quorum.

Chairwoman Laura Koerner, Vice-Chair Mary Dale, Secretary Kevin Barber, Commissioner Mike Hernandez, Commissioner Chuck Wright
Also present: Executive Director Thomas P. Palladino.

C. Commissioner Mike Hernandez led the Pledge of Allegiance to the United States Flag, and Commissioner Chuck Wright led the Pledge of Allegiance to the Texas Flag.
D. Chip Osborne led the Commission in prayer.

II. PUBLIC COMMENT

A. Keith Wilson

III. CONSENT AGENDA

Action regarding approval of the Consent Agenda*. Chair Koerner asked if any commissioner wanted to remove anything from the consent agenda and place it on the FY 25, 2Q Commission Meeting agenda. No items were moved to the FY25, 2Q Commission Meeting agenda.*

MOTION: Made by Commissioner Mary Dale and seconded by Commissioner Kevin Barber to approve the Consent Agenda.
VOTE: 5-0: Motion Passed.

IV. PRESENTATIONS

A. ***Veterans Land Board regarding Veterans' Homes and TVC Claims Initiative.***

i. Darren Fitz Gerald, Assistant Executive Secretary of the Veteran Land Board, summarized the benefits of Claims providing assistance to veterans living in veterans' homes.

V. REPORTS

A. ***Report on Agency Departments and Programs.***

i. **Program Operations Division**. Charles Catoe, Division Director of Program Operations.

a. **Claims.**
- Update on the approved rule changes for the VCSO Advisory Committee to Focus Groups.
- On January 27th, 2025, Groundbreaking Community-based Outpatient Clinic in Abilene.
- Claims Training Conference, University of North Texas, July 14-17, 2025.

b. **Employment.**
- The federally mandated statewide single audit was completed, pending the final report.
- VES Symposium will be Aug 26 to 29, 2025, in Austin at the Barbara Jordan Building.

c. **Education.**
- Attended the National Association of State Approving Agency (NASAA) conference – David is the Vice President of NASAA.
- The Education Department received its annual rating from the VA of Satisfactory, which is the highest rating possible.
- The Texas Association Collegiate Veterans Program Officials (TACVPO) Conference will be held at Lakeway from February 24 to 27, 2025; this is where many of the VEERA presentations will take place.

d. **Healthcare.**
- Performance goals – closed out 65% of annual performance goals, 60% of their outreach program, and 714 outreaches, with 90 of them being homeless.
- In January, the NW District Supervisor assisted a veteran without dental insurance and was able to get it paid for by a veteran non-profit in the area.
- In January, the NE District Supervisor assisted a veteran with getting his house out of foreclosure by explaining the Homestead Exemption and getting his taxes wiped away.

ii. **Resource Management Division**. Chip Osborne, Division Director of Resource Management, provided DRM updates.

a. **Legislative Session update for FY26-FY27**
- Legislative Appropriations Request (LAR): SB1 and HB1 match the dollar amount, they also approved funding for two of our five Exceptional Items:
  - VMHD – 8 FTE's
  - Data Center – for all software licenses
- Chair Koerner and Mr. Palladino presented to the Senate Finance Committee on the other exceptional items
  - Increase in Agency operations support for current and future ops with an additional 35 FTEs, which is 8.8 million dollars for the biennium.
  - Support services database with one FTE, which is 2.6 million dollars for the biennium.
  - Agency equity adjustment so our salaries could be at the same median as other state agencies; that amount is 2.8 million dollars.

- Performance measures are updated in SB1 and HB1 that were requested. Mental Health program has their own strategy.

b. **Finance. – Michelle Nall, CFO**
- FY 2025 First Quarter Operating Statement and backup documentation
- Grant money –
  - Chair Koerner confirmed we have approximately 44 million for grants in May.

B. ***Deputy Executive Director Report***. Shawn Deabay, Deputy Executive Director, provided DED updates.

i. **Updates.**

a. **Advisory Committee Process and Procedures.**
- No scheduled vacancies unless someone resigns.
- Updated the procedures to change from three to two Advisory Committees.
  - Chair Koerner asked about adding the conflict of interest statements into the application process.

b. **89th Legislative Session – James Crabtree, Government Relations Director.**
- Veteran Affairs Committee remains mostly the same.
- The Defense and Veteran Affairs Committee was abolished as a permanent regular committee and recreated as a subcommittee under the Homeland Security Public Safety & Veterans Affairs Committee. No committee chairs or members have been named.
- On January 29th, the Chairwoman and Mr. Palladino testified to the Senate Finance Committee, and they will testify again in front of the House Appropriations Committee either on February 24th or 25th.
- Introduced Brad Burnett as the new Government Relations Specialist.
- GR team visited all 181 house and senate offices at the Capitol and provided them their business cards, Biennial report, and the Texas Coordinating Council on Veteran Services (TCCVS) report.
- Mr. Palladino also sent you all the updated bill tracker.
- Two of five exceptional items were approved.
  - Chair Koerner stated that one of the reasons for the bill tracker is that sometimes we, get called up to be resource witnesses.
  - Mr. Palladino stated that James and Brad are the main points of contact for the Governor's office. We don't testify for or against any bill; we are resource witnesses.

c. **Social Media Metrics – Angela Woellner, Communications and Outreach Director.**
- Updated Communications plan with new goals
- Social Media presence shows growth in the majority of metrics
- Outreach events covered have increased from 2023 to 2024
- Hiring a social media content expert
- More campaigns & events this year
- KXAN monthly segment

C. ***Executive Director Report***.

i. **Agency Updates.**

a. Legislature in session

b. Department Training happens throughout the year.
c. Assessing department workload; shift workloads to address needs in rural areas
d. Services for veterans are provided by various means
e. Summit to engage with partners who provide services to veterans in October 2025. This summit will focus on Mental Health and Veteran Treatment Courts.
f. Grants are currently being reviewed and will be awarded in the May Commission meeting.
g. NASDVA – meet new VA leadership

VI. CONSIDERATIONS

A. ***Action Regarding FY25 Internal Audit Plan.*** Richard Galindo, Partner, Garza/Gonzalez and Associates, LLC., will present this item for consideration.

MOTION: Made by Commissioner Mike Hernandez and seconded by Commissioner Chuck Wright to approve the FY25 Internal Audit Plan.
VOTE: 5-0: Motion Passed.

B. ***Action Regarding Fund for Veterans' Assistance 2024-2025 Grant Renewal Extensions.*** Elaine Zavala, Director of the Fund for Veterans' Assistance, will present this item for consideration.

MOTION: Made by Commissioner Kevin Barber and seconded by Commissioner Chuck Wright to approve the extension of the 2024-2025 grants that are renewed for the 2025-2026 grant year for 14 months without additional funds.
VOTE: 5-0: Motion Passed.

C. ***Action Regarding the Amendment Request to Increase the Grant Amount for USA Cares.*** Elaine Zavala, Director, Fund for Veterans' Assistance, will present this item for consideration.

MOTION: Made by Commissioner Chuck Wright and seconded by Chairwoman Laura Koerner to approve USA Cares' amendment request for an additional $ 250,000 in grant funding and an increase of 100 veterans to its performance goal for the 2024-2025 grant period.
VOTE: 5-0 Motion Passed.

D. ***Action Regarding the Amendment Request to Increase the Grant Amount for Austin Dog Alliance.*** Elaine Zavala, Director, Fund for Veterans' Assistance, will present this item for consideration.

MOTION: Made by Commissioner Kevin Barber and seconded by Commissioner Mike Hernandez to approve Austin Dog Alliance's amendment request for an additional $100,000 in grant funding and one additional service dog for the 2024-2025 grant period.
VOTE: 5-0 Motion Passed.

E. ***Action Regarding the Amendment Request to Increase the Grant Amount for Canine for Companions.*** Elaine Zavala, Director, Fund for Veterans' Assistance, will present this item for consideration.

MOTION: Made by Commissioner Kevin Barber and seconded by Commissioner Chuck Wright to approve Canine for Companions' amendment request for an additional $250,000 in grant funding and an increase of five dogs to its performance goal for the 2024-2025 grant

period.
VOTE: 5-0 Motion Passed.

AMENDED MOTION: Made by Commissioner Mary Dale and seconded by Commissioner Kevin Barber to approve Canine for Companions' amendment request for an additional $250,000 in grant funding and an increase of five dogs to its performance goal for the 2024-2025 grant period, pending a successful compliance visit.. **(when is compliance visit?)**
VOTE: 5-0 Amended Motion Passed.

F. ***Action Regarding the Amendment Request to Increase the Grant Amount for Bexar County Commissioners Court, VCSO..*** Elaine Zavala, Director, Fund for Veterans' Assistance, will present this item for consideration***.***

PUBLIC COMMENT: Keith Wilson, Director, Bexar County Commissioners Court, provided public comment.

MOTION: Made by Commissioner Kevin Barber and seconded by Commissioner Chuck Wright to approve Bexar County Commissioner Court, VCSO grant amendment request for an additional $125,000 in grant funding and an increase of 50 clients to its performance goal for the 2024-2025 grant period.
VOTE: 5-0 Motion Passed.

RECOMMENDATION: Made by Commissioner Mary Dale and Commissioner Kevin Barber anyone requesting an amendment in grant funding should have a successful compliance visit and also appear before the Commission.

G. ***Action Regarding 2024 Excellence in Media Awards.*** Jim Halbrook, Communications and Outreach, will present this item for consideration.

MOTION: Made by Commissioner Mary Dale and seconded by Commissioner Mike Hernandez to approve the action regarding the 2024 Excellence in Media Awards.
VOTE: 5-0: Motion Passed.

VII. ***Executive Session.***

None.

VIII. ***Discussion about setting the date, time, and location of the next Commission Meeting.***

The Commission agreed that the 3rd Quarterly Commission Meeting of FY 2025 would be held on Thursday, May 15, 2025, at 9:00 a.m., at HQ Austin, TX, George HW Bush building, 4.300 conference room.

IX. ***Adjournment.***

Chairwoman Koerner asked each Commissioner for any closing remarks. The Commissioners extended their gratitude to the staff and the Advisory Committee members. The Executive Director extended their gratitude to the Texas Veterans Commission staff for their support and hard work in serving Texas Veterans.

MOTION: Made by Commissioner Mary Dale, seconded by Commissioner Kevin Barber, motion to adjourn.
VOTE: 5-0: Motion Passed.

Chairwoman Koerner adjourned the meeting at 11:17 a.m.

Laura Koerner
Chairwoman