



Sullivan County

Veterans Committee

Meeting Agenda - Final

100 North Street
Monticello, NY 12701

Chairman Luis Alvarez
Vice Chairman Nicholas Salomone Jr.
Committee Member Terry Blosser-Bernardo
Committee Member Catherine Scott
Committee Member Matt McPhillips

Thursday, October 9, 2025

12:00 PM

Government Center

1. **Call To Order and Pledge of Allegiance**
2. **Roll Call**
3. **Opening Remarks - Luis Alvarez, Chairman**
4. **Commander's Reports - Veterans Service Organizations**

Directors Report:

5. **Veterans Service Agency - Director's Report** [ID-7796](#)
6. **Public Comment**
7. **Resolutions:**
8. **Adjourn**

Sullivan County

Legislative Memorandum

File #: ID-7796

Agenda Date: 10/9/2025

Agenda #: 5.

VETERANS SERVICE AGENCY REPORT

October 9, 2025 - 12:00 PM

Director's Report

▪ *Local Activities*

- On six separate dates in August and September, our Clerk Sheldon Dillon helped to distribute up to 19 pallets of food with Sharon Ferber at the Community Assistance Center to distribute pallets of food. On many occasions after loading pallets, Sheldon will personally deliver the food enabling him to gather information on veterans in need.
- In May, our office established a resource guide to assist veteran students at SCCC in obtaining benefits and services within VA and the local community. As the students have returned for the fall semester, we will confirm a date in October to present this information to the faculty and students and answer any questions they may have.
- On September 9th, our monthly VSO training provided by NYS DVS was completed and was attended virtually. Some of the topics covered included:
 - Benefits
 - Burial
 - Legislative & Executive Actions and Proposals
- On September 16th, I attended the drug pillar meeting along with ATI, Vet 2 Vet staff, and VA Mental Health. September is Suicide Prevention Month. The Task Force Action Plan included:
 - Solution for identified gaps (e.g. rural outreach)
 - My reason for Living Lock Box
 - Loot Boxes (Narcan Kits, Gun Locks)
 - Suicide Prevention Training
 - Vet Fest & Stand Down
 - Blue Envelope Project
 - VA Programs & Treatment Options

- Coffee and Camaraderie & Reel Bonds Veterans Fishing day will continue
- On September 19th, we held our POW/MIA Ceremony in the lobby of the GC. I would like to thank all that attended. As of September 2025, the POW MIA Accounting Agency has recovered 220 of our missing since last year. 157 WWII, 55 Korea, and 8 Vietnam finally providing closure to family and loved ones.
- On Saturday, September 27th, I attended the Annual Vet Fest and Stand Down, sponsored by the Sullivan County Veterans Coalition. All County Veterans organizations were involved to include, ATI and Vet 2 Vet of Sullivan County staff. The Coalition, ATI and AMVETS acquired military surplus and civilian clothing items which were distributed along with food, which was supplied by the office of Paula Kay NY State Assembly. Congressman Josh Riley was in attendance to hear our concerns and help find solutions to challenges we currently face.
- On Sunday, September 28th, I attended the 4th Annual Youth and Veteran Pheasant Hunt, sponsored by the Sullivan County Long Beards and Gary Muthig of the SC Sportsman Federation. Contact information for local veterans' services and VA claims process information was presented.
- On September 30th, our Administrative Assistant, April Barschow went to the Castle Point VA Campus to have her fingerprinting done. She will be receiving her Federal PIV Card soon after.
- Our office has continued to conducted wellness checks for elderly veterans and those suffering from food insecurity within the community. Working closely with our Divisional and County partners we have located and assisted many vets that have never contacted our office or enrolled with VA healthcare. A higher number of our elderly clients are struggling with the cost of groceries and heating their homes.
- *VA & PACT Act Updates*
 - **Veterans' Health Administration - Legislative and Executive Actions & Proposals**

***** Dole Act Becomes Law - But Still Not Implemented by VA.*** On January 2, 2025, the President of the United States signed Elizabeth Dole Act into law. This omnibus bill contained sweeping provisions regarding positive change in improving access to healthcare, reducing Veteran homelessness, improving services and resources for caregivers of Veterans, and providing unprecedented levels of federal funding for County Veterans Service Organizations.

To date, the VA has implemented virtually none of the provisions of the Dole Act. The Congressional staffers who addressed us seemed extremely frustrated from all sides of the political aisle that the VA has not taken any of these actions, including actions that the Dole Act specifies to be "effective immediately."

Apparently, conversations continue to take place in the background between members of Congress and VA leadership, particularly Veterans Health Administration leadership, regarding this multitude of provisions that the VA has not implemented. It is unclear what

further actions Congress will take if these seemingly inexplicable delays by the VA continue.

***** Staffing & Morale Problems at VHA Medical Facilities Reported Throughout the Nation.***

Throughout the conference, multiple reports arose regarding staffing difficulties at VA medical facilities in both urban and rural areas. One Congressional staffer even went as far as referencing "staffing chaos" at too many VA medical facilities.

While VA leadership states that there will not be a major reduction in force at healthcare facilities, staffing attrition at these facilities appears to be taking place in large numbers, with the VA choosing to not replace many of these roles. Reasons cited for this increase in attrition include the terminations of a sizeable number of probationary employees, concerns about the current federal administration's actions toward weakening collective bargaining abilities, return to office policies enforced by the Secretary of the VA, large numbers of voluntary separations under the deferred resignation plan that the VA offered this year, and inability for the VA to pay competitive salaries to healthcare personnel - particularly in areas of specialty care, and even more specifically in the areas of specialty mental health care.

The last of these is especially bizarre, given that the aforementioned Dole Act - signed into law several months ago - removes prior spending caps on VA physician salaries, a measure designed specifically for the VA to improve their ability to recruit and retain doctors with more competitive salaries.

Again, it is unclear why the VA has not implemented this provision of the Dole Act. Statements from VA leadership that Congress needs to give them the authority to pay physicians more money seems to be disingenuous, given that the enactment of the Dole Act already granted this authority to the Veterans Health Administration months ago.

■ ***The Good News***

- ***** Advocacy Continues for H.R. 1970 - Providing Veterans Essential Medications Act.***
This bill, which continues to receive bipartisan support in Congress, calls upon the VA Secretary to reimburse State Veterans Homes for certainly costly drugs or, alternatively, to furnish the State Veterans Homes with these medications directly. All too often, State Veterans Homes wind up covering the difference when a Veteran's medication costs exceed standard VA payments. This is particularly true with medications provided to Veterans with chronic or complex health conditions that necessitate particularly intensive and unique treatment plans. As the nation's Veteran population ages-referred during this conference as the "gray tsunami" - and the prevalence of these complex, chronic health conditions increases among that aging Veteran population, standardizing federal support for these essential medications becomes more important than ever.
- ***** Automatic Enrollment for VA Healthcare Moving Toward Reality for Transitioning Service Members. Under a new level of collaboration between the United States Department of Defense (DoD) and the VA, a Service Member transitioning out of their branch of the military will be able to have their military medical records shared rapidly with the Veterans Health Administration.***

Under this newly designed workflow, when the DoD gets a notice of intent from a Service Member to enroll in Veterans Health Administration care, DoD will transition that Service Member's electronic health records to the Veterans Health Administration within twenty-four hours.

This is a tremendous procedural improvement, one that will improve vastly the ability of a transitioning Service Member to receive the proper continuity of medical care following their discharge from their branch of the military.

- We have continued strong advocacy for surviving spouses and veterans within our county. VSO's Zack Jones and Joseph Putnam have achieved a high success rate on claims and appeals awarding the highest possible ratings and retroactive payments for our veterans and surviving spouses.

VETERANS SERVICE AGENCY REPORT

October 9, 2025 - 12:00 PM

1. Veterans referred to Sullivan County Transportation for VA Medical Appointments:

	<u>Albany</u>	<u>Castle Point</u>	<u>Local</u>
July	3	53	26
August	6	54	36

2. Veterans/Dependents buried in Sullivan County Veterans Cemetery through Sept. 29, 2025:

Veterans Buried Alone 1,181

Dependents 146

Veterans/Spouses 690

Total Burials in Veterans Cemetery - 2,017 (+41 since Dec. 2024)

3. Contacts:

July	287
August	263

4. Applications:

July	11
August	18

5. Homeless Veterans:

July	1
August	0

6. New Veterans

July	6
August	9

7. Phone Calls

July	813
August	741