

**2021-2022 Annual Activity Report  
of  
JAMES V. "CAPT'N JIM" MCMAHAN  
COMMISSION ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS  
FOR HARFORD COUNTY, MARYLAND**

Harford County Councilman: Andre V. Johnson, Liaison  
Chairperson: Mr. Robert A. Brown  
Vice Chair: Mr. Hayden Anthony

June 21, 2022

### **Mission and Vision**

Mission: To advocate for our veterans and their families and connect them to resources through outreach and education.

Vision: A Harford County community that is responsive to the needs of veterans and their families.

### **Duties and Responsibilities:**

To research, assemble, analyze, and disseminate information and educational materials relating to activities and programs that will assist in meeting the needs of all veterans and their families.

To institute and conduct educational and other programs, meetings, and conferences to promote the rights and opportunities for veterans.

To advise the County Executive and County Council on the status of programs and services in the state and County related to the needs of veterans and their families.

To assist in planning appropriate public acknowledgement of the contributions made by veterans and assist in planning commemoration activities recognizing the contributions made by veterans.

### **Introduction**

#### Description

The James V. "Capt'n Jim" McMahan Commission on Veterans Affairs for Harford County ("Veterans Commission") is a volunteer organization appointed by the County Executive and confirmed by the County Council. Members are dedicated Soldiers, Sailors, Marines and Airmen as well as non-Veteran members, who serve veterans and their family members as required by the Commission. The appointed and auxiliary members willingly give of their free time, use their own special expertise, personal and professional contacts, and talents to improve the lives of our Veteran heroes and their families. Many veterans Commission members are active in local, county, state, and national volunteer organizations and may also be members of Veteran Service Organizations such as the Disabled American Veterans, American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and many others. The Veteran Commission members volunteer to work with various subcommittees, work groups, and projects commensurate with expertise and need.

#### Report Summary

The Veterans Commission's 2021-22 year was again impacted by safety restrictions due to the COVID-19 virus, however unlike the previous reporting year the Veterans Commission was able to conduct in-person outreach and events to a limited extent. Although some public events were

limited in scope and required social distancing, that did not deter the Veterans Commission from participating in events such as the annual Resource Fair, 4<sup>th</sup> of July Parade, Veterans Day, and Memorial Day ceremonies. When in-person events were not possible, the use of various web-based platforms were used. Veterans Commission meetings continued using MS Teams, through the technical production by member Bill Montgomery, until October when meetings returned to in-person format. The quarterly Veteran Collaboratives, Maryland Joint County Veterans Commission Meetings, VSO and Congressional Stakeholder meetings, Governor's Challenge, and Crisis Intercept Mapping programs remain in a virtual format.

Requests for assistance from veterans and their family members remained steady throughout the past year, with an increasing diversity of requests from all geographical areas of Harford County. Assistance with benefits claims remained the major category of requests, followed by housing related issues such as rent and homelessness, healthcare and particularly mental health issues, and employment.

The Veterans Commission utilized a wide network of support from Harford County government, local non-government organizations and agencies, Veterans Service Organizations ("VSOs"), Maryland State Agencies and Maryland VA, and the US Department of Veterans Affairs including both the Baltimore-Washington Veterans Benefits Regional Office and the VA Maryland Healthcare System. Commission members participated in a variety of outreach and memorial events including hospital visits, phone calls of support to veterans and their families, funerals, awards and recognition activities, and joint working group sessions.

Veterans Commission monthly meetings had an increase emphasis on distributing information and discussion changing laws that are or will impact veterans. When possible, guest speakers were invited to update the commission on local, state, and federal regulations. Veterans Commission members were then better able to provide up to date information and assistance.

## **Annual Report**

### **The Commission Membership**

The Commission membership consists of thirteen appointed members. Twelve members are appointed by the County Executive and confirmed by the County Council. The County Council appoints one County Council member as a liaison to serve as the Commission Coordinator. The County Executive also appoints three ex-officio members: The Aberdeen Proving Ground (APG) Garrison Commander or designee to represent APG, a Harford Community College representative for veterans' educational issues, and a representative from the Harford County Chamber of Commerce. The County Executive designates a chairperson, and the members designate a Vice-Chair and Recording Secretary. There are also several Auxiliary Members who attend meetings and volunteer to participate in events.

Although not official members, the Commission Coordinator's Legislative Aide plays an important role in receiving messages and Veteran information via phone and email, and then passing this information or request on to the Veterans Commission for action. Mr. Ryan Koch,



Mike Ray 410-459-3712 mike@survice.com  
Harford County Chamber of Commerce representative

Colonel Johnny Casiano\* 410-278-1511 john.m.casiano.mil@army.mil  
The Garrison Commander of Aberdeen Proving Ground

\* *New to the Veterans Commission in 2021-2022*

All terms expire on December 5, 2022.

### **Major Commission Outreach and Informational Events:**

Veterans Resource Fair. The Veterans Commission returned to an in-person, on site event at the Bel Air Army in 2021. There was both the event inside the Armory and a drive-by station set up for those that did not want to come inside. All were provided with goodie bags. The event theme was "Veteran Mental Health, From Awareness to Action." In keeping with the theme, the agencies represented at the Fair were benefits and health related. Tables were dispersed for safety protocols, and masks were required due to attendance requirements of the Federal VA health and benefits teams. Lunch was provided "grab-and-go." Approximately 325 people attended.

The event commenced with an opening ceremony featuring County Executive Barry Glassman and Major General Robert Edmondson, Commanding General, Communications and Electronics Command and Senior Commander at APG. County Executive Glassman and MG Edmondson then presented the awards for the poster and essay contest sponsored by the Susquehanna Chapter of the Military Officers of America (MOAA). New this year to the Resource Fair, MOAA members partnered with Commission members Lisa Brown and Jennifer Button for a poster and essay contest where school children wrote and displayed their thoughts on the theme, "What is a Veteran?" APGFCU sponsored a raffle and four veteran attendee winners each received \$250 gift cards.

In conjunction with the Veterans Resource Fair, Veterans Commission members worked with the Harford County Governmental & Community Relations office to update the Veterans Discount Book and the Veterans Resource Guide. Dana Burl, Program Director for Outreach and Advocacy Program at the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs and Joy Ashcraft, Director - Maryland's Commitment to Veterans and Behavioral Health Administration at the Maryland Department of Health were instrumental in providing the "goody bags" filled with information, resources, and other "SWAG" that was distributed to all attendees.

Harford County Veterans Photo Gallery of Honor. The Gallery of Honor was displayed again this year in recognition of Harford County Veterans. The Director and staff from Harford County's Governmental & Community Relations partnered with the Veterans Commission to display Harford County Veterans pictures and information on the Veterans Commission website.

Wreaths Across America Mobile Unit. Chairperson Brown was one of the guest speakers for the mobile Wreaths Across America mobile unit at the Harford Mall. The event, sponsored by the

Governor William Paca Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR), was inspirational and informative.

Hospital Visits. The Veterans Commission Chaplain, Deacon Vic Petrosino, continued to conduct hospital visits, both in-person and telephonic. These interactions helped veterans tremendously who were sometimes otherwise isolated.

Participation and Collaboration with Maryland State Veterans Outreach Initiatives. The Veterans Commission collaborated with and assisted with the Maryland State Department of Veterans Affairs for the Governors Challenge to Prevent Suicide among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families. The Veterans Commission and the Harford County Department of Community Services is working with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Service Members, Veterans, and their families (SMVF) Technical Assistance Center for the Crisis Intercept Mapping project for suicide awareness and prevention in Harford County. Harford County was selected by the State of Maryland to pilot this project.

Veteran Collaboratives. The Veterans Commission and Harford County Department of Community Services now conduct quarterly virtual Veterans Collaboratives. These informal meetings between service providers and community organizations will serve as an action-oriented platform to share knowledge, celebrate wins, identify gaps, learn together, and build relationships. All are welcome to attend these highly interactive sessions centered on specific topics of interest to veterans and their families such as employment, mental health, and benefits. The opening session featured retired US Navy Lieutenant and SEAL Jason Redmond, a highly sought-after guest speaker, discussing his journey and mental health issues.

Memorial Day Ceremonies. The Veterans Commission participated in the 2022 Bel Air Memorial Day Celebration at Shamrock Park in Bel Air with a wreath presentation by County executive Barry Glassman, Vice-Chair Hayden Anthony, and member Dennis Miller. Commission members answered questions and promoted the 2022 Veterans Resource Fair. Veterans Commission members also participated in Aberdeen and Havre de Grace ceremonies.

**Assistance Requests.** While not a direct service provider, the Veterans Commission supported Veterans and their Families by coordinating support on a myriad of requests to include VA Claims and Benefits, healthcare, tax information, COVID-19 vaccines, coordination for VA Social Worker assistance, obtaining military records, contacting Patient Advocates at the VA Hospital, employment opportunities, unemployment benefits, legal assistance, housing repairs assistance, donation of items, funeral support, scholarship information, sending cards and letters, and providing information to Veteran Service Organizations. The requests for benefits and employment, along with rent assistance, increased as the year progressed.

## **Additional Functions, and Support Activities.**

### **Highlights as an Outreach Commission**

- Harford County Employees Veterans Day breakfast and Marine Corps flag raising
- Havre de Grace Veterans Day parade

- Wreaths Across America wreath laying in Bel Air and Havre de Grace
- Trauma REBOOT graduation ceremony
- State of Maryland Joint County Veteran Commission Meetings
- Aberdeen Retiree Appreciation Day
- Sergeant Alfred B. Hilton breakfast  
APG Pre-retirement Soldier for Life/TAP programs
- Women Veterans Virtual Conference
- APG Military Appreciation Event
- Darlington Lions Club presentation
- Employment outreach opportunities through CVS/Aetna and Gilchrist Hospice
- Veterans Business Outreach Center
- Harford County Spirit of Thanks ceremony

### **Communications: Social Media, Website, and County Partnership**

Facebook. The Commission's Facebook page is one of the major conduits for veteran interaction and questions as well as for the posting of information. Commission member Art Kaff keeps the site current with daily postings of information and responses to questions. The Harford County Veterans Commission Facebook site is located at <https://www.facebook.com/HarfordVeterans12>.

Website. In addition to the Virtual Wall of Honor described earlier, the Veterans Affairs website section of the Harford County website is updated to include meeting minutes, agendas, and assistance information. The Commission receives requests for assistance and information through the site, and the number of these requests continues to increase. Requests for assistance have been received from within and outside of Harford County. Members reach out and contact as soon as possible after a request for assistance is received.

### **Partnering and Support with Other County Agencies**

#### Partnering with Harford County Governmental & Community Relations.

- The Veterans Commission continued to receive strong support and assistance from the Director and staff of the Harford County Governmental & Community Relations. The Harford County Veterans Photo Gallery of Honor, Veterans Day breakfast event for County workers, design and printing of the 2021 Veterans Resource Guide, and marketing products for the Resource Fair are a few of projects the Director and her staff have made possible through their work.
- The Harford County Community Services Director and staff are key to the work on the Veterans Intercept project and providing contacts within other Harford County agencies to assist with veterans' issues, especially when these veterans do not qualify for federal or state assistance.

### **Partnering with Veteran Service Organizations, and Federal and State Departments of Veterans Affairs**

The Veterans Commission received impactful assistance from VSO, State, and Federal organizations that improved the lives of Veterans. There are many agencies and individuals that have helped the Veterans Commission. Noteworthy for their continued support are:

- Maryland State Veterans Service Officer Mike Cantrell. Mr. Cantrell compassionately and expertly handled several requests for veterans benefits and in-person appointments.
- VA Maryland Health Care Systems (VAMHCS) aided with homeless, mental health, housing and healthcare issues. VAMHCS Community Engagement and Partnership Coordinator (CEPC) Melissa Huber assists the Veterans Commission with social work and mental health related issues. Ms. Huber regularly attends the Veterans Commission meetings.

#### **Speakers and Information Sessions presented during Commission meetings:**

- Veronique Hauschild from The Buddy Program, distributed information regarding the non-profit Buddy Program for seniors and veterans to adopt small pets.
- Diane Sancilio, Rick Sullivan, Wayman Scott, Lori Rheubottom, and Gail Blackburn from Gilchrist Hospice provided an overview of the work Gilchrist Hospice does to support veterans and asked for volunteers to assist. Ms. Rheubottom added that there are job opportunities at Gilchrist, and they actively recruit veterans.
- Mr. Bob Norton, Maryland Council of MOAA Chapters provided state legislative update written material for presentation at meetings monthly

#### **Commission Upcoming Projects and Goals 2022**

- Respond to the needs and requests of veterans by quickly finding resources, assistance and guidance as required.
- Continue to reach out to business to publicize job openings and opportunities for veterans.
- Assist and co-sponsor the Veterans Alliance Benefits and Health Clinic at Harford Community College on September 7<sup>th</sup>.
- Conduct the Annual Resource Fair on November 12th.
- Participate in events such as the Fourth of July parades, Veteran Day observances, and Wreaths Across America.
- Conduct a smooth transition when Veteran Commission member appointments end December 5, 2022.

#### **Conclusion**

The James V. "Capt'n Jim" McMahan Commission on Veterans Affairs for Harford County continued to support the needs of the over 19000 veterans and their families in Harford County during the transition of safety and social protocols because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The members have stood steadfast in support of Harford County's veterans by providing support, comfort, education, and assistance. The growth in programs, outreach, and activities would not have been possible without the continued support of the County Executive and his staff and the County Council.