



Alameda County
Veterans Affairs Commission
General Meeting Minutes
Monday, November 17, 2025

Alameda County
**Social Services
Agency**
6955 Foothill Blvd – Ste. 300
Oakland, CA 94605
<http://alamedasocialservices.org>

CALL TO ORDER

- Meeting called to order at 10:06 am
- Roll Call, Quorum Achieved.

| <u>In Attendance:</u> <i>(P=Present, E=Excused, A=Absent, O=Online Attendance)</i> | County Staff Present: |
|--|---|
| G. Owens (Chair) = P O. Farmer (Vice Chair) = Online R. Forbes = P F. Jaffin = E J. McLvain = P K. Warner = E J. Phair = P S. Dolgin = P M. Gilmore = P N. Harrison = P L. Brunner = A J. Loparo = E D. Boldt = P R. Cole = P D. Reed = online S. Yohannes = P A. Gordillo = online M. Reed = online D. Williamson = P J. Jones = P D. Bitner = P R. Hart = P | Jonathan Montano-Flores Anthony Simpson Rhoda Turner Sonya Frost |

AGENDA/DISCUSSION ITEMS:

| Item | Discussion/Recommendations |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Adopt Agenda | Meeting agenda adopted by Commission as read. |
| Approval of Meeting Minutes | Motion to accept meeting minutes from 10/20/2025: Motion to approve: Commissioner Michal Gilmore (M) Commissioner Dian Williamson (S) Motion Passed |
| Public Comment | No public comment. |
| Staff Updates: | Anthony Simpson, VSO, reported increased outreach and claims activity in October despite staffing shortages. The team participated in several community events, including a luncheon and the Swords to Plowshares event in Oakland. Sonya Frost, SSA Division Director, noted food and beverage costs weren't budgeted due to the lack of a line item and should be included in future requests. She shared that the new CVSO facility is nearly ready, pending internet setup. Temporary systems are in place, and |

| | |
|--|---|
| | <p>SSA's rebranding will launch in December. Brown Act training is being planned by County Counsel.</p> <p>Anthony Simpson stressed the need to recognize the County VSO as a vital partner in veteran support and not overlook its contributions.</p> |
| <p>Guest Speaker: Eric Wick</p> <p>Topic: Swords to Plowshares</p> | <p>Eric Wick reported that veteran suicide remains high, especially among younger veterans. He emphasized peer support, direct communication, and connecting individuals to mental health resources as key prevention strategies and encouraged ongoing community outreach..</p> <p>Discussion/Q&A followed.</p> <p>Laura, VA Suicide Prevention Coordinator, explained that 988 responders are trained in crisis intervention but not clinicians. Pressing 1 connects veterans to specialized support. The VA team follows up within 24 hours, assesses risk, and coordinates care. She highlighted 988's effectiveness in providing timely help.</p> <p>Anthony clarified that the Compact Act of 2020, outlined in 38 CFR Part 17, defines the VA's responsibilities in providing care to veterans.</p> |
| <p>Sub-Committee Reports</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Outreach: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Chair Owens highlighted the Veterans Summit scheduled for January 15, 2026, at Las Positas College ○ Vice Chair Omar Farmer announced that he and Mia Clark, a stand-down service provider, are organizing an Adopt-a-Veteran event for December. He noted that additional details will be shared via email by the end of the week. ○ Farmer explained the original intent of rotating meeting locations was to increase outreach and visibility across the county. ○ Vice Chair Farmer supported the idea of occasionally rotating meetings to maintain outreach while using the new VSO as a central hub. ➤ Executive: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Chair Owens reported that the recent Executive Committee meeting was attended only by himself and Shewee as others experienced technical issues. They discussed the Nomination Committee, upcoming guest speaker, veteran observance days, legislative updates, and membership. ➤ PAL Legislation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Commissioner Phair reported on Senate Bill 694 (Deceptive Practices for Veterans), which would make it |

unlawful under California law to charge veterans for assistance with VA claims in violation of federal law. The bill also prohibits unauthorized access to veterans' personal records and places violations under the Consumer Legal Remedies Act.

- He noted that eight counties, including San Francisco, Contra Costa, and Los Angeles, have endorsed the bill. Commissioner Phair recommended submitting a PAL request for the Alameda County Board of Supervisors to formally support the legislation.

Chair Owens proposed a vote on whether to allow Commissioner Michael Phair to move forward with submitting a legislative position request. All responded with "Aye."

Outcome:

The proposal was approved by unanimous vote.

Motion for the Veterans Affairs Commission to file a Policy, Advocacy, and Legislation (PAL) position request to the Board of Supervisors in support of SB 694.

Motion to approve: Commissioner Phair (M)
Commissioner (S)

Motion Passed

- Commissioner Phair noted a lack of significant legislative activity in Washington but highlighted a bill seeking to award a Congressional Gold Medal to World War II nurses. Despite multiple attempts over five years, the bill has limited support.
- **Veteran Memorial Building:**
 - Commissioner Brunner to follow up with Omar regarding archived lawsuits related to veterans' removal from memorial buildings in Berkeley, Oakland, and Albany.
 - Lawsuits, reportedly from the 1990s, were found in favor of the veterans but are not available online.
 - Documents referencing the cases were discovered in archived materials at the Berkeley Veterans Memorial Building.
 - Commissioner Brunner plans to visit the Berkeley courthouse to request physical copies from the archives.
 - The goal is to locate official records and determine next steps based on Omar's input.
- **Nomination:**

Commissioner Yohannes shared the following update:

 - Nominations were collected via email.
 - Current nominees::

| | |
|--|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Chair – Commissioner Yohannes ▪ Vice Chair – Commissioner Phair (self-nominated) ○ Final call for any additional nominations. ○ Commissioner Yohannes added the following remarks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Both nominees are willing to serve to keep the Commission moving forward. ▪ Appreciation was expressed to Commissioners Owens and Farmer for their continued support and institutional knowledge. ○ Commissioner Owens confirmed there were no further nominations. <p>Action Taken:</p> <p>A vote was conducted.</p> <p>By acclamation, Commissioner Yohannes was confirmed Chair and Commissioner Phair was confirmed Vice Chair.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Chair Owens shared the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Executive Committee includes five members: Chair, Vice Chair, and three others. ▪ He will be stepping down to allow other commissioners the opportunity to serve. ▪ With 22 members on the commission, there is strong talent to draw from. ▪ The Commission will reach out to identify interested members for the open seats. |
| <p>ORAL COMMUNICATION/ANNOUNCEMENTS</p> | <p>A motion was made not to hold a meeting in December.</p> <p>Motion to approve: Commissioner Owens (M) Commissioner Williamson (S)</p> <p>Motion Passed</p> <p>There was a brief discussion regarding the meeting location for 2026.</p> <p>The Commission discussed conflicts with federal holidays on the third Monday of January and February. It was agreed that, moving forward, meetings will be held on the following Tuesday for convenience.</p> <p>Commissioner Harrison noted that some appointments are set to expire next year and asked what steps are needed or necessary to address them.</p> <p>Commissioner Phair mentioned, even if we’ve signed up before, we need to reapply by completing the application again—typically about a month before the expiration date.</p> |

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| | Commissioner Gordillo announced that American Legion for 68th will be hosting their Thanksgiving Dinner this coming Saturday at 5:00 p.m. at the Hayward Memorial Building. |
| ADJOURNMENT | Meeting adjourned at 11:59 pm. |