

**OKLAHOMA VETERANS COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
AUGUST 8, 2025, 10:00 A.M.
CLAREMORE VETERANS HOME
3001 W. BLUE STARR DRIVE
CLAREMORE, OK 74017**

MINUTES OF REGULAR MEETING:

The Oklahoma Veterans Commission held a Regular Meeting on Friday, August 8, 2025, at 10:00 a.m., at the Claremore Veterans Home, 3001 W. Blue Starr Drive, Claremore, OK 74017. A Notice of this meeting was filed with the Secretary of State on November 4, 2024. The Agenda of this meeting was also properly posted at least twenty-four (24) hours prior to this meeting pursuant to the provisions of Title 25 O.S. § 311. ODVA Executive Assistant Jessica Stuehler served as Clerk of the Commission for this Meeting. The Agenda and Minutes of the meeting actions are set out below.

AGENDA:

CHAIRMAN BRETT MARTIN:

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Martin called the meeting to order at 10:05 a.m.

II. DETERMINATION OF QUORUM

A. ROLL CALL

Chairman Martin asked the Clerk to call the roll. The roll was taken as follows:

Commissioner Allen – Present
Commissioner Dukes – Present
Commissioner Ellington – Absent
Commissioner Martin – Present
Commissioner Mutchler - Present
Commissioner Offel – Absent
Commissioner Orr – Present
Commissioner Perry – Absent

The Clerk notified Chairman Martin that 5 Commissioners were present.

B. DECLARATION OF QUORUM

III. The Chair declared that a quorum was present. Also present was General Counsel for the Oklahoma Veterans Commission, John O'Connor.

IV. VERIFICATION OF PROPER NOTICE OF MEETING AND POSTING OF THE AGENDA

The Clerk verified proper notice and posting of the agenda.

Official notice filed with the Secretary of State on **November 4, 2024**.

Agenda posted at the **Oklahoma Veterans Complex** on **August 7, 2025 at 1:25 PM** and at the **Claremore Veterans Home** on **August 7, 2025 at 8:05 AM**.

V. INVOCATION

Commissioner Orr led the Invocation.

VI. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Commissioner Dukes led the Pledge of Allegiance.

VII. WELCOME TO VISITORS AND GUESTS.

Chairman Brett Martin welcomed commissioners, staff, residents, and guests, expressing appreciation for the hospitality of the Claremore Veterans Home leadership and staff. He emphasized the value of holding meetings at veterans' facilities to maintain close ties with the people served.

VIII. BUSINESS

A. DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION REGARDING APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF THE MAY 9, 2025, OKLAHOMA VETERANS COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING.

Chairman Martin asked the Commission if there was any discussion.

There was no discussion.

Commissioner Allen made the motion to approve the May 9, 2025, meeting minutes.

Commissioner Orr seconded the Motion.

Chairman Martin asked the Clerk to call the roll.

Commissioner Allen – Aye

Commissioner Dukes – Aye

Commissioner Martin – Aye

Commissioner Mutchler - Aye

Commissioner Orr – Aye

The Clerk notified the Chair that the vote was 5 Ayes, 0 Nays.

Chairman Martin declared the motion passed.

B. CHAIRMAN BRETT MARTIN, GENERAL HOUSEKEEPING, DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION ON THE FOLLOWING:

i. The Oklahoma Veterans Foundation.

Commissioner Martin stated that the foundation is established as an Oklahoma Corporation and recognized as a charity in the great state of Oklahoma. An application to the IRS has been submitted to be recognized as a 501 (c) 3 organization, and that there is an EIN number established.

Commissioner Ellington is working on the by laws with John O'Connor and the goal is to put into place as soon as possible, as there are already people out there ready to donate.

ii. Oklahoma Veteran Suicide Task Force.

Commissioner Martin stated that this will be his last report on this topic. We concluded last November. The report was sent to Senator Rosino but no action has been done. He's going to go visit him later in September and talk to him about it, but at this time we have everything on our part and it's up to the Senators to take it from there.

iii. Veteran Service Officer (VSO) Training.

Commissioner Martin stated that ODVA does an amazing job of training for Veteran Service Officers but we have a contingent of veteran service organizations across Oklahoma that have many more service sites. He would like to optimize training through ODVA for Veteran Service Officers. Lisa Acevedo has been in conversations with one of his representatives who has spent a lot of his own money to be trained up on Veteran Service Officer responsibilities. The plan is to create an MOU and Commissioner Martin has a couple of examples to bring to ODVA. He requested for Lisa Acevedo to schedule a working group level meeting with the commissioners and to bring a formal idea and proposition on this.

iv. Oklahoma Veterans Advisory Forum.

Commissioner Martin stated the need to hold another forum but holding one for this quarter is probably not going to happen and he's out of country all of September. He would like to schedule it for some time in October. The advisory forum is a forum where we take subject matter experts from ODVA, we invite veterans, veteran service organizations, to come to a meeting and kind of like a town hall where they get to ask us questions, and instead of one of the commissioners to answer, to instead have a subject matter expert from ODVA give the best answer. May need to bring an outside speaker in to talk about something, or one of the commissioners talk about something before we go to the questions, but it's an opportunity for people to ask questions.

C. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, JAY BYNUM, STAFF INTRODUCTIONS.

Director Bynum welcomed the Commissioners, and thanked the host of the Claremore home, Jenifer Miller. He also extended an invitation to tour the facility after the meeting has concluded. Director Bynum introduced Lisa Acevedo, Chris Busby, and Candice McIntire, the experts in their fields and that they will be sharing the progress that ODVA has made.

D. REPORTS WITH DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION ON THE FOLLOWING:

i. **CHRISTOPHER BUSBY, CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER, REPORTS, DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION ON THE FOLLOWING:**

Chris Busby has been with the organization for about four months and has focused on improving financial operations and workflow. Accounts receivable were initially reported at \$13.4 million, but the actual figure is closer to \$2 million after detailed review.

Workflow automation for financial processes is being implemented, with a go-live target of October 1, aiming to streamline payments and close out old bank accounts. Cash handling in homes is being phased out in favor of card-based systems for residents and employees, improving tracking and reducing cash management.

Computer and vehicle refresh programs are underway, with a quarter of computers being replaced each year and a reduction in the vehicle fleet from 97 to 81.

The agency underwent an audit related to COVID funds, with some issues found but most resolved, and only a small amount outstanding.

Document storage and destructions processes are being improved, with efforts to clear out old records and comply with state rules.

There was an issue with uncashed checks, which, if not voided within 36 months, could result in the state keeping the funds. Some of these were federal funds, not state appropriations.

Director Bynum explained that the state's process for handling federal reimbursements is problematic, as funds can be clawed back by the state due to system limitations. The plan is to cash flow the money and seek legislative appropriation to recover it.

Chris submitted a \$10.3 million grant reimbursement request and identified an additional \$1.3 million in potential reimbursements.

Receivables are now being tracked by home, with a significant portion of outstanding balances attributed to deceased or discharged residents.

Financials show a \$6.2 million increase in revenue year-over-year, with most expenses related to labor. The agency is working to improve cost controls, especially in homes with higher fixed costs or lower reimbursement rates.

Chris and the team are focused on cleaning up financial records, improving automation, and ensuring compliance with state and federal requirements.

A digital copy of this presentation is available as an attachment to these minutes.

Director Bynum emphasized a shift in organizational focus from simply following processes to achieving meaningful outcomes for veterans. The mission is to connect Oklahoma veterans and their families with all available benefits and services, whether federal, state, or from nonprofit

organizations. The approach is moving from a reactive, office-based model to a proactive, outreach-driven one, aiming to reach all 260,000+ veterans in the state. Bynum stressed the importance of providing world-class service efficiently and cost-effectively, using data to drive decisions and measure performance. The organization is adopting centralized planning and management, but empowering decentralized execution, and is building partnerships with other agencies and organizations to maximize impact and value for veterans.

John O'Connor asked a question about homeless veterans and if there is someone or would ODVA consider having someone reach out to the people who manage the homeless populations in Tulsa, Oklahoma City, and Enid.

Director Bynum described ongoing efforts to build partnerships with organizations like Oklahoma Veterans United and other agencies to better serve homeless veterans. He emphasized a shift toward outcome-focused leadership, professional standards, transparency, and continuous learning within the organization. Leadership training is being conducted to instill these values. The organization is moving from a fragmented, site-based approach to a more centralized and standardized model for logistics, food service, facilities management, and onboarding. This includes consolidating purchasing and training processes to improve efficiency and consistency across all homes. Quality assurance is being reinvigorated, with plans to model oversight after best practices and ensure high standards in care and compliance. Facility upgrades, such as at Ardmore, are underway to modernize and address long-standing issues. Finally, Bynum addressed the high costs and inefficiencies of agency staffing that arose after COVID, noting efforts to reduce reliance on agency labor and improve direct hiring and retention of staff.

The organization significantly reduced its reliance on costly contract nursing staff by giving raises to direct employees, resulting in projected annual payroll savings of \$5 million while improving team morale and onboarding. They transitioned to 12-hour shifts, which reduced manpower needs by 20%, and are exploring flexible part-time staffing models. On the financial side, leadership is preparing to brief the legislature on the need for more flexible and sustainable funding, as current appropriations are insufficient for maintenance and modernization. They are considering alternative funding sources, such as those used in other states (e.g., taxes, mineral rights, lottery fees). Candice has been tasked with increasing admissions and reducing delays, aiming to fill empty beds and improve efficiency. Her outreach and process improvements have already helped the organization reach a goal of 1,000 residents, the highest since 2020, by streamlining admissions and leveraging relationships with hospitals and other partners. The focus remains on mission-driven, outcome-based service for veterans.

iii. **CANDICE MCINTIRE, STATE VETERANS HOMES OUTREACH AND MARKETING, REPORTS, DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION ON THE FOLLOWING:**

Candice described how the admissions process was streamlined by moving from paper-based approvals to a digital system, reducing approval times from up to three weeks to mostly within 24 hours. The organization set a target of five admissions per home per week, which is now publicly posted, helping staff and families track availability and driving team performance. Progress is measured in smaller, achievable steps, with homes like Clinton and Norman reaching high occupancy rates (above 90% and nearly 85%, respectively). Centralizing calls and applications has reduced redundant work and improved efficiency. The team is also working to accommodate families with flexible admission times. Overall, these changes have improved admissions efficiency, reduced staff workload, and enhanced the quality of life for veterans and their families.

Chairman Martin asks a question about lessons learned from these new processes.

Candice states that they are in that process now, and that they are going through lessons learned during their meetings. The team is working to streamline and standardize the admissions paperwork by creating a single, centralized ODVA admission packet for all homes. This will reduce redundant manual entry of information like names and dates. Once finalized, the packet will be digitized so forms can auto-fill, saving significant staff time. This improvement aims to allow patient services staff to focus more on new applicants rather than being tied up with repetitive paperwork.

Chairman Martin asks a question about the forms and if they could be pre-loaded on the website for patients or residents to fill out ahead of time.

Candice responds that she would have to work through Shawn Kirkland and Rob Arrington to take a look at that and the legalities involved but that they will take a look and get as much ahead of time as they can.

Director Bynum mentions that they are careful with some of those processes and some initiatives are in the works of being established within the state. The organization is implementing a secure digital login system for veterans, similar to federal platforms, to streamline access to services and protect personal information. They are also clarifying VA billing processes, ensuring residents understand that ODVA will be the sole biller for care, and requiring attestations to that effect. Education efforts are ongoing to address confusion among families and providers. Outreach has increased, with more inquiries and admissions from both in-state and out-of-state veterans, reflecting the program's growing reputation and efforts to fill available beds efficiently.

The organization is working to make admissions more flexible and responsive, including enabling weekend admissions and providing

personalized support to address delays for veterans and their families. Efforts are underway to standardize agreements and billing processes with VA medical centers and private providers, ensuring clarity and compliance for all parties. The team is also improving the management of veterans' trust funds by moving away from cash handling and ensuring proper safeguards like surety bonds. Overall, these initiatives aim to streamline operations, enhance service quality, and prepare for future partnerships, such as with the upcoming VA hospital in Tulsa.

The organization is developing new partnerships with VA facilities, including interim service agreements and potential shared use of real estate for veteran services. Outreach efforts are expanding through public service announcements, sports networks, and direct engagement at community locations to reach more veterans. There is a major initiative to build a comprehensive, shareable veterans registry for the state. Infrastructure improvements and consultant support are being used to prepare for upcoming VA inspections, with the goal of passing on the first attempt and increasing resident admissions. Overall, the focus is on modernizing services, expanding access, and ensuring high standards of care and compliance.

The organization is consolidating veteran data from various sources to create a reliable contact list, currently narrowed down to about 110,000 good records. They are working on data-sharing agreements with state agencies and exploring additional data sources to improve geographic targeting. Additionally, the training symposium is being revamped to focus on hands-on, standards-based training, aiming to expand outreach capacity and ensure consistent, high-quality service across all veteran service officers and partner organizations.

iv. **LISA ACEVEDO, ODVA DIRECTOR OF VETERAN SERVICES & LEGISLATIVE LIAISON, REPORTS, DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION ON THE FOLLOWING:**

The Joint Service Officers Training has been rebranded as VSOT (Veteran Service Officer Training) and rescheduled for January 16 as a hands-on, day-and-a-half event. The training will feature the National Veterans Legal Services Program (NVLSP), which provides advanced legal support and will present six breakout topics. The focus is on practical, case-based learning for various types of veterans' claims. The program is expanding to include participants from other states and local organizations, and a pilot is underway to accredit volunteer VSOs under ODVA, maintaining their training with the federal VA. Additionally, computer-based training modules are available, and efforts are ongoing to make these accessible to partner organizations through MOUs. The goal is to position ODVA as a leader and resource hub for veteran service organizations statewide.

The organization has restructured to improve efficiency, adding new leadership roles and shifting away from less effective itinerant work. There is a strong focus on standardizing and validating processes through "train the trainer" programs and outreach, including partnerships with tribal organizations. Accountability and high standards are emphasized, with efforts to ensure all staff are properly certified. On the legislative side, the agency is working to educate lawmakers about its unique funding structure and the need for more flexible, tailored funding mechanisms. The goal is to secure alternative funding sources and greater operational flexibility to support the agency's growing needs.

The organization is preparing to update administrative rules and finalize its legislative agenda, with input from directors and the legislative committee. Leadership is actively exploring new funding streams and sharing options with the team. Recent hiring events have brought in many new staff, highlighting the importance of aligning talent with organizational needs. There are plans for further organizational changes to improve accountability, reporting, and efficiency. Building partnerships and advisory councils is a priority, aiming to strengthen relationships with stakeholders across the state and enhance communication and collaboration.

The organization has focused on matching the right people with the right tasks, which has led to successful large-scale hiring events. Leadership is prioritizing building partnerships and advisory councils to strengthen relationships across the state. There are plans for organizational changes to improve accountability and data reporting. Regarding finances, it was clarified that \$222,000 in COVID-related spending was for agency staffing, and emergency funds are being strategically used to support operations, particularly in Sallisaw, while delaying the use of other appropriated dollars.

Commissioner Dukes asks a question about training for veteran service officers. There is a recognized challenge in ensuring all veteran service officers across different organizations receive consistent training and information. Currently, standards and training vary, leading to inconsistencies. The goal is for ODVA to serve as a central hub so that all service officers are trained to the same standard and provide uniform information—ensuring everyone "speaks the same language" when serving veterans.

The organization aims to strategically deploy veteran service officers (VSOs) to avoid overlap and gaps, using a tiered system of expertise (from entry-level to master specialists). Collaboration with other organizations, including tribal and national groups, is encouraged to maximize coverage and expertise. There is a strong stance against fraud and pay-for-play practices, with new legislation (effective July 1)

requiring any organization that charges veterans for services to inform them that free assistance is available through ODVA, ensuring transparency and protection for veterans.

New legislation effective July 1 requires any veteran service organization that charges veterans for services to provide written notice that ODVA offers those services free of charge. The organization is preparing new training and standards to ensure compliance and high-quality service, and is committed to rooting out improper or fraudulent practices. Leadership encourages open collaboration and participation in legislative committees, while adhering to rules about committee membership. The overall focus is on transparency, integrity, and partnership in serving veterans.

IX. NEW BUSINESS

- i. Strategies for expanding outreach to underserved rural veterans.
- ii. Planning for Veterans Day activities and community open houses.
- iii. Consideration of policy adjustments to improve collaboration with VA facilities.
- iv. Discussion on enhancing volunteer programs.

X. PUBLIC COMMENT

- i. Residents expressed gratitude for the Commission's presence and requested more recreational programs, additional therapy options, and improvements to visiting spaces.
- ii. Staff shared appreciation for recent maintenance improvements.

XI. OKLAHOMA VETERANS COMMISSION DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION REGARDING THE NEXT REGULARLY SCHEDULED MEETING.

NEXT REGULAR MEETING:

November 7, 2025, 10:00AM
Lawton Veterans Home
501 SE Flower Mound Road
Lawton, OK 73501

Chairman Martin asked the Commission if there was any discussion.
There was no discussion.

XII. DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION REGARDING ADJOURNMENT.

Chairman Martin asked the Commission if there was any discussion.
There was no discussion.

Commissioner Dukes made the motion to adjourn.

Commissioner Orr seconded the Motion.

Chairman Martin asked the Clerk to call the roll. The vote was as follows:

Commissioner Allen – Aye

Commissioner Dukes - Aye
Commissioner Martin – Aye
Commissioner Mutchler – Aye
Commissioner Orr – Aye

The Clerk notified Chairman Martin the Roll Call vote was 5 Ayes, 0 Nays.
Chairman Martin declared the Motion passed.

Chairman Brett Martin thanked all attendees for their participation and reaffirmed the Commission's commitment to veteran care and advocacy.

Chairman Martin declared the meeting adjourned at 11:48 a.m.