



STATE OF ALABAMA
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

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REAR ADMIRAL W. CLYDE MARSH, USN, (RET.)
COMMISSIONER

June 30, 2014

The Honorable Robert Bentley
Governor of Alabama
Alabama State Capitol
600 Dexter Avenue
Montgomery, AL 36130

Dear Governor Bentley:

Please find enclosed the Alabama Executive Veterans Network (AlaVetNet) Commission's Long-Range Plan as required by Executive Order 42.

This plan was developed with input from 18 state agencies and six advisory committees that comprise the Commission and represent a unified balance of services in areas of behavioral health, employment, education, homelessness, legal assistance and family services. The enclosed plan describes the goals, objectives, and strategies to provide advocacy and services to Alabama Servicemembers, Veterans and their Families (SMVF).

AlaVetNet and its various partners and stakeholders are committed to the continuing progress to improve the quality of life and wellbeing of those who are serving, and have served in uniform and their families. Alabama is truly most fortunate to have highly skilled services throughout the state, and it is the AlaVetNet Commission's intent to build a unified roadmap in bringing these services together.

As Commission Co-chairs, we are available to answer any questions you may have regarding the AlaVetNet Long-Range Plan.

Sincerely,

W. Clyde Marsh
Commissioner, ADVA

James Reddoch
Commissioner, ADMH

Alabama Executive Veterans Network

AlaVetNet

Long-Range Plan



Created By:

The Alabama Executive Veterans Network Commission

Presented To:

Governor Robert Bentley

June 30, 2014

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Acknowledgement

The State of Alabama has made a commitment to provide the best possible services to our nation's Servicemembers, Veterans and their Families (SMVF) by establishing the Alabama Executive Veterans Network (AlaVetNet) Commission through Executive Order 42 signed by Governor Robert Bentley on December 10, 2013.

An organizational and orientation meeting of the newly created AlaVetNet Commission, co-chaired by W. Clyde Marsh, Commissioner of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and Jim Reddoch, Commissioner of the Department of Mental Health, took place on January 23, 2014, in the 5th floor conference room of the RSA Plaza in Montgomery, AL.

The Commission is comprised of the following state agencies: Department of Veterans Affairs, Department of Mental Health, Alabama National Guard, Department of Labor, Serve Alabama, Office of the Attorney General, Department of Education, Department of Corrections, Department of Economic and Community Affairs, Department of Post-Secondary Education, Commission on Higher Education, Department of Rehabilitation Services, Department of Public Health, Medicaid Agency, Law Enforcement Agency, Department of Human Resources, Department of Transportation, and Office of the Chief Justice.

To date, the Commission has hosted five (5) meetings to include the initial meeting on January 23; a meeting with all respective committees on March 13, 2014; the Commission's first quarterly meeting of FY 2014 on April 23; and meetings on May 22 and June 19, 2014. Within three months of the governor's signing of Executive Order 42 that established the Alabama Executive Veterans Network (AlaVetNet), the Commission formed the following six committees that function under its authority: Behavioral Health, Education, Employment, Homelessness, Legal Assistance and Family Services. On March 13, 2014, representatives from a cross section of state, federal and non-governmental agencies convened at the Troy University campus in Montgomery to form the six committees, install the committees' leadership, and to initiate the development of each committee's strategic plan that will ultimately support the AlaVetNet Commission's Long-Range Plan.

The Executive Order requires the AlaVetNet Commission to study and evaluate all services in the state and direct at improving the well-being of SMVF in the areas of education, employment, health, homelessness and legal assistance. The Commission also included family services.

The Executive Order also requires the AlaVetNet Commission to develop a long-range plan, reviewed annually, for a comprehensive statewide system to SMVF, which, to the extent possible, is derived from known best practices.

The AlaVetNet long-range plan will address key strategies for developing, improving, sustaining and delivering services to SMVF to include the establishment of an AlaVetNet website, logo and branding, and launching the Alabama Veterans Cellular News Briefs on July 15, 2014. The plan will also incorporate methods to identify existing resources, establish a database of resources and employ strategic measures to increase communication and awareness of resources among SMVF and stakeholders.

Based on those strategies, the AlaVetNet Commission submits the following initial long-range plan:

Behavioral Health

(1) Develop Networking Relationships Among Providers that Serve Military Members, Veterans and their Families

AlaVetNet will provide mission-ready resources for service members including Active Duty, Reserve, National Guard, Veterans and their family members in order to facilitate their easy access with formal and informal services. AlaVetNet will identify healthcare service providers across the state as well as gaps in services. The Commission will use website technology and social media to inform SMVF of available healthcare services by creating an AlaVetNet Website and a statewide healthcare phone application for immediate and convenient access.

(2) Path of Resolution

AlaVetNet will develop an educational program for community healthcare providers that will focus on military culture and behavioral health issues common to servicemembers and Veterans. The Alabama National Guard, represented on the Commission, will continue to conduct Continuing Education Unit (CEU) workshops across the state with support from institutions of higher learning such as the University of Alabama at Birmingham and Troy University.

Employment

(1) Reduce Veteran Unemployment to Below 5% for Current and Future Alabama Veterans

In the next five years, some 250,000 service men and women each year will be exiting the military and returning to America's communities seeking to fulfill the American dream with meaningful employment. With Alabama's Veterans unemployment rate at approximately 7%, AlaVetNet proposes to take immediate steps to help mitigate the unemployment rate for in-state and returning Veterans and also to reduce the Veterans unemployment rate to below 5% by 2016.

The Commission will focus on improving public/private partnerships, identifying barriers to Veteran's employment, incentivize proactive hiring of Veterans by recognizing employers, agencies, and organizations who demonstrate excellence in supporting Veterans, and formally develop a statewide Veteran's entrepreneurial initiative. AlaVetNet will encourage state agencies to partner with private organizations that can focus on helping Veterans find employment opportunities.

The Commission will develop award incentives to recognize employers who make hiring Veterans a priority, and proposes to give tax incentives to companies that hire unemployed Veterans. AlaVetNet will work with the Alabama Department of Labor (DOL), Alabama Business Council, Small Business Administration and the Alabama Community College System to consolidate an

employer and Veteran employee program. AlaVetNet will seek the opportunity for hosting in 2015 a series of Regional Employer Summits by partnering with state, federal and non-governmental agencies.

(2) Improve Veteran Underemployment

AlaVetNet will partner with public and private agencies to reduce underemployment and support Veterans in finding meaningful careers vice “just a job-any job” by optimizing educational opportunities, educating employers about the value of Veterans, expediting developmental certification programs, and through legislation, establish a manner in which an appointing authority for a State agency will be allowed to promote a disabled Veteran regardless of the disabled Veteran’s standing on the requested register.

The Commission recommends tax incentives to companies that create job training that translates Veterans’ military skills and experience to career opportunities. AlaVetNet will encourage bridge training with community colleges and will work with the Alabama National Guard to incorporate non-National Guard Veterans in the National Guard’s Civilian Job Training program.

AlaVetNet will work with DOL to pass legislation for accelerating and streamlining licenses and the certification process for Veterans seeking critical skill employment. Finally, AlaVetNet will help identify public and private programs to help financially bridge Veterans as they transition from active service to a meaningful career.

(3) Improve Veteran Retention

Once a Veteran has found a suitable job, the challenge turns to keeping it. AlaVetNet, working with DOL, Small Business Administration and Network of Family Resources Centers will encourage peer-to-peer guidance programs in schools, businesses, and government agencies across the state. It is recommended that employer Veteran employment tax incentives include criteria not just for hiring Veterans, but from retaining them over time.

(4) Cross-Cutting Veteran Employment Initiatives

Reducing Veterans' unemployment, improving Veteran underemployment, and facilitating veteran retention are tightly coupled goals. Success is engendered by three major cross-cutting initiatives. The first is implementing a deliberate, consistent, and persistent Strategic Communications Campaign targeted at key stakeholders (i.e. Veterans and their families; employers; and, public and private employment service providers).

The second initiative is to establish an AlaVetNet branding for "Veteran Friendly Employers" which includes specific criteria to reinforce hiring, developing, and retaining veterans. The final initiative is to develop an Alabama Veteran Employment Roadmap to help Veterans identify and navigate the labyrinth of existing public and private programs designed to help Veterans find meaningful work, grow in skill, and continue to contribution after hiring.

Education

To be successful AlaVetNet will identify Service Members, Veterans and their Families (SMVF), determine needs, and link them with existing support resources. This will be done using Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping techniques to insure maximum coverage of military communities, provide for efficient integration of support resources and aid in identifying gaps in support coverage. The education goals are:

(1) Educate to Inform and Train Veterans

The AlaVetNet strategy includes locating SMVF statewide to determine their informational and training needs. A multiyear effort to engage Veterans will begin by interacting with National Guard and Reserve Service Members and Families at Yellow Ribbon pre-deployment and post-deployment events. This will expand to include active duty Service Members and will transition to other venues as mobilizations wind down. A key objective is to track SMVF in their educational and other pursuits following deployment.

To insure SMVF are aware of education benefits and to assist in successful completion of their higher education goals, a comprehensive effort has begun to reach out to them throughout all 2 and 4 year institutions in the state. A primary method of outreach is to promote the establishment of Student Veteran Centers on all Alabama College and University campuses led by the Governor's endorsement.

A partnership has been initiated with the Community College System to create a unified approach to meet the education needs of SMVF. Promoting educational success and workforce development across the state is of primary importance in this partnership and awarding college credit for learning received on the job and through military training will reduce the amount of time it takes SMVF to complete their certificate and degree programs.

AlaVetNet proposes legislation to allow in-state tuition to all Veterans attending state supported colleges, universities and technical schools. The Commission also agrees to provide assistance in developing new initiatives to include a military friendly culture by staff professional development in the awareness of education benefits, and increased awareness of resources available to meet student needs. Finally an increased emphasis in obtaining professional and/or industry recognized certifications and expanding workplace learning opportunities will ensure the SMVF are ready to enter the workforce with the necessary skill set to succeed. Additional legislation may also be proposed to further assist all SMVF in their educational endeavors.

Additionally, a pilot effort by Priority Soldier (community Veteran organization) targeted to assist the state's Career Centers is underway in Birmingham to provide recently discharged Veterans with career building skills to include mock interviews, resume writing and basic computer skills. A similar effort last summer in Birmingham was very successful in getting Veterans employed in quality jobs. A companion effort will bring together employers and other SMVF support resources in the Birmingham/Jefferson County area this fall.

(2) Communicate to Inform and Involve Stakeholders (Corporate, Non-profit, Associations, Organizations, Government, Public)

A myriad of local, county, state and regional resources exist to aid SMVF in all of the functions under the purview of AlaVetNet. A partnership has already been

established to provide more robust community assistance information to SMVF through the statewide United Way 211 system. More partnerships will be developed as other resources are identified that can provide services to our SMVF to fill gaps identified in the geographic mapping process. Three other support efforts currently underway are:

The AmeriVet Clergy Commission

This initiative of the National Leadership Congress (NLC) will sponsor numerous events with nationally known experts over the next year, to include an innovative 'Gateway to Hope' Conference in September which will deal with moral injury.

Veterans Health Administration (VHA)

AlaVetNet will also support and promote the annual mandated VHA Mental Health Summits this summer and fall which promote collaboration between the USDVA and the community to better serve our SMVF.

Alabama Cooperative Extension System (ACES)

AlaVetNet supports the integration of SMVF support in every county through ACES, modeled after an extremely successful effort in St. Clair County.

Homelessness

(1) Reflect a Broad Spectrum of Homeless and Housing Representatives

In 2015, AlaVetNet will identify key stakeholders for membership on the Commission to include service providers that can provide and/or expand affordable housing to SMVF. AlaVetNet will identify events that occur in the state to increase services to homeless Veterans and will develop a statewide calendar of such events. AlaVetNet will engage homeless service providers through teleconferences, webinars and by participating in Regional Planning Commission meetings. The Commission will also initiate a partnership with the Alabama Alliance to end Homelessness (ALAEH) regarding potential AlaVetNet training in November 2014.

(2) Establish a Coordinated Access System of Homeless Services for Servicemembers, Veterans and their Families

AlaVetNet will work collaboratively with homeless service providers to survey SMVF to determine how services were accessed. The Commission will analyze survey results to determine how individuals learned about and accessed homeless services and where gaps may exist in services. AlaVetNet will develop a resource directory and geo-map of homeless services and programs that will include information on housing, financial assistance, employment, faith-based community services and legal assistance. The Commission's intent is to facilitate the implementation of a coordinated access system that will link Veterans and their families to homeless prevention and recovery services by the end of 2015.

Legal Assistance

(1) Provide Legal Assistance to Servicemembers, Veterans and their Families

AlaVetNet will identify and recruit attorneys statewide to be part of a pro bono legal system for SMVF. By December 31, 2014, the AlaVetNet Commission will contact and coordinate services with the Alabama State Bar Volunteer Law Program, local VLPs, and other legal service organizations to share numbers of pro bono for SMVF. The Commission will develop an information sharing mechanism to track and calculate pro bono hours to SMVF and procure necessary funds to cover any incurred cost. AlaVetNet will also promote pro bono legal services through a public relations and marketing plan.

AlaVetNet will actively promote and assist in establishing a statewide Veterans Treatment Court (VTC) program by identifying and using existing successful county programs as models. The Commission will coordinate efforts to establish the program with the Alabama State Bar VTC Task Force, State VTC Task Force and the Federal VA Veterans Court program. AlaVetNet will seek to extend services by developing a statewide mentor training program for all Alabama

Veterans Courts. Twelve VTC pilot programs are currently in existence initiated by the VTC Task Force. The VTCs will provide Veterans an opportunity to receive the prescribed treatment or medical care for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Traumatic Brain Injury, sexual trauma, anger management, substance abuse, or other issues that will allow him or her a second chance to become productive citizens. The VTC program is successful in saving lives, providing hope to families, and diverting Veterans from the criminal justice system.

(2) Advocate for the Passing and Amending of State Law to Further Benefits and Services for Servicemembers, Veterans and their Families

AlaVetNet will survey and compare other state laws to identify gaps in services to SMVF. By August 31, 2014, the Commission will contact the Alabama State Bar, in-state law schools and other groups for assistance with surveying other laws.

AlaVetNet will analyze Alabama state laws to address gaps and other concerns by reviewing materials of reviews of Veterans and military laws performed by the Alabama National Guard and the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs. AlaVetNet will seek to amend legislation to address identified gaps in and to improve the quality of services and benefits for SMVF.

If amendments to existing laws are required, AlaVetNet will draft proposed legislation, identify appropriate sponsors for legislation, and form advocacy groups to push legislation for consideration in the 2015 Regular Legislative Session.

Family Services

(1) Promote and Connect Available Resources and Benefits for Military and Veteran Families

AlaVetNet will identify, or provide assistance in developing a 24-hour service resource for military families via the “211 Connect Alabama” as well as a state map that is web based showing all Veteran-specific groups and general family service agencies and non-profits that provide services for SMVF.

AlaVetNet proposes to create a branding logo, or seal that will convey the purpose of AlaVetNet that can be voluntarily incorporated on websites, printed materials, onsite signage, etc. for agencies and non-profits that wish to promote veterans services. The Commission will utilize a vetting process to confirm the services claims of the agency/non-profit.

AlaVetNet also proposes to establish a Military Family Service Interagency modeled after the Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) organizational concept. A military Family Services umbrella organization could exist to increase visibility and communications between the non-governmental agencies that serve the military community. Potential models could include regional groups (Tennessee Valley, Central Alabama, Southeast and Southwest Alabama) of non-governmental agencies that coordinate on a quarterly basis, communicate with each other, share contact information and service areas. The interagency could collaborate on training; refer each other for client services, etc.

(2) Educate Businesses in Military Culture

AlaVetNet will pursue opportunities for training businesses, service providers and organizations in military culture to allow for a better understanding of the military and Veteran population in Alabama. The Commission will promote initiatives to connect businesses with organizations that provide online and ground training in military culture via professional development and in-services.

(3) Evaluate Services for Best Practices and Allow for Feedback

AlaVetNet will identify, collect and review existing national, state, and local data from community, state and national service providers by using data as a needs assessment in order to strengthen, increase, and/or decrease provided services. AlaVetNet will also use collected data to obtain funding to strengthen the programs and services for Veterans, service members, and military family members in Alabama. The Commission will advocate for businesses and service providers to collect feedback from military and Veteran family members to facilitate and improve services.

Conclusion

Recapitulation of Goals and Near-Term Objectives

Goals:

- (1) Develop networking relationships among healthcare providers that can provide needed services to military members, Veterans and their families
- (2) Reduce Veterans unemployment to below 5%
- (3) Improve Veterans underemployment
- (4) Improve Veteran employment retention
- (5) Educate to inform and train Veterans for career opportunities
- (6) Communicate to inform and involve stakeholders in the AlaVetNet initiative
- (7) Establish a coordinated access system of Veteran homeless services
- (8) Provide pro bono legal assistance to Veterans and their families
- (9) Promote and connect available resources to the needs
- (10) Evaluate services and best practices for delivery and sustainability

Objectives:

- Launch the Alabama Veterans Cellular Broadcasting Network, July 15, 2014
- Establish an AlaVetNet Website to connect SMVF with services by January 1, 2015
- Create a pro bono legal assistance program for SMVF by January 1, 2015
- Partner with U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs for three Mental Health Summits in 2014
- Host “Gateway of Hope” conference in September 2014
- Support a series of Regional Employer Summits in 2015
- Develop and implement a Governor’s Employer Recognition program in 2015
- Facilitate the development of an education program for community healthcare providers that focuses on military culture and mental health issues common to Servicemembers and Veterans

- Reduce Veteran unemployment to below 5% for current and future Alabama Veterans by 2016
- Develop a 24/7 service resource for SMVF through Connect Alabama 211

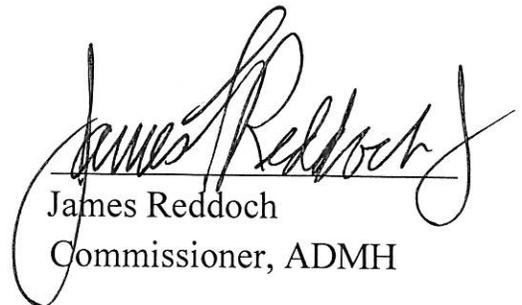
Executive and Legislative Considerations

- Encourage new industry to set a Veteran employee percentage goal of 12% or higher
- Create a Governor's Veteran Friendly Employer Recognition Award Program
- Offer a form of tax incentives to employers who hire unemployed Veterans and to companies that create job training that translates Veterans' military skills and experience to career opportunities
- Establish through legislation a manner in which an appointing authority for a State agency will be allowed to promote a disabled Veteran regardless of the disabled Veteran's standing on the requested State register
- Offer in-state tuition to all Student Veterans and promote reciprocation of such a tuition benefit to neighboring state governors
- Promote and encourage the establishment of Student Veteran Centers on all Alabama College and University Campuses

The AlaVetNet Commission will continue to strive for interagency collaboration, public participation, and mutual sharing of information to facilitate policy decisions and the implementation of this plan as outlined in Executive Order 42. The Commission's main objective is to create a comprehensive statewide system of care and services for Alabama Servicemembers, Veterans and their Families that can serve as a model initiative and shared with other states and nationally.



W. Clyde Marsh
Commissioner, ADVA



James Reddoch
Commissioner, ADMH

EXECUTIVE ORDER NUMBER 42

WHEREAS, Alabama ranks as the third highest state in the nation in the number of persons it deployed to support the Global War on Terrorism with over 30,000 deployed;

WHEREAS, 133 Alabama service members have lost their lives serving their country and their state since September 11, 2001;

WHEREAS, unprecedented numbers of Alabama's service members are experiencing multiple deployments to active theaters of war, separating them from family, community and traditional supports for extended periods of time;

WHEREAS, the adjustment of returning service members and their families to the members' physical and psychological disabilities, including traumatic brain injuries (TBI), post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other debilitating health conditions pose long-lasting and challenging implications for our state;

WHEREAS, a unified, seamless, and systematic method of accessing services for those who have served our country and our state is needed, particularly in the areas of education, employment, health, homelessness, and legal assistance; and,

WHEREAS, it is necessary to create an interagency planning and coordinating body to develop a coordinated system of services in these areas.

NOW, THEREFORE, based upon these considerations, and other good and valid reasons related thereto, I, Robert Bentley, Governor of the State of Alabama, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the State of Alabama, do hereby establish the Alabama Executive Veterans Network, to be known as AlaVetNet, for service members, veterans and their families.

BE IT ORDERED that the AlaVetNet shall consist of the chief officer, or his or her designee, of each of the following participating agencies and organizations:

1. Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs;
2. Alabama Department of Mental Health;
3. Alabama National Guard;
4. Alabama Department of Labor;
5. Serve Alabama;
6. The Office of the Attorney General;
7. Alabama Department of Education;
8. Alabama Department of Corrections;
9. Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs;
10. Alabama Department of Post-Secondary Education;
11. Alabama Commission on Higher Education;
12. Alabama Department of Public Health;
13. Alabama Medicaid Agency;

14. Alabama Department of Human Resources;
15. Alabama Department of Transportation;
16. Alabama Law Enforcement Agency;
17. The Office of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Alabama; and,
18. Additional members as the Commissioners of the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs and the Alabama Department of Mental Health deem necessary.

BE IT FURTHER ORDERED that the participants in the AlaVetNet shall be inclusive and reflect the racial, gender, geographic, urban/rural, and economic diversity of the state.

BE IT FURTHER ORDERED that the Commissioners of the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs and the Alabama Department of Mental Health shall serve as the co-chairs of the AlaVetNet.

BE IT FURTHER ORDERED that the AlaVetNet shall study and evaluate all services in the state, directed at improving the well-being of service members, veterans and their families in the areas of education, employment, health, homelessness, and legal assistance. The AlaVetNet shall develop a long-range plan, reviewed annually, for a comprehensive statewide system of services to service members, veterans and their families, which, to the extent practicable, is derived from known best practices. The AlaVetNet shall provide a copy of the plan and a detailed summary of any progress toward implementation of the plan to the Governor by June 30, 2014.

BE IT FURTHER ORDERED that the AlaVetNet shall strive for interagency collaboration, public participation, and mutual sharing of information to facilitate policy decisions and the implementation of a plan for a comprehensive statewide system of care and services for service members, veterans and their families in need.

BE IT FURTHER ORDERED that the AlaVetNet shall define the roles and responsibilities of all AlaVetNet participants. The AlaVetNet shall adopt rules for the internal operation of the AlaVetNet and for governing its manner of conducting its business. The AlaVetNet shall meet at least quarterly, and the meetings shall be open to the public. The AlaVetNet, and any committees of the AlaVetNet, may meet via teleconference. All AlaVetNet members shall serve without compensation.

BE IT FURTHER ORDERED that the Advisory/Working Committees for Education, Employment, Healthcare, Homelessness, and Legal Assistance may include representatives from within the twelve (12) Regional Planning Commissions of the state. The Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs and the Alabama Department of Mental Health shall be responsible for the general administration, supervision, and monitoring of all AlaVetNet activities.

BE IT FURTHER ORDERED that this Executive Order become effective immediately upon signing and shall remain in force until such time as it is modified or rescinded by the Governor.

DONE AND ORDERED this 10 day of December, 2013.



Robert Bentley
Robert Bentley
Governor

Attested

Jim Bennett
Jim Bennett
Secretary of State