

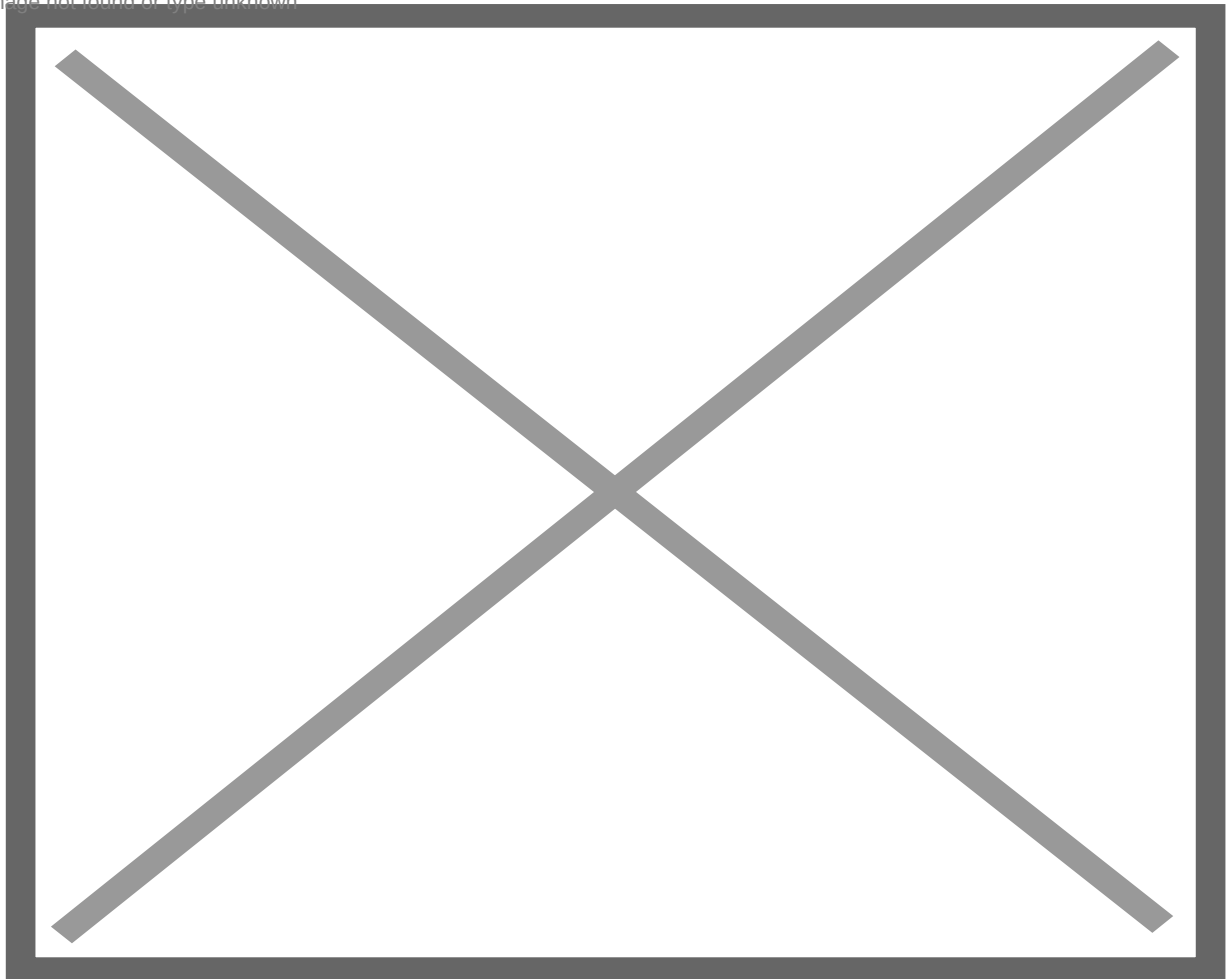
Advancements in Veterans' Support Discussed at V.I. Council Meeting

Council tackles transportation challenges and introduces new initiatives for local veterans

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The V.I. Veterans Advisory Council held its quarterly meeting on Wednesday to discuss veterans benefits, services, and upcoming events.

Council Chair Muria Nisbett provided updates on several initiatives from the Office of Veterans Affairs, including the new veteran discount program that offers discounts at local businesses to veterans who show their Virgin Islands driver's license or ID card with the veteran designation. The council discussed ensuring all veterans receive information about obtaining this updated ID.

Transportation challenges for medical appointments off-island were also addressed. One veteran, identified as R. Phipps, spoke about the difficulties he faced in getting appointments scheduled earlier in the day due to flight times from St. Croix. Flights from the Big Island to Puerto Rico often do not arrive until late morning, but appointments were scheduled as early as 11:00 a.m., he said. Last-minute travel arrangements also cause stress, he noted. Ms. Nisbett promised to work with the Veterans Affairs Office to explore options such as the increased use of charter flights to accommodate travel needs.

Upcoming events like the grand opening of a new Veterans Center location in St. Thomas and the annual Vietnam Veterans Day commemoration in March were announced. Resources for veterans dealing with PTSD or seeking entrepreneurship opportunities were also highlighted. Ms. Nisbett spoke of the Wounded Warrior Project's free, two-week intensive outpatient treatment program available at four locations nationwide. This retreat-style program provides counseling, support groups, and coping skills training. The council chair shared her own positive experience with the program after leaving military service. "They did a lot of support groups, give you a lot of resources, just a lot of stuff that you wouldn't ordinarily know that exist," she explained.

The hope is that the council can now move to connect more local veterans with this and other Wounded Warrior Project initiatives that offer mental health support, job assistance, wellness activities, and financial aid.

Council vice-chair Kai Callwood spoke about the advocacy by a now-deceased veteran to advance progress on the legally mandated veteran's museum. He vowed to meet with the Office of Veterans Affairs to ascertain whether legislators had appropriated funding to fulfill that legal mandate, and to see how that project will be able to get underway. Developing a museum was viewed as a way to honor veterans' service and preserve their history for future generations in the islands.

Volunteers were also sought for initiatives including a program to provide regular check-in visits to isolated, older veterans.

The next advisory council meeting will be held on May 15th to continue the dialogue on serving the needs of local veterans. Overall, the meeting provided a forum for information sharing and addressing issues important to the veteran community.