

Minutes for Idaho Veterans Affairs Commission

July 17, 2024

Hybrid In-Person & Virtually

Call to Order – 8:30 AM MT

Idaho Veterans Affairs Commission was held on Wednesday, July 17, 2024, at the Central Support Office (located at 351 N. Collins Road Boise, ID 83702) and virtually via Microsoft Teams.

Attendees

Commission Members in attendance: **Chairman Josh Callihan, Art Gimpel, Jinny Cash, Eugene Brown**

IDVS Staff Members in attendance included: IDVS Chief Administrator **Mark Tschampl**, Deputy Chief Administrator **Tracy Schaner**, ISVH-Boise Administrator **Rick Holloway**, ISVH-Lewiston Home Administrator **Mark High**, ISVH-Post Falls Home Administrator **Amber Goodchild** (Virtual), OVA Bureau Chief **Bill Heyob**, Idaho State Veterans Cemeteries Bureau Chief **Jacob Faulkner**, Business Support Bureau Chief **Paul Spannkebel**, Financial Officer **Debbie Spence**, Community Resource Specialist **Mitzi Cheldelin**, and Management Assistant **Kevin Wallior**.

Also in attendance: Sara Stover from the Governor's Office (Virtual), Adam Jarvis DFM Analyst (Virtual), Frances Lippitt LSO Analyst (Virtual)

Number of Citizens in attendance: 0

Announcements

Adam Jarvis was introduced as the new DFM analyst assigned to IDVS. Frances Lippitt was introduced as the new LSO Analyst assigned to IDVS.

Approval of Minutes

Chairman Callihan asked for a motion to approve the minutes of the previous meeting on April 10, 2024. **Commissioner Brown** motioned for approval. **Commissioner Cash** seconded. The motion was approved with unanimous assent.

Division Bureau Reports

Boise Veterans Home Report presented by **Rick Holloway**

	Census								
	Nursing Care			Medicare A		Residential/Domiciliary Care			
	Days of Care	Avg Daily Census	Occupancy Rate	Days of Care	Avg Daily Census	Days of Care	Avg Daily Census	Occupancy Rate	
April	2,352	78	98%	15	0.5	0	0	0%	
May	2,437	79	98%	37	1.2	0	0	0%	
June	2,312	77	96%	31	1.0	0	0	0%	
Total/Avg	7,101	78	98%	83	0.9	0	0	0%	

Census is capped at 80, and hovers between 77-80 depending on hospitalizations. There is a waiting list.

Customer satisfaction remains high.

DPW – Main kitchen sewer line in the basement was replaced. A new double stack oven was installed in the Kitchen.

The Boise Home received a \$200,000 grant from the Borbonus Foundation, through IVAC, to purchase a new bus.

VA survey was conducted April 2-5. There were 3 minor citations, that have been corrected.

Boise Home is in COVID outbreak status. There is no danger of hospitalization for our residents as prescriptions for Paxlovid and Remdesivir have worked.

Pocatello Veterans Home Report presented by **Tracy Schaner**

	Census				
	Nursing Care			Medicare A	
	Days of Care	Avg Daily Census	Occupancy Rate	Days of Care	Avg Daily Census
April	1,453	48	73%	30	1.0
May	1,592	51	78%	38	1.2
June	1,410	47	71%	30	1.0
Total/Avg	4,455	49	74%	98	1.1

Pocatello Home is in survey, which is why Josiah is unable to attend.

Census is stabilizing, the Pocatello Home brings in more students during the summer break.

Pocatello received a top rating in their Pinnacle customer satisfaction surveys.

Showcased a slideshow video of the various activities and events Veterans participated in during the previous quarter.

Lewiston Veterans Home Report presented by **Mark High**

	Census				
	Nursing Care			Medicare A	
	Days of Care	Avg Daily Census	Occupancy Rate	Days of Care	Avg Daily Census
Apr	1,484	49	75%	24	0.8
May	1,517	49	74%	17	0.5
Jun	1,439	48	73%	7	0.2
Total/Avg	4,440	49	74%	48	0.5

Census remains steady.

The staff receive a lot of kudos from the community.

The home had some power issues during this quarter. Power Company had to come out and replace a transformer.

The Idaho Commission of the Arts hosted a series of Creative Aging workshop for the residents. Given the choice of what type of art they would like to learn, the residents chose leather working.

Showcased a slideshow video of the various activities and events Veterans participated in during the previous quarter.

Post Falls Veterans Home Report presented by **Amber Goodchild (virtual)**

	Census				
	Nursing Care			Medicare A	
	Days of Care	Avg Daily Census	Occupancy Rate	Days of Care	Avg Daily Census
April	1,460	49	74%	47	1.6
May	1,618	52	79%	38	1.2
June	1,592	53	80%	41	1.4
Total/Avg	4,670	51	78%	126	1.4

The Post Falls Census has been steady between 75-80%, 52-54 residents. There is currently a waitlist. Stabilizing staffing to be able to increase admissions.

Volunteer hours are steadily increasing. Kady, Volunteer Services and Activities Coordinator, is doing a great job recruiting the community.

Resolving the HVAC and DOAS punch list items continues to be an issue.

Dietary staff have been doing a fantastic job with "around the world" themed meals for residents. They've had authentic meals from Germany, Ukraine, and the Philippines, so far.

The Idaho Workforce Council visited. It was an excellent opportunity to discuss workforce challenges facing the Veterans Home.

Flash the therapy dog had an article written about him in the Coeur d'Alene Press highlighting the good work he does for the residents. <https://cdapress.com/news/2024/may/26/flash-therapy-dog-veterans-home-post-falls/>.

Showcased a slideshow of Veterans Art created during the Idaho Commission of the Arts Creative Aging workshops at the Post Falls Home.

OVA Report presented by **Bill Heyob**

OVA statistics comparing 3rd Quarter FY-2024 YTD totals to FY-2023:

	2024 YTD	2023 YTD	Increase/Decrease
Interviews YTD	10,134	8,449	+ 1,685
POAs Filed YTD	7,453	6,048	+ 1,405
Claims Filed YTD	12,938	12,037	+ 901
Appeals YTD	672	393	+ 279
BVA Hearings YTD	51	64	- 13
Veterans Seen by			
OVA in Vet Courts	480	507	- 27
State Emergency			
Grants Approved	4	6	- 2

Notable changes from 4th Quarter 2024 and 4th Quarter 2023: 4th Qtr 2024 had 2,593 Office Interviews (+336), 2,942 Claims filed (-183) and 1,710 POAs filed (+80).

Noteworthy Issues Currently Happening with the VA

- Boise VA Regional Veteran Service Center Manager (Kevin Schneider) has been promoted to the VA Central Office's Office of Automation. Bill Mitchell is the acting VSCM until a full-time replacement is named.

- Boise VA's job vacancies are almost filled.
- \$38.5 million was paid out to Idaho veterans under the PACT Act with \$6.2 billion Nationally.
- VA will be releasing a new PTSD stressor statement that will replace the two current forms which will be dated 28 June 2024. A New Rating Table being released in December 2024 for the new criteria for Mental Health conditions which will more closely represent how the condition impacts the Veteran's ability to work.
- New Rating Tables being released in December 2024 for Respiratory and ENT conditions- Tinnitus will be evaluated as a symptom of an underlying service-connected disease (hearing loss) and not as standalone condition. Sleep Apnea will be evaluated based on residual impairment after treatment instead of the treatment itself.
- Camp Lejeune Justice Act (PACT Act)- anyone who wants to file a lawsuit against the Department of the Navy/Department of Justice needs to do so before August 10, 2024. Veterans can still file presumptive service-connected claims with the VA regardless of the date.

Significant Events within the OVA

- Personnel Changes- We hired a new Administrative Assistant 2 position within the Boise VA Regional Office to replace Jessica Tegnell- Jay Bartram is an Air Force Retiree who worked at the Boise VA Regional Office for 11 years.
- Location Changes- since our last IVAC Meeting, the OVA Pocatello Team is now located back in the Pocatello State Veterans Home. Nick Percy has moved out of the Boise VA Regional Office and is now located in the Boise State Veterans Home. Our OVA Team in Caldwell moved out of the Caldwell IDOL building. Abel Silva moved into the Caldwell Veterans Memorial Building (with Kelly McCartney) while Wes McAuslan moved back into the Boise VARO.
- Frank Fabbi and myself will be attending the Veterans of Foreign Wars National Convention in Louisville, KY from July 26th to August 2d.
- The 2024 Annual County and Post Service Officer Training will be held at the Riverside Hotel in Boise from August 7-9. The OVA Staff will have a combined meeting at the Riverside Hotel on Tuesday, August 6th, prior to the scheduled training.
- The next VFW Service Officer Training in Annapolis, MD September 22-27. I will be attending in-Person with Frank Fabbi. Joe Riener, Iris Higgins and Robert Smith will be attending virtually. We currently have (7) VSOs on the standby list to attend in-person.

BREAK 9:30 AM – 9:45 AM

Veterans Cemetery Report presented by Jake Faulkner

DPW 20-606 Boise Cemetery Expansion

1. Memorial Wall-Stage 3 of concrete footings poured, and precast concrete panels are being placed.
2. Inground Urn Expansion-Completed.
3. Space Force Seal- Completed-Concrete required to be repoured 4 times.

DPW 24-601 Boise Bathroom Renovation (6 Total)

1. Public/Employee Bathrooms-Complete
 - a. Remaining DPW project funds w/ISVC additional funds
 - i. Admin Bldg.
 1. Painting-Complete
 2. LED Lighting-Substantial Completion 6-8 weeks

DPW 21-605 Blackfoot Maintenance Bldg., Public Bathroom/Conference Room, Memorial Wall

1. Shop- Complete
2. Employee Breakroom-Complete
3. Public Bathroom/Conference Room-Will be put out to bid this summer.
4. Memorial Wall-Incomplete-Redesign required

DPW 24-600 Blackfoot Erosion Control

1. MOA signed with local farmer to farm additional 20 acres of unutilized land IDVS land.

- a. This has been a huge success in both general appearance and operationally.
 - 2. Developing landscaping plan for importation of mature trees, additional road access, flood mitigation.
 - 3. Flood mitigation step 1, perimeter road graded to provide 1-2' berm and runoff channel.
- As of this time, mitigation controls have been successful.

Veteran Interments

Apr	Cemetery Boise: 44	Cemetery Blackfoot: 6	
May	Cemetery Boise: 68	Cemetery Blackfoot: 7	
Jun	Cemetery Boise: 53	Cemetery Blackfoot: 12	
YTD	Cemetery Boise: 532	Cemetery Blackfoot: 68	Total Cemetery Bureau: 600

Dependent Interments

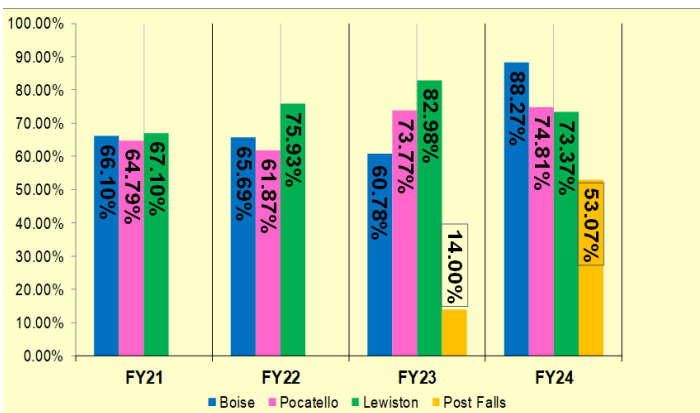
Apr	Cemetery Boise: 22	Cemetery Blackfoot: 2	
May	Cemetery Boise: 25	Cemetery Blackfoot: 3	
Jun	Cemetery Boise: 24	Cemetery Blackfoot: 0	
YTD	Cemetery Boise: 24	Cemetery Blackfoot: 13	Total Cemetery Bureau: 260

Volunteer Hours

Apr	239
May	297
Jun	217
2024 Total	1,300

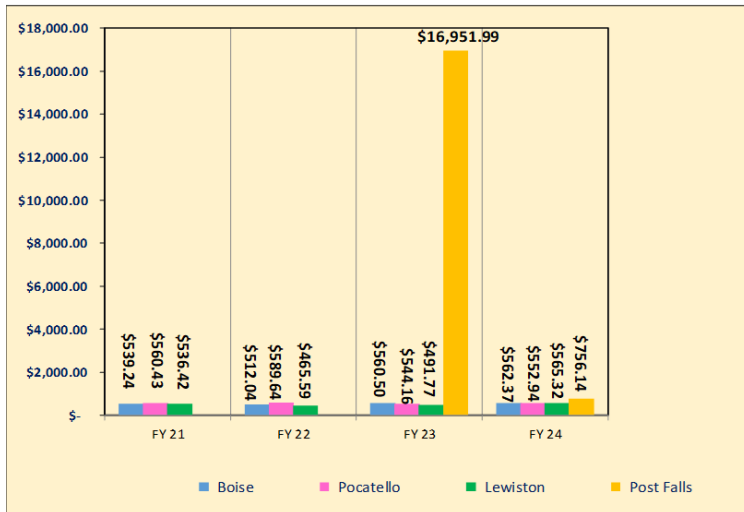
Fiscal Report – presented by Debbie Spence

Average Census YTD Comparisons between the Homes:



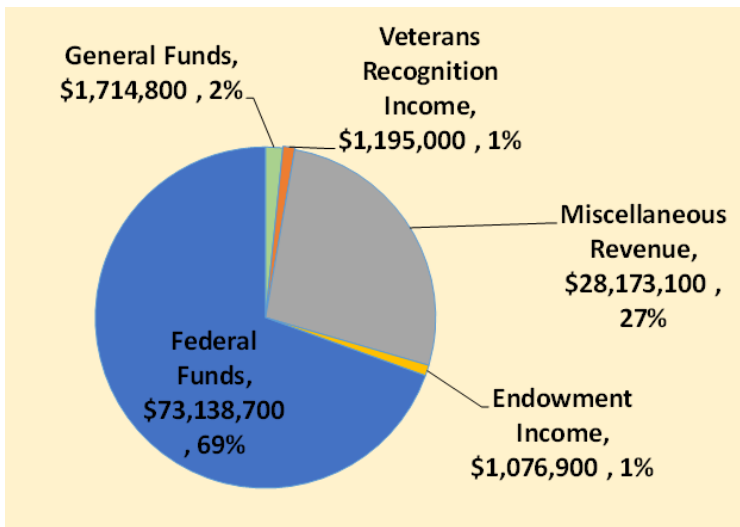
FY2024 Average cost per resident day was \$592.36 for nursing and \$446.27 for Dom/Residential.

Nursing Yearly Costs Comparisons per resident day:



FY2023 Cost Report Audit – still awaiting contact from auditors.

FY2025 Budget Appropriation is \$105,298,500



FY2026 Budget Preparation has begun.

- Once again, the Veterans Recognition Fund Allocation Plan recommendation will be no grants.
- Reappropriation for All VA Construction Grants (not completed).
- Transfer of appropriation from operating (agency staffing) to personnel (in-house temp staffing pool)

Business Support (HR/ITS/Education) – presented by Paul Spanknebel

HR – Update

Implemented FY2025 CEC, 3-4.5% based on merit and compa/ratio.

3 New HR staff were assigned to our Homes. Carrie Wilk (Post Falls), Taran Gray (Boise), Linda Stribeck (Lewiston).

State of Idaho Health Insurance Plan transitioned from Blue Cross of Idaho to Regence – Blue Shield.

Business Office – LUMA continues to provide challenges. The close out at the end of the year was a struggle

ITS – Update

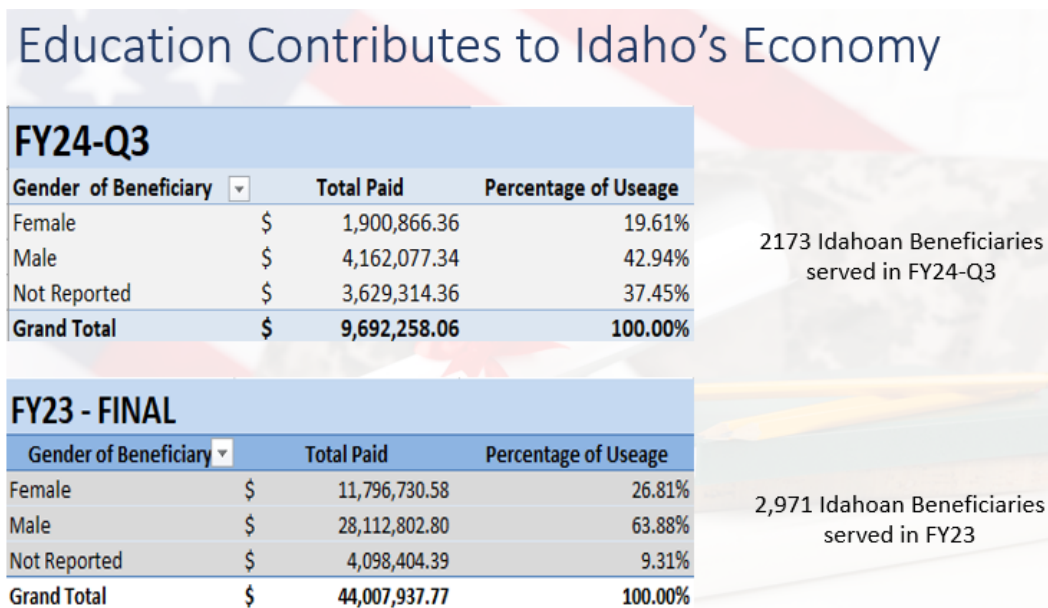
ITS costs are expensive and continue to rise. Talie Bendixsen has been invaluable as a liaison between IDVS and ITS, helping ensure that ITS is meeting all our agency information technology support needs. ITS have been more responsive.

Education Report

Keeping Tabs on the Cooperative Contract Agreement with the VA:

1. FY24 Allocation:
 - a. Received Q2’s reimbursement on 06/06/2024 in the amount of \$85,160.42
 - b. Received Q1’s reimbursement on 03/13/2024 in the amount of \$82,311.62
 - c. A \$6,564.00 COLA adjustment accepted by the Idaho SAA and submitted to VA in December 2023 raising FY24’s allocation to \$211,692.00
 - d. \$205,128.00 approved by VA in September 2023

2. FY23 Supplemental approved by the VA:
 - a. Received July 10th in the amount of \$84,276.92



The Education Team oversees 386 facilities throughout the state of Idaho, adding 8 new facilities in Q3. In Q3, the team approved an additional 1,194 programs.

Facility Type	Total Number of Idaho Facilities	Programs Approved
IHL	21	1114
NCD plus Flight	41	253
Apprenticeships (APP)	183	4
On-The-Job (OJT)	135	2
License/Certification & Prep-Courses	6	25
Totals:	386	1,398

SAA Database Updates:

- Power Aps and Power Pages build out is complete – the team will test throughout the month of July.
 - Will enable the team to streamline the upload process and store facility specific information in a secure database.
 - Will allow facility SCOs a place to see the progress of their approval packet in real time.
 - Will allow facility SCOs the ability to predict when their next 24-month review is due.

Education Summit details:

- Over 3 days, October 9th through October 12th , the Education Team will conduct a full day of SCO training on 10/9/24
 - *IDVCC (AKA Idaho Veterans’ Chamber of Commerce)*
 - *ISU (AKA Idaho State University)*
 - *SCO (School Certifying Officials)*

Education Activities:

- Abby and Wendy attended Veteran Appreciation Fair at the Boise VA Parade Grounds on July 7th
- Shannon and Wendy attended the Annual Career Expo in Mountain Home at the High School on April 24th
- Meet Officer Strong; he is an Education Team Success Story: Officer Strong is the veteran who the team helped to receive a year of OJT back-benefits mere weeks before his education benefit expired.
- He received the benefit at time when he (& his family) experienced significant financial hardships.
- He communicated he is now up for a promotion to detective and that he owes his career success to the SAA’s persistence, particularly the warm, support he received from Wendy.

Community Outreach – presented by Mitzi Cheldelin

Events:

- Joining Forces Conference – Sold out in under 2 weeks. 170 attendees.
- Memorial Day – a quick move to the lower level of the Boise Cemetery turned out to be a crowd favored location. 900+ attendees. Governor Kempthorne was the keynote speaker.
- Women Veterans Conference – Approximately 62 attendees. Col Nicole Washington was the keynote speaker. Those who attended received helpful information and made impactful connections.

Engagement total 2024 calendar year:

- Veterans – 652
- Civilians – 3
- Mixed Events – 3,245
- Events – 46
- Counties Visited – 22/44

Highlighted Events hosted by Community Partners this quarter:

- Sweet Ride
- VA Mental Health Summit
- Quilts of Valor Presentations
- Idaho Housing Round Table
- North Idaho Standdown
- Silver Star Presentation for Milo Plank

Contributions through Outreach:

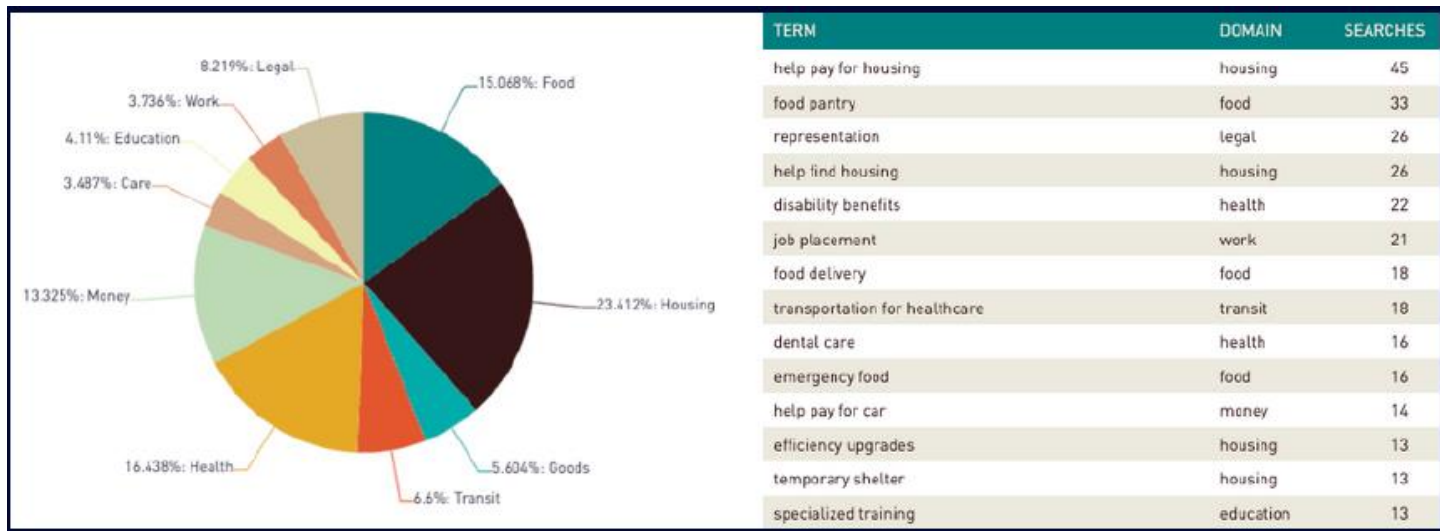
- Raised \$8,792.33 in direct Veterans Support thanks to Community Partners.
- This quarter had many car repairs, rent payments, and help cleaning up yards and assisting with wheelchair ramp installations.

Ongoing Projects

- Joining Forces Idaho – has received wonderful feedback for its monthly meetings. The conference was a huge success with representatives from every office and over 100 organizations in attendance.
- Governor's Challenge – The Challenge to Prevent Suicide among Service Members, Veterans and their Families. Team 1 has moved into the launch of the Ask the Question Campaign with donated printed material and the completion on the Medical Provider toolkit. Team 2 saw great success with the Joining Forces Conference. Team 3 has been working with local law enforcement across the state to finalize safety measures for suicide crisis situations.
- Idaho Veterans Guide – Report from April 1 – June 30, 2024
 - 110 Programs Added (4,470 Total)
 - 50 Programs Claimed (1,232 Total)
 - Programs by Area:
 - Local – 2,562 total
 - State – 1,006 total
 - National – 902 total
 - Top 5 Local Engaged Programs –IDVS Office of Veterans Advocacy; Brave Hearts Idaho, Veterans

Grant; El Ada Community Action Partnership; Idaho Department of Labor, Find Work; DAV Homeless Veterans Initiative

- Site Activity: 1,714 Searches, 1,181 Interactions
- Site Search Trends:



Idaho State Veterans Cemeteries have withdrawn from the Wreaths Across America program. Worked with the Idaho Veterans Network to found Idaho Veterans Wreaths. Keeps the money internal to Idaho for Veterans.

Central Support Office Updates

Deputy Chief Administrator's Remarks presented by Tracy Schaner

Boise Replacement Home Project – still have not received a BABAA waiver from the VA under the State Home Construction Grant Program. American Manufacturing and Supply Chain are about 20 years away from being able to provide all the requisite materials to meet the provisions of BABAA. This was known when this bill was drafted and is why a waiver process was included in the statutory language. BABAA has three different Waiver processes: Public Interest Waiver; Increased Cost Waiver; and Non-Availability of Materials Waiver. Despite meeting the qualifications for both the Public Interest Waiver and the Increased Cost Waiver, the Boise Home Project was denied for both. IDVS also applied for a Non-Availability Waiver. Our staff compiled a list of the materials currently impossible to obtain under BABAA. IDVS spent \$200,000 to research what materials are and aren't available that meet BABAA requirements to submit the non-availability waiver. Shared with other States for their waiver applications. Idaho has spent ~\$9,000,000 in preparation for the project. Will continue with an expectation that a solution will be found. Expect the priority list to be released in mid-August. VA delay will increase construction costs.

Tracy's Presidency with NASVH ends next month. Intends to take advantage of the Summer Conference to ask the VA leadership pointed questions. Tracy was selected for an appointment with VA Advisory Committee to the VA Secretary. Additionally, NASVH has decided to create an Executive Director position. Tracy will transition to that role upon completing her term as President.

Staffing – CMS minimum staffing requirement changes. Congressional Leaders and the Skilled Nursing industry are opposed. Trying to mandate an increase at a time when there already exists a critical staffing shortage is ill conceived. This rule change will exacerbate the national staffing crisis. Lawsuits and congressional bills have been drafted to attempt to overturn the final CMS rule. The consequences for violating this rule, if it goes into effect, are civil monetary penalties. If staffing levels aren't met a facility will have to decrease census, which due to the financial model would likely lead to facilities closing.

Chief Administrator's Remarks presented by Mark Tschampf

Strategic Direction of IDVS. The State Homes will find it even more difficult to operate under these onerous

regulations. They were created with the best intentions, to increase the quality of elder care in skilled nursing facilities but will likely result in the reverse as an unintended consequence. Due to national shortage of nursing staff wage competition will increase to a significant degree to compete for the limited number of skilled nurses. This will be extremely tough for the State to compete against private entities.

Having Tracy in a senior leadership position in a national advocacy group is supremely beneficial for Idaho.

IDVS is currently working with the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare to get reimbursed approximately \$7,000,000 Medicaid overpayment.

Community Outreach – continue to look for opportunities to increase the mission and impact. Trying to add language to our section of Idaho Code to ensure that Community Outreach continues to be a point of emphasis in perpetuity. Looking to add staff to the Community Outreach team to meet the increased volume of work. Also, looking to bump the annual tax contribution on Idaho Income Tax forms from \$3 to \$5.

New Business

Commissioner Cash brought up the recent bad press the Idaho Department of the American Legion received. The Idaho American Legion fell victim to a fraud. They've had new elections and implemented new fiscal security measures to ensure no one else is ever able to conduct the same scheme. The Idaho Department will be able to continue to fund their major programs. The VFW stepped up to fund the annual legislative reception.

The next IVAC meeting is tentatively scheduled for Thursday, January 9, 2025, in Boise.

Chairman Callihan is open to a motion to adjourn. **Commissioner Brown** motioned to adjourn at 11:34 AM MT. **Commissioner Gimpel** seconded. The motion was approved with unanimous assent. Meeting was adjourned at 11:34 AM MT

Kevin R. Wallior
Management Assistant
Idaho Division of Veteran Services