

APRIL

# Newsletter



**Welcome** to this month's edition of our ADVA newsletter. We appreciate your continued interest in the work we're doing to support Alabama's veterans and their families. Each month brings new opportunities to strengthen our services, share important updates, and highlight the efforts taking place across the state. Thank you for staying connected with us and for your commitment to Alabama's veteran community.

*Jeff Newton*

Commissioner, Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs

## In this edition

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Remembering James Rumore  
and more.





# STATE BOARD OF VETERANS AFFAIRS QUARTERLY MEETING

The State Board of Veterans Affairs (SBVA) held its quarterly meeting in early April and discussed numerous ADVA-related updates such as the new state cemetery as well as the Veterans Benefits and Services Committee also began work on the Alabama Veterans well-being grant to be announced later this year.

## NOTABLE TOPICS



**Joe Buschell, Cemetery Director**, briefed the board on exciting updates about the latest information on the state cemetery being established in North Alabama. With the property now owned by ADVA, the project continues to move ahead with a groundbreaking planned for Fall 2026.



**Alabama Veterans Resource Center Executive Director Alex Karagas**, provided an exciting update on the new resource center located in downtown Montgomery. Along with ADVA's Veterans Service Officers being located at the AVRC, Ms. Karagas has been on the road creating partnerships and bringing more programs and services to the facility.



**Dave Burford, Chairman of the Central Alabama Veterans Coalition**, middle, briefed the SBVA on the latest efforts taking place in the Birmingham area. Among many things, CAVC and the veterans community are preparing to host the Medal of Honor Convention in 2027.

# QUARTERLY STATISTICS

## VSO & APPEAL & REVIEW DIVISION BY THE NUMBERS

### 5,600

Compensation Claims

### 1,100

Pension and Death  
Related Claims

### 19,000

Clients Served

### 99

Informal Hearings

### 30

BVA Hearings

In the second quarter of FY26, our mission to serve Alabama's veterans reached new heights as our county-based Veterans Service Officers assisted nearly **19,000** in-office clients, **an increase of over 2,000 from the previous quarter**. This commitment to advocacy resulted in **over 5,600 compensation claims** and **1,100 pension and death-related claims**, increases of 400 and 500 respectively, while our Appeal and Review staff furthered our support by conducting **99 informal hearings and 30 BVA hearings**. The Office of Outreach also assisted nearly 300 veterans, an almost 27% increase of veterans assisted from the previous quarter, with well-being challenges last quarter.

### 283

Veterans Assisted

## DEPARTMENT OF OUTREACH BY THE NUMBERS

### 105

Call-ins

### 178

Website Contacts

# COMMISSIONER NEWTON CELEBRATES FIVE YEARS WITH ADVA



At the SBVA meeting on April 9, SBVA Vice-Chairman Walter Kozak presented Commissioner Jeff Newton with a 5-year service pin in recognition for his five years at the ADVA. This pin doesn't just commemorate this milestone but also the depth of experience he brings to the department.

Prior to being appointed by Governor Kay Ivey in March 2025, Commissioner Newton served as the Assistant Commissioner for Operations and Chief of Staff, leading efforts to support Alabama's nearly 400,000 veterans and their families. Before joining ADVA, he completed a distinguished 41-year military career with the U.S. Air Force and Alabama Air National Guard, including overseas deployments supporting Operations Iraqi Freedom, Enduring Freedom, and Noble Eagle. His leadership, shaped by decades of service and numerous military honors, continues to strengthen the department's mission and its commitment to Alabama veterans.

# CSM BENNIE G. ADKINS STATE VETERANS HOME



## 1 Year of Progress!



The Command Sgt. Maj. Bennie G. Adkins State Veterans Home restoration project remains on schedule for its Fall 2026 reopening.

*Kim Justice, Executive Director of State Veterans Homes*, reported at the SBVA meetings that significant progress has been made over the past quarter, noting that the facility now has all roofing completed, full power and air restored, and the moisture barrier removed. Crews are actively installing flooring, sheetrock, paint, tile, lighting, and millwork, while mechanical, electrical, and plumbing teams continue evaluating and repairing major systems including boilers, generators, fire alarms, and wander-management systems.

Ms. Justice also emphasized ADVA's continued coordination with the Central Alabama Veterans Healthcare System and the Federal VA to ensure uninterrupted care for the 45 residents currently housed at Enterprise Health and Rehabilitation Center, whose partnership has been vital throughout the recovery process.

# NEW VETERANS MENTAL HEALTH STEERING COMMITTEE PROJECTS

## New Veterans Mental Health Steering Committee Projects

### AltaPointe — Veteran Crisis Care and Treatment Linkage

<https://altapointe.org/services/crisis-services/>

Call 251-450-2211 for the Access to Care line

Veteran-led teams at Altapointe's Crisis Center provide tailored prevention, outreach, and crisis services with follow-up support that connects veterans to ongoing outpatient care.

### Centerstone — 3,000 Free Therapy Sessions for Veterans (In Person or Telehealth)

<https://centerstone.org/militaryservices>

Call 1-866-726-4560, or email [militaryservices@centerstone.org](mailto:militaryservices@centerstone.org)

The project connects veterans to a contracted network of service providers and licensed behavioral health clinicians in Alabama.

### Sojourn Counseling — Free Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing Therapy (EMDR), Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), & Microcurrent Neurofeedback (MCN) Services to Veterans

<https://www.sojourncounseling.org/sojournserves>

Call 205-578-2028 for counseling; 205-259-6215 for Microcurrent Neurofeedback

Evidence-based therapies such as Microcurrent Neurofeedback (MCN) services are offered at no cost to veterans, both in office and through a mobile service unit.

### The Shoulder — Residential Substance Use Treatment and Recovery Services to Veterans

<https://theshoulder.org/>

Call 251-626-2199 or email [info@theshoulder.org](mailto:info@theshoulder.org)

The project provides preventative outreach and residential substance-use treatment for veterans—especially women, rural residents, and those involved in the justice system—with scholarships available to support access.

### UWill — Free Telehealth Therapy and Crisis Calls for Veterans Ages 18-34

<https://uwill.com/alabama-veterans-mental-health/>

Call 205-928-6059

Six free telehealth therapy sessions are offered to every Alabama veteran ages 18-34, their spouses and partner. In addition to immediate, 24/7 telehealth crisis care with follow-ups and check-ins.

Please contact the providers directly to sign up.

Funded through the Oversight Committee on Alabama Opioid Settlement Funds.



To find all projects visit the Veterans Pilot Projects page on our website:

<https://mh.alabama.gov/veterans-mental-health-pilot-projects/>



Alabama Department of Mental Health

To expand and improve mental health access for veterans across Alabama, the Veterans Mental Health Steering Committee has awarded grant funding to new mental health pilot projects supported by Opioid Settlement Funds. These projects increase awareness of evidence-based, veteran-focused services and ensure veterans and their families can more easily access crisis care, outpatient therapy, telehealth options, residential treatment, and trauma-focused services tailored to their unique needs.

No VA referral is required. Please contact the providers directly to sign up.

<https://mh.alabama.gov/veterans-mental-health-pilot-projects/>



## EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT

*Sam Yount served 24 years in the United States military, including deployments to Bosnia, Kosovo, and Iraq. Now, he carries those experiences into a career centered on helping others. His time in uniform, along with the personal challenges he faced with alcoholism and mental health, shaped his perspective in a powerful way. Now more than 20 years sober, he openly shares how faith and perseverance helped him rebuild, and how those experiences allow him to connect with veterans who may be walking a similar road.*

Today, he serves as the county, Veteran Service Officer with the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs, where he works directly with veterans and their families to navigate the VA claims process and secure the benefits they've earned. His passion is simple: to make sure every veteran feels supported, understood, and never alone in the process.

## 'RUCK AND RIDE'

ADVA was proud to join Operation Iron Ruck and Bondfire Ranch on April 11 for Ruck and Ride. The event brought together veterans, service members, families, and supporters at Sherer Farms in Billingsley and BondFire Ranch in Clanton. Participants rucked or rode before joining equine-assisted learning sessions, a lunch-and-learn, and a veterans resource fair designed to strengthen community, raise suicide-awareness, and connect attendees with meaningful support.

The event served as a powerful reminder of why this mission matters. The conversations, camaraderie, and shared purpose reflected a deep commitment to ensuring no veteran faces their challenges alone. ADVA extends its gratitude to every partner, volunteer, and participant who made the day possible. Veterans well-being is a holistic approach to lives well lived.



# STANDING THE WATCH

## *A VSO Perspective*

Today I mourn another brother in arms lost to suicide – **the 23rd soldier** I've known who didn't make it home from their internal battle. As a VSO, I sit across the desk from veterans every day, helping them fight for benefits, healing, and hope. But behind every claim number and every form is a human being carrying weight most people will never see.

***A few years ago, I was about 45 minutes from becoming another statistic myself.*** The pressure, the memories, the silence – it was heavy. What changed everything was reaching out to those who could help. Just like we tell veterans in our offices every day, you don't have to face this fight alone.

In this line of work, we talk about building evidence – diagnosis, event, nexus – but sometimes the strongest evidence of hope is simply connection. A phone call. A conversation. A reminder that someone cares enough to stay in the fight with you.

***“Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” – Galatians 6:2***

As VSOs, battle buddies, and brothers and sisters in service, we have to do better at checking on one another beyond the paperwork. ***If you're hurting today, there is always another way forward.***

***Call or text the Veterans Crisis Line – 988, then Press 1.*** And if you need someone who understands the VSO side of the fight, reach out to me anytime. Maybe together we can help each other heal while we continue standing the watch for others.

*Sam Gount*

Jefferson County Veterans Service Officer

# HONORING JOSEPH RUMORE

The Life, Legacy, and Dedicated Service of the 106 Year-Old WWII Veteran



**Joseph Anthony Rumore**, passed away peacefully on April 1, 2026 at an extraordinary 106-years-old. Rumore, a Bessemer native, served his country as a First Lieutenant in the United States Army Air Corps during World War II in addition to Camp Shelby, Mississippi. Mr. Rumore was a true example of resilience and dedication of the Greatest Generation.


Beyond his military contributions, he was a man of profound faith and simple joys, from his devotion to his Catholic community to his love for Alabama football and jazz. ADVA Commissioner Jeff Newton noted that Mr. Rumore represented the very best of the nation, leaving behind a legacy of humility and service that spanned more than a century and continues to inspire the state of Alabama.

To learn more about Mr. Rumore, visit:

<https://va.alabama.gov/15701/alabama-honors-the-life-and-legacy-of-106-year-old-world-war-ii-veteran-joseph-rumore/>



## COVINGTON COUNTY VETERANS SERVICE OFFICE HAS RELOCATED TO:

 23989 AL-55  
Andalusia, AL 36420

## PURPLE UP! DAY

On **April 15**, the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs celebrated "Purple Up! Day," a statewide tribute to military children. Staff from every corner of Alabama wore purple, a color symbolizing the unity of all military branches, to show their support for these young heroes.

The ADVA recognizes the unique challenges these children face, from frequent moves to long periods of separation, and are inspired by their strength and sacrifice everyday.

For more Purple Up! photos, visit:  
<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/1HqKqaXitn/>



## THANK YOU!

The Command Sgt. Maj. Bennie G. Adkins State Veterans Home in Enterprise received a beautiful new addition as Alabama Power unveiled a custom bench crafted by their General Shops employees.

This unique piece was created from recycled materials and showcases both creative sustainability as well as a deep commitment to the veteran community. As one of only six such benches placed across the state, its arrival holds special significance, falling two days shy of the one year anniversary of the fire at the home.

This generous donation serves as a lasting reminder of the strength and support surrounding our veterans, and we are incredibly grateful to Alabama Power for their continued investment in our mission and our heroes.