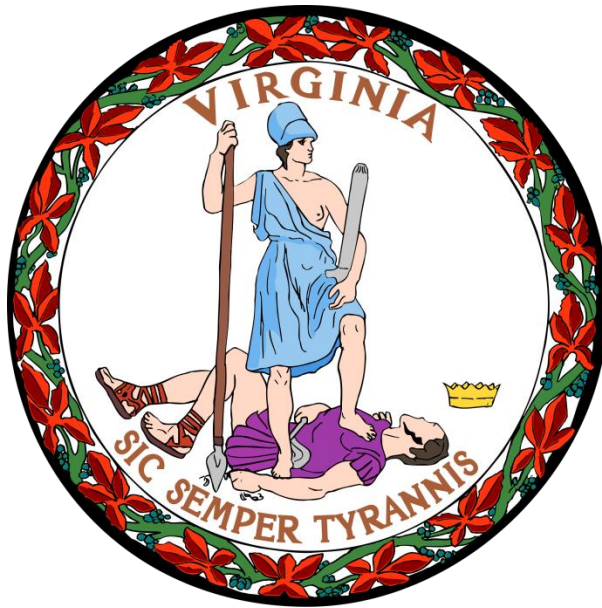


# Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs Virginia Military Advisory Council 2020 Annual Report



Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs  
January 2021

# 2020 VMAC Annual Report

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**Preface: The Virginia Military Advisory Council was created by the Code of Virginia through §2.2-2666.1. The legislation requires an annual executive summary of interim activity and work of the Council to be submitted to the Governor and General Assembly.**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

The General Assembly established the Virginia Military Advisory Council (VMAC) as an advisory council to: maintain a cooperative and constructive relationship between the Commonwealth and the leadership of the Armed Forces of the United States and the military commanders of such Armed Forces stationed in the Commonwealth, encourage regular communication on continued military facility viability, and encourage the exploration of privatization opportunities and issues affecting preparedness, public safety, and security.

In 2020, the VMAC, led by the Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs, Carlos L. Hopkins., was comprised of thirty-one (31) military officers representing major military commands and installations in the Commonwealth. The House of Delegates and Senate of Virginia each appointed members to serve on the VMAC during 2020. Governor Ralph Northam appointed four individuals with backgrounds in quality of life for military families. Through the normal rotation of installation commanders, there were nine new members in 2020.

Under the Secretary's leadership, the focus of the VMAC in 2020 remained on continuing efforts to make the Commonwealth of Virginia the most military-friendly state in the Nation. This was accomplished by addressing the needs identified by the military service chiefs and the base and installation commanders in the areas of support for military Spouses, Families, Students, Veterans, and our shared environment. The VMAC also kept focus on growing the military mission in Virginia.

## **ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the 2020 VMAC met only twice. In order to minimize health risks, each meeting adhered to social distancing requirements and was offered virtually. Approximately 70% of participants attended virtually.

Support to military Spouses was a key focus of the VMAC in 2020. The VMAC fully supported House Bill 967 and Senate Bill 981; Military Spousal Licensure Enhancement. The bills were passed by the 2020 General Assembly. The legislation, signed into law by Governor Northam at the July VMAC meeting, expedited the licensure process for the spouses of military service members assigned to installations and residing in the Commonwealth. With VMAC's support, this was the second strengthening of the code to support military spouses since the original law was passed in 2012. The 2020 legislation expanded access and eligibility to the spouses of service members in all surrounding jurisdictions, extended access to the spouses of National Guardsmen on federal orders to deploy overseas, included eligibility of recently transitioned service members, and granted Commonwealth licensing boards greater authority to determine a substantially equivalent license.

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The Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) also received strong VMAC support. The EFMP is a U.S. Department of Defense enrollment program that works with civilian agencies to provide comprehensive and coordinated community support, housing, educational, medical, and personnel services worldwide to U.S. military families with special needs. The VMAC supported the Secretary's efforts to work with Commander, Navy Region Mid-Atlantic (CNRMA) to establish an EFMP Action Plan. The mutually agreed action plan was established in March 2020, and briefed to the VMAC in July by RADM Rock, Commander CNRMA. A major milestone completed in November 2020 is the Navy's hire of two special education lawyers as part of a three-year pilot program to expand support for service members enrolled in the EFMP. The attorneys will assist families with special education program eligibility assessments, helping them gather and present the evidence of their children's needs for individualized education plans, and other related services, such as speech therapy and special transportation needs. In certain cases, the attorneys may attend meetings with school staff members to advocate for their clients. They will also assist if court intervention is required. The attorneys will also provide training for families and develop strong relationships with regional legal aid, pro bono networks, and local court conservatorship and guardianship clinics. They also plan to routinely review client files to ensure school compliance, and host informational town halls to help families be their own advocates.

The VMAC also supported Virginia's Public to Public Partnerships. Notable in 2020 was an Inter-Governmental Service Agreement (IGSA) shared by the Army, Marine Corps, Northern Virginia Regional Commission, and the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT). The agreement establishes cooperation in addressing mutual interests and resources to address roadway sustainment. Military Partners include Fort Belvoir, Joint Base Meyer-Henderson Hall, and Marine Corps Base Quantico.

The Governor's Virginia Coastal Resilience Program was also supported by the VMAC. Military installations are directly affected by the threat of climate change and associated risks. The VMAC engaged with the Governor's Special Assistant for Coastal Adaptation and Protection at the November meeting. They received a comprehensive brief on the Virginia Coastal Resilience Master Planning Framework, including application of existing NDAA authorities. As a result of the exchange, VMAC representation was assigned to the Master Framework Technical Advisory Committee.

The VMAC also supported Virginia's pending 2021 Sentinel Landscapes application; Virginia Secure Corridors Sentinel Landscape. The Sentinel Landscapes Partnership is a coalition of federal agencies, state and local governments, and non-governmental organizations that works with private landowners to advance sustainable land management practices around military installations and ranges. The partnership connects private landowners with voluntary government assistance programs that support defense, conservation, and agricultural missions. The Virginia Security Corridors proposal establishes four regional landscapes under the leadership of Marine Corps Base Quantico, Fort A.P. Hill, Joint Base Langley-Eustis, and Fort Pickett. All installations within the whole of Landscape will benefit and contribute. Virginia Secure Corridors complements Governor Northam's Virginia Coastal Resilience Master Planning Framework. It also complements the Eastern North Carolina and Middle Chesapeake Sentinel

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Landscapes to create a near contiguous military readiness, nature preserve, and private landowner empowerment space. The VMAC received a Virginia Secure Corridors update at the November meeting and will continue to support the initiative as the application and selection process continues through the Spring and Summer of 2021.

The VMAC facilitated awareness and shared understanding of COVID-19 risks, preventive measures, and best practices with our Military Installations. The efforts included routine communications regarding plans and response efforts in combating the pandemic. At the July 2020 meeting, a comprehensive review of Commonwealth and Military Installation initiatives, best practices, and resultant outcomes was presented.

In pursuit of growing the Military in Virginia, the VMAC supported development and delivery of the Virginia Military Factbook. The Factbook captures the impact of military economic contribution to each region of the Commonwealth. It details the prosperity and security our rich military partnerships deliver. Military spending adds \$103.7 billion to Virginia's economy, accounting for 19% of our gross domestic product, and benefits every one of our 95 counties and 38 independent cities.

### **Conclusion**

Despite the challenges of COVID-19, the VMAC remained a healthy, engaged, and effective advisory council. Their efforts were invaluable in shaping and advocating issues that ensure strong and resilient partnerships, advocate for our Veterans, Service Members and their Families, and make Virginia a national leader in attracting and growing military investment. Challenges and avenues for improvement to serve Virginia's Military members and Veterans, their families, compatibility among our communities and installations, and opportunities to grow the military in Virginia will continue to drive the VMAC. As we remain ever vigilant to the potential of future cuts to the Department of Defense negatively impacting the state, it is critical to maintain this valuable council of military leaders and advocates in the Commonwealth of Virginia.