

**WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

**COMMITTEE: HUMAN SERVICES (VETERANS' SERVICES)**

**DATE: OCTOBER 6, 2009**

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**COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:**

SUPERVISORS SIMMES  
BENTLEY  
GIRARD  
STEC  
SOKOL

**OTHERS PRESENT:**

DENISE DiRESTA, DIRECTOR, VETERANS' SERVICES  
HAL PAYNE, COMMISSIONER OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND FISCAL  
SERVICES  
JOHN RHODEN, CUSTOMER SUPPORT MANAGER, STERLING  
SOLUTIONS, INC. (VIA CONFERENCE CALL)  
REPRESENTING THE NEW YORK STATE DIVISION OF  
VETERANS' AFFAIRS:

**COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:**

SUPERVISORS VANNESS  
TAYLOR

BILL BRENNAN, LEGAL CONSULTANT  
HARRY CANDEE, COUNSELOR  
JOAN SADY, CLERK OF THE BOARD  
SUPERVISOR STRAINER  
ROBERT METTHE, DIRECTOR, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY  
SARAH MCLLENITHAN, LEGISLATIVE OFFICE SPECIALIST

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Mrs. Simmes called the meeting of the Human Services Committee to order at 1:32 p.m.

Motion was made by Mr. Sokol, seconded by Mr. Bentley and carried unanimously to approve the minutes of the previous Committee meeting, subject to correction by the Clerk of the Board.

Privilege of the floor was extended to Denise DiResta, Director of Veterans' Services, who announced that John Rhoden, Customer Support Manager for Sterling Solutions, Inc., was present via telephone conference to provide a presentation on the proposed Veterans Information Management System (VIMS). She explained that this was the second of two presentations on prospective database administrators her Office was considering for records management.

Mr. Rhoden apprised that VIMS was developed and maintained by Veterans for Veterans record keeping management. He stated that VIMS was not a web based program, it was a 32 bit program that was encrypted to ensure that all of the data entered was secured. He explained that the database would have to be loaded on to one computer, which could be the County server or a computer in the Veterans' Office and short cuts would be created on any other users computers.

Mr. Rhoden reviewed and explained the merits of VIMS. Ms. DiResta asked Mr. Rhoden how many of the Veterans' Administration forms were available on VIMS and Mr. Rhoden replied that there were currently 70 forms available. He said that the system was periodically updated and additional forms were added.

Ms. DiResta queried how many Power of Attorney's (POA) were allowed by VIMS and Mr. Rhoden responded that all of the POA's listed on the back of Form 2122 were included as options on VIMS. Ms. DiResta questioned if the American Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) and New York State were included as options and Mr. Rhoden replied affirmatively. Mr. Rhoden pointed out that forms could not be populated prior to the Veterans information being entered into the database.

With regards to reports, Mr. Rhoden apprised that there were two types of reports the system generated,

one being VIMS reports and the other being reports which were created manually by the user. He stated that all scanned documents were saved on a folder titled "scanned" and were in numerical order.

Ms. DiResta asked Harry Candee, Counselor for the New York State Division of Veterans' Affairs, if he could enter a Veterans information into the VET Cop system if they listed their POA as the VFW or the American Legion and Mr. Candee replied in the negative. He explained that a Veteran with the VFW or the American Legion listed as their POA could be entered into the system if they signed a form changing their POA to the State; however, he said, if they were not agreeable to this, their file would be transferred to Ms. DiResta so she could assist them. Bill Brennan, Legal Consultant for the New York State Division of Veterans Affairs, interjected that although Mr. Candee would not be able to file a claim for the Veteran, he would be able to advise them on the matter.

Mrs. Simmes queried how many claims were filed in the prior month with the State listed as the POA as compared to ones with the VFW or the American Legion as their POA and Mr. Candee responded that he had filed 25 claims; whereas Ms. DiResta advised she had filed 6 claims. Ms. DiResta pointed out that there was a significant difference in the number of claims she filed as compared to Mr. Candee because she was new to the position and was required to file paper based claims which took longer to process.

Hal Payne, Commissioner of Administrative and Fiscal Services, advised he was concerned that issues would arise when the New York State Division of Veterans' Affairs opened their new Office on the Adirondack Community College campus, as Mr. Candee would no longer be at the County Office five days a week. Mr. Brennan pointed out that if Ms. DiResta was using the Vet Cop system there would be no issues, as the program would be web based; therefore, he said, she would have access to the Veterans records.

Mrs. Simmes asked Ms. DiResta if she had any issues with using Vet Cop and Mrs. DiResta replied that her only concerns were that no representation was provided if an appeal was brought to Washington, D.C. and that Veterans with their POA listed as the VFW or the American Legion could not be entered into the system, which, she noted, was the majority of the Veterans her Office served. Mr. Brennan interjected that very few claims ever went as far as Washington D.C.; however, he noted, in such cases, representation was retained from other organizations such as the American Legion or a private attorney was hired. Mrs. Simmes queried whether representation was provided in Washington, D.C. through VIMS and Ms. DiResta replied affirmatively.

With regards to Ms. DiResta's concern that the system could not be used for Veterans with the American Legion or the VFW listed as their POA, Mr. Brennan suggested Ms. DiResta distribute a letter to Veterans explaining that it would be necessary for their POA to be with the State to file electronic claims. He pointed out the letter should note that if they did not change their POA to the State, she would still be able to assist them with paper claims. Mrs. Simmes questioned if VIMS allowed for Veterans with the VFW or the American Legion listed as their POA to be entered and Ms. DiResta replied affirmatively.

Robert Metthe, Director of Information Technology, advised that he felt that the Department Head should be the one to make the decision regarding which database would be chosen, as they would be the one utilizing it. Ms. DiResta apprised that she would need more time to make a decision, as she was researching which system other counties in New York State were using to assist her with her decision. Mrs. Simmes asked if Ms. DiResta would be able to make a decision within a timely manner and Ms.

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DiResta replied affirmatively. Ms. DiResta explained that she would be able to make a decision prior to the end of the year, as the database did not have to be implemented until January 1, 2010.

Ms. DiResta asked how many counties within the State were currently using Vet Cop and Mr. Brennan responded that there were two counties using Vet Cop and one was in the process of implementing the system. Mrs. Simmes queried how many counties in the State were using VIMS and Ms. DiResta replied that 27 out of the 62 counties in the State were using VIMS.

Ms. DiResta asked why there was no information on the Veterans' Administration website pertaining to the commencement of electronic filing and Mr. Brennan responded that the information had not been made public because it was a pilot program and the information would not be made public until any issues that may arise were resolved. Ms. DiResta asked if the electronic filing would be available to all the Veterans database vendors and Mr. Brennan replied affirmatively. He explained that once all of the issues were resolved, electronic filing would be offered to all vendors.

Mr. Sokol queried whether the Information Technology Department could develop a database for the Veterans Office and Mr. Metthe replied affirmatively; however, he explained, that he did not feel that this would be a feasible option in light of the time and cost implications.

Discussion ensued.

Pursuant to further discussion on the matter, it was the consensus of the Committee that Ms. DiResta should make a decision on the operating system prior to the end of the year and return to the Committee with her recommendation.

As there was no further business to come before the Human Services Committee, on motion made by Mr. Bentley and seconded by Mr. Stec, Mrs. Simmes adjourned the meeting at 2:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah McLenithan, Legislative Office Specialist