

Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs



Functional Analysis & Records Disposition Authority

Revision
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State Records Commission
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Note: Please see a separate document titled “General Schedule Records Disposition Authority” for commonly created records related to the following functions: Managing the Agency, Managing Finances, Managing Human Resources, and Managing Properties, Facilities, and Resources. The General Schedule should be used in conjunction with the agency-specific Records Disposition Authority.

The General Schedule Records Disposition Authority is available on the Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH) website under the “Manage Records” tab, or may be accessed directly at this link: <https://archives.alabama.gov/RDA/?id=255>

Functional and Organizational Analysis of the Department of Veterans Affairs

Sources of Information

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Historical Context

Alabama citizens have served in the armed forces since before the state’s establishment, with Alabamians fighting in the Creek War of 1813.¹ It was not until the Civil War era, however, that the state of Alabama began issuing specialized resources, compensation, and recognition for the state’s veterans. In the wake of the Civil War, the federal government pioneered an organized, sustained network of assistance available to veterans and their families, including dedicated care facilities and disability compensation. These benefits, however, were only made available to former Union soldiers, leaving Southern states to create their own support systems.²

Alabama first began offering assistance to Civil War veterans in 1864, when the Legislature passed a bill authorizing the state to provide “an artificial leg to every maimed indigent soldier of Alabama.”³ Alabama Act 1867-643 expanded the program and instituted more defined parameters, allocating thirty thousand dollars to provide prosthetics to former soldiers who had lost a limb in service. Veterans submitted written applications to the county probate office, detailing information about service and the circumstances of injury. Accepted applicants received a prosthetic limb crafted to their specifications at no cost. The bill additionally provided that veterans too injured to benefit from a prosthetic would be eligible to receive \$100 in compensation. This initiative was renewed twice, in 1872 and 1875.⁴

In 1879, the State Legislature retooled its veterans relief measures,⁵ passing a pair of bills that provided financial assistance to former Confederate soldiers who had lost limbs or lost their sight.⁶ Soldiers qualifying under the first act were eligible for up to \$75 in compensation; soldiers qualifying under the second act were eligible for up to \$150 in compensation. As the latter half of the century progressed, these benefits were repeatedly renewed and eventually expanded to offer financial relief to individuals unable to work because of other wartime injuries and to widows who had lost their husbands in the war or due to a service-related injury and had not remarried.⁷

On the national stage, the Civil War also represented a turning point for federal veterans’ care initiatives. Faced with unprecedented numbers of affected soldiers and their families, the U.S. government moved to establish more organized and extensive structures to assist

¹ Kathryn Braund, “Creek War of 1813-14,” *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, updated January 30, 2017, <http://encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-1820>.

² Michael Megelsh, “Caring for Veterans: The Civil War and the Present,” *The Journal of the Civil War Era*, February 28, 2017, https://www.journalofthecivilwarera.org/2017/02/caring-veterans-civil-war-present/#_ftnref10.

³ Alabama Act 1864-8.

⁴ Alabama Act 1872-17; Alabama Act 1875-53.

⁵ In accordance with agency practice, this document refers to programs, initiatives, and benefits aimed at former members of the armed forces in the plural, not the plural possessive (ex.: “veterans benefits”).

⁶ Alabama Acts 1879-23 and 1879-24.

⁷ Alabama Act 1880-20; Alabama Act 1883-109; Alabama Act 1885-95; Alabama Act 1887-23; Alabama Act 1889-96.

servicemembers.⁸ Congress first empowered Abraham Lincoln in 1862 to “purchase cemetery grounds and cause them to be securely enclosed, to be used as a national cemetery for the soldiers who shall die in the service of the country.”⁹ That same year, the first twelve national cemeteries opened, many near the sites of significant battles or military training facilities.¹⁰ In Alabama, the first national cemetery was established in 1865 in Mobile to provide for the respectful burial of Union casualties from the Battle of Mobile Bay.¹¹

By 1867, the ever-growing network of independent national cemeteries under the oversight of the Army Office of the Quartermaster necessitated the formation of the Cemeterial Branch of this office. Also in 1867, the U.S. Congress passed the National Cemetery Act, which appropriated \$750,000 to maintain existing cemeteries and develop new burial grounds, including purchasing land, constructing walls and fencing, building lodging for superintendents, and acquiring headstones. Additionally, Congress allocated funds to pay cemetery superintendents, often disabled Civil War veterans, to provide upkeep for each cemetery. Wooden headstones provided by the Office of the Quartermaster marked burials before being replaced by marble markers beginning in 1873.¹²

While Southern states focused their relief efforts specifically on Confederate war veterans, filling the assistance gap created by the federal government’s decision not to provide benefits to former Confederate soldiers, the national government shifted its attention to helping national military veterans of all wars.¹³ Prior to the Civil War, three federal care facilities catered to veterans: the Philadelphia Naval Asylum (opened in 1834), the Old Soldiers’ Home in Washington, D.C. (opened in 1853), and the Government Hospital for the Insane (opened in 1855).¹⁴ In 1865,

⁸ While “servicemember” may be spelled as one or two words, the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs uses the single-word spelling. This document also spells “servicemember” as one word in keeping with the agency’s practices.

⁹ National Cemetery Administration, “Facts: NCA History and Development,” U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, updated September 29, 2021, https://www.cem.va.gov/facts/NCA_History_and_Development_1.asp.

¹⁰ National Cemetery Administration, “Dates of Establishment: National Cemeteries & NCA Burial Sites,” U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, updated October 19, 2021, https://www.cem.va.gov/facts/Dates_of_Establishment_1.asp. The first twelve cemeteries were Alexandria National Cemetery in Alexandria, Virginia; Annapolis National Cemetery in Annapolis, Maryland; Camp Butler National Cemetery in Springfield, Illinois; Cypress Hills National Cemetery in Brooklyn, New York; Danville National Cemetery in Danville, Kentucky; Fort Leavenworth National Cemetery in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas; Fort Scott National Cemetery in Fort Scott, Kansas; Keokuk National Cemetery in Keokuk, Iowa; Loudon Park National Cemetery in Baltimore, Maryland; Mill Springs National Cemetery in Nancy, Kentucky; New Albany National Cemetery in New Albany, Indiana; and the U.S. Soldiers’ and Airmen’s Home National Cemetery in Washington, D.C.

¹¹ National Park Service, “Mobile National Cemetery, Mobile, Alabama,” U.S. Department of the Interior, accessed June 24, 2022, https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/national_cemeteries/alabama/mobile_national_cemetery.html.

¹² Today, the National Cemetery Administration maintains 155 cemeteries and thirty-four soldiers lots or monument sites in forty-two states. The National Park Service cares for an additional fourteen cemeteries as part of their responsibilities towards historic sites and battlefields.

¹³ VA History Office, “History – Department of Veterans Affairs (VA),” U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, updated May 27, 2021, https://www.va.gov/HISTORY/VA_History/Overview.asp.

¹⁴ Frances M. McMillen and James S. Kane, “Institutional Memory: The Records of St. Elizabeths Hospital at the National Archives,” *Prologue Magazine*, National Archives and Records Administration, updated July 23, 2020, <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2010/summer/institutional.html>. The Philadelphia Naval Asylum relocated to Gulfport, Mississippi in 1976, where it is now known as the Armed Forces Retirement Home – Gulfport. The Old Soldiers’ Home is now known as the Armed Forces Retirement Home – Washington, D.C. The

Congress authorized the establishment of nine National Homes for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers. Each Home's facilities included dormitories, hospitals, kitchens, churches, recreational areas, and often cemeteries.¹⁵

By the turn of the century, Alabama and other states faced a new reality: thirty-five years after the Civil War, even those veterans who survived the conflict uninjured were aging, increasingly infirm, and, in many cases, unable to work and facing destitution. In Alabama, state legislators initially responded to aging veteran populations by further expanding pension eligibility to any "needy soldiers and sailor residents of Alabama, who from wounds or other cause are now unable to earn a livelihood."¹⁶ The enabling legislation explicitly dictated that veterans unable to support themselves because of sickness or old age would be eligible for pension funds. As counties began implementing the pension program, legislators worked to ensure pension funds were distributed where most needed. Alabama Act 1895-512 permitted the governor to appoint three Confederate veterans in each county to evaluate applicants before issuing pension funds and designated that a fraction of each property tax dollar be set aside for the pension fund; later, Alabama Act 1897-342 extended the act indefinitely. Eventually, conditions necessitated the creation of a State Board of Examiners of Pensions comprising of a physician and two Confederate veterans to examine pensions applications.¹⁷

Beginning in the early 1880s, other states opened rest homes for Confederate veterans; in many cases, local chapters of national fraternal or charitable organizations like the United Confederate Veterans and the United Daughters of the Confederacy led such efforts. Often, these organizations arranged for construction of the home and even accepted residents before securing state appropriations or, in some cases, transferred ownership of lands and facilities to the government to ensure continued funding and operations. Though the public supported the establishment of specialized homes as earned repayment for military service, many veterans themselves hesitated, viewing the homes as charity and a last resort in tough times. This attitude kept home populations small; most would house only around 150 residents at a time, and many veterans only stayed for a year or less.¹⁸

As Alabama legislators continued to tweak the pension system, independent veterans' groups turned their attention towards the establishment of a specialized home for former Confederate servicemembers, similar to those established in other Southern states. As in other states, prominent Confederate veterans led the charge in Alabama. The state's division of the United Confederate Veterans adopted a resolution in 1901 supporting building a home for Confederate veterans in Alabama, one of the earliest actions of that chapter. As the State Legislature was not in session, attorney and former Confederate officer Jefferson M. Falkner purchased and donated

Government Hospital for the Insane continues operations as Saint Elizabeths Hospital, a mental health hospital operated by the Department of Behavioral Health of the City of Washington, D.C.

¹⁵ National Cemetery Administration, "Facts: NCA History and Development," U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, updated September 29, 2021, https://www.cem.va.gov/facts/NCA_History_and_Development_1.asp.

¹⁶ Alabama Act 1891-286.

¹⁷ Alabama Act 1899-421.

¹⁸ R. B. Rosenburg, *Living Monuments: Confederate Soldiers' Homes in the New South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

102 acres in Chilton County for that purpose.¹⁹ Securing land was only half the battle, however, and Falkner and the United Confederate Veterans turned to the public for the funds necessary to build proper facilities. After an outpouring of support, construction began in 1902 on the main building of what became the Alabama Home for Confederate Soldiers. Once finished, the property featured ten residential structures, a mix of dormitories and small cottages, and twelve other supporting buildings including an administrative building, a hospital, and barns. The Home admitted the first residents later that same year.²⁰ Alabama Act 1903-273 formally transferred ownership of the Alabama Home for Confederate Veterans to the State of Alabama and allocated funds to complete construction and provide care to residents. It additionally created a Board of Control made up of ten Confederate veterans from around the state to oversee operations at the facility. Under the state's control, the Home was designated a refuge for "indigent Confederate Veterans, residing in the State of Alabama, who are unable to make a livelihood on account of physical disability or old age."

The Board of Control opened the Home not just to indigent veterans, but also to their wives. While legislation originally decreed that wives were only welcome for as long as their husband's residence, in practice, Confederate widows could continue living at the Home after the death of their resident husband.²¹ In 1915, the Legislature formally condoned existing practice in Alabama Act 1915-219, though the Act simultaneously narrowed application eligibility to women over sixty years of age who had been "the wife of such Confederate veteran for five years or more prior to making such application for admission to said home."

Throughout the first two decades of the twentieth century, the Alabama government and its citizens considered care for its Confederate veterans to be a priority. Even in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, Alabama still focused many of its veterans relief efforts on aging Civil War servicemembers. Governor Charles Henderson noted in his 1919 address to the state legislature that while 73,825 Alabamians were drafted into the U.S. Army, state government officials focused on token commemorative gestures to its young returning veterans rather than concrete re-integration assistance.²² On the national stage, Congress enacted programs for disability compensation, insurance, and vocational rehabilitation for returning World War servicemembers, including the creation of three smaller predecessor offices to the modern consolidated Veterans Administration.²³ Conversely, the Alabama Legislature focused

¹⁹ R. B. Rosenburg, *Living Monuments: Confederate Soldiers' Homes in the New South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

²⁰ Bill Rambo, "Confederate Memorial Park," *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, updated October 8, 2014, <http://encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-2366>.

²¹ Bill Rambo, "Confederate Memorial Park," *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, updated October 8, 2014, <http://encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-2366>.

²² Among these measures were the creation of the Alabama Memorial Commission by Alabama Act 1919-9. The work of the commission resulted in the construction of the World War Memorial Building, which houses the Alabama Department of Archives and History.

²³ VA History Office, "History – Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)," U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, updated May 27, 2021, https://www.va.gov/HISTORY/VA_History/Overview.asp. Congress created the Veterans Bureau, the Bureau of Pensions of the Interior Department, and the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers between 1917 and 1920. World War I programs were consolidated under the umbrella of the Veterans Bureau in 1921, before all three entities, along with other scattered federal veterans programs, were merged by President Herbert Hoover in 1930 to create the Veterans Administration. The modern iteration of the federal Veterans

their recognition of recent veterans on commemoration rather than financial or medical assistance.²⁴ This focus would remain the status quo until 1927, when Governor William W. Brandon highlighted Spanish-American War and World War I veterans in his address to the legislature:

“This State has not properly recognized the Veterans of the Spanish-American War and the Veterans of the World War. I realize that so long as we have a Confederate soldier or widow of such soldier, the State is unable to pension the Spanish War or World War Veteran... but I believe they are worthy of such recognition.”

To assist returning World War servicemembers and veterans of previous conflicts, Governor Brandon proposed appropriating funds to the American Legion and to the United Spanish American War Veterans. Additionally, the Governor suggested providing space to both organizations in new state facilities to create a central location for veterans to access resources.

The State Legislature exceeded the Governor’s recommendation, creating the position of State Service Commissioner during that same session. Alabama Act 1927-136 provided that the Commissioner be appointed by the Governor from one of three candidates put forth by the American Legion. Of those recommended, each must have served in World War I and received an honorable discharge. The State Service Commissioner was tasked to “aid all residents of the State of Alabama who served in the military or naval forces of the United States during any war in which the United States has been engaged, their relatives, beneficiaries and dependents, to receive from the United States any and all compensation, hospitalization, insurance, or other aid or benefit to which they may be entitled.”

The position of State Service Commissioner lives on today as the head of the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs, though the Department itself would not be formed for nearly another two decades. The initial bill did not provide for any state-specific benefits or funding beyond routine salary and administrative costs. In 1931, legislators added an Assistant State Service Commissioner, two State Service Field Commissioners, and a Secretary to the State Service Commissioner to assist the Commissioner in carrying out his duties.²⁵ Then, as now, the position directed veterans towards existing federal resources, streamlining the benefits claims process and making it as easy as possible for servicemembers to access aid.

Meanwhile, the Legislature had reliably funded the Home for Confederate Soldiers’ operation for a quarter century.²⁶ However, by the late 1920s, many of the Home’s veteran residents had passed away; the last residing soldier died in 1934, leaving less than a dozen widows as the last permanent residents of the Home. The facility finally closed its doors in 1939 and transferred the last five widows in residence to the care of the Alabama Department of Public Welfare (a predecessor of the modern Alabama Department of Human Resources). In thirty-seven years of

Administration, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, incorporates three subsidiary agencies: the Veterans Health Administration, the Veterans Benefits Administration, and the National Cemetery Administration.

²⁴ A notable exception came with the passage of Alabama Act 1921-5, which authorized a poll tax exemption for World War I veterans.

²⁵ Alabama Act 1931-633.

²⁶ Alabama Act 1907-205; Alabama Act 1909-173; Alabama Act 1911-165; Alabama Act 1915-688; Alabama Act 1919-16; Alabama Act 1927-413; Alabama Act 1935-373.

operation, between 1902 and 1939, the Alabama home had cared for approximately 850 veterans and their spouses.²⁷ The Home may have closed, but the state continued to issue pensions to Confederate veterans until 1955 and to widows of Confederate veterans until the last widow passed away in 2004.²⁸

As the Home for Confederate Soldiers concluded its operations, Alabama pioneered new benefits initiatives. Even as the Great Depression swept through Alabama and the nation at large, legislators in 1931 set aside \$2,400 to fund scholarships for the children of deceased World War I servicemembers, the first scholarship of its kind in Alabama.²⁹ Each eligible child between the ages of sixteen and twenty-one could receive free tuition at a state college or secondary school and additional funds for room and board, books, or supplies. The scholarship program was originally intended to last through 1942; however, a successor of this initiative continues today as the G.I. Dependent Scholarship Program, now administered by representatives of the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs.

As World War II erupted, Alabamians stepped up in unprecedented numbers. Approximately 321,000 Alabama men served in the armed forces, in addition to thousands of Alabama women serving in military support roles through auxiliary organizations like the Women's Army Corps and the Army Nurse Corps.³⁰ As early as 1943, the state legislature began considering the eventual return of thousands of servicemembers and their specialized needs as they integrated back into society and the workforce. As a first step, lawmakers enacted legislation authorizing each county to create an office of County Service Commissioner to operate under the auspices of county government. County Service Commissioners' duties echoed those of the State Service Commissioner: "to aid all residents of [their] county who served in the... armed services during any war in which the United States has been engaged, their relatives, beneficiaries and dependents, to receive from the United States any and all compensation, hospitalization, insurance, or other aid or benefits to which they may be entitled."³¹

The influx of returning World War II veterans spurred a new awareness of the support needed by returning servicemembers. Governor Chauncey Sparks foresaw this eventuality in his 1945 address to the Legislature, saying "There will be a tremendous dislocation when this war is over. The returning soldier who began a career perhaps at eighteen will have reached maturity, will have had strange and unusual experiences, and will need to be reoriented and furnished some kind of guidance and assistance. The Federal government may undertake to do some or much of what is needed... [but] the job, in reality, is a State function." Relief efforts for returning soldiers and sailors were no longer a topic confined to the small bubble of the State Service Commission and the county service commissioners; proper treatment and benefits for servicemembers extended into the realms of education, public and mental health, and the state's economy and

²⁷ R. B. Rosenberg, *Living Monuments: Confederate Soldiers' Homes in the New South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993).

²⁸ Associated Press, "Last widow of Civil War veteran dies," NBC News, May 31, 2004, <https://www.nbcnews.com/id/wbna5106000>. Alberta Martin married William Jasper Martin, 81, in 1927 when she was 21 years old.

²⁹ Alabama Act 1931-640.

³⁰ Allen Cronenberg, *Forth to the Mighty Conflict: Alabama and World War II* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1995).

³¹ Alabama Act 1943-586.

workforce.

The state needed to rethink how to best assist veterans, leading to the creation of the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs in 1945. The new agency consolidated the State Service Commissioner and the county service commissioners under one administration and charged the agency's staff to liaise with the federal government to connect veterans with benefits and to "cooperate with all other heads of the State Departments in coordinating the plans and programs of state agencies which may be utilized in the administration of various aspects of the problems of veterans, and dependents of veterans."³² The new State Board of Veterans Affairs, comprising representatives of veterans support organizations, oversaw the agency. Veterans themselves steered the leadership of the state agency formed for their benefit. As new veterans associations have formed in the ensuing years, the Board of Veterans Affairs has expanded its membership to include these organizations, ensuring that the agency continues to be directed by the people it serves.³³

Since its inception, the mission of the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs has remained the same: to connect Alabama's servicemembers and their families with well-earned benefits. Over time, the agency expanded its work from offering veterans a method for receiving federal benefits to administering state-led programs specific to Alabama residents.

In 1951, the agency revived the dormant scholarship program for the dependents of servicemembers who had suffered a disability in the course of their service, died in the line of duty, or been declared missing in action. Dependents received full tuition for any state two-year, four-year, or trade school program.³⁴ The program's scope has changed in the course of its seventy years of existence. The Department adopted the federal tuition cap in 2017, and the state Legislature authorized students to apply scholarship money to a select list of Alabama private schools in 2022.³⁵

Also in 1951, the Legislature passed enabling legislation for a future cemetery administered by the agency, authorizing the Department to "develop and implement state-wide plans for a repatriation program for proper re-interment, with appropriate honors, of the bodies of members of the armed services returned from temporary overseas cemeteries."³⁶ At the time, the state was home to one national cemetery, the Mobile National Cemetery. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs additionally opened the Fort Mitchell National Cemetery in Russell County in 1987 and

³² Alabama Act 1945-173.

³³ The State Board of Veterans Affairs initially comprised representatives of the American Legion, the United Spanish American War Veterans, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the Disabled American Veterans. Alabama Act 1966-207 added representatives of the Veterans of WWI of the USA, Incorporated; Alabama Act 1975-1038 added representatives from AMVETS; Alabama Act 1986-504 added representatives from the American Ex-Prisoners of War, Incorporated; Alabama Act 1990-526 added representatives of the Vietnam Veterans of America; Alabama Act 1994-262 added representatives from the Military Order of the Purple Heart; Alabama Act 2011-625 added representatives of the Alabama Alliance of the Military Officers Association of America, Incorporated and the Marine Corps League. All organizations are represented by a number of members in proportion to the number of veterans they serve.

³⁴ Alabama Act 1951-47.

³⁵ Alabama Act 2017-349; Alabama Act 2022-91.

³⁶ Alabama Act 1951-960.

the Alabama National Cemetery in Montevallo in 2009.³⁷ That same year, the Legislature moved to establish a state veterans cemetery. Governor Bob Riley signed Alabama Act 2009-788 into law on May 22, 2009, at the future site of the Alabama Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Spanish Fort. The first interments occurred in April 2013; since then, more than five thousand Alabama veterans and their families have chosen the cemetery's grounds as their final resting place.

By the 1980s, the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs faced a familiar challenge: providing appropriate assistance to an aging veteran population. In 1982, the average age of World War II veterans was 64 years old. Alabama met the challenge with an old solution to a revived problem: a designated care home, operated by the state, exclusively catering to former members of the armed forces. In September 1988, the State Legislature granted the Department permission to construct and operate necessary veterans homes and receive funding from the federal Veterans Administration for that purpose.³⁸ Just over a year later, the Bill Nichols State Veterans Home, named for late U.S. Representative and Army veteran Bill Nichols, opened its doors in Alexander City to its first residents. The agency opened an additional two Homes in 1995, the William F. Green State Veterans Home in Bay Minette and the Floyd E. "Tut" Fann State Veterans Home in Huntsville, and a fourth Home in 2012, the Colonel Robert L. Howard State Veterans Home in Pell City. All four homes provide skilled nursing care to residents; the Howard Home additionally serves as a domiciliary/assisted living facility for residents with less intensive medical needs. In July 2022, construction began on a fifth Home, the Command Sergeant Major Bennie G. Adkins State Veterans Home, in Enterprise.³⁹ The agency constructs new facilities based on the needs of the veteran population living in the state, including the age distribution of veteran populations and the population's disability level.

Since its earliest days, the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs has endeavored to fulfill its mission to "promote awareness, assist eligible veterans, their families, and survivors to receive from the U.S. and State Governments any and all benefits to which they may be entitled under existing or future laws to be enacted." Agency staff administer and adjust programs over time to best address the changing needs of veterans, whether through special programs, health assistance, or even monetary compensation.⁴⁰ In 2023, the Department offers Alabama veterans of all six military branches support for a myriad of challenges facing former servicemembers, including suicide prevention and homelessness, in addition to assisting individuals in accessing

³⁷ National Cemetery Administration, "Fort Mitchell National Cemetery," U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, updated April 26, 2019; National Cemetery Administration, "Alabama National Cemetery," U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, updated October 28, 2020.

³⁸ Alabama Act 1988-776: "An Act: To authorize the State Department of Veterans' Affairs to provide for the operation of a state veterans' home or homes; to provide for the administration of such homes; to authorize the receipt and use of federal and other funds for such purpose; to provide for the powers and duties of the State Board of Veterans' Affairs regarding said veterans' home; to create a veterans' home trust fund; to provide certain admission and discharge policy; to require certain reports and budget requests; to specify reimbursement policy; and to provide that certain certification requirements are met."

³⁹ Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs, "Rabren General Contractors selected to build new ADVA State Veterans Home," June 24, 2022, <https://va.alabama.gov/rabren-general-contractors-selected-to-build-new-adv-a-state-veterans-home/>.

⁴⁰ Alabama Act 1973-760: "An Act: To authorize and provide for the payment out of the general fund in the state treasury of a gratuity to each member of the armed services from this State who was a prisoner of war in Vietnam; to provide for the administration of this Act by the State Department of Veterans Affairs."

federal benefits.⁴¹ The Department prides itself on living up to its motto, “Proudly Serving America’s Finest,” by channeling assistance from the state and federal governments to serve its veterans as well as they served the country.

Agency Organization

The Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs is overseen by the State Board of Veterans Affairs which, per the mandate of the Code of Alabama 1975 § 31-5-3, “shall be responsible for the adoption of policies, rules, and regulations... for the government of the Department of Veterans’ Affairs.” The Board’s membership consists of the Governor, who serves as chair of the Board, and representatives from the Alabama Department of the American Legion, the United Spanish American War Veterans, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Disabled American Veterans, Veterans of WWI of the USA, Inc., the Vietnam Veterans of America, AMVETS, the Military Order of the Purple Heart, the American Ex-Prisoners of War, Inc., the Alabama Alliance of the Military Officers Association of America, Inc., and the Marine Corps League. Board member numbers vary over time, as each association is represented by a number proportionate to the constituents it serves. Each association appoints one Board member for the first 7,500 or fewer servicemembers it serves, and an additional Board member is appointed for each 7,500 constituents thereafter, with numbers determined on July 1 of each year. In 2023, the Board consists of seventeen members, and no longer includes representatives from the United Spanish American War Veterans or the Veterans of WWI of the USA. The Code of Alabama 1975 § 31-5-3 requires that these nominations “include, in representative proportions, veterans of every war which are included in the membership of the organizations.”⁴² Board meetings are held quarterly and a majority of members is necessary to establish a quorum.⁴³

In its oversight role, the Board appoints a State Service Commissioner, the highest ranked employee of the Department. The Commissioner must be a resident of Alabama and “shall be a veteran who served on active duty for a period of 60 days or more in the military or naval forces of the United States in any war in which the United States shall have been engaged, and shall have been honorably discharged therefrom...”⁴⁴ The Commissioner directs day-to-day actions of the Department, including the authority to hire clerical personnel and “engage in activities designed to educate, recognize, and promote the mission of the board to veterans, the public, potential applicants, and other public agencies...” The Commissioner may appoint assistant commissioners, district and county service commissioners, and department representatives to state veterans homes. These appointments are subject to approval by the State Board of Veterans Affairs. As of 2023, the Department employs 126 employees statewide.

The Code of Alabama § 31-5A-4 directs the Department of Veterans Affairs to “contract with a non-governmental entity to operate a state veterans’ home or homes for the care and support of

⁴¹ As of 2023, the six branches of the military which the Department supports are the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Space Force, and Coast Guard.

⁴² The Code of Alabama 1975 § 31-5-3 additionally permits the Board to grant representation to “any organization of veterans of the Second World War having a national charter authorized by an act of Congress and operating through local organizations in Alabama.” No such organizations are active as of 2023.

⁴³ Alabama Administrative Code 920-X-1.

⁴⁴ Code of Alabama 1975 § 31-5-6.

elderly or disabled veterans in the State of Alabama.” As of 2023, the Department contracts with HMR Veterans Services, Inc., a private company specializing in veterans’ medical care. HMR Veterans Services, Inc. staffs medical, administrative, and facilities roles at the four homes in Alexander City, Huntsville, Bay Minette, and Pell City.⁴⁵ The Department of Veterans Affairs employs two state employees at each State Veterans Home: a home director and an administrative assistant to the director, who oversee work completed by the healthcare contractor on behalf of the agency.

Agency Function and Subfunctions

The mandated function of the Department of Veterans Affairs is to provide assistance to all veterans and their family members in formulating and processing claims for compensation, pension, hospitalization, education, burial, and other benefits or privileges. The Department is one of the agencies primarily involved in carrying out the Client Services function of Alabama government.

In the performance of its mandated function, the Department of Veterans Affairs may engage in the following subfunctions:

- **Assisting.** In accordance with the Code of Alabama 1975 § 31-5-4, the Department of Veterans Affairs assists “every veteran of the United States in presenting and pursuing any claim the veteran may have against the United States arising out of his or her military service and in establishing the veteran’s right to any privilege, preference, care, or compensation provided for by the laws of the United States or of the State of Alabama.” To best assist veterans and their dependents on a statewide basis, the department maintains a network of Veterans Service Offices throughout the state, where servicemembers or their families may receive assistance in filing claims for benefits or accessing other available resources. As of 2023, the Department of Veterans Affairs operates sixty-three offices in sixty-one counties, with plans to further expand the Department’s footprint. Agency staff assist veterans and their families in filing claims for benefits including, but not limited to, pension benefits, medical benefits, and educational benefits.

The Department also maintains an office, known as the Appeal and Review Division, in the U.S. Department of Veterans’ Affairs (USDVA) regional office in Montgomery. Staff of this Division provide representation to claimants who have appeals pending at levels of the USDVA’s appeal process. Appeal and Review staff review appellants’ files, contact appellants to discuss the issues on appeal and establish a hearing strategy, and counsel appellants regarding evidence required to support the issue(s) in dispute. Staff then represent the appellant before a local hearing official, a Committee on Waivers and Compromises official, or a Board of Veterans Appeals Veterans’ Law Judge. After a hearing is conducted, Appeal and Review staff assist appellants in gathering and

⁴⁵ The Department previously contracted with four other companies: PHP Healthcare, Total Care Management, Diversified Health Services, and USA Healthcare. All previous contractors have served in the same capacity as HMR Veterans Services, Inc. currently operates.

submitting new evidence and documentation to support the appeal and monitor the appeal as it continues through the appeal process. Staff additionally review disability rating decisions issued by the USDVA to ensure completeness and accuracy. If errors are identified, Appeal and Review staff contact USDVA regional office personnel for further review and correction. Appeal and Review staff additionally provide support to Veterans Service Officers throughout the state of Alabama by reviewing claim files, clarifying procedure, and troubleshooting in-process claims. Division staff do not represent veterans claimants in appeals beyond the Board of Veterans Appeals; however, it may facilitate contact between appellants and partner law firms, who can represent appellants to the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, the U.S. Court of Appeals, or the U.S. Supreme Court.

Additionally, the Department works independently and with other agencies to create and administer special programs aimed at veterans and their families, such as those addressing veteran suicide and homelessness. As of 2023, the agency maintains records on behalf of the Alabama Executive Veterans Network (AlaVetNet) and Alabama's Challenge for Preventing Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families (SMVF). The agency takes a leading role in both of these initiatives with the cooperation of other state agencies and private organizations. Agency staff conduct outreach to communicate available programs and resources to veterans across the state, such as through town hall meetings, conferences, and radio or television interviews.

- **Operating Veterans Homes.** The Code of Alabama 1975 § 31-5A-1 authorizes the Department of Veterans Affairs to establish and operate state veterans homes for the care and support of elderly or disabled Alabama veterans. As of 2023, the Department operates facilities in Alexander City, Bay Minette, Huntsville, and Pell City, and plans to open a fifth facility in Enterprise in 2024. All four homes and the future Enterprise home are skilled facilities, treating residents who require a level of medical care that precludes living alone.⁴⁶ The Colonel Robert L. Howard State Veterans Home in Pell City also operates as a domiciliary/assisted living facility for residents who require minimal assistance with medication and minor day-to-day issues. To be eligible for admittance to a state veterans home, veterans must have been honorably discharged with a minimum of ninety continuous days of active duty service, must have resided in Alabama for the previous twelve months, and must provide an examination by a physician demonstrating that the veteran's medical needs fall within the capabilities of the home's care. Veterans who enlisted after September 7, 1980, and those commissioned after October 16, 1981, must have served a minimum of twenty-four continuous months or the full period for which the person was called to active duty.

In order to provide the best possible care for residents, the Department may receive funding from the U.S. Veterans Administration or other federal agencies to build and operate state veterans homes. Agency staff utilize the State Veterans Home Trust Fund to receive funding for facilities from the federal government.⁴⁷ The U.S. Veterans

⁴⁶ Skilled nursing facilities are also known as nursing homes.

⁴⁷ Code of Alabama 1975 § 31-5A-7

Administration funds approximately 65 percent of building costs for new facilities and provides a per diem for each resident in the care of a state veterans home. Veterans homes additionally receive state funds through the Veterans Assistance Fund.⁴⁸ As of 2023, residents pay less than twenty-five dollars a day out of pocket to support their care.

The Code of Alabama 1975 § 31-5A-4 requires the Department to contract with a non-governmental entity for day-to-day operations at each home. The contracted company performs work including, but not limited to, providing nursing care for residents, operating the on-site pharmacies, orchestrating recreation activities, preparing food, and performing custodial work. Each facility has two state employees: a home director and an administrative assistant who oversee the contractors' work and facility operations and compile reports about home activities.⁴⁹ The contracted company creates patient medical files on behalf of the Department, which are included in this document alongside records created and maintained by the agency's state employees; patient medical files are considered to be the property of the Home and remain with the Home in the event that the Department switches contracted companies. All financials route through the Department and are addressed in the document under the subfunction heading "Administering Internal Operations: Managing Finances." The contract company produces day-to-day operational records, such as dietary menus, staffing schedules, and recreational program records like bingo schedules. These records are considered the property of the contracted company and are not addressed in this document as a result.

- **Operating State Veterans Cemeteries.** The Code of Alabama 1975 § 31-5-3(d) grants the State Board of Veterans Affairs permission to "establish and operate through the Department of Veterans Affairs a state veterans' cemetery." Pursuant to this legislation, the Alabama State Veterans Memorial Cemetery began accepting interments in 2013. Staff anticipate that the 108-acre property will continue facilitating remains and cremains burials and interments for approximately 100 years. State Veterans Memorial Cemetery staff accept applicants for interment in accordance with eligibility guidelines issued by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. As of 2023, the State Veterans Memorial Cemetery is open to veterans who die in the course of active duty or military training or who have received a discharge of a status besides "dishonorable." The Cemetery additionally accepts interment of veterans' spouses and minor or legally dependent children.⁵⁰ In the course of their duties, Cemetery employees process pre-registration, communicate with funeral homes to schedule interments, arrange for grounds and facilities maintenance, document use of cemetery space, and coordinate with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and National Cemetery Administration to track interments and maintain national cemetery standards established by those agencies. As of 2023, 3,600 veterans have pre-registered for interment, and staff facilitate approximately 350 interments a year.

⁴⁸ Code of Alabama 1975 § 38-4-12; Code of Alabama 1975 §38-4-12.1.

⁴⁹ Code of Alabama 1975 § 31-5A-9.

⁵⁰ U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, "Eligibility for burial in a VA national cemetery," updated March 23, 2022, <https://www.va.gov/burials-memorials/eligibility/>. National Cemeteries accepts interment of veterans who have received an honorable discharges, a general discharge, or a medical discharge. Veterans receiving a bad conduct discharge or an officer discharge may also be eligible for interment after further review.

- **Administering the Alabama G.I. Dependent Scholarship Program.** The Code of Alabama 1975 § 31-6-1 through § 31-6-17 directs the department to administer the Alabama G.I. and Dependent’s Educational Benefit Act. Enacted in 1951, the act provides children and spouses of deceased or disabled veterans or prisoners of war with educational benefits in any state-supported college or university.

Staff of the Department of Veterans Affairs receive applications for educational benefits, determine eligibility for applicants, and compensate Alabama schools for students’ tuition costs. Additionally, staff promote the program by producing promotional materials and attending events such as conferences, job or college fairs, or informational sessions; create reports to the State Legislature in accordance with the Code of Alabama 1975 § 31-6-15.1, summarizing information on program expenditures, number of applicants, and number of active students; and compile a yearly budget for the program.

As of 2023, students are granted up to ten semesters, or five standard academic years, of tuition assistance. Students may claim the ten semesters of assistance in an eight-year period after the first semester. Eligibility requirements vary over time; as of 2023, educational benefits are made available to children, stepchildren, un-remarried widow(er)s, and spouses of veterans falling into certain categories. Benefits are offered to children or stepchildren of veterans who are former prisoners of war, are missing in action, have died while on active military service in the line of duty, have a disability rating of 40% or more due to service-connected disabilities, or have died as the result of a service-connected disability.⁵¹ Ten semesters of benefits are also offered to spouses or un-remarried widow(er)s of veterans with a 100% permanent disability rating due to service-related injuries.⁵² Additionally, spouses and un-remarried widow(er)s of veterans with a disability rating between 40% and 90% may receive up to six semesters, or three standard academic years of benefits. Benefits claimed by these students must be used within six years of the date of application.⁵³

Veterans whose dependents file for scholarship benefits in any of the above categories must have received an honorable discharge or other honorable termination of service from the armed forces; have served ninety consecutive days of active duty service, or been discharged or released due to a service-connected disability after less than ninety consecutive days of active duty service; be a permanent civilian resident of Alabama for a year prior to initial entry into active military service, or reside in Alabama for at least one year prior to a subsequent entry into active duty service after a twelve-month break in service. Veterans must also be either a current Alabama resident for two or more years prior to the date of application or the date of the veteran’s death, be a current resident discharged from active duty within twelve months prior to the date of application, or have filed an Alabama resident income tax return for the past ten consecutive years. Veterans who were not permanent residents of the state of Alabama at the time of entry into service must have served at least ninety consecutive days of active duty service, have

⁵¹ Code of Alabama 1975 § 31-6-4.

⁵² Code of Alabama 1975 § 31-6-5.

⁵³ Code of Alabama 1975 § 31-6-6.

received an honorable discharge or other honorable termination of service, have been a permanent resident for five consecutive years immediately prior to the application for scholarship funds, and have a one hundred percent permanent and total service connected disability rating.⁵⁴

Children or stepchildren of eligible veterans must initiate schooling before their twenty-sixth birthday. All students must be a resident of Alabama and remain a full-time resident of the state for the duration of schooling; must yearly complete a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA); must utilize all other available sources of funding before applying scholarship benefits; must comply with Standards of Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) for each semester in which they receive benefits; and must complete a Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) release form for their institution.

The Department has offered educational benefits in line with the Department of Defense Tuition Assistance Cap since 2017. As of 2023, the Department offers educational benefits of up to \$250 per semester hour. Additionally, the Program compensates up to \$1,000 worth of textbooks and lab fees. Students have been permitted to use scholarship funds at any public institution of higher education in Alabama since legislation was first passed in 1950.⁵⁵ In 2022, the State Legislature expanded school eligibility to include private institutions receiving “a direct appropriation from the state.” At the time of this document’s revision, thirty-five public schools and fourteen private schools in Alabama are included in the program.⁵⁶

- **Administering Internal Operations.** The agency performs routine administrative tasks that support or otherwise enable its primary functions. This subfunction does not include records that fall under the “Other Administrative Records” category below.
- **Other Administrative Records.** A significant portion of the agency’s work includes general administrative, financial, and personnel activities performed to support the programmatic areas of the agency.

Please see a separate document titled “General Schedule Records Disposition Authority” for commonly created records related to the following functions: Managing the Agency, Managing Finances, Managing Human Resources, and Managing Properties, Facilities, and Resources. The General Schedule should be used in conjunction with the agency-specific Records Disposition Authority.

The General Schedule Records Disposition Authority is available on the Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH) website under the “Manage Records” tab, or may be accessed directly at this link: <https://archives.alabama.gov/RDA/?id=255>

⁵⁴ Code of Alabama 1975 § 31-6-11.

⁵⁵ Alabama Act 1950-44.

⁵⁶ Alabama Act 2022-91.

Records Appraisal of the Department of Veterans Affairs

The following is a discussion of the three major categories of records created and/or maintained by the Department of Veterans Affairs: Temporary Records, Permanent Records, and Records No Longer Created.

Temporary Records

Temporary records should be held for what is considered their active life and be disposed of once all fiscal, legal, and administrative requirements have been met. Some of the temporary records created by the Department are discussed below:

- **Veterans Claim Files.** Employees of the Department assist veterans in receiving state and federal benefits at Veterans Service Offices throughout the state of Alabama. Veterans Service Officers generate Veterans Claim Files for each servicemember seeking assistance in claiming benefits. Claim Files contain information about the veteran's eligibility and any past claims actions. This may include, but is not limited to, a copy of the veteran's DD-214 discharge documentation, marriage certificates, divorce decrees, birth certificates or adoption papers of dependent children, complete or in-progress state and federal claims forms, summaries of previous visits to a Veterans Service Office, and claims appeals filings. Veterans Claim Files should be retained for fifteen years after last claim activity in order to encompass the typical longest period between interactions.
- **Field/District Office Regular Activity Reports.** Veterans Service Officers produce daily reports tracking the numbers of different types of claims submitted, calls fielded, clients assisted, and other operational statistics. Officers maintain daily and monthly reports to create quarterly and annual reports, submitted to their district manager. District managers collect and submit quarterly and annual reports to Department administration. Information from these reports is made available to the State Board of Veterans Affairs, elected officials, and the general public on the ADVA website, and is summarized in the agency's published annual report. This series also encompasses other routine activity reports not otherwise described. Regular activity reports should be kept for one year after the end of the fiscal year to compare year-to-year statistics.
- **Honor Guard Recognition Program Records.** The agency offers special recognition to Alabama residents who perform military honors within the state. Applicants for recognition must have completed an honor guard or color guard detail at twenty-five events and are nominated by their overseeing service branch.⁵⁷ Recognized applicants receive an Honor Guard Certificate and a commemorative pin. This series includes, but is not limited to, applications for recognition, copies of issued certificates, and related correspondence. Honor Guard Recognition Program Records should be retained for one year after audit in order to account for pin expenditures.

⁵⁷ Members of a military honor guard are servicemembers who perform ceremonial military duties at funerals, including serving as pallbearers, playing Taps, and folding and presenting the burial flag, among other duties. Color guard members carry the flag at special events, such as funerals, graduations, and sporting events.

- **Meeting Minutes of Veterans Home Admissions Committees.** A committee at each State Veterans Home comprising the Home’s director, administrator, staff physician, director of nursing, pharmacist, and social worker examine applications for admission. This committee, known as the Admissions Committee, strictly determines whether Home resources can meet the needs of a potential resident. All decisions are recorded in the meeting minutes of this committee. Committee meeting minutes contain sensitive medical information that is closed to protect residents’ privacy. Permanent statistical information about State Veterans Homes can be found in the department’s annual report. Meeting Minutes of Veterans Home Admissions Committees should be retained for three years to facilitate lookback by Home staff in the event a previously rejected applicant re-applies.
- **Veterans Home Admission Waitlists.** Due to space constraints, State Veterans Homes maintain waitlists of veterans seeking admission to a Home. Applicants are typically on the waitlist for a few months. Veterans are admitted off the waitlist in order, with exceptions for specialized memory care beds, and all veterans on the wartime list receive admission before a Home admits veterans from the peacetime list. Due to the frequent rate at which these lists change, Veterans Home Admission Waitlists should be retained until superseded.
- **Veterans Home Resident Files.** Veterans Home Directors maintain Resident Files for each resident under the Home’s care. Resident files contain information certifying the patient’s eligibility for residency and detailing care requirements. This includes, but is not limited to, the resident’s application (including supporting documentation of medical needs from the applicant’s physician or mental health professional), DD-214 discharge documentation, sex offender registry checks, and the per diem approval issued by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Resident Files do not include information about resident’s medical care received while in the care of a State Veterans Home. Records relating to the resident’s medical care while living in a Home are discussed below; see record series “Veterans Home Patient Medical Records.” Veterans Home Resident Files are maintained for seven years after discharge of the resident in keeping with medical industry best practices.⁵⁸
- **Veterans Home Patient Medical Records.** A contracted third party manages daily operations at State Veterans Homes on behalf of the agency in accordance with the Code of Alabama 1975 § 31-5A-4. Among other duties, the contractor provides medical care to Home residents. Contracted medical professionals document medical care provided to residents in the resident’s patient medical file. Though the contractor creates these records, the records are considered the property of the Home. In the event the agency switches contracted companies, patient medical files will remain with the Home. Veterans Home Patient Medical Records should be retained for seven years after the discharge of the resident to adhere to medical industry best practices and align with the retention for Veterans Home Resident Files.

⁵⁸ Kathy Downing and Marcy Pye, “Retention and Destruction of Health Information,” American Health Information Management Association, updated October 2013, <https://bok.ahima.org/PB/RetentionDestruction#.YuQFVHbMLcs>.

- **Pre-Registration Files.** Alabama Veterans can pre-register for remains or cremains interment at a State Veterans Memorial Cemetery. Pre-registration applications and supporting eligibility documentation are maintained in Pre-Registration Files until the time of the applicant's interment. Records in a Pre-Registration File include, but are not limited to, the pre-registration application and the veteran's DD-214 discharge documentation. At the time of interment in the Cemetery, staff merge the information from the decedent's Pre-Registration File into the decedent's Interment File (discussed under the Permanent Records heading below). Pre-Registration Files should be retained for 100 years to ensure that pre-registration information is preserved until the death of the registrant.
- **Alabama G.I. Dependent Scholarship Program Student Files.** This series encompasses information verifying the student and veteran's eligibility for the scholarship. This includes, but is not limited to, DD-214 discharge documentation, proof of residency, documentation of disability rating, birth certificates or adoption decrees, stepchild affidavits, marriage certificates, program application, eligibility extension documentation, and the certificate of eligibility. Alabama G.I. Dependent Scholarship Program Student Files should be maintained for twenty-five years after the student leaves the program or loses eligibility to encompass the typical longest period of time in which another dependent may apply.

Permanent Records

The Archives Division has appraised the following records as permanent:

Assisting

- **Veterans Outreach Records – Representational Selection of Veterans Outreach Presentations, Publications, or Recordings.** Agency employees conduct regular outreach to apprise veterans of available state and federal benefits. This may be through such venues as conferences, town hall events, and television or radio interviews. This series encompasses presentations, event agendas, publications, recordings, or other records documenting information presented at the outreach event. This series does not concern routine correspondence or planning ephemera associated with outreach events. A representative selection of veterans outreach materials should be preserved to document how the agency communicates its services to constituents. **(Bibliographic Title: Veterans Outreach Records)**
- **Meeting Minutes, Packets, and Agendas of the State Board of Veterans Affairs.** Per the Code of Alabama 1975 § 31-5-3, the State Board of Veterans Affairs is “responsible for the adoption of policies, rules, and regulations for its government and for the government of the Department of Veterans Affairs.” The Board meets quarterly to approve new Department facilities and initiatives. Meeting Minutes, Packets, and Agendas of the State Board of Veterans Affairs document the decision-making process of the board and should be retained permanently. **(Bibliographic Title: Meeting Files)**

- **Meeting Minutes, Packets, and Agendas of Alabama’s Challenge for Preventing Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and Their Families (SMVF).** Alabama’s Challenge for Preventing Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and Their Families (SMVF) is an inter-agency initiative consisting of representatives of the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs, the Alabama State Legislature, the Office of the Governor, the Alabama Department of Mental Health, and the Alabama Department of Public Health which works to address the high rate of suicide among current and former members of the military.⁵⁹ As of 2023, in their role as a lead agency in Alabama’s Challenge, the Department maintains records on behalf of the initiative, including minutes of initiative meetings. Meeting minutes should be retained permanently to document the decision making and planning process to address a public mental health concern. Other records relating to the Alabama’s Challenge program are found in the series “Veterans Claim Files,” “Veterans Outreach Records,” and “Representational Final Versions of Informational and Promotional Materials.” **(Bibliographic Title: Meeting Files)**
- **Meeting Minutes, Packets, and Agendas of the Alabama Executive Veterans Network (AlaVetNet) Executive Committee.** The Alabama Executive Veterans Network unites the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs, the Alabama Department of Mental Health, and the Alabama Adjutant General to lead an initiative providing on-demand resources to Alabama’s veterans and their families.⁶⁰ As of 2023, in their role as a lead agency in the initiative, the Department maintains records on behalf of AlaVetNet. These records include AlaVetNet Executive Committee meeting files. Executive Committee meeting files document the decision-making process of the Committee, including adding new resources to the public AlaVetNet database, and should be preserved permanently. **(Bibliographic Title: Meeting Files)**
- **Reports of Transfer or Discharge (Form DD-214).** These records are copies of Reports of Transfer or Discharge (Form DD-214) issued to the agency by the U.S. Department of Defense. DD-214s document a veteran’s time in military service, including branch of service, rank, station, type of transfer or discharge, and service data, and serve as the foundation for all benefits actions. They should be kept permanently by the agency to facilitate assistance efforts and aid veterans and/or their families in retrieving information about a veteran’s service. This series encompasses the reference copies provided to the Department by partner federal agencies and does not address copies submitted by veterans as part of the benefits process. DD-214s submitted as part of the benefits process, such as are contained in a Veterans Claim File, Veterans Home Resident File, Denied Veterans Home Resident File, Alabama Veterans Memorial Cemetery Pre-

⁵⁹ While the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs uses the one-word spelling of “servicemember,” Governor Kay Ivey reconstituted Alabama’s Challenge for Preventing Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families (SMVF) using the two-word spelling. This document adheres to the two-word spelling when discussing Alabama’s Challenge.

⁶⁰2-1-1 Connects Alabama, “What is 2-1-1 Connects Alabama?,” accessed August 9, 2022, <https://www.211connectsalabama.org/about-us/>. AlaVetNet’s cornerstone project, an online database of resources known by the same name, is hosted by the United Way and 2-1-1 Connects Alabama. 2-1-1 Connects Alabama is a telephone and text message hotline connecting Alabamians with community resources. In addition to hosting the online database, the United Way and 2-1-1 Connects Alabama field requests to be added to the database.

Registration or Interment File, or Alabama G.I. Dependent Scholarship Program Student File, should be retained for the period of time specified by the appropriate benefit claim's record series. **(Bibliographic Title: Not Applicable) (Maintained by the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs)**

Operating State Veterans Cemeteries

- **Interment Files.** The Department maintains information about individuals buried in State Veterans Cemeteries in Interment Files. Interment Files document a veteran's eligibility to be buried in a Cemetery and the circumstances of their interment and may include such records as the application for interment, the veteran's DD-214 discharge documentation, and scheduling documentation from funeral homes. If a veteran is interred with their spouse, minor child, or legal dependent, the Interment File may also include records documenting the individual's relation to the veteran, such as marriage certificates, birth certificates, certifications of age, or medical letters certifying a legal dependent's disability. Additionally, Interment Files contain information about where in the Cemetery an individual is buried. Interment Files are separate from, but related to, Pre-Registration Files. When a pre-registered veteran is buried at the State Veterans Memorial Cemetery, their Pre-Registration File is absorbed into their Interment File. **(Bibliographic Title: Not Applicable) (Maintained by the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs)**
- **Plot Maps – Periodic Captures of the Veterans Memorial Cemetery Plot Map.** Agency staff with the Veterans Memorial Cemetery maintain electronic and printed paper maps detailing the layout of cemetery grounds and where individual decedents are interred. Staff use plot maps both to track interment locations internally and to facilitate interment tracking efforts by the National Cemetery Administration of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Due to the nature of the information plot maps chronicle, these records are quickly superseded as the Cemetery facilitates new interments; however, information in plot maps is historically valuable in demonstrating how the Cemetery evolves over time, including as extensions are added to the site. In recognition of this value, the agency should preserve captures of the plot map on a periodic basis corresponding with regular inspections by the National Cemetery Administration, typically performed on a five-year schedule. Intermittent maps may be updated and superseded as necessary. **(Bibliographic Title: Veterans Memorial Cemetery Plot Maps)**

Administering Internal Operations

- **Inspection Reports by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.** The Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs partners with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to execute many key projects, including the construction and operation of State Veterans Homes and the State Veterans Memorial Cemetery. Partnership may come in the form of federal permission to pursue initiatives, grant funding from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs or its subsidiary bureaus, compensation for services, or ongoing access to federal resources. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs performs periodic inspections, typically on a five-year schedule, to verify that the agency is conforming to

federal standards, such as for expenditure of federal funds or operation of facilities receiving federal support. Examiners with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs produce a report at the end of each inspection detailing agency practices and areas that need improvement. Inspection Reports should be retained permanently to document how the agency adheres to federal standards and collaborates with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. **(Bibliographic Title: Federal Inspection Reports)**

Records No Longer Created

- **Alabama Servicemember Casualty Database.** The agency previously maintained a list of Alabama casualties in the Global War on Terrorism. These records were used to create the Alabama Fallen Heroes Memorial within the State Capitol Building.⁶¹ As of 2023, the database is no longer maintained. These records should be preserved for their research value in documenting Alabama’s involvement in the Global War on Terrorism. **(Bibliographic Title: Alabama Servicemember Casualty Database)**
- **Staff Meeting Agendas and Minutes.** The Department holds regular staff meetings to discuss agency operations and programs. The agency previously produced agendas and minutes for quarterly meetings attended by all staff, including those working in offices other than the Montgomery headquarters. Minutes and agendas produced in the course of quarterly staff meetings included information such as summaries from State Board of Veterans Affairs meetings and other program-related issues. As of 2023, the agency no longer creates minutes, agendas, or packets for routine staff meetings. **(Bibliographic Title: Not Applicable) (Maintained by the Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs)**

⁶¹ Ainsley Allison, “Alabama’s fallen heroes honored and remembered at State Capitol,” *ABC 33/40 News*, October 27, 2010, <https://abc3340.com/archive/alabamas-fallen-heroes-honored-and-remembered-at-state-capitol>.

Permanent Records List Department of Veterans Affairs

Assisting

1. Veterans Outreach Records – Representational Selection of Veterans Outreach Presentations, Publications, or Recordings
2. Meeting Minutes, Packets, and Agendas of the State Board of Veterans Affairs
3. Meeting Minutes, Packets, and Agendas of Alabama’s Challenge for Preventing Suicide Among Service Members, Veterans, and their Families
4. Meeting Minutes, Packets, and Agendas of the Alabama Executive Veterans Network (AlaVetNet) Executive Committee
5. Reports of Transfer or Discharge (Form DD 214)*

Operating State Veterans Cemeteries

1. Interment Files*
2. Plot Maps – Periodic Captures of the Veterans Memorial Cemetery Plot Map

Administering Internal Operations

1. Inspection Reports by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Records No Longer Created

1. Alabama Servicemember Casualty Database
2. Staff Meeting Minutes, Agendas and Packets*

*indicates records that the Department of Veterans Affairs determined should be retained permanently and that ADAH anticipates will remain in the care and custody of the creating agency. All other permanent records are to be transmitted to the ADAH once they are no longer in active use by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Note: For other permanent administrative records, such as annual reports, newsletters, organizational charts, and informational and promotional materials, please see a separate document titled “General Schedule Records Disposition Authority.”

The General Schedule Records Disposition Authority is available on the Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH) website under the “Manage Records” tab, or may be accessed directly at this link: <https://archives.alabama.gov/RDA/?id=255>

Department of Veterans Affairs Records Disposition Authority

This Records Disposition Authority (RDA) is issued by the State Records Commission under the authority granted by the Code of Alabama 1975 § 41-13-5 and 41-13-20 through 21. It was compiled by the Archives Division, Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH), which serves as the Commission's staff, in cooperation with representatives of the Agency. The RDA lists records created and maintained by the Agency in carrying out their mandated functions and activities. It identifies records which must be maintained permanently and ultimately transferred to the ADAH; establishes retention periods for temporary records; and provides the legal authority for the Agency to implement destruction of eligible records.

Alabama law requires public officials to create and maintain records that document the business of their offices. These records must be protected from "mutilation, loss, or destruction," so that they may be transferred to an official's successor in office and may be made available to members of the public. Records also must be kept in accordance with auditing standards approved by the Examiners of Public Accounts (Code of Alabama 1975 § 36-12-2, 36-12-4, and 41-5-23). For assistance in implementing this RDA, or for advice on records disposition or other records management concerns, contact the agency records manager or ADAH Archives Division at (334) 242-4452.

Explanation of Records Requirements

The RDA shall govern the disposition of all records, regardless of format, created by the agency from creation to dissolution. Please contact the staff of the Department of Archives and History before destroying any records created prior to 1940.

This RDA supersedes any previous records disposition schedules or RDAs governing the retention of the records created by the Agency. Copies of superseded schedules are no longer valid and may not be used for records disposition.

The RDA establishes retention and disposition instructions for records listed below, regardless of the medium on which those records may be kept. Electronic mail, for example, is a communications tool that may record permanent or temporary information. As for records in any other format, the retention periods for e-mail records are governed by the requirements of the subfunctions to which the records belong.

Certain other record-like materials are not actually regarded as official records and may be disposed of under this RDA. Such materials include (1) duplicate record copies that do not require official action, so long as the creating office maintains the original record for the period required; (2) catalogs, trade journals, and other publications received that require no action and do not document agency activities; (3) stocks of blank stationery, blank forms, or other surplus materials that are not subject to audit and have become obsolete; (4) transitory records, which are temporary records created for short-term, internal purposes, may include, but are not limited to, telephone call-back messages, drafts of ordinary documents not needed for their evidential value,

copies of material sent for information purposes but not needed by the receiving office for future business, and internal communications about social activities; (5) honorary materials, plaques, awards, presentations, certificates, and gifts received or maintained by the agency staff. They may be disposed of without documentation of destruction.

Records Disposition Requirements

This section of the RDA is arranged by subfunctions of the Agency and lists the groups of records created and/or maintained as a result of activities and transactions performed in carrying out these subfunctions. The Agency may submit requests to revise specific records disposition requirements to the State Records Commission for consideration at its regular biannual meetings.

Assisting

Veterans Claim Files

Disposition: Temporary Record. Retain 15 years after the last claim activity.

Field/District Office Regular Activity Reports

Disposition: Temporary Record. Retain 1 year after the end of the fiscal year in which the records were created.

Veterans Outreach Records

- a. REPRESENTATIONAL SELECTION OF VETERANS OUTREACH PRESENTATIONS, PUBLICATIONS, OR RECORDINGS.

Disposition: PERMANENT RECORD.

- b. Veterans Outreach Administrative Records

Disposition: Temporary Record. Retain for useful life.

MEETING MINUTES, PACKETS, AND AGENDAS OF THE STATE BOARD OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

Disposition: PERMANENT RECORD.

MEETING MINUTES, PACKETS, AND AGENDAS OF ALABAMA'S CHALLENGE FOR PREVENTING SUICIDE AMONG SERVICE MEMBERS, VETERANS, AND THEIR FAMILIES (SMVF)

Disposition: PERMANENT RECORD.

MEETING MINUTES, PACKETS, AND AGENDAS OF THE ALABAMA EXECUTIVE VETERANS NETWORK (ALAVETNET) EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Disposition: PERMANENT RECORD.

Recordings of Meetings

Disposition: Temporary Record. Retain until minutes are signed.

Honor Guard Recognition Program Records

Disposition: Temporary Record. Retain 1 year after compliance or financial audit by the Examiners of Public Accounts or an equivalent auditing firm or one year after the end of the fiscal year the audit covers, whichever is later.

REPORTS OF TRANSFER OR DISCHARGE (FORM DD 214)

Disposition: PERMANENT RECORD.

Records No Longer Created

ALABAMA SERVICEMEMBER CASUALTY DATABASE

Disposition: PERMANENT RECORD.

Operating Veterans Homes

Meeting Minutes of Veterans Home Admissions Committees

Disposition: Temporary Record. Retain 3 years after the end of the fiscal year in which the records were created.

Veterans Home Admission Waitlists

Disposition: Temporary Record. Retain until superseded.

Veterans Home Resident Files

Disposition: Temporary Record. Retain 7 years after discharge of the resident.

Denied Veterans Home Resident Files

Disposition: Temporary Record. Retain 7 years after denial.

Veterans Home Regular Activity Reports

Disposition: Temporary Record. Retain 1 year after the end of the fiscal year in which the records were created.

Veterans Home Patient Medical Records

Disposition: Temporary Record. Retain 7 years after discharge of the resident.

Operating State Veterans Cemeteries

Pre-Registration Files

Disposition: Temporary Record. Retain 100 years.

Note: If individual is interred at a State Veterans Memorial Cemetery, transfer contents of the individual's Pre-Registration File to the individual's Interment File.

INTERMENT FILES

Disposition: PERMANENT RECORD. Retain in office.

PLOT MAPS

- a. Plot Map Master File
Disposition: Temporary Record. Retain until superseded.
- b. PERIODIC CAPTURES OF THE VETERANS MEMORIAL CEMETERY PLOT MAP
Disposition: PERMANENT RECORD. Agency staff should preserve a copy of the plot map at the time of inspection by the National Cemetery Administration.

Cemetery Grounds Maintenance Records

Disposition: Temporary Record. Retain 5 years.

Veterans Memorial Cemetery Regular Activity Reports

Disposition: Temporary Record. Retain 1 year after the end of the fiscal year in which the records were created.

Administering the Alabama G.I. Dependent Scholarship Program

Alabama G.I. Dependent Scholarship Program Student Files

Disposition: Temporary Record. Retain 25 years after student leaves the program or loses eligibility.

Administering Internal Operations

INSPECTION REPORTS BY THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

Disposition: PERMANENT RECORD.

Legal Case Files

Disposition: Temporary Record. Retain 20 years after the final disposition of the case.

Records No Longer Created

STAFF MEETING MINUTES, AGENDAS, AND PACKETS

Disposition: PERMANENT RECORD. Retain in office.

Other Administrative Records

Note: For all other administrative records, please see a separate document titled “General Schedule Records Disposition Authority” for commonly created records related to the following functions: Managing the Agency, Managing Finances, Managing Human Resources, and Managing Properties, Facilities, and Resources. The General Schedule should be used in conjunction with the agency-specific Records Disposition Authority.

The General Schedule Records Disposition Authority is available on the Alabama Department of Archives and History (ADAH) website under the “Manage Records” tab, or may be accessed directly at this link: <https://archives.alabama.gov/RDA/?id=255>

Requirement and Recommendations for Implementing the Records Disposition Authority (RDA)

Requirement

Under the Code of Alabama 1975 § 41-13-21, “no state officer or agency head shall cause any state record to be destroyed or otherwise disposed of without first obtaining approval of the State Records Commission.” This Records Disposition Authority constitutes authorization by the State Records Commission for the disposition of the records of the Agency as stipulated in this document.

One condition of this authorization is that the Agency submit an annual Records Disposition Authority (RDA) Implementation Report on its activities, including documentation of records destruction, to the State Records Commission.

Unless otherwise stipulated in this document, the Agency must transmit all permanent records which are no longer in active use to the ADAH.

Recommendations

In addition, the Agency should make every effort to establish and maintain a quality record-keeping program by conducting the following activities:

The Agency should designate a staff member in a managerial position as its records liaison/records manager, who is responsible for: ensuring the development of quality record keeping systems that meet the business and legal needs of the agency, coordinating the transfer and destruction of records, ensuring that permanent records held on alternative storage media (such as microforms and digital imaging systems) are maintained in compliance with national and state standards, and ensuring the regular implementation of the agency’s approved RDA.

Permanent records in the Agency’s custody should be maintained under proper intellectual control and in an environment that will ensure their physical order and preservation. ADAH archivists are available to work with Agency staff in determining the best location and storage conditions for permanent records.

Destruction of temporary records, as authorized in this RDA, should occur agency-wide on a regular basis – for example, after the successful completion of an audit, at the end of an administration, or at the end of a fiscal year. Despite the RDA’s provisions, no record should be destroyed that is necessary to comply with requirements of the Open Meetings Act, audit requirements, or any legal notice or subpoena.

The agency should maintain full documentation of any computerized record-keeping system it employs. It should develop procedures for: (1) backing up all permanent records held in electronic format; (2) storing a back-up copy off-site; and (3) migrating all permanent records when the system is upgraded or replaced. If the agency chooses to maintain permanent records

solely in electronic format, it is committed to funding any system upgrades and migration strategies necessary to ensure the records' permanent preservation and accessibility.

Electronic mail contains permanent, temporary, or transitory record information. Although e-mail records can be printed out, filed, and retained according to the RDA's requirements, the office should preferably employ an electronic records management system capable of sorting e-mail into folders and archiving messages having long-term value.

The staff of the State Records Commission or the Examiners of Public Accounts may examine the condition of the permanent records maintained in the custody of the Agency and inspect records destruction documentation. Agency records managers and/or the ADAH archivists are available to instruct the staff in RDA implementation and otherwise assist the Agency in implementing its records management program. For more information, please call the ADAH Archives Division at 334-242-4452.

The State Records Commission adopted this records disposition authority on April 19, 2023.

Steve Murray, Chairman
State Records Commission

Date

By signing below, the agency acknowledges receipt of the retention periods and requirements established by the records disposition authority.

W. Kent Davis, State Service Commissioner
Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs

Date

Note: This RDA has been updated to reflect the adoption of the "General Schedule Records Disposition Authority" at the State Records Commission's April 22, 2026, meeting.