Meeting Minutes - Michigan Council of Chapters, MOAA
February 20, 2026

1. The Michigan Council of Chapters of MOAA met on February 20, 2026, via Zoom. Council President Rich Higgins called the meeting to order at 2:00 PM.

   Attendees:
   - LCDR Rich Higgins, USN (Ret.), President
   - COL Bruce Bahr, ARNG (Ret.), 1st Vice President
   - CDR Roy Yaple, USN (Ret.), Secretary
   - LTC Jim Sigmon, AUSA (Ret.), Legislative Liaison
   - CPT Mary Johnson, ARNG (Ret.), Surviving Spouse Liaison
   - CH (LTC) Mel Flikkema, USAR (Ret.), Treasurer
   - LTC Chris Johnson, USA (Ret.), Member

   Quorum was verified with at least one member from each Michigan chapter present.

2. Call to Order, Invocation & Pledge
   The meeting was called to order at 2:00 P.M. and Mel Flikkema delivered the invocation, and the Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

3. Approval of Previous Minutes
   The minutes from the prior meeting were approved. No corrections or comments were offered.

4. Treasurer's Report – Mel Flikkema
   - No income or expenditures since the last meeting.
   - Current balance: $3,678.96.
   - National MOAA funds (via new Tipalti system) are expected within two to three working days.
   - Each chapter is encouraged to request the $300 Community Involvement Grant if not already done.

5. Legislative Committee Report – Jim Sigmon
   - First committee meeting held February 4, 2026.
   - Committee is drafting a Procedures Manual (to be presented at the April 29 meeting) so future changes can be made without full council vote.
   - Future Legislative Committee meeting dates (all via Zoom): APR 29, AUG 5, and NOV 4
   - Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy (HBOT) legislation – Michigan House has a pilot program bill drafted. All chapters urged to have members contact legislators via the Michigan Commanders Group website (pre-scripted letters; only zip code required). Responses already being received.
   - Jim participates in the State Legislative Exchange Forum (next meeting March 31, 2026). Additional Monday 4:00 p.m. meeting on suicide prevention / White Oak Collaborative noted; interested members may contact Rich.
   - Other members and chapter representatives are welcome to attend legislative committee meetings.

6. Communications Committee Report – Rich Higgins
   - Last meeting: January 19, 2026.
   - Mary Johnson volunteered to serve as Army-Navy Club representative.
   - Recent newsletter focused on suicide prevention; next issue will cover legislative priorities and the April 13–16, 2026 Advocacy in Action (AIA) conference in Washington, D.C. (Rich & Bruce attending).
   - Priorities for AIA: Shutdown Fairness Act, Military Care Act, Guard & Reserve VA Benefits Act, Major Richard Star Act.

7. Membership Report – Rich Higgins & Roy Yaple
   - National "Near Real-Time" spreadsheet distributed January 23, 2026.
   - Roy processed ~1,600 records for Southeastern Michigan (many lacking emails/addresses or geographically mismatched). Response rate so far <10 %, consistent with national chapter membership rate (~9 %).
   - Several new members have joined after outreach.
   - Chapters reminded to keep committee module and Near Real-Time data current and to list all chapter affiliations when using the Legislative Action Center.

8. Chapter Reports
   - Northwest Michigan (Chris Johnson)
     - Membership steady at 90–95.
     - New board seated; first meeting held last week.
     - Quarterly dinner planned for March.
     - Website (Weebly) transfer from Rich to new officers in progress.

   - Capitol Area (Bruce Bahr)
     - Membership stable but chapter experiencing significant health-related losses (three active members passed in past year).
     - Spouse Liaison Christina Bahr is actively engaged at national level and available to assist other chapters with survivor support.

   - Southeastern Michigan (Rich Higgins)
     - 39 members paid for 2026.
     - Upcoming events:
       - April 17, 2026 – TACOM visit & tour at U.S. Army Tank Command, Warren (BG Behm as guest speaker).
       - May 9, 2026 – International Armed Forces Night, Troy (black-tie / business attire).
     - Wreaths Across America affiliate program established; $5 per wreath sold returns to chapter.
     - JROTC/ROTC medal presentations underway (primarily Detroit-area schools).

   - Army-Navy Club (Mary Johnson)
     - Denny Gillum named Kent County Veteran of the Year 2025–2026.
     - Dues increased to $40; generated $800 in renewals.
     - Silent auction at winter dinner raised $705.
     - Sad note: Tammy Ahrens (West Michigan Veterans Alliance) passed away from metastatic cancer.
     - Upcoming: Spring dinner, summer picnic, December winter dinner.

9. Old Business

- Fisher House Engagement. Continued attempts to connect have received limited response. Council will keep the door open while also exploring other meaningful veteran-support projects (especially homelessness initiatives) that can utilize the MOAA $300 chapter grant and engage members.

10. New Business

- Michigan MOAA Council Conference – Proposal to host a full-day (or half-day) conference at the Doherty Hotel, Clare, MI (central location) on Friday, August 21, 2026. Goal: Invite a national MOAA representative and feature speakers (e.g., Derek Blumke on suicide prevention). Rich will contact the hotel and begin agenda planning.
- USAA Council Grant – $800 application already submitted by the Council (separate from the $300 chapter grants).
- MVAA Update – New director Terry Sable; Michigan Veterans Affairs Agency Women's Conference set for April 9–11, 2026 in Grand Rapids.
- EverPlan / End-of-Life Planning – Roy Yaple asked whether any chapters have experience with MOAA's EverPlan product. Discussion noted the value of estate/funeral planning resources for surviving spouses. Bruce will check with Christina Bahr; others encouraged to review the MOAA webinar.

10. Adjournment. A motion to adjourn was made by Mary Johnson and seconded by Jim Sigmon. The meeting adjourned at approximately 4:30 p.m.

Next Council Meeting: 2:00 PM May 15, 2026 (via Zoom)

Submitted

CDR Roy Yaple, USN (Ret.)
Secretary