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MAYORS OF BUFFALO, NIAGARA FALLS, LOCKPORT AND TONAWANDA ANNOUNCE SUCCESS IN CHALLENGE TO END VETERAN HOMELESSNESS

Buffalo - Mayors of the Cities of Buffalo (Byron W. Brown), Niagara Falls (Paul Dyster), Lockport (Anne McCaffrey) and Tonawanda (Rick Davis) are pleased to announce an effective end to Veteran homelessness in response to First Lady Michelle Obama's call to action through the Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness in Western New York (WNY). The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, United States Department of Housing and Urban Development and United States Department of Veterans Affairs recently recognized the four cities for achieving significant federal benchmarks that resulted in an effective system to quickly identify homeless Veterans, provide immediate shelter to any Veteran experiencing unsheltered homelessness who wants it and, once they accept an offer of housing, are able to house them within 90 days.

City of Buffalo Mayor Brown stated, "Next month on Veterans Day, we'll come together to pay homage to our service members and Veterans who courageously served our great nation and it's our responsibility to ensure that once our veterans have served their nation, they have a safe place to call home. Today, I'm honored to stand with the Mayors of Niagara Falls, Lockport and Tonawanda to report that homelessness among Veterans in our community has effectively ended. Thanks to a strong collaboration between government agencies, our community's service and housing professionals who assist veterans and our many other partners, Buffalo has demonstrated that ending veteran homelessness is achievable. I congratulate everyone involved who worked tirelessly to give our veterans a dignified home, setting an example for communities across the nation. We owe our veterans our gratitude for their service and sacrifice to this nation and making sure they have a place to call home is a small but powerful way we can show our appreciation."

City of Niagara Falls Mayor Dyster said, "The hard work and countless hours put forth through this coordinated effort over the course of the last several years were no small feat, but pale in comparison to the dedication and sacrifice our Veterans have made on behalf of our country. It is because of them that we are here today. Our veterans deserve a place to call their own, and it is our duty to do all within our power to provide them with that basic right. I commend my fellow Mayors, our partners in government and in the community for taking a stand and setting a national example to effectively end Veterans homelessness once and for all."

City of Lockport Mayor Anne McCaffrey stated, “We are so pleased that Lockport has achieved the distinction of ending homelessness among veterans. It takes dedicated community partners to ensure that resources are in place to help our veterans. Our communities are stronger because we’ve ensured adequate housing for our veterans.”

City of Tonawanda Mayor Rick Davis stated, "As a veteran this is something that I hold near and dear to my heart. We as a country need to do more for my brothers and sisters. Veteran homelessness should be a top priority for everyone and I'm honored to have answered the call for all our veterans".

The Mayors’ Challenge was issued as part of First Lady Michelle Obama’s Joining Forces Initiative June 4, 2014 as a goal to Prevent and End Veteran Homelessness before the end of 2017. The goal is to achieve and sustain “functional zero”—a well-coordinated and efficient community system that assures homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring and no Veteran is forced to live on the street. This means every Veteran has access to the support they need and want to move quickly to permanent housing. This does not mean that there are no homeless Veterans or no Veteran will become homeless in the future, but does mean there is an effective system in place to quickly identify homeless Veterans and, once they accept an offer of housing, are able to house them within 90 days.

“Our veterans deserve access to safe, affordable housing, and no one who has served their country should find themselves without a roof over their head. Which is why—ending veterans homelessness in Western New York is so vital. This achievement has not come easily, and has required collaboration across federal, state, and local governments, as well as community organizations like One-stop. The Veterans One-stop Center of WNY is a great organization and I am proud to work with them to support the men and women who fought for our country and have sacrificed so much for our freedom,” said Senator Chuck Schumer.

Congressman Brian Higgins said, “Thanking our veterans is about more than words. We demonstrate our gratitude best by understanding the challenges our veterans face and extending the same commitment to them as they’ve provided to this nation. This goal of functional zero veteran homelessness is made possible through a cohesive effort between local communities, government and the extremely dedicated Western New York service agencies whose commitment and collaboration continues to make a difference in the lives of those in need. I commend the project partners whose work demonstrates Western New York’s promise to leave no man, or woman, behind.”

“Our Veterans deserve to have the strongest support system available,” said Congressman Christopher Collins. “We must do more at all levels of government to ensure that every Veteran has the resources they need to succeed in our communities. I applaud the efforts of our mayors and will continue to do everything I can on the federal level to eliminate Veteran homelessness.”

Efforts to effectively end Veteran homelessness in our community began well before the First Lady’s official call to action, with significant infrastructure and systems put in place to assist any Veteran in obtaining a permanent home in the City of Buffalo, City of Lockport, City of Niagara Falls, City of Tonawanda and all of Erie, Niagara Orleans, Genesee and Wyoming Counties. Going back to 2008 the WNY community, including federal, local, and nonprofit entities represented by Department of Veterans Affairs-VA WNY Healthcare System, Department of Housing and Urban Development, Belmont Housing Resources for WNY, the Homeless Alliance of WNY gained momentum and partners to resource Veterans homelessness.

Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) providers such as Veterans One-stop Center of WNY, Veterans Outreach Center Inc., and Pathstones Corporation have been critical to achieving this designation. Other key partners to include Grant and Per Diem (GPD) providers Cazenovia Recovery Systems and Altamont Veterans Program, Contract Residence Providers Eagle Star and Cornerstone Manor, WNY Veterans Housing Coalition, the City Mission, Community Missions Shelters and Lockport Cares, as well as Continuum of Care (Coc) programs such as street outreach, Rapid Re-housing (RRH) and Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) working together are essential for the prevention of Veteran homelessness.

“This designation confirms the hard work our local partners have been doing to assist our most vulnerable Veterans. Through our close community partnerships, we have now become a national best practice model for service to homeless Veterans,” stated Dale Zuchlewski, Executive Director, Homeless Alliance of WNY.

“Achieving and maintaining functional zero for Veteran homelessness is a community effort that requires collaboration and accountability at all levels,” said Roger L. Woodworth, President & CEO of the Veterans One-stop Center of WNY. “This is an exciting designation for our region and an opportunity to be recognized for the impact of work our community has done and continues to do in empowering our Veterans.”

“Congratulations to all the partners in Buffalo and Western New York who have proven once again that homelessness is solvable,” said Matthew Doherty, executive director of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness. “As leaders in communities across the country work together to implement effective strategies, our confidence grows that we will end homelessness, not just for Veterans, but for everyone.”

“New York/New Jersey VA Health Care Network is elated that Western New York has been recognized for having effectively ended Veteran homelessness,” said Joan E. McInerney, Network Director. “Western New York has demonstrated its commitment to meeting the needs of vulnerable Veterans, and VA is proud to be an integral part of the partnership network that will prevent Veterans from becoming homeless in the future.”

Declaring the end of Veteran homelessness to functional zero required meeting several federal benchmarks. These benchmarks included identifying all Veterans experiencing homelessness, provide shelter immediately to any Veteran experiencing unsheltered homelessness who wants it, to only provide service-intensive transitional housing in limited instances, to build the capacity to assist Veterans to swiftly move into permanent housing, and to develop and execute resources, plans, and system capacity should any Veteran become homeless or be at-risk of homelessness in the future.

Brian Stiller, Director, VA Western New York Healthcare System shared, “VA strives to meet the needs of Veterans by providing various services to help them achieve their full potential. Often times, it’s linking them to health care, job training and community services that provide them skills to maintain permanent housing. Working with our WNY community partners is paramount to ensure Veterans are connected to services.”

If you know a Veteran who is homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless, contact VA Health Care for Homeless Veterans Program at 716-862-8885, 1-877-4AID-VET 24 hours a day/7 days a week or the Veterans Crisis Line 1-800-273-8255 to be connected to VA services.

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