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HUD Announces that County, City Have Effectively Ended Veterans Homelessness

PITTSBURGH – County Executive Rich Fitzgerald and City of Pittsburgh Mayor William Peduto were joined today by U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Regional Administrator Joe DeFelice who announced that Allegheny County and the City of Pittsburgh have effectively ended homelessness among veterans. The county and city have been engaged in the Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness since May 2014. With numerous partners, a coordinated system to identify, assess, connect and permanently house veterans experiencing homelessness has been created, ensuring that their experience is rare, brief and nonrecurring.

“I couldn’t be prouder of the effort made by these partners on behalf of the veterans in our community. Allegheny County is home to the largest number of veterans in the state, and we owe them a significant debt of gratitude,” said Fitzgerald. “Perhaps just as important as the accomplishments made through this process, is that we have created a system that can be duplicated and used throughout the county to address homelessness on a broader level. We owe all of you who worked on this a great deal of thanks for your innovative thinking and collaboration and cooperation on behalf of our community.”

The U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH), along with HUD and the U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) launched this effort in early 2014 to ensure that veterans’ homelessness would be “rare, brief and a non-reoccurring experience.” In order to meet that goal, a Rapid Results Veteran’s Boot Camp was created with partners who shared information and worked cooperatively on reworking the system through which housing is provided to those in need. Along with the County Executive and Mayor, and their respective offices and departments, partners in the Boot Camp included HUD, VA the Allegheny County Housing Authority, the Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh Mercy Operation Safety Net, Shepherds Heart Fellowship, Soldier On, United Way of Southwestern Pennsylvania, Veterans Leadership Program of Western Pennsylvania, and Veterans Place of Washington Boulevard.

“Allegheny County and the City of Pittsburgh have created a system, and the capacity, to quickly identify and house veterans experiencing homelessness, with a joint community to ensuring their experiences are rare, brief and nonrecurring,” said Peduto. “But our work is far from over. We need to make sure the system created by this coalition is resilient, and receives diligent engagement and sustained funding.”

In early 2015, a master list of all veterans experiencing homelessness was created from which the Boot Camp worked to meet the goals of the program. Since that date, 587 veterans have been assisted into housing and, currently, there are just four veterans that are currently unsheltered, all of which have housing options available to them. Meeting the criteria for each benchmark, set by USICH, means that Allegheny County and the City of Pittsburgh have created a system and capacity to quickly identify veterans experiencing homelessness and assist them into permanent housing.

“On behalf of HUD Secretary Ben Carson, I’d like to congratulate County Executive Fitzgerald, Mayor Peduto and everyone involved in this county-wide effort to end veteran homelessness,” said DeFelice, Regional Administrator of HUD’s Mid-Atlantic region. “This collaboration is making a difference in the health and well-being of our veterans. Although there’s more work ahead, the momentum to permanently house them will continue to grow now that the systems are in place.”

Under the Boot Camp program, there are four veterans housing options: (1) permanent housing through HUD-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) which combines HUD housing vouchers with VA supportive services to help veterans who are homeless and their families find and sustain permanent housing; (2) temporary housing through the Domiciliary Care for Homeless Veterans (DCHV) program which provides short-term treatment and rehabilitative services; (3) transitional housing programs through Grant and Per Diem (GPD) which offers funding to community-based agencies to provide supportive housing and services to homeless veterans to improve residential stability; and, (4) Supportive Services for Veterans and Families (SSVF) which offers grants to private non-profit organizations and consumer cooperatives to provide permanent housing.

“Congratulations to County Executive Fitzgerald, Mayor Peduto and all the partners who have worked tirelessly to ensure that veterans have a safe and stable place to call home in Allegheny County/Pittsburgh,” said Matthew Doherty, executive director of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness. “Today, Allegheny County/Pittsburgh adds to our proof that ending homelessness is possible, not just for veterans, but for everyone.”

Every year in January, the county’s Continuum of Care conducts an official count of individuals and families that are experiencing homelessness – either unsheltered on the streets, or temporarily sheltered in emergency shelter or transitional housing. Since 2014, Allegheny County has reduced the number of people experiencing homelessness by 27%. The considerable progress towards implementing best practices in the delivery of homeless services has been made by adopting Housing First, implementing Coordinated Entry, and expanding Rapid Re-housing.

While we are pleased with our progress, we are now faced with the challenge of sustaining our efforts. We, as the Boot Camp committee, will continue to meet in order to quickly assist veterans who are experiencing homelessness into permanent housing,” said Christy Pietryga, co-chair of the Rapid Rehousing Boot Camp Committee. “Veterans Leadership Program of Western Pennsylvania is committed to these efforts in order to maximize the impact of services provided to Allegheny County veterans.”

Since June of 2014, more than 880 mayors, city and county officials, and governors have joined the challenge. Over 50 communities across 29 different states have achieved the goal of driving down the number of veterans experiencing homelessness to as close to zero as possible, while building systems that support long-term, lasting solutions that can effectively and efficiently respond to future needs.

Allegheny County and the City of Pittsburgh become the sixth community to achieve the goal in Pennsylvania. Philadelphia, Scranton/Lackawanna County, Lehigh Valley, Lancaster City and County, and Reading/Berks County have also received confirmation from USICH, HUD and the VA that they have effectively ended homelessness among veterans.

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