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**Contacts:** Today marks the kickoff of the statewide 100 Day Challenge to house veterans experiencing homelessness. On any given night, 617 veterans in Virginia are homeless based on the 2014 Point-In-Time Count, a survey of sheltered and unsheltered homeless persons.

## Virginia Moves to End Veteran Homelessness by the End of 2015

~Communities across the state engage in the 100 Day Challenge to house veterans experiencing homelessness~

Today marks the kickoff of the statewide 100 Day Challenge to house veterans experiencing homelessness. On any given night, 617 veterans in Virginia are homeless based on the 2014 Point-In-Time Count, a survey of sheltered and unsheltered homeless persons. Understanding the gravity of this situation, Governor Terry McAuliffe and mayors from Alexandria, Hampton, Richmond, Petersburg, Salem, Roanoke, Norfolk, Portsmouth and Newport News signed the Mayors Challenge. The initiative is designed to encourage community leaders to collaborate on strategies targeting veteran homelessness.

"Together, we can be a force for positive change," said Governor McAuliffe, one of only five state executives to sign the Mayors Challenge. "We must renew our commitment to better serve our veterans in every community across the Commonwealth. Our labors on their behalf pale compared to the sacrifices these men and women have made in service to our country."

This 100 Day Challenge is a step toward ending veteran homelessness by the end of December 2015. It follows a two-day Boot Camp in which community partners from Roanoke, Richmond and Hampton Roads teamed up to create local goals based on unique challenges that each community is experiencing in housing veterans faster. The initiative was sponsored by the Governor's Homeless Coordinating Council, the Virginia Department of Veterans Services, and the Virginia Coalition to End Homelessness. The National League of Cities also has been an active partner in encouraging local leader participation in the Challenge.

"This important effort will significantly strengthen Virginia's ability to end veteran homelessness," said Brandi Jancaitis, Executive Director of the Virginia Department of Veterans Services/Virginia Wounded Warrior Program. "The Boot Camp and 100 Day Challenge highlight the importance of collaboration on federal, state and local levels to tackle this



challenge. In the past two days, communities set concrete goals, and the 100 Day Challenge puts urgency behind these goals and our Governor's commitment to end homelessness for veterans in the Commonwealth."

The 100 Day Challenge is an opportunity for members of local, state, and federal governments, as well as nonprofits, charities, and faith-based organizations, to join together in teams to implement strategies that have been proven effective in ending homelessness in communities across Virginia and the nation. The Housing First model is one of the adopted approaches. It focuses on providing housing for the most chronically homeless veterans, then connecting them with additional resources to retain their housing. These resources include case management, health care, mental health and substance abuse counseling, and job training. This was a primary strategy used by Phoenix, Arizona, and Salt Lake City, Utah. Leaders of the two cities announced early this year that they have ended chronic veteran homelessness in their communities. Another key to their success was the deployment of navigation teams into the communities to work directly with veterans and obtain any documentation they may need to obtain housing. Once housed, veterans are linked to additional resources and provided with what they need to create a stable lifestyle and remain in housing.

"The 100 Day Challenge is an acknowledgement of the need to bolster our efforts and establish clear, sharp goals for ending veteran homelessness without delay," said John Harvey, Secretary of Veterans and Defense Affairs.

Bill Hazel, Secretary of Health and Human Resources, added, "The swift, enthusiastic response by communities across the state gives me confidence. We can meet this important goal and eradicate veteran homelessness by the end of 2015."

"Bold leadership at the state and local levels will ensure that veterans affected by homelessness have an opportunity to live in stable housing," said Secretary of Commerce and Trade Maurice Jones. "This should be a minimal expectation in our society. Our veterans have earned it."

"Ending homelessness among veterans in Virginia is a goal that is within our reach," said Phyllis Chamberlain, executive director of the Virginia Coalition to End Homelessness. "We have the political and community will to do this. It is the right thing to do to house veterans who have served our country. It also makes economic sense, as housing vulnerable veterans is generally less expensive than keeping them in homelessness."

The Hampton Roads, Roanoke and Richmond metro area communities, in partnership with the Veterans Affairs Medical Centers, have rigorously evaluated their current systems and created a plan to efficiently house as many veterans as they can in the next 100 days. Through this effort, they will also be eliminating the duplication of processes, challenging groups to look at this issue in a new way, and moving veterans into housing first while connecting them to services more quickly. This collaboration of local, state and federal efforts is a pivotal movement that will push Virginia closer to becoming the first state to reach the federal goal of ending veteran homelessness by the end of 2015.

These local communities are continuously searching to create partnerships with individuals, organizations and landlords who want to contribute to the lives of the men and women who have protected our freedom.

*About Virginia Coalition to End Homelessness: A statewide nonprofit organization that advocates for increased resources and implementation of best practice strategies, such as the Housing First model, to prevent and end homelessness.*

*About Department of Veteran Services (DVS): ([www.dvs.virginia.gov](http://www.dvs.virginia.gov) (<http://www.dvs.virginia.gov/>)). The Virginia Department of Veterans Services operates 23 benefit services offices where representatives assist veterans and their family members in filing claims for federal veterans benefits. Among other services, DVS operates two long-term care facilities offering nursing and domiciliary care for veterans, and also provides veterans with direct linkages to needed services including behavioral healthcare, veteran's benefits, housing, employment and other public and private assistance programs.*

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#### Navigation

- [About The Governor \(/about-the-governor/\)](#)
- [The Administration \(/the-administration/\)](#)
- [Constituent Services \(/constituent-services/\)](#)
- [Policy Priorities \(/policy-priorities/\)](#)
- [Newsroom \(/newsroom/\)](#)
- [Executive Actions \(/executive-actions/\)](#)
- [Integrity Commission \(/integrity-commission/\)](#)

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