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Federal Officials Recognize Montgomery County, Maryland's Success in Ending Veteran Homelessness

Official confirmation given by HUD, Zero: 2016 National Campaign

The Montgomery County Coalition for the Homeless (MCCH) and Bethesda Cares today announced that Montgomery County has achieved two major endorsements in the effort to end homelessness among Veterans.

The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), and United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) have officially confirmed that Montgomery County has effectively ended homelessness among Veterans.

Additionally, Montgomery County has now been confirmed by the national Zero: 2016 campaign as one of the first four communities in the country to achieve a "Functional Zero" system for Veteran homelessness. Functional Zero is reached when the number of Veterans experiencing homelessness, both on the streets and in shelters, is less than the number of Veterans being connected with permanent housing each month.

"These two official recognitions are the culmination of years of work by leaders in the County. County Executive Isiah Leggett, a veteran himself, established the County's Commission of Veteran Affairs and provided ongoing commitment of staff and resources to ensure our community's success. We also want to recognize the significant efforts of Congressman Chris Van Hollen, as well as the unanimous support of the County Council under the dedicated leadership of past Council President George Leventhal," said Susie Sinclair-Smith, MCCH's Executive Director and Susan Kirk, Bethesda Care's Executive Director.

"Ensuring every person has a safe, stable place to call home takes teamwork and dedication at every level. Montgomery County and its partners stepped up to the challenge of ending veteran homelessness and today have every reason to celebrate its incredible achievement. Their progress should be an example to every community across the nation that is working to follow in Montgomery County's path," said HUD Secretary Julián Castro.

"President Obama has made a bold goal to end Veteran homelessness. I'm pleased that Montgomery County has responded to that challenge by helping the most vulnerable homeless Veterans find permanent housing," U.S. Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert A. McDonald said. "Americans understand and believe, as I do, that no one who has fought for this country should have to fight to keep a roof over their head. This progress would not be possible without the partnerships that have been built here in Maryland and across the nation; partnerships across the federal government, with state and local governments, with non-profit organizations and with the private sector. I'm also proud of the role VA plays to provide the necessary services to help Veterans get back on their feet. Solving Veteran

homelessness is not a static challenge; it is an ongoing challenge and we will keep at it because that is what the men and women who have served our nation have earned and deserve.”

“Ending veteran homelessness is a remarkable achievement, and I’m proud of my home county for making it a priority. I’m also proud of our work at the Labor Department to meet the challenge of veteran homelessness in communities nationwide,” said Labor Secretary Tom Perez. “By helping veterans get training and access to job opportunities, we are doing our part to serve those who have served us so admirably, helping them successfully re-integrate into civilian life. It’s unacceptable that men and women who have worn the uniform are sleeping on the street or in shelters. The least we can do for those who’ve sacrificed so much for the nation is to ensure they have a home of their own.”

The recognition from HUD, VA, and USICH acknowledges successful completion of the “Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness”, an initiative led by First Lady Michelle Obama. The Mayors Challenge calls upon mayors and other state and local leaders across the country to publicly express their commitment and provide the leadership to implement the strategies necessary for their communities to end homelessness among all Veterans within their communities. Almost 900 state and local leaders from across the country have signed onto this challenge. Montgomery County is among the first 30 jurisdictions in the country to receive official confirmation from the federal agencies that the initiatives goals have been met.

The recognition from the national Zero: 2016 campaign is official confirmation that Montgomery County has documented and proven that fewer veterans are now experiencing homelessness than the County is routinely housing each month. Montgomery County is one of 75 communities from around the country that were approved to participate in the Zero: 2016 campaign, which provided technical assistance in optimizing local resources, tracking progress against monthly housing goals, and accelerating the spread of proven strategies.

"Montgomery County has defined itself as a vanguard community in the national effort to end Veteran homelessness, demonstrating that it's possible to solve this complex problem," said Beth Sandor, director of Zero: 2016. "They have proven that they have a coordinated system and the ongoing capacity to ensure that homelessness among Veterans will be rare, brief and non-recurring."

“Achieving Functional Zero Homelessness for our Veteran population is an accomplishment that should make us all proud,” said Councilmember George Leventhal, who also serves as chair of the Montgomery County Council’s Health and Human Services Committee. “This was a total team effort, from the County’s work with Congressman Chris Van Hollen to our incredible non-profit providers to the grassroots volunteer work done by the County’s Commission on Veterans Affairs. With collaboration and combined resources, we were able to accomplish a monumental feat.”

Reaching both the Mayors Challenge and Zero: 2016 milestones involved an unprecedented collaboration of multiple federal and local agencies. In collaboration with County officials, Congressman Van Hollen and the County’s Commission on Veterans Affairs have worked for years to gain federal support for the efforts to house Veterans in the County. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs DC Medical Center staff has forged a strong partnership with County agencies, which has been crucial to the success of efforts in Montgomery County. County agencies that stepped up to meet the challenge include the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Housing and Community Affairs, the Housing Opportunities Commission, and the Interagency Commission on Homelessness.

In addition, new County funding committed in 2015 enabled Montgomery County Coalition for the Homeless (MCCH) to set up a permanent supportive housing program to serve up to 20 Veterans, and Bethesda Cares to establish a rapid-rehousing rental assistance program to serve up to 15 Veterans. Both of these locally funded programs are permanent housing programs and have ongoing social services supports for the clients/tenants included as part of the contracts.

About MCCH: Montgomery County Coalition for the Homeless (MCCH) provides solutions in Montgomery County to ensure that homelessness is rare, brief and nonrecurring. Our vision is to build a community where everyone has a safe, stable, and affordable place to call home. Visit www.mcch.net for more information.

About Bethesda Cares: Bethesda Cares is a community outreach program whose mission is to prevent, ease and end homelessness in Montgomery County. Visit www.bethesdacares.org for more information.

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