



JANUARY 22, 2021

Holyoke Soldiers' Home Coalition

OFFICIAL MEMORANDUM

Dear Members of the Western Massachusetts Delegation to the General Court,

Thank you to all the members who participated in our recent presentations regarding the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke Needs Assessment and Implementation Roadmap. This memorandum serves as a summary of our analysis of the state's study and recommends a 280-bed facility in Holyoke.

In just 10 years, the Veteran community in western Massachusetts has seen the number of Veterans placed at Holyoke drop from a high of 275 Veterans to 235 in 2016. Yet, the demand for long-term care is significant with wait lists historically in the range of 100 to more than 300 Veterans at any given time. To build a new facility with a bed capacity of 180 to 204 would be a significant reduction in services for Veterans. At a time, when our family members are still grieving and find great fault in the state's initial response to the COVID-19 outbreak, we call on you, our elected representatives, to ensure our state is committed to building a new Home that will meet the demand for long-term care.

While the four-county Veterans' population is projected to decrease, it is our contention that the Vietnam-era Veteran population, combined with the Post 9/11 Veteran population, both with higher-than-average co-morbidities and behavioral health diagnoses, will create a "silver Tsunami" of Veterans seeking care at Holyoke. Together, with our Nation's increased reliance on the Guard and Reserve components of our Armed Forces, and with the potential for unanticipated future conflicts, we believe the state's current recommendation for a 180-204-bed facility will grossly understate the demand for care. Per the state's own analysis, approximately 40% of Veterans seeking long-term care will die before they are admitted to the Soldiers' Home due to wait times. This is unacceptable.

The Coalition recommends the current Soldiers' Home in Holyoke be completely replaced with a new state-of-the-art facility with 280 private rooms. The 280 number is based on what we know to be the demand in our region among Veterans seeking long-term care and matches the census figure of 276 when every available bed in Holyoke was filled with an eligible and deserving Veteran. Regardless of state projections that the bed occupancy rate for community nursing homes in our state will also drop, it is also our firm belief that Veterans will, in nearly all circumstances, choose care at the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke over care in the community. Based on our own survey, many municipalities in our region assist at least one Veteran per month with an application to the Soldiers' Home.

Given this information, we ask you to question why the state's analysis recommends only 180 and 204 beds and how the state will accommodate those Veterans who will not be able to be placed when there is no space available. We also ask how the state plans to assist those Veterans who would otherwise be forced into community nursing homes, paying at private rates of \$12,000 per month.

In the study's executive summary, the state notes the imperative for our Commonwealth in meeting the need for all Veterans who require long-term care or when safety to their health becomes a concern. We, the Coalition of Veterans, family members, and concerned citizens, do not believe the study will meet that need today or for future generations. We ask you to support and petition the state for a 280-bed facility.

Respectfully,
Members of the Holyoke Soldiers' Home Coalition