

MEDIA RELEASES

FROM THE HOLYOKE SOLDIERS' HOME COALITION

NOTE:

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MEDIA RELEASE

HOLYOKE SOLDIERS' HOME COALITION

On the Web: www.HolyokeSoldiersHomeCoalition.org

On Email: HolyokeSoldiersHomeCoalition@gmail.com

Phone: (413) 387-9966

Coalition responds to state's announcement on design team

HOLYOKE, Mass., Aug. 17, 2020 – The Holyoke Soldiers' Home Coalition today released the following statement in response to the Baker-Polito Administration's announcement on the selection of Payette for the first phase of the expedited capital project for a new Soldiers' Home in Holyoke.

“When we speak of reimagining the future, we should not be constrained by the past. Adult Day Healthcare, enhanced behavioral health services and services for Veterans requiring our state's help with substance use disorders, post-traumatic stress or traumatic brain injuries must be part of any plan moving forward. This is our state's moment to get it right.

“While we applaud the selection of Payette to design a new Soldiers' Home in Holyoke since they are familiar with the 2012 design of the Home and with the concept of the Veterans Affairs small house design and current requirements, we do have some concerns with the state's plan. They are:

“First, in respect to a needs assessment and basing the design on the current and future demographic needs of Veterans in Massachusetts. This should not be code words for reducing the size and bed capacity of the Soldiers' Home. There is a significant demand in the Veteran community in our state for long-term care and our Coalition stands firm that the state should maintain a total capacity of at least 250 private room/private bath bedrooms, which was the approximate census before the pandemic. Any design should also include a much-needed Adult Day Healthcare Program, which would include enhanced outdoor recreational area for use by all residents of the facility.

“Second, in respect to engaging stakeholders, the Coalition has the expertise, desire and commitment to provide informed input to the process and we wish to be contacted so we can have a collaborative and purposeful dialogue during the entirety of the planning phase.”

ABOUT THE COALITION: The Holyoke Soldiers' Home Coalition is a grassroots organization of Veteran leaders, family members, Veteran services' representatives and concerned citizens, including former members of the executive leadership team of the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke.

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Coalition calls on state to detail its COVID-19 response plan

State should acquire UV disinfection system immediately to contain virus

HOLYOKE, Mass., Aug. 11, 2020 – A needs assessment (*see attached PDF summary*) conducted by members of the Holyoke Soldiers' Home Coalition recommends the state take immediate actions to prevent another outbreak of the COVID-19 disease at the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke.

The advocacy group, which consists of former executives of the Soldiers' Home, as well as family members of veteran residents at the Home and veterans who died of COVID-19 at the Home, are concerned about recent news that 11 people at the Home have again tested positive for COVID-19.

The Coalition's analysis calls on the state to publicly report details of its infection control plans to confront the current outbreak and how the Soldiers' Home will prevent an expected second wave of the COVID-19.

Coalition research conducted this month revealed that there are federal funds to purchase state-of-the-art disinfection devices, such as [Xenex Disinfection Services](#), which is the first and only UV disinfection technology that has been proven to deactivate COVID-19 (SARS-CoV-2).

“We have learned that the state has an opportunity to acquire the Xenex disinfection system, through the CARES Act, which could immediately help prevent COVID-19 from further spreading. Since the virus has re-emerged at the facility, each day of delay continues to put veterans and staff at the facility at further risk.”

Our Coalition researched [several systems](#) and found that one in particular, Xenex, is currently being used at the New Hampshire Veterans Home in Tilton, N.H., a 250-bed, state long-term care facility. The New Hampshire home reports zero COVID-19 cases, and among many practices, to include the use of [Clorox 360](#) to disinfect toilets, has [highlighted the success of the Xenex system](#). The system is used in hospitals, [VA medical centers](#), [VA treatment centers](#), and [health care sites of care](#) throughout the nation.

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In addition to COVID-19, the system, the most widely deployed form of no-touch germicidal disinfection in the United States, kills other pathogens including C. diff, Ebola, and MRSA.

The Coalition has informed leadership at the Soldiers' Home of the system and the availability of federal funds to help offset the costs of the system and calls on the state to immediately pursue the system or a similar system.

The Coalition's needs assessment – *see attached PDF for a summary* -- looks at the relative strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats related to the Soldiers' Home and, in addition to an infection control plan, recommends several additional actions the state needs to take, to include:

1. Immediate steps for an infection control plan to meet expected "Second Wave" and the immediate acquisition of the Xenex UV disinfection system and other best practices in infection control, such as the Clorox 360 System.
2. Eliminating Part-Time positions while increasing staffing levels.
3. Development of a detailed strategic plan with communication strategies for Veterans, family members, the Veteran community, and the Coalition to clarify the fall/winter infection control procedures for COVID-19 to include addressing adequate staffing and PPE supplies.
4. Expedited planning for the construction and renovation of the Soldiers' Home to meet the April 15, 2021 deadline for VA construction grant. The "reimagined Home" design should include accommodations for 250 Veterans with a private room/private bath for every Veteran and inclusion of the previously approved Adult Day Healthcare Program at the facility.
5. Immediately scheduling outreach and listening sessions with key audiences to include the Coalition to discuss the state's path forward with its plans for improvements and for construction of a new Soldiers' Home in Holyoke.
6. Link annual budget increase to inflation rate, thereby preventing reduction in services to Veterans due to inflation.
7. Consider increase in per diem charge, also linked to inflation.
8. Restore the Board of Trustee's authority to hire, evaluate and terminate the superintendent, thereby allowing superintendent to honestly discuss the actual status and needs of the Home, and advocate for resources.

Since its inception in June, the Coalition has grown to more than 70 members and has received the support of more than 20 municipalities, veteran groups and civic organizations in calling for immediate state action to increase funding at the Soldiers' Home to ensure sufficient staff, equipment and supplies to provide safe care for veterans.

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Media can check the Coalition's "Our Coalition" page for a complete list of members, names of citizens who support the Coalition, to include elected officials, organizations and cities and towns.

ABOUT THE COALITION: The Holyoke Soldiers' Home Coalition is a grassroots organization of Veteran leaders, family members, Veteran services' representatives and concerned citizens, including former members of the executive leadership team of the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke. The organization calls on the Baker-Polito Administration to address significant concerns they have with the state's plan to improve the operations and oversight of the Soldiers' Home.

A major focus for the coalition is to ensure that Veterans and family members of Veterans are included in any major reforms or changes to the governance of the Soldiers' Home.

An outreach effort must include a process for the state to receive feedback and consensus from family members and from the Veteran community in western Massachusetts.

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NEEDS ASSESSMENT – HOLYOKE SOLDIERS’ HOME COALITION – 2020

Current Strengths	Weaknesses & Needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Location – Crossroads with I-90 and I-91 ▪ Serves entire Commonwealth ▪ Dedicated frontline staff with strong sense of service ▪ Federal VA reimbursement ▪ Legislative and Congressional commitment ▪ Dental services ▪ Community/Volunteer Support ▪ Joint Commission accreditation ▪ Relationship with National Association of State Veterans Homes 	<div data-bbox="753 291 1317 359" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">FACILITY/SERVICES</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Room sizes, private rooms, private baths ▪ Lack of female dementia beds ▪ Reduction in number of hospice beds (from 18 in 2011) ▪ Outdoor campus space ▪ Lack of Electronic Medical Records system (EMR) ▪ Key specialized care such as respiratory therapy, geriatric psych, geriatrics, urology ▪ Infection control and point of entry checks for risk of exposure and monitoring of staff <div data-bbox="740 764 1328 831" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">STAFF</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reliance on part-time staff ▪ Excessive unscheduled overtime ▪ Culture of Fear ▪ Staff morale/turnover ▪ Competency/Training <div data-bbox="740 1024 1328 1092" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">FUNDING</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Annual budget fluctuations ▪ Funding for staffing for of the re-imagined home of the future (nursing, housekeeping, recreation, infection control dietary, maintenance, outdoor grounds) ▪ Financial shortfalls – Budget vs. expenditures vs. operating costs <div data-bbox="753 1360 1328 1428" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">GOVERNANCE</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Need for Veteran Service Organization representation on Board of Trustees ▪ Dysfunctional Organizational Structure (BOT, DVS, EOHHS) ▪ Superintendent Appointment, Evaluation and Process <div data-bbox="748 1654 1325 1722" style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">TRANSPARENCY/COMMUNICATION</div> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Timely Communication with families ▪ Visible Quality metrics ▪ Community Outreach

Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strong media, legislative and Congressional focus due to pandemic ▪ Aspiration and renewed vision to be a Veterans’ Hub for all Veterans and future center of excellence and the pinnacle of long-term care ▪ Culture of safety and continuous process improvement to include refocused effort on staff competencies and in key areas like infection control, dementia care ▪ Virtual care and telehealth technologies ▪ Community partnerships (such as Honor Flight New England, Veterans History Project, Alzheimer’s Assoc.) ▪ Fostering relationship with VA center of jurisdiction (VA Central Western Massachusetts Healthcare System) ▪ Greater family advocacy, communication and ombudsman responsibilities for training opportunities, collaboration ▪ Pursuit of highest standards in infection control (i.e. “Xenex UV” system) ▪ Adult Day Health Care ▪ Potential to raise room and board charges for those with ability to pay additional surcharges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Uncertainty of State’s commitment to build a center for excellence ▪ Continued reliance on part-time employees resulting in an infection control risk and lack of continuity of care ▪ Preparedness for “Second Wave,” isolation area and negative pressure room(s) and strict adherence to CDC and infection control protocols ▪ Lack of confidence/trust in leadership from staff, families & community ▪ Ability to fill vacancies, hire staff due to negative perception and overall staffing constraints ▪ Lack Board of Trustee autonomy ▪ Reduced authority of superintendent

NEEDS ASSESSMENT – HOLYOKE SOLDIERS’ HOME COALITION – 2020

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SWOT Analysis Summary – Recommended Actions for State to Take

1. Immediate steps for an infection control plan to meet expected “Second Wave” and the immediate acquisition of the Xenex UV disinfection system and other best practices in infection control, such as the Clorox 360 System.
2. Eliminating Part-Time positions while increasing staffing levels.
3. Development of a detailed strategic plan with communication strategies for Veterans, family members, the Veteran community, and the Coalition to clarify the fall/winter infection control procedures for COVID-19 to include addressing adequate staffing and PPE supplies.
4. Expedited planning for the construction and renovation of the Soldiers’ Home to meet the April 15, 2021 deadline for VA construction grant. The “reimagined Home” design should include accommodations for 250 Veterans with a private room/private bath for every Veteran and inclusion of the previously approved Adult Day Healthcare Program at the facility.
5. Immediately scheduling outreach and listening sessions with key audiences to include the Coalition to discuss the state’s path forward with its plans for improvements and for construction of a new Soldiers’ Home in Holyoke.
6. Link annual budget increase to inflation rate, thereby preventing reduction in services to Veterans due to inflation.
7. Consider increase in per diem charge, also linked to inflation.
8. Restore the Board of Trustee’s authority to hire, evaluate and terminate the superintendent, thereby allowing superintendent to honestly discuss the actual status and needs of the Home, and advocate for resources.

(August 11, 2020)

MEDIA RELEASE

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Coalition's Paul Barabani to testify before Congress

Retired Soldiers' Home superintendent calls for greater, formal state-federal partnership

HOLYOKE, Mass., July 29, 2020 – The former superintendent of the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke and a member of the Holyoke Soldiers' Home Coalition will speak before Congress this morning to advocate for greater oversight from the federal government of state Veteran homes and, in particular, more collaboration with the federal U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

Paul Barabani, a retired U.S. Army colonel in the Massachusetts National Guard, who served as the superintendent at the Home from 2011 to January 2016, will provide testimony on Wednesday to the Subcommittee on Health of the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

The subcommittee will meet in open session to conduct an oversight hearing entitled, "Who's in Charge? Examining Oversight of State Veterans Homes during the COVID-19 Pandemic."

The [hearing](#) will be livestreamed on [YouTube](#) and [Facebook](#).

In addition to Barabani, who will provide remote testimony from his home in Chicopee, other witnesses speaking before the subcommittee include federal officials with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the U.S. Government Accountability Office and the president of the National Association of State Veterans Homes.

The Holyoke Soldiers' Home Coalition is a grassroots organization of Veteran leaders, family members, Veteran services' representatives and concerned citizens, to include former members of the Home's executive leadership team. The organization calls on the Baker-Polito Administration to address significant concerns they have with the state's plan to improve the operations and oversight of the Soldiers' Home. A major focus for the coalition is to ensure that Veterans and family members of Veterans are included in any major reforms or changes to the governance of the Soldiers' Home.

Barabani's prepared statement submitted to the subcommittee follows.

TESTIMONY OF

**PAUL BARABANI
HOLYOKE SOLDIERS' HOME COALITION MEMBER
(SUPERINTENDENT OF THE SOLDIERS' HOME IN HOLYOKE FROM 2011-2016)**

BEFORE THE

HOUSE VETERANS' AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH

HEARING ON

**“Who's in Charge? Examining Oversight of State Veterans Homes
During the COVID-19 Pandemic”**

JULY 29, 2020

Chairwoman Brownley, Ranking Member Dr Dunn and the Subcommittee:

Thank you for this opportunity to represent the Holyoke Soldiers' Home Coalition at today's hearing.

Our mission is to advocate for the staff and residents of the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke by demanding improved staffing, the construction of a new Home to include an Adult Day Healthcare Program and better governance and oversight of the Home.

The lack of state support to the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke has long been a topic of much consternation among Veterans in western Massachusetts.

We greatly appreciate the commitment of Congressman Richard Neal in his support for the construction of a new Home, to include the Adult Day Healthcare program.

A decade ago---In 2010, the Annual VA Survey noted life safety and resident room-size deficiencies. Of the 278 beds at the time, less than 5% met VA Standards.

We created a design to accommodate 270 residents, with construction of a new wing containing 120 private rooms and renovation of the existing building into private or semi-private rooms, configured in neighborhoods typical of the VA's Community Living Center model.

This plan was approved by the VA Construction Grant Program in 2013. In 2014, the VA approved our design for an Adult Day Healthcare program at Holyoke.

It is the Coalition's belief that the lack of sufficient staff and crowded rooms were root causes of the rapid spread of the virus resulting in the deaths of 76 American Heroes.

When asked "what he would have liked to have done differently regarding the Soldiers' Home", Governor Baker said that his administration's Department of Veteran's Services did not properly oversee the superintendent or the long-term care facility. He responded: "That one's on us."

Our Coalition is now focused on a path forward toward a new Soldiers' Home in Holyoke. We believe the federal VA plays an important role in our vision for a much-improved facility and governance model.

The Annual VA Survey is a thorough review of clinical and life safety standards to ensure quality resident care and compliance with VA standards. The most recent survey, completed on January 31, 2020, stated "the facility did not have an established infection control program."

My thoughts on improving the VA oversight of State Veteran Homes would be to create a "Strategic Partnership" between the VA and State Veteran Homes. Here are my recommendations:

- a. The VA survey would include an analysis of staffing levels in relation to resident complexity, as the critical first step of the annual survey.
- b. VA would require the Facility of Jurisdiction to assist the State Veteran Home with developing corrective action plans; utilizing their expertise, network of data and their vast knowledge of Evidence Based Practices.
**** Recall my mention of the January 2020 finding that the Home lacked an infection control program? Imagine if the Facility of Jurisdiction and the Home had worked collaboratively to implement such a policy during the month of February****
- c. The survey process should require the VISN Director to approve Corrective Action Plans.
- d. The results of the State Veteran Homes survey would be added to the performance metrics for the Director of the Facility of Jurisdiction.
- e. The Establishment of a formal "Partnership" between the Facility of Jurisdiction and the State Veteran Home, which would include:
 - a. Allowing the attendance of State Home staff at VA training
 - b. Access to VA On-Line Resources
 - c. Joint participation in Disaster Preparedness Exercises, to include preparation for a pandemic or an infectious disease outbreak
 - d. Assistance with placement of "Challenging" residents that the State Home and VA mutually assess to be beyond the State Home's ability to provide quality care

- e. The Facility of Jurisdiction providing Assistance Visits and collaboration in areas such as:
 - i. Behavioral Health Services
 - ii. Quality Management
 - iii. Falls/Risk Management
 - iv. Dietary Services
 - v. Pharmacy Program
 - vi. Systems Redesign/Lean Training
 - vii. Facilities Management
 - viii. Infection Control
- f. Establishing a methodology to formally address “recurring deficiencies”; especially those that require corrective action and resources above the facility level.

***In this regard, I bring your attention to the 2010 VA Findings regarding room size that I mentioned at the beginning of my testimony...and the Home’s renovation project... approved for VA funding? Has our state approved funding for this project? No! That project and the Adult Day Health Care project both remain on the list of projects “Lacking State Matching Funds”.

In 2013, and every year until my retirement in 2016; I needed the VA’s help to influence the state’s decision makers....to provide funds for proper staffing levels, and the renovation of the Home; to ensure safe, quality Veteran care.

I often ask myself: “What if they had listened?” and funded to my requests for additional staff... and the creation of individual rooms in the renovation project.

How many of these deaths could have been prevented? ...IF they had listened.

The Department of Veteran Affairs and the State Veteran Homes share a sacred and moral obligation to provide quality care for all Veterans, whether in a VA Community Living Center or a State Veteran Home.

Through a professional partnership and collaboration, we have the unique opportunity to vastly improve the quality of Veteran care for future generations of Veterans.

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Granby, Ludlow & Southwick boards of select pass resolutions calling for state action for Soldiers' Home

First town boards to support Coalition call for immediate steps

HOLYOKE, Mass., July 22, 2020 – The Holyoke Soldiers' Home Coalition today noted the first action by town boards and municipal bodies in Massachusetts to pass a resolution that calls for much-needed staffing and capital improvements in support of Veterans who reside at the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke.

The Board of Selectmen in Ludlow and the Southwick Select Board, both in Hampden County, and the Granby Selectboard in Hampshire County, resolved to call on Governor Baker and the Legislature to take immediate action to increase funding to ensure sufficient staff, equipment and supplies to provide safe care at the Home.

The resolutions support the Coalition's appeal to the state to expedite the design of a new Soldiers' Home in Holyoke. The design would allow for the construction of fully compliant rooms for 250 Veterans, including a toilet and shower in each bedroom and supports the Coalition's strong advocacy for an Adult Day Health Care program at the Home.

The resolutions agree with the Coalition that the state must meet the VA project submission dates of April 15, 2021 for these projects to finally get off the ground.

"It is my honor and privilege to put this resolution forward for all our heroes who have passed away from this unbelievable tragedy," said Ludlow Selectmen Derek DeBarge, who introduced the resolution.

See attachments for the Ludlow and Granby resolutions. Southwick's resolution will be posted to our Coalition web page at a future date.

"We encourage cities and towns across our Commonwealth to take similar action to demonstrate their support for significant improvements to the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke," said a statement today by the Coalition. "Through their elected representatives, we call on every citizen in our state to advocate for increased funding and staffing for the Soldiers' Home, the construction of a new and upgraded Home, to include an Adult Day Healthcare Program, and better governance and oversight. We must address the inadequate and unsafe conditions that contributed to the deaths of 76 Veterans to COVID-19."

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In addition to Granby, Ludlow and Southwick, organizations that have also passed resolutions in support of Coalition efforts include the Massachusetts Department of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, representing all VFW members in the state and the of the American Legion and Chapter One-Eleven of the Vietnam Veterans of America.

More cities and towns and organizations are also expected to pass resolutions. Media can check the Coalition's "Our Coalition" page for a complete list of members, names of citizens who support the Coalition, to include elected officials, organizations and now cities and towns.

Citizens, cities, towns and organizations can write to the Coalition at HolyokeSoldiersHomeCoalition@gmail.com for assistance with the language for a resolution and to discuss Coalition efforts, our mission, and goals to bring much-needed improvements to the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke.

ABOUT THE COALITION: The Holyoke Soldiers' Home Coalition is a grassroots organization of Veteran leaders, family members, Veteran services' representatives and concerned citizens, including former members of the executive leadership team of the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke. The organization calls on the Baker-Polito Administration to address significant concerns they have with the state's plan to improve the operations and oversight of the Soldiers' Home.

A major focus for the coalition is to ensure that Veterans and family members of Veterans are included in any major reforms or changes to the governance of the Soldiers' Home.

An outreach effort must include a process for the state to receive feedback and consensus from family members and from the Veteran community in western Massachusetts.

A detailed list of recommendations to the state are listed on the organization's web page at www.holyokesoldiershomecoalition.org.

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MEDIA ADVISORY

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Coalition calls on State to address federal inspections

Group also notes Mass. VFW's support for a new Soldiers' Home in Holyoke

HOLYOKE, Mass., July 13, 2020 – The Holyoke Soldiers' Home Coalition today noted two important developments in its advocacy for much-needed staffing and capital improvements in support of Veterans who reside at the state-run facility.

The first development is the release through the Freedom of Information Act of federal inspections of the Soldiers' Home that document serious findings of neglect of Veterans at the Home, from staffing shortages to inadequate room size. [These findings were reported by Kathy Curran of WCVB Channel 5 in Boston](#), and the Coalition calls on the General Court's Joint Committee on Veterans & Federal Affairs to immediately review these findings in its deliberations over [Senate Bill 2788](#), the proposed act to improve the governance of the Soldiers' Home, filed by Governor Charlie Baker.

The second development is the passage of a resolution this weekend by the Department of Massachusetts, Veterans of Foreign Wars, in support of Coalition efforts to call on Governor Baker and the Legislature to take immediate action to increase funding to ensure sufficient staff, equipment and supplies to provide safe care at the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke. The resolution supports the Coalition's appeal to the state to expedite the design of a new Soldiers' Home in Holyoke. The design would allow for the construction of fully compliant rooms for 250 Veterans, including a toilet and shower in each bedroom and supports the Coalition's advocacy for an Adult Day Health Care program at the Home.

The Massachusetts VFW furthermore agrees with the Coalition that the state must meet the VA project submission dates of April 15, 2021 for these projects to finally get off the ground.

See the attachment for the resolution which Mass. VFW signed on July 11.

“We cannot continue to wait for the Baker-Polito Administration to further analyze, study, deliberate and otherwise delay what it should have done years ago in supporting significant improvements to the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke,” said a statement today by the Coalition. “There is no doubt that the findings as reported by WCVB contributed to the inadequate and unsafe conditions at the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke that resulted in the deaths of 76 Veterans to COVID-19. Enough is enough. The state must act now on significant and major improvements and not continue to take a band-aid approach that continues to place Veterans in Holyoke in terrible conditions.”

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2-2-2 / HOLYOKE SOLDIERS' HOME COALITION

The Holyoke Soldiers' Home Coalition also announces the following key events this week.

Tuesday, July 14, 2020 – The Coalition will be conducting a Stand Out at the State House in Boston to call attention to our demands for a major investment for the future of the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke. Coalition members will be near the steps of the State House from approximately 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Tuesday, July 14, 2020 – Coalition members Paul Barabani, former superintendent of the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke, and John Paradis, former deputy superintendent, will speak out in opposition to Senate Bill 2788 during testimony to the Joint Veterans and Federal Affairs Committee.

Their statements are attached.

The Coalition's Media Release from June 28, 2020 detailing our opposition to the Baker-Polito Administration list of proposed reforms is attached with areas highlighted in yellow that address changes to Massachusetts General Law in Senate Bill 2788.

ABOUT THE COALITION: The Holyoke Soldiers' Home Coalition is a grassroots organization of Veteran leaders, family members, Veteran services' representatives and concerned citizens. The organization calls on the Baker-Polito Administration to address significant concerns they have with the state's plan to improve the operations and oversight of the Soldiers' Home.

A major focus for the coalition is to ensure that Veterans and family members of Veterans are included in any major reforms or changes to the governance of the Soldiers' Home.

An outreach effort must include a process for the state to receive feedback and consensus from family members and from the Veteran community in western Massachusetts.

A detailed list of recommendations to the state are listed on the organization's web page at www.holyokesoldiershomecoalition.org.

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Coalition changes name to highlight advocacy for Soldiers' Home

Group calls on state to ensure Voices Must Be Heard for improvements to Home

HOLYOKE, Mass., July 1, 2020 – A grassroots organization that developed earlier this month to petition the state for significant capital improvements to the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke has rebranded its efforts under a new name that incorporates their broader effort to provide greater advocacy on behalf of Veteran residents at the Soldiers' Home and their family members.

Formerly known as the Fund Holyoke Soldiers Home Now coalition, the group has renamed itself the Holyoke Soldiers' Home Coalition with a new web page that can be found at www.holyokesoldiershomecoalition.org.

Coalition members include Veteran leaders, family members, Veteran services' representatives and concerned citizens, including former Soldiers' Home Superintendent Paul Barabani and former Deputy Superintendent John Paradis. They have called on the Baker-Polito Administration to address significant concerns they have with the state's plan to improve the operations and oversight of the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke.

A major focus for the coalition is to ensure that they are included in the discussion with the state before major reforms or construction plans go forward.

An outreach effort must include a process for the state to receive feedback and consensus from family members and from the Veteran community in western Massachusetts. This is our first and most important demand of the administration.

A detailed list of recommendations to the state are listed on the organization's web page.

"We, the members of the Coalition to Fund the Holyoke Soldiers' Home Now, demand a voice on all matters regarding the future of the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke. Our voices must be heard. In the aftermath of the COVID-19 outbreak at the Soldiers' Home, the reforms outlined will have consequences far reaching for Veterans and their family members for years to come and we appeal to Governor Baker to include our input before moving forward. We, as a Commonwealth, must get this right if we are to move forward from the tragedy that resulted in the deaths of 76 Veterans. Their family members deserve to be heard, and we as citizens call on the Governor to hear our voices."

For more information about the group's membership, mission and vision visit <https://www.HolyokeSoldiersHomeCoalition.org>

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MEDIA RELEASE

FUND HOLYOKE SOLDIERS' HOME NOW

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Coalition addresses key concerns with Baker-Polito reforms

Five issues identified on oversight, governance, additional services, capital improvements

HOLYOKE, Mass., June 26, 2020 -- A coalition of Veterans, family members, Veteran services representatives and concerned citizens called on the Baker-Polito Administration to address significant concerns with the list of reforms announced on June 25 to improve the operations and oversight of the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke.

While the Coalition appreciates the numerous proposals outlined in the press release and the administration's attention to the most serious matters in the Pearlstein investigation findings, its members caution that the implementation of reforms must not take place until there is an outreach effort.

The outreach effort must include a process for the state to receive feedback and consensus from family members and from the Veteran community in western Massachusetts. This is our first and most important demand of the administration.

"We, the members of the Coalition to Fund the Holyoke Soldiers' Home Now, demand a voice on all matters regarding the future of the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke," said Coalition members in a statement following a meeting Thursday evening. "In the aftermath of the COVID-19 outbreak at the Soldiers' Home, the reforms outlined will have consequences far reaching for Veterans and their family members for years to come and we appeal to Governor Baker to include our input before moving forward. We, as a Commonwealth, must get this right if we are to move from the tragedy that resulted in the deaths of 76 Veterans. Their family members deserve to be heard, and we as citizens call on the Governor to hear our voices."

We call on the Baker Administration to remember the words of Governor Paul Dever.

"The scissors of false economy will never be used to cut the appropriations needed for the maintenance of this outstanding institution erected for the veterans of Massachusetts," said Governor Dever on the day of the dedication of the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke in 1952.

It is our Coalition's belief that Governor Dever's words are as important today as ever before. Our Veterans must not be victimized by any administration that does not adequately fund their needs. We, a coalition of Veterans, family members of Veterans and concerned citizens demand that our Commonwealth commit to providing care with honor and dignity for our most senior Veterans. This is a moral obligation.

In the vein of ensuring this commitment is followed and after reviewing the administration's press release, the Coalition specifically outlines the following five areas of concern with recommendations. The lack of comments on other reforms does not constitute our consent currently, but we believe these five areas are of the greatest priority for attention and deserve the utmost attention.

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2-2-2 / HOLYOKE COALITION

First, regarding the Department of Veterans' Services Oversight of the Soldiers' Homes.

We recommend that both the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke and the Soldiers' Home in Chelsea be aligned under the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Bureau of Hospitals. The bureau currently provides oversight of four multi-specialty care facilities, including Western Massachusetts Hospital in Westfield. Their focus is on the "delivery of health care services to special populations." Veterans are a special population with multiple physical and behavioral health challenges distinct from the general population, and DPH is far more capable in overseeing and providing regulatory guidance to the two homes than the appointment of an individual in the Department of Veterans' Services.

Second, regarding changes to the Soldiers' Homes' Board of Trustees.

While we agree with an approach that builds consistency with the governance of the two Homes, we propose that the Trustees' model be much more closely examined and be overhauled. We propose the appointment of representatives to the respective boards from the Congressionally Chartered Veterans' Services Organizations and major Veteran representative groups in Massachusetts (Veterans of Foreign Wars, Disabled American Veterans, American Legion, AMVETS, Vietnam Veterans of America, Military Order of The Purple Heart and the Western Massachusetts Veteran Service Officer Association). We further propose that the chairperson of the respective boards be chosen by a vote of the board members.

We strongly oppose the addition of the Secretary of the Executive Office of Health and Human Services and the Secretary of Veterans' Services as ex-officio members. This proposal is contrary to the intent of the citizens of the Commonwealth to create the Homes as independent agencies with a board of trustees chartered by law to ensure the proper resources for the care and well-being of Veterans, *independent of the administration.*

The current board structure for the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke mandates representation from the four counties of western Massachusetts in providing a voice for citizens in our region.

To have the administration place two of its governor-appointed secretaries on the board would further destroy the autonomy of the board and would subject the Homes to the political and fiscal priorities of the administration, resulting in continued underfunding and understaffing as has been the case over the past several years in Holyoke.

Further, our Coalition has noted a direct correlation between DVS micro-management of the Board of Trustees of the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke as demonstrated by DVS directing a 1 percent increase to the Home's budget for fiscal year 2021. This administrative control has resulted in dire consequences for the Veterans the Trustees are chartered to serve.

Third, regarding the hiring of a Designated Occupational Health Nurse.

The Coalition supports this proposal. We further propose the creation and funding of the following positions: a full-time geriatric physician as the medical director; a geriatric nurse practitioner; and a psychiatric nurse practitioner. We are especially concerned, following feedback from family members, that the state must address the increased demand for geriatric psychiatric care given the population that the Soldiers' Home serves.

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3-3-3 / HOLYOKE COALITION

Fourth, regarding the appointment of the Superintendent of the Holyoke Soldiers' Home.

The Coalition strongly opposes the EOHHS Secretary as appointing authority. Coalition members view this proposal as another attempt by the administration to further dilute the autonomy of the Board of Trustees, allowing for a political "at-will" appointment that would be subject to the removal of the governor at any time. Such an appointment is perceived by the Coalition as a political maneuver to solidify loyalty to the administration. This would be to the detriment of the independence of the Board of Trustees, which was chartered by the citizens of our Commonwealth to ensure the interests of the Veterans it is entrusted to serve.

Furthermore, we recommend that the Chairman of the Board of Trustees be responsible for the annual performance appraisal of the superintendent to allow the superintendent to advocate for the true needs of the Soldiers' Home without fear of retribution from the administration when he or she disagrees with the administration when supporting the objectives of the Board of Trustees and to eliminate the possibility of removal by the governor as an "at-will" employee.

Finally, the Coalition seeks to reinstate the former provisions of Massachusetts General Law, Part 1, Chapter 6, Section 71 which the Baker Administration advocated to change. The law must be reinstated to protect the superintendent from the political whim of the governor. A portion of the removed section stated: "The superintendent may be removed by said board of trustees for inefficiency, failure to perform duties properly or other good cause." The recent change to the law removed the provision thus making the superintendent subject to the desires of the governor, via the DVS secretary as opposed to the Board of Trustees.

Fifth, regarding capital improvements.

The Coalition seeks a commitment by the Baker Administration for the renovation and expansion of long-term care at the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke while maintaining a minimum of 250 long-term care beds. This is a necessity to meet the demand for long-term care in the Veteran population in our region.

All rooms must be in full compliance with federal U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs requirements, Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards and the Americans with Disabilities Act and must include a private toilet and shower in each one-person room.

All rooms must have a private toilet and shower to provide privacy and dignity for the Veterans as a key component to reducing the possibility of infection being spread and for increased fall safety. Community showers with an associated need for Veterans to walk a distance to shower must not be in any new capital improvement plan.

The integration of ceiling lift rails must be included into any new design for construction to accommodate future generations of Veterans with amputations and other chronic conditions requiring lift assistance.

To meet the increasing needs of Veterans with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia, the Coalition strongly requests enhanced dementia care units.

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4-4-4 / HOLYOKE COALITION

There must be a greater awareness of the needs of women Veterans as the female Veteran population continues to increase. While most room provisions may be gender neutral, the addition of such necessities as a hair salon and other specific requirements must be considered.

Finally, the renovation of the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke should include the creation of an Adult Day Healthcare Program.

A plan for ADHC was submitted to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and is listed on the state construction grant program list as Project FAI 25-080. This construction project for the Soldiers' Home was approved by VA for 65 percent reimbursement for funding in 2016. Yet, the project, which would allow Veterans to age in place in their community with loved ones until they require admission into long-term care, remains on the list of projects with "No State Matching Funds." Such a program would further provide a per-diem payment for each day of care provided, helping to offset the state funds needed for this proven program.

For more information about the group's membership, mission and vision visit <https://www.fundholyokesoldiershomenow.org>

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Coalition to conduct more 'stand outs,' receives key support

Massachusetts Military Order of the Purple Heart sends letter to Governor Baker

HOLYOKE, Mass., June 24, 2020 – A coalition of Veterans, family members, Veteran services representatives and concerned citizens will continue to conduct “stand outs” throughout the Pioneer Valley to draw awareness and support for major renovations and significant construction to include a new wing at the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke.

Coalition members and supporters on Tuesday raised signs and conducted their first “stand out” in Holyoke at a busy intersection less than one mile from the Soldiers' Home.

On Wednesday, coalition members will be at three new locations: at the Memorial Drive-Granby Road-Westover Road rotary in Chicopee from 4 to 6 p.m.; in Longmeadow at the Town Green on Route 5 from 4 to 6 p.m.; and in Agawam at the Morgan-Sullivan Bridge at the Agawam-West Springfield town line over the Westfield River from 4 to 6 p.m.

The effort is all part of a campaign to tell Governor Charlie Baker and Lt. Gov. Karyn Polito to immediately approve funding for major renovation and addition to the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke.

Organizers say they may move to other locations in Massachusetts, to include the Boston area, as necessary to achieve the support needed.

Meanwhile, the Military Order of The Purple Heart, Department of Massachusetts, informed the coalition that a letter was sent to the Baker-Polito Administration in full support for the construction of a new Soldiers' Home in Holyoke.

“Our Veterans and their family members deserve a profound statement of support as a memorial to the Veterans who died from the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020,” said the letter signed by Brian Willette, the commander of the MOPH Department of Massachusetts. “Our state needs to express in a significant way that their sacrifice resulted in positive and lasting change that would truly improve the quality of life for future generations of Veterans in western Massachusetts.” The letter ended with Willette quoting President Abraham Lincoln: “That we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain.”

The Military Order of the Purple Heart is composed of Veterans and military men and women who received the Purple Heart for wounds suffered in combat.

The MOPH letter was the third major statement of support sent to Governor Baker this past week, including a letter from the Massachusetts Department of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and a letter from 25 family members of Veterans from the Soldiers' Home.

As of Wednesday morning, more than 1,400 people have signed the petition, which states that conditions at the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke are unacceptable and violate the patient rights of Veterans for safe and adequate care.

More information about the group's mission and vision to include a narrative of the construction project can be found at <https://www.fundholyokesoldiershomenow.org>

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Coalition is petitioning Governor to fund a new Soldiers' Home in Holyoke

HOLYOKE, Mass., June 19, 2020 – A coalition of Veterans, family members, Veteran services representatives and concerned citizens are petitioning Governor Charlie Baker and Lt. Gov. Karyn Polito to immediately approve a project that would result in a new Soldiers' Home in Holyoke.

The group has created a web page where citizens can link to a petition. The web page also provides sample letters and telephone messages for people to write to and call elected officials.

"I support immediate action by Governor Baker and legislature to provide state funding to renovate and expand the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke by July 31, 2020, in order to allow the correction of serious conditions which have been ignored for several years," says the group's petition.

As of Friday afternoon, more than 850 people have signed the petition, which states that conditions at the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke are unacceptable and violate the patient rights of Veterans for safe and adequate care.

The coalition formed after news reports that a project for a new wing at the Soldiers' Home was approved for 65 percent federal funding in 2013 but has never received a commitment from the Baker Administration for state matching funds to proceed.

"We want to be part of the solution to take advantage of a major opportunity to make things right for the families of the Veterans who died, right for the families of the Veterans who died, right for the incredibly dedicated staff who had to work in those conditions and right for future generations of Veterans who will need the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke," says the group's message on its web page.

In addition to the online petition, a group of family members of Veterans who died at the Soldiers' Home after testing positive for COVID-19 sent a letter to Governor Baker to request state approval of the project that would result in a new five-story addition.

Today, in his first official action as the newly installed commander of the Massachusetts Department of Foreign Wars, Russ Jobe signed a letter on behalf of all state VFW members calling on Governor Baker to support the new construction.

The best path forward following the deaths of more than 75 Veteran residents who tested positive for COVID-19 at the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke is a vastly improved facility for the Veterans, says the petition and letters.

"We envision a Soldiers' Home in Holyoke where Veterans enjoy excellent quality of life and quality of care; where they, their families, and the staff engage in relationships that result in the best possible environment where Veterans want to live and staff want to work; and where all are protected, sustained in the safest and most compassionate Home possible," says the group.

More information about the group's mission and vision to include a narrative of the construction project can be found at <https://www.fundholyokesoldiershomenow.org>

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