



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
WASHINGTON

March 16, 2015

The Honorable Nikki R. Haley  
Governor of South Carolina  
1205 Pendleton Street  
Columbia, SC 29201

Dear Governor Haley:

Five years ago, President Obama set our Nation on a course to prevent Veterans from ever having to experience the desperation of homelessness. He challenged us to have "zero tolerance" for a Veteran—any Veteran—sleeping on the streets after serving our country. Since then, considerable progress has been made to address homeless Veterans' needs through data-driven enhanced programming, resources, and community-based partnerships.

On any given night in January 2014, an estimated 49,933 Veterans were without a safe, stable home in the United States—17,885 homeless Veterans living on the streets and 32,048 in shelters, transitional housing programs, or safe havens. This represents a 33 percent decline in the total number of homeless Veterans since 2010, and includes a nearly 43 percent reduction in Veterans living on the street. I credit this success to the hard work of dedicated Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) employees, strong partnerships with the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness and other Federal partners, and the thousands of state and local partners, inside and outside of the Government, that have joined us in this mission.

The goal of ending homelessness among Veterans is within our grasp, but challenges remain in housing, employment, and other areas. Communities across America have seen how effective rapid rehousing resources have made a difference in getting Veterans into housing quickly. VA's resources are robust, but not sufficient alone. I encourage you to actively engage property managers, developers, and real estate professionals in your state to generate more affordable housing options for Veterans. If your communities can set aside a number of affordable housing units for Veterans and their families who are exiting homelessness and look at expanding localized rental assistance, possibly low cost capital for new construction, and rehabilitation of housing for Veterans and their families experiencing or most at risk of homelessness, the results would be extremely positive.

Additionally, to alleviate poverty, a key risk factor of homelessness, communities must be able to expand opportunities for meaningful and sustainable employment and improve access to mainstream programs and services. These are two key areas that reduce financial vulnerability to homelessness. I ask that you encourage business and industry leaders in your state to hire job-ready Veterans exiting homelessness so they

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can earn steady income from well-paying jobs, re-establish credit, and obtain and maintain housing.


I realize that there are employers who may be reluctant to hire Veterans with sporadic work histories or long periods of unemployment. To ease the concerns of potential employers, VA has programs that can assist by vetting candidates to ensure appropriate referrals and provide wrap-around vocational counseling, job coaching, and support services to those Veterans referred for employment.

As 2015 progresses, collectively we must quicken our pace. VA has made significant investments and has done considerable work in your communities in collaboration with local leadership and agencies to prevent and end homelessness among Veterans. However, there are many things that VA is not authorized to provide. Together, we must re-double our efforts and demonstrate the value of effective partnerships and interventions that will address gaps in securing and maintaining permanent housing. Homelessness is a local problem that requires local solutions. I ask that you lead efforts in your state to maximize resources, increase awareness, and grow effective interventions to end homelessness among our Nation's Veterans. We have less than a year to make good on our promise to the Veterans who defended our Nation.

Ms. Lisa Pape, Executive Director, Veterans Health Administration Homeless Programs, and I are available to discuss specific efforts and leadership that you can provide in support of ending homelessness among Veterans. Ms. Pape can be reached at (202) 461-1635 or at [Lisa.Pape2@va.gov](mailto:Lisa.Pape2@va.gov). A copy of this letter has been sent to your State Director of Veterans Affairs.

I look forward to working with you on this critical effort, and offer my sincere gratitude for all that you already do to assist our country's Veterans experiencing homelessness.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert A. McDonald". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Robert A. McDonald