



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

NEWS

ROD R. BLAGOJEVICH - GOVERNOR

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Governor Blagojevich announces new program to give homeless Illinois veterans housing and assistance at the state's Manteno Veterans' Home

Pilot program will serve as national model for how to overcome challenges in financing housing for disabled veterans

MANTENO – Governor Rod R. Blagojevich today announced a new pilot program that will help provide housing and supportive services for 15 disabled, homeless Illinois veterans at the state's Veterans' Home in Manteno. The pilot program will serve as a national model for how to overcome challenges in providing permanent housing for homeless and disabled veterans, including veterans suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and will help Illinois lead the nation in preparing for the likely increase in mental health problems among veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

The construction and program start-up will be funded through \$1,562,000 in state and federal grants and will be implemented by the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs (IDVA).

“The men and women who put their lives on the line to serve our country deserve our respect and gratitude. It's terribly unjust that some of our veterans are living on the streets without the medical care or help they need. This expansion at the Manteno Veterans Home will help provide shelter, medical assistance, and job training to help disabled veterans live in dignity,” said Gov. Blagojevich.

IDVA Director Roy Dolgos, along with Illinois Housing Development Authority (IHDA) Executive Director Kelly King Dibble, Capital Development Board Executive Director Janet Grimes, and other federal, state and local officials broke ground today – on behalf of Gov. Blagojevich – for the expansion project at the Manteno Veteran's Home.

“Those men and women of Illinois who have borne the battle in military service to our country have earned our help and support,” said Lt. Governor Pat Quinn. “This new Veterans Home is one more example of the leadership the State of Illinois has shown in caring for our veterans. I commend Governor Blagojevich for this latest achievement, and I am proud that our state has created another national model for veterans care.”

By transforming the Manteno Homeless Program into a permanent supportive housing program, the state will be able to meet a statewide need for a homeless veterans’ program operated in collaboration with veterans’ services providers. The pilot program will:

- Provide quality housing and supportive services to 15 veterans who cannot live independently;
- Serve as a national model for how to overcome challenges in financing housing for physically disabled veterans, and veterans suffering PTSD;
- Tap into federal resources that are only available to programs located on State VA Home properties, becoming the first homeless veterans program in the nation to make use of these funds;
- Cost the State less than \$7,000 per year, per veteran in operating and supportive service expenses;
- Keep homeless veterans – 60 percent of whom spend time in prison – out of incarceration facilities.

Homelessness is a crisis affecting hundreds of thousands of veterans across the nation. According to U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs estimates, nearly 300,000 veterans are homeless on any given night, and more than 500,000 experience homelessness over the course of a year.

Homeless veterans are mostly males, and more than half are people of color. Although a majority of veterans are single, local providers across the country are reporting an increasing number of veterans with children who are seeking assistance. Most homeless veterans are poor, and more than 40 percent suffer from a mental illness, according to information from the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans.

According to veterans’ organizations, veterans are at high risk of becoming homeless due to low or no income, substandard housing conditions and lack of access to affordable healthcare. A large number of at-risk veterans also live with post-traumatic stress disorder and addictions acquired during – or exacerbated by – their military service.

The National Coalition for Homeless Veterans has indicated that homelessness among veterans is a nationwide problem requiring a national solution, and have recommended both at the federal and state levels an increase in funding for the array of housing, workforce development, and healthcare programs available to veterans.

“Supportive housing has always been the missing piece in treating the toughest cases - this is a great start and I hope it can be replicated elsewhere,” said George Basher, Director of the New York Division of Veterans Affairs and President of the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs.

“This pilot is a new road to hope for homeless veterans,” said Pete Dougherty, Director of Homeless Veterans’ Programs at the USDVA. “A new road to access housing, healthcare, benefits, and a new road for these veterans to rejoin their rightful place in society.”

The program will be staffed by a program director, a caseworker, two addiction counselors, and one psychiatric nurse. Seventy-five percent of the veterans in the program will be homeless individuals referred by Federal VA medical centers and IDVA officers. The additional 25 percent of residents will be homeless veterans referred by the Veterans’ Assistance Commission and community providers.

The renovations at Manteno’s Prince Building will allow IDVA to provide residents with single dwelling units equipped with semi-private bathrooms and kitchenettes, new carpet, laundry facilities and other improvements.

The program will also offer its residents on-site medical assistance, job training and all the other services available to those who currently reside at the Manteno Home.

“This program will serve as an innovative model for the rest of the nation to emulate as a way to combat homelessness among the brave men and women who fought for this country,” Illinois Department of Veterans’ Affairs Director Roy L. Dolgos added.

“Gov. Blagojevich’s 2005 Building for Success: Illinois Comprehensive Housing Plan identified the homeless community, including homeless war veterans, as one of the priority populations targeted for affordable housing spending,” said Kelly King Dibble, executive director of IHDA. “The Governor also signed the Comprehensive Housing Planning Bill in June to ensure that the housing needs of the state's homeless continue to be addressed for many more years to come. IHDA is proud to allocate \$816,000 from the State Affordable Housing Trust Fund to finance the Manteno Veterans' Home.”

“Today we celebrate an important pilot program. Tomorrow, the work continues in earnest to make this building a first-class facility worthy of the sacrifices these warriors made for our country,” Capital Development Board (CDB) Executive Director Jan Grimes said. “All of us at CDB are going to do everything we can to ensure that the Prince Building becomes a secure, comfortable and welcoming home.”

Since 2003, Gov. Blagojevich has taken several measures and launched a number of initiatives to help the state’s veterans, including:

EXPANDING CARE AND TREATMENT OF VETERANS

Last Spring, Governor Blagojevich signed into law his landmark *Veterans Care*, a health insurance initiative that will provide access to affordable, comprehensive health care to thousands of veterans across Illinois. The program will help up to 9,000 veterans in Illinois who

currently earn too much to qualify for Veterans Administration Healthcare but cannot afford to purchase health insurance in the private market.

Top officials from Governor Rod R. Blagojevich's administration recently broke ground on a new 80-bed addition to the LaSalle Veterans' Home. Gov. Blagojevich directed \$13 million to build the 60,000-square-foot unit that will allow the facility to serve dozens more of the state's disabled veterans. The expansion will allow the home to admit 40 residents into the Alzheimer's unit and 40 more into the skilled care unit, as well as hire 60 to 65 additional employees.

PROTECTING VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES

This year, the Governor signed into law the following legislation:

- Senate Bill 916, which protects military personnel and their families against the inadvertent loss of health insurance after a tour of duty or an honorable discharge from military service.
- Senate Bill 1144, which shields grieving military families from protests during funerals and memorial services of fallen soldiers. The "Let Them Rest in Peace Act" requires protesters to stay at least 200 feet away from family and friends as they mourn soldiers who made the ultimate sacrifice.
- House Bill 4121, which punishes individuals who falsely claim to be decorated war heroes. The new law creates criminal charges and imposes penalties on individuals falsely representing themselves as recipients of various military honors, including the Purple Heart, the Congressional Medal of Honor, the Distinguished Service Cross, the Navy Cross, the Air Force Cross, the Silver Star and the Bronze Star.
- House Bill 4822, which protects Illinois veterans from discrimination in employment and housing by changing the definition of military status in the state's Human Rights Act. Under the new law, military status now includes a veteran of the Armed Forces of the United States, a reserve component of the Armed Forces of the United States, the Illinois Army National Guard and the Illinois Air National Guard.
- House Bill 4703, which strengthens consumer protections for active military members under the Illinois Patriot Plan. The new law imposes penalties on companies for offenses such as canceling life insurance policies or turning off heat while soldiers are deployed.

HELPING VETERANS GET THE BENEFITS THEY ARE ENTITLED TO

Last year, following through on a promise made during his 2005 State of the State Address, the Governor hired 25 new Veteran Service Officers and deployed them across the state to significantly improve the state's outreach to one million Illinois veterans and their families. Thanks to the increase in staffing, the VSOs have helped more than 5,000 additional veterans apply and receive federal compensation and other benefits during the first quarter of 2006, compared to the same time period in 2005.

On May 20, the Illinois Department of Veterans' Affairs hosted a "Supermarket of Veterans Benefits" where hundreds of Central Illinois veterans were able to get information about their

federal benefits and services from Veterans Service Officers, as well as connect with educational opportunities and job openings. This “Supermarket” followed similar events held last year in Chicago, Springfield and DuQuoin.

EXPANDING FUNDING OF STATE PROGRAMS AND SERVICES FOR VETERANS

Earlier this year, the Governor announced that just three months after going on sale, the state’s first lottery ticket designed to benefit Illinois veterans and their families has generated more than \$1.9 million for veterans. *Veterans Cash* is the first instant ticket in Illinois Lottery history where a portion of the proceeds will help fund state programs and services for veterans.