

\$1.5 MILLION IN FEDERAL FUNDING TO END HOMELESSNESS AMONG VETERANS

Commonwealth expands innovative SHARP program with U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs funding to help end veteran homelessness

NORTHAMPTON-- Thursday, October 4, 2012 – Lieutenant Governor Timothy Murray today announced the awarding of \$1.5 million by the Obama Administration to provide street level outreach, peer support services and case management to chronically homeless veterans in Massachusetts. Joined by Massachusetts Department of Veterans' Services Secretary Coleman Nee, officials from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the Massachusetts Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness (ICHH) and Veteran service providers at a forum to address housing for homeless veterans in Western Massachusetts, Lieutenant Governor Murray outlined the announced funding as part of a new contract from the VA New England Health Care System. The Massachusetts Department of Veterans' Services (DVS) will use this funding to apply the 'Statewide Housing Advocacy for Reintegration and Prevention' (SHARP) model to the Housing & Urban Development – VA Supported Housing (HUD-VASH) program.

“By working across agencies and in partnership with many advocates and service providers, Massachusetts continues to make great strides in providing resources for our military servicemen and women,” said Lieutenant Governor Murray, Chair of the Governor’s Advisory Council on Veterans’ Services and Chair of the Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness. “We welcome this great news, but there is plenty more work to be done. This increased funding will complement our ongoing work with local, state and federal partners as we address a statewide plan to help individuals and families, including our veteran population, transition to affordable and stable housing.”

The SHARP model, which is administered by DVS, offers peer support, mental health services, psychiatric evaluation and linkages to emergency shelter to veterans recently placed in supportive housing at a veteran-centric facility. The team also identifies and enrolls new homeless veterans in the HUD-VASH program. This new funding was specifically designated to hire 9 new peer support specialists, 12 new case managers, and be accompanied by 320 new HUD-VASH vouchers.

Lieutenant Governor Murray announced the \$1.5 million in federal funding at a meeting organized by the ICHH, “Drafting the First Statewide Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness among Veterans in Massachusetts: Western MA Forum.” In December 2011, under the leadership of Lieutenant Governor Murray, the ICHH and DVS jointly launched the statewide steering committee. Since December, the steering committee has been researching the current scope of the problem, examining plans from other states, identifying promising practices, and articulating goals and targets for significantly reducing veterans’ homelessness in the next two years.

“Expanding the reach and effectiveness of the Statewide Housing Advocacy for Reintegration and Prevention (SHARP) program will help get more veterans the services and help they need to escape homelessness,” said Congressman Edward Markey. “I welcome this vital funding, and look forward to working with Governor Deval Patrick, Lieutenant Governor Tim Murray and Secretary of Veteran Services Coleman Nee to continue and improve this critical support for our veterans.”

“We have a responsibility to ensure that those who served our country receive the very best services that we, as a nation, can offer,” Congressman Stephen F. Lynch said. “I am pleased to see that this funding will help the S.H.A.R.P. program end homelessness among veterans here in Massachusetts and I want to commend Lieutenant Governor Murray and Secretary Coleman Nee for continuing to make our veterans a priority.”

“One of the greatest challenges facing our nation is the number of veterans returning home from their service only to find that they are now alone in a different type of personal struggle,” said Congressman William Keating. “A direct result of not being able to reach these men and women is the increasing number of homeless veterans. That is why the SHARP program is so critical – it is the link helping veterans receive the services and support they need. I congratulate Lt. Governor Murray, DVS Secretary Coleman Nee, the Massachusetts Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness and veteran service providers across the Commonwealth in their tireless efforts to help these dedicated men and women who have given us so much to protect our country.”

“The SHARP model reflects Massachusetts’ unparalleled commitment to supporting veterans,” said Secretary of Health and Human Services Dr. JudyAnn Bigby. “The peer-to-peer approach has been extremely effective in other veterans’ initiatives, and this new partnership will help support veterans transitioning back into civilian life. We appreciate the strong support and generous funding that the VA has provided to Massachusetts to support this important work.”

“Massachusetts leads the nation in providing benefits and services to our veterans and their families,” said Secretary Nee. “By coordinating the resources of federal, state, local and not-for-profit entities working with veterans, we have been able to serve more people, establish better outcomes and maximize public dollars to their fullest potential. Fully utilizing all existing resources as well as employing new methods, such as peer-to-peer outreach, will help us dramatically reduce the number of homeless veterans in Massachusetts and take great strides toward ending veterans’ homelessness in the Commonwealth.”

Building on the work of the SHARP model and the ICHH steering committee, the Patrick-Murray Administration anticipates releasing a statewide plan later this year, which will outline strategies for integrating federal, state, and private sector resources. The plan will also be aligned with the Department of Veterans’ Affairs 5 Year Plan to End Veterans’ Homelessness and the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness plan, Opening Doors.

“Together, the U.S. Department of Veterans’ Affairs and the Department of Veterans’ Services are capitalizing on the unprecedented federal, state, local, and nonprofit collaborations, while building on best practices that make a real difference for homeless veterans,” said Massachusetts Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness Executive Director Liz Rogers. “Programs such as this are exactly what we

will work into a statewide plan to provide the housing and supports necessary to ensure all our veterans have a safe, affordable home.

The SHARP model is a collaborative effort between the Massachusetts Department of Veterans' Services; the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs; VA New England Health Care System (Network 1); the National Center for Homelessness Among Veterans; the VA Health Center in Bedford; the VA Quality Enhancement Research Initiative; the University of Massachusetts Medical School; and the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness.

Since 2009, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and HUD have worked with more than 4,000 community agencies across the country to successfully house 33,597 veterans in permanent, supportive housing with dedicated case managers and access to high-quality VA health care. In Massachusetts, DVS works with the VA and more than 30 contracted providers to offer emergency beds, transitional beds and permanent beds on VA campuses and elsewhere. The Commonwealth also applied for and was awarded 1,035 HUD-VASH vouchers between 2008 and 2011. The VASH program combines Housing Choice Voucher rental assistance for homeless veterans with case management and clinical services provided by the VA, which offers these services for participating veterans at VA Medical Centers and community-based outreach clinics.

"We are extremely grateful for our partnership with the Massachusetts Department of Veterans' Services and so many other expert community and federal organizations," said Craig Coldwell, MD, Director of Mental Health Services at the VA New England Healthcare System. "Ending and preventing homelessness among Veterans requires full collaboration. Together we are dramatically advancing our systems of social support and health care to deserving veterans and their families."

"We are grateful for the opportunity to serve the veteran population of Massachusetts in partnership with the Department of Veterans' Services and the Department of Veterans Affairs and other community based agencies working together to eliminate veteran homelessness," said Soldier On President and CEO John Downing. "As we implement these new systems and tools, the veterans of Massachusetts should be more effectively served and protected from falling into homelessness."

Ending homelessness, particularly among veterans, is a top priority of the Patrick-Murray Administration. Governor Patrick and Lieutenant Governor Murray have instituted a number of policy changes, new collaborations and strategies to accomplish this mission. DVS funds more than 30 shelter and transitional housing non-profit organizations, providing housing services to eligible veterans ranging from Emergency Homeless Shelters, group residences, to Single Room Occupancy quarters. In addition, the Massachusetts Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness is leading a five-year strategic plan to end homelessness in the Commonwealth by 2013. Chaired by Lieutenant Governor Murray, the Council established a veterans' subcommittee designed to address the specific needs of homeless veterans in Massachusetts.