Ending Veteran Homelessness Update to the Community

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Kent County Becomes Michigan's First "Functional Zero Community" Efforts to Reach Every Veteran Experiencing Homelessness a Success

GRAND RAPIDS - The United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) signed off as Kent County being a "Functional Zero Community." This means current veterans experiencing homelessness have been connected to resources to secure housing and that future homeless vets can be assured a plan to secure them housing after it is known they are homeless. Agencies working to attain this goal will celebrate their successes today during an awards ceremony on the campus of Calvin College.

The Grand Rapids Area Coalition to End Homelessness, housing providers, federal, state, government officials, veterans, and local partners received awards today for their part in ensuring that homelessness is both rare and brief for Veterans in Kent County. USICH and its member agencies have adopted a vision of what it means to end Veteran Homelessness.

- 1. The community has identified all Veterans experiencing homelessness.
- 2. The community provides shelter immediately to any Veteran experiencing unsheltered homelessness who wants it.
- 3. The community provides service-intensive transitional housing only in limited instances.
- 4. The community has capacity to assist Veterans to swiftly move into permanent housing.
- 5. The community has resources, plans, partnerships, and system capacity in place should any Veteran become homeless or be at risk of homelessness in the future.

In a letter proclaiming Kent County reached Functional Zero, Matthew Doherty, the Executive Director of USICH, spoke of the remarkable efforts of the agencies involved. "We are confident that the infrastructure and systems you have built will ensure that any Veteran experiencing homelessness in Kent County will get the support they need to quickly obtain a permanent home," Doherty wrote.

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PLEDGE AGENCIES: Arbor Circle | City of Grand Rapids Community Development | City of Grand Rapids Mayor | City of Wyoming Community Development | City of Wyoming Department of Public Safety | City of Wyoming Mayor | Community Rebuilders | Degage Ministries | Department of Veterans Affairs - Battle Creek VAMC | Grand Rapids Area Coalition to End Homelessness | Grand Rapids Community Foundation | Continuum of Care Community Member | Grand Rapids Community Development and Housing Commission | Heart of West Michigan United Way | Heartside Ministry | Hope Network | HQ | Legal Aid of Western Michigan | Kent County Board of Commissioners | Kent County Department of Health and Human Services | Kent County Sheriff Department | Kent County Veterans Services | Mel Trotter Ministries | Michigan State Housing Development Authority | Pine Rest | Safe Haven Ministries | The Salvation Army Housing Assessment Program | Veterans Affairs - Health Care for Homeless Veterans | Vietnam Veterans | Volunteers of America Michigan | Urban Pharm LLC | West Michigan Veterans Assistance Program | The WODA Group | 211 |

The Michigan State Housing Development Authority appreciates the collaboration of the pledge agencies. "In its efforts to end veteran homelessness, Kent County has done something remarkable that will serve as a catalyst for other communities working toward this common goal," MSHDA Executive Director Earl Poleski said. "The State stands ready to assist with the financial, technical and collaborative resources that can help end veteran homelessness here and across our great state."

Vera Beech, Executive Director of Community Rebuilders, spoke about the cross-sector partnerships that made this achievement possible. "It took a team of dedicated, caring community members to rearrange structures and resources so that Kent County can ensure that no Veteran will remain homeless in our community," Beech shared. "We must honor those who have served our country and use what we have learned in this process to end homelessness for all populations."

Commissioner Tom Antor will accept an award on behalf of the Kent County Board of Commissioners. "The County staff has shown a great dedication to helping veterans and ending homelessness," Commissioner Antor said. "More than 170 Veterans Affairs Housing Vouchers have been provided in Kent County in recent years. I'm proud of the work they've done to help reach Functional Zero."

Kent County joins more than 50 communities across the country who have achieved Functional Zero. "We are proud to work with our community partners in Kent County to help end Veteran homelessness," Dr. Mary Beth Skupien, Ph.D., Battle Creek VA Medical Center Director added.

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