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Governor Chris Christie Announces Partnership with Freedom House to Support New Jersey's Homeless Veterans

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Trenton, NJ – Governor Chris Christie today detailed plans for the start-up of Veterans Haven North, including a partnership with Freedom House, as part of an initiative to increase access to transitional housing and provide comprehensive care for New Jersey's veterans. The Christie Administration is reinvesting existing resources to expand the Veterans Haven program run by the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMAVA) which currently serves homeless veterans in Winslow Township, Gloucester County. Services offered at the Southern New Jersey facility will be replicated in the northern part of the state in partnership with Freedom House as part of the Administration's efforts to provide a safety net for veterans in need. Since the mid-80s, Freedom House has provided expert long-term residential treatment and transitional living programs for individuals, providing them a second chance and integrating them back into meaningful lives. Freedom House's team of counselors and professionals will complement DMAVA's work with homeless veterans.

"We're launching an effort that continues to honor the commitment of the brave men and women who have worn our nation's uniform by providing them the support they need to get on their feet and be successful," said Governor Christie. "By reinvesting existing resources we will be able to replicate the highly successful Veterans Haven transitional housing program to serve our homeless veterans in the northern part of our state. Thanks to innovation and a partnership with Freedom House, New Jersey will continue to lead the country in providing state-of-the-art facilities and quality care for our veterans. Veterans have sacrificed in their service to our state and country and it is our obligation to support them in every way we can."

The Veterans Haven facility in Gloucester County has helped nearly a thousand homeless veterans since opening in 1995. Three of every four veterans who complete the program remain off the streets for good and return to purposeful lives. The facility recently underwent a 20,000-square-foot expansion to serve an additional 44 homeless veterans.

Startup funds for the project total \$2.3 million and are included in DMAVA's and the Department of Human Services' Fiscal Year 2013 Budgets for treatment services. In addition, federal funding through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs will allow DMAVA to provide housing, health services and social and vocational rehabilitation to approximately 50 homeless veterans.

"I believe that we all can agree that the words 'homeless' and 'veteran' should never be said in the same breath. However, it is an unfortunately reality," said Brigadier General Michael Cuniff, the Acting Adjutant General. "Since 1995, Veterans Haven has helped homeless veterans return to purposeful lives. Expanding the reach of our services to Hagedorn will ensure that all homeless New Jersey veterans are afforded the care and assistance they deserve after their honorable and faithful service to our country."

After being medically evaluated at a VA Medical Center, eligible veterans participate in a long-term program focusing on psychological, social and vocational rehabilitation. Veterans Haven is a drug- and alcohol-free program and residents must abide by this zero tolerance rule while enrolled.

Vocational counselors are on hand to help the veteran prepare to look for work. After finishing vocational testing, the veteran will complete a program plan with the vocational counselor which will best suit the veteran based on experience, education and available funds for school. All veterans enrolled in Veterans Haven are required to find and maintain full-time employment within six months of enrollment. Determination of employment may be made sooner by their case manager.

Residents are also required to attend a variety of self-improvement classes. These classes cover the gamut of life and work skills including anger management, career management, resume writing, basic computer training, health issues, money management and health and hygiene.

Governor Christie continues to demonstrate his commitment to veterans and their families. Since taking office, he has signed legislation that strengthens the support network for military families after the death of a service member; establishes a program that awards high school diplomas to veterans who dropped out to serve in World War II, Korea and Vietnam; honors Gold Star Families with a special license plate for families of members of the military killed in action for their sacrifice; establishes the New Jersey National Guard State Family Readiness Council Fund; ensures funding for the Veteran to Veteran Peer Support Program telephone helpline and reinvigorates programs like Helmets2Hardhats to put veterans back to work.

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