

*In the Year Two Thousand and Twenty*

Upon the Recommendation of Mayor David J. Narkewicz, the Northampton Department of Veteran's Services, Councilor Marianne LaBarge and Councilor Michael Quinlan, Jr.

## R-20.105

### A RESOLUTION

#### IN SUPPORT OF THE SOLDIERS' HOME IN HOLYOKE

*A Resolution honoring the Five Northampton Veterans who lost their lives to COVID-19 at the Holyoke Soldier's Home*

*Be it resolved by the City Council of the City of Northampton, in City Council assembled, as follows:*

Whereas America's Veterans have served our country and community, defended our liberties, and should live with respect, and a good quality of life and are entitled to death with dignity.

Whereas in 1952, the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke opened and has provided "Care with Honor and Dignity" to thousands of Massachusetts Veterans for over 68 years and in that time countless Northampton residents have been cared for at the Soldiers' Home;

Whereas in 2010, Veteran rooms at the Holyoke Soldiers' Home were determined by the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs to be non-compliant with the Uniform Federal Accessibility Standard;

Whereas in 2012, The Massachusetts Division of Capital Assets Management and Maintenance commissioned a Needs Assessment Study that determined that "of the 278 current beds, less than 5% meet VA Standards";

Whereas in 2013, a design to add 120 private rooms, as well as convert existing rooms thus creating 278 fully compliant beds, was approved by the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) for 65% federal funding; however, the state has repeatedly failed to commit its 35% share of matching funds, required to allow for the start of construction;

Whereas in 2016, a project to create an Adult Day Health Care Program at the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke was also approved by the VA for 65% funding; however, it also has never received Massachusetts' commitment for the 35% matching funds;

Whereas in November 2017, with the support of Governor Baker and the Legislature, the state approved \$199 million to build a new 154-bed long-term care facility at the Soldiers' Home in Chelsea; while disregarding the long- documented deficiencies at the Holyoke Soldiers' Home;

Whereas the lack of sufficient space and staff were major contributing factors in the rapid spread of the Novel Coronavirus-19 at the Home which resulted in the deaths of 76 Veterans, including five

Northampton residents, who tested positive for COVID-19. This atrocity is one of our country's worst Veteran tragedies and contradicts Massachusetts' claim of being the best in the nation for Veteran benefits;

Whereas **all Veterans deserve equal treatment** in Massachusetts state-funded Veteran Homes; to include the same living conditions as well as proportionate funding to provide for a safe and efficient level of staffing in all departments;

NOW THEREFORE IT BE RESOLVED that the sponsors call upon the Northampton City Council to urge Governor Baker and the Massachusetts State Legislature take **immediate action to increase funding** to ensure sufficient staff, equipment and supplies to provide safe care; and to **expedite the design of the new Soldiers' Home in Holyoke** to allow for the construction of fully compliant rooms for 250 Veterans, including a toilet and shower in each bedroom, and the establishment of an Adult Day Health Care Program to meet the VA project submission date of April 15, 2021; in order to provide the best in care for "those who have borne the battle" and sacrificed their safety and well-being to preserve our nation's freedom.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Administrative Assistant to the City Council shall cause a copy of this Resolution to be sent to Governor Charles Baker, House Speaker Robert DeLeo; Senate President Karen Spilka, Chairs of the Joint Committee on Veterans and Federal Affairs (Senator Walter F. Timilty, Representative Linda Dean Campbell, Vice Chair Senator Michael F. Rush), State Representative Lindsay Sabadosa, and State Senator Jo Comerford.