



Office of Mayor Lawrence J. Morrissey  
*LEADING BOLDLY, WORKING TOGETHER*

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Rockford Completes Mayors Challenge; Lauded as First City in the Nation to Reach Functional Zero and Effectively End Veteran Homelessness**

Rockford, IL – The City of Rockford Department of Human Services, a community action agency serving Boone and Winnebago counties, announced today that the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Department of Veteran Affairs, and the national nonprofit agency, Community Solutions, have recognized Rockford as the first community in the national *Zero: 2016* movement to reach functional zero and effectively end homelessness among local Veterans.

The City of Rockford has also been recognized by the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness for successfully completing the *Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness*, an initiative led by First Lady Michelle Obama. The Mayors Challenge calls upon mayors and other state and local leaders across the country to publicly express their commitment and provide the leadership to implement the strategies necessary for their communities to end homelessness among all Veterans within their communities by the end of 2015.

“Ensuring every person has a safe, stable place to call home takes teamwork and dedication at every level. Rockford stepped up to this challenge and today has every reason to celebrate its incredible achievement in effectively ending Veteran homelessness. Communities around the country can now look to the Forest City as a model for serving our nation’s heroes,” said HUD Secretary Julián Castro.

The *Zero: 2016* movement, coordinated by Community Solutions with coaching from the Corporation for Supportive Housing, consists of 75 communities working to end Veteran and chronic homelessness by the end of 2016. The national effort supports participants in optimizing local resources, tracking progress against monthly housing goals, and accelerating the spread of proven

strategies, such as those implemented through the Mayors Challenge. Rockford was selected for *Zero: 2016* through a competitive, national application process.

Functional zero is a key component to ensuring every Veteran in the community has a permanent home. In *Zero: 2016*, functional zero is reached when, at any point in time, the number of Veterans experiencing literal homelessness, both on the streets and in shelters, is no greater than the city's monthly Veteran housing placement rate. Rockford has housed a total of 73 Veterans to date. To remain at functional zero, Rockford must have no more than eight homeless Veterans awaiting housing and any new homeless Veteran is housed within 30 days.

Initial housing for homeless Veterans is provided through a variety of resources, some of which include emergency shelters, grant per diem providers and transitional housing. These stop-gap resources are often used as a precursor to securing permanent housing. Permanent housing is defined as any lodging (private or subsidized rental units, nursing homes, family or friends) that does not have a termination date.

Nationally, there are approximately 85,000 chronically homeless individuals and nearly 50,000 homeless Veterans. According to the 2014 United States Census, Rockford is home to approximately 9,600 Veterans. "It is with great pride that we are able to address the needs of those who are homeless," said Jennifer Jaeger, community services director for the City of Rockford human services department.

According to Community Solutions, people experiencing homelessness are three times more likely to die than the general population across all age groups, often from treatable and preventable illnesses. A study commissioned by the nonprofit found that on average, taxpayers save an average of \$13,000 per year for each person moved into permanent housing. This cost savings is the result of reduced costs in emergency services, such as emergency health care, emergency mental care, and jail, all of which are associated with homelessness.

The City of Rockford human services department has led local efforts to end Veteran homelessness in partnership with the local Veterans Administration, Winnebago County Veterans Assistance Center, the Illinois Department of Employment Security Veteran's Program, Rosecrance Ware Center, and Carpenter's Place, among other agencies serving Veterans.

"I am extremely proud of our local Continuum of Care, whose members have worked together to accomplish the goal of ending chronic Veterans homelessness in our community," said Mayor Larry Morrissey. "I am also very thankful to the Obama Administration and First Lady Michelle Obama for challenging us to rise to this occasion and supporting us through practical training and vital housing

resources. I am committed to using this positive accomplishment and the management lessons learned across a broad spectrum of social and economic challenges facing our community."

The "Housing First" policy adopted by the local Continuum of Care ensures access to programs that will work with Veterans regardless of some of the barriers that may plague Veterans such as sobriety, income, and criminal background. While all housing programs to which Veterans meet eligibility requirements are offered, Veterans are always first presented with and encouraged to utilize permanent housing. Funds used to house homeless Veterans are provided by HUD Emergency Solutions Grant/ rapid re-housing, HUD Continuum of Care, state homeless prevention funds, local Veteran assistance commission subsidies, HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing vouchers and subsidized housing providers.

"We at HUD are so proud that the City of Rockford has met the First Lady's call to action to end Veteran homelessness as we know it," said HUD Midwest Regional Administrator Antonio R. Riley. "Rockford has met the federal Mayors Challenge criteria and benchmarks for ending Veteran Homelessness. Rockford is also the first city in the nation to meet the *Zero: 2016* community standard thereby setting an exceptional standard to guide others across the country toward a true and sustainable end to Veteran homelessness."

Efforts to end Veteran homelessness include a variety of key strategies. Most notably, the City of Rockford human services department created and maintains a master by-name list that is provided to all partner agencies who use a coordinated case management process to identify permanent housing options for individuals. Clients placed in transitional housing are kept on the active-by-name list until permanent housing is secured. Partners supply updated information bi-weekly or as needed and the list is updated in real-time. Other strategies include a single point of entry system for coordinated intake and assessment, the development of a Veteran's committee comprised of community partners who often encounter and provide outreach to homeless Veterans, and the cultivation of relationships with local fire, police and park personnel who provide notification of unsheltered Veterans.

"Rockford has defined itself as a vanguard community in a national movement to end Veteran homelessness, demonstrating that it's possible to solve this complex problem," said Beth Sandor, director of *Zero: 2016*. "They have proven that they have a coordinated system and the ongoing capacity to ensure that homelessness among Veterans will be rare, brief and non-recurring. We look forward to continuing to support them in sustaining these gains and working toward an end to chronic homelessness by the close of next year."

The city will continue its strategies to tackle its next goal, ending chronic homelessness by the end of 2016.

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