



**THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
WASHINGTON**

February 12, 2020

Lieutenant General John D. Hopper, Jr., USAF (Retired)  
Chairman  
Veterans and Community Oversight and  
Engagement Board Advisory Committee  
241 18th Street South, Suite 202  
Arlington, VA 22202

Dear Lieutenant General Hopper:

Thank you for your recent letter that was included as part of the Veterans and Community Oversight and Engagement Board's recommendations. I was pleased to review the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) responses to your current recommendations on the key issues identified from the August 2019 meeting in Los Angeles, California. Enclosed are VA responses to the Board's recommendations.

I sincerely appreciate your leadership and the efforts of the Board. The Board has made valuable contributions: identifying the goals of the community and Veteran partnership; improving services and outcomes for Veterans, members of the Armed Forces, and the families of such Veterans and members; and implementing the Draft Master Plan.

If additional information is needed, please contact your Committee Designated Federal Officer, Mr. Eugene W. Skinner, Jr. at (202) 631-7645, or by email at [Eugene.Skinner@va.gov](mailto:Eugene.Skinner@va.gov).

Sincerely,

/s/ Robert L. Wilkie

Robert L. Wilkie

Enclosure



**THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
WASHINGTON**

February 12, 2020

The Honorable Jerry Moran  
Chairman  
Committee on Veterans Affairs  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Enclosed are the Veterans and Community Oversight and Engagement Board's recommendations. The recommendations reflect the Board's meeting conducted in August 2019 and the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) responses to these recommendations. The Board's recommendations contribute to identifying the goals of the community and Veteran partnership; improving services and outcomes for Veterans, members of the Armed Forces, and the families of such Veterans and members; and implementing the Draft Master Plan.

I appreciate the continued expertise that the Board provides to VA. We are working to implement the Board's recommendations.

A copy of the recommendations has been sent to leaders of the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs.

Sincerely,

/s/ Robert L. Wilkie

Robert L. Wilkie

Enclosure



**THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
WASHINGTON**

February 12, 2020

The Honorable Jon Tester  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Veterans Affairs  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Tester:

Enclosed are the Veterans and Community Oversight and Engagement Board's recommendations. The recommendations reflect the Board's meeting conducted in August 2019 and the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) responses to these recommendations. The Board's recommendations contribute to identifying the goals of the community and Veteran partnership; improving services and outcomes for Veterans, members of the Armed Forces, and the families of such Veterans and members; and implementing the Draft Master Plan.

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Sincerely,

/s/ Robert L. Wilkie

Robert L. Wilkie

Enclosure



**THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
WASHINGTON**

February 12, 2020

The Honorable David P. Roe, M.D.  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Veterans Affairs  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Roe:

Enclosed are the Veterans and Community Oversight and Engagement Board's recommendations. The recommendations reflect the Board's meeting conducted in August 2019 and the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) responses to these recommendations. The Board's recommendations contribute to identifying the goals of the community and Veteran partnership; improving services and outcomes for Veterans, members of the Armed Forces, and the families of such Veterans and members; and implementing the Draft Master Plan.

I appreciate the continued expertise that the Board provides to VA. We are working to implement the Board's recommendations.

A copy of the recommendations has been sent to leaders of the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs.

Sincerely,

/s/ Robert L. Wilkie

Robert L. Wilkie

Enclosure



**THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS  
WASHINGTON**

**February 12, 2020**

**The Honorable Mark Takano  
Chairman  
Committee on Veterans Affairs  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515**

**Dear Mr. Chairman:**

**Enclosed are the Veterans and Community Oversight and Engagement Board's recommendations. The recommendations reflect the Board's meeting conducted in August 2019 and the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) responses to these recommendations. The Board's recommendations contribute to identifying the goals of the community and Veteran partnership; improving services and outcomes for Veterans, members of the Armed Forces, and the families of such Veterans and members; and implementing the Draft Master Plan.**

**I appreciate the continued expertise that the Board provides to VA. We are working to implement the Board's recommendations.**

**A copy of the recommendations has been sent to leaders of the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs.**

**Sincerely,**

**/s/ Robert L. Wilkie**

**Robert L. Wilkie**

**Enclosure**

## **DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS (VA)**

### **Veterans and Community Oversight and Engagement Board (VCOEB)**

#### **VA Responses to Recommendations from the August 2019 VCOEB Meeting**

#### **Recommendation 1: Increase “A Bridge Home” bed capacity and prioritize Lease Revenue Fund expenditures to support expansion until 2022**

VCOEB recommends that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs enhance its partnership with the City of Los Angeles’ “A Bridge Home” housing effort on campus, beyond the 100 beds currently contemplated, to at least 400 beds.

According to the Los Angeles County 2019 Homeless Count, VA and local partners were successful in housing over 2,800 Veterans last year. Under normal circumstances this would be cause for celebration; however, the fact remains that more homeless Veterans remain unsheltered than the previous year.<sup>1</sup>

The “Bridge Home” program at VA West Los Angeles is part of a city-wide effort to create emergency bridge housing in every council district. The City and County of Los Angeles have each allocated \$2.5 million to construct two 50-bed tension membrane structures along with trailers for sleeping, personal hygiene, and supportive services on campus exclusively for the benefit of Veterans. We believe that this effort should be expanded to up to 400 beds on the campus.

VCOEB recommends that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs prioritize use of the Lease Revenue Fund to increase “A Bridge Home” capacity until 2022. The Lease Revenue Fund is projected to exceed \$3.8 million by the end of this year and will near or exceed \$7.5 million by 2022.<sup>2</sup> Any financial resources needed for the expansion effort, such as non-recurring maintenance costs<sup>3</sup> or leasing<sup>4</sup> additional membrane structures, can be afforded by a drawdown of the Lease Revenue Fund.<sup>5</sup>

The Bridge Home program on campus will work to provide immediate shelter for veterans currently living on the street. VA West Los Angeles is expected to add approximately 320 permanent supportive housing units by 4th Quarter 2022. In this three-year interim period, VCOEB requests that the Department take extraordinary measures to provide homeless Veterans with temporary housing on campus while construction of new homes is underway.

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<sup>1</sup> Exhibit A: 2019 Greater Los Angeles County Homeless Count Presentation, Slide 14.

<sup>2</sup> Exhibit C: Lease Revenue Account Forecast.

<sup>3</sup> Exhibit D: VA, FY 2020 Congressional Submission Vol. II, at 225.

<sup>4</sup> Exhibit E: VA, FY 2020 Congressional Submission Vol. II, at 224.

<sup>5</sup> West Los Angeles Leasing Act of 2016 Section 2(d): <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/5936/text>.

Additionally, as it relates to the site currently contemplated for the two 50-bed units, we have the following recommendations: (1) if the current “A Bridge Home” site cannot support additional beds, VCOEB recommends that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs explore alternative sites on campus. If a suitable site for expansion is currently occupied by a revocable license, VA should temporarily revoke the land use agreement until the “A Bridge Home” partnership is terminated.<sup>6</sup> (2) VCOEB does not support expansion on any site currently planned for permanent supportive housing (e.g. MacArthur Field).

**VA Response:** Concur in principle. VA agrees that it needs to continue to work in partnership with the community to implement urgent solutions to the continuing challenge of Veteran homelessness. VA is guided in this effort by longitudinal data collected and analyzed by VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System’s (VAGLAHS) Community Engagement and Reintegration Service (CERS), by the VA Homeless Program Office (HPO), and by external stakeholders such as the Los Angeles Housing Services Authority (LAHSA). Historically, these data indicate that homeless Veterans follow several different pathways from their initial experience with homelessness to stable permanent housing. As described in an April 2019 article in the American Psychiatric Association’s Psychiatric Services Journal, 59.1 percent of Veterans typically make only one-time and relatively brief use of VA homeless programs—specifically, Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) prevention and rapid rehousing programs—and generally do not utilize emergency housing.<sup>7</sup> Another 10 percent of homeless Veterans made longer use of SSVF rapid rehousing programs, but again do not utilize emergency housing.<sup>8</sup> According to that study—which followed 15,260 Veterans who newly entered any VA program in 2015 and were followed for 2 years thereafter—only 31 percent of homeless Veterans generally take advantage of a mix of programs that may include emergency housing.

At the local level, CERS conducts its own data analysis with assistance from HPO and LAHSA, among others, to determine how many units of permanent supportive housing (PSH) and beds of various types of emergency or transitional housing are needed to meet homeless Los Angeles-area Veterans’ needs. CERS’ most recent data analysis shows a gap of just over 1,200 units of PSH and a slight surplus (+/- 180 beds) of emergency/transitional beds, assuming optimal utilization of the latter.

VA will continue to use all available data to refine its understanding of demand for, and gaps in, the various types of housing and other services homeless Veterans and their families need in Los Angeles and across the Nation. To the extent that gaps are

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<sup>6</sup> Exhibit B: VA OIG 18-00474-300, Pages 12-13.

<sup>7</sup> Jack Tsai, Ph.D., and Thomas H. Byrne, Ph.D., *National Utilization Patterns of Veterans Affairs Homelessness Programs in the Era of Housing First*, Psychiatric Services 2019, Volume 70, Issue 4, p. 311, retrieved at <https://ps.psychiatryonline.org/doi/10.1176/appi.ps.201800393>.

<sup>8</sup> Id., p. 312.



identified, VA will work in partnership with the City and County of Los Angeles—as we are doing now with the City’s “A Bridge Home” initiative—and with other community partners to ensure homeless Veterans have access to all of the services they want and need.

Status: Ongoing

Target Completion Date: N/A

**Recommendation 2: Partner with the U.S. Secretary of Education and Brentwood School to implement a Veterans Upward Bound Program at VA West Los Angeles**

VCOEB requests that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and Secretary of Education invite Brentwood School to participate in the Veterans Upward Bound Program, or equivalent program. According to the U.S. Department of Education Web site, “Veterans Upward Bound is designed to motivate and assist Veterans in the development of academic and other requisite skills necessary for acceptance and success in a program of postsecondary education. The program provides assessment and enhancement of basic skills through counseling, mentoring, tutoring and academic instruction in the core subject areas. The primary goal of the program is to increase the rate at which participants enroll in and complete postsecondary education programs.”<sup>1</sup>

VCOEB believes implementation of the Veterans Upward Bound Program or equivalent program is consistent with Section II.14 of the Draft Master Plan which outlines eleven service categories to be offered at VA West Los Angeles. Item 8 under Proposed Veterans Service Enhancements details “education, vocational training, and job placement” as an appropriate use of VA land.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, Section 2(b)(2)(B) of the West Los Angeles Leasing Act of 2016 also permits the VA Secretary to authorize leases for the purpose of providing “education” services that principally benefit Veterans and their families.<sup>3</sup>

Brentwood School is uniquely positioned, with appropriate facilities and staff, to offer veterans academic instruction that would prepare them for postsecondary education. Currently, there is only one Veterans Upward Bound Program, offered by The East Los Angeles Community Union (TELACU) Education Foundation<sup>4</sup>, serving the entire County of Los Angeles. VCOEB encourages the VA, Department of Education, and Brentwood School to open a second program in Los Angeles (LA) County which would improve access to remedial education training for veterans living on or near campus.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Education Veterans Upward Bound Program Web site: <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/triovub/index.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Draft Master Plan Section II Housing and Service Needs: <https://www.vatherightway.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/02-VAGLAHS-Campus-Draft-Master-Plan-II-Housing-and-Service-Needs-final.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> West Los Angeles Leasing Act of 2016: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/5936/text>.

<sup>4</sup> TELACU Education Foundation Veterans Upward Bound Flyer: <https://telacu.com/wp-content/uploads/2019-Summer-Class-Schedule.pdf>.



Finally, VCOEB strongly urges that the Veterans Upward Bound Program take place at Brentwood School during the evening as to not interfere with construction activity at VA or daytime instruction at Brentwood School.

**VA Response:** Concur in principle. VA remains committed to ensuring that the use of the West LA Campus by any third-party land-use partner, including the Brentwood School, results in high-value services that meet Veterans' most pressing present-day needs.

Direction has been made to VAGLAHS' CERS employment specialists to work together with their colleagues at the Veterans Benefits Administration's Los Angeles Regional Office to analyze Los Angeles-area Veterans' education and training needs and to work with the Brentwood School and other appropriate community partners to determine how best to meet those needs. More specifically, VAGLAHS leadership will report to VA leadership on the feasibility and advisability of implementing the Veterans Upward Bound Program as recommended by the VCOEB.

Status: Ongoing

Target Completion Date: March 31, 2020