

McAuliffe: Va. is first state to 'effectively end' veteran homelessness

By [JOHN RAMSEY](#) [Richmond Times-Dispatch](#)



Va. Gov. Terry McAuliffe and his First Lady Dorothy McAuliffe, carry the Commonwealth Memorial Wreath at the Virginia War Memorial where the wreath was placed with others in observance of Veterans Day. Nov. 11, 2015.

P. KEVIN MORLEY/TIMES-DISPATCH

Virginia provided housing to 1,432 homeless veterans last year, more than double the 620 identified in January as part of an annual one-day count of the homeless.

That qualifies Virginia as the first state in the country to effectively end veteran homelessness, Gov. Terry McAuliffe announced Wednesday during a Veterans Day ceremony at the Virginia War Memorial.

State and federal leaders acknowledge that the achievement, known technically as a “functional” end to homelessness, doesn’t mean that no veterans in the state are without shelter.

But it’s still a tremendous achievement, they say, that the state now provides housing to more veterans during the year than the number identified during the annual January homelessness count.

McAuliffe promised that for any veterans who find themselves homeless in Virginia in the future, “it will be a rare, nonrecurring experience and brief.”

“We cannot stop here. This is not a one-time effort,” McAuliffe told the crowd of hundreds gathered at the War Memorial’s amphitheater. “We have an obligation to take care of them and their families.”

The governor challenged all Virginians to help make sure veterans don’t fall through the cracks. Anyone who knows a homeless veteran, he said, can start the process by calling 211 to alert the state so it can begin to help.

Julian Castro, secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, also spoke at the event, relating that during an hour-long meeting with McAuliffe earlier Wednesday morning, the governor told him about 101 times that Virginia is the greatest state in the country.

“Today, y’all have a strong claim to that,” he said. “Virginia truly is showing that we can meet this challenge.”

Cities around the country have met the goal of housing veterans faster than new ones become homeless, including New Orleans; Mobile, Ala.; and Winston-Salem, N.C. Since 2010, when President Barack Obama announced a plan aimed at ending homelessness, veteran homelessness has been reduced by 36 percent, Castro said.

In Virginia, the push started in earnest last year when McAuliffe and elected leaders across the state signed on to the federal “Mayor’s Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness.” One of their goals remains to find housing for any veteran within 90 days of discovering that the vet is homeless. And it’s a joint effort, linking local, state and federal agencies to make sure veterans receive the help they need to keep them from becoming homeless again.

McAuliffe described the various services as “enveloping” veterans with everything they need to keep them in their new homes.

He said that helping veterans, whether with homelessness, employment or other issues, will be one of his top two priorities in the upcoming budget, alongside K-12 education funding.

House Majority Leader Kirk Cox, R-Colonial Heights, released a statement vowing to continue working with the governor to make sure “every veteran has the education, health care, job and home they deserve.”

“While we are proud of the progress Virginia is making, we know there is more work to do,” Cox said.

“Our brave men and women do not get to claim a functional victory on the battlefield and we shouldn’t either.”