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**DIVISION III – HOUSE FINANCE COMMITTEE
BUDGET HEARING
NEW HAMPSHIRE VETERANS HOME
FISCAL YEARS 2024-2025
March 8, 2023**

Members of the House Finance Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. The New Hampshire Veterans Home submits for your approval, a proposed budget that both meets the needs of our Veterans while keeping within the Governor’s budgetary targets. Our efficiency budget submission reflects just a 3% increase over FY23 ‘s Adjusted Authorized budget and reflects no increase for FY25 excluding contractual spending related to salary and benefit increases reflected in each year’s collective bargaining agreements.

The New Hampshire Veterans Home was established in 1890 and is enabled under RSA:119 for the care and treatment of Civil War veterans and we are proud to continually provide high quality, professional long-term care and treatment services to our state’s elderly and disabled veteran population. The Veterans Home is presently a 250-bed long-term care facility that is capped at that number by federal statute. Supporting the Home’s budget is projected revenue from the State of New Hampshire General Fund (47%), the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (29%), and from individual resident’s payments, what we call “Room and Board”. (24%).

The FY 2024-2025 Veterans Home budget reflects the Home’s goals, priorities, and needs for the upcoming biennium. This budget has been prepared and is being submitted upon the planning assumption of having a resident census of 225 veterans. The Home’s current census is 129 with 46 active applications and 19 applicants that are approved but waiting in the candidate pool. Our current census remains low due to low staffing, particularly among our clinical staff. With the support of the Governor and the people’s Executive Council, we have steadily increased our census to a level that is currently proportional to our clinical staff shortfall. Most noteworthy, is our RN and LNA shortage which stands at 51% and 45%, respectively. With our current vacancies, we can provide an excellent level of service for up to 131 Veterans.

Overall, my strategic priorities are to continue to maintain the safest possible facility as we come out of the pandemic while meeting all VA regulatory requirements. We will also attempt to further grow the census while simultaneously supporting (and retaining) our employees.

As I mentioned, qualified staffing, particularly in nursing, continues to be a challenge in terms of recruitment and retention in order to meet the increased resident census and care needs. Vacancies remain in these direct care positions and we will continue to fill them when possible. I have chosen not to unfund any clinical positions because my top priority is to grow our census should our staffing situation improve. However, I am requesting we re-fund several previously unfunded positions which I have included as a programmatic need. These positions will alleviate some of the administrative burden placed on other departments and I ask that you consider fully funding them this biennium.

We have continually tackled our staff shortages by clinical wage enhancements, in-house LNA certification programs, and improved recruitment efforts. We are now examining how we can “create” nurses through a possible sponsorship “bridging” program to continue to address our ongoing staffing needs.

VA regulations mandate that qualified nursing staff is available on a daily basis to meet needs for nursing care in a manner and in an environment which promotes each resident’s physical, mental and psychological well-being, thus enhancing their quality of care and quality of life. Additional challenges with women’s health care, bariatric care, hospice care, dementia with behavior disturbances, are among the needs our newer admitted veterans, and their families, face. We are also leaning forward in preparing our facility for the next generation of veterans, the post 9/11 generation, who will begin to replace our vanishing WW2 population. Post 9/11 veterans will bring further needs, for example medical issues related to burn pits, the effects of which the VA has formally recognized under the recent PACT Act legislation.

I am so proud to be the Commandant The New Hampshire Veterans Home. We have maintained an outstanding tradition of providing the highest quality care in a cost-effective manner serving the disabled and elderly veteran population in New Hampshire. With the continuing support of Governor, his Council, and this Committee, the Veterans Home will be able to continue in this tradition.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

Respectfully submitted: Kim MacKay, Commandant