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Subject: The American Legion Calls for Accountability at Holyoke and Other State Homes
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The American Legion Calls for Accountability at Holyoke and Other State Homes

(INDIANAPOLIS—June 27, 2020) – The head of the nation's largest veterans organization called the coronavirus death toll at a Massachusetts veterans' home, "Exhibit A, for accountability."

"COVID-19 has been a global tragedy but few places have been hit harder than nursing homes and assisted living facilities," American Legion National Commander James W. "Bill" Oxford said. "The Holyoke Soldiers Home in Massachusetts is a tragedy made worse due to neglect and incompetence. At least 76 patients died, perhaps needlessly, in a facility where the governor's investigator found comingling of coronavirus patients with asymptomatic residents, shortages of personal protective equipment and staff rotating between units. Whether a veteran is in a state-run facility or a center operated by the Department of Veterans Affairs, he or she has earned the right to quality care in a safe environment. Holyoke has failed to serve these patients as well as the patients have served their country."

Oxford promised that his organization would advocate for veterans regardless of where they are located. "A veteran is a veteran no matter where he or she lives. I have reached out to The American Legion Department of Massachusetts and the Legionnaires there are all over this. The department leadership is making its concerns known to the governor. We realize that mistakes have been made in many facilities during this pandemic. But we owe it to our nation's veterans to ensure these type of tragedies do not repeat themselves.

"At the federal level, we have noticed a significant upgrade in the quality of care since the VA Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act was enacted several years ago," Oxford said. "No veterans' facility should employ management or staff who are not fully dedicated to the health, safety and wellbeing of America's heroes. When failures occur, those responsible must be held accountable."

The American Legion, www.legion.org, was founded in 1919 on the four pillars of a strong national defense, the care and wellbeing of U.S. military veterans, patriotic youth programs and Americanism.

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