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The Houston Housing Authority's Newest Partnership Will Benefit Homeless Veterans

HOUSTON—The Houston Housing Authority has partnered with Cloudbreak Houston, LLC to provide affordable permanent housing for Houston's veterans. The partnership is a Project Based Voucher program that is tied to Midtown Terrace Suites, a former Days Inn in midtown Houston. The partnership was made possible by the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Department of Veterans Affairs Supported Housing (HUD-VASH) Program, which provides long-term case management, supportive services and permanent housing to homeless veterans. The Houston Housing Authority has the third largest HUD-VASH Program in the United States.

"We are proud to partner with Cloudbreak to provide affordable housing and supportive services to veterans in Houston," said Tory Gunsolley, Houston Housing Authority President & CEO. "There is an overwhelming need for the HUD-VASH program as so many of this country's homeless population are veterans. The Houston Housing Authority is committed to diminishing those numbers in Houston."

Connie Boyd, President and CEO of the Coalition for the Homeless Houston-Harris Co. (CFTH) is familiar with the staggering numbers of homeless veterans in Houston. The recent Point in Time Homeless Count administered by CFTH confirmed that veterans accounted for over 16 percent of Houston's homeless population. In the recently completed follow-up community survey, over 77 percent of participants whom were disabled ranked housing in the highest category of needs.

"The Coalition for the Homeless Houston-Harris Co. supports and encourages these types of creative partnerships to address the critical housing needs for veterans," Boyd said. "As we welcome more veterans home, the VA Homeless Program as well as other Homeless Provider Agencies who serve veterans are critical."

VA estimates that about one-third of the adult homeless population served in the U.S. Armed Forces. Current population estimates suggest about 195,000 Veterans (male and female) nationwide are homeless on any given night and perhaps twice as many experience homelessness at some point during the course of a year. Many other Veterans are considered near homeless or at risk because of their poverty, lack of support from family and friends, and dismal living conditions in cheap hotels or in overcrowded or substandard housing.

“We are committed to the struggle against chronic homelessness among our Nation’s Veterans,” said Adam C. Walmus, M.H.A., M.A., F.A.C.H.E., Director of the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center. “This new program is another way for the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center to bring Veterans in need of assistance together with the wide range of programs and services VA and other community agencies provide.”

Midtown Terrace Suites is home currently to 250 former homeless veterans and houses on-site supportive services including the U.S. Veterans Initiative and Goodwill Industries of Houston. The Housing Authority and Cloudbreak worked closely with the City of Houston and the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center to move forward the development of the facility.

Buddy Grantham, City of Houston Office of Veterans’ Affairs Director advocated in support of the facility.

“We don’t leave our wounded buddies on the battlefield of war,” Grantham said. “We also do not want to see our buddies left desolate on the battlefield in the War on Poverty. The HUD-VASH program is an excellent example of taking that concept to the streets of America. I appreciate HUD and VA for coming up with this program and the Houston Housing Authority, the local VA Homeless Program and their partners for helping us provide a decent place for our fellow veterans to live in safety. ”

The existing facility will house 50 new residents. An expansion project to build an additional 192 units and add more on-site supportive services for veterans is scheduled to be completed next year. The project has been assisted by the partnership with the Housing Authority and the City’s Housing and Community Development Department.

“HHA’s commitment allows us to move veterans from homelessness to independent substantive housing and then to permanent apartment living,” said Ralph Cooper, Community and Residential Veteran Services Coordinator for Cloudbreak Houston, LLC. “The 50 units of Project Based VASH vouchers allows Cloudbreak the ability to help those vets who sacrificed for their nation and are now too old, too fragile, and/or too

damaged to obtain and sustain competitive employment have a safe, affordable place to live.”

The Houston Housing Authority provides affordable homes and services to more than 55,000 low-income Houstonians. The agency and its affiliates own and operate 25 housing communities with about 5,500 units for families, elderly and disabled residents as well as mobile voucher programs that serve over 16,000 low-income households. More information about HHA can be found at www.housingforhouston.com.

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