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New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Welcomes Additional Oversight with Consent Decree for Veterans Homes

The U.S. Department of Justice and the State of New Jersey today jointly filed a consent decree in the United States District Court, District of New Jersey. As part of this agreement, a third-party federal monitor will be appointed to the Veterans Memorial Homes at Menlo Park and Paramus, two long-term care facilities operated by the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.

"We welcome this additional input and oversight. We're committed to making sure our veterans have the best possible care and quality of life at all three of our Veterans Homes," said Governor Phil Murphy. "With this consent decree, we can resolve past differences with the Department of Justice and focus our efforts on providing the best possible care to our Veterans Homes residents. I'm proud of the progress we have made and remain determined to not only meet federal standards but to exceed them."

"This agreement between the State of New Jersey and the U.S. Department of Justice is the result of months of constructive conversations on how best to care for the Veterans, Veteran Spouses, and Gold Star Families who call our facilities home," said Col. Yvonne Mays, the Acting Commissioner of Military and Veterans Affairs. "The veterans homes at Menlo Park and Paramus have made significant progress confirmed by repeated, independent inspections conducted by the New Jersey Department of Health and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. We look forward to continuing our important work and we welcome this partnership with a federal monitor."

The New Jersey Veterans Memorial Homes at Menlo Park and Paramus achieved zero deficiencies in two separate no-notice focused infection control surveys conducted by the New Jersey Department of Health on behalf of the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. The surveys occurred on Sept. 5, 2024 and Sept. 10, 2024. The Veterans Memorial Home at Vineland also achieved zero deficiencies in a no-notice focused infection control survey on June 8, 2024.

These no-notice focused infection control surveys consisted of inspections that assessed the homes' procedures related to infection control regulations, including staff handwashing, donning and doffing of personal protective equipment, and continuing education records. Additionally, inspectors reviewed kitchen and sanitizing operations, contact tracing, cohorting, isolation, and quarantine protocols.

Menlo Park also received no clinical deficiencies in two no-notice facility wide surveys conducted by the New Jersey Department of Health from July 8-16, 2024 and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs from July 16-19, 2024. These separate surveys were comprehensive and encompassed everything from the home's infection control and clinical care, to kitchen operations, human resources, emergency management, and housekeeping.

These on-the-ground achievements follow a series of reforms signed into law by Governor Murphy in 2021. In late 2022, the Governor also engaged consulting and management support services from long-term care subject matter experts to accelerate positive change. These reforms led to systemic changes implemented at all three homes, including the onboarding of full-time resident advocates, new electronic medical records systems, a learning management system that has enabled thousands of hours of training and continuing education for direct care and non-direct care staff, and increased wages for frontline healthcare workers to attract and retain the best and most qualified individuals to care for residents.

The Veterans Memorial Homes at Menlo Park, Paramus, and Vineland remain open for admissions to eligible applicants. For those interested in learning more, please visit the Veterans Memorial Homes' website: <https://www.nj.gov/military/veterans/memorial-homes/>