



THE AMERICAN LEGION

DEPARTMENT OF NEW JERSEY

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The American Legion, Department of New Jersey, is beginning our 102nd year of service to the community, state and nation. Founded in 1919, The American Legion has never wavered from its mission "to care for those who have borne the battle." Our primary task is and will always be to be sure that our veterans are well cared for.

The American Legion, Department of New Jersey, is deeply troubled by the barrage of bad publicity that has been generated in the past several months, by the media and two Congressmen, regarding the performance of the CEO and staff at the Paramus, Menlo Park and Vineland Veterans Memorial Homes, run by the State of New Jersey, Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.

To single out the three homes is a disservice to the staff and more so to the residents and their families. Nursing homes in general, across the tri-state area have been hit exceptionally hard by COVID-19. The primary reason for this exception is simply put, the residents are mostly older individuals with health issues that make them extremely susceptible to any virus and of course the COVID-19.

The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, thru their Division of Veterans Health Care Services were out in front of the COVID-19 response for the State of New Jersey. The facilities were closed and extra precautions were taken to protect the residents and staff, prior to CMS/DOH or CDC guidelines being issued.

People are losing sight that this was and is a "global pandemic." The world was caught unaware by this previously unknown organism. Lack of PPE, lack of testing kits, delays in testing turn-around times impacted every facility caught in the jaws of this thing, both public and private.

The two northern homes, Paramus and Menlo Park, were near or in the epicenter of the COVID-19 outbreak in the state. Over 92% of the staff at these two homes, live in Bergen, Middlesex and Passaic Counties, three of the hardest hit during the pandemic. The Vineland home, which has the same policies and procedures as the two northern New Jersey homes was minimally impacted, because the infection rates were so much lower in Cumberland County.

The Adjutant General (TAG) Jamel Beale, has been the leader and on the front lines of the DMAVA response and has done everything within his power and used all resources at his disposal to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 on the residents and staff. When the media reports were going wild, DMAVA reached out to the Veterans Administration for help and quickly 40 VA nurses were dispatched to Paramus, as well as many New Jersey National Guard medics and nurses.

An Organization of Wartime Veterans in Service to America...

The staffing shortages which were created based on several factors that were out of the control of DMAVA, led to many of the issues the home experienced during the height of the pandemic. When you lose 40% of your staff, operations are going to suffer. The heroes that showed up to work during this time, to include the CEOs should be applauded for their efforts, not slandered and made to be the problem or scapegoats, by legislators that never asked what they can do to help, but were the first to cast blame in the fourth quarter, when the game was almost over.

There are naysayers that have an agenda, many of whom are litigious and will say or write whatever they can to make their case look better. The homes have consistently followed all guidance given to them by the CDC, NJDOH and CMS.

The two northern homes have been inspected by the USDVA, NJDOH and CMS 9 times, since January 1, 2020. They have passed 8 of 9, with no deficiencies and are appealing the Paramus CMS inspection.

The Division of Health Care Services, of the three Homes are guilty of one thing, transparency. They have been honest in their reporting of the COVID-19 in the homes since day 1, whereas many of the privately run homes only reported information as of May 1, 2020. If the three state run homes had followed suit, the numbers would have been significantly different.

The Homes have started the process of screening new applicants and soon they will be admitting new residents.

During this pandemic, we have all changed the way we live and work. We have established new norms such as social distancing, face coverings and sanitizing. Our schools are inventing new ways to teach our children either from home, in-person or both.

American Legion Posts across New Jersey and indeed, across the country are changing the way they do business, and so we believe, that DMAV is re-inventing the way they conduct their mission to provide a safe and comfortable home for our aging veteran population, and together we will accomplish this goal.

Our new motto is: "Veterans Strengthening America," will continue as long as we have veterans.

For God and Country,



ROBERT B. NEWELL

Commander