



Cc: Legislative Council

House Clerk

Senate Clerk

Enclosures:

Exhibit 1: Letter from BGS Commissioner to Vermont Congressional Delegation, May 30, 2013

Exhibit 2: Vermont Congressional Response Letter, June 27, 2013

Exhibit 3: VVH Short History & Funding Decisions, June 24, 2013, updated 7/26/2013



Department of Buildings & General Services  
Agency of Administration

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May 30, 2013

Senator Bernie Sanders  
1 Church Street, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
Burlington, VT 05401

Senator Patrick Leahy  
P.O. Box 933  
87 State Street, Room 338  
Montpelier, VT 05602

Representative Peter Welch  
30 Main Street  
Third Floor, Suite 350  
Burlington, VT 05401

Dear Senators Sanders, Leahy and Rep. Welch,

I am writing you on behalf of the Vermont Veterans' Home in Bennington, VT. The Home cares for approximately 120 veterans and family members in their 140,000 square foot facility. Some parts of this facility date back to the 1880's, and the most recent building wing was built in 1985. In 2004, the physical plant and residential care rooms were both found to be in very poor condition due to old age and neglect. The Vermont Department of Buildings and General Services (BGS) immediately began a comprehensive inspection of the entire facility, and immediately performed several critical repairs and upgrades, including new heating coils and other heating equipment, replacing multiple in-operable exhaust fans, repaired multiple water leaks, cleaned all the ductwork (which had never been done) and abated mold in a large area of the basement. BGS also began investigating, planning and designing upgrades and improvements, and applying to the VA Construction Grants Program in hopes to obtain financial assistance from the Federal Government. In the past seven years, the VA Construction Grant Program has awarded us three Grants (FAI-50-008, -009, and -010) totaling approximately \$7,000,000 toward the \$11,000,000 project. This three phased project, completed in 2012, made many significant upgrades to the facility, first by installing new boilers, replacing 40 year old boilers that were deemed unsafe by the Vermont Boiler Inspector. Other improvements include a new geothermal heating and cooling system (the Home had no air-conditioning before this), asbestos and mold removal, life-safety code improvements, and major renovations to two patient wings.



We continue today with several smaller but critical projects, improving the buildings infrastructure, air quality, operations and cosmetics, which ultimately results in a better, more modern facility and improved conditions for both staff and residents.

This is an aged facility that has a long history of serving our veterans. In order to maintain and improve the facility and quality of life, we need to dedicate funds to this on-going process. In this year's legislative session, approximately \$1,200,000 was appropriated by the State of Vermont, Bill H.533, to address additional mold and air quality problems. These funds will again make significant and critical improvements, but will not be enough to address all of the current and future needs. Part of this years appropriation is designated to update the 2006 Facility Assessment Report that investigated, categorized, prioritized and provided estimated costs for work required to bring the facility back into good operating and safe condition. That report also led to the three-phased project noted above. This new investigation will provide a revised list of issues that still need to be addressed.

The Bill also required that all potential sources of funding be explored. In April 2013, the Home applied for another VA Construction Grant to help with this current mold remediation and air-quality project. Are any other potential sources of funds that may be available to us to make the necessary improvements and maintain the Vermont Veterans' Home? I can provide you with any information and documentation required for an application or request process.

I sincerely ask that you review our funding request for the Vermont Veterans' Home and provide us with any options that you may have to help make these valuable and critical improvements possible and continue to serve our veterans in the best manner possible.

Sincerely,

*Michael J. Obuchowski*

Michael J. Obuchowski  
Commissioner

cc: ✓ Jeb Spaulding, Agency of Administration  
Senator Peg Flory  
Representative Alice Emmons  
Melissa Jackson, Vermont Veterans' Home  
Richard Reed, Vermont Veterans' Cemetery

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

June 27, 2013

The Honorable Eric K. Shinseki  
Secretary of Veterans Affairs  
United States Department of Veterans Affairs  
810 Vermont Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20420

Dear Secretary Shinseki:

We write to express our strong support of the State of Vermont's application to the Department of Veterans Affairs' VA Construction Grant Program to make much-needed renovations to the Vermont Veterans' Home in Bennington, Vermont.

The Vermont Veterans' Home (VVH), which was established in 1884, provides a complete range of specialized care services in a residential setting for area veterans and their family members. VVH focuses on ensuring the dignity, independence, and quality of life for its residents, including comprehensive rehabilitation and restorative care.

After almost 130 years of continuous operation, many of the buildings – some of which actually date to the Civil War – require upgrades in order to meet current safety and care standards and to allow VVH to continue providing high quality care in a cost-effective manner. In 2004, VVH began a multi-phase project to renovate and modernize its buildings, and we appreciate that to date, VVH has benefited from three VA Construction Grants to assist with those improvements.

However, VVH urgently needs the current proposed VA Construction Grant to continue implementing this crucially important project. The grant would be used to address several critically important infrastructure deficiencies, including mold remediation and air quality. Vermont's state legislature has appropriated funds for the state's cost share, and to update the 2006 Facility Assessment Report that categorizes, prioritizes, and provides cost estimates for work required to ensure the facility continues to provide proper conditions for residents and employees alike.

At its core, this application is not just about upgrading buildings. It is about meeting our mutual commitment to delivering the quality of care our veterans deserve.

We thank you for your consideration of this grant application. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact us directly.

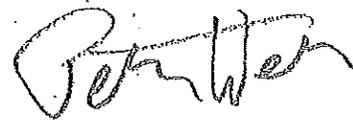
Sincerely,



PATRICK LEAHY  
United States Senator



BERNARD SANDERS  
United States Senator



PETER WELCH  
United States Representative



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*Agency of Administration*

**Vermont Veterans' Home Mold Update July 26, 2013**  
Prepared by Peter Hack, PE, BGS Project Manager

I have been involved at the Veterans' Home since 2004. BGS made initial inspections that reported that the Home had been neglected for some time and needed significant resources to bring it back to acceptable conditions. BGS made several recommendations that lead to a capital Bill Request. These funds were used to make significant improvements in 2005, 2006 and 2007, including replacing multiple exhaust fans, heat coils, heat tubes and other misc. heating components, repaired multiple leaks in water pipes, heating pipes and sewer lines, cleaned all of the ductwork in the facility (which appeared to have never been done before) and abated the mold in one large area of the basement that had been locked off to eliminate access to those rooms. We also have replaced several leaking roofs and skylights.

The "Life Safety Code Improvements, Mold and Asbestos Removal" project (aka Geothermal) started in late 2005, and in early 2006, BGS applied for a Construction Grant from the Veterans Administration, which ultimately became the large, well known, three phased "Geothermal" project. The total VA Grants for this project were approximately \$7,000,000 and the State Appropriated approximately \$3,800,000.

Phase I began with the replacement of inoperable 40 year old boilers (with asbestos abatement), and then the installation of the geothermal infrastructure outside, as well as bringing new heat and air conditioning to the largest common spaces throughout the facility. The facility did not have a central air conditioning system, and the only AC was by window units. The new HVAC systems in these common spaces consist of floor mounted console heat pumps installed in each individual space. Phase 2 gut renovated D Wing, repaired code deficiencies, and brought new heat and air conditioning to B and C Wing patient areas. Phase 2 HVAC systems were mainly installed in the basement, and ducted to the floor above. Phase 3 gut renovated North Wing, repaired coded deficiencies, and brought new heat and air conditioning to A Wing. A Wing has two types of console heat pumps; floor models in the common areas, and vertical style in patient rooms. Phase 3 was essentially complete in December 2011.

Throughout the first three phases, mold, asbestos and moisture issues were addresses in those areas by cleaning, removal, replacement, abatement, waterproofing, ventilation, repairing and replacing roofs, and repairing mechanical leaks.

On or about August 10, 2012, the Staff at the Vermont Veterans' Home noticed a musty smell in some areas of B and C Wings. On Monday August 13, 2012 Crothers Environmental Group visited the site and confirmed what appeared to be mold growth in floor mounted heat pumps in specific common areas. On Wednesday, Crothers returned to perform a more thorough investigation, take more tests, and analyzed them on site. Due to the presence of mold in many heat pumps, and the potential harmful effects it could have on the patients and staff, immediate remediation was recommended. At a meeting held on Wednesday August 15, 2012 decided that a professional contractor should be hired ASAP to perform remediation measures. Ms. [redacted] also removed the patients for these wings as a precaution.



Catamount Environmental was hired and immediately went to work cleaning and removing mold from the floor mounted heat pumps, and that work was completed by August 31, 2012, at which time the residents returned to their rooms. The Home also removed the fiberglass insulation in the units and replaced it with closed cell foam insulation, which does not collect moisture, dust and dirt like fiberglass insulation.

Since September 2012, the Home, Tim Smith & Associates (TDS&A), Friedman Fisher Associates, Crothers Environmental Group, and BGS have met several times to review the conditions at the Home and fine tune a plan of action. By September 17, 2012, they had a preliminary estimate and scope of work, including removing the console units in several common areas most prone to patient abuse, and try to lessen the water infiltration in the basement. One major cause of the mold in these specific areas appears to be due to food, drink and urine introduced into the heat pumps. Also, open windows is causing excess condensation in these rooms, that the HVAC units were nor designed to accommodate.

One early recommendation to add UV lights in the console units to prevent mold growth has been implemented. On December 20, 2012, I participated in a conference call with Jim Reardon to discuss the preliminary budget request of \$1,200,000, in the Capital Bill. In January 2013, TDS&A began investigating the building for moisture intrusion and mold growth. The Records Room (second floor of the Administrative wing, which was not included in any earlier work) was found to have some limited mold, missing pipe insulation, and a possible leak in an old heat unit. This room has been tested for mold, and has been sealed off from public access since September 2012.

On March 6, there was a job meeting at VVH, attended by Lucinda Kirk of HR, where preliminary findings were discussed at length, i.e. various mold spore counts throughout the facility, the known dampness in the basement, site drainage. It was also said that 100% mitigation is not practical or possible, due to some conditions of the home, but also due to the normal presence of mold spores everywhere in the atmosphere. Other areas noted for further investigated were the exterior of the building shell, sump pumps and piping, and exterior areawells (ventilation intakes).

A 2013 Capital Bill Appropriation was made for this project, and that appropriation requested that BGS seek other federal financial assistance for this project through our Congressional Delegation. A letter requesting assistance was sent to Senators Leahy, Sanders and Rep. Welch on May 30, 2013.

Currently, we have nearly completed our "Phase 1" mold remediation of the central basement storage area, including demo & removal of mold, scrubbing all surfaces then painting or sealing those surfaces. Specific areas will be waterproofed, and all damaged or removed materials will be replaced with moisture resistive materials. The temporary air scrubbers continue to filter the air in the basement and crawl spaces. We are completing our "Phase 2" work plan for the crawl spaces below B & C Wings, which is similar in scope, and that plan will be completed in September, 2013. Finally, the relocated HVAC project, "Phase 3" should commence this winter. Also, an RFP was issued for consultants to update the 2006 Facilities Assessment Report, and proposals are due August 1, 2013.

Since April 9, 2013, Melissa Jackson and I have been actively working on a grant application seeking funds from the VA Construction Grants Program. On Friday, April 12, 2013, Melissa sent in the completed application. Throughout May and June, we corresponded with the VA, providing more information and updating the application forms. After receiving more information from the Home on 7/24/13, Mr. Vernon Wilkes (US Dept of Veterans Affairs, State Home Construction Grants program) forwarded the application to one of his colleagues, requesting her to "process the application". We believe the application is now complete and in process. The VA cannot officially release the answer to our request until January or February, 2014. However, of our \$1,200,000 request, we believe we have a good chance of receiving 65% (\$780,000) from the VA.

