



EXECUTIVE ORDER #157

**Relating to the Creation of the Governor's Blue Ribbon Commission
on Veteran Opportunity**

WHEREAS, Wisconsin is home to more than 300,000 veterans, each one of whom is deserving of the utmost respect and gratitude for their service to this state and country;

WHEREAS, through service to our country, veterans often face unique emotional and physical health challenges after completing their service;

WHEREAS, the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, which has caused less social interaction and increased isolation, stress, and economic uncertainty, has disproportionately affected Wisconsin veterans, who are already at increased risk for economic insecurity, experiencing mental health challenges, and substance use disorders;

WHEREAS, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs in 2021 released a study revealing veterans experience several types of financial insecurity, including debt, unemployment, lower incomes, which also increase the likelihood of housing insecurity for veterans and their families;

WHEREAS, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs reports that 1.5 million veterans live in poverty across the United States and poverty rates are increasing;

WHEREAS, in 2020, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development estimated 337 veterans in Wisconsin were experiencing homelessness, but as with many point-in-time estimates, could underrepresent the number of veterans experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity across the state;

WHEREAS, in 2019, the veteran suicide rate in Wisconsin was 26 percent, significantly higher than the suicide rate for the national general population;

WHEREAS, this administration has worked to reckon with historic shortcomings in services to Wisconsin veterans, including improving the viability of veteran's benefits programs and fiscal stability for veteran's homes by providing state general purpose revenue to the Veteran's Trust Fund and solidifying the Veterans Outreach and Recovery Program as a permanent, state-funded initiative;

WHEREAS, developing comprehensive, long-term efforts to support our veterans and address the challenges they face—whether those challenges preceded or were created or exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic—is essential to ensuring the well-being of our veterans and ensuring their success and opportunity;

WHEREAS, finding solutions to challenges facing Wisconsin’s veterans requires a multidisciplinary and collaborative approach to identify gaps in existing services, opportunities for robust investment, areas for additional collaboration with federal and private partners, and addressing obstacles to receiving services and program benefits designed for veterans, while reducing barriers to higher education, job training, employment, healthcare, and affordable housing, among other key areas; and

WHEREAS, essential to ensuring the success of this Commission is the intentional involvement of veterans and their families, who having lived through these challenges, are best suited to provide insight and feedback on opportunities for improvement and coordination.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, TONY EVERS, Governor of the State of Wisconsin, by the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the laws of the State, including Section 14.019 of the Wisconsin Statutes, do hereby create the Governor’s Blue Ribbon Commission on Veteran Opportunity (“Commission”) and order the following:

1. The Governor shall appoint the members of the Commission to serve at the pleasure of the Governor. Commission members shall include people representing the interests of Wisconsin veterans, including but not limited to veterans, representatives of state agencies, members of the Wisconsin State Legislature, stakeholder and advocacy organizations, and other public members.
2. The Commission shall:
 - a. Host listening sessions and meetings with Wisconsinites to hear directly from stakeholders, including veterans, their family members, and advocates, regarding the issues affecting Wisconsin veterans;
 - b. Gather input from stakeholders on current and future challenges facing Wisconsin veterans and ideas for addressing these challenges, with specific focus on and regard for the following subject areas:
 - i. employment and job training;
 - ii. post-service education;
 - iii. accessible housing, homelessness, and housing insecurity;
 - iv. the viability and sustainability of the Veterans Trust Fund;
 - v. long-term care nursing care quality and accessibility, including Wisconsin Veterans Homes; and
 - vi. affordable healthcare, including mental and behavioral health support and substance use treatment;

- c. Report to the Governor by December 31, 2022, with the Commission's findings; and
 - d. Provide additional reports and recommendations as requested by the Governor.
3. The Commission shall be attached to the Department of Administration.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Great seal of the State of Wisconsin to be affixed. Done at the Chippewa Falls Veterans Home in the City of Chippewa Falls this twenty-first day of February in the year of two thousand twenty-two.

TONY EVERS
Governor

By the Governor:

DOUGLAS LA FOLLETTE
Secretary of State