

**NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
OF
THE AMERICAN LEGION
INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA
OCTOBER 15 - 16, 2014**

Resolution No. 20: Department of Veterans Affairs Preservation of National Historic Properties
Origin: Resolution No. 73 (SD) 2014 National Convention
Submitted by: Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation Commission

WHEREAS, The mission statement of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is to fulfill President Lincoln's promise 'to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan' by serving and honoring the men and women who are America's veterans; and

WHEREAS, In furtherance of this mission, the VA stewards more than 2,000 historic buildings and landscapes in its portfolio of 5,800 structures, including some of the Nation's most significant buildings and campuses related to the medical care and treatment of America's veterans; and

WHEREAS, Dozens of the VA's historic buildings and landscapes have been designated by the Department of the Interior as historically and architecturally significant through listing in the National Register of Historic Places, including five campuses and one building recognized as National Historic Landmarks, the Nation's highest and most prestigious historic designation; and

WHEREAS, These historic buildings and landscapes have consistently provided high-quality medical care to veterans—some for more than a century; and

WHEREAS, Many of the VA's historic medical facilities and the communities that they serve, such as Hot Springs, South Dakota, known as 'The Veterans Town,' provide a sense of heritage and continuity for generations of America's veterans; and

WHEREAS, Some high-performing historic medical facilities, such as the Hot Springs VA Medical Center in South Dakota, a National Historic Landmark which received a 2013 Joint Commission Gold Seal of Approval, are currently proposed by the VA for closure; and

WHEREAS, Under the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), the VA is legally obligated to preserve the historic properties under its care and consider the impacts of agency programs and projects on historic properties and evaluate alternatives to avoid, minimize, or mitigate these impacts; and

WHEREAS, According to the 2013 National Trust for Historic Preservation report, titled "Honoring Our Nation's Veterans: Saving Their Places of Health Care and Healing," the VA routinely neglects, or circumvents, its responsibilities pursuant to NHPA; and

WHEREAS, This lack of compliance with NHPA and other federal law places hundreds of historic buildings that provide quality medical care to veterans at risk of demolition, neglect and abandonment and removes meaningful stakeholder input, including that of veterans, from the decision-making process; and

WHEREAS, Many of the historic VA medical centers in the VA's portfolio were authorized by Congress to honor America's veterans with monumental buildings that incorporated design elements that were conducive to healing like ample daylight, fresh air and serene landscapes, a concept promoted in current health-care facility planning; and

WHEREAS Historic hospital buildings have been rehabilitated and used for high-quality, modern medical care, often at a fraction of the cost for new construction; and

WHEREAS, America's veterans would benefit from the VA committing to improved stewardship of the historic properties within its portfolio, thereby providing continued access to medical center campuses conducive to healing and 21st Century medical care; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, By the National Executive Committee of The American Legion in regular meeting assembled in Indianapolis, Indiana, on October 15-16, 2014, That The American Legion urge that the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) to comply with all laws that pertain to the National Historic Preservation Act; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge the Department of Veterans Affairs to use Section 111 of the National Historic Preservation Act to provide additional leasing opportunities for the continued use of the VA's historic medical facilities for veterans care; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge Congress to establish a new construction funding account within the VA that is dedicated to the maintenance of VA's historic medical facilities; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge Congress to enact legislation that would require the VA to establish an office within the department that would be responsible for the oversight and improvements of all VA's historic medical facilities; and, be it finally

RESOLVED, That The American Legion urge Congress to include in such legislation annual reporting requirements, that would require the VA to report how the federal agency is meeting the requirements of National Historic Preservation Act, any action VA is taking to bring the department into compliance and the amount of funding VA has allocated toward each VA's historic medical facility.