State of North Carolina
Department of Administration

Pat McCrory, Governor | Bill Daughtridge, Jr., Secretary

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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North Carolina Division of Veterans Affairs Launches "Vet Tip Hotline" for USVA Allegations

RALEIGH – June 2, 2014

The North Carolina Division of Veterans Affairs (NCVA) launched a "Vet Tip Hotline" today to help veterans and improve services at US Department of Veterans Affairs (USVA) medical facilities located in North Carolina. The hotline will provide a resource for veterans and federal employees to confidentially report alleged misconduct within USVA facilities. The Vet Tip Hotline, via (844)-NC4-Vets or VetTips@DOA.NC.GOV, will connect the tipster directly to NCVA executive staff. Tips will be referred to appropriate authorities within the USVA for investigation.

"Hundreds of thousands of veterans have received care from dedicated USVA employees at medical facilities in North Carolina," said NCVA Director Ilario Pantano. "Our goal, first and foremost, is to care for our North Carolina veterans, and as their advocate, I want to help the USVA get back on track."

The hotline was set-up after the NCVA received specific allegations of misconduct at USVA medical facilities in North Carolina. After conducting interviews, the allegations were found credible and referred to the appropriate USVA authority.

"Our goal with the Vet Tip Hotline is to be constructive, systematic and transparent," said Pantano. "We are not looking for scapegoats but rather solutions to get our veterans the care they deserve."

The Vet Tip Hotline follows a restructuring already underway that will locate NCVA offices within all 17 USVA medical facilities in North Carolina by 2016. This restructuring will assist with advocacy, provide benefit services to veterans, and will assist with the reporting of allegations received through the Vet Tip Hotline.

For more information, please contact NCVA Director Ilario Pantano at (919)-628-6894. To report misconduct at USVA medical facilities located in North Carolina, please call (844)-NC4-Vets or email: VetTips@DOA.NC.GOV.

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Department of Administration

Pat McCrory, Governor
Bill Daughtridge, Jr., Secretary

Ilario G. Pantano
Assistant Secretary for Veterans Affairs

JUNE 2, 2014

MEMORANDUM

TO: All Veterans, Service Members, Their Families and Those Who Care for Them

FROM: Ilario Pantano
Director, North Carolina Division of Veterans Affairs

SUBJECT: Two Constructive Ways We Will Help Veterans and Improve Services at VA Medical Facilities: 1) "Vet Tip" Hot-Line for Whistleblowers and 2) Co-Location of State Veteran Service Officers at All VA Medical Facilities in North Carolina.

Hundreds of thousands of veterans have received care in federal Veterans Health Administration (VHA) medical facilities in the state of North Carolina from many dedicated VHA employees. Presently, the VHA system finds itself beset by allegations triggering internal and external investigations as well as a crisis of confidence.

The state's veterans advocacy agency, the North Carolina Division of Veterans Affairs, is determined to assist both its client population of 800,000 veterans and its partner organization, the VHA, by developing solutions to improve quality of care and restoring confidence in a system recently shaken by scandal.

With the twin goals of improving quality of care and restoring confidence of a large federal agency that operates 17 facilities across the state, The North Carolina Division of Veterans Affairs will immediately begin implementing the following two courses of action:

1) Implement an anonymous "Vet Tip" Hot-line for whistleblowers with credible and actionable information on misconduct.

2) Co-locate NC State Veteran Service officers at all 17 federal VHA Medical facilities in North Carolina by 2016 in order to assist with advocacy and provide additional state and federal benefit service and advice to veterans in a "one-stop-shop" environment.

1) **"Vet Tip" Hot-line**

In a preliminary interviews conducted by the state's veterans advocacy agency, the North Carolina Division of Veterans Affairs, multiple whistleblowers came forward making credible allegations of misconduct at VA facilities in North Carolina. It was quickly determined that there are likely more sources within the VA system that would come forward if there was a confidential method to do so.

Furthermore, addressing these allegations will be more effective if their presentation to VHA investigators and management, and the subsequent remedy, is tracked systematically and transparently rather than piecemeal and in the dark. This method will help the VHA better manage its internal processes and allow the North Carolina Division of Veterans affairs to maintain its independence as an advocate for the state's 800,000 veterans while allowing both to work together for a common solution that repairs gaps in the system and restores confidence.

The North Carolina Division of Veterans Affairs is launching a confidential "Vet Tip" hot-line for whistleblowers with credible and actionable information on misconduct at VA medical facilities.

- The "Vet Tip" hot-line will be operated exclusively out of the offices of the Director of North Carolina Division of Veterans Affairs and will be completely confidential.
  - Call: (844)-NC4-Vets
  - email VetTips@DOA.NC.GOV

- Credible reports of misconduct will be redacted and forwarded to the regional VA leadership for investigation or resolution, with a response due back to NCDVA in 14 days (or as mutually agreed upon by our VHA partners).

- Summaries of the "Vet Tip" Reports and the VA Responses will be published quarterly on our website in an effort to further provide transparency for the VA, the public and state and federal law makers.
  - Publication of reports with names redacted will occur 15 days after months end to allow for action by VA on all issues submitted in that three month quarter.

The goal of the North Carolina Division of Veterans Affairs "Vet Tip" hotline is to better serve our state's 800,000 veterans by helping our partner, the VHA, to be more responsive and to correct discrepancies in a timely fashion.

2) **Co-location of NC State Veterans Service officers at all 17 VHA locations**

Historically, the North Carolina Division of Veterans Affairs has operated 13 District Service offices that supported the state's 100 counties and their myriad county veteran service operations. In a new effort to be more responsive to our veterans and make it easier for them to access more services in "one-stop," NC State Service Officers will begin operating out of permanent office spaces inside of federal VHA medical facilities across the state.

By "going where the veterans are," this new plan to permanently co-locate NC State Veteran Service Officers at federal VHA facilities ushers in a new and unprecedented "ease of access" for our veterans. Historically, veterans have had to travel great distances to access their VHA health care. Once they arrived at the VHA facility, NC veterans had no advocacy, access or support pertaining to their earned benefits or disabilities. That is about to change.

In the last few weeks, the North Carolina Division of Veterans Affairs, working with its partners at the VHA, signed three leases for office space inside of VA medical facilities in Salisbury, Asheville, and Wilmington. Staffing these new locations will begin soon as part of an on-going re-organization plan that will make VHA medical centers into a "one-stop-shop" for veterans services and benefits.

The goal of this co-location plan is to have NC State Veterans Service officers at all 17 VHA locations across the state by 2016.