



ANNUAL REPORT

2016



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I am honored to present the 2016 Annual Report for the Rhode Island Office of Veterans Affairs.

Since I started on this journey in February 2016, I have been humbled by how deeply the people of our state care for our Veterans and their families. The goodwill is real, and it has made a positive impact on the lives of many. But Governor Raimondo knew that we could do more. So when she asked me to lead her effort at strengthening our state's commitment to Veterans, I gladly accepted the challenge.

With her unwavering support, my team and I have worked to collaborate and partner with everyone who stands ready, willing, and able to honor the service and sacrifice of our Veterans and military families. We give voice to the ideas and concerns of our Veterans. And by working together, we can ensure that every Veteran has an opportunity to make it in Rhode Island.

While we have much to do, this past year has seen remarkable progress for our Ocean State Veterans.

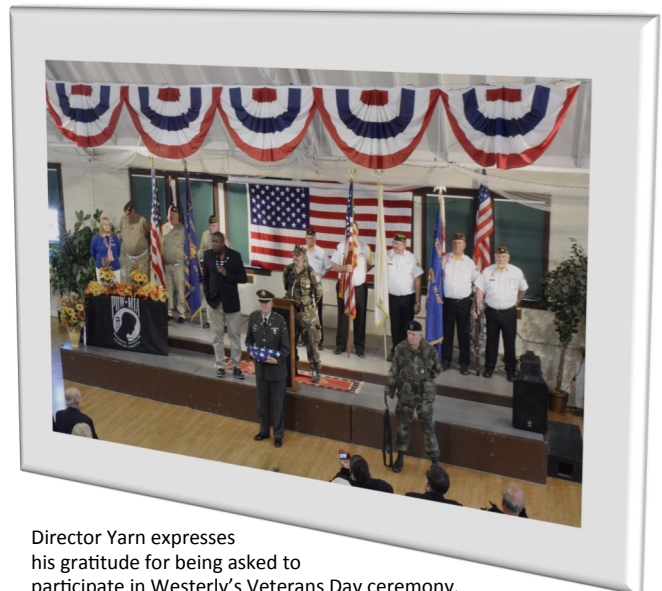
The new Veterans Home project is slated to open later this year. New rules and procedures are being developed for the RI Veterans Memorial Cemetery to improve operations and ensure it remains hallowed ground. We have a new website and are finding new ways to communicate to Rhode Islanders through traditional and social media. And we now have a central location that serves as a resource center, staffed by two experienced case managers who can help answer questions and get Veterans started on how to apply for benefits and services.

“By working together, we can ensure that every Veteran has an opportunity to make it in Rhode Island.”

This progress is only possible because of our strong partnerships. The Governor and her staff provides leadership and resources. Our General Assembly gives us thoughtful support and guidance. Our Veterans advocates share their advice and counsel. Our congressional delegation remains steadfast in their commitment to representing Veterans' interests in Washington. And our colleagues in federal, state, and municipal government continue to be there for us and our Veterans community.

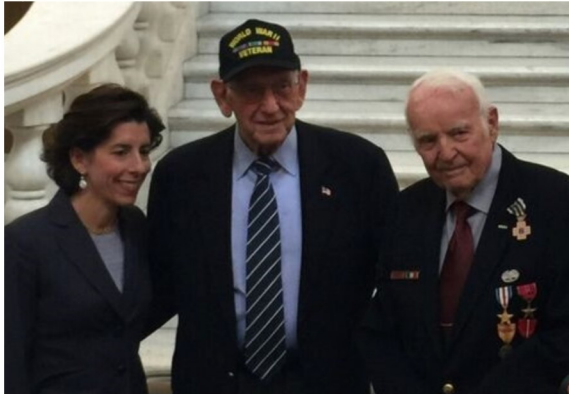
We know that challenges will remain but we are committed to keeping up the progress we've made in such a short time. To our Veterans, I ask that you continue to be flexible and patient with each other – and most importantly, the process – as we move forward. To our taxpayers, as your steward, our office will strive to continue to earn your trust. To everyone, thank you for your continued support and for the love you show each day to our fallen, our Veterans, our active-duty servicemembers, our reservists, and their families.

Director of Veterans Affairs
State of Rhode Island



Director Yarn expresses his gratitude for being asked to participate in Westerly's Veterans Day ceremony.

Our mission is simple: Serve the Ocean State's 67,800 Veterans and their families. We execute this mission through (1) the RI Veterans Home, (2) the RI Veterans Memorial Cemetery, and (3) the RI Veterans Resource Center.



The Governor with a WWII Veteran and SSG Arthur O'Connell (r), who received the Rhode Island Star in May for heroism as a combat medic in the Philippine Islands during WWII. Mr. O'Connell deployed as a member of the RI National Guard.

2016 ushered in many exciting changes for Rhode Island's Office of Veterans Affairs:

- ◆ Governor Raimondo appointed LCDR (ret.) Kasim J. Yarn to serve as Rhode Island's first Director of Veterans Affairs.
- ◆ The Governor proposed and the General Assembly passed legislation to elevate the Office of Veterans Affairs to a cabinet-level agency.
- ◆ The Governor added two case managers to her FY 2017 budget to assist Veterans and their families with their questions and concerns.
- ◆ The Office of Veterans Affairs secured dedicated office space in Warwick to serve as a resource center.
- ◆ And, in collaboration with the RI National Guard and the chairs of the Senate and House Veterans Affairs Committees, we held two summits for service providers to begin the work of creating a coordinated network of care to serve all Veterans.

Working together, we can improve the health and economic well-being of our Veterans – who are truly assets to our community and our state. We still have work to do, but the transformation has begun.

Who We Serve

- ◆ **67,800 Veterans live in Rhode Island**
- ◆ **Half of our Veterans are 65 or older**
- ◆ **49,200 served in wartime**
- ◆ **2,900 WWII**
- ◆ **6,400 Korean Conflict**
- ◆ **21,100 Vietnam Era**
- ◆ **6,700 Pre-9/11 Gulf War Era**
- ◆ **7,400 Post-9/11 Gulf War Era**
- ◆ **62,600 Male Veterans**
- ◆ **5,200 Female Veterans**



The Governor received a virtual tour of our new website after the ribbon cutting ceremony for our Warwick office in September.

The Office of Veterans Affairs will continue to work with federal, state, and local government leaders, as well as with nonprofit and charitable organizations, to achieve success in serving those who have served.



Director Yarn had the honor of speaking at the VFW's Department of RI annual convention in June.

The Current Home

The Rhode Island Veterans Home is a skilled nursing facility that serves war Veterans in need of quality nursing and domiciliary care. It is located on a 110-acre campus in Bristol. The current facility was built in 1955, with additions added in 1969, 1976 and 1989.



The welcome mat at the entrance of the current RI Veterans Home.

Founded by the State Board of Soldiers Relief in 1890, the Veterans Home provided living quarters and meals for Rhode Island Veterans of the Civil War. The mission of the Veterans Home has since evolved to focus primarily on skilled nursing care.



Two WWII Navy guns "guard" the front of the RI Veterans Home property in Bristol.

To receive care in the Home, Veterans must meet the following criteria: (i) be honorably discharged after serving for 90 days or more in any campaign for which a campaign or expeditionary medal is issued, and (ii) have either resided in the state at least two consecutive years prior to admission or were inducted into the military while living in Rhode Island.



A postcard depicting the original "RI Soldiers' Home," including the iconic water tower, which remains standing today.

With approximately 200 beds, the Home provides nursing care, Alzheimer's care, and palliative care, in addition to x-ray, dental, and pharmacy services, physical therapy and occupational therapy, psychological services, and transportation to and from the Providence VA Medical Center.



A photo of one of the patio sections at the current RI Veterans Home.

Brigadier General (ret.) Rick Baccus serves as the Administrator of the Veterans Home. He retired from military service in April 2006 after a 32-year career, including over 22 years of active duty service. He is a 1974 graduate of Eastern Michigan University, a 1990 graduate of the University of Rhode Island with a Master's in Business Administration, and a 1992 graduate of the US Army War College.



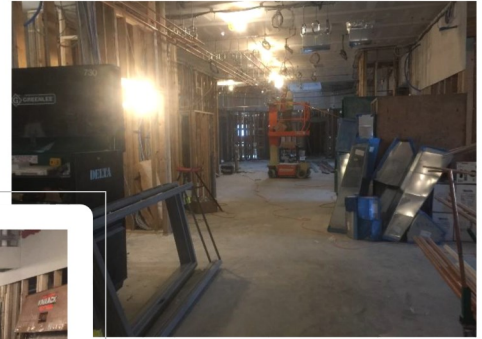
BG Rick Baccus (ret.), administrator of the RI Veterans Home.

The Future Home

In November 2012, Rhode Island voters approved a \$94 million bond for a new 208-bed home to serve the state's Veterans. The new Home is being built with a single-story design to retain a residential feel and give a sense of living in a "neighborhood." Site work and initial construction began in 2015. Since that time, all six "neighborhoods" are under roof with interior construction well under way. Each neighborhood will have a private family dining room that will allow families to visit and eat with their loved ones, and a "living room" area with a fireplace so residents can sit and relax, read, or socialize with others. Each resident will have his or her own living space, a single room that includes a personal bathroom with a shower.



Photos taken in December of the work taking place inside the "neighborhoods" of the new Veterans Home.



As of December 2016, construction is about 66% complete.

The new home is scheduled to open by the end of 2017. Peregrine Group, a veteran-owned, Rumford-based contractor, is serving as the state's owner's representative. Brewster Thornton Group Architects, a Providence-based, women-owned enterprise, is delivering architectural and engineering services. And Gilbane, a RI-based company with an international portfolio, is providing construction management at-risk services.



The exterior and entrance of the main building of the new Veterans Home.

The Future Home Project Budget

Project Budget Summary	Submitted Approved Budget	Completed & Stored to Date	% Complete
Hard Cost	103,965,651	64,108,276	61%
FF&E Cost	6,437,448	-	0%
Soft Cost	10,101,205	6,535,679	65%
Total Project Budget	120,504,304	70,643,955	58%

◆ **Status of Federal Funding:**

- ◇ Amount Requested: \$60,588,515
- ◇ Final Request Issued: April 2016
- ◇ Approval Letter Received from VA: September 2, 2016

◆ **Status of Funding**

- ◇ Completed and Stored to Date (Dec. 2016): \$70,643,955
- ◇ Projected Balance of Spending for FY 2017: \$32,000,000
- ◇ Projected Spending for FY 2018: \$18,000,000



An aerial photo of the RI Veterans Home project taken in October, courtesy of JP Cloutier and his drone.

The Rhode Island Office of Veterans Affairs serves as a central hub to provide assistance and access to resources to those who have served in the Armed Forces, as well as their families. Our new office in Warwick at 560 Jefferson Boulevard serves as our headquarters and our new Veterans Resource Center.

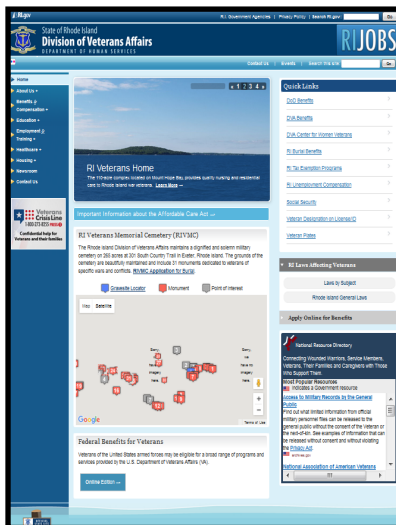
We help Veterans and their loved ones with a broad range of federal, state, and nonprofit/community-based programs. The staff at the Veterans Resource Center meets regularly with constituents and Veteran organizations to identify and address the needs of our Veterans and their families. Combined with the outreach efforts of our new case managers, our office is partnering with cities and towns, businesses, veteran service organizations, and nonprofits such as the United Way, to offer assistance and opportunity for those who have served.



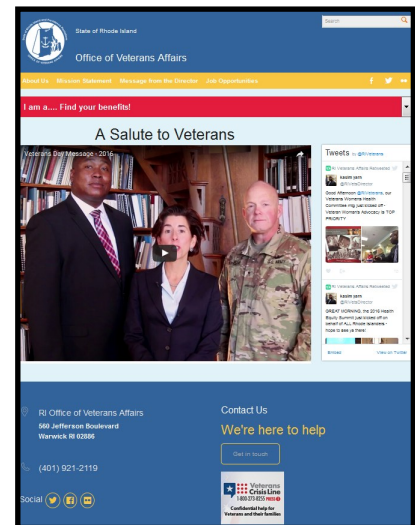
Our headquarters and resource center in Warwick at 560 Jefferson Boulevard.

A Brief Look at Some 2016 Milestones

⇒ **Website** A newly revamped website, www.vets.ri.gov, now serves as a central digital hub for Veterans. Through the renovated website, Veterans can now identify benefit eligibility, as well as explore career and wellness opportunities simply by selecting the era in which they served.



The visual difference between the outdated website of the past (pictured left), and the new site built from the ground up (pictured right) highlights the Office's commitment to bringing veterans services into the modern age.

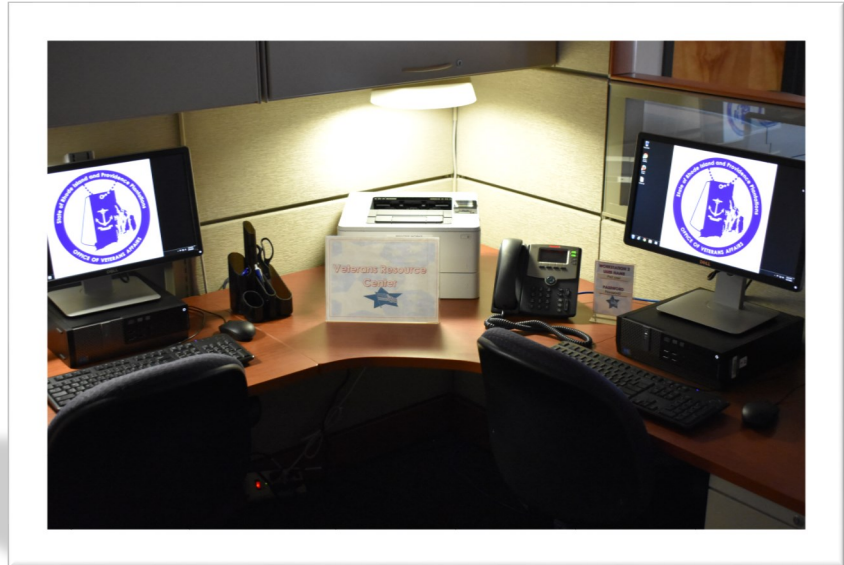


⇒ **Communication** In addition to the website, a new focus has been placed on accessibility. Veterans may now directly submit messages to the Office of Veteran Affairs' staff on a 24/7 basis through our digital contact form. Our efforts to engage via social media have also been successful, sharing information through Facebook ([@RIOOfficeofVeteransAffairs](https://www.facebook.com/RIOfficeofVeteransAffairs)) and Twitter ([@RIVeterans](https://twitter.com/RIVeterans)). And our Twitter feed is now integrated into the website, providing updates on Director Yarn's outreach and initiatives.



⇒ Veterans Resource Center

When Director Kasim Yarn embarked on his 39 Municipalities in 39 Weeks Tour in 2016, one of the constant refrains he heard was the need for a place for Veterans to go to get one-on-one assistance. In partnership with Governor Raimondo and her staff, he was able to secure office space at 560 Jefferson Boulevard in Warwick to make this long-standing item on the “to do” list a reality. The Veterans Resource Center provides free consultation services and work space for our Veterans and their families. Two workstations are available, complete with computers, internet access, printers, and telephones. Staff are on hand to assist with job searches, resume development, and research. Veterans now have the access to technology to navigate through the employment and benefits processes of the digital age.



Our work stations, located at the Veterans Resource Center, available to Veterans for job searches and research.

⇒ Veteran Case Managers

In another first, two new case managers were added to the team in 2016. Both are Veterans with unique skill sets, buttressed by real-world experience advocating for Veterans. They serve as navigators to help Veterans identify, research, and access available benefits. They are a “one stop shop” for Rhode Island Veterans and can be reached through walk-in, phone call, or email directly through our website. And with our partnership with the United Way’s 2-1-1 team, we’ll be on the road visiting communities to bring our services to Veterans throughout Rhode Island.

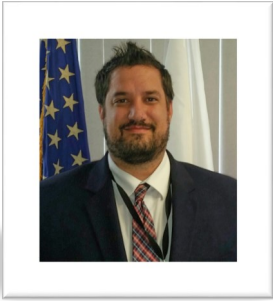
Below: One of our new case managers, David Dos Reis, out in the community with the United Way’s 2-1-1 van.



Above: Director Yarn and the United Way’s Jay Burdick shake hands after discussing our outreach partnership. One of our case managers joins Jay each week as he drives the 2-1-1 van around the Ocean State. If you see the van, stop by and #Ask4Dave!

Below: And our other case manager, David Rothermel, in Olneyville with the United Way’s 2-1-1 van.

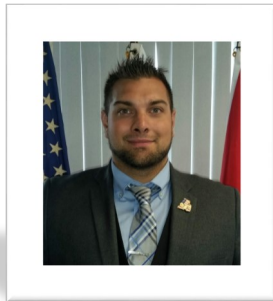




David Dos Reis
U.S. Army, Combat Medic
Operation Iraqi Freedom, 2004

I grew up in a family of service. After high school graduation in 2001, I left for Army basic training. It was in these opening days of my military career that I stood shoulder to shoulder with my fellow military

trainees as we watched the Towers fall on 9/11. I knew then I was about to serve our country in a time of war. The call came in 2004. I deployed to Iraq as a combat medic with the National Guard. While serving overseas, I witnessed firsthand what America's newest wave of Veterans faced on the battlefield. Coming home I would share with them the difficulties of transitioning back to civilian life and finding our place in society after taking part in combat. I found purpose when I began working at the VA Medical Center out of West Roxbury, MA., and then as the Patient Advocate at the Providence VA Medical Center. In my nine years in that role, I was able to help fellow Veterans with all of the medical and benefit options available. Now, with the Rhode Island Office of Veteran Affairs, I am able to take this knowledge and experience and work with greater numbers of those who have served our nation and those who support them at home. I am honored to be a part of the newly-transformed Office of Veterans Affairs.



David Rothermel
U.S. Marine Corps, Infantryman
Operation Iraqi Freedom, 2006 & 2007
Operation Enduring Freedom 2009

I am a Marine. I enlisted in 2005 and served my entire contract with 2nd Battalion, 8th Marines. Over the course of 4 years and 9 months I would deploy three

times – Fallujah, Ramadi (Iraq), and Helmand (Afghanistan). When I finished my active duty time, I came back home to Rhode Island and learned of the difficulties facing veterans like me who are transitioning back to civilian life. This led me to becoming a Veteran advocate. While going back to school at CCRI, I helped create the Student Veteran's Office. For the past three years, I have worked at Operation Stand Down, assisting veterans with housing and employment issues. With my current position, I am in the enviable position of being a resource for state's 68,000 veterans and their families. In the past six months, we have answered the call, helping answer questions ranging from transitioning off of active duty to burial benefits to education to employment. We stand ready to take on the challenges our veterans face in the ocean state. I am most grateful for this opportunity to be part of the team.



The entrance to the RI Veterans Memorial Cemetery at 301 South County Trail, Exeter, RI.

The Office of Veterans Affairs continues to maintain the Rhode Island Veterans Memorial Cemetery (RIVMC) as a dignified and solemn resting place for Rhode Island Veterans and their eligible spouses or dependents. Situated on 280 acres in Exeter, the Veterans Cemetery is one of the most important ways for the state to express its everlasting appreciation for those who served this country honorably.

Interments Averaging 102 interments a month, the Rhode Island Veterans Memorial Cemetery remains one of the busiest state Veterans cemeteries in the nation. Last fiscal year, the RIVMC conducted 1,230 committal services. The staff of RIVMC consists of 16 employees, 12 of whom are full-time and four are seasonal.

Memorials and Monuments The RIVMC offers all families the option of having the Veteran’s name inscribed on the Memorial Wall or Memorial Walkway. Notification of the Memorial Wall/Walkway Program is sent out each February. Many of the specific units, organizations and campaigns also have monuments throughout the cemetery to honor their respective Veterans. Monument design, placement, and installation is coordinated with the RIVMC. Last year, two new monuments were completed and two more are planned for 2017:

- ◆ RI National Guard 102nd Aircraft Control and Warning Squadron – dedicated November 2016
- ◆ Rhode Island Military Police Corps Monument – dedicated October 2016
- ◆ Completion of the Submarine Veterans Memorial – anticipated October 2017
- ◆ United States Airforce Monument – anticipated August 2017

Ceremonies The Office of Veterans Affairs conducts the annual Memorial Day observance at the RIVMC against the fitting backdrop of the World War II Monument. Throughout the year, the RIVMC is also host to several events that promote unending gratitude to those Rhode Island Veterans who served our country. These events include:

- ◆ Wreaths Across America
- ◆ 9/11 Patriot Day Remembrance
- ◆ Tolling of the Bells Ceremony
- ◆ Armed Forces Day (Echo Taps)
- ◆ Memorial Day Commemoration



A sailor renders the salute at the RI Veterans Memorial Cemetery. In December, volunteers laid 4,000 wreaths as part of the Wreath Across America event.

Partnerships In 2016, the Office of Veterans Affairs and the RIVMC continued to build and maintain partnerships with several organizations throughout the state. These relationships not only promote the mission of providing Veterans a dignified resting place, but also strengthen the Veteran community through outreach and camaraderie. The Administrator of the RIVMC is a member of the Rhode Island Historical Cemetery Commission, and conducted outreach with the local Veterans' service organizations, including the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Other established relationships include:

- ◆ Funeral Directors' Association of RI
- ◆ Patriot Guard Riders
- ◆ Sons and Daughters of the Revolution
- ◆ Rhode Island Job Corps of Exeter
- ◆ VA National Cemetery Administration
- ◆ Rhode Island National Guard
- ◆ Naval Station Newport
- ◆ Gold Star Families
- ◆ University of Rhode Island



The Vietnam Memorial at the RI Veterans Memorial Cemetery.



Cara Condit, the new cemetery administrator.

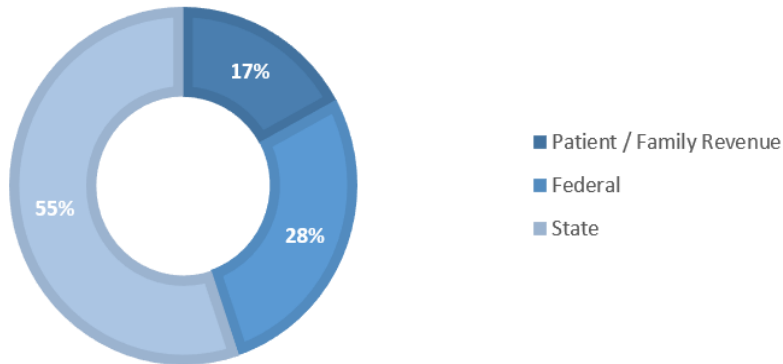
Accomplishments In 2016, the Office of Veterans Affairs hired new leadership for the cemetery. Cara Condit, a Veteran of the U.S. Coast Guard and the Air Force Reserve, took the helm in November. Since then, she has been focused on revising regulations, implementing new procedures, planning infrastructure improvements, and investing in new grounds maintenance equipment, such as sanders and aerators.

Looking Forward In 2017, the Chapel's roof replacement, interior and exterior repairs and painting, and installation of air conditioning will be completed. Roof repairs and interior rehabilitation of the Maintenance Building are also scheduled for completion in 2017. RIVMC will look to increase security on all buildings and improve electricity availability throughout the cemetery in the next fiscal year.



The main pathway to the WWII Memorial at the RI Veterans Memorial Cemetery.

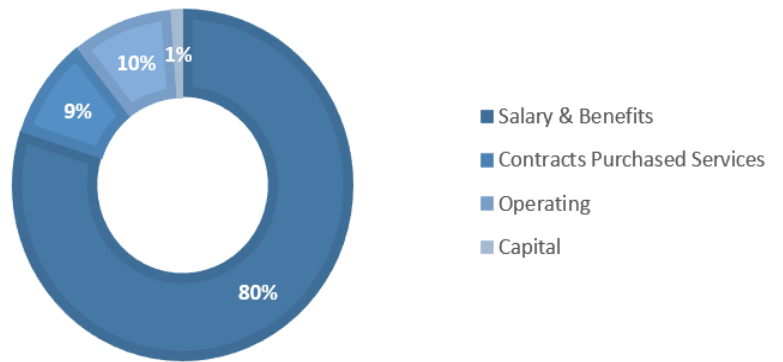
RI VETERANS AFFAIRS FY 2016 REVENUE
TOTAL: \$29,199,995



RI VETERANS AFFAIRS FY 2016 REVENUE

Patient/Family Revenue	\$4,992,203.63
Federal	\$8,091,964.00
State	\$16,115,827.70
Total	\$29,199,995.33

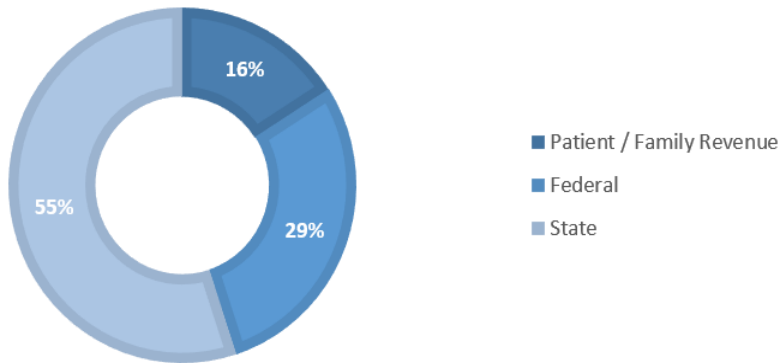
RI VETERANS AFFAIRS FY 2016 EXPENDITURES
TOTAL: \$29,199,995



RI VETERANS AFFAIRS FY 2016 EXPENDITURES

Salary & Benefits	\$23,357,604.00
Contracts Services	\$2,722,724.00
Operating Costs	\$2,779,952.00
Capital	\$339,715.00
Total	\$29,199,995.00

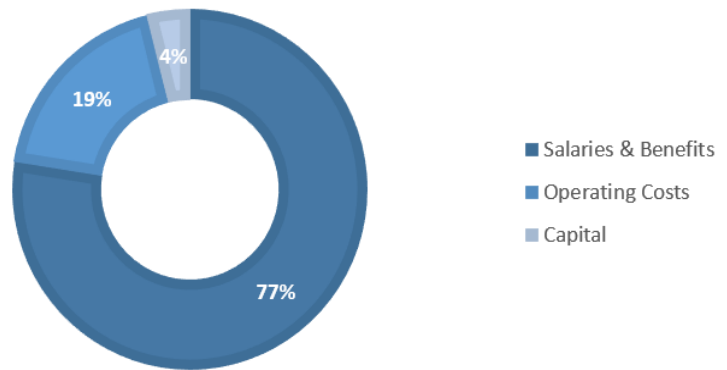
RI VETERANS HOME FY 2016 REVENUE
TOTAL: \$27,874,259



VETERANS HOME FY 2016 REVENUE

Patient / Family Revenue	\$4,441,136.63
Federal	\$8,091,964.00
State	\$15,341,158.70
Total	\$27,874,259.33

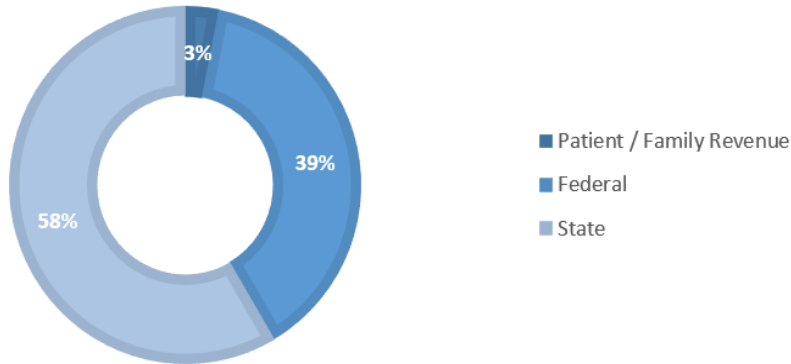
RI VETERANS HOME FY 2016 EXPENDITURES
TOTAL: \$27,872,079



VETERANS HOME FY 2016 EXPENDITURES

Salary & Benefits	\$22,333,707.00
Contracts Services	\$2,717,998.00
Operating Cost	\$2,533,754.00
Capital	\$286,620.00
Total	\$27,872,079.00

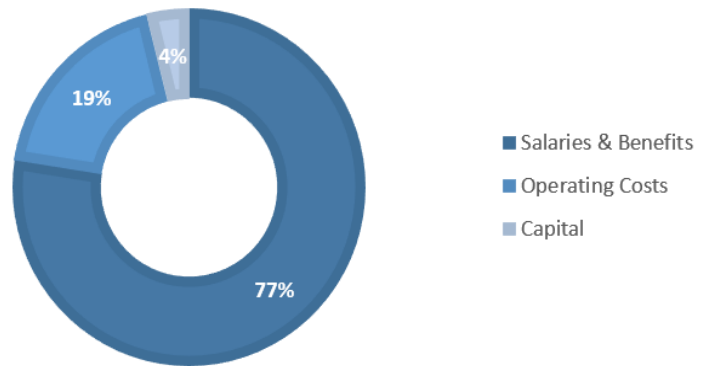
RI VETERANS CEMETERY FY 2016 REVENUE
TOTAL: \$1,325,736



VETERANS CEMETERY FY 2016 REVENUE

Patient / Family Revenue	\$40,802.00
Federal	\$510,265.00
State	\$774,669.00
Total	\$1,325,736.00

RI VETERANS CEMETERY FY 2016 EXPENDITURES
TOTAL: \$1,325,736



VETERANS CEMETERY FY 2016 EXPENDITURES

Salary & Benefits	\$1,023,897.00
Contracts Services	\$4,726.00
Operating Cost	\$246,198.00
Capital	\$50,915.00
Total	\$1,325,736.00

Rhode Island Veterans Resource Center

560 Jefferson Boulevard, Suite 206
Warwick, RI 02886

(401) 921-2119

Rhode Island Veterans Cemetery

301 South County Trail
Exeter, RI 02882

(401) 268-3088

Rhode Island Veterans Home

480 Metacom Avenue
Bristol, RI 02809

(401) 253-8000



Clockwise from top left: Our Warwick office staff; the indoor entrance to the Veterans Resource Center in Warwick; the curbside sign at 560 Jefferson Boulevard; Director Yarn, Governor Raimondo, and the Adjutant General, BG Callahan, at the February press conference announcing the Director's appointment as the state's first Director of Veterans Affairs; Governor Raimondo taking a tour of the new Veterans Resource Center in September.

