



THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
OFFICE OF THE VETERAN ADVOCATE
50 BRAINTREE HILL OFFICE PARK, SUITE 108
BRAintree, MA 02184

May 7, 2026

The Honorable John Velis
24 Beacon St., Room 513
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Joseph W. McGonagle
24 Beacon St., Room 171
Boston, MA 02133

Re: Summary of Veteran Support During the Gabriel house Fire

Dear Chairs of the Joint Committee on Veterans and Federal Affairs,

This letter serves as a summary of the Massachusetts Office of the Veteran Advocate's (OVA) involvement following the July 13, 2025, fatal fire at Gabriel House Assisted Living Facility in Fall River, outlining both the basis for our engagement and the actions taken to support the affected veterans and their families.

This fire resulted in ten fatalities, including four veterans, and the injury or displacement of additional residents, including five veterans. The presence of multiple veterans among those impacted required both immediate coordination of assistance and a focused review of whether any veteran-specific systems were implicated.

OVA's involvement was driven by two factors. First, a significant portion of those affected by the fire were veterans. Under M.G.L. Chapter 115B sec.2(x), OVA has a responsibility to respond to incidents involving serious harm or loss of life where veterans are receiving services from an executive or constituent agency of the Commonwealth or where it is believed an executive agency may have failed in their duty of care to a veteran, regardless of whether the facility itself is part of a veterans' system. Second, OVA was directly engaged by our federal partners. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), through its Criminal Investigations Division, notified OVA of the incident and requested assistance. This federal engagement aligns with the OVA's liaison requirement with the VA.

In parallel with its review responsibilities, OVA immediately activated its regional liaison network to support affected veterans, families, and local officials. OVA's Southeastern Regional Liaison worked closely with the Fall River Veterans Services Office to assist displaced veterans and the families of the deceased. This included facilitating access to emergency resources, coordinating benefit-related support, and ensuring continuity of care and services during a period of acute disruption. Examples include providing compassionate presence, information, and support to victims and support staff when local veteran services were spread thin. This coordinated response reflects OVA's role not only as an oversight entity, but also as a partner and connector across local, state, and federal systems during emergencies impacting veterans.

While relief efforts were underway, OVA conducted a focused review to determine whether any veteran-specific programs, placements, or services were implicated. This review included:

- Verification of veteran status of those impacted by the fire, in coordination with federal and state partners;
- Assessment of whether any veterans were placed at the facility through state or federal housing programs or referrals; and
- Evaluation of whether any issues in the provision of benefits and services to veterans contributed to the incident.

OVA deliberately limited its review to these veteran-specific questions and did not duplicate the work of fire investigators, law enforcement, or regulatory agencies responsible for determining cause, compliance, or liability.

OVA's review confirmed that Gabriel House, while certified by the Executive Office of Aging and Independence, is a privately operated assisted living residence with no operational or contractual relationship to state or federal veteran housing programs. The affected veterans were residing at Gabriel House as private individuals and were not placed at the facility through any veteran service system. No deficiencies in veteran benefits, services, or placement mechanisms contributed to the incident. Based on these findings, the case has been formally closed with no further action required within OVA's statutory authority. Regarding any further policy recommendations, we defer to the recommendations of the Assisted Living Commission and their report. Please contact my office if you would like additional information or further discussion on this matter.

The Office of the Veteran Advocate remains committed to supporting veterans and their families, particularly during times of crisis, and to ensuring that the Commonwealth's systems continue to serve them effectively. This incident, coupled with population estimates showing nearly two-thirds of the state's veteran population over the age of 60, has guided us to develop a strategic priority focused on the geographical distribution, needs, and housing options for older veterans.

Sincerely,



Robert Notch
Veteran Advocate