



For immediate release

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**Denis McDonough, Secretary, U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs, Awards Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs the 2022 Abraham Lincoln Pillars of Excellence Award**

*Department is recognized for innovative program delivery supporting veterans*

ANNAPOLIS, MD—Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary, George Owings, today announced that The Honorable Denis McDonough, Secretary of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) awarded the department the 2022 Abraham Lincoln Pillars of Excellence Award for innovative state program for Maryland's Serving Those Who Served-A Public Library program. The program, a partnership with the Maryland State Library Agency, began as a pilot initiative in 2014 to expand veteran outreach and library personnel education in Maryland.

The VA and National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs worked together to establish the Pillars of Excellence Awards to identify and formally recognize innovative state programs that support or exemplify VA's strategic goals and priorities. Each year, states submit the work and programs they have developed to compete for an award in a number of categories. Maryland was one of eight states to submit a best practice, which improves opportunities and outcomes for veterans.

"The partnership between the Department of Veterans Affairs and Maryland State Library Agency has increased awareness of the many programs offered to support Maryland's veterans and families," said Governor Larry Hogan. "Our administration is excited for the department's recognition and to celebrate receipt of this national award."

"We are honored to receive the 2022 Abraham Lincoln Pillar of Excellence Award, a first for the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs, for Innovative State Programming," said Secretary Owings. "I am thankful for Maryland State Library Agency's commitment to expanding its service delivery to service members, veterans, and families."

"The Maryland State Library Agency is thrilled to be recognized as a recipient of the Abraham Lincoln Pillars of Excellence award, along with our partners at the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs, honoring this important work to meet the needs of Veterans and their families," said Irene Padilla, State Librarian. "This partnership has allowed those who served and their loved ones to connect to valuable programs and services through their local public libraries."

Maryland submitted for the award this year to recognize its eight-year partnership with the Maryland State Library Agency. Since 2014, Dana Burl, Outreach and Advocacy Program Director for the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs has led the partnership, alongside Carrie Sanders, Youth Services Coordinator for the Maryland State Library Agency, and Joy Ashcraft, Director, Maryland's Commitment to Veterans, a Maryland Department of Health program. More than 10 events have been held to discuss best practices for connecting with veterans and their families. Events have included military/veteran cultural competency training, VA benefits training, book club facilitation, military youth programming, and transitional housing program and Vet Center briefings. Library personnel have been exposed to many organizations serving the military connected community and last year close to 40 completed the VA's S.A.V.E. Gatekeeper Suicide Prevention Training program.

For more information on the Maryland Department of Veterans Affairs, visit [veterans.maryland.gov](https://veterans.maryland.gov).

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