

Dept. of Military Affairs: Wisconsin National Guard Soldiers help setup, staff Milwaukee voluntary COVID-19 self-isolation facility

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MILWAUKEE — Twenty-five Wisconsin National Guard troops are supporting a Milwaukee County isolation facility for Milwaukee's homeless population as part of the state's ongoing COVID-19 response efforts.

The City of Milwaukee Health Department and the Milwaukee County Housing Division designated Clare Hall on the Saint Francis de Sales Seminary grounds in St. Francis as an isolation facility for referrals from area homeless shelters and healthcare facilities that have individuals with housing instability. The initiative is part of the Milwaukee County Unified Emergency Operations Center.

The Wisconsin National Guard is staffing the facility with a team of ten medics and fifteen other Citizen Soldiers to provide administrative and operational support. Each team will be rotating staff to provide 24/7 coverage.

Soldiers spent hours March 30 assembling donated furniture and preparing rooms for occupants who began arriving at the facility later in the week. Spc. Braydon Budz, a Soldier with the Medford, Wisconsin-based 273rd Engineer Company, said it's good to be able to help out close to home.

"Being able to help in the community is why a lot of people joined," Budz said. "Personally, that's why I joined as well."

Pfc. Katrina McMartin, also with the 273rd Engineer Company, agreed.

"I feel like as long as I'm helping out the community, I feel pretty good about it," McMartin said.

As occupants come to the facility, Wisconsin National Guard troops will make sure people's needs are being met. The administrative team will bring occupants their meals and ensure people keep to the policies requested for safety purposes, according to Sgt. 1st Class Adam Reynolds, the noncommissioned officer in charge of the administrative team.

"I think it's a very important thing that we're doing to ensure hopefully this is enough to cause some type of impact to help get past what's happening right now," Reynolds said. He added that morale among the troops is high.

"We're more than happy to help," Reynolds said.

The medical team will be conducting initial baseline medical assessments of each occupant coming to Clare Hall, Capt. Katelyn Voss, the officer in charge of the medical team and a member of the Wisconsin Army National Guard's Medical Detachment in Camp Douglas, Wisconsin, said. Following initial assessments, the team will conduct phone contacts every four hours to see if there are needs for any of the occupants to be assessed for a further level of care.

On the civilian side, Voss works for a hospital as a nurse practitioner. She said her leadership at the hospital was very supportive of her fulfilling her role in the Wisconsin National Guard.

"I know there's a need at my hospital, but I've been in for 17 years and this is the first time I've ever been called to state active duty," Voss said. "I feel great that I'm actually able to help the people in my state as opposed to a lot of times having the opportunity to go outside of our state or the United States. I feel great about the mission and glad to be here for sure."

Nick Tomaro, the preparedness coordinator with the City of Milwaukee Health Department, said Clare Hall started taking in people on March 30. He added that he was appreciative of everybody's help on this initiative, and that the Wisconsin National Guard's help was essential.

"We've been meeting with the Guard daily for several days here, just really incredible individuals, and for us, obviously the medical presence is critical,"

Tomaro said. "It's just doing the overall mission of standing up the facility in a really short amount of time – we wouldn't be able to do it without them."

James Mathy, the housing administrator for Milwaukee County's Housing Division, agreed, adding that he would've said the same thing.

The Wisconsin National Guard is also helping staff two state-run self-isolation facilities – one in Milwaukee and one in Madison. Twelve personnel are staffing each of those sites and providing medical and administrative support at each of those locations in addition to the Milwaukee-run facility.

Meanwhile, the Wisconsin National Guard is actively supporting the Wisconsin Elections Commission in multiple ways. The Guard is assisting WEC by procuring and distributing supplies such as wipes, hand sanitizer, and spray bottles to polling sites needed to ensure a safe and sanitary election April 7, and a still yet-to-be determined number of National Guard troops are in the process of mobilizing to state active duty to serve as poll workers in the face of a shortage of volunteers across the state.

Wisconsin National Guard troops are simultaneously conducting warehousing operations in support of Wisconsin DHS where they are receiving personal protective equipment (PPE) shipments at warehouses, repackaging it, and then distributing it to sites that need PPE, and another team of 30 troops were dispatched to Sheboygan County April 5 to conduct a specimen collection mission after establishing a mobile COVID-19 testing site at a senior living facility there.

A team of six Wisconsin National Guard medics also augmented the staff at a senior living facility in Grafton, Wisconsin, for three days in March while the facility dealt with a staffing shortfall after a COVID-19 outbreak there.

Also last month, a team of 30 Wisconsin National Guard personnel assisted the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) transport a group of Wisconsin citizens back to their homes after they returned to our state from a cruise ship that had confirmed cases of COVID-19 onboard.