

**For Release Tuesday May 5, 2020 11:35AM**

## **County of Berks / COVID-19 Leadership Team Alert**

*Flag Decoration of Veteran's Graves Threatened Due to COVID-19*

**Reading, PA— 5/5/2020** — The Berks County Department of Veteran's Affairs has been forced to place its plans on hold to decorate the graves of deceased veterans for Memorial Day. In compliance with Governor Tom Wolf's statewide stay-at-home order, the manufacturer for the American flags, Flag Zone LLC in Gilbertsville, PA, has suspended its operations for the time being, placing Berks County's flag order on hold.

### **More than 200 cemeteries, 50,000 graves affected.**

53,000 flags were scheduled for distribution to Berks County cemetery partners and volunteers on April 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>. The leadership of South-Central Transit Authority (SCTA), a firm who manages the property where the Berks County Department of Veteran's Affairs office is housed, loaned the location of 722 Cherry Street to the department to use for flag distribution on these two days. With the help of its partners and volunteers, these flags were to be placed at 233 cemeteries across the county.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and Governor Tom Wolf's "Stay at Home" order, flag distribution from the Berks County Department of Veteran's Affairs to Berks County cemeteries has been postponed. Until such time that operations at Flag Zone recommence, the Department of Veteran's Affairs will have to wait for their order to be filled, indefinitely.

### **A request to Governor Tom Wolf: help us find flags.**

Berks County is only one of the 67 counties in Pennsylvania who are similarly affected by the work stoppage. Some counties received their flag orders prior to the COVID-19 outbreak

but lack the volunteer workforce required to distribute them. Others who also received their flags cannot safely distribute them to partners and volunteers due to the current stay-at-home order.

“As is the case with Berks County, most counties have not had their orders filled,” stated Ken Lebron, Director for Berks County Veteran’s Affairs. “They do not have the number of flags in their inventory needed to fulfil their county’s promise of decorating each deceased veteran’s grave on Memorial Day.”

As mandated by Pennsylvania County Code *Section 1922-A, Flags to Decorate Graves*, counties are required to provide flags to decorate the graves of all deceased servicepersons on each Memorial Day. A request was sent to Governor Tom Wolf to authorize an exemption to the closure of facilities such as Flag Zone so that they may commence operations of flag manufacturing and fulfill orders across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

“As American citizens, we must never forget the service and sacrifice of our countries veterans.” Lebron said. “As a community, we express our gratitude and appreciation to the surviving family members of our veterans with this very noble and important gesture.”

If the Department of Veteran’s Affairs is unable to place flags at gravesites this Memorial Day, Lebron said they’ll postpone the distribution of flags to a later date until their order is fulfilled for distribution.

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