Kassandra Gove, Chair
Myra Ortiz, Vice Chair
Kathleen Colwell, Secretary
James Ryan, Treasurer
Noah S. Berger, Administrator

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
CONTACT: Niorka Mendez

November 6, 2023

Haverhill, MA — Local veterans seeking care at the VA Bedford Healthcare System will soon have access to a free door to door ride service with the launch of the new MeVa Transit *VA Bedford mediMeVa*. Last Thursday, the MeVa Transit Advisory Board unanimously approved the new mediMeVa service to the VA Bedford Healthcare System in Bedford, MA. Bob Snow, MeVa Advisory Board representative from Rowley was an early champion of the new service, stating that, "Being a Marine Veteran, Rowley's representative to the MeVa advisory board, and a member of the Paratransit committee, I was excited that MeVa's operations team was able to turn this idea into service so quickly. I was proud to join my fellow board members in voting to start the VA Bedford mediMeVa in January to help our region's Veterans who have given so much in service to our Country."

The idea of service to VA Bedford came through conversations between MeVa and Vision Committee members of the Merrimack Valley Veterans Collaborative. Each month, the Merrimack Valley Veterans Collaborative brings together Veterans Service Officers (VSOs) and other community organizations who serve veterans. Through community outreach and conversations with the Veterans Collaborative, it was clear there was a transportation service gap for Veterans and their families across the region who needed to access care at the VA Bedford Healthcare System. As the public transit providers for the region, MeVa Transit was perfectly positioned to close this gap with their mediMeVa van service. MeVa joined the Collaborative's September meeting with an idea of a service plan going forward. Christina Penna, Community Outreach Program Manager at AgeSpan who oversees the Veterans Collaborative said, "This new service is great news! We are grateful to MeVa Transit for providing more transportation options for our deserving veterans."

To ensure the best quality service, MeVa worked closely with the VA Bedford Health Care System to determine how best to implement this new service, which will take riders outside of MeVa's service district to reach Bedford. Patrick Kirby, Public Affairs Officer of the VA Bedford Health Care System is grateful to MeVa for responding to the needs of veterans by making this new service possible. "Reliable access to care is imperative, and MeVa has helped reduce barriers through this free offering. This not only improves access to medical appointments, but also enables Veterans to take advantage of the VA's many community-building offerings. From our free produce market, recreational therapy classes and healthy cooking classes, these programs help strengthen the bonds between Veterans and provide holistic support beyond healthcare. By making it easier for Veterans to visit our Bedford campus through this new transportation route, MeVa is helping advance our mission to care for Veterans' whole health."

Starting on January 2, 2024, the VA Bedford mediMeVa will operate Wednesdays and Fridays by reservation. "As public transit professionals, MeVa was able to quickly design a program that would immediately address the need presented by the local veteran services community. We have created a program that is easy to use, without forcing our Veterans and their families to fill out excessive paperwork to access this service. Veterans and their families just have to call our

offices to get set up in our reservation system," said Amy Jenkins, Director of miniMeVa services at MeVa Transit.

Rides to the VA Bedford Healthcare System will be available on Wednesdays and Fridays with one trip to Bedford in the morning and one return in the afternoon. This is a door to door shared ride service. Veterans will be picked up at their homes or other origination point within MeVa's service area and ride with others to Bedford. The hours of the service are flexible and will vary depending on the appointment times of the riders. All Veterans and their families, regardless of age or ability, who reside in one of the 16 cities and towns in MeVa's service area, are eligible to use this service. Sign up is easy by simply calling the miniMeVa office at 978-469-6878 option #3. Reservations must be made at least one week (7 days) in advance, and may be made no more than 14 days in advance. When making reservations, riders should be prepared to provide the reservationists with the date of travel, the pick-up location, and the time of the appointment. Like all of MeVa's transportation services, the VA Bedford mediMeVa is completely free.

This new service will close critical transportation gaps for Veterans living in the Merrimack Valley. Kirby added that "We are grateful that MeVa has made this possible and look forward to welcoming Veterans who utilize this convenient new service."

For routes, schedules, and more information about MeVa Transit bus and van services, visit www.mevatransit.com

About MeVa Transit:

The mediMeVa service is provided by MeVa Transit, the regional transit provider serving the 16 communities along the Merrimack River from Andover to the seacoast. MeVa Transit runs fixed service buses with service hubs in Lawrence, Haverhill, Amesbury, and Newburyport and their miniMeVa and mediMeVa van services. In March of 2022, the MeVa advisory board voted to go fare-free systemwide in a move to encourage ridership and alleviate some of the financial burden shouldered by residents in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to free-fares, MeVa rebranded all their vans and buses, doubled service on Lawrence-based routes, extended service into Groveland, and optimized routing to improve efficiency. Through October 2023, ridership on MeVa's fixed route bus network as more than tripled since going fare free, and now exceeds pre-pandemic ridership levels by 37.9 percentage points. On the paratransit side, ridership has almost doubled since going fare free and now exceeds pre-pandemic levels by 4.6 percentage points.