

Recommendation that Veterans Affairs Commission requests a Mayoral Certificate of Honor for Dr. John Akhtar Straznickas. Certificate to acknowledge the doctor's retirement from the SF VA Health Care System on August 31, 2025.

Text below submitted by Commissioner Nicholas Rusanoff for consideration at June 10, 2025 VAC meeting.

The San Francisco Veterans Affairs Commission proudly recommends Dr. John Akhtar Straznickas for a Certificate of Honor from the Mayor of San Francisco for his extraordinary, decades-long contributions to the mental health and well-being of veterans in the city.

Dr. Straznickas has served as Associate Clinical Professor of Psychiatry at UCSF and as a core faculty member at the San Francisco VA Health Care System (SFVAHCS) for over 30 years. He is a nationally respected leader in veteran mental health, PTSD, and substance use treatment, and has shaped trauma-informed clinical programs that are now models of care. He has led a long-standing psychotherapy group for Vietnam veterans for 22 years, and taught and mentored hundreds of psychiatry fellows, psychology interns, social work students, and nurse practitioners.

His teaching style emphasizes humanity, interpersonal respect, and theory-based practice, earning him multiple Excellence in Teaching Awards and twice being named Mentor of the Year by UCSF psychiatry residents. Former trainees now lead clinical and academic efforts across San Francisco and beyond, amplifying Dr. Straznickas' legacy.

He has published and presented his insights on veteran recovery nationally, and his work has appeared in media including the Netflix documentary *Resurface* and the *Hippie Docs 2.0* podcast, highlighting his role in surf therapy for veterans. Dr. Straznickas' advocacy extends into housing, community building, and veteran-civilian connection, and although retiring from the VA, he continues to promote healing through the ocean and community-based initiatives.