



Chairman Miller and members of the Committee, I am honored to be here today on behalf of Soldier On and the 3,815 veterans we serve each year. Soldier On has become the largest provider of supportive services to veterans in the United States and operates eight SSVF (Supportive Services for Veteran Families) grants throughout five eastern states. This was accomplished with early assistance from Congressmen Richie Neal and James McGovern of Massachusetts. With the help of Congressman Chris Smith of New Jersey and Congressman Chris Gibson of New York, Soldier On has also been able to expand its SSVF services to 36 counties in New York and 8 counties in New Jersey. In addition, Soldier On serves 76 Counties in Mississippi, 23 counties in Pennsylvania, and the four counties of Western Massachusetts

Next year, we are slated to increase our breadth of service and assist more than 5,315 veterans and family members with a special focus on the chronically homeless veterans whose lives are reduced by an average of 20 years compared to their stably housed counterparts.

The Department of Veterans Affairs' goal to end veteran homelessness by 2015 was not a goal that could take place without examining and combatting the underlying effects of poverty that cause homelessness. The lack of safe, affordable housing with services on-site has allowed veterans in poverty and those suffering from untreated and undertreated mental health and addiction disorders to be left forgotten and alone in their prolonged states of homelessness. Eliminating homelessness requires society to look at the causes of poverty, which are rooted in a capitalist society and its impact on the standard of living and lack of educational/vocational training opportunities. The reality is that our goal has been to bring each homeless veteran back to the center of their life.

With great help from the National Director of Homeless Programs, Lisa Pape, Soldier On became a leading Grant/Per Diem shelter bed provider for the VA and realized that we needed to provide veterans with a stable living facility with services delivered where they live. Soldier On has built a first of its kind limited equity cooperative in Pittsfield, Massachusetts that has become home for 39 formerly homeless veterans. The safe, sustainable, affordable housing development was honored with a HUD Doorknocker award in 2011 for its quality and innovation in assisting veterans. Transportation and case management, along with medical and mental health services are delivered to each veteran where he or she lives so that appointments are met and the veteran receives the support necessary to ensure success and dignity. Currently, Soldier On is in the development phase of constructing eight more of these facilities throughout the East Coast including one on the grounds of the VA in Leeds, MA. This enhanced use lease project received great support from Paul Macpherson and will utilize VAi2 funds and will be a first of its kind

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**THE FIGHT DOESN'T END WHEN THEY GET HOME**

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project in which the VA and Soldier On will partner to serve veterans in limited equity units of their own.

Soldier On has made a commitment to partner in SSVF with agencies which have a history with tenancy preservation and housing search upgrades for eligible veterans as well as mentoring programs that train and enable veterans to provide services to keep them safely housed. We couple these services with a housing resiliency stabilization program that works with “high risk” veterans in need of rapid rehousing and support. These veterans can call into our hotline which is staffed 24 hours of the day so that a case manager can be sent to a veteran's home within 48 hours to address their individual needs. As a result of this, we found our costs were driven down. These SSVF supportive services cost an average of \$2,400 to \$4,400 for at-risk veterans in need of housing who are not getting VA care compared to the \$42,000 it costs for a veteran who is in GPD care.

The VA is continuing to try to provide services using a medical model which does not and cannot help all homeless and at-risk veterans, and often leaves the most disconnected of them unserved. Following a model promoted by Vince Kane and the VA National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans in Philadelphia, we must divert the current VA funding to proactive programs such as Housing First with services delivered to veterans where they live. The VA needs to become more community based and responsive to partnering with community providers in offering integrated housing, healthcare and employment services where the veteran lives so that we can create an environment in which veterans can heal. We must look at the mind, body, and spirit together. We can't just divide a person into parts and disorders that we can treat in different silos. This creates a cost system that is dehumanizing and degrading to the men and women who served our country. Delivering services to people where they live eliminates decompensating episodes, non-compliance, and relapse.

By providing veterans with Housing First, services delivered to where they live, and training for employment opportunities, we can strengthen our veteran communities and restore the dignity and support that has been taken from veterans after years of neglect and disservice.

Thank you for your time.

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