

September 9, 2019

The Honorable Mark Takano
Chairman
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives
B234 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Phil Roe, M.D.
Ranking Member
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives
102 Cannon House Office Building
Washington D.C. 20515

RE: Written Testimony of Congressman Adriano Espaillat (NY-13) submission to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs for Member Day in the 116th Congress.

Dear Chairman Takano and Ranking Member Roe,

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to submit this testimony and share with the Committee on Veterans' Affairs priorities of mine and my constituents in New York's 13th Congressional District. Over the past several months, including this most recent district work period, my staff and I have heard from veterans throughout Manhattan and the Bronx that I am privileged to represent.

As a first order of business, I wish to voice my support for the Housing and Urban Development Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program. I have long supported increased funding for this vital program, administered jointly by the Veterans Administration and Department of Housing and Urban Development, and I want to encourage the Veterans Affairs Committee to work to expand eligibility and provision of HUD-VASH. Many veterans in my district receive their care at the James J. Peters VA Medical Center in the Bronx, and several case managers and health care providers have told my staff and me that many service-members they see are homeless and face threats to their health and well-being. Furthermore, without a home address, many veterans cannot receive their earned benefits, only worsening their plight. The current funding of HUD-VASH allows for too few to meet demand. I understand that housing exists in a limited market, but a great number of veterans who have sought support through the HUD-VASH program desperately need this assistance in order to be successful. I respectfully ask that the Committee continue to make this and addressing veteran homelessness in general a top priority.

Also, in the discussion of housing, it has come to my attention that the VA Home Loan Program (Veterans Benefits Administration) has only issued or guaranteed only two home loans in Manhattan and just 21 in all five boroughs of New York City. This is a tool that is underutilized and not widely advertised to veterans, service members, and their families. I would ask the committee to examine this disparity and explore a means to broaden the eligibility not just to single or multi-family homes, but also co-ops that are found more widely in densely populated metropolitan areas such as New York City.

Finally, many servicemembers and veterans who served on or after September 11, 2001 and have returned to civilian life have been frustrated that landlords and housing management companies in certain instances are not accepting the Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) granted to active and non-active duty individuals enrolled in higher education or job-training programs as a proof of income for a new lessee. While this is anecdotal and not a uniform standard of rejection, I know that even one instance is too many, especially when it comes to the benefit and stability that housing provides. Even in New York City, where the Commission on Human Rights and Department of Veterans' Services have made it abundantly clear that the BAH afforded through the *Post 9/11 G.I. Bill* is comparable to any other, "lawful source of income"^[1], I would ask that the Committee continue its vigilance and oversight of this issue to make sure that this does not become a pervasive trend.

I again thank both Chairman Takano and Ranking Member Roe for the opportunity to submit my testimony. Given the breadth of vitally important issues before the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, I am heartened that you have made a commitment to hear from colleagues who serve on other committees and listen to their concerns. Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to working with you to address these issues.

Sincerely,

Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress

^[1] The New York City Administrative Code Title 8: Civil Rights (§ 8-102 Definitions.): The term "lawful source of income" includes income derived from social security, or any form of federal, state or local public assistance or housing assistance including section 8 vouchers.; § 8-107 Unlawful discriminatory practices