

**STATEMENT OF REP. DEREK KILMER (WA-06)
BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS, MEMBER DAY**

JUNE 22, 2023

Good morning, Chair. I'd appreciate a moment of your time to discuss the Housing America's Veterans and Ensuring they have Needed Services Act, or as we call it, the HAVENS Act. I've been honored to partner with my good colleague from South Carolina, Representative Mace, in leading this bipartisan effort.

Look, we've got a serious problem with veteran homelessness in our country. Right now, over 37,000 of our brave veterans are without a home. Despite veterans only constituting about six percent of our total population, they make up eight percent of those experiencing homelessness. It's heart-wrenching to see these folks, many of whom are battling tough challenges like PTSD, social isolation, unemployment, or substance abuse. The pandemic has only exacerbated these issues, revealing that our system for assisting homeless veterans falls short.

That's where our HAVENS Act steps in. This legislation proposes a shift away from the traditional congregate care facilities, which unfortunately have been disease hotspots during the COVID-19 pandemic, towards the creation of tiny home villages. But it's not just about the homes; these villages will provide essential wraparound services on-site, including counseling, job training, and financial management. This model has been proven successful – residents gain a sense of security and independence, while the available services cultivate a caring community, equipping individuals with the support they need to secure permanent housing. Importantly, these communities see fewer residents return to homelessness than conventional shelters.

The HAVENS Act calls for a six-year pilot program through the VA's existing Grants and Per Diem program. We'll allocate five grants totaling \$10 million each year to construct these tiny home villages. The funding comes from the current GPD budget, filling in its case management gaps and expanding access to crucial resources for our veterans.

And it's not just about housing – it's about sustainable housing. Preference will be given to grant applicants who use energy-efficient building materials, such as cross-laminated timber. Plus, the Act mandates improved tracking of outcomes for homeless veterans, ensuring we continue to focus on those who may otherwise be overlooked.

Secretary McDonough said it best when he stated that the term "homeless veteran" should not exist in our vocabulary. Our HAVENS Act is a leap forward in making that a reality. I urge you to support this critical legislation.

Thank you.