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Testimony of
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The Salvation Army in the United States
before the
U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Veterans' Affairs
Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity
“Transitional Housing Reform: Examining the Future of the VA Grant and Per Diem Program”
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Good morning, Chairman Levin, Ranking Member Moore, and distinguished members of the subcommittee. It is an honor to appear before you today on behalf of The Salvation Army concerning the Veterans Affairs' Grant and Per Diem Program (GPD) and its future role in serving veterans experiencing homelessness.

Ever since General John J. Pershing asked The Salvation Army to send its personnel to the front lines in France during World War I, it has been our privilege to provide support, encouragement, and assistance to those on active service, to those who have served, and to their families. We do so because, as an international movement, The Salvation Army is an evangelical part of the universal Christian Church. Our message is based on the Bible, and our ministry is motivated by the love of God. Our mission is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to meet human needs in His name without discrimination. To that end, The Salvation Army serves literally hundreds of thousands of veterans every year through our more than 7,200 locations in virtually every zip code. This includes shelters, drug and alcohol rehabilitation centers, community programs, food pantries, and job training programs.

We deem it an honor to walk alongside veterans striving to attain stability, achieve more for themselves and their families, and continue to make our nation stronger. Earlier this year, the Annual Homelessness Assessment Report announced an 11% decline in veterans' homelessness at the 2021 point-in-time count. We rejoiced at this good news, as it reflected the result of effective intergovernmental and non-profit collaboration. To reduce further the number of veterans experiencing homelessness, our GPD program leaders and I share information on emerging trends, the impact of federal COVID pandemic response measures, and we recommend future actions for the VA GPD program.

At the present time, The Salvation Army operates across the country with an average of over 900 GPD beds and over 50 Transition in Place residences. In August 2022, The Salvation Army received \$3.4 million in Capital Grants.

Over the past three years, the emerging trends we have observed are:

- increasingly higher rates of clients with mental illness, dual-diagnosis, and Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome;
- much longer stays than expected year over year;
- a rise in older veterans entering GPD with chronic/terminal health issues that require higher levels of care; and
- limited availability of affordable housing for eligible veterans to obtain long-term housing.

In response to the COVID pandemic, increased federal subsidies enabled veterans to safely reside in motels or hotels. Veterans in shared housing were able to obtain single rooms. New program funding made it possible for The Salvation Army to obtain additional PPE, hire temporary cleaning staff, and purchase bus passes to provide individual transportation. Unfortunately, at the same time, veterans' access to rehabilitation services in many locations decreased during the pandemic.

After a national survey of Salvation Army GPD programs the most critical and recognizable future GPD needs are:

- expanded mental health services, trauma-informed care, and substance abuse rehabilitation;
- increased flexibility for veterans to transfer between GPD service models to better meet their needs;
- additional opportunities for VA caseworkers to meet with veterans in the evenings and outside of normal work hours;
- additional consultation with GPD providers about veterans' health needs, their ability to care for themselves, and more support for Aging and Disability assessments; and
- further grants for transportation, technical training and education, and on-going mental health resources further veterans' self-sufficiency.

One of the most significant events on The Salvation Army's calendar is a ceremony held each year at the grave of General Pershing at Arlington National Cemetery. Planned with the kind cooperation and support of the Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, that occasion pays tribute to the man who initiated The Salvation Army's relationship with the military, and it always includes the testimony of a veteran who has escaped homelessness and addiction. I look forward to that ceremony every year, because regardless of who has been slated to serve as the guest speaker, it is the veteran's testimony which invariably proves to be the most important, the most powerful, and the most inspirational element of the program.

Mr. Chairman, we want more such testimonies. So, The Salvation Army is committed to doing everything it can to help veterans, and we look forward to working together with Congress to improve their opportunities and outcomes.

This concludes my testimony, and I welcome any questions you or the members of the subcommittee might have.