Testimony of Ray Carville, Public Affairs Manager, Veterans Inc., before the House Committee on Veteran Affairs, Subcommittee on Economic Development, June 29, 2024.

Chairman Van Orden, Ranking Member Levin, and distinguished members of this most Honorable Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Ray Carville, and I am the Public Affairs Manager for Veterans Inc., a non-profit organization that has been providing supportive services to veterans and their families since 1991. Veterans Inc. provides dozens of holistic, wrap-around services to veterans and their families across thirty-three separate federal, state, and local grants. We are the largest provider of supportive services for veterans in all six New England states, Montana, and North Dakota.

I am also a service-connected combat veteran, having served as an Army Human Intelligence Collector in Iraq, and as a military contractor in Afghanistan.

Today, I would like to discuss the critical importance of utilizing data intuitively and creatively to better reach homeless and at-risk veterans, providing them with housing and comprehensive supportive services. Effective data management is essential for several reasons: **it helps keep program management costs low**, maximizes staff time in the field, ensures funding goes to geographic areas where it is most needed, and identifies emerging trends in homelessness demographics and geographic density.

I strongly believe that investing in these systems and processes now will yield enormous cost efficiencies in the long run. To achieve this, we must focus on several key areas.

There are four opportunities to dramatically improve the provision of services to homeless veterans. All of them impact, and are impacted by, data.

I. **Finding the homeless or at-risk veteran** and providing them services.
II. **Managing the data relationship with the client-veteran** to maximize the likelihood of a successful outcome (i.e., reintegration of the veteran into their community).
And analyzing that data acquired from veterans to predict trends in homelessness, identify service gaps, visualize population densities, maximize coverage areas etc.
III. **Reporting data in a more efficient way.**
IV. **Geographically appropriate allocation of funding for veterans' homeless services.**

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I. Finding the Homeless or At-risk veteran.

- **Data Acquisition: We Need GIS Mapping Software**
  - Old methodologies of outreaching veterans no longer work for Post 9/11 veterans.
  - Solution: Behavioral Modelling of Post 9/11 veterans, visualized on GIS mapping software.

Traditional methodologies of outreaching veterans to provide them services are no longer efficient in their application to Post 9/11 veterans. For instance, veterans of former eras are far more likely to patronize VFWs, American Legions, and other organizations than veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan.

We need a need new methodology, a way of planning our disbursement of resources, which is based on the Behavioral Modelling of the post-9/11 veteran demographic.

The best way to understand who a population is, where they are, where they might be in the future, what their needs are and might be, **is to incorporate multiple layers of data in a format that is visually accessible.**

Think – Google Maps.
Now, Google Maps is not the solution I am advocating for, but it is a useful illustrator here.

Google Maps is a type of **Graphic Information System (GIS)**. A GIS enables one to take things like street addresses and business names and put them on a map of your hometown so that you can see which restaurant is closest to your workplace, for instance.

Effective data acquisition involves having a comprehensive data collection methodology, modeling and understanding of your target demographic, process training for front-line providers, and the use of targeted **GIS mapping/outreach software** to support outreach activities. Behavioral modeling of post-9/11 veterans can assess patterns of activity and likely intersections with service providers, allowing us to find veterans more effectively.

Drawing from my background as a former Army 35M Human Intelligence Collector, I see a strong correlation between human intelligence collection principles and veteran outreach, engagement, management, and client cultivation. Incorporating behavioral modeling into a software platform that can visualize this data geographically, such as through 'heat' maps, can optimize our outreach efforts and reduce staff outreach costs.

We can incorporate this functionality from many pre-existing software programs without reinventing the wheel. **Palantir** is an incredibly useful battlefield system employed by our military for conducting the mapping and network analysis of complex systems, like local populations in a forward area.

Software *like* Palantir would be incredibly useful to track network interactions of veterans with other veterans, community events/interaction opportunities, service providers, VA, community-based organizations, and multiple grants along with the geographic dispersion of all of them.

There are other, simpler programs like local election canvassing software that can be used handheld in the field on a digital device. I have worked with **MiniVAN** in the past for a City Councilor's election campaign. On my phone I could visualize all my targets for the day, have it plan the most efficient route for me to travel to them all, linked each personality's file to their location, which enabled me to input data about each interaction with a voter in near-real time.

A bespoke software platform that integrates Client Relationship Management (CRM) software with GIS maps can offer several benefits:

- **Client Density Analysis:** Understanding where the highest concentrations of veterans are located.
- **Pattern Analysis:** Identifying trends in veteran movement and service utilization.

- **Service Density Analysis:** Ensuring service providers are optimally placed.
- **Geographic Trend Modeling:** Forecasting future needs based on current data.

Further capabilities such as geofencing, geotagging, network analysis, and handheld interoperability enable outreach providers to identify their assigned catchment areas and track/update resident clients in near real-time with greater data input efficiency and accuracy.

As mentioned above, MiniVAN is an existing canvassing software for street-level election outreach that possesses much of the functionality we require. The military's Palantir system offers excellent GIS and network mapping functionality that could be repurposed to build complex networks of service providers, community-based organizations, government entities, clients, and localized resources.

Palantir took a month to learn, MiniVAN took 15 minutes. These examples represent the spectrum of system complexity we could consider. I am certain that by incorporating aspects of both these software platforms we can create a simple yet revolutionary way to expand our services to veterans while lowering costs to the grant and the taxpayer.

Finding the veteran is the *sin qua non* of providing that veteran services**. GIS mapping software is critical.** The use of the latest scientific thinking about demographic modelling, with innovative mapping software will enable front-line, on-the-ground providers to meet the veteran where they are, and not where they were 30 years ago.

Stopping Veteran Homelessness Before It Starts – Transition Assistance Program (TAP)

The best, most cost effective, and easiest place to find a veteran is at the moment they become one. The Transition Assistance Program should be conducted for the soon-to-be-veteran not at their military post of departure, but in their intended domiciliary state of return.

TAP program ingestion and data acquisition at this domiciliary point of return would enable data collection of every transitioning veteran in the region they will settle with the most updated and relevant personnel and contact information.

An initial assessment of the veteran's needs – for housing, employment, and other supports – would enable a seamless provision of those supports *prior to the veteran every intersecting with the cycle of chronic homelessness*.

TAP education, information, networking, and support structure would be far more useful to the transitioning veteran by being relevant to the area to which they are transitioning, and not the area they will likely never see again.

Let us get ahead of the problem of veteran homelessness by addressing it at the moment the veteran becomes a veteran.

It is far, far less expensive to keep someone housed in the housing they have, than it is to rectify their homelessness.

II. Managing and analyzing the data relationship with the client-veteran.

Problem: Massive inefficiencies in ad hoc local client record keeping systems lead to duplication errors, cost grants critical funds, and overwhelm Case Managers' time, all while failing to enable cross-referrals of those clients between supportive grant program silos, and without any mechanism to efficiently report program data to grantors.

Solution: Data management and analysis enabled by **Client Relationship Management Software (CRM, e.g., Salesforce)**

Veteran homeless service providers desperately require a proper data management system to track their clients. **This lack of proper technological resources like cloud-based CRM software incurs the largest single unnecessary cost in the provision of homeless services.**

Salesforce is the market leader in Client Relationship Management software (CRM). Acquiring a CRM system for managing the provision of services to homeless and at-risk veterans is critical to the success of the overall endeavor and a very fiscally responsible solution to pursue.

Clients' records could be available, updateable, referable, transferable, quantifiable, analyzable, and reportable all from one system.

- Critical for eliminating time costs and duplication errors associated with paper files and ad hoc localized computer files.
- Enables robust cross-referrals between service provider programs (housing – E&T – supportive services – suicide prevention/behavioral health), which increases the likelihood of successful long term client outcomes (lowering long-term costs of chronic homelessness) while providing an economy of scale and economy of proximity to services.
- Front line providers are positioned to be the most agile responders to changing demographics and community needs, when they can visualize the data that they have collected. CRM software together with GIS software enables accurate catchment visualization.
- Critical for lowering program costs by enhancing case manager retention and productivity. Burnout, turnover, hiring and retraining costs – all weigh on programs' ability to cost-efficiently deliver services.
    - A unified and useful tool that increased efficiency and support for Outreach teams' needs lowers long-term costs and increases provider efficiency.

Veterans Inc. Case Study – Data inefficiencies due to lack of cloud-based CRM system.

Duplicative Data Fields

A Case Manager is assigned to each client entering a Veterans Inc. service or program. After an initial review and determination of eligibility, enrollment forms must be completed. Currently, **between twelve (12) and twenty-four (24) forms** must be completed for each enrollment.

Because none of the forms are integrated with one another, and often exist across multiple formats (Word, Excel, PDF), duplicate data must be entered repetitively. For example:

Examples of *minimum* input for one client in one grant

Client name	11 times
Date	10 times
SSN	5 times
Address	5 times
Contact information	11 times
Phone number	3 times
Case Manager Name	7 times
Client signature	8 times

Each duplicative input of data increases the likelihood of a transcription error, and extrapolated over hundreds of clients, equates to hundreds of wasted personnel hours.

Additionally, every action between a Case Manager and a client requires documentation of that action in at least two separate and nonintegrated forms (Word, Excel, and possibly PDF) followed by manually placing the printed, scanned, and updated forms into client files.

And yet despite this effort to enroll a veteran client in a single program, that client's information and potential eligibility for other services and programs is not visible in other grant "silos." Clients cannot be cross-referred between mutually supportive grants in the same organization. Peer reviewed research clearly shows the likelihood of successful outcomes in reintegrating any homeless person improved by the provision and inclusion of wrap-around, holistic supportive services.

When grant programs are audited by grantors as part of the natural grant cycle, the decentralized nature of the current client management system means service providers like Veterans Inc. require hundreds of personnel hours spent tracking down relevant documents across multiple computers and accounts, physical files, folders, and binders, all stored and enumerated in compliance with ad hoc local procedures. A fully integrated cloud-based data management program could reduce audit compliance time from hundreds of personnel hours to a click of a button.

Lastly, reducing enrollment time enables Case Managers to spend more time with veterans. If 30 case managers each enroll an average of six new clients a month, approximately 135 to 405 person/hours would become available to provide services to veterans.

Multiple Grant Enrolment Duplications

Currently we provide services to veterans under thirty-three (33) grants from multiple sources (VA, DOL, CODE, State, HUD). Client enrolment for a single grant takes 45 to 60 minutes. But the client must be entirely re-enrolled in any other program they might be eligible for.

If roughly 75% of our clients are receiving services under more than one grant, then Case Managers need to duplicate entire enrolments 75% of the time.

Case Manager Retention as a Cost Issue and Grant Performance Issue

Case manager retention, and the previously mentioned isolation and unavailability of client records across different grant record silos, are two root causes of service providers not achieving grant objectives.

A modern and intuitive cloud-based CRM software platform would provide the tools Case Managers desperately need to succeed in their role and reduce the organizational costs of rehiring and training, all while maximizing each Case Manager's career productivity.

Over the last three years at Veterans Inc., the average new case manager across all grants was employed for 7 to 8 months. The major reason given for leaving the organization was "burnout", but more specifically, inefficient, laborious, repetitive, and unnecessary duplication of client records; lack of any training on a CRM system; and the inability to enroll clients across grants.

The national average of replacing an employee costs 20% of the employee's salary. A case manager, at a salary of $54,000 will usually require $10,800 in advertising, interviewing, vetting, and initial training.

Additionally, the average new case workers take 3 to 6 months to achieve proficiency and reach expected productivity levels. At a salary of $4500/month, this equates to an *additional* investment, beyond the $10,800 cost of employee procurement of between $13,500 to $27,000 to acquire a productive case manager.

By extrapolating those numbers over a three-year grant period, Veterans Inc. will have to hire at least four (4) new case managers for each vacant case manager position, and cost Veterans Inc. $97,200 to $151,200 for each position, to achieve 4 to 16 months of productivity per person.

These scenarios are representative of the challenges faced by *every* organization conducting complex outreach to homeless and at-risk veterans.

III. Compliance/Regulatory Assistance: Federal assistance with streamlining reporting processes.

Streamlining reporting processes to grantors and federal assistance can significantly reduce the cost inefficiencies currently plaguing homeless provider programs. Current local ad hoc processes, with significant regional and program variations and requirements, create massive cost inefficiencies in homeless provider programs that drive up costs.

For instance, Congress might consider reviewing the benefits of a homogenized Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), as states like Massachusetts alone have five different systems.

Although Congress created the requirement for the use of HMIS, they did not specify a particular system or format to be used, only the demographic information that should be collected.

Additionally, a single point of access to file reports for all Federal veteran homeless programs would dramatically reduce the cost of reporting. Regardless of the source of funding (HUD, DOL, VA) report formats should be intuitive, interoperable, and homogenized.

Data mapping to different report formats

Accurate and timely reporting of field and program data is crucial to all aspects of the veteran service provision cycle, including resource allocation and program efficiency maximization. This includes program audits and regularly scheduled reporting, which currently take hundreds of person-hours to comply with but could be simplified with the touch of a button.

In the absence of the above suggested homogenized end reporting formats, enabling individual providers to **"map"** their CRM client files **directly to disparate reporting formats** would save enormous amounts of time and money.

Enabling report **"mapping"** at the user level is critical to connecting the data a provider collects with the multiple formats in which the service provider must issue grantor compliance reports.

Example of Report Mapping:

- **Homeless Service Provider X** is completing statutorily required reporting to three different grants.
- **X's** cloud-based CRM program has all of Veteran Client Y's personal information, such as first name, last name, and social security number.
- In X's CRM program, all **Last Names** are stored in **Field #2**.
- In **Grant 1**, all Last Names are reported in **Field #4**
- In **Grant 2**, all Last Names are reported in **Field #6**

- In **Grant 3**, all Last Names are reported in **Field #7**
- **Provider X** utilizes the mapping function on their CRM software to automatically populate their local Last Name field in the appropriate end reporting Last Name field. (#2 to #4, #2 to #6, #2 to #7)
- Every time subsequent reports are run, fields are now populated automatically.
- This enables virtually automatic uploads without incredibly cost-expensive manual entry into each report.

Providers must be relied upon to help define Homelessness categories

Providers should be included in a process to reassess how homeless veterans are categorized and reported. It is far more useful for accurate, granular data collection if those on the front lines define terms of art like emergency shelter, transitional housing, permanent housing, and permanent supportive housing. For example, there is no utility in assuming that a veteran sleeping in their car or on a neighbor's couch is housed in any real sense. They are functionally homeless, yet their needs differ from veterans in congregate care emergency shelters. Achieving "functional zero" in veteran homelessness cannot ethically ignore the functionally homeless. **Homeless veterans will continue to impact system costs until they are fully reintegrated.**

IV. Modernization of resource distribution methodology: Defense Travel Service reimbursement rates as a model

The current blanket reimbursement rates for veteran program services across disparate geographic regions are inefficient and detrimental to service provision. Since the lapse of COVID-era funding for programs like Grant Per Diem, providers across the country who provide homelessness services to veterans are facing financial insolvency and organizational collapse.

At the June 2024 conference for the National Coalition of Homeless Veterans, I spoke with several providers who were incurring unsustainable $200,000-a-month losses since the reversion of the GPD rate to pre-Covid, pre-inflation, pre-supply chain problem, rates.

In the meantime, multiple GPD disbursement proposals have been made to redress the insufficiency of a single base domiciliary rate payment.

We can save significant funds by accurately assessing the necessary funding for each program area. Fortunately, we already have a system for categorizing localized differences in cost of living: **the Defense Travel Service sets and revises DOD reimbursement rates for every zip code in the United States.**

For example, an E-5 without dependents at Los Angeles Air Force Base in California is eligible for $2865 per month, whereas an E-5 without dependents in rural Alexandria, Louisiana is entitled to $939 per month. The **ratio** between these rates ($2865/$939 = 3.051) can be used to set rates for other locations. If a rural Louisiana service provider

receives $65 per day for the GPD program, a service provider in downtown Los Angeles would need $198.31. This approach allows us to adjust funding based on local cost variations accurately.

- Blanket reimbursement rates for veteran program services across wildly disparate geographic regions should intuitively seem inefficient.
- We can save a lot of money if we have a useful way of assessing how much funding is necessary for every program area.
- We need a better system for categorizing localized differences in cost of living.
- The great news is we already have one!
- The Defense Travel Service sets the reimbursement rates for every single zip code in the United States.
    - To whit – if I am receiving Vocational Rehabilitation benefits under Chapter 31, my basic allowances for my housing are determined by the zip code where I go to school.
- An E-5 without dependents at Los Angeles Air Force Base in California is eligible for $2865 per month. The second highest out of all air force bases.
- An E-5 without dependents in rural Alexandria, Louisiana is entitled to $939 per month.
- The ratio between the number of dollars you send to Los Angeles and the amount you send to rural Louisiana is ($2865/$939) = 3.051/1
    - Set the rate in one place, and you know the rate for every other zip code.
    - If you give rural Louisiana service provider $65/day for GPD, you know a service provider in downtown LA will need $198.31.
    - Rurally located veterans will offset metropolitan veterans, but the degree is uncertain without further statistical analysis.
- We have this wonderful data already, free of charge.

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In conclusion, investing in data-driven solutions is crucial for enhancing our outreach to homeless and at-risk veterans. **And it will save the United States taxpayer money**. Programs will operate more efficiently, reach more veterans, have more successful reintegration outcomes, with greater Case Manager retention, and report to grantors with a higher degree of responsiveness and compliance.

By adopting Client Relationship Management software and GIS map overlays, employing Behavioral Modelling of our post-9/11 veteran population, and utilizing established cost-of-living data, we can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our programs, ensuring that veterans receive the support they need, where they are, today, and not where they were 30 years ago. I urge the Committee to consider these data-driven strategies to optimize resource allocation and enhance the impact of our efforts.

For further program cost offsets, a successful software system for managing veteran outreach would be of great utility to *all* organizations conducting outreach. There may even be opportunities for academic partnerships to develop this system. Additionally, there may be a way to recoup

federal program costs through end-user licensing fees for this proposed outreach management software program.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss this important matter. Should this Honorable Committee request, I will provide any additional data, reports, testimony, or papers as may be needed to assist in informing this important effort to modernize and maximize the way we use data to provide services to homeless and at-risk veterans. This would include peer-reviewed research and Best Practices established by reputable and established thought leaders in the field.

I know what this looks like. We can build it. Let me help.

Thank you for your time and attention. I look forward to your questions and to working together to better serve our nation's veterans.

Forward Always!