

My name is Michael Raposa, and I am the CEO of St. Vincent de Paul CARES, Inc.

Since 2011 we have been the lead agency leading the charge to end veteran homelessness in the West Central Florida area – including the counties of Pasco, Pinellas, Hillsborough and Polk. In 2018 we added the counties of Citrus, Hernando, Sumter and Lake to our service area.

When we embarked on the mission, the mere concept of ending veteran homelessness for any sub-population was a dream that many felt unrealistic. To that end, I was summoned at one point to a local County administrator's office who requested that I stop talking about it publicly; stating that the commissioners thought that I was crazy.

I understood where he was coming from – as the number of unsheltered/sheltered veterans was approximately 2,850 in that County. I am pleased to say that the number is significantly less than 200 today ... 164 last time I looked. We have made significant progress – much thanks to substantial congressional appropriations over the years.

The creating and continued funding of the Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program under the Veterans Administration has completely transformed homeless services delivery nationwide. The data continues to show that the majority of veterans on the street can be moved into housing immediately and, with wrap-around supportive services, thrive. The length of time between being on the street and housing has declined from nearly 180 days when we began – to near 40 days today.

In addition to the positive impact that SSVF has had on the clients and households served – the greatest impact has been on the local communities. The program has proved that a systemic approach to ending homelessness across the US can/will produce a dramatic decline in homelessness. In the Tampa Bay region alone, we have seen the dramatic decline in communities (as illustrated above) – whereas other portions of our community where the system is less developed; the numbers remain stagnate – or continue to increase. The substantial foundation laid by SSVF is now able to be easily replicated with other subpopulations.

To that end – during the month of August Pinellas County saw the number of homeless families with children seeking shelter and housing intervention at zero for four days. While this may seem meager – it is substantial considering the number has been over 200 at various points.

So, the rapid access to affordable housing, supportive stabilization services, community organization and coordination, and strong advocacy for change have proven to be the perfect combination.

The greatest obstacle being faced across the nation today is the availability of affordable housing. We, as a nation, need to adapt services to meet the changing conditions it has created. The first is the need to expand the affordable housing supply. VA's Enhanced Use Lease (EUL) program allows for the development of housing on underutilized or unused VA properties, but there are no capital funds associated with the program to develop targeted

rental housing or permanent supportive housing. Allowing the EUL program to offer both capital resources as well as the ability to collaborate with the HUD-VASH Program on Project-Based HUD-VASH, in a one-stop procurement, would eliminate the need for developers to seek out multiple sources of capital and operating assistance. This would also help integrate Project-Based HUD-VASH into all EUL development.

Within HUD, there are cross-cutting HUD regulatory requirements (e.g., Davis Bacon or Environmental Review requirements) that are applied to programs and projects regardless that offer rental assistance or operating assistance (e.g. Section 811 Project Based Rental Assistance or Section 8 Project Based Vouchers) not capital sources that support housing development. HUD may want to consider conducting a review of the cross-cutting regulatory requirements to see if any of these requirements could be eliminated to reduce barriers/burden on developers of multi-family rental housing or permanent supportive housing, as well as the time it takes for a project to come to fruition. Eliminating or reducing some of these requirements would both lower developer costs to comply and improve the efficiency of the development process (i.e. reduce time to develop an affordable multi-family development). As a result, these reforms may increase housing developers, especially for-profit entities, participating in these HUD programs.

Two promising practices being initiated by SSVF should be supported and expanded.

- Its Rapid Resolution seeks to identify available housing that veterans may access by moving in with family or friends. Through a process of conflict mediation and limited financial assistance, Rapid Resolution helps homeless and imminently at-risk veterans reconcile sufficiently so that these relationships can become housing resources. This avoids the trauma of homelessness for these households and creates a new untapped housing resource. SSVF has supported this national initiative by training grantees on mediation techniques and creating the programmatic framework to make this initiative possible.
- A second SSVF initiative is known as shallow subsidies. Shallow subsidies offer a fixed rental subsidy of up to 35 percent of the Fair Market Rent (as published by HUD) for 2 years. As the subsidy is fixed for 2 years, participants are strongly incentivized to increase income as their rental subsidy would not be impacted by income growth. SSVF has partnered with DOL's Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP) to co-enroll participants with the goal of reach economic self-sufficiency by the end of SSVF's 2-year shallow subsidy period. Currently offered in 10 CoCs, we would like to see this resource expanded into other communities with inadequate supplies of affordable housing.

Finally, we here in Florida continue to see the states affordable housing trust fund being swept by our state legislature. 2019 was the first time (in many years) that we saw the Governor and Senate on the same page to release a historic portion of fund. However, with House opposition – no great change happened. We desperately need more advocacy from Washington.