



June 14, 2023

Chairman Van Orden, Ranking Member Levin, I submit this statement for the record to the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity's Legislative Hearing on behalf of Nation's Finest which has provided Grant and Per Diem services in the Northern California VAMC catchment area in Sacramento and also within the San Francisco VAMC in Santa Rosa and Eureka since its inception. Our organization currently is operating 126 beds, 6 of which are special needs for women veterans, and have been able to offer increased clinical support to our GPD veterans with 83% participating in groups and 59% attending individual Mental Health sessions. Additionally, 83% were able to maintain their sobriety while in our GPD programs as a direct result of this increase in clinical engagement.

We thank you for the bipartisan work your Committee partook in to enhance the per diem rate during the public health emergency. During the health emergency, our nightly per diem rate increased to \$132.27 in the Northern California VAMC and \$144.42 in the San Francisco VAMC per night from our pre-pandemic rate of \$48.50 This allowed us to modify rooms for enhanced safety procedures, provided safer meal options (single serve), allow clients to stay in hotels as they waited for test results or were too high risk for a community environment. We were able to hire more staff (clinical and case management) to try and keep people working as time off for staff and their family increased dramatically and ultimately continue to provide the much-needed support to our veterans. We were able to do some maintenance on our facilities that were in desperate need of repair to improve the residential experience for veterans staying in our programs.

The recent decrease dropped our rate to \$64.52. This has required us to decrease our staff that added stability, cut clinical hours that were a needed addition and unfortunately go over budget on items such as food and activities. We have to cut back on any repairs that are needed to our facilities and often triage what problem is addressed first (if at all). We appreciate the intent of H.R. 3848, to restore section 4201 assistance, which has been critical, and to increase the per diem rate to \$133%. However, having this ceiling on funding would still require us to cut back on the services that enable a veteran the opportunity to change their lives and become successful. Services such as mental health support require highly paid professional staff, serving high quality, nutritious meals, and maintaining a facility to provide a safe and comfortable environment are all aspects that will once again become unaffordable.

We support access to reimbursement in H.R. 491 to allow us to restore levels of services and supports the veterans we serve have earned, and the level of services that are required to successfully operate this grant.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact us at 833-468-9676.

Best Regards,

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