

**STATEMENT**

**OF**

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**BEFORE THE**

**COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
SENATE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS  
AND EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS**

**REGARDING**

**HOMELESS VETERANS**

**FEBRUARY 6, 2012**

Senator Baker, members of the committee, Veterans, Advocates, good morning. Representing The Philadelphia Veterans Multi-Service & Education Center, I thank you for the opportunity to address this committee on the topic of homeless Veterans.

You have given me the ability to speak today as a representative example of non-profit Veteran service providers across the state. This is a chance not given to many but one you have determined to be important in the deliberation of the topic of homelessness among Veterans.

In today's climate and at this juncture we face many challenges which I hope will lead us to continued discussions. What are we capable of achieving within the confines of the law, our fiscal responsibilities and the duty to represent our citizens?

While you have continued contact and input from the Pennsylvania War Council and the Pennsylvania Veterans Commission, I see this as an opportunity to speak from the perspective of those who have daily contact with Veterans seeking answers...Veterans seeking change...Veterans seeking direction...Veterans reaching for another chance.

We are those who spend our working hours "where the rubber meets the road", so to speak. We work every day with Veterans, and many of them are homeless. Private sector Veteran specific service providers can prove to be great contributors to the development process of possibilities.

Secretary Shinseki has laid out a plan and developed initiatives and partnership in order to end Veteran homelessness in five years. We're about half way there on the VA calendar. And while not so long ago the number of homeless Veterans was thought to be well over a quarter of a million, today the VA reports it to be 67,000. It is extraordinary how the numbers have dropped in such a short period of time. If we are to accept this number as truth and many don't, the timeline of the VA should be no problem.

In 2010, homeless Veterans accounted for 1 in 150 veterans and about 1 in 9 Veterans were living in poverty. While there are volumes written and some debate on the cause of Veteran homelessness, none can dispute that it does exist.

Overall, the administration reports that homelessness among veterans dropped 12 percent during the year-long period ended in January 2011. Still, the issue of homelessness among veterans looms large. Reports indicate that veterans are 50 percent more likely to be homeless than the average American.

In addition, homeless veterans are more likely to die on the streets than their non-veteran counterparts and tend to remain homeless for longer periods of time, according to another recent study, the 100,000 Homes Campaign of 2011. In this study, homeless veterans reported an average of nearly six years homeless, compared to four years among non-veterans. Among those who reported spending two or more years homeless, veterans reported an average of nearly nine years homeless, compared to just over seven for non-veterans. Age accounted for only part of this disparity. Length of homelessness matters because the longer people spend on the streets, the more health risks they tend to develop. Among the 62% of homeless veterans who reported two or more years of homelessness, over 61% reported a serious physical health condition, 55%

reported a mental health condition, 76% reported a substance abuse habit, and 32% reported all three. As a group, veterans were 11 percentage points more likely to suffer from at least one condition linked to increased risk of death among the homeless population, which means the men and women who risked their lives defending America may be far more likely to die on its streets. According to the recently released HUD, in its homeless Veteran Supplemental Report (AHAR), on a single night in January 2010, states that 76,329 Veterans were living in shelter and transitional housing (57%), or in unsheltered places (43%). However, during a 12 month period just prior to this count, 144,842 Veterans spent at least one night in a shelter or transitional program.

The January 2011, *Point in Time* Count joint report of the US Departments of Housing and Urban Development and Veterans Affairs, indicated that there was an estimated 1,392 reported homeless veterans in Pennsylvania.

And while the AHAR provides us a snapshot into the demographics of this unfortunate life existence, it must be remembered it is just that, a snapshot... without a wide angle lens. No *Point in Time* count will ever be any more than a quick “down and dirty” report in an attempt to find as many homeless as one can on a given night. No one can know the actual number. It’s impossible. We cannot reach into every corner of every city or town or rural countryside or for that matter every home or church mission. All we can do is draw conjecture and estimates from the homeless we do find, using this tactic.

Ironic as it seems, while the overall number of homeless Veterans has been identified as decreasing, the number of homeless women Veterans is increasing. Much can and has been said about the reason for this interesting statistic. In four years, according to a new Government Accountability Office report, the number of homeless veteran women more than doubled, rising to 3,328 in 2010 from 1,380 in 2006, But even as more veteran women are becoming homeless, the report found that the VA still isn't prepared to deal with it. Nearly a quarter of VA Medical Center coordinators surveyed for the report said they didn't have plans to temporarily house homeless women while those women wait for housing in other programs aimed at housing homeless veterans.

However, what’s also important is that these women Veterans are not overlooked in the development of services and assistance and that those in the position to do so understand homeless women Veterans. The report also found that nearly two-thirds of homeless female veterans are between the ages of 40 and 59 years old, many of them living with children. That's an especially large problem, seeing as 60 percent of the VA's Grant and Per Diem Programs that serve homeless women, a VA grant effort that gives community agencies funding to provide veterans with services, don't house children.

#### Housing First vs. Housing Ready

This is a major initiative within the homeless arena. It is also one that everyone is watching for outcomes. For some homeless, it will certainly work well, but not for all.

As you are well aware, not all the homeless Veterans are prepared for immediate housing. They lack abilities that we take for granted in our own lives. Besides the medical and mental health

disabilities many of them face, others haven't lived in independent housing for years. They lack the ability to appropriately care for their house, communicate with landlords, or resolve neighbor disputes. Some lack fundamental life skills, have never had a bank account or learned to budget their money. Some need fiduciaries. They have difficulty setting priorities. Some have no assurance of a steady sustainable income. I believe that all options for housing should be on the table to include transitional programs to address the shortfalls that may be identified on their road to a successful independent living situation. Setting them up for failure in permanent housing when they are not ready or prepared for its challenges will not solve anyone's problem and may be a set back for life. With this thought in mind, I would like to look at the ability and capacity that our State Veteran Home system may have in this regard and its role in programs for moving Veterans out of homelessness.

#### State Home Program for Homeless Veterans

A question to ask is, "If homeless Veterans are not nursing home candidates, should the state be housing them at all?" But one can also ask the question, "If we have identified a situation facing the Veterans in Pennsylvania, one we could address at some level of assistance, what is our duty to them within the Commonwealth?"

The federal government has invested in many homeless Veteran grants and subsidies throughout the states through various agencies, and it has made an impact. But in the end at what point do we, as a state, need to evaluate if we are capable of contributing to this effort for our citizen Veterans. Other states have seen that an investment in homeless Veteran programs has given them a solid play in reducing homelessness in their respective states. In those states where homeless Veterans were part of the general state home population, they felt that opening the state resources to the development a true program within the state home system for these Veterans eliminated a setting where the state was partner to an enabling process.

Many found they needed to begin by addressing the handicap they faced in creating this program; that of the designated state agency or department that oversaw the state Veterans homes. Some states needed to change the line of authority/compliance in order to develop and establish a programmatic homeless transitional residential program. Their current regulations would not permit this type of residential setting. With the change came the capability to move to the formulation of treatment reintegration programs. These programs have professional staff, defined lengths of stay, and a clean and sober environment. It now allows the state Veterans homes to carve out a portion of their domain for the purpose of initiating a vigorous program to address life choices, life skills, and a move to independent living in the community. These homes now exist as an option for homeless Veterans and it is a state investment for the reclaiming of their lives.

Of course, there are a number of variations on this program format. This deserves an investigation of how these various states restructured. Not all state homes in our PA system needs to provide this component. One thought may be to consider a reclamation component whereby a state home with a separate free standing building could be set aside and developed as a transitional residential program.

There is a segment of our Veteran population dealing with heavy baggage. It is our belief we must take ownership, to some degree, of the responsibility to assist homeless Veterans in this “home town” war... and that all possibilities should be investigated. I encourage you to have active conversation on this consideration as an adjunct to homeless Veteran state services and programs in the state home program.

### Employment

Veterans are also having a tougher time than ordinary Americans navigating the job market once they return home. The veteran unemployment rate was 13.1 percent in December compared to the national jobless rate of 8.5 percent, according to the Department of Labor.

Young military veterans saw little to celebrate in last week's much cheered unemployment report. Data released the same day by the Department of Labor revealed that one in three young veterans, between the ages of 18 and 24, were out of a job in the last quarter of 2011, an employment picture even worse than a year earlier, when one in five couldn't find work. Their situation is especially dire. This rate is more than double that of their civilian peers; the unemployment rate for all Americans age 18-24 actually decreased over the same time period.

Ted Daywalt, who operates [VetJobs.com](http://VetJobs.com) in Georgia, observes that most young unemployed veterans are part of the National Guard or the Reserves, and employers hesitate to hire them not because of weak résumés, but because of the increase in Pentagon calls for Reserve and Guard members to return to service. A new policy on call-ups implemented in 2007, combined with a law that requires companies to restore reservists to their jobs after they come home, means that employers are more reluctant than ever to hire veterans. He stated "An employer cannot run their business if their most critical asset, human capital, is being taken away for 12 to 24 months."

### New Veterans

Some Veterans come to us because they need help with their Veteran benefits and entitlements. This is expectedly true for our newer Veteran population. They don't know where to turn because “home” and friends aren't what they used to be before they went to war. They don't know why they don't fit back into the life they left.

If one compares the new war Veterans with those of the Vietnam War there are similarities. As I like to say, if you've been in a war you share a commonality with all others who have been in battle: commitment to duty and honor and leave no comrade behind. We recognize that fear and passion are known emotions to all. You also share loneliness, sometimes isolation, an unknown environment and culture, you see comrades and buddies die or gravely injured, and blood has the same dark smell as it has had throughout the ages...old and dark... This we share. This unites us no matter when we served. And you do not return from war unchanged. On some level it affects who we are...how we see the world around us...and ourselves in it.

But there are also dissimilar experiences. In Vietnam we served a defined period of service. Not so today. Troops were re-deployed again and again and again. They and their families faced the relief of returning home safely only to prepare for another tour of survival left to fate. This existence has gone on for years. Add to the mix those troops of our National Guard and Reserve

forces. These men and women were the salvation of the Department of Defense...and the American people. They were called up in a way they never imagined when they joined. This was to the relief of those who could have been eligible for a draft as we saw during the Vietnam era. And during these recent times we have seen an increase in suicides, domestic violence and sexual assaults. Overlay this with the personal casualties of war, the stress on family and marriage, the employment and housing markets, and the sense many have of somehow being a different person as we have the ingredients for a very difficult and challenging homecoming. This is certainly not to insinuate that all troops join the rank of Veteran with overwhelming issues to resolve. Many do find their way home to productive and successful lives. But even so...many do not.

The Veterans of America...the Veterans of our Commonwealth...have served us well. Many have given much...many have lost much...many are lost. Looking at the sacrifices of the “new” Veterans, the last thing we would want is to leave them without resource and assistance as they transition back to their communities, towns and cities. As we attempt to weigh the challenges they face we are in turn facing and accepting our role in the responsibility we have to contribute to their successful reintegration. We have the opportunity to make this as painless and timely as possible by shoring up the gaps we identify in the existing systems. We can find resources and develop a solid environment for moving from uniform to “civies” that will be the foundation of solid support for the Veterans of PA today and in the decades to come.

Our challenge is to identify the gaps on our way to discovering and implementing a plan to collaborate and coordinate these resources in the most effective, efficient, and fiscally responsible manner. This is a new age of Veteran and it requires us to re-think our approach and tap into our creativity, utilizing advocacy and partnerships to do so.

#### What we do

I represent a segment of the non-profit world dedicated to freely providing services and assistance to Veterans, men and women from all eras and in every life situation. Our agency has been in existence for over thirty years and was created initially by the federal government in response to the high unemployment rate among Vietnam Veterans. Our programs, enhancements and partnerships have enabled us to move through time meeting the ever-changing needs of Veterans. Our services are comprehensive, our staff is proficient, and we know “Veteran”. For this reason, and like many others in our position, we have been identified by the City of Philadelphia and sit at its table as contributors on behalf of Veterans, as we continue to fulfill our mission.

The great difficulty for any non-profit is funding. While we do have a donor base and receive contributions from Veteran Service Organizations and a large number of individuals sensitive to the needs of Veterans, this doesn't cover program and staff expenses. Our major program initiatives are primarily funded (87%) by federal agency (VA, HUD, DOL) grants. These are augmented by smaller foundation and non-profit grants (13%).

As background into the work that our Center does with homeless Veterans, I have inserted some data from the services and assistance that we have provided to these Veterans. A glimpse of our overall FY11 data shows that the total individual Veteran client visits were 22,747; total number

of *unique individual homeless* Veteran clients was 1056; and the total homeless Veteran client service hours were 77,360.

Our homeless Veterans programs include:

- A Day Service Program for Veterans still on the streets and in the shelters (The Perimeter)
  - FY11: *unique* individual homeless Veteran clients: 1056
  - FY11: homeless Veteran client service hours: 77,360
  - FY11: Veteran transport to VA, shelters, job interviews: 1010
  - FY11: Total meals served 31,340
- 95 bed homeless Veterans Transitional Residence for men (LZ II)
  - Opening in 1997, total male Veterans served: 1,310.
- 30 bed homeless Veterans Transitional Residence for women (The Mary E. Walker House)
  - Opening in 2005, total female Veterans served: 205
- 40 units of permanent HUD subsidized housing with case management for Veterans
- Federal Homeless Prevention Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP)
  - FY9-10: 334 placed into housing
  - FY11: 89 sustained with services & rental assistance
- Homeless Assistance Fund, Incorporated (HAFI)
- VA Supportive Services Grant for Veteran Families:
  - Awarded August 2011: 78 Veterans applied; 45 placed in housing
- Department of Labor Homeless Veterans Reintegration Training Program grants (HVRP)
  - Three awards: general homeless; homeless women specific; recently released incarcerated Veterans
- Partnership with Phila. VA Medical Center HUD/VASH voucher team
  - FY 10: 59 FY11: 27 Veteran Housing placements
- Other housing related services:
  - Provided furniture FY10: 60 Veterans. FY11: 76 Veterans
  - Food Assistance 208 veterans/families (food cupboards)
  - Legal Assistance via Philadelphia Homeless Advocacy Project

A significant portion of the help we offer to Veterans is not covered by the grants we receive. There are always gaps in funding.

#### The Cost of Lost Funding

The Governor's Veterans Outreach and Assistance Centers (GVOAC) were closed by order of the Governor as of January 31, 2009. The program helped veterans obtain benefits and was not a cost to Pennsylvania taxpayers. Operational since 1980, these five offices were funded through the Wagner-Peyser 7B grants through the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry from the U.S. Department of Labor.

Not well known was the fact that several Veteran specific service provider agencies were also receiving this funding in an effort to increase this devised Veteran service network. The Philadelphia Veterans Multi-Service & Education Center was one of these agencies.

The unspent money reclaimed from the program closures, was rerouted to other state programs, filling holes created by the state budget shortfalls in the wake of the economic downturn. Some had said this was a stunning shortsighted decision. And many editorials were written at the time, hoping the political environment would spurn a change in the decision. It didn't happen. And so the GVOAC went away.

With the elimination of Wagner-Peyser 7B grants and the GVOAC offices, it was felt Veterans could turn to other places for help. One option discussed were the individual county veterans' offices, historically understaffed and under funded, would take on their new task. Another was that of Career Link and the Department of Labor DVOP system. Here again, these hard working Veteran employees also had limitations in staff numbers and time to continue the vast amount of work performed by those who had previously been funded by the 7B grants. The Veterans lost.

As the result of this budgetary decision, our agency also had to lay off Veteran employees, just as did the GVOAC offices when the contracts for this funding were eliminated, only half way through the contract year. Consequently, we now continue to have no funding to assist the Veteran who is not homeless, but comes to our door in need of guidance, resources, direction, a job, some training, a competent resume, G.I. Bill assistance, entitlement information or to file a claim. This is what Wagner-Peyser did for us. We have been extraordinarily hard pressed to continue the services we offered under the 7B contract but the staff has taken it upon themselves to forge on with this vital work. Again, it is our mission. I offer the following example of our accomplishments.

Our 7B Contract (\$174,360) was terminated on December 31, 2009. From January 1, 2010 to December 31, 2010, **740** veterans inquired about or obtained services in the below categories, even though there was no funding to do so. In addition **410** veterans filed Disability Claims to include Upgrades, New Claims, and Appeals. From January 1, 2011 to December 31, 2011 **800** veterans also inquired about or obtained services in these categories. **404** veterans filed Disability Claims to include Upgrades, New Claims, and Appeals. In the past, all of these veterans would have been eligible to be processed for services under 7B. When the contract ended, services continued but veterans were processed under no grant funding stream.

Resume Writing- Request for DD214-Food Letters- Transportation and Clothing Request- Job Search Assistance-Medical Care Inquiries, Insurance and Social Security Inquiries, Counseling for Drug and Alcohol Abuse, Assistance with Legal Issues, Assistance with burials, head stones, and flags, assistance with filing for educational G.I Bill and vocational rehab benefits, home loan guarantees, business loans, assistance in placing elderly veterans in Senior Citizen Facilities, aid and support to families of deceased, infirmed and incarcerated veterans.

Wagner-Peyser 7B funding created a successful network program approach to critical Veteran assistance that didn't cost our state taxpayers anything. Our current funding primarily comes to us for homeless Veteran programs. With the new found state budget funding money claimed by various departments, I doubt there will ever be a return to this program of the past. This one may be lost forever. And unfortunately, in many respects and for many Veterans, it was a program of homeless prevention.



With that said, it is imperative to look in another direction for the answer to the question. The question being, “How can we, working together in Pennsylvania find viable and sustainable options to funding projects and programs for Veterans?”

#### Investments:

Pennsylvania recognizes the advantage of involvement in two national organizations that are of true value and benefit in the process of the shared development of ideas, innovations and opportunities for the Veterans of this state. They are National Association of State Directors of Veteran Affairs and National Association of State Women Veteran Coordinators. It’s in this forum that open conversation leads to thoughtful debate and identification of program and incentive options that increases our connection with a wealth of ideas. It is for all practical purposes an incubator of possibilities. I have had the opportunity to attend several of the meetings of these two organizations. Some of what I bring to this testimony is ideas that were discussed at these gatherings. I hope you will continue to value these resources.

#### Prevention

- Challenges of returning home: Much has been written on this topic to include adapting to physical disabilities, TBI, dealing with varying degrees of mental health stability (PTSD), living with the memories of sexual trauma and abuse, family reunification, reclaiming community involvement, re-establishing friendships with those who have no connection with the Veterans experiences, finding their new norm, determining employment possibilities and employability, knowing how and when to seek assistance and resources. Time is often of the essence in addressing situations, that if not resolved could have lasting effects on a successful re-entry into the non-military world that reach far into the future and across many generations.

Noted earlier in this testimony, I discussed the loss of strong program access points when Wagner-Peyser 7B funding was redirected in 2009. How can we approach a renewal of efforts to attack homelessness and coordinate actions for homeless preventions initiatives?

- Comprehensive Mental Health Assessments: This has been a topic in the homeless Veteran provider community and between VA and DOD for quite awhile. If all who enter the military, even at the National Guard level, were given an in-depth comprehensive mental health screening that had assessment tool indicators designed to identify predictors for homelessness, this would be a base line for a similar pre-discharge evaluation. In this manner, certain markers would provide an alert allowing for discharge counseling to be scheduled in order to diminish the likelihood of future homelessness.
- Resource knowledge: We have held a number of groups to discuss what the Veterans felt was a need or identified as a shortfall in the system as they cycled home. The overwhelming items identified were that they didn’t know where to go for help and resources, couldn’t figure out how to traverse the VA system, weren’t receiving help in a timely manner, or didn’t have faith in the dependability of the information. In some ways this may seem simple. But how do we make it happen?

As a non-profit I offer that we, together, could enter into an established active advisory partnership. This framework, in conjunction with the State Department of Veterans Affairs, would increase the state's capacity to coordinate a consolidated, well orchestrated and comprehensive approach to creating an integrated plan of services that makes sense on the streets to those working every day with homeless Veterans.

### Funding

- How can enhanced services for homeless Veterans and those Veterans on the brink be established? How can this be done in the most effective and responsible way while not creating a burden on the overall state budget, the Pennsylvania tax payers, or that of the existing budget for the state Department of Military and Veterans Affairs? How can program financing that enhances assistance and resources be accomplished?

Certainly in these tenuous economic times and in the efforts being made by our governor and legislature to keep the Commonwealth financial healthy, creativity in planning is the word of the day. There are many much smarter than me, and some of this conversation has already taken place in another forum. For this reason you may have already given thought to much that I will propose. As mentioned earlier, I was fortunate to have been present at several meetings of the National Association of State Directors of Veteran Affairs and National Association of State Women Veteran Coordinators. You may also have their input. If so it's my hope you will be able to support these ideas. If not my attempt is to encourage you and those who hold the power and authority to see beyond the road blocks...and envision what difference can be recognized by these possibilities.

- A Repository for Financial Capital: Other states have established a "holding tank" or fund for the repository of dollars attained through vehicles outside the normal budget allocations to the state Department of Veterans Affairs. In this way the income from this source would not be lost at the end of the budget cycle creating a means of development for enhanced services and newly recognized need.
- Veterans Emergency Assistance Program: The VEAP is a budget line item, this past year approximately \$400,000 were set aside. Any veteran of any era that meets the program guidelines can get it. The program provides financial aid in an emergency and on a temporary basis (not to exceed three months in a 12-month period) to veterans and their beneficiaries who reside in Pennsylvania for the necessities of life (food, dairy, shelter, fuel and clothing). With only about 50% being utilized this past year the remainder went back to the general budget at the end of the fiscal year. Since the money was already budgeted for Veterans, an investigation of the process for re-directing this money into the "Fund" as previously described would be worthwhile. These are "emergency" funds. What better place to secure the unused annual dollars of this program than into a "fund" to assist with on-going emergency needs as identified through time, regulated for purposeful use in Veterans' assistance and programs.
- The Lottery Program: the use of this income gives great support to the senior citizens for Pennsylvania. Years ago I wondered if it had a component for the senior Veteran. Today, I look at the increased revenues that come to the state from the growing number

of casinos and wonder what a very minimal amount of this income could mean to Veteran programs. The FY11 PA tax revenue, as reported by the Pennsylvania State Gaming Commission Board, for casinos and tracks, was \$1,365,410,111. Even if only a small fraction of this money could be designated for the “Fund”, over time it would create a viable and long standing funding support for Veteran programs and services.

A second thought surrounds what could be done if, on Memorial Day, the 4<sup>th</sup> of July and Veterans Day, state lottery rub off cards could be expanded, for just those three days, to include a patriotic card with the income from its sales going to Veteran programs. This format for an additional state Veteran funding stream is being utilized by other states. This income could also be placed in the “Fund.”

- State Tax Return Form: MFRAP, which is the one with the state income tax check-off options (and sitting on about \$1M) is a “current” war program, where any costs within 1 year of a recent deployment (or during it) that you have a crisis, and demonstrate financial need, you get assistance. This is a wonderful program but could be recognized as discriminatory to all the other Veterans who truly need assistance. If this money were placed in the “Fund” how much further would it go? How many more opportunities could be recognized and resolved? What impact would it have on other Veterans and their families, to include those who are homeless or those trying desperately to hold on to their dignity, their families and their homes through homeless prevention initiatives?
- Pennsylvania Veterans Foundation: Approved by the state on December 12, 2011, (pending IRS 501 (c)(3) formal documents) this aggressive move would not be in competition with the “Fund.” but have the capacity to raise money and seek sponsors and contributors. This is a healthy move and could be utilized to augment private sector programs within the parameters as defined by its application criteria. Millions have been generated in other states through foundations such as this. Certainly one area of need that might be recognized is the gap in funding opportunities for Veterans who are in danger of becoming homeless if attention is not given to their slipping grip on stability, income, and health concerns. As a side, the “Fund” could in fact even be a source of program funds to the Pennsylvania Veterans Foundation.

#### Outreach:

If we don't know what exists as a resource we can't address our needs...if maddening frustration and/or depression takes control, we can become immobile; feel that attempts are useless, lose control; lose motivation; feel left behind; and wonder, “what's the point of trying.”

The Internet is a tremendous tool for obtaining information on any issue one could imagine. It's one the new Veterans were born with; they were teathed on the cyber net space. And there are a myriad, literally hundreds of thousands of sites that can direct Veterans to a site that may or may not be helpful or even legitimate. But for a Veteran looking for local resources of information and service, it can be quite challenging.

The addition of a web page to the State Veterans Affairs Web Site that tab out into counties could be an advantageous comprehensive repository. It could bring the Veteran in contact with

not only governmental programs and offices in their communities, but also vetted, reputable and recognized non-profit agencies that offer great advantage along with local emergency contact and help lines. And all this on one site where descriptive information could assist them in the decision for the most appropriate individualized access point. Other appropriately designated state agency web pages could then also have a link to this coordinated internet “warehouse.” The County Director of Veteran Affairs could then also have a local listing along with the link to the state web page. Another link on the PA State Veterans Affairs Web Site could be one listing the myriad of recognized employment opportunity web sites.

### Closing

I view this hearing as an opportunity as a non-profit to contribute thoughts that could be discussion points in which we, contribute and share in our common commitment to the Veterans of PA. Today, I talked about areas related to our joint ability to address the issues of homeless Veterans and also those of the Veterans living in poverty... Veterans who live on the brink of homelessness...and the need to aggressively approach the issue of homeless prevention.

In the beginning, I discussed the contribution that Veteran service providers may well make to the development of possibilities. All resources, knowledge, and expertise need to be drawn into the process. This could be a reality by inviting a small group of these providers from representative areas of the state to meet with the PA Director of Veterans Affairs, General Michael Gould, and with the staff of this committee. This select group of experienced providers would serve in an advisory capacity and would be a valuable commodity and one of considerable resource.

The big question looming in front of us all “Is what will be done or accomplished? What will come from this day? The energy and commitment of this committee has the ability to leave a lasting mark on the state’s real dedication to Veterans...a legacy of innovation, action and progress.

We can’t leave it to others. We can’t expect the federal government to do it all. We must also take ownership of this tragic situation of many of our Veterans. And they are our Veterans...our troops... In a time when budgets are crippling...when all of us are financially strapped...let’s take a long hard and decisive look at possibilities that result in long term support and commitment...ones that will be inventive, ones that take an active possession of our responsibilities and duties to “our own.” You set the tone, you set the priorities, and you have the power to turn this situation around, having an untold impact on the lives of Pennsylvania Veterans far into the future.

My hope is that this hearing will continue a march forward with further collaborative exchanges into what *could be* by “joining forces”, by holding on to a vision that moves us all toward developing action plans, by pulling in all the guns, and by using all the ammunition we have at our disposal.

Thank you for allowing me to be a part of this hearing and the opportunity to address you today.

**Marsha Four, RN**  
**Executive Director**  
**The Philadelphia Veterans Multi-Service & Education Center**

Ms. Four is a Vietnam in-country veteran who served on active duty with the Army Nurse Corps. She entered the service on the Student Nurse Recruitment Program and began active duty in 1968. From 1969 to 1970 she served in Vietnam with the 18<sup>th</sup> Surgical Hospital, located first at Camp Evans and then Quang Tri, the northern most hospital in South Vietnam. She was awarded the Bronze Star.

Ms. Four has been actively involved in veterans' issues on a local, regional and national level for nearly 25 years. She was the initiator and Executive Director of the Philadelphia Stand Down for Homeless Veterans from 1993 until 1999.

A life member of the Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA), Delaware County Chapter 67, she has served on VVA's National Board of Directors since 1999, and is the long standing Chair of its National Women Veterans Committee and Vice Chair of its Homeless Veterans Committee.

Ms. Four was appointed to the Department of Veterans Affairs Secretarial Advisory Committee on Women Veterans from 1992 to 1994, and again from 2001 to 2006. VA Secretary Principi appointed Ms. Four as Chair of this Committee for two terms from 2002 until August of 2006. In this position Ms. Four also served as a liaison/consultant to the VA Secretarial Advisory Committee on Homeless Veterans.

Currently, Marsha is the Executive Director of The Philadelphia Veterans Multi-Service and Education Center, a non-profit agency that has, from its inception in 1980, worked exclusively with military veterans, where all assistance is provided free. She began her employment with The Center in 1996, as its Program Director of Homeless Veteran Services. Prior to that time she worked as a registered nurse in the community hospital arena. She is married, resides in Springfield, Delaware County, Pennsylvania, and has three sons.