



Pennsylvania Senate Joint Public Hearing  
Senate Urban Affairs and Housing Committee  
Senate Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness Committee  
Tuesday, November 10, 2015  
Drexel University

Testimony on Veteran Homelessness  
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Philadelphia Veterans House

1. What Philadelphia Veterans House does to help homeless veterans in the Commonwealth?

The Philadelphia Veterans Health is a transitional living facility for homeless veterans and their families. With fifteen (15) beds, our house provides room and board, three meals a day, laundry, cable, internet access, case management, financial budgeting, advocacy and assistance getting employment, education and benefit claims processed. The program, which is based on military structure and the foundation of family support, permits a veteran to stay for one to three months based on the goals they set upon initial intake. Every 30 days our veterans cases are reevaluated to address goals and their accomplishments over the course of the month. While instilling the military structure, our organization operates with a set of rules and regulations and brings our veterans back to a time when they were most successful during their service. Respect and support are among the most important values here at our house to help in the restoration of dignity that so many have lost during their period of homelessness. With 15 beds, housed in a row home in West Philadelphia, we have a dorm style environment with three (3) veterans per room where they have the opportunity to emphasize the camaraderie that is overwhelmingly present. As we guide our veterans through these difficult

periods of time in transition, we hope to instill the importance of family and a support structure. Our veterans eat dinner together as a family every night and enjoy much of their free time spending it with one another in and outside the house. One thing about the Philadelphia Veterans House is that we are not just a shelter, we are the place that are veterans can call home and we are the family that will get them on the right track to getting their own home.

2. Provide the committees with information on the number of homeless veterans in Commonwealth along with background on issues surrounding homeless veterans.

Tomorrow, November 11, 2015 is Veterans Day and the same day that Mayor Nutter has committed to ending veteran homelessness. According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, “although research indicates that veterans who served in the late Vietnam and post-Vietnam era are at greatest risk of homelessness, veterans returning from the recent conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq often have severe disabilities, including traumatic brain injuries (TBIs) and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) that are known to be correlated with homelessness. And as the military evolves, so too do the challenges. Homeless women veterans, for instance, are far more common now than in any other time in the past.”

Homelessness occurs for a multitude of reasons, and particularly when looking at our veterans, the issues can stem from difficulties managing PTSD and TBI symptoms, to substance abuse or broken support structures, unemployment, physical disabilities or general difficulty transitioning back into the civilian lifestyle. According to the recorded statistics of the Office of Supportive Housing, who performed the 2015 PIT (Point-In-Time) Count of homeless veterans in Philadelphia this past January, they saw an 11% decrease over a two year span. On a single night in January 2015, 337 veterans were recorded to be on the streets or in emergency or transitional housing.

With a goal to end veteran homelessness by tomorrow, November 11<sup>th</sup>, the PhillyVetsHome, a city-wide collaborative effort to end homelessness, details a strategy of

'Implementing Housing First practices and approaches across every part of the homelessness services and housing systems, removing barriers to help veterans and their families obtain permanent housing as quickly as possible, without unnecessary prerequisites.' We can provide all of our veterans with a house, but if we are not providing them with consistent and supportive models of structure to sustain these properties and lifestyle changes, then many will never be able to turn it into a home. Our veterans need a comprehensive plan of action so that they are well-prepared to take on all the responsibility of having their own home and continue to move forward with their life.

3. And how the state legislature can assist in solving this problem.

Simply stated, what are program needs from the state is funding. As a 501(c)(3) non-profit, we are currently operating on donations and our reserve account alone. In October 2014, after 3 years under contract with the Veterans Administration, our contract was terminated. There has been no clear indication as to why the termination occurred nor have we been privy to opportunities that may be present now. Under contract, the Veterans Administration allotted \$75 per night, per veteran, to cover our operating costs. Since the termination of our contract we have provided over \$300,000 worth of services to veterans who have been referred directly from the VA. Under contract our program was restricted to a two-week stint in which time, we were expected to secure permanent housing for our veterans. This is simply an impossible task and our veterans were shuffled in and out of different programs before getting any real results. In three years, not a single veteran was housed permanently from our program. With our program restructuring that was introduced in January 2015, we have had 25 veterans permanently housed this year alone. Not only do we have the statistics to back up our success and support structure, nearly all of the veterans that 'graduate' from our program and secure their lives, come back in volunteer capacities to give back and help foster the next set of veterans fighting homelessness. It is a privilege to work with these men and women that have

sacrificed so much for our nation, but it costs money. Our program is in desperate need of steady funding to ensure that we continue to house our homeless veterans and maintain the support needed to keep them moving forward towards successful futures.