

Testimony
Homeless Veterans Issues
Joint Public Hearing to the
Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness
&
Urban Affairs and Housing
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Department of Military and Veterans Affairs

Mr. Nicholas “Chip” Gilliland

Chief, Reintegration and Outreach Division, Office of Veterans Affairs

Introduction

Chairmen Vulakovich, Costa, Wagner, Fontana, and members of the committees, General Beck, the Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans Affairs, is at a Veterans' Event at the Mansfield University today and he has asked me to present our testimony that is focused on Veteran Homelessness and the Governor's Challenge to end Veteran Homelessness among Veterans, on his behalf.

It is important to remember that Veterans are created through federal military service and the United States Department of Veterans Affairs has the responsibility to provide benefits and services to those who served. The Office of Veteran's Affairs first priority is to ensure that our Veterans are receiving the full measure of both federal and state benefits to which they are entitled. We are very grateful for the additional benefits afforded our Veterans from the Commonwealth; and are proud to be leading the Governor's Challenge to End Homelessness among Veterans.

Governor's and Mayor's Challenge Overview

The Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs through the Office of Veterans' Affairs are collaborating with various agencies across the Commonwealth as a part of our efforts to reduce Veteran's homelessness in support of Governor Wolf's challenge. Through this initiative, governors, mayors and other state and local leaders across the country are rallying federal, state, local and nonprofit efforts to end Veteran homelessness in their communities. Ending homelessness means reaching the point where there are no Veterans sleeping on streets and every Veteran has access to permanent housing.

Non-profits and federal agencies across the Commonwealth receive funding to reduce the homelessness of Veterans through various programs. Last year the Commonwealth received nearly \$18 million federal dollars from the Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program. This program was established in 2011 to promote housing stability among homeless and at-risk Veterans and their families. Under this program the federal VA awards grants to private non-profit organizations and consumer cooperatives that can provide a range of supportive services to eligible very low-income Veteran families.

Continuum of Care Program is designed to promote communitywide commitment to the goal of ending homelessness; also provides funding for efforts by nonprofit providers, and state and local governments to quickly rehouse homeless individuals, families, and communities of homelessness. This program along with the Housing and Urban Development – VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) which combines housing choice voucher, rental assistance for homeless Veterans with case management and clinical services provided by the Department of Veterans

Affairs, this year HUD provided \$92 million for different housing programs – and not just Veterans programs – across the Commonwealth to support Veteran homelessness.

The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs contacted Governor Wolf and explained the importance of this initiative. He fully supports this initiative and joined the nationwide challenge program. Currently Pennsylvania has 12 cities participating in the Mayor’s challenge. The Mayors of:

- Allentown- Ed Pawlowski
- Altoona-Matt Pacifico
- Downingtown-Josh Maxwell
- Erie-Joseph Sinnott
- Lancaster- Richard Gray
- Philadelphia- Michael Nutter
- Pittsburgh-Bill Peduto
- Reading-Vaughn Spencer
- West Chester-Carolyn Comitta
- Wilkes Barre- Tom Leighton
- York-Kim Bracey
- County Commissioners of Chester County
 - Kathi Cazzone, Terrence Farell and Michelle Kinchline

Across the country nine Governors have committed to the Governor’s challenge to involve agencies across their state. These states are:

- Colorado-John Hickenlooper
- Connecticut- Daniel Malloy
- Delaware-Jack Markell
- Kentucky- Steve Beshear
- Puerto Rico- Alejandro J. Garcia Padilla
- Pennsylvania- Tom Wolf
- Illinois-Bruce Rauner
- Minnesota- Mark Dayton
- Virginia- Terry McAuliffe

All told, 550 Mayors, 9 Governors, and 151 county/city officials are participants in this challenge.

Governor’s Challenge in Pennsylvania

The challenge began in Mid-September when Governor Wolf accepted and offered the challenge to the state to reduce homelessness by at least 30% in the next 100 days. Many of the cities already involved in the challenge are well on their way to ending homelessness among Veterans by the end of the year. Supporting the challenge is just part of what their organizations and programs have been working towards for about one year. By the beginning of September, all stakeholders planned and coordinated to accomplish the Governor’s challenge within their already established programs. On 22 September the challenge began signifying 100 days remaining in 2015 to accomplish this challenge. The challenge ends on 31 December with a goal that over 500 Veterans are no longer on the homeless count across the Commonwealth. Current points in time studies have determined that there are approximately 1300 homeless Veterans in PA. Last year over 1400 Veterans were housed over the entire calendar year.

The stakeholders for this challenge are the following:

- Pennsylvania Department of Military and Veterans Affairs
- Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry
- Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development
- Pennsylvania Department of Human Services
- Supportive Services to Veterans and their Families (SSVF) Grantees
- Regional Continuums of Care
- United States Department of Veterans Affairs
 - VISN Homeless Coordinators (4)
 - 8 Veterans Affairs Medical Centers within the Commonwealth
- United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
- United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH)

The stakeholders just mentioned have accepted the Governor's Challenge. The Pennsylvania VA medical centers reported permanently housing 244 Veterans in the month of September and 87 in the month of October. Our team is currently refining the reporting mechanism to accurately capture and share all of the data from the other federal, state and local partners.

Conclusion

I thank the Committees for the opportunity to appear before you today. As a result of the commitment of Governor Wolf and his Administration, our department faces the challenges of the future with the confidence that we can succeed.

Again, thank all of you for your commitment to the Veterans of this great Commonwealth.