



Housing Alliance
of Pennsylvania

Good morning. I am Liz Hersh, Executive Director of the Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania, a statewide not-for-profit organization that works for a home within reach of every Pennsylvanian, especially those with low incomes.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on Senate Bill 227 to establish a Veterans' Housing Assistance Program and Senate Bill 38 to establish the Veteran's Homeownership Assistance Program.

I wish I could tell you that these two pieces of legislation are not needed, but unfortunately, I cannot. Veteran's homelessness is a crisis for many of our service-men and women.

A point-in-time survey conducted in January of 2014 found approximately 50,000 veterans experiencing homelessness nationwide¹. This does not include the nearly 1.4 million² at risk of employment difficulties, poverty and/or unstable housing conditions that may lead them to becoming homeless.

An estimated 1400 veterans experienced homelessness in Pennsylvania³ in 2014.

Veterans are typically single men between the ages of 30 and 61. They tend to be concentrated in, but not limited to, urban areas. With the growing number returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, the demography of veterans experiencing homelessness is changing. They are increasingly younger (18-30 years old) and more are female.

Why are vets so vulnerable to homelessness? According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness "veterans are at a significantly increased risk of homelessness if they have low socioeconomic status, a mental health disorder, and/or a history of substance abuse. Yet, because of veterans' military service, this population is at higher risk of experiencing traumatic brain injuries and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), both of which have been found to be among the most substantial risk factors for homelessness."⁴

There has been progress and there is hope. Congress set a goal of ending veterans' homelessness by 2015. While that goal has not been accomplished yet, the National Alliance reports that "since 2008, nearly 70,000 VASH vouchers have been awarded to Public Housing

¹ National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) 2015 Fact Sheet on Veterans Homelessness

² Pulled from the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans website

³ Pulled from www.homelessnessanalytics.org

⁴ National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) 2015 Fact Sheet on Veterans Homelessness