

Testimony of the

Veterans Service Office of Indiana County

Senate Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness and Urban Affairs & Housing
Committees

Joint Hearing on Veterans Homelessness

July 26, 2022

Veterans Service Officer Allen J. Lockard Jr. SGM (Ret.)

Veterans Service Officer Indiana County Pennsylvania

Introduction

All over the world millions of veterans are reported as being homeless every year. Whether it be from not having the resources, coming back home from being deployed, or just financially not being able to support themselves in today's age, they all are not able to have a sound roof over their heads. This is something that we take for granted every day. Something that is not seen as a true luxury to many. Now when talking about it, we are able to sit back and see how much of a privilege we have. These men and women made the true choice to put their lives on the line for us to be able to sit where we are today and not have fear of danger, and yet they have fear of whether or not their water bill will be getting paid for next month.

Throughout the Nation

Throughout the nation on any given night there are between 130,000-200,000 veterans who are homeless. Homeless veterans make up about $\frac{1}{4}$ of the homeless population. And three times this amount are dealing with financial problems which poses them the problem of becoming homeless. According to the *National Coalition for the Homeless* approximately 1 in 3 homeless men who are on the street have served our country. 40% of homeless men are veterans, veterans only comprise 34% of the male population. They also report that over 400,000 veterans will face homelessness during the year. Most of these veterans are also seen dealing with some sort of problem while being homeless, whether it's drugs, alcohol, PTSD, or any other form of mental health problems. 76% of the homeless veteran's community deals with one or more of these issues.

In Pennsylvania

Compared to the other states in the U.S. Pennsylvania has a lower percentage of veterans that are homeless. Out of the nearly 800,000 veterans that live in Pennsylvania, approximately 857 of them are reported as homeless. While having so many veterans in Pennsylvania 4.6% are reported as

being unemployed, the overall rate of unemployment being 5.2% in Pennsylvania. With unemployment then comes the problem of housing and median salary for veteran families in Pennsylvania.

Out of the over 500,000 houses occupied by veterans, or 10%, over 120,000 of veterans are dealing with one or more major problems of quality, crowding, or cost. It is reported that 23.5% of veterans pay too much for their housing. The median cost for a house in Pennsylvania is \$165,000. This sounds completely normal and not a true problem until we hear the median income for veteran households. The salary discrepancy between what veterans are making for a median income versus what non-veteran households are making then leads to the problem of poverty and homelessness with veterans. The median income for veteran households is \$55,000, the median income for non-veterans' households in Pennsylvania is \$61,000. Thus, leading to the 6.5% of veterans who are currently living in poverty in Pennsylvania.

In the Past 10 Years

During the time of when the pandemic first arose and a few months before that the rate of homeless veterans had risen. According to HUD's annual point in time estimate, the number had risen by a few hundred, bringing it to 37,085. This study was conducted in January of 2020, this total means that in every 10,000 veterans in the U.S, 21 were experiencing homelessness at the time. Luckily in the past 10 years there have been many great steps to get the percentages down. From 2010-2019 the number of veterans without stable housing had gone down by 50%. This wouldn't have happened if it weren't for political figures taking initiative. During this time, the President at the time, Barack Obama, had made it a federal effort to take initiative to address the issue. Now in 2020 we are seeing the recommitment to the Housing First initiative come back into place. With these 28 states have since then seen declines in the number of veterans that were experiencing homelessness. North Carolina, Oregon, and Utah all had seen double digit percentages decrease in their homeless veteran population. Thus, putting the nation back on track for a positive trend.

It has been proven time and time again that the issue of veteran homelessness and veteran poverty is not something that just one state is dealing with, it is something the whole nation must face. The steps that have been taken over the years is just the start of a new foundation. It's just the start of making sure the people who fought for our safety, and fought for our right to be here today, are able to have the right to come to a safe environment, that they are able to call home. The discrepancies with wages, access to shelters, and reliable and safe places to reach out to are finally not a question of will they be able to get it, or will they be able to afford it, it will become a matter of fact. Many veterans across the nation are starting to be able to make that dream a reality. But this dream will not be able to happen if we don't stand up and fight for them like they fought for us.

https://www.pinestreetinn.org/news_events/facts_about_homeless_veterans

<https://veteransdata.info/states/2420000/PENNSYLVANIA.pdf>

<https://www.nationalhomeless.org/factsheets/veterans.pdf>

<https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2021/03/18/the-number-of-veterans-experiencing-homelessness-rose-slightly-even-before-the-coronavirus-pandemic/>