

COUNTY OF



ALLEGHENY

**Testimony of Timothy Martin, Allegheny County Chief Veterans Affairs Officer
Before the Senate Urban Affairs & Housing, Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness
Joint Hearing on Veteran Homelessness
Tuesday, July 26, 2022 – 10:30 AM: Veterans Place, 945 Washington Boulevard**

Good morning to the Chairs and members of the Senate Urban Affairs & Housing and Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness. Senators Pittman, Saval, Stefano and Muth, thank you for convening this important hearing to talk about efforts to address veteran homelessness.

My name is Timothy Martin I am the Chief Veterans Affairs Officer for Allegheny County. It is my pleasure to be here with you today to talk about the work that our county has done and continues to do.

First, a little history, in 2017, Pittsburgh and Allegheny County were joined by the then-HUD administrator to celebrate a milestone. In November of that year, we commemorated finding housing for nearly 600 homeless veterans in a three-year period after joining a nationwide effort to end homelessness for ex-service members.

No matter the issue, the secret to our success in this region is our ability to all work together to address challenges, and address veteran homelessness is no exception. In 2014, officials from Allegheny County and the City of Pittsburgh began working with veteran advocacy groups and created the Pittsburgh Rapid Results Homeless Veterans' Boot Camp. In the county, that effort included our Department of Human Services and the Veterans Affairs

Working with service providers across the county, we first created a master list in 2015 of veterans needing help. Then through collaboration, we created a system to “identify, assess, connect and permanently house” homeless veterans. Our goal was to move veterans to permanency within 90 days of finding out of their need.

Our challenge, of course, is that the need does not end. We still see a lot of veterans in the homeless system, with about 10% of persons age 18+ identifying as veterans. In the last 12 months, we have served over 400 veterans through our shelters and outreach, bridge and permanent housing programs. We also believe that it is an undercount.

DHS put together a report on veteran homelessness that I would encourage you to take a look at if you have the opportunity. (Veterans in Allegheny County’s Homeless Services System, 2014-2018: https://www.alleghenycountyanalytics.us/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/21-ACDHS-08-VeteransHomelessness_v3-final.pdf).

There are some takeaways in it, but it looked at the system through 2018, obviously pre-COVID. We know that the pandemic has exacerbated the need for assistance and programming, and veterans are certainly no exception. We also know that there continue to be underlying racial disparities. More than half of county veterans who accessed homeless assistance programs were black.

One of the biggest takeaways, however, is that veterans who left the homeless system after receiving services were slightly less likely than non-veterans to re-enter the system, suggesting that they were able to find and maintain stable housing. That, of course, underscores the work that our team continues to do and its importance.

We continue to meet. The bootcamp group and process set up several years ago continues to meet and work. Those bi-weekly meetings are co-chaired by the Veteran Leadership Program and Veterans Place where they discuss unhoused veterans and provide updates.

The biggest challenges are identifying resources for veterans who are unable to access Veterans Health Administration (VHA) and Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA). Furthermore, the current grant guidelines that are in place for programs such as Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) are almost exclusively focused on housing first rather than harm reduction which leads to recidivism. The grant holders do a wonderful job with housing our veterans but sadly many veterans return to programming because the underlying barriers that lead to their homelessness remain unaddressed.

Again, thank you for convening this important hearing to talk about efforts to address veteran homelessness. I welcome your questions and input.