

ENDING VETERANS' HOMELESSNESS

HEARING
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON
HOUSING, TRANSPORTATION, AND COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON
BANKING, HOUSING, AND URBAN AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES SENATE
ONE HUNDRED ELEVENTH CONGRESS
FIRST SESSION
ON
EXAMINING THE ENDING OF VETERANS' HOMELESSNESS

NOVEMBER 10, 2009

Printed for the use of the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs



Available at: <http://www.access.gpo.gov/congress/senate/senate05sh.html>

U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE

56-914 PDF

WASHINGTON : 2010

For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office
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TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2009

U.S. SENATE,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING, TRANSPORTATION, AND
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT,
COMMITTEE ON BANKING, HOUSING, AND URBAN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The Subcommittee met at 10:05 a.m., in room SD-538, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Senator Robert Menendez (Chairman of the Subcommittee), presiding.

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN ROBERT MENENDEZ

Chairman MENENDEZ. This hearing of the Subcommittee on Housing, Transportation, and Community Development will come to order.

Our first order of business, I would ask all of us to take a moment of silence to remember the soldiers who were tragically killed and wounded at Fort Hood.

[Pause.]

Chairman MENENDEZ. Thank you. Our hearts go out to them and to their families today as they and many from across the country attend a memorial service in Texas.

Let me say, we decided to stay and move forward with this hearing to honor all those veterans to whom we owe so much and who deserve the full attention of a grateful Nation. Having said that, let me welcome our distinguished panelists this morning. I would also especially like to recognize two veterans who will be on our second panel this morning, Ms. Lila Guy, a veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom from Philadelphia, who I know has a compelling story to tell, and Mr. William Wise from Winslow, New Jersey, who served in Vietnam and was himself homeless for a time after his return. We look forward to hearing their firsthand testimony on the pressures on returning veterans and the thin line that exists between survival and despair.

To me, the crisis we face is no less than a national disgrace represented by the haunting image of 131,000 veterans on the streets of America on any given night. A hundred-and-thirty-one-thousand men and women who served this Nation in uniform, American heroes huddled over a heating grate in the shadow of the Washington Monument, or curled up on a bench by the war memorials on the Mall in Washington, or trying to find shelter in cities across America.

What is more troubling than the images is the statistics. The VA estimates more than 260,000 veterans will be homeless at some

point during the course of a given year, and a staggering 25 percent of all homeless in this country—one in four—are veterans. With increasing numbers of veterans coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan last year, the number of veteran families that found themselves homeless increased 24 percent because of difficult economic times.

We also know that nearly 600,000 veterans who do have housing are paying more than 50 percent—50 percent—of their monthly income in rent, and may well be at risk of becoming homeless in the next year.

The Federal Government, in my view, is not doing nearly enough when so many new veterans are falling through the cracks. These new veterans are facing a range of issues that veterans of other wars have not faced. They have difficulty reintegrating. Like many Americans, they can't find a job. They can't find decent, affordable housing. And the current system of dealing with their needs is being overwhelmed. I think we can say with certainty that veterans' homelessness is a national disgrace and we need to address it.

Now, last week, Secretary Shinseki began to do just that. He outlined a 5-year plan, which I hope we will discuss today. Secretary Shinseki addressed a wide range of issues, everything from supportive services for low-income veterans to the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill. Also last week, the VA and DOD cosponsored a summit to coordinate the need to aggressively diagnose and treat the unseen but devastating wounds of war that all too often lead to homelessness. These are positive steps, but I am looking forward to learning from our panelists what more steps we can take and what our priorities should be.

I am pleased to say that Congress has been proactive on veterans' homelessness. Senator Schumer and Senator Jack Reed have both worked tirelessly on this issue. Senator Schumer's Home for Heroes Act and Senator Reed's Zero Tolerance for Veterans Homeless Act focus a laser-sharp light on veterans' homelessness and all the accompanying issues that have forced a growing number of veterans to live on the street.

So let me conclude by saying what I said at the outset. I am haunted by the image of homeless veterans sleeping in our cities every night, men and women who wore the uniform and bravely stood a post in some far-off land in the middle of the night. And I am haunted to think that they now come home, some here to Washington, only to spend their nights in the shadow of the very monuments to freedom, justice, and equality for which they fought, looking for help and a little help, perhaps lost, but certainly not forgotten by a grateful Nation.

So I want to thank our witnesses for joining us today. We look forward to a productive hearing that we will then build upon to seek legislative results.

And with that, let me recognize Senator Akaka, who has done so much work in this regard as the Chairman of the Veterans Affairs Committee, and we appreciate his leadership, and, of course, as a Member of this Committee, combines two very powerful opportunities to help our homeless veterans. Senator Akaka.

STATEMENT OF SENATOR DANIEL K. AKAKA

Senator AKAKA. Thank you very much, Chairman Menendez, for having this very important hearing on homelessness today. I really appreciate, Mr. Chairman, your interest in the issue.

I also greatly admire Secretary Shinseki's commitment to ending homelessness. As the Chairman mentioned, Secretary Shinseki has a plan to work on homelessness in the period of 5 years and is proceeding quickly on that.

As Chairman of the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs, I have worked to strengthen VA's homelessness and housing programs. Currently on the Senate calendar is my Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2009. As you know, we have been trying to have it on the floor to work on, and we haven't been able to do it because one of the members of the Senate has been holding it up. Title VII of the legislation contains a number of provisions designed to enhance and improve VA efforts to address the overall problem and to provide assistance to homeless veterans.

Additionally, a few weeks ago, the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs held a hearing on pending legislation which highlighted a bill that was proposed by Senator Murray of the State of Washington, and it is entitled Homeless Women Veterans and Homeless Veterans with Children Act of 2009, and also a bill that is proposed by Senator Reed, and that is entitled the Zero Tolerance for Veterans Homelessness Act of 2009. So we are focusing on the homeless here.

I look forward to continuing to work with the Members of the Subcommittee, members of the Veterans Affairs Committee, and the Administration to assist homeless veterans in accessing affordable housing and support services so that they are able to find and remain in their homes. It is essential that we continue to address the underlying causes of homelessness, such as lack of mental health services, affordable housing, and sustainable employment.

I thank the witnesses for appearing today and thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman MENENDEZ. Thank you, Senator Akaka, and thank you for your leadership.

Let me recognize Senator Reed, who I mentioned in my opening statement on legislation and we appreciate his leadership on this.

STATEMENT OF SENATOR JACK REED

Senator REED. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for your leadership in convening this hearing. I particularly want to recognize Senator Akaka, who has been a leader in veterans affairs for many, many years and Chairs the Committee and is someone who has done a remarkable amount of work on behalf of our veterans.

It is unfortunate, to say the least, to recognize the fact that there are thousands and thousands of veterans who are on the streets of America. I was particularly moved by a comment by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mullen, who was out in San Diego and met with a group of 20 or 30 homeless veterans, and they were veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan. So this is not a phenomenon of people who sort of lost their way years ago and have difficulties. This is a real and growing problem. And we have to

commit ourselves to an all-out effort to help these young men and women and not-so-young men and women. This is a phenomenon that stretches through every conflict we have had and they are on the streets of America today.

I am encouraged by the President's commitment and I am certainly encouraged by Secretary Shinseki, who understands this issue not just from a policy perspective, from a deeply personal perspective, as a soldier's soldier. And I was pleased, as Senator Akaka mentioned, to introduce along with Senator Bond, Senator Johnson, and Senator Murray the Zero Tolerance for Veterans Homelessness Act. It contains housing provisions that would be important. The VA would be authorized to provide Rapid Re-Housing benefits, like short-term rental assistance and housing relocation and stabilization services. And they would authorize in this legislation additional housing vouchers through HUD to get veterans off the streets and into homes.

But I think, also, given the tragic events of the last week, we understand that housing alone is not the solution. Housing has to be wedded to services and we have to integrate our approach. We have to be supportive as well as sheltering, and that should be the goal and we should not stop until we can say that there are virtually no veterans on the streets of America. Thank you.

Chairman MENENDEZ. Thank you, Senator Reed.
Senator Tester.

STATEMENT OF SENATOR JON TESTER

Senator TESTER. Thank you, Chairman Menendez. I want to echo my thanks for you holding this hearing.

I also want to associate myself with Senator Reed's comments as concerns Senator Akaka. Senator Akaka is very much a leader when it comes to veterans in this country and I certainly appreciate that leadership, whether it is here in this Committee or on the VA Committee.

When veterans don't get the benefits they deserve, that is distressing enough. When we have veterans that are homeless, that is totally unacceptable, and I think we can all agree on that.

We have different groups out there that are trying to address the needs of homeless veterans. One of them is the Poverello Center in Missoula, Montana. They have got a great Executive Director there who has done some great work addressing the issues of homeless veterans. I toured the Pov about a year ago and we talked a little bit about the veterans and veterans they could help and so many that they couldn't help because they were slipping through the cracks. We talked about a local homeless veteran who was beaten to death, another one who couldn't find help and ultimately froze to death. The issues that evolve around homeless veterans are huge and they are real and they are unacceptable.

When the President talks about the need for increased assistance, funding shelters and services for homeless veterans, I couldn't agree more, because we have seen the overcrowding. We have seen the loss of dignity, in some cases, the outright discarding of men and women who have made the sacrifice for this country. We need to do more to help homeless veterans to obtain permanent housing and address their health concerns.

In the United States, there are over 131,000 homeless veterans on any given night. There is a tendency to look at the homelessness as an urban problem. It is not. In Montana, where we have more veterans per capita than almost any other State, there are 168 veterans currently on waiting lists—the ones we know of—waiting for shelter. They may not live in a big city, but their problems are just as real and our obligation to help them is just as real, especially in a State like Montana where in the wintertime it gets bitterly cold.

This may not seem like a lot to some, but these men and women are more than just names on a list. I am going to cite some of them, veterans like Richard Roy Jones, a Native American who was honorably discharged from the military. He is a homeless veteran. He drowned in the Clark Fork River around Missoula last July. He served in the Marine Corps in 1980 to 1983. Richard Roy Jones was on the waiting list to get into the Valor House. He finally made it to eighth in line on that list. After months of trying to succeed under the constraints of an overcrowded shelter, he succumbed to mental illness and the elements. A local media report described him as a local transient. He was much more than that and we failed him, just plain and simple.

Rural communities often face a challenge of limited resources. They are underserved by health professionals who can treat the underlying problems that contribute to the veterans' homelessness. In Montana, weather extremes and great distances further complicate that issue. That is why I am going to cosponsor the bill that we are discussing today, S. 1547, Zero Tolerance for Veterans Homeless Act of 2009, and continue pushing for the passage of S. 1963, which is still being held by a single Senator.

I know the hard work that professionals are doing around Montana to take care of our homeless veterans, but it is not near enough. We must provide them with the resources they need to make sure veterans do not become victims of the elements, crime, hunger, substance abuse, or treatable mental illness. We absolutely have to do more.

With that, Mr. Chairman, thank you.

Chairman MENENDEZ. Thank you, Senator Tester.
Senator Schumer.

STATEMENT OF SENATOR CHARLES E. SCHUMER

Senator SCHUMER. Mr. Chairman, thank you so much for holding the hearing today on ending veterans homelessness. I want to thank you, as Chair of the Housing Subcommittee, and Senator Akaka, who Chairs the Veterans Committee, for the great leadership that you have shown in this area.

The crisis of veteran homelessness has never been worse in our country, and frankly, we face a moral responsibility to address it as soon as possible. The Department of Veterans Affairs recently reported that on any given night, approximately 131,000 male and female veterans are homeless. Over the course of the year, over 330,000 veterans face homelessness.

I was reminded of these staggering statistics on a visit I made last year to the historical Camp Shanks in Rockland County, New York, also known as Last Stop, USA. Camp Shanks served as one

of the largest Army embarkation points in the United States during World War II. Approximately 1.3 million soldiers attended camp for processing before being deployed to serve our country in Europe.

At present, Camp Shanks is in an area that is surrounded by well over 7,000 homeless veterans. A local community group called Homes for Heroes, led by Rockland County legislator John Murphy, has proposed a development that would include 50 units of affordable housing and supportive services designated for homeless veterans in the area. Projects like this underscore the need for additional Federal assistance for places like Rockland County to address veterans homeless issues, bolster efforts already underway, and offset the cost of constructing and properly maintaining the property.

Legislation introduced by then-Senator Barack Obama in the 109th Congress addressed this need for adequate housing for our Nation's homeless heroes. I was asked to carry the torch for this legislation, Homes for Heroes, this session because it recognizes that in order to combat and prevent veterans homelessness once and for all, we must take a comprehensive approach and use all the tools at our disposal and partner affordable long-term housing with supportable clinical services. I would like to thank Senators Menendez, Durbin, Brown, Begich, Bingaman, Gillibrand, Kerry, Lautenberg, Tester, and Udall for cosponsoring this legislation. A House companion of this legislation was introduced by Representative Green of Texas earlier this year.

Here is what the legislation does. First, it expands existing Federal programs by authorizing 20,000 new HUD Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing Program Vouchers annually through fiscal year 2013 and makes the program permanent.

Second, Homes for Heroes also creates a new assistance program that provides grants for community and nonprofit organizations to purchase, build, or rehabilitate housing for low-income veterans, just like Camp Shanks. In addition, these organizations would supply supportive services, including substance abuse and mental health counseling, vocational and employment training, transportation, child care, and other services independently. By providing Federal funding to these community groups, housing projects like Camp Shanks could become a realistic endeavor and end veteran homelessness.

Third, Homes for Heroes establishes special assistance for Veterans Affairs at HUD to coordinate services in housing with the Veterans Affairs Department and work with public housing authorities to create a plan to address the needs of homeless veterans.

I would also like to recognize, in addition to all of my cosponsors, that while my legislation uses different methods to address veterans homelessness, Senator Reed's legislation and ours seeks to achieve similar goals, and I look forward to working with Senator Reed, who has done great work in this area, as well, in the future to combine our two approaches.

It is imperative that Congress acts quickly to address these challenges and work with the Administration to end veterans homelessness. Our veterans needed our Nation's call. The least we can do

as a Nation is ensure they have a roof over their head in the Nation they fought to protect.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to today's hearing and the prepared testimony from the witnesses.

Chairman MENENDEZ. Thank you, Senator Schumer. I thank all my colleagues for their statements and their advocacy and their respective leadership together. This is a lot of firepower. We can get something done here.

With that, let me recognize our first panel. Let me welcome our first witness to testify, Assistant Secretary Mercedes Márquez. Ms. Márquez is the Assistant Secretary for Community Planning and Development at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Her office is charged with administering several homelessness programs at HUD. We welcome you.

And our second witness is Mr. Peter Dougherty, the Director of Homeless Programs of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Mr. Dougherty's office takes a proactive approach in identifying homeless veterans in need and administering programs to help.

We welcome you. We would ask you to summarize your testimony for about 5 minutes apiece. Your full statements will be included in the record. It will give us some time to have our colleagues have a question and answer session with you.

Ms. Márquez.

STATEMENT OF MERCEDES MÁRQUEZ, ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT, DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Ms. MÁRQUEZ. Chairman Menendez, Members, I am pleased to be here with you today representing the Department of Housing and Urban Development. As you said, I am the Assistant Secretary for Community Planning and Development, and I oversee, among other things, the Department's efforts to confront the housing and service needs of homeless persons, including homeless veterans and their families. We strongly support our sister agency at the Department of Veterans Affairs in achieving their new goals.

The Department administers a variety of programs that can serve veterans. These including the Housing Choice Voucher Program, the HOME Program, and the CDBG Program. These programs provide great flexibility so that communities can use these Federal resources to meet their local needs.

In addition to these programs, Congress has also authorized a variety of targeted programs for special needs populations, including persons who are homeless. HUD provides assistance in a variety of ways.

In February of 2009, HUD competitively awarded approximately \$1.4 billion in targeted Homeless Assistance Grants. A record 6,336 projects received awards. Veterans are eligible for all of our homeless assistance programs, and HUD emphasizes the importance of serving veterans in its grant applications. Communities may submit veteran-specific projects or projects that support a general homeless population that includes veterans. In this past competition, HUD awarded 136 projects that specifically target veterans. In addition, over 1,000 projects were awarded that would serve veterans and others.

The Congress provided \$75 million in both 2008 and in 2009 for the HUD Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing Program, the HUD-VASH Program. HUD-VASH combines HUD Housing Choice Voucher rental assistance with homeless veterans with case management and clinical services provided by the VA at its medical centers. Through this partnership, HUD and VA will provide permanent housing and services for approximately 20,000 homeless veterans and their family members, including veterans who have become homeless after serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. HUD-VASH will make a significant impact on those who have bravely served this great Nation and who have been left on the streets.

Through the ARRA funding, you have provided an unprecedented level of funding to HUD and other Federal agencies. Overall, HUD is responsible for \$13.6 billion ARRA funds for housing and community development. The ARRA Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program, or HPRP, provides \$1.5 billion to communities nationwide. These funds can be used to both prevent homelessness and to rapidly rehouse persons who have become homeless. In designing the program, we specifically allowed and highlight that HPRP can be used to help homeless veterans access HUD-VASH by, for instance, providing the security deposit needed to obtain housing with the voucher.

The recently enacted Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act, or the HEARTH Act, provides unprecedented flexibility to confronting homelessness. The Act consolidates HUD's existing competitive homeless programs into a single streamlined program, the Continuum of Care Program. The program requires that all of the stakeholders, including veterans' organizations, determine how the funds should be used. In essence, we are combining all the competitive programs and the HEARTH Act also makes special provisions with the Rural Housing Stability Assistance Program to provide targeted assistance to rural areas. Combined, these new programs will provide communities with greater flexibility to prevent and end homelessness, including veterans.

The 2009 Appropriation Act provided HUD with \$10 million for a demonstration program to prevent homelessness among veterans as part of the appropriation for HUD's homeless programs. HUD is working with the VA to design and implement this initiative. It is intended to conduct an evaluation of this demonstration and then share the results. We will share it widely through HUD's technical assistance resources to organizations serving veterans.

In essence, we are collaborating. Secretary Donovan, Secretary Shinseki, they are working together on the Council to end homelessness. Secretary Donovan has now taken the torch from Secretary Shinseki as the chair and we are working very closely together. I can tell you actually that it is pretty much every day conversation between the staffs at HUD and VA on all these programs, and that is really not an exaggeration. Pretty much every day, there is conversation and work going on between our agencies.

In the end, we are also working to reach out to veterans organizations. We have established the HUD Veterans Resource Center. It is headed by a veteran. We have a 1-800 number to take calls from veterans and to help address their individual needs. The Re-

source Center works with each veteran to connect them to resources within their own community.

In conclusion, I want to reiterate our support, our desire, and our commitment to help end homelessness among our veterans and by working effectively with our Federal partners and yourselves. Thank you very much.

Chairman MENENDEZ. Thank you.
Mr. Dougherty.

STATEMENT OF PETER H. DOUGHERTY, DIRECTOR OF HOMELESS VETERANS PROGRAMS, DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. DOUGHERTY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We appreciate the opportunity to be here today. As you indicated, tragically, there are, we believe, about 131,000 homeless veterans who are without an appropriate place to stay. While progress has been made, just a few years ago we were reporting closer to a number of 200,000, that is still far too many.

VA's goal and our objective is to have "no wrong door," a no wrong door approach to the assistance that can be provided so that whether a veteran gets assistance from us, the Department of Veterans Affairs, or from community partners through contracted services, we want to make sure those services are available.

VA, as you know, has the largest integrated health care network in the country and this year, we are targeted to spend approximately \$3.2 billion on homeless veterans, including \$2.7 billion for health care services, and a little more than a half-a-billion dollars for targeted programs for homeless veterans.

The 5-year plan that has been discussed is an ambitious goal to end homelessness among veterans within 5 years. The Secretary's plan includes bold new measures that will both serve those who are seriously impaired and, in a major shift for us, attacking the problem with preventive measures, like discharge planning for incarcerated veterans reentering society, supportive services grants for low-income veterans and their families, a national referral and call center to link veterans to local services, and the partnership the Assistant Secretary just spoke about with veterans who are recently separated.

Thanks to the support of the Congress and the leadership at the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the first 20,000 units of HUD-VASH are now out. I think as you will hear later today, this has had a great impact because it has given us a great opportunity to provide health care services to veterans while at the same time making sure the veteran and, veterans with families, have a place to stay. To date, about 11 percent of those units are occupied by a woman veteran and 12 percent of those units are occupied by veterans with children. On average, 1.7 children are in each of those homes.

Our continuing efforts are to work with the more than 600 community organizations who provide transitional housing to more than, we believe, 20,000 homeless veterans who will get that assistance this year. We work closely with the 240 Public Housing Authorities with the HUD-VASH Program. Earlier this year, we have opened a new National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans,

which is really a research opportunity that we have not had available to make sure that we are providing timely assistance to veterans.

We continue to work with our Grant and Per Diem Program. We activated more than 1,100 beds this past year. The Secretary just announced a month ago that we have awarded grants that will create nearly 1,200 new transitional housing beds this year.

We have expedited claims, because part of this is about getting veterans benefits; but it is also about getting them back to gainful employment once again.

Regarding the newest generation of veterans, we have seen nearly 4,000 veterans in our outreach effort who had served in Iraq and Afghanistan. About a thousand of them have used homeless-specific programs.

We are working, with some of the nearly 40,000 veterans who come out of institutional and correctional settings every year. We are working very closely with courts and the criminal justice system.

We are also working very closely with keeping veterans in their housing if they already have housing. The Supportive Services Grant Program that we have will do much more to make sure that those veterans are able to stay in housing and never become homeless in the first place.

Housing, health care, jobs, education, these are all critical areas where VA is focusing to address the needs of homeless veterans. We work very closely with our colleagues at the Department of Housing and Urban Development, but also with Labor, HHS, U.S. Interagency Council on the Homeless, and the others.

I know the Congress, the Secretary, the President, are all committed to ending veteran homelessness. No one who served our Nation, especially those who have worn our military uniforms, should ever find themselves without care and without hope. We know there are never any absolutes in life, but we have set an ambitious target and we are going to give our best effort as we moved forward.

Again, we thank you for the opportunity to testify and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Chairman MENENDEZ. Thank you both for your testimony.

We will start a series of 5-minute rounds of questions, and the Chair will recognize himself to start off with.

Let me just say, I appreciate both of your testimony and I certainly am enthused by hearing about the coordination, Ms. Márquez, that you mentioned. But, you know, I wonder—and I understand this Administration is only 10 months old, so I start from that starting point, I grant that—but I wonder, how is it that with the wide array of programs you both described, that we have 131,000 homeless veterans, that we may have at any given time during the course of a year 260,000 homeless veterans, that we have 600,000 veterans who have a home but pay over 50 percent of their income toward rent, which is astronomical. What is it that we are not doing right that, in fact, leads us, despite the array of programs, leads us to that reality?

You know, one of the witnesses on the next panel will say that the fragmentation of these programs is a challenge, and so, you

know, I am wondering if you can talk about, first of all, what is it that leads us, notwithstanding all of these resources and these programs, to still face the alarming statistics that I think are a national disgrace?

And second, what are we doing to coordinate and to integrate these programs so we are being successful at our goal here, which is to have a home for those who serve the country? Why don't we start there.

Mr. DOUGHERTY. Let me start off, Mr. Chairman, because I think what you have done in the last 2 years has given us a tool that we did not have before, and that is the opportunity for veterans to get into permanent housing with case management services from VA. I think the HUD-VASH Program has given us, 20,000 units now, it looks like the Congress is poised perhaps to give us another 10,000 units. That is a critically important piece of what needs to occur as we move forward.

Our Transitional Housing Programs have been effective. They have been good. We are continuing to increase them. But HUD-VASH, the opportunity to give that veteran a permanent housing place has been very helpful, and it has been very helpful particularly for those veterans that have families and have children, because historically, VA has been constrained and our programs have not been very family friendly. So HUD-VASH has been a good thing.

The other is what you have done this past year is given us the authority to provide supportive services grants, and that, we think, is going to have great long-term impact, because as was said by the Senators earlier, about 650,000 veterans, we believe, are low income and are just that paycheck away from perhaps losing that housing. And so as we are looking to ramp up and increase that opportunity to provide assistance in the community for those veterans, we think that will have long-term benefits, as well.

Chairman MENENDEZ. So HUD-VASH, you consider that a success?

Mr. DOUGHERTY. HUD-VASH, I think, is remarkably successful as to what we have been able to start.

Chairman MENENDEZ. One of the things that I am enthused about the 5-year plan is that it also talks about prevention of homelessness. Our ultimate goal is not only to give all of those who are homeless a home, but is to prevent this from happening. What is it that the Administration can do to prevent homelessness before it begins? What are some of your initiatives in that regard?

Mr. DOUGHERTY. Well, besides the Supportive Services Grants that I mentioned a moment ago, we are now getting fully engaged in doing more with veterans who are discharging from institutional settings, particularly those who are coming out of correctional settings, because we know a significant percentage of them go in with mental illness and substance abuse problems. They are coming out now with a criminal arrest record history, as well. They have multiple strikes against them.

Last year, we intervened in about 4,500 cases of veterans who were coming out of institutional settings. Besides those who are in institutional settings, we are now moving into working more with court diversion programs. Many years ago, I was a magistrate

court judge, and one of the things that I think this gives us an opportunity to do is to say to that veteran, who really needs health care and assistance, that if we can get you into treatment and get those problems addressed that will be less likely to set you into homelessness. You will have a much better opportunity to move on with your life, get back into employment, and take on responsibility.

Chairman MENENDEZ. If there is a veteran or the family of a veteran or a neighbor of a veteran who is homeless or facing a challenge right now, is there a 1-800 number that we could give them right now?

Mr. DOUGHERTY. Any veteran can contact us by the 1-800-827-1000 number.

Chairman MENENDEZ. One-800-827—

Mr. DOUGHERTY. One thousand.

Chairman MENENDEZ. —1000.

Mr. DOUGHERTY. Mr. Chairman, as you talk about prevention, one of the things that we are doing is we are hooking up with the suicide hotline that goes out across the country that works as a collaborative with the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Veterans Affairs. About 20 percent of the veterans who call that number may have some suicidal tendency, but many times, they are calling because they have a homeless issue. We are matching up with the veteran portion of those calls, because what we want to be able to do is to be able to respond immediately to that veteran who is in crisis and get them into a program and services, because one of the other things that we are doing is more preventive activity that Senator Tester was talking about.

We have a sixfold increase in contract residential care. What we want to be able to do is to get to the point that when veterans are coming to us and they need assistance, we will be able to provide some assistance to them today, not to say, come back at some time in the future or go on a waiting list to get assistance.

Chairman MENENDEZ. Thank you.

Senator Reed.

Senator REED. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Madam Secretary and Mr. Dougherty.

Let me first ask, Mr. Dougherty, one of the lessons that we have learned with respect to homelessness is to get the sickest, most complicated individuals who are homeless the longest into permanent supportive housing and to do this without preconditions or requirements that would otherwise screen out these people. And again, that is a tension between the decorum in the facility and getting these people off the street.

Are you embracing this approach of housing first, of literally getting the most difficult, challenging cases off the street? Can you elaborate on your approach?

Mr. DOUGHERTY. Yes, Senator Reed, we do that. We are looking, and unlike some, we have a long history of both the health care needs of these veterans and an opportunity to make an assessment of what their needs are. We, in fact, do look to try to make sure that those who are in the greatest need get those services. And we don't have preconditions. We want to make sure this is an appropriate veteran who will come in, and as the law requires, we will

participate in ongoing health care services. What we don't want to do is just put somebody in housing without services because we don't think they are going to get better or do well. But we will take anybody into this program as long as they are interested in continuing to get ongoing services.

Senator REED. Let me follow up. How could having resources for Rapid Re-Housing initiatives, such as short-term rental assistance, security deposits, utility payment, help in your efforts? That is one of the aspects of the legislation I have proposed.

Mr. DOUGHERTY. Well, it helps tremendously because, we know that there are two groups of veterans that it would help. We have run across an increasing number of veterans who are having a difficult time right now that perhaps some short-term assistance would keep them from ever becoming homeless in the first place. And we also know that that assistance is very helpful to help get some of those veterans who are sliding into homelessness or have slid into homelessness.

One of the things that we are hoping prior to your legislation is to try to use authority in the Supportive Services Grant money we have. We will give some money and the grantees will be able to use that money to help get veterans into housing who would otherwise be able to get into housing but don't have money for security deposits and those things. We work closely, as the Assistant Secretary has said, with Rapid Re-Housing, but we also know that in many communities, it is a community decision as to what they are going to do with that money and so we want to make sure that there is adequate resources to get those veterans taken care of.

Senator REED. Thank you.

Let me turn to the Secretary, and I know you are both committed, not just individually, but as organizations, to help our veterans. But what are the challenges that you have perceived—both of you, but I will start with the Secretary—in veterans accessing HUD programs, and specific strategies that collectively you are weighing to address these difficulties? Madam Secretary?

Ms. MÁRQUEZ. Thank you for the question. I think I would start by saying that up until the efforts of the last 2 years, there was not a great bridge between the HUD programs and the VA programs. The HUD-VASH has created a bridge. The Rapid Re-Housing elements have strengthened it, because with Section 8 there is not money there for any kind of deposit for the utility assistance that you spoke of. The Rapid Re-Housing money now ties the Section 8 voucher to the money that gets you in and keeps you in the housing and services that the VA is offering. So now there is a real bridge and a real path to walk.

I would also say that in any effort, any strategy on this, you have to decide where you are going to draw your line. And as you have spoken about how all the numbers continue, you have to decide, where are you going to start the intake process on those that are coming back, whether it is that they are coming back from the field or they are coming out of another institution, how you are going to catch them there, do the intake and assessment properly there, and then how are you going to look back at those that now have more chronic issues.

The money that we have at the moment, the types of programs that we have now are allowing us to keep that line. That is something we did not have before. Without having enough resources to focus on prevention, essentially, then, everyone is dropping back into the deeper problems, and then that is more costly and more difficult to work both with the individual and their families.

Senator REED. Thank you, Madam Secretary.

Just a quick comment, Mr. Dougherty, from your perspective?

Mr. DOUGHERTY. I think, Senator, that the issue of having dedicated vouchers for veterans has been terrific and the other provisions that you put in that would allow us to serve those veterans. I think what has happened here is we have been able to do the best of two things. The Department of Housing and Urban Development obviously is the lead and does good housing. We provide lots of good health care and other services. And so the ability for us to tie each veteran in each housing unit with the best of both of what we do is the secret to success.

Senator REED. Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Chairman MENENDEZ. Thank you.

Senator Tester.

Senator TESTER. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank both of you for the work you do. It is critically important work, I think, as we move forward to address the issue.

Mr. Dougherty, I think I will start with if the VA has a policy regarding VA-funded contractors who provide shelter to veterans, are they, or do they—it is a two-edged sword—do they allow the shelter to take in intoxicated veterans?

Mr. DOUGHERTY. Are you talking about our Grant and Per Diem Program, the Transitional Housing Program?

Senator TESTER. I am talking about Grant and Per Diem Program.

Mr. DOUGHERTY. Yes. In the Grant and Per Diem Program, there is a provision in law that says sobriety. That doesn't mean I can't come in, having been drinking, but there is a sobriety provision in the law for that program. So I have to try to achieve and maintain sobriety.

Senator TESTER. Right, and so how—I mean, do you give any sort of consultation to folks who run these shelters about—I mean, I get it. I understand it. You don't want somebody that is not sober coming into a place where it is safe. On the other side of the coin, you don't want to kick them out if it is 20 below zero, or even if it is 20 above zero, you don't want to kick them out. You don't want to kick them out, period.

Mr. DOUGHERTY. Right.

Senator TESTER. What kind of counsel do you give to them?

Mr. DOUGHERTY. Right. We should, if the veteran can't continue to stay in there because they are not complying with the requirements—

Senator TESTER. Yes.

Mr. DOUGHERTY. Then the VA should be working with that provider to work on an appropriate discharge plan. Our plan should not be just simply to put that person out. The plan should be what can that veteran get in the way of additional treatment outside of there.

Senator TESTER. So where do they go? Where does the head of that shelter, where does the administrator of that shelter go?

Mr. DOUGHERTY. Every Grant and Per Diem Program has a liaison who is a clinical case manager who is supposed to work with them.

Senator TESTER. OK, and that is pretty much across the board, even in rural areas?

Mr. DOUGHERTY. Yes.

Senator TESTER. OK. You had spoken about 40,000 veterans coming out of corrections every year, is that correct?

Mr. DOUGHERTY. Yes.

Senator TESTER. This may not be in your bailiwick, but does the VA work with those folks while they are incarcerated?

Mr. DOUGHERTY. We are prohibited under law from providing direct health care services while they are in incarceration. What we do now is we go in when there is a release pending to work on a discharge planning process. That is not considered to be sort of direct hands-on health care services.

Senator TESTER. What about just consultation as far as—I mean, there are a lot of mental health issues that revolve around a lot of these veterans that end up—and everybody, as far as that goes. Is there any opportunity to try to give them some counseling, because from what I have heard, the counseling in the correctional facilities is pretty much nonexistent.

Mr. DOUGHERTY. Having worked in the correction field in the past, as well, I would concur with your view that there is not enough being done inside correctional institutions generally to address that. We attend joint meetings with people who provide services there, but generally, no, we do not provide any direct services inside institutions.

Senator TESTER. I mean, with those kind of numbers coming out, it would be great to try to build some bridges there, too.

The only other question I have, and it is for—I have got a lot more questions, but it is for both of you. For instance, Ms. Márquez, you said \$13.6 billion in ARRA money that came out for housing and community development. I assume some of that goes for veterans. Some of it goes for folks who aren't veterans. Do you guys measure how effective those dollars are, not necessarily those dollars, but any dollars you put on the ground? Do you measure the effectiveness as far as how many veterans end up getting served?

Ms. MÁRQUEZ. Actually, yes, we do. Those particular programs that serve veterans, we have over 7,000 clients. The assistance that is provided and the recordkeeping that is done is actually fairly significant, particularly in the special needs populations. We have quite a bit of information. On housing units—

Senator TESTER. OK. What qualifies as special needs?

Ms. MÁRQUEZ. Well, special needs would be someone who is homeless, at risk of being homeless, has a disability. So all of those programs. We have about 7,000 clients in our particular Special Needs programs, and when I mean clients, I mean organizations that receive money.

Senator TESTER. Right.

Ms. MÁRQUEZ. There is a fairly significant reporting process that keeps track of exactly what happens. And actually, an enriched technical assistance program for them.

Senator TESTER. Well, we may touch base with you to try to get some numbers on that, because I think that if we are getting a good bang for the buck on any of these programs, then I think we need to investigate it further.

Just a closing comment. I just toured here a month or two ago a homeless facility, a facility that was taking care of homeless people in Billings, Montana. The VA contributed 65 percent of the money. Volunteers of America contributed 35 percent of the money. I was very, very impressed, and I think they can hold them for 2 years, get them back on their feet, get them some education if that is the direction they want to go, get them a job if that is the direction they want to go, and then try to mainstream them back in the general population.

I cannot applaud those kind of efforts enough. There are a lot of these folks that if we don't supply them the kind of basic needs—if we don't help them meet them, it is going to cost them a lot as far as quality of life, potentially their life, period, where we can really help these folks. I just—in the short period of time that was open—I think it was open about a month when I got there—I was very impressed with the clientele that was there and how they were progressing.

Thank you very much for your work. I very much appreciate it.

Chairman MENENDEZ. Thank you, Senator Tester.

Senator Merkley.

Senator MERKLEY. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you all for the work you are doing.

I wanted to particularly thank the Veterans Affairs, because we had a challenge with the VASH Program in Portland, Oregon, where the vouchers simply weren't getting distributed. There was a bureaucratic block in the pipeline, if you will, and earlier this year when we brought it to the attention of the Veterans Department, they jumped in, found what the problem was, fixed it, and put it back on track so those vouchers were really reaching veterans, and so I wanted to thank you for the team doing a great job in making the program work on the road.

I want to try to understand this issue of homelessness among veterans as much as possible. I understand that homelessness tends to reach a peak about 7 years after veterans return, those who have served overseas. One might have initially thought that maybe homelessness would be higher first after returning, as people try to get their feet on the ground. But what drives the curve of homelessness as people return from the theater of war?

Mr. DOUGHERTY. I think there are two issues that are at play. One is that that has been the historical view of what has happened, has been about a 10-year period from the time you have discharged from military service. But that also predates the fact that we had early intervention and programs that were in existence.

We are now much more proactively going out and reaching. But the real issue for most veterans who we see in homeless programs is a significant substance use disorder problem and mental illness problems, and many of those problems are something that accumu-

late over a period of time. And while I may have mental illness problems, I may have a substance abuse problem, for many, I can sort of cope and maintain for a while. I may be able to maintain some housing. I may be able to maintain. But my relationships start breaking apart. My friends and family stop associating with me, stop letting me stay with them, because while you go off to work, I sit and drink and abuse my opportunity to stay with you until finally you have had enough and you say, no, you have got to go.

That is where many of the veterans that we have seen in the past have been. They have literally been homeless and out on the street or under the bridges or in an emergency shelter. What we are trying to do is change the focus of that, as we are in a lot of things in health care, into, instead of getting to illness care, we are trying to work on wellness. We are trying to stop that veteran early on so they don't become so disabled that they fall into what you and I would consider to be chronically homeless veteran. We want to try to make sure when they are having those first signs of mental health and substance abuse problems and employment-related problems, we are intervening with them at that period and not waiting until they get sick.

Senator MERKLEY. Secretary Márquez, I saw you shaking your head. Is there anything you want to add to that, or shaking your head up and down.

Ms. MÁRQUEZ. I think the issues, the arc that people go through, if we are not careful about now removing judgment in our programs, right, judgment, for instance, if you are intoxicated, you can't come into a shelter, what ends up happening is that then that person can go outside, become belligerent, get arrested, and you drop down to another problem.

If we had, for instance, something like a drop-in center, not that they should come into the shelter and be belligerent there, but if there were a corollary drop-in center where they could go to calm down, to sleep a bit, right, it would help, and that is because we would have removed judgment from our programs.

The same is true as we go through with how do you serve people in permanent supportive housing. If we adopt a housing-first model, truly adopt a housing-first model, then we will design buildings, common areas, spaces, and services to accommodate that more long-term and have a system later, that as folks stabilize, have another level of housing that doesn't have the deepest level of permanent supportive services, which are also the most expensive, and allows them to move from a certain level of deep services to another level of services, making room for someone else. We yet do not have the full measure of housing that takes someone from absolute crisis, like the individual that presents themselves at a shelter, to the level of sustainability of the individual until the point where they can actually be integrated back into the regular community without any stigma at all or being in any particular special needs types of housing. That is what we have to do.

Senator MERKLEY. One other question, and certainly I will yield to the Chair if—is it appropriate to take another question here? As we study homelessness among veterans, do we find, if you will, for similar-aged folks who came from similar backgrounds who didn't

go into the service, do we find a significantly different curve for those who didn't serve, those who served but didn't serve in a theater of war, didn't serve in battle, and those who ended up in Iraq and Afghanistan-type situations with the stress of battle? Do we see significantly different curves in terms of the level of substance abuse, the level of mental illness, the level of homelessness? Can we kind of see what the challenge of that—do we see distinctions from the veterans' experience to the experience of the regular population?

Mr. DOUGHERTY. I think that we are not sure we have a final, definitive answer on that. That is one of the things that these new Centers on Homelessness are really looking at. What we do know is that there are many common risk factors among all homeless people, those who have had military service and who have not. What we also know is those that had military service with long deployments, those who have been in combat zones, those are additional stress factors that are on people who generally are not on the civilian population who has not had military service.

Among the OIF/OEF veterans, for example, that we have seen, is a significantly higher percentage of these veterans than any veterans we have seen before of having some affective disorder, perhaps combat PTSD. But these veterans have had multiple deployments in many cases and obviously have been in a very hot war situation, and so that is an additional stress.

But we are still trying to come to the good answer as to whether or not we can really categorize whether there are so many risk factors in my youth and in my military service and in my postmilitary service to make a good correlation between those who had military service and those who have not.

Senator MERKLEY. Thank you very much, both of you.

Mr. DOUGHERTY. Thank you.

Chairman MENENDEZ. Thank you, Senator.

Thank you both for your testimony. We applaud your coordination. We are looking forward to greater integration so that we can provide a powerful set of programs that provide solutions, both on the housing and the supportive services side that, I think, universally we agree need to be integrated to make this successful. I know, having spoken to many of my colleagues about this, and you saw the turnout today about this issue, there is a great desire to be supportive of evidence-based successful programs. Just having an array of programs doesn't cut it if we are not succeeding at the goal.

So we will look forward to our continuing engagement. We are going to be hearing a second panel of both individuals as well as organizations who are involved with veterans and homelessness. We will share it with you and look forward to your responses. Thank you very much.

Let me call up our second panel as our first panel leaves.

The first witness on our second panel is Ms. Melanie Lilliston. She is the Director of Technical Assistance and Finance at the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, a nonprofit organization which is a resource and technical assistance center for a national network of community-based service providers assisting hundreds of thousands of veterans each year.

Our next witness is Mr. Jack Fanous. He is the Executive Director and founder of the G.I. Go Fund. The G.I. Go Fund specifically supports veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom with respect to transition assistance, and we are certainly proud to have Jack here. The G.I. Go Fund is a New Jersey organization.

Our third witness is Ms. Lila Guy, a veteran of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Ms. Guy served in Kirkuk, Iraq, from September 2005 to September 2006. She is from the 101st Airborne Division at Fort Campbell, Kentucky. Ms. Guy has a compelling story to tell all of us, and on behalf of our colleagues here in the Senate, we thank you for your service to our country.

Our final witness is Mr. William Wise of Winslow, New Jersey. He is a Vietnam War veteran. Mr. Wise himself was homeless for a time after his return, and once again, Mr. Wise, thank you for your service to our country.

We welcome you all. We look forward to your testimony. And again, we would ask you to summarize that testimony in around 5 minutes. Your full statements will be included in the record.

And with that, Ms. Lilliston, would you start?

STATEMENT OF MELANIE LILLISTON, DIRECTOR OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND FINANCE, NATIONAL COALITION FOR HOMELESS VETERANS

Ms. LILLISTON. Good morning. The National Coalition for Homeless Veterans is honored to appear before this Committee today to comment on ending veterans homelessness.

For 20 years, NCHV has worked diligently to serve as the Nation's primary liaison between the community and faith-based organizations that help homeless veterans, the Congress, and the Federal agencies that are invested in this campaign. The efforts have been commendable and we are grateful that we have such dedicated and passionate leadership within the Department of Veterans Affairs, the Department of Labor, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development. We have made significant progress in the efforts to end veterans homelessness. However, our work is not done until the last veteran is off the street.

Just last week at a summit hosted by the VA, Secretary Eric Shinseki stated, this is not a summit on homeless veterans. It is a summit to end homelessness among veterans. That is our purpose. President Obama and I are personally committed to ending homelessness among veterans within the next 5 years.

To demonstrate his commitment, Secretary Shinseki has created a 5-year plan that would expand the VA's partnerships and collaborations between the Federal agencies and community-based partners. Four of the six strategic pillars of the plan work on—have been built on the work of the past two decades, outreach, treatment, employment and benefits, and community partnerships. Two represent new critical focus, prevention and housing and supportive services for low-income veterans.

NCHV acknowledges the leadership role of the Subcommittee and that of the full Committee in this noble effort. There are three key bills that lay the foundation on which we as a Nation can build

a successful, comprehensive campaign to end and prevent homelessness among veterans and fulfill the Secretary's 5-year plan.

The Zero Tolerance for Veterans Homeless Act of 2009 provides authorization for up to \$50 million annually to provide supportive services for low-income veterans to reduce the risk of becoming homeless. It will modernize the extremely important and successful VA Grant and Per Diem Program and allow for the utilization of innovative project funding strategies. It calls for the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to study the method of reimbursing Grant and Per Diem Programs for their program expenses and reporting recommendations for revising the payment system. It will increase the annual Grant and Per Diem authorization to \$200 million annually beginning in fiscal year 2010, and it will establish the Special Assistant for Veterans Affairs within HUD to ensure veterans have access to housing and homeless assistance programs funded by the Department.

The Homes for Heroes Act of 2009 will allow low- and extremely low-income veterans to access housing and the vital services they need in order to be successful citizens. The Act would provide \$200 million annually for the development of supportive housing for veterans who need case management and wrap-around services in order to be successfully housed. It would fund 20,000 rental vouchers for extremely low-income veterans, and it would create the position of Veteran Liaison within HUD to ensure veteran inclusion in all of their programs.

More and more families are requesting services and affordable housing, and providing them this support would reduce the likelihood that many veteran families in crisis will continue on this downward spiral into homelessness. The Homeless Women Veterans and Homeless Veterans with Children Act of 2009—for the first time in American history, women comprise more than 11 percent of the forces being deployed to serve in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, including more than 30,000 single women with dependent children. The VA anticipates women will account for more than 50 percent of the Nation's veterans within the next 10 years. Currently, more than 5 percent of veterans requesting assistance from the VA and community-based homeless veterans service providers are women, and more than half of these women are between the ages of 20 and 29, with 10 percent having dependent children. This bill would authorize up to \$10 million in grants to community and faith-based organizations to provide critical, specialized supports for these deserving families as they work their way out of homelessness.

In closing, on this day before Veterans Day, I want to thank you for your support helping the men and women who have served this country in the greatest hour of need. The successes we have seen in decreasing the number of homeless veterans over the last 5 years would not have happened without your leadership and support. These three bills are vital for the Secretary's 5-year plan to move forward. From the increase in the number of HUD-VASH vouchers and the ability to provide supportive services for low-income and women veterans, to the improvement and expansions of the Grant and Per Diem Program, these bills provide real opportunities to move the plan into action and fulfill the historic mission

to end homelessness among veterans and former Guardians in 5 years.

Once again, on behalf of the veterans we serve, thank you for your support. I can think of no better way to say thank you to all of those who served this Nation than continuing to support those veterans who need our help the most.

Chairman MENENDEZ. Thank you very much.

Mr. Berg, let me apologize. In my original set of introductions here, there was an omit. We welcome you to the hearing. Steven Berg is the Vice President for Programs and Policy at the National Alliance To End Homelessness, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that was founded back in 1983 by a group of leaders deeply disturbed by the appearance of thousands of Americans living on the streets of our Nation. And while I know your agenda is broad in terms of all homelessness, we certainly welcome you to today's hearing and I recognize you at this time.

STATEMENT OF STEVEN R. BERG, VICE PRESIDENT FOR PROGRAMS AND POLICY, NATIONAL ALLIANCE TO END HOMELESSNESS

Mr. BERG. Well, Senator Menendez, thank you again for holding this hearing and inviting us to the hearing. I think your statement about wanting to support things that work is really what I would like to talk about for a few minutes here today.

As many people on this Committee are aware, and largely because of the work of programs under the jurisdiction of this Committee, this country—the leading communities in this country have really changed the way homelessness is addressed. The cities, the States that are doing the best work on this issue have really changed from programs that merely manage the problem of homelessness and take care of homeless people to programs that really seek to solve the problem of homelessness.

I know you are familiar with the use of permanent supportive housing in New Jersey as a real leader for the rest of the country. Initiatives like Rapid Re-Housing, like more intensive prevention kinds of services, coordinating across systems, these initiatives have had real impacts in some of the leading communities. The number of homeless people has dropped substantially up until the recession, and even in the face of the recession, it managed to stave off the increases that we have come to expect as the unemployment rate goes up.

We have an opportunity now to use what we have learned to get these same results for veterans. For 20 years, we have been addressing the problem of homeless veterans, decrying the lack of results, but somehow not able to ever get the results that we have wanted. The learning that we have had in recent years, the political support for doing more about homeless veterans, those things combine to give us an opportunity that I think is illustrated by the new VA Secretary's announcement of a 5-year plan to end homelessness for veterans.

I think what it is going to take—what we have learned from what we have seen with the homelessness system more generally is that there are certain things that it is going to take. It is going to take leadership. It is going to take leadership at the national

level, and, of course, the Secretary has put down a hugely important marker for that. It is also going to take leadership at the local level.

Too often—and this, of course, varies by location and there are many places where the local VA representatives are very closely tied in with what the rest of the community is doing around homelessness—but there are other places where the VA's homeless programs or the VA itself is separate from what happens in the rest of the community around homelessness. There is not a lot of interaction there.

What needs to happen is the VA needs to take leadership at the local level, and very specifically, as we put it, there has got to be somebody whose job it is, if a veteran is homeless or about to become homeless, to help that veteran get housing. And the VA are the ones to do it.

That has started now with the HUD Voucher Program, as the VA has hired case managers, part of whose job is to find landlords who are willing to take those vouchers and rent to homeless veterans. The advent of the Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program in the stimulus, that is a HUD program, but it makes more resources available, and we are hearing the VA getting more active about finding out who has got those resources in the community, making sure veterans have access to those. The kind of prevention and Rapid Re-Housing initiatives that are in Senator Reed's bill, the Zero Tolerance bill, would take that a step further, as Pete Dougherty was saying. This is an important thing that has to happen. There needs to be a broader array of programs for homeless veterans.

The VA has programs such as the Per Diem Program that are focused on veterans for whom a 2-year transitional housing stint is an appropriate response, where sobriety is an achievable goal. But there also need to be programs like permanent supportive housing that find people who have more severe disabilities and severe problems, for whom sobriety is just not going to be able to be the first thing on the agenda. And at the same time, on the other end, there need to be programs like Rapid Re-Housing for people who don't need a 2-year program. They are having an emergency crisis. They need an emergency crisis response. These are things that are starting to really have an impact in the regular homeless system and it needs to happen in the VA, too.

We know that for many years, we have not dealt with this issue the way it should be dealt with. There is a sense in which, as a country, we made some mistakes with veterans of an earlier era, of the Vietnam era and the era right after that, and the result was thousands of veterans homeless for a long period of time. We hope not to make that same mistake now, and at the same time maybe rectify some of the mistakes we made earlier. I think the opportunity exists to do that, and that is why I am so enthused about what this Committee is doing. Thank you.

Senator MERKLEY. Thank you very much.

Mr. Fanous.

**STATEMENT OF JACK S. FANOUS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND
FOUNDER, G.I. GO FUND**

Mr. FANOUS. Good morning, Chairman Menendez. I would like to thank you for this opportunity to testify on the difficulties our Nation's homeless veterans face and the steps our organization is taking to answer the call to end all homelessness among veterans within 5 years.

I am the Executive Director and founder of the G.I. Go Fund, a grassroots 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization with a mission to assist our Nation's heroes along the difficult path of transition. The G.I. Go Fund was founded in 2006 following the death of one of my closest childhood friends, Army Lieutenant Seth Devorin, from wounds he suffered while attempting to dismantle an IED in Iraq.

The organization began as a small community group which aimed to preserve the memory of my friend by providing veterans with days of rest and relaxation. However, as we began to understand these men and get to know them, we began to understand that their problems didn't end the minute they stepped back foot on American soil, that the problems actually just began.

Our veterans who have just endured and survived the unimaginable are now expected to execute a smooth transition back to civilian life. They are expected to establish relationships with family and friends. They are expected to find either long-term secure employment based on their work experience in the military or expected to become students utilizing the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill, all this while still tending to their mental and physical wounds by fully addressing utilizing their VA benefits.

It has been my experience that a fragmented transition which results from one of these steps being missed or mishandled leaves our veterans to face a myriad of problems that can range from fractured family ties, unemployment, depression, as well as many others. This is all in addition to the veteran's experienced physical or mental wounds. The issues can fester and manifest to become chronically debilitating illness.

Ultimately, a fragmented transition is the primary cause of homelessness among our Nation's veterans and we must formulate a two-pronged approach that first works to avoid future homelessness among new veterans, while simultaneously ending the current disaster. This two-pronged approach has been implemented by Mayor Booker of Newark, New Jersey, who has partnered with our organization to create the first-ever nonprofit run Municipal Office of Veterans Affairs, which aims to help veterans find employment and get off the streets when they are actually homeless.

When a soldier returns to the United States from Iraq or Afghanistan, he or she is immediately inundated with the problems many Americans face today, which include unemployment, an empty refrigerator, shut-off notices, or an eviction or foreclosure notice. While our organization has assisted thousands of American military families with these problems as they arise by hosting job fairs to address the unemployment, but also providing direct financial assistance to help put food on the table and keep a roof over their heads, it just isn't enough.

The root of the financial difficulties usually stems from unemployment. Like any one of us here today, a veteran cannot pay for

groceries if they are unemployed. A veteran cannot pay for utilities if they are unemployed. A veteran cannot pay for a mortgage if they are unemployed. However, unlike the rest of us sitting here today, these men and women have been defending our Nation's freedom against the threat of terrorism, causing them to miss years of their lives. Our Nation's veterans deserve our patience, assistance, and understanding that it will take some time to put these lives back on track.

In addition, the Department of Labor's Office of Federal Contract Compliance, which oversees the hiring practices of Federal contractors as it pertains to women, minorities, veterans, and people with disabilities, tracks numbers on the number of women and minorities that are hired by Federal contractors. However, it does not track the number of veterans which are hired by Federal contractors. Until our Federal contractors and all of our employers in the country take affirmative action to hire our veterans now, we will not be able to end the flow of veterans onto the streets.

On any given night in America, one-third of all homeless people are men and women who proudly served our Nation. They live in boxes and under bridges. They are our forgotten heroes. To end this national disaster, a vigorous series of partnerships between all branches of Government and at all levels of Government must be forged with community groups and faith-based organizations. However, these partnerships must result in veterans actually getting off the streets, not the same outreach attempts which have failed in the past, like the Veterans Homeless Standdown, which we host every year in the city of Newark, which amounts to nothing more than just a nice day for veterans. They come in, they get a hot meal, they get some clothes, but they go right back out on the streets. It doesn't accomplish much.

This more can only come in the form of housing—more housing, more beds, more transitional beds, more permanent housing, as we spoke about with the HUD-VASH, housing projects like the one we are working on in the city of Newark, which will pursue to rehabilitate a 33,000-square-foot building into a transitional housing facility that will house 100 homeless veterans. In a State that has 9,000 homeless veterans on any given night in a State that only has less than 200 permanent transitional housing facilities, we need more.

And in conclusion, I would like to thank you, Senator Menendez, and all the Members of the Committee, for providing me the time to speak about this important issue on ending homeless within 5 years. While the task that lies before us is great and the clock has already begun ticking, I leave here today deeply encouraged by the attention this Committee has shined on the issue. I am encouraged that the Chairman of this Committee, Chairman Menendez, has in his Congressional office a liaison that fights for veterans issues in the State of New Jersey with a passion that is unmatched. And I am most encouraged that President Obama and Secretary Shinseki have made ending homelessness among veterans a top priority of the new Administration. I am encouraged, but I am keenly aware of the enormity of the task at hand, and I am ready to dig in and manifest the direction provided by the President and Congress. Thank you.

Chairman MENENDEZ. Thank you very much.
Ms. Guy.

STATEMENT OF LILA M. GUY, IRAQ WAR VETERAN

Ms. GUY. Hi. I just want to thank you for allowing me to come here and share my story.

As you have already said, I spent a year in Iraq, from 2005 to 2006, and during that time, I was in Kirkuk, Iraq. But I had four children at home and a husband. When I came back home, about a month after we got home, they informed us that we will be redeploying in less than a year after we had come back. My husband was not happy. He was not in the military, but he decided that it just was not something that he wanted to do, and so he just left.

And so at the time, I had three children. Me and my children were at Fort Campbell and we were doing field training and things like that. I didn't have anybody to watch the kids for me or whatever while I went to the field for 30 days, and I had to ask my mom to come and stay with me so I could do 2 weeks of training. And after all of that, I couldn't do it anymore. I was having issues just trying to readjust to being back home and taking care of kids and all that kind of stuff.

So I ended up getting out of the military on a hardship discharge. So when I got out, I had nothing. Because it was such an abrupt discharge, I didn't have anything, nowhere to go, and I drove home. All I had was my car and my kids. So I drove home to my parents' house and I stayed there for a while.

I ended up having another baby and my father said, you know, you can't—we don't have enough room, so you are going to have to find something. But at that time, I still had not found a job. I had four kids now in one room in a two-bedroom house with my parents, and so I sent an e-mail to Congressman Sestak and I informed him of my situation. I was in school. I was a full-time student. But I just didn't have the money. I had no place to go. And I asked him, could he help me.

They sent me to the VA, and they had just started a pilot program for the HUD-VASH—I mean, not a pilot, but it just started, and I was, like, one of nine of the people that had just started, you know, going to be first on the program. And it took about a year before I actually got into a house. During that time, it was really stressful because I am watching as all of the people who are in charge—it was only one person. They finally brought in another person, and by the time he came, they had about 150 applicants and they were supposed to be, you know, having meetings with those, coming to our house, and all of that kind of stuff, but they couldn't do it because they didn't have enough people.

But anyway, I got a house through the HUD-VASH Program. It is a four-bedroom house and it is a beautiful—it is a nice house, you know, just a transition, but I just thank the HUD-VASH Program for being there for me when I needed them, because I really didn't have any other choice or whatever.

With the HUD-VASH Program, I really believe in it, because my situation could have been a lot worse. And I see a lot of people that are—when we go to the meetings, there are a lot of other people that are in the HUD-VASH Program that are literally living on the

street, and a lot of them have mental illnesses. I was listening to his statement and it was true to me, because I see so many—not just veterans, but soldiers, as soon as they come back, with so many mental issues.

And like he said, the transition is hard. They teach you to go and to train and to fight and do all of those things, but they don't teach you how to live a normal life when you come back. They don't teach you how to take care of your kids or pay all of your bills or whatever. A lot of that stuff is all clumped in together. But once you are out in the real world, those things are not there for you. There is nobody to say, well, this is what you need to do, this is the next step, whatever.

And a lot of those people are lost. There are a lot of veteran programs, but most veterans don't know what options are out there for them. So it just so happened that I was able to reach out to somebody that could help me, but a lot of those people don't know. They don't have those resources.

So I just thank the HUD-VASH Program for all that they have done for me, because it has given me an opportunity to move on with my life. I am still a full-time student and I am doing the Vocational Rehabilitation Program, so all of those programs are all different. But every time that you have to reach out to somebody, you are reaching out here, reaching out there, it is frustrating, and a lot of those people don't have the patience to deal with those kind of things.

So if there was some way that all of those things could be pushed together—not necessarily pushed together, but giving them an opportunity to be able to say, well, these are the options that you have, these are the things that are out there for you, it would help a lot of these soldiers out a lot, because they don't have anybody as their liaison to say, look, you can do this, that, and the other.

So I just thank you for allowing me to be here. Thank you.

Chairman MENENDEZ. Thank you very much for sharing your story, and again, thank you for your service. We wish you well in school, as well.

Ms. GUY. Thank you.

Chairman MENENDEZ. Mr. Wise.

STATEMENT OF WILLIAM WISE, VIETNAM WAR VETERAN

Mr. WISE. Good morning and thank you for having me. I am pretty much here to endorse the long-term residential programs, like the one I am in in Winslow. Having been into short-term programs, in and out of psych wards, *et cetera*, in programs, and then thrown back out in the private sector, the VA—their long-term residential program has provided me with the time to really address—assess and address the issues of a veteran and to use a military skill, a military training and experience, and turn that into a new skill set to learn how to transition out.

It is a very good program, and I think the time that you are there is more important. Short-term, it is not going to work, the 120-day program, at least not for me. Had I known about the VA earlier, it probably would have been like fourth down and 99 before I even tried to call the 1-800 number. You know what I am saying. I come from a generation where it is nothing but a scratch. I can

handle it. And so it was a long time coming before I got to the point where I sought someone to get a new play to run, and I still probably would have run my own play.

I don't know what else to say about that except I really, really enjoy that program. It saved my life. I have created a balance where I can see something. Instead of trying to assimilate, I can take my own self and go on, and that is all I have. Thank you.

Chairman MENENDEZ. Mr. Wise, which program were you talking about?

Mr. WISE. Veterans Haven. Veterans Haven in Winslow. It is a 2-year vocational and residential—I mean, vocational and transitional arrangement, 2 years, and then after completion, with an income, with a certain income, you can go to get housing assistance as long as you stay in the State of New Jersey, which I leave in March, and that is why I plan to stay in Jersey.

Chairman MENENDEZ. Great. Thank you very much, again, for your testimony and your service.

Thank you all for your testimony. We will start a series of 5-minute rounds, and I may take more than 5 minutes since there is no one else looking to ask questions.

Let me start off with a little bit of what I heard here. Mr. Berg, you said the VA needs to take leadership at the local level, as I heard you. Can you expound? What exactly do you mean by that, that they need to take leadership at the local level?

Mr. BERG. I think there are two things I mean by that. One is within a community, in every community in this country, there are people working on the issue of homelessness. There are HUD-funded programs. There are HHS-funded programs. There are VA programs. A lot of times, those programs don't necessarily work together around veterans, around the simple things of, you know, if you are going to really be serious about reducing and ending veterans homelessness in the community, you have to find the veterans who are homeless, find the veterans who are about to become homeless, make sure somebody is doing that, and then find the housing resources that are going to be available and the other kinds of resources that are going to be needed for those veterans.

So it is a matter of reaching out to different people in the community, to leaders in the community, to federally funded programs, to private programs, bringing them together around this task of, in this community, we are going to identify veterans who are homeless and we are going to get them into housing and we are going to chip away at the numbers until we reduce the number to zero.

So it is that kind of leadership, and it is also just the leadership of making sure that help with housing is available to veterans who turn to the VA. I mean, right now—and this is changing because of HUD-VASH—but in the past, the VA just hasn't had housing resources other than the 2-year transitional programs, which are limited in number and really just not really enough of that to really cover the scope at all. So veterans would come in—homeless veterans would come in, or people about to losing their housing would come in and there was no help to give them. And so it is making sure that an array of housing resources are available and there are people at the VA who can work with landlords and help resolve housing problems.

Chairman MENENDEZ. Mr. Fanous, you talked about the fragmentation. So if you had a magic wand and could make what you think is the best coordinated effort to take place, what would it be?

Mr. FANOUS. Well, honestly, Senator, I believe that the most important thing would be to have all the stakeholders who are providing care for veterans, they should be localized and put into one location. When a veteran has to travel from the VA in one part of the State and has to go to the Social Security Administration in another part of the State, and then he has to go to the Salvation Army or the G.I. Go Fund and he has got to drive all over the State, many times, they don't have enough money to put gas in their car.

It just gets that simple, that the facilities all have to be together in one centralized location, which is something that we are hoping to work on in the city of Newark, was create a mall of services, you know, just a one-stop—a legitimate one-stop mall of services, where one office would be Social Security Administration, one office would be the VA, one office would be various nonprofits that can support veterans. If a veteran can just walk into one spot—which is kind of what the VA's War-Related Illness Injury Center has at the VA, where they try to handle all medical issues at one point, if you can try to handle all issues completely, veterans' issues from the Department of Labor, every single one of those departments, it is the best chance you are going to have to helping veterans.

Otherwise, it is going to stay fragmented, because if a veteran goes to the VA and he talks to one person, he might not know that he has to go to the Social Security Administration. He might not be getting the right information, which is what happens every single day. I see it every single day in my office. It sounds like it is easily fixed, but I haven't found a way to do so.

It is just every single veteran that I see in my office that comes in with a problem, it is because they didn't handle a certain part of their transition. Something was missing, whether it be the employment, whether it be the VA, whether it be the education, whether it be something, they missed something. And unless everybody is housed together and providing services for them together, I don't see how it is going to change.

Chairman MENENDEZ. So a holistic, one-stop—

Mr. FANOUS. Right.

Chairman MENENDEZ. —service effort is what you are talking about.

Mr. FANOUS. Right. Like our office serves as a one-stop, where we have information from every office. However, I don't think that is as effective as it would be if every agency was housed in one building for veterans.

Chairman MENENDEZ. Ms. Guy, you gave us a little bit of an insight in your testimony. Women are now 15 percent of the Armed Services of the United States. I am wondering, from your own experience, and maybe from fellow soldiers who are women, what do you think are the biggest obstacles faced by returning female veterans that are not addressed by the programs that have, obviously because of our history, traditionally been designed for men? What do you think, if you had a magic wand and could tailor something that is particularly responsive to female veterans returning, par-

ticularly in this whole field of homelessness and related services, what would it be?

I got a little sense from your statement that you are a little frustrated with trying to figure out where to get help and how to coordinate it, and you are lucky to have your Congressman be responsible and hook you up, so to speak, but—

Ms. GUY. Right. I just want to say that he really hit the nail on the head as far as the issue, and it is not just, you know, female veterans, but all veterans. I go to Iraq War Veterans group meeting for soldiers that have post-traumatic stress disorder and TBI, things like that, and our biggest issues—most of them are male. I think every now and then I might get another female. But most of the time, it is just me. When I listen to everybody, their biggest complaint is the fact that they don't know where they are supposed to go and they don't know the things that are out there for them. And one of the big things that we discuss is, like if I know something that they don't know, we talk about it and they will write things down. We share information, and that is how we find out things.

But from a female perspective, I think my biggest issue is, just like every other issue that the other veterans have, mine is compounded with becoming a female again, you know, learning how to talk to people, not like—you know, most people that see me now would never believe that I was a veteran, that I was a soldier. They don't understand how I did it. But I had to change my whole train of—my whole way of thinking being I was a soldier. I wasn't a female. I was a soldier. And so now, I am a female again and it is a hard transition. I know the VA is not going to necessarily help me with that, but being—the Philadelphia VA is really good with their program that they have there for female veterans. They have a women's center where it is in the hospital, and if you have any issues, your primary care doctor, everybody is right in there.

But as far as, like, going to physical therapy and the Social Security Administration building and all that, I mean, they are all over the place, and if I didn't have a vehicle, like most of these veterans don't have, you are not going to fight. After a while, they are just going to get frustrated, because on top of trying to get all of these things done with the VA, they are still trying to find a job, still trying to find somewhere to live, still dealing with their mental issues, and they get tired.

And guess what? When they get tired, they say, you know what? I am just going to have a drink. I am just going to sit down in my basement or somebody's basement or wherever and I am just going to drink myself to death, or whatever it is that they—you know, it is a hard thing, being a veteran, because those issues never go away. A lot of them still have that battle mind, and you don't—they don't know how to turn it off. And until they learn how to turn it off and live a normal life, it is going to be the same way that it is now.

Chairman MENENDEZ. Mr. Wise, I saw you shaking your head there a couple of times—in agreement, it seemed like. You talked about the longer-term program that has worked for you. What were the elements of that that worked for you that didn't work with other programs that you had been involved with?

Mr. WISE. Well, I think the staff there, you know, they had a staff that was really helpful in getting veterans back on their feet and they were really attuned to the different kinds of veterans that would come through, whereas on the mental level or a psychological level, they say someone would fail—would not try because he was afraid to fail, something on that note. They would notice that and encourage you to try a little more or something like that. With that being asked all the time, one can incorporate that and start to ask themselves that, you know, like be self-aware of what I wasn't doing, to look at a situation as a problem or an obstacle, where before it wasn't, you know, much to look at, but it was still there. You know, you can't address what you don't see.

So there, with the counselors and the nurse, I got to see some certain things that I couldn't see before, you know, like, where did that come from? And it was there long before. And you have something to look forward to, like not just completion. At first, you are so—I am so happy and secure to be there, like in the first couple of months, you know. Now I am getting close to the end. I am ready to transition, not like I was kicked out in 120 days from another place. It is time to go. I am really ready to go now and it was a process. It is a heartfelt process, and not just forced because my days are up. That is the best thing about it, the self-awareness and the ability to help yourself and not afraid to ask for help, which was really hard and still is kind of hard for me to do.

Chairman MENENDEZ. Thank you. That is very insightful.

All right, Ms. Lilliston, last word. I heard your testimony. I understand what you want us to do legislatively. But if you had, again, a magic wand and you singularly said, Senator, one, two, three, what would it be?

Ms. LILLISTON. Well, I think we have all heard some great examples of the successes that have been going on the past years, and I would say, you know, I urge everyone to continue the great work that we have done, continue putting in the resources where we need them the most, in prevention and the strategies for housing and the supportive services that go with them. Those are the things that veterans need in order to be successful and continue in order to either prevent homelessness or get them out of the part that they need the most.

You know, I don't—the magic wand, I think, is great, but I think everyone is going to have a success story that is unique to themselves. And allowing organizations and allowing communities to be able to provide those services that are unique to each veteran, but still provide those tools and resources to get them out of homeless or prevent them from being homeless are the key things that we should take and we should think about moving forward.

Chairman MENENDEZ. All right. Well, I appreciate that Mr. Dougherty stayed and listened to the series of comments here. I heard a lot of commonality, and one thread of that is certainly some type of holistic, coordinated approach so that a veteran doesn't get bounced from location to location to location to deal with all of their challenges is part of our challenge on homelessness, as well as their own reintegration to our society after they serve their country. That is one clear take-away for me.

Obviously, the HUD-VASH Program seems like it is the type of program that we want to expand on and that is providing a real sense of opportunity and a way in which when we say, welcome home, we mean it at the end of the day.

Well, thank you all for your testimony. The record is going to remain open for 2 days so that other Members who had conflicts or others who have additional questions—I am sorry, it is going to be open for 1 week because we are going to obviously have a lot of questions here. It will be open for 1 week. If you do receive questions from Members of the Committee, we would ask you to answer them as expeditiously as possible. It will help us fill the record and work on some of these legislative solutions.

We thank you all for your testimony. Ms. Guy and Mr. Wise, thank you for your service to this country.

With that, this hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 11:45 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

[Prepared statements and responses to written questions supplied for the record follow:]

PREPARED STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN CHRISTOPHER J. DODD

I want to begin by thanking Subcommittee Chairman Menendez for holding this important hearing.

Tomorrow is Veterans Day, a day to mark the service and sacrifice of our soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen.

But more than 131,000 men and women who wore the uniform of the United States of America—nearly one in every 172 vets—will be homeless tonight. And during the course of the year, more than a quarter million veterans experience homelessness. One in four homeless Americans is a vet.

That is unacceptable.

The Obama administration has recently committed to ending homelessness among veterans within 5 years, and I commend that commitment. According to Secretary Shinseki and our witnesses today, the Administration's holistic approach to the problem encompasses the various services a vet may need to escape or avoid homelessness: education, jobs, health care, housing, and other support services. I look forward to learning more about the Administration's proposal, and I offer them my support and assistance.

Unfortunately, the struggle to access benefits is a common one for the veterans who have earned them. Too often, Federal agency silos and fragmented programs stand between vets and the support services they need. That has to change.

I am encouraged by the partnerships being forged between the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Veterans' Administration that have helped connect vets with housing vouchers and support services through the HUD-VASH program. And I intend to continue working with HUD, the VA, the Interagency Council on Homelessness, and other Federal agencies to encourage a coordinated approach and eliminate structural barriers in our system.

In addition, I remain concerned with the situation of female veterans—women being increasingly represented in our armed forces—and veterans with children, who have special needs when it comes to housing and health care. When a loved one goes off to serve in the armed forces, their family shares the burden. Multiple deployments put tremendous financial and emotional strains on the spouses and children of our troops. That's why I've fought to expand benefits for military families under the provisions of the Family and Medical Leave Act. And that's why we must take special steps to ensure that those who have borne such a burden in defense of our country do not face the threat of homelessness.

We are all glad that thousands of veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom are now, and will continue to be, returning home. But for many, home is a very different place than the one they left. With an economy in turmoil and high unemployment, the customary challenges many face when reintegrating into society are only magnified.

But we can build upon the lessons of the past two decades of antihomelessness research and practice to offer these veterans better solutions and support than ever before.

In her written testimony, Sergeant Lila Guy—herself an Iraq war veteran who found help through the HUD-VASH program—states that “veterans have served their country well and I believe the least they can get for their service is help finding a place to live.”

I agree. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MERCEDES MÁRQUEZ

ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT, DEPARTMENT
OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

NOVEMBER 10, 2009

Introduction

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Vitter, Members of the Subcommittee, I am pleased to be here today to represent the Department of Housing and Urban Development. My name is Mercedes Márquez, the Assistant Secretary for Community Planning and Development. My office seeks to develop viable communities by promoting integrated approaches that provide decent housing, a suitable living environment, and expand economic opportunities for low and moderate income persons. I oversee, among other things, the Department's efforts to confront the housing and service needs of homeless persons. This responsibility includes confronting the needs of our country's homeless veterans and their families. As President Obama has said,

“Too many who once wore our Nation’s uniform now sleep in our Nation’s streets.” Last week Secretary Shinseki announced the Department of Veterans Affairs plans for ending homelessness among veterans. HUD fully supports these efforts. HUD provides housing and needed supports to homeless veterans through the Department’s targeted homeless assistance programs, as well as through mainstream HUD resources.

The Department administers a variety of programs that can serve veterans. These include the Housing Choice Voucher Program, Public Housing, HOME Investment Partnerships, and the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. These programs, by statute, provide great flexibility so that communities can use these Federal resources to meet their local needs, including the needs of their veterans. In addition to these programs, Congress has authorized a variety of targeted programs for special needs populations, including for persons who are homeless.

Unfortunately, veterans are well represented in the homeless population. HUD is committed to serving homeless veterans and recognizes that Congress charges HUD to serve all homeless groups. HUD’s homeless assistance programs serve single individuals as well as families with children. Our programs serve persons who are disabled, including those who are impaired by substance abuse, severe mental illness and physical disabilities as well as persons who are not disabled. HUD provides an array of housing and supportive services to all homeless groups, including homeless veterans.

Targeted HUD Homeless Assistance Grants

In February 2009, HUD competitively awarded approximately \$1.4 billion in targeted homeless assistance grants. A record 6,336 projects received awards. It is important to note that veterans are eligible for all of our homeless assistance programs and HUD emphasizes the importance of serving veterans in its grant application. Communities may submit veteran-specific projects or projects that support a general homeless population that includes veterans. In this competition, HUD awarded 136 projects that specifically target veterans. There were 1,079 additional projects awarded that will serve a broader population, which include veterans.

To underscore our continued commitment to serve homeless veterans, we have highlighted veterans in our annual planning and application process. In the annual grant application we encourage organizations that represent homeless veterans to be at the planning table. Because of HUD’s emphasis, communities have active homeless veteran representation. We also require that communities identify the number of homeless persons who are veterans so that each community can more effectively address their needs.

HUD-VASH

The Congress provided \$75 million in both 2008 and 2009 for the HUD–Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing Program, called HUD–VASH. The HUD–VASH program combines HUD Housing Choice Voucher rental assistance (administered through HUD’s Office of Public and Indian Housing) for homeless veterans with case management and clinical services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) at its medical centers in the community. Through this partnership, HUD and VA will provide permanent housing and services for approximately 20,000 homeless veterans and their family members, including veterans who have become homeless after serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. The VA is working with local organizations, including those in HUD’s Continuum of Care, to help identify eligible clients and provide needed support. HUD–VASH will make a significant impact on those who bravely served this great Nation and who have been left on our streets.

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) Funding

ARRA provides unprecedented funding to HUD and other Federal agencies to directly confront the very difficult economic times in which we live. Overall HUD is responsible for \$13.6 billion in ARRA funds for housing and community development. The ARRA Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP) is specifically targeted to confront homelessness. HPRP provides \$1.5 billion to communities nationwide. These funds were awarded to States, metropolitan cities, urban counties and territories.

The funds are now being used by grantees and subgrantees, including nonprofit organizations, to provide an array of prevention assistance to persons, including veterans, who but for this assistance would need to go to a homeless shelter. The program will also be used to rapidly rehouse persons who have become homeless. Program funds can be used to provide financial assistance (*e.g.*, rental assistance and security deposits) and housing stabilization services (*e.g.*, case management, legal services, and housing search). The HPRP funding notice expressly references that the program can serve homeless veterans and that program funds can be used to

provide to homeless veterans with security deposits and HUD-VASH can be used for long-term rental assistance. Deputy Secretary Ron Sims highlighted the potential to use HPRP funds to serve homeless veterans in a keynote address at VA's National Summit on Homeless Veterans, held last week.

HPRP represents a unique opportunity for communities. This significant level of funding—which equals the approximate level of funding historically appropriated by Congress for all of HUD's other homeless programs combined—will enable communities to reshape their local homeless systems. For the first time, communities now have targeted funding to prevent homelessness. In the past, virtually all of HUD's homeless-related programs could only assist persons after they became homeless. These funds have the potential to assist persons at risk, including veterans, stay in their homes rather than be relegated to moving themselves and their families to emergency shelters, or worse, the streets. HPRP also will allow communities to significantly reduce the time that veterans and others must stay in emergency shelters, as HPRP can be used to immediately rehouse persons in conventional housing and also provide temporary supports such as case management to help ensure housing stability. These two components—homelessness prevention and rapid rehousing—have been the missing links in each communities' Continuum of Care system. Communities now have the tools they need to effectively confront homelessness. Importantly, the new approaches that communities implement with HPRP will have the potential to be carried on, thanks to legislation recently passed by the Congress and enacted by the President on May 20, 2009.

New HUD Homeless Programs

The recently enacted Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act (HEARTH) provides unprecedented flexibility to confronting homelessness. The Act consolidates HUD's existing competitive homeless programs into a single, streamlined program, the Continuum of Care Program. The program requires that all stakeholders—including veterans organizations—determine how the funds should be used. The law also reforms the Emergency Shelter Grants program into the Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) program. The new ESG will provide for flexible prevention and rapid-rehousing responses to homelessness so that veterans and others who are either at risk or who literally become homeless may receive assistance. Finally, the legislation provides for the Rural Housing Stability Assistance Program to provide targeted assistance to rural areas. HEARTH includes as a selection criterion for grant award the extent to which the applicant addresses the needs of all subpopulations, which includes veterans.

Veteran Homeless Prevention Demonstration

The 2009 Appropriations Act provides HUD with \$10 million for a demonstration program to prevent homelessness among veterans as part of the appropriation for HUD's homeless programs. HUD is working with the VA to design and implement this initiative. Urban and rural sites will be selected. The demonstration funds may be used to provide both housing and services to prevent veterans and their families from becoming homeless or to reduce the length of time veterans and their families are homeless. HUD intends to conduct an evaluation of this demonstration, with funds provided for by the Congress, and then share the results widely through HUD's technical assistance resources to organizations serving veterans.

Interagency Collaboration on Homeless Veterans Issues

Secretary Shaun Donovan is the current Chair of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH). Secretary Donovan has met with VA Secretary Shinseki to discuss the needs of homeless veterans and how our agencies can work collaboratively to solve this problem.

Historically HUD and VA have been involved in several collaborations related to homelessness among veterans. The agencies are currently working together in implementing and operating HUD-VASH. Another joint initiative involved reducing chronic homelessness, in which HUD provided the housing assistance and the VA and the Department of Health and Human Services provided support services to chronically homeless persons. HUD is also an ex-officio member of the Secretary of VA's Advisory Committee on Homeless Veterans. The Committee met last week and HUD discussed resources and strategies that can be brought to bear on housing homeless veterans.

Technical Assistance

To coordinate veterans' efforts within HUD, to reach out to veterans organizations, and to help individual veterans, HUD established the HUD Veterans Resource Center. The Center, headed by a veteran, has a 1-800 number to take calls

from veterans and to help address their individual needs. The Resource Center works with each veteran to connect them to resources in their own community.

HUD's Homelessness Resource Exchange (located at www.HUDHRE.info) is HUD's one-stop shop for information and resources for people and organizations who want to help persons who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. It provides an overview of HUD homeless and housing programs, our national homeless assistance competition, technical assistance information, and more.

The HUDHRE has a number of materials that address homeless veterans issues. For example, HUD dedicated approximately \$350,000 to enhance the capacity of organizations that do or want to specifically focus on serving homeless veterans, update existing technical assistance materials, and coordinate with VA's homeless planning networks. As a result, we developed two technical assistance guidebooks, available on the Web site. The first guidebook, *Coordinating Resources and Developing Strategies to Address the Needs of Homeless Veterans*, describes programs serving veterans that are effectively coordinating HUD homeless funding with other resources. The second guidebook, *A Place at the Table: Homeless Veterans and Local Homeless Assistance Planning Networks*, describes the successful participation of ten veterans' organizations in their local Continuums of Care. Additionally, we have held national conference calls and workshops to provide training and assistance to organizations that are serving, or planning to serve, homeless veterans.

Conclusion

Again, I want to reiterate my and HUD's desire and commitment to help end homelessness among our veterans by working effectively with our Federal, State, and local partners.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF PETER H. DOUGHERTY

DIRECTOR OF HOMELESS VETERANS PROGRAMS, DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

NOVEMBER 10, 2009

Good Morning Mr. Chairman and Mr. Ranking Member. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Subcommittee. You have called us here today to discuss an issue of great importance: Veteran homelessness, and what the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is doing to end homelessness among Veterans. Tragically, Veterans are overrepresented among the homeless, and we must do more to end this scourge. We now estimate that 131,000 Veterans live on the streets of the wealthiest and most powerful Nation in the world; far too many, but a significant decline from 195,000 homeless Veterans 6 years ago. Some of those homeless are here in Washington, DC—men and women, young and old, fully functioning and disabled, even the current operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

VA's goal is to have a "no wrong door" approach so that Veterans who seek assistance directly from VA's programs, from community partners or through contract services will be able to access the needed services. VA has the Nation's largest integrated network of homeless assistance programs. We have a strong track record in helping homeless Veterans; a study completed several years ago found approximately 80 percent of Veterans who complete a VA program are successfully housed 1 year after treatment. In fiscal year (FY) 2010, VA expects to spend a total of \$3.2 billion to provide health care and specialized homeless programs, which includes \$500 million in targeted programs for homeless programs this fiscal year. VA social workers and clinicians work with community and faith-based partners to conduct extensive outreach programs, clinical assessments, medical treatments, alcohol and drug abuse counseling and employment assistance.

VA's 5-Year Plan on Ending Veteran Homelessness

We have a goal of ending homelessness among our Nation's Veterans within 5 years, which Secretary Shinseki announced last week. We formally announced that goal last week at a national summit on ending homelessness among Veterans. The Secretary's plan for achieving that goal includes bold new measures that will focus on both serving those who are seriously impaired and attacking this problem with preventive measures like discharge planning for incarcerated Veterans reentering society, supportive services for low-income Veterans and their families, and a national referral center to link Veterans to local service providers. Additionally, we will expand efforts for education, jobs, health care (including mental health care) and housing.

One of VA's most successful tools has been our partnership with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is where public housing authorities re-

ceive housing choice vouchers and VA provides dedicated case management to appropriate homeless Veterans who need and are willing to accept services. We will expand our collaboration on the HUD-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program to provide 20,000 Housing Choice vouchers to Veterans and their families, and we will partner with HUD to develop new pilot programs to test a program for at-risk Operation Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom (OIF/OEF) Veterans and families with homeless prevention services. In Fiscal Year 2009, there was a \$10 million HUD appropriation and \$5 million VA appropriation for a demonstration program on the prevention of homelessness among the Nation's veterans. Our collaboration with HUD has also grown in scale and produced measurable results. In 2008, HUD provided 10,150 HUD-VASH vouchers for homeless Veterans. Thanks to the continuing support of Congress and the personal leadership of House and Urban Development Secretary Shaun Donovan, HUD-VASH II, approved in 2009 for 2010 implementation, provides 10,290 more vouchers. HUD-VASH vouchers enable housing for single Veterans or Veterans with families. Of the 13,000 Veterans accepted for HUD-VASH housing, 11 percent are women, and another 12 percent are Veterans with family members. Safe housing is a critical step to ending homelessness among Veterans, especially among women Veterans and Veterans with children. This effort is having very positive results, and we thank Congress for authorizing this very effective and beneficial tool.

We are also making enhanced efforts to provide opportunities to return Veterans to employment, including the new Post-9/11 GI Bill. The new GI Bill is providing a powerful option for qualified Veterans to pursue a fully funded degree program at a State college or university and will serve as a major component of the fight against Veteran homelessness.

This program will require close partnership with Federal and State agencies, local, nonprofit, and private groups; outreach and education to Veterans, people and organizations providing services to Veterans, and the general public; universal and targeted prevention; treatment focused on recovery and tailored to individual Veterans' needs; housing and supportive services; and income, employment and benefits assistance.

For example, we will continue our collaborative efforts with the Department of Labor to provide employment services. VA is working with the Small Business Administration and the General Services Administration to certify Veteran-owned small businesses and service-disabled Veteran-owned small businesses for listing on the Federal Supply Schedules, which enhances their visibility and competitiveness, creating jobs for Veterans. VA will also work closely with the Departments of Education, Labor, Health and Human Services, and Housing and Urban Development, the Small Business Administration, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, State directors of Veterans Affairs, and Veterans Service Organizations, as well as national, State, and local service providers and community groups.

We think we are making appropriate efforts to have the right partners, the right plans, and the right programs in place on safe housing. We will monitor and adjust the balance as required to continue increasing our gains in eliminating Veteran homelessness. We are moving in the right direction to remove this blot on our consciences, but we have more work to do.

At the summit on ending Veteran homelessness last week, we shared ideas on new efforts. During this conference, approximately 1,200 homeless service providers from Federal and State agencies, the business community, and faith-based and community providers participated and discussed the Department's 5-year plan.

Effectively addressing homelessness requires breaking the downward spiral that leads Veterans into homelessness. We must continue to improve treatment for substance abuse, depression, traumatic brain injury (TBI) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD); better educational and vocational options, better employment opportunities; and more opportunities for safe and hospitable housing. Early intervention and prevention of homelessness among Veterans is critical. We have to do it all; we simply cannot afford any missed opportunities. We will leave no opportunity unexplored, and we will continue this pursuit until every Veteran has safe housing available and access to needed treatment services. We are eager to work together with Congress to achieve these goals.

Continuing Efforts

VA partners with more than 600 community organizations to provide transitional housing to 20,000 Veterans. It also works with 240 public housing authorities to provide permanent housing to homeless Veterans and their families under a partnership with the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Earlier this year, we established the National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans. The Center will work to ensure homeless or at-risk Veterans and their

families receive timely, practice-proven services to either prevent homelessness or exit homelessness. The primary goal of the Center is to develop, promote, and enhance policy, clinical care research, and education to improve homeless services so that Veterans may live as independently and self-sufficiently as possible in a community of their choosing. We believe the Center will be a national resource for both VA and community partners, improving the quality and timeliness of services delivered to homeless or at-risk Veterans and their dependents.

In October, Secretary Shinseki announced that 29 grants were awarded to create new transitional housing under our Homeless Grant and Per Diem (GPD) program in 19 States, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. This initiative will share more than \$17 million in grants to community groups to create 1,155 beds for homeless Veterans this year. For example, this program will support:

- four programs in New York and more than 160 beds;
- one program in Oregon with 10 beds;
- one program in South Carolina providing almost 100 beds;
- one project in Tennessee with 14 beds; and
- two projects in Texas that will offer more than 200 beds, as well as two vans.

These grants will aid our efforts to eliminate homelessness among those who have served in uniform. Our partnerships with community-based organizations provide safe, transitional housing while these Veterans leverage VA's health care and other benefits to return to productive lives.

This year, VA implemented new safety standards in the facilities providing Mental Health Residential Rehabilitation and Treatment Programs, including 24/7 staffing and keyless entry. Our GPD program activated 55 new projects for a total of 1,090 beds since October 2008. New homeless prevention initiatives assist Veterans at risk for homelessness to maintain their residences in the community by addressing factors which lead to becoming homeless.

Mental Health Care

The psychological consequences of combat affect every generation of Veterans. VA now employs 18,000 mental health professionals to address their mental health needs. We know if we diagnose and treat, people can improve. If we don't, they won't—and sometimes their problems become debilitating. We understand some see a stigma attached to seeking mental health care, but we are not going to be dissuaded. We have integrated mental health care into primary care settings to help identify Veterans at risk and provide them treatment before their conditions worsen. We will not give up on any of our Veterans with mental health challenges, and particularly not the homeless. At the end of October, VA and the Department of Defense (DoD) cosponsored a national summit on mental health care to help both agencies better coordinate mental health care for those who serve our country and those who formerly wore the uniform.

Newest Generation of Veterans

We know from past experience that homelessness among Veterans peaks 7–10 years after military service, and we are conducting aggressive early intervention now to ensure Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF/OIF) Veterans do not have that same experience. Our current efforts have reached nearly 3,800 OEF/OIF Veterans, more than 1,100 of whom have sought homeless specific housing or treatment services. Since 2003, VA has expedited 28,000 claims for compensation and pension for Veterans who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness.

Incarcerated Veterans

Every year, 40,000 Veterans are released from prison. This is part and parcel of the larger discussion about homelessness. We recognize the needs of Veterans who have been incarcerated, and in 2009, VA implemented a new initiative to support State and local Veterans Court Programs. This program provides VA health care instead of incarceration for eligible Veterans with substance use disorders, PTSD or mental health conditions. Our Incarcerated Veterans Re-Entry program has contacted and supported more than 13,000 Veterans since 2007 and has contacts in more than 1,000 Federal and State prisons across the country (two-thirds of all prisons). Veterans Justice Outreach Specialists are working with courts to develop relationships and referral procedures.

We are reaching out to courts, prosecutors, defense attorneys, and police and other first responders. We began training these specialists in September. This complements existing VA programs that provide outreach to incarcerated Veterans. We have received enthusiastic responses from State Supreme Court Justices, Judges,

Veterans Service Organizations and State Directors of Veterans Affairs. VA is working to overcome homelessness with programs that impact high-risk individuals such as Veterans involved in the Criminal Justice System. VA will provide additional training in FY2010, and will continue outreach to State Attorneys General, American Bar Association and national bar associations.

Helping Veteran Homeowners

Another key element of our strategy to end homelessness among Veterans is to prevent them from becoming homeless in the first place. Section 604 of Public Law 110-387, codified at 38 U.S.C. 2044, provides VA with authority to offer grants to organizations offering supportive services for low-income Veterans and their families. VA is currently developing regulations to implement this legislation. The Administration has pursued a number of initiatives to keep such homeowners, including Veterans, in their residences. In addition, the Veterans Benefits Administration offers assistance to Veterans who encounter problems making their mortgage payments. When a VA-guaranteed home loan becomes delinquent, the loan servicer has the primary responsibility of servicing the loan to help cure the default. VA provides financial incentives for servicers who arrange reasonable repayment plans or pursue other home retention options for Veterans.

In some cases loan modification may help make payments more affordable, and VA made extensive rule changes in early 2008 to make loan modifications easier for servicers to arrange. However, in cases where the servicer is unable to help the Veteran borrower retain the home or find a suitable alternative to foreclosure, VA's Loan Guaranty Service has Loan Technicians in nine Regional Loan Centers and the Hawaii Regional Office who review all cases prior to foreclosure to evaluate the adequacy of the loan servicing. Loan Technicians may initiate supplemental servicing by contacting the Veteran to determine whether any further assistance is possible, and Veterans may also call a nationwide toll-free contact number at any time during the process to receive loan counseling from VA.

In other cases, VA will purchase a loan from the holder and modify the terms so that a Veteran can retain his or her home. The Regional Loan Centers can also provide advice and guidance to Veterans with non-VA guaranteed home loans, but VA does not have the legal authority or standing to intervene on the borrower's behalf in these situations. Under the Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 2008 (Public Law 110-389), Veterans with non-VA guaranteed home loans have new options for refinancing to a VA guaranteed loan. Veterans who wish to refinance their subprime or conventional mortgage may do so for up to 100 percent of the value of the property, generally up to a maximum of \$417,000. High-cost counties have even higher maximum guaranty amounts, which can result in higher maximum loan limits. These changes allow more qualified Veterans to refinance through VA, allowing for savings on interest costs and avoiding foreclosure. Additionally, some Veteran borrowers may be able to request relief pursuant to the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA). In order to qualify for certain protections available under the Act, the Veteran's obligation must have originated prior to the current period of active military service. SCRA may provide a lower interest rate or forbearance, or prevent foreclosure or eviction, even after the borrower's period of military service ends.

Conclusion

Housing, health care, jobs, and education—these are the critical areas where VA is focusing to address Veteran homelessness. We have work to do here; but we have momentum, and we know where we are headed. We are positively engaged with the Departments of Housing and Urban Development, Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and the Small Business Administration to work our collaborative issues. I know that Congress, Secretary Shinseki, and President Obama are committed to helping VA end homelessness among Veterans. No one, who has served this Nation, as our Veterans have, should ever find themselves living without care—and without hope. I know that there are never any absolutes in life, but unless we set an ambitious target, we would not be giving this our very best efforts in education, jobs, mental health, substance abuse, and housing.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I am available to answer any questions you may have.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF MELANIE LILLISTON

DIRECTOR OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND FINANCE, NATIONAL COALITION FOR
HOMELESS VETERANS

NOVEMBER 10, 2009

Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Senator Vitter, and Distinguished Members of the Committee: The National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (NCHV) is honored to appear before this Committee today to comment on ending veterans' homelessness.

For 20 years, NCHV has worked diligently to serve as the Nation's primary liaison between the community- and faith-based organizations that help homeless veterans, the Congress, and the Federal agencies that are invested in the campaign to end veteran homelessness in the United States.

The efforts have been commendable and we are grateful that we have such dedicated and passionate leadership within the Department of Veterans Affairs, Department of Labor and the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Through the VA's Grant and Per Diem program over 15,000 veterans are being served in transitional housing programs each year. The Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP), administered by the Department of Labor-Veterans Employment and Training Service, has continued to grow each year and now serves veterans in nearly 100 communities throughout the country. HUD has expanded its efforts through the HUD-VA Supportive Housing Program (HUD-VASH) for those veterans who have serious mental illness or disabilities that keep them from living successfully on their own. Through these efforts and the efforts of the community-based partners NCHV represents, we have made significant progress in the effort to end veteran homelessness. However, our work is not done until the last veteran is off the streets.

In March of this year, President Obama stated, "We will provide new help for homeless Veterans because those heroes have a home—it's the country they served, the United States of America. And until we reach a day when not a single Veteran sleeps on our Nation's streets, our work remains unfinished." This bold statement has served as the catalyst for creating a 5-Year Plan To End Homelessness Among Veterans, an initiative of VA Secretary Eric Shinseki. Just last week at a summit hosted by the VA, Secretary Shinseki stated, "Let me reiterate that this is not a summit on homeless veterans—it's a summit to end homelessness among veterans. That's our purpose. President Obama and I are personally committed to ending homelessness among veterans within the next 5 years."

To demonstrate his commitment, Secretary Shinseki has created a 5-year plan that would expand the VA's partnerships and collaborations between the Federal agencies and community-based service providers. Four of the six strategic pillars of the plan build upon the work of the past two decades: outreach, treatment, employment and benefits, and community partnerships. Two represent new critical focuses—prevention, and housing and supportive services for low-income veterans.

Currently there are 14 bills pending before the House of Representatives and the Senate that would have a direct impact on the delivery of services to homeless veterans and those at risk of becoming homeless. These bills would move Secretary Shinseki's historic plan forward.

NCHV acknowledges the leadership role of this Subcommittee, and that of the full Committee, in this noble effort. There are three key bills that lay the foundation on which we, as a Nation, can build a successful, comprehensive campaign to end and prevent homelessness among veterans and fulfill the Secretary's 5-Year Plan.

S. 1547—Zero Tolerance for Veteran Homelessness Act of 2009

For several years the homeless veteran assistance movement NCHV represents has realized there can be no end to veteran homelessness until we develop a strategy to address the needs of our former guardians before they become homeless—victims of health and economic misfortunes they cannot overcome without assistance.

The causes of all homelessness can be grouped into three primary categories: health issues, economic issues, and lack of access to safe, affordable housing for low- and extreme-low income families in most American communities.

The additional stressors veterans experience are prolonged separation from family and social support networks while engaging in extremely stressful training and occupational assignments; war-related illnesses and disabilities—both mental and physical; and the difficulty of many to transfer military occupational skills into the civilian workforce.

NCHV believes the Zero Tolerance for Veteran Homelessness Act of 2009, introduced by Senators Reed, Bond, Murray, Johnson, Kerry, and Durbin—with the sup-

port of 12 cosponsors—has the potential to set this Nation on course to finally achieve victory in the campaign to end veteran homelessness in the United States.

Victory in this campaign requires success on two fronts—effective, economical intervention strategies that help men and women rise above adversity to regain control of their lives; and prevention strategies that empower communities to support our wounded warriors and their families before they lose their ability to cope with stressors beyond their control.

We believe the Zero Tolerance for Veteran Homelessness Act addresses needs on both fronts.

- The Act provides for the expansion of HUD–VASH to a total of 60,000 housing vouchers for veterans with serious mental and emotional illnesses, other disabilities, and extreme low-income veteran families that will need additional services to remain housed. According to an analysis of data by the National Alliance To End Homelessness, about 63,000 veterans can be classified as chronically homeless. This Act would, therefore, effectively end chronic veteran homelessness within the next 5 years.
- The Act provides authorization for up to \$50 million annually to provide supportive services for low-income veterans to reduce their risks of becoming homeless, and to help those who are find housing. Provisions include short- to medium-term rental assistance, poor credit history repair, housing search and relocation assistance, and help with security and utilities deposits. For many among the Nation’s 630,000 veterans living in extreme poverty (at or below 50 percent of the Federal poverty level), this aid could mean the difference between achieving stability and continuing on the downward spiral into homelessness.
- The Act would modernize the extremely important and successful VA Grant and Per Diem Program (GPD) to allow for the utilization of innovative project funding strategies—including the use of low-income housing tax credits and matching funds from other Government sources to facilitate and hasten project development.
- The Act calls for the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to study the method of reimbursing GPD community providers for their program expenses and report to Congress, within 1 year, his recommendations for revising the payment system. For years service providers have appealed for a system that reflects the actual cost of providing services to veterans with multiple barriers to recovery rather than a “per diem” rate based on reimbursements paid to State veterans’ homes.
- The Act calls for an increase in the annual GPD authorization to \$200 million, beginning in FY2010, which could provide additional funds for outreach through community-based veteran service centers and mobile service vans for rural areas, while continuing to increase the bed capacity of VA’s community-based partners. These outreach initiatives will likely play a pivotal role as the VA’s veteran homelessness prevention strategy moves forward.
- The Act would establish within HUD a Special Assistant for Veterans Affairs to ensure veterans have access to housing and homeless assistance programs funded by the Department.

S. 1160—The Homes for Heroes Act of 2009

One of the greatest challenges community-based organizations face is how to provide long-term housing and services to veterans and their families. Due to multiple deployments, financial difficulties, disabilities sustained in combat and other family stressors, family members and the children of veterans often are in need of support and services when their loved ones come back from war. Currently, community-based providers are unable to access dedicated funding to pay for housing or services for veteran families. The Homes for Heroes Act provides funding for the development of housing for low-income veteran families and provides the mechanism to distribute these much needed supportive services.

According to the 2009 VA CHALLENGE survey, long-term housing ranks in the top 10 reported unmet needs of veterans. Finding and obtaining safe and secure housing is often the biggest obstacle veterans in recovery face. This bill will allow low- and extremely low-income veterans to access housing and the vital services they need in order to be successful citizens.

Introduced by Senator Charles Schumer, Durbin, Brown, and Menendez, the Homes for Heroes Act would:

- Provide \$200 million annually for the development of supportive housing for veterans who need case management and wrap-around services to remain housed.

- Fund 20,000 rental assistance vouchers for extremely low-income veteran families (those living at or below 50 percent of the Federal poverty level), estimated at approximately 630,000 veterans. These individuals represent those who are at highest risk of becoming homeless and most in need of prevention supports.
- Create the position of veteran liaison within the Department of Housing and Urban Development to ensure veteran inclusion in all HUD housing programs, and require inclusion of veteran data in local housing plans.

More and more families are requesting services and affordable housing, and providing this support would reduce the likelihood that many veteran families in crisis will continue on a downward spiral into homelessness.

S. 1237—Homeless Women Veterans and Homeless Veterans With Children Act of 2009

One of the most daunting challenges in the campaign to end veteran homelessness is presented by the changes in the demographics of this special needs population. For the first time in American history, women comprise more than 11 percent of the forces deployed to serve in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, according to Department of Defense (DoD) figures early this year, including more than 30,000 single women with dependent children (DoD, March 2009). The VA anticipates women will account for 15 percent of the Nation's veterans within the next 10 years.

Because of the Nation's reliance on Reserve and National Guard personnel, men and women must leave their families at the highest rate since World War II—approximately half of them for multiple deployments. This places considerable strain on family relationships, which in turn makes the difficult process of readjustment to civilian life after wartime service even more stressful.

Currently more than 5 percent of veterans requesting assistance from VA and community-based homeless veteran service providers are women. According to VA officials, more than half of these veterans are between the ages of 20–29, a majority represent minority communities, and roughly 24 percent are disabled or were medically retired from the service. More than 10 percent of these women have dependent children.

Senators Murray, Johnson, and Reed, in introducing this bill, recognize the same readjustment difficulties for single women veteran parents are experienced by single male parents. During the last 2 years, more than 11 percent of male veterans receiving housing vouchers in the HUD–VASH program are single parents with dependent children, according to VA officials.

According to VA data in its annual CHALENG Reports, the highest unmet needs of homeless single veterans with dependent children are:

- Child care assistance
- Legal aid for credit repair and child support issues
- Access to affordable permanent housing

S. 1237 would authorize up to \$10 million in grants to community- and faith-based organizations to provide critical, specialized supports for these deserving men and women as they work their way out of homelessness. There are about 200 homeless veteran assistance providers under the VA Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem Program (GPD) that offer housing assistance for women veterans. More than 90 community-based programs offer job preparation and placement assistance to homeless veterans under the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program—one of the most efficient, effective programs in the Department of Labor portfolio.

These programs provide irrefutable evidence that stable, safe transitional housing—with access to health and employment services—empowers the great majority of homeless veterans to achieve self-sufficiency within their eligibility limits. The addition of child care assistance promises to enhance those successful outcomes through supports that will enable veteran parents to pursue their employment goals without having to worry about the health and safety of their children.

NCHV believes this funding level would allow for immediate implementation of an employment assistance program for homeless women and homeless single parents with dependent children within an existing and highly successful service provider community, and allow for evaluation of the effectiveness of this innovative strategy.

In Summation

On this day before Veterans Day, I want to thank you for your support helping the men and women who have served this country in their greatest hour of need. The successes we have seen in decreasing the number of homeless veterans over the last 5 years would not have happened without your support and leadership.

These three bills are vital for the Secretary's Five-Year Plan to move forward. From the increase in the number of HUD-VASH vouchers, and the ability to provide supportive services for low-income and women veterans, to the improvement and expansion of the GPD program, these bills provide real opportunities to move the PLAN into ACTION and fulfill the historic mission to end homelessness among America's former guardians in 5 years.

Once again, on behalf of the veterans we all serve, thank you for your support. I can think of no better way to say "thank you" to those who have served this Nation than continuing to serve those veterans who need our help the most.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF STEVEN R. BERG

VICE PRESIDENT FOR PROGRAMS AND POLICY, NATIONAL ALLIANCE TO END HOMELESSNESS

NOVEMBER 10, 2009

Chairman Dodd, Ranking Member Shelby, and Members of the Subcommittee, on behalf of our Board of Directors, our President Nan Roman, and our thousands of partners across the country, I am honored that you have invited the National Alliance To End Homelessness to testify before you on veteran homelessness. Veteran homelessness is one of the most pressing issues plaguing our Nation today, and by moving toward a solution to this problem we are serving these men and women as they have once done for us.

The National Alliance To End Homelessness is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that was founded in 1983 by a group of leaders deeply disturbed by the appearance of thousands of Americans living on the streets of our Nation. We have committed ourselves to finding permanent solutions to homelessness. Our bipartisan Board of Directors and our thousands of nonprofit, faith-based, private and public sector partners across the country devote ourselves to the affordable housing, access to services, and livable incomes that will end homelessness. The Alliance is recognized for its organization and dissemination of research to encourage best practices and high standards in the field of homelessness prevention and intervention and we wish to share our insights with you today.

As our name implies, our primary focus is ending homelessness, not simply making it easier to live with. We take this idea very seriously. There is nothing inevitable about homelessness among veterans in the United States. We know more about veteran homelessness and how to address it than we ever have before, thanks in part to extensive research. We know a great deal about the pathways into homelessness, the characteristics of veterans who experience homelessness and the interventions and program models which are effective in offering reconnection to community and stable housing.

This testimony will summarize the research available on homelessness among veterans and the most promising strategies currently successful at addressing this issue in community settings, as well as policy recommendations to implement these strategies to the national scale.

Homelessness Among Veterans

Far too many veterans are homeless in America. In November 2007, the Homelessness Research Institute of the National Alliance To End Homelessness first published *Vital Mission, Ending Homelessness Among Veterans*, quantifying this problem as well as reporting on housing status among veterans. Today, the Alliance is publishing its second annual update to this report, using new analysis and more recent data to deepen our understanding of the issue. Today's update uses data from homelessness counts that took place in early 2008, as well as other sources. The update includes the following findings.

- 131,000 veterans were homeless at a point in time in early 2008. This number is lower than 2 years earlier, and it is probable that some reductions had taken place, but much of the reduction is due to methodological differences. It is also possible that rapidly rising unemployment since early 2008 has increased the number of homeless veterans in more recent months.
- 58 out of every 10,000 veterans are homeless, a ratio more than double the rate of homelessness within the nonveteran population. This rate varies markedly by State and locality.
- The demographic of homeless veterans follows the demographic of the overall veteran population: women represent a small but growing proportion of homeless veterans as well as veterans overall. Veterans aged 55–64 represent 25 per-

cent of the homeless veteran population and 29 percent of the overall veteran population.

- Veteran homelessness tends to be concentrated near military and veteran centers such as military bases and VA medical centers. Texas, the State with the highest concentration of military bases, is reported to have 9,063 homeless veterans. Along with Louisiana, home to one of the larger VA medical centers nationally, has 3,600 homeless veterans, a rate of 118 homeless veterans to every 10,000 overall Louisiana veteran residents.

Housing Status of Veterans

What all homeless people have in common is the lack of a place to live—homelessness is at base a problem of housing availability and affordability. When we first analyzed this data, we assumed that the disproportionate representation of veterans in the homeless population must be due to the fact that veterans have housing problems. So we looked at the housing situation of veterans more generally, examining the American Community Survey data (for 2005—the most recent data available at the time of the research). In fact, we found that, when viewed as a group, veterans can typically afford their monthly housing costs.

But while the average veteran is well housed, there is a subset of veterans who rent housing and have severe housing cost burdens. Those that are most vulnerable and/or face the worst crises, lose their housing, have no other help available, and become homeless.

- In 2005, 467,877 veterans were severely rent burdened and were paying more than 50 percent of their income for rent.
- Not surprisingly, many of these veterans were poor. More than half (55 percent) of veterans with severe housing cost burden fell below the poverty level and 43 percent were receiving foods stamps.
- California, Nevada, Rhode Island, and Hawaii were the States with the highest percentage of veterans with severe housing cost burden. The District of Columbia had the highest rate, with 6.5 percent of veterans devoting more than 50 percent of their income to rent.

We examined the characteristics of this group of veterans paying too much for housing and we found the following.

- Veterans with a disability are more likely to have severe housing cost burden. They are twice as likely to have a work disability as other veterans (18 percent *versus* 9 percent). Similarly, they are twice as likely to have a disability that limits their mobility (20 percent *versus* 10 percent).
- Female veterans are more likely to have housing cost burdens. Although women are only 7 percent of veterans, they represent 13.5 percent of veterans with housing cost burdens. And while 13 percent of them have housing cost burdens, only 10 percent of male veterans have such burdens.
- Unmarried veterans are more likely to have cost burdens by a factor of nearly two. Thirteen percent of veterans who do not have a spouse have severe housing cost burden *versus* 7 percent of those who are married.
- Period of service seems to matter. Veterans who left the military between 1980 and 2003 are less likely than earlier veterans to have housing cost burden. Somewhat surprisingly, older veterans from the Korean War and World War II are more likely to have housing cost burdens. These are comparisons of rate. By sheer size, Vietnam War veterans make up the largest group of those with housing cost burdens.
- In 2005, approximately 89,553 to 467,877 veterans were at risk of homelessness. The lower estimate is renters with housing cost burden, living below the poverty level, disabled, living alone, and not in the labor force. The upper estimate is all renters with housing cost burden.

Needed Federal Response

Of all the population groups impacted disproportionately by homelessness, veterans are the one where the Federal Government has taken direct responsibility for the well-being of the entire group, as it should be. The Federal Government, through the VA, is in a position to set an example for how to safeguard a vulnerable population from homelessness. At present, however, this is not being accomplished, despite existing programmatic initiatives, and despite the fact that sufficient understanding exists regarding the nature of homelessness and the programmatic and policy responses needed to end it. The rest of this testimony describes what is need-

ed in order to complete this response, and to reach a point where homelessness among veterans is not only said to be intolerable, but is in fact not tolerated.

Across the country, leading communities have made substantial progress at reducing the number of people who are homeless. The keys to success have become well known:

- Leadership that takes responsibility for achieving results.
- Permanent supportive housing targeted at those who have been homeless the longest and have the most severe disabilities.
- Prevention and rapid rehousing programs that solve people's housing crises, preferably before they become homeless.
- Collaboration with the entire range of systems that impact the problem, around the goal of ending homelessness.

To achieve these ends for veterans, the Alliance recommends the following:

Pass the Homes for Heroes Act (S. 1160) to create a HUD sponsored permanent supportive housing production program. For disabled low income veterans who require ongoing services in order to stay stably housed, permanent supportive housing is a proven solution. This program is a needed companion to the widely popular HUD-VASH program, in that it would help provide housing stock for homeless and at risk veterans.

Continue to expand the HUD-VA Supportive Housing program. This proven program provides rental assistance through HUD's popular Section 8 voucher program; and case management, treatment and support services through the VA. It replicates the highly successful model of permanent supportive housing, getting veterans with the most severe, permanent disabilities off the streets for good. Permanent supportive housing for all veterans who need this level of intensive intervention to escape homelessness will require 60,000 HUD-VASH vouchers and accompanying case management and services. Funding for 20,000 has already been appropriated, and 10,000 more are included in House and Senate FY2010 appropriations bills.

Give the VA the authority to run larger scale homelessness prevention and rapid rehousing programs. Allowing the VA to provide homeless prevention and rapid rehousing services is a key intervention in communities that have had success with homelessness. This means reaching out to veterans who either have recently lost their housing or are in danger of doing so; working with landlords and family members to resolve conflicts; working to give the veteran access to employment, benefits, health care, and other needed income and services; and providing short term cash assistance to pay a security deposit, catch up on unpaid rent, *etc.* In the Senate, the Zero Tolerance for Veterans Homelessness Act would authorize such a program.

Support results-oriented VA homelessness programs. Existing VA homelessness programs such as the Homeless Grants and Per Diem Program, providing temporary housing and treatment for veterans for whom an abstinence model is appropriate, are in the process of being expanded through the appropriations process. These programs also require policy adjustments to allow better cooperation with other Federal housing programs, more flexibility, and a greater focus on outcomes and appropriate targeting.

Conclusion

I am not happy to report that our Nation now has some 20 years of experience on the issue of homeless veterans. We know that while some veterans become homeless immediately after discharge, for many more their difficulties take years to emerge. We know that post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injuries and other factors of war may make them vulnerable to increasing poverty and housing problems. And we know that housing and supportive housing are a solution to these problems.

Tens of thousands of veterans will be returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. While some have already experienced homelessness, the numbers are not large. Experience from the Vietnam era, however, teaches that there is a possibility of delayed impact of combat service on homelessness, especially when veterans are returning to high unemployment. If we do not take advantage of all that we have learned about solutions to homelessness, in the future we can expect to see thousands more veterans on our streets and in our shelters.

We have a tremendous opportunity before us. There is unprecedented public will that we not make the same mistakes with the veterans of the current conflicts as we did with veterans from the Vietnam era and after, and that we do whatever is necessary to prevent these veterans being consigned to the streets. That same public will gives us an opportunity as well to rectify those previous mistakes, and house veterans who have lived in the street for years. Now is the time to be bold. We can

prevent veterans from becoming homeless. We can house those veterans who are already homeless. And we can ensure that all veterans, including those with low incomes, have stable, decent and affordable housing. This is our vital mission.

Thank you for inviting us to testify before you today on this critical issue.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF JACK S. FANOUS
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AND FOUNDER, G.I. GO FUND

NOVEMBER 10, 2009

Chairman Menendez, Senator Vitter, and Members of the Subcommittee: Thank you for this opportunity to testify on the difficulties our Nation's homeless veteran's face and the steps our organization is taking to answer the call to end all homelessness among veterans within 5 years.

I am the executive director and founder of The G.I. Go Fund, a grassroots 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization with a mission to assist our Nation's heroes along the difficult path of transition.

The G.I. Go Fund was founded in 2006 following the death of one of my closest childhood friends, Army Lt. Seth Devorin, from wounds he suffered while attempting to dismantle an IED in Iraq. The organization began as a small community group, which aimed to preserve the memory of my friend through providing days of rest and relaxation to our Nation's veterans. However, as we began to spend time with these men and women, we began to understand that their problems and their fears had not merely ended the minute they returned home and stepped on to American soil. In fact, they had just begun.

Our veterans, who have just endured and survived the unimaginable, are now expected to execute a smooth transition back to their civilian lives. They are expected to reestablish relationships with family and friends. They are expected to find either long-term, secure employment based on their "work" experience in the military or are expected to become a student utilizing the Post 9/11 GI Bill, all while being expected to tend to the physical and mental wounds associated with combat by fully utilizing their Veterans Administration benefits. It has been my experience that a fragmented transition, which results from one of these steps being missed or mishandled, leaves our veterans to face a myriad of problems that can range from fractured family ties, unemployment, depression, and many others. This is all in addition to the veteran experiencing a physical or mental wound. These issues fester and manifest into a chronically debilitating ailment. Fragmented transitions often result in deep depressions and eventual substance abuse by our veterans who feel they have nowhere left to turn. Ultimately, a fragmented transition is the primary cause of homelessness among our Nation's veterans, and we must formulate a two-pronged approach that first works to avoid future homelessness among new veterans, while simultaneously ending the current disaster.

This two-pronged approach was adopted by Mayor Cory A. Booker of Newark, New Jersey, who has partnered with our organization to provide the City with the first-ever nonprofit-run municipal office of veteran's affairs in the country, which assists returning veterans with their transition, while assisting the homeless veteran population to find suitable transitional housing.

Preventing Homelessness Among Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans

When a soldier returns to the United States from Iraq or Afghanistan, he or she is immediately inundated with the problems many Americans face today, which include unemployment, an empty refrigerator, shut-off notices, or an eviction or foreclosure notice. While our organization has assisted thousands of American military families with these problems as they arise by hosting job fairs to address unemployment, providing direct financial assistance to help put food on the table and keep a roof over their heads, it is just never enough.

First, our Nation's lending institutions need to be more understanding of the difficulties that our veterans face during their transition back to civilian life, by providing ample time for our veterans to secure a job to get their lives in order, and keep a roof over their families' heads.

However, the root of these financial difficulties usually stem from unemployment. Like any one of us here today, a veteran cannot pay for groceries if they are unemployed. A veteran cannot pay for utilities if they are unemployed. A veteran cannot pay a mortgage if they are unemployed. However, unlike the rest of us sitting here today, these men and women have been defending our Nation's freedom against the threat of terrorism, causing them to miss years of their lives. Our Nation's veterans

deserve our patience, assistance, and understanding that it will take some time to put their lives back together.

To prevent homelessness among today's returning soldier we need to emphasize to employers the benefits of hiring a loyal, hardworking, dedicated veteran. With the unemployment rate among veterans up to three times higher than the national average, more and more of our Nation's heroes are facing these financial disasters with little help. We need to expand the Department of Labor's Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP), which oversees the hiring practices of Federal contractors as it pertains to women, minorities, veterans, and people with disabilities. While the OFCCP requires that statistics be provided showing the number of women and minorities a Federal contractor employs, no such requirements exist for their veteran employees. The Federal Government must be able to track the hiring practices of these Federal contractors as they pertain to veterans. If and only if Federal contractors, as well as all of our Nation's employers take affirmative action to hire our veterans now, will we be able to end the flow of veterans onto the streets.

Concurrent to providing veterans every employment opportunity and benefit, we must also find a more suitable, logical, and efficient method to help our veterans navigate the remaining complex process of transition. Our organization is in the process of creating a true "One Stop Center" that will make a veterans transition smooth, efficient, and effective. This center will provide office space to Government agencies, nonprofits, and other organizations that play a vital role in a veteran's transition. In one building a veteran will be able to find The Department of Veterans Affairs, The Department of Social Security, The Department of Labor, The USO, The Red Cross, and The Salvation Army, to name a few. With a center such as this, these stakeholders can come together and provide the most comprehensive approach to handling each individual veterans needs, and ensure that not one step, not one benefit, and not one piece of information is missed, ensuring that a veterans transition is complete rather than fragmented. We must always remember that homelessness is not an aberration, but rather it is always a result of leaving major steps of transition fragmented and unaddressed. We as a Nation must recognize that the magnitude of information and services that are available to veterans is vast, but the implementation is disjointed. We need to remedy the issue from the root of the problem, and that problem is fragmentation.

Ending Homelessness Among Veterans in Five Years

On any given night in America, one third of all homeless people are men and women who once proudly wore our Nation's uniform. They live in boxes and under bridges. They are our forgotten heroes. To end this national disaster, a vigorous series of partnerships between all branches of Government and at all levels of Government must be forged with community groups and faith-based organizations. All sectors of the community must come together with the common goal of ending homelessness among veterans.

However, these partnerships must result in veterans actually getting off the street and into housing rather than the same outreach techniques implemented in the past that do little more than to provide one day off of the streets for these veterans. Just last month our organization cosponsored our third Homeless Veterans Stand-Down in the city of Newark, NJ, which provided for a hot meal, clothes, haircut, physical checkups, to name a few. There were also various Government agencies in attendance to provide veterans with information on benefits. This is a day which on the surface appears like we did much to serve the veteran population, and it is a day that oftentimes garners us many accolades and thanks, but the truth, however, is that I consider these days to be among my greatest failures as the Executive Director of The G.I. Go Fund. When the event is over, I get into my car and drive home, while these men and women are right back where they started, on the streets. The event amounts to little more than one nice day and a thank you for your service for a man or a woman who so desperately needs more.

This more can only come in the form of more housing and more beds to be made available for long-term transitional housing projects. Housing projects much like the one my organization along with the city of Newark, NJ, is pursuing, which will rehabilitate an historic 33,000-square foot mansion that once belonged to the Frelinghuysen family of New Jersey to create a 100-bed long-term transitional housing facility for homeless veterans. This facility will provide for medical treatment to homeless veterans, job counseling, and training for homeless veterans, substance abuse counseling for homeless veterans, but most importantly, it will provide a chance for these men and women to finally, after many years in the cold, get off the streets and into a home of their own.

It is unreasonable for us as a Nation to expect these homeless veterans to rectify their situation without an address and a home they can call their own. We must

ask ourselves: where would perspective employers mail correspondences to without an address? Where would Government agencies that have benefits for these homeless veterans send information and payments to without an address? Still, more importantly, where will these homeless veterans, these brave men and women who fought to defend our streets not live on them, sleep, shower, and get dressed before their big interview without an address? The answer is nowhere, and that is why we need more long-term, transitional housing made available in every State in the country. In New Jersey, we currently have an estimated homeless veteran population of between 7,000 and 9,000 on any given night, but we have less than 200 long-term transitional beds available.

I am sure that we can all agree that this math does not add up, and if more beds that provide proper training and counseling and long-term shelter are not made available, it will be impossible to meet the aggressive goal of ending homelessness among veterans within 5 years that President Obama and VA Secretary Shinseki have vowed to do.

Conclusion

Again I would like to thank you Chairman Menendez, Senator Vitter, and all the Members of the Committee for providing me the time to speak about this important issue of ending homelessness among veterans within 5 years. While the task that lies before us is great, and the clock has already begun ticking, I leave here today deeply encouraged by the attention this Committee has shined on the issue. I am encouraged that the Chairman of this Subcommittee, Chairman Menendez, has in his congressional office a liaison that fights for veterans' issues in the State of New Jersey with a passion that is unmatched. And I am most encouraged that President Obama and Secretary Shinseki have made ending homelessness among veterans a top priority of the new Administration. I am encouraged but I am keenly aware of the enormity of the task at hand and I am ready to dig in and manifest the direction provided by the President and Congress. Thank You. I'll be glad to take your questions.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF LILA M. GUY

IRAQ WAR VETERAN

NOVEMBER 10, 2009

My name is Lila M. Guy and I am an Iraq War veteran. I served in Kirkuk, Iraq, from September 2005 to September 2006. I was a soldier in the 101st Airborne Division, Fort Campbell, KY, and a SGT in CBRN (Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear) Reconnaissance Platoon. When we were not doing CBRN missions we did convoy security. Before going on active duty I was in the Army Reserves for 8 years. For three of those years I was an Army Reserve Unit Administrator (GS-07). I am currently a full-time Nursing student at Widener University thanks to the VA Vocational Rehabilitation Program.

Being in the Army meant the world to me because I was a soldier serving my country. I loved my job, and the soldiers I served with. We were like family. The down side was I had a real family that needed me. I was married with three children. About a month after returning from Iraq, my unit was informed that we would be redeploying to Iraq and had to begin training for that deployment. Knowing the struggles of deployment, my husband decided he was not going to go through it again and he left. Being a single mother and trying to do field training was hard and I could not do both. Especially with a child diagnosed with epilepsy. When my husband called me and told me that either I get out of the Army or he would divorce me and take my children, I had to make a decision. I chose my children. When I left Fort Campbell, KY, I had nothing and had no idea what I was going to do. My parents had a two-bedroom house and I moved in with them. My three children and I lived in a 10'x12' room. My husband and I tried to get back together and I got pregnant. That was when things got worse for us. My husband decided he didn't want any more children and I was not willing to have an abortion. Things were already tight for us and my father told me that there was no way we could stay there with the new baby. At that point I had been diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and was receiving disability from the VA. I was grateful for the help but it just was not enough to raise four children. Faced with this dilemma, I sent an e-mail to Congressman Joe Sestak asking for help. I had not been able to find a job but was attending college. That next week I received a phone call from a Social Worker named Stephen Bennett, at the Philadelphia VA. They told me they may be able to help. At that time the HUD-VASH program was new and

they had not approved any housing yet. I was happy to know there was help for me. Steve told me that he was trying to do two jobs at once and to be patient and soon after came Frank McGuire. Frank has been instrumental in helping me get a house. During that time I watched as he struggled to try to get housing over 100 veterans. You would think that people would want to rent to a veteran but that was not the case. The HUD-VASH program coordinators were instrumental in speaking on my behalf to landlords in order to get a place and after moving in helping me to communicate with my landlord in getting things that need to be done in the house. I believe very strongly in the HUD-VASH program because I don't know where I would be without their help. There are many soldiers out there that don't think anybody cares and don't know that there is help out there. I had a focus and that was getting a place to stay for my children, so I didn't give up. This program needs to be able to reach out to those veterans and let them know that yes their service to the military is over but that the Government still cares about their welfare. When soldiers are no longer an asset they are thrown again and left to fend for themselves in an unfamiliar world. Anybody who has spent time on active duty and tried to integrate to civilian life will tell you, it is a different world. The HUD-VASH Program helps veteran to navigate this unfamiliar territory. I am not just speaking on the behalf of the HUD-VASH program, I am speaking on behalf of all the veterans who are still homeless and the ones coming home who will become homeless. They are my focus and if I could be standing there guiding them to the help they need I would. These veterans have served their country well and I believe the least they can get for their service I help finding a place to live. Thank You.

PREPARED STATEMENT OF WILLIAM WISE

VIETNAM WAR VETERAN

NOVEMBER 10, 2009

Thank you, Chairman Menendez, and Members of the Subcommittee for giving me the opportunity to testify today and for your leadership in addressing the critical issue of Veterans' Homelessness.

My name is William Wise. I am currently a participant in a residential homeless Veterans' program sponsored by the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs called Veterans Haven. The 2-year program, has given me the opportunity to put my life back together.

Let me provide you with some background into my situation.

I'm a 57-year-old man originally from Washington, DC. I'm a Veteran of the Viet Nam War. I had been a productive member of the community—holding a job and owning my own home.

But I made a number of bad choices due to addiction and mental health issues. Over time I lost my job, lost my home, and ended up residing in my sister's basement. For almost 3 years I remained homeless.

In order to try to address my issues, I tried short-term 4-month programs. These programs never provided me with enough time to deal with the core issues that I needed to address. And without addressing those core issues I continued to falter.

Finally I was referred to Veterans Haven.

Veterans Haven, a 2-year residential program, has allowed me the time to deal with the core issues that caused me to become jobless and homeless. There's an analogy I gave to the New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs Staff when I was first asked to talk about my situation and possibly provide testimony today.

My situation was comparable to someone moving from room to room blowing a fuse each time they entered a new room. The short term solution had been to try to fix the fuse. But that was only a temporary fix because the problem was actually the wiring.

I am currently nearing the end of my participation in the Veterans Haven program. As I think you can tell, the program has made a difference in my life. It has been an opportunity to deal with issues that have existed and escalated over a period of many years. Programs like this should be available to more Veterans allowing them the opportunity to get back on their feet and resume normal lives.

**RESPONSES TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS OF SENATOR VITTER
FROM MERCEDES MÁRQUEZ**

Q.1. Ms. Márquez, in your testimony you detail very thoroughly both your dedication and the Administration's dedication to ending homelessness among our veterans. This is an extraordinarily laudable goal. One that I believe every member of Congress can support. In your testimony you note that the Housing Choice Voucher Program, the HOME Program, and the CDBG Program and Homeless Assistance Grants all provide "great flexibility so that communities can use these Federal resources to meet their local needs." Given that we are talking about billions of dollars of taxpayer money what, if any, additional flexibility do you all need in order to maximize your resources? That is, are there rules and regulations that could be streamlined in order to help you better carry out your charge to end homelessness for veterans? I'm interested to hear any suggestions you may have.

A.1. Answer not received by time of publication.

**RESPONSES TO WRITTEN QUESTIONS OF SENATOR VITTER
FROM MELANIE LILLISTON**

Q.1. In your response to Chairman Menendez you said that everyone is going to have a success story that is unique to themselves and cited providing organizations and communities with the flexibility to provide services that are unique to each veteran as essential to ending homelessness for veterans. Please tell me specifically what more Congress can do to provide that essential flexibility.

A.1. Answer not received by time of publication.