

**Remarks of  
Assistant Secretary for Community Planning and Development  
Roy Bernardi  
Before the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
Thursday, September 20, 2001**

*H.R. 2716, the Homeless Veterans Assistance Act of 2001  
and H.R. 936, the Heather French Henry Homeless Veterans Assistance Act*

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Evans, and other distinguished members of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, thank you for this opportunity to appear before you to discuss the role of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) in supporting America's homeless veterans.

This nation owes its veterans a tremendous debt, for their sacrifices have made America strong and able to take on its aggressors. When a veteran joins the military, the federal government makes a contract with them that they will be cared for, and that is a promise the government will keep. Veterans who need our help must know that we will not turn our back on them.

For more than half a century – predating the creation of HUD itself – the federal government has worked specifically to meet the housing needs of this nation's veterans. After World War II, HUD's Federal Housing Administration's mortgage insurance teamed up with the Department of Veterans' Affairs' (VA) mortgage guarantees to help returning veterans achieve the American Dream and buy their own home, which they did in record numbers. Since HUD's creation in 1965, we have sought to improve housing opportunities for America's veterans by ensuring a coordinated federal response.

At least 600,000 people in this country are homeless on any given night. VA estimates that more than a quarter million are veterans; of those, approximately 80 percent are disabled. Each year, half a million veterans find themselves without a home at some point.

Many of these veterans have special needs or face extreme personal circumstances that propel them in and out of homelessness. Many have nowhere to go except back out on the streets when they are unable to access homeless shelters or transitional housing. Their lives are revolving doors that again and again return them to homelessness.

In July, in a speech before the National Alliance to End Homelessness, Secretary Martinez endorsed the goal of investing in permanent solutions to end chronic homelessness within ten years. The Bush Administration is reactivating the Interagency Council on the Homeless as a first step.

The Council was established in 1987 to help streamline Washington's approach to homelessness by coordinating the efforts of 16 federal agencies and other designated groups. Yet, the full Council has not met in more than five years. We will put it back to work: planning and coordinating federal homeless programs, reducing duplication, recommending improvements, and offering assistance to our partners at the community level.

VA, of course, is a primary resource for homeless veterans, and we commend Secretary Principi and his department for the exceptional service they provide. HUD and VA share a number of crosscutting responsibilities; for example, both agencies maintain separate programs that provide housing and supportive services to veterans. With this new emphasis on cooperation, we pledge to better coordinate with our counterparts at VA and other federal agencies in order to serve the homeless veteran population more efficiently and effectively.

Working with national service organizations, HUD established HUDVET, a resource center for veterans through which we provide information on community based programs and services, with an emphasis on veterans who are homeless. At the suggestion of veterans groups, an individual with special knowledge of veterans' needs – who is himself a combat-disabled Vietnam veteran – oversees the HUDVET program.

As the federal government's primary provider of targeted homeless assistance, HUD has the lead federal role in finding homes for the homeless. That is appropriate: we have 36 years of experience in helping Americans find safe and affordable shelter. HUD's homeless funding represents nearly three-fourths of all targeted federal homeless assistance.

Veterans assistance projects funded by HUD fall into one of two categories: those projects that primarily serve veterans, and those projects that target veterans as one of any number of key populations to be served. In 2000, HUD funded 68 projects targeted specifically to veterans, and another 1,348 projects that in some way supported veterans. Based on grantee reports submitted to HUD for 1999, HUD's homeless assistance programs served more than 160,000 homeless veterans. It is important to point out that a veteran may have been counted more than once, if they were served by more than one HUD program during the reporting period.

HUD continues to reach out to veterans and veterans' organizations in our grant applications by stressing the importance of serving veterans. In both the 2001 Continuum of Care Notice of Funding of Availability and the 2001 Continuum of Care application, applicants are asked to target veterans.

The FY 2002 budget for HUD demonstrates a strong support of homeless veterans. In FY 2002, a total of \$1.12 billion is provided for homeless assistance grants and shelter plus care renewals. This will fund four major programs, which I would like to briefly outline for the Committee:

**SUPPORTIVE HOUSING PROGRAM.** The Supportive Housing Program provides funds to develop supportive housing and services that allow homeless persons to live as independently as possible. Funds offer up to 24 months of transitional housing, and permanent housing for persons with disabilities.

**SHELTER PLUS CARE.** The Shelter Plus Care program provides rental assistance for homeless persons with disabilities. This is a form of permanent housing.

**SECTION 8 MODERATE REHABILITATION FOR SINGLE ROOM OCCUPANCY (SRO) DWELLINGS FOR HOMELESS INDIVIDUALS PROGRAM.** The Single Room Occupancy program provides rental assistance on behalf of homeless individuals through the moderate rehabilitation of SRO dwellings.

**EMERGENCY SHELTER GRANTS.** HUD will provide approximately \$150 million in Emergency Shelter Grants for FY 2002. These grants are used for the rehabilitation or conversion of buildings into homeless shelters, as well as related social services, operating expenses, homeless prevention activities, and administrative costs.

HUD administers a number of other programs that reach out to veterans and their families. These include HOME Investment Partnerships, Title V, Community Development Block Grants, Homeownership of Single-Family Homes and the Section 8 Homeownership Program, Lower-Income Rental Assistance, Section 202 Supportive Housing for the Elderly, Section 811 Supportive Housing for Persons with Disabilities, and Federal Housing Authority Mortgage Insurance Programs.

The Department has initiated an effort to develop and disseminate information especially for organizations serving homeless veterans. This effort includes developing guidebooks and holding conferences at which HUD provides technical assistance information. We conducted one of these technical assistance programs last month in Baltimore; the next is scheduled for Santa Fe in November.

In the coming years, HUD will make the goals of preventing homelessness and ending chronic homelessness as high a priority as that of housing the already homeless. We can do this by ensuring that individuals who pass through mainstream social services – such as the mental health, welfare, and criminal justice systems – do not move out of those services and back into homelessness. HUD administers a number of programs that touch the “potentially” homeless, and we will work to highlight their availability and usefulness to our grantees.

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate your leadership in calling this hearing, and I thank the Committee for its willingness to focus on this important issue. HUD looks forward to working together with the Committee and the appropriate federal agencies to combat homelessness among our veteran population.