

**STATEMENT OF**  
**VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA**

**SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD**

**BY**

**SANDRA A. MILLER**  
**CHAIR**  
**VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA**  
**HOMELESS TASK FORCE**

**BEFORE THE**  
**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**REGARDING**  
**THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS HOMELESS VETERANS**  
**PROGRAMS AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF P.L. LAW 107-95, THE**  
**COMPREHENSIVE VETERANS HOMELESS ASSISTANCE ACT OF 2001**

**SEPTEMBER 12, 2002**

Mr. Chairman, and members of the committee my name is Sandra A. Miller, and I serve as Chairman of Vietnam Veterans of America Task Force on Homeless Veterans. On behalf of VVA, I thank you and your colleagues for this opportunity to express our views on homeless veterans.

VVA believes the Department of Veterans Affairs is long overdue implementing section 601 of Public Law 105-368, which established the Pilot Program for VA Guaranteed Loans for Multifamily Transitional Housing for Homeless Veterans.

These pilot projects were authorized almost 4 years ago and there is no excuse that thousands of veterans still sleep on the streets because these pilots have not been started. While different agencies of the Executive branch bicker amongst themselves about implementing this program, homeless veterans are denied decent shelter. VVA believes that the permanent staff of the Office of Management & Budget (OMB) has deliberately delayed implementation of this program. The permanent staff of OMB essentially said that they would do this in a public meeting at the VA *before* the law was enacted, and that if the law was enacted, that it would still be theirs' to implement (or not). OMB's objection was to use of private funds that might actually weaken their total control over any program, even though they know nothing about homeless veterans. OMB has done what they as much said they would do, while America's veterans who are homeless needlessly suffer. Now is the time to stop this irresponsible behavior. Now is the time to demand that the Administration implement the law as Congress intended.

Frankly, the delays are puzzling to VVA: Is it private capital the current Administration does not like, or is it our most vulnerable veterans, many of them disabled, that the Administration does not like? VVA cannot understand why the continued delay, particularly with the professed values of this Administration.

Once these projects are implemented, they will expand the vitally needed supply of transitional housing for homeless veterans. The pilot loan guarantee program was established by Public Law 105-368 enacted November 11, 1998. This is a limited pilot program, and a maximum of 15 loans may be made. VVA believes that because of the delays, all 15 projects should be funded. As the projects are underway, VA can review the process and make the necessary administration alterations that are needed.

Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) enthusiastically supports these pilot programs as a creative and yet thoroughly prudent approach that will help meet the increasing needs for transitional housing for veterans. By "transitional housing" we mean housing that is safe, clean, sober and has responsible staff to ensure that it stays that way, and that supportive services are regularly provided as to be sufficient to help veterans fully recover as much independence and autonomy as possible. VVA believes that involving private sector funds in solutions to America's problem of veterans who are homeless is essential.

Vietnam Veterans of America believes that the mechanism created by these pilot projects could create an additional 5,000 beds in long term transitional housing for homeless veterans in the next five years. This estimate of 5,000 beds is based on the experience of

USVETS in the renovation and construction of the type of transitional housing units that would be created by this proposed authority. The experience is that it should cost no more than approximately \$20,000 per bed. It is the belief of VVA and the National Coalition of Homeless Veterans that in some cases this cost could possibly be reduced a bit with more experience, at least in some areas of the country.

While the Vietnam Veterans of America is very committed to the creation of additional pools of capital that would enable some of our service providers to be able to create additionally needed transitional housing for homeless veterans, VVA is equally committed to ensuring that adequate safeguards be taken in regard to the administration of such projects to ensure that they contribute to helping homeless veterans return to a productive role in American society.

The provisions of the pilot programs were established by the consulting firm, Birch and Davis Associates, Inc. A member of their team included a subcontractor, Century Housing Corporation of Culver City, California. Century Housing has experience in the development and financing of transitional housing for homeless veterans. They were the developers of the Westside Residence Hall in Los Angeles, California which was the model which the pilot loan program was based.

As a result of this experience we are urging the Committee to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to fund all 15 pilot projects at this time. VVA is aware that projects financed pursuant to this new authority require veteran residents to maintain sobriety as a condition of occupancy, charge a reasonable fee to occupants, provide supportive services and counseling (including job counseling), and requiring the veteran resident to obtain and keep employment (or engage in an education or training program designed to lead to meaningful employment) are all requirements that VVA supports. VVA believes that forcing veterans to pay rent and keep active helps those residents re-establish personal responsibility, pride, and self esteem necessary to successful recovery and reintegration into mainstream society.

VVA holds that the goal of transitional housing must not be just to create more units of housing, but rather to create more units of safe, clean, sober, supportive housing that promotes the recovery of self sufficiency and exercise of responsibility of each veteran who is currently homeless. The stringency of the rules must be matched by the positive environment and quality supportive/counseling services established. The difference here is not just one of semantics, but rather reflects a commitment to an approach that works.

VVA has a commitment to its members to respect our veterans enough to move beyond “warehousing” to help create additional projects where each veteran has the opportunity to re-establish his or her sense of self-worth and pride. Finally funding these projects will be one more solid step in the direction of creating enough tools to assist veterans to overcome problems and realize their potential.

It is a fact there is a need for a significant number of new units of transitional housing for veterans; VVA believes that the need is clear, apparent, and pressing in most areas of the

country. There are 275,000 veterans who are homeless on any given night, with double that number during the course of a given year. VVA members and others express the need for safe, clean, sober housing for veterans as being one of the most pressing needs in their efforts to assist veterans, if indeed not the most pressing need.

VVA agrees with those service providers who believe that the need for such housing is accelerating as a result of both the shift of the delivery of health care services by the Veterans Administration (VA) from inpatient based models to outpatient models of service delivery, as well as the system wide pressures on VA to “save money.”

VVA has much anecdotal evidence to indicate that the diminishment or virtual elimination of adequate quality substance abuse treatment and other neuro-psychiatric treatment services is a significant problem in virtually every major city. In some cases the inpatient resources devoted to these purposes have not been shifted to delivery of similar services on an outpatient basis. In other cases the lack of safe, clean, sober housing for veterans while in outpatient treatment or participating in partial hospitalization programs destroys any effectiveness that the treatment might provide toward rehabilitation and recovery of the veterans affected, particularly veterans who are homeless.

VVA believes the time for discussion of this program is long past, it is time this program became a reality. We urge this committee to direct the Secretary of VA to finally finalize the administrative guidelines that will govern these loans. At the same time the VVA requests the Secretary of VA to issue RFP’s for the pilot projects before the end of the current year.

At this time VVA also wants to be on the record to urge Congress to fully fund the VA Homeless Grant and Per Diem and the DOL HVRP programs authorized by Congress with passage of P.L. 107-95, The Homeless Veterans Comprehensive Assistance Act of 2001, in their FY03 budgets. Over the years, these programs administered by the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Labor, have been a vital resource in providing assistance to homeless veterans, Congress should fully fund these homeless programs at the authorized levels in Fiscal Year 03 in order to carry out the comprehensive intent of the law as passed.

Mr. Chairman, the Department of Veterans Affairs has testified before the House and Senate Appropriations Committees regarding its FY03 appropriations request. It has not included funding for homeless veterans. Why is the VA not asking for this funding? How does the VA expect to provide the care and services as set forth in P.L. 107-95 without appropriate funding to do so?

VVA is requesting that funding, authorized under P.L. 107-95, be designated by this committee solely to help homeless veterans. Far too often the VA comes before this committee and cannot account for the allocated funding that has been appropriated to them. For this reason, VVA is asking that \$135 million be earmarked in the VA FY03

budget and \$75 million for each of the next four years for the VA Homeless Grant and Per Diem program.

Lastly, VVA urges full funding to the authorized level of \$50 million for the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP) administered by the Department of Labor. This training/employment program has long suffered the consequences of limited funding. How can the Department of Labor extol a commitment to the training of homeless veterans and deny them the full funding that has been requested under P.L. 107-95?

Mr. Chairman, on behalf of Vietnam Veterans of America, I thank you and your distinguished colleagues for the opportunity to offer our views regarding our nations homeless veterans and urge your support by providing full funding of P.L. 107-95.

**VIETNAM VETERANS OF AMERICA**  
**Funding Statement**  
**September 12, 2002**

The national organization Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) is a non-profit veterans membership organization registered as a 501(c)(19) with the Internal Revenue Service. VVA is also appropriately registered with the Secretary of the Senate and the Clerk of the House of Representatives in compliance with the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995.

VVA is not currently in receipt of any federal grant or contract, other than the routine allocation of office space and associated resources in VA Regional Offices for outreach and direct services through its Veterans Benefits Program (Service Representatives). This is also true of the previous two fiscal years.

For Further Information, Contact:  
Director of Government Relations  
Vietnam Veterans of America.  
(301) 585-4000, extension 127

## **SANDRA A. MILLER**

Sandra A. Miller currently serves as Chair of Vietnam Veterans America Task Force on Homeless Veterans. She served as a Senior Enlisted Women in the U.S. Navy Communications from 1975 until 1981.

Ms. Miller currently works as a Program Coordinator at LZ II a 95 bed residential homeless transitional facility in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She is responsible for the budgetary and educational needs of the facility to ensure that homeless veterans received the best possible care and services. She has served over six years organizing the city of Philadelphia Homeless Veterans Stand Downs.

During Ms. Miller military service she received the National Defense Service Ribbon, Good Conduct Medal, Navy Meritorious Unit Citation @1 Bronze Device(2 awards), Zaire Airlift Letter of Commendation, U.S. Naval Forces Europe Letter of Appreciation, Command Petty Officer of the Quarter – 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter, Command Petty Officer of the Quarter – 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter, Command Petty Officer of the Year – 1980 and Command Sailor of the Year – 1980. She also received Vietnam Veterans of America, Region II James “Pop” Johnson Memorial Distinguished Service Award and the Chapel of Four Chaplains, Legion of Honor Award, September 2000 for her work with homeless veterans.

She currently resides in Douglass Pennsylvania

*(Letter was also sent to Chairman Young)*

June 26, 2002

Honorable Robert Byrd  
Chairman  
House Appropriations Committee  
S-128 Capitol Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Byrd:

Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) urges Congress to fully fund the VA Homeless Grant and Per Diem and the DOL HVRP programs authorized by Congress with passage of P.L. 107-95, The Homeless Veterans Comprehensive Assistance Act of 2001, in their FY03 budgets. Over the years, these programs administered by the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Labor, have been a vital resource in providing assistance to homeless veterans, Congress should fully fund these homeless programs at the authorized levels in Fiscal Year 03 in order to carry out the comprehensive intent of the law as passed.

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Honorable Robert Byrd  
Chairman  
House Appropriations Committee  
June 26, 2002

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Mr. Chairman, on any given night in the United States over 275,000 men and women who served this country find themselves without a decent place to lay their heads. They struggle every day with the burden of daily existence on the streets.

VVA urges you and your colleagues to support America's homeless veterans by providing the full funding and ensuring them the reality of P.L. 107-95.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Thomas H. Corey".

Thomas Corey  
National President