

**STATEMENT OF
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OF THE
DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATION
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to submit the views of the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) regarding the implementation of Public Law 107-95, the Homeless Veterans Comprehensive Assistance Act of 2001.

According to Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) estimates, more than 275,000 men and women who served our nation are homeless. As a matter of perspective, the number of homeless veterans is large enough to fill five large sports stadiums to capacity. Of these veterans, nearly a third incurred physical and mental conditions during active military duty.

Our nation came into existence through war. Great virtues can be established by winning wars, but war is also inherently brutal and destructive. Inevitably, a percentage of people exposed to such dark and twisted glimpses of humanity remain forever touched by the horrors they encountered. Until fairly recently, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was a largely unacknowledged and untreated residual of war. Many veterans suffering from PTSD withdrew from society and turned to alcohol and illicit drugs to anesthetize themselves from intrusive thoughts and memories of battle. Added into the equation of despair and hopelessness associated with PTSD, intoxicating substances can be a quick ticket to life on the street.

With the vast array of opportunities available in the United States, it is easy to acquire the notion that everyone is capable of self-sufficiency. Often, the perception exists that a homeless person is a vagabond with a low level of motivation or drive to maintain employment. Perhaps some people are homeless for such reasons. But it is indeed a sad fact that many veterans face life on the streets as a direct result of the trauma of war. During my tenure as a DAV National Service Officer, I met homeless veterans who were verified Purple Heart and Silver Star recipients. It is bitter knowledge to realize that sometimes our most deserving citizens are forgotten by society.

The DAV is deeply committed to ensuring that homeless veterans receive basic health care, housing, financial counseling, and vocational training. With help, many homeless veterans will attain self-sufficiency, and become contributive members of the society they once helped defend.

The DAV does not believe the burden of helping homeless veterans rests solely on the Federal government. The DAV Homeless Veterans Initiative helps homeless veterans make the transition from life on the streets to one of productivity and normalcy. Our motto, “We don’t leave our wounded behind,” is a heartfelt principle and a promise we strive to uphold. The purpose of the DAV Homeless Veterans Initiative, which is supported by DAV’s Charitable Service Trust and Colorado Trust, is to promote the development of transitional housing and supportive services needed to assist homeless veterans. Since 1989, DAV’s Charitable Service Trust grants and allocations for homeless projects total \$1,512,364.

Given our deep concern for homeless veterans, we were quite pleased last year when Public Law 107-95 was enacted. This commendable law is perhaps the most comprehensive effort ever made to improve existing programs for homeless veterans.

Public Law 107-95 establishes grant programs for homeless veterans with special needs, authorizes limited dental care for VA homeless programs, provides rental vouchers for homeless veteran housing programs, and increases funds to community providers for care of homeless veterans. When fully implemented, these provisions will provide meaningful steps toward accomplishing Congress’ stated goal of ending chronic homelessness among veterans within a decade.

We are pleased that VA Secretary Anthony Principi has implemented a very important provision of Public Law 107-95—the Homeless Advisory Committee, a 15-member committee consisting of advocates for homeless veterans from a variety of backgrounds. The DAV is pleased with the Secretary’s selections, and we are confident that the committee will fulfill its purpose and become a valuable source of expert advice on homeless veteran issues.

Transitional housing is vital to homeless veterans in their ascent to productive citizenship. The VA projects that by the end of fiscal year (FY) 2003, 6,615 transitional housing beds will be available through the Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem program. The level of funding for this program corresponds directly with the number of homeless veterans receiving assistance. Clearly, the number of beds does not adequately meet the number of homeless veterans. The need remains for increased funding for the Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem program.

Transitional housing provides temporary shelter to homeless veterans, but the key to successful rehabilitation is meaningful employment. The Homeless Veteran Reintegration Program (HVRP) managed through the US Department of Labor, focuses on helping homeless veterans find and maintain employment. HVRP programs work with veterans who have special needs in dealing with substance abuse, PTSD, legal issues, and those who are HIV positive. HVRP has demonstrated success in rehabilitating such veterans. Despite its success, HVRP has long suffered the consequences of limited funding. Public Law 107-95 authorized an increase for HVRP funding to \$50 million, yet the program has not been funded accordingly.

More than a year has passed since Public Law 107-95 was enacted. Monumental goals set by the provisions of this law require commitment and resources. We strongly encourage full funding for the provisions of Public Law 107-95. With proper assistance—including health care,

substance abuse treatment, mental health services, education, and job training—homeless veterans can improve their lives and become productive members of the society they once helped defend.

I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.