

STATEMENT OF
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VETERANS OF FOREIGN WARS OF THE UNITED STATES

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

WITH RESPECT TO

STATUS OF HOMELESS-ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS FOR VETERANS

WASHINGTON, D.C.

MAY 6, 2003

MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE:

On behalf of the 2.6 million members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States (VFW) and our Ladies Auxiliary, I appreciate the opportunity to present our views on the status of Homeless-Assistance Programs for veterans.

Mr. Chairman, the Administration and Congress must provide adequate resources to expand the existing homeless veteran programs with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Department of Labor (DOL), Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and other government agencies.

Although accurate numbers are impossible to acquire, it is estimated that more than 275,000 veterans are homeless on any given night. More than half a million veterans experience homelessness over the course of a year.

Conservatively, one out of every three homeless males who is sleeping in a doorway, alley, or box in our cities and rural communities has put on a uniform and served our Nation. VA reports that homeless veterans are mostly male (2% are women). The majority of homeless veterans are single. Most come from poor, disadvantaged communities, 45% suffer from

mental illness, and half have substance abuse problems. More than 67% served our country for at least three years.

Because the government money for homeless veterans is currently limited, it serves only one in ten of those in need. The VFW encourages Congress and its leaders to put forward practical, cost-effective proposals that will fill the serious gaps in services for the men and women who have served this Nation.

Mr. Chairman, the VFW fully supports PL 107-95 "The Homeless Veterans Comprehensive Assistance Act of 2001", which was introduced by Chairman Smith and seeks to end homelessness among America's veterans in the next decade. However, this program has not been adequately funded. While the House Veterans' Affairs Committee has requested \$75 million to fund certain provisions of the Act, the Administration has not requested additional funding to implement this law. PL 107-95 has the potential to make great strides in eliminating veterans' homelessness. But in order to do so it needs the full commitment and support of the Administration and that must be demonstrated by requesting full funding.

Having and keeping a job with a routine, decent pay, and benefits is the key to ending homelessness. The VFW recognizes sound employment programs as the ultimate priority. The Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP) of DOL has been the paramount program of employment for homeless veterans. However, DOL must request the full appropriation to ensure the success of this valuable program.

Health care, both physical and mental, is vital for many homeless veterans to gain and hold employment. The VA mental health and substance abuse programs are essential to making many homeless veterans job ready. Currently it is unclear what the staffing and funding levels dedicated to homeless services are in each medical center. The VFW requests a reporting, by each medical center, of the current level of service and the plans each center has to build comprehensive services for homeless veterans.

Finally Mr. Chairman, the VFW applauds the Secretary of Veterans' Affairs for establishing an Advisory Committee on Homeless Veterans. We also welcome the re-establishment of the Presidential Interagency Council on the Homeless. Both of these initiatives hopefully will produce a dialogue, which can only enhance existing efforts to eliminate veteran homelessness.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. The VFW looks forward to working with you and the Subcommittee in eliminating a national tragedy -- homeless veterans.

James N. Magill, Director

National Veterans Employment Policy
Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States

James N. Magill, a native of the Chicago suburb Aurora, Illinois has been a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Washington Office staff since 1981 and is currently the Director of National Veterans Employment Policy.

Prior to being honorably discharged from the U.S. Navy in 1971 as a Hospital corpsman 2nd class, Jim served in Vietnam as a Rifle Platoon Corpsman and the 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines, 1st Marine Division. Upon his discharge, he joined the staff of U.S. House of Representatives as a Legislative Analyst responsible for legislation relating to veterans affairs. While working of the House of Representatives, he attended evening classes at George Washington University under the GI Bill where he earned his degree in Business Administration.

Jim resigned his position with the U.S. House of Representatives to join the Washington Legislative Staff as a Special Assistant Director and then later became the Director of National Legislative Service.

Currently as the Director for Veterans Employment Policy, Mr. Magill maintains liaison with federal officials. He works to ensure that policies and procedures for assisting veterans in obtaining and retaining federal employment are carried out in accordance with the spirit and intent of established laws.

He and his family reside in Gaithersburg, Maryland.

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