



Testimony of Loree Sutton, M.D., Brigadier General, U.S. Army, Retired

Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs

New York City Council Committee on Veterans

and the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare

Oversight: Ending Veteran Homelessness and Hunger in New York City

1:00 pm, Monday, November 10, 2014

Committee Room

New York City Council Chambers, City Hall

Good morning, Chairman Ulrich, Chairman Levin, members of the City Council Committee on Veterans, and the City Council Committee on General Welfare. My name is Loree Sutton, and it is my privilege to serve as Commissioner, Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this hearing Oversight: Ending Veteran Homelessness and Hunger in New York City.

First, I would like to say "Happy Birthday," to any Marines and Marine Corps veterans attending today's hearing. The US Marine Corps is celebrating 239 years of service to our nation today. Also, an early Happy Veterans' Day to all who have served, and are still serving, in the US military. I hope you will all join us as we march up Fifth Avenue tomorrow honoring the service of our nation's veterans.

Today's topic of homelessness and hunger for our veterans is timely and critical. There are many reasons accounting for veterans going through these issues across the country. Post-traumatic stress, military sexual trauma, substance abuse, social isolation, and unemployment are some of the factors that contribute to veteran homelessness. It's not just about finding a place to live, having access to supportive services is critical to maintaining a home.

Since 2008, New York City has had a partnership with the US Department of Veterans Affairs and the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. This partnership formed the Housing Urban Development – Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing program, better known as HUD-VASH. This program provides Section-8 vouchers to eligible homeless veterans.

Another program for eligible veterans and their families from the US Department of Veterans Affairs is the Supportive Services for Veterans Families also known as “SSVF.” This grant is used to help veteran families from becoming homeless and also to help in “Rapid Rehousing” assisting veteran families already homeless obtain their own housing.

Veteran constituents come to MOVA for assistance, in a variety of ways: walk-ins, telephone calls, snail mail, emails and referrals – from family, friends, veteran and community-based organizations, and elected officials. If a veteran comes to MOVA and is street homeless, or in need of rental arrears assistance, they are connected with Project TORCH, 40 Flatbush Extension, 8th Floor, Brooklyn, for assessment so they may receive, if eligible, assistance through the HUD-VASH or SSVF program. If a veteran is not eligible for VA services, they are linked to the proper New York City Department of Homeless Services shelter intake center. MOVA keeps in touch with the veteran throughout the process.

In assessing the needs of veterans who come to MOVA for assistance, if it is found, through their assessment, that they are in need of assistance for getting food for themselves, and their families, MOVA connects them with the New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA) Job Income Center in their area to apply for cash assistance and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits. HRA also provides income eligible veterans information on food pantries and community kitchens. Information for this and other services can be applied for through ACCESS NYC. There is also link to this portal on the MOVA website at www.nyc.gov/veterans.

In summary, MOVA remains committed to ensuring that New York City veterans, and their loved ones, receive the best public and private resources New York City has to offer. Thank you again for this opportunity to meet with you today. I look forward to continuing our work together on behalf of all New York City veterans and their loved ones. I welcome your comments and questions.

**VETERANS HOMELESSNESS:
ENDING THE BATTLE ON THE HOME FRONT**

Testimony by Congressman Charles B. Rangel

**The New York City Council Hearing
By Committee on Veterans
Jointly with the Committee on General Welfare**

**Oversight: Ending Veteran Homelessness and Hunger in New York City
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Thank you, Chairman Eric A. Ulrich of Committee on Veterans, and Chairman Stephen T. Levin of Committee on General Welfare, for allowing me this privilege to speak on this critical issue of veterans' homelessness.

On Veterans Day, Americans pause to salute those brave men and women who have given their lives for our country and served under the banner of freedom and democracy. Far from home; on distant battlefields, our soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and Coast Guardsmen have fought and died in the name of liberty. As we gather together across the nation to honor their sacrifice, we must renew our commitment to keep our solemn promises to the more than 2 million troops and reservists, their families and the 22 million veterans across our country, including 50,000 veterans in New York City. America has a sacred trust with the men and women who have served our country in uniform. We must not lose sight of our responsibility to ensure that these veterans and those that served before them have adequate care when they return home. After fighting for our nation, no veteran should have to suffer from hunger or sleep on the streets.

As a veteran, I am proud that President Barack Obama has made it a priority to end veterans' homelessness by 2015. U.S. Housing and Urban Development Secretary Julián Castro released a report on October 31, 2014, that noted a continued general decline and specifically among veterans and persons living on the street, citing the number of homeless veterans to have declined by 33 percent (or 24,837 people) since 2010.

However, we must do more to reduce that number to zero. That is why I am testifying to express my wholehearted support for the Proposed Res. No. 204-A Resolution calling upon the New York State Legislature to pass and the Governor to sign legislation which would require the Division of Veterans Affairs to conduct a study regarding homeless female veterans in New York.

As more women serve in the military, the number of women veterans has grown substantially, doubling from 4% of the veterans population in 1990 to 8% (or an

estimated 1.8 million) today. The number of women veterans will continue to increase as service members return from the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Some women veterans are at-risk of homelessness because: they have disabling psychological conditions, such as Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) & Major Depressive Disorders often resulting from experiencing Military sexual trauma (MST), or are single mothers facing challenges with readjustment to civilian life.

According to the Government Accountability Office (GAO) report, titled, "Homeless Women Veterans: Actions Needed to Ensure Safe and Appropriate Housing, December 2011 (GAO-12-182)", data on the characteristics of homeless women veterans are limited to those who have been in contact with Veterans Affairs. While HUD captures data on homeless women and on homeless veterans, neither HUD nor the VA collects detailed information on homeless women veterans. Specifically, they lack data on the characteristics and needs of these women on a national, state and local level.

Therefore accurate data is critical to ensuring the success of addressing the needs of homeless women veterans who face barriers when accessing and using veterans housing, including lack of awareness of these programs, lack of referrals for temporary housing while awaiting placement in GPD & HUD-VASH housing, limited housing for women with children, and concerns about personal safety.

Recent studies by the Department of Defense reveal that black female veterans are disproportionately being left to fend for themselves. According to follow up studies, black women who are sexually traumatized in the military are one of the fastest growing segments of the homeless population.

Sexual assault is one of the military's most vicious secrets for women, a recent New York Times profile shows. One in three military women has been sexually assaulted, the Defense Department revealed -- a rate twice as high as that for civilians.

A report conducted by the GAO showed that 45% of homeless veterans were black women, while 41% were White, 7.6% were Latina, and 1.3 were Asian. Most homeless female veterans served during the Persian Gulf and Iraq War periods. The profile says, "while male returnees become homeless largely because of substance abuse and mental illness, experts say that female veterans face those problems and more, including the search for family housing and an even-harder time finding well-paying jobs.

On the battlefield, the military pledges to leave no soldier behind -- black, white, male or female. As a nation, let it be our pledge that when they return home, we leave no veteran behind. This Veterans Day and every day, let us honor their service with actions that fulfill our commitment to our troops, their families, and our veterans -- and that are worthy of our grateful nation.

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FOR THE RECORD

McSilver Institute
for Poverty Policy and Research

NYU SILVER SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

Testimony of **Gary Parker, MSW, Deputy Director**
McSilver Institute for Poverty Policy and Research

before the

New York City Council
General Welfare & Veterans Committees

regarding

Ending Veteran Homelessness and Hunger

November 10, 2014

City Hall Council Chambers
New York, NY 10007

Good afternoon and thank you Council Member Levin, Council Member Ulrich, and the members of the General Welfare and Veterans Committees for the opportunity to speak today on the critical topic of ending veteran homelessness and hunger.

My name is Gary Parker and I am the Deputy Director of the McSilver Institute for Poverty Policy and Research. Housed in the Silver School of School Work at New York University, the McSilver Institute oversees applied research studies to address the root causes and consequences of poverty and to inform policy and program solutions. McSilver's work is defined by partnerships with policy makers, service organizations, and community stakeholders both in New York and globally. An understanding of the links between individuals, families, and communities to their external environments, as well as the interrelatedness of race and poverty, guide our efforts.

Despite an improved general economy following the financial crisis of 2008 and the subsequent recession, homelessness is still on the rise in New York. According to the Coalition for the Homeless, 58,056 individuals used city shelters each night in September, the highest level ever recorded and an increase of nearly 20,000 people from the same period five years ago.¹

The McSilver Institute approaches homelessness as a physical and mental health issue, which ultimately becomes an expensive living condition from which people seek services. It costs New York City approximately \$3,000 to shelter a homeless family for one month and \$2,300 to do so for an individual homeless adult.² These costs do not take into account frequent emergency room visits, temporary incarceration and other consequences of housing instability, which are far more costly than investment in subsidized housing and preventative services.

To the credit of service members returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, who have generated increased attention around the issue, federal and local efforts have been underway to address homelessness among veterans. In 2010, President Obama announced his commitment to ending homelessness among veterans by 2015 as part of the larger Opening Doors initiative. Before Opening Doors, 1 out of every 6 people in a shelter had served in the military.³ According to the latest data from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, since 2010 there has been a 33

¹ Coalition for the Homeless, "Facts About Homelessness." Accessed November 9, 2014
<http://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/the-catastrophe-of-homelessness/facts-about-homelessness>.

² The City of New York, "Mayor's Management Report," September 2014

³ Khadduri, J; Culhane, D. Veteran Homelessness. A Supplemental Report to the 2010 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress. 2010.

percent decrease in veteran homelessness nationally⁴ and since 2011, there has been a 65 percent decrease in veteran homelessness in NYC, with an even larger decrease in veterans living on the street.⁵ Nonetheless, 1,645 homeless veterans, 329 of whom were unsheltered, were counted on a single night in January 2014.⁶

The first concerted U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) program targeted at homeless veterans was implemented in 1988, and Williamsburg, Brooklyn was home to the city's first federally financed drop-in center for homeless former service people.⁷ Since then, the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) has expanded efforts to address veteran homelessness by developing transitional housing programs, tailoring programs for sub-populations of former service members including women and the chronically homeless, and adopting a Housing First model.

Professor Deborah Padgett, a McSilver Institute Faculty Fellow, has conducted extensive research demonstrating the efficacy of the Housing First model,^{8,9,10} and the McSilver Institute commends the VA for embracing this approach to ending homelessness by providing a comprehensive menu of services starting with a stable place for someone to live. The Department of Housing and Urban Development – Veterans Administration Supportive Housing's (HUD-VASH) Housing First program immediately places homeless veterans into housing without sobriety or psychiatric requirements through HUD's provision of Section 8 housing vouchers. The VA then provides wraparound case management and treatment services after housing placement, rather than requiring treatment compliance as a prerequisite to housing. Another program that is contributing to the reduction of veteran homelessness is the Supportive Services for Veteran Families Program (SSVF), which also employs a Housing First model and provides rapid re-housing and short-term interventions to alleviate immediate homelessness.

⁴ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, "2014 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress," October 30, 2014.

⁵ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, "2007 - 2014 Point-in-Time Estimates by CoC," October 2014.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ "U.S. Opens a New Center for Homeless Veterans," *New York Times*, May 15, 1988.

⁸ Padgett, D.K., Stanhope, V. & Henwood, B.F. (2010). Housing First services for homeless adults with co-occurring serious mental illness and substance problems: A growing body of evidence. In: M. Roberts-DeGennaro & S.J. Fogel (Eds.), *Empirically-supported interventions for community and organization change*. Chicago, IL: Lyceum Press.

⁹ Stanhope, V, Padgett, D.K & Henwood, B. (2010). Housing First approaches to addressing homelessness. In S. Fitzpatrick, L. Fox & S. Smith (Eds.), *International encyclopedia of housing and home*. Oxford, UK: Elsevier.

¹⁰ Padgett, D.K., Stanhope, V., Stefancic, A., Henwood, B.F., Davis, A. (2011). Substance use outcomes in 'housing first' and 'treatment first' consumers after one year. *Community Mental Health Journal*. 47, 227-232.

A key principle that underlies the success of both HUD-VASH Housing First and SSVF is community partnerships. This point was made by panelist Julie Irwin, Homeless Care Line Manager for the Department of Veterans Affairs New York / New Jersey Health Care Network, at a symposium the McSilver Institute hosted in May of this year on the issues of homelessness and food insecurity. Cities that have claimed recent success in eliminating poverty, such as Phoenix and Salt Lake City, have cited robust collaboration between government, housing agencies, and the non-profit sector as instrumental for improving outcomes for the homeless and *preventing* those at-risk from becoming homeless in the first place.^{11,12} It will be critical for New York City to strengthen these partnerships as it works to address these issues.

The evidence base indicates that HUD-VASH's Housing First Program has been a key driving force in the reduction of veteran homelessness, with several studies affirming its efficacy. One such study compared a control group that underwent treatment before being eligible for housing (n=70) with a group receiving immediate housing (n=107). The results suggested that the Housing First approach is conducive to long-term housing stability.¹³ While both groups saw similar decreases in emergency mental health care, the Housing First group was eight times more likely than the treatment-as-usual group to maintain housing stability for twelve months, with a 98 percent housing retention rate.¹⁴

Another study found that in addition to having positive housing outcomes, the HUD-VASH Housing First program had significant clinical outcomes, especially for those in drug and alcohol abuse programs.¹⁵ A third study supported this conclusion: through the comparison of the outcomes of a group of homeless veterans placed in Housing First with those receiving treatment but not initially housed, it was found that housing is a key aspect of recovery from a substance abuse disorder. Not only did participants in Housing First have more stable housing in the long-term, but their use of high-cost inpatient and emergency care services was consistently lower than their homeless

¹¹ Susan Page, "How Phoenix ended homelessness among vets," *USA Today*, January 23, 2014.

¹² J.B. Wogan, "How Salt Lake City Solved Chronic Veteran Homelessness," *Governing*, December 9, 2013.

¹³ Montgomery, A. E., Hill, L. L., Kane, V. and Culhane, D. P. (2013), Housing chronically homeless veterans: evaluating the efficacy of a Housing First approach to HUD-VASH. *J. Community Psychol.*, 41: 505–514.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Cheng AL, Lin H, Kaspro W, Rosenheck RA. Impact of supported housing on clinical outcomes: analysis of a randomized trial using multiple imputation technique. *J Nerv Ment Dis.* 2007 Jan;195(1):83-8.

counterparts who received substance abuse treatment only at baseline, regardless of whether they were housed at a later point during the course of the study.¹⁶

SSVF is a relatively new intervention, launched by the VA in federal fiscal year 2012. However, a preliminary analysis of prospective data collected on 12,259 veterans who exited the program in that first year points to its efficacy.¹⁷ Program participants were analyzed based on four subgroups: single veterans who received prevention services, veterans in families who received prevention services, single veterans who received rapid re-housing, and veterans in families who received rapid re-housing. One year after exiting the program, at least 90 percent of veterans in families who received either service had not experienced another episode of homelessness and at least 84 percent of single veterans who received either service had not experienced another episode of homelessness.

To end homelessness among veterans, New York City and the Federal Government will have to redouble their commitment to evidence-based programs like Housing First and SSVF. Furthermore, as persuasively argued by Proposed Res. No. 204-A, which is also on today's joint committee agenda, there is a need for a greater understanding of the challenges faced by homeless female veterans in our state so that we can implement effective interventions to facilitate their stable housing. In expressing strong support for this resolution, I should note that the McSilver Institute has been awarded a grant from the VA to support the development of a comprehensive training program to assist the agency's care coordinators and case managers in addressing issues that either place female veterans and their families at risk for future episodes of housing instability or are the consequences of the stressors associated with homelessness. This training program has the ultimate goal of increasing permanent housing placements for these women who have served our country.

Food insecurity among veterans, particularly among those who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, is also a significant issue. It's no surprise that in 2011, the Food Bank of NYC found that one in three veteran households were concerned about needing food assistance.¹⁸ Recent national research shows that over 25 percent of veterans reported

¹⁶ Buchholz, J. R., Malte, C. a, Calsyn, D. a, Baer, J. S., Nichol, P., Kivlahan, D. R., Saxon, A. J. (2010). Associations of housing status with substance abuse treatment and service use outcomes among veterans. *Psychiatric Services* (Washington, D.C.), 61(7), 698–706. doi:10.1176/appi.ps.61.7.698.

¹⁷ VA National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans Research Brief, "Housing Outcomes of Veterans Following Exit from the Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) Program," February 2014.

¹⁸ Food Bank for New York City, "From the front lines to the bread lines: food poverty among veterans," (2011).

food insecurity in the past year and 12 percent reported severe food insecurity,¹⁹ which is significantly higher compared to overall household rates of 14 and 6 percent respectively per the USDA. The high rates of food insecurity among veterans deserve increased attention and targeted policies and programs to decrease its prevalence.

A recent report released by Feeding America estimates that 620,000 veteran households nationwide receive assistance from the organization's network of pantries and food banks.²⁰ Recent cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) have also impacted veterans: in 2011, 900,000 veterans nationwide relied on SNAP to help afford food. In addition to the expiration of a provision from the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act, the latest iteration of the Farm Bill slashed SNAP benefits further. Commendably, Governor Cuomo intervened and, working with the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, restored level benefits for 300,000 households statewide.²¹ McSilver Institute's Food and Family Matters! project is currently conducting qualitative research on SNAP and food pantry participation and opportunities for policy and program improvements. We look forward to sharing our findings in the coming months to help inform the conversation around ending hunger and why SNAP eligible individuals sometimes choose not to participate in the program.

In closing, the McSilver Institute strongly supports coordinated efforts between non-profit, city, state, and federal resources and services that will help end veteran homelessness and hunger. Beyond discussions around specific policies or programs, 2014 McSilver Symposium panelist Julie Irwin put it best: "What lies behind all of this are real people, who served our country, who deserve the best from us, and it's imperative that we end that cycle of despair and embrace our veterans in a continued circle of care."

Thank you.

¹⁹ Widome, R; Jensen, A; Bangerter, A; and Fu, S. Food insecurity among veterans of the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Public Health Nutrition, available on CJO2014. doi:10.1017/S136898001400072X.

²⁰ Feeding America, "Hunger in America 2014: Military Service in Feeding America Client Households Background and Calculations," August 2014.

²¹ New York State Governor's Press Office, "Governor Cuomo Announces New York State Will Preserve \$457 Million in Snap Benefits for 300,000 Households," February 25, 2014.

**Testimony by New York Legal Assistance Group (“NYLAG”)
before the Committee on General Welfare w/ the Committee on Veterans
Oversight: how to end veterans’ homelessness and hunger in New York City**

November 10, 2014

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to speak to the Committees on Veterans and General Welfare about the effort to end veterans’ homelessness and hunger in New York City. My name is Kevin Kenneally and I am a Supervising Attorney at the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG). NYLAG is a nonprofit law office dedicated to providing free legal services in civil law matters to low-income New Yorkers. NYLAG serves veterans, immigrants, seniors, the homebound, families facing foreclosure, renters facing eviction, low-income consumers, those in need of government assistance, children in need of special education, domestic violence victims, persons with disabilities, patients with chronic illness or disease, low-wage workers, low-income members of the LGBT community, Holocaust survivors, as well as others in need of free legal services. I am joined today by Kamilla Sjödin, Associate Director at NYLAG¹ and this testimony was written with input from David Falcon, Staff Attorney in NYLAG’s Veterans Legal Assistance Project.

We commend all those members of the committees who have worked to end veterans’ homelessness and hunger. My work at NYLAG is to provide free legal services in hospitals across

¹ For full disclosure, Kamilla is a former employee of the New York City Council where, at one time, she served as counsel to the Committee on Housing and Buildings, as well as counsel to the (at that time) Subcommittee on Public Housing.

the city, specifically through weekly clinics at the VA medical centers in the Bronx on Kingsbridge Road and Manhattan on 23rd Street. We see every day how veterans are affected by the threat of or actual loss of housing on a daily basis. As this body is acutely aware, this problem is particularly severe for veterans with serious health problems, both physical and mental. The stress and uncertainty of facing eviction exacerbates their conditions. Having adequate housing is also vital to ending hunger and stabilizing a person's or a family's food source. Permanent housing allows for storage of food, buying in bulk, cooking one's own meals, and knowing where to find healthy food locally, all things that save money and that are impossible without a place to live. Simply put, when you are homeless, you don't have a stove, or a refrigerator.

Since our legal clinics at the VA medical centers started two years ago, we have opened 861 housing and benefits-related cases. Many of our veteran clients are the formerly homeless who receive a Section 8 subsidy through the federal HUD-VASH program. In order to be eligible for this type of Section 8, a veteran must have experienced some form of chronic homelessness. If the veteran is evicted, then he or she loses his or her Section 8 voucher and repeats the cycle of homelessness. Therefore, legal assistance and preventing the loss of these vouchers is essential.

For example, one NYLAG client is Paul, a 57 year old veteran whose current income is public assistance. He was homeless but now receives a Section 8 housing subsidy through HUD-VASH. Paul was referred to us because his landlord sued him in Housing Court for nonpayment of rent. NYLAG discovered that his Section 8 share was too high because NYCHA did not change his income when a temporary job ended several months earlier. We represented him in Housing Court and subpoenaed NYCHA Section 8 to appear. NYLAG delayed the case in Housing Court by arguing that the tenant's Section 8 was incorrect and must be fixed before entering into a settlement for the arrears. Four months later, NYCHA reduced Paul's Section 8 share to the correct amount and issued retroactive payments. We then entered into a settlement agreement for the remaining arrears which were later paid by a one-shot grant from the Human Resources Administration. Due to our

representation, Paul preserved his Section 8 voucher which would have terminated had he been evicted from his apartment.

As Paul's experience illustrates, an important component of ending veteran homelessness, and therefore also veteran hunger, is to preserve veterans' housing and Section 8 subsidies. Housing court is an intimidating and chaotic place where landlords almost always have attorneys and tenants rarely have legal representation. As a result, NYLAG works closely with HUD- VASH case managers at the VA to ensure that veterans who face eviction are referred to our staff. Furthermore, our legal clinics are located in the outpatient mental health departments. Most of our veteran clients who face eviction receive treatment for mental impairments. They are easily overwhelmed and impaired in their abilities to perform basic tasks. Consequently, they find it challenging, if not impossible, to interact with government officials and they cannot navigate complex agency structures.

NYLAG's attorneys who work with the veteran population outside of VA clinics see different, and equally troubling, issues affecting homeless veterans. Many of these veterans are not eligible for the federal HUD-VASH vouchers because they have not yet been chronically homeless and we try to ensure that they never are. However, because ongoing rental assistance in this form is not available to them, they often face eviction on the basis of falling into arrears because of temporary loss of income, increase in rents, roommates moving out, unexpected medical expenses, and similar matters. Our Veterans Legal Assistance Project is able to connect veterans with substantial arrears or those facing eviction with local nonprofit providers that administer funding from Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) programs and traditional emergency rent programs.

The organizations that administer the SSVF funds have some latitude to develop their own criteria when choosing which candidate to serve. Often the criteria match the requirements for a one-shot deal. However, the candidates are instructed to apply for a one-shot deal before they can apply

for SSVF funds. We believe that there is an opportunity for HRA to coordinate with these organizations to ease the burden of the application process and prevent unnecessary delays. Furthermore, the organizations that administer the funds should provide veterans and city agencies with greater transparency of their personalized criteria.

Since the sequestration in 2013, we have also seen many public housing residents and Section 8 voucher recipients forced to downsize based on the number of adults in the household or risk losing their subsidized assistance. In one particular case, Joseph, a disabled veteran living with his mother in a two bedroom apartment was downsized to a one bedroom apartment based on the update HPD Section 8 Voucher payment standards. Ultimately, Joseph qualified for a reasonable accommodation due to his medical conditions, but this family was subjected to a lengthy administrative appeal process.

Additionally, the New York City Housing Authority, as well as other agencies, often takes several months to process income change requests which then results in rent arrears and thereafter housing eviction cases being filed in civil court. The Legal Aid Society has filed a class action case to address this issue within NYCHA but in the meantime, many formerly homeless veterans continue to face delays and are incorrectly budgeted with high Section 8 shares.

Accordingly, based on our experience, we urge the Council to consider the following policies which would support the effort to end veterans' homelessness and hunger in New York City:

1. That the New York City Housing Authority implement reforms to more quickly process income changes so formerly homeless veterans with HUD-VASH Section 8 vouchers do not fall behind in their rent shares
2. That the Council continue to support one shot funding so the Human Resources Administration can continue to provide rent arrear assistance that prevents evictions and preserves veterans' HUD-VASH and Section 8 vouchers.

3. That all city agencies be trained on ADA compliance requirements so veterans with physical and mental impairments receive the appropriate accommodations that would allow them to full access to government benefits, such as help in applying for and recertifying Section 8 and income-related benefits.
4. That all city agencies be trained on how to screen for veteran status so eligible New Yorkers are directed towards the income support and housing programs.
5. That HRA coordinate with those groups administering SSVF funding to streamline the application process and that other groups that administer arrears assistance be encouraged to provide more transparency in their applications and approval processes; and
6. That HPD and NYCHA place those residents who have received service-connected disability benefits from the VA on lower-priority for future downsizing.

We would be happy to discuss our proposals further with the Council or other advocates and work together to end veterans' homelessness and hunger in New York City. Again, we commend all those who have already worked on these important issues, as well as improving them. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Respectfully submitted,

Kamilla Sjödin, Associate Director

Kevin Kenneally, Supervising Attorney

David Falcon, Staff Attorney



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Testimony prepared by

Triada Stampas

for the

Committees on Veterans and General Welfare

on

Ending Veteran Homelessness and Hunger in New York City

November 10, 2014

on behalf of

Food Bank For New York City

INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon and thank you, Chairpersons Ulrich and Levin, and members of the Committees on Veterans and General Welfare. My name is Triada Stampas and I am the Vice President for Research and Public Affairs at Food Bank For New York City. Food Bank appreciates the opportunity to present testimony today to the City Council about hunger among veterans in New York City.

First, Food Bank For New York City thanks the City Council for your continued commitment to addressing the issue of hunger and ensure all New Yorkers have access to affordable, nutritious food. The City Council has long played a leadership role in this arena, and the Council's support for implementing universal free school meals, increasing enrollment of eligible households in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), expanding the in-classroom School Breakfast Program, as well as funding to increase the supply of food available at emergency food programs are especially appreciated. Today's announcement of a citywide food drive for

veterans across our city is an important way to help raise awareness and support about existing needs among our former service members.

For more than 30 years, Food Bank For New York City has been the city's major hunger-relief organization, working to end food poverty throughout the five boroughs. Nearly one in five New York City residents relies on our programs and services. Through our network of more than 1,000 charities and schools citywide, Food Bank provides food for more than 63 million free meals for New Yorkers in need. Food Bank For New York City's income support services, including SNAP enrollment and free tax assistance for the working poor, put more than \$100 million each year into the pockets of New Yorkers, helping them to afford food and achieve greater dignity and independence. In addition, Food Bank's nutrition education programs and services empower more than 275,000 children, teens and adults to sustain a healthy diet on a low budget. Working toward long-term solutions to food poverty, Food Bank develops policy and conducts research to inform community and government efforts.

My testimony today will focus on what we know about food poverty among veterans in New York City, and best practices that have been developed by anti-hunger organizations across the country in recent years, as the drawdown of forces from Iraq and Afghanistan have brought our nation's service members back into an unwelcoming economy.

With regard to what is known about food poverty among our city's veterans, I offer this information with a serious *caveat*: our most recent data, from 2012, predates the across-the-board cuts to SNAP benefits that took effect in November 2013 and changed the landscape of food needs among low-income households in New York City. Those cuts, which affected every single one of more than 1.8 million New York City residents receiving SNAP at the time, have, in their first eleven months, taken away more than 56 million meals in our city alone – more food than the average food bank distributes in a year.¹

The month this SNAP cut took effect, the charity network of food pantries and soup kitchens across the five boroughs reported an immediate and widespread increase in need: indeed, 76 percent of food pantries and soup kitchens reported more people on their lines in November 2013 than in the immediately preceding months. Nearly half (48 percent) reported running out of food that month.²

Five years since the end of the Great Recession, indicators of need in New York – including poverty, food insecurity and unemployment – remain entrenched above pre-recession levels. Through recession and recovery, the costs of food and other basic necessities have risen steadily in our city. It should be understood, then, that the November 2013 cuts to SNAP have deepened vulnerability among low-income individuals and families beyond even what these contextual factors would suggest.

¹ Food Bank For New York City analysis of SNAP participation and benefit data reported by the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA).

² "Research Brief: Visitor Traffic Increases as Emergency Food Providers Post-SNAP Cuts." Food Bank For New York City. January 2014.

FOOD POVERTY AMONG NYC VETERANS

Food Bank For New York City research finds nearly **70,000 of New York City's veterans access food pantries and/or soup kitchens.**³ While a small fraction of the approximately 1.4 million New York City residents who rely on emergency food, **this number constitutes 30 percent of New York City's entire veteran population.**⁴

Public opinion research further illuminates the difficulty that many households with veterans in New York City experience affording food. **Almost one in three New York City veteran households (29 percent) reported difficulty affording food in 2012**, representing a one-year increase of 16 percent (25 percent).⁵

This difficulty affording food has resulted in both skimping on food and skipping meals. More than one in three New York City veteran households (37 percent) reported that they had eaten smaller meals to save food or money in 2012, up from almost one in three (32 percent) in 2011; almost one in three veteran households (32 percent) reported that they had bought less food to save money, up from more than one in four (28 percent) in 2011; and almost one in six veteran households (15 percent) reported that they had skipped meals, up from more than one in seven (14 percent) in 2011.⁶

Inability to afford food also impacts the type of food that households purchase. Almost one in five New York City veteran households (19 percent) reported buying less fresh fruits and vegetables to stretch their grocery dollar; one in five (20 percent) reported buying less dairy (e.g., milk, yogurt, cheese); and almost one in three (29 percent) reported buying less meat, poultry, or fish.⁷

Having to pay for rent, utilities and/or transportation left almost one in six New York City veteran households (16 percent) unable to pay for food at some point in 2012. More than one in six (17 percent) reported that they could not pay for food because they had to pay for medicine or medical care.⁸

While veteran status is not among the individual/household characteristics tracked by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) in its annual report on food insecurity, other research on need among veterans – particularly veterans of the post-9/11 conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan (known as “Gulf War era II”) – is consistent with these findings. Research has found homelessness among veterans to be disproportionately high, as is unemployment among Gulf War-era II veterans.⁹ Recently released research on the food security status of Minnesota veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan found a food insecurity rate of 27 percent in 2012, considerably above that state's household average of 10.6 percent in that year.¹⁰

³ *Hunger's New Normal: Redefining Emergency in Post-Recession New York City*. Food Bank For New York City. October 2013.

⁴ According to the 2012 American Community Survey (U.S. Census Bureau), approximately 225,000 veterans live in New York City.

⁵ *NYC Hunger Experience 2012: One City, Two Realities*. Food Bank For New York City. January 2013.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics finds an unemployment rate of 7.2 percent among Gulf War Era II veterans in October 2014, compared to a non-veteran unemployment rate of 5.4 percent.

¹⁰ Widome, Rachel, Agnes Jensen, Ann Bangerter and Steven S Fu. “Food Insecurity among Veterans of the US Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.” *Public Health Nutrition*, available on CJO2014. doi:10.1017/S136898001400072X.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO BETTER SERVE NYC'S VETERANS

Over the past several years, food banks and other anti-hunger organizations across the country have contended with the increasing numbers of veterans among the ranks of the unemployed, and on food pantry and soup kitchen lines. As a result, a number of best practices have emerged to effectively connect veterans to the resources and services they need.

CULTURAL COMPETENCE MATTERS

Those who need and seek help to meet their basic needs are often stigmatized and judged in our society. For veterans, the feelings of competence, self-sufficiency and self-worth they cultivated during their military service can be eroded by the struggles they experience in their civilian lives. In addition, social isolation, particularly among recent veterans, is common.¹¹

As a result, veterans on food pantry and soup kitchen lines rarely identify themselves as such. It takes time to establish the trust for a person seeking help to reveal the details of their lives to strangers, particularly when a source of pride has become one of shame. Within Food Bank For New York City's network are two agencies that specifically tailor services to veterans – Vets, Inc. in Queens and Black Veterans for Social Justice in Brooklyn – but we know that veterans receive food from food pantries and soup kitchens across the city. Over the past few years, we, like other food banks across the country, have heard from our members about discovering that individuals who have been on their pantry lines for months are veterans.

Because certain benefits and resources are available to only veterans, it is important for any organization that provides services to veterans to develop the cultural competencies for establishing trusting, respectful relationships. As in all fields of social service provision, learning to speak the same language is vital to being effective.

- Food Bank For New York City encourages the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs to work with veterans organizations to develop and offer cultural competency trainings to civilian non-profits so that they can better serve veterans' needs.

THE RIGHT PARTNERSHIPS ARE IMPORTANT

Civilian anti-hunger organizations have found they can most effectively reach veterans by partnering with governmental and non-governmental veterans organizations. In years past, Food Bank For New York City has worked with the Mayors Office of Veterans Affairs to share information about the availability of our free tax assistance program during the tax season. In addition, our sister food bank Long Island Cares, for example, collaborates with the local Veterans Affairs (VA) hospital and the veterans services agencies in Nassau and Suffolk counties on outreach to veterans about available services, as well as providing support to Veteran Stand Downs on Long Island. Not only do partnerships like this enable civilian non-profits to leverage existing veterans' networks, having the "seal of approval" of an existing and trusted veterans organization can provide meaningful validation, signaling to veterans that they will be dealing with service providers who will respect them and understand their needs.

- Food Bank is eager to continuing work with the Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs and the City Council to effectively connect veterans with the food, information and resources

¹¹ See, for example, Schell, Terri L. and Terry Tanielian (eds.). *A Needs Assessment of New York State Veterans: Final Report to the New York State Health Foundation*. Rand Health. 2011.

they need to sustain healthy lives – including emergency food, access to SNAP and the Earned Income Tax Credit.

ENGAGE VETERANS IN SERVICE

Allowing veterans to help at food pantries and soup kitchens, to conduct outreach for SNAP, to train as a volunteer tax preparer and engage in other forms of service to help fellow veterans in need not only taps into a core value of our servicemen and –women, it makes those services more welcoming to the veterans who need them.

- We would welcome a collaboration between the Mayor’s Office of Veterans Affairs, NYC Service and the New York City Council that engages more veterans in volunteerism to support the programs and services available through Food Bank’s network of community-based charities and schools.

CONCLUSIONS

Nearly one in three of our city’s veterans is accessing a food pantry or soup kitchen. Food Bank For New York City’s goal is not only to provide food for the 1.4 million New Yorkers accessing emergency food programs, but to reduce the need for emergency food by providing New Yorkers on tight budgets the tools and resources to sustain healthy lives. We are committed to making our programs and services as accessible as possible to New York City’s veterans, and we are eager to partner with the Administration and the City Council to improve services that address hunger among our veterans.

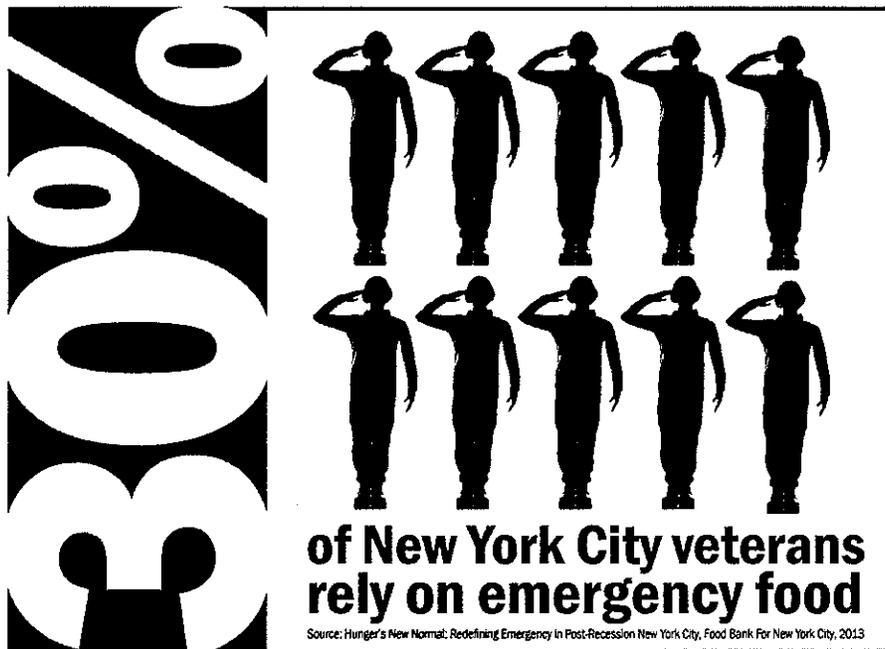
Thank you again for the opportunity to provide testimony today. I look forward to your questions.



foodbanknyc.org

HUNGER'S NEW NORMAL: REDEFINING 'EMERGENCY' IN POST-RECESSION NYC

VETERANS EXTRACT



Food Bank For New York City research finds that thirty percent of New York City's veterans – nearly 70,000 in total – accessed a food pantry or soup kitchen in 2012.¹ Even before a \$16 billion cut to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as the food stamp program) went into effect in November 2013, these numbers show New York City's veterans facing a new battle: hunger.

In November 2013, SNAP benefits were reduced for all recipients – an average loss of \$29 per month for a household of three. The cut was estimated to result in the total loss of 76 million meals for New York City residents in its first year, more food than Food Bank For New York City, the country's largest food bank, distributes annually. Nationally, an estimated 900,000 veterans faced this benefit cut.²

The research shows SNAP benefit levels were already inadequate for meeting many households' basic food needs even before the cuts – more than 40% of SNAP recipients in the five boroughs were turning to food pantries and soup kitchens to keep food on the table. Despite a 2009 SNAP benefit increase, 75% of New York City residents accessing food pantries and soup kitchens who receive SNAP report that their benefits do not last past three weeks into the month.

Hunger's New Normal is Food Bank For New York City's second report based on 2011-2012 Hunger Safety Net data, collected between November 2011 and July 2012 from more than 1,200 emergency food program participants at 141 food pantries and soup kitchens throughout the city. Data was collected on a variety of topics, including patterns of participation, demographics, household composition, income and employment, participation in income support and food assistance programs (like SNAP), housing, and health. The report can be read in its entirety at foodbanknyc.org.

¹ According to the 2012 American Community Survey (U.S. Census Bureau), approximately 225,000 veterans live in New York City.

² "SNAP Benefit Cuts Will Affect Thousands of Veterans in Every State," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2013.



**HOMELESSNESS AND HUNGER
IN THE VETERAN COMMUNITY**

**TESTIMONY OF MAJOR RETIRED
SHARON SWEETING LINDSEY
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR- VETS INC.**

**NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
MONDAY NOVEMBER 10,2014**

Good Afternoon,

My name is Sharon Sweeting Lindsey. I served 26 years in the United States Army reserve as a Food Service Officer and Clinical Dietitian. I retired with the rank of Major and for the last four years I have administered a ten(10) bed residential facility for formerly displaced Veterans, where we provide 3 meals per day and a myriad of supportive services and for the last eight(8) years, managed five (5) food pantries in Southeast Queens that are Veteran operated, we do however serve the non- Veteran community-at- large, thus I feel duly qualified to speak to the duality of homelessness and hunger in the Veteran community.

Homelessness in the Veteran community is a serious quality of life issue, which NYC and the Federal Government have attempted to address. NYC has funded several agencies thru DHS and HRA to house the Veteran population. The efforts have been noble at best, in that they provide the basic human needs of food, clothing and shelter however my issues of concern are that the "Esprit de Corp" concepts that are paramount to the reactivation of the military mindset has not been realized. HRA and DHS have awarded all of their housing contracts for Veterans to corporate-based organizations. In an effort to appear Veteran-friendly these organizations have employed former Veterans in key positions, however the corporate culture still exists. Studies have shown repeatedly that Veterans relate more readily to Veterans, the degree of success and measurable outcomes are greatly increased yet none of the DHS or HRA contracts are awarded to truly Veteran-based organizations that will reactive the core military values of leadership, dignity, respect, selfless service, honesty, integrity, and personal courage.

Hunger- No citizen of this great city should experience the pangs of hunger, but with food stamps being reduced and housing expenses rising, the issues of food inadequacy are alive and real as demonstrated by the increase in the pantry participation by the community at large and our Veteran population. In Vets Incorporated five (5) food pantries, of the 147 men that we service, 64 are Veterans. This is indeed a sad commentary to the men who have served our country and now are on a food distribution line. Hunger has replaced their pride and their survival skills have been re-engaged.

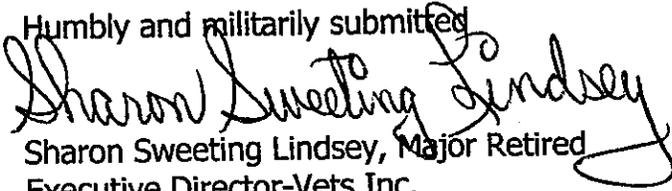
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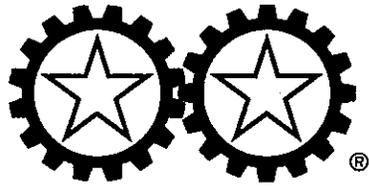
Homelessness: All housing contract to house and feed Veterans should be prioritized to Veteran- operated agencies with the skillsets to reactivate all of the core military values and return the Veteran to the "don't give up the fight" warrior mindset they had prior to their "fall from grace". Subcontracts for maintenance and food services should be given to Veteran-based agencies. These two suggestions will first and foremost give Veterans gainful employment and demonstrate the mantra of "Veterans helping Veterans". Additionally it will increase the level of program efficacy as Veterans respond more readily to Veterans.

Hunger: Increase funding to organizations such as the Food Bank for the City of New York and EFAP, that provide food distribution packages to community based agencies and allocate special funding for those CBO's that serve predominately Veteran populations, especially Veteran based organizations such as Vets Inc.

If this fact finding committee is truly interested in making an impact on the quality of life for Veterans in NYC, the above listed recommendations are the first step on the road to progress.

Humbly and militarily submitted


Sharon Sweeting Lindsey, Major Retired
Executive Director-Vets Inc.



AMERICA WORKS
of New York, Inc.

Testimony of Craig Caruana, Director of Veterans Affairs, Matthew Silverstein, Director of Public Affairs and Carla Giglio, Corporate Representative and Petty Officer 3rd Class, USN(R)

Joint Committee Hearing on Homeless Veterans in New York City

1:00 pm, Monday, November 10th, 2014

My colleagues and I would like to thank Chairman Ulrich and Chairman Levin as well as the rest of the committees' members for this hearing on an issue of importance to all of us – battling the issue of homelessness among Veterans in New York City.

Today, we will discuss our experience in helping New York City's Homeless Veterans. We will then offer some recommendations on how New York City can build upon the services it offers homeless Veterans.

Since 1984, America Works of New York (America Works) has been lifting people out of poverty by providing employment readiness and job placement services. America Works has found employment for over 400,000 hard to place individuals, which includes Veterans, homeless Veterans, welfare recipients, formally incarcerated individuals, youth aging out of foster care, SSI/SSDI recipients, disabled individuals, food stamp recipients and non-custodial parents. America Works pioneered the idea of pay for performance contracting for social services. America Works only gets paid, if we get someone a job and they keep that job. According to New York City's Office of Data Reporting and Analysis, America Works of New York, Inc. has consistently ranked first in long-term job placement among all city employment services contractors.

America Works was the first company to develop and implement the "work first" theory, resulting in over thirty (30) years of success placing Veterans in jobs and averting homelessness. The idea that work is the most important step in any social program designed to improve the economic self-reliance, health and well-being of needy individuals. America Works first began by serving long term, generational welfare recipients and has since expanded to aforementioned other low income populations.

Around 2008, we noticed a surge of Unemployed Veterans coming into our offices for employment services. According to a report by U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand's office there were 12, 577 unemployed Veterans living in NYC back in 2008. Also, in a 2009 NYC Department of Homeless Services report there were about 2,277 homeless Veterans living in the City's homeless shelters in 2008.

At that time, we decided that as a company, we needed to do something to help these Veterans. We started a pilot program with the NYC Human Resources Administration (HRA) & The NYC Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs (MOVA). We were already contracted by the City of New York to help find jobs for people receiving public assistance such as food stamps and welfare. After meeting with HRA & MOVA, HRA allowed us to create a pilot program to help any Veteran living in NYC on food stamps come to our program for assistance. Over a five year period, America Works placed about 2,000 Veterans into jobs.

Since 2009, America Works has been servicing homeless Veterans through the Department of Labor's Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP). Each year we are contracted to help 160 Homeless Veterans find jobs. In addition we are servicing Veterans through the Social Security Administration's Ticket to Work program. Each year, we are seeing more and more homeless Veterans come to us for assistance. We can and we must do more as a City to help end homelessness among our City's Veterans.

America Works will now offer recommendations on how the City can better serve our Veterans:

1. One innovative way to serve Veterans is through existing HRA contracts which set aside money for New Yorkers on Food Stamps. In July of this past year, HRA removed the work requirement for food stamp recipients.. HRA accepted the Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents waiver, thereby removing work requirements for people on food stamps. In addition, HRA went one step beyond the waiver and said individuals on food stamps who *want to work* are not able to utilize the services of America Works or other vendors who have Back to Work (B2W) contracts with the city. According to research from the Food Bank for NYC, 30 percent of New York City's veterans rely on emergency food each year. We are asking the City Council to pass a resolution, calling on Commissioner Banks to allow our City Veterans, who are on Food Stamps, to look for work through the B2W contracts. There is just over \$5 million in the contract to assist Food Stamp recipients. That money is sitting there un-used and as a result our Veterans are being short-changed.

2. Create a Department of Veterans Affairs. A Department of Veterans Affairs should be adequately staffed and serve as a one stop center for Veterans. A full department will have established metrics for assisting Veterans and could spear head assistance for homeless Veterans. There are at least 1,600 homeless Veterans in New York City, the second highest amount of homeless Veterans in any American city. As the draw down from Afghanistan continues and the military continues to downsize, that number will likely increase. Currently, the services for Veteran are broken up among non-profits, Veterans Shelters and organizations like America Works, who have federal contracts to assist Veterans. What is missing is a lack of coordination for services at the City level. A Department of Veterans Affairs can rapidly connect all of the city's homeless Veterans to employment organizations and other services so that our Veterans

can become self-sufficient. New York is already known as a state with more senior Veterans. However, as the military downsizes, New York City will be confronted with the problem of servicing recently discharged Veterans who have become homeless and an aging post-Vietnam generation who never fully integrated back into civilian life after their initial discharge decades ago. In other words, a one size fits all approach to Veterans will not be possible. America Works tailors its services to each individual Veteran. The city needs a dynamic agency that can make sure each Veteran gets the services he or she needs. This will take money and resources, but most of all dedication from the City's political leadership.

3. Build New Housing Specific For Veterans & Military Families. More and more Veterans are returning to New York City every day from current conflicts. There is currently not adequate housing for our City's Veterans. It is a disgrace to see our City's Veterans living in homeless shelters and on the streets. The City of New York should invest in new Veteran specific housing developments.

Thank you for taking the time to hear from us today. We would be happy to answer any questions about America Works and the ideas we've discussed.



**New York City Council Hearing
Monday, November 11, 2014, 1:00 p.m.
Testimony re: Oversight: Ending Veteran Homelessness and Hunger in New York City**

Good afternoon. My name is Peter Kempner. I am the Coordinator of Veterans Litigation and a Senior Staff Attorney with the Veterans Justice Project (VJP) at Legal Services NYC. Legal Services NYC is the largest provider of free civil legal services in the nation with offices in all five boroughs where we serve over 60,000 New Yorkers annually.

The Veterans Justice Project represents low-income veterans, active duty service members and their families who are in need of civil legal services in the areas of housing law, public benefit eligibility, employment law and other essential needs. Our attorneys and paralegals answer calls on our city wide legal hotline for veterans and staff multiple legal clinics at VA facilities throughout the city. Since launching this project just a few years ago, we have provided free legal services to thousands of New York City veterans, active duty service members and their families.

We are delighted that the City Council and the Veterans Committee is holding this hearing on ending veteran homelessness and hunger in New York City. There is no greater tragedy than seeing those who sacrificed so much come back home only to face hunger and homelessness.

In March 2009, President Obama and then Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, Eric Shinseki vowed to end veteran homelessness by the end of 2015. Much progress has been made towards this goal. The federal government has poured millions of dollars into effective and successful initiatives such as the Supportive Services for Veterans and Families (SSVF) homeless prevention and rapid rehousing program, creating temporary and transitional housing through the Grants and Per Diem Program and making more HUD-VASH Section 8 vouchers available so homeless veterans can find affordable permanent housing. While these programs have made a huge dent in curing the homelessness problem amongst veterans, there are still far too many homeless veterans and far too many veterans going hungry in New York City.

Every week, the VJP hosts a legal clinic at the VA's Chapel Street Healthcare Center where we partner with the VA's Project Torch, which provides services to homeless veterans. Advocates from the VJP provide legal advice to homeless veterans in the Center's cafeteria where veterans have come to get a hot meal. Many of these veterans live in homeless shelters or in substandard housing and some are facing eviction.

Legal Services NYC
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Raun J. Rasmussen, Executive Director
Michael D. Young, Board Chair

In our estimation there are a number of root causes of homelessness and poverty among veterans. Two of these causes are a lack of access to benefits for disabled veterans and a lack of affordable housing for low income veterans.

We have all heard the news stories of how veterans who applied for service connected disability benefits from the VA must wait years for the VA to make a decision on a claim. While they wait, veterans have very few options available and most often must apply for public assistance. As we all know, public assistance benefits for individuals without children are meagre, including the shelter allowance of a mere \$215 per month. In New York City, this is simply not adequate income to find housing. Veterans on public assistance, who are able to leave a shelter, are often forced to rent rooms in three-quarter houses or in illegal single room occupancy units (SROs). Some of these substandard housing dwellings are funded through the VA. We are currently representing a veteran, who is facing eviction from one of these illegal SROs, where an organization receiving funding from the VA converted a two family home into a boarding house where 16 veterans now reside. This is simply unacceptable.

Even if a veteran receives service connected disability benefits from the VA, these funds are often insufficient to find affordable housing. For instance, a veteran with a 50% disability rating only receives \$822 per month, while a veteran with a 60% disability rating receives \$1,041 per month. It is not until a veteran receives a 90% or 100% disability rating, receiving \$1,714 or \$2,858 respectively, that he or she has enough funds to live somewhat comfortably in New York City.

One remedial effect would be for the City to create a housing subsidy similar to the subsidy created for individuals who suffer from clinical symptomatic HIV. Under the HIV/AIDS Services Administration (HASA), qualified recipients receive a shelter allowance that assists them in finding medically appropriate housing. As a result of the HASA program, homelessness amongst the medically qualified HIV positive population in New York has been virtually eliminated. A division of the Human Resources Administration could develop a comparable program for disabled veterans. Then veterans can be paired with legal service providers and other advocates to help them apply for and obtain service connected disability benefits from the Veterans Administration and/or disability benefits from the Social Security Administration.

We must shine a spotlight on the needs of our veterans and we as a city have a duty to address these needs. We should not solely look to the federal government to end the scourge of veteran homelessness. We, as a city, can and must do much more.

We thank the Committee and the Counsel for holding this important hearing and look forward to working with you to ensure that New York City's veterans are afforded every possible opportunity to reintegrate into civil society when they return home.

Peter Kempner
Coordinator of Veterans Litigation and a Senior Staff Attorney
Veterans Justice Project, Legal Services NYC



COMMUNITY VOICES HEARD

Testimony for Homeless Veterans New York City Welfare Committee

Good Afternoon Chairman Levin & Council Members:

My name is (John Medina), a Combat Veteran living in Harlem and also a Board Member for Community Voices Heard.

I became a Food Stamp Program participant with Human Resources Administration shortly after arriving to New York from the United States Army. I first utilized my G. I. Bill to obtain my Bachelor Degree in Business from Baruch College and started a Subcontractor business.

This lasted a few years but due to President Bush's policies with the economy I had to file Bankruptcy and shut down the business.

When I had no other means to support and feed myself I turned to (SNAP) Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program to have food to eat.

This Federal Program is vital to all Americans in need even if they have employment because sometimes the income is not enough to meet the most Basic needs of feeding families.

The distribution and outreach of this program to the Homeless veterans is urgently required in order to reduce hunger among those individuals who served our country Honorably.

The Human Resources Administration assigned me a work assignment under (WEP), work experience program with the Department of Aging because I am receiving Public Assistance. The problem with this program is that a participant receives no paycheck and no earned income credit towards taxes.

According to Commissioner Steven banks Employment Plan, this program will be phased out and transitional jobs will be substituted which means a paycheck will greatly assist those veterans who seek an alternative to permanent poverty.

Community Voices Heard and other allied organizations believe that a consistent & comprehensive screening process to help veterans is a better method than using a one size fits all approach to poverty.

Many are called to the line of Duty but few are chosen who serve & die for America let us now who are in Power extend our deepest respect by helping those veterans that survived combat not be homeless and hungry today.

Thank you Chairman Mark Levine & Council members for your actions in this matter.



Statement of CSH before
The New York City Council Committee on General Welfare and Committee on Veterans
Ending Veteran Homelessness and Hunger in New York City | November 10, 2014

Good afternoon. My name is Erin Burns-Maine and I am a program manager with CSH. CSH works nationally to advance solutions that use housing as a platform for services to improve the lives of the most vulnerable people, maximize public resources and build healthy communities. Our organization offers capital, expertise, information and innovation that allow our partners to use supportive housing to achieve stability, strength and success for the people in most need.

CSH is dedicated to creating the housing and service models that work to reach and house the most vulnerable veterans, along with the systems needed to identify and engage them. In New York, CSH has served on the MISSION: HOME Leadership Team alongside the Veterans Administration (VA), the New York City Departments of Homeless Services, Housing Preservation and Development, the Human Resources Administration, and the New York City Housing Authority, service providers and advocates. Our team has been researching and piloting assessment tools held weekly case conferencing to ensure that every veteran in a NYC shelter is matched with the most appropriate housing resource. These meetings demonstrated the dedication of the VA, HRA, and DHS to end veteran homelessness in NYC. Over the next few months, we will continue to explore evidence-based models from all over the country, and develop a common assessment tool that will assist us in placing every homeless veteran into the most appropriate housing option, as quickly as possible.

This tool alone will not end veteran homelessness. Housing ends homelessness. There are two important Federal housing programs for preventing veteran homelessness and housing subsidies for rehousing veterans. The first is the Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program. SSVF funds the staff and resources local service providers need to help veteran families maintain their housing and identify and place them into new housing if they need it. The second resource is the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing program, more commonly known as HUD-VASH. This program combines rental assistance for homeless veterans with case management and clinical services provided by the VA.

But there is a subset of veterans who will require more services and support to achieve housing stability. Forty-five percent of homeless veterans suffer from mental illness and fifty percent have substance use disorders. Homeless veterans are more likely to be chronically homeless than non-veteran homeless persons. Permanent supportive housing is the solution for these most vulnerable veterans. Permanent supportive housing combines affordable housing with services that help people who face the most complex challenges, such as mental illness and substance use disorders, to live stably and thrive.

The majority of supportive housing units developed in NY have been created through City-State supportive housing initiatives, known as "New York-New York" (NY/NY) agreements. NY/NY was the resource that made it possible for the Jericho Project to develop Fordham Village and Kingsbridge Terrace, two veteran-dedicated supportive housing developments providing housing to 132 of New York's most vulnerable veterans. By almost every measure, NY/NY has been a success. The current program has reduced use of shelters, hospitals, psych centers and incarceration, for an average net public savings of \$10,100/unit per year; decreased chronic homelessness among single adults by 47% in first five years; and provided stability with more than 75% of NY/NY III tenants remaining housed after two years.

More than 20,000 households per year are found eligible for supportive housing but there's currently only one housing unit available for every six eligible applicants. This ratio will only worsen if a new City-State supportive housing agreement is not reached this year as the current agreement expires next year. CSH, and 183 other NYC-based agencies endorsing the Campaign 4 NY/NY Housing, urge the City to establish a new agreement to create 30,000 units of supportive housing over the next ten years. Units created under this agreement will have a significant impact on ending veteran homelessness and providing homeless veterans the housing and support they need to live with stability, autonomy and dignity.

Thank you for your time and attention.



**Testimony for the New York City Council Hearing
on Veteran Homelessness & Hunger**

*Submitted by the
Supportive Housing Network of New York
Monday, November 10th, 2014*

The Supportive Housing Network of New York (the Network) thanks the Council for the opportunity to submit testimony on the issue of veteran homelessness in the City. The Network is a member association representing over 220 nonprofit developers and social service providers that build and run 48,000 supportive housing units throughout New York State, including over 30,000 units in New York City. Supportive housing is permanent, affordable housing with on-site services, for people who are homeless and living with disabilities and/or other barriers to finding and maintaining housing. For the most vulnerable homeless individuals and families in the City's shelter system and on its streets, supportive housing has shown to be the most successful and cost-effective intervention, providing people with both the housing and the social services needed to enable individuals and families to find stability and begin rebuilding their lives. Thousands of veterans in New York have been saved by supportive housing and we are proud of our members such as the Jericho Project, Services for the UnderServed, Volunteers of America, Help USA and others who continue to develop supportive housing for homeless veterans.

The Network has worked for years with city agencies and the local office of Veterans Affairs to create more housing for homeless veterans but our testimony today is focused on our role with the NYC Coalition on the Continuum of Care (CoC), the coalition that oversees the City's allocation of HUD homeless assistance funding. It is a broad-based coalition of homeless housing and shelter providers, consumers, advocates, and government representatives, working together to shape citywide planning and decision-making, and monitor over \$100 million in federal funding. The Network is part of the CoC leadership as co-chair of the Steering Committee and voting member on behalf of the supportive housing providers who receive this federal funding.

For the past several years, the CoC has worked diligently on addressing veteran homelessness, particularly among those who are chronically homeless – i.e. those living on the street or stuck in shelter year after year, and in the past year created a task force specific to this mission. The objective of the task force is to meet the Obama Administration's aggressive but achievable goal of ending veteran homelessness by the end of 2015. We're proud to report that in the past year New York City has reduced veteran homelessness by over 50%. While this is a remarkable achievement and we're grateful for the national recognition we're getting for housing so many veterans so quickly, it is a travesty that there are still an estimated 1,300 homeless veterans in the City and until that number is zero, the Veterans Task Force will continue the work it started.

State of Veteran Homelessness in New York City

According to the most recent January 2014 point-in-time estimate from the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD), there were 49,333 homeless veterans in our country. New York State has the fourth highest homeless veteran population in the country with 2,542, or one out of every 20 of the nation's homeless veterans.¹ 1,645 or nearly two-thirds of the State's homeless veterans live in New York City.

As previously mentioned, the City has made great strides in reducing veteran homelessness and is closing in altogether on ending street homelessness for veterans. As of this summer all but an estimated 60 veterans were left living on the street. This decline is due to a number of factors including most notably the significant infusion of federal and local resources invested into housing resources for veterans such as the HUD Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) and Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF) programs. The former provides Section 8 rental assistance social services for the most vulnerable homeless vets and the latter provides prevention, short-term rental subsidies and other services to help veterans at or just over the doorstep of homeless find or keep their housing. This consistent funding from Washington has allowed for a number of social service providers to become experts in working with the distinct challenges that veterans often face when returning from military duty, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injuries, mental illness, physical injuries, and substance abuse. This is only magnified for veterans with little family or other supports and insufficient economic resources, making it incredibly challenging to maintain their housing and overall wellbeing. Programs such as SSVF and VASH are effective because they offer the necessary services that veterans need to re-adjust back to non-military life.

However, federal resources alone would not have led to this significant reduction in veteran homelessness. There has also been increased interagency collaboration among the various city, state and federal partners that provide services to veterans, ongoing coordination with the nonprofit sector, and significant philanthropic support from Robin Hood and other foundations. Thanks to this coordination and support, we have been able to better target our housing stock for homeless veterans, mitigate inefficiencies in our system that often delay housing placement and services and, in less than six months, completed a thorough assessment and housing placement plan for almost every single homeless veteran in the City.

Moving Forward

The Council can support these efforts by joining us in lobbying for increased local, state and federal resources; greater flexibility with the resources we have; and help ensuring that the City has the systems in place to expedite housing placement for all homeless individuals and families in New York City, starting with those who fought for our country. For more information on national efforts to end veteran homelessness please visit www.neveranotherhomelessveteran.org and join the pledge. The Network appreciates the opportunity to testify and is happy to answer any questions or provide additional information.

Nicole Branca

*Interim Executive Director, Supportive Housing Network of New York and
Co-Chair, NYC Coalition on the Continuum of Care*

646-619-9642

nbranca@shnny.org

¹ *The 2014 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress*. US Dept. of Housing & Urban Development.

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Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

Name: Bill Busk (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 465 East Tremont Ave, Bronx

I represent: concerned citizen, no group.

Address: _____

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Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

Name: Kevin Kennelly (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 7 Hanover Square, NY, NY 10004

I represent: New York Legal Assistance Group

Address: 7 Hanover Square

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in favor in opposition

Date: _____

Name: Kamilla Sjodin (with Kevin Kennelly) (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____

I represent: NYLAG (New York Legal Assn. Group)

Address: _____

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Date: 11-10-14

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Coco Culhane

Address: 40 Rector St NY NY 10006

I represent: Veteran Advocacy Project - Urban

Address: 40 Rector St Justice CTR.

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Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Gary Parker

Address: _____

I represent: NYU MS Silver Institute

Address: _____

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Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Peter Kemper - Legal Services NYC

Address: 105 RAY STREET BROOKLYN NY 11201

I represent: _____

Address: _____

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Date: 11/10/14

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: John Kawan

Address: 82-72 Penelope Ave MVNY

I represent: Vietnam Veterans of America

Address: _____

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Appearance Card

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in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Craig Pannana

Address: 229 E 45th

I represent: America Works

Address: C@panna@americaworks.com

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in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Carla Giglio

Address: 228 E 45th St

I represent: America Works

Address: _____

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in favor in opposition

Date: _____

Name: Matthew Silverstein (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 228 East 45th St NY, NY 10017

I represent: America Works of NY

Address: _____

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I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

Name: Linda Crowler (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 3120 Wilkinson Ave Bronx

I represent: MFSU - military families speak out

Address: _____

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Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

Name: Dr. Loree Setton, Commissioner (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: Mayor's Office of Veterans Affairs

I represent: Office of the Mayor

Address: 340 Broadway, 3 East, NY, NY 10013

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Date: _____

Name: Sharon Sweeting Lindsey (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 111-16 173rd Street Jamaica, NY

I represent: Vets Inc

Address: 111-16 173rd St Jamaica, NY

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in favor in opposition

Date: _____

Name: John MEDINA (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 1695 LEXINGTON

I represent: CVH

Address: 115 EAST 106 STREET

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I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

Name: TRIADA STAMPAS (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____

I represent: FOOD BANK FOR NYC

Address: 39 BROADWAY, NYC, NY

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Date: 11/10/14

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Erin Burns-Maine

Address: 473 Newark Ave. #403 Jersey City NJ

I represent: CSH

Address: 61 Broadway Suite 2300 NY NY

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in favor in opposition

Date: 11-10-14

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Teis Rodriguez; Assist Comm.

Address: _____

I represent: Dept of Homeless SVS

Address: 33 Beaman St. NY NY

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