

Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Health with Respect to Various Veterans' Issues

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STATEMENT OF

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BEFORE THE

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

WITH RESPECT TO

**H.R. 1017, H.R. 1036, H.R. 2504, H.R. 2559, H.R. 2735, H.R. 3073, and H.R.
3441**

WASHINGTON, DC

MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THIS SUBCOMMITTEE:

On behalf of the 2.2 million members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States and our Auxiliaries, I would like to thank this committee for the opportunity to testify. The issues under consideration today are of great importance to our members and the entire veteran population.

As we speak, more than 131,000 homeless veterans are walking the streets of the country they fought so bravely to defend. A great number of these men and women are likely

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walking these streets due to injuries, physical or mental, resulting from their service to their country.

There is no one causative factor for homelessness but there are many aggravators. Substance abuse, lack of familial ties, physical and mental health issues, lack of access to affordable housing, lack of employment and other issues can all eventually lead a person to being either temporarily or chronically homeless. We must consider these factors and be proactive in consideration of homeless policy now and into the future.

The most recent monthly survey from the Bureau of Labor Statistics highlighted the dire situation facing America's newest veterans. There are only 9,000 fewer unemployed post-9/11 servicemembers in the United States than there are servicemembers in Iraq and Afghanistan (185,000 unemployed compared to 194,000 in OEF & OIF). Unemployment combined with high rates of mental health and physical injuries due to multiple deployments is a recipe for disaster. If we are not proactive in our approach to solving homelessness, all of the aggravating factors will combine to leave many thousands of my era of veteran homeless. We must act immediately to alleviate the problem before it explodes.

President Obama addressed us at our National Convention last month. He stated "I've directed Secretary Shinseki to focus on a top priority -- reducing homelessness among veterans. After serving their country, no veteran should be sleeping on the streets. No veteran. We should have zero tolerance for that."

We have full faith that this administration, and this Congress, will fully address this issue, today and not tomorrow, by eradicating homelessness for America's heroes of past, current, and future wars— forever.

H.R. 1017, to amend the Department of Veterans Affairs Health Care Programs Enhancement Act of 2001 and Title 38, United States Code, to require the provision of chiropractic care and services to veterans at all Department of Veterans Affairs medical centers and to expand access to such care and services.

The VFW supports this legislation that would provide veterans with direct access to chiropractic healthcare. Currently, chiropractic care is rarely, if ever, offered to veterans with injuries that would likely receive such referrals from private medical facilities. In many instances, veterans are paying for chiropractic care from service-related injuries out of their own pocket.

This important legislation would require 75 VA medical centers to provide such services no later than December 31, 2010, and at all VA medical centers by no later than December 31, 2012. We believe this legislation to be of great importance in consideration of the various

injuries veterans have received and the known benefits for chiropractic care.

H.R. 1036, to amend title 38, United States Code, to establish the position of Director of Physical Therapy Service within the Veterans Health Administration and to establish a fellowship program for physical therapists in the areas of geriatrics, amputee rehabilitation, polytrauma care, and rehabilitation research.

The VFW strongly supports H.R. 1036. This important legislation would create a Director of Physical Therapy Service within the VHA. Also, of great importance, this legislation would create a fellowship program for physical therapists in the areas of geriatrics, amputee rehabilitation, polytrauma, and rehabilitation research. Increasing the physical therapy programs at the VA will enhance the healthcare for all generations of injured veterans. Injured servicemembers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan often rely on the special and unique services provided by physical therapists to rehabilitate from minor or catastrophic injuries. Physical therapists also help the aging population of veterans with new or enhanced disabilities that result with age. Therefore, the VFW sees the value in the VA enhancing these services to better serve their customers.

H.R. 2504, to amend title 38, United States Code, to provide for an increase in the annual amount authorized to be appropriated to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out comprehensive service programs for homeless veterans.

The VFW is in strong support of H.R. 2504. This important legislation would increase VA funding to carry out crucial service programs for homeless veterans. H.R. 2504 would expand funding to services such as case management, education opportunities, crisis intervention, counseling, job training, etc. This important bill would assist our homeless veterans in returning to the job force and would restore order and hope to their lives.

H.R. 2559, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to carry out a national media campaign directed at homeless veterans and veterans at risk for becoming homeless.

The VFW strongly supports H.R. 2559. This important proactive legislation would work to advise homeless veterans, and veterans at risk of homelessness, of available benefits and services. The VFW believes that no veteran should be homeless in the streets of the country they fought so valiantly for. However, in too many instances veterans are unaware of benefits and services available to them. This legislation would create an outreach campaign aimed at addressing these very veterans.

H.R. 2735, to amend title 38, United States Code, to make certain

improvements to the comprehensive service programs for homeless veterans.

The VFW strongly supports H.R. 2735. This important legislation would change the Grant and Per Diem Program from a daily care cost payment system to one based on the annual cost of the services provided to homeless veterans. These annual costs would be distributed by the VA Secretary based on predicted changes in the cost of care and the cost of care by geographic regions. When distributing this funding, the VA Secretary would also take into account other sources of income to these centers such as payments from other departments or agencies of the United States, payments from State or local governments, or payments from private entities or organizations. H.R. 2735 would also make grant funds available to pay for the personnel and staff of homeless veteran service centers. Such grant funds would make it easier for service centers to meet the service availability requirements and help these centers provide the help and care that our homeless veterans desperately need.

H.R. 3073, to amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a grant program to provide assistance to veterans who are at risk of becoming homeless.

The VFW is in strong support of this important legislation, which would provide funding to public entities and to non-profit organizations to help veterans who are in imminent danger of becoming homeless. These organizations would be able to make utility, rent and mortgage payments as well as security deposits on behalf of the eligible veterans for up to three months. H.R. 3073 would also ensure that the eligible veteran is receiving further services such as job training and counseling to prevent homelessness.

H.R. 3441, to provide for automatic enrollment of veterans returning from combat zones into the VA medical system, and for other purposes.

The VFW currently has no formal position on this legislation.

H.R. _____, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to transfer funds to the Secretary of Health and Human Services for a graduate psychology education program.

The VFW strongly supports this important legislation that would increase funding for the Graduate Psychology Education program under the purview of Health and Human Services. The need for mental health services continues to grow as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan continue. Recent reports issued by GAO, the DoD Mental Health Task Force, the Institute of Medicine, and others, have identified shortages of trained mental health providers. This important legislation would begin to address this shortfall by increasing the numbers of trained mental health counselors.

H.R. _____, to amend title 38, United States Code, to improve per diem grant payments for organizations assisting homeless veterans.

The VFW supports this important legislation that establishes an increased rate at which crucial per diem payments are made to organizations that assist homeless veterans. Such rates would equal the daily cost as estimated by the grant recipient or \$60 per bed. This legislation also provides an organized and detailed priority list for those organizations assisting our nation's homeless veteran population. This new priority list allows smaller non-profit organizations to receive 25% of the supportive services for homeless veterans funding. Currently, these organizations are deemed ineligible and receive no funding yet they still provide crucial care to our homeless veterans. This legislation would provide funding to these organizations so that they can continue to provide America's homeless service members the help they need. The 25% funding to these smaller non-profit organizations would be distributed by the Secretary and priority would be given to the organizations meeting the most supportive services requirements of the current law.

H.R. _____, to amend title 38, United States Code, to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to eliminate the required reduction in the amount of per diem payments provided to entities furnishing services to homeless veterans to account for other sources of income, and for other purposes.

The VFW currently has no formal position on this legislation.

H.R. _____, to reform and expand the Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing Program carried out by the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The VFW currently has no formal position on this legislation.

As America's largest group representing combat veterans, we thank you for allowing the Veterans of Foreign Wars to present its views on these bills.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony and I will be pleased to respond to any questions you or the members of this Subcommittee may have. Thank you.