

DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS



Report of the Advisory Committee on Homeless Veterans

21st Annual Report

April 2024

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Department of Veterans Affairs
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HISTORY

On December 21, 2001, P.L. 107-95, the Homeless Veterans Comprehensive Assistance Act of 2001 (hereinafter the Act), became effective. The Act revised, improved, and consolidated provisions of law providing benefits and services for homeless Veterans and authorized an Advisory Committee on Homeless Veterans (hereinafter Committee or ACHV). In response to its provisions, the Committee was established on March 1, 2002, pursuant to 38 U.S.C. § 2066. The mission of the Committee is to advise and make recommendations to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs and to Congress on issues affecting homeless Veterans. In addition, the Committee assesses the needs of homeless Veterans to determine whether VA and other programs and services are meeting those needs.

MEMBERS

The Secretary selects Committee members from experts knowledgeable in treating mental illness and substance abuse disorders, as well as those adept at developing permanent housing alternatives for lower-income populations. Additional experts selected by the Secretary include state Veterans' Affairs officials, community-based service providers, and advocates for homeless individuals and families in the civilian and Veteran populations. The members serve without pay in accordance with the Committee charter .

A brief biographical summary of each Committee member is attached (Attachment 1). Attachment 2 lists the Committee support staff and ex-officio members.

INTRODUCTION

This is the 21st Annual Report filed by the ACHV. The Committee is pleased that the Administration and Congress have continued to prioritize ending homelessness among Veterans. We recognize the historic progress VA and its partners have made. Since 2010, Veteran homelessness has been reduced by more than 52%. The latest point-in-time count revealed a 7.4% increase in homelessness among Veterans. Despite this increase, there is still an overall decrease. Within the last 3 years alone, there has been approximately a 4% overall reduction in Veterans homelessness.

To make substantial gains for ending Veteran homelessness nationally, we wholeheartedly agree that VA should stay its course and continuously improve previously adopted models, including Housing First, that led to these dramatic reductions. The Committee applauds VA's work to achieve its 2022 goal of housing

38,000 Veterans, as well as its efforts to date to achieve its 2023 goal of moving an additional 38,000 Veterans to housing and keeping them stably housed.

As the Department works toward these goals, there are several overarching areas the Committee recommends be incorporated throughout the VA's homeless programs in addition to the specific recommendations made later in this report. Those areas include:

- **Equity practices.** The aging Veteran population continues to increase and we know that people of color, Native Americans, women, and LGBTQ+ Veterans are disproportionately represented in the population of Veterans experiencing homelessness. As such, we recognize that equity and targeted universalism should be centered in all VA strategies to end Veteran homelessness moving forward.
- **Learning from the pandemic resources and policies.** This year's end of the COVID-19 public health emergency has meant that the successful resources communities relied upon to end Veteran homelessness have expired. Our conversations during site visits revealed that the end of the public health emergency resulted in the loss of many resources and flexibilities that allowed VA and community partners to serve Veterans holistically during the emergency, which was a time when many anticipated Veteran homelessness would increase. We recognize the need to restore these essential services and flexibilities, particularly as the general pandemic-era social safety net also has disappeared.
- **Affordable housing.** The Committee had a conversation with Deputy Secretary Tanya Bradsher in 2022 related to the need for more affordable housing and the ways that the Department could work with the Departments of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and Treasury to align goals, incentives, and outcomes around access to affordable housing for Veterans. We are interested in understanding how work in that direction continues to move forward.

Since the authorization and implementation of ACHV, we have been pleased that most of our recommendations have received concurrences and we hope that they remain under active consideration by the Secretary and Congress for implementation. Our recommendations are based on data, and personal and professional knowledge and experience, as well as information provided in person and in writing from a variety of sources, including direct input from Veterans experiencing homelessness, community partners, and stakeholders. We have focused on matters we believe should be emphasized, are achievable, and, if implemented, will result in meaningful progress toward the goal of ending Veteran homelessness.

VA RESPONSES TO RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMMITTEE

This year, our recommendations are grouped under three main headers:

1. Peer Support Services.
2. Employment.
3. Transitioning Service Members/Suicide Prevention.

Recommendation 1: Peer Support Services.

Initiatives to end Veteran homelessness and housing instability require the hard work of committed staff and partners to be carried out effectively. Veterans benefit from the ability to work with a variety of partners, including clinicians, social workers, peer support specialists, and others to move from homelessness to housing stability.

Recommendation 1A: Enhance Existing Peer Specialist Support Program.

ACHV recommends that VA further enhance the existing Peer Specialist Support Program in the VA Department of Mental Health by hiring additional personnel to provide “one-stop shop” peer mentor assistance (called a Peer Specialist Mentors Team), services, and referrals in partnership with the community resource network for homeless Veterans participating in the VA sponsored Homeless Shelter, Transitional Housing, and Permanent Housing Programs.

Continuous interpersonal connections with mentors who can encourage, focus, and provide recommendations and service referrals to homeless Veterans provide an immeasurable benefit to overall wellness, resiliency, and mental health, and promote continued social progression and reintegration back into the local community and with loved ones. The result is successful rehabilitation of conditions and habits that often contribute to homelessness.

Current, VA Peer Specialist duties are focused on the medical/treatment aspects of Veteran wellness. Although this is key in addressing the Veteran’s condition, it is not comprehensive when looking at the Veteran’s long-term resiliency and reintegration back into the community. The proposed new Peer Specialist Mentors Team can fill the current gap and increase positive outcomes of the VA Homeless Programs.

VA Response: Non-Concur.

The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Office of Mental Health and Suicide Prevention (OMHSP) disagrees with the recommendation because VHA peer specialists already provide the services to Veterans that the ACHV is recommending in the programs where the peer specialists work. Therefore, VHA OMHSP does not support the development of a Peer Specialist Mentors Team because it would duplicate

existing services. In addition, devoting finances and other resources to develop a Peer Specialist Mentors Team would pull those needed resources from VHA's efforts to continue hiring additional peer specialists to be assigned by facilities to work in programs where the facilities would determine where the peer specialists could best be used to provide peer support services to unhoused Veterans and other Veterans in need.

The peer specialist profession is a mental health care profession in VHA, not a program. Like other mental health professional disciplines, it is dispersed throughout VHA services across the enterprise. The OMHSP Peer Support Services Section provides oversight for implementing the peer specialist health care profession across VHA through national policy, training development efforts, and consultation. The OMHSP Peer Support Services Section is not responsible for hiring or supervising peer specialists. All peer specialists are hired by the local VHA facilities, which determine the peer specialists' program assignments. The facilities also assign local staff members to supervise the peer specialists' work in the programs, each staffed by interdisciplinary teams.

Peer specialists are assigned to work in various settings in VHA. Examples include outpatient, residential, and inpatient mental health and substance use treatment programs, intensive community mental health recovery services, psychosocial rehabilitation recovery centers, primary care patient-aligned care teams, the Veterans Crisis Line's Peer Support Outreach Center, vocational rehabilitation services, the Veterans Justice Program, and homeless programs. Currently, over 500 peer specialists are working in homeless programs across VHA. They assist Veterans with tasks to secure housing and connect them with resources in their community that support their health, wellness, and successful integration as members of the local community.

Over the years, VHA has hired hundreds of Veterans as peer specialists and is currently the largest employer of peer specialists in the United States. As of December 4, 2023, there are 1,418 peer specialists working in VHA, with 1,121 peer specialists identifying as men (79.06%) and 297 peer specialists identifying as women (20.94%). Staffing models for several VHA health care service programs have evolved to include peer specialists as part of the interdisciplinary teams that provide health care services to Veterans with mental illnesses, substance use disorders, and/or chronic health conditions, as well as Veterans experiencing homelessness, unemployment, and those involved with the criminal justice system.

Through their required peer specialist certification, peer specialists are professionally trained to effectively use their personal lived experience with recovery to inspire hope and serve as relatable role models of recovery for other Veterans. They assist Veterans with identifying their personal strengths; VA and community resources from which they would benefit; and desired skills that support their personal goals. Peer specialists use a variety of recovery tools to help Veterans of diverse ages, genders, races, and ethnic backgrounds to enhance healthy coping strategies and improve self-management skills

over their health conditions. They support Veterans to empower themselves to encourage self-care, advocate for themselves, access available resources in and outside the VA, reconnect with peers, and find a sense of belonging in their communities.

To reduce confusion on the duties of peer support staff members, as well as reduce the risk of role drift from peer specialists' expected scope of practice, the peer support staff position descriptions are nationally standardized for the General Schedule (GS) 5 peer support apprentice, GS-6/7/8/9 peer specialist, GS-10 lead peer specialist, and GS-11 supervisory peer specialist positions. The nationally standardized position descriptions were written to be used in any setting where the peer support staff members work. There is a version of the GS-5 peer support apprentice and GS-6/7/8/9 peer specialist position descriptions for peer support staff members who mainly work on station at a facility (facility-based version) and a version of the GS-5 peer support apprentice and GS-6/7/8/9 peer specialist position descriptions for peer support staff members who work in community-based programs where they are expected to be working in community settings at least 25% or more of their work schedule (community-based version).

The only difference between the two versions of the position descriptions is that the community-based version includes more content that addresses where the work takes place so that community-based programs, like homeless programs, can enforce local program-level expectations for working off-station (which means working away from your assigned duty station/VA medical center) in the community when needed. The facility-based peer support staff position descriptions are used for peer support apprentices and peer specialists when the expectation is that they will work mainly on-station in the program or programs where they are assigned and may occasionally go into the community if needed. The community-based peer support staff position descriptions are for peer support apprentices and peer specialists when they are assigned to programs where staff members are expected to spend 25% or more of their work week working off-station in the community with Veterans, meeting with community stakeholders, and so on. Although the community-based work requirements are different for each position description, they both allow for it. Both versions of the position descriptions allow for community-based work.

Examples of relevant duty statements listed in the nationally standardized peer support apprentice and peer specialist position descriptions include:

- Assist Veterans in obtaining services that suit the individual's personal recovery and wellness needs.
- Assist Veterans in exploring their interests and options for making improvements in life functioning areas such as housing, employment, relationships, and community engagement (that is, assist Veterans in exploring options for obtaining decent and affordable housing and coordinate with the treatment team for referrals to appropriate VA housing programs; support Veterans' vocational choices and coordinate with the treatment team for referrals to appropriate

resources to support employment such as VHA vocational rehabilitation services).

- Inform Veterans about VA and community supports and resources, including effectively using them in the recovery and wellness process. Community resources may include, but are not limited to, consumer-run organizations, self-help and mutual support services, Social Security offices, Department of Family and Children Services, Young Men's Christian Associations, libraries, restaurants, Veterans Service Organizations, and HUD.
- Serve as a liaison to community-based organizations to develop and/or foster Veterans' community integration, natural supports, and self-reliant strategies.
- Perform outreach activities to establish community partnerships that will provide health care services for the Veterans in the community and inform Veterans of the availability of those health care services and other benefits.
- Assist Veterans in building social skills that enhance community reintegration using techniques such as role playing and social skills training.

Recommendation 1B: Augment the Current Peer Specialist Training Program.

ACHV recommends that VA augment the current Peer Specialist training program to include working knowledge and networking with local, county, state, and Federal/VA services and programs designed to provide the best-informed support to the homeless Veteran and enhance the probability of successful housing outcomes, treatment, rehabilitation, reintegration, and non-recidivistic behavior.

Research conducted by the ACHV has identified mentor programs across the country that can serve as models for best practices to include in the Peer Specialist Mentors program. These programs excel in using a mix of volunteer, paid, and certified peer mentors to give Veterans the opportunity to build peer support, develop friendships, and receive guidance to improve their ability to become successful in their community. They also offer critical guidance and connections to community resources that offer trauma-informed support related to housing, mental health, substance use recovery, and overall stabilization.

Examples include:

- **Volunteer Veteran Mentor Program at the Tampa Veterans Treatment Court.**
- **The Camaraderie Foundation's Mentor Leadership Certification Program, paired with the Transition Assistance Program.**
- **Veterans Coffee Social Program at the Bedford VA Medical Center (VAMC).**
- **North Carolina Certified Peer Support Specialists based out of the Asheville Buncombe Community Christian Ministry.**

VA Response: Non-Concur.

The VHA OMHSP Peer Support Services Section disagrees with the recommendation because the VHA OMHSP Peer Support Services Section provides national trainings to support peer specialists in their scope of practice for their profession and optimally

delivering peer support services to Veterans in any program setting where they are assigned to work at the VHA facilities that hire them. Trainings for peer specialists and other health care professionals are tailored to the specific programs where they work (for example, homeless programs) and are either provided by the local facility program or the national program office (for example, VHA Homeless Programs Office (HPO) in collaboration with the National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans) that oversees the facility-level program.

Recommendation 1B herein listed Veterans Coffee Socials Program as an example of a recommended resource for providing training for peer specialists. The VHA OMHSP Peer Support Services Section is familiar with Veterans Coffee Socials, now renamed “Veterans Socials” at the following link <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/socials/>. It has been promoting the program as approved for peer specialists in VHA to use in their work with Veterans. The Veterans Socials Quick Start Guide is located on the VHA Peer Support Services SharePoint, which any VA staff member can access. In recent years, the VHA OMHSP Peer Support Services Section has organized several national webinars and national conference presentations about Veterans Socials for peer specialists and peer support supervisors to encourage Veterans Socials to be developed across VHA settings.

Since all peer specialists are expected to support Veterans with accessing VA and community resources for the Veterans’ personal wellness goals and community integration interests, the VHA OMHSP Peer Support Services Section’s national webinars and virtual national conferences routinely include several presentation topics in these areas. The VHA OMHSP Peer Support Services Section offers national webinars for peer specialists every other month, national webinars for peer support supervisors every quarter, and an annual virtual national conference that provides 20 hours of continuing education each year for peer specialists and their supervisors. These trainings regularly include content related to community integration and accessing community resources. Recent presentation examples include:

- **Supporting Veterans in the Community.** Navigating Community Relationships was a breakout session presented in the August 2023 VHA Peer Specialist and Peer Support Supervisor Virtual National Conference that was repeated twice during the conference. One of the presenters was Dr. Jay Gorman, VHA’s lead for implementing the Veterans Socials Program.
- **Supporting Veterans in Community Integration.** This subject was a breakout session presented at the August 2022 VHA Peer Specialist and Peer Support Supervisor Virtual National Conference that repeated three times during the conference.
- **Community Self-Help Groups and Resources.** These groups and resources were also a breakout session presentation that repeated three times at the conference.
- **The VHA Peer Specialist Webinar Series.** This webinar series provided a national training for peer specialists in September 2021 regarding examples of how peer specialists can support Veterans’ community reintegration efforts. In

November 2021, the VHA Peer Specialist Webinar Series provided a national training for peer specialists on Veteran Community Partnerships. It discussed opportunities for peer specialists to work with their local facilities' Community Partnership Program to develop networks of local community partners to facilitate improved connections of Veterans to needed resources.

- **The VHA Peer Support Supervisor Webinar Series.** This webinar series provided a national training for peer support supervisors in October 2022 on Promising and Innovative Practices in Peer Support Services. The practices highlighted included Veterans Socials and Confident and Courageous, a peer specialist-facilitated, group-based community intervention that brings together women Veterans to foster personal empowerment and social connections.
- **National Trainings.** These national trainings are provided several times per year for women peer specialists to be trained to deliver Women Veterans Network in VA, which is a peer support group intervention for women Veterans that is designed to foster connection and build friendships.

In addition, VHA contracts with not-for-profit agencies to provide the VHA-approved peer specialist certification training course and require peer specialist certification for GS-5 peer support apprentices who are working on 1-year time-limited appointments. This certification is necessary to gain the specialized experience and training to qualify for permanent peer specialist positions in VHA. VHA-contracted peer specialist certification training vendors include a module on connecting Veterans to community resources as part of the training course for peer support apprentices.

Recommendation 1C: Identify and Assign Caseloads.

Identify and assign caseloads of homeless Veterans enrolled in VA Homeless Shelters, Transitional Housing, and Permanent Housing programs to the Peer Specialist Mentors Team.

Once the Peer Specialist Mentors Team has been established, the Committee recommends proceeding quickly to match Veterans in need of this type of support with the new resource and to document the impact of the program.

VA Response: Non-Concur.

Suicide Prevention and VHA OMHSP Peer Support Services Section disagree with the recommendation and will not implement it because we do not support Recommendation 1A to develop a Peer Specialist Mentors Team, as it would duplicate existing services. Also, peer specialists are a mental health care profession, not a program. Peer specialists work on interdisciplinary teams in the program and programs at the local VHA facilities where they are assigned to work.

Recommendation 1C depends on Recommendation 1A, which calls for OMHSP to expand and change the structure of how peer support services are provided across VHA. Recommendation 1C calls for certain VHA HPO programs to refer Veterans to

those restructured peer support resources, but this recommendation is only applicable if Recommendation 1A were to be implemented. Otherwise, there will be no Peer Specialist Mentors Team to whom to refer anyone. OMHSP non-concurs with Recommendation 1A, so Recommendation 1C is not applicable.

However, with peer specialists, VHA HPO already provides the services to Veterans that the ACHV recommends as part of their service models.

Recommendation 1D: Examine Focused Recruitment and Retention Efforts.

The Committee recommends that by October 1, 2024, VHA's HPO and the Office of Human Resources and Administration examine focused recruitment and retention efforts implemented in 2015 to prioritize recruitment and retention for homeless program staff and implement successful strategies from those efforts to accelerate recruitment and retention for homeless positions within VAMC operations.

While many duties within homeless program operations are well-suited to be conducted by peer support specialists, certain duties still require clinicians, licensed social workers, or other specialties. As of August 2023, VAMC positions related to homelessness were 84% staffed, with a 26% turnover rate. It is clear these critical specialties must be filled with qualified staff within every VAMC if we are to truly address unsheltered homelessness, particularly via the Healthcare for Homeless Veterans Program and the Housing Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing Program (HUD-VASH). Longer term vacancies within key homeless programs have persisted in some communities due to local human resources prioritization decisions. Thus, the ACHV encourages swift action to improve recruitment and retention.

VA Response: Concur in Principle.

VA agrees with the recommendation in principle. As shared during the ACHV annual meeting in September 2023, the VA Under Secretary for Health issued a memorandum on June 8, 2023, which focused on expediting the filling of all vacant positions in the HUD-VASH and Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV) programs. The memorandum included direction for VAMCs to immediately remove any barriers to approving position recruitments and highly encouraged recruitment and retention incentives for hard-to-fill or retain positions. As part of the current hiring initiative, monthly Community of Practice calls are being hosted in collaboration with VHA HPO and Workforce Management and Consulting (WMC) to share best practices and trainings to support recruiting and retaining a highly skilled workforce. This is very similar to the 2015 VHA homeless programs hiring initiative.

Since April 2023, VA has seen an increase in staffing across the Nation with 85.4% of all HUD-VASH positions filled and 82.7% of HCHV positions filled, which is a net gain increase of 128 HUD-VASH positions and a net gain of 127 HCHV positions. This net

gain was recognized even with a 24.2% turnover rate in VHA homeless programs. Although this does not meet the 90% filled goal for VHA homeless programs positions, it does demonstrate positive progress toward filling positions that VA has not seen since 2019, with nearly 87% of all positions filled.

VA will continue the momentum in fiscal year (FY) 2024 to fill vacancies in homeless programs, including collaboration with WMC and strong support from VA leadership and VA partners with the goal of meeting the 90% or better filled rates.

Recommendation 2: Improve Collective Understanding.

Improve the collective understanding of how Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) benefits support Veterans experiencing and at-risk of homelessness.

The Committee requests a feasibility study from the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) on Veterans being served by VR&E – Chapter 31 to determine whether an update to program criteria to include homeless status is needed to adequately serve Veterans experiencing homelessness. The Committee also supports VHA’s efforts to secure funding and authorization for the continuation of homeless supportive services.

Recommendation 2A: Conduct Feasibility Study.

Conduct a feasibility study to determine if homeless Veterans are accessing and receiving adequate support within the framework of the VR&E program. The final study report should include an analysis of any gaps in service delivery (e.g., participation rates, outcomes) for Veterans experiencing homelessness and a plan to address those gaps by June 1, 2025.

Homeless Veterans constitute a vulnerable and underserved demographic within the Veteran community. While having honorably served the Nation, they are often grappling with housing instability and a range of physical, mental, and emotional challenges. Integrating homeless Veterans into the VR&E program aligns seamlessly with the program's core mission of preparing Veterans for a successful transition into civilian life. This strategic initiative not only fulfills our ethical responsibility to assist those who have dutifully served but also yields tangible advantages for both Veterans and broader national safety net programs.

Current VR&E eligibility requires an “other than dishonorable” discharge and a service-connected disability rating of at least 10%, as determined by the VA. The array of VR&E services encompasses personalized employment plans, vocational counseling, rehabilitation planning for employment services, employment training covering resume development and work-readiness support, employment retention assistance with special employer incentives and job accommodations, on-the-job training (OJT), apprenticeships, non-paid work experiences, post-secondary education and training at various institutions, supportive rehabilitation

services like case management, counseling, and medical referrals, as well as independent living services aimed at fostering self-sufficiency. These services can be critical to support long-term stability for Veterans who have experienced homelessness.

The Committee recommends that the final study report include an analysis of any gaps in service delivery (e.g., participation rates, outcomes) for Veterans experiencing homelessness and a plan to address those gaps. The purpose of the assessment is to identify ways to enhance homeless Veterans' access to education, training, and employment opportunities. Moreover, the study should strive to assess the alignment between the integration of homeless Veterans and the overarching objectives of the VR&E program, thereby amplifying its potential to achieve successful reintegration outcomes. The study should also include an evaluation of the potential benefits arising from the inclusion of homeless Veterans in the program, spanning individual advancements and broader societal impacts, including the potential reduction of Veteran homelessness rates.

A pivotal component of the study's scope should involve an evaluation of the practical feasibility of implementing structural modifications to the program. We recommend that the evaluation includes a comprehensive analysis of logistical intricacies, requisite adaptations, resource allocation considerations, and potential collaborations with existing initiatives addressing homelessness. To ensure a comprehensive perspective, proactive engagement with pivotal stakeholders such as Veterans' advocacy groups, homeless shelters, and pertinent government entities is of paramount importance. This engagement should endeavor to cultivate a profound understanding of the diverse viewpoints and concerns held by these stakeholders, thereby enriching the study's insights.

The feasibility study is recommended to commence on April 1, 2024, and conclude by March 31, 2025. The primary objective of the feasibility study is to conduct a comprehensive assessment of how VR&E serves Veterans experiencing homelessness and determine if changes are needed to make the program more accessible or impactful for this population.

VA Response: Concur.

VA agrees with the recommendation and will begin the study by June 2024.

Recommendation 2B: Execute Data-Sharing Agreement.

Execute a data-sharing agreement between the VR&E database and VHA HOMES system.

Conducting the study will require data sharing between the VR&E database and VHA's Homeless Operations Management and Evaluation Systems (HOMES) system. The assessment will examine demographic characteristics (e.g., race,

gender, age, etc.) track participation, and outcomes compared to Veterans not experiencing homelessness.

VA Response: Concur In Principle.

VA agrees with the recommendation in principle; however, VBA is unable to unilaterally implement it because data sharing would need to be established between VBA and VHA for access to the Corporate Database or Enterprise Data Warehouse. VBA will initiate a discussion with VHA by June 2024.

Recommendation 2C: Enhance VR&E Policies and Procedures.

If the study indicates a need for additional support, enhance VR&E policies and procedures to guarantee that homeless Veterans can fully access VR&E and receive an appropriate level of assistance.

The VR&E program can enhance its relevance by tailoring services to directly address the unique challenges confronted by homeless Veterans. This approach prioritizes immediate housing stability, mental health support, substance abuse treatment, and skill development for sustainable employment, offering a comprehensive solution to the multifaceted needs of homeless Veterans. To expedite progress, the program should endeavor to formulate and implement individualized VR&E plans for homeless Veterans within two months of their enrollment. Over the ensuing six months, the program's objective should be to guide these Veterans toward securing employment or vocational training, thereby facilitating their reintegration into civilian life and self-sufficiency. This time-sensitive strategy underscores the program's commitment to providing timely and effective support, empowering homeless Veterans to rebuild their lives and rediscover their sense of purpose.

The VR&E program's comprehensive suite of services encompassing counseling, education, training, and job placement, offers thorough support addressing both employment prerequisites and the underlying factors contributing to Veteran homelessness. By providing stable housing and meaningful employment, the program not only facilitates the reintegration of homeless Veterans into society but also alleviates the strain on social services. Assisting homeless Veterans in attaining employment fosters self-sufficiency and yields substantial economic benefits, reducing enduring public assistance expenditures and generating positive outcomes for local communities and the nation. Driven by our moral duty to assist homeless Veterans and acknowledging the debt of gratitude owed for their service, the provision of stable housing and employment serves as a catalyst for their successful reintegration. profoundly enhances mental and physical well-being, ultimately leading to an enhanced quality of life.

VA Response: Concur in Principle.

VA agrees with the recommendation in principle; however, we are unable to implement it because VA is unable to determine if any policy and procedures will need to be updated until the feasibility and gap analysis are completed, per Recommendation 2A.

VR&E strives to develop a plan of service with all participants as soon as possible once vocational exploration and counseling are completed. VR&E delivers service based on individual needs and delineates the type of service pursued.

The entitlement criteria for the VR&E Program are based on a service-connected disability rating of 10% or more. Regardless of homelessness status, a Veteran can still meet the criteria and would not be exempt from receiving services. Therefore, an update to program criteria may not be necessary; however, expanding collaborative services is possible.

Recommendation 2D: Secure Funding and Authorization for Continuation of Homeless Support Services.

The advisory committee supports VHA's efforts to secure funding and authorization for the continuation of homeless supportive services by:

- **Shifting excess funding from other areas to this program.**
- **Immediately utilizing all existing authorities for this program.**
- **Ensuring upcoming Presidential Budget Requests include sufficient funds to restore pandemic-level funding for this program.**

During the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, HPO's programs observed favorable outcomes stemming from the utilization of section 4201(a) of the Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020 (P.L. 116-315). This provision empowered the Secretary of VA to allocate appropriated funds for the provision of life-saving sustenance, shelter, essential goods, and services to homeless Veterans or individuals participating in the HUD-VASH program. Additionally, it encompassed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (P.L. 116-136), the Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020 (P.L. 116-315), and the American Rescue Plan Act (P.L. 117-2). These emergency funds contributed significantly to the heightened support provided to homeless Veterans in their pursuit of long-term stabilization.

The Committee supports efforts to make these authorities permanent, which would allow all homeless programs the ability to provide important services such as transportation assistance, attire provisions, communication tools, services, and training programs, all of which are pivotal to augmenting their employability and overall welfare. The VA Homeless Veterans Community Employment Services (HVCEs) program occupies a pivotal role in facilitating the attainment of sustainable employment outcomes for Veterans with prior experiences of homelessness. Given the negative impacts of unemployment on the health,

safety, and well-being of homeless Veterans, it is essential that HVCES is part of an integrated HPO effort to provide these services. The absence of funding authorization for supportive services impedes the program's capacity to holistically address the intricate requirements of these susceptible Veterans. To fortify the efficacy of the HVCES, a strategic approach centered on goals is recommended.

The FY 2024 budget has established specific performance metrics and funding for HVCES to achieve measurable progress in increasing the proportion of homeless Veterans securing employment and the incorporation of supportive services. HVCES will reassess future targets to include the positive impacts expected from these authorities. HVCES will collaborate closely with community employment programs, the Department of Labor (DOL), and the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program. This improvement effort will be evaluated in comparison to the outcomes of the preceding year, underscoring the program's unwavering dedication to delivering quantifiable improvements for this vulnerable demographic.

The significance of these objectives lies in the urgent need to comprehensively address the multifaceted requirements of homeless Veterans. This program seeks to achieve this by providing foundational support in areas such as transportation, clothing, communication tools, and training programs, with the ultimate goal of facilitating their seamless integration into the community and the workforce and reducing the likelihood of homelessness recurrence. These objectives represent a proactive strategy not only to enhance homeless Veterans' employability but also to nurture their overall stability and well-being through a wide range of essential services. Through the HVCES program, the aim is to bring about a substantial transformation in the lives of homeless Veterans, enabling their successful reintegration into civilian life and preventing the recurrence of homelessness.

VA Response: Concur in Principle.

VA agrees with the recommendation in principle. Through section 4201 of the Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020 (P.L. 116-315), VA staff were able to purchase life-saving goods and services, including those related to obtaining and maintaining employment, to help over 69,000 Veterans, using \$13.1 million in funding.

In addition, the Rideshare Program used rideshare services to provide Veterans with rides to medical and mental health appointments, housing inspections, emergency shelters, and employment-related activities. Before this program, VA staff often had to transport Veterans. Over 494,000 rides were provided to over 44,000 Veterans through the Rideshare Program, which cost \$16 million. The program ended on May 11, 2023. Since the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency's end, VA has been unable to provide

these services. While there have been some draft bills proposing to make this authority permanent, these bills have not yet passed.

VHA HPO will continue communicating requests for legislation, laws, or policies that would give flexible authorization to provide these services again through official channels. However, until the authority to provide transportation and other supportive services has been granted by Congress, additional funding for Homeless Veterans Community Employment Services (HVCES) cannot be used for these employment-related services and goods. Annual increases in funding for HVCES have been included in the FY 2024 and FY 2025 President's Budget requests. Still, these funds can only be used for additional staff or other services that are currently authorized by Congress.

In the interim, HVCES staff will continue to provide individualized employment services to homeless Veterans served by VHA homeless programs and will work closely with the Department of Labor (DOL) and other VA programs such as VHA Vocational Rehabilitation/Compensated Work Therapy to meet identified employment targets for Veterans served by HUD-VASH and Grant and Per Diem.

Recommendation 3: Transitioning Service Members/Suicide Prevention

To date, roughly 30% of Veterans receive VA health care, and fewer than 50% use any VA benefits or services at all. Many Veterans who die by suicide did not receive care from VA prior to their deaths.

The current structure of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP), including its curriculum and resources, lacks the coordination necessary to move Service members toward the help they need. As a result, too many Veterans fall through the cracks into homelessness and suicide. VA should leverage the TAP to close the gap and strengthen communication between VHA and Transitioning Service Members (TSM).

Recommendation 3A: VA Work to Establish Access to VHA and VB Services for High-Risk Service members.

The Committee recommends that VA work with the TSM Task Force, DOL, military and Veteran service organizations, and transitioning or recently transitioned Service members to establish clear pathways for high-risk Service members to access VHA and VBA services and to develop and implement strategies to prevent Veteran homelessness and suicide throughout the transition process. The Committee requests that an update on the TSM Task Force be provided at the September 2024 ACHV Meeting.

Transition from military service can create psychosocial stressors and adjustment challenges, thus TAP counselors screen for transition risk. These stressors and challenges may also be associated with increasing risks of suicide.

Yet the service TAPs do not screen for suicide risk despite each having its own Service member self-assessment tool.

The Department of Defense (DoD) TAP identifies the transition risk in three tiers, with Tier 3 indicating that the Service member is not fully prepared or career-ready to transition and, based on their personal self-assessment and Individual Transition Plans, will require maximum support to address post-transition goals. In 2019, TAP counselors rated 17,878 of the 47,085 (38%) active-duty Service members as Tier 3. In 2020, TAP counselors rated 26,326 of the 60,991 (43%) active-duty Service members as Tier 3. These data reveal that many individuals recently transitioning out of military service needed additional assistance to become career ready.

Bridging the gap between TAP, VBA, and VHA will create an opportunity to standardize support services and assessments across the program for Service members and Veterans. In the current structure, TSMs arrive at and/or connect with the VA expecting direction and support. They often encounter civilians expecting highly trained and competent Veterans with a clear understanding of the system. For a Veteran assessed into “Tier 3,” that expectation might be enough of a deterrent to prevent them from seeking additional support. There are multiple risk factors, including poverty, mental health and substance use disorders, and limited support, that can be mitigated by having the VA engaged early in the process. This is an opportunity to create a community that more effectively identifies and catches at-risk Service members as they transition and become Veterans.

We strongly encourage the Secretary to weigh the multiple benefits associated with seamless support, beginning in TAP and extending throughout the VA system in creating safeguards and stop gaps to end Veteran homelessness and prevent suicidal ideations from taking root.

VA Response: Concur in Principle.

The VA Suicide Prevention Program (SPP) agrees with the recommendation in principle that VA work with partners to enhance the pathway for high-risk Service members to access VA services. However, SPP is unable to implement it because the Committee’s recommendation is unclear as to what the direct implementation actions are. More detailed information would assist in determining the necessary key partners in VHA and VBA to improve the transition pathway.

VBA will support VHA in serving this population. VBA collaborates with VHA to deliver access to high-risk Service members transitioning from the military and will continue to partner with VHA to provide benefits and services.

Recommendation 3B: Establish Mental Health Service-Connected Pilot Program.

Establish a pilot program in up to three sites that provides TSMs who have mental health service-connected disabilities, to include Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), with a certified Peer Support Specialist for one-year post discharge to support mental health, and to connect the TSM with VHA, VBA and community supports. This pilot program should be established by September 2024 and implemented by January 2025, with a final report published and disseminated to this Committee by April 2026.

Peer Support initiatives have already proven beneficial via the Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act, Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act (CARA), and VA S.A.V.E. Peer Support is also in direct alignment with the National Strategy for Preventing Veteran Suicide Strategic Direction, including:

- 1. Healthy, Empowered Veterans, Families and Communities.**
- 2. Clinical and Community Prevention Services.**
- 3. Treatment and Support Services.**

The Committee encourages the Department to enhance peer support services for this critical group of high-risk Veterans.

VA Response: Concur in Principle.

Suicide Prevention and VHA OMHSP Peer Support Services Section concur in principle with the recommendation; however, it is not within the purview of either office to implement.

The VHA OMHSP Peer Support Services Section provides oversight for implementing the peer specialist health care profession across VHA through national policy and training development efforts and consultation. The OMHSP Peer Support Services Section is not responsible for hiring nor supervising any peer specialists in VHA. The local VHA facilities hire all peer specialists and determine their program assignments. The facilities also assign local staff members to supervise the peer specialists' work in the programs, each staffed by interdisciplinary teams. It is outside of the purview of the OMHSP Peer Support Services Section to develop and implement the pilot program in Recommendation 3B of this report. The OMHSP Peer Support Services Section defers to the VHA national program office that oversees services for transitioning Service members to provide a response to Recommendation 3B, because their program would need to hire peer specialists at the local facility branches and then provide oversight for the pilot. VBA will work with VHA to establish the pilot.

CONCLUSION

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these recommendations for your review and consideration. As we continue to acknowledge the many challenges Veterans face, we are confident that VA, in partnership with community stakeholders, will remain committed to our collective efforts to end homelessness among Veterans. We look forward to helping to identify and implement improvements that build upon the tremendous successes of recent efforts to address Veteran homelessness. We appreciate your and your staff's steadfast commitment to the honorable men and women who have served this great Nation and your openness to our recommendations.

Attachment 1: Biographies of Members of the Department of Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee on Homeless Veterans

Brandon L. Wilson

Brandon L. Wilson is currently serving as the Director of Veterans Services of the Carolinas with Asheville Buncombe Community Christian Ministry. His duties include the oversight of six Federal and state grants supporting Veterans and their families in 74 counties across North Carolina. This \$5 million portfolio includes: Supportive Services for Veteran Families, a VA housing program addressing homelessness; Homeless Veteran Re-integration Program, an employment program from the Department of Labor designed to support Veterans in transition from homelessness to the workforce; and Healing Outreach Partnership for Empowerment, a program aimed at intensive outreach to the homeless population that struggles with mental illness/substance abuse from the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. In addition, Brandon spearheads NC Serves, the state's first service coordination platform for Veteran Service members and their families, using a shared web-based platform with public and private partners addressing over 20 human service needs.

Before these roles, Mr. Wilson held numerous positions with the North Carolina Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, including Regional Veteran Service Officer, State Training Coordinator, and Deputy Director of the North Carolina Division of Veteran Affairs (NCDVA). During his time in Raleigh, North Carolina, Brandon served on the NCDVA Senior Leadership Team and was instrumental in the creation of the NC4VETS Resource Guide, as well as the transformation and restructuring of the agency and establishment of a new North Carolina cabinet-level agency of Military and Veterans Affairs. As the State Training Coordinator, Brandon developed a new training platform for veterans service organizations, which led to a 42% increase in fully developed claims, leading to the growth of North Carolina's Veteran portfolio by over \$1.2 billion; the fastest growth rate of VA claims in the United States in 2015. He began his career as the Director of Veterans Services with Haywood County, North Carolina, in 2009.

Brandon is a combat Marine who served in the infantry during Operation Iraqi Freedom. He has served as an advisor to many local and state Veterans committees, including North Carolina State Veterans Commission, North Carolina Veterans Council, and North Carolina Coalition to End Homelessness. He currently serves on the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration State Committee for Veterans and the State Consumer and Family Advisory Committee, an advisory board to the Secretary of the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. Brandon is also an active member of the Waynesville Rotary Club and Sunday School Director at Allen's Creek Baptist Church.

Currently, Mr. Wilson resides in Waynesville, North Carolina, with his wife, Sara, and their two daughters, Daisy and Anna.

Ann Marie Oliva

Ann Marie Oliva is the Chief Executive Officer of the National Alliance to End Homelessness, a public education, advocacy and capacity building organization dedicated to ending homelessness in the United States. An expert in homelessness and housing policy, she is recognized as one of the foremost experts on homelessness in the Nation. In her role, Ms. Oliva works closely with members of Congress and the Administration, as well as with officials and advocates at the state and local levels. As part of that role, she also collaborates closely with partners to educate the public on the real nature of homelessness and its solutions and to advance known best practices within the homeless services sector.

Ms. Oliva previously served as Vice President for Housing Policy for the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and as a Senior Policy Advisor at the Corporation for Supportive Housing. Her distinguished career is also marked by a decade of Federal service at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

During her 10-year tenure at HUD, Ms. Oliva successfully designed and implemented a variety of initiatives and programs, including homelessness prevention, supportive housing, and rapid re-housing programs, as well as a demonstration to end youth homelessness.

In 2015, Ms. Oliva was named one of the 50 Most Influential Leaders in the department's first 50 years and was honored with the True Colors Fund's True Leader Award. She was a finalist for a Samuel J. Heyman Service to America Medal (Sammie) in management excellence in 2011 and was part of an inter-agency team that won a Sammie for the team's work on reducing Veteran homelessness in 2012.

Currently, Ms. Oliva resides in Washington, District of Columbia.

Robert E. Accordino

Robert E. Accordino is a physician executive and passionate champion of mental health parity, currently serving as the Chief Medical Officer at Ontrak Health and on the faculty of Massachusetts General Hospital and Harvard Medical School. In 2020, he was named to Modern Health Care's Top 25 Emerging Leaders list.

Dr. Accordino previously served as the Chief Mental Health Officer of Quartet Health and the Chief of Psychiatry and Behavioral Health at CareMore Health System. In 2016, he was appointed by President Barack Obama to the White House Fellowship, a year-long, a non-partisan program founded in 1964 by Lyndon Johnson to foster public service and leadership development. In this capacity, he advised the Secretaries of Defense of the Obama and Trump Administrations on health care delivery, technology, and payment innovation for Service members and their families. For this work, Dr. Accordino received the Secretary of Defense Medal for Outstanding Public Service, among the highest civilian honors in the Department of Defense.

Board-certified in general psychiatry and child and adolescent psychiatry, he completed a fellowship in child and adolescent psychiatry at Massachusetts General and McLean Hospital of Harvard Medical School and a residency in general psychiatry at New York-Presbyterian Hospital of Weill Cornell Medical College. Dr. Accordino continues to practice psychiatry and is a member of the faculty of Massachusetts General Hospital, Harvard Medical School. Throughout his medical career, he has actively engaged in clinical research, resulting in over 40 peer-reviewed publications, book chapters, and articles and over 80 conference, seminar, and grand rounds presentations.

In 2007, as a first-year medical student, he founded the nonprofit organization Music for Autism, serving as executive director and leading the charity's fully subsidized programs' national expansion.

Dr. Accordino received a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, summa cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa, from Princeton University; a Master of Science in Experimental Psychology from the University of Oxford as a Fulbright and Rotary Ambassadorial Scholar; and an M.D. with Distinction in Research and Medical Education and as a member of the Gold Humanism Honor Society from Mount Sinai School of Medicine.

Currently, Dr. Accordino resides in New York, New York.

Toni Jackman

Toni Jackman is a retired U.S. Army lieutenant colonel with over 24 years of professional experience as a military senior leader in tactical and strategic healthcare operations and combat health information systems. She held leadership positions in a variety of Army units, including deployable units and fixed facilities stateside and overseas. Lieutenant Colonel Jackman is also a member of The Order of Military Medical Merit, which denotes distinguished service within the Army Medical Department Regiment.

Post-military retirement, Dr. Jackman has served in academia, holding a variety of positions which included a position as an Assistant Dean and Program Director of the Health Information Management associate degree program at Northern Virginia Community College. She is currently employed as an Adjunct Associate Professor in the Health Information Management and Technology Graduate Program at the University of Maryland Global Campus, and full-time faculty in the Health-Related Professions department at the College of Southern Nevada.

Lieutenant Colonel Jackman earned a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from the Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences at the University of Pittsburgh. She also earned a Master of Science in Health Information Systems (Informatics) from the School of Health and Rehabilitative Sciences, University of Pittsburgh. She has a second Master's in Technology Management from Georgetown University and a Doctorate in

Education from the Rossier School of Education at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles.

She is a member of the American Health Information Management Association and the Healthcare Information and Management Systems Society and is credentialed as a Registered Health Information Administrator. She is also a certified Coach, Teacher, and Speaker with the John Maxwell Leadership Certified Team.

Outside of Dr. Jackman's professional pursuits, she is a Legacy member with the Women Veterans Interactive Foundation (WVIF), where she has volunteered since 2012 to assist women Veterans with their post-military transition. She is passionate in her efforts to assist the WVIF in their mission of meeting women Veterans at their points of need through advocacy, empowerment, interaction, outreach, and unification, and in her support of WVIF initiatives, which include donating resources to Operation Safety Net to assist at-risk and homeless women Veterans to rise above their circumstances. Her support extends to additional WVIF initiatives for Women Veterans, which include the Women Veterans Transition Space, the Pink and White Women Veteran Empowerment Series, and the annual National Women Veteran Leadership and Diversity Conference. In addition, she previously served on the Education Development Committee in various chapters within her sorority, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated.

Currently, Dr. Jackman resides in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Patrice Livingston

Patrice Livingston is a Veteran, and the owner of a job shop focused on Research and Development for new processes and techniques related to design manufacturing for manufacturing sectors. Ms. Livingston has a background in engineering and holds a Bachelor of Science in Clinical Laboratory Science and a Bachelor of Science in Applied Mathematics from the University of Rhode Island. She also holds a Master of Business Administration from Johnson and Wales University, Providence. Currently, Ms. Livingston is working on her Master of Engineering from the University of Cincinnati.

Currently, Ms. Livingston resides in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Thomas J. Lyons

Thomas J. Lyons has a longstanding commitment to service—to his country, his community, and his fellow Veterans.

Mr. Lyons was Vice President of External Affairs before his retirement in November 2018 after 16 years of service at MassHousing, the state's affordable housing bank. From 1995 to 2002, he was the Executive Director of the New England Shelter for Homeless Veterans. He served as Deputy Commissioner for Veterans' Services for the

City of Boston from 1984 to 1995. He was a Cable installer for the Boston Edison Company from 1969 to 1984.

Born in South Boston, Massachusetts, Mr. Lyons graduated from South Boston High in 1967 and served in the United States Marine Corps from 1967 to 1970. He is a decorated combat Veteran who served a tour of duty from 1968 to 1969 in Vietnam.

In 1978, Mr. Lyons organized a committee of Veterans to pay tribute to those in his community who died during the Vietnam War. On September 13, 1981, the Committee erected the South Boston Vietnam Memorial, which was the first of its kind in the Nation. In 1987, he founded the Semper Fidelis Society of Boston, a Marine Corps organization that has grown to more than 2,500 members. The Society sponsors an annual luncheon on the Marine Corps' Birthday and donates proceeds to the Marine Corps Scholarship Foundation and local Veterans' charities. In addition, he started the annual Boston Marine Corps Honor Run, which raises money for the Marine Corps Scholarship Foundation.

Mr. Lyons graduated from Boston State College in 1978 and completed the Senior Executive Fellows Program at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government in 1988. He was honored by the University of Massachusetts Boston with the Robert H. Quinn Award for Outstanding Community Leadership, recipient of the 2011 "Marine for Life" Award, recognized in 2012 for 30 years of advocacy on behalf of our Nation's Veterans, recipient of the Commandant's Award from the Marine Corps Scholarship Foundation in 2014, and recipient of the John W. McCormick Public Service Award in 2016.

Mr. Lyons serves on a number of boards and committees: Chairman of the South Boston Vietnam Memorial Committee; Chairman of the Governor's Veterans Advisory Council; Chairman - Board of Trustees at the Chelsea Soldiers Home; Director of the Marine Corps Scholarship Foundation; Chairman of the 2001, 2006, 2015 and 2021 Medal of Honor Society Convention; and Board Member - Addiction Treatment Center New England Legislative Agent for the Massachusetts Veterans' Service Officers Association.

Currently, Mr. Lyons lives in Wakefield, Massachusetts, with his wife, Jean. They have two daughters, Sarah and Maura, and a son, Todd, who is a Federal Agent in Immigration Customs Enforcement and a Combat Veteran of the Iraq War.

Wendy Charise McClinton

Wendy Charise McClinton is a native daughter of New York City, where she was reared and received her formal education. After graduation from High School, she joined the U.S. Army and served for a decade. This decorated Veteran served during the Desert Storm Persian Gulf Era.

So much can be said about the individual who is naturally gifted intellectually, works diligently, and has committed herself to the pursuit of excellence. Numerous citations

and awards mark her tenure with the military, Black Veterans for Social Justice, Inc., the National Association for Black Veterans (NABVETS), and the National Association of Black Military Women.

As an Administrator, Ms. McClinton's leadership and management skills gave way to her prolific role as President/CEO of Black Veterans for Social Justice. As a result of her sterling reputation for professionalism and devotion to duty, she was appointed as the National Vice Commander for NABVETS. This complicated and challenging position encompassed the overall responsibility for furthering the services of Veterans while galvanizing and organizing Veterans throughout the Eastern Region of the United States. Currently, Ms. McClinton serves on the Board of Directors of the National Coalitions for Homeless Veterans, and currently, she serves as Chair of the New York City Veterans Advisory Board.

This patriot is very proud of her years of service and discipline in the Army, as well. She was assigned to the U.S. Army Information Systems Command, Pentagon, Washington District of Columbia, the 118th District Postal Unit, Pusan, Korea, and the 25th Infantry Division Light Mechanized, Schofield Barracks, Hawaii. Wendy is a graduate of the U.S. Army Logistical Management College.

Wendy earned her Bachelor of Arts in Theology from the Andersonville Baptist Seminary. A Master of Arts in Theology was bestowed upon her in June 2006 when she graduated from the Rebooth Theological Institute in Brooklyn, NY, and she received certification from Stanford University Graduate School of Business Executive Leadership Program in Not-for-Profit Management.

Most view Wendy as the go-to person. She is a doting community servant who is a genius at organizing and motivating others. Wendy is the loving mother of her three sons, Knecos, Jamal, and Jahcobe, and the grandmother ("GyGy") to Synai, Amauri, Kenos Jr., Alivia, LaShaya, Bryson, Trinity, Mia, Jacobe, Jr., Zuri, and Josiah.

Currently, Ms. McClinton resides in Elmont, New York.

Kathryn C. Monet

Kathryn C. Monet is the Chief Executive Officer of the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (NCHV). In this role, she focuses on the execution of NCHV's strategic policy and technical assistance agenda and on expanding NCHV's strategic partnerships to end Veteran homelessness more effectively.

Kathryn has spent over a decade in the public and nonprofit sectors working to address housing instability and homelessness among Veterans. Before joining NCHV, she was with the National Alliance to End Homelessness, focusing on the promotion of data-driven, evidence-based interventions to end homelessness, particularly among Veterans. Kathryn also was involved in Veteran homelessness in a legislative capacity during her time at the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

She earned a Master of Public Administration from Villanova University and a Bachelor of Science in Diplomacy and International Relations from Seton Hall University. Kathryn currently serves on the VA Advisory Committee for Homeless Veterans, the U.S. VETS District of Columbia Advisory Council, the Board of Directors for the National Low Income Housing Coalition, and the Board of Governors for the National Housing Conference.

Currently, Ms. Monet resides in Washington, District of Columbia.

Dawanta Parks

Dawanta Parks brings over a decade of experience in the field of homeless Veteran support. During his tenure as a Disabled Veterans Outreach Program Specialist for the Colorado Department of Labor and Employment under the Jobs for Veteran State Grant, Dawanta provided comprehensive services and facilitated job placements to address the employment needs of Veterans. He prioritized assistance to special disabled Veterans, other disabled Veterans, and Veterans falling into various categories established by the Secretary of Labor, such as homeless individuals, justice involved, recently separated Service members, those without a high school diploma, and those with low income.

Throughout his career, Dawanta completed several Veteran-focused training programs, including the Veterans at Work certificate from the SHRM Foundation, Advanced Case Management, Labor, and Employment Specialist, Basic Veterans Benefits On-Line, Intensive Services, Case Management, and Managing Case Management. He also received training from PsychArmor on topics such as creating a military-friendly culture and onboarding program, posttraumatic stress disorder, strategies for effective Veteran hiring, and creating a military spouse hiring program.

During his time in this role, Dawanta developed a strong collaboration with the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless Veterans reintegration program. He was later hired to establish a new department at the Denver nonprofit organization, Bayaud Enterprises, amid the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. His department delved into the housing sector and provided employment opportunities for individuals affected by the pandemic. Dawanta and his team implemented efficient standardization methods to navigate the complexities of operating during a global health crisis.

Recognized for his leadership abilities and expertise, Dawanta was chosen to chair the Colorado Veterans Leading Government for the Colorado City and County Management Association, the state affiliate of the International City/County Management Association. In this role, he oversaw talent strategies aimed at helping Veterans pursue employment opportunities in local government.

Dawanta served his entire military career as an infantryman in the Oklahoma Army National Guard under the 45th Infantry Brigade Combat Team. He participated in the historic deployment to Bosnia and Herzegovina in support of the North Atlantic Treaty

Organization. In addition, he was deployed to Afghanistan for Operation Enduring Freedom. Dawanta concluded his military service as a noncommissioned officer.

Education has played a significant role in Dawanta's professional development. He holds an associate degree in applied science degree in Business Management and Operations from Oklahoma State University. He furthered his education with a Bachelor of Liberal Arts degree in Administrative Leadership, a Master of Human Relations degree in Organizational Development, and a Master of Business Administration degree in Strategic Business Management from the University of Oklahoma and the University of Denver, respectively. Dawanta also earned a Master of Science degree with a dual focus on Human Resources Management and Change Innovation, as well as a Master of Public Administration degree with a specialization in Local Government, both from the University of Colorado Denver.

Quandrea Patterson

Quandrea Patterson is retired from the Marine Corps as a staff sergeant, where she served in a variety of roles during her 20-year tenure. She has experience working directly with homeless Veterans during her time in the Marine Corps as a recruiter, along with her work for the American Legion. In her current role at the Veterans of Foreign Wars, her focus is advocating for access to disability assistance and memorial affairs for all Veterans. The brave men and women who served in dignity should have access to the benefits they earned that will help them to live with dignity and be laid to rest with dignity. This is especially true for Veterans who are homeless or at risk for homelessness.

Ms. Patterson has a Bachelor of Science in Human Relations. While completing her degree, she volunteered her time at a homeless shelter. At the shelter, she served and assisted homeless men with addiction and history of incarceration. She also volunteered as a Court Appointed Special Advocate for children in foster care, which also connected her to homeless Veterans during that time. Quandrea Patterson worked for Troops to Teachers, where she advocated for students with different learning abilities in a Title 1 school. In addition, she served as a member of the AmeriCorps, where she worked alongside community organizations to address illiteracy and end homelessness.

Shortly before the pandemic, Ms. Patterson worked for the Department of Veterans Affairs Transition Assistance Program. Here, she was able to gain a strong understanding of homeless prevention programs. She assisted with counseling Transitioning Service Members to ensure they had awareness and education of the benefits and services at VA.

Ms. Patterson is passionate about serving our Veterans, as she has rich experience working alongside homeless and at-risk Veterans. In 2022, she worked as a Policy Analyst at the American Legion, National Veterans Employment and Education Division in Washington, District of Columbia. She oversaw the homeless Veterans and

incarceration program. Additionally, she was responsible for the management of the American Legion's Homeless Veterans Task Force, which works to ensure local services and resources are available to homeless Veterans and their families. As an Associate Director of National Legislative Services with the Veterans of Foreign Wars, she continues to advocate for Veterans by staying engaged in policy and events that facilitate the wellbeing of Veterans and their families.

Currently, Ms. Patterson resides in Arlington, VA.

Josh Protas

Josh Protas is the Vice President of Public Policy and heads the Washington, DC, office for MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger. In this role, which he assumed in 2012, Josh coordinates and implements MAZON's advocacy agenda, including efforts to protect and strengthen the Federal nutrition safety net, with particular emphasis on the food security needs of seniors, Veterans, and military families. Josh has extensive experience working at Jewish community agencies at the local and national level including as Director of the Jewish Community Relations Council at the Jewish Federation of Southern Arizona and as Vice President and Washington Director for the Jewish Council for Public Affairs. He previously served as a member of the board of directors for the Coalition on Human Needs and currently participates as part of the Vote Advisory Council for Food Policy Action. Josh earned his Master of Arts in Western American History and Public History from Arizona State University and his Bachelor of Arts in American Studies and French Literature from Wesleyan University.

Currently, Mr. Protas resides in Silver Spring, Maryland.

D.J. Reyes

D.J. Reyes is the son of a Korean and Vietnam War Veteran and a proud Asian/Pacific Islander. Colonel Reyes began his military career simultaneously with his graduation from the University of Notre Dame in 1979, when he was awarded the Patrick M. Dixon Award for the top graduating Army ROTC cadet and was commissioned a Second Lieutenant, U.S. Army Military Intelligence. In 1982, he earned his Doctor of Law (J.D.) from Temple University Law School. In 2005, he earned his Master of Arts in National Strategy and Policy at the U.S. Naval War College. In 2013, he retired at the rank of Colonel with over 33 years of military service.

During his military career, Colonel Reyes provided direct intelligence support to senior U.S. Government officials and U.S./multi-national/Special Operations Forces (SOF) Commanders in global hot spots throughout the Middle East, Afghanistan, North Africa, Bosnia, Kosovo, Korea, and Haiti. He has commanded units at the Detachment, Company, Battalion, Brigade, and Joint Site levels. Among his combat zone assignments, Colonel Reyes served as the Senior Division Intelligence Officer (G2), 101st Airborne Division, for General David Petraeus, as part of the initial multi-national invasion force for Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003 and captured in Pulitzer Prize

recipient/war correspondent Rick Atkinson's book "In the Company of Soldiers: A Chronicle of Combat." Among the operations included the finding and termination of Saddam Hussein's sons—Uday and Qusayr Hussein—in Mosul, Iraq.

Colonel Reyes earned multiple combat and service medals and awards. Among the many military schools attended were the U.S. Naval War College; U.S. Army Command and General Staff College; U.S. Army Airborne and Advanced Airborne Schools; U.S. Army Ranger School; U.S. Army Special Forces Assessment and Selection Course. Colonel Reyes is also a graduate of the Canadian Airborne School and earned the Canadian Jump Wings.

Upon military retirement in 2013, he served as Operations Officer, National Security Agency Field Office support to U.S. SOP HQ, MacDill Air Force Base. To further leverage his leadership experiences and impact positive change at the local through national levels for the Veteran and military communities, he and his wife founded Cuspis Vir Consulting LLC. From 2013 to 2020. This company provided subject matter expertise to companies in and outside of Florida regarding how best to support Exceptional Family Member Program military families/special needs in the areas of health care and financial wellness. From 2016 to 2019, Colonel Reyes served as the Gulf Coast Florida Veterans Employment Coordinator (the Department of Defense contract directly supporting the Florida Employer Support to the Guard and Reserve). He interfaced with over 1,000 companies (in an 11-county region) seeking to hire Veterans.

But it is in the area of community service that established the cornerstone of his impact on the Veteran and military communities at every level. Most notable is his key support to the Veterans Treatment Court in Tampa, which is one of the largest of over 500 courts in the USA. Over 90% of Veterans in trouble with the law and with a diagnosed disability or condition as a result of military service get the necessary medical treatment and community support and successfully graduate from the program. Tampa's Court also saves millions of annual local taxpayers' dollars because the Veterans are kept out of jail and reintegrated back into the communities via housing, schooling, employment, and community service initiatives. Colonel Reyes also serves on the nationally based Veterans Court Coalition (VCC), three U.S. (Florida) Congressmen/women Veterans Advisory committees, the Florida Department of VA Legal Subcommittee, the Florida Veterans Council, and the Florida Veterans Foundation.

Colonel Reyes was recently appointed to the CDS Life Transitions Inc. Advisory Board for developing low-cost, attainable Veteran housing in Florida. In June 2019, he briefed Tampa's Veterans Court program in the White House and on Capitol Hill and championed for Federal legislation supporting Veteran Courts nationwide (President of the United States signed HR886 into law on August 7, 2020). He also directly supported the passing and signing of the PACT Act (Toxic Exposures). He continues to assist Florida and non-Florida Veterans Treatment Court (VTC) Mentor Coordinators as an advisor and trainer. Three specific initiatives have thus evolved from Colonel Reyes' VTC involvement: (1) by request of a US Federal District Court Judge, Middle District of

Florida, DJ volunteered to mentor a Veteran defendant in federal court due to federal charges; (2) In conjunction with the VCC, DJ is coordinating with the U.S. Tribal Courts, Navajo Nation, and the Kansas Potawatomi Tribes to establish a VTC on their respective reservations; and (3) DJ has joined the National Judicial College (NJC) Judicial Team of Judges who are currently advising the Ukrainian Ministry of Courts and Judges on how to establish their own VTC program.

Colonel Reyes has received multiple awards and recognitions. Local awards included: WFLA (NBC) Channel 8 “Great Inspirations” of 2017 for his work in the Veterans Treatment Court; the Hillsborough County Bar Association’s highest Citizen Award – the Liberty Bell Award (2016) – presented to the Citizen making the most positive impact to the criminal justice process; the 2020 Tampa Bay Lightning (National Hockey League) “Community Hero” Award – a \$50,000 award presented to the individual making the most impact to the local community; the 2020 Lieutenant General James Peake Award (Bay Area Legal Services) for Outstanding Community Service to the Tampa Bay area Veteran community; and the 2020 University of Notre Dame’s Reverend William Corby Award, an award that is presented to a Notre Dame alumnus who demonstrated a career of distinguished military and community service to this Nation.

Nationally, the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) recognized Colonel Reyes in its inaugural “ChangeMakers” December 2020 edition. In 2022, Colonel Reyes was awarded the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) Distinguished Service Award and the Military Order of the World Wars (MOWW) National Citation for his advocacy at the local through Federal levels in the VTC and other Community Service programs. He also was selected by Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and the Florida Cabinet for induction into the 2022 Florida Veterans Hall of Fame. Finally, in February 2023, Colonel Reyes was invited by US Congresswoman Kathy Castor (FL-14) to accompany her at the President’s State of the Union Address in honor of his specific involvement with Federal legislation supporting our Veterans.

Since 2013, Colonel Reyes has “improved his foxhole” with his wife Julie and their triplets—Alexis, Christian, and Samantha—in South Tampa. Colonel Reyes continues to give back to his community with his 2020 Tampa Mayoral appointment to the Tampa Bay Citizens Review Board, formed to enhance trust between the Tampa Police Department and the community it serves by creating an unbiased panel of citizens to review completed disciplinary cases and issues of importance or interest to the community and the Police Department. He currently serves as the Board’s Vice-Chair. Colonel Reyes currently serves as an advisory member on WFTS (ABC) Community Panel for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion and the National Louis University Board of Advisors for Organizational Leadership. He also supports local organizations in the fight against human trafficking activities and has advocated establishing a “Human Trafficking Treatment Court” patterned after the successful and nationally renowned Tampa VTC model program.

Currently, Colonel Reyes resides in Tampa, Florida.

Darryl J. Vincent

Darryl J. Vincent is the Chief Operating Officer of U.S. VETS. In his role as chief operations officer, Mr. Vincent directly supervises all executive directors and operational vice presidents across the organization's 12 service areas. In addition, he oversees the overall operations of U.S. VETS nationally.

As a Veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps, Mr. Vincent has a long-standing commitment and sincere compassion for the Veteran community. Mr. Vincent truly operates with the belief that any Veteran who sleeps on the same streets they were once asked to defend represents a dishonor to us all and that it is our job at U.S. VETS to work ourselves out of a job. After his military service, Mr. Vincent received his bachelor's degree in human services and became a Certified Substance Abuse Counselor. He then went on to earn a Master of Social Work degree from the University of New England. Earlier in his career at U.S. VETS, Mr. Vincent led the expansion of our U.S. VETS-Barber's Point and opened U.S. VETS-Waianae. As the head of U.S. VETS programs nationally, his attention to quality and measurable outcomes led the organization to achieve Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities accreditation and to be recognized as a national leader in service delivery to homeless Veterans.

During Mr. Vincent's leadership in Hawaii, he was recognized as one of the "Ten People Who Make a Difference in Hawaii" in 2007. In 2008, he was awarded the "Unsung Hero" award at the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans. He also served as the Chairperson for the entire Continuum of Care from 2010 to 2013. In 2012, Mr. Vincent was honored at the Helping Hands Hawaii annual dinner in celebration of his 19 years of work in the social service field. In 2013 and 2015, Mr. Vincent received the Harry & Jeanette Weinberg Foundation AIM for Excellence Award. In 2021, the Hawaii Community Foundation awarded Mr. Vincent the Ho'okele Award. This award recognizes nonprofit leaders in Hawaii who are making a difference and the significant and often less visible role that a nonprofit leader plays in improving the quality of life for Hawaii people. Mr. Vincent has been featured in local and national media, including Hawaii Magazine, Honolulu Star-Advertiser, ABC, CBS, and Fox News, and has provided testimony at state and Federal levels to Government, community coalitions, and Veterans Administration leadership, advocating for the needs of America's Veterans.

Beyond his professional and community involvement, Mr. Vincent is a Weinberg Fellow and a proud member of the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity. He is the proud father of two sons, a teenager enrolled in the Navy Junior ROTC program in the tenth grade and an older son who recently graduated from West Point Class of 2020, aviation school in 2022, and is now stationed in South Korea as an Apache Pilot.

Currently, Mr. Vincent resides in Ewa Beach, Hawaii.

Donald Whitehead

Donald Whitehead served in the U.S. Navy aboard the U.S.S. Horne-CG 30 as the ship's journalist. Following his service, he struggled to readjust to society for a decade. Mr. Whitehead's struggle culminated in homelessness. On August 25, 1996, he entered a substance abuse treatment facility. After completing the program, Donald began his career as an outreach worker.

Donald now has over 25 years of experience working on the issues affecting marginalized communities. He has provided direct service and technical assistance on homeless services, Veterans' services, substance abuse services, racial equity, and poverty throughout his career. He provided direct service at various levels in his first 10 years, from outreach coordinator to executive director positions in several cities. From 2001 to 2004, Mr. Whitehead served as Executive Director of the National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH). During his tenure at NCH, the organization led the effort to pass the Education for Homeless Children and Youth Act. It introduced the Bring America Home Campaign, the most comprehensive legislation to end homelessness in history. He also used his fundraising skills to set new records for fundraising NCH.

Mr. Whitehead left the NCH in 2004 to pursue his goal of using his knowledge of program development, strategic planning, and fundraising to a broader range of organizations. As a consultant, he has worked in communities throughout the United States and within Federal agencies, including the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Veterans Affairs, the Center for Disease Control, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration, along with the States of Maryland, Minnesota, California, Oregon, Massachusetts, Florida and Arizona. Cities include Cincinnati, Baltimore, Washington (District of Columbia), Orlando and St. Cloud.

In 2020, Mr. Whitehead joined Jeff Olivet and Kavita Sing-Gilcrest to found Racial Equity Partners (REP). Over the last two years, REP has grown as one of the leading consultant companies working on racial equity. REP has numerous contracts with non-profit and for-profit clients, city-state and Federal organizations, and community-based and large organizations.

Mr. Whitehead specializes in integrating people with lived experience into the planning and governance structures in Continuums of Care and Community-Based organizations and rethinking shelter, coordinated entry strategic planning.

Throughout his career, Mr. Whitehead has provided services to the Homeless Veteran Community. He has managed Veterans' outreach, Supportive Services for Veteran Families, Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program, transitional housing and emergency shelter programs in service to the Veteran community. He has also received awards for managing stand-downs in Ohio.

Mr. Whitehead has served on advisory committees for Presidents Bush, Clinton, Bush

II, Obama, and Biden. In 2005, he received a distinguished service award for his work on homelessness from the Congressional Black Caucus. He received a second award of Special Recognition from Congress in 2008. In 2011, Mr. Whitehead completed the prestigious American Express Leadership Academy.

Currently, Mr. Whitehead resides in Laurel, Maryland.

T. Evonne Williams

Ms. T. Evonne Williams is a U.S. Air Force Veteran with over 20 years of experience working with underserved communities and individuals experiencing housing instability. Ms. Williams has managed the Supportive Services for Veteran Families grant's Shallow Subsidies services at Swords to Plowshares since October 2019. As the Program Manager, she led the development and launch process for the Shallow Subsidies pilot program; supervision and training of case managers; and engagement with VA to ensure program compliance, strategic planning for the Department, and bottom-line collaboration with other Supportive Services for Veteran Families grantees. She began managing the Supplemental Security Income/Social Security Disability Insurance Outreach, Access, and Recovery program in early 2021.

In addition to program management, Ms. Williams provides de-escalation training for the organization. She has volunteered with the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee to support the Cultural Humility Initiative since 2019. The Cultural Humility Initiative aims to uphold and establish DEI as a central cultural norm within Swords to Plowshares. Responsibilities of the committee include providing cultural humility and supportive supervision training for staff, acting as an advisory board for upper management regarding policy changes and practices (particularly with the Human Resources and Finance departments), facilitating open DEI meetings for all staff, and leading annual DEI strategic planning to further integrate practices at an organizational level.

In her spare time, Williams spends time with family and supports a culturally rooted, active, thriving, healthy Black community.

Currently, Ms. Williams resides in Oakland, California.

Attachment 2: Committee Support Staff and Ex-Officio Members

Department of Veterans Affairs Advisory Committee on Homeless Veterans

Committee Support Staff:

Anthony Love, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), is the Designated Federal Officer for the Committee and serves as the Principal Advisor, Intra/Inter-Agency Collaboration and Director of Community Engagement, Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Homeless Programs Office.

Leisa Davis, VA, is the Alternate Designated Federal Officer for the Committee and serves as a Program Analyst, VHA Homeless Programs Office.

Lucia Spinelli, VA, is the Special Assignment to the Homeless Program Office, VHA Homeless Programs Office and a Social Worker, Health Care for Homeless Veterans, Jesse Brown VA.

Ex-Officio Members:

Susan Black, DSW, VA, Veterans Benefits Administration, is the National Suicide Prevention Officer.

Greg Crawford, U.S. Department of Justice, is the Correctional Program Specialist at the National Institute of Corrections.

Heather Denny, U.S. Department of Education, is the Education Program Specialist, Education for Homeless Children and Youth Team

Ivan Denton, U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), is the Director of the Office of National Programs and oversees the DOL VETS programs, among others.

Jeff Olivet, U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, is the Executive Director.

Stacy Owens, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, is the Military and Veterans Affairs Liaison.

Yashika D. Neaves, U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), is the Policy and Communication Strategist for DoD's Military-Civilian Transition Office, under the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness.

Monshi Ramdass, Department of Agriculture, is the Acting Military and Veteran Agricultural Liaison.

Norm Suchar, Housing and Urban Development, is the Director, Office of Special Needs Assistance Programs.