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Chief Executive Officer

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House Committee on Federal Stimulus and Census Oversight

Volunteers of America of Massachusetts

July 27, 2021

***Written Testimony from Volunteers of America of Massachusetts***

Volunteers of America of Massachusetts (VOAMASS) provides an array of outpatient and residential behavioral health services including substance use and mental health treatment for individuals, families, and veterans, and re-entry programming, as well as critical wrap around services including housing and workforce development. Our presence is strongest in communities with the highest rates of underserved, unemployed, and illicit opioid substance use.

Some of the most consequential challenges facing the Commonwealth have been exacerbated due to COVID-19. Too many residents of the Commonwealth, particularly a disproportionate share of Black and Latinx residents, remain locked in a gridlock of disadvantage, including systemic barriers to housing and economic opportunity driving and driven by chronically poor health outcomes. Across the state we serve communities where unemployment rates remain double since COVID-19 and spikes in opioid use have put the Commonwealth on target for the most opioid-related deaths in any year to-date.

Recognizing the complexity of our client's needs, over the course of this year we have begun the challenging transformation of our service model into an integrated behavioral health care organization. Integrated care for us means we provide behavioral treatment through a distinct patient-centered, trauma-informed, culturally competent, whole-person care approach. This model is at the heart of an integrated care framework, delivered by a licensed and vetted multi-disciplinary team.

Central to this approach of treating the "whole-person" is delivering comprehensive workforce development programs. We prioritize serving high-risk populations, including homeless, chronically unemployed, low-income, veterans, and BIPOC communities.

*Care Today. Opportunity Tomorrow.*

Volunteers of America of Massachusetts, Inc. 441 Centre St., Jamaica Plain, MA 02130.  
(t) (617) 522.8086 (f) (617) 522-4533. [www.voamass.org](http://www.voamass.org)



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It is our intent to scale current services to create regional and comprehensive workforce solutions serving vulnerable communities across the state that address social determinants of health through behavioral health treatment along with job readiness programming with credentials responsive to regional labor needs, life coaching, housing services, and the utilization of strong partners among WIBS, community colleges, community-based organizations, legal services and the DTA.

More than ever, agencies like VOAMASS need additional funding sources to address growing needs by providing treatment and services that alleviate behavioral health, housing, and economic suffering.

The transformation into an integrated health care organization will increase our scope of services and ensure our neighbors across the state receive life-saving behavioral health treatment to meet their own potential and add vitality to our social fabric and economic engine.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony.

Sincerely,  
A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Charles Gagnon'.

Charles Gagnon  
President and CEO

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