

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Barry Moore
Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity
Hearing on “Veteran Homelessness in the Wake of COVID-19”
June 16, 2021

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I am pleased to be here with you today to address the very important topic of homelessness among our nation’s veterans. As I have mentioned in previous hearings, I wish we were holding this hearing in person, especially now that Washington, DC has almost fully reopened.

I hope that we can get back to in-person forums as soon as possible.

While VA, HUD, other agencies, and thousands of government and non-profit partners have made great strides in reducing homelessness among veterans, we are now staring down a new challenge.

There is no doubt that COVID-19 has impacted the lives of all Americans, and the sluggishness of the Biden economy will have an impact on homelessness among veterans for months, if not years, to come.

We also know that the eviction moratorium and forbearance rules for both VA and non-VA mortgages are going to have an impact on those seeking assistance.

Congress has stepped up by providing \$1.4 billion in extra dollars for VA homelessness programs as part of the CARES Act and American Rescue Plan.

Congress also recently passed sweeping new rules in the Roe-Isakson law to provide flexibility for providers and VA to respond to the impact of COVID. These changes include increasing the Grant and Per Diem rate and streamlining case management rules so VA can ensure housing vouchers are being utilized.

While I will always prioritize improving services for veterans, I think it is fair to begin asking questions about how much money for these programs is enough and if the funds are being used effectively.

According to the latest “Point In Time” count from HUD, there were 37,252 homeless veterans on a night in January 2020. We should expect this number to be even higher now after the impact of COVID-19.

However, even if we assumed that this number would double to 74,504 veterans, the amount of funding Congress would be providing to homeless veteran programs at VA through the Fiscal

Year 2022 request, combined with leftover funds from the American Rescue Plan, would equate to \$41,963 per homeless veteran.

To most Americans that is a lot of money and it still doesn't include the cost of housing vouchers provided by HUD and other government expenditures. To be clear, I am not saying this amount of money is too much or isn't justified.

I am saying that we should be asking questions about how this level of funding is, or is not, meeting the need and working to eliminate veteran homelessness.

For example, we know there are still thousands of un-used HUD-VASH vouchers that could immediately house homeless veterans. Why are these vouchers not being used? What can we do to help eliminate red-tape and ensure veterans are housed?

We should also be asking the Department of Labor questions about job training and employment services because helping homeless veterans find gainful employment is another critical piece of this puzzle.

I also know one of the largest hurdles in veteran homelessness is addressing the high cost of living and lack of affordable housing in certain areas of the country. I am curious as to how we address that and increase housing stock.

I was pleased that the House recently passed Mr. Mann and Mr. Pappas' proposal to sell un-used VA owned properties to Public Housing Authorities and providers. This would help these agencies house homeless veterans by increasing the housing stock. I urge our Senate colleagues to quickly pass this proposal.

Before I close, I do want to thank Ms. Lula Skowronek with Veterans Priority for being here with us today from Alabama. I am excited to hear about the innovative programs they are using to help my district and my state's homeless veterans.

Thank you all for being here and I look forward to your comments and recommendations.

I yield back.