

**STATEMENT OF
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OF THE
DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
SEPTEMBER 20, 2001**

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I am pleased to submit the views of the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) regarding H.R. 2716, the Homeless Veterans Assistance Act of 2001, and H.R. 936, the Heather French Henry Homeless Veterans Assistance Act. As an organization of more than one million members devoted to the welfare of disabled veterans and their families, we embrace the opportunity to support measures that would enhance the lives of those who served our Nation.

Many thousands of veterans who defended our country's freedom have been unable to find their way in society. They live in a bleak, hopeless world without decent shelter, adequate nutrition, or medical care. Some of these people are true war heroes who received physical and psychological injuries during horrific combat that few could imagine.

When DAV National Service Officers visited Florida's Ocala National Forest during a homeless veteran outreach program, they found an encampment of more than 2,000 people living as refugees from society. Among the veterans assisted that day were verified recipients of the Purple Heart and Bronze Star Medals, both of which come at a very dear price. Still suffering from the mental anguish of war, many such brave men have become discouraged with a government they perceive as uncaring and bureaucratic. Others are unaware that help is even available for the troubles by which they are plagued.

VA benefits and health care services can mean the difference between a veteran living on the streets or living in a home. Many homeless veterans are the victims of the national trend to close mental hospitals or beds. Due to funding shortfalls and apathy, those suffering from mental illness are being forced out of inpatient care and on to the streets before they are capable of providing for themselves.

These important bills would reduce homelessness among veterans by increasing necessary resources to help veterans become a part of the society they once protected. Homeless veterans deserve the consideration afforded to them through this legislation. The DAV is very supportive of the intentions of H.R. 936 and H.R. 2716, to provide for a wide range of services to homeless veterans and to begin focus on issues of prevention.

H.R. 2716
THE HOMELESS VETERANS ASSISTANCE ACT OF 2001

SECTION 2: Sense of the Congress Regarding the Needs of Homeless Veterans and the Responsibility of Federal Agencies.

DAV concurs with the sense of Congress that effective Federal programs to assist homeless veterans should be expanded. We agree that assessment is needed to measure the efficiency of support programs and to expand upon those that are determined to be most helpful.

DAV supports Federal efforts to prevent homelessness among veterans and encourages cooperative efforts between Federal agencies, such as the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Housing and Urban Development, to address the problem of homelessness among veterans.

Section 3: Improvement and Consolidation of Provisions of Law Relating to Homeless Veterans.

Subchapter ii—Comprehensive service programs

2011. Grants.

DAV is in favor of grants to eligible entities for the purposes of outreach, rehabilitative service, vocational counseling and training, and transitional housing assistance.

The text of this section does not specify which department secretary would have authority to make such grants; it simply refers to the Secretary. We suggest sections 2011 and 2012 be edited to include the Secretary's full title.

2012. Per Diem Payments.

Part (A) of this section appears to stipulate that services are available only to those homeless veterans who had been referred to the providing agency by the Secretary. A homeless veteran seeking assistance on his or her own accord would appear to be excluded from such assistance without the stated referral. We contend any homeless veteran should receive aid, regardless of referrals. If exclusion was not the intent of part (A), we suggest it be edited accordingly.

DAV agrees that facilities eligible for per diem payments should be subject to inspection by the Secretary to ensure established standards are met. Payment recipients should be required to return unused funds and grants, as stipulated in paragraph (d). We suggest paragraph (d), RECOVERY OF UNUSED GRANT FUNDS, be included under Grants, section 2011.

Subchapter iii—Training

DAV supports appropriation of funds to conduct comprehensive training to expedite the reintegration of homeless veterans into the labor force. Annual evaluation and feedback should be provided to Congress to evaluate services furnished to veterans.

Section 4: Rental Assistance Vouchers for HUD-Veterans Affairs Supported Housing Program

DAV supports an increase in the number of rental vouchers for VA-supported housing programs, and an increase in the number of VHA case managers.

Section 5: Increase in Representative Payee Services for Homeless Veterans

DAV supports expansion of contracts described in section 2035 of title 38, United States Code, to provide representative payee services for veterans who are not competent to manage their own funds.

Section 8: Authorization of Additional Domiciliary Care Programs

DAV supports appropriations for the provision of domiciliary services to homeless veterans.

H.R. 936

THE HEATHER FRENCH HENRY HOMELESS VETERANS ASSISTANCE ACT

This important legislation is intended to end homelessness among veterans by encouraging alliances between federal, state, and local governments, and private and public sector entities to address the homeless issue and by providing necessary resources to combat homelessness. Homeless veterans deserve a better deal than they are currently receiving from our government. This bill is an important key to ending this national shame.

As a member of the Veterans Organization Homeless Council (VOHC), the DAV supports the testimony and recommendations presented by the Chairman of VOHC to this Committee on July 19, 2001, regarding S. 739, a bill similar to H.R. 936. We believe that H.R. 936 will provide much needed emphasis on and expansion of homeless programs for veterans, and it will help to enhance community partnerships.

About one-third of the adult male homeless population—about 275,000 on any given night—are veterans, many of whom are combat veterans. Many other veterans are considered near homeless or at high risk because of poverty, lack of family support, because they are living

in cheap hotels or overcrowded or substandard housing, or because they are victims of the national trend to eliminate hospital beds for the mentally ill. These veterans have given their all for their country when it needed their service. Now that these homeless veterans are in need of assistance from our government, there is a reluctance to provide the needed resources to make a difference.

In a report designed and funded by 12 federal agencies—“Findings of the National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients”—it was reported that:

- almost 25 percent of homeless people are veterans; a third of the male homeless are veterans
- almost all homeless veterans are males—two percent are females
- 57 percent have used VA health care services
- almost half of homeless veterans served during the Vietnam era
- 33 percent of the male veterans served in a war zone, and 28 percent were exposed to combat

The report went on to state that, when homeless people get housing assistance and other needed services, about 76 percent of those living with their families and 60 percent of those living alone improve their living situation. Such services include health care, substance abuse treatment, mental health services, education, and job training.

Reducing homelessness among veterans requires greater government commitment and more federal resources. We hope Congress will make a significant long-term commitment to getting homeless veterans off the street and into the mainstream of society again.

As a nation, we must remain steadfast in our efforts to fulfill our promise to veterans by ensuring that no veteran who honorably served his or her country is ever without adequate living quarters.

Accordingly, DAV supports the passage of this important legislation.

DAV Homeless Veterans Initiative

Clearly, DAV is largely in support of H.R. 2716, the Homeless Veterans Assistance Act of 2001, and H.R. 936, the Heather French Henry Homeless Veterans Assistance Act. These important pieces of legislation are a step toward reducing homelessness among veterans.

DAV will certainly continue its efforts to make a difference in the lives of homeless veterans across this nation. One of our top priorities is to help break the cycle of poverty and isolation, and move homeless veterans from the streets to self-sufficiency.

The DAV Homeless Veterans Initiative is our program to assist homeless veterans make the transition from life on the streets to one of productivity and normalcy. Our motto, **“We Don’t Leave our Wounded Behind,”** is a heartfelt principle, a rule, and a promise that we, as a grateful nation, must keep.

The DAV Homeless Veterans Initiative, which is supported by DAV’s Charitable Service Trust and Colorado Trust, promotes the development of supportive housing and necessary services to assist homeless veterans become productive, self-sufficient members of society. Our goal is to establish a partnership between the DAV and Federal, state, county, and local governments to develop programs to assist homeless veterans in becoming self-sufficient. Our network of volunteers is able to provide food and shelter and, in many cases, medical, vision, and dental aid to homeless veterans.

Since 1989, DAV allocations for homeless projects total \$1,041,764.00. In many instances, grants are permitting the expansion of services that VA medical centers offer homeless veterans who suffer mental illness and substance abuse.

In Massachusetts and the New England region, the DAV Homeless Veterans Initiative provides financial support for an innovative, specialized transitional housing program called the Veterans Hospice Homestead, which serves homeless veterans diagnosed with terminal illnesses such as HIV/AIDS. The DAV provides funds to assist terminally ill veterans find appropriate housing and to obtain needed services such as specialized counseling, medical services, mental health counseling, food service support, and supportive service planning.

Additionally, our Homeless Veterans Initiative is helping fund a transitional housing project in DePere, Wisconsin. The facility, named the Armitage in honor of a young Marine killed in Vietnam, was purchased to serve as both a transitional housing facility and an information and assistance center for homeless and at-risk veterans.

With the help of local veterans’ groups and the business community, the Armitage provides single-room occupancy housing with communal meals at a cost that allows residents to ascend into their own permanent housing and employment. Veterans who are unemployed or without financial means are not charged.

It is estimated that there are as many as 2,000 homeless and at-risk veterans in northeastern Wisconsin. Homeless veterans represent about 42 percent of the individuals housed in local shelters.

At the DAV’s 79th National Convention, Ford Motor Company donated 14 new passenger vans to the Disabled American Veterans Transportation Network, Homeless Veterans Initiative, and a new pilot respite care program. Nine of the vans will be donated to Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Centers (VAMC) in Decatur, Georgia; Salt Lake City, Utah; Wichita, Kansas; Salisbury, North Carolina; White City, Oregon; Sioux Falls, South Dakota; Waco, Texas; and Sheridan, Wyoming. Four vans were assigned to homeless veterans programs in Florida, Maine, Michigan, and Virginia. The remaining van was used in a pilot respite care program at the Bay Pines, Florida VAMC.

At the DAV's 80th National Convention, Ford Motor Company donated 18 new passenger vans that will be used at Little Rock, Arkansas; West Haven, Connecticut; Honolulu, Hawaii; Shreveport, Louisiana; Togus, Maine; Biloxi, Mississippi; Fort Harrison, Montana; Grand Island, Nebraska; Las Vegas, Nevada; Manchester, New Hampshire; Albuquerque, New Mexico; San Juan, Puerto Rico; Providence, Rhode Island; and Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Four vans were assigned to homeless veterans programs in Utah, Kentucky, Ohio and Washington, D.C.

As a nation, we must remain steadfast in our efforts to fulfill our promise to veterans by ensuring that no veteran who honorably served his or her country is ever left behind. The DAV will remain true to our commitment to ensure that we make every effort to assist our fellow veterans and their families in obtaining appropriate assistance for their needs, including adequate housing.

Without question, proper assistance—including health care, substance abuse treatment, mental health services, education, and job training—will enable homeless veterans to improve their situations and begin the transition to once again become productive members of society. They served and fought to preserve liberty and freedom for all Americans. Accordingly, DAV supports the passage of House Bills 936 and 2716.