The American Legion

For God and Country

bulletin

National Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Commission
1608 K Street, N.W. • Washington, D.C. 20006
K. Robert Lewis, Chairman - Connecticut
Peter S. Gaytan, Director - Maryland

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STATEMENT OF
SHANNON MIDDLETON, DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR HEALTH
VETERANS AFFAIRS AND REHABILITATION COMMISSION
THE AMERICAN LEGION
TO THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
ON
H.R. 2699; DRAFT LEGISLATION TO ASSIST HOMELESS VETERANS; AND DRAFT LEGISLATION ON MENTAL HEALTH

JUNE 21, 2007

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for this opportunity to submit The American Legion's views on H.R. 2699 and the two pieces of draft legislation being considered by the Committee. The American Legion commends the Committee for discussing these very important issues.

The American Legion supports the efforts of public and private sector agencies and organizations with the resources necessary to aid homeless veterans and their families and support proposals that will provide medical, rehabilitative and employment assistance to homeless veterans and their families.

HR 2699, A bill to amend title 38, United States Code (U.S.C.), to repeal adjustments to per diem payments to homeless veterans service centers for receipt of other sources of income and to extend authorities for certain programs to benefits homeless veterans.

Section 1

This section would strike the mention of adjusting the rate estimated by the grant recipient to exclude other sources of income. In effect, it would repeal the authority of adjustments to per diem payments to homeless veteran service centers for receipt of other sources of income.

The American Legion supports this provision. Homeless veteran providers are constantly struggling to raise funds and navigate the grant process in order to provide the best possible service. Enactment of this legislation would support these providers by allowing them to receive federal grants at a greater rate in addition to any private donations they may receive.

Section 2 and Section 3

Section 2 would create a program that would identify members of the Armed Forces on active duty who are at risk of becoming homeless after they are discharged or released from active duty. The program would also provide counseling services to prevent homelessness.

Section 3 would expand and extend the authority for program referral and counseling services for at risk transitioning veterans. This program would expand the authorization of the Secretaries of the VA and Department of Labor to provide referral and counseling services to eligible veterans in at least 12 locations.

The American Legion has no official position on these provisions; however, we feel that the Department of Defense should require all separating, active-duty service members, including those from Reserve and National Guard units, be given an opportunity to participate in Transition Assistance Program (TAP) training not more than 180 days prior to their separation or retirement from the armed forces. Creation of the mandatory TAP requirement should include the identification of homeless risk factors of all transitioning veterans and refer them to counseling services as needed to prevent homelessness.

Section 4

The American Legion supports this provision of adding a clause that permits grants to be used to fund staffing as necessary for a service center for homeless veterans thereby increasing the effectiveness of such centers. Homeless veterans require special care, attention, and need to have greater access to assistance programs. It is shameful for a homeless veteran seeking help to be turned away because they visited a center outside of limited operating hours. By staffing these centers during all-normal working hours of a day as compared to limited hours, the likelihood of successful link up and assistance of a staff member and a homeless veteran is increased.

Section 5

This section would authorize permanent domiciliary care services to ensure that the programs are adequate with respect to meet the needs of female veterans.

The American Legion supports adequate funding for all domiciliary programs for all qualified veterans. More women veterans and women veterans with young children have sought help. Additionally, the approximately 200,000 female Iraq veterans are isolated during and after deployment making it difficult to find gender-specific, peer-based support. Access to gender-appropriate care for these veterans is essential.

Draft Legislation To Assist Homeless Veterans

Section 1

The draft legislation aims to amend the VA Homeless Grant and Per Diem program by eliminating the phrase "per diem", redefining the rate of payment to become "annual cost of furnishing services" and titling the section 2012 as "Payments for furnishing services to homeless veterans." Additionally, the draft legislation authorizes the VA Secretary to increase the rate of payment to reflect anticipated costs to furnish services, repeals the requirement of each grant recipient to report additional sources of income, and inserting the cost of services provided to the grant recipient to make a determination of the rate payable to the grantee.

Furthermore, the legislation proposes to allow payments to a grant recipient to be used to match, or in combination with, other payments or grants. Finally, it repeals the limitation that grants not apply to an entity that received a grant under section 3 of the Homeless Veterans Comprehensive Services Programs Act of 1992.

The American Legion supports these provisions. The American Legion supports the efforts of public and private sector agencies and organizations with the resources necessary to aid homeless veterans and their families and support proposals that will provide medical, rehabilitative and employment assistance to homeless veterans and their families. A full continuum of care – housing, employment training and placement, health care, substance abuse treatment, legal aid, and follow-up case management – depends on many organizations working together to provide services and adequate funding. The availability of homeless veteran services, and continued community and government support for them, depends on vigilant advocacy and public education efforts on the local, state and federal levels. Payment to a grant recipient in addition to private funding will increase the effectiveness of homeless veteran providers.

Section 2

Section 2 would expand eligibility for dental care by removing the requirement that the eligible, enrolled veteran has to have been receiving care from the VA or a VA contracted provider for 60 consecutive days in order to receive dental care. Although The American Legion has no official position on eliminating the requirements for dental care eligibility, the organization believes that veterans should receive timely access to necessary health care services, to include dental care.

Section 3

Section 3 would create at least one full time VHA employee position to oversee and coordinate homeless veteran programs at the office of each regional health delivery network. The American Legion supports this provision. Designating a single point of contact would be an efficient way for VA to keep abreast of deficiencies within the network and to identify exemplary programs to use a template for others. It would also be useful for identifying specific issues or trends that may be developing among certain homeless veteran populations, which may lead to innovative solutions VA-wide.

Section 4

This bill would provide emergency grants to repair and replace homeless veteran facilities after declaration of a major disaster.

The American Legion has no official position on this provision; however, rapid and accurate delivery of all veteran benefits greatly assists veterans.