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79th LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
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Testimony Summary

Topic: *Transition Projects' Veterans Services*

Committee Briefer: *Alex Glover, Director of Veterans Services*

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Major Points of Testimony:

I. How Transition Projects serves veterans experiencing homelessness

Transition Projects helps veterans experiencing homelessness through various programs and services with the goal of ensuring a veteran's homeless experience is rare, brief, and one-time only. We have resources in place to identify veterans experiencing homelessness, provide shelter and case management, and move them into housing with long-term supports to ensure housing stability. To respect time, I have a bulleted a quick over view of our services.

- *Day Center – Serving 600-800 people each day, members in our community can access hygiene and mail services, connect with long-term housing opportunities, receive assistance in obtaining necessary documents for housing, and get connected with shelter options.*
- *Low barrier shelters – Veterans are prioritized for admission to our five low-barrier shelters. These shelters focus on the “Harm Reduction Model”, where a member wouldn't be excluded because of substance abuse or lack of engagement in case management. Low barrier shelters prevent an excess of street deaths, and provide an opportunity to connect with services to move into housing.*
- *Residential Programs – Similar to a shelter environment, residential programs have specific participation expectations. Which focus on housing and employment search, engagement in supportive services, and abstinence from drugs or alcohol while in a residential program. Grant and Per Diem is a residential program funded by the VA and provides approximately one million dollars each year to serve 55 veterans in a residential setting at any point in time.*
- *Supportive Services – a menu of services made available to veterans engaged in our programming; veterans are able to access services in-house or contracted, such as:*
 - *Employment search and retention assistance*
 - *Access to benefits through the VA or Social Security Administration*
 - *Civil legal services to eliminate barriers to housing or income stability*
 - *Rent Well – A tenant education course that offers incentives to the participant and any potential landlords*

- *Peer Navigation – Assistance through the experiences of homeless to housing by those with lived experience*
- *Rapid Rehousing – Quick connections and ongoing engagement, rapid rehousing uses a housing-first and harm reduction approach to assist people in finding housing and then surrounding them with supportive services to ensure stability. Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) is our agency’s largest rapid rehousing resource. Funded by the VA at 3.4 million dollars each year, SSVF serves **three Oregon counties and one county in the state of Washington. SSVF comprised of 70% of Multnomah County’s permanent housing** placements of veterans over the last two years.*
- *Permanent Supportive Housing – Long-term housing subsidies coupled with ongoing supportive services. Most commonly allocated to chronically homeless individuals and those with significant barriers to maintaining stable housing. Most notably, HUDVASH fills this role, but we also have funding through Oregon Health Authority to serve veterans with severe and persistent mental illness.*

II. *Coordination of services within agency and with community partners*

- a. *Although we have had partners in SSVF such as Impact NW, 211, Metropolitan Public Defenders, Northwest Pilot Project, and Central City Concern; the real coordination started in 2015; when Multnomah County Joint Office and the City of Portland joined the national challenge to end veteran homelessness. This campaign brought all providers serving veterans to one table and we began to evaluate our systems, resources, and the veterans we are serving. Throughout this process, we developed a master list of all veterans experiencing homelessness – this list is updated daily and every veteran on this list is contacted weekly. Veterans contacted are given an initial plan to work toward housing; accessing shelter and going to the VA’s Community Resource and Referral Center are often the first step.*
- b. *Each month, all providers come together to discuss every veteran on our registry and create a plan of next steps to ensure veterans are connected to the appropriate resource and that the resource is moving quickly to move that veteran into housing*
- c. *A separate meeting of managers from the Joint Office on Homelessness, Transition Projects, The VA, and Home Forward occurs to assess the benchmark criteria set forth by USICH in order to evaluate our system address potential gaps for funding or program modifications.*
 - i. ***These meetings have been especially successful in creating additional programs and funding resources to fill gaps in services. Some examples are:***
 - 1. *A Landlord Recruitment and Retention Team in order to find new landlords to partner with and to provide additional supports to landlords.*
 - 2. *50 Housing Choice Vouchers for veterans that need long-term supportive housing, but may not qualify for HUDVASH*
 - 3. *Additional case management positions and rent assistance dollars for veterans that do not qualify for any services through VA – particularly applicable to guard/reserves*
 - 4. *Prioritization of affordable housing units by our housing authority upon turnover of units.*
 - ii. ***This system-changing work resulted in nearly 1,300 veteran families being placed into housing over 2015 and 2016; and***

Portland/Multnomah County becoming the first west coast city to be recognized by the Whitehouse for functionally ending veteran homelessness.

- III. *Potential vulnerabilities of VA funding and opportunities for the State of Oregon. At the federal level, we are anticipating 11-15% cuts to non-military appropriations and that this will have a drastic impact on anti-poverty and anti-homelessness efforts.*
- a. *SSVF funding throughout our state is reliable until the end of September. The recent NOFA process for renewals does not reflect a finalized budget; although we know SSVF's approved 2018 budget is 320 million dollars, this is nearly half of the 600 million that has been operational for the last 2.5 years.*
 - b. *Similar to SSVF, Grant and Per Diem programs expire at the end of September with a NOFA for renewal currently posted. Many grantees are applying to renew their programs, again, without a clearly determined budget.*
 - c. *The state of Oregon currently funds programming for veterans experiencing homelessness such as:*
 - i. *Oregon Health Authority – Permanent Supportive Housing to veterans with severe and persistent mental illness*
 - ii. *Emergency Housing Assistance – Also known as STRA. Approximately seventy thousand dollars go to Multnomah county each year to assist veterans who are homeless or at risk with barrier mitigation, eviction prevention, or housing placement services*
 - iii. *OHCS – Currently has capacity to fund opportunities to support the development of veteran housing. Transition Projects is currently working toward funding opportunities for a cost-effective supportive housing development to include veterans.*

If suggesting adjustment/improvements to proposed legislation include the following details:

- A. *Inform policy and funding decisions of the state to support efforts to curb veteran homelessness*
 - a. *Explore opportunities to fund:*
 - i. *Rent assistance programs (to include prevention)*
 - ii. *Permanent supportive housing opportunities*
 - iii. *Development of cost-effective permanent housing*
 - iv. *Peer navigation/advocacy roles within programs serving homeless and at-risk veterans*
 - v. *Payee and adult protective services for elderly and vulnerable veterans*
 - vi. *Develop policy and regulations to ensure County Veterans Service Officers are deeply engaged in efforts to coordinate services regarding veteran homelessness.*

