

For the Record My name is Russ Clark, US Army veteran, I serve as the Columbia County Veterans Service Officer (CVSO) with Community Action Teams (CAT).

Thank you for this opportunity to address this committee.

As an accredited Veterans Service Officer I serve as an advocate for the veterans, dependents and surviving spouses of Columbia County. I assist veterans' dependents and surviving spouses in filling claims for VA disability compensation, VA pensions for qualifying veteran and surviving spouses, VA education benefits, applying for VA vocational rehabilitation training, applying for VA health Care, obtaining certificates of eligibility for VA Home Loan Guaranty program. I also prepare legal arguments and serve as the veterans' representative at VA appeal hearing. Additionally, I help surviving spouses in securing burial and death benefits.

In my role as a member of CAT, I work with our housing team obtain housing for our homeless veterans through federal funds obtained through our Supportive Services of Veterans and Families (SSVF) grant or through federally funded Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) program and state funded EHA-VET program.

As the VSO, I assist the housing team in determining whether a veteran meets the qualifying criteria these programs. As a member this team, I work with our other local, state and federal resources to assist the housing team in developing a housing stabilization plan to assist the veteran in returning to a state self-sufficiency.

Because of my unique relationship with CAT, I can provide assistance to my aging veterans by referring them to our senior programs like Oregon Project Independence (OPI), meals on wheels, respite care for care givers and options counseling.

Other programs I often refer veterans to include: energy and utility assistance, weatherization, Healthy Homes, Self Help Acquisition Rehabilitation Program, Head Start, Healthy families.

For Veterans struggling with their home loans I refer them to our Foreclosure Prevention program. Working directly within CAT organization, allows me the opportunity to truly serve the veteran beyond the scope of the Veterans Administration.

This model of the VSO working within CAT is very successful for Columbia County and I feel this model could be replicated throughout the state.

There are still many issues are veterans and their families face. A great many our Oregon National Guard veterans have served numerous tours duty in the combat environments Iraqi and Afghanistan and we are losing to many of these young veterans to suicide, drugs and alcohol abuse. Many of these young veterans have mental health issues stemming from the trauma of combat, loss of purpose and the perception of apathy and lack of commitment from general public and their elected officials. And still many others bear the physical scars and disabilities associated military service. We have not even begun to see the rising tide of this veteran group; we must prepare for the them; we owe it to them.

Our WWII, Korea, Vietnam, Cold War and Gulf war veterans are and aging and with aging comes many issues: income stability, physical limitations, transportation and mental health issues and changing family dynamaics.

Measure 96 was brought forward to the voters as a measure designed to improve veteran services throughout this state. However, the attempt to simply backfill the vast majority of Oregon Department of Veteran Affairs (veterans service program) general funds with (Measure 96) lottery dollars is deceptive, unacceptable and totally counter to the intent of Measure 96. It demonstrates to our veterans, that the Governor and the legislators lack of commitment and true concern for the veterans of this state.

Veterans of this state took an oath to protect and defend our constitution. Most of them volunteered and some were drafted. All served to the best of their ability. They have served in the combat zones and conflict areas of this world. They have fought fires and protected property of the citizens of this state. They trained to complete the mission at the sacrifice of themselves and their brothers and sisters. Many have seen their brothers and sisters in arms pay the ultimate price for their service to this country. Simply stated our veterans have done the job we asked of them.

Veterans of this state now ask support from ones who sent them; the ones who lauded over them when we departed, the politicians who claimed the victories when they returned. We need your help to ease our pains, fix our bodies and provide comfort and support to our minds that have endured so much on behalf of this country and this state. Measure 96 was a beam of light, it gave us hope that our needs would be met. Its overwhelming voter support demonstrated to us that our community was concerned about our well fare.

We all know the state has a large deficit and all state programs will need to take some cut backs in general funds and it is reasonable to assume ODVA will have cut backs; however, to lower the general funding beyond the levels of 2011-2013 budget is unreasonable. I ask you to fund Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs (veterans' service program) at minimum 50 percent of the 2015-2017 legislatively adopted budget.

I also request the revenue from Measure 96 be used to enhance local transportation resources so our veterans who live beyond VA Veterans Transportation System boundaries can get their medical appointments. Additionally, the revenue from Measure 96 should be used to provide much needed additional mental health resources and create and or enhance existing homeless prevention programs.

Again, I thank you for this opportunity to speak today.

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St. Helens, Oregon 97051
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Fax (503) 397-3290
Administration
Information & Referral Ext. 274

FISCAL OFFICE
124 N. 18th St.
St. Helens, Oregon 97051
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(503) 366-6565
(503) 366-6569
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COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS
125 N. 17th St.
St. Helens, Oregon 97051
(503) 397-3511 Ext. 279
Housing Development
Community Facilities

HOUSING CENTER
(503) 325-8098
(800) 325-8098
Housing Information & Referral
Homeowner & Tenant Trainings
Home Ownership Assistance

SELF-HELP HOUSING
Acquisition Rehabilitation Sweat Equity
(503) 366-6550
(503) 366-6544

HOUSING REHABILITATION
Rehabilitation
Weatherization
Astoria
(503) 325-8098
(800) 325-8098
Columbia
(503) 366-6552

EMERGENCY HOUSING PROGRAM
125 N. 17th St.
St. Helens, Oregon 97051
(503) 336-6546
(800) 404-3511

**CHILD & FAMILY
DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM**
PO Box 10, 108 W. B. St.
Rainier, Oregon 97048
(503) 556-3736
Head Start
Healthy Start

ENERGY SERVICES PROGRAM
125 N. 17th St.
St. Helens, Oregon 97051
(503) 397-4951
(866) 722-4951
Energy Utility Assistance
Consumer Education
Tillamook
(503) 842-3267
(866) 722-4951
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(866) 722-4951

**SENIOR, RESPITE & VETERANS
SERVICE PROGRAMS**
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St. Helens, Oregon 97051
(503) 366-6543
Respite Care, OPI
Senior Support & Nutrition Programs

Veterans Service Program
125 N. 17th St.
St. Helens, Oregon 97051
(503) 366-6580

DISASTER RECOVERY PROGRAM
125 N. 17th St.
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COMMUNITY ACTION TEAM, INC.

"BUILDING BRIDGES TO SELF-SUFFICIENCY"



December 12, 2016

Chair Boquist, Chair Lively, Members of the Committees,

For the record, my name is Dan Brown and I serve as the Executive Director for the Community Action Team (CAT), the community action agency that serves Columbia, Clatsop and Tillamook counties. Thank you for the opportunity to briefly explain the unique way in which we have partnered with Columbia County to provide effective and comprehensive services to veterans in this county through our County Veterans Service Officer (VSO).

The VSO is accredited by the U.S Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to represent claimants of VA benefits. The Veteran Service Officer typically serves as a veteran's advocate or liaison: assisting veterans, veteran spouses and dependents in filing claims for VA pensions, disability compensations, education benefits, vocational rehabilitation training, applications for VA Health Care, obtaining VA certificates of eligibility for the VA home loans, preparing legal arguments and serving as the veteran's representative at VA appeal hearings, as well as securing burial and death benefits.

VSO programs receive support from federal revenues passed through the Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs. These funds are sometimes insufficient to hire a full-time officer. In these cases the county settles for a part-time position or uses other county resources such as local, unrestricted revenue. In cases such as ours there is still a funding gap to make it a full-time position.

CAT's solution to the shortfall was to suggest that Columbia County outsource the VSO role to us. CAT provides the balance of the needed funding by adding the VSO as a staff member in the part of our agency that delivers emergency housing programs, senior and disability programs, as well as the energy assistance programs. In order to fully support clients as they move towards self-sufficiency, all clients with military experience are referred to our VSO. Our VSO carries out his normal role but to that we have added additional responsibilities which increases our ability to house veterans faster by securing missing documents, offering resources and referrals to assure they remain securely housed, connecting them with additional service grants and eligible pensions, making sure they receive all the benefits to which they are entitled.

There are approximately 5,580 veterans who reside within Columbia County, approximately 10 percent of the general population. The Columbia County VSO currently represents 1,425 veterans, surviving spouses and dependents [an increase of 400 in a two year period].

Sincerely,

Dan Brown
Executive Director