



Massachusetts Veterans Inc.

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Homeless Shelter ♦ Supportive Housing ♦ Employment & Training ♦ Food Bank ♦ Outreach

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The Honorable Rob Simmons
Chairman Subcommittee on Health
House Committee on Veterans Affairs
United States House of Representatives
338 Cannon Building House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

May 6, 2003

Dear Chairman Simmons:

On behalf of the Massachusetts Veterans Inc. (MVI), I would like to thank you for this opportunity to share MVI's experiences with VA Homeless Programs. The MVI has operated a successful VA funded Per Diem program for six years. This year MVI was instructed by the VA to participate in an application process as a "new" program. The outcome of this direction was devastating to MVI and the veterans it serves. Subsequent discussion with VA representatives has led MVI to believe its situation is not unique to the VA application process.

Since September 1996 MVI was a recipient of 15 Per Diem Beds at a rate of \$15.00 per day through the VA Per Diem Program. In July 2002, the VA notified the MVI that its VA funded homeless program would be discontinued and it would have to apply for Per Diem funds as a "new program". MVI maintained that it was a renewal program and our application should reflect that fact. Conversations with the VA regarding MVI's status as "new" vs. "renewal" grew more and more puzzling. MVI's records indicate it was awarded Per Diem Beds; however, the VA informed MVI that its reimbursement came through separate VA program. MVI's application was not selected to receive Per Diem funding. Through follow-up conversation with VA representatives, it is MVI's understanding that "renewal" applications were funded and no "new" programs in New England received funds. After six successful years, the MVI VA Per Diem program has abruptly ended. MVI believes being required to apply as a "new" program seriously impacted our opportunity for funding. This loss of funding created a devastating void in service to the homeless veterans' community throughout Massachusetts.

MVI is in its 12th year of operation. Over the years, MVI built a strong collaboration of services for veterans who are homeless. The VA Per Diem Beds enabled MVI to provide a safe, drug and alcohol free emergency/transitional housing program to veterans living on the streets. Once admitted to MVI's housing program the veteran is assigned a Case Manager, funded through HUD Homeless Programs. The Case Manager works with the veteran in developing and implementing an Individual Treatment Plan aimed at addressing issues of health and recovery, employment and housing. MVI offers a comprehensive employment and training program funded through the Department of Labor. The Employment and Training Department consists of Employment Specialists, Job Developers, and an on- site Computer Academy offering a varied curriculum.

With the collaboration of funding from the VA, HUD and DOL MVI has successfully provided services to more than 1000 veterans each year. Unfortunately, this valuable collaboration has been broken due to the VA's discontinuation of Per Diem Beds.

Respectfully,

Tara M. O'Connor
Massachusetts Veterans Inc.