



**Testimony for the New York City Council Hearing
on Veteran Homelessness & Hunger**

*Submitted by the
Supportive Housing Network of New York
Monday, November 10th, 2014*

The Supportive Housing Network of New York (the Network) thanks the Council for the opportunity to submit testimony on the issue of veteran homelessness in the City. The Network is a member association representing over 220 nonprofit developers and social service providers that build and run 48,000 supportive housing units throughout New York State, including over 30,000 units in New York City. Supportive housing is permanent, affordable housing with on-site services, for people who are homeless and living with disabilities and/or other barriers to finding and maintaining housing. For the most vulnerable homeless individuals and families in the City's shelter system and on its streets, supportive housing has shown to be the most successful and cost-effective intervention, providing people with both the housing and the social services needed to enable individuals and families to find stability and begin rebuilding their lives. Thousands of veterans in New York have been saved by supportive housing and we are proud of our members such as the Jericho Project, Services for the UnderServed, Volunteers of America, Help USA and others who continue to develop supportive housing for homeless veterans.

The Network has worked for years with city agencies and the local office of Veterans Affairs to create more housing for homeless veterans but our testimony today is focused on our role with the NYC Coalition on the Continuum of Care (CoC), the coalition that oversees the City's allocation of HUD homeless assistance funding. It is a broad-based coalition of homeless housing and shelter providers, consumers, advocates, and government representatives, working together to shape citywide planning and decision-making, and monitor over \$100 million in federal funding. The Network is part of the CoC leadership as co-chair of the Steering Committee and voting member on behalf of the supportive housing providers who receive this federal funding.

For the past several years, the CoC has worked diligently on addressing veteran homelessness, particularly among those who are chronically homeless – i.e. those living on the street or stuck in shelter year after year, and in the past year created a task force specific to this mission. The objective of the task force is to meet the Obama Administration's aggressive but achievable goal of ending veteran homelessness by the end of 2015. We're proud to report that in the past year New York City has reduced veteran homelessness by over 50%. While this is a remarkable achievement and we're grateful for the national recognition we're getting for housing so many veterans so quickly, it is a travesty that there are still an estimated 1,300 homeless veterans in the City and until that number is zero, the Veterans Task Force will continue the work it started.

State of Veteran Homelessness in New York City

According to the most recent January 2014 point-in-time estimate from the U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD), there were 49,333 homeless veterans in our country. New York State has the fourth highest homeless veteran population in the country with 2,542, or one out of every 20 of the nation's homeless veterans.¹ 1,645 or nearly two-thirds of the State's homeless veterans live in New York City.

As previously mentioned, the City has made great strides in reducing veteran homelessness and is closing in altogether on ending street homelessness for veterans. As of this summer all but an estimated 60 veterans were left living on the street. This decline is due to a number of factors including most notably the significant infusion of federal and local resources invested into housing resources for veterans such as the HUD Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) and Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF) programs. The former provides Section 8 rental assistance social services for the most vulnerable homeless vets and the latter provides prevention, short-term rental subsidies and other services to help veterans at or just over the doorstep of homeless find or keep their housing. This consistent funding from Washington has allowed for a number of social service providers to become experts in working with the distinct challenges that veterans often face when returning from military duty, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injuries, mental illness, physical injuries, and substance abuse. This is only magnified for veterans with little family or other supports and insufficient economic resources, making it incredibly challenging to maintain their housing and overall wellbeing. Programs such as SSVF and VASH are effective because they offer the necessary services that veterans need to re-adjust back to non-military life.

However, federal resources alone would not have led to this significant reduction in veteran homelessness. There has also been increased interagency collaboration among the various city, state and federal partners that provide services to veterans, ongoing coordination with the nonprofit sector, and significant philanthropic support from Robin Hood and other foundations. Thanks to this coordination and support, we have been able to better target our housing stock for homeless veterans, mitigate inefficiencies in our system that often delay housing placement and services and, in less than six months, completed a thorough assessment and housing placement plan for almost every single homeless veteran in the City.

Moving Forward

The Council can support these efforts by joining us in lobbying for increased local, state and federal resources; greater flexibility with the resources we have; and help ensuring that the City has the systems in place to expedite housing placement for all homeless individuals and families in New York City, starting with those who fought for our country. For more information on national efforts to end veteran homelessness please visit www.neveranotherhomelessveteran.org and join the pledge. The Network appreciates the opportunity to testify and is happy to answer any questions or provide additional information.

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¹ *The 2014 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress*. US Dept. of Housing & Urban Development.