



Department of Maine

**STATEMENT OF
STEVEN J. SANPEDRO FIRST SERGEANT, RETIRED
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
UNITED STATES SENATE
ON
LONG-TERM CARE FOR VETERANS IN MAINE
January 26, 2024**

Good afternoon, Senator King and Members of the U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs

It is an honor and a privilege to address you today regarding access to long term care for our Veterans in Maine. My name is Steven SanPedro, I am currently the National Councilman and a Legislative Committee Member for the Veterans of Foreign Wars representing Maine. I served as the Maine State Commander of the VFW in 2016-2017. In addition, I have served on the Maine Veterans Home Board of Trustee from 2015 to present and currently serve as Vice Chair of the Board.

As I have traveled throughout Maine, I have heard nothing but great things about the Maine Veterans Homes. It is clearly the choice of most Veterans.

However, as a Veteran myself, I have great concern for the future care of all Veterans throughout the nation but particularly, right here in Maine. These men and woman have served their country and deserve to be cared for as the true heroes they are. The Maine Veterans Home's ability to do that is very much in jeopardy due to today's rising costs of healthcare.

Maine Veterans Homes is a non-profit organization providing quality care for over 40 years. We operate six facilities throughout the state, many of which have received National accolades. CMS has rated four of our homes with five stars and one home with four stars. Three of our homes have held the gold standard level of care, and another one was given silver by The American Health Care Association. We take great pride in what we do.

Three main areas that need to be addressed for us to overcome the challenges we face are: the effects of inflation, current reimbursement rates, and staffing.

Cost of Care – Maine Veterans Homes have the unique challenge of meeting requirements from both the State of Maine and the VA, adding the need for additional resources to cover expenses not incurred by similar facilities. Inflation and the sky-rocketing increase in costs of goods has created a financial

deficiency that can't be met, also causing great hardship. This has caused many other nursing homes in Maine to consider closing their doors and could cause Maine Veterans Homes to consider the same thing.

Reimbursement - Reimbursement rates are no longer in line with today's costs of a Veteran's care. The current VA reimbursement rates are \$115.62 for per diem care and \$49.91 for domiciliary care. These stipends, in conjunction with Medicare, Medicaid, commercial health insurance and private pay are all used to assist the Veteran in paying for their care, however funds still fall way short of the total cost. As a non-profit entity, we are left to absorb this difference. We ask that these stipends be raised to adequately provide quality health care to the Veteran and more accurately reflect the true cost of their needs.

However, if you are rated 70% or higher disabled by the VA your care will be taken care of by the VA with no stipend at a lower rate of cost of care. The VA has a set price no matter the type of care a Veteran receives if they are rated at 70%. Long Term, Skilled and Assisted Living care for a Veteran do not cost the same. This needs to be changed to reflect the different types of care and the cost of those services provided.

Staffing – Like with many other things, the pandemic made an already strained healthcare system even worse. Over the last three years we have seen a large increase in health care professionals leave the field, not to return. Many seasoned professionals chose to retire, others didn't want to endanger their families and chose to switch careers in an effort to be safe, this caused the medical field to see shortages like never before. As a result of this, organizations like ours are forced to participate in wage wars and hire more contracted nurses at double and triple regional pay rates in an effort to fill very necessary positions. A secondary effect of these staffing shortages is that workloads have been too much to bear for the professionals that have remained leading to burn out and more turnover. This can be seen not only in Maine, but throughout the entire nation.

No one can see the future but we must fix what is in front of us right now. This can be done by paying the true cost of care in all areas. To provide this quality healthcare it cost money and it needs to be provided appropriately. Stop unfunded regulations that increase cost to execute them. Fund education to help with staffing issues.

Respectfully Submitted

Steven J. SanPedro
VFW National Council Member – Maine
VFW National Legislative Committee Member – Maine
VFW Department of Maine Legislative Chairman
Sanpedro105@roadrunner.com