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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT
BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS

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Introduction

Chairman Akaka, Ranking member Burr, members of the Committee, I am pleased to be here today to represent the Department of Housing and Urban Development. My name is Mark Johnston, the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Special Needs. I oversee the Department's efforts to confront the housing and service needs of homeless persons and of veterans.

This responsibility includes confronting the specific needs of our country's homeless veterans and their families. As President Obama has said, "Too many who once wore our nation's uniform now sleep in our nation's streets." Secretary Shinseki has announced the Department of Veterans Affairs' plans for ending homelessness among veterans. HUD fully supports these efforts. In fact, in HUD's 2011 Budget, HUD has four priority performance goals. One is Veterans Homelessness. This performance goal is shared with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to end homelessness among veterans. The joint efforts will reduce the number of homeless veterans from the estimated 131,000 in fiscal year 2009 to 59,000 in fiscal year 2012. To help achieve this goal, HUD will provide housing and needed supports to homeless veterans through the Department's targeted homeless assistance programs, as well as through mainstream HUD resources.

The Department administers a variety of programs that can house veterans. These include the Housing Choice Voucher Program, Public Housing, HOME Investment Partnerships, and the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. These programs, by statute, provide great flexibility so that communities can use these federal resources to meet their local needs, including the needs of their veterans. In addition to these programs, Congress has authorized a variety of targeted programs for special needs populations, including for persons who are homeless.

Unfortunately, veterans are well represented in the homeless population. HUD is committed to serving homeless veterans and recognizes that Congress charges HUD to serve all homeless groups. HUD's homeless assistance programs serve single individuals as well as families with children. Our programs serve persons who are disabled, including those who are impaired by substance abuse, severe mental illness and physical disabilities as well as persons who are not disabled. HUD provides an array of housing and supportive services to all homeless groups, including homeless veterans.

Targeted HUD Homeless Assistance Grants

In December 2009, HUD competitively awarded approximately \$1.4 billion in targeted homeless assistance renewal grants. A record 6,445 renewal projects received awards. It is important to

note that veterans are eligible for all of our homeless assistance programs and HUD emphasizes the importance of serving veterans in its grant application. Communities may submit veteran-specific projects or projects that support a general homeless population that includes veterans. In this competition, HUD awarded 1,372 projects that serve veterans, either as a veteran-specific project or more typically as a project that serves veterans among other persons. Overall, 1 in 10 persons served by HUD's targeted homeless programs is a veteran.

To underscore our continued commitment to serve homeless veterans, we have highlighted veterans in our annual planning and application process. In the annual grant application we encourage organizations that represent homeless veterans to be at the planning table. Because of HUD's emphasis, communities have active homeless veteran representation. We also require that communities identify the number of homeless persons who are veterans so that each community can more effectively address their needs.

HUD-VASH

The Congress provided \$75 million in 2008, 2009 and 2010 for the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing Program, called HUD-VASH. The program combines HUD Housing Choice Voucher rental assistance (administered through HUD's Office of Public and Indian Housing) for homeless veterans with case management and clinical services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) at its medical centers in the community. Through this partnership, HUD and VA will provide permanent housing and services for approximately 30,000 homeless veterans and their family members, including veterans who have become homeless after serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. HUD and VA are working to get the vouchers out on the street and leased up. We're making good progress on this between our agencies and with housing authorities and VA Medical Centers, and want to focus this next year on making sure that the 30,000 HUD-VASH vouchers already appropriated are being efficiently and effectively used.

RECOVERY REINVESTMENT ACT (ARRA) FUNDING.

ARRA provides unprecedented funding to HUD and other Federal agencies to directly confront the very difficult economic times in which we live. Overall HUD is responsible for \$13.6 billion in ARRA funds for housing and community development. The ARRA Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP) is specifically targeted to confront homelessness. HPRP provides \$1.5 billion to communities nationwide. These funds were awarded to States, metropolitan cities, urban counties and territories.

The funds are now being used by grantees and sub-grantees, including non-profit organizations, to provide an array of prevention assistance to persons, including veterans, who but for this assistance would need to go to a homeless shelter. The program is also being used to rapidly re-house persons who have become homeless. Program funds can be used to provide financial assistance (e.g., rental assistance and security deposits) and housing stabilization services (e.g., case management, legal services, and housing search). The HPRP funding notice expressly references that the program can serve homeless veterans and that program funds can be used to provide to homeless veterans with security deposits and HUD-VASH can be used for long-term rental assistance. To date, well over 150,000 persons have been assisted through HPRP .

HPRP represents a unique opportunity for communities. This significant level of funding—which equals the approximate level of funding historically appropriated by Congress for all of HUD’s other homeless programs combined—will enable communities to re-shape their local homeless systems. For the first time, communities now have targeted funding to prevent homelessness. In the past, virtually all of HUD’s homeless-related programs could only assist persons after they became homeless. These funds have the potential to assist persons at risk, including veterans, stay in their homes rather than be relegated to moving themselves and their families to emergency shelters, or worse, the streets. HPRP also will allow communities to significantly reduce the time that veterans and others must stay in emergency shelters, as HPRP can be used to immediately re-house persons in conventional housing and also provide temporary supports such as case management to help ensure housing stability. These two components—homelessness prevention and rapid re-housing—have been the missing links in each communities’ Continuum of Care system. Communities now have the tools they need to effectively confront homelessness. Importantly, the new approaches that communities implement with HPRP will have the potential to be carried on, thanks to legislation passed by the Congress and enacted by the President on May 20, 2009.

NEW HUD HOMELESS PROGRAMS

The recently enacted Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act (HEARTH) provides unprecedented flexibility to confronting homelessness. The Act consolidates HUD’s existing competitive homeless programs into a single, streamlined program, the Continuum of Care Program. The program requires that all stakeholders—including veterans organizations—determine how the funds should be used. The law also reforms the Emergency Shelter Grants program into the Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) program. The new ESG will provide for flexible prevention and rapid re-housing responses to homelessness—similar to the Stimulus HPRP program—so that veterans and others who are either at risk or who literally become homeless may receive assistance. Finally, the legislation provides for the Rural Housing Stability Assistance Program to provide targeted assistance to rural areas. HEARTH includes as a selection criterion for grant award, which is the extent to which the applicant addresses the needs of all subpopulations, which includes veterans.

VETERAN HOMELESS PREVENTION DEMONSTRATION

The 2009 Appropriations Act provides HUD with \$10 million for a demonstration program to prevent homelessness among veterans as part of the appropriation for HUD’s homelessness programs. HUD is working with the VA and the Department of Labor to design and implement this initiative. Urban and rural sites will be selected. The demonstration funds may be used to provide both housing and services to prevent veterans and their families from becoming homeless or to reduce the length of time veterans and their families are homeless. HUD intends to conduct an evaluation of this demonstration, with funds provided for by the Congress, and then share the results widely through HUD’s technical assistance resources to organizations serving veterans. The findings from this effort will help inform future initiatives to prevent homelessness among veterans, as we agree with the Congress that homeless prevention needs to be a key element to solve this problem.

INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION ON HOMELESS VETERANS ISSUES

Secretary Shaun Donovan is the current Chair of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH). He has met with VA Secretary Shinseki to discuss the needs of homeless veterans and how our agencies can work collaboratively to solve this problem.

The Interagency Council on Homelessness is developing the Federal Plan to End Homelessness, which is due to Congress on May 20, 2010. The Council has been reaching out to a variety of stakeholders, including those who serve homeless veterans. This effort will further ensure a Federal-wide focus on ending homelessness among veterans.

Historically HUD and VA have been involved in several collaborations related to homelessness among veterans. The agencies are currently working together in implementing and operating HUD-VASH. Another joint initiative involved reducing chronic homelessness, in which HUD provided the housing assistance and the VA and the Department of Health and Human Services provided support services to chronically homeless persons. Finally, I serve as an ex-officio member of the Secretary of VA's Advisory Committee on Homeless Veterans, which is focused on ending homelessness among veterans.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

To coordinate veterans' efforts within HUD, to reach out to veterans organizations, and to help individual veterans, HUD established the HUD Veterans Resource Center. The Center, headed by a veteran, has a 1-800 number to take calls from veterans and to help address their individual needs. The Resource Center works with each veteran to connect them to resources in their own community.

HUD's Homelessness Resource Exchange (located at www.HUDHRE.info) is HUD's one-stop shop for information and resources for people and organizations who want to help persons who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. It provides an overview of HUD homeless and housing programs, our national homeless assistance competition, technical assistance information, and more.

The HUDHRE has a number of materials that address homeless veterans issues. For example, HUD dedicated approximately \$350,000 to enhance the capacity of organizations that do or want to specifically focus on serving homeless veterans, update existing technical assistance materials, and coordinate with VA's homeless planning networks. As a result, we developed two technical assistance guidebooks, available on the website. The first guidebook, *Coordinating Resources and Developing Strategies to Address the Needs of Homeless Veterans*, describes programs serving veterans that are effectively coordinating HUD homeless funding with other resources. The second guidebook, *A Place at the Table: Homeless Veterans and Local Homeless Assistance Planning Networks*, describes the successful participation of ten veterans' organizations in their local Continuums of Care. Additionally, we have held national conference calls and workshops to provide training and assistance to organizations that are serving, or planning to serve, homeless veterans.

Finally, each year HUD collects information from communities nationwide on homelessness and develops a detailed report on of homelessness and submits that to the Congress. This report helps inform the Congress, the Administration, and communities nationwide on the nature and extent of homelessness in America so that we collectively can more effectively confront the problem. Similarly, HUD is working closely with the VA on collecting data and developing a special report on veteran homelessness, which will be issued later this year.

CONCLUSION

In closing, I want to reiterate my and HUD's desire and commitment to help end homelessness among our veterans by working effectively with our federal, state, tribal and local partners.