



MINNESOTA ASSISTANCE COUNCIL FOR VETERANS

SERVING VETERANS THROUGHOUT MINNESOTA

May 29, 2019

The Honorable Johnny Isakson
Chair, Committee on Veterans Affairs
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jon Tester
Ranking Member, Committee on Veterans Affairs
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

RE: Support for S.980, the Homeless Veterans Prevention Act of 2019

Dear Chairman Isakson and Ranking Member Tester:

I write on behalf of the Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans (MACV), an organization dedicated to ending veteran homelessness in Minnesota. Our housing services include legal aid programs. Because legal issues are inextricably linked to housing stability in homeless or at-risk veterans, I strongly encourage you to support the passage of S.980, the Homeless Veterans Prevention Act of 2019. This bill provides necessary tools to support our servicemembers as they transition back to the communities they served.

If passed, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) could “enter into partnerships with public or private entities to fund a portion of the general legal services... that are provided by such entities to homeless veterans and veterans at risk of homelessness.” The bill highlights legal issues related to housing, family law, income support, and criminal matters. Each of these have been identified both in Minnesota and nationwide as among the top 5 legal issues faced by veterans through local surveys and the VA’s own CHALENG report. And when veterans lack access to the resources to pay for an attorney, their risk of homelessness increases dramatically.

The Minnesota veteran community has benefited greatly from the legal aid services provided by veteran-specific legal support through counsel, legal clinics, and partnerships with legal professionals in the community. In 2018 alone, the MACV Vetlaw Program provided legal aid to over 2,200 veterans. Many of these veterans lacked access to legal services and protections afforded by the legal system when faced with challenges that threatened their housing and employment. As you are probably aware, preventing an episode of homelessness – whether through legal intervention or other services, acts to stabilize not just the veteran and their family but also the community they call home.

In many regions of the state, the Minnesota Department of Veterans Affairs has declared “functional zero” veteran homelessness. This is due in no small part to the accessibility of legal services. Financial support from the VA for legal aid will enable us to continue to end veteran homelessness and prevent veterans from becoming homeless once they are stably housed.

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Minnesota has found success in combating veteran homelessness by integrating legal services into its housing support model. Unfortunately, many communities simply do not have a legal aid network prepared to serve veterans experiencing housing crises. No matter which state you call home, an eviction is an eviction, child support needs to be paid, and somewhere, a veteran is in need of legal services that they cannot afford. In addition to bolstering preexisting legal aid organizations that serve veterans, the passage of the Homeless Veteran Prevention Act of 2019 would enable communities lacking legal aid services to partner with the VA and develop legal aid programs targeted at ending veteran homelessness.

MACV has demonstrated firsthand just how impactful the availability of legal aid is to housing stability among veterans. Given that each of the top five most common legal issues faced by the veteran community can be directly tied to housing, the continued need for veterans to have access to the legal resources to avoid homelessness is self-evident. We have made great progress but there is still significant work to be done to end veteran homelessness, and maintain functional zero once achieved, and legal services are critical to achieving this goal.

I respectfully encourage you to promote the passage of S.980, the Homeless Veteran Prevention Act of 2019, so that the VA can support the development of veterans' legal services. Your support puts our country one step closer to ending veteran homelessness for good.

Sincerely,



Neal Loidolt
President/CEO
Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans

Cc: Members of the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs