



Testimony of the

NATIONAL COALITION
for **HOMELESS VETERANS**

New York City Council Committees on Veterans and
General Welfare

“Joint Hearing to Examine the City’s Efforts to End Veteran
Homelessness”

April 4, 2022

Chairs Holden & Ayala, and Distinguished Councilmembers of the Veterans Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony for today's oversight hearing.

On behalf of our Board of Directors and Members across the country, thank you for the opportunity to share the views of the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (NCHV) with you. NCHV is the resource and technical assistance center for a national network of community-based service providers and local, state and federal agencies that provide emergency, transitional, and supportive housing, food, health services, job training and placement assistance, legal aid and case management support for thousands of homeless, at-risk, and formerly homeless veterans each year.

We are committed to working with our network and partners across the country to end homelessness among veterans. We thank you for your leadership and continuing efforts to focus on the needs of veterans experiencing or at-risk of homelessness.

Every veteran deserves safe and permanent housing, whether they are currently experiencing homelessness or are facing housing-cost burdens that put them at risk of homelessness. We must enhance and invest in efforts to ensure that homelessness is rare, brief, and nonrecurring, for veterans and all New Yorkers.

Housing affordability presents an incredible crisis that leaves many without options for safe and stable housing. The City must do more to make housing – not just shelter – available to veterans and other residents at the lowest income levels. Innovating with COVID-relief funding and thinking outside the box around prioritizing vacant permanent supportive housing stock, and any vacant city or state-owned property for use by veterans and organizations that can develop and operate housing for them are two strategies we encourage in order to increase access to housing.

These deep investments in affordable housing must be paired with solid implementation of housing-first oriented systems and housing-first interventions in order to see true success. It is NCHV's position that Housing First should never mean housing only. It is also NCHV's view that shelter and services alone will not solve this problem, though they do provide a critical crisis response tool.

There is a solid body of research pointing to the success of evidence-based Housing First interventions. New York City must commit to continued implementation of Housing First oriented systems to end veteran homelessness, and to implementing these programs well. Veterans have earned quick access to permanent housing, employment, services and any resources they request to attain housing stability. This requires communitywide partnership to create Housing First oriented systems incorporating a variety of housing interventions, including adequate transitional housing options in communities where these facilities fill gaps in services or where the housing crisis is so extreme that permanent housing placement takes longer than it should, or where veterans actively choose therapeutic and treatment-oriented environments. We need to recognize that successful implementation of a Housing First model also includes access to physical and mental health care, including wraparound services like benefits assistance and employment and training services to ensure that a placement is indeed sustainable. The needs of veterans must come first in designing

our approach to meeting their needs and we encourage the Council to identify meaningful ways to incorporate their insights and inputs into your work to address veteran homelessness.

Programs serving veterans experiencing homelessness must focus on racial and other types of equity to ensure we are not leaving people behind. Black veterans comprise 33 percent of the population of veterans experiencing homelessness, but only 12 percent of the veteran population. American Indian and Alaska Native veterans are at high risk as well. Among VHA users, transgender veterans are three times more likely to experience homelessness than non-transgender veterans. The recent passage of the Deborah Sampson Act improved care for women veterans, but we cannot stop there. Women veterans are the fastest growing sub-population of veterans experiencing homelessness. Aging veterans and rural veteran populations have become an increasingly important intersection in the discussion of improving services, access and information dissemination for some of the most remote and inaccessible veterans.

As the City evaluates its response to veteran homelessness, it is imperative that local partners be held accountable for understanding and prioritizing equitable treatment of, and outcomes for, veterans exiting homelessness. Also critical, based on a look at national data, is understanding how to combat inequities in homeless adjacent systems that contribute to the inequities we see within the inflow population of veterans experiencing homelessness.

There are many issues that veterans get wrapped up in that are not unique to veterans whether they are challenges accessing identification, food insecurity, or struggles to access the system. We encourage you to examine all aspects of the City's social safety net, from the lens of a person experiencing homelessness, to better understand and address needless bureaucratic barriers that can prevent and or delay access to crucial supports.

A significant issue that applies to all who experience homelessness are the City's increasing propensity to utilize police forces to dismantle homeless encampments and criminalize homelessness. These sweeps are harmful to those experiencing homelessness, destroying what little property and dignity they have, while potentially giving them a criminal record that makes it harder for them to access permanent housing later in life. These sweeps also destroy their trust in the system, making it harder sometimes for outreach workers to engage, and elevating their risk of contracting COVID-19. As a part of the National Coalition for Housing Justice, NCHV jointly released a longer [statement](#) on this issue in particular that we direct you toward. The City must redirect its approach from the current, unconscionable status quo, to one that respects the dignity of veterans and civilians experiencing homelessness.

Thank you for your interest in addressing veteran homelessness. We, and our members in New York and the surrounding boroughs, look forward to partnering with you to address this issue.