**Veterans and Military Affairs Finance and Policy Division Committee Chair: Jerry Newton**

**Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans Testimony January 23rd, 2023**

Chairman Newton and Committee Members, my name is Sara Riegle and I’m the Vice President of Property Operations for Minnesota Assistance Council for Veterans - MACV. We are a 501c3 non-profit operating throughout the State with the mission to end Veteran homelessness in Minnesota. I began with MACV in July 2022. I’ve served the mission of ending homelessness in MN for 17 years. Prior to that I worked in mental health, providing trauma-based services to those who had experienced violence and post-traumatic stress. I am the proud wife of an Air Force Veteran. I am honored to be a part of MACV and their mission.

MACV has served Veterans experiencing or at-risk of homelessness for over 30 years. We do so with a wide-reaching network of staff and partners throughout the State. We coordinate comprehensive services for long-term housing stability, employment and legal services. MACV services cover the entire state of Minnesota, with offices in Saint Paul, Duluth, Saint Cloud, Moorhead, Mankato, Minneapolis, Bemidji, and Rochester.

The MACV team, which recently reached the milestone of 100 staff members statewide - over a third of whom are Veterans themselves - is committed to ending Veteran homelessness. We operate 200 beds of transitional and permanent supportive housing units in Duluth, Hibbing, Mankato, St. Cloud, and throughout the Twin Cities metropolitan area, with approximately 40 additional units being added in the Twin Cities metro and an additional 10 being added in Greater Minnesota with a potential for even more. This figure represents an increase of 50 available housing units since CEO Neal Loidolt last testified to this committee with another 50 currently in the works. Strong partnerships with Lennar Builders, Housing First, Minnesota Foundation, Hennepin County, and MDVA led to this incredible increase of nearly double what we anticipated when the state appropriation for Veteran Supportive Housing Options was secured.

* In 2022, we enrolled 1,717 Veterans in comprehensive services. Of those individuals:
* 63% have a documented disability
* 49% are 55 years of age or older
* 15% have children
* 37% identify as Veterans of Color
* 12% were female Veterans

1,099 Veterans received direct financial assistance from MACV in 2022 for a total amount of over $3,455,458.

While the drive to end Veteran Homelessness has been ongoing for years, the call is greater than ever and Minnesota is determined to be the fourth state to end Veteran homelessness with a goal to declare statewide Functional Zero by the end of 2024.

* One of the key tools in ending Veteran homelessness is data about where the need exists.
* The Homeless Veteran Registry (known as the HVR), allows us to keep count of those experiencing homelessness, their most recent location, and amount of time spent in homelessness as well as other key pieces of information.
* As of January 17th, 2023, there were 318 Veterans on the HVR
* December 2022 was the second highest inflow of Veterans to the HVR since its inception
* While the number of Veterans on the Registry has ebbed and flowed over time, please let me be clear, that much progress has been made. The fact that the number has increased does not mean that Veterans have not been served or are regularly returning to homelessness. Increased efforts around outreach and engagement has led to identification of more Veterans in need
* We can’t truly claim functional zero until all Veterans in need have been identified and served
* In summer of 2022, MACV was awarded 8.2 million dollars from MDVA to aid in housing Veterans experiencing homelessness who have barriers to that level that they can not be housed with traditional market rate community-based landlords.
* MACV has purchased five additional buildings with a sixth set to close in the next week.
* Stryker Avenue apartments offers 7 one bedrooms in St. Paul. The very first lease was signed on August 2nd 2022, less than 45 days after MACV received its funding award. The building was completely occupied within 90 days.
* PowderHorn apartments in Minneapolis provides 17 units of housing. The first lease was signed August 15th, again providing swift access to urgently needed housing. Two units are still under construction as we work to provide great access to those Veterans with limited mobility.
* NorthStar in NE Minneapolis provides 8 one-bedroom apartments and the first Veteran moved in shortly after January 1st 2023 and leasing efforts are ongoing
* Arlington House in St. Paul is an asset donated by a previous non-profit. Construction will be underway in the next few weeks to build out 16 new units of house as well as office and community space
* Robin Hotel in the city of Robbinsdale was purchased with the assistance of HOME ARP funds via our partners at Hennepin County. Reconstruction is anticipated to begin approximately June 2023 for an additional 16 units.
* Closing for an 8 plex in St. Cloud is anticipated for early next week. We are pleased to bring more housing to Greater MN, especially in such proximity to VA healthcare and treatment services.
* Multiple Auxiliary Units have been added in the Twin Cities as well as two in Duluth which will be occupied in February.
* New Single-family homes and Single room occupancy housing options have been added through our partnership with Lennar with more planned for 2023. We are currently working on partnering with the city of Bloomington with the hope of building on several vacant parcels along Lyndale Avenue.

These strategic initiatives will continue into 2023 and beyond as we continually adjust MACV’s resources to the needs of the community we serve.

A tenant at one of MACV’s newly acquired permanent supportive housing complexes shared his story of where his life was at before MAC-V. Ben’s journey started when the lease at his place of residence with his late wife was due to expire, and at the time, his wife was sick and in the hospital. Ben did not have income to support his housing at the time, so when his wife passed away, he was faced with living on the street.

Ben didn’t feel safe staying in shelters, so he braved the elements and found ways to survive, like going into McDonalds at 6:00am for a cup of coffee to warm him up. A few years ago, Ben walked into a VA office looking for help after spending quite some time without safe shelter. While at the VA office, he was connected with MAC-V who helped him with setting up appointments for his mental health, which he claims helped navigate him away from the depression and anxiety that he was frequently experiencing. MAC-V assisted him in obtaining transitional housing for 2 years before entering into MAC-V’s new permanent housing in South Minneapolis. Ben stated “MAC-V has a housing option for Veterans, and anyone who is experiencing homelessness should take advantage of it, I’m very thankful for the opportunities I’ve been given by them.”

Ben’s story is one with many trials, but the outcome of him having his own apartment to call home again, is the opportunity that MAC-V strives to give all Veterans in Minnesota experiencing homelessness.

I am optimistic that we are on track to achieve a functional end to Veteran homelessness in Minnesota over the next two years. In 2022, 427 Veterans were housed, 22% of which were experiencing chronic or long-term homelessness. Veterans who accessed housing through placement by a MACV service provider have less than a 10% return to homelessness rate.

In 2022, St. Louis County declared functional zero. With 8 of 10 CoCs at Functional Zero, MACV and our partners can focus even more resources on Ramsey and Hennepin CoCs to make Minnesota the 4th state to declare the functional end to Veteran homelessness, meaning that benchmarks have been met to certify that homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring.

Use of two new subsidy programs, MNVEST through the State of Minnesota, and the federal VA funded SSVF Shallow Subsidy offers our providers additional tools to serve Veterans struggling with housing instability. An additional position of Financial Capability Coordinator was added in January 2023 to assist Veterans access benefits, managing funds responsibly, and encouraging savings for housing or even potentially, home ownership.

MACV has a vision that every Veteran we serve has a way to afford housing, has the access and opportunity to find a place to call home, and has the services and supports needed to sustain long term stability.

We could not do this critical work without the support of our state partners, MDVA, MHFA, DEED, DHS, DOC, and you. Thank you for your past support and consideration of future partnership with us in achieving our mission to end Veteran homelessness in Minnesota.