

EMPLOYMENT & EDUCATION BULLETIN

By Bob Looby, Chairman

HOW MANY HOMELESS VETERANS ARE THERE IN NEW JERSEY?

The government's annual Point in Time study says about 700, which is a snapshot of the number homeless on one night in January or February and understates the scope of the problem. The State of NJ says 2,000. There are many other statistics published, but they are not germane to the numbers variations. The statistic that is really disturbing to me is tragically 9% of homeless Veterans are Women (many with children), also the fastest growing homeless Veteran population. If the Point in Time study is somewhat correct, why were there 1,605 "Rapid Re-housing" homeless grants in 2015 for 3 of 6 SSVF (Supportive Services for Veterans and their Families) providers in NJ vs. the 700 published.

So what if we don't have any accurate count of our homeless brothers and sisters. Well primarily, the SSVF and other funding will dry up, and we'll be left picking up the pieces like our Vietnam vets that are still picking up the pieces of their bodies and minds, if they're not already dead from the cancers caused by Agent Orange! Isn't it interesting the government is about to identify several other presumptive Agent Orange diseases after 40 years. So why couldn't it happen with our homeless – simply say mission is complete, that's the end of it, and no more funding, and from a government that vowed to take care of its veterans!

Maybe this is a far-out comparison, but were talking about the same government entities that took 30+ years to recognize that Agent Orange was killing our vets! Philly, New Orleans and CT. have already said they are homeless veteran free! Ask any cop in my home town of Philly how true this is, and they will laugh! My remarks are not about criticizing any source or any organization, but sounding an alarm of what could come, and that is reduced or lack of funding from Congress!

So what can we do about it? True and accurate identification is the key – not a one-night count on your fingers methodology! Probably one of the best methods you can combat this American disgrace is to contact every one of our mayors and have them sign onto the Mayors Challenge (www.hud.gov/mayorschallenge) and get engaged actively and ensure they actually performed what they signed to do. Who else has more employees and eyes on the streets than our city governments! Only 35 NJ towns signed, of the 500+ NJ municipalities – disgraceful! Also have them engage with developers for adoption and further pursuit of the COAH (affordable housing) preferences for Veterans articles, that encourages town officials and developers to devote x% of low income housing to veterans. We've been campaigning across the state for several years for mayors to agree to these simple processes to identify these heroes. Now it's your turn to contact them!

Get engaged with our Housing Our Heroes program, with the State Parole Board. Contact Paterson and Camden Catholic Charities and Community Hope with their vibrant SSVF and unmet needs programs, or other faith based groups. Also learn more about and tackle the 4 cause and effect subjects which must be pursued that haunt our veterans, i.e. unemployment, criminal justice situations, mental health such as TBI, and homelessness. Go to the Stand-Downs around the state, and not only volunteer but talk to our brothers and sisters.

Also contact your federal representatives to encourage passage of S1731, which eliminates the minimum continuous active duty service requirement for homeless veterans to receive certain benefits. S684, increases the per diem payment for transitional housing assistance, and S1885, which directs the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to provide: additional services.

Also follow the lead of your Department that has raised \$600,000 in the last several years to buy furniture and vehicles for our homeless facilities. DO IT! Thank you!