

**Testimony**  
**Veterans Programs and Services**  
**Joint Informational Meeting of the**  
**Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committees**  
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**Department of Military and Veterans Affairs**  
**Major General Anthony J. Carrelli**  
**The Adjutant General**

The testimony included in this document is provided from the following personnel from the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.

1. Major General Anthony J. Carrelli, The Adjutant General
2. Major General (USAF Retired) Eric Weller, Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans Affairs

Good morning, Sens. Vulakovich and Costa, Reps. Barrar and Sainato, members of the Senate and House Veterans' Affairs Committees. We are privileged to be here today to discuss the work of my staff at the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs does on behalf of our veterans, service members and their families. I also want to thank Mr. Ed Burris, Chairman of the State Veterans Commission; Lieutenant Colonel (USA Retired) Keith Beebe, the Pennsylvania War Veterans Council's Vice President and Legislative Committee Chair; and Kit Watson, Adjutant of the Pennsylvania American Legion for being here today. These organizations and those they represent are valued partners in assisting us in connecting veterans from across the commonwealth with the federal and state resources that are available to them.

I will briefly discuss what we have accomplished for veterans in the past year. I will be followed by Deputy Adjutant General Eric Weller to discuss our continuing efforts to assist the veterans of the commonwealth. We will then be available for your questions.

At 820,000, the commonwealth has the fourth-largest veteran population in the nation. I am very proud to lead the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs in advocating for our veterans and supporting the nearly 20,000 members of the Pennsylvania National Guard and their families. In total, we support approximately 3.5 million Pennsylvanians who served and are serving, including immediate family members of our veterans and service members. We take the responsibility of training, equipping and deploying service members in Pennsylvania's National Guard as seriously as we do in caring for those who have served. To put it succinctly we are Pennsylvania.

### **Caring for Our Most Vulnerable Veterans**

Over half of our veteran population is at retirement age of 65 or older, which means that more veterans are going to need care as they continue to age. Our six State Veteran Homes provide excellent personal care, skilled nursing and dementia care for all veterans regardless of their ability to pay. Veterans with a disability rating over 70 percent qualify for federal long-term care or contracted support. Our homes allow for the spouses of veterans and Pennsylvania National Guard Veterans to be admitted into our homes, yet we do maintain a 12 percent threshold. Due to the growth of our aging veteran population and in order to meet their diverse needs, we have made efforts to reduce our personal care beds to accommodate additional skilled and dementia care. It is my greatest priority to continue to explore innovative and efficient ways to provide superior care to our residents. General Weller will go into more detail shortly

### **Honoring Pennsylvania's Veterans**

The Governor's Advisory Council on Veterans Services was established as Pennsylvania's first interagency cooperative approach to veterans' services. The council evaluates and assesses state veterans' programs in collaboration with senior staff from state agencies and commissions. Governor Wolf and the council are dedicated to working together across state government to break down administrative barriers and enhance our ability to serve our veteran and military communities.

The Veteran Service Officer Grant Program (Act 66 of 2007) last year awarded \$2.3 million to our Veteran Service Organization partners to improve our ability to provide education, awareness, and access to assist veterans in receiving their federal benefits. We estimate that we

have only reached 25-30 percent of the veterans who are eligible for the federal veterans' benefits. One of our top priorities is supporting this program to ensure our Pennsylvania veterans and their families are receiving the benefits they earned.

Through Governor Wolf's leadership, the Department of Military and Veterans' Affairs continues to collaborate with various agencies across the commonwealth as a part of our efforts to reduce veterans' homelessness. Mr. Gilliland will shortly provide more detail on the collaborative efforts in this area.

DMVA provided more than \$5 million in direct payments to our veterans through the various State Veterans Benefits Programs to include; Educational Gratuity, Disabled Veterans Real Estate Tax Exemption, Pension programs for the Blind and Amputee and Paralyzed Veterans and Persian Gulf Conflict Bonus.

The Veterans Trust Fund continues to do very well. Since the grant program began in 2013, 98 grants totaling \$2,159,860 have been awarded to organizations providing services to veterans in Pennsylvania. We are fortunate that Pennsylvanians genuinely care about the quality of life of those who have sacrificed for our freedom. This caring nature is reflected in the generous financial support the fund receives every year. I want to thank the leadership of Sen. Vulakovich and the members of the VA&EP Committees for advocating for sports teams to support the VTF with 50/50 raffles. In two events, the Pittsburgh Pirates and Steelers teams donated over \$13,000 dollars to the fund.

In 2016, DMVA expanded its offering for individuals and businesses to make online donations benefitting veterans, which included the Pennsylvania Veterans' Memorial Trust Fund and the six Veterans Homes Resident Welfare Funds. The department has received online donations to the nine funds totaling more than \$14,000. I'm pleased that we can offer the citizens of the commonwealth a way to easily make donations in honor of someone they know that has served or simply because they appreciate the sacrifices that veterans have made in service to our Nation.

DMVA continues to partner with the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund "Wall of Faces" program to locate more than 250 photos of Pennsylvania service members who sacrificed their life in the Vietnam War. We are currently working on finding the last 44 photos.

#### **Connecting with Pennsylvania's Veterans**

More than 11,000 individuals registered online with DMVA's Veterans Registry for assistance with obtaining veterans' benefits and services and regular updates from DMVA. The Veterans Registry is part of DMVA's long-term strategy to achieve a higher level of communication with Pennsylvania veterans as well as our partners who support them. I am pleased that the General Assembly put forward a bill, that Governor Wolf approved, making our registry available to all departments and agencies across the commonwealth to better assist our veterans in enrolling in the program at the point-of-contact with that particular agency.

DMVA's two Mobile Veterans Outreach Vans along with teams of accredited veteran service officers traveled to 159 events across the state and interacted with nearly 3,000 veterans. This

year with the support of Agricultural Secretary Redding, we once again were able to have one of our Mobile Vans during Veterans Day at the farm show, which provided many opportunities to connect. We will continue to explore innovative and efficient ways to provide that quality care to veterans from all over Pennsylvania.

### **Advocating for Pennsylvania's veterans and our military**

Governor Wolf, along with the Pennsylvania General Assembly, supported the military and veteran's community through the passage and enactment of two significant bills into law this past year. First, with the creation of the Pennsylvania Achievement Medal and the Pennsylvania Veterans Service Award we can better recognize the accomplishments in the military and veteran communities. Additionally, we can now award the Pennsylvania Distinguished Service Award to veterans and civilians in addition to military members; and the Pennsylvania Meritorious Service Medal may now be awarded to veterans as well. Second, the codification of the DMVA Veterans Registry allows us to better connect with the veteran population. These two Acts enhance our ability to serve the veterans and military community and we appreciate your efforts in making these changes.

### **Conclusion**

Because of the commitment of Governor Wolf and his Administration and your continued support, our department continues to improve our ability to support Pennsylvania's Veterans and military community. We are humbled by the opportunity to work with our veterans, service members, and their families. I will be available for questions after testimony from General Weller.

**Major General (USAF Retired) Eric Weller**  
**Deputy Adjutant General for Veterans Affairs**

Good afternoon and I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I've been on the job since November 2016, and in that time, have learned a great deal about the veterans' community within the commonwealth. The passion for veterans concerns among the DMVA, county directors for veterans affairs, veterans service organizations and charitable non-profit community organizations is unsurpassed. I am proud to be working alongside these patriots as we advocate for all veterans.

I will briefly touch on some programs and activities that the Office of Veterans Affairs has been involved with and will be working on over the next year. Through the evaluation of policies, procedures and reviewing the staff training program I have implemented several changes including; reorganizing personnel, adding checklists, policy reviews and audit teams.

For example, last year, DMVA worked with the Administration to identify opportunities to reduce costs through privatization. Because of those discussions, we are currently working to contract with a vendor for food standardization across all six facilities. My team and I are committed to ensuring that the quality of care for our residents remains outstanding and will continually improve the administrative process. As you know, the commonwealth has the fourth-largest veterans' population, (approx. 820,000). Generally, 50 percent live in urban areas and 50 percent in rural areas. Interesting to also note is that approx. 50 percent of our veterans are over the age of 65.

**Caring for our Veterans**

The federal government creates veterans, and we must hold the Veterans Administration accountable when it comes to supporting our most vulnerable veterans. Further, as advocates for



all veterans and their family members, we pause to remember that they have earned the title of veteran through their service to others. While most veterans are solid and resilient, unfortunately, some are in need of greater assistance to meet life's challenges. As a community of veterans, we stand ready to meet the needs all our veterans and service members. As you know, state appropriated funding associated with DMVA's budget relative to our mission; which include veterans' programs and services and caring for our veteran elder population, represent less than 1 percent of the current annual commonwealth budget.

Over the past several years, we have been modernizing the facilities to address the ever-changing needs of the veteran population in order to make our footprint align with community living center (CLC) models. The overall effort is to continue to transition beds from domiciliary to skilled and dementia care. In 2007, a Needs Assessment/Feasibility Study concluded that there is an unmet need for three additional State Veteran Homes. Recently, our department has discussed the feasibility of adding another facility in the southcentral region of Pennsylvania. The cost models necessitate a five-year construction period, with staggering timelines for implementation. Further evaluation would need to be conducted relative to the construction costs and available federal funds.

Two of the more promising ideas are to offer an Adult Day Health Care Program or to expand the number of beds through partnerships with County Residential Homes. The USDVA supports state-operated Adult Day Health Care Programs and provides for a reimbursement rate of \$85.37/day (2017). This model would extend care to veterans by providing access to services in the State Veterans' Homes. This action would reduce the wait list as we could transition participants in the Adult Day Health Care to a resident in the home when their needs change.

The constraint is that to establish a program, capital improvement for dedicated space at the facility, along with increasing staff, will be required. Currently, we are moving forward to pilot Adult Day Health Care at our Southeastern Veterans Center; targeting SFY 19/20. A portion of the facility will be modified to accept 30 Adult Day Health Care participants. This will require an increase of staff and, based on current reimbursement estimates, we are projecting a positive cash flow. If successful, this program will be exported to our other veterans' homes; with Hollidaysburg Veterans Center next on the list.

Additionally, we are considering partnering with County Residential Homes to expand capacity without additional infrastructure and will also allow for the expansion of services across a greater geographical area without a significant increase in staffing. The constraint is funding to ensure that the County Veteran facilities meet and pass both the commonwealth and federal standards before gaining the approval of the USDVA. The USDVA would then have to approve and inspect the veteran facility for compliance. An in-house preliminary study has been completed that highlights financially, this is a promising concept.

Within our six State Veterans' Homes, staffing standards are designed to meet commonwealth and federal regulations, while addressing the acuity of care needs for this unique population. Our goal is to provide high caliber, long-term skilled nursing, dementia, personal and domiciliary care, while at the same time delivering that level care as efficiently as possible. To do this, we strive to maintain full-occupancy and align our staff and bed capacity in each home to remain

agile and adaptable as it relates to construction projects and any regulatory/mandated changes that occur. Currently, all our homes are operating under full licensure.

Over the past year, we have performed a comprehensive manpower study to define an acceptable staffing plan based on the number of beds authorized vs. the number of personnel required to take care of the residents. There is a definite correlation between the two. If the number of staff is reduced, the number of residents will, correspondingly, be reduced. In preparing the study, BVH staff identified regulatory standards, industry standards, current research and analyzed both the physical footprint and operational needs of each of the six State Veterans' Homes. Where no regulatory or industry standard exists, staffing formulas were determined by utilizing the currently available research or through operational analysis. The overall outcome of the study is that BVH staffing levels are comparable with the private sector. Also, for planning purposes, considering maximum capacity and type of care required, the BVH has completed a five-year plan that defines staffing levels required to provide proper care.

We have also completed a cost study highlighting the cost differential between State Veterans' Homes' vs. private nursing homes' care through utilization of "certified" MA cost report data to generate a quantifiable, all-inclusive rate comparison. As we framed the study, it is important to highlight that the original intent of the PA General Assembly was to establish State Veterans' Homes to provide long-term care (skilled/dementia/personal/domicile) for Pennsylvania's indigent and disabled ex-service members. As such, the implied intent of the PA General Assembly is one of "benevolence."

Applicants are largely incapable of self-support and demonstrate a financial need for admission.

Unlike the private sector, veterans are not denied admission to our homes on grounds of inability to pay maintenance/resident fees. Residents of a State Veterans' Home are required to make monthly payments against a maintenance/resident fee liability in accordance with a resident's ability to pay.

Residents in our homes do contribute to their cost of care. However, the resident monthly maintenance fees are based on their ability to pay and their current income. Along with funding received from the state and resident monthly maintenance/resident fees, we also receive federal funding; to include, Medicare, Medicaid and third-party revenue that further support the cost of operating our homes.

Approximately 2 percent of our resident population pays full cost of care. In the past, State Veterans' Homes have been measured and compared to private nursing homes by numerous entities. However, those comparisons were disparate because a strict dollar comparison of cost of care was utilized, which was not totally inclusive of all costs (i.e., pharmacy, transportation, medical practitioners, volunteer services, lab and x-ray and adaptive equipment) in private nursing homes. Whereas, cost data from the State Veterans' Homes was all inclusive.

Therefore, previous cost comparisons did not paint a complete, comprehensive picture and, instead, gave the appearance that the cost of care in a State Veterans' Home was much higher than that of a private nursing home. In performing the BVH study, we found the following:

1. Based on cost report data, when comparing all-inclusive data from the State Veterans' Homes to non-inclusive data for private nursing care homes, the State Veterans' Homes are more expensive in salary, benefits and operational costs.
2. When comparing all-inclusive costs for the State Veterans' Homes to the all-inclusive operational costs for private nursing homes, the State Veterans' Homes are still more expensive in state employees' salary and benefits, but less expensive relative to operational costs.
3. When comparing all-inclusive costs from the State Veterans' Homes to all-inclusive operational costs for the private nursing homes; to include private nursing homes' profit margin(s), the State Veterans Homes' costs are overall slightly more expensive for skilled nursing care than the private nursing homes' costs by \$13.14 and less expensive for personal care by \$20.96. When considering estate insolvency, state skilled care costs would also be slightly less expensive.
4. When comparing all-inclusive numbers from the State Veterans' Homes to all-inclusive operational costs for private nursing homes who privatize/contract-out all employees through a private corporation/vendor, the state veterans homes are overall less expensive.

## **Veterans Outreach**

As military members leave active duty and return to communities within the commonwealth, the transition to civilian life and identification of services and benefits can be daunting. Our veterans need assistance in gaining access to employment opportunities, education benefits, healthcare services, transportation, family reintegration services and counseling. Navigating the various resources to receive these services can be challenging. It is important to note that the VA demographics study represents that 54 percent of the population is 65 years or older while 21 percent are between the ages of 50 and 64 and the remaining 25 percent are between the ages of 20 and 49. Older veterans are typically receiving care for more than one chronic illness that requires medical care and support from a caregiver or healthcare provider. For our veterans who live in rural Pennsylvania, finding caregiver support or transportation to a VA healthcare facility can be a real challenge. With only three active duty military bases, all located in south central Pennsylvania, most Pennsylvania veterans lack the resources found on active duty posts.

Our Reintegration and Outreach Division identifies and assists veterans in gaining access to the benefits, programs, and services they have earned. DMVA's Outreach Team has been conducting outreach to veterans utilizing two mobile Outreach Vans beginning in November of 2013. In May of 2014, an additional van was placed into service. The team executed 92 events in SFY 13/14, 116 events in SFY 14/15 (an increase of 25 percent), 145 events in SFY 15/16 (an increase of 25 percent) and 159 events in SFY 16/17 (an increase of 10 percent). The team is on pace to meet or surpass last year's event numbers. In total since 2013 through these interactions, our outreach team has assisted 13,200 veterans. It is imperative that we continue to invest in outreach through a holistic approach.

## **Veterans' Homelessness**

Homelessness is a priority concern especially for our veterans with service-related traumatic brain injuries, post-traumatic stress and substance abuse issues. Based on the 2016 Point in Time (PIT) Homeless Survey, we estimate that there are approximately 1,136 homeless veterans in the commonwealth. This number is likely higher as it is just a reference point-in-time and the 2017 count has not yet been released. These surveys provide a good baseline for developing strategic responses to combat the conditions and develop effective plans of action. Although, DMVA does not receive state and/or federal funding specifically for veteran's homelessness, we work closely with other agencies and assist them to ensure that veterans receive the support they need.

Through the Veterans' Trust Fund Grant program, we provide funding to community programs that are removing barriers and assisting homeless with housing. Additionally, with specified funding from the legislature we plan to provide even more grants to fund mental health and co-occurring substance abuse resident and outpatient programs. The Governor's Advisory Council for Veterans Services (GAC-VS) has been instrumental in allowing us to not only share information but also identify and quantify resources and support from other State Agencies that also focus on assisting veterans with housing, employment and receiving needed benefits. The GAC-VS has played an important role in helping us to identify potential partners in this effort then consolidate and deliver a variety of information and direct services within these focus areas.

Governor Tom Wolf signed on to the Mayor's Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness in September 2015. From mid-September 2015 until the end of September 2017, there have been 6,599 veterans placed in permanent housing as reported by the Veteran's Integrated Service Network 4 (VISN 4). VISN 4 works directly with each of the eight Federal VA Medical Centers

Homeless Veteran Coordination Teams, Supportive Services to Veterans and their Families (SSVF) grant recipients as well as community Continuums of Care (COCs). Communities and Continuums of Care throughout the commonwealth who have achieved and met the benchmarks and criteria for achieving the goal of ending veteran homelessness established by the, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, Department of Housing and Urban Development and Federal Veterans Administration are listed in the presentation.

The DMVA is regularly provided updates on Supportive Services to Veterans and their Families and Continuums of Care activities; we offer financial assistance through grants to non-profit organizations and direct support to veterans in need through the Veterans Temporary Assistance Program and the Military Family Relief Assistance Program. We also work in partnership with other state departments such as The Department of Community and Economic Development, The Department of Health, The Department of Labor and Industries and to other veteran service organizations that are directly providing services to veterans and their families.

#### **Veterans Trust Fund**

The Veterans Trust Fund continues to do exceptionally well. Last year, we received \$1.7M in donations from the citizens of commonwealth. We also receive on-line and mail-in donations as well as profits from the sale of the Honoring our Veterans License Plate for both motor vehicles and motorcycles. This money is used to provide temporary assistance to veterans in need as well as fund the VTF Grant Program which, this year earmarks \$650,000 to non-profits in support of Veterans Programs as well as \$150,000 to support outreach and other veterans services by our County Directors of Veterans' Affairs. Act 109 of 2016 aligned the Veterans Emergency



Assistance Program with VTF Veterans Temporary Assistance Program to use funding from both program and establish one program to help our veterans in temporary need. The Veterans Temporary Assistance Program has provided nearly \$500,000 in direct grants to veterans need of shelter or other necessities of living in 2017. With the support of Governor Wolf, the General Assembly and working collaboratively with other public and private partners, we strive to represent a government that works when advocating for our veterans.

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### **Veterans Services and Programs Overview**

The Division of Veterans Services and Programs manages eight programs, the maintenance of the Pennsylvania Veterans Memorial and overseeing Veterans Service Officers (VSO) support through training State and County VSO's in accordance with federal standards and maintaining accredited VSO's in the two VA Regional Offices, which are in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. The eight programs are the Educational Gratuity Program, Blind Veterans Pension, Amputee and Paralyzed Veterans Pension, Veterans Temporary Assistance, Military Family Relief and Assistance, Veterans Registry, Persian Gulf Bonus and Disabled Veterans Real Estate Tax Exemption Program. These programs improve the quality of life for our disabled veterans and require collaboration with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs to determine eligibility.

### **Educational Gratuity and the Veterans' Registry**

Two programs that I would like to highlight today are the Educational Gratuity Program and The Veterans Registry. The necessity of the Educational Gratuity Program has increased the use of the program over the past two years. In State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2016-2017 we expended 100 percent of our appropriation and applied funds that were available through General Government

Operations (GGO) funding to further reach those children of severely disabled veterans that need help with the cost of post-secondary education, our funding was increased from \$101,000 to \$120,000. We are committed to those on the program and what to ensure that this important benefit is available to all who are eligible.

The second program I would like to focus on today is the Veterans Registry. The Veterans Registry signed by Governor Wolf ensures that identifying and outreach to veterans is a collaborative effort among all commonwealth agencies. This interagency collaboration will enable us to locate, identify, educate and outreach our 820,000 veterans and assist them in receiving the federal and state benefits they have earned.

#### **Service Member, Veteran and their Families (SMV&F) Wellness Initiative**

DMVA has outlined a series of initiatives within our 5-year Strategic Plan that are designed to position us and our partners to act to help our SMV&F to sustain wellness as opposed to responding to a crisis. These initiatives are designed to be long term, allowing us to add new initiatives while managing change in our on-going efforts. Please note, that while DMVA provides leadership in each of these initiatives, it does not currently fund any of the efforts that are outlined within these programs. We thank our government, private and public partners for their support, funding and dedication to helping us to take care of those who have and continue to serve. These initiatives are a direct response to our understanding and ability to address emerging needs of our service members, veterans and their families.

### **PTSD with co-occurring Substance Use Disorders**

This program has demonstrated success over the past several years through funding that was established under the General Appropriation Act. Grants from this appropriation were initially managed by DMVA, then transferred to the Department of Drug and Alcohol Programs (DDAP) and we are proud to see that this appropriation has been returned to DMVA in the SFY 17-18 budget. Success in this program spans several years and two community partners; Treatment Trends, Inc of Allentown PA and New Vitae Wellness and Recovery. Both organizations located in Eastern Pennsylvania. Treatment Trends discontinued their participation in 2015 and the bulk of services has been provided by New Vitae Wellness and Recovery. New Vitae has allowed us to provide services to the neediest of our SMV&F by providing services to those who do not have health insurance and otherwise would not qualify for treatment through the Veterans Administration. Many of the patients we refer to New Vitae meet the criteria to be considered homeless and are truly destitute. These are truly those veterans who fall into what is often referred to as “the Gap”; they have immediate needs and no way to afford the care that they deserve. New Vitae provides person-centered and trauma-informed care. New Vitae is also cleared by the FDA to administer Deep Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (DTMS) which has been found to be successful in treating depression. The services offered by New Vitae have been so successful and meaningful that DMVA plans to seek a partner who offers these services in the western part of the state.

### **Suicide Prevention PEER (SPPEER)**

DMVA and OMHSAS have partnered on several initiatives that include Mental Health First Aid (MHFA), ComPEER, QPR (Question, Persuade, Respond) and others. In March of 2017,

OMHSAS asked DMVA if we would accept the role of “Convener” and work to establish a committee on PEER Support with representation from both community and Veteran Peers and to formalize Suicide Prevention efforts within the commonwealth. During June and July of 2017, we worked together to develop a comprehensive implementation plan designed to address the abnormally high suicide rate of service members and veterans within the commonwealth.

In July of 2017, we presented our implementation plan before the Governor’s Advisory Council for Veterans Services (GAC-VS) and asked that the SPPEER Initiative we accepted as a Sub-Committee, thereby providing the structure, leadership and executive oversight necessary to ensure that this program was both publicly recognized and supported to facilitate success. In the months that followed, the SPPEER Committee of the GAC-VS formed subcommittees to address Community Awareness and Communications, Prevention and Treatment Services and Strategies and Training and Education. We are looking forward to the opportunity to make a positive difference in the lives of service members, veterans and their families who are facing debilitating emotional and behavioral health issues by offering them viable alternatives that keep them from considering self-harm.

#### **Veteran-Centric Fairweather Lodge Initiative**

Our partners at OMHSAS have been gracious in providing initial funding that allowed us to establish a total of 4 Veteran-Centric Fairweather Lodges. There are 2 lodges in Erie County, 1 in Venango, 1 in Cumberland/Perry with interest to develop additional lodges in Lackawanna County, York County, Lebanon County and Dauphin County. We see the Veteran-Centric Fairweather Lodge initiative as a preferred option for our homeless veterans, our transitioning incarcerated veterans and those veterans who may be experiencing debilitating behavioral health

challenges. This initiative is more than a housing first model; it is a pathway back to society where the veteran is both functional and productive. We truly believe that this initiative will help us help veterans in ways that cannot be measured in terms of money.

A lodge program creates a community culture that promotes interdependence, empowerment and social engagement. A typical lodge consists of 4 to 8 veterans who share a house, build upon social skills, make autonomous decisions and take responsibility for themselves and their future. Lodge members share responsibility for the house and its upkeep; they must work independently and together to be successful, relying on each other for the greater success of the group. Each lodge must develop an employment component either by selecting a business to operate and developing a business plan, or by securing community based employment or contracts.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, our State Veterans' Homes are the product of a benevolent vision to care for our most vulnerable veterans; those unable to secure or afford the care we now associate with this veteran benefit. The care and services provided by our State Veterans' Homes and their staff are similar, and yet markedly different, in terms of delivery, length of stay and the predominately male population.

It is imperative that we invest in our veteran programs. We must care for the vulnerable, identify and outreach all veterans through the registry. We are committed to providing education, awareness, and access to veterans benefits, programs and services throughout the commonwealth. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to serve the commonwealth's veterans. I am honored to advocate for all of those who have served our commonwealth and nation. We are prepared to answer your questions.