



Easter Seals

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WRITTEN STATEMENT

**KATY BEH NEAS
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, GOVERNMENT RELATIONS
EASTER SEALS INC.**

**BEFORE THE
HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON INSURANCE,
HOUSING AND COMMUNITY OPPORTUNITY**

REGARDING

**HOUSING FOR HEROES: EXAMINING
HOW FEDERAL PROGRAMS CAN BETTER SERVE VETERANS**

SEPTEMBER 14, 2012

Chairwoman Biggert, Ranking Member Gutierrez and members of this subcommittee, Easter Seals thanks you for holding this hearing on ways the federal government can help address veterans' homelessness. We appreciate the opportunity to share our idea for improving the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF) Program, an existing federal program that is instrumental in helping homeless and at-risk veterans and their families establish stable housing. Easter Seals recommends that the VA expand the SSVF Program allocation criteria to allow national nonprofits, with active and experienced local chapters or affiliates, to apply for regional or national grants within available SSVF funds. By modifying this criteria, the VA will allow grantees to demonstrate service efficiency, to model best practices and to enhance implementation oversight.

Easter Seals is a leading national provider of community-based services for veterans, people with disabilities and their families. Through our national network of 73 affiliates, 550 service locations and 24,000 staff, Easter Seals provides veterans, military families and others with local, person-centered services, including transition, housing, employment, caregiving, respite, assistive technology, child care and medical rehabilitation. Easter Seals has forged partnerships with several federal agencies to provide community-based services to veterans and military families. Most recently, the VA contracted with Easter Seals and our partners to provide training for the VA's Caregiver Training Program and the Homeless Veterans Supportive Employment Program. Easter Seals believe that no veteran should suffer from a lack of access to or understanding of how to navigate housing and reintegration services.

Background on the SSVF Program

Easter Seals applauds Congress for its commitment to end veterans' homelessness. With the help of new federal programs and resources, the veterans' homeless population continues to decline. One of the programs helping to provide homeless and low-income veterans with the supports and tools they need to succeed is the VA's Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF) Program. Congress created SSVF in 2008 through the Veterans' Mental Health and Other Care Improvement Act (P.L. 110-387) to assist homeless and at-risk veteran families by providing local access to supportive services, including outreach, case management, and assistance in obtaining VA and other benefits such as health care services, transportation, housing counseling and transportation services. Congress designed the SSVF Program to leverage the expertise and capacity of the existing social services network of community providers. In the legislation, Congress identified "*private nonprofit organizations*" or "*a consumer cooperative*" as the only entities eligible to provide the supportive services to eligible veterans and their families. In addition, Congress intended that grantees have demonstrated "*evidence of the experience*" and "*managerial capacity*" in providing supportive services to very low-income veteran families. Congress understood the importance of the VA and qualified community providers working together to effectively address the needs of homeless and low-income veterans. Through new legislation (H.R. 1627) signed into law in August, Congress increased the SSVF authorization to \$300 million in fiscal year (FY) 2013, a \$200 million increase over the FY 2012 authorized and funded level.

Implementation of the SSVF Program in FY 2011 and FY 2012

Congress gave much of the authority to implement SSVF to the VA Secretary, including the authority "*to establish intervals of payment for the administration of such grants and establish a maximum amount to be awarded, in accordance with the services being provided and their duration.*" Using this legislative authority to "*establish intervals of payment for the administration of such grants and establish a maximum amount to be awarded,*" the VA established the following allocation criteria for FY 2011 and FY 2012 SSVF grants:

- “1. Each grant cannot exceed \$1 million per year.*
- 2. The total amount of supportive services grant funds awarded to a grantee (via one or multiple awards) cannot exceed \$1 million per state per year.*
- 3. The total amount of supportive services grant funds awarded to a grantee (via multiple awards) cannot exceed \$3 million nationwide per year.”*

The VA has completed two SSVF grant competitions using the above allocation criteria. In FY 2011, the VA awarded 85 SSVF grant awards totaling \$60 million. In FY 2012, the VA awarded 83 renewal grants and 68 new SSVF grants totaling \$100 million. FY 2012 grants ranged from \$150,000 to \$1 million. The VA recently requested letters of intent by September 28, 2012 from nonprofit organizations interested in applying for SSVF grants under the FY 2013 competition. The VA currently manages 151 separate SSVF grants. In some cases, multiple affiliates or chapters of national organizations are current grantees or subgrantees on FY 2011 or FY 2012 SSVF grants. Under the existing SSVF guidelines, local and state chapters or affiliates of national organizations can separately apply for and win SSVF grants. However, these separate grants do not necessarily benefit from service delivery expertise and managerial capacity of their national organizations.

Administrative Efficiencies leveraged in Other Federal Programs

Several federal programs, including the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) at the U.S. Department of Labor and the Youth Mentoring Grant Program at the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), utilize local, multi-state and national grant awards to help accomplish the programs’ objectives. For example, DOJ has divided the youth mentoring funds appropriated by Congress into separate National Mentoring Program and Local Mentoring Program grant competitions. DOJ benefits from the diversity and mix of the local and national grantees to help implement youth mentoring activities and youth development programming throughout the United States in the most cost-effective and efficient manner. DOL also values from its combination of state and national awards for SCSEP. Easter Seals Inc. operates SCSEP (which provides job training for low-income individuals, including veterans, over 55) in eight states across the country by providing local service through nine separate community-based Easter Seals affiliates. As a national grantee, Easter Seals Inc. holds each of the participating Easter Seals affiliates accountable for service delivery and outcomes. In addition, Easter Seals Inc. provides participating Easter Seals affiliate staff with specialized training and consultation on best practices to improve the quality and effectiveness of our service. The VA could also benefit from the service delivery expertise and managerial capacity that national organizations, like Easter Seals and others, could provide through regional or national grants.

Opportunities to Leverage National Nonprofit Organization Capacity and Expertise in FY 2013

Easter Seals applauds the VA for its implementation of the SSVF Program. Homeless veterans in several dozen communities across the country are now receiving critical supportive services through SSVF that are helping the veteran and their family transition into stable housing. However with SSVF Program funding expected to triple to \$300 million in FY 2013, the VA has a real opportunity to expand the scope of the SSVF Program in FY 2013 to tap into the expertise and effectiveness of national organizations. Easter Seals recommends that the SSVF Program be expanded to allow both local and national grants within FY 2013 funds appropriated by Congress. Our proposal also has the full support of the Vietnam Veterans of America.

Because this improvement can be changed administratively and does not require congressional action, Easter Seals has shared our proposal with VA officials and are hopeful that the VA will modify the SSVF Program allocation criteria in time for the FY 2013 grant cycle. However, we welcome support from Congress and this

subcommittee to help improve the already effective SSVF Program. While tremendous progress has been made to significantly decrease the homeless veterans' population, new service delivery strategies should be examined and implemented to meet the goal of ending veterans homelessness by 2015 and to prepare for the one million active-duty personnel expected to return to civilian life over the next five years. Thank you for the opportunity to share with this subcommittee our recommendation for improving the VA's Supportive Services for Veterans Families Program.



Vietnam Veterans of America

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A Not-For-Profit Veterans Service Organization Chartered by the United States Congress

September 6, 2012

Katy Beh Neas
Senior Vice President, Government Relations
Easter Seals
1425 K Street, NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20005

Dear Katy,

We at Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) are pleased to support Easter Seals' proposal to modify the allocation guidelines for the Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF) Program to allow qualified, national nonprofits with active and experienced local chapters or affiliates to apply for and win regional or national grants within fiscal year (FY) 2013 SSVF funds.

VVA strongly supports the SSVF Program, which provides housing stability to homeless and at-risk Veteran families through community-based supportive services. VVA endorsed the legislation that created SSVF in 2008 and has closely followed the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) implementation of the program. Vietnam Veterans of California, Inc. successfully operates two SSVF grants serving Veteran families in California and Northern Nevada. SSVF has already brought much advantage to Veterans in communities across the country.

VVA agrees with Easter Seals that the VA would benefit by using some of the FY 2013 SSVF funds to award both local and national grants. Current VA SSVF guidelines preclude a national nonprofit with qualified local affiliates or chapters from securing a single grant that would operate in multiple service areas. National grants to qualified organizations could help the VA to improve service delivery, enhance program management, streamline reporting and increase program outcomes. VVA believes the minor program change proposed by Easter Seals would help to support the VA's goal of ending Veterans' homelessness by 2015.

Katy Beh Neas
Senior Vice President, Government Relations
Easter Seals
September 6, 2012

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Thank you for the opportunity to comment on your SSVF Program proposal. VVA lends our support in helping Easter Seals to achieve this technical fix in time for the FY 2013 SSVF Program grant cycle.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "John Rowan", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

John Rowan
National President