

**Statement of Edward Quill
Chief Administrative Officer, Volunteers of America of Florida**

**Submitted to the
U.S. House of Representatives
Financial Services Committee**

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Thank you for the invitation to testify today and for all you do to assist our nation's veterans. Volunteers of America of Florida is a statewide 501 (c) (3) non-profit, faith-based human services organization operating in Florida for 98 years. We are an affiliate of Volunteers of America, a national charitable organization with headquarters in the Washington, DC area, in existence for 116 years, serving more than two and a half million people in over 400 communities in 46 states and Puerto Rico.

Volunteers of America of Florida provides housing and essential services to vulnerable Floridians including individuals, families and veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, senior citizens with limited financial resources striving to maintain an independent lifestyle, and individuals with disabilities. With a continuum of services and strong community support, Volunteers of America delivers comprehensive solutions to the complex challenges facing Florida communities. Currently, we serve more than 5,500 of our most vulnerable through community-based initiatives, and 87 programs in 22 cities and Puerto Rico. We have a strong presence in urban centers such as Jacksonville, Tampa, Orlando and Miami. We are equally responsive to Floridians struggling in our rural communities and we are proud to be a resourceful partner in more than 30 rural counties.

Our long term service to veterans is predicated on solid partnerships and common goals to bridge veterans back into their community of choice. As a provider, Volunteers of America of Florida appreciates the dedication and resources to make this bridge; the funding partners required to deliver comprehensive solutions; the opportunities community partners to collaborate to reintegrate our veterans; and the tireless efforts to provide successful programs as a strategic gateway for veterans to reclaim their position in our communities. We have acquired the capacity to operate statewide, develop a continuum of housing options and array of support services, and have applied diligence in allocating limited resources responsibly. We appreciate the efforts of the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans to advocate for veterans' needs. The VA

healthcare for homeless veteran's services has helped to deliver the necessary the housing and supportive services. Their support has been valuable as we continue to forge solutions that benefit our veterans, their families and the communities they call home.

Florida is projected to have the largest veteran population in the nation by 2020. Consistently, Volunteers of America of Florida has taken action to address the complex housing and service needs of veterans. We are one of the largest providers of the Veterans Affairs Grant and Per Diem transitional housing program in Florida. We have an acute awareness of the issues faced by our returning men and women who have served our country. Based on more a decade of intensive service to veterans, the rest of my testimony will sharpen the focus of the challenges ahead for us to continue to lead communities in effectively care for the needs of our veterans.

Housing stability. Homelessness among Florida veterans has decreased from 17% to 13% over the past three years. This is due in great measure to Homeless Veterans Grant and Per Diem program. This program recognizes the need to give veterans stable housing and supportive services as a pathway to community reintegration. More recently, the HUD/VASH program has also contributed to decrease the number of homeless veterans in Florida. We also recognize the many HUD programs that assist our veterans and individuals struggling with disabilities and financial limitations. The HUD Section 811, Section 202, Supportive Housing Program, and Neighborhood Stabilization Program have enabled us to contribute to develop affordable housing choices. We are grateful to the Florida Department of Veterans Affairs. In 2010, they recommended to the Florida Housing Finance Corporation that we serve as a special needs coordinator for the "LINK Program". This program requires for profit developers to set aside a portion of housing units for individuals at or below 60% of the median average income. We are also appreciative of The Home Depot Foundation and their generous support to assist our veterans with home repairs so they may stay in their homes. We have also stood up to expand our transitional services to veterans over the past three years during the uncertain economic conditions. Our mission driven employees sacrificed personal gain so we could develop housing for our veterans. The long-term solution is to overcome the restrictions and limitations of conventional financing and burdensome mortgages so housing development may continue.

There are major impediments to creating the estimated 7,000 beds needed to house our homeless veterans in Florida. The Grant and Per Diem program is part of the solution. However, there is a need for funding for supportive housing that realizes the needs of our recently returning veterans and the implications for care based on their complex health care issues. The readjustment difficulties of our veterans require stable housing as a platform for the delivery of health care. We must increase veterans' access to a range of housing choices based on their needs. Additional funding for supportive housing

is a priority to assure that our veterans receive the highest quality of care in our communities. We fully support the need for the Grant and Per Diem program, and related initiatives to place dignified housing for veterans where it belongs – the residential community of their choice. With Florida’s rise to the first position as home to our nation’s veterans, we will continue to work in collaboration with partners who embrace the evidence. Supportive housing is an essential building block for our veterans and their families. Federal programs need to spend limited funds wisely without the requirement of a local cash match. Faith-based and community partners can develop housing as a stabilizing platform for veteran recovery and resilience.

Supportive Services. The invisible wound of our current wars is making it hard for our veterans to adjust and reclaim their position in our communities. Traumatic brain injuries, post traumatic stress injuries, severe mood swings, substance abuse, depression, loss of family support, and isolation are among the challenges faced everyday by our heroes suffering from combat exposure. The impact is also felt by the veterans’ families. There is a long road that lies ahead and the best solutions must be delivered. Once the veteran is in secure housing, it is time to provide the supportive services. These services are driven by the goals of the veterans and the needs of their families. Supportive services progressively enable each veteran to succeed in optimizing his or her strengths. A plan is set so each veteran is supported, encouraged, and accompanied to achieve a healthy lifestyle. Fortunately, the VA is there to provide hospitals, clinics and increasingly sophisticated medical services. For our veterans requiring this level of care, we respect the expertise of the VA to deliver. However, for our veterans who can live in our communities and do not require inpatient care, community partners are critical.

We deliver supportive services to veterans with demonstrated results. We focus on the goals of the veteran, and the incremental steps up the ladder to these highly personalized goals. We build community-based alliances, know our community resources and operate with a high level of efficiency. Services to veterans can spring from their communities working in collaboration with the VA to advance veterans’ ability to reintegrate in our communities more efficiently, more compassionately. Future resources can be placed with community alliances that can provide direct behavioral health care services to veterans. This enables the VA to focus on medical care priorities as we provide the community based behavioral health care services to enable veterans to reclaim a productive role in our communities. We have seen the impact of our programs as veterans take employment offers worthy of their talents, unify with their families, and purchase a home. Programs like Grant and Per Diem, supportive housing initiatives, and contracting supportive services to community providers are all elements of veterans’ successful future.

My final point is to share our purpose and demonstrate the role of community in housing and supportive services for our veterans

Purpose and community. We want veterans to have access to housing that maximizes their independence and strengthens their family. We want our veterans to reclaim their positions in our communities and have the full benefit of the resources our communities offer. We want veterans to effortlessly navigate through the benefits they may rightly claim, the opportunities for retraining, the quality of medical care our VA hospitals provide, and we want them to experience wellness, stability and growth. Our purpose is to advance each veteran in accord with the housing and health goals he or she has selected. We organize community partners, build partners, and know how to navigate so we may guide others responsibly to community resources.

We ask you to support our efforts on behalf of every veteran and our fellow community-based providers. We need resources to continue to develop stable housing for our veterans – they need both transitional and permanent homes in our communities. We want to serve as a community linkage and a supportive services provider so veterans can be served in our communities. In this economic climate, the difficulty in securing a local match makes expansion of services extremely difficult.

On behalf of every veteran we have served, our fellow community providers, our public and private partners, we trust our ability to bridge our heroes into our communities. When we embrace common goals to serve and support those in need, when we deliver nationally recognized, high quality processes in housing and health service program, when we continue to ask for the resources needed to house and serve our veterans, we will continue to create innovative solutions to revitalized lives, neighborhoods, communities, and our nation.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my experiences and views on the issues impacting our veterans and our communities. I appreciate your time. In closing, I send a thanks to all our men and women who have served to protect our communities.

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