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Participation to Commission to Strengthen and Align the Services Provided to Maine's Veterans
Round Table Discussion.

First I would like to thank House Chairman Jared Golden for inviting me to talk about the Homeless Veterans issues in the state. My experiences come from being involved with the VA Homeless Veterans Network Group (VAHVNG) for the past 9 years and participation in the York County MMCN.

Included in this document is the Maine Housing Annual Point in Time Survey – 2015 data and the US HUD Point in Time Count Methodology Guide. The definition for homeless as stated in the PIT Survey data is, as stated, the US-HUD definition. Please note that individuals who are couch surfing (going from one friend house to another) are not included in this definition. Also is included an article about the Utah efforts to end homelessness in their state.

For many years the Maine PIT Survey was conducted in Portland and Bangor. The rest of the state didn't participate in the survey. About 7 years ago Amy Marcotte, the team leader of the Sanford Vet Center, called Togus to arrange assistance for two Homeless Veterans. She was told that there aren't any Homeless Veterans in York County. Her response was, "Please tell these two Veterans in front of me that they are not homeless. Shortly after this communication the York County MMCN was formed. Three important events were on the top priority for the group. 1: The first Harvest of Resources Fair was created to bring the local non-profit corporations together. 2: A Job Fair was created from the funds raised for the resource fair. 3: The Point in Time survey was performed. The Harvest of Resources Fair has been put on a non-annual calendar because it was not attracting new Veterans seeking assistance. The Job Fair has been passed to the DOL Resource Center in Springvale with the assistance of the YCMMCN. The Point in Time Survey has been performed each year for the past 5 years.

There was little guidance in the PIT survey so the YCMMCN started writing its own guide. It was fine-tuned each year and shared with other groups looking to participate around the state. Tri-County Mental Health in Lewiston spearheaded the L/AMMCN and started performing the PIT Survey in Androscoggin, Oxford and Franklin counties. About three years ago, a representative from the Community Action Agency for Hancock and Washington Counties attended the VA Homeless Veterans Stand-Down and became involved in the VAHVNG. They started to perform the PIT Survey in Washington and Hancock counties. They also held outreach events in both counties to assist any homeless Veterans. This past year they had TV coverage of the upcoming event that drew information about homeless encampments. The information was from a professor at the UM-Machias. The volunteers were able to locate some individuals living

in unsuitable housing but due to the depth of the snow and the snow storm during that day, they were not able to locate the encampment. These homeless people were not counted. In Sanford, we were notified of two encampments with a reported 40 individuals but they could not be located for the same reasons.

This year, January 2015, the state Continuum of Care (CoC) severely limited the methodology for counting our homeless. We were only allowed to count from dusk to dawn. With this limitation the count numbers dropped by 66. That is 5.5%. This brings up the question of, “Are there less homeless people or did we not have the opportunity to find and document them?”

The YCMMCN has questioned the statewide numbers because we know that all the numbers we submitted were not accepted. For some reason the state believes the numbers do not reflect actual homeless individuals. “Why?” is a question for the parties that are responsible to receive the information.

If you look at the PIT Survey data, you see several parts of the state have 0 homeless. If you look at the MMCN testimony from Chaplain Gibson from last week, you can see areas that have 0 homeless also do not have a MMCN presence. This makes one think, are there no homeless or is there no one counting in those county?

In an organization there is a responsibility to maintain membership. It is easy to maintain 50% or 80% of the members it is difficult to keep 95% or 100%. I would like to relate that to the counting of homeless. We have been able to count the people staying in shelters, living on the streets, located under easily accessible places under bridges. We now have the difficult task of finding those that are deep in the woods trying to live a difficult life or that are in unsuitable housing hoping no one will condemn their home and cause them to live a harsher life. These people have given up on society and don't expect anyone will help them. They deserve our assistance and perseverance to locate them and help them live a better life.

The VA has stated on several occasions that it takes a village to resolve the Homeless Veterans problem. They are turning to the non-profit corporation to assist in a solution. The VA is unable to solve the problems for several reasons and here are two, 1: There is not enough funding given to the VA to solve the problem. 2: There aren't enough affordable housing units to solve the problem. Even with a section 8 housing voucher, the apartments are not affordable for the Veterans. Some Veterans are not eligible for VA benefits due to their period of service. If they are eligible, the funds are low. A single Veteran on a non-service connected pension receives \$12,868 a year. This is \$1,072 per month. If an apartment could be found with a section 8 voucher there is little money left for all the other items needed to survive. If they also qualify for Social Security the VA funds are reduced. The \$12,868 is the maximum income the VA will guarantee.

There are problem facing our homeless population but there are also issues for our homeless Veterans because there are several definition of a Veteran. To try to resolve this confusion we try to ask, "Have you served in the Armed Forces?"

Yesterday there was a bond question about affordable housing for the elderly/senior citizens. We need another bond to build affordable housing for our homeless. Not just the Veteran population but every homeless person in Maine.

Thank you for allowing me to participate in this process. I look forward to continue this process as long as it is needed.