

**TESTIMONY OF PHILIP F. MANGANO
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**BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

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Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Evans and Members of the Committee, I bring you good news. The initiative and work which all of you invested in revitalizing the Interagency Council on Homelessness has had the desired performance outcome. In March, President Bush appointed me as the fifth Executive Director of the Council. And on March 15 of this year I was sworn in by Secretary Mel Martinez, the Chairman of the Council.

The commitment of this Committee, I believe, was instrumental in revitalizing the Council. Chairman Smith, I have been especially encouraged and inspired by your unwavering commitment to all veterans and especially to the plight of those veterans who have fallen into homelessness. Your avowed commitment to end chronic homelessness among veterans in the next decade is a serious charge to the work of the Council and is resonant with the President's call to end chronic homelessness in this country.

The Administration's revitalization of the Interagency Council on Homelessness is consistent with this Committee's intuition and initiative regarding the reactivation of the Council as a means to insure further collaboration among federal departments and agencies.

I am honored to report to you that Section 11 of PL 107-95, which called for meetings of the Council to be held minimally annually, has been implemented. On July 18 of this year, the revitalized Council had its inaugural meeting at the White House. This meeting was the first meeting of the Council in more than six years.

While early in the history of the revitalized Council, the meeting was scheduled to reconfirm the continuing commitment of the federal government to all of our neighbors who are at risk of, or who are, experiencing homelessness. We scheduled the meeting in July to coincide with the fifteenth anniversary of the signing into law of the McKinney Homeless Assistance Act in 1987. That legislation now known as the McKinney -Vento Act is the cornerstone of the targeted federal response to homelessness.

With the support of Secretary Card the meeting took place, as mentioned, at the White House. One observer, who has attended every one of the dozen Council meetings spanning the fifteen years, indicated that the July 18 meeting was the

highest-ranking meeting in the history of the Council. All eighteen of the Council members were represented and several other agencies sent observers.

In the meeting, one of the first activities of Chairman Martinez was the introduction of Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Principi who in his opening remarks confirmed his commitment to ending chronic homelessness for veterans. Along with Secretary Martinez and HHS Secretary Tommy Thompson, he joined in the announcement of a preliminary \$35 million joint effort between HUD, HHS, and the VA targeted to those experiencing chronic homelessness. This unique and innovative collaboration of three Federal departments on behalf of homeless people is a significant step towards creating a template for future joint collaboration and funding. The agencies have engaged in preliminary discussions of a NOFA for this collaboration which would permit applicants to respond to one announcement of funding from multiple federal agencies and thereby tap into a combined pool of resources from these agencies that covers the housing and supportive service needs of chronically homeless people.

There were other initiatives announced at the historic Council meeting including:

- A Re-entry Initiative targeted to ex-prisoners returning to communities. A total of eight federal agencies led by the Departments of Justice and Labor participated in this collaborative effort to ensure that those leaving prison all across our country would have an appropriate reintegration trajectory on release, including a strong link to employment opportunities. Just as veterans would be a focus of the joint HUD, HHS and VA effort on targeting chronic homelessness, there is no question that incarcerated veterans will benefit from this re-entry effort to insure appropriate treatment, jobs and housing.
- The Department of Education announced that the President's signature of the NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND Act would help ensure a liaison for homeless children in every school district in America. The work of the liaison is to coordinate resources for homeless children to promote educational parity and long term prevention for another at risk generation.
- The Department of Labor announced new efforts, including Incarcerated Veteran Transition Demonstrations and a Job Corps/Foster Care Initiative, to make its resources more accessible to homeless veterans, ex-offenders, disabled people and age outs from the foster care system.
- The Department of Health and Human Services announced that the National Institutes of Health would be releasing its first targeted program announcement for research on the homelessness issue in over a decade. This collaborative undertaking among the National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, the National Institute on Drug Abuse and the National Institute on Mental Health will support "health services research

projects designed to increase understanding of the efficiency, effectiveness and diffusion of services provided to homeless persons with alcohol, drug abuse and/or mental disorders.” Such an intra-agency supported research effort will provide the basis of further policy development related to those experiencing chronic homelessness.

- And in another collaborative effort between HUD, HHS, and the VA, technical assistance was offered to every state to assist in making mainstream services - whether substance abuse treatment, mental health resources, Medicaid, or housing - more available to those experiencing chronic homelessness. These “ Policy Academies” will be offered in the next year with the objective of increasing federal, state and local collaboration in reducing and ending chronic homelessness.

In the spirit of the inter-departmental collaboration so evident in the meeting, Secretary Principi spoke about the Multifamily Housing Loan Guarantees and sought a broader partnership, especially with HUD, in the implementation of this important resource.

Through these interactions and collaborations, the work of the Council moved beyond symbolic gesture to substantive reality. And that new reality is informed by policy considerations and emphases that have become the building blocks of a new federal approach.

When research tells us that the number of homeless people in the country is greater than it was 10 years ago; and when we read in our newspapers that the number of homeless families and the number of homeless individuals on the streets and so-called “encampments” is on the rise; and when we discover that there are now 40,000 programs for homeless people in our country, we are ready to acknowledge that we need change.

Change based on a new diagnosis that leads to a new prescription and a much needed cure. To an outside observer, it might appear that our performance outcomes for the past decade are increased homeless people, increased street people, and increased programs.

The reality is that all over this country the people who work in these programs serving homeless people, making personal sacrifices for a moral cause, are frustrated. Frustrated by the burgeoning numbers, frustrated by punitive and criminalization approaches in some places, frustrated that their sacrifice and dedication has not had more visible outcomes of reducing homelessness and we are frustrated that our attempts to honor the lives of those who have served their country are often strategically inadequate. We need to address these frustrations with a renewed commitment and strategy.

In the Council we are developing the new federal **strategy** based on the following policy objectives:

1. First, **preventing homelessness**.

For too long we have, in the words of former HUD Secretary Cisneros, been “bailing a leaking boat.” We move some out the back door of homeless programs, beyond homelessness, only to see many more come in the front door to fill every emptied bed. We’ve been doing this bailing for twenty years now. Our backs ache. And so do our hearts.

This Administration has prioritized prevention as a policy cornerstone in building the new federal strategy. Prevention that focuses on more appropriate outcomes for people leaving mainstream services, places of incarceration and, service to our country. People coming out of substance abuse programs, mental health treatment, prisons, foster care, or the military service should not fall into homelessness. We need to do a better job at every level of government to promote more appropriate discharge planning when people are leaving systems. We need to break the “bailing” cycle. Prevention of homelessness needs to be a declared and contracted performance measure for all systems.

2. Second, **eliminating chronic homelessness**. Now, I’m from Boston. So I’m an abolitionist. It’s in the gene pool. We see a moral wrong and we want to right it. We see a social evil, we want to cure it. Is there any manifestation of homelessness more tragic or more visible than the chronic homelessness experienced by those who are suffering from mental illness, addiction, or physical disability?

The President called for the ending of this disgrace in the next ten years. And again, I know that you, Mr. Chairman, and this Committee have enlisted in this initiative on behalf of veterans experiencing chronic homelessness.

As Secretary Martinez rightly pointed out in the Council meeting, the research tells us that this 10 to 20 percent of the homeless population utilizes more than half of all resources. Dennis Culhane, a leading researcher on these issues from the University of Pennsylvania, confirmed this data and analysis at our Council meeting.

While some believe that this initiative seems undoable, the new research and new housing technologies tell us the opposite. Across the country from New York to San Francisco, and places in between, innovators have developed **housing first** efforts that rely on aggressive, clinically based street outreach combined with scattered site and congregate housing options. This service/housing strategy is working to create supportive housing units with customized service packages that support tenancies

and end homelessness for our most vulnerable neighbors. Once stability is achieved, many of those previously experiencing chronic homelessness request a next step – a job. And Department of Labor programs are increasingly responsive to that request. All together, these programs are securing the performance outcomes that we seek – ending chronic homelessness.

3. Third, **collaborating in interagency, intra-agency and intergovernmental approaches with the private sector and faith communities as partners.** The work of the Council is to facilitate coordination among federal departments and agencies. But it doesn't take long to understand that the collaboration sometimes needs to start at an intra-agency level and needs to extend to where "the action is," in the states and communities of America. And that the resources, physical and spiritual, of the private sector and faith communities need to be harnessed to governmental efforts.
4. Fourth, **accessing the mainstream resources.** A GAO report a few years ago indicated that the 14 targeted homeless programs of the federal government scattered among 7 agencies, valued at \$2.1 billion, needed to be supplemented by federal mainstream resources available to poor and homeless people valued at hundreds of billions of dollars. Whether, as the Report indicated, those resources are substance abuse and mental health treatment services, Medicaid, TANF, housing, or veterans' benefits—all of them are available and need to be accessed. That's why the case management resources in your bill make sense. Case management should open the door to access. The Policy Academies I mentioned earlier, in which VA is a crucial partner, are important in opening up state resources to homeless people.
5. Fifth, and finally, **innovating new solutions based on performance outcomes.** The President has called for the elimination of chronic homelessness. "Elimination." Abolition. These are the appropriate outcomes we are seeking for homelessness. No veteran should be homeless. No American should be homeless.

Our efforts are not to **manage** the crisis, or **maintenance** the effort, or to **accommodate** the wrong. Our work is to bring this disgrace to an end.

For twenty years we have been reticent to apply performance outcomes to the homelessness effort. Perhaps we thought we could not achieve our goal. But in the last few years, as cities and states are embracing 10-year goals to end homelessness in their jurisdictions, we are encouraged to come back to our true mission and embrace the notion of performance outcomes.

On the streets of our cities, in the hidden homelessness of our suburbs and rural communities, in the parks that adjoin resort communities, in the shelters that accommodate overflow, we need to adopt a new standard of expectation.

We want to see **visible, measurable, quantifiable** change in the numbers and circumstances of homeless people. Not through punitive, criminalization approaches that only hide the problem, but through innovative, entrepreneurial initiatives that solve the problem.

The new research and new technologies are already out there all across America. Those who would say it's not possible or that we don't know how to do it or that we've tried everything and nothing works - well, they just need to get out more. In New York City, Boston, Philadelphia, Miami, Indianapolis, Columbus, St. Louis, Denver, and Los Angeles, innovative approaches are being incubated and replicated. Discharge planning strategies, clinically based aggressive outreach, housing first strategies - all are working. And most importantly, these efforts have performance outcomes of decreasing street populations, decreasing inappropriate discharges, increasing housing and, increasing hope.

The work of this Committee has been foundational in creating these new initiatives. Your collective work on behalf of homeless veterans has had a broader impact on homelessness policy. The five themes I've just sounded as the cornerstones of a new federal approach are familiar to the members of this Committee. Through your Chairman and enactment of PL 107-95, the Homeless Veterans Comprehensive Assistance Act, you have called directly or indirectly for prevention, elimination of chronic homelessness, collaboration among governmental agencies and the private and faith sectors, and innovation tied to performance outcomes.

You have made the connection between treatment, case management and housing assistance which is the focus of the innovative housing first approach. You have called for accountability, the basis of performance outcomes. You have ensured that employment, the basis of self-sufficiency, is a focus. You have emphasized housing as the appropriate antidote for homelessness, without ignoring support services. You added prevention and outreach to put a tourniquet on the hemorrhaging. You created an Advisory Committee to ensure inductive input and accountability. You established coordinators at regional offices who will now have the opportunity to collaborate more broadly with homelessness-oriented coordinators at other federal agencies.

And you affirmed the work of the Interagency Council on Homelessness as a vehicle to accomplish the objectives of this Committee. Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I want to assure you that the work of the Council is exactly that: to work with you to end the disgrace of homelessness for our

neighbors who are veterans. We'll focus first on those experiencing chronic homelessness and we'll keep working until our job is finished, our mission, accomplished.

Thank you.