

Veterans Committee Meeting Minutes - 3/15

In attendance: Daniel Bahls, Community Legal Aid, Steve Connor, Veterans Services, Craig Deraway, Soldier's On, Shaundell Diaz, Three County CoC, Gumersindo Gomez, Bi-Lingual Veterans Center, Jay Levy, Eliot Services, Pamela Schwartz, Network, Uri Strauss, Community Legal Aid, Kate Sweetster-Owens, HUD-VASH, Robert Vigneault, Veterans Services, Sue White, HUD-VASH

Discussion of Possibility of VA Leeds Site Closing

The VA just issued [a report](#) identifying the Leeds VA site as one of 3 VA sites across the nation that may close. HOWEVER, it's a very preliminary report with the stated fact that this process will involve input from all stakeholders, via a commission, any decisions must be presented to Congress, signed by the President, and will take roughly 10 years to execute if it is executed. And while this is being considered, the VA is clear that current investments in infrastructure at the site will continue (because they can't afford not to). So while the prospect is inherently alarming, it is premature to be totally alarmed, according to our VA folks on the call.

There was discussion about the vital role this center plays in serving rural veterans; that without it, so many would go without care.

More resources to combat homelessness:

There was discussion about the issue of aging veterans; how that is gaining more attention both locally and nationwide. The VA is starting a pilot to fund services and positions to help keep frail and elderly veterans in their homes.

The VA is also investing additional funds into homeless services - more staff positions, more project based voucher sites.

HUD-VASH update:

Collaboration continues to grow between GPD and HUD-VASH; more veterans are getting housed. The VA policy shift to allow non-health care eligible veterans to be eligible for HUD VASH has had a huge positive impact. The remaining challenge is if non-VA eligible is income resources since not eligible for pension or other benefits. But more connection to community services is happening.

Issue noted with need for more case management via ServiceNet or Soldier On (depending on which org is case managing) for veterans housed through continuum vouchers. Steve and Sue will discuss this further.

Soldiers' Home legislation: Legislative reform pending in House and Senate. Group recommended supporting the Senate version as it creates greater accountability.

Network updates:

The Network released its [FY23 budget priorities](#) to Western MA legislators last week, as well as an update on its [legislative priorities](#). Stay tuned for advocacy opportunities via the blog (subscribe here).

BE SURE TO REGISTER for the Network's annual event on **May 6** - a great gathering of leaders and partners. [Register here.](#)

Next meeting date: Tuesday, May 24, 10 am - 11 am