

THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' SERVICES
600 WASHINGTON STREET, 7th Floor, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02111
TEL: (617) 210-5480 FAX: (617) 210-5755 TTY: (617) 210-5883
WWW.MASS.GOV/VETERANS

DEVAL L. PATRICK
GOVERNOR

TIMOTHY P. MURRAY
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

JOHN W. POLANOWICZ
SECRETARY, EOHHS

COLEMAN NEE
SECRETARY, DVS

October 24, 2014

Department of Veterans' Services Advisory Letter #14-001

Subject: Guidance Concerning M.G.L. Chapter 115 benefits administration and Supportive Services for Veteran Families Program

To all VSOs,

This notice serves as guidance for how VSOs should coordinate Chapter 115 benefits as well as resources available through the Supportive Services for Veteran Families Program (SSVF) in order to maximize the efficiency and efficacy of the Commonwealth's mission to assist veterans. It is our challenge and duty as professionals that serve our veterans to get this coordination right.

It is the mission of both the VSO and the SSVF provider to maximize the benefit of all resources to the veteran without confusion or redundancy. This requires early engagement and regular communication between and among VSOs and SSVF providers. This veteran centered, no wrong door approach, will afford the parties the capacity to be flexible and make timely investments to insure a seamless continuum of support. Activities like joint intake and screening of veterans and regular case conferencing if appropriate should be encouraged. In addition, VSOs and SSVF providers should avail themselves of information regarding benefits awarded to specific veterans through their ETO/HMIS systems and Web-VSMIS.

Background Information

During the last several years, the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has implemented several housing programs and invested an unprecedented amount of resources in its national effort to end homelessness among veterans. One of the VA's most important and impactful new initiatives is the SSVF Program. SSVF offers flexible funding and supportive services to provide short term intervention and housing resources to prevent homelessness among veterans and to rapidly re-house those who have fallen into homelessness. Over the last three years, the SSVF Program has expanded significantly throughout the Commonwealth with increased levels of funding for a number of community-based services providers. The VA expects that the SSVF Program will continue to play a crucial role in ending homelessness among veterans and act as the foundation of its community-based homeless prevention and rapid re-housing system over the long-term.



Guidance to Veterans Service Officers (VSOs)

Communities are required to provide the First/Last and Security Deposit to veterans and families in need of immediate housing assistance. **Therefore, VSOs must accept applications for emergency housing assistance from veterans and their families, and must make an immediate determination regarding eligibility for and receipt of those benefits.**

“Emergency housing assistance,” for purposes of this directive, refers to the payment of First/Last and Security Deposit for veterans and families.

While the VA has designed the SSVF Program to provide intensive, short term supportive services and temporary financial assistance to veterans and their families to quickly address their housing needs, this does not mean that a veteran must apply for or exhaust SSVF benefits before the VSO processes an application for Chapter 115 benefits.

In terms of strategy, it is important for VSOs to refer Veterans and Veteran families experiencing literal homelessness directly to SSVF for rapid re-housing assistance because rapid re-housing is a core SSVF service. In other instances, VSOs can play a critical role in supporting households especially where items may not be eligible under SSVF funding like last month’s rent. Overall, communication is key to ensure that Veterans and their families receive the support needed to obtain and maintain permanent housing.

DVS will process all reimbursements at 100% for First/Last and Security Deposit payments authorized by DVS starting in October 2014.

VSOs should work with the SSVF resource in their region or community to ensure that veterans and families are not applying for or receiving duplicative payments as outlined above.

Current List of SSVF Provider Organizations

The VA has selected an experienced, qualified array of community-based non-profit organizations to provide crisis response services for homeless at and risk veteran families throughout the Commonwealth. At present these organizations include:

1. New England Center for Homeless Veterans
17 Court Streets, Boston, MA 02108
Andrew McCawley, Executive Director – 617-371-1732
Marta Budu Arthur, Program Director-(617) 371-1706
Intake 1-800-365-3665
Serving Suffolk, Essex, Middlesex, Norfolk and Bristol counties
2. Soldier On
421 Main Street, Building 6 Leeds, MA 01053
John Downing, Executive Director – 413-582-3059
Mike Hagmaier, Grant/Contract Manager, 413-822-8240
Intake 1-866-406-8449
Serving Berkshire, Hamden, Hampshire, and Franklin counties

3. Veterans Inc.
69 Grove St., Worcester, MA 01605
Denis Leary, Executive Director – 508-791-1213
Christiana Ellis-Morris, Regional Manager--508-845-6176 x 329
Intake 1-800-482-2565
Serving CT, MA, ME, RI, NH, VT

4. Veterans Northeast Outreach Center
65 Cedar Hill, Haverhill, MA 01830
John Ratka, Executive Director – 978-521-9668
Jason Gilbert, Program Manager—978-891-4949
Intake 978-372-3626
Serving Essex and Middlesex counties

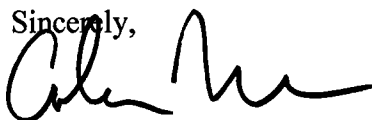
5. Volunteers of America of Massachusetts
441 Centre St., Jamaica Plain, MA 02130
Henry Goodhue, Chief Operating Officer – 339-236-0674
Franchesca Casado, Program Director-617-360-1744
Serving Norfolk, Plymouth and Suffolk Counties
In addition serving Barnstable, Bristol and Balance of State

6. Lynn Housing Authority
117 Franklin St., Lynn, MA 01902
Harry MacCabe, Program Director-781-581-8606
Erin Ford Sheehan, Program Manager-(781) 581-8609
Intake-781-581-8644
Serving Essex and Middlesex counties

7. Operation Stand Down – RI
1010 Hartford, Ave., Rhode Island 02919
Erik Wallin, Executive Director--401-383-4730
John McDonough, Program Director--401-383-4730
Intake 401-383-4730
Serving Bristol County, MA

Other providers may be added as determined by the VA.

Sincerely,



Coleman Nee