

Committee for veterans and legal affairs 10-28-2015 at 1430

CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

MY NAME IS JERRY DEWITT; I LIVE IN NEW GLOUCESTER, MAINE. CELL NUMBER 5760376, EMAIL JDEWITT@TCMHS.ORG

I HAVE BEEN SERVING OUR MILITARY FAMILIES AND VETERANS SINCE 1984 WITH THE AMERICAN RED CROSS SMF&V PROGRAM. I SERVED IN TIKRIT IRAQ IN 2008 AS THE ASSISTANT STATION MANAGER. I AM THE PAST NATIONAL CHAIRMAN FOR VETERANS AFFAIRS VOLUNTARY SERVICES. VAVS... RETIRED ARMY 28 YEARS, 1ST SGT. 405TH COMBAT SUPPORT HOSPITAL IN SACO, ME... EMT SINCE 1976 TO 2009 MILITARY TRAINED PRESENTLY LICENSED IN MAINE AS A NURSE, SOCIAL WORKER AND CADC SUBSTANCE ABUSE COUNSELOR.

AFTER SERVING 3 YEARS AS A VISTA VOLUNTEER DOING VETERANS OUTREACH , I AM EMPLOYED WITH TRI COUNTY MENTAL HEALTH UNDER A GRANT FROM BANK OF AMERICA , DORI TAYLOR FOUNDATION.

I AM A MEMBER OF ALL THE VETERANS SERVICE ORGANIZATIONS, SERVING AS CHAIRMAN OF THE L/A VETERANS COUNCIL, CHAIRMAN OF THE L/A CBOC COMMITTEE WITH ROY DRIVER FROM THE VET CENTER. COMMANDER DISTRICT 3 AMERICAN LEGION, VICE COMMANDER OF AMVETS DEPARTMENT OF MAINE. CO CHAIR OF THE L/A MMCN WITH ALIE SMITH.

OUR OUTREACH WORK AT TCMHS IS PRIMARILY AS AN ADVOCATE FOR VETERANS AND FAMILIES THAT NEED HELP NAVIGATING THE VA SYSTEM. WE SIGN VETS UP FOR VA HEALTH CARE, WE SEE ISSUES RELATING TO TRANSPORTATION, SUICIDE, RECORDS RETRIVAL, EMPLOYMENT, HOMELESSNESS, MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE COUNSELING, VET COURT/JAIL DIVERSION, COMP AND PEN, SOCIAL SECURITY, DISCHARGE UP GRADE, UTILITIES AND RENT AND FOOD(HUNGAR). MOST OF THE WORK IS ACCOMPLISHED BY REFERRAL AND PARTNERING WITH OTHER AGENCIES THAT PROVIDE THE SERVICES NEEDED. A GOOD AMOUNT OF THE WORK IS WITH THE VA, VSO'S , THE VET CET CENTERS AND THE CBOC. WE DO HAVE OVER 200 VETERANS AND FAMILY MEMBERS IN TREATMENT AT TCMHS.

TRANSPORTATION IS AN ISSUE WE WORK WITH DAILY. THE DAV VAN ONLY GOES TO CERTAIN TOWNS ON CERTAIN DAYS AND DOES NOT MEET THE NEEDS FOR MOST VETERANS TO GET TO THEIR APPOINTMENTS. THERE IS TO FEW VOLUNTEER DRIVERS SOME WHAT DUE TO THE LENGHTLY CERTIFICATION PROCESS. ONCE WE BUY THE VANS AND GIVE THEM TO THE VA WE (DAV) HAVE NO CONTROL OVER HOW THEY ARE USED. THE VANS DO NOT GO TO CBOC'S THEY GO BYE THEM. THE VANS WILL NOT STOP AT THE TURNPIKE EXITS TO PICK UP VETS, THE VETS HAVE TO GO TO TOGUS FIRST TO BE TRANSPORTED TO BOSTON AND POINTS SOUTH.

SOME POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO THIS IS TO HAVE THE DAV COMMANDER WORK ON THE ISSUE OF USE WITH THE VA. STREAM LINE THE VOLUNTEER PROCESS, GET MORE VOLUNTEER DRIVERS FROM VSO'S, PRE POSITION VANS WHERE NEEDED, BUT I THINK MOST IMPORTANT IS TO PARTNER WITH THE COMMUNITY PROVIDERS LIKE COMMUNITY CONCEPTS AND WESTERN MAINE TRANSPORTATION. OF COURSE FUNDING IS AN ISSUE, HOW IS THE TRIP PAID FOR? MEDICARE

ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH AND MEDICAL CARE;

AGAIN TRANSPORTATION IS AN ISSUE AS WELL AS GETTING AN APPOINTMENT IN A TIMELY FASHION. THE CHOICE CARD NEEDS TO BE USED, RIGHT NOW THE VA IS NOT MAKING REFERRALS AS MUCH AS I THINK IS NEEDED. THE COMMUNITY STANDS READY TO SERVE THESE VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES IF THE VA WOULD OPEN THE PROCESS. THE MAINE ASSOCIATION OF MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE PROVIDERS HAVE QUALIFIED MEMBERS IN OUR TOWNS THAT CAN SERVE VETS AND FAMILIES RIGHT WHERE THEY LIVE. THE VA NEEDS TO HIRE MORE STAFF MEDICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND RETAIN THEM. MORE OFTEN THAN NOT A VETERAN WILL SEE MORE THAN ONE PROVIDER AT THE VA DUE TO ATTRITION. ACCORDING TO THE VA OWN FIGURES THERE ARE OVER 30,000 VETS IN MAINE ELIGIBLE FOR VA HEALTH CARE AND NEED TO REGISTER. USING THE GOVERNORS PROCLAMATION THAT FEBRUARY 25TH IS MAINE VETERANS STAND UP AND BE COUNTED DAY, ALL VSO SHOULD BE OPEN THAT DAY TO RECRUIT MEMBERS AND SIGN VETS UP FOR VA HEALTH CARE.

WAIT TIME FOR CLAIMS; IN THE PAST WE HAVE DEFERRED TO THE VA, MAINE NEEDS TO TAKE THE BALL BACK AND RUN WITH IT BY HAVING MORE VSO'S LIKE JERRY SMITH.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS; VA NEEDS TO OFFER TRAINING TO ALL VSO'S AT THE POST LEVEL SO MORE PEOPLE ARE DOING CLAIMS CORRECTLY AND COMPLETE. THE STATE OF MAINE NEEDS TO BETTER FUND THE MAINE VETERANS SERVICES. UNFORTUNATELY THE MORE CLAIMS WE FILE THE SLOWER THE SYSTEM GETS. TOGUS SHOULD NOT BE SEND MAINE CLIMS TO OTHER VISN AND TOGUS SHOULD NOT BE DOING THE WORK FOR OTHER VISN CLAIMS. OUR VSO SHOULD TRAIN EVERY POST SERVICE OFFICER. WE (VSO) NEED TO DO A BETTER JOB OF EXPLAINING OUR BENEFITS TO OUR MEMBERS SO THEY KNOW WHAT TO ASK FOR. EVERY MAINE VETERANS HSOULD SIGN UP FOR VA HEALTH CARE AT POINT OF DISCHARGE.

HOMELESSNESS HAD 3 JUST THIS WEEK

WE NEED MORE HUD VASH VOUCHERS AND MAINE STATE HOUSING VOUCHERS. WE NEED HOUSING STOCK THAT WILL PASS THE HUD HOME INSPECTION. WE NEED LANDLORDS THAT WILL WORK WITH US TO MEET THE NEEDS OF VETERANS AND FAMILIES ON THE DEPOSIT AND FIRST MONTHS RENT.

SOME SOLUTIONS; THE PIT SURVEY, WORK WITH ME STATE HOUSING FOR VETERANS AND MENTAL HEALTH VOUCHERS ,SHELTER PLUS CARE. THE HOMELESS NEEDS JOBS AND BUDGET TRAINING. RICH KOWALSKI AT MAINE JOB SERVICE IS GREAT AND VERY SUCCESSFUL, HE SHOULD TRAIN HIS PEERS. WE CAN'T PUT PEOPLE IN HOUSING THEY CAN'T SUSTAIN. WE NEED TO WORK WITH THE MAINE PUC TO BE MORE FLEXIBLE WITH LOW INCOME PEOPLE. MAYBE DEVELOP A LOW INCOME RATE FOR ELECTRICITY BASED ON THE POVERTY LEVEL. WE

CONTINUE TO EDUCATE THE PUBLIC AND PROVIDERS THRU THE LOCAL MMCN'C WITH MILITARY 101 COURSES SO EVERY BODY WORKING WITH VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES ARE MILIARY CULTURE COMPETANT.

EMPLOYMENT JOBS 100 VETS IN 100 JOBS IN 100 DAYS WHAT A CONCEPT GO TEAM.

THE MILITARY TRAINS MEDICS THAT ARE NATIONAL REGISTERED EMTS, WE NEED EMT AND FIRE FIGHTERS IN OUR COMMUNITIES LETS MAKE IT EASY FOR THE VET TO TRANSITION TO CIVILIAN LIFE BY RECONGIZING HIS MILIARY TRAINING ANY WHERE POSSIBLE. WE SHOULD PARTNER WITH GOOD WILL TO PROVIDE VETS WITH CLOTHES APPROPRIATE FOR JOB SEARCH.

THE VA HOLDS THE PURSE STRINGS; WE CAN HELP THEM AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL PROVIDE SERVICES TO MAINES VETERANS AND FAMILY MEMBERS AS THE NATIONAL DIRECTIVE REFLECTS. VISN ONE NEEDS TO PARTNER WITH MAINE PROVIDERS. WORKING TOGETHER WITH ME VETS SERVICES AND COMMUNITY PROVIDERS AND THE VSO'S WE CAN SERVE OUR VETERANS AS WELL AS THEY HAVE SERVED US. WE AT TRI COUNTY STAND SIDE BY SIDE WITH ANY AND ALL THAT WANT TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE. SHOW THE WAY OR HELP US LEAD

RESPECTFULLY SYBMITTED

YOURS IN SERVICE

JERRY DEWITT