

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 25, 2017

The Honorable David Shulkin
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary Shulkin:

I am writing concerning the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs decision to not renew grants for several residential homeless programs in Wisconsin. This action will lead to the displacement of at least 54 veterans who currently reside and receive services at these sites, and the loss of 73 transitional housing spaces throughout Wisconsin. I am requesting that the VA work with the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs to obtain permanent housing for veterans currently in these programs, restore capacity in the state and ensure veterans who will need these services in the future are not harmed.

Since 1995, veterans in Wisconsin have successfully benefited from the Homelessness Providers Grant and Per Diem (GPD) Program. Veterans have used this program to transition to permanent housing and begin rebuilding their lives. Federal and state programs aimed at ending veteran's homelessness have evolved since 1995 and I support the VA's effort to respond to updated best practices for homeless services. However, I am concerned about the implementation of these changes and the impact they will have on Wisconsin veterans, especially those in rural areas of our state.

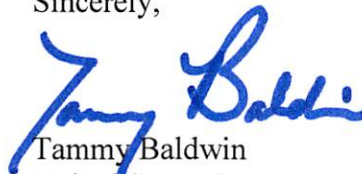
On December 23, 2016, the VA published a Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) for the Grant and Per Diem Program, which required all grant recipients to reapply and utilize one of five prioritized transitional housing models. It is my understanding that the facilities in Wisconsin that lost funding all used the lowest ranked transitional housing model. While I understand the desire to utilize more effective transitional housing models, the VA did not consider the statewide impact that defunding several programs would have on the availability of transitional housing resources. Almost all of Wisconsin's rural GPD recipients lost funding; reducing a quarter of all available GPD funded transitional housing in the state. In order to address this drastic reduction, I am specifically requesting the following actions by the VA:

- Expedite any VA benefit claims that the 56 veterans currently enrolled may have before the Veterans Benefits Administration. Quickly resolving their claims will lead to a steady source of income and assist these veterans in finding permanent housing.
- Increase the number of HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) vouchers available to Wisconsin by 25 percent.

- Increase Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) Program funding for Wisconsin, especially in rural areas, to offset the decrease in GDP funding.
- Direct the Madison VAMC, Milwaukee VAMC and Tomah VAMC to increase the number of dedicated transitional housing spaces they have available to temporarily increase capacity in the state.
- Allow defunded entities to reapply for the GDP using a priority transitional housing model or give them preference in the next available round of funding.
- Lastly, the GDP Program was funded at \$226.1 million in fiscal year 2017. Please provide me with the aggregate number of funding awards from the most recent funding round and what, if any, amount remains unspent.

However well-intentioned the changes to the GDP Program are, the fact remains that the loss of funding puts veterans in Wisconsin at risk. Our veterans have served and sacrificed for our country, and I believe it is unacceptable that decisions affecting our veterans who are most in-need are made without considering the impact to our entire state's veterans community. I look forward to working with you to bring about a quick resolution to this issue that honors and cares for our veterans.

Sincerely,



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

Cc: Duane Honeycutt
Director
Milwaukee Regional Benefit Office

Renee Oshinski
Network Director
VISN 12 – VA Great Lakes Health Care System

Daniel J. Zimmerman
Secretary
Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs