

Rep. Thomas P. Murt
Remarks to Appropriations Committee
27 FEB 2014

Mr. Chairman, I am here today on behalf of all our veterans across the Commonwealth, to speak to you regarding the proposed reduction in funding for our veterans' homes in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. As a veteran of the war in Iraq, and as a member of the Advisory Council at the Delaware Valley Veterans Home in Northeast Philadelphia, this line item is near and dear to my heart, as it is to thousands of families across our Commonwealth.

Mr. Chairman, our men and women who have fought in World War II, Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, and in other conflicts around the world, deserve the very best care that Pennsylvania can offer, we owe them that much.

There are six state veterans' homes across the Commonwealth. These facilities provide long term care to 1,554 veterans and / or their spouses. An additional 2,160 skilled nursing beds exist.

Mr. Chairman, for the fiscal year 2014-2015, cost saving initiatives will continue to be in effect at our veterans' homes. These measures ensure that standardization is in effect across all the system to deliver comparable care regardless of which of the six homes at which a veteran may reside. We desire to afford our veterans' the highest level and quality of care. These efforts have had great success. Per diem rates have been lowered to our veterans by \$6 a day. Mr. Chairman, in this economic climate where healthcare costs are rising significantly, this is a remarkable accomplishment in itself.

One of the factors that make our veterans' homes so attractive, is that in addition to high quality, professional, and compassionate care, our veterans are required to pay what they can afford. In addition, all of our veterans' homes are now in full licensure status and promptly address any issues as noted by the Department of Public Welfare, U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs, and the Department of Health.

Mr. Chairman, the Bureau of Veterans Homes has kept up with the transformations in healthcare that we have witnessed over the past two decades. The Bureau of Veterans Homes has updated their practices in handling long-term care and fostering a more home-like environment. They have been phasing-out archaic institutional approaches to care. Modernization has also been fostered at the dining service level at all six facilities. \$133 million dollars has been allocated over the past five years to make these modifications possible, \$62 million dollars of that funding was from the Federal Department of Veterans Affairs which accounted for 46% of the funding provided.

Mr. Chairman, the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs has also moved on an initiative to leverage dollars from the federal government, by enrolling their residents in Medicare Part D for pharmaceuticals in our facilities. Two pilot projects to achieve this are currently underway with expansions to all veteran's homes expected by the end of this year. The quality of our state veterans' homes is also well above the national average, as manifested in part by the extensive waiting list of those trying to be admitted to our facilities across the state.

Mr. Chairman, if we hope to keep our promise to our veterans, like the promise they took to defend this great nation, we must not cut funding to our veterans' homes. Our veterans deserve the best care possible here in Pennsylvania. Our veteran population, like every other population is living longer. As an example, men and women who served in Vietnam and who were exposed to Agent Orange and other chemicals, and are now making their way into our Veterans' homes and are suffering from Parkinson's Disease, Hodgkin's lymphoma, prostate cancer, lung cancer, colon cancer, soft tissue sarcoma and liver cancer.

We are a Commonwealth that proudly boasts almost one million veterans living within our borders. To keep the level of care in these homes as one of the best in the nation, we must increase our support of this mission of caring for our veterans.

The Bureau of Veterans Homes has shown they can reduce costs and bring better care to our veterans. Mr. Chairman, I respectfully and humbly request on behalf of Pennsylvania's veterans, that we find a way to increase investment in the mission of these critically important veterans' homes.

Thank you for your consideration of my request.