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THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

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SENATE BILL

No. 561 Session of  
2019

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INTRODUCED BY BLAKE, FONTANA, K. WARD, BREWSTER, SANTARSIERO,  
FARNESE, HUGHES, YAW, BOSCOLA, BROWNE, YUDICHAK, TARTAGLIONE  
AND HAYWOOD, APRIL 25, 2019

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REFERRED TO URBAN AFFAIRS AND HOUSING, APRIL 25, 2019

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AN ACT

1 Establishing the Veterans' Housing Assistance Program; and  
2 making appropriations.

3 The General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
4 hereby enacts as follows:

5 Section 1. Short title.

6 This act shall be known and may be cited as the Preventing  
7 Veterans' Homelessness Act.

8 Section 2. Definitions.

9 The following words and phrases when used in this act shall  
10 have the meanings given to them in this section unless the  
11 context clearly indicates otherwise:

12 "Agency." The Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency.

13 "Costs associated with rental." The total costs of rent and  
14 utilities, per month, for a residential rental unit.

15 "Department." The Department of Military and Veterans  
16 Affairs of the Commonwealth.

17 "Financial assistance." The rental voucher established under

1 section 5(a).

2 "Homeless veteran." A veteran identified and determined by  
3 the department to be homeless or at imminent risk of becoming  
4 homeless according to guidelines established by the department.

5 "Housing ombudsman." An individual designated by the agency  
6 to carry out the duties and responsibilities under section 3(c)  
7 (1).

8 "Program." The Veterans' Housing Assistance Program  
9 established under section 3.

10 "Veteran." An individual who served on active duty in the  
11 United States Armed Forces, including any of the following:

12 (1) A reservist or member of the National Guard who was  
13 discharged or released from the service under honorable  
14 conditions.

15 (2) A reservist or member of the National Guard who  
16 completed an initial term of enlistment or qualifying period  
17 of service.

18 (3) A reservist or member of the National Guard who was  
19 disabled in the line of duty during training.

20 Section 3. Veterans' Housing Assistance Program.

21 (a) Establishment.--The Veterans' Housing Assistance Program  
22 is established and shall be administered by the agency in  
23 coordination with the department.

24 (b) Duties of department.--The department shall do all of  
25 the following:

26 (1) Implement a program to identify homeless veterans  
27 for purposes of enrolling them in the program.

28 (2) Coordinate with the agency to ensure that homeless  
29 veterans are provided the opportunity to receive assistance  
30 from the agency's housing ombudsman or financial assistance

1 from the agency.

2 (3) Establish guidelines to assist with the  
3 implementation of this act.

4 (c) Duties of agency.--The agency shall do all of the  
5 following:

6 (1) Establish a housing ombudsman or contract with a  
7 nonprofit organization to provide housing location,  
8 relocation and stabilization services to homeless veterans,  
9 including negotiating lease agreements with public agencies  
10 or private landlords on behalf of a homeless veteran.

11 (2) Provide or contract with a third party to provide  
12 credit counseling services to homeless veterans to resolve  
13 personal credit issues that may have resulted in a negative  
14 credit report.

15 (3) Award financial assistance to eligible homeless  
16 veterans determined to be in need of financial assistance to  
17 obtain housing.

18 (4) Establish guidelines to assist with the  
19 implementation of this act.

20 Section 4. Enrollment.

21 (a) Procedure.--A veteran may enroll in the program by  
22 filing an application with the department or the agency. A  
23 veteran shall be eligible for enrollment if the veteran meets  
24 all of the following:

25 (1) Is homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless  
26 as defined in departmental guidelines established under  
27 section 3(b).

28 (2) Cannot obtain adequate housing without the  
29 assistance of the department and the agency.

30 (b) Conditions.--The department may require an eligible

1 veteran to engage in or complete any of the following activities  
2 as a condition of acceptance into the program:

3 (1) Mental health counseling, including treatment and  
4 recovery support.

5 (2) Substance abuse treatment and recovery support,  
6 including counseling, treatment planning, recovery coaching  
7 and relapse prevention.

8 (3) Integrated, coordinated treatment for co-occurring  
9 disorders.

10 (4) Health education, including referrals for medical  
11 and dental care.

12 (5) Services or activities designed to promote self-  
13 sufficiency, including:

14 (i) Job training.

15 (ii) Assistance in seeking employment.

16 (iii) Job placement services, including job  
17 readiness, literacy and skills training.

18 (iv) Credit counseling services and remediation.

19 (v) Benefits advocacy.

20 (vi) Money management.

21 (vii) Parental skills and family support programs.

22 (viii) Other self-help programs deemed necessary by  
23 the department.

24 Section 5. Financial assistance.

25 (a) Rental voucher.--The agency may award financial  
26 assistance under section 3(c) to a veteran deemed to be in need  
27 of the assistance based on the veteran's personal finances.  
28 Financial assistance shall be awarded to an eligible veteran in  
29 the form of a housing rental voucher payable to the lessor named  
30 in a leasing document executed between the veteran and a

1 landlord.

2 (b) Amount.--The monthly amount of the rental voucher may  
3 not exceed the costs associated with the rental or \$1,000,  
4 whichever is less.

5 (c) Term.--Financial assistance shall be awarded to a  
6 veteran for the term of the lease executed between the veteran  
7 and the lessor or for 12 months from the effective date of the  
8 lease, whichever is less.

9 Section 6. Renewal.

10 A veteran receiving financial assistance under section 5 may  
11 seek an extension of the term of the financial assistance by  
12 filing an application with the department. In determining  
13 whether to extend the term of the financial assistance, the  
14 department shall consider the following concerning the veteran:

15 (1) Employment status.

16 (2) Personal finances.

17 (3) Compliance with conditions of enrollment placed on  
18 the veteran under section 4(b).

19 Section 7. Cooperation.

20 The department and the agency may cooperate with the United  
21 States Department of Veterans Affairs or local public housing  
22 authorities to carry out the provisions of this act. At the  
23 discretion of the department and the agency, the cooperation may  
24 include coordinating the program with an existing Federal  
25 program that provides funding for housing for homeless veterans,  
26 including the United States Department of Housing and Urban  
27 Development-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing Program.

28 Section 8. Appropriations.

29 (a) Agency.--The sum of \$12,500,000 is appropriated from the  
30 General Fund to the agency for the period of July 1, 2019, to

1 June 30, 2020, for purposes of providing financial assistance to  
2 homeless veterans and carrying out the agency's responsibilities  
3 under this act. Not more than \$500,000 of the funds appropriated  
4 under this section may be used for administrative costs incurred  
5 by the agency to carry out this act.

6 (b) Department.--The sum of \$500,000 is appropriated from  
7 the General Fund to the department for the period of July 1,  
8 2019, to June 30, 2020, for purposes of carrying out the  
9 department's responsibilities under this act.

10 Section 9. Effective date.

11 This act shall take effect in 60 days.