
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

HOUSE BILL

No. 688 Session of
2021

INTRODUCED BY HILL-EVANS, FITZGERALD, MADDEN, FREEMAN, SANCHEZ,
SCHLOSSBERG, D. WILLIAMS, KINSEY, HOHENSTEIN, ZABEL,
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DALEY, INNAMORATO, SAINATO, KINKEAD, BULLOCK, SHUSTERMAN,
GUENST, HOWARD AND DELLOSO, FEBRUARY 26, 2021

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS AND EMERGENCY
PREPAREDNESS, FEBRUARY 26, 2021

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

1 Affairs of the Commonwealth.

2 "Financial assistance." The rental voucher established under
3 section 5(a).

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

7 "Housing ombudsman." An individual designated by the agency
8 to carry out the duties and responsibilities under section 3(c)
9 (1).

10 "Program." The Veterans' Housing Assistance Program
11 established under section 3.

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

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

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

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

22 Section 3. Veterans' Housing Assistance Program.

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

26 (b) Duties of department.--The department shall do all of
27 the following:

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

30 (2) Coordinate with the agency to ensure that homeless

1 veterans are provided the opportunity to receive assistance
2 from the agency's housing ombudsman or financial assistance
3 from the agency.

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

6 (c) Duties of agency.--The agency shall do all of the
7 following:

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

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

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

20 (4) Establish guidelines to assist with the
21 implementation of this act.

22 Section 4. Enrollment.

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

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

30 (2) Cannot obtain adequate housing without the

1 assistance of the department and the agency.

2 (b) Conditions.--The department may require an eligible
3 veteran to engage in or complete any of the following activities
4 as a condition of acceptance into the program:

5 (1) Mental health counseling, including treatment and
6 recovery support.

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

10 (3) Integrated, coordinated treatment for co-occurring
11 disorders.

12 (4) Health education, including referrals for medical
13 and dental care.

14 (5) Services or activities designed to promote self-
15 sufficiency, including:

16 (i) Job training.

17 (ii) Assistance in seeking employment.

18 (iii) Job placement services, including job
19 readiness, literacy and skills training.

20 (iv) Credit counseling services and remediation.

21 (v) Benefits advocacy.

22 (vi) Money management.

23 (vii) Parental skills and family support programs.

24 (viii) Other self-help programs deemed necessary by
25 the department.

26 Section 5. Financial assistance.

27 (a) Rental voucher.--The agency may award financial
28 assistance under section 3(c) to a veteran deemed to be in need
29 of the assistance based on the veteran's personal finances.

30 Financial assistance shall be awarded to an eligible veteran in

1 the form of a housing rental voucher payable to the lessor named
2 in a leasing document executed between the veteran and a
3 landlord.

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

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

11 Section 6. Renewal.

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

17 (1) Employment status.

18 (2) Personal finances.

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

21 Section 7. Cooperation.

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

30 Section 8. Appropriations.

1 (a) Agency.--The sum of \$12,500,000 is appropriated from the
2 General Fund to the agency for the period of July 1, 2020, to
3 June 30, 2021, for purposes of providing financial assistance to
4 homeless veterans and carrying out the agency's responsibilities
5 under this act. Not more than \$500,000 of the funds appropriated
6 under this section may be used for administrative costs incurred
7 by the agency to carry out this act.

8 (b) Department.--The sum of \$500,000 is appropriated from
9 the General Fund to the department for the period of July 1,
10 2020, to June 30, 2021, for purposes of carrying out the
11 department's responsibilities under this act.

12 Section 9. Effective date.

13 This act shall take effect in 60 days.