

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMPILATION OF PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Submitted to the Committee on Defense & Veterans' Affairs
For HB 2476

Compiled on: Monday, April 3, 2023 1:33 PM

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Hearing Date: April 3, 2023 12:00 PM

Harold Dougherty
Winkle Court Military Villafe
San Antonio, TX

I strongly suggest funding for this pilot project. These funds will be best leveraged to support Veterans in need of support after separation. Just small programs with easily managed budgets and metrics that matter as the way forward.

Richard Grady, Hon.
Collin County Veterans' Coalition
Plano, TX

Dear Representatives:

Collin County Veterans' Coalition is a collective of numerous non-profits and affiliated organizations. Those organizations' missions and purposes are to provide services and support to veterans within the county and the surrounding metroplex. As a coalition, we serve to help coordinate those activities and serve as a communications conduit between them and the public.

We are writing to register our support of HB2476, the adoption of a veterans' land bank program by the Texas State Affordable Housing Corporation (TSAHC).

The cost of housing is a critical issue across the United States and, especially, here in the north Texas region. Some military personnel, when leaving the service and earning the title "Veteran," enter the civilian workforce with lower than the average median income (AMI) of an area.

As examples, a junior non-commissioned officer (NCO) staff sergeant (E-6) with six years of experience earns in the service \$3,565.40 pretax. Housing and supplemental living allowances are then added to this base pay if they live off base or outside military supplied housing. The base pay equates to \$42,784.80 annually. Yet, even at the base pay, this service member could not afford paying rent of more than \$1,060.62 monthly (thirty percent of monthly salary). Those of the lower enlisted and junior NCO ranks earn less. When this service member leaves the service all this is lost.

This service member, now Veteran, finding civilian employment, may earn as a starting salary slightly more than what they earned while in the military. The AMI for Collin County is \$95,600. At \$42,784.80 the veteran is below the 50 percent AMI level. Thus, the need for affordable housing is critical.

While we support HB2476, we would suggest that holding onto vacant land for a period of ten years is a long time. Affordable housing is needed now, and we suggest changing the hold period to five years. (Sec. 2306.5622 (q)).

Thank you for your attention today and your service to the state.

Sincerely,

Richard Grady
Co-Founder, Collin County Veterans' Coalition
Plano, Texas

Cynthia Inkpen, Dr.
Self
San Antonio, TX

As a Veterans Advocate I am in full support of the approval and full implementation of House Bill 2476 for the purpose of acquiring, holding, and transferring unimproved real property under this section to provide affordable housing for veterans who are members of low-income households."

Mandi Coker
Self
San Antonio, TX

I fully support this bill and believe it will provide a great service to our under served veteran population. Providing affordable safe housing for these men and women makes a dramatic impact on their lives. I have worked with some of these organizations and seen first hand the gratitude and appreciation they have when receiving assistance. These housing developments provide the veteran the ability to not worry about how they will sleep safely, where they will be able to have basic hygiene needs met and if the people surrounding them are "brothers" or not. Many I have talked to said just knowing they were in a safe space allowed them to get rest they had been unable to get for years which exacerbates mental health issues and leads to further inability to obtain employment and take care of themselves. Servicing our nation's heroes through providing shelter and access to basic human needs is vital to ensuring these brave men and women are not forgotten and that no one is left behind

Virginia Simonson, LTC, US Army - Retired
Texas Council of Chapters, Military Officers Association of Texas and self, Volunteer Peer Specialist
FLOWER MOUND, TX

On behalf of myself and the members of the Texas Council of Chapters, Military Officers Association of America, I respectfully request that you favorably consider HB 2476 today.

If approved, this legislation would add a Veterans' component to the existing statewide land bank and land trust program. The current program assists local non-profit and governmental entities with the acquisition and redevelopment of distressed properties. The Texas Land Bank Program also partners with housing organizations to redevelop properties which are sold or donated to Texas State Affordable Housing Corporation (TSAHC). In addition, TSAHC helps local governments manage local land banks and plan for new land bank efforts.

Housing prices are getting more and more expensive in North Texas (where I live) and throughout the state, squeezing both renters and buyers. That puts a particular burden on Veterans, who sometimes come out of the military with little preparation or support for civilian life's challenges. Searching for a home, on top of challenges like physical injury and mental illness, can seem insurmountable to new Veterans previously accustomed to clarity and structure in their daily lives.

Although the rate of homelessness among Texas Veterans is lower than the rate in other states - like California and Florida - it will take proactive policy decisions to drive down the rate even further. A lack of affordable housing can also be a barrier for skilled Veteran workers to move to areas where they are in demand. And, although, it's not generally discussed in public meetings, there is wide-spread resistance to "affordable housing" developments in many areas of Texas, like mine. This type of resistance is sometimes less palpable when it applies to affordable Veterans housing.

I served with the Denton County Homeless Coalition (DCHC) for several years before the COVID epidemic and have direct experience with homelessness in general, and Veteran homelessness in particular. I continue to work regularly with homeless Veterans in my capacity as the Service Officer, VFW Post 5074 (Roanoke) and as a volunteer peer specialist with the Military Veteran Peer Network (Denton County). I have also spent countless hours working with several non-profits in an unsuccessful attempt to establish an affordable tiny house community in North Texas.

I have worked with dozens of formerly homeless Texas Veterans, who, with effective connections to a myriad of VA, state, and local problems, now have their own place to call home and be the type of productive citizens that they always aspired to be.

I believe that this bill, if passed, will play an important role in ending veterans' homelessness in Texas. Please report it favorably today.

Steven Price, Sgt
The VOICES of Our Veterans
San Antonio, TX
Veterans Committee Members,

“As a Veterans Advocate I am in full support of the approval and full implementation of House Bill 2476 for the purpose of acquiring, holding, and transferring unimproved real property under this section to provide affordable housing for veterans who are members of low-income households.”

Thank you,

Steven C. Price Sr.

On behalf of The VOICES of Our Veterans