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**LD 658, 'An Act To Provide Funding for 3 Veterans Services Officers in the Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services'
Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs**

March 15, 2021

Senator Luchini, Representative Caiazzo, and honorable members of the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee – my name is David Richmond, and I am the Director of the Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services. I am here today to testify neither for nor against LD 658.

The Bureau currently has designated positions for eight Veteran Service Officers; six in our field offices located in Caribou, Bangor, Augusta (Togus), Lewiston, Portland, and Springvale; and two traveling service officers who split the state regionally, North and South.

In addition to our claims VSOs, we also have one VSO who is designated as the Bureau's Homeless Veteran Coordinator. This current position is dedicated to assisting veterans who are homeless, or who are on the brink of homelessness. Over the past few years, the monthly rate of veteran homelessness in Maine has hovered around 100 veterans. This past year, that number has jumped to over 180. The effects of the pandemic have caused the spike, further stressing an already sparse housing stock.

While our homeless veteran team is small, we have been successful in partnering with community agencies to reach and service those in need. The Homeless Veterans Action Committee is made up of organizations across the state, including our bureau, working together to end veteran homelessness. The HVAC meets monthly to compare notes on the homeless veterans' we are collectively serving. The result of these meetings is the maintenance of the By Name List, a list shared within the committee to make sure that we have an updated status on the veterans we are tracking and a plan for their shelter.

In a recent example of collaboration, the BVS homeless coordination team hosted 4 mobile stand downs to bring both supplies and services to veterans. Those stand downs were held in Sanford, Portland, Lewiston and Bangor and participating veterans received services including connection to the VA and community organizations, emergency financial assistance, winter gear, a hot meal, and non-perishable food bags. These events were successful in large part due to our partner agencies: HVAC, Easterseals Maine, the American Legion, Maine Veterans in Need, Maine Vet Centers, Operation Brotherhood, the VA and others.

Our team also works closely with Easterseals Maine, the VA, and other community organizations to connect veterans with necessary case management, temporary housing, and housing vouchers. Our team, although small, works hard to provide the best service possible. We are proud of the partnerships we have fostered, as they are tremendously valuable assets to our veteran population.

As always, we look forward to working with the legislature on items that impact Maine veterans.

I thank you for taking the time to hear testimony on this important topic and would be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.

Respectfully,
David A. Richmond
Director, Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services