

Thank you, Chairman Hickman, and Representative Caiazzo for allowing me to testify in support of keeping the Caribou Veterans home operating. My name is James Gehring, Service Officer for the Aroostook Veterans Alliance. (AVA). AVA is a 501 © (3) organization serving the Veterans and their families in Aroostook County Maine. Our mission is twofold. First, we work to ensure that veterans and their families receive the benefits they have earned along with our program to transition homeless veterans into permanent housing. We can fully furnish and stock these apartments to begin a new chapter in their lives. One critical issue for the veteran population in Aroostook County is the need for nursing home care. The VA has generally set the criteria for admittance to nursing homes for veterans rated 70 % or greater for service-connected disabilities. In reviewing AVA's membership, 95% of our group is rated 100% P&T. All these veterans are Viet Nam era in their mid-seventies. It is our opinion that MVH has not projected the increase in demand that most likely is coming. While the veteran population is shrinking, the demand for medical care will increase. If the VA would lower the percentage to allow more veterans into nursing homes, there would be very few empty beds. If the Caribou facility is closed, veterans' families will be required to travel from two to five hours or longer to visit their relatives. While the veteran community is made up of different organizations we do stand together in support of keeping these homes open.