



PROVIDING AFFORDABLE HOUSING FOR OUR GARDEN STATE VETERANS

By State Senator Bob Smith D-17

November 11th marked the passage of another Veteran's Day. As we paused to commemorate and appreciate those who have given freely and tirelessly of themselves to protect our freedom we also should consider how we support the veterans. Military veterans sacrifice the comfort of their homesteads and families in exchange for the realities of war. Many of these brave men and women return home from deployment having missed application deadlines to apply for affordable housing opportunities that may have been available to them had they not been at war. According to the Center for American Progress, one in seven homeless people in America is a veteran. Nationwide, there are more than one million veterans at risk of becoming homeless, with tens of thousands currently without shelter.

The men and women who have served heroically in our nation's armed forces should not have to come back stateside to a situation where they do not have a roof over their head. After speaking with some of our veteran's years ago I was prompted to write legislation requiring the Council on Affordable Housing (COAH), in consultation with the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, to promulgate rules and regulations to provide a preference for veterans who qualify for affordable housing assistance and to hold harmless military personnel from any affordable housing application deadlines which may have lapsed during their period of deployment in active military service.



The legislation was embraced by my colleagues in the New Jersey legislature and secured bi-partisan support. Working together with the Senators and Assemblyman to combat the issue of rampant homelessness within the veterans' community, I shepherded this legislation through the NJ Legislature. It was unanimously approved in both the Senate and General Assembly and signed into law on January 28, 2013. New Jersey municipalities are encouraged to use this new tool as they go through the new judicial process mandated by the Supreme Court. Township attorneys should review P.L. 2013, c. 6 for guidance.

The law allows municipalities to enter into agreement with developers to provide preference to affordable rental housing for low and moderate income veterans of up to 50 percent of the available affordable housing units within new housing developments. This law is a big step to ensure that low and moderate income veterans will have access to the American Dream that they have fought so courageously for, including a home and establishing roots within a community.

Municipalities may have developers contact Terry Dearden, Legislative Liaison at The New Jersey Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (NJDMVA) to advise the department of available housing. She may be reached at (609) 530-6893. The Department also publishes the New Jersey Veterans and Benefits Guide which provides information on programs and services for our Veteran's here in the Garden State. The NJDVMA stand by their promise of "serving those who served" and this booklet is an

invaluable tool. The NJDVMA recognizes that too many veterans are unaware of all the federal and state program benefits, entitlements and services they have earned in defense of our great nation. The booklet is available online at www.nj.gov/military/veterans or by calling 1-888-8NJ-VETS (1-888-865-8387). NJDMAVA is the best resource for information of veterans in the State of New Jersey and can also be an excellent resource to the municipalities with housing for our veterans.