

Testimony on the Vermont Veterans Home:

My Name is Michelle Salvador. I am the Vice President of the Vermont State Employees Association and have been a state employee for 17 years. I am here today to advocate for the Vermont Veterans Home.

The Vets Home has been a part of Vermont's culture dating back to the Civil War. It serves Veterans and their spouses as well as parents who have lost children in the line of duty. Over the last ten years, it has been home to thousands of Veterans.

It is my understanding that there has been much talk this session about closing, privatizing or only partially funding the Vets Home. Any of these options will seriously hurt our state and especially devastate Bennington County's already struggling economy, to which the Vets Home has an impact of over 11 million dollars.

I have also heard it said that when contemplating VVH's closure, one reason behind that thought is the threat of CMS' (Center for Medicaid) funding loss. This is not a real threat and should not be considered as a reason to close the home. To do so, would be to ignore all of the work the staff has done over the last few years to prove to CMS, the State and even to the nation that the Vermont Veterans Home actually offers Best In Class care for its members. In fact, in May, Licensing & Protection was at the home with representatives of CMS and the facility was found in compliance "due to the hard work and dedication of our staff," said Melissa Jackson.

"They've been incredible, to see the growth in their ability to handle that pressure, I'm just very proud,"

The home has received recognition for its work and improvements. The Pinnacle surveys prove that VVH is in fact 'Fulfilling the Promise'. Anyone who has been to the Veterans Home can attest to this.

Highly skilled nursing staff travel as much as an hour and a half to work at the Veterans Home. Nurses are in high demand and they could choose to work closer to their homes, many times at higher pay, but instead they make the trip every day to be able to take care of veterans and also to be able to work in a unionized nursing home, which in these days is often times the only way caregivers can truly advocate for the best outcomes for their patients.

Were the Veterans Home to be privatized or its members uprooted and shipped to private nursing homes, their caregivers would not be able to fully advocate for them without the threat of losing their jobs- that is how it works in the healthcare world right now. In talking to staff about the consideration of closing VVH, their first response was not that they were afraid of losing their jobs...it was that they were

extremely concerned at what it would do to the veterans if they lost their home...some of whom have lived there since the 80s.

They told me of how even simple room changes can severely impact the health and quality of life of this vulnerable population. This is a staff whose dedication puts the "home" in Veterans Home.

I know that this is a very difficult year and you all have a very hard job of trying to balance the budget-nobody wants to be in your shoes right now- but PLEASE do not balance the budget on the backs of these veterans by taking their home away or taking their caregivers, who are often times the closest thing they have to family. It would be an absolute embarrassment to make Vermont the ONLY state in the ENTIRE nation that does not have a Veterans Home!

Respectfully,

Michelle Salvador