

PHFA Kathy A. Possinger Housing Policy Fellowship Narrative

Serving After Service: Addressing Transitional and Long-Term Housing Gaps for Pennsylvania's Veterans

❖ Issue and Significance

Pennsylvania is home to more than 700,000 veterans — one of the largest veteran populations in the nation. Yet across the Commonwealth, particularly in rural counties and deindustrialized towns, far too many veterans face severe barriers to housing stability. While state and federal programs offer support, there remains a critical disconnect between available resources and the lived experiences of veterans navigating the civilian housing system. Many find themselves caught in eligibility gaps, confronted by landlord stigma, unable to access transitional housing after discharge, or struggling with underlying health or substance use conditions that compound housing instability.

This project seeks to identify and address the persistent challenges that veterans in Pennsylvania face in accessing both short-term and long-term housing solutions. While national organizations such as the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and HUD administer robust housing support programs, their implementation on the ground often falls short of meeting veterans' nuanced needs — especially in rural areas where housing assistance is sparse, transportation is limited, and community reintegration services are scattered.

The research will explore how Pennsylvania's veteran population interfaces with housing systems across different regions and highlight opportunities for more effective coordination between federal, state, and local housing resources. It will also surface policy and program innovations that could close existing gaps — particularly for veterans who are not fully connected to VA benefits, who live in underserved communities, or who are navigating multiple transition points (e.g., discharge from military service, reentry from incarceration, or recovery from substance use).

As both a public housing professional and a logistics officer in the U.S. Army Reserves, I've seen firsthand how difficult it can be for even the most resilient veterans to find and maintain stable housing. This Fellowship offers an opportunity to elevate their stories, analyze systemic issues, and design actionable solutions to ensure that Pennsylvania honors its veterans not just in word, but in housing equity and access.

❖ Methods and Work Plan

This project will use a mixed-methods approach combining policy research, stakeholder interviews, and regional case studies. The methodology will include:

- Qualitative interviews with veterans in transitional housing, housing case managers, VA liaisons, and nonprofit service providers in five Pennsylvania counties, including both urban (e.g., Erie, Harrisburg) and rural (e.g., Clearfield, Union, Crawford) locations.
- Mapping of service networks and housing availability across veteran-specific programs (e.g., HUD-VASH, SSVF, GPD), and where they intersect or fail to intersect with broader

affordable housing systems such as PHFA programs, HOME-ARP, and county housing authorities.

- Policy analysis of VA and Commonwealth housing initiatives to identify barriers, eligibility mismatches, and missed coordination opportunities — especially for veterans with non-traditional discharge statuses, criminal backgrounds, or housing insecurity not captured in HUD's point-in-time counts.
- Review of innovative models from other states or localities — such as community land trusts, supportive housing pods, and veteran housing navigators — that could be adapted to the Pennsylvania context.

The project will be conducted over a 12-month period, beginning in January 2026 and concluding by January 2026 at the latest. It will be based primarily in central Pennsylvania, with field visits to selected communities across the state. I will dedicate 10–15 hours per week to the project outside of my state employment, using weekends, evenings, and scheduled leave time.

Fellowship funding will be used to support travel to interview sites, data visualization software, and the production of a final policy report and community briefings. The final output will synthesize research findings into targeted recommendations for PHFA, the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA), local housing authorities, and nonprofit organizations serving veterans.

❖ Final Product and Dissemination

The final deliverables of this project will include:

- A policy report (30–40 pages) summarizing the findings from interviews, fieldwork, and policy analysis. This report will include clear, actionable recommendations for state and local housing policymakers, as well as PHFA and DMVA.
- A regional case study brief that highlights conditions and innovations in 2–3 counties that exemplify either persistent barriers or promising models.
- A visual data dashboard or mapping tool (if feasible within the timeline) showing regional disparities in veteran housing access, transitional housing availability, and program utilization.
- A public-facing presentation summarizing the findings for PHFA's Board and stakeholders, and potentially for veterans' advocacy groups and regional housing summits.

These materials will be disseminated via PHFA's platform and made available to housing authorities, veterans service organizations, municipal governments, and legislative offices. A copy of the final report will also be provided to the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and shared with DCED.

Most importantly, the project will center the voices of veterans themselves — ensuring that their insights, frustrations, and hopes guide the policy discussion.