

March 13, 2025

Submitted by Marshall Smith, Veteran

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Senate Agriculture and Veterans Affairs Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in strong support of HB1504.

My name is Marshall Smith, and I am a veteran of the U.S. Navy. I served for ten years between active duty and the reserves. Thank you for taking the time to hear my statement in support of this bill and the Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program. I was asked to share my experience with SSVF, an organization that has been instrumental in helping me regain stability.

As a veteran and a single father, my transition from military service to civilian life was filled with challenges. After being discharged from the Navy, I struggled to find stability, constantly moving from job to job and place to place. I was never able to hold a job for more than a few months to a year, and I rarely stayed in one place for more than six months. At times, I found myself couch-surfing, but I avoided acknowledging that I was homeless because admitting it meant confronting the painful reality of my situation.

What made it even harder was that my son had to witness this instability and dysfunction. It broke my heart every time he asked, “Why aren’t we living in the same place as before?” or “Why can’t we do this activity? Why don’t we have the money for things?” There were moments when I had to bury my shame because I couldn’t provide the stability he deserved. My financial and housing situation often kept me from spending the quality time with him that he needed.

A few years ago, I finally told myself I have had enough. I reached out to the VA for help, and a counselor there gave me some much-needed tough love. He challenged me to seek mental health counseling because he could see I was struggling, even if I was not ready to admit it. Through that process, I was connected with SSVF and other resources that the VA offered.

This is where SSVF made a real difference in my life. The counselors at SSVF treated me with dignity and respect. They didn’t see me as someone stuck in a difficult situation, they saw a veteran determined to change his circumstances. I didn’t want to be defined by my struggles, I wanted to rebuild my life and SSVF gave me the support to do just that either through services or just taking the time to listen and empathize. They helped me to develop a plan to regain stability. SSVF provided me with critical support, including housing and financial assistance, to help me rebuild my foundation.

When I first started with SSVF, they helped me secure a deposit and the first month’s rent for the duplex I now call home—and have lived in for the past six years. The counselors worked closely with me to assess my financial situation. Just like my housing struggles, I had avoided facing my financial difficulties. They helped me create a budget, ensuring that I could manage my VA disability benefits and any additional income coming into my household.

SSVF’s support extended beyond just housing and finances. There was a time in college when my vehicle broke down, leaving me unable to get to class. SSVF stepped in, helped me get it repaired, and got me back on the road so I would not miss classes. Because of their help, I was able to graduate this past December with my degree.

Beyond financial and housing support, SSVF continued to check in on me. They asked, “Do you have food? Do you need anything?” They truly look out for veterans. One winter, a counselor reached out to see if I or any other veteran needed boots. When I first moved into my home, they made sure I had basic essentials like plates, cups, and silverware.

SSVF goes above and beyond to support veterans, providing resources to help us regain stability—whether through financial assistance, household necessities, or housing support. Their impact

extends far beyond just one aspect of our lives. During my check-ins, I never feel judged—only supported. Speaking of my counselor she has been nothing short of phenomenal. She ensures that veterans like me never feel forgotten. For these reasons, I strongly support this bill and urge you to continue funding SSVF. This program changes lives, and I am living proof of the impact it can have on veterans in need. This program has truly helped me become successful because of their support.

Thank you.