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Plaskett, Farrell Present \$300,000 Grant to Methodist Training and Outreach Center to Help Homeless Veterans and Those Facing Homelessness

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L2R: Chair Dwayne Benjamin, Danny Derima SSVF program director, Congresswoman Stacey Plaskett, Delegate's Office Field Rep. and wounded warrior Kandyia Rivera, Exec. Dir. of MTOC Erma C. Derima, CFO Oliver White, and VA Dir. Patrick D. Farrell By. VI CONSORTIUM

Delegate to Congress Stacey Plaskett alongside Patrick Farrell, director of the Office of Veterans Affairs, on Monday awarded the Methodist Training and Outreach Center Inc. (MTOC) a grant of \$300,000 to end Veteran homelessness. This is the MTOC'S 7th time being awarded the funds, which was granted by the U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs.

The grant will serve under the MTOC's Supportive Services for Veteran Families Program (SSVF), and it will be used to immediately meet the needs of homeless veterans or veterans facing homelessness.

"This is a homeless prevention rapid rehousing program where we assist veterans out of homelessness and prevent veterans from becoming homeless," said Danny Derima, program manager of SSVF. He said the grant provides funding to support services such as rental arrays, first month and security deposits, utility deposits, uniforms, and "anything to stabilize the home so that the veteran does not fall into crisis and fall back into homelessness."

Mr. Derima said the program requirements call for 20 veterans and families to be served, "but we have exceeded that amount every year."

There are two requirements for program entry. First, the veteran applying must have either an honorable, Other Than Honorable or general discharge. Dishonorable discharges don't qualify.

Additionally, the veteran must fall under the 50 percent area median income for each respective island. When asked what the age range was for veteran homelessness in the Virgin Islands, Mr. Dermia said, "From my experience, the age range of homeless veterans is 20-74 years old."

The SSVF program serves veterans territory-wide and has been available since 2013 at MTOC.

While giving her speech, Delegate to Plaskett said, "I learned a new word, not homelessness but "houselessness," because your home is wherever you are and where ever you are loved. "Houselessness" is not having appropriate shelter and that is a distinction we should understand."

Ms. Plaskett added, "I am happy to partner with the U.S. Department for Veterans Affairs to ensure that organizations like MTOC have the necessary funding to provide housing and essential services to that population. The check we are presenting today is part of the funding that my colleagues and I really fought for out of the CARES Act."

Mr. Farrel, the Veterans Affairs director, said, "We are absolutely grateful to have an organization like MTOC being a part and assisting our veterans with the resources they need in a timely manner."

Erma C. Derima, executive director of MTOC, said, "We are grateful to be able to meet the need of our community through our veterans and their families."

Veterans Affairs and MTOC officials said they recognize the expeditious need to serve homeless veterans, and are currently seeking out veterans in need of said assistance.

The grant funds are also being used to provide supportive services to these veterans living in or transitioning to permanent housing. When questions were asked on what the community could do to assist, Ms. Plaskett said, "I think it's for all of us to continue working on taking away the stigma. Many of these individuals have PTSD or other issues. So taking away the stigma of mental illness and supporting as a community the notion of getting support. Therefore, when they are approached, they don't see it as something that will be shunned on by the rest of the community."

Mr. Farrell stated, "The community could give the veterans encouragement. This encouragement will allow them to accept the services provided."

According to Mr. Farrell, the Virgins Islands has about 8,000 veterans on record, however there are more who have not registered.

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