Program Overview
Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) is an essential program in the Department of Veteran Affairs’ (VA) efforts to end homelessness among veterans. The program uses proven, cost-effective models to serve tens of thousands of homeless veterans and their families by either preventing their homelessness from occurring in the first place, or quickly moving them out of homelessness and into sustainable housing.

Through SSVF, VA provides competitive grants to nonprofit organizations and consumer cooperatives to serve at-risk and homeless low-income veteran families – defined as those households where the head of household or his/her spouse is a United States veteran. For the purposes of this program, a single, unaccompanied veteran can be defined as a veteran family and is eligible to receive SSVF assistance.

The SSVF program provides homelessness prevention and rapid re-housing services to help veteran families keep, or rapidly transition to, permanent housing. SSVF is intended to be a short-term intervention, and it is crucial in serving those veteran families who may only need minor, one-time assistance to prevent or end their homelessness. Grantees provide low-income families with case management services and direct supportive services, including rental assistance, utilities assistance, child care costs, moving costs, transportation expenses, emergency supplies, and security deposits. The program targets families who are in transitional housing, are scheduled to be homeless through eviction, or are currently homeless. Eligible veterans are identified through outreach and referrals.

As homeless veterans are increasingly younger, female, and/or part of a family and many need less intensive interventions, SSVF is quickly becoming the cornerstone in VA’s range of interventions. It complements VA’s other tools to serve homeless veterans, including the Grant and Per Diem (GPD) transitional housing model and permanent supportive housing through the joint Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program. SSVF largely reflects the effective rapid re-housing and prevention services provided to a broader homeless population through the Emergency Solutions Grant within the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants program. In the first three years of the SSVF program, Congress provided funding for nearly 140,000 SSVF interventions with much success: homelessness among veterans declined by more than 10 percent from 2013 to 2014 and by more than 33 percent between 2009 and 2014.

Current Status
The Administration included $300 million for SSVF in its FY 2016 Budget Proposal. In April, the full House passed legislation that would fund the SSVF program at $300 million in FY 2016, representing flat funding from the final FY 2015 level. Although the MilCon-VA spending bill passed through the full Senate Appropriations Committee this May, the full bill text, including the funding level for SSVF, is not yet publicly available.

Recommendation
Congress should continue to make ending homelessness among veterans a top priority by providing $500 million for the SSVF program in FY 2016. To do so, Congress will need to make a small legislative fix to lift a spending cap on the program and ensure that the program can be funded at the full $500 million funding level needed to bring the program to scale. Estimates indicate that continued expansion of the SSVF program will result in great progress made toward the goal of ending homelessness among veterans by the end of 2015.