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Legislative Audit of state's Homeless Veterans Program Released

(MADISON) -- An audit of veterans' homeless assistance services provided by a Milwaukee non-profit organization, requested by the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA) and released today, says the organization has "cash flow" problems and that its accounting systems should be improved – and that it should look to additional sources of federal funding for the program.

The state Legislative Audit Bureau noted in its report that the Center for Veterans Issues, Inc. had revenues in 2003 totaling \$2.6 million, which primarily consisted of federal grants, and including \$381,200 in state funds.

"The audit by the Legislative Audit Bureau was fairly critical, showing areas in need of reform for both the vendor and the department," said WDVA Secretary John Scocos.

"I had concerns about the program and requested this audit, and I embrace its findings and recommendations," said Scocos.

Scocos was appointed secretary last October, and has since been reviewing all of the department's programs. The agency's current budget is \$168.6 million, almost all of it funded by interest earned from state veteran lending programs.

"However, it is also important to point out that the state's broader Veterans Assistance Program has helped thousands of homeless Wisconsin veterans and veterans at-risk of becoming homeless," he said.

"Can we do better? Clearly we can, and we will, and I intend to fully implement the recommendations of the Legislative Audit Bureau," said Scocos.

The Veterans Assistance Program, a program of the Wisconsin Department of Veterans Affairs, served 365 veterans in 2003 in five sites, including Milwaukee, Madison, on the VA hospital campus at Tomah, and on the grounds of the Wisconsin Veterans Homes at King and Union Grove. While the number of homeless veterans who were served was down almost 100 over four years, the Audit Bureau noted that 60 percent of all veterans entering the program eventually obtain jobs and find homes of their own.

"The program has successfully helped a lot of veterans," Scocos said. "So while the LAB accurately pointed out a number of problems that we will promptly act to correct, we will also be careful to maintain what has been successful."

The LAB noted a number of management issues, many stemming from the fact that the programs are funded through a host of federal, state and city grants and programs – making it difficult to link specific issues with individual funding sources. The LAB suggested accounting systems that better separate – and track – the funding for specific activities. The Audit Bureau also identified additional sources of federal funding the Center could use to finance its programs.

"The Audit Bureau did an excellent job in pointing out problems and making suggestions," said Scocos. "This audit is exactly the type of tool we need to move this important program forward. We'll act as quickly as possible to use this tool to restructure this program to make it even better," he said.

"We owe it to our veterans, and we owe it to taxpayers to ensure that this program works effectively," said Scocos.