For the record, I am Catherine Kooyers from Kent County, Michigan, a veteran advocate for decades. I was asked to speak today and be the voice for a group of veterans at the Home who are unable to be here due to disabilities or the sad fact too many fear retaliation if they speak out. As has been discussed, Home residents look forward to the day a panel of legislators will meet with them at the Home to amicably hear their words and work with them for positive changes.

Thank you, Chairwoman, Committee members and staffers who made this hearing possible. And thank you for allowing us to speak before you today. For those who do not know, last fall, Rep. Barrett and Ron Kendall, III made a surprise visit to the Home. They were introduced to veterans who then gave a guided tour - from their perspectives. They toured, visited with residents, listened intently and made each one feel important. But most significantly, Rep. Barrett then walked the talk by acting on what is in their best interests...because of that, we are here today and they have new hope for the future.

And, that is the main message they want to send to all of you today:

Home residents need every one of you to listen to them, to act to restore the basic, constitutional and civil rights that have been stolen from them by an incompetent and selectively deaf administration. And, to protect our vulnerable or aging veterans, especially from J2S which is failing them miserably, despite repeated warnings from the State.

A dilema today is "how do we crunch years of visits, stories, issues and evidence into these short moments before you?" So, at this time, I submit for the record and consideration the following:

- Relevant sections of my report to the OIG, President Obama and V.A. Secretary McDonald, such as allegations and history.
- A list of people residents believe should be fired or replaced and why

We need each one of you to read those attachments. Please do not gloss over them. Lives are at stake. Quality of care is at stake. Careers are at stake. This is could not be more serious. More documents and evidentiary pieces are available to support allegations and statements, just let me know what you need.

Be clear, there are people happy with the Home and many good things do happen there. I like happy comments....happy, comfortable, at peace veterans is a goal. Yes, there are many good aspects to the Home and great programs they like and enjoy, for instance, outings, BINGO, poker, memorial ceremonies and events supported by outside groups, like Carnival and dinners. We encourage you to keep those smile maker things going forward.

And today, we recognize there are many good, dedicated caregivers, who work hard, multiple shifts and sacrifice a lot to help these deserving veterans. For instance, they work back-to-back shifts to cover the irresponsible no-shows. And we recognize the families this takes a toll on. We remember caregivers who are no longer with us, like Theresa Renee Spaulding, a 20 year CNA, who was diagnosed with cancer the same week she received a pink slip when State workers were replaced by J2S. We deeply thank and do recognize those who go above and beyond. We stress, this is not about the good caregivers residents cherish. This is about the ones who fail to show up for duty or fail our veterans.

There are people who say a family member received good care. But we also ask, how many times did those people visit that family member? How long did they stay? How many other residents did they get to know and talk with in depth? Point being, there has been much discussion this week about the fact many people volunteer for a quick project or visit and leave. But, they do not see what else happens – that takes time and trust.

And there are military representatives from the community who wear their cloth and pins and tout that they are veterans. That is great and we do thank them for their service. But when I asked the residents which ones they knew, who visited with them and listened to their stories, they sadly said, "not many of them." When I asked which ones do they call in crisis – they listed only a handful that they trust. So, I am honored that they trust me and ask me to speak for them.

And this is how I came to represent them. I come from a strong military family. My father served in Germany during its liberation. Meanwhile, Uncles served in the Pacific and France. Cousins served in Korea and Nam. My godson served in the Navy. And the boy across the street died in Vietnam during the bloody week of Thanksgiving, 1967. I have experienced the cost of freedom. After Co-Chairing the original P.T.S.D. Awareness Committee for National Vietnam Veterans of America, I remained involved in veteran issues for decades. Then, these issues became very personal.

V.A. over-radiated and disfigured a Marine Namvet. He had no jaw, cancer and at least 4 dozen pieces of metal and shrapnel embedded in his body. He was given 2 – 3 weeks to live. He was denied admittance by Home Admin. then was found homeless on a relative's property. My family took him in. With the help of family, friends and veterans, we surrounded him with care, appreciation and people who made his dying days as comfortable as possible. He survived over 3 years and died last fall. He asked me to let the V.A. hear his story, to keep it from happening to others. V.A. Secretary McDonald listened to me and immediately sent the vet a personal letter and Challenge Coin. Our veteran also asked me to keep advocating for veterans, especially those at the Home which refused to accept him. So, I am here today to honor that dying request as well.

In 2014, my sister and I attended a V.A. Town Hall meeting at the CBOC. Veterans there asked for the resignation of the regional director. That is relevant here as she is the same person who repeatedly signed off on audits of the Home, turning a blind eye to issues before us today.

As we were leaving, we saw a dying Home resident, with three other veterans. They stated his Home doctor refused to allow a second opinion and Home caregivers were unresponsive to his needs. So, fellow residents put him in a wheelchair and pushed him to the CBOC. The CBOC also refused to help him without an ok from his Home doctor. They asked me to help. I called over Rep. Huizenga who was at the CBOC, but even he could not get help for that veteran. He was told legislators made the law. That now he knows how it feels to be unable to help a veteran because of needless laws. Securing that one form, one authorization, from a Home doctor protecting his territory, is often a matter of life or death. That veteran was admitted to ICU hours later. His nurse called me to come to the hospital immediately, my heart sank as she stated he was not expected to live throught the night. I was told he had been overdosed by staff at the Home. No wonder they did not want him to get an outside opinion. Fortunately, the local hospital drained out the bad blood and gave him several units of fresh blood. It was hard, but he survived. We ask how many cases like his did result in deaths that were labeled "death due to natural causes." When I called this case to Sara's attention, she proudly stated she had reprimanded the veteran! Her staff failed and almost killed him – and she reprimanded him?!?!? He would have died without family taking him to the hospital. Or is that what Admin. wanted to happen?

Strangely, there is no oversight on this issue, making it easy to abuse or kill a resident and get away with it. We ask you legislators to change that law, give residents a way to get an outside second opinion or help without that referral, which is nothing more than a roadblock that can be deadly. And we urge you to create strong oversight when there is a death at the Home. Frankly, we believe each death should be investigated. Blood and fluid should be drawn to test for overdoses and unneeded medications, like Seraquel and Ativan. An autopsy should be performed to check for abuse and broken bones. An independent coroner, not connected to the State, should sign the death certificate, not the doctor who failed to let the residents get second opinions.

After the CBOC incident, I was invited to visit dozens and dozens of veterans at the Home. I went there almost daily for several months. It was such an honor to gain their trust, hear their stories and visit. I helped where I could and pursued options where needed.

When I first met Jim Dunn and Sara Dunne, they expressed a willingness to work with the residents and I. But working with Admin. was beyond bizarre.

- For instance, days after meeting Jim Dunn, I was speaking with a legislator at a memorial service. Jim Dunn stood behind me, listening to every word. He then stated "you are never to talk with any legislator about anything at the Home" because he said, and this is his exact quote, "Legislators will hear what I want them to hear."
- Then, in June of 2014, an amicable meeting was scheduled. Veterans had a list of 21 questions for Admin., Admin. was given those in advance so there would be no surprises. I was to mediate that meeting. As over 80 residents quietly sat in the APR and more were arriving, Admin. told them to leave in the most bizarre manner, stating there would be no meeting. We truly believe if that meeting had happened as agreed to, we would not be here today. And, we believe those who treated the residents with such contempt and disrespect that day should be fired.
- Then, there was the second meeting wherein residents arranged to meet with about seven of their elected officials from across that State. They simply wanted to discuss current benefit programs, transitional options and services available to them as veterans. We learned Admin. blindly contacted legislators and said there would be no meeting. It was strange because one legislator called and said, Sara called to cancel a meeting, but she had nothing on her calendar. She added she would love to meet with the residents. Another told me to call Sara – that she had called him to cancel, not the residents who were clueless to her canceling their meeting. I did call Sara. She said "I will not have them talking with legislators...I do not want them to say anything bad about me....." As we discover the messes she left behind, we understand why. But it was wrong of her and her fellow leaders to deny the residents their basic, civil and constitutional rights or interfere.

So, we took the next step. In June of 2014, we made an unannounced visit to Lansing to schedule a meeting with the Attorney General or Governor. A man sent to talk with us was later identified as Joe Froelich, Assistant Attorney General. When asked if he had any idea how bad things were at the Home, he arrogantly stated his desk sits next to Jim Dunn's in Lansing and said "I know everything that happens at that Home....so much so, that I know your meeting was canceled ... and I am willing to bet you are Catherine Kooyers, .." and named those who came with me. I had never met him nor been introduced to him. He then told us the governor gets regular updates and he is also aware of everything happening at the Home. The governor and his staff have refused multiple requests to meet to discuss issues before us today...another step that could have kept us from being here today.

So, with the help of residents, I filed a formal complaint with the OIG that June of 2014. They gave us a case number and later asked for more information, which indicated they were actively investigating. In the fall of 2014, we sent to President Obama and the new V.A. Secretary McDonald copies of our report. Mr. McDonald has been awesome to work with.

In 2015, Mr. Lino Pretto, who sits on the BOM, threatened me at a BOM for using his name in that report...which had finally made its way downline. He said "I will tear you to pieces...or worse." That was the same day he jumped out of his seat on the Board and slandered a dedicated volunteer, a Gold Star family member with a Presidential award for her service. He then hunted down her husband, who is a Gold Star Brother, in another city. As her husband stated "Pretto pretty much told me to get my wife under control – for an incident I was not even at!" When a report was filed with Jim Dunn, he simply stated "thank you for sharing your thoughts." He took no action to remove this dangerous man from the Board. Last week, I learned Pretto treated a

female Navy veteran with such disrespect in the Capitol Building elevator, a Namvet in the elevator had to step between them. As a result, the State offered us police protection for these hearings. These are not the types of people who should represent the State or veterans.

Today is about calling your attention to the those who:

- failed to show up for shifts, arrived late or left early
- mistreated and failed our cherished veterans
- left residents with broken bones due to neglect or improper training
- failed to check on residents
- *failed to respond to their calls*
- left residents to lie in their own waste
- failed to rotate them
- failed to treat their bed sores
- knowingly sedated them to control staffing and costs
- stole from them
- the ones who said "that is not my job" when they could have helped
- the ones who were verbally abusive
- the ones who failed to do the job hired for
- My pet peeve: the ones who left veterans outside without help or caregivers
- The ones who left my friend Dale Bronson unattended depite knowing he was heavily medicated -- meaning they left a former POW who survived the worst of war, to die alone on the Home grounds under questionable circumstances
- the one who left the frail WWII vet outside in freezing temperatures without a coat, soaked in his own urine who could barely mouth "help" when I found and saved him

Today is about the officials, some still in office, who

- placed in charge of the Home a woman who worked in the kitchen and lacked required credentials
- abuse the trust placed in them
- have threatened or intimidated those who asked questions
- threatened acts of violence against those who reported them
- failed to remove an abusive Board member
- only repaired reportedly dangerous areas after veterans were hurt or sent to ER
- violated rights by stating "you are never to speak to legislators about the Home – they *will hear what I want them to hear*"
- called men who survived battlefields "boy" and other condescending names
- the ones who denied residents basic, civil and constitutional rights
- placed veterans in the Courtyard for minor offenses without the rights prisoners have
- stopped resident meetings, especially with legislators
- stripped residents of their dignity
- refused to listen to resident concerns much less address them
- did not check credentials of caregivers
- did not obtain proper licensing of several aspects of the Home like doctors, cafeteria, cigarette machine and more
- allowed improperly trained people to care for residents
- failed to do criminal background checks (like the felon who was arrested in front of residents his first week on the job)
- *treated men who survived the horrors of war like prisoners or children*
- catered in high quality foods and items the veterans do not get, then ate it in front of them
- shut down the Cafeteria with total disrepect or regard for the volunteers, family members, contractors and visitors who needed it
- allowed mice to roam the cafeteria and kitchen

- allowed placement of a bug zapper over the food prep area
- paid for lawn care that left weeds six to eight feet high in areas
- overdosed veterans, sending them to ICU or worse
- Administration and doctor who said "no autopsy" and told the mortician to label it death due to natural causes
- How many deaths were called "death due to natural causes" but were actually "death due to neglect or overdose?"
- the lack of oversight or investigations into deaths
- the one doctor against whom almost all complaints are leveled
- practiced for almost nine years without a required license
- LARA for refusing to investigate complaints against him
- staff members who complied with orders they knew were wrong – often to keep their jobs
- left all sorts of records in questionable status
- did not audit guardianships
- who turned away dying, homeless veterans who need a warm meal or safe place to sleep

Above all: The ones who saw the horrors and wrongful incidents residents endured but did nothing. Said nothing. Saw their jobs as more important than our veterans.

I could go on for hours, believe me.

Yes, there is a very dark side that "outsiders" often do not see. I was chilled to the bone recently when a Home resident asked "Catherine, do you find it ironic you are doing the same work your dad did?" I was totally puzzled. He then said "just as your dad served in WWII in Germany and liberated the Nazi camps, you are here to liberate us." Wow -- that some residents compare their situation to that chilled me to the soul.

So, today, please work with us to keep what is good and what works. But also fix the problems and create an environment that feels like a real home with quality care for our veterans.

Thank you, again, for your time and consideration.

Catherine Kooyers
Veteran Advocate
616-719-3122

Following are key people who need to be replaced or fired if we are to gain the trust of veterans and the community needed to make positive changes:

MARY BETH SKUPIEN:
Ms. Skupien works for the V.A. and has signed off on audits yearly. She had the power to call for a more thorough investigation and demand positive changes. Instead, she blindly signed off on audits yearly. A year and half into the job, veterans had major issues and her reply was "be patient, I have only been on the job 18 months, I am still learning." We compare that with someone like Leslie Shanlian who stepped into this current fiasco and hit the floor running.
Bottom line: We ask the State to have V.A. Secretary McDonald replace her.

GOVERNOR SNYDER:
As in Flint, Detroit, the school system and other fiascos, Governor Snyder has repeatedly demonstrated not only unprecedented incompetence in running this State, he has repeatedly shown no willingness to work with citizens or advocates when approached in early days of crises. We have proof he was advised of critical situations at the Home in 2014. Also, Joe Froelich, Assistant Attorney General, confirmed Snyder was updated and aware of the many issues at the Home. He did not remove any of his appointees until this became public news, far too late. And, too many still need to be let go. As Rachel Maddow pointed out when the Home story became national news, Snyder needed a scalp and threw Jeff Barnes under the bus as fall guy. Many citizens and veterans do not want him office, we are sick and tired of dealing with his messes. And, now the public is absorbing all these needless costs to fix what should not have been broken, like millions of dollars in legal fees to his supporters. The disrespect he has shown to veterans at the Home is unacceptable.
Bottom line: We ask you to demand and push for his resignation.

JOE FROELICH, ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL:
The fact Joe Froelich knew so much about the situation at the Home in 2014 and did not stop it, tells us he should be fired. To us, he is part of the problem. It is his job to protect the State, but he has failed at that.
Bottom line: He failed our veterans and should be fired.

JIM DUNN:
Ask most residents, volunteers and advocates who should go, Jim Dunn comes up first behind Snyder. He oversaw the operations at both Homes. He is the person who told us not to speak with legislators. He is the one who said "legislators will hear what I want them to hear." He blocked the flow of information from residents to you. He is the one who promised to meet with residents then not only did not meet with them, he treated them in the most disrespectful manner then was seen walking down the hall laughing about it. Most of all, he has a demonstrated history of saying he will do one thing, then does the most polar opposite. He is also the man who said "thank you for your concerns" after abuse by another Board member was reported to him, then did not remove that member from his seat. He is the person who supervised and guided Sara Dunne. He is the one who gave her high reviews. Meanwhile, we can see now she failed miserably at her job. How could he not see the huge messes she left to clean up and money unaccounted for? He is the person who failed to do timely reviews for her personnel file and did not put an exit review in her file. We would not be here today if he had done the job he was hired to do.
Bottom line: many believe he should have been fired before Jeff Barnes and ask you to make that happen. We stress "fired" – not allowed to take an early retirement package with benefits.

LINO PRETTO:
Quite disturbing to residents and us is his nonstop abusive behavior. Saying to me at a Board of Managers meeting he will tear me to pieces for reporting him. Slandering a Gold Star family volunteer who asked a simple question "Is it true an assistant has been hired to help Sara?" at a Board of Managers meeting in front of all present. Then, the fact he hunted down her husband to complain about her is bizarre. He regularly treats members in a condescending manner as well. For example, calling the brave men who survived the battlefield and horrors of war "boy" in front of others. Last week, we learned he was so disrespectful to a female Navy veteran in an elevator, that a Namvet in the elevator called him out. His behavior has been so unacceptable, we were offered a police escort just to attend these hearings. Residents at the Home want him gone, they say he is part of the intimidation that needs to stop.
Normally, we are respectful of a Purple Heart veteran. However, this man's behavior has been so abusive that fellow Purple Hearts have stated he is not one of them and he is not a brother. Mr. Pretto was one of those who forced veterans to go to their rooms, when they were gathered for a June 2014 meeting re their questions and concerns. That day, he had a rare opportunity to talk with many members, to hear their concerns and work toward resolution. That is what an advocate does. Instead, he totally failed them then treated men and women who served our country like they were children.
Bottom line: a man who cannot control his temper, threatens and slanders people at State meetings, has no place on the Board of Managers or working with our cherished veterans. For the safety and well-being of those involved with the Home, we ask that Pretto be removed from State offices and barred from being on Home grounds.

GARY DAVIS:
Many residents are not pleased with Gary Davis. Gary Davis was also at that June meeting where Dunn, Dunne and Pretto refused to meet with those gathered. He is the person who went to the front of the room and told them to "go to their rooms" and there would be no meeting. He is one who carried out Jim Dunn's dirty work. Ironically, just last week he asked a resident why they call the Home a prison. Had he done his job and listened to them, as he is paid to do, he would not be asking that question, he would know. Having participated in meetings where he is present, he is just that, "present." He does not get involved as one would expect. For instance, we were both in a meeting with Senator Warren re mental health. A contractor asked for more time to finish the new Wyoming clinic, which is in his service area. Davis just sat there and said nothing. I was the one who said that is not acceptable, we needed that clinic long ago. Senator Warren stated if that contract was not honored by the deadline, she would have the maximum fines and penalties assessed. The clinic actually opened early after that. But we wondered why Davis sat there and said nothing. I have seen that same scenario play out at V. A. meetings, like the one at Peckham. He just occupies a seat and does not represent the needs of those he was hired to serve.
Bottom line: many residents would like him fired.