



Final Transcript

HUD - US DEPT OF HOUSING & URBAN DEVELOPMENT: Financial Protection for the Military - External

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SPEAKERS

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PRESENTATION

Moderator Ladies and gentlemen, we'd like to thank you for standing by. Welcome to the Financial Protection for the Military - External Teleconference Call. At this time, all participants are in a listen-only mode. Later, we'll conduct a question-and-answer session with instructions being given at that time. [Operator instructions]. As a reminder, today's call will be recorded.

I would now like to turn the conference over to our host and facilitator,

Mr. Ben Yanetta. Please go ahead, sir.

Ben

Great. Thank you very much. Hello, everyone. Thank you for joining us today and Happy Homeownership Month. I hope everybody is enjoying their summer.

Before we move into the presentation, I have just a few logistic issues or items to share with you all so you can make the best of this webinar. First of all, as mentioned, the audio is being recorded. We'll also have the transcript of the entire call and the PowerPoint available on our HUD Exchange page. It takes about a week to get that posted, and that's a great way to share this resource, this webinar, with colleagues that may have not been able to join us today.

Also, the handouts were sent to everybody that registered for this webinar about an hour ago. So you have that and if you missed that, you can also download the handouts, the PowerPoint slides directly from this webinar in the handouts section of the webinar interface. It's a PDF. You just click on it and it'll automatically download.

We can move to the next slide. The best way to ask questions during this webinar is to just type them directly into the Questions box of the webinar's interface. It'll go into a queue and we are watching those throughout. We'll start answering questions towards the end of the webinar and you can submit them in advance so we have them in the queue. And, you can also ask questions over the phone line and instructions will be given when we offer that to you. Again, that'll be at the end of the webinar.

If you have questions that don't get answered, or you think of a question afterwards that you really want an answer to, you can always send a question to housing.counseling@hud.gov. If you put what the topic is in the email title, we will route that to an expert and you'll get a response as soon as we can. It's always great to have this resource for you because we have a quick turnaround time on that, and it always goes to somebody that can answer your question.

Next slide please. If you've joined the webinar today, only if you've signed in, you will get a certificate from GoToWebinar in about 48 hours that confirms that you attended and you can print that out and save it for

your records, proof of your training and ongoing training that you have received.

Next slide. Another option for getting credit for joining the webinar or viewing the webinar is to go to our HUD Exchange page after the webinar is published and you sign up, do a quick account for HUD Exchange and it'll keep track of every webinar that you have attended or viewed the materials for. That's a great way also to keep track of all the trainings that you have received directly from HUD in recent times. So that's a great resource and you can also print out those records.

Next slide please. The Housing Counseling Training Digest is a great resource. This is where all the HUD webinars are archived, and you can also view upcoming trainings, register for those, and there's a lot of other information that's very beneficial for housing counselors to view on the HUD Exchange website if you're not already very familiar with it.

That wraps it up for the logistics and now I would like to turn it over to David Berenbaum, the Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Office of Housing Counseling.

David

Thank you so much, Ben, and hello everyone and thank you for joining us today. As part of HUD's National Homeownership Month events, the Office of Housing Counseling is hosting this important webinar for housing organizations and our professional housing counselors who serve military personnel and families. Today, participants will learn about protections aimed to ease the housing financial burden on active duty service members and their families.

For those of you who are members of the Armed Forces or are vets, I would like to thank you for your service and express our appreciation to you before we even kick the program off.

I would also like to take a moment to recognize all of the work that you are doing to help residents who are struggling to maintain their rental housing situations or if in fact they're mortgage holders, mortgagors, their home. We understand in particular right from our surveys that the volume of eviction prevention services that you're providing to consumers are increasing and we know the important work, how it's making a difference to assist consumers to tap into financial resources, as well as protections that are available to tenants and mortgage holders today.

I also want to thank those of you who are working with us to outreach to the over 300,000 FHA consumers who we believe may still be eligible for the COVID forbearance initiative and we are doing our best, including a letter that was just sent out to every mortgagor, to engage with them, to have them call their servicer, or to call you as housing counselors to help them with their situation.

I'd like to present our experts today who will be sharing their wealth of knowledge with you, their depth of knowledge, and we have quite a group. Let's run through some of our folks. Medora Benson and Sid Alvarado have been working with our partner ICF in supporting the Office of Housing Counseling as technical assistance providers. Sid recently joined ICF from the housing counseling community, in particular having worked at Catholic Charities and CRC and Omidos [ph] US. She's a certified housing counselor and has a deep experience in working with military families. Johanna Barrero supports our work as well as a national expert in financial empowerment and works day-to-day in fact with the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

Then we have another exciting group of presenters, quite a cohort. From Money Management International, we have Tara Alderete, forgive me if

I'm mispronouncing, who is the Director of Enterprise Learning at Money Management. She is responsible for developing in-person and online education programs and since joining MMI in 2010 she's been using her development and facilitation skills to benefit the diverse communities served by MMI as an intermediary, which does include military service members, veterans, Hispanic audiences, students and athletes. She hails from the University of New Mexico and is also an FCC certified, HUD certified and FCRA certified.

From the USA Homeownership Foundation, Connie Der Torossian is currently the program manager of the housing counseling program there and she's held that position for over four years. She oversees and manages the housing counseling department for USAHF and they are also a HUD-approved housing counseling agency. Their goal is to increase the state of homeownership, financial literacy education, VA loan awareness, and economic opportunity for active military and veteran communities across the nation.

Thomas Griffin is also with the USA Homeownership Foundation. He is a HUD certified counselor and has held that position for the past six years. Thomas is responsible for counseling clients and managing the junior

housing counselor and administrative assistant for housing counseling department. He's a retired Marine and as a veteran, he has a specialty in providing services to active military and veteran community members.

And then more locally to where I am, in Fredericksburg, Virginia, we have LaDonna Cruse, who is currently employed with Virginia Housing. They are a state housing finance agency and she is the housing education manager where she leads a team credited with developing a replicable educational resource for consumers, including their industry partners and stakeholders. And she directly helps countless individuals and families overcome challenges to attaining housing, maintaining and retaining their homes.

As I said, quite the qualified group, a very important issue, let's kick off the discussion. Thanks, everyone.

Medora

Thank you, David. For today's webinar, we will be discussing protections for service members, housing counseling for service members. You'll hear about best practices from field. There will be an opportunity for Q&A and at the very end we will provide everybody with additional resources.

During this presentation, we will ask questions via the polling software Mentimeter. You might be familiar with Mentimeter if you've used it during other webinars. You can access Mentimeter by going to www.menti.com. Please use a smartphone or desktop and open up another browser so that you're using a different browser than the one you're viewing this webinar in.

So, to kick off this webinar, we will start with two Mentimeter questions. Please go ahead and go to www.menti.com. Once you arrive at [menti.com](http://www.menti.com), you can enter the code 7478220, and we'll also pop that into the Chat.

We will head into our first question. So we are looking to gauge who is in the audience today and our first question is, "Are you currently working with service members and their families?" So we're looking to see what experience you might have. You can answer whether you are currently working with service members and their families or maybe you aren't just yet and you're looking to service them next year. So far it looks like this is a pretty mixed crowd, so that will be great. You are in good hands with the panelists today. We'll give everybody a few more moments to join.

Again the code is 7478220, and just visit menti.com to go ahead and answer this question. Giving folks just a few more moments and we will go ahead and move on to our second question before passing it over.

With that first question, we want to know now, “Are you familiar with financial protections available to service members?” Again, we’re looking to see who’s in the audience and if you are familiar but maybe you’re looking for a refresher on the different protections and maybe it’s been a couple of years since you’ve worked with service members or maybe you’re hoping to start working with service members and that’s why you’re here to learn more. Either way, like I said earlier, you are in good hands. We have very knowledgeable panelists today. Maybe you are not familiar with any protections so you want to learn everything there is out there and so we are excited to share a lot more with you throughout this webinar.

Again, it looks like a good mix today, so I will now go ahead and pass it over to Sid to begin our webinar.

Sid

Hello, everyone. Thank you for joining us today. Today we are going to be talking about protections for service members as well as their families.

The protections that we're going to be talking about today are those financial protections specifically for service members and their families, and we are going to be particularly highlighting the Servicemembers' Civil Relief Act which some of you may know as SCRA. And then we'll also be talking about Military Lending Act which some of you may also know as MLA.

There are some additional protections that we're going to be discussing that can be used for our service members and their families. However we do want to note that those protections that we're going to be talking about military service is not a requirement for eligibility, specifically when we get to those protections that fall under the CARES Act as well as the American Rescue Plan.

What is SCRA? As stated, it is Servicemembers' Civil Relief Act. Just to give you a little bit of a background behind SCRA, it is a federal law that provides protections for military members, which we also call service members, as they enter active duty. And, we're going to be highlighting what active duty means. SCRA is revised from the Soldiers' and Sailors'

Civil Relief Act of 1940. So it's not something that's particularly new but there's been some revision and expansion on it.

So, what does SCRA cover, and who does SCRA cover? SCRA covers active duty military members, and we're going to expand on what they mean and who they mean by active duty. SCRA also covers service members' attendants [ph], service members who are absent from duty for a lawful cause or because of sickness, wounds or leave. And then the last two many people really don't associate this group with SCRA, but the commission officers in active service of the Public Health Service, PHS, as well as commission officers in active service of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, NOAA, also is covered by SCRA.

Now we're going to break down what SCRA means by military service as well as active duty. So we talked about how SCRA can provide a wide range of benefits and protections for those who fall under the definition of military service. So, SCRA defines military service as including those who are full-time active duty members of the six military branches that includes Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard, and Space Force. SCRA also covers reservists on federal active duty and we

emphasize active duty there, as well members of the National Guard on federal orders for a period of more than 30 days.

Now, we're going to break down what they mean by active duty. So SCRA they provide protections for those who have entered into active duty. What do we mean by active duty? That includes those who are actively serving, so we talked about those within the six branches of the military, those who receive a notice to serve, as well as those who are serving one year prior to date of occurrence. And what they mean by date of occurrence is it depends on the issue in which the service member is facing. For example, if they're facing foreclosure or if they're facing eviction, then that means that SCRA will cover them one year prior to that date of occurrence.

Now we're going to talk about what are some of the housing protections that fall under SCRA that protects those service members. There are a few areas that we want to highlight here that are housing related. First off are those service members who have a mortgage. So those who fall under active duty or actively serving that means that if they have a mortgage, the interest rate is capped at 6% and that is during the entire period of military service and for one year after the period of military service.

Those who may be facing foreclosure issues, SCRA treats foreclosure proceedings differently and that is going to depend heavily on whether or not they are in a judicial or non-judicial state. So states they specify which way foreclosure proceedings may go.

Then there are the tenants. Tenants who have a rental agreement they can terminate a residential lease if they receive a permanent change of station, which we also know as PCS, or if they have orders for deployment for a period of at least 90 days. So the lease will terminate 30 days after the next rent payment is due.

Then we have those service members who may be facing eviction. So while we're on active duty and away from home, SCRA prevents the landlord from evicting service members unless their rent is higher than \$4,089.62. It's important to note that this amount changes on a yearly basis, so this amount here is actually present and active only for 2021.

There are some things that service members want to know or as housing counselors you may want to note when you're working with service members. Service members, they should be prepared to provide creditors

with a written notice of service as well as a copy of military orders. They also can express their concerns or they're encouraged to do that and seek legal assistance through local military legal assistance offices. We're going to provide you with a resource and a link where service members can go to get this type of service.

Then in addition to that, there is an opportunity for those that need to verify military service to do that. So that verification actually can happen and take place on the Department of Defense Manpower Data Center.

There's a link there where whoever needs to verify that service can click on that link. They would need to create a username and a password and provide some basic information on the service member, but they will have the ability to verify their service on that link there.

Who is eligible under SCRA? We talked about that just a moment ago. However, here's a quick visual that may be beneficial to you as housing counselors if you needed to refer to it quickly when you're working with service members. As we stated, we have those six branches. We have Army, we have Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Coast Guard and Space Force. Then we also talked about those who are commission officers under PHS as well as NOAA. If they fall into any of these categories and

they are actively serving, then that means that they are eligible under SCRA. However, if they are in any of these branches, and they are reserves, or active reserves or inactive reserves, if they're veterans or they are retired, then they are not eligible under SCRA.

The other category that is eligible are the spouses, domestic partners or dependents of the service members that are under those branches in military who are actively or active duty and actively serving. They are also eligible for the benefits that fall under SCRA.

So now we're going to talk about some additional SCRA protections. They're not per se housing related however they are very beneficial to our service members. So we talked about that 6% cap on mortgages just a moment ago and that 6% cap also lends itself to if they have credit cards, if they have automobile loans, ATV, boat, we talked about mortgages, and in addition to housing related also home equity loans. If they have any of these financial obligations, then that means that there has to be a 6% cap on that when they are actively serving.

Now student loans, any student loans that originated after August 14, 2008, also falls under SCRA. Unfortunately, if you're working with a

service member or dependent of family member that has student loans that originated prior to August 14, 2008, then that means that it was not covered under SCRA at that time.

What are some other protections that we can use as housing counselors to assist service members as well as their families? There are some things that we're going to talk about here but we do want to recognize that military service is not required for these protections however they are resources that can be used to help our service members. First off is forbearance. If we have a military member who is in need of a forbearance, they can do that under the CARES Act, and that is true if their loan is backed by either FHA, USCA, the VA. What we want to recognize is that the deadline for requesting these initial forbearances is June 30, 2021. If the loan is backed by Fannie Mae or Freddie, then that means that there's currently no deadline for requesting an initial forbearance.

For a tenant, there is a temporary halt in residential eviction, so there's an order that temporarily halts residential eviction for covered persons for non-payment of rent. And, that would mean that that non-payment of rent would need to fall between September 4, 2020 and June 30, 2021.

Then we have the American Rescue Plan, which provides economic relief. Here is where those that are in need can find immediate and direct relief to families and workers that were impacted by COVID-19 crisis. We're going to be providing a resource in just a moment where you can go to find some resources that are within your state and even more so locally.

Some additional protections for renters—you can go back one screen, Medora, thank you. Additional protections for renters are those that are in multifamily units. So as of June 3, 2021, SHFA announced that Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac will continue to offer COVID-19 forbearance to qualifying multifamily property owners through September 30, 2021. And what this does is it helps families who are struggling to pay their rent and to help multifamily property owners maintain their properties.

One of the things that property owners need to recognize is that when they enter into either a new or modified forbearance agreement they must inform their tenants in writing about the tenant protections that are available during the property owners forbearance as well as repayment plans. Property owners must agree not to evict tenants during this time solely for the non-payment of rent while the property is in forbearance.

We have provided a tool or we have a tool available for housing counseling for service members. When you are in your offices you may be asking yourself, well how do we use this resource and this information and integrate it into the counseling session? What we have provided is a quick in-hand reference for counselors. And what it does is it summarizes a background on SCRA, those things that we just talked about, eligibility. It includes the chart that we showed you for those who are active duty and then those who are not, letting you know exactly who falls under the eligibility for SCRA. We also have some information on those housing-related protections that we just talked about and that is in relation to mortgage default as well as eviction. We've included some information in there as well on non-housing-related protections that fall under SCRA. We talked about that 6% tax for credit cards and other financial obligations that service members and their families may find themselves in, as well as we provided a resource list and then that eligibility chart.

Medora, could you bring that chart up for us, please? Here is the check sheet that we have available and that will be made available to you. And, as I said, the elements in this check sheet provides everything that we talked about in a very concise manner, but it's a quick reference to

housing counselors when you are in your offices and you're providing those counseling services to service members and their families. It's a great way to get your hands on something quick just to see if a person or service member is eligible and not eligible, and what areas of eligibility they may fall into. This resource is made available to you and will be made available to you after the webinar is over.

Next we're going to talk about the Military Lending Act which we know as MLA, and we're going to have Johanna to break that down for us.

Johanna

Thank you so much, Sid. Let's now take a look at the main protections that are covered in the Military Lending Act or MLA.

The Military Lending Act is a federal law that provides special protections for active duty service members, such as capping interest rates on certain credit products and requiring lenders to provide disclosures on consumer credit products that are used by military personnel, their spouses and dependents. The MLA was enacted in 2006 to protect active duty members from lending practices that could pose a risk to their financial stability and threaten military readiness and service member retention. The MLA is implemented by the Department of Defense and is enforced

by various federal agencies, including the Department of Justice, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, the National Credit Union Administration, among others.

The MLA applies to consumer credit products that are used for personal, family and household purposes and are subject to a finance charge and payable in more than four installments per a written agreement. And originally the MLA was intended to provide protections that applied to payday loans, vehicle title loans and refund anticipation loans. But this regulation was amended by the Department of Defense in 2015 to extend these protections to a broader range of products, including credit card accounts, installment and small dollar loans, including payday alternative loans, overdraft lines of credit with finance charges, and student loans.

The MLA applies to active duty service members, including those on active guard or active reserve duty, their spouses and certain dependents, such as a service member's child under 21 or a service member's parent or parent-in-law that lives in the same household and depends on the service member for more than half of their support, and a married person over whom the service member has custody by court order.

We can go to the next slide. The MLA differs from the SCRA in two ways. First it covers debt and other transactions that are acquired while the service member is in active duty, and it does not apply to transactions such as residential mortgages, financing of a motor vehicle that is secured by the vehicle, financing of personal property that is secured by the property, and transactions where the borrower is not a covered borrower.

Under the MLA, eligible service members have the right to a 36% interest rate cap on many consumer loans as well as other important protections.

The 36% rate is also known as the military annual percentage rate, or MAPR, and applies to finance charges, credit insurance premium, and add-on credit-related products that are sold in connection with the main credit, as well as fees, such as application fees or fees for debt cancellation contracts.

In addition to the 36% interest rate cap, the MLA also protects eligible service members from waiving certain legal rights like being required to submit to mandatory arbitration and it prohibits creditors from charging a penalty for early repayment of a loan, whether it's a partial or a total repayment.

So in short, the MLA is intended to protect service members from high costs associated with certain types of consumer credit. However, service members are advised to learn about the terms and conditions of any consumer credit they decide to take and build their financial readiness as part of their overall readiness for military duty.

With that, I'd like to hand it over back to Sid.

Sid

Thank you, Johanna. Now we're going to be talking about some of the best practices.

We are going to have a conversation with Tara who was introduced a little bit earlier. She is going to be talking about the Military Reconnect Program which highlights financial education for service members. We're also going to hear from Connie and Thomas who are going to talk about their VAREP Program which provides online education, in addition to a success story that's going to be coming from Thomas. And then LaDonna is going to finish that by talking about how her agency provides education as well as some targeted accessibility options for veterans and mortgage options as well.

Now I'm going to hand it over to Tara.

Tara

Thank you, Sid, and thank you very much to HUD and ICF for including us in this webinar. I'm happy to join you today so that we can share a little bit about our organization as well as services and support available through our Military Reconnect Program.

MMI is national, full-service, non-profit, education and counseling organization. Our mission is to improve lives through financial education and we provide a variety of services to help clients manage their finances and achieve their goals. We provide a full range of housing counseling services and beyond that, we also provide credit counseling where we work with clients to build a workable budget, credit report reviews and debt management plans to help folks get out of debt, student loan counseling, bankruptcy counseling and education. We also do disaster financial recovery through our Project Porchlight Program, and then financial education and outreach.

So with all those services in mind, we create tailored partnerships and programs so that we can tackle the areas of greatest need.

Next slide, please. It was through these outreach and education efforts that our Military Reconnect Program was born in 2012. Since then, I'm proud to say that we've served over 30,000 military members and their families just through education and outreach alone. That does not include counseling services provided.

The program started with the knowledge that service members transitioning back to civilian life really have a unique set of financial challenges. And then of course military families, active duty members and reservists, that might be mobilized or deployed, veterans seeking benefits, retiring service members, all of these folks have a bit of a unique situation. So with the support of city community development, we launched Military Reconnect to provide free in-person outreach. We've extended that to virtual workshops, plus a dedicated online learning community and then of course our core counseling resources all designed to help service members achieve their goals.

Today we continue to collaborate with city and other financial institutions and veteran service organizations to make sure that we're continually providing relevant and timely resources for the military community. So, we see here at the top of this screen folks can register for free in that

community at recon.mmiuniversity.org. And there they can sign up for 24-7 access to e-learning courses, articles and newsletters, community and VSO resources, financial tools and then of course access to our counseling services.

Next slide, please. I just wanted to talk about some of the outcomes that we've seen, particularly last year presented financial challenges for many people as we know. During 2020, we found that members of the military were significantly more likely to experience an increase in expenses related to the COVID-19 pandemic; 20%, almost 20,000 of all clients counseled by us last year had a military affiliation. Within our pandemic-impacted housing counseling clients, 17% of all homeowners and 16% of all renters were from military families. So, we know that the need exists and we continue to work closely with partners across the financial services' sector but then also within military and veteran support groups to find innovative ways to address that need, and reach consumers where they are.

So, again, military members can register in the free Military Reconnect online community at recon.mmiuniversity.org. They can visit us online at our website, moneymanagement.org, to schedule an initial counseling

session or they can do that through the learning community. And then to learn more about the Military Reconnect Program in general, you could visit moneym.org/recon.

I just wanted to take a moment to thank everybody once again for including us today. I'm excited to be part of this group and I look forward to continued collaboration across the board so that we can continue to provide world-class financial services to those military members and their families going forward.

So now I'll turn it over to Connie and Thomas at USA Homeownership Foundation.

Connie

Thank you, Tara. I appreciate it. My name is Connie Der Torossian. I'm with USA Homeownership Foundation, also known as VAREP. And today I'll be talking a little bit about our organization and how our organization has been able to utilize the SCRA to help our clients which are predominately active military individuals and veterans stay protected from their housing situation.

Next slide, please. So a little bit about USA Homeownership, we were established back in 2011. We're also known as the Veterans Association of Real Estate Professionals or VAREP, which is more of our industry side. So we have chapters throughout the nation that include real estate and lending and other housing industry professionals that do work in the community. But our non-profit side, and our HUD housing counseling side, is under USA Homeownership Foundation, and our headquarters is in Corona, California. However, we do service the whole United States.

We are a HUD-approved housing counseling agency and we offer a variety of housing counseling services. And, our mission is we're dedicated to increasing sustainable homeownership, financial literacy, education, VA loan awareness, and economic opportunity for the active military and veteran communities.

It's really important for us that we recognize the military service of our military service members and veterans. In fact, they utilize the benefits that are awarded to them, many of them don't know about the VA loan benefit. And, we help them with maintaining that homeownership. So even though our focus is really military and veteran communities, our services are open to anyone who may need assistance.

Next slide, please. So what types of services do we provide? We provide credit, financial budgeting, of course home buying and educational programs. We really dive deep into the VA loan and really encourage our communities, military and veteran communities, to utilize the VA loan benefit. Even though they may get discouraged through the housing industry we help them overcome those hurdles. We also educate on down payment assistance. We're doing a lot in the area of foreclosure prevention and loan modification counseling, and we also provide rental counseling.

We do offer our VAREP online educational series, which is free virtual workshops that provide foreclosure prevention information, rental assistance, VA loans, down payment assistance, and all of that can be accessed through our website at myhomeownership.org. Really we want to just get the information out to individuals so that they understand how to utilize these benefits and if they are having trouble that they know they can come to us as a resource.

All of our services are provided of course free of charge, and as I said our main focus is assisting military service members and veterans with resolving their housing issues.

Today we're going to talk a little bit about how we've been successful in utilizing the SCRA to protect our active military service members who are deployed overseas. I'm going to invite Thomas Griffin, who is our HUD housing counselor and also a Marine, to talk about some of the success stories we've had through USA Homeownership. Thomas?

Thomas

Thank you, Connie. I'm Thomas Griffin and as Connie says, I am a Marine. And so I'm the HUD housing counselor for USA Homeownership Foundation.

The story we're going to talk about today, we had an active Army service member contact USA Homeownership with difficulties with his servicer. He was being deployed and so of course that uprooted his family to move from one state to another and from that point then he was being deployed overseas. He reached out to his servicer for assistance and to no avail felt he was given the runaround and everything. All the resources that he was looking for was not being offered to him.

So when he contacted me, I reviewed all his information and so I contacted the servicer. And so I understood exactly what the service member was going through but I also understood that the servicer needed the education of what the SCRA was all about. And so, after several months of going back and forth and everything, the bottom line was we were able to save his home. He got his loan modification. He completed the trial period and now he's back stable. He's back from overseas and so they're very happy with his present condition.

And so the fact about it is the information is out there. A lot of times both sides need education because we're here to help our servicemen who are protecting the country, and so the least that we could do is protect them when they're in need.

That's one of our stories. But if you want to see more of our stories, you can always go to our website, myhomeownership.org, and we have a library there and so you can see all of the different situations that are going on. Thank you today.

Back to you, Connie.

Connie

Thank you, Thomas. So we highlighted one of our client stories here today. We do that in that even if I know there's a lot of housing counselors out there that are not used to working with the veteran and military community and they have special needs and special circumstances that may come up that offer us as a resource to you. If you have questions as you're dealing with your clients, questions about the SCRA or questions about deployment or getting a certificate of eligibility for the VA loan, feel free to outreach to us and we're happy to be a resource for you all because we do understand that they do have certain circumstances that may just come up because they are military or veteran members.

Next slide, please. How do you connect with us? The easiest way is to go to our website at myhomeownership.org. As Thomas mentioned, we have a great library, video library, short little clips of how we've been able to assist our clients, the majority of them military members, veteran members. And so, we've got some great, wonderful stories there.

If your client needs assistance, you want to refer them over, the easiest way to do that is to go to our website. We have online intake forms. They complete the forms. Once we get those, we'll schedule an appointment

with them or you can just give us a call or email us at 951-268-1518, or go to myhomeownership.org and all of our contact information is there.

I thank you for allowing us this opportunity to speak today. I want to wish everybody a Happy Homeownership Month and thank you to all the service members and veterans who have provided a service to our country.

We appreciate you.

I believe that I will be handing it off to LaDonna Cruse from Virginia Housing.

LaDonna

Thank you, Connie, and a special thanks to HUD and OHC and ICF for this invitation to participate today. I'm thrilled to talk about the many consumer resources Virginia Housing provides and our longstanding partnerships with military installations and military service providers throughout the Commonwealth.

Next slide. Virginia Housing is a state housing finance agency and we have served as a HUD intermediary for 23+ years. We were created by the Commonwealth of Virginia in 1972, so we will soon celebrate 50

years. We are a self-supporting—and we receive no state taxpayer dollars to fund our program.

Instead we raise money in the capital markets and we contribute a significant portion of our net revenues each year to help meet Virginia's most difficult housing needs. In FY20, Virginia Housing committed more than \$53 million to help people stay in their home and much needed assistance to our housing partners. We do operate under the direction of 11 Board of Commissioners appointed by the Governor of Virginia and our Chief Executive Officer Susan Dewey.

Our mission: helping Virginia attain quality affordable housing. And we do this through public, private partnership. One of our most valued partnerships is the work we do with military installations throughout the state to help educate service members and their families.

Next slide. As a result of our experience with the military, we developed a military homebuyer education program and conducted our very first homebuyer education class, exclusively for military buyers in 1998. Operation Homeownership is a free class that we co-facilitate in partnership with varying military offices, as well as our local housing

professionals with military backgrounds. Our program lead here at Virginia Housing is an active duty reservist as well.

We started the program in partnership with just two military installations. Twenty-two years later, and with ten installations throughout the state, we continue to partner with military financial educators and the housing offices to address unique factors, challenges, and resources military buyers should definitely consider before purchasing.

Next slide. Virginia Housing offers several educational resources for consumers which also supports service members and their families. As part of our rental education program, we developed our How to Be a Successful Rental curricula. This is an in-depth nine chapter resource, both in English and Spanish, that addresses financial readiness, credit, the rental surge, application, lease agreement, security deposit, rights and responsibility, house-keeping maintenance and repairs, and lease termination. Both the free online course and the downloadable e-book includes information regarding special military provisions such as the SCRA, JAG legal assistance, military financial educators, early termination.

One of the things I wanted to mention was last year veteran status and soon-to-be military status was added to Virginia fair housing laws as a protected class, which means there is now protection against discriminatory acts of targeting military service members. This includes discrimination based on physical or mental disabilities, reasonable accommodations or modifications, and unfair practices due to mobility concerns. Many times landlords are concerned and tenants do not want to rent to military because they're afraid that they'll move soon and get military relocation orders.

As part of our homebuyer education program, we offer a self-paced online course and an in-person class that is based on the HUD and industry standards benchmarks. At the end of FY20, 19,320 people prepared for homeownership by completing either our online course or attending an in-person class. Although we suspended in-person classes as a result of social distancing mandates, even so we continued to educate potential buyers through our online course. And to date, during FY21, again, close to 20,000 people are getting that education that is needed.

And as a result of the pandemic, we created Chatting It Up Live, one-hour virtual sessions that address frequently asked questions about home

buying. The live sessions include a host who poses several prepared questions to a panel of subject matter experts as well as posing questions that are submitted through the Chat box from potential home buyers. It's been a very successful program. We created a series of virtual sessions for the general public, a series in Spanish, and also a series for military home buyers. We offer a series of post-purchase video tutorials we call "The New Homeowners Guide," and a 30-minute podcast entitled, "Buying and Renting a Home in Virginia."

Next slide. Virginia Housing offers several types of mortgages for first-time homebuyers, grants to reduce the borrower's out-of-pocket expenses, a tax credit program that reduces the amount of federal income tax a borrower may owe, along with accessibility grants. For qualifying military borrowers, we offer the VA loan, 100% financing, with a 620 liberal qualifying credit score.

We also offer closing cost assistance. This is different from down payment assistance. This is closing cost assistance for our military that use their VA loan. This never has to be paid back.

We offer a tax credit program, we call it MMC, which is a dollar for dollar federal tax credit, again, that could save that borrower thousands each year for the life of the loan. And for disabled service members and veterans, whether you're renters or homeowners, we offer grant freedom [ph], a grant to modify their home, up to \$6,000.

Now, I said a lot very quickly. I was trying to make up a little bit of time as well but there is a convenient digital flyer that will be available to you about a lot of the resources that I talked about. The flyer will have direct links to the programs and resources I shared today. Thank you so much, Medora, for putting that up.

Again, thank you, and I will now turn the session over to Medora.

Medora

Thank you, everyone, and just so we can review all of the different resources, I am going to pass it over to Sid, but if you have any additional questions, please email in at housing.counseling@hud.gov. Thank you.

Sid

Thank you, Medora. So we have provided some additional links and resources for you to review. We've gone through some of these within the webinar where we've talked about linking [indiscernible] service member,

but there's also some direct resources related to SCRA that is in a user reader-friendly format. We have also links that talk about resources for renters where if you need to find some financial resources to help those in your community it provides some very state-specific resources that you can locate not only within your state but also within your locality.

And if you have any questions that we have not had the opportunity to answer today, please make sure you reach out to housing.counseling@hud.gov and ask those very important questions. We'll be sure to follow up with those answers.

Now, I'm going to pass it back over to David who is going to provide us with some closing remarks. I'm not sure if David is on mute.

Well, with that being said, I'd like to thank all of you for attending today's webinar. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to use your Chat box to answer those questions. We do have the ability to capture that information and answer any questions that you had on today. We'll make sure that we get it to the right expert and give you the answer that you are in need of.

I'd like to thank you for taking time to be with us today as we talked about the housing protections for service members. That concludes our webinar for today.

Moderator

Ladies and gentlemen that does conclude our conference call for today.

On behalf of today's panel, we'd like to thank you for your participation in today's Financial Protection for the Military - External Teleconference Call, and thank you for using our service.