

**TESTIMONY
OF
CHRISTOPHER P. Z. STANLEY
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
FISHER/NIGHTINGALE HOUSES, INC.**

TO THE OHIO SENATE, SELECT COMMITTEE ON GAMING

MARCH 3, 2021



Fisher/Nightingale Houses, Inc.

Touching Lives with Compassion

Chairman Schuring and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide comments concerning Gaming and the associated support by Veterans Service Organizations. I am Chris Stanley, Executive Director of the Fisher/ Nightingale Houses, Inc. I retired from the Air Force in 2001, after a twenty-four year career. I have been involved with the Fisher Houses for more than 26 years and have served as the Executive Director of the organization for more than 19 years.

For those of you who are not aware of or familiar, Fisher Houses are compassionate care homes, like Ronald McDonald Houses, but with a mission to support our wounded, injured and ill military men and women, Veterans, and their caregivers and family members. Most likely, you know someone who has had to travel somewhere away from their home for medical treatment. This can be traumatic enough, not to mention compounding the situation with finding a place to stay, the potentially high costs for that place plus food, as well as the loneliness of a hotel room. Whether for a few days, a month or even a year, this type of situation can wear on a family – emotionally, physically and financially. There are a total of 91 Fisher Houses at 65 locations around the world, with another one under construction and a recognized need for yet another twenty-seven. Here in Ohio, we have two Houses at Wright-Patterson AFB, one at the Dayton V.A. Medical Center, two in Cleveland and one at the Cincinnati V.A.

Fisher/Nightingale Houses, Inc. is the local nonprofit that supports the three Dayton-area Fisher Houses. The program began at Wright-Patterson AFB when we opened the Nightingale House in May 1990. The Fisher family started building Fisher Houses in 1990 with the first opening in 1991. Since the Nightingale House, we added Wright-Patt Fisher House I in May 1994 and Wright-Patt Fisher House II in April 2011. The Nightingale House was demolished in February 2011 when Fisher House II was nearing completion. The Dayton V.A. Medical Center Fisher House was added to the network of Fisher Houses in October 2018.

Between the three Dayton-area Fisher Houses, we have a total of 37 fully handicapped-accessible suites, each with a private bath. That equates to lodging availability of more than 13,500 nights a year which further translates to a savings of more than \$2M in hotel costs alone – in a warm and inviting home environment. Since we started this program in May 1990, we have served nearly 25,000 families that have come from all over the world to receive inpatient or outpatient treatment at the Wright-Patt Medical Center and the Dayton V.A. Medical Center – over 1,200 families in 2019 alone. Even with the COVID-19 impacts in 2020, we still supported 526 families.

The guests stay in the Fisher House at no cost for as long as someone is receiving medical care. Our 2021 budget is \$410,857; that equates to \$30 per room, per night. We're good stewards of our donations with more than 94 cents of every dollar available for program expenses.

Yes, the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted our Fisher House occupancy due to increased use of telemedicine visits versus in-person appointments, the delay of some medical procedures, and the cancellation of elective surgeries, nevertheless we have never shut down and occupancy is on the way back up. Our largest source of funding – two-thirds – is from fundraisers and charitable contributions from organizations conducting fundraisers on our behalf. As you can imagine, due to COVID-19, we had eighteen 2020 fundraisers (either ours or supporting organizations) cancelled, so the ongoing crisis has certainly had a negative impact in that regard.

Some of our biggest supporters are Veterans Posts. Some Posts provide direct support from their Instant Bingo programs via a contract while others are more than likely making regular monthly, quarterly and/or annual donations from monies they raise with their Instant Bingo program. To provide you an example of their support in 2020, 64 donations were made by Veterans organizations totaling more than \$36,000 – in spite of the pandemic and the associated COVID impacts to the Posts. This was a year where we raised more than \$362,000 – so about ten percent of the donations we received were from Veterans organizations. In 2019, 98 Veterans organizations made more than \$90,000 in donations in a year where we raised more than \$630,000 – or more than 14 percent of our total donations received.

A Fisher House is not a bed-and-breakfast, but for our military members and Veterans and their families, is often a home-away-from-home during a time of need. We have a unique situation at the Dayton V.A. Medical Center Fisher House. If you know where the V.A. campus is located on the West side of Dayton, you may know that this area of Dayton has been classified as a food desert. There are no nearby grocery stores or restaurants. As such, the Fisher/Nightingale Houses, Inc. provides the House Manager \$5,000 in Visa cards every four to six weeks to use to purchase food and stock two of the three subzero refrigerators and both subzero freezers for the guests. This is a unique need that our organization fills for the V.A. Fisher House guests since Wright-Patt has a commissary on-base and grocery stores located just outside the base gates – a need we wouldn't be able to fulfill without valuable donations.

We ask for support from our donors because sometimes saying "Thank you for your service" is just not enough and I ask our donors to think of their donation this way: It's not about giving money, but more significantly about directly impacting and changing the course of someone's recovery – because, in the words of the national Fisher House Foundation, "a family's love is good medicine."

Donations are the lifeblood of our organization and we know we would not be able to sustain our mission of supporting the three Dayton-area Fisher Houses without Veterans organizations. Thank you from all of us associated with the Fisher/Nightingale Houses, Inc. and the Fisher House families for your time and allowing me to bring awareness to the excellent charitable work the Veterans organizations do for our Veterans in need. I know this would not be possible without charitable gaming dollars.