How can we address and prevent veteran homelessness in our communities?

Homelessness in the State of Florida is a serious issue, and Florida is ranked third nationally based on the amount of homeless people in relationship to the population. Not only that, but the demographic that is hit the hardest by homelessness are our Veterans. Veterans are some of the most important people in our history and our culture, but they still remain deprived of support. This is not an acceptable way to treat those who have put everything on the line to protect our ideals and our democracy. Veteran homelessness is a serious issue that is too often ignored by legislators on local and state levels.

Currently, almost 20% of Florida’s homes sit vacant and unoccupied, which begs the question: what do we do with these structures and that land? I propose that the unoccupied land and vacant buildings be purchased by the state government and be registered as living accommodations for homeless Veterans in Florida. The vacant buildings are to be demolished, and in their places, tiny homes should be built. These homes would be 360 square feet, which would provide enough space for a full kitchenette, as well as a full sized bed, living room, and dining space. These homes would be built so that they could accommodate any disability a Veteran might have, as well as be small enough to fit multiple homes on one lot. These homes would grant Veterans autonomy over their living spaces, provide a community, and be payment for services given to our country. These tiny homes would be built on lots acquired by the state for the purpose of temporary housing in order to aid Veterans. These tiny homes are transitional
housing, so that as Veterans get back on their feet, Veterans can move towards permanent housing, and the tiny homes can be continuously used to aid our Veterans and decrease Florida’s homeless population.

Homeless Veterans do not only need housing, they also need other support to prevent homelessness, and to help them get back on their feet. These services include mental health treatment, healthcare, food assistance, and job training programs. Currently, Florida has several programs to assist Veterans in finding jobs and training in other skills, such as the Veterans Employment Program and Veteran Workforce Grants. Within the tiny home communities, Veterans will have greater access to these programs, as well as mental health programs. Each of these aspects is so essential to aiding our Veterans, and it is of the utmost priority that our Veterans get the support and training that they need to succeed. Our Veterans have given so much to their country, and it’s time that their country starts to give back in a truly helpful and meaningful way.