

**Statement of  
Mr. Max Burke  
Altarum Institute  
Co-Director, Veterans Community Action Teams Project  
Before the  
Texas Senate Veteran Affairs and Military Installations Committee and  
Senate Select Committee on Veterans Health  
Thursday, September 30, 2010  
8:00 a.m.  
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Good morning, Senator Van de Putte, Senator Wentworth, and Members of the Committees. On behalf of our Chief Executive Officer and President, Linc Smith, thank you for inviting Altarum Institute (Altarum) to testify on the Veterans Community Action Teams (VCAT) project. For the sake of brevity, I have submitted supplemental information regarding the Institute and this project under separate covers.

Altarum is a nonprofit health systems research and consulting organization serving government and private-sector clients. We provide objective research and tailored consulting services that assist our clients in understanding and solving the complex systems problems that affect health and health care. Our unique model combines the analytical rigor of a research institution with the business acumen of a traditional consultancy to deliver comprehensive, systems-based solutions that meet unique needs.

Altarum has a strong commitment to serving the needs of our nation's service members and veterans. For more than 30 years, Altarum and our predecessor organizations have worked to improve military and veterans health care serving such diverse clients as the TRICARE Management Activity; the Army, Navy, and Air Force medical services; and the Department of Veterans Affairs. Our commitment to our nation's current and former service members does not stop with our client-based work. Starting in 2008, we launched a new \$7 million, self-funded Mission Projects Initiative. The VCAT project is one of our mission projects, specifically targeted to meet the needs of veterans and their families.

The challenge to meet these needs is immense. Almost 1.8 million service members have left the active military since 2002, and approximately 165,000 veterans reside in Bexar County alone. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen, has punctuated the case we seek to help: "Community nonprofit groups are the answer to meeting veterans' needs after they've left the federal system. We did not do a good job of addressing the problems of those veterans from Vietnam. Community organizations are in the best position to identify veterans in need and to use agility and innovation to help them.... I'm asking that you reach out to them, first understanding what our challenges are.... Time is of the essence."

As our local military heroes return home, many arrive requiring specialized medical and social services as well as support for their families and caregivers. Unfortunately, even in "Military City USA," veterans and their families face the daunting challenge of navigating a fragmented patchwork of service providers to access the benefits, services,

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and help that they need. Compounding the problem is the sad reality that the veterans who need the most help are often the least capable or likely to access it on their own.

Altarum initiated the VCAT project in Bexar County in April 2009, with the endorsement of the Texas Veterans Commission. Since that time, and together with our community partners, the VCAT project has worked to assist the community to design and implement an integrated network or system of local service providers to meet the complex needs of veterans and the domestic needs of their families. This system will empower providers, through readily available information and knowledge of the services of other providers in the network, to effectively connect veterans and families to the services they require. In essence, the goal is to give service providers the ability to effectively implement the “no-wrong-door” policy regardless of where veterans and family members touch the system.

This strategy is achieved via a collaborative of Bexar County-based service providers and other veterans’ advocates, branded the Alliance for Veterans and Families (AVF). In partnership with this emerging organization, the VCAT project has already achieved several important milestones that set the stage for ensuring this initiative’s long-term success:

- The establishment of the AVF, currently pursuing nonprofit status;
- Completion of a community assessment, establishing the specific needs for serving veterans in Bexar County;
- Development of strategic priorities through a facilitated strategic planning forum of almost 100 local service providers and other veterans leaders; and
- Conducting surveys targeting thousands of veterans and scores of service providers to assess the effects of the VCAT project in improving service integration and ultimately veterans’ quality of life and well-being.

Additionally, we are planning an event for hundreds of service providers to inaugurate this service provider network on October 28, 2010. These are the first major steps toward the integrated system of care that we envision.

With technical assistance from Altarum, the AVF is working through the steps of making this veteran services system of care a reality. Multiple government agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and community-based organizations are collaborating on what could be a huge cost saving effort for the community. Moving forward, Altarum’s goal is to ensure the AVF’s success by assisting the emerging organization in operationalizing this system of care in Bexar County. We also strive to assist with resourcing the capabilities required to effectively implement the no-wrong-door concept. As I have already mentioned, Altarum’s financial commitment to this effort has been considerable with \$2.5 million dedicated to the VCAT project through March of 2011. We are now working actively with our partners to secure additional funding partners in the San Antonio community to build on our efforts.

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There are many local partners in this effort and we are continually gratified to know that our common goal remains the same – to ensure that Bexar County veterans, their families, and caregivers receive the benefits and services that they richly deserve. We must ensure that every door is the right door.

We are pleased to be able to brief this committee on this unique community-based solution. Thank you for this opportunity.

Madam Chair, this concludes my statement. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.

Thank you.