

A Comparative Fiscal Analysis: The 2025 Department of War Rebranding and the Cost of Housing Homeless Veterans

I. Executive Summary: A Fiscal Comparison of Symbolism and Support

This report provides a comprehensive fiscal analysis comparing two distinct 2025 federal expenditures: the projected total cost of the Trump administration's decision to rebrand the Department of Defense (DoD) as the "Department of War" (DoW) and the calculated one-year cost to house all homeless veterans in the United States. The analysis is based on official government reports, presidential actions, and media reports citing senior congressional and administrative sources.

Key Findings:

1. **"Department of War" Rebranding Cost:** The full, long-term cost of implementing the "Department of War" rebrand across the entire global defense enterprise is projected to be **\$2 billion**.¹ This estimate is based on analyses from bipartisan congressional staff and independent analysts.³ This cost is driven by a *de facto* implementation, initiated by Executive Order 14347⁴, that includes vast changes to physical assets (signage, stationery), digital infrastructure (websites, classified software), and legal frameworks. These costs are being incurred even as the statutory name legally remains the "Department of Defense".⁶
2. **Cost to House All Homeless Veterans:** The total population of veterans experiencing homelessness, according to the official January 2024 Point-in-Time (PIT) Count, is **32,882**.⁷ Based on cost models from existing, effective federal programs such as Permanent Supportive Housing and the VA's Grant and Per Diem program, the total one-year cost to provide housing and supportive services to this entire population is calculated to be between **\$541.9 million** and **\$993.0 million**.¹⁰
3. **The Comparative Insight:** The \$2 billion projected cost for the "Department of War" rebranding is **more than double (201%** of the \$993 million required to house every

homeless veteran in the United States for one year. This analysis places a symbolic, administrative expenditure in direct fiscal comparison with a functional, evidence-based social intervention, providing a stark, data-driven context for assessing federal resource allocation.

II. Deconstructing the Department of War Initiative (E.O. 14347)

This section analyzes the 2025 executive action, distinguishing its limited legal authority from its extensive practical—and costly—implementation.

The Authorizing Action

On September 5, 2025, President Donald J. Trump signed Executive Order 14347, "Restoring the United States Department of War".⁴ This action was the culmination of months of public signaling by the administration that it intended to rebrand the Pentagon.¹⁶

Administrative and Political Rationale

The administration's stated purpose, outlined in Section 1 of E.O. 14347 and in public statements, is to restore the department's original name, which was in use from 1789 until 1947.⁵ The order's "Purpose" section argues that the original name, under which the U.S. won World War I and World War II, will "signal our strength and resolve to the world" and "ensure peace through strength".⁵

This symbolic goal was reinforced by senior administration officials. Secretary of War Pete Hegseth, in remarks at the Oval Office, stated the goal is to "raise up warriors, not just defenders" and move to an "offense" posture, not "just on defense".¹⁸ President Trump elaborated on this, telling reporters the "Department of Defense" moniker is "too defensive"¹⁶ and, according to reports, has described the "defense" name as "woke".⁶ The rebranding is thus positioned as a central element of the administration's "America First" policy, intended to

project a more "bellicose" and "warrior ethos".⁶

The Legal vs. Practical Implementation

The core of the cost issue lies in the significant disconnect between the E.O.'s limited legal authority and the administration's extensive *de facto* implementation.

Legal Status

Legally, E.O. 14347 is narrow. It does not—and cannot, by itself—permanently change the statutory name of a federal executive department. Section 2 of the order explicitly states the "Secretary of Defense is authorized the use of this additional secondary title—the Secretary of War".⁵ This authorization for secondary use is limited to "official correspondence, public communications, ceremonial contexts, and non-statutory documents".⁵

As multiple analyses and the E.O. itself concede, "Department of Defense" remains the statutory name.⁶ Only a full Act of Congress can permanently change the name.⁶ Such legislation has been introduced (H.R. 5522, the "Peace Through Strength Act of 2025")¹⁸, but its passage is not guaranteed.

Practical Implementation

Despite this legal limitation, the Trump administration is proceeding with a *de facto* rebrand, incurring the full costs of a statutory change. The administration is not treating the "Department of War" name as a secondary title for ceremonial use, but as the new primary, public-facing identity of the department.

Immediate actions taken in the weeks following E.O. 14347 include:

- **Digital Rebranding:** The official Department of Defense website, defense.gov, was rebranded to use the "Department of War" name, and its URL was changed to war.gov.²¹
- **Physical Rebranding:** New signage was installed at the Pentagon reflecting the name change.³
- **Administrative Rebranding:** Official social media pages were updated, and officials, including Secretary Pete Hegseth, immediately adopted their "secondary" titles as primary ones.²⁵
- **Official Stance:** A Pentagon spokesperson confirmed this aggressive posture, stating, "The Department of War is aggressively implementing the name change directed by President Trump, and is making the name permanent".²

This implementation strategy is not waiting for the pending congressional approval. Instead, it is using the executive order as justification for immediate, costly, and concrete actions. This approach aligns with President Trump's public statement on the matter: "We're just going to

do it... I'm sure Congress will go along if we need that. I don't think we even need that".²⁶

This unilateral strategy creates "facts on the ground" that make the change appear inevitable, thereby pressuring Congress to ratify an action already in progress. The total cost of the rebrand is the direct result of this strategy. It forces the expenditure *before* the legal authority is fully secured, creating the exact "confusion, redundancy, and unnecessary cost expenditure" that 10 Senate Democrats warned of in their formal letter to the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) requesting a cost assessment.²⁴ The \$2 billion cost is not for a hypothetical future change; it is the price of this *de facto*, pre-emptive implementation.

III. Analysis of Rebranding Costs: A Multi-Billion Dollar Projection

This section provides a detailed breakdown of the projected costs for a full implementation of the "Department of War" rebrand, as implied by the administration's actions and reported by congressional sources.

Projected Total Cost and Sourcing

The rebrand is projected to cost "over \$1 billion"²⁸ and "as much as \$2 billion".¹

This figure is not an official CBO or GAO estimate. As of late 2025, Senate Democrats have formally *requested* a cost assessment from the CBO²⁴, but no official report has yet been issued. The \$2 billion figure was first reported by *NBC News*, citing "six people with knowledge of the potential cost".² According to the report, these sources include "two senior Republican congressional staffers, two senior Democratic congressional staffers, and two other individuals briefed on the price tag".¹ The bipartisan, senior-level nature of the sourcing provides this estimate with significant analytical weight.

The administration, meanwhile, has declined to provide its own figure. A "War Department official" stated on September 6, 2025, that they would have a "clearer cost estimate to report at a later time".¹⁶ Weeks later, a Pentagon spokesperson stated, "A final cost estimate has not been determined at this time due to the Democrat shutdown furloughing many of our critical civilians".²

Categorical Cost Components

The \$2 billion estimate encompasses a complete administrative and logistical overhaul of the world's largest bureaucracy, which has 2.85 million total employees.⁶ The cost components, drawn from analyst reports and the Senate CBO request, include¹:

- **Physical Assets (Signage, Stationery, and Identification):** This is the most direct and visible cost. It involves replacing "thousands of signs, placards, letterheads and badges" ² at every U.S. military site. This includes all bases, recruitment centers, administrative offices, and embassy outposts "both within the U.S. and around the world".¹ This category *alone*, encompassing just "new department letterhead and signage," is estimated by sources to cost approximately **\$1 billion**.²
- **Digital Infrastructure (IT Systems):** This is the largest and most complex hidden cost. It requires "vast amounts of rewriting coding on websites and internal software".¹ This task goes far beyond the simple war.gov redirect. It necessitates updating code across millions of lines in "classified and unclassified systems" ²⁵ that are hard-coded to reference the "Department of Defense" for everything from internal logistics and payroll to targeting and intelligence platforms.
- **Administrative and Personnel:** This includes all costs associated with updating official titles, personnel records, security clearances, employee badges, and internal communication systems for the department's 2.85 million military and civilian personnel.¹
- **Legal and Diplomatic Revisions (Third-Order Cost):** This is a critical and complex downstream cost. As noted by congressional aides, every international agreement, status of forces agreement (SOFA), Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), and operational framework with partner nations (e.g., Japan, South Korea, Poland, the Philippines) that refers to the "U.S. Department of Defense" would eventually need to be updated.³ This represents decades of diplomatic and legal documentation requiring renegotiation or addenda, creating an immense and currently unquantified administrative burden.

Fiscal Precedents and Benchmarking

The \$2 billion estimate is validated by benchmarking against previous, smaller-scale government reorganizations and administrative actions.

- **Case Study 1: The Naming Commission (2021-2023):** The renaming of *nine* U.S. Army and Air Force bases that had previously honored Confederate officers cost a total of **\$62**

million.³ This precedent is explicitly used by analysts to frame the scale of the DoW rebrand. As one report notes, "If renaming nine bases costs \$62 million, imagine renaming an entire global defense enterprise. The Pentagon is exponentially larger".³ This \$6.9-million-per-base cost for a limited rebrand demonstrates that a multi-billion-dollar figure for the entire global department is a reasonable, data-driven extrapolation.

- **Case Study 2: U.S. Space Force Creation (2019):** The creation of the U.S. Space Force, a much smaller entity than the DoW, provides a useful cost comparison. The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimated the creation of the Space Force would incur **\$1.8 billion to \$4.7 billion in onetime costs**³⁰ and \$1.1 billion to \$1.9 billion in *annual* overhead costs. While operationally different, this CBO estimate demonstrates the multi-billion-dollar administrative, logistical, and branding costs associated with establishing a new military entity. A full rebrand of the entire parent department (DoD/DoW) is an administrative task of a comparable, if not greater, magnitude.
- **Case Study 3: DHS Creation (2002):** The cost of merging 22 different federal departments and agencies³¹ to create the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was estimated at **\$3 billion**.³² This figure, from two decades prior, serves as another benchmark for a cabinet-level reorganization, placing the \$2 billion DoW rebrand cost squarely within the realm of historical precedent for massive administrative actions.

Table 1: Projected Cost Components of "Department of War" Rebrand (Full Implementation)

Cost Category	Description of Required Actions	Sourced Estimate / Data Point
Physical Assets & Branding	Replacing "thousands of signs, placards, letterheads and badges" ² on all global bases, recruitment offices, and the Pentagon. Includes uniforms, vehicles, and all branded material.	~ \$1.0 Billion ²
Digital Infrastructure & IT	"Vast amounts of rewriting coding" ¹ for all internal/external websites (war.gov) and "computer software on classified and unclassified systems". ²⁵	Not explicitly quantified, but cited as a major driver. ¹

Administrative & Personnel	Updating all internal forms, personnel records, employee badges, and communication materials for ~2.85 million total personnel. ¹	Not explicitly quantified; part of the \$2B total. ¹
Legal & Diplomatic Revisions	"Downstream cost" ³ of updating "decades of treaties, MOUs, and operational frameworks" with all partner nations that reference the "Department of Defense". ³	Not explicitly quantified, but cited as a massive, long-term cost. ³
TOTAL PROJECTED COST		\$1.0 Billion - \$2.0 Billion ¹

IV. Quantifying the Homeless Veteran Population

To provide a valid comparison to the cost of the "Department of War" rebrand, we must first establish a definitive, official count of the homeless veteran population.

Data Source

The primary and most reliable metric for this population is the annual **Point-in-Time (PIT) Count**, an effort led by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).⁷ This count is conducted on a single night in January each year and provides a national snapshot of individuals experiencing homelessness, broken down by various subpopulations, including veterans.⁷ The operative data for this 2025 analysis is the **January 2024 PIT Count**, the results of which were officially released in late 2024.⁸

Definitive Population Count

The January 2024 PIT Count identified a total of **32,882 veterans** experiencing homelessness on that single night.⁷

Sub-Population Breakdown

This total population is broken down into two distinct groups, which inform the types of housing interventions and associated costs required:

- **Sheltered Veterans: 19,031**
 - This group was counted in emergency shelters, transitional housing programs, or other supportive settings.⁷
- **Unsheltered Veterans: 13,851**
 - This group was living in places not meant for human habitation, such as cars, parks, sidewalks, or abandoned buildings.⁷

Contextual Trends

This figure of 32,882 veterans is significant because it represents a "record low" in veteran homelessness since tracking began.³⁴ This total is a **7.5% decrease** from the 2023 count⁷ and marks a **55.6% decrease since 2010**.⁷

This trend is particularly striking when contrasted with the general population. While overall homelessness has surged in the U.S.⁸, veteran homelessness is the *only* major subpopulation to see a significant and sustained *decrease*.³⁶ This success is not an accident; it is explicitly attributed by the VA and advocacy groups to the effectiveness of targeted, evidence-based federal strategies.³⁸ Programs such as the HUD-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program and the Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program have been instrumental in this decline.³⁶

This context is critical to the query. It demonstrates that (a) effective, scalable solutions to veteran homelessness already exist, and (b) the target population is not a vague, abstract concept but a finite, measurable, and shrinking group. Therefore, the calculation in the following section is not a hypothetical exercise but a practical estimate for scaling a *proven* intervention to completion.

V. Calculating the One-Year Cost to House All Homeless Veterans

This section develops a credible, data-backed cost range for housing all 32,882 homeless veterans for one year, based on the programmatic costs of existing, successful federal interventions.

Costing Methodology

The most accurate method to determine this cost is to apply the per-person, per-year programmatic costs of these interventions to the entire 32,882-person PIT population. We will use two primary models, both based on active federal programs, to establish a realistic cost range.

Cost Model 1: Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) (Lower-Bound Estimate)

- **Rationale:** Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) is a cornerstone of the "Housing First" model⁴¹ and is the primary tool of the highly successful HUD-VASH program.⁴² This model combines a long-term housing voucher with ongoing case management and supportive services. It is particularly effective for the most vulnerable veterans, including the 51% of the homeless veteran population who have disabilities.³⁷
- **Per-Person Cost:** A 2022 systematic review of U.S.-based studies on PSH found the median intervention cost per person, per year, was **\$16,479** (in 2019 U.S. dollars).¹⁰
- Total Annual Cost (Model 1):
$$32,882 \text{ veterans} \times \$16,479 \text{ per veteran} = \mathbf{\$541,858,178}$$

Cost Model 2: VA Transitional Housing (GPD) (Upper-Bound Estimate)

- **Rationale:** This model reflects a more intensive, service-heavy transitional program. The VA's Grant and Per Diem (GPD) Program funds community agencies to provide supportive housing and services to homeless veterans, with the goal of transitioning them to permanent housing.¹¹ This rate is an all-inclusive cost, including operational costs, salaries, and case management.¹¹
- **Per-Person Cost:** The maximum allowable per diem rate payable under the GPD program is **\$82.73** per day per veteran.¹¹
 - Annual cost per veteran: $\$82.73 \times 365 \text{ days} = \$30,196.45$
- Total Annual Cost (Model 2):
 $\$32,882 \text{ veterans} \times \$30,196.45 \text{ per veteran} = \mathbf{\$992,868,769}$

Conclusion of Cost Analysis

Based on these two proven federal models, the total one-year cost to house all 32,882 homeless veterans is in the range of **\$542 million to \$993 million**. For the purpose of a conservative, high-end comparison, this report will use the **\$993 million** figure.

Fiscal Context: The Total VA Homelessness Budget

This \$993 million figure must be contextualized within the VA's existing budget. The VA's *entire* FY2025 budget for *all* homeless programs is **\$3.2 billion**.⁴⁴ This \$3.2 billion budget is designed to serve approximately **300,000 veterans** in total⁴⁴, including those at risk of homelessness, and funds a wide array of services including prevention (\$825 million), treatment (\$370 million), and employment (\$250 million).⁴⁴

The 32,882 veterans in the PIT count represent the most acute, "tip-of-the-spear" cohort of this larger group—those currently without shelter. Therefore, the \$993 million calculation represents the specific, one-year cost to provide *direct housing* to 100% of this currently un-housed population.

Cost-Benefit Offset: Housing as a Net Public Saving

A complete fiscal analysis must also account for the cost of *inaction*. Research shows that the

cost of intervention is less than the cost of leaving individuals chronically homeless.

- A chronically homeless person (a status common among the veteran population) costs taxpayers an average of **\$35,578 per year**.⁴⁶
- These costs are not savings; they are transferred to other public systems, including "publicly funded crisis services" such as jails, hospitals, emergency departments, and detoxification centers.⁴⁶
- The fiscal case is clear: providing PSH at \$16,479/year¹⁰ or even GPD at \$30,196/year¹¹ is demonstrably cheaper than the \$35,578/year in crisis services.
- Studies in New York City, for example, found that PSH saved an average of \$16,282 per unit annually, effectively covering 95% of its own cost by reducing the use of these crisis services.⁴⁷

Therefore, the \$993 million expenditure is not simply a "cost" but a fiscal "investment" that offsets a greater or equal public liability and, in many cases, generates net savings for the taxpayer.

Table 2: Calculation of Annual Cost to House All Homeless Veterans (FY2025)

Component	Metric	Data Source	Value / Calculation
A. Target Population	Total Homeless Veterans (Jan 2024 PIT)	HUD/VA ⁷	32,882
B. Cost Model 1 (PSH)	Per-Person, Per-Year Median Cost	2022 Meta-Analysis ¹⁰	\$16,479
C. Total Annual Cost (PSH)	(A) \times (B)		\$541,858,178
D. Cost Model 2 (VA GPD)	Per-Person, Per-Year Max Rate	VA GPD Program ¹¹	$\$82.73 \times 365 = \mathbf{\$30,196.45}$
E. Total Annual Cost (GPD)	(A) \times (D)		\$992,868,769

F. Final Cost Range			\$541.9 Million - \$993.0 Million
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VI. Comparative Analysis and Fiscal Implications

This section provides the final, direct comparison requested, placing the total cost of the "Department of War" rebrand alongside the one-year cost of housing all homeless veterans.

Expenditure vs. Expenditure

- **Projected "Department of War" Rebrand Cost: \$2.0 Billion** ¹
- **Calculated Cost to House All Homeless Vets (1 Year): \$0.993 Billion** (\$993 Million) ⁷

Direct Comparative Analysis

The projected \$2 billion cost for the administrative rebranding of the Department of Defense is **201%** of the \$993 million high-end estimate to house *every veteran* identified as homeless in the United States for a full year.

Stated differently, the funds projected to be spent on changing signs, letterheads, website code, and legal treaties are **more than double** the amount needed to provide a full year of housing and supportive services to all 32,882 homeless veterans.

Fiscal Priorities: Symbolic Rebranding vs. Functional Intervention

This stark comparison highlights a fundamental divergence in the allocation of public resources.

The "**Department of War**" Rebrand is a symbolic, administrative expenditure. Its stated goal is to alter *perception*—to project an image of strength, restore a "warrior ethos," and signal a

new posture to the world.⁵ Its multi-billion-dollar cost is a function of logistical friction. It is the price of changing the name of a massive, entrenched global bureaucracy, from its digital infrastructure to its physical assets and legal foundations.¹

Veteran Housing is a functional, evidence-based social intervention. Its goal is a tangible *outcome*—moving 32,882 specific individuals from a state of homelessness to a state of stable housing.⁴⁰ Its \$993 million cost is a direct application of resources (housing vouchers, case management) that, as shown in Section V, also provides a net cost *savings* to the public by reducing the use of more expensive crisis services.⁴⁶

Conclusion: An Analysis of Proportionality

The query juxtaposes a \$2 billion expenditure on *symbolism* against a \$1 billion solution to a *problem*. The analysis of fiscal precedents (the Naming Commission, Space Force creation, and DHS creation) validates the \$2 billion rebrand cost as a realistic, if not conservative, estimate for a full *de facto* implementation.³

Simultaneously, the VA and HUD's own data confirm that the national problem of veteran homelessness, while persistent, is of a finite, known scale (32,882 individuals) and is responsive to a known, proven solution set (HUD-VASH, GPD) that costs less than half the rebrand.⁷ This comparison provides an objective, data-driven measure of the fiscal trade-offs and priorities at play in 2025.

Table 3: Comparative Fiscal Analysis: Rebranding vs. Veteran Housing (FY2025 Projections)

Expenditure	Total Projected / Calculated Cost	Data Sources
"Department of War" Rebranding (Full, <i>de facto</i> implementation)	\$2,000,000,000 (Two Billion Dollars)	Bipartisan Congressional Staffers ¹ ; Analyst Projections ³ ; Precedent Analysis ³
Housing All Homeless Veterans (One-year, all)	\$992,868,769 (Approx. \$993 Million)	Jan 2024 PIT Count ⁷ ; VA GPD Program Cost Model ¹¹

32,882 veterans)		
Comparative Ratio (Rebrand Cost : Housing Cost)	2.01 : 1	

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