



Statement for the Record of the

National Coalition
for Homeless Veterans

**United States House of Representatives
Committee on Veterans' Affairs,
Subcommittee Economic Opportunity**

Hearing on

Performance of the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program (VRAP)
and the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP)

September 12, 2013

Chairman Bill Flores, Ranking Member Mark Takano, and distinguished members of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity:

The National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (NCHV) is honored to present this Statement for the Record for the legislative hearing on September 12, 2013. On behalf of the 2,100 community- and faith-based organizations NCHV represents, we thank you for your commitment to serving our nation's most vulnerable heroes.

This written statement will focus on NCHV's longstanding support for the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP) – the only federal program specifically dedicated to helping homeless veterans prepare for and enter employment, and providing follow-up mentoring and counseling to help them remain employed.

HVRP is one of the most important tools in our nation's toolkit to end homelessness among veterans by 2015. The program has been authorized by Congress at \$50 million a year since 2005. Despite serving about 16,000 veterans with serious and often multiple barriers to employment each year, and its standing as one of the most successful programs in the Department of Labor portfolio, it has never received the full level of funding authorized by Congress. In FY 2013, HVRP was funded at \$38.1 million.

NCHV strongly supports a full annual appropriation of \$50 million for HVRP to increase the number of homeless veterans served by the program. We also endorse reauthorizing HVRP through 2018, as proposed in H.R. 2150, the "Homeless Veterans Reintegration Programs Reauthorization Act of 2013."

Finally, NCHV strongly supports the intent of Section 6 of H.R. 357 – extending HVRP eligibility to veterans who are fast-tracked into permanent housing. When the original regulations for HVRP eligibility were drafted, there were no veteran-specific programs designed to quickly move homeless veterans from the streets into housing. Today, that is the prime objective of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) "Housing First" policy.

HVRP is particularly vital to veterans receiving vouchers under the HUD-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program. Helping these formerly homeless veterans re-enter the workforce offers the greatest hope they will become progressively less dependent on government assistance as they advance to independent living in permanent housing.

Description of Program

HVRP is administered through the Department of Labor-Veterans Employment and Training Service (DOL-VETS). VETS administers competitive grants to several types of community partners, including state and local government agencies, private service providers, and faith- and community-based organizations. Organizations must reapply for funding every three years, and must meet or exceed their program goals to remain competitive.

Organizations awarded HVRP grants provide their homeless veteran clients with:

- Job training and professional development services
- Career counseling, and resume preparation
- Job search and placement assistance
- Follow-up services to ensure job retention
- Vital supports like clothing, referrals to housing resources, health and substance abuse treatment services, and transportation assistance

Roughly 16,000 veterans each year benefit from the services that HVRP provides. In recent years those services have been increasingly utilized by younger homeless veterans. The returning soldiers, sailors, Marines, and airmen who served in Iraq and Afghanistan (OEF/OIF era) face unemployment rates of 10% as of August 2013. Many of these out-of-work veterans fall into homelessness – 12,700 OEF/OIF veterans were homeless at some point during 2010.

HVRP is the most effective program available to address homeless veteran's financial issues – by helping them become gainfully employed. With relatively small grants to already-existing community service delivery systems, HVRP capitalizes on the expertise and infrastructure of its 143 community-based partner organizations.

Despite the breadth of services offered by HVRP, they currently can only be accessed by veterans meeting the definition of “homeless” in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. A veteran who is housed through the HUD-VASH Program does not meet that definition. Placement of chronically homeless and extreme low-income veterans in permanent housing with a HUD-VASH voucher is a priority under the new VA policy of “Housing First.” This policy places a homeless veteran as soon as possible into stable, safe housing with intense case management. Though this is a sound and results-proven policy, the current rules prevent veterans who are placed in HUD-VASH housing quickly from receiving the benefits of HVRP.

As a nation we are committed to ending homelessness among veterans by 2015. Though progress is being made to reach that goal, a fully funded and properly applied HVRP is a critical, strategic component of the campaign.

Unique Aspects of HVRP

HVRP is the nation's only employment program wholly dedicated to serving homeless veterans. Despite the multiple barriers to re-employment most homeless veterans face, the HVRP program *requires* its grantees to successfully place clients in jobs, and to provide follow-up services to help them remain employed for nearly a year. HVRP is so successful because it does not just fund employment services; it guarantees job placement and job retention supports.

Through HVRP, these men and women are given an opportunity to build the skills necessary to enter the workforce. The program provides wrap-around supports including residential stability, health services, and counseling. Furthermore, HVRP providers do not abandon their veterans when they become employed; regulations stipulate they must provide follow-up services for 270 days after the veteran returns to work.

At an average cost of \$3,295 per placement, HVRP clients can expect to find a job with an average wage of \$10.48 per hour. The job placement rate of HVRP grantees is, in many cases, higher than that of veteran employment programs overall.

Recommendations

H.R. 2150 would re-authorize HVRP at its current level of \$50 million annually through 2018. The long-term nature of veteran enrollment in HVRP (often almost two years) means that year-to-year authorizations are hard on the community partners administering the services. For each veteran helped, a two-year commitment must be made to a program of support, training and post-employment follow-up.

The Department of Labor has stated that historically the low funding levels have not impacted the quality of services but have limited the number of veterans served by the program. Increasing the funding would undoubtedly increase program capacity and reach more of those who need these services. The most recent estimates place the number of homeless veterans above 62,000. Although this represents a 17% drop since 2009, the fact remains that tens of thousands of homeless veterans still need help to get off of the streets.

An interesting footnote to the economic impact of HVRP is that the government expense of providing these services – average job placement cost of \$3,295, average hourly wage of \$10.48 – returns about 150% of the program cost in federal and state tax revenue during the first year of employment.

“Housing First” paradigms place the emphasis on providing stable, safe, and permanent housing to homeless veterans as soon as possible in order to properly support their recovery from homelessness. These data-driven, results-proven paradigms should not exclude homeless veteran clients from jobs training and employment assistance. The recovery and reintegration of homeless veterans requires stable, safe, and permanent housing, *as well as* job training and placement assistance.

Ensuring a stable income – through employment opportunities or earned veterans’ benefits – is the surest way to prevent recurring homelessness and to end chronic homelessness among veterans. “Housing First” was never meant to mean, and never should mean, “Housing Only.” NCHV supports extending eligibility for the HVRP program to veterans fast-tracked into permanent housing in the HUD-VASH program.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this Statement for the Record. Thank you also for your commitment to ending veteran homelessness. NCHV is confident you will continue your unwavering support of veterans in crisis in the future, and we look forward to working with this subcommittee for the duration of the Five Year Plan to End Veteran Homelessness, and beyond.

Thank you for your service,

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