

Policy and Legislative Update: House Appropriations for FY 2016

Joshua Stewart, Assistant Director of Policy

Recently the House of Representatives began consideration on annual appropriations bills. Among them was the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs appropriation bill, which governs most of the spending for homeless programs serving homeless and at-risk veterans. Unfortunately, this bill (H.R. 2029) proposes to woefully underfund our nation's response to the crisis of veteran homelessness. H.R. 2029 passed the House on April 30th, 2015 with a vote of 255 to 163, more or less along party lines.

Though the House's proposed bill matches the budget ask made for the Department of Veterans Affairs by the Obama Administration (as you will be aware from past NCHV communications) that proposed budget was itself insufficient to meet the needs of communities around the country for the end of 2015 and beyond.

For Fiscal Year 2016, which runs from October 1, 2015 to September 30, 2016, the appropriations bill proposes:

- No new funds for the HUD-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) partnership. Though vouchers are governed through a different appropriations bill, the supportive services dollars for the program would need to be included in this bill – but are not,
- A cut of \$49 million dollars to the Grant and Per Diem (GPD) program from FY 2015, and
- A cut of \$75 million to the Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program from funds which had previously been appropriated for the use of the program in FY 2016.

These disinvestments would significantly impact the ability of communities to serve homeless veterans in need. Though the appropriation bill includes an additional \$227 million for projected medical treatment costs for homeless veterans in the coming year, it includes a total cut of \$124 million from transitional housing, prevention, and rapid-rehousing programs.

In short, this premature disinvestment amounts to a 23% cut to the SSVF and GPD programs from their FY 2015 levels. This cut to housing programs for homeless and at-risk veterans removes crucial funds that should be used in the first fiscal quarter of 2016 as we near the end of the Five-Year Plan to End Veteran Homelessness by 2015.

There are many successful stories around the country of communities and cities ending veteran homelessness already, including tremendous success stories like New Orleans, but there are also many communities around the country that are committed to the goal but have yet to reach it. These communities have specific resource needs that will not be filled if this proposed appropriation is passed as-is.

Cutting programs that help to house homeless veterans is not a solution to veteran homelessness.

NCHV calls upon the Senate to protect these programs from cuts in its forthcoming appropriations bills, and upon all of Congress to reach an agreement that would allow committed communities and service providers around the country to end and prevent veteran homelessness.