

Policy and Legislative Update: Passage of Veterans Bill and Funding at Year End

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H.R. 6416 Signed into Law

In December as they wrapped up the final days of the 114th Congress, the U.S. Senate passed H.R. 6416, the “Jeff Miller and Richard Blumenthal Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2016”. This bill contained several provisions related to veteran homelessness, some of the highlights of which included:

- Permanently authorizing the use of VA homeless programs by veterans with “Other Than Honorable” discharges,
- An update to the VA’s definition of homelessness, to include the McKinney-Vento updates which allow individuals fleeing domestic violence to be considered homeless,
- An authorization of a higher Per Diem rate to be paid to Transition in Place programs,
- The creation a program to allow for follow-up case management for veterans who have successfully completed a GPD program,
- Provisions designed to ease the transition for any GPD that wishes shift to units to permanent housing, and
- Permanently authorizing the National Center for Homelessness Among Veterans.
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Just a few days later, President Obama signed the bill into law. NCHV will be tracking the roll-out of the new provisions by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs in the coming weeks and months.

Thank you to everyone who responded to our calls for advocacy! Your contributions to the effort made the difference; it kept this issue at the top of the agenda, even in the contentious environment confronting the Congress at the close of the session.

Congress Funds the Government Through April 2017

The CR was passed earlier on in the same legislative day as H.R. 6416, and narrowly averted a governmental shutdown that was almost triggered by a procedural fight over miners’ healthcare. The agreement that was reached funds the federal government at the level of the last fiscal year until it expires in April, 2017. The current plan is to have the new Congress and President tackle the funding provisions when they arrive in D.C. beginning in January.

It is important to note that the Department of Veteran’s Affairs is not covered by the CR. Legislation governing the funding levels for this fiscal year at VA was passed several months ago (as part of a previous CR), and therefore negates the need for a continuing resolution in the part of the federal government. You can read NCHV’s message on the VA funding at <http://bit.ly/2i5XF4P>.

Final Thoughts for 2016 and First Thoughts of 2017

All in all, the service provider community had a good year legislatively speaking. While of course there remains a mountain of work to accomplish in 2017, there was more substantive legislation signed into law in 2016 than in the previous two years. Likewise, on the appropriations front, two of the pillars of our work to end veteran homelessness received increased funding; the SSVF program received an increase of \$20 million, and the GPD program also received an increase of \$10 million. NCHV remains committed to

continuing our work in these areas, as well as completing the unfinished work of long term funding increases for HVRP and the HUD-VASH program.

With a potential GPD re-application directive coming from VA (not yet released at press time), and the changing of the Presidency, the opportunities for policy changes in our area of government are nearly countless. NCHV remains committed to our core mission and looks forward to working with our traditional federal partners under the new Administration. Together we can ensure that a veteran never has to sleep on the streets of the nation he or she signed up to defend.