



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 Pending Legislation

April 10, 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 April 10, 2013. On behalf of the 2,100 community- and faith-based organizations that NCHV represents, we thank you for your commitment to serving our nation's most vulnerable heroes.

This written statement will focus on NCHV's strong support for Rep. Brad R. Wenstrup's H.R. 1305, "To amend title 38, United States Code, to provide clarification regarding eligibility for services under the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program." If signed into law, this legislation would immediately impact veteran service providers and their clients.

H.R. 1305 serves a simple purpose: to clarify eligibility for the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP). Specifically, the bill would ensure that the following two subgroups of homeless veteran are able to access HVRP:

1. Veterans who participate in the interagency supportive housing program known as HUD-VASH, and
2. Veterans who are transitioning out of incarceration.

While current law could potentially be construed in such a way as to render H.R. 1305 unnecessary, this bill would eliminate any uncertainty. Therefore, NCHV strongly supports its swift passage.

Background on Federal Programs Impacted by H.R. 1305

Administered by the U.S. Department of Labor-Veterans' Employment and Training Service (DOL-VETS) for more than two decades, HVRP is the nation's largest employment program wholly dedicated to serving homeless veterans, most of whom have serious and multiple barriers to re-entering the workforce.

HVRP is authorized by Title 38, U.S. Code, § 2021, which instructs the Secretary of Labor to conduct such programs "to expedite the reintegration of homeless veterans into the labor force." The term "homeless veteran" is defined in Title 38, U.S. Code, § 2002 as: "a veteran who is homeless (as that term is defined in section 103(a) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11302(a))."

A veteran who is housed through the HUD-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) Program – jointly administered by the U.S. Departments of Housing and Urban Development and Veterans Affairs – does not meet the definition of "homeless veteran" as described above. However, a veteran possessing a HUD-VASH voucher and actively searching for housing is not prohibited from enrolling in HVRP. If a veteran resides in a shelter while searching for permanent housing, for instance, he or she would be considered homeless. Only once that veteran moves into permanent housing with a HUD-VASH voucher would he or she no longer meet the McKinney-Vento definition of "homeless."

The HUD-VASH Program was revamped in fiscal year (FY) 2008, when the U.S. Congress appropriated \$75 million for approximately 10,000 HUD-VASH vouchers. Through FY 2013,

Congress has appropriated at least \$50 million for new vouchers each fiscal year. Today, about 57,000 vouchers are funded by Congress.

Why Does HVRP Eligibility Need to Be Clarified?

The modern-day version of the HUD-VASH Program did not exist when HVRP was introduced, and the rapid advancement of homeless persons into permanent housing was not necessarily an expected outcome for clients in VA-funded transitional assistance programs. There is mounting pressure to reduce inefficiencies among federal homeless assistance programs, yet HVRP is constrained by regulations conceived in a bygone era of limited homeless veteran services.

Certain realities for veterans have not changed over the past two decades, however. Income supports remain a critical need for veterans searching for and working to remain in permanent housing. While some veterans in the HUD-VASH Program do not actively seek employment due to serious mental illness, chronic substance abuse, physical disabilities or co-occurring disorders, many others need the specialized job preparation, placement and retention services offered by HVRP.

It can take up to 120 days for a veteran who receives a HUD-VASH voucher to secure and move into permanent housing. In theory, this is an ideal opportunity for voucher-holders to become enrolled in the HVRP program. But if the veteran client and his or her case manager have not identified employment services as a priority early in the housing search process, or they are unaware that the veteran is only eligible for HVRP before moving into permanent housing, the opportunity is lost.

The “Housing First” strategy adopted by the federal government under the “Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness” in June 2010 fundamentally changed the nation’s homeless services delivery landscape. This strategy calls for rapid re-housing of homeless persons and families – including veterans – and waives many of the requirements veterans had to satisfy to participate in the HUD-VASH Program.

As the name Housing First implies, placement in permanent housing as rapidly as possible with sound case management is the top priority, with additional services provided on a case-by-case basis according to client preferences. Considering the multiple challenges faced by veterans eligible for the HUD-VASH Program, the intense focus on successful housing placements can delay or preclude referrals to employment assistance programs.

H.R. 1305 Provides an Immediate Resolution to This Issue

The permanent supportive housing provided through the HUD-VASH Program does not reduce a veteran’s need for the employment supports provided by HVRP. Helping veterans increase their earning potential and employment security hastens their advancement off the rolls of those who depend on subsidized housing. This, in effect, makes those vouchers available for other veteran families in desperate need of housing assistance.

Knowledge of HVRP is not uniform among HUD-VASH case managers, and there is no mandate in place to ensure that voucher-holders are considered for HVRP enrollment while they are still eligible. Even if these veterans are able to apply in time, local HVRP programs may be operating at capacity, which could prevent them from utilizing this resource or require them to postpone their move into permanent housing until their enrollment is effected.

In light of these possibilities, and to ensure that homeless veterans are able to make full use of the federal assistance available to them, NCHV urges the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity to help shepherd H.R. 1305 to the president's desk.

In Summation

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this Statement for the Record for today's hearing. It is a privilege to work with the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, to ensure that every veteran in crisis has reasonable access to the employment supports they earned.

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NCHV Disclosure of Federal Grants

Grantor: U.S. Department of Labor
Subagency: Veterans' Employment and Training Service
Grant/contract amount: \$350,000
Performance period: 8/13/2012 - 8/12/2013
Indirect costs limitations or
CAP limitations: 20% total award
Grant/contract award notice
provided as part of proposal: Yes

Grantor: U.S. Department of Labor
Subagency: Veterans' Employment and Training Service
Grant/contract amount: \$350,000
Performance period: 8/13/2011 - 8/12/2012
Indirect costs limitations or
CAP limitations: 20% total award
Grant/contract award notice
provided as part of proposal: Yes

Grantor: U.S. Department of Labor
Subagency: Veterans' Employment and Training Service
Grant/contract amount: \$350,000
Performance period: 8/13/2010 - 8/12/2011
Indirect costs limitations or
CAP limitations: 20% total award
Grant/contract award notice
provided as part of proposal: Yes