

Rep. Zoe Lofgren (CA-19)
Member Day Hearing: Testimony and Proposals on the Department of Veterans Affairs
House Committee on Veterans Affairs

May 16, 2018

I want to thank Chairman Roe and Ranking Member Walz for providing Members who do not serve on the Veterans Affairs Committee the opportunity to relay feedback from our districts on veterans' issues and to share our proposals for how to address them. My testimony will focus on veteran homelessness, and two Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) programs that have shown success in reducing veteran homelessness, and can continue to do so with sustained and additional support from Congress and the Administration.

One of the biggest concerns for veterans in my district, and across my home state of California, is homelessness. Of the 40,000 homeless veterans in the United States,¹ in 2017, 11,000 were in California². The San José/Santa Clara City & County region, which encompasses my district, places fifth among metropolitan regions with the highest number of homeless veterans in the country—the count, in 2017, was 660 in that area, according to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) *2017 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress*.³ The HUD *2017 Comprehensive Housing Analysis on San José-Sunnyvale-Santa Clara, CA*, found that rental market “vacancy rates have declined since 2010 because of increased population growth, strong household preferences in renting, and a sustained economic recovery supported by the technology sector.”⁴ The rising costs and demands for housing in the area have contributed to the growth in the homeless population, including that of homeless veterans.

Collaborative solutions are needed to tackle this crisis, and I have seen how this works in my own district at the San José Homeless Veterans Emergency Housing Facility (HVEHF), which I have visited several times since it opened in 2013. HVEHF provides homeless veterans transitional housing and supportive services, including treatment beds, housing assistance, case management, vocational rehabilitation, and mental health and addiction treatment. Staff at HVEHF are available to residents daily, at all hours, and enriching activities, such as financial management workshops, community outings, and job training workshops are offered. Residents of the San José HVEHF receive a well-rounded set of services to help ensure their healthy transition to permanent housing and employment.

Although the San José HVEHF has served over 6,600 homeless veterans to date, the facility is limited with the services it can provide at any one point in time. Currently the facility's capacity is for 25 treatment beds, and 125 transitional housing beds for homeless or near-homeless veterans in need of emergency housing services. San José HVEHF is a non-profit organization that combines partial funding from VA's Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem (GPD) Program with charitable funding from community partners and corporations in order to provide services. There is a great need for additional capacity at the San José facility and for more

¹ https://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/pit_count.asp

² <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2007-2017-PIT-Counts-by-State.xlsx>

³ <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2017-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/publications/pdf/SanJoseCA-comp-17.pdf>

facilities like this one to open. More funding should be made available for such facilities to help homeless and near-homeless veterans get the support they need to transition to permanent housing.

One of the most successful programs, in my district and across the country, in eliminating veteran homelessness is HUD-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH). HUD-VASH combines rental assistance, in the form of HUD vouchers, with case management and supportive services provided by the VA. The holistic approach taken by HUD-VASH is a key to its success in getting and keeping veterans permanently housed. Participating veterans receive case management services that provide access to supportive services, such as those that address mental illness, substance use disorder, or physical disabilities—leading causes of veteran homelessness in Santa Clara County⁵. Another critical benefit of this program is that HUD-VASH is available to both veterans, as well as veterans with families. HUD-VASH is also well integrated into the VA system, so not only are veterans able to apply for HUD-VASH directly, but they are often referred to it by case managers from other VA programs.

HUD-VASH has issued more than 87,000 vouchers and served approximately 144,000 homeless veterans through the program since 2008.⁶ Locally, the City of San José, Santa Clara County, the Santa Clara County Housing Authority, and Destination: Home launched the “All the Way Home” campaign on Veterans Day 2015 with the ambitious goal of ending veteran homelessness by Veterans Day in 2018. As of last month, the campaign accounts for a total of 861 HUD-VASH voucher holders⁷. The City of San José and Santa Clara County have also authorized funding for housing assistance for homeless veterans, including property owner incentives, to supplement the federal subsidies provided by HUD-VASH. Even with these supplemental investments into veteran housing assistance, the rental market in the area continues to pose challenges. HUD-VASH vouchers will not help get veterans off the streets, in my district or anywhere else in the country, if property owners do not rent to them or affordable rental properties are not accessible.

Through the consistent efforts of federal, state, and local agencies, as well as community partners, veteran homelessness in the Santa Clara County region was reduced from the over 700 individuals recorded by the 2016 HUD assessment. This reduction tracks with the overall trend of declining veteran homelessness throughout the country over the last several years. Despite these successes, the Santa Clara County region continues to stay in the top five of HUD’s assessment of metropolitan areas with the highest total number of homeless veterans. To keep the momentum going in the right direction and make further progress we need continued resources and investment in the programs that are helping to end veteran homelessness.

Even one homeless veteran is too many. Ending veteran homelessness is an achievable goal through continued investment in collaborative wraparound services, such as HVEHF and HUD-VASH. I look forward to continuing to work with my colleagues on this Committee to reaching this important target.

⁵ <https://destinationhomesv.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Homeless-Veterans-in-SCC-2017-fact-sheet.pdf>

⁶ https://www.hud.gov/press/press_releases_media_advisories/hud_no_18_027

⁷ There were 512 voucher holders at the start of the initiative in the same area.