

Committee on Veterans Affairs
Member Day
Statement by Rep. Salud O. Carbajal (CA-24)

Chairman Takano and Ranking Member Roe,

Thank you for having me here this morning.

I believe these Member Days are prime opportunities for Members to not only share challenges veterans are facing in their district, but also help the Committee identify issues that may be consistent across a number of districts, or even issues the Committee may not be aware of.

I have the pleasure of representing the 24th district of California – the beautiful Central Coast – where approximately 40,000 veterans reside.

I represent a number of military installations including: Vandenberg Air Force Base, Camp Roberts, and Camp San Luis Obispo.

I believe I represent one of the most beautiful districts in the country.

However, as you all know, the cost of living in California is very high and finding affordable housing is extremely challenging, especially for the veterans who are trying to make ends meet.

On any given night, over 39,000 veterans are homeless across America, and 25% of our nation's homeless veterans reside in California.

This is why Congress, along with the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Housing and Urban Development, came together to create the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program.

The purpose of this program is to provide rental assistance for homeless veterans along with case management and clinical services.

The HUD-VASH program has provided housing assistance to veterans nationwide including veterans in my district.

However, I have learned that veterans, along with the local Housing Authority, currently cannot take full advantage of this program due to the delays in getting referrals from the VA for VASH vouchers.

I learned that the County of Santa Barbara has a total of 261 VASH vouchers allocated to them.

From those 261 vouchers:

- 154 VASH vouchers are currently under contract where veterans have been housed and are receiving services.
- 10 veterans had been approved for VASH vouchers and are searching for housing.
- Unfortunately, 97 of these allocated VASH vouchers are awaiting referrals from the VA.

This issue was brought to my attention in May, and in August, 97 vouchers were *still* awaiting referrals from the VA in order to be used.

What this means is that the local housing authority could have been housing 97 more veterans, just in my district alone, if

referrals from the VA had arrived in a timely manner.

It is my understanding that this delay is a result of the VA being understaffed and the Department's inability to attract and retain staff case workers for VASH.

We are all aware of the challenges that the VA faces when it comes to staffing, but I believe this is an area we must prioritize.

The vouchers are available but not being used to house veterans who desperately need a home.

This is unacceptable.

The reason I am here today is to ask the Committee to work with me to address this issue.

I have brought this issue up with the local, state, and federal VA leadership, and I plan on continuing the discussion until a plan of action is presented, as we must do our best to provide homes to those who served this country.

I hope, with the help of this committee, we can provide the veterans in my district, and veterans nationwide, with a home to feel safe in, as they have the done the same for us through their service.

Thank you for the opportunity to raise this important issue.