

STATEMENT OF  
HONORABLE DAVID B. MCKINLEY, P.E.  
MEMBER OF CONGRESS  
BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS  
TUESDAY, JULY 9, 2013  
10:00 AM

Chairman Benishek, Ranking Member Brownley and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for holding this legislative hearing today on important issues that affect our nation's veterans. I appreciate the opportunity to give remarks on my bill, H.R. 2065, the Safe Housing for Homeless Veterans Act. This is the same bill, with some modifications, that I testified for before the Subcommittee in the last Congress and that passed the House.

Currently, there are over 2,100 community-based homeless veteran service providers across the country and many other homeless assistance programs that have demonstrated impressive success reaching homeless veterans. I have visited some of the shelters in my home district in West Virginia and was struck by how many seemed to not be in compliance with state, local or federal safety codes.

Consequently, we began to investigate how widespread this problem was. It was unsettling to learn about shelter fires where lives have been lost. We read stories of a homeless shelter fire where occupants were killed because there was no sprinkler system at the facility and another where homeless veterans were injured because a sprinkler system was not working properly and the fire exits were blocked. These types of tragedies could have been avoided.

This common sense legislation would ensure the wellbeing of veterans who have fallen on hard times and are in the most need of assistance. There is no current law mandating VA homeless shelters meet code. There is only a loosely defined policy that is not universally being followed. As a licensed professional engineer, I found this to be an egregious omission in the law governing VA homeless program funds.

H.R. 2065 would require any organization that seeks funding from VA for services to homeless veterans to have documentation that their building meets or exceeds all building Codes. Since last Congress we made some modifications to the bill after meeting with stake-holder groups including the International Code Council. The current draft actually makes it easier for facilities to be certified as we open up the requirements beyond only Life Safety Codes to International Building and Fire Codes or any version of these codes that a local jurisdiction has adopted. Furthermore, the legislation would require adding a section in the VA annual report to Congress that would report the number of grant recipients or eligible entities who have submitted a certification that their facility met all building Codes.

I understand that there is some concern over an undue burden for facilities to be certified that they meet or exceed the building codes. We welcome a continued dialogue on possible amendments to the legislation to make sure that this bill is simply requiring the facilities to

follow what is already state and local law in most jurisdictions. I am pleased to let you know that we have already begun these discussions with the concerned parties and we are well on our way to a solution.

After passing the House last year, this language was dropped from the final package that became law at the end of the year. As a nation, it should be unacceptable for us to allow homeless veterans be housed in potentially unsafe conditions. In defense of our country, these men and women were put in harm's way; they should not be in doubt about their own safety now that they are home again. These homeless veterans are experiencing a difficult phase of their lives and should be able to trust that they will be safe each night as they continue their return to being productive members of society.

I appreciate the testimony in support of H.R. 2065 from other witnesses testifying here today and I thank you for your concern for the safety and living environment of our veterans.