

I would like to thank this Subcommittee, especially Chairman Benishek and Ranking Member Brownley – two friends of mine – for holding this important hearing.

Homeless veterans are a pressing problem for this nation. More than 62,000 veterans are homeless on any given night, and over 120,000 veterans will experience homelessness over the course of the year.

While only 7% of Americans qualify as veterans, veterans make up nearly 13% of the homelessness population.

Sadly, my home of Los Angeles County has the most homeless veterans in the nation.

Today, I want to address one segment of homeless veterans – those who are homeless because of domestic violence. Currently, the Department of Veterans Affairs' definition of homeless veterans does not include veterans who are homeless because of domestic violence.

Across the country, too many victims of domestic violence feel that there is nowhere for them to turn. Lacking resources, help and a safe place to go, some victims stay with their abusers.

Tragically, too often women veterans are among those who find themselves in this horrible situation. According to the VA, 39% of our women veterans report experiencing domestic violence, well above the national average. **However, because of antiquated laws on the books, they have not been eligible to access resources designated for “homeless veterans.”**

I approached Chairman Benishek with my legislation -- H.R. 627, which updates the definition of “homeless veteran” to include victims fleeing domestic violence, not only was he extremely supportive of it, he joined me in introducing it. For that, I thank you Mr. Chairman.

Our legislation will update the definition of homeless veteran to include veterans fleeing domestic violence, and will correct this oversight and ensure that veterans fleeing domestic violence can receive benefits from the VA.

This is a minor change of great importance to ensure veterans do not feel trapped in dangerous situations.

H.R. 627 is endorsed by countless veterans organizations, such as Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), AMVETS, The National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, The Service Women's Action Network, Blinded Veterans Association, and the list goes on and on.

Providing benefits to veterans driven to homelessness by domestic violence is something we all should support – and have supported in the past.

In fact, I have worked with the House Appropriations Veterans Affairs Subcommittee to include report language the past two years to make these benefits available. That process, however, only helps until the next year and has to be repeated every year to provide temporary help.

Now is the time to stop making temporary fixes. This legislation permanently fixes this loophole for veterans.

While it is unknown how many veterans will be helped by this bill, if it provides one veteran the support they need to leave a dangerous situation, our work here will be worth every minute.

We must step up to provide these heroes who have protected us with the resources they need including a place where they can be safe and protected.

In conclusion, I want to thank you for working with me to solve an urgent problem, and I yield back the balance of my time.