



January 18, 2018

Chairman Phil Roe, M.D.
House Committee on Veterans Affairs
335 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Ranking Member Tim Walz
House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
333 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: HVAC “Addressing Veteran Homelessness: Current Position; Future Course” Statement for the Record

Dear Chairman Roe and Ranking Member Walz,

We write to thank you for your leadership in addressing the veteran homelessness crisis in Los Angeles. Vets Advocacy is a nonprofit formed out of the landmark settlement of the class action brought on behalf of homeless and disabled veterans, Valentini v. Shinseki, to partner with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to end veteran homelessness. We represent the interests of our former clients in that lawsuit, homeless and disabled veterans in Los Angeles. The settlement agreement that created us not only settled the litigation, but also created a long-term partnership between us, as representatives of the Valentini plaintiff class, and the VA. The single biggest project at the heart of our partnership with the VA is the revitalization and reactivation of the 388-acre West LA VA campus. Together with the VA, we helped deliver a Draft Master Plan that called for the development of 1,200 supportive housing units for homeless veterans, including all the essential life-enhancing services to support the future residents on the campus. In January 2016, the Secretary of the VA took a historic step by adopting the Draft Master Plan as official policy for the campus. Following VA’s adoption of the Draft Master Plan, Congress proudly fulfilled its obligation, without any opposition, to LA’s homeless veterans by enacting the West Los Angeles Leasing Act of 2016. That law authorized the implementation of the Draft Master Plan and expressly gave the Secretary broad authority to develop homeless veteran housing on the 388-acre West LA VA campus.

The veteran homelessness crisis in Los Angeles has substantially deteriorated. According to the most recent homeless count, there were over 40,000 veterans experiencing homelessness nationwide in 2017, a 1.5% increase from 2016. Los Angeles County accounted for much of the increase, with the number of veterans experiencing homelessness rising 57% from 3,071 in 2016 to 4,828 in 2017. This was even sharper than the overall increase in homelessness in the county, which saw a 23% rise to a new high of 57,794 in 2017. Veterans experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles County were also especially vulnerable as the majority were unsheltered; in 2017, 73% of veterans were unsheltered, up from 53% of veterans being unsheltered the prior year. If veterans experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles and Seattle were excluded from national figures, veteran homelessness would have declined by 5% in 2017; as such, addressing veteran homelessness in these regions should continue to be a priority.



The role of the West LA VA campus in halting veteran homelessness in Los Angeles will be hugely significant. The Draft Master Plan's 1,200 supportive housing units will add significant and critical supply to LA's housing market for homeless veterans, which has been plagued by unprecedented scarcity.

A key element of the Draft Master Plan is the provision of supportive services to ensure homeless veterans stay housed and receive the support they need to live independently and with purpose and to have meaningful social connections to community. Much of that funding will come from the special purpose funding for the HUD-VASH program, which a memorandum dated September 22, 2017 put at dire risk. Currently, given the disproportionate number of homeless veterans in Los Angeles, the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System receives a substantial amount of specially-allocated HUD-VASH funding.

Last year, the amount of that funding going to Los Angeles was roughly \$90 million. It funded the Welcome Center on the West LA VA campus, as well as supportive services, including outreach workers, peer-to-peer support, and case management, for up to 6,000 homeless veterans living in community-based supportive housing. Abandoning the agency's long-standing policy of special funding for homeless veterans, all these services that are essential to helping those who fought for this country, including the roughly 60 emergency beds in the Welcome Center, are in serious jeopardy. Given the undisputed need for those services in Los Angeles, we unequivocally oppose the directive set forth in that memorandum.

While it is our understanding that the VA has subsequently modified the position articulated in the September 22 memorandum, we remain extremely concerned about the underlying administrative approach embodied in that document. Any compromise or diminution in the itemization of funds for these critical support services deprives veterans of the wide of services they need and deserve. It would be our hope that should the VA return to policies as outlined in that memorandum, that Congress would take appropriate and immediate action to repeal such efforts.

We are grateful for your leadership and hope you can continue to ensure our homeless veterans have the resources and policies they need to have affordable, decent, and safe housing. In addition, I am happy to make myself available to you or committee staff for any questions or clarification regarding Vets Advocacy's statement for the record.

[Signature Page Follows]



VETSADVOCACY

Sincerely,

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