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Department of Housing and Urban Development
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Introduction

Good afternoon Chairman Wenstrup, Chairman Arrington, Ranking Member Brownley, Ranking Member O’Rourke and members of the subcommittees. Thank you for this important opportunity to discuss the efforts of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and our federal partners to end veteran homelessness in the United States.

HUD is committed to ending veteran homelessness by working collaboratively with our partners and maximizing the effectiveness of all existing resources. Thanks to funding from Congress and close collaboration among federal and local partners, the nation has continued to make progress in addressing veteran homelessness and creating sustainable federal and local systems that quickly respond to homelessness.

General HUD Homeless Assistance Programs

HUD’s Office of Community Planning and Development (CPD) provides about \$2.4 billion annually to communities to help end homelessness. Funding is primarily used for permanent supportive housing, which successfully houses people with long histories of homelessness and significant disabilities. Permanent supportive housing has proven to reduce hospitalization and emergency room utilization while dramatically improving the well-being of the people it serves. HUD also provides funding for rapid re-housing, a cost-effective strategy that helps people move quickly into housing, provides short-term financial assistance, and provides supportive services to help the formerly homeless stabilize in their housing, increase their employment and income, and connect them to community supports. HUD also supports emergency shelter, transitional housing, and many other types of assistance dedicated to ending homelessness.

In 2017, approximately 17,000 veterans were served using \$97 million through HUD’s Continuum of Care (CoC) program. Most of that funding is for permanent supportive housing that houses approximately 10,000 veterans with disabilities. Thousands more veterans are served with rapid re-housing, emergency shelter, and other assistance.

Housing and Urban Development – Veterans’ Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH)

HUD-VASH is part of the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program in the Office of Public and Indian Housing (PIH). The HCV program currently houses over 2.2 million families and had an annual budget of over \$20 billion in 2017. HUD-VASH is the only PIH program dedicated to homeless veterans; however, many formerly homeless families, including veteran families, are assisted in the regular HCV program.

The HUD-VASH program has been very successful in its approach to addressing veteran homelessness. The program provides long-term housing assistance to the most vulnerable veterans experiencing homelessness by combining HCV rental assistance for homeless veterans with case management and clinical services provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). VA provides these services for participating veterans at VA medical centers (VAMCs) and community-based outreach clinics.

In the HUD-VASH program, the local VA case managers screen and determine veteran eligibility for the program. These HUD-VASH eligible veterans are then referred to the partnering Public Housing Authority (PHA) to receive their housing voucher assistance. By agreeing to administer the HUD-VASH program, the PHA is relinquishing its authority to determine the eligibility of families in accordance with regular HCV program rules and PHA policies with one exception: PHAs are required to prohibit admission of any member of the household subject to a lifetime registration requirement under a state sex offender registration program.

A total of \$675 million has been appropriated in new HUD-VASH funding to date. HUD-VASH vouchers are renewed based on actual leasing, as is the case for the HCV program generally. When a household leaves the program, their voucher is typically reissued to another eligible household. Since 2008, over 131,000 veterans and their families have moved into housing with a HUD-VASH voucher. As of the last day of FY2017, more than 77,000 veterans and their families were housed with a HUD-VASH voucher.

HUD-VASH vouchers are specifically targeted to communities based on geographic need, meaning the size of the eligible population. Every year since 2008, HUD and VA have collaboratively awarded new HUD-VASH vouchers based on geographic need and administrative capacity. A total of 87,864 HUD-VASH vouchers have been awarded to PHAs between 2008 and 2016. Of these, about 4,700 were awarded through a competitive set-aside as project-based vouchers (PBV), in which the rental subsidy is assigned to a specific housing unit rather than provided to a veteran to find a unit in the private market to rent. PBV have proven to be an effective tool to help address the need for HUD-VASH in high-cost rental markets or where there is a lack of affordable housing stock. In addition to the HUD-VASH vouchers specifically awarded as PBV, PHAs, with the support of their local VA partners, have the ability to convert any of their existing HUD-VASH vouchers to PBV. The Housing Opportunity Through Modernization Act of 2016 (HOTMA) made this process even easier for PHAs. PHAs can now convert any of their existing HUD-VASH portfolio without additional approval by HUD. HUD will be awarding approximately 5,500 new HUD-VASH vouchers with the additional \$40 million in HUD-VASH funding that was appropriated in FY2017 and has worked with VA and United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) to determine the processes and priorities for this award process, as has been the case in past years as well.

We realize the distribution of homeless veterans across the country has changed since 2008. For this reason, HUD and VA are working collaboratively to develop a process for recapturing unused HUD-VASH vouchers from communities that no longer need them. We will then reallocate these vouchers to current high-need communities.

To fulfill our commitment to ending veteran homelessness, it is important to remember that we must serve *all* veterans experiencing homelessness, including those not eligible for VA services. To achieve this, HUD has been working with VA and CoC-funded local supportive service providers to test a process that allows PHAs to partner with local, VA-designated service providers and use a portion of their existing HUD-VASH vouchers to assist those homeless veterans with an other-than-dishonorable discharge who do not qualify for VA healthcare.

These efforts around HUD-VASH demonstrate HUD's commitment to optimize the effectiveness of the HUD-VASH program and allow for local flexibility in addressing the homeless veteran population.

Tribal HUD-VASH

The Tribal HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing, or "Tribal HUD-VASH," pilot program provides rental assistance and supportive services to veterans who are Native American and experiencing homelessness, or at risk of homelessness, while living on or near a reservation or other Indian areas. Veterans participating in this program are provided housing assistance through HUD and supportive services through VA to foster long-term stability and prevent a return to homelessness.

The pilot was first authorized in the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2015—Public Law 113-235, approved December 16, 2014—and Congress has continued its support in subsequent years by enacting funds for renewal grants and modest expansion. Thirty tribes or tribally designated housing entities were invited to participate in the program based on their level of need and administrative capacity; ultimately, 26 of those invited submitted applications and were awarded grants totaling \$5.9 million to fund approximately 500 units of rental assistance for veterans and their families, and to fund associated administrative costs. HUD will renew those grants, and potentially fund additional grants or units of assistance, using funding provided in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2017.

Implementation of the program is overseen by HUD's Office of Native American Programs (ONAP) within the Office of Public and Indian Housing; and VA is responsible for providing case management services and referring eligible veterans for housing assistance. As of November 2017, 281 total veterans were receiving case management services, and of those, 214 veterans had been housed under the Tribal HUD-VASH program. The program is producing tangible results, housing Native American veterans and their families who were living in severely inadequate units—without running water, heat or electricity—or in overcrowded living conditions.

In FY2017, HUD worked with VA to produce three regional joint trainings for tribal grantees and key stakeholders, VA Case Managers, and HUD Grants Management staff. The trainings provided an opportunity for the respective staffs to share ideas and enhance the cross agency and local working relationships that are key to this program's success.

Continued Collaboration with VA and USICH

HUD has worked closely with VA for many years administering HUD-VASH. Together, HUD, VA, and the USICH have implemented a joint decision-making structure known as “Solving Veterans Homelessness as One” (SVHO) where the agencies jointly administer the programs and policies related to veteran homelessness and develop and implement a range of strategies for preventing and ending veteran homelessness. This structure allows us to jointly review data on HUD-VASH and other programs and to coordinate policymaking to ensure our assistance is integrated and impactful.

This collaboration has also helped us improve utilization in the HUD-VASH program, coordinate the implementation of the Tribal HUD-VASH program, better target available assistance to those with the highest needs, and ensure resources are prioritized for communities with greater numbers of veterans experiencing homelessness.

HUD, VA, and USICH have also used the structure of SVHO to work together to create a set of standards to evaluate whether communities have ended veteran homelessness. Since 2014, more than 880 mayors, city and county officials, and governors have set a goal of ending veteran homelessness in their communities. As of January 11, 2018, 60 communities across 30 states have achieved the goal.

The agencies also collaborate on the implementation of Coordinated Entry Systems, meaning a system that is easy for veterans and other persons experiencing homelessness to access. Coordinated Entry ensures that a person experiencing homelessness has simple access to housing and other homelessness resources. The collaboration between HUD and VA ensures that veterans have access to all the resources in a community, including VA dedicated resources, no matter where and how they access assistance.

Technical Assistance for Communities

Since the ability of any community to meet the goal of ending veteran homelessness depends on the strength of each community’s leadership and successful implementation of proven strategies, HUD and its federal partners are committed to helping communities get there. In addition to providing funding for homeless assistance, HUD supports several technical assistance initiatives that have helped reduce veteran homelessness. The Built for Zero and Vets@Home initiatives help communities implement best practices and learn from the success of other communities. Both initiatives were designed with the explicit goal of helping communities reach the goal of ending veteran homelessness.

In 2012, HUD and VA partnered with the 100K Homes Campaign and Rapid Results Institute to hold “bootcamps” for 13 HUD-VASH communities. The events brought together PHA, VA, CoC, and HUD staff as community-centered groups to map their processes and come up with ways to improve them in creative and collaborative ways. These bootcamps were extremely successful and helped to get the HUD-VASH program utilization to where it is today. This bootcamp model has since been used to inform the continuing collaborative process for HUD-VASH and the roll out of Tribal HUD-VASH.

Some best practices have included incorporating HUD-VASH in a larger coordinated entry system to ensure there are multiple access points for veterans seeking help, coordinated outreach efforts to locate all veterans in need of assistance, and better data sharing across systems to ensure veterans do not fall through the cracks.

HUD has worked with our partners to identify specific strategies for utilizing HUD-VASH vouchers in high-cost, low-vacancy communities. These are often the same communities with the greatest need. In addition to converting HUD-VASH to PBV, PHAs have used their flexibility to increase their payment standard, including the adoption of exception payment standards, to be competitive in the private market. Another strategy has been intensive landlord outreach and maintaining landlord relationships. PHAs have also been able to connect with local service providers that are able to assist veterans in their housing search.

In the coming year, HUD will continue to help communities with targeted assistance. We will be launching a technical assistance initiative focused on helping communities with high numbers of unsheltered people experiencing homelessness, including high numbers of unsheltered veterans. The initiative will focus on helping those communities implement best practices that have helped end veteran homelessness in cities such as Houston, New Orleans, and Las Vegas. HUD is also providing assistance to rural communities to help increase their capacity and address uniquely rural challenges for veterans such as transportation.

Results

Each year, communities across the country conduct point in time counts of people experiencing homelessness. The count, held at the end of January 2017, includes people living in shelters as well as people sleeping on sidewalks, in parks, in cars, or in other places not meant for human habitation. Based on that count, veteran homelessness increased by 1.5 percent (585 veterans) between 2016 and 2017, but has declined by 46 percent (a decrease of 34,031 veterans) since 2010. This kind of reduction is historic, and HUD-VASH has been a primary reason for this progress. Most communities across the country actually showed a decline in veteran homelessness. However, sharp increases in several communities with extremely high housing costs led to an overall increase.

A robust body of evidence shows that the combination of permanent supportive housing, rapid re-housing, and other targeted interventions can indeed end homelessness. Although there was a small increase last year, the long-term national trend and the results in the many communities that have ended veteran homelessness show the positive results of a coordinated effort.

Conclusions

Despite this slight increase in national veteran homelessness in 2017, a great deal of progress has been made in the way we work together to address veteran homelessness. However, we acknowledge that there is still a lot of work to be done. The HUD-VASH program continues to be a model for interagency collaboration and one of the best tools we have for ending veteran homelessness. We must continue to find ways to maximize the effectiveness of the HUD-VASH

program, while also assisting communities in utilizing all available homeless assistance resources.

Thank you again for this opportunity to describe HUD's efforts to end veteran homelessness.