



Testimony of the

**NATIONAL COALITION**  
*for* **HOMELESS VETERANS**

United States House of Representatives  
Committee on Veterans' Affairs,  
Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity

"Hearing on Pending Legislation"

May 18, 2022

Chairman Levin, Ranking Member Moore, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity:

The National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (NCHV) thanks you for the opportunity to offer our views on the following pieces of legislation on today's agenda. We are providing views only for legislation which could impact efforts to prevent and or end homelessness among veterans and their families.

1. **H.R. XXXX: Health Care for Homeless Veterans Act** - NCHV supports the *Health Care for Homeless Veterans Act*. The Health Care for Homeless Veterans (HCHV) program is critical in maintaining the Department of Veterans Affairs' ability to reach our nation's homeless veterans and would be extended through 2027. The legislation would also expand eligibility to veterans with "Other Than Honorable" (OTH) discharge statuses, allowing for more seamless integration with the programs it interacts with regularly that have already incorporated OTH veterans. The HCHV program is the front door to homeless services in many communities and bringing eligibility in line with other homeless veteran programs is the right thing to do. NCHV looks forward to working with Congress to make this bill law as we make greater strides toward a world where no veteran is left homeless.
2. **H.R. XXXX: Homeless\_Ext** – NCHV supports the extension of certain Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Programs for homeless veterans. The language in this legislation would extend program authorizations for the Advisory Committee on Homeless Veterans through 2027, which is critical in harnessing the collective knowledge and best practices of community stakeholders. The legislation would also extend the Grant and Per Diem (GPD) program's Special Needs grants through 2038, providing services for those homeless veterans with the most acute needs. NCHV thanks the Committee for its diligence in reauthorizing these programs.
3. **H.R. XXXX: SSVF\_Pilot** – NCHV supports the intent of this legislation, as access to supportive services is critical to the success of any housing placement. However, developing an additional technology system to track homeless veterans may add to the issue. Comparable data systems are already widely used nationally, such as HUD's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and VA's Homeless Operations Management System (HOMES). Congress should fully diagnose the communication and integration issues among the existing federal health and homeless technology systems in development of such a tracking system.

One issue that may close the gap is further deployment of the housing navigator model across the spectrum of programs working with veterans experiencing homelessness. These navigators work with local property managers, landlords, and owners to find opportunities for homeless veterans who have housing vouchers to find their own apartment. One of the main barriers to voucher utilization and ending veteran homelessness is navigating the rental housing marketplace. These challenges would

lessen if Congress provides additional support for housing navigation services and ensured that activity is appropriately tracked in existing client data systems.

4. **H.R. XXXX: Food Pilot** – NCHV supports establishing a Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Food Insecurity as no veteran should be without the means to sustain themselves or their families. There is a need for coordination of additional research and data collection within the multiple federal nutrition programs, so veterans are accessing the complete range of benefits they are eligible for. This legislation would create an office capable of improving the estimates of food insecurity among veterans. Current estimates can vary widely, ranging from 6% to 24% or twice that of the general U.S. (United States) population. Yet even higher rates of food insecurity have been reported among certain high-risk subgroups, including veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan (27%), female veterans (28%), homeless and formerly homeless veterans (49%), and veterans with serious mental illness (35%). Additional risk factors for food insecurity specific to veteran populations include younger age, having recently left active-duty military service, and lower final military paygrade.

This legislation would also create a pilot program to support partnerships that address food insecurity among veterans and their dependents. Nationwide, food insecurity is a major issue for veterans and their supporting families who are or are at risk of becoming homeless. Service providers nationwide would have access to an additional tool in the effort to end veteran homelessness.

5. **H.R. XXXX: LEVIC\_042** – NCHV supports the expansion of Department of Veterans Affairs COVID-19 Veteran Rapid Retraining Assistance Program and High Technology Pilot Program (VRRAP & VETTEC). The language would extend additional access to training programs for veterans reentering the workforce, and stable employment plays a key role in the depth and duration of a veteran’s homelessness as well as their plan to exit housing insecurity and remain stably housed.
6. **H.R. 6307\_ANS** – NCHV does not support this legislation as it is currently drafted. NCHV is not opposed to a tiny home pilot. However, the bill has some areas where language falls short, which will need to be addressed as a successful local program is scaled up nationally. NCHV previously shared with this Committee, concern that funding for this pilot could limit funding available for existing Grant and Per Diem programs.

In addition, the language as drafted requires GPD providers to educate veterans to become licensed contractors, have them participate in the building process, and would leave providers with the responsibility of maintaining any premises between lots, communal areas etc. It is unclear whether a sufficient number of providers are able to pull together this type of training program. Further, it is unclear whether GPD program requirements to meet the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) life safety code would severely limit access to the types of tiny homes that are allowable if this pilot is

enacted. As such, NCHV is unable to support this bill as drafted. We look forward to working with the Committee on language that would better address stated concerns regarding this legislation.

### **Additional Legislation NCHV Supports**

S. 2172 - NCHV supports the *Building Solutions for Veterans Experiencing Homelessness Act of 2021*. This critical legislation makes necessary program adjustments to better accommodate homeless veterans with difficulties accessing services, as requested by VA, service providers and veterans. It would expand public transportation for veterans to access care, provide stable housing, and deliver appropriate medical care for aging veterans while they await long-term care placement. Emphasizing continuous improvement, the bill includes an assessment of remaining barriers to securing permanent housing and longer-term program reporting to refine veteran housing outcomes. NCHV urges the House to continue drafting similar legislation as has passed the Senate.

S. 2403 – NCHV supports the *Commitment to Veteran Support and Outreach (CVSO) Act* which would provide timely resources to county veterans service officers (CVSOs.) As Congress works to reach a bipartisan, bicameral agreement on legislation addressing toxic exposure among veterans, we urge you to maintain these resources for the County Veterans Service Officers (CVSOs) who will be helping former service members access their new benefits.

S.3094 — NCHV supports the *Reaching Every Homeless Veteran Act of 2021* as NCHV supports extending access to the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP) program. NCHV recognizes this will increase the cost of the program, but these should be weighed against the cost benefits incurred by programs pairing HVRP employment services with their housing programs.

H.R. 5025 – NCHV supports this bill which would increase and extend the authorization of appropriations for HVRP.

H.R. 5301 – NCHV supports the provision of technical assistance to recipients of grants for supportive services for very low-income families in permanent housing and comprehensive service programs, and for other purposes.

H.R. 5470 – NCHV supports the *HOMES for our Veterans Act of 2021*. The bill would improve grants awarded by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs for comprehensive service programs to serve homeless veterans. It would remove barriers for existing Capital Grant recipients, allowing them to more readily transition their programs and facilities to meet the current needs of veterans in their community.

H.R. 5606 – NCHV supports the *Return Home to Housing Act*. This bill is the stand-alone adjustment to the rate of per diem payments provided by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to grantees that provide services to homeless veterans.

H.R. 5783 - NCHV supports extending access to the HVRP program. NCHV recognizes this will increase the cost of the program, but these should be weighed against the cost benefits incurred by programs pairing HVRP employment services with their housing programs.

H. R. 5624 – NCHV Supports the *Ending Veteran Homelessness Act of 2021*. The bill requires VA to produce a report with further data on shallow subsidy program under the Supportive Services for Veteran Families program.

Discussion Draft – NCHV supports the discussion draft from the March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2022, legislative hearing. The language codifies and makes permanent the Section 4201 authorities from Public Law 116-315, Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020.