

## HVAC Testimony Script

*Tuesday, December 6<sup>th</sup>*

- Good morning to the assembled members of this distinguished Committee. It is my great honor to be here on behalf of PATH (People Assisting The Homeless).
- PATH is one of the most impactful homeless service providers in California, serving over **16% of the Golden State's homeless population**.
- My name is Hanan Scrapper and I have the honor of serving as the Regional Director for PATH San Diego.
- I supervise many programs targeting Veterans experiencing homelessness, including grant per diem, or GPD; Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing, or HUD VASH; Supportive Services for Veterans Families, or SSVF; and the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program, or HVRP; and I've been working with unhoused Veterans for the majority of my career.
- I want to specifically thank Congressman Levin for inviting me here today and for his unrelenting pursuit of solutions to Veteran homelessness.
- The most important point that I can share with you today is that San Diego is making great strides in reducing Veteran homelessness.
- Despite the challenges of the pandemic, we have seen a **30% decrease in Veterans homelessness since 2020**, with only 9% of our homeless population identifying as Veterans.
- This tremendous progress has come thanks to a meaningful focus and investment from Congress, our federal partners, strong collaboration at the local level, and a commitment to Housing First principles.
- Importantly, San Diego joined the Built for Zero movement in October 2020, aiming to reach functional zero in Veteran homelessness.
- One of ways we were able accomplish this is by having a functional **by-name list**, which enables us to know all veterans experiencing homelessness in our community by name and identify appropriate housing interventions.
- PATH is a firm believer in these approaches and is fully committed to these goals.

- With nearly **40 years of work in this sector**, our organization is built upon the Housing First model, ensuring low barriers to entry for those in need.
- This model is especially vital to our Veterans, who may have greater substance use and mental health needs due to the inherently difficult, and potentially traumatic, nature of their experiences.
- In order to demonstrate the effectiveness of this approach and show how these programs are working in real life, I'd like to share a participant story; I did change the names in this story to protect identities.
- When we first met Mike, he was having a hard time dealing with addiction, homelessness, and depression. Mike sought help by enrolling into the VA's treatment program, which he completed successfully. Mike then enrolled into PATH's low demand GPD program.
- During his stay in our GPD program, he graduated from Workshops for Warriors, a program that trains Veterans for manufacturing careers. Mike was connected to an addiction therapist at the VA and continued to work on his sobriety and mental health challenges.
- Mike was motivated to find housing and secured a unit with his VASH voucher. Mike continues to work with his addiction therapist and peer support specialist and can now focus on obtaining employment.
- Mike's story has a happy ending, but not every participant's story does. We know that additional work is necessary to improve programs serving Veterans experiencing homelessness, such as GPD.
- While GPD started out as a largely traditional model with a high barrier to entry, the changes made back in 2014 have spurred the progress we are seeing.
- Greater adherence to the Housing First model in all GPD programs across the nation can help to replicate San Diego's success in reducing Veteran homelessness.
- We were thankful for the new flexibility that came to the GPD program during the pandemic. Congregant sites became sub-optimal, especially in the year before vaccines became readily available, so the ability to move participants to a de-congregated site, such as a hotel room, were optimal.

- Even though the threats of COVID have lessened, we know that many of our participants would be better served by these smaller, de-congregated sites.
- Our participants frequently cite packed shelters, bunk beds, rigid policies and high barrier criteria as obstacles to successfully getting housed. **We would encourage you to continue the enhanced rate so that providers can continue to offer a greater variety of options to this important population.**
- Additional flexibility is also necessary as many providers, such as PATH, operate their GPD programs at a loss. We must keep beds available, but we are not paid if the bed is empty, even though we still incur a cost; not to mention the cost of not having that same bed available to others in need.
- One possible solution to this dilemma would be to **offer providers a base rate**, for instances like this to ensure that the immediate cost of that bed is reimbursed, at the minimum, thus reducing the losses for providers.
- PATH and our fellow providers are there as a final safety net when all other systems and policies fail.
- We appreciate the dedication of this Committee and this Congress to helping us increase the options available to us to serve our country's Veterans with dignity.
- It was a great honor to be here today to share our experiences with the GPD program and some suggestions on how to improve its efficacy moving forward.
- Achieving functional zero for Veteran homelessness is possible, but we can only do this together.
- Thank you.