

**ALL HANDS ON DECK: ENDING  
VETERAN HOMELESSNESS IN SAN DIEGO**

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**HEARING**

BEFORE THE

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC  
OPPORTUNITY**

OF THE

**COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS**

**U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

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C O N T E N T S

THURSDAY, MAY 4, 2023

	Page
OPENING STATEMENTS	
The Honorable Derrick Van Orden, Chairman .....	1
The Honorable Mike Levin, Ranking Member .....	2
The Honorable Mark Takano, Ranking Member, Full Committee .....	5
The Honorable Young Kim, U.S. House of Representatives, (CA-40) .....	7
WITNESSES	
PANEL 1	
Mr. Frank P. Pearson, DPT, PA-C, Director, Jennifer Moreno VA San Diego Healthcare System .....	8
Accompanied by:	
Ms. Jill Albanese, Senior Advisor and Director of Clinical Operations, Homeless Program Office	
Ms. Leilani A. Hines, Housing and Neighborhood Services Director, Oceanside Public Housing Authority .....	10
Mr. David Estrella, Director of Housing and Community Development, San Diego County Public Housing Authority .....	12
Mr. Matthew Wechter, Supervising Attorney, Public Defendant Homeless Court Team, San Diego County .....	14
PANEL 2	
Mr. Greg Anglea, CEO, Interfaith Community Services .....	30
Ms. Hanan Scrapper, Regional Director, PATH San Diego, People Assisting the Homeless (PATH) .....	32
Dr. Dustin Potash, Veterans Director, Adjoin .....	34
Mr. Sean Spear, President and CEO, Community Housing Works .....	35
APPENDIX	
PREPARED STATEMENTS OF WITNESSES	
Mr. Frank Pearson Prepared Statement .....	45
Ms. Leilani A. Hines Prepared Statement .....	51
Mr. David Estrella Prepared Statement .....	60
Mr. Matthew Wechter Prepared Statement .....	61
Mr. Greg Anglea Prepared Statement .....	63
Ms. Hanan Scrapper Prepared Statement .....	67
Dr. Dustin Potash Prepared Statement .....	68
Mr. Sean Spear Prepared Statement .....	71
STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD	
San Diego Housing Commission .....	75



# **ALL HANDS ON DECK: ENDING VETERAN HOMELESSNESS IN SAN DIEGO**

**THURSDAY, MAY 4, 2023**

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY,  
COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS,  
*Washington, D.C.*

The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, at 1:38 p.m., Little Theater, MiraCosta College, 1 Barnard Drive, Oceanside, California, Hon. Derrick Van Orden, (chairman of the subcommittee) presiding.

Present: Representatives Van Orden, Kim, Levin, and Takano.

## **OPENING STATEMENT OF DERRICK VAN ORDEN, CHAIRMAN**

Mr. VAN ORDEN. The subcommittee will come to order.

In accordance with Committee Rule 5(e), I ask unanimous consent that Representative Kim from California be permitted to participate in today's subcommittee hearing.

All right. So ordered.

Good afternoon. First, I want to thank all of you for joining us today at this field hearing for the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity for Veterans on the House Veterans Affairs Committee.

I want to thank the staff for setting everything up. We have got all the sound people that flew out here from D.C. and spending time away from your homes. I want to thank you for doing that.

My name is Derrick Van Orden, and not only is it my pleasure to serve as the Congressman for the 3rd congressional District but also I have the honor to serve as the chairman of this subcommittee.

This morning we are at the United States Navy SEAL Team headquarters in Coronado, California, dealing with transition issues to make sure that we do not have to have this conversation much longer because part of making sure our veterans do not wind up homeless is to make sure they can go from being an active duty service member to being a productive member of society.

My background with homelessness and homeless veterans is I worked at First Presbyterian Church cooking at their soup kitchen for several years, which is right in downtown San Diego.

My roommate from Navy SEAL training was on the homeless outreach task force working as a nurse and so I have a real understanding of what is taking place in the veterans' community and then also the homeless community writ large, and so I am very thankful that this is Ranking Member Levin's legislative priority.

Before we begin I want to say it is nice to be here in Southern California. You see my face is a little red because I pulled the rookie move yesterday again. The overcast, do not worry about sun-screen. That happened.

This campus is absolutely beautiful. I talked to some of the facilities ladies here earlier that got things set up. It was very kind of them to show us around, and I appreciate so much how the staffs have been working together, including Mr. Vogt who was able to make it down to Coronado today to meet my SEAL brothers. That was wonderful.

Then the people of the 49th District are lucky to have our ranking member as your representative. He is just doing a great job.

Today we are here to discuss any veterans' homelessness in both the greater San Diego area and across the country. This topic is one of the reasons I actually ran for Congress, because I have a heart for this.

Permanent housing is an essential component to a stable life. After a veteran transitions out of active duty and without a home it is much harder to maintain a stable job, continuing to acclimate to civilian life, and maintain mental health.

This subcommittee in the past has done an amazing job improving programs for veterans but we still have a lot of work to do. Improving the Department of Housing and Urban Development-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) voucher program, finding a new grant and per diem rate, retain VA employees that serve homeless veterans, and getting the VA to actually hire more employees with the funds Congress has given them are all areas that we are going to continue to work on.

However, it is important that both Congress and the Department of Veterans Affairs administer and evaluate these programs in a way that ensures veterans are housed in a way that is fiscally responsible.

We have got to find ways to fund these essential programs without putting a huge financial burden on the backs of the taxpayers now and in the future. These can both exist in the same universe.

We also need to ensure that these programs we have already are paid for—that have been paid for by Congress are run as intended and we have got to pass programs without ever doing—excuse me, we must pass programs and continue to do the oversight on them and this can never be at the expense of veterans getting the services they need.

Hopefully, we are going to hear from the VA today and local government and community providers about the impact of programs the subcommittee has already enacted and find new ways to improve the lives of America's veterans, and, simply put, we just have a lot of work to do, and I am a retired enlisted guy so I know how to work.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about how they believe what works, what needs to be improved, and how Congress can employ them to ensure that no veteran goes unhoused across our country.

I now yield to the ranking member for his opening remarks.  
Mr. LEVIN. Well, thank you so much, Chairman Van Orden.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF MIKE LEVIN, RANKING MEMBER**

I, first, want to welcome you and thank you for coming to our beautiful congressional district. I am so glad that the sun is shining. I was a little worried when it was raining this morning.

Very, very grateful to work with you in a collaborative manner and also very grateful to both Ranking Member Takano, who did a wonderful job as our chairman for these past 4 years, and my friend, Young Kim, from not too far away in Orange County have also joined us.

As I mentioned outside, these opportunities to get together on a bipartisan basis and learn about each other's districts and priorities are rare in the Congress of the United States. I hope that you know our commitment to doing that on the House Veterans Affairs Committee.

Today's hearing is centered around the need for all hands on deck, which in this case is in reference to the critical work of our Marines at Camp Pendleton or sailors down in San Diego.

Rather, we are here to discuss how we can employ all available resources to end veteran homelessness in the San Diego region. The rate of veteran homelessness in San Diego County has dropped by nearly 30 percent over the last 4 years and that is thanks to a lot of people in this room, and that is according to '22—but according to the '22 point in time count conducted in our communities nearly 700 veterans are still experiencing homelessness, including 88 here in the city of Oceanside.

In February of this year the Board of Supervisors for San Diego County approved this all hands on deck approach to reaching functional zero for veteran homelessness in our region.

This approach will require the input, expertise, and hard work of every person in this room and many others who are unable to join us today to reach our shared goal of ensuring that every veteran has a place to call home.

I want to thank all the dedicated organizations, the practitioners, and the experts who are here with us today, some of whom you are going to hear from who have been doing this critical work for a very long time and will continue doing so together.

There is not a single cure-all to veteran homelessness just as there is not a single cause of veteran homelessness. Homelessness occurs as the result of complex factors and experiences that veterans face, some of which may be related to their military service.

That is why we must take a multifaceted approach to address the underlying specific needs of each individual veteran to ultimately end homelessness.

I convened this hearing with my friend, Chairman Van Orden, who is doing a great job with that gavel, with the thought in mind to bring organizations across our homelessness prevention and response system together to speak how their services integrate to meet veterans where they are on their journey to stable housing.

As difficult of a time as we faced during COVID-19 we learned quite a bit about what is going to—what it is going to take to end veteran homelessness and the three key elements of that solution, urgency, resources and flexibility.

During the pandemic, Congress acted swiftly to give VA and community providers the resources and the flexibility that they needed

to ensure the safety and health of unhoused veterans and that focused effort, influx of funding, and increased authority resulted in a reduction in veteran homelessness across the country, including here in the San Diego region.

I am working with Ranking Member Takano on a policy roadmap that will outline key areas where Congress can remove barriers at both VA and HUD to ensure a veteran's path to a home is smooth and quick.

A significant roadblock that I hope to discuss today relates to the ongoing issue of veterans with service-connected disabilities being rendered ineligible for permanent supportive housing built specifically to serve their needs.

Often when a developer undertakes an affordable housing project they accept financial incentives that come with restrictions on the number of units that must be set aside for individuals or families at certain income levels.

Generally, this is a great practice and ensures affordable units are set aside for those most in need. However, when calculating income for eligibility purposes a veteran's disability compensation is included in that formula and often puts them over the limit.

As a result, many veterans are deemed ineligible for housing specifically built for them like permanent supportive housing where care and resources are directly incorporated. This problem is only going to get worse as more veterans receive benefits under the Promising to Address Comprehensive Toxics (PACT) Act.

I look forward to working closely with Ranking Member Takano to address this real obstacle to ending veteran homelessness and I am eager to hear today from our witnesses about this and other roadblocks Congress may need to address to ensure every veteran's housing security.

We have with us on our first panel representatives from VA's San Diego Healthcare System—good to see you—a national homeless program office to discuss the various programs VA offers in the region to identify, treat, and house veterans experiencing homelessness.

We also brought to the table two local housing authorities from right here in Oceanside and from San Diego County. The housing authorities play an integral role in the provision of permanent housing through the HUD-VASH program, which is the partnership between VA and the Department of Housing and Urban Development that connects veterans with a housing choice voucher and the supportive services that they need to thrive.

I will be interested to hear the latest updates on the status of HUD-VASH in our community and how we can improve the process to more seamlessly identify housing options and connect veterans in need of permanent housing.

I am also pleased that Matthew Wechter is joining us today from San Diego County's Homeless Court. We routinely hear and research shows that a top unmet need of homeless veterans is access to legal services.

This innovative program employs practices that assist homeless individuals who have committed misdemeanors in accessing the services they need with a focus on rehabilitation and addressing the root causes of their housing insecurity. I hope to see more of



these efforts throughout the country as we continue the fight to end veteran homelessness.

On our second panel we will hear from local homeless service providers who execute veteran-centered programs across the continuum.

We have Interfaith Community Services—I see Greg up there—which operates emergency and transitional housing through the Healthcare for Homeless Veterans program and the grant and per diem program.

Their bridge and service-intensive housing in Oceanside bring veterans indoors to connect them with treatment options and wrap-around services as they secure a permanent place to call home.

We have People Assisting the Homeless, or Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH), which I would like to welcome back to our subcommittee. PATH testified for us this past December in D.C. about their grant and per diem program.

Today we will hear from them about Grant and Per Diem (GPD) as well as the rest of their extensive service offerings for veterans, including rapid rehousing through VA's Supportive Services for Veterans Families program, job training and placement through the Department of Labor's homeless veterans reintegration program, and permanent supportive housing through HUD-VASH.

We also have Adjoin, which partners with VA's Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF) program. Adjoin plays a critical role in homelessness prevention and housing assistance for very low income veterans and their families.

They participate in executing new strategic VA resources like shallow subsidy, which is a vital tool to stabilize veterans in their permanent housing.

Finally, we will have Community Housing Works, an affordable housing developer. We know that a root cause of homelessness throughout our country is due to a lack of affordable housing. I will be interested to hear the barriers that developers may face in constructing, operating, and getting veterans placed in their units.

I am so excited to dive in the conversation today with our witnesses. I thank the chairman again for visiting our district in beautiful Oceanside.

With that, I yield back.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Thank you, Ranking Member Levin.

I now recognize the ranking member of the full committee, Mr. Takano, for any remarks he may have.

**OPENING STATEMENT OF MARK TAKANO, RANKING MEMBER,  
FULL COMMITTEE**

Mr. TAKANO. Well, thank you, Chairman Van Orden, and thank you, Ranking Member Levin, for inviting me back to your district today, and it is indeed a lovely day here.

It is great to be back in Oceanside again. Last July, I participated in the Economic Opportunity Subcommittee's field hearing on veteran food insecurity. I am proud of the bipartisan nature of the Economic Opportunity Subcommittee and your commitment to hosting field hearings in each other's districts to hear directly from your constituents about what issues veterans face.

I hope our committee will host many more field hearings throughout this Congress. Ending veteran homelessness has long been a key priority of mine.

I echo Ranking Member Levin's statement that there is no single solution to ending veteran homelessness and that it takes an integrated approach to alleviate housing insecurity.

I appreciate San Diego and Oceanside's commitment to addressing the homelessness crisis with the urgency it deserves. Barriers remain to ensuring every veteran has a place to call home. I am hopeful that Congress can act to make tweaks to existing law to remove unnecessary roadblocks.

Throughout this Congress I plan to work on a number of pieces of legislation with my colleagues that touch nearly every aspect of the homelessness services continuum, and ending and preventing veteran homelessness will take a concerted effort.

VA has made tremendous strides in pursuit of this goal and the numbers—and the number of homeless veterans has reduced by over 55 percent since 2010.

Last year VA housed over 40,000 veterans. Yet, still, according to VA—according to HUD's point in time count, roughly, 33,000 veterans were experiencing homelessness in 2022.

I am interested in learning more about innovative approaches to homelessness prevention and how we may be able to more adequately address inflow into the system through shallow subsidies and rapid rehousing.

I also want to fully open up the front doors of VA by ensuring veterans with other than honorable discharges can access the health care for homeless veterans program.

I am looking forward to hearing from transitional housing providers today about improvements we can make to grant and per diem program—to the grant and per diem program to ensure organizations have the resources and funding they need to serve veterans on their journey to permanent housing.

Now, on the permanent housing end of the continuum expanding veteran eligibility for HUD-VASH and modernizing that program is a top priority of mine and I believe will lead to significant reductions in the number of veterans experiencing homelessness.

As Ranking Member Levin mentioned, we are working on a fix to ensure that veterans with service-connected disabilities can access the permanent supportive housing built to meet their needs by adjusting how income is calculated for the purposes of eligibility for that housing.

It seems backward that veterans with service-connected disabilities could be denied housing. It is happening in communities across the country and I am intent on removing this barrier to ending veteran homelessness.

The affordable housing crisis is one of the chief causes of homelessness and nowhere is that crisis more apparent than here in California. I am pleased we will hear directly from affordable housing developer today—from an affordable housing developer today about how we can encourage the construction of more housing units for veterans including through project-based funding—project-based HUD-VASH vouchers.

I believe that by giving VA and providers flexibility and fully funding the resources they need they can better address the needs of homeless veterans in their care and communities who are moving through their system and that is why I am going to continue to fight for passage of H.R. 645, Congresswoman Cherfilus-McCormick's Healthy Foundations for Homeless Veterans Act, which extends VA's authority to pay for basic needs for veterans experiencing homelessness.

I am deeply concerned about the effects that the May 11th expiration of that authority and the elevated grant and per diem reimbursement rate may have on VA providers and the veterans who need our help the most.

There are a number of other issues within homeless programs I hope to address this Congress and into the future, including coordinated entry, data collection, and access to legal services and program training, and I want to ensure that we are encouraging the guiding principles of housing first across our homeless response systems so that we are prioritizing permanent housing placements for veterans and securing the treatment and services they may need as well.

I hope to hear ideas for how we can make the journey from at-risk or homeless to stably housed as smooth as possible for our veterans from our San Diego and Oceanside providers.

I thank the chairman and the ranking member again for letting me participate today in this field hearing, and I yield back.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Thank you, Ranking Member Takano.

I would like to recognize my friend, Representative Kim, and thank her for making the drive down to the district. If you would like to make some opening comments.

#### **OPENING STATEMENT OF YOUNG KIM**

Ms. KIM. Thank you, Chairman Van Orden and Ranking Member Levin, for holding this field hearing in Southern California on veteran homelessness and allowing me to participate, too.

I represent California's 40th congressional District and most of my district is primarily in Orange County but I do also have parts of San Bernardino and Riverside Counties.

You know, I was looking up the statistics. California is home to 1.8 million former service members and that is about a little over 5 percent of the state's population and that is also one-third most in the entire United States among all 50 states.

We have a lot of veterans here in the state as well as in our respective districts so there is a lot of concentration about making sure that we take care of our veterans and find out what the needs are, which is one of the reasons why in my own district I have formed a veteran advisory group where, you know, I invite the veterans, those who work with the veterans—organizations, associations—so that they can come and have a regular conversation with me so I can find out what the needs are, what resources we have at the Federal level that, you know, we can dispense to the communities.

In my district, like I said, we have a number of nonprofits, government, and law enforcement agencies and health agency partners that are designed to increase collaboration on finding, you know, a

temporary shelter, connecting homeless veterans to health care and addiction services, and enrolling veterans into reintegration programs and help them find stability and reenter the workforce.

We got a lot of work to do but that is one of the reasons why I took the time to drive down here to listen from the veterans, those of you who are working closely with the veterans, to give us some ideas on how we can better our work as Members of Congress to disseminate and help our veterans better.

Thank you so much for, again, inviting me and I look forward to hearing our witnesses talk to us. Thank you.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Thank you, Representative Kim.

I am going to ask the witnesses on the first panel to please stand and raise your right hand. Can you do that back there? Man, they got you in a tight spot. Raise your right hand, please.

Do you solemnly swear that the testimony you are about to provide is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

[Witnesses are sworn.]

Mr. VAN ORDEN. All right. Thank you. Let the record reflect the witnesses have answered in the affirmative. Please take your seats.

Before we get started, I am a retired Navy SEAL. There is a clock that says 5 minutes. That is when you are stopping. Okay. I will hold myself to the same standard, just so you know. All right.

Mr. Pearson, you are now recognized for 5 minutes to deliver your testimony on behalf of the VA witnesses.

#### **STATEMENT OF FRANK PEARSON**

Mr. PEARSON. Good afternoon, Chairman Van Orden, Ranking Member Levin, Ranking Member Takano, and Congresswoman Kim.

My name is Dr. Frank Pearson. I am the director of the VA San Diego Healthcare System and the Jennifer Moreno VA Medical Center. I am accompanied today by Jill Albanese, senior advisor and director of clinical operations in VA homeless program's office.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the topic of veteran homelessness, the work in this area by my staff at the VA San Diego Healthcare System, and the challenges that we face in our efforts to end homelessness among veterans in San Diego.

The VA San Diego Healthcare for Homeless Veterans program collaborates with many community organizations to combat veteran homelessness. It all starts with identifying at-risk homeless veterans and then helping them with the continuum of care and services.

The most common way to document veteran homelessness is through the annual point in time counts. As stated, in 2022 to the point in time count recorded almost 8,500 homeless individuals in the San Diego region. That was a 10 percent change since 2020.

Six hundred and eighty-six of these individuals, 8 percent, self-identified as veterans. These statistics reflected a 27 percent reduction in the veteran homeless population since 2020, which was a welcome trend in the right direction.

While the success leads that have other large cities on the West Coast, VA San Diego struggles to meet some of the national VA goals for permanent housing placements. Our calendar year 2022 goal was 842 and we achieved permanent placement for 704 vet-

erans. The written testimony submitted explains some of the reasons why.

There are new 2023 goals and VA San Diego is implementing and has implemented several initiatives aimed at increasing permanent housing, decreasing recidivism, and engaging with veterans facing homelessness.

In many ways, the COVID-19 pandemic provided advantages that enabled VA San Diego to assist homeless veterans. Namely, the city of San Diego utilized the convention center to ensure that all individuals and families struggling with homelessness had access to shelter, basic necessities, and services.

This allowed VA San Diego to increase collaboration with community partners to streamline services and focus engagement efforts in one location. VA programs had over 200 admissions into HUD-VASH and 135 veterans were transferred directly from the convention center to housing in 2021.

Other factors that came about because of the pandemic included special funding flexibilities provided through Section 4201 of the Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020. That was greatly appreciated.

That law authorized the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to use appropriated funds for life-saving food, shelter, goods and services for homeless veterans or those who participate in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing—HUD-VASH—during the pandemic. That funding, as you know and as have been stated, is set to expire soon and that is a bad thing, potentially.

In San Diego the VA uses those funds in many ways. In an extremely competitive housing market 4201 funding approval enabled an increase of the maximum grant per diem rate for grant recipients.

Programs such as Ride Share enabled over 4,400 rides for homeless veterans to get to our clinics for medical care. Supportive Services for Veteran Families provided hotel vouchers for veterans and their families awaiting permanent housing.

Funding flexibilities also allowed VA San Diego to form new partnerships with organizations like Brilliant Corners to engage in community programs such as landlord engagement and assistance and other San Diego County landlord-assisted incentive programs and, similarly, Landlord Engagement and Assistance Program (LEAP) in the city of San Diego.

By definition, the search for affordable housing is a key part of our efforts to reduce veteran homelessness. There are many programs in our continuum of care that address some of the root causes of homelessness.

We use clinic and street-based outreach to engage veterans and provide resources and referrals. VA transitional housing programs offer both grant and per diem beds and contract residential specialty beds.

The VA homeless patient-aligned care team offers walk-in and scheduled appointments to more than 300 enrolled veterans.

The Veterans Justice Outreach Program provides resources, referrals, and case management service for veterans who are incarcerated, on probation or parole, or otherwise in need of Homeless

Court advocacy, and VA San Diego employment readiness staff members assist homeless veterans overcoming housing instability as they seek employment.

VA San Diego Healthcare System is committed to ensuring veterans have access to the housing resources and services they require and deserve. We are working to improve access to programs designed to meet veterans' needs.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to appear before you here today. We truly appreciate the many resources that Congress has provided the VA so we can care for our Nation's veterans. Now we are happy to respond to any questions that you may have.

[THE PREPARED STATEMENT OF FRANK PEARSON APPEARS IN THE APPENDIX]

Mr. VAN ORDEN. You made it.

Just so you know, Mr. Pearson, I read all of your testimony already. Thank you very much for that and the written statement of Mr. Pearson will be entered into the hearing record.

Ms. Hines, you are now recognized for 5 minutes to deliver your testimony.

#### **STATEMENT OF LEILANI A. HINES**

Ms. HINES. Good afternoon, Chairman Van Orden, Ranking Member Levin, members of the committee, and the public in attendance here today and virtually.

My name is Leilani Hines. I am the director of housing—of the housing department and housing authority for the city of Oceanside.

Oceanside in particular has long been defined by its neighbor, Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, with over 42,000 active duty personnel, 73 percent of which live off base, and more than 77,000 retired personnel residing in the San Diego region.

Many of these active, retired, and discharged service members and their families make Oceanside their home, and since 2015 this region has worked toward functional zero for the homeless population in veterans and we have seen an overall decrease, as has been stated.

That is not necessarily the case here in Oceanside. We have experienced a significant increase in our point in time from five persons in 2020 to 88 in the last count.

Oceanside is in collaboration and works to support leadership efforts of our continuum of care committed to the national built for zero initiatives the board of supervisors that have adopted a county framework for ending homelessness, creating that unified strategic approach to support coordinated services and funding.

As part of this effort and the growth of homelessness in contradiction to the region in Oceanside what we bring to the table are our HUD-VASH vouchers, a hundred vouchers. As you often hear the media and cause for concern for many in our community it is the lack of affordable housing and a competitive rental housing market that is a big contributing factor for the use of housing choice vouchers.

To address this and to meet the challenge the city does use the 120 percent of our fair market rent for its VASH program. We utilize zip code level small area Fair Market Rents (FMRs) that better

reflect rents within our individual neighborhoods to meet those high costs and the changing market in Oceanside.

The temporary change in the FMR methodology employed for 2023 incorporates private market rental data that will help us to close that gap in high housing cost markets like Oceanside where we see a median rent of \$3,400 a month, a hundred-dollar-a-month increase in rents from March to April 2023 and an \$800 increase from the same time last year.

Consumer choice for our veterans' self-determination housing stability are dependent upon the availability of housing and its affordability, and so where opportunities arise the city does work with our private market developers to stimulate development, expand our available housing stock, particularly through project-based vouchers, and Oceanside has committed to full utilization of 20 percent of the program cap for Projected Based Vouchers (PBVs), the additional 10 percent for permanent supportive housing to just support housing affordability.

In recent years you have seen all three of our housing authorities dedicate PBVs to a number of permanent supportive housing developments and as a local municipality our impact on the market is truly limited and to services.

We can, however, take proactive measures to outreach, make known the availability of resources to the community to connect potential VASH-eligible veterans with our local San Diego Veteran Affairs Medical Center.

We can help to educate and engage landlords and property owners of participation in the voucher program, the benefits, the availability of incentives we have, and the services that can be available through VASH or even the Emergency Housing Vouchers (EHV) program.

While we as a local jurisdiction we have all committed to doing what we can there is more to be done for veterans experiencing homelessness.

As the county has alluded to in their written testimony, VASH vouchers left on the table are left on the table and available. We have utilized only about 50 percent—nearly 50 percent over the last few years of our VASH vouchers. That is lost opportunity.

Our use of VASH vouchers is truly relying upon direct referrals of the VA and their case management services and that is what impacts the greatest higher utilization of our services.

Our referrals have been slow and trickling in and we continue to examine ways in which we can partner to strengthen those relationships and increase our referral rate.

In the future what we would ask for you to do as we work together as municipalities, our Continuum of Care (COC) and Regional Task Force on Homelessness (RTFH), we hope to identify referrals. We hope that the—we increase program caps for PBVs as a useful financing mechanism.

As Ranking Member Levin has championed, we urge legislators to think about the methodology of the FMR and to go beyond 2023 and to incorporate that data. Last—

[THE PREPARED STATEMENT OF LEILANI HINES APPEARS IN THE APPENDIX]

Mr. VAN ORDEN. The gentelady's time has expired.

Ms. HINES. Thank you.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Thank you very much.

Ms. Hines, I read all your testimony, too, in case you wondered.

Ms. HINES. Thank you.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Yes. I owe that to you. The written statement of Ms. Hines will be entered into the hearing record.

Mr. Estrella, you are now recognized for 5 minutes to deliver your testimony.

#### **STATEMENT OF DAVID ESTRELLA**

Mr. ESTRELLA. Good afternoon, Chairman Van Orden, Ranking Member Levin, and members of the committee. Welcome to the county of San Diego and my hometown, Oceanside, California.

My name is David Estrella and I am the director of County of San Diego's Health and Human Services Agency Housing and Community Development Services. As such, I also represent the housing authority of the County of San Diego.

San Diego County is a proud military community. San Diego has the largest concentration of military and veteran presence in the world with approximately 120,000 active duty personnel and 230,000 veteran residents.

The majority of our active duty service members are split, roughly, between the Navy and Marine Corps serving among our eight military bases in the county.

According to the Regional Taskforce on Homelessness, there are nearly 1,000 veterans currently experiencing homelessness in our region. Over the last several years the San Diego County Board of Supervisors has demonstrated its commitment to addressing the needs of all people experiencing and at risk of homelessness.

The board adopted the county's Framework for Ending Homelessness in 2021, which created a unified strategic approach to support the coordination of homeless services and funding.

On February 7th, 2023, the board formally prioritized ending veteran homelessness in the region. The county of San Diego will join community partners and other local municipalities in developing and implementing a regional strategic action plan to achieve functional zero for veterans' homelessness within a 15-month period and maximize available resources to meet our veterans' housing needs across the region.

The introduction of the Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing VASH program in 2008 has been a key contribution to an over 55 percent reduction in veterans experiencing homelessness nationwide since 2010.

According to San Diego's regional 2022 point in time count, while the number of persons experiencing homelessness saw an overall increase veterans homelessness in the region decreased by over 350 veterans since the 2020 report.

The county of San Diego has engaged in working with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and other partners to address the challenges in the region. Some recent highlights of the county's effort include enhancing county outreach, educating and engaging landlords, and enhancing the county's landlord incentive program to reduce the amount of time between voucher issuance and lease up in a very competitive rental market, connecting veterans with



units by providing vacancy leads through our landlord liaison and streamlining the administrative process to increase efficiencies and reduce barriers.

While remarkable progress has been made there is more to be done to help veterans experiencing homelessness. According to the February 2023 U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Dashboard there are 2,334 VASH vouchers allocated to three housing authorities in the San Diego region.

While the housing authority of the county of San Diego, the San Diego Housing Commission, and the Oceanside Housing Authority have over 1,670 veteran families leased in units and receiving VASH assistance, over 650 VASH vouchers remained not utilized.

In order to get our veterans off the street and into housing an additional outreach and referrals from the local VA are needed throughout the region. In 2022 the county received an average of less than 11 referrals per month.

Recognizing the need to increase outreach and referrals in the housing authority's jurisdiction, the San Diego Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) has recently secured a contractor to assist the VA with outreach and referrals.

So far in 2023 the county has received an average of 15 referrals per month. While we anticipate seeing the referral numbers continue to grow in 2023, the current pace is not nearly enough to fully utilize the vouchers within the next 12 months and still leaves too many veterans far too long without a place to call home.

While the county has been successful in applying to HUD and bringing additional vouchers to the region in the past, the inadequate referral rate has made the county housing authority ineligible to apply for additional VASH vouchers based on utilization rate thresholds.

Not being able to apply for additional vouchers is a missed opportunity. We can enhance the San Diego VAMC's capacity to identify and refer homeless veterans by expanding the local VA's current third party referral contract.

Additional strategies that would help streamline access to VASH vouchers for eligible veterans include expanding program wide VASH waivers to align with flexibilities already allowed under the emergency housing voucher program and stability voucher programs, increasing the amount of VASH project-based vouchers, or PBVs, that the local VA will support per proposed housing development.

Currently, there is a limit of either 10 VASH PBVs per development or 10 percent of the development's units, whichever is greater. This minimum should be increased.

Thank you for your time and I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.

[THE PREPARED STATEMENT OF DAVID ESTRELLA APPEARS IN THE APPENDIX]

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Good job. You made it.

Mr. Estrella, thank you very much. Oh, excuse me. Yes, thank you very much, and your written statement, which I did read, will be entered into the record.

Mr.—is it Wexter?

Mr. WECHTER. Wechter.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Wechter. You are now recognized for 5 minutes to deliver your testimony.

**STATEMENT OF MATTHEW WECHTER**

Mr. WECHTER. Thank you. Good afternoon, Chairman Van Orden, Ranking Member Levin, Ranking Member Takano, and Representative Kim.

My name is Matthew Wechter. I am the deputy public defender supervising the Pretrial Advocacy and Community Connections unit of the Public Defender's Office. On behalf of the county of San Diego, department of the Public Defender, our chief deputies, and the members of our office, thank you for inviting me to testify on this issue.

Since my first years as an attorney in this office, now over 13 years ago, it has been clear to me the strong commitment that the San Diego Public Defender and our collaborative justice partners and the greater county of San Diego community has to serving our homeless veteran population.

We can do better in two ways. The first is best addressed by my panel colleagues today, increasing the housing and other nonlegal resources available that they need, and the second is to eliminate the legal barriers to being able to utilize and meaningfully receive those resources and that is what I will focus my comments on today.

In my written materials I discussed how important the Stand Down event has been and continues to be for our county and our community members and beyond. The way I have always heard Stand Down described is you take a step, we take a step. You walk in and ask for help and we will walk with you.

Homeless courts started its stand down 34 years ago as a collaborative justice effort between the public defender, district and city attorneys, and the Superior Court, and continues to be one of the biggest if not the biggest service provider at the event. In fact, most years at San Diego High School's field the veterans are lined up early just for legal help.

The public defender is there in force—I call it the public defender army—with over 50 volunteers over those 2 days there to meet the incoming veterans looking for help.

In return for coming to the event, engaging with services, and working on themselves the public defender and the court partners can now research their cases, look for outstanding warrants, locate Department of Motor Vehicle (DMV) holds, pull those cases and remove those barriers on the spot.

Never let a pandemic go to waste. We now have that technology to do this in real time with a click of a button.

The criminal case, fine, and relief is just the start of what legal help is available at Stand Down. DMV Legal Aid, San Diego Volunteer Lawyer, Child Support Services, League of Women Voters, county assessor recorder helping with birth certificates—it is a one-stop shop for a veteran looking for a way out of that cycle. They take a step, we take a step.

That is only 3 days a year, 3 days twice a year in San Diego. What about the rest of that time? Our monthly formal Homeless Court Program operates 12 months a year with the VA, PATH,

Interfaith, Adjoin, and over 90 other approved Homeless Court providers in this community, able to refer their clients and participants to clear these legal barriers once they have met those program requirements.

San Diego was not satisfied there either. In 2021, on the heels of the pandemic, that same collaborative spirit among our county and community partners also begun using the model of Homeless Court at Stand Down to institute Homeless Court pop-up resource fairs throughout the community to remove immediate barriers and we hope to expand those to twice per month in the near future.

The Homeless Court pop-up model of hyperlocal meet them where they are action is gaining traction through the American Bar Association's Commission on Homelessness and Poverty as well.

In fact, I just returned from Charleston, South Carolina, supporting their first Homeless Court pop-up resource fair last Friday, and there are already discussions to plan their next one.

If you sense a theme to my opening comments today it is meeting the unhoused person where they are to lift that barrier. For the veteran they came out for us when we needed it and now we will come out for them and address their needs.

Sometimes that first step is the hardest, and the public defender and the other community collaborative partners will be ready to take those steps with them.

While this is a field hearing in San Diego, veteran homelessness is not unique here. I extend the invitation to any and all the members of this subcommittee to join us at any of our Homeless Court pop-up events, our monthly Homeless Court Program graduation, or our Stand Down event this July to see it in action.

If you are interested in this type of event in your community through the American Bar Association on Homelessness and Poverty I would be happy to make that connection with your community as well.

Thank you, and I would be happy to answer any questions that committee has.

[THE PREPARED STATEMENT OF MATTHEW WECHTER APPEARS IN THE APPENDIX]

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Thank you, Mr. Wechter.

The written statement of Mr. Wechter will be entered into the hearing.

We will now proceed to questioning. I ask members and witnesses to respect the 5-minute rule—I think we have covered that—and I now recognize myself for 5 minutes.

Ms. Hines, you said it is 30—and I read it but I did not see what type of apartment costs \$3,400. Like, how big is that?

Ms. HINES. That would be a two-or three-bedroom unit. Our two-bedroom units go anywhere from \$2,400, \$2,800 and then three-bedroom units upwards of \$3,000 to \$4,000.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Okay.

Ms. HINES. If you have been to the Oceanside community we have—

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Oh, yes.

Ms. HINES [continuing]. We have had a renaissance, if you will, and a lot of new physical developments coming online.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Okay. That would be for a family then?

Ms. HINES. Yes, it would be.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Okay. Thank you, ma'am.

Mr. Wechter, what qualifies a veteran as homeless and allows them access to your services?

Mr. WECHTER. The good part about the way that our community has done it is homeless or at risk of homelessness, which really opens it up and makes it so that we have as much eligibility as possible.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Okay.

Mr. WECHTER. When a person comes there might be suitability issues but eligibility is as broad as possible.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Okay. Excellent. Thank you.

Dr. Pearson, as you know, Southern California is an area with a significant defense presence—we have discussed that—and members of the armed forces in the community make the transition of the military to civilian life every day. About 750 members of the Naval Special Warfare community do this annually.

Can you please discuss how the local VA Medical Center collaborates with the nearby naval and Marine bases to ensure that service members who may not have a housing plan as they exit the military are connected with the resources they need?

Then the second question is does the Department of Defense provide warm handovers directly to the local VA for service members who do not have a housing plan?

Mr. PEARSON. Okay. Thank you for that question.

The military offers the Transitional Assistance Program for military members that are exiting the Navy or any military service. I am a 37-year veteran myself and having been a commanding officer I am very familiar with this.

You know, the military actually has a very good program for people that are going to be medically disabled and there is a very significant handoff as we have had in this community with Wounded Warriors and everything.

We have a very strong connection between Camp Pendleton and Navy Medical Center of San Diego for those veterans or soon to become veterans.

There is a really good handoff process there. When military members are exiting the military they go through TAPS. They get representatives from the VA who come to share—

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Dr. Pearson, I do not want to cut you off but I have limited time. I was just doing the stuff for this. I want to make sure that the Department of Defense (DOD) is not—like, they are not chilling you out and it sounds like they are not so far, from your perspective. I am going to follow up

—have my staff follow up with you if that is all right.

Ms. Albanese—is that correct?

Ms. ALBANESE. Yes.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Yes. Okay. Can you discuss the disparity in the treatment of veterans' Federal service disability payments between the most Federal agencies and HUD and how this affects veterans' ability to get affordable housing?

Ms. ALBANESE. Yes. Thank you for the question.

What I can tell you is of the veterans that are currently enrolled in all of our homeless programs nationally about 20 percent of

those veterans would be over income for these projects that Mr. Levin described.

It is a significant number of veterans who would not be eligible for those project-based because they are over income even though they have a service-connected disability.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Okay. Yes, that is unacceptable. We are going to work on that.

Yours is kind of a general question but, Doctor, I am going to start with you. I want to know what actually goes into trying to deconstruct this problem because I read all this stuff again and I see a lot of—I do not see a lot of upstream solutions.

With that transition program in Naval Special Warfare they start 24 months out making sure that these service members—they start off in a productive way. Can you tell me a little bit about the upstream solutions that you are working with that could potentially help this?

You have a active duty service man or woman who is performing incredible functions and then they wind up in a bush on a corner. You know, that just did not happen.

I really want—and I know Ranking Member Levin is all over this—I want to try to deconstruct that problem so we can prevent getting here. The reason being is I am not sure that the at-risk—I think that is too late at that point. Can you address that?

Mr. PEARSON. Sure. The VA has a Move to VA program and so that is one program that is helping to facilitate resources for military members who are transitioning. We also have veteran resource centers and we actually just opened up a brand new one at the VA hospital here recently.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Okay. With that, I yield back.

I now recognize Ranking Member Levin for 5 minutes to question the witnesses.

Mr. LEVIN. Thanks again, Mr. Chairman, and thanks to everybody on the panel for being here today and for all your excellent work in the community.

I wanted to start by discussing barriers to affordable housing for veterans and one of the most important tools that we have got to improve access is the ability to project base HUD-VASH vouchers. We have been talking about that a bit. Project-basing vouchers effectively sets aside units in a building or development so that there is a dedicated housing stock for veterans.

My understanding is that there has been a slow uptake in project basing in the San Diego region despite the difficult reality that many veterans face when competing in the rental market, as we have been discussing, with a tenant-based voucher.

I would like San Diego and Oceanside public housing authorities as well as VA to please discuss the barriers to project-basing HUD-VASH vouchers in our community and any solutions you are working on to ensure that there are units available for veterans, and let us begin with Mr. Estrella.

Mr. ESTRELLA. Thank you for your question, Ranking Member.

The discussion of project-based vouchers starts as a financing discussion and it is a form of subsidizing permanent affordable housing.

Typically VASH project-based vouchers are included amongst a package of other either housing choice project-based vouchers and other types of financing, State tax credits, or State financing for veterans housing, et cetera.

Typically what you see is a voucher that is a set aside for veterans within a larger affordable housing development, so glass half full.

Part of the question is that it is a portion of financing so it does not carry the full burden of affordable housing development. It is part of a broader challenge, which is financing affordable housing development generally.

The more project-based vouchers that are made available that are VASH vouchers that increases the probability that the project will be—the affordable housing development will be financially solvable over long term. It will be operational, et cetera.

In summary, affordable housing finance is very difficult, particularly in the San Diego region and California region. VASH vouchers as project-based vouchers are a tool that can be used. Expanding that tool allows us more freedom to build more housing.

Mr. LEVIN. Ms. Hines, I will ask you the same question.

Ms. HINES. I think my answer would be very similar to David's response, but project-based vouching is absolutely necessary when you do financing for the extremely low or very low.

When we look at a development you can have upwards of six different funding sources coming in. We recently approved Greenbrier Village, which is a 59-unit permanent supportive housing all VASH—all project-based vouchers with five VASH vouchers. The equivalent value of those project-based vouchers was about \$21 million.

You cannot do permanent housing without project-based vouchering, and so the more that we have the ability to use project-based vouchers the more housing stock we think that we will be able to get at those extremely low or very low income levels.

Mr. LEVIN. Why do not we do more of it? You just think it is a financing matter as Mr. Estrella referred to?

Ms. HINES. At times it is a choice. We can do—we in Oceanside have committed to using the full maximum. We are obligated under the legislation to only use a maximum of the 20 percent of our vouchers.

Increasing that maximum will help us to do more affordable housing and then it becomes a choice of a developer or a partner and, in the case of the VASH vouchers, the VA as to how many of those they will use for a targeted population group.

Mr. LEVIN. Dr. Pearson, I will turn to you for my last minute in the hope that we will have another round because I got a bunch more questions if you are willing.

Dr. Pearson.

Mr. PEARSON. Absolutely. Thank you for the opportunity.

I will make it very quick. We have 76 project-based vouchers for the city, 13 for the county, and none for Oceanside. I would say there is opportunity there.

Mr. LEVIN. Zero for Oceanside?

Mr. PEARSON. Right.

Mr. LEVIN. Wow.

Mr. PEARSON. Project-based housing, yes.

Mr. LEVIN. You do not think that there is—so do you agree with the general premise that it is the financing that is the challenge?

Mr. PEARSON. You know, that is at a different level than what I get involved with but I certainly think there is—cost has something to do with everything these days. Absolutely, you cannot dismiss that.

Mr. LEVIN. Okay. Do you have any insight on why Oceanside has not had any of these projects?

Mr. PEARSON. No, sir, I do not.

Mr. LEVIN. Okay. Ms. Hines, do you have any insight on this?

Ms. HINES. We just started to get into the game of project-based vouchers, and so as I discussed the Greenbrier Village project was just awarded funding this year.

Mr. LEVIN. Out of time. Sorry. Okay.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Thank you very much, and at the request of Ranking Member Levin we will do a second round of questioning.

Mr. LEVIN. Thank you, Chair.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. We will get to—of course, no.

I now recognize Ranking Member Takano for 5 minutes to question the witnesses.

Mr. TAKANO. Thank you, Chairman Van Orden.

I want to follow up on the chairman's questioning on veteran eligibility compensation.

Mr. Pearson, how often does this issue of veteran disability compensation putting veterans over the income eligibility requirements for a unit in a permanent supportive housing complex—how often does it present itself in the San Diego area?

Mr. PEARSON. Surprisingly, it is not significant in San Diego because there is plenty of housing to be able to—as far as when we are talking per diem and we are talking about Area Median Income (AMI) rates, the rates that are currently available meet the number that were allocated.

There is sufficient allotment for what we are available to do. Does that mean that project-based housing would not appreciate an increase? No, because that would probably make ineligibility for more housing available there.

Mr. TAKANO. You are not saying you do not encounter this that often?

Mr. PEARSON. That is right.

Mr. TAKANO. Does it—but does it happen sometimes there?

Mr. PEARSON. Sure. Yes, and I am very familiar.

Mr. TAKANO. What happens when it does happen to veterans who are turned away from accessing a unit in permanent supportive housing because of their permanent—for their disability compensation? What do you do in that case?

Mr. PEARSON. Sure. I would like Ms. Albanese to help me with that.

Mr. TAKANO. Sure.

Ms. ALBANESE. Sure. I can tell you one of the consequences is that when a veteran does not qualify for these project-based then they are—they are able to use a tenant-based voucher because San Diego has made those vouchers available so folks can get vouchers if they are up to 80 percent area median income, which certainly

does help and it sounds like Oceanside is even 120 percent of FMR. That is hugely helpful.

When you are a veteran and you are in—you have a voucher, you are competing with everybody else in the rental market, right. Using a voucher you are already at a little bit of a disadvantage.

That means that you have to go through an inspection. You have to figure out how you are going to get the deposit. It is a very competitive market and so, again, I would say that that can put a veteran at a disadvantage if they cannot take advantage of the project-based units.

Mr. TAKANO. Well, thank you for that.

Let me go to Mr. Estrella. One critical step Congress took during the COVID-19 pandemic was to authorize emergency housing vouchers, or EHV's, through the American Rescue Plan. EHV's were created to help pay rent for individuals or families at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

The new program came with higher rent caps, extra money for landlord incentives, and laxer documentation requirements than housing choice vouchers.

The San Diego public area housing authorities were extremely successful on using their EHV's unlike many other communities in California and across the country. I have been working on legislation that would expand administrative funding for the HUD-VASH program to mimic the EHV program.

Can you please discuss—I see some nodding heads over there. Can you please discuss why San Diego was successful in utilizing its emergency housing voucher allotment? If you cannot I will turn to them. So—

Mr. ESTRELLA. Thank you for your question.

I think it is a reflection of the collaborative efforts across the region, including the Regional Taskforce on Homelessness, all of the housing authorities working together.

Those vouchers were issued during a very difficult time and I think the—just the collaboration that came through quick referrals, quick processing, and the administrative efficiencies that came with the program that would very much benefit—you know, is very much modeled and similar to VASH.

I think those kind of administrative efficiencies help us to get the vouchers out in a quick fashion. I think that is the best way to respond.

Mr. TAKANO. Do you have anything to add, very quickly, either one of you?

Mr. PEARSON. I do. In addition to that, again, it is all about the dollar. You were—they gave efficiencies of being able to provide deposit money immediately whereas HUD-VASH does not do that.

Mr. TAKANO. Are there any other lessons from the EHV program that we could apply to other subsidies like HUD-VASH that you would add besides that or was that the key one?

Mr. PEARSON. That is the key one, sir.

Mr. TAKANO. Okay. Ms. Albanese?

Ms. Albanese.

Ms. ALBANESE. I would just say that we absolutely would support having those same benefits that were included with the emergency



housing vouchers included with HUD-VASH. It would be a game changer for us, sir, so we absolutely appreciate that consideration.

Mr. TAKANO. Well, it seems like the previous issue I raised, which is an issue in other parts, which is the eligibility cliff. Seems like that is not such a problem. You are all—you are all, like—you are all showing a lot of enthusiasm around this particular reform that I just mentioned.

Ms. ALBANESE. I would say that it is a bigger problem in other communities than it is in San Diego. Not every housing authority chooses to raise their eligibility limit to 80 or 120 percent of fair market rent. So while—

Mr. TAKANO. I am going to have to—I am going to have to—

Ms. ALBANESE. Okay. Thanks.

Mr. TAKANO [continuing]. cut us off here. Thanks.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. We will have a second round if you want to follow up. I now recognize Representative Kim for 5 minutes.

Ms. KIM. Thank you, Chairman.

As all of our witnesses know, the veteran homelessness is a problem that can be prevented if veterans are connected with our local, state, and federal resources before they become homeless, right. We can think about the mental problems. The emotional health and substance abuse are often the factors contributing to veteran homelessness.

I want to ask all witnesses, and this is open to all of you, what are some of the examples at any level like state, federal, and local levels that have worked well at preventing our veterans from becoming homeless?

Anyone can go first.

Ms. ALBANESE. I can say that one of the—one of the programs that we see that has worked very well has been the Supportive Services for Veteran Family programs. It does provide prevention services. One of the things that we are looking at utilizing SSVF for is to use our shallow subsidy intervention a little bit further upstream.

Some folks are at risk of homelessness just because they do not have enough income to pay their rent. For those folks a shallow subsidy makes sense, and just to explain, the shallow subsidy pays up to 50 percent of someone's rent.

We do feel like we can use that intervention, encourage our grantees to use it further upstream. It will reach a broader population. That is one of the things that we are looking at.

Ms. KIM. Does anyone want to—

Mr. ESTRELLA. Thank you, Congresswoman.

I guess what I would add on top of that is an understanding, one, that this discussion is a discussion of poverty when we are talking about homelessness, generally. I think you were referencing that.

Two, any response that we provide should be multidisciplinary in nature. Our housing authorities are part of Health and Human Services Agency, which means we leverage all the services that are available through self-sufficiency and behavioral health services and everything that is offered through Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA).

Then understanding that it is a regional effort across multiple jurisdictions including—you know, in our case it would be the Regional Taskforce on Homeless and all the wonderful providers that are part of our RTFH.

It is very much a comprehensive approach. Less silos and more cooperation generally yields better results with the resources braided along with that and understanding that health also plays a part in that.

Thank you.

Ms. KIM. Thank you so much.

You know, we know that a major issue with veterans getting the benefits and resources that they are entitled to is that we do not know who they are and we do not know where they are. That is probably the major issue, right.

In California, as you probably already know, we have added the voter identification—veteran identification to driver's licenses. We can now allow the local veteran service officers—VSOs—to have a more accurate method of educating our veterans on resources that are available to them.

Outside of this what are the best practice that you can share with us when trying to connect veterans to local resources and, you know, the resources that have been proven effective?

Mr. PEARSON. I would offer that, you know, if a veteran is connected to the Veterans Administration, we, through our medical system, primarily through our caseworkers, our social workers, we are going to identify those issues and we are going to connect them.

We are going to provide every intensive resource that is available to be able to connect them. The important point is, as you stated, is identifying them. It is difficult unless they are connected to us.

I think there are also opportunities to identify those people that are transitioning from the military and then once they connect with the VA we have got a great opportunity.

Ms. KIM. Is there any other methods that you can share?

Mr. WECHTER. Thank you, Congresswoman.

I would say it is meeting them where they are with these types of resource fairs because they are not just homeless, right. It is homeless or at risk of homeless or really anybody that walks up.

When we have the representatives from the VA, our Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) team in San Diego, which is amazing, they are there to actually discuss what benefits they might have. They might not know. Having the access in the community where they are is, I think, a crucial step.

Ms. KIM. We will definitely want to work with you. I have my veteran resources staff that works on this. We have veterans' resource fairs coming up. You mentioned the pop-up events for the homeless veterans. Will love to team up with you and then get the information out and collect their information as well. Hopefully—

Mr. WECHTER. Orange County just actually wanted to switch to that model, too. Thank you.

Ms. KIM. Thank you. Thank you, Chairman.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Thank you, ma'am.

We will now proceed to our second round of questions. With that, I recognize myself for 5 minutes.

Dr. Pearson, to ensure every veteran has a permanent home we also have to work toward employing every veteran that wants to work and currently the VA San Diego has two employment specialists to provide services to 173 veterans.

Do you think this is an optimal number or should they have more employees helping veterans?

Mr. PEARSON. We are actually in the process of hiring additional employment specialists at this time. We will have three.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. You will have three?

Mr. PEARSON. Yes, sir.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Okay. What is the linkage between your folks there with the State and Federal Department of Labor folks?

Mr. PEARSON. That is a great question and, Ms. Albanese, can you help me with that?

Ms. ALBANESE. Sure. I can tell you from a national level we do work closely with them. There are lots of opportunities for us to work with our Federal partners and we certainly do work closely with them to look at opportunities for veterans and to look at potential policy issues as well as additional programs that may need to be developed to help our veterans become employed.

Mr. PEARSON. I would also add that, you know, we have USA Jobs. It is a wonderful—actually, a website that we are trying to create more efficiencies with. There are a tremendous amount of opportunities, particularly for the veterans there.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Okay. I want to—Doctor, I want to get a little more into this, the upstream solutions here, because we are also responsible for the Transition Assistance Program and we have—I do not want to use the word obstructionist but I am going to.

I found the Department of Defense to be obstructionist when it comes to allowing us to access our Transition Assistance Program. I—maybe other than you—I had a terrible experience with the Transition Assistance Program. I thought it was nearly meaningless.

I want to work with you guys to make sure that you know that there are some very quality things out there that we can implement but we have got to break the—we have got to break through that with the Department of Defense.

I mean, I know you are trying to help. I know that we are trying to help. I also know that it is my responsibility to make things better to the best of my ability.

I need to know with these—with the TAP program what could we potentially do, again, to prevent the productive service member who—man, I lived in a bush on purpose for a long time, right, as a Navy SEAL—to prevent the person from doing that to living in a bush because they have to.

Are there any other things that you could think of or really across the board—I have a little bit of time

—that we could get into the TAP programs that could help prevent that veteran from becoming homeless or even the at risk?

Mr. PEARSON. One thought, having gone through TAPS just within the last 5 years, is maybe more dedicated time that actually we forward, maybe even a VA day. You know, speaking honestly, that most veterans or most people that are transitioning are very interested in finding out ways of compensation.

We do not really spend a whole lot on examining the whole person. VA has a whole health program that does not just take you from benefits and everything but it is looking at your whole experience of life and part of that is how you are transitioning and taking care of yourself.

That is a recent program that the Veterans Administration has. It has been growing and growing to include employees. But it is a great opportunity to actually introduce it there at TAPS.

Mr. Van Orden. Okay. Before we leave I want my staff to give you a copy of the unclassified document that we got from Naval Special Warfare today, which is now in MFP 11, which it is a programmatic thing through the Special Operations Command for the transition stuff because I think it is nailing what you are talking about.

Before we go, take a look at that and then I would like you—I will just give you my personal phone number, if that is okay. Give me a call.

Mr. PEARSON. Absolutely.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. I want to talk to you about this because—

Mr. PEARSON. I was deputy force medical officer there in 2015.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Oh, were you really?

Mr. PEARSON. I was.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Oh, what is up, man?

[Laughter.]

Mr. VAN ORDEN. All right. Well, with that, I yield back. I now—

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Chairman, before you yield back all your time might I suggest we also look at the skills bridge program but we also look at some jurisdictional changes that we—your experience with DOD makes me think—we discussed it when we were in the majority—the prospect of expanding this committee's jurisdiction over some programs that DOD runs like skills bridge, for example, which is a 6-month time period that those service members still are getting their food and their pay but could be doing apprenticeship programs, et cetera.

It might get better attention from us than it does from Armed Services, for example. I might—I might suggest the majority look at that.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Well, we will. Thank you very much, and I yield back.

I now recognize Ranking Member Levin for 5 minutes.

Mr. LEVIN. Thank you. As the former chairman of the subcommittee I concur with what Ranking Member Takano said.

It has been a constant struggle trying to get the attention of the DOD and the jurisdictional issues and the House Veterans Affairs Committee-House Armed Services Committee (HVAC-HASC) delineation has been a challenge. We just have to keep working at it.

Dr. Pearson, I appreciate all the hard work that you are doing at the Jennifer Moreno VA Medical Center for—on many levels but one thing is to hire and retain HUD-VASH case managers, particularly since we passed the Isakson-Roe Act a couple years ago.

These case managers have some of the hardest jobs I can think of, some of the highest case loads of any VA employee, and I am

really grateful for their commitment to the mission of ending veteran homelessness.

How does the Medical Center address the high cost of living in our area, which frequently makes it difficult to find and retain talent that can afford to work and live in our region?

Mr. PEARSON. Thank you very much for your question.

We have a number of things and PACT Act actually has been one of the great benefits of late.

We have—looking at some of our very hard to recruit hard to retain positions and we have—it has afforded us some flexibility such as retention incentives and so that has been very key to actually being able to keep on existing staff and we look at recruitment bonuses also for staff that we want to bring on.

That has been a necessity and very thankful to Congress for helping us and getting that passed.

Mr. LEVIN. Well, let us continue to dialog on that. When we look at HUD-VASH voucher utilization rates we often associate a lower rate of utilization with a lack of available case managers to staff.

The vouchers—I remember a conversation I had with your predecessor about this. Here, you are operating with a high number of your case manager positions filled, yet, the voucher utilization rate remains relatively low with our two public housing authorities represented here.

Can you speak to why voucher utilization rates remain low with these Public Housing Agency (PHAs) and any ongoing efforts to address this, and are there best practices from your relationship with the San Diego Housing Commission that you could apply to your processes with the county and Oceanside PHAs?

Mr. PEARSON. Thank you for that question.

You know, our numbers might differ a little bit in how we are counting because, you know, the VA is in this from the beginning all the way through to making sure that veterans are getting housed.

The process is not just with getting the voucher. It is actually putting the veteran in a house, and so that is why our numbers look a little—so we are counting all of those veterans that we are working with because that is a lot of time spent by our caseworkers in order to do that.

Our numbers are a little higher than what you may have heard reported. I think there are—were a lot of efficiencies that were at the convention center, you know, congregating everybody there.

I think a lot of the wonderful provisions of 4201 that were able to give us Ride Share were able to get veterans to medical appointments. Of over 4,400 Ride Shares almost half of those were for medical appointments and 800 of those were for mental health appointments.

Okay. We are getting veterans to their mental health appointments. That—a great efficiency that we are—that we gained from that.

Additionally, we are getting people to employment opportunities and housing appointments as well. I cannot also be thankful enough for the increases in per diem that were afforded through there.

With 4201(b) we were able to get the increase in per diem. You know, we are very supportive of the efforts to increase that to 200 percent, going forward, as in the budget that is being proposed. Those are necessities and very thankful.

Mr. LEVIN. Thank you, Dr. Pearson.

Ms. Hines, I want to get your thoughts on this as well with the time we have got. Can you discuss the referral process between VA and the Oceanside PHA and how you are all working together to move veterans into permanent housing more quickly?

Ms. HINES. We are starting to work and we meet on a biweekly basis, on a monthly basis, to talk about referrals, to talk about case management. It has been a slow trickle. I mean, there are months where we get no referrals and months where we get a few referrals.

We are working on that with—directly with the VA and the staff, I think, as a region through the county's efforts and the framework that they are establishing to look at region wide what are those administrative bottlenecks that are preventing the referrals and then locally what do we have going on in Oceanside. Maybe it is an affordability issue that may be preventing those referrals from happening.

Mr. LEVIN. I appreciate that. I am running out of time. One reason I have heard is—particularly for Oceanside is veterans might want to look closer to services in the city of San Diego.

I will not ask you to answer because I do not want to hear the—I do not want to hear you get timeout. Obviously, we want to make sure those services are making their way to North County and we appreciate it.

I yield back.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. With that, I recognize Ranking Member Takano for 5 minutes.

Mr. TAKANO. Thank you.

Ms. Albanese, in our discussion about the emergency housing voucher lessons you were sort of cutoff. Do you remember what you were wanting to say about—with respect to other communities maybe having a greater—so I want to make sure we got that on the record?

Ms. ALBANESE. Yes. I would just reiterate that we strongly support utilizing the admin funds that were available for the emergency housing vouchers for HUD-VASH and have that mirror for HUD-VASH.

We do know that we have seen nationwide it has been easier in some instances for those emergency housing vouchers to be used and it has also been a little bit difficult for HUD-VASH to compete with those in some areas. Not everywhere, but in some areas.

If there was a way to make those same benefits and services available for HUD-VASH it would certainly help.

Mr. TAKANO. What it sounds like to me is we ought to examine how we can redesign or reissue HUD-VASH to more resemble what was done with emergency housing vouchers during the pandemic.

Ms. ALBANESE. Absolutely. I will say that we at the VA have tried to mimic that ourselves using SSVF. It was the best that we could do at the time. Having that attached directly to the HUD-VASH voucher would be better.

Mr. TAKANO. Okay. Well, that is a big lesson. I thank you for that. I am glad we got you more time to get that on the record.

I want to go to Mr. Wechter.

Mr. Wechter, does the Homeless Court engage with community landlords or housing providers to ensure that those who come through the court are not discriminated against when accessing housing?

Mr. WECHTER. What I can speak to is from the criminal aspect from the Public Defender's Office. At our pop-up events as well as our monthly graduations we do have representatives from the Legal Aid Society of San Diego that handle the civil legal end of it.

We do have available resources so when someone does come to a graduation or they do come to one of the pop-up events they can consult with Legal Aid to be able to get assistance on those matters.

Mr. TAKANO. Well, great. With regard to making sure that these particular veterans are not discriminated against when accessing housing is there anything that you are able to do about that?

Mr. WECHTER. On the criminal side, no. It would have to be something on the civil side with Legal Aid because we have—

Mr. TAKANO. That is why you mentioned the Legal Aid folks—

Mr. WECHTER. Correct.

Mr. TAKANO [continuing]. being there with them. All right. That is maybe a separate line of question we have or another witness we have to get here.

Mr. WECHTER. Yes.

Mr. TAKANO. I have been working on legislation to expand and modernize the HUD-VASH program and a critical part of that legislation would expand eligibility for HUD-VASH veterans—for HUD-VASH veterans who are transitioning out of incarceration so that they do not have to experience literal homelessness to be eligible for housing assistance.

In many cases some of these formerly incarcerated do not even have IDs, right, and so at least for our veterans we should be doing this for all of our formerly incarcerated. Are there additional protections that Congress could consider to make it easier for justice-involved individuals to access housing?

Mr. WECHTER. Well, what I can say is that with our new unit, the Pretrial Advocacy Community Connections Unit, we are trying to get in as soon as someone is arrested and developing plans so that when they go through the reentry process they can get access to a quick ID.

We were working with the self-sufficiency services for the county to try and make sure that if they do have local benefits that we can get them access to that as they are, you know, leaving.

The problem is with the previously incarcerated we are either dealing with people that have been in for a while or they are circulating in and out on these lower level crimes.

Talking to them and getting them access to those benefits and really just getting their idea about what they—what they have access to is the most important.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Chairman, if we think we are having trouble with transitioning service members out of the service think about

veterans who are transitioning out of the justice system and how they fall through the cracks.

That is another—if you think you are having trouble with DOD—

Mr. PEARSON. Would you like me to answer that for you?

Mr. TAKANO. Please go ahead.

Mr. PEARSON. We have a very successful program, actually. We have actually treated or been able to accommodate more than 233 veterans in this program.

Mr. TAKANO. Formerly incarcerated?

Mr. PEARSON. Absolutely, and so we are actually—there is a goal that is set nationally. We are actually at 107 percent of our goal annually, right, at this point already for this year.

We are exceeding what the country is. The national average right now is about 51 percent and we are over 107 percent. We actually are working with intensive case management and working to get people to homes.

Mr. TAKANO. Boy, I would love to learn more about your success, especially as it applies to our veterans who are formerly incarcerated.

Mr. PEARSON. Yes.

Mr. TAKANO. We, certainly, need to find out how we can do this for all formerly incarcerated. Thank you so much. Well, I hope we can follow up with the gentleman. Thanks.

I yield back.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Before I introduce Representative Kim, there is also a program—I am on the Agriculture Committee and there is a program under Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) that is specifically designed to help with formerly incarcerated folks getting job training to make sure that they break that cycle of recidivism.

That is something we could try to link together between the Veterans Justice Outreach Program. That is what you are referring to. Is that correct, Doctor?

Mr. PEARSON. Yes.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Chairman—

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Yes?

Mr. TAKANO [continuing]. I am glad. On SNAP—on the Ag Committee on SNAP. There is so much we need to do with regard to food insecurity and veterans.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Well, then maybe you should come to Wisconsin. We will talk there, sir.

Mr. TAKANO. I will be glad to join you and put on a cheese—put on a cheese hat.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. That is now in the congressional Record. You all heard it.

[Laughter.]

Mr. VAN ORDEN. I now recognize Representative Kim for 5 minutes.

Ms. KIM. Thank you, Chairman.

The purpose of the hearing is to hear from all of you, the experts who are actually working in this space and actually working with the veterans—homeless veterans, specifically.



As we are talking about the best practices here in San Diego County and on the—especially from the Oceanside area where you work with a lot of veterans, I wonder in part of your best practices in trying to get the support and the resources to them because, at the end of the day, we are all here having this discussion to better serve the veterans so that we can get them out of being homeless into someplace that are stable. That is the ultimate goal here.

In that process how much of your work and effort really involve dialoguing and talking directly with the veterans? I wanted to know if you can share some of the best practices that have worked really well, but at the same time can you also talk about some of the initiatives that you found to be less impactful in the process?

I really want to take the information that I am gathering here today to be able to take it back to my district, which is just next door.

Mr. ESTRELLA. Congresswoman, I can offer for the county of San Diego, I mean, as established it has an existing Office of Veteran Services and Affairs.

That has been a part of our program for many years and, of course, most recently the Office of Homeless Solutions was created within Health and Human Services Agency specifically for outreach and services and creation of new interventions.

As a part of that very much veterans are included with that and then, most importantly, regionally for the entire San Diego County region the county right now is in a 15-month effort, you know, to create an action plan and blueprint to end veterans' homelessness for functional zero.

Going along the lines of best practices very much that regional emphasis and having very specific offices that are charged to provide specific interventions to address the needs of, you know, each population in the best way that meets them where they are and provides the needs that they specifically encounter. Thank you.

Ms. KIM. Ms. Hines, can you talk about, in addition to the first question but also if there is any initiative that you found to be less impactful?

Ms. HINES. Sure. Just to add on to the county's efforts, I think all of us as local jurisdictions need to play the part. We have heard a lot about outreach and intervention.

I think that that really is the best practice, getting out where our veterans are, where folks are. Oceanside has a strong history of community events, outreach. We house four community resource centers in our more disadvantaged areas.

Getting information out to our military community before they are at risk, before they are homeless, to connect them to the right resources, to connect them to the VA, we should be leveraging those touch points, if you will, on a day to day.

Someone may be coming to a farmers market. Certainly, if that veteran is thinking—a military personnel thinking about and being discharged from the military, having VA part of the farmers market, part of resource events that we hold and doing that direct outreach, I think, would be beneficial because I really think and believe that, again, the theme prevention and intervention before.

Ms. KIM. Sure.

I would like to ask one last question to Mr. Pearson. You know, when VA hears about, you know, from officials like you from San Diego County about a particular homelessness program that is working really well do you communicate these successes to stakeholders at other VA regions to try to replicate them and then make sure that all regions are helping our veterans?

Mr. PEARSON. Thank you for that question.

Yes, we do. We do. As a medical center director

—we have a forum for medical center directors. It also goes up to the network VISN—to the Veterans Integrated Service Networks—but also at the case management level.

All the case management, everybody, is basically working together in the various communities to share all those best practices.

Ms. KIM. Well, thank you so much. I will yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Outstanding.

Well, thank you very much for coming. The witnesses are now excused and I do hope you stick around for the second panel so you can get information from them.

We will take a short recess and get set up for the second panel.

[Recess.]

Mr. VAN ORDEN. All right. This hearing will reconvene. I would like to learn how to turn on my microphone.

I would like to welcome the witnesses to our second panel to the table and, please, just going to ask you to stand and raise your right hand.

Do you solemnly swear that the testimony you are about to provide is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?

[Witnesses are sworn.]

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Excellent. You may be seated. Thank you. Let the record reflect that the witnesses have answered in the affirmative. It is Anglea? Is that correct?

Mr. ANGLEA. Anglea, sir.

Mr. Van Orden. Wow. How about that? Mr. Anglea. Awesome. You are now recognized for 5 minutes for your testimony.

Mr. ANGLEA. Wait, where are the colors?

#### STATEMENT OF GREG ANGLEA

Mr. ANGLEA. Thank you, sir.

My name is Greg Anglea. I am here on behalf of Interfaith Community Services. We are a community-based organization serving individuals in need throughout San Diego County, primarily here in North San Diego County. We provide more than 75 different programs and last year we had the honor of serving 786 veterans in need.

I am here on behalf of the veterans we have served, on behalf of our teams, to share a boots on the ground perspective of what works, what has been proven effective, and what we need to do more of in order to end veteran homelessness here in San Diego and support efforts to end veteran homelessness throughout this country.

As I shared in my written testimony, we have decreased homelessness as a nation more than 55 percent and the two biggest factors in that have been a significant increase in investment of re-

sources by the Federal Government and the development of strong partnerships, which we have heard a lot of today and you have seen here locally. That is partnerships between government, community-based organizations, and providers.

As has been referenced, the grant per diem transitional housing program has had additional funding that sunsets next week on May 11th. That program, which my organization provides beds here in Oceanside—64 beds, community-based beds—that program has historically been under funded and providers like ours have been hamstrung with what we are able to provide.

I want to share some personal experiences of who we are working with so you can understand the level of complexity we are dealing with. I will not detail their experiences. It is more in depth in the written testimony I provided.

I shared about Mr. Jones, a Vietnam veteran Marine, who came to Interfaith Community Services after he lost his daughter and his wife within a 1-week period. He attempted suicide and was homeless.

I shared about Mr. Martin, a Navy veteran who was nearly beaten to death in a park while experiencing homelessness. He came to Interfaith with a traumatic brain injury, with memory loss, and substance use disorder.

I shared about Ms. Smith, an Army veteran, who has a long history of abuse and trauma from people close to her in her life and from her military service.

Next week on May 12th the rate of reimbursement to organizations like my own to help individuals like Mr. Jones, Mr. Martin, and Ms. Smith will decrease from a maximum of \$152 per day to \$64 per day.

That amount is not enough to purchase a hotel room in a community like this, let alone provide housing and the care that we were able to successfully provide to the veterans I just described.

Mr. Martin has been approved for HUD-VASH, passed his appointment for an interview. He is moving into a new apartment home of his own in the coming weeks.

I included additional testimony from Ms. Smith, who is a successful graduate of Veterans Treatment Court, has completed her education and is committing her career to helping other veterans in crisis.

These life-changing improvements are not possible in a community like San Diego or most communities in this country for about \$60 a day. It does not fund the housing that these veterans need. It does not provide the case management, the addiction treatment, the mental health, the employment services that are provided.

My organization has the opportunity to provide a number of these services in partnership with Federal and local government. We provide recuperative care programs for veterans exiting a hospital with a recuperative need.

I discussed the grant per diem transitional housing programs. We are also providing employment assistance, and then there was talk on the panel earlier about prevention. We provide that as well funded through private donations because there is not enough of the existing government resources to provide that.

We strongly, strongly support going back to the transitional housing piece, the grant per diem. Passage of acts like H.R. 491, Return Home to Housing Act, or other legislation that can increase the reimbursement for these programs.

As we also think about the challenges accessing things like HUD-VASH and other resources, the grant per diem program is a place. It is a safe haven for veterans to go to access a stable home, and for these staff to help these individuals to get into permanent housing we do need more support. I outlined some other strategies.

I will close with the words of one of the individuals I shared from her words, that she will soldier on. Thank you.

(THE PREPARED STATEMENT OF GREG ANGLEA APPEARS IN THE APPENDIX)

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Very well. Thank you, Mr. Anglea.

I just—it occurred to me that I did not realize how that was pronounced and it is apropos that you are representing the Interfaith Community Services.

I would now like to recognize Ms. Scrapper for 5 minutes.

#### **STATEMENT OF HANAN SCRAPPER**

Ms. SCRAPPER. Good afternoon to the assembled members of this distinguished committee and thank you to Congressman Levin for the kind invitation.

I am Hanan Scrapper, regional director for PATH San Diego and it is my great honor to be here on behalf of my organization. PATH is the most impactful homeless service provider in California, serving over 60 percent of the Golden State's unhoused population.

I supervise many programs targeting veterans experiencing homelessness including grant per diem, or GPD, Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing or HUD-VASH, Supportive Services for Veteran Families, or SSVF, and the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program, or HVRP.

We also operate a veteran justice reentry program funded through the county where we pick up each veteran upon their release from custody and ensure they have immediate housing placement while providing the supportive services geared toward preventing reentry.

At any given time we have a little over 400 veterans enrolled in our programs with an average age of 50. Veterans make up about 9 percent of our unsheltered population and 7 percent of the shelter population in the San Diego region. On average there are about 900 individuals who are veterans that experience homelessness each month.

As a community we house about 80 veterans each month on an average inflow of 130. To achieve functional zero we need to house over a hundred veterans each month. San Diego has a strong collaboration with the VA, the continuum of care, veteran service providers, and our public housing authorities, which is how we were able to reduce veteran homelessness by 30 percent last year.

However, the high cost of housing in our region makes it challenging for us to find viable affordable housing for our veteran families. The average income for veterans in our programs is \$1,600 per month and an average cost of a one-bedroom is \$2,200.

Based on these numbers, we are finding veterans to be rent burdened, which is proven to place these households at high risk of eviction and financial instability.

San Diego is one of the pilot communities to launch the shallow subsidy program through SSVF. Shallow subsidy expands housing options and increases the veterans' households' ability to meet other costly living expenses while receiving a fixed rate of rental assistance.

This program has been a tremendous help in bridging the gap of housing affordability for veterans who meet the eligibility. This also shows that SSVF is serving veterans with high needs who may need—who may not meet eligibility for HUD-VASH. It would be beneficial to consider a multidisciplinary team for SSVF that is geared toward meeting the needs of veterans we serve in this program.

We are also very excited to be a grantee for the HUD-VASH program in partnership with the VA and San Diego County. As the lead street outreach provider for the city and county with nearly 70 staff deployed across the region, our goal is to connect every veteran we encounter on the streets to a permanent housing intervention.

I wanted to share a veteran family story to demonstrate the level of collaboration that was needed to end their homelessness. I did change their names for protecting their identity.

Veteran Angela was experiencing homelessness when she connected with our SSVF program. Angela had an 8 percent household and was caring for two elderly members of the household.

Due to their situation, the household was spread across the county. Some were in their vehicles. Others were couch surfing. Once Angela and her family were enrolled in our SSVF program we were able to place them in a hotel with emergency housing assistance.

During this process we connected them to HUD-VASH and our housing specialists located permanent housing through SSVF while providing application fees, double security deposit, and 5 months of rental subsidy until their HUD-VASH subsidy kicked in. The veteran family is happily housed and stable.

Sadly, we know that not every veteran household story ends this way. We need to treat veteran homelessness as a humanitarian crisis, which is why it is imperative that we maintain many of the waivers that were in place during COVID-19 pandemic.

Some of the pandemic-era waivers we found to be helpful are expanding the length of rental assistance beyond 9 months for SSVF, expanding eligibility for homeless prevention assistance and shallow subsidy, and increasing providers' flexibility to use hotels for GPD programs for veterans who may be more successful in a non-congregate setting.

PATH and fellow providers are 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 serving our country's veterans.

It was a great honor to be here today. Thank you.

[THE PREPARED STATEMENT OF HANAN SCRAPPER APPEARS IN THE APPENDIX]

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Thank you very much, ma'am—Ms. Scrapper, and along with Mr. Anglea's testimony. Written statements will be entered into the hearing record.

Dr. Potash.

Mr. POTASH. That is correct.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Yes. You are now recognized for 5 minutes to deliver your testimony.

#### **STATEMENT OF DUSTIN POTASH**

Mr. POTASH. Thank you so much.

Good afternoon, members of this committee and fellow providers. I am honored to be here on behalf of Adjoin.

My name is Dr. Dustin Potash and I have the honor and privilege of serving as the veterans' director for Adjoin. I oversee multiple programs including the SSVF and shallow subsidy programs. With nearly 12 years of work in this sector our organization is built upon the housing first model, ensuring the goal of low barriers to entry for those in need.

San Diego has seen a reduction in veteran homelessness through the use of the SSVF and shallow subsidy programs. These reduced numbers have only come because of the continued efforts made by service providers, Congress, and local partners, and the use of the housing first model.

This model ensures that those veterans who may have mental health needs due to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) from events during their time in the military have permanent housing to better address their needs.

Many of our clients come in with high barriers that make it very difficult for them to be housed. We would encourage this committee to continue the landlord incentive program so that we can continue to offer more options.

At this time I would like to share a story of one of our clients. The names have been changed.

Emily is an Air Force veteran who received an honorable discharge. When she came into the program she was living in an abandoned RV that had no running water or electricity. She had been asked to leave the RV as it was parked on someone's property.

Emily was a registered nurse. By the time she came to the program her nursing license was suspended. Emily had a service connection compensation of \$1,100 per month from the VA. At the time of enrollment Emily's money was spent on paying for drug testing as required by the licensing board as part of her efforts to reinstate her license.

Most of the time Emily was left with no money for other needs. Emily was in high crisis mode when she reached out to be enrolled in the SSVF program and it was often challenging to engage with her.

Emily was consistently stressed due to not having a place to live and no money to cover basic needs. Emily was estranged from friends and family due to her constantly asking them for money to sustain her needs.

With the assistance of an SSVF housing coordinator Emily found a unit that she liked and we helped her move in. Emily continued to work on completing all requirements with the licensing board

and after being housed she was able to apply for Cal-Fresh assistance and was approved.

With the assistance of Adjoin with rent payments and utilities Emily was able to concentrate on getting her nursing license reinstated. Emily is now a full time nurse at a local hospital making \$36 an hour.

Her license was reinstated in January 2022. Emily has since moved into our shallow subsidy program where she has been very successful.

We appreciate the dedication of this committee and this Congress for helping to find more solutions to end veterans' homelessness like Emily.

I do believe, however, there is still a gap in our system when it comes to a service member transitioning from the military to civilian life. When talking to many of our clients many of them state they were rushed out of the military with no plan in place, which played a role in them becoming homeless.

Since my separation from the military I know this committee and Congress has implemented the Transition Assistance Program to help service members with resources, classes, and training but I believe it needs to go a step further.

It is my belief that service members should already have a job, permanent housing, and VA disability income if applicable all secured before leaving the military. I do not know whose responsibility that falls onto, the military or the community.

One possible solution is to allow providers and grantees to be a part of that transition process on military installations. I believe this type of collaboration will drastically reduce the number of homeless veterans not just here in San Diego County but nationwide.

The rental rates here in San Diego are high and the available housing is low, which is another barrier for our clients. A possible solution would be to allow SSVF and shallow subsidy providers to turn rundown hotels and motels into permanent housing units.

Case management and wraparound services would be available onsite to address needs. Ending veteran homelessness can be achieved with out-of-the-box thinking and working as a collaborative.

It was an honor and privilege to testify in front of you at this committee about the SSVF programs, shallow subsidy programs, and some possible solutions to better protect those veterans who served us.

I look forward to answering your questions. Thank you.

[THE PREPARED STATEMENT OF DUSTIN POTASH APPEARS IN THE APPENDIX]

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Thank you, Dr. Potash.

The written statement of Dr. Potash will be entered into the hearing record.

Mr. Spear, you are now recognized for 5 minutes.

#### **STATEMENT OF SEAN SPEAR**

Mr. SPEAR. Good afternoon, Chairman Van Orden and Ranking Member Levin. My name is Sean Spear and I am president and CEO of Community Housing Works.

I, first, want to thank you for holding this hearing today and giving each of us the opportunity to share our perspectives and ideas with you.

As mentioned earlier, Community Housing Works is a nonprofit affordable housing developer and owner. We also provide services to our residents as well.

We are a nationally recognized organization that has been around for 35 years serving the greater San Diego County, although we have properties in other—in eight other counties scattered throughout California as well as property in Texas.

We emphasize providing affordable housing for working families, seniors, and those with special needs, including veterans and other people who may have recently experienced homelessness.

CHW believes that opportunity begins with a stable home and providing a place that translates to a sense of pride of self and that that spirit of hope leads to the realization of dreams.

Today CHW owns more than 4,000 life-changing apartment homes across the State as well as in Texas, as I mentioned earlier, with—and that we—our services themselves emphasize the notions of providing better outcomes to our residents once they have moved into our developments.

Our services themselves focus on education outcomes from K through five all the way through those graduating high school and going on to college or to other certificate programs.

We also provide financial sustainability and well-being programs and also health and well-being programs primarily geared toward seniors and those with special needs.

Our informal model is we build futures and that emphasizes that we do not just provide a roof over people's heads but that we also help them achieve their dreams of a better future for themselves and their loved ones.

We at CHW pride ourselves on serving people of many different backgrounds, including our community's honored veterans who have done so much for us. We currently have dedicated veteran units in four of our housing communities with additional self-identified veterans living within two other CHW supportive housing communities that are utilizing our partner-provided case management services.

Whether it is from our own staff in terms of providing the services or from third party partners, a few of which are at this table with me, as well as partnerships with the Veterans Administration more recently, the emphasis is really on providing resident services that are freely offered to these residents with the goal of helping them develop a sense of belonging, camaraderie, and pride for one another and their community.

For our veterans specifically this work could not be done without the strong partnership that we have recently forged with the VA as well as other local HUD-supported public housing authorities.

I want to emphasize that while we have built positive and lasting relationships with our local VA offices while utilizing the HUD Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing Program, or VASH for short, we believe that there are administrative steps that Congress could facilitate to have this program support the creation of even more vet-



eran-serving affordable housing as well as get vulnerable veterans into those units more quickly.

In my written statement shared with you earlier I provided some detail on a set of challenges and suggested solutions centering around, one, reducing the time lag between when new units are ready and when VASH-supported veterans are able to move into those units; second, the unfortunate disqualification of many needy veterans from being able to occupy those units based upon their disability benefits and how those are treated in their income eligibility certification process; and, third, a set of real estate-related measures that could attract more private capital to potentially generating thousands of new veteran-serving affordable housing units and supportive housing units nationwide.

Authority to project base more rental subsidies within a given community, more co-location of housing on VA-controlled land, expanded use of the existing funding authorized under the 2022 PACT Act, and other key reforms that have been spelled out for the housing tax credit program would be potentially cost neutral changes that could ultimately spur more of those units for more veterans.

If time permits as we go forward I am hoping to elaborate on some of those ideas as well.

Just quickly to say that, you know, we really appreciate the opportunity to come before you, to share our ideas, and also hopefully discuss some solutions as we go forward. Thank you.

[THE PREPARED STATEMENT OF SEAN SPEAR APPEARS IN THE APPENDIX]

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Thank you, Mr. Spear.

Mr. Spear's written statement will now be entered into the record. We will proceed to questioning and I recognize myself for 5 minutes.

I got to tell you, housing is really hard. I live in rural Wisconsin and we have a similar problem that you do here in San Diego. You call it the Pacific Ocean. I call it the Mississippi River.

We just—you just cannot go that way any farther and how it affects me in Wisconsin's 3rd District is that we have a real issue housing migrant agricultural labor and it is the same story. You know, that is for another committee. We are here talking about veterans.

I did not see in anybody's testimony the public-private funding breakdown comparison between, like, 2020 and 2023. Mr. Anglea, you referred to this, that your donations have kind of—not there so much anymore. What is the ratio between in 2020 private donations, Federal Government money?

Mr. ANGLEA. In 2020 the community was very generous in response to COVID. Private donations made up about a third of our revenue that year.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Okay.

Mr. ANGLEA. For this year it will make up closer to 15 to 20 percent, and I also spoke in my written testimony to our private intervention is simply not scalable to the level of the need.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Yes. I got you.

Ms. Scrapper.

Ms. SCRAPPER. Generally, for San Diego we rely heavily on federal-local funding, city and state. We—about 10 percent of our operating budget would be maybe privately donated or foundations and such.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. That is consistent from 2020—2019 to 2023?

Ms. SCRAPPER. Correct. A little spike in the pandemic during 2020 because people did respond generously.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Okay.

I am going to skip you for sec, sir. I am going to go to Mr. Spear. You were quick on that microphone.

Mr. SPEAR. Sorry. We are a little bit of a different animal. As a affording housing developer—

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Right.

Mr. SPEAR [continuing]. we have primarily used both a combination of developer fee that is allowed under some of the programs that we use as well as some amount of rental revenue that comes off of after payment of debt service on properties, and then we will fund raise for usually our resident services.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Okay. If your—

Mr. SPEAR. Generally, it is about a third—a third in each of those cases.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Has there been a change in that between 2020 or 2019 to now?

Mr. SPEAR. We have seen some challenges during COVID in terms of our fundraising work for our resident services. That has rebounded a bit but we still have a target. Essentially, the kind of profit that we get off of the developer fee and off of the rental we then turn back into services.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Okay. I just—

Mr. SPEAR. We have had to put more into the services. So—

Mr. VAN ORDEN. My concern is this, and I expressed this when I was running for office, is that a lot of people, unfortunately, folded some of these funds—these emergency funds—into essentially programmatics and they started depending on them knowing full well that they were going to sunset.

We got to figure out a way to continue to provide the services that we have, and thank you for being very honest with that.

Okay. Dr. Potash, me. That is the answer to your question, me. I am responsible for the Transition Assistance Program as the chairman of this subcommittee.

When this is not going right it is my fault, and I have been in Congress for 111 days or something like that. I am working on it. I also want—I want you to know that these are the problems that keep me up at night. Like, how did—how did Emily go from being an RN to living in a mobile home or a RV without electricity? Again, that did not just happen.

You had a productive person working, I am assuming, at the time as a registered nurse because she lost her license. How did she go from there to here? Do you know the answer to that question? I am asking you.

Mr. POTASH. No. You know, that is a big question, right, and I think it goes back to before she even left the military, right, addressing any type of needs that she may have either mental health, substance abuse, the whole gamut. Someone actually needs to do

a hand holding process for these service members because a lot of them do not have plans—

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Yes.

Mr. POTASH [continuing]. and they are being rushed out of the military.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Yes. I just—I want to find the answer to that question because, again, we have to start doing upstream solutions—

Mr. POTASH. Yes, sir.

Mr. VAN ORDEN.—and the only way we are ever going to do that is if we really meticulously look at how did the person get there to begin with. Thank you very much for that.

Mr. POTASH. You are welcome.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. I appreciate it. With that, I yield back. I now recognize Ranking Member Levin for 5 minutes to question the witnesses.

Mr. LEVIN. I thank the chairman again and I thank all of you for being with us and for all the great work that you do.

Mr. Anglea, in particular I want to thank you and the work Interfaith does. You had mentioned that the higher per diem reimbursement rate for providers that operate GPD transitional housing is set to significantly decrease in one week and you also discussed how that is going to impact your ability to provide services and resources for veterans under your care.

I strongly support fixing this and I hope that we can work on a bipartisan basis to figure this out. Short of congressional action what is your plan in the near term? How are you going to, as you said, soldier on?

Mr. ANGLEA. Well, Chair Van Orden, as you described, many organizations received emergency one-time support that was built into ongoing programming. We did not. We used the one-time support to provide one-time additional assistance to the veterans we were working with.

What that means, though, is that we were not able to provide wage increases that we would like to our master's-educated case managers, to our licensed behavioral health specialists providing mental health services, to the addiction treatment specialists doing this work.

We are working to secure additional revenue sources, particularly public-private partnerships with health care to bring forward additional revenues to increase those salaries so that we can bring on credentialed workers to do this.

Also, increasing peer engagement specialists with lived homeless experience, and we will rely upon the generosity of this community to support that work and do the best that we can.

Mr. LEVIN. Well, you have my commitment, being very knowledgeable about the work that you do, that our office will do whatever we can to assist in that regard.

Ms. Scrapper, I was really pleased to hear PATH is now providing services for veterans residing in permanent housing in the HUD-VASH program. I have been exploring tweaks to modernize the HUD-VASH program including expanding eligibility to veterans with less acute needs than those historically served.

Given the significant number of unused HUD-VASH vouchers across the country and here in San Diego the hope would be to allow more veterans who just need the vouchers to utilize them while ensuring case management is retained for veterans who need that support.

Could you discuss how that might affect the allocation of case management resources for the veterans who require the most intensive services?

Ms. SCRAPPER. Thank you, Congressman.

I think if we are thinking about having HUD-VASH vouchers for veterans who may not need the case management component I would worry about losing the much-needed vouchers for those who truly need case management unless we are thinking about increasing that utilization or the number of vouchers that would come into the community.

This would absolutely bridge the gap in housing affordability that we are talking about because veterans may not need that long-term high need case management but they are still at high risk of recidivism and continuously being in the cycle of homelessness if they are not in a housing stable situation.

I would say, first, we need to fix our utilization rate so that we are getting more referrals of veterans into housing and also looking at the inflow and preventing homelessness from occurring to begin with, and then also utilizing basic Section 8 that could be considered HUD-VASH that—for veterans who need that long-term subsidy without case management.

Mr. LEVIN. Thank you for that answer for the work that you do.

Mr. Spear, I will turn to you. I appreciated you sharing how Community Housing Works uses the project-based HUD-VASH voucher allocations to develop permanent supportive housing for veterans, and I think you heard the commentary on our first panel with our government witnesses about the slow uptake of these sorts of projects in our region.

Do you have any comments you would like to share in response to that discussion, how should public agencies be working with organizations like yours and how can we improve these numbers?

Mr. SPEAR. Yes. I think the biggest thing is the notion of the availability of it and, you know, there is a process for being able to dedicate a certain number of units to serving veterans through the VASH program.

Certainly, you would want to have more bang for the buck by being able to kind of lift that cap that was spoken to earlier about the notion of no more than 10 units or no more than 10 percent of a given development.

This is a resource that when used properly then can leverage an additional amount of private capital to come to the deal. By having the rent revenue in the FMRs that gets set, for instance, by, like, Oceanside and having that become the basis for the rent that then can attract more debt to the project that means less public resources that need to be done in order to do that affordable housing development.

It is a win-win in terms of being able to not only have additional veterans served but also be able to leverage valuable public resources for more private capital.

Mr. LEVIN. Thank you so much for all the work you are doing. I am out of time but greatly appreciate you all being with us. Look forward to working with you in the months and years ahead. I yield back.

Mr. VAN ORDEN. I want to thank everybody for coming out today and to have me back in California, even though I would much rather be in Wisconsin, let us be honest. I just—I love it there. You guys come visit. You will see. I will give you cheese and your choice of malt beverage.

Listen, no veteran should be going unhoused. We just—we just should not, and some of my veteran brothers and sisters, unfortunately, you know, wind up in that situation.

I want to thank you, Mr. Levin, for having us here. I really do appreciate it and I appreciate your openness and your candor and the fact that I truly believe that you care about what we are dealing with and that you truly understand that sometimes we are not going to agree on everything. I guarantee if we keep these people and our veterans on the forefront of our minds that we are going to come to an equitable solution.

Thank you very much for that. We are going to get back to D.C. and we are going to go to work. That is what—I came here to get tasked by you and I am going to get down and I am going to sit down, as I said, with Ranking Member Levin here and come up with some solutions that are the best for the most amount of people we possibly can come up with because that is what we have been tasked to do by you folks here.

That is what we tasked Mike with and back in the 3rd that is what they tasked me to do. I will tell you what, I have learned several different things that were disconcerting during your testimony and, again, a lot of these problems keep me up at night.

I am a retired senior enlisted man, which means the rubber will meet the road. There is a lot of time for talk. There is time for some action.

With that said, I would like to yield back to Ranking Member Levin for any concluding remarks you might have.

Mr. LEVIN. Well, I just want to thank the chairman again for joining us today and I want to thank all of our witnesses on the first panel and the second for representing our community really, really well.

I am so grateful for the leadership that you show and the collaboration that you employ in your duties to serve our veteran community and it is really an honor to get to work with all of you in your responsibilities.

I will also take back to Washington, D.C., that sense of camaraderie and that sense of collaboration because I think it is sorely lacking in Washington, D.C.

I really want to thank the staff as well, both majority and minority, for working together in a spirit of collaboration as well as has been the case for the last number of years on the committee.

I look forward to going to Wisconsin. I am ready and I am also ready to take you to one of the great craft breweries in North County San Diego after this hearing.

With that—with that, I will yield back. Thank you.

[Laughter.]

Mr. VAN ORDEN. Thank you, Ranking Member Levin.

Again, thank you all again for participating in today's hearing. I ask unanimous consent that all members may have five legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous materials and I ask unanimous consent to enter into the record a statement from the San Diego Regional Housing Commission. Without objection, so ordered.

This hearing stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 3:43 p.m., the subcommittee was adjourned.]

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**A P P E N D I X**

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## PREPARED STATEMENT OF WITNESSES

### Prepared Statement of Frank Pearson

Good afternoon, Chairman Van Orden, Ranking Member Levin, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. I also want to acknowledge Ranking Member Takano who is also with us today. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the topic of Veteran homelessness and the challenges and efforts in ending homelessness among Veterans in San Diego. I am accompanied today by Jill Albanese, Senior Advisor and Director of Clinical Operations, VA Homeless Programs Office.

#### Introduction

While VA provides programs and support services to combat Veteran homelessness nationwide, we are here to speak about the Healthcare for Homeless Veterans (HCHV) Program at the VA San Diego Healthcare System (VASDHS). Our programs have served Veterans to promote housing stability since 1987, and we work collaboratively with many community partners to ensure a full continuum of care and services.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought forth many added challenges for Veterans facing housing instability. However, the VA San Diego HCHV team relied on innovative solutions, initiatives, and collaborations to ensure that Veterans have access to housing and services to the greatest extent possible. This has been achieved through full participation in coordinated outreach and the use of the community's coordinated entry system, the provision of permanent and transitional housing programs and referrals, and the strengthening of our community-based partnerships.

During the 2022 Point in Time (PIT) Count, the San Diego region recorded a total of 8,427 sheltered and unsheltered individuals experiencing homelessness on a single night in February. Sheltered individuals were considered residing in an emergency shelter, transitional housing, or a safe haven. Unsheltered individuals were considered residing in a location not meant for habitation. Of the persons counted as homeless, 686 (8 percent) self-identified as Veterans. The homeless person's status as a Veteran and their character of discharge were not verified during the Count. Of those who self-identified as Veterans, 308 were sheltered and 378 were unsheltered. Based on these annual counts, the total number of Veterans experiencing homelessness in the region has decreased by 27 percent since 2020. During this same period, the count for the non-Veteran community increased by 10 percent. The PIT counts show a downward trend of the region's number of Veterans experiencing homelessness which has decreased by 58 percent. The COVID-19 pandemic caused a national suspension of the 2021 Point in Time Count.

Despite decreasing homelessness since 2011, there were challenges in meeting National VA Goals for permanent housing placements in San Diego. Nationally, the calendar year (CY) 2022 goal was to house 38,000 Veterans, with San Diego being assigned 842 of those 38,000 placements. During 2022, we housed 704 Veterans, reaching 84 percent of our goal. While we increased our housing placements from the year prior, we fell short of meeting the CY 2022 Permanent Housing Placement goal. San Diego original goal was impacted by special circumstances in FY 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020 and 2021, the city of San Diego utilized the Convention Center and centralized all services for homeless individuals in the area. This created efficiencies that enabled us to increase the rate of housing placements. These efficiencies were not able to be replicated when the Convention Center closed in 2021, which had an impact on providing services and housing Veterans in 2022. VA San Diego has also implemented many initiatives reflected in the testimony below to meet CY 2023 Permanent Housing Placement goals, aimed at increasing permanent housing, decreasing recidivism and engaging with Veterans facing homelessness.

#### COVID 19 Pandemic Impact on Homeless Services

Many of our strongest partnerships and initiatives were further developed during the early months of the global pandemic. During this period, VA and our community

partners embraced the public health mandate that aligned with increased funding to engage and house as many Veterans as possible. While this time was challenging, there were positive and long-lasting impacts on the community that led to rapid housing that reflects the decrease in the Point in Time Count data above. Examples include:

- The city of San Diego utilization of the Convention Center to ensure that all individuals and families struggling with homelessness had access to shelter, basic necessities and services. This allowed VA San Diego to increase collaboration with community partners to streamline services and focus engagement efforts in one location. VA Programs had over 200 admissions into HUD-VASH and 135 Veterans were transferred directly from the Convention Center into housing over 11 months. This streamlined process was supported further by Department of Housing and Urban Development waivers, which San Diego Housing Commission applied for, and provided increased flexibilities of documentation that was needed to apply for housing vouchers. While the national waivers have ended, and the Convention Center closed, these enhanced partnerships between VA San Diego and our community partners endure.
- Funding flexibilities that permitted Grant and Per Diem (GPD) to increase the maximum per diem rate for grant recipients which resulted in additional services to Veterans, including COVID-19 isolation hotels, increased wages for staff retainment, additional support staff such as housing navigators, and creation of isolation rooms, in addition to other support services. Each GPD grant recipient in San Diego benefited from the increased per diem rates which addressed increased local operational costs. After May 11, 2023, the per diem rates will return to no more than 115 percent of the State Home domiciliary rate which is a maximum GPD grant per diem rate of \$64.82 per Veteran per night. We support the legislative proposal included in the FY 2024 budget that allows VA to increase per diem payments up to 200 percent of the State Home domiciliary rate. The increased per diem rates are essential to the survival of our transitional housing programs, and to ensure Veterans receive the support they require on their way to permanent housing.
- Programs including Ride Share, which enabled Veterans improved access to health care and housing services. Through Ride Share, over 4,400 rides were provided in FY (FY) 2022, with almost 50 percent of those rides being used for medical care, and other rides being given for therapy appointments, vaccinations, employment, housing, legal follow up, and to access food.
- Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) provided hotel vouchers to be utilized by Veterans who required a non-congregate setting prior to obtaining permanent housing services.
- SSVF also released a special Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) in FY 2022 to provide funding and increased opportunities to support Veterans, including housing navigation staff and support to locate housing and engage with landlords. In addition, the NOFA included special funding to assist in payments for Veteran security deposits, landlord incentives, and a discretionary fund for Veteran stabilization post housing.
- VA San Diego established new partnerships with community-based programs including Landlord Engagement and Assistance Program, Brilliant Corners, and San Diego County's Landlord Incentive Programs. These programs provide ancillary financial support, housing navigation, and a discretionary fund to Veterans seeking and stabilizing in permanent housing. These partnerships expedited permanent housing placements in a housing market that has a high cost of living and low vacancy rates.

#### **VA Continuum of Care & Programs for Veterans with Housing Instability**

The VA San Diego Healthcare for Homeless Veterans (HCHV) Program provides a continuum of services that includes outreach, medical care, transitional and permanent housing programs, legal support, employment services, and many partnerships with community providers. In FY 2022, the Healthcare for Homeless Veterans team served over 2,000 unique Veterans within the continuum of care. These programs work collaboratively with each other, as well as with our community partners, to assist Veterans in accessing housing and clinically indicated resources to move toward the goal of ending and preventing Veteran homelessness.

**The VA San Diego HCHV Outreach** team utilizes a combination of clinic and street-based interventions to engage Veterans and provide resources and referrals. They work closely with our community partners to screen and refer Veterans to appropriate housing and clinical services. This is achieved through partnering in the

community and meeting with Veterans together, connecting through our Coordinated Entry System, bi-monthly case conferencing, and attending community-based meetings. Additionally, there is a walk-in clinic located at the VASDHS and staff respond to 40–50 hospital-based consults on a monthly basis and over 200 monthly national calls from the National Call Center for Homeless Veterans. In FY 2022, VASDHS received 2,708 calls and as of March 2023, VASDHS has received 1,413 calls from the National Call Center.

Special initiatives on this team include:

- North County partnership with Interfaith Community Services, Oceanside Homeless Outreach Team, People Assisting The Homeless in Downtown San Diego, within the Homelessness Response Center, coordinated outreach events planned by the city of San Diego, and multiple annual stand down events. Stand downs are events during which VA staff collaborates with our community partners and volunteers to provide food, clothing and health screenings to homeless and at-risk Veterans. In addition, Veterans also receive referrals for health care, housing, employment, substance use treatment, mental health counseling and other essential services.
- Participation in the Coordinated Outreach weekly meeting hosted by the City of San Diego and regular meetings with various homeless outreach providers.
- In the next year, the Social Work team will regionalize and assign an outreach specialist to different parts of the region, to include North County, East County, South Bay, and Central San Diego to include Downtown. This will increase specialization and ensure that the team can respond to the unique needs of each region within San Diego and build strong relationships with community-based outreach providers.

**VA Transitional Housing Programs** offer both Grant and Per Diem (GPD) beds and Contract Residential Specialty Beds with a variety of program models including bridge housing, service intensive beds, low demand, and clinical treatment. In FY 2022, these programs served more than 450 unique Veterans amongst 5 different programs. VA liaisons work collaboratively with community partners with clinical and administrative collaboration meetings to decrease barriers to entry, enhance engagement, and connect Veterans to services. They ensure each Veteran has a viable permanent housing plan. New transitional housing programs that aim to enhance Veterans services include:

- Under 38 USC 2061, a new Special Needs Grant for the Frail and Older Adult Veteran population that works with individuals who struggle in at least one activity of daily living.
- Existing community partners have recently applied for both transitional housing and case management grants to improve access to services for Veterans.
- Partnerships between transitional housing programs and Supportive Services for Veteran Families and HUD-VASH to ensure timely referrals and access to permanent housing placements.

**The VA Homeless-Patient Aligned Care Team (H-PACT)** team offers both walk-in and scheduled appointments to more than 300 enrolled Veterans, assisting Veterans in transitioning out of the hospital and those who require regular primary care services. Currently, a third of those enrolled in H-PACT are over 65 years of age and have Care Assessment Need (CAN) scores of over 90, which indicates that they have higher medical and mental health needs. The H-PACT team works closely with both VA medical services and the VA homeless team to ensure that the Veterans have increased access to care and housing supports.

Special initiatives include:

- A vaccination effort in response to community outbreaks of hepatitis A.
- Ongoing efforts to better integrate primary care medical services into the VA Emergency Department to ensure that any Veteran needing emergency care has primary care follow up, and to divert those from the emergency room to primary care, when medically indicated.
- A mobile medical unit is slated to be delivered in quarter (Q)4 of this year that will aim to increase medical outreach services in the community. The medical unit will allow H-PACT staff to go into the community to meet with Veterans where they reside for medical care and support. The medical unit will be shared with the outreach team for additional efforts to engage Veterans who require housing supports or other services.

**The Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) Program** provides outreach, resources, referrals, and case management services to Veterans with a variety of justice-involved needs, ranging from those participating in Treatment Court to those who are incarcerated, those that may be on probation/parole, and for those in need of homeless court advocacy. Assisting Veterans in navigating their legal challenges, allows for a better transition from incarceration to housing, ensures that legal debts can be forgiven so Veterans can focus on their housing or clinical needs, and supports diversion so Veterans can access care over incarceration. Special initiatives include:

- Case management services to Veterans involved in the following treatment court programs: San Diego Superior Court's Veterans Treatment Court, Federal Military Diversion Court, Homeless Court Program, and Federal Veterans Treatment Court.
- Homeless Court began in 1989, during the first Stand Down, and inspired many other communities to build similar courts to serve those struggling with legal infractions linked to housing instability. Homeless Court assists any individual that is working on their housing and clinical goals, to address legal infractions and fines. In FY 2022, Homeless Court dismissed \$27,345 in court fines and fees across 20 participants, with over \$375,000 of fines and fees dismissed since 2018. This program began in 2013, with close to 400 Veteran participants.
- A Veterans Module at the Sheriff's Department in the Vista Detention Center to offer information, resources, and participate in discharge planning for incarcerated Veterans to ensure that Veterans are linked to housing, substance use, medical, mental health, and employment programs prior to their release and case management services and post services to help reduce recidivism.
- A recent expansion of Veteran services within the San Diego Prison network offering resource information for incarcerated Veterans regarding filing for VA benefits and resources needed for reentry.

**Employment Support:** The HCHV team has employment readiness staff for those who are interested in workforce participation. Many Veterans face challenges to obtain or maintain employment when struggling with housing instability, and they benefit from full or part time employment once they are housed. Their interventions include assistance with job placement, coaching, referrals to appropriate community training programs, resume building, and other employment readiness, which can include civilian employment opportunities at Federal agencies. The US Department of Labor provides many Veteran employment services to include Veteran job listings on USAJobs.gov, information on starting a business through the Small Business Administration, a national resource directory, My Next Move for Veterans, employment opportunities by industry, and the Career One Stop website for career exploration, training, and jobs. Currently, the VA San Diego has two Employment Specialists providing services to 173 Veterans. Employment outcomes within the VA San Diego HUD-VASH program are currently at 41.46 percent, and GPD employment rates are at 50 percent. VA San Diego is working to on-board additional staffing resources to increase employment services and improve employment outcomes. Special employment initiatives focused on continuing to meet these goals include:

- Increased collaboration between employment support and transitional housing program participants to assist Veterans in accessing employment support as they prepare to transition to permanent housing.
- Job readiness groups in the Vista Detention Facility on the Veterans module. These groups assist Veterans with linkage to employment in the transition from incarceration back to the community.

**The HUD-VASH Program** is a partnership with the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Veteran Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) to align HUD housing vouchers for Veterans with supportive case management services from VA. Currently, HUD has 2,369 vouchers among 4 different Public Housing Authorities that are assigned to the VASH Program. Of those, 33 are reserved for future project-based programs, and 35 were awarded in FY 2023, and will actively be included in VA metrics starting in FY 2024. Hence, there are 2,301 vouchers actively counted. As of March 2023, there are 1,738 Veterans housed, which indicates a voucher usage of 75.5 percent. However, there are also 147 Veterans and their families with active vouchers searching for housing, and 39 Veterans and their families have identified housing and are awaiting PHA approval to sign the lease and move forward with the identified unit. That indicates an 84 percent usage of vouchers, with 16 percent (377 vouchers) available for use. In comparison to the last two fiscal years, the percentage of vouchers utilized has remained steady. However, San

Diego has been awarded new vouchers each year which means increased housing placements for Veterans.

We continue to expand our efforts in the HUD-VASH program with the work of our VA Supportive Housing Case management team, which has a robust multi-disciplinary team that includes Social Workers, Nurse Practitioners, Occupational Therapists, Housing Specialists, and Registered Nurses.

They work closely together to creatively address challenges in voucher utilization and the needs of the Veterans they serve with many initiatives, to include:

- Expansion of both project vouchers and sponsor-based wrap around services to address challenges in availability and cost of housing.
- Expansion of service area into Imperial Valley and working collaboratively with established medical, mental health, and SSVF providers in the area to identify and work with Veterans requiring housing and case management services.
- \* Service provision to Veterans that were previously considered ineligible due to the character of their military discharge status or time in service, with the national expansion of eligibility, and working with community-based providers for needs outside of housing.
- HUD-VASH services contract that was awarded to People Assisting The Homeless (PATH). The contract enables PATH to provide case management services for homeless Veterans and assist them with obtaining and maintain housing through a HUD-VASH voucher.
- VA San Diego has worked with our local Public Housing Authorities to identify special housing types to include board and cares, independent living facilities, and other shared living arrangements that are not traditionally used with a housing voucher. These housing types focus on older adult Veterans to support independent housing whenever clinically possible through collaboration with VA Geriatric Extended Care program in an initiative to identify available resources for our older adult Veterans and decrease barriers to accessing those resources.
- VA San Diego also supported San Diego Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) Grantees in applying for additional funds to support Veterans struggling in obtaining housing. These awarded funds allowed grantees to serve increased numbers of Veterans, as well as provided additional housing navigation supports, landlord incentives, and other financial incentives for eligible Veterans who have barriers to obtaining housing. This funding also expanded Veteran eligibility from 50 percent Area Median Income to 80 percent to allow more Veterans to be eligible for these services.
- VASH recognizes the need to assist Veterans who have graduated from services and prevent returning to homelessness. VASH's robust Aftercare Team provides services to Veterans who require short or longer-term assistance, ensuring that Veterans maintain housing. They engage in over 1,000 calls a year, more than 300 annual HUD recertifications, and support almost 800 Veterans who are considered to be in "graduation status" to ensure that services are available when needed. It is estimated that in FY 2022, 378 Veterans were able to maintain their housing vouchers due to this support.

#### **VA Initiatives and Collaborations**

VA San Diego Healthcare System has well established partnerships with many different faith-based and non-profit programs including: Interfaith Community Services (ICS), Veterans Village of San Diego (VVSD); Volunteers of America; Southwest (VOA); People Assisting the Homeless (PATH); Regional Task Force on the Homeless (RTFH); Family Health Centers of San Diego (FHCS); Alpha Project, San Diego Police Department Homeless Outreach Team (HOT); Oceanside Police Department Homeless Outreach Team (HOT); Vista Detention Center; San Diego Superior Court—Veterans Treatment Court; Federal Military Diversion Court; Federal Veterans Treatment Court; The Elks Club; AmVets; Brilliant Corners; The San Diego Housing Commission; The County of San Diego Public Housing Authority; the Imperial Valley Housing Authority; The city of Oceanside Public Housing Authority; HUD; and many other community partners. VASDHS is the co-founder of Stand Down alongside VVSD. These community partners have been strong allies in our efforts to address Veteran homelessness, and we appreciate their contributions to Veterans' health and welfare. VA cannot end Veteran homelessness alone, and depend heavily upon collaborative, joint efforts from community agencies and local governments.

The VASDHS Chief, Social Work Service, is a Board Member of the San Diego Continuum of Care (CoC) Advisory Board. As part of the CoC, HCHV is a co-leader for the Veteran's Consortium Committee, which focuses on community action plan-

ning, data sharing, navigating community relationships, and creating sustainable systems in an effort to end Veteran homelessness. The Veteran's Consortium is dedicated to creating an accurate by-name-list of homeless Veterans and utilizing the case conferencing to identify programs and supports needed to move the individual to permanent housing.

Included in this effort is the utilization of our community's Coordinated Entry System to track inflow and outflow of Veterans experiencing homelessness. This data is utilized to better understand Veterans needs and provide timely housing services for any Veteran facing housing instability. The VASDHS' HCHV program participates in the local Coordinated Entry System (CES). The Coordinated Entry System is a centralized data base system where Veterans are entered and matched to the most appropriate level of intervention, based on their acuity, vulnerability, and housing placement needs. Any participating agency in the region can enter homeless Veterans' information into the system which will connect them with available resources that are most appropriate to the level of intervention needed, including permanent supportive housing or rapid re-housing programs. In addition to the work with the CoC, HCHV is currently involved in the County Board of Supervisors' Initiative to end Veteran Homelessness and participating in the community workgroups created through the initiative. Past initiatives that VA San Diego participated in include the Mayor of San Diego's 1,000 Veterans program, the 25 Cities Initiative, Project 25, and many others.

#### **Community Based Challenges Facing Veterans**

Although our community has made significant efforts to address homelessness among Veterans in the San Diego area, several challenges remain. This includes a lack of affordable housing inventory and the high cost of living in the area. San Diego also would benefit from increased prevention funds to help Veterans and families maintain in their current housing whenever possible. We support the FY 2024 HUD budget proposal that seeks \$13 billion for housing vouchers for extremely low-income Veterans. These Veterans have what HUD calls "worst case housing needs," namely, incomes that do not exceed the Federal poverty line or 30 percent of the area median income; pay more than half of their income for rental costs or live in housing with faulty heating or plumbing; and receive no housing assistance.

#### **Conclusion**

VA San Diego Healthcare System and HCHV are committed to ensuring Veterans have access to housing and services they require and deserve. We continue to improve access and services to meet the needs of Veterans. We appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today and the resources Congress provides VA to care for the Nation's Veterans. We are happy to respond to any questions you may have.

Prepared Statement of Leilani Hines



**CITY OF OCEANSIDE**  
HOUSING AND NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES DEPARTMENT

**COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS**  
**SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY**  
**OVERSIGHT HEARING**

**"All Hands on Deck: Ending Veteran Homelessness in San Diego"**  
May 4, 2023

San Diego County is a proud military community. It's home to over 250,000 veterans, one of the nation's largest concentrations. Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton is a significant part of this military community in the region. Directly north of the City of Oceanside, Oceanside has significant community ties to the military base. Camp Pendleton has over 42,000 active duty personnel (73% living off base), a daytime population of 70,000 military and civilian personnel, and more than 77,000 retired personnel residing in the San Diego region. Many of these active, retired, and discharged service-members and their families make Oceanside their home.

Point-in-Time Data: Veterans

Many of our veterans discharged from military service have found themselves at greater risk of homelessness. According to the Regional Task Force on Homelessness (RTFH), there are nearly 1,000 veterans experiencing homelessness in our region right now. Point-in-Time data for 2022 show that in Oceanside, there are 71 unsheltered veterans. While the number may appear to be small, this data is reflective of a single count of sheltered and unsheltered people experiencing homelessness on one given night. What is important to note in the data is a trend that followed significant efforts in the region to end veteran homeless but yet a **dramatic increase in Oceanside in unsheltered veteran homelessness from 2020 to 2022, 66 persons or 1,320% increase**. The San Diego Region, however, saw a 30% decrease from the 2022 to 2020 PIT count.<sup>1</sup> The region, as a whole, has seen a steady decline in veteran homelessness since 2015.

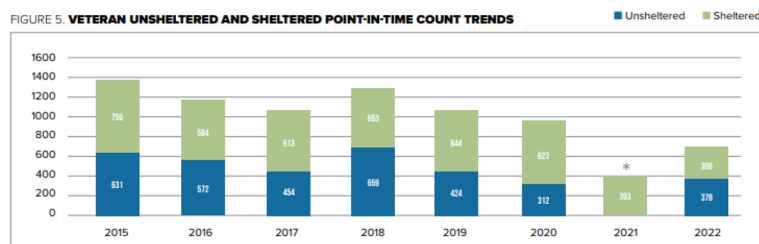
**City of Oceanside**  
**Point-in-Time Count Data**

Year	Unsheltered Persons			Sheltered Persons			TOTAL	Overall Change
	Total	Veterans	%	Total	Veterans	%		
2018	326	33	10%	157			483	
2019	290	15	5%	202			492	2%
2020	242	5	2%	166	48	29%	408	-17%
2021								
2022	318	71	22%	196	17	9%	514	26%

<sup>1</sup> Regional Community Action Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness in San Diego. San Diego Regional Taskforce on Homelessness, September 2022. pp. 55-56.

**“All Hands on Deck: Ending Veteran Homelessness in San Diego”**  
**City of Oceanside**  
**May 4, 2023**

*Due to the pandemic and putting health and safety above all else, the Regional Taskforce on the Homeless (RTFH) and its board of directors decided not to conduct its annual Point-in-Time Count (PITC) of unsheltered San Diegans for 2021.*



*Note: In 2021 the CoC did not conduct an unsheltered PIT Count due to COVID-19. The 2021 PIT Count only included the sheltered count. Veteran homelessness has steadily decreased over the last several years as a result of increased focus on the issue, local initiatives, and increased funding from the VA, particularly in housing first interventions including the HUD VASH and SSVF programs.*

## Addressing Housing Needs

The San Diego region's Continuum of Care (CoC), as the collective impact body on homelessness in San Diego, adopted in September 2022, a single plan with a shared vision and direction for the region, the Regional Community Action Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness in San Diego, authored by the Regional Taskforce on Homelessness (RTFH). As part of its 5-year People Goals, the region is working towards ending veteran homelessness with its participation in the national Built for Zero initiative with Community Solutions. While over the years, the region has made strides in reducing veteran homelessness, the County of San Diego Board of Supervisors approved in February 2023 the development of a plan over the next 1 ½ years to bring veteran homelessness to functional zero.

Through a comprehensive, urgent, deliberate, and collaborative approach, stakeholders from the County, local municipalities, RTFH, the VA, and others will build a framework to achieve Functional Zero (FZ) to Leave No Veteran Homeless in the San Diego region. As a part of this effort and with the growth of veteran homelessness in contradiction to the region, the City of Oceanside, as a Housing Authority (OHA) with the availability of 100 HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV), is examining additional and measurable actions it can take in addressing the housing needs of our unsheltered veterans.



**“All Hands on Deck: Ending Veteran Homelessness in San Diego”**

**City of Oceanside**

**May 4, 2023**

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### Housing Choice Voucher (HCV)

Oceanside is one of three Public Housing Authorities (PHAs), along with the San Diego Housing Commission and County of San Diego, to administer a HUD VASH program in the region in partnership with the Veterans Administration (VA). As Oceanside increased its HUD-VASH program to 100 vouchers, **utilization of the VASH program dropped from a high of 75% utilization to approximately 55% currently and historically.**

**Tenant Based HUD VASH – Oceanside**

Allocation	Leased Up		In Pipeline		Allocation Remaining	
100	55	55%	5	5%	40	40%

### Housing Costs and FMRs

One of the significant challenges in implementing one of the most beneficial affordable housing programs (Housing Choice Voucher) for economically challenged households, while leveraging the private market, is current market conditions. To keep pace with the rental market and ensure voucher holders have meaningful choice about where they live, Oceanside has increased its payment standards up to 115% of the Fair Market Rents (FMRs) by utilizing current available waivers, set to expire in December 2023, for its regular HCV program and the maximum allowed of 120% of FMR for our HUD-VASH program. Oceanside utilizes zip code-level Small Area Fair Market Rents (SAFMRs) that better reflect rents in individual neighborhoods within its City limits.

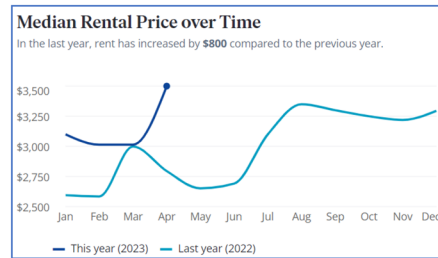
Fair Market Rent (FMR) is the basis for determining the “payment standard” amount for the maximum monthly subsidy for an assisted family in the federal HCV program. FMR calculations are HUD’s best efforts to estimate gross rent paid by recent movers into standard quality housing units in regions utilizing U.S. Census information from the American Community Survey (1-year and 5-year) and applying inflation and trend factors based upon the Consumer Price Index (CPI). For FY 2023 only, with the lack of availability of 1-year data because of the impacts of COVID-19 on data collection, HUD temporarily revised calculations to the FMR introducing private sector rent data. While such data may not provide the transparency and soundness needed in FMR calculations, private sector data can be timelier and more reflective of rapidly changing rents in certain geographic areas than the resulting delay in the measurement of rent increases by estimating rent inflation in the CPI. As a result, nationally, FMRs increased by an average of approximately 10 %. The table below demonstrates the change in the FMRs for FY 2023 in Oceanside, ranging from a 7 to 13% increase. Whereas, in previous years utilizing census data and CPI adjustments, rents in Oceanside have been more conservative and flat at 1 to 5% increases.

**“All Hands on Deck: Ending Veteran Homelessness in San Diego”**  
**City of Oceanside**  
**May 4, 2023**

San Diego-Carlsbad, CA MSA Small Area FMRs By Unit Bedrooms  
 Fair Market Rents (40th PERCENTILE RENTS) | HUD USER

Zip Code	Unit Size	2018	2019	% Increase in FMR	2020	% Increase in FMR	2021	% Increase in FMR	2022	% Increase in FMR	2023	% Increase in FMR
92054	Studio	\$1,230	\$1,350	10%	\$1,420	5%	\$1,470	4%	\$1,530	4%	\$1,700	11%
	One	\$1,370	\$1,520	11%	\$1,580	4%	\$1,630	3%	\$1,690	4%	\$1,870	11%
	Two	\$1,770	\$1,970	11%	\$2,060	5%	\$2,110	2%	\$2,170	3%	\$2,380	10%
	Three	\$2,550	\$2,820	11%	\$2,930	4%	\$2,970	1%	\$3,010	1%	\$3,250	8%
	Four	\$3,130	\$3,460	11%	\$3,620	5%	\$3,650	1%	\$3,690	1%	\$3,960	7%
	Five	\$3,599	\$3,979	11%	\$4,163	5%	\$4,197	1%	\$4,243	1%	\$4,554	7%
92058	Studio	\$1,330	\$1,450	9%	\$1,520	5%	\$1,550	2%	\$1,630	5%	\$1,840	13%
	One	\$1,480	\$1,620	9%	\$1,700	5%	\$1,720	1%	\$1,800	5%	\$2,030	13%
	Two	\$1,920	\$2,110	10%	\$2,210	5%	\$2,230	1%	\$2,310	4%	\$2,580	12%
	Three	\$2,770	\$3,020	9%	\$3,140	4%	\$3,140	0%	\$3,210	2%	\$3,530	10%
	Four	\$3,390	\$3,710	9%	\$3,880	5%	\$3,860	-1%	\$3,930	2%	\$4,290	9%
	Five	\$3,898	\$4,266	9%	\$4,462	5%	\$4,439	-1%	\$4,519	2%	\$4,934	9%
CPI for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U)				2.4%		1.5%		5.2%		7.7%		

In areas such as California and particularly the San Diego County region, the value of the HCV still has difficulty meeting the rapidly changing rent market and where extremely low and very low-income renters have limited opportunities in available housing and often compete against moderate and upper-income households with great credit and qualifying income.



San Diego County saw rent growth over the past year at 3.8%, which continues to outpace the State average of 2.3% and the national average of 3.3%. (ApartmentList.com). For Oceanside, the median rent according to Zillow is \$3,400. Oceanside has seen a \$100+ increase in median rents from the previous month, and an \$800 increase since 2022.

For the HUD-VASH program, utilizing a 120% of FMR for the payment standard is effective in bridging the gap between market pricing and the voucher value. When coupled with the temporary change in the FMR methodology, the gap can be closed. The OHA would further encourage the reform of the FMR methodology to incorporate private sector rental data beyond FY 2023.

**“All Hands on Deck: Ending Veteran Homelessness in San Diego”**

City of Oceanside

May 4, 2023

SECTION 8 - EXISTING HOUSING ALLOWANCES EHV/VASH VOUCHER PAYMENT STANDARDS						
Locality: <b>OCEANSIDE</b> - Effective Date: <b>12/1/2022</b>						
	<b>Studio</b>	<b>1 BR</b>	<b>2 BR</b>	<b>3 BR</b>	<b>4 BR</b>	<b>5 BR</b>
<b>92054/92057</b>	\$2,040	\$2,244	\$2,856	\$3,900	\$4,752	\$5,465
<b>92056/92058</b>	\$2,208	\$2,436	\$3,096	\$4,236	\$5,148	\$5,920

**Outreach and Collaboration**

As the use of the VASH vouchers is reliant upon direct referrals from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and case management and clinical services provided by the VA, a collaborative relationship with the VA is the most impactful in gaining higher utilization of the vouchers. The VA San Diego Healthcare System has taken a leadership role in the region, with local VA staff serving as members of the CoC Advisory Board and co-chair of the CoC Veterans Consortium Committee and active in the region's Built for Zero initiative. The VA works collaboratively with the RTFH on efforts to better track data on the inflow and outflow of veterans in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). While the efforts of the VA are proactive and committed to Built for Zero initiatives, these efforts are focused on the region.

As smaller jurisdiction, with only 4% of the region's VASH vouchers, within a large geographic area of very diverse demographics and communities, the City of Oceanside has experienced being "last to the party." In regional collaborations and discussions, such as discussions of the HMIS data system for veteran's data, quarterly check-ins have occurred with the San Diego Housing Commission and the County of San Diego but are just now being established with Oceanside.

Jurisdiction	VASH Vouchers	
San Diego Housing Commission	1,310	56%
County of San Diego	949	40%
Oceanside Housing Authority	100	4%
TOTAL	2,359	100%

Limited collaborative efforts are also experienced in the direct referrals, considered to be a slow trickle, to Oceanside despite the growth of unsheltered veterans in Oceanside and the ongoing availability of nearly half its VASH vouchers. Bi-weekly and monthly meetings have been established with VA staff to assist in coordination and to maximize voucher utilization. Despite the coordination meetings, Oceanside's efforts of incentivizing landlords, and implementing higher payment standards, VASH voucher utilization rates remain low with minimal referrals forwarded. The OHA will continue not only to do case conferencing with the VA on current participants but work collaboratively to understand administrative bottlenecks and resource limitations that may be affecting the referral process.

**“All Hands on Deck: Ending Veteran Homelessness in San Diego”  
City of Oceanside  
May 4, 2023**

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OHA utilizes its own network of four Oceanside Community Resource Centers located in low opportunity areas staffed by the City and various social service providers including Vista Community Clinic, North County Lifeline, the NAACP, Interfaith Community Services and others and the Library with a staff dedicated outreach on community resources to bring awareness of resources available inclusive of the homeless veteran population. Staff and providers are available to assist households in navigating processes and completing applications.

With the VA and its staff and the network of Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program, VA funded rapid re-housing and homelessness prevention assistance for eligible Veterans, and Grant and Per Diem Case Management program partners based in central San Diego, coupled with a large geographic area of great demographic and cultural diversity to be served, economics, convenience, and logistics become a barrier to serve the entire region with equity and utilization of VASH vouchers becomes San Diego centric. The three main providers that operate the SSVF programs locally are Veterans Community Services, Veterans Village of San Diego, and People Assisting the Homeless (PATH). While San Diego has a diverse array of VA Grant and Per Diem (GPD) and VA Contracted Residential (CRS) programs, which include beds for low-demand shelter, recuperative care, bridge housing, clinical substance use treatment, and service-intensive transitional housing, the majority of these programs are focused in San Diego and not always easily accessible from the North County, a nearly hour commute each way on the best day.

In the Oceanside community, the infrastructure for veteran services is present with services offered through the VA medical center at Rancho Del Oro and the recent addition of the Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinics at Veterans Village of San Diego. In addition, the VA has more recently entered into a contract with PATH to add necessary resources to serve a broader veteran community.

If the goal in housing veterans is through a path of greater ease and to count the successes as a region on the whole, then referrals that are San Diego-centric may be acceptable. If we are also working towards full utilization of all available housing resources and greater housing stability and sustainability, attention should be focused on other principles of the Housing First model, consumer choice and self-determination in terms of housing choice and social and community integration. People thrive when provided with support systems. Veterans should be served and allowed choices to remain and/or be housed in communities, such as Oceanside, where they feel connections of family and friends and familiarity with the neighborhood from their previous military service. Social and community integration can be greater when people are familiar, comfortable, and supported by their environment versus referred to other areas of the region simply because of availability of resources or forgo services to be in their community of choice.

**“All Hands on Deck: Ending Veteran Homelessness in San Diego”  
City of Oceanside  
May 4, 2023**

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**Areas of improvement that are needed to achieve success in leveraging housing resources:**

- **Greater availability and funding of case managers and housing navigators located and focused in various areas of the region** with the goal of gaining a better understanding and familiarity of the diverse communities and resources available to provide the necessary client-driven support system and meeting participants where they are;
- **An increase in access/flow/communications/awareness of resources and availability of HUD-VASH in the North County** to provide consumer choice and self-determination;
- **Consistent, open, and inclusive communication and collaboration** with all stakeholders, from the three PHAs, the VA, community-based outreach clinics (CBOCs), and VA contracted service providers to ensure efficacy and efficiency in the delivery of services.

**Availability of Housing at Affordable Levels**

Consumer choice, self-determination, and housing sustainability are dependent upon the availability of housing and its affordability. **Efforts to stimulate development and expand our available housing stock by increasing the cap on Project Based Vouchers (PBVs) and resources for affordable housing production are necessary to meet demand.**

In order to address the needs of its extremely-low and very low-income residents, the use of PBVs is critical to the funding stack for the financial feasibility of housing at this affordability level. Housing at this level is nearly only possible to fund using PBVs. Recently, the City committed 59 PBVs to this type of housing, Greenbrier Village, which also targets homeless veterans (5 VASH vouchers) and transitional-age youth (8 TAY). This is only the second affordable housing development the City has committed PBVs. Oceanside is committed to utilizing its full 20% of the program cap for PBVs and an additional 10% for permanent supportive housing for the homeless to support housing affordability. In the next few months, the City anticipates opening its first 24/7 low-barrier navigation center to provide shelter for its homeless population. Without permanent supportive housing as the next step in the continuum, a model of sustainable housing for the unsheltered is unrealistic.

Increases in financial resources available for affordable housing production and preservation, such as the volume cap for Tax Credits and HOME funds as a major financing mechanism and a source of local contribution to housing, is also recommended. Homelessness is about the lack of affordable housing. While mental health and addiction issues are high contributing factors to homelessness and chronic homelessness, studies have demonstrated a direct correlation in higher instances of homelessness within communities with higher housing costs.

Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC) remain the premier source of funding in the capital stack for the production of housing opportunities. In 2021, \$191.4 million in nine percent (9%) annual federal LIHTCs were awarded to 106 proposed housing projects. As in previous years, the 9% LIHTCs remained competitive and oversubscribed with 182 applications. The ability to provide various levels of housing affordability using LIHTC through income averaging, setting the maximum income and rent limit at 80% AMI and the average of all restricted units at no more

**“All Hands on Deck: Ending Veteran Homelessness in San Diego”  
City of Oceanside  
May 4, 2023**

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than 60% AMI, give local jurisdictions and housing developers flexibility in meeting the various needs of its community and an ability to meet the varying levels of financial resources veterans have available. Social and community integration can be facilitated when varying demographics, particularly economic levels, can come together.

In past tax credit rounds, the average income for LIHTC awarded projects was approximately 36% of the AMI. The City of Oceanside was successful this year in partnering with an affordable housing developer to receive 9% tax credits coupled with 59 PBVs, five of which are VASH, to provide these units as permanent supportive housing (Greenbrier Village).

As a smaller jurisdiction, Oceanside relies on funding sources such as HOME to meet the critical housing needs of its community through the production of housing, homeownership opportunities, and tenant-based rental assistance. Oceanside provided \$3.5 million of its HOME funds to assist with the 59-unit Greenbrier development. To bridge the gap between those waiting on our HCV program, the City also utilizes HOME funds to provide tenant-based rental assistance.

### Thinking outside of the Traditional with Alternative Housing

As housing affordability and the production of affordable housing are long-term solutions, alternative types of housing should be considered to address affordability and increasing needs for disabilities and aging. Clarifying and establishing payment standards for the HCV program for differing types of housing, such as assisted living facilities, independent living facilities/group homes, and shared housing, could meet both the physical and financial needs of veterans.

### Conclusion

Continued work by the San Diego region’s Continuum of Care (CoC) with the Built for Zero initiative with Community Solutions and current collaborative work in building a framework Countywide to achieve functional zero for unsheltered veterans within the next 1 ½ years incorporates many of the recommendations cited. Lines of efforts being worked on by stakeholders from the County, local municipalities, RTFH, the VA, and others to build a framework to achieve functional zero include:

- Building Community Partnerships
- Data Management
- Housing Solutions
- Support Services
- Veteran Homeless Outreach
- Funding
- Prevention and Sustainment

**“All Hands on Deck: Ending Veteran Homelessness in San Diego”  
City of Oceanside  
May 4, 2023**

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### Prepared Statement of David Estrella

Good afternoon, Chairman Van Orden, Ranking Member Levin, and members of the committee. Welcome to the County of San Diego. My name is David Estrella, and I am the Director of the County of San Diego's Health and Human Services Agency—Housing and Community Development Services. As such, I am also representing the Housing Authority of the County of San Diego.

San Diego County is a proud military community. San Diego has the largest concentration of military and veteran presence in the world with approximately 120,000 active-duty personnel, and over 230,000 veteran residents. The majority of our active-duty service members are split roughly evenly between the Navy and the Marine Corps, serving among our eight military bases in the County. The region has long been defined by its military presence, however the connection extends past active-duty service, resulting in military and veterans and their family members accounting for approximately 35 percent of the entire San Diego population.

According to the Regional Task Force on Homelessness (RTFH), there are nearly 1,000 Veterans currently experiencing homelessness in the region. Over the last several years, the San Diego County Board of Supervisors (Board) has demonstrated its commitment to addressing the needs of all people experiencing and at-risk of homelessness. The Board adopted the County's Framework for Ending Homelessness in 2021 which created a unified strategic approach to support the coordination of homeless services and funding. On February 7, 2023, the Board formally prioritized Ending Veteran Homelessness in the region. The County of San Diego will join community partners and other local municipalities in developing and implementing a regional strategic action plan to achieve functional zero for Veteran homelessness within a 15-month period and maximize available resources to meet our Veteran's housing needs across the region.

The introduction of the Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) program in 2008 has been a key contribution to an over 55 percent reduction in Veterans experiencing homelessness nationwide since 2010 (from 76,329 Veterans in 2010 to 33,136 Veterans).<sup>1</sup> According to San Diego's regional 2022 Point-in-Time Count, while the number of persons experiencing homelessness saw an overall increase, Veteran homelessness in the region decreased by over 350 Veterans since the 2020 report, representing a 35 percent decrease over a 2-year period.

The County of San Diego (County) has been engaged and working with the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and other partners to address the challenges in the region. Some recent highlights of County efforts include:

- **Enhancing outreach efforts** to identify and connect potential VASH eligible Veterans with the local San Diego Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC);
- **Educating and engaging landlords and enhancing the County's Landlord Incentive Program (LIP)** to reduce the amount of time between voucher issuance and lease-up in competitive rental market;
- **Connecting Veterans with units** by providing vacancy leads through our Landlord Liaison to the VA for housing navigation; and
- **Streamlining administrative processes** to increase efficiencies and reduce barriers for Veterans.

While remarkable progress has been made, there is more to be done to help Veterans experiencing homelessness. According to the February 2023 US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Dashboard, there are 2,334 VASH vouchers allocated to three of the housing authorities in the San Diego region. While the Housing Authority of the County of San Diego, the San Diego Housing Commission, and the Oceanside Housing Authority have over 1,670 Veteran families leased in units and receiving VASH assistance, over 650 VASH vouchers remain not utilized. In order to get our Veterans off of the streets and into housing, additional outreach and referrals from the local VA are needed throughout the region.

In 2022, the County received an average of less than 11 referrals per month. Recognizing the need to increase outreach capacity and referrals in the Housing Authority of the County of San Diego's jurisdiction, the San Diego VAMC has recently secured a contractor to administer a portion of the County's 300 unused VASH vouchers. So far in 2023, the County has received an average of 15 referrals per month. While we anticipate seeing the referral numbers to continue grow in 2023, the current pace is not nearly enough to fully utilize the vouchers within the next 12 months and still leaves too many Veterans far too long without a place to call home.

<sup>1</sup>San Diego Regional Task Force on Homelessness –Point in Time Count Results



The VASH program has been one of the most instrumental resources available in helping Veterans overcome homelessness. Where the County has been successful in applying to HUD and bringing additional VASH vouchers to the region in the past, the inadequate referral rate has made the Housing Authority of the County of San Diego ineligible to apply for additional VASH vouchers (based on utilization rate thresholds). Not being able to apply for additional vouchers is a missed opportunity to help more Veterans move from the street and into permanent housing.

Identifying ways to enhance the San Diego VAMC's capacity to identify and refer homeless Veterans to the housing authorities, such as expanding the local VA's current contract or entering an additional contract, is critical to fully utilizing the VASH resources available within San Diego County. Additional strategies that would help streamline access to VASH vouchers for eligible Veterans include:

- Expanding program-wide VASH waivers to align with flexibilities already allowed under the Emergency Housing Voucher and Stability Voucher programs, programs with populations like VASH recipients.
- Increasing the amount of VASH project-based vouchers, or PBVs, that the local VA will support per proposed housing development. Currently there is limit of 10 VASH PBVs per development or 10 percent of the requested PBV units; whichever is greater.
- Ensuring the San Diego VAMC and other partners provide adequate and equitable outreach/referrals throughout the region. The Housing Authority of the County of San Diego's jurisdiction includes 13 of the 18 incorporated cities and all unincorporated areas.
- Encouraging HUD to release guidance on qualifying housing authorities to become Designated Service Providers to help the VA with outreach and case management for a portion of the VASH vouchers.

Through a comprehensive, urgent, and collaborative approach, the County has committed to work in partnership with stakeholders including local municipalities, the Regional Task Force on Homelessness, the VA, and other community partners toward Ending Veteran Homelessness in San Diego.

Thank you for your time and attention and for inviting me to share our experiences in helping Veterans overcome homelessness. I welcome any questions that you may have.

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#### **Prepared Statement of Matthew Wechter**

Chairman Van Orden, Ranking Member Levin, and distinguished members of the Committee: On behalf of the County of San Diego Department of Public Defender, our Chief Deputies, and the members of our office, thank you for inviting me to testify on the issue of Veteran Homelessness.

Thank you for inviting me to the hearing on this very important topic. Since my first years as an attorney in this office, it has been clear to me the strong commitment that the San Diego Public Defender – and the greater County of San Diego community – has to serving our homeless veteran population. Veteran issues are always at the forefront of our concerns; our court has a Veteran Court, we have the new Community Care Coordination for Veterans program, and are always trying to find ways to support our veteran community – housed or unhoused.

Let's be clear – not all veterans are unhoused, and not all unhoused individuals are veterans; but veteran homelessness is an unacceptable combination phenomenon. Of all our various populations that do not have adequate shelter, veterans should not be counted among them. All levels of government have worked hard over the past several years, and made great strides to reduce the number of unhoused veterans; they should be applauded for their amazing efforts and results in this area.

With several military facilities within our borders, San Diego County is a heavily veteran-focused community that still has work to do. That being said, San Diego CAN get to Functional Zero – but only if we remove barriers to their success. I will focus my written comments on how we can make that happen through removing legal barriers.

#### **Addressing Legal Issues is Paramount to Exit the Cycle of Veteran Homelessness**

Two examples of this scenario may be illustrative.

Example 1: A veteran is cited for a minor quality of life offense, and doesn't show up to court (as is often the case) because they are more concerned with their next

meal or their safety on the streets than keeping track of the court citation. As a result of their non-appearance, a warrant is issued for their arrest. That warrant may result in them being denied certain benefits, or housing, they may face barriers to some treatment programs that will not allow entry, or they may refrain from reporting themselves as a victim of a crime because they are frightened of being arrested. In either situation, that veteran is more likely to stay on the streets for years in the cycle.

Example 2: A veteran is cited for the same offense, but shows up to court. They plead or are found guilty, and are assessed fines and fees and put on probation. Through probation, or on their own, they engage in substance use or mental health treatment, or work with a housing provider for a voucher. At the end of working with that case manager, they are ready to graduate and get into housing. However, the fines and fees have gone to collections, and they owe several thousands of dollars in fines/fees, the housing is denied, and they fall back into homelessness.

In both of those examples, without addressing the legal issues that are the collateral consequences of being unhoused, the cycle of homelessness will continue. What can be done?

### **Origins of Homeless Court in San Diego – Stand Down**

In 1988, the first Veteran Stand Down event was held in San Diego County. Stand Down events are one-stop-shops, where those veterans and their families that are homeless, or at-risk of homelessness can come and engage with community services. In San Diego, that event is a 3-day event, formerly at the San Diego High School field, where the veterans can stay for the duration of the event onsite, bunking with other veterans in a safe, secure and welcoming environment. Volunteers come from all aspects of the community – food service, clothing, medical, dental, jobs, substance use help, musical entertainment, haircuts, and so much more.

One of our retired Public Defenders was among those volunteers – Steve Binder. He was part of an exit survey of the veterans at the 1988 event; the most requested item for help listed was “legal help”. In response to that survey, Mr. Binder went to the Superior Court and asked that the court participate in future events. The court’s initial – and understandable – response was, “we are open 9–5 Monday through Friday, have them come down and we will help.” Mr. Binder’s response, in 1989, was ahead of its time; he and the members of the Stand Down volunteer team told the court, “Your Honor, with all due respect, that isn’t good enough. We need to serve and meet these veterans where they are.” And the Court listened. So, in 1989, the Public Defender, the Superior Court, the City and District Attorney, all came to the Stand Down event to do just that. Based on the participation and engagement of the veterans with the multitude of services provided to them, minor quality of life offenses<sup>1</sup>, fines, and fees that had been hanging over the heads of these veterans were pulled from the courtrooms to the Stand Down “courtroom” where the judge appeared and lifted the weight and burden of these cases off their shoulders.

These cases being lifted are not insignificant. Many times a minor unpaid traffic infraction can result in a court “hold” on someone’s Driver’s License, or be referred to collections and cause a negative report on a credit report. An outstanding warrant can prevent someone from accessing the full benefits or receiving housing for which they may be entitled. The Homeless Court portion of Stand Down successfully provides opportunities for veterans experiencing homelessness, mental health issues, and substance abuse to receive services to address their needs. With the exception of COVID, the Public Defender and the rest of the justice partners have been there almost every year since 1989, rain or shine, to continue that tradition. Homeless Court @ StandDown was born.

### **Homeless Court and Stand Down Today**

In 2001, through a grant, the monthly Homeless Court Program, similar to its current form, was born. Building off the model of the Stand Down event, individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, can participate with an approved Homeless Court Program community provider (including the VA, and some others testifying on this panel), be referred to us, and their minor infraction and misdemeanor cases can be dismissed and/or fines and fees satisfied. The model is one of “recognition” of the work someone is doing on themselves to identify the root causes of their homelessness and justice-involvement, addressing it through engage-

<sup>1</sup>The cases handled at Stand Down/Homeless Court are of the minor variety – infractions and minor misdemeanor cases. These may be a minor nuisance to any one of us, but getting to court across town, on time, and/or a \$100 fine for an unhoused individual who is attempting to find food for their next meal or find shelter from the cold can prove to be an insurmountable barrier.

ment in services, and the Court merely getting out of the way of their positive trajectory.

Homeless Court @ Stand Down and the standard Monthly Homeless Court Program are alive and even stronger today. The American Bar Association Commission on Homelessness and Poverty<sup>2</sup> lists the Homeless Court Program as one of its national initiatives, providing technical assistance to jurisdictions across the country to create or improve their Homeless Court Programs with San Diego as the gold standard. The California Chief Justice's Workgroup on Homelessness Report listed creation of more Homeless Courts as one of the recommendations to the Chief Justice<sup>3</sup>. We are in the planning stages now, with Veteran's Village of San Diego, to put on the 2023 Stand Down event in late July.

### **Innovation in the HCP Model – Stand Down as a Model for the San Diego Homeless Court Pop-up Resource Fair**

In the same way the Stand Down Homeless Court paved the way for the monthly Homeless Court Program accessible to veteran and non-veteran alike, in 2021 the Public Defender, City Attorney, District Attorney, DMV, County Office of Homeless Solutions and Equitable Communities, and Superior Court decided to go even further in adoption of the Stand Down model to all unhoused individuals. On a monthly basis, the above partners and several hyper-local community-based providers join together in a geographic location(s) where there is demonstrated need for these services. The events have been widely popular, and many communities have asked for the HCP Pop-up Resource Fair to be held in their community.

At the Pop-up, veterans (similar to the Stand Down model) and non-veterans alike can walk up to engage in resources, including benefits, medical, showers, substance use. In exchange for that engagement, the Homeless Court is there to *immediately* clear the cases holding up their license, and clear outstanding warrants that may prevent them from accessing benefits or housing. We can do this immediate relief now as a result of the forced innovation to keep the court lights on during COVID. With a judge and clerk on call at the courthouse, relief can be granted with a click of a button.

If the clients have other non-immediate barriers, they are referred to one of our approved Homeless Court Network Providers<sup>4</sup> to further work on themselves and go through the traditional Monthly Homeless Court Program to satisfy the remainder of the cases/fees.

### **Homeless Court for Veterans nationwide**

Stand Down may have some of its initial origins in San Diego, but they occur throughout the country in communities with a high veteran population. Several Federal agencies also support Stand Down events through grants and other supportive work.<sup>5,6</sup> Stand Down events are an important "surge" to provide community support in a big way, but these events are traditionally one time per year, and have varying degrees of court/legal barrier relief; some may include civil legal aid, or basic post-conviction consultation, but no meaningful active case assistance. Without relief of legal issues, the cycle of homelessness for veterans will continue.

### **Conclusion**

San Diego has been a leader in addressing the legal needs of its veterans for the past 30 years – both in the San Diego County community and beyond in consulting with other jurisdictions to improve their offerings. By supporting more regular monthly Homeless Courts and Stand Down/Pop-up style events that clearly incorporate legal relief, where the veterans need it most, we can further stem the tide of veteran homelessness and work toward veteran Functional Zero.

## **Prepared Statement of Greg Anglea**

### **Introduction**

Today, we can honestly say that ending Veteran homelessness is possible. We can say that empirically, because as a nation since 2010 we have decreased Veteran

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.americanbar.org/groups/public\\_interest/homelessness\\_poverty/initiatives/homeless-courts/about-homeless-courts/](https://www.americanbar.org/groups/public_interest/homelessness_poverty/initiatives/homeless-courts/about-homeless-courts/)

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.courts.ca.gov/documents/hwg\\_work-group-report.pdf](https://www.courts.ca.gov/documents/hwg_work-group-report.pdf) (Recommendation 2.1)

<sup>4</sup> <http://homelesscourtprogram.org/> / <http://bit.ly/sdhcp>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.va.gov/homeless/events.asp>

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.dol.gov/agencies/vets/programs/StandDown#:~:text=Stand%20Downs%20\(SD\)%20are%20typically,VA%20Social%20Security%20benefits%20counseling.](https://www.dol.gov/agencies/vets/programs/StandDown#:~:text=Stand%20Downs%20(SD)%20are%20typically,VA%20Social%20Security%20benefits%20counseling.)

homelessness more than 55 percent. This progress included an 11 percent decrease between 2020 and 2022, demonstrating that even among the challenges of pandemic, ending Veteran homelessness is possible.

**Two factors are primarily responsible for these successes:**

- 1) **Increased investment** from the Federal Government in housing solutions and supportive services for Veterans experiencing and at-risk of experiencing homelessness
- 2) **Strong coordination and partnership** within the Federal Government (especially the VA & HUD), with State and local government at all levels, community-based organizations, Veterans groups, business leaders, philanthropy, and faith communities.

San Diego County has exemplified the positive outcomes of these factors, realizing a more 30 percent decrease in Veteran homelessness over the past four years. Recent and ongoing commitments from our congressional Representatives, the County of San Diego, the San Diego Regional Taskforce on Homelessness, and a large network of Veteran-serving community-based organizations will build on these strengths and drive San Diego toward ending Veteran homelessness.

Despite these strengths and the positive progress we have realized, significant challenges remain. Veterans need additional Congressional support to end Veteran homelessness in San Diego, and to support similar efforts in communities throughout the United States.

**Interfaith Community Services' Role in Ending Veteran Homelessness**

Interfaith Community Services (Interfaith) operates more than 75 diverse but complimentary programs addressing poverty, inequities, and homelessness throughout San Diego County, with an emphasis on North San Diego County. Last year we provided services to 19,175 people, **including 786 Veterans**.

Interfaith operates the following programs exclusively for Veterans:

- Post-Hospitalization Recuperative Care for Veterans
  - o 16-bed contract with VA for Veterans with VA Healthcare Benefits who are discharging from local hospitals (including VA Medical Center), and in need of both housing and medical respite care
- VA Grant Per Diem Transitional Housing for Veterans
  - o 64-beds of community-based Service Intensive Transitional Housing as well as Bridge Housing Grant Per Diem VA-funded Transitional Housing
- Equity Target Populations Fund Employment Training Program for Veterans
  - o State California Employment Development Department (via Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Governor's Discretionary funds) grant to provide workforce training for Veterans
- Veterans Housing Stability
  - o Privately funded case management and homeless prevention rental assistance for Veterans at-risk of homelessness
- Veterans Behavioral Health
  - o Privately funded behavioral health clinicians to address Veteran mental health needs pre/post entry into existing Interfaith Veterans programs

**Strengths, Challenges, and Opportunities for congressional Action**

**1) VA Grant Per Diem (GPD) Transitional Housing**

Nationwide, GPD programs housed more than 10,000 Veterans in 2022, with the **VA reporting that GPD providers are demonstrating some of the highest performance outcomes in GPD history**.

This is a direct result of the two primary factors cited above:

- 1) **Increased investment** by the Federal Government in Veterans in the GPD program
- 2) **Strong partnership** and coordination between government, GPD service providers, and key community stakeholders

The increased investment in Veterans via GPD was the result of COVID public health regulations which will sunset May 11, 2023. This will reduce the maximum per diem rate for a GPD provider from \$152.73 to just \$64.52. In high-cost communities like San Diego, \$64.52 per bed night does not support the cost of emergency shelter, and it certainly will not cover the cost of proven effective and critically

needed, service-intensive GPD Transitional Housing programs serving the complex needs of Veterans experiencing homelessness.

To demonstrate the severity of these challenges, we would like to share the following stories of Veterans Interfaith has been able to effectively serve this past year as a result of increased GPD reimbursement rates (names have been changed):

*Rick Jones, USMC Vietnam Veteran. Mr. Jones was living in his car when coming to Interfaith, after his wife died from an accident and his daughter died in that same week from a heart attack. He was drinking alcohol daily, and attempted suicide before coming to the GPD program. In GPD he received support from case management, participated in an active recovery group, and engaged in behavioral health counseling. He stabilized his mental health, was taken off the suicide prevention list, and stopped drinking alcohol daily. He completed steps to ensure his financial stability, and was able to save \$9,000 while in the program.*

*Tim Martin, Navy Veteran. Mr. Martin came to Interfaith about being attacked while sleeping in a park. He has a Traumatic Brain Injury, memory problems, and substance use disorder. He had problems budgeting his money, using appropriate social skills, and remembering his appointments. While at Interfaith's GPD program he was able to attend his doctor appointments, learn budgeting skills in order to be able to pay his rent, and improve his social skills. While at the program he attended case management, active recovery group, and life skills. Mr. Martin has displayed a need for continued case management, so Interfaith has helped him apply and gain acceptance into the HUD-VASH program. He recently passed an interview for an apartment application and will be moving in soon to his new home.*

*Vanessa Smith, Army Veteran. Ms. Smith has a long history of abuse and trauma from people close to her, including her family. She suffers from physical, mental health, and substance abuse related issues. Interfaith's GPD has provided a safe haven for Ms. Smith to heal and recover. She entered without housing, traumatized, unemployed, and with significant debt. Through case management support, therapy, and Veterans Treatment Court, Ms. Smith has completed her education, found stable employment, paid off her debt, and learned to use the supportive resources to establish her independence.*

**Dignified and safe housing which provides professional, Veteran-centered support services to address trauma, physical problems, mental health, and addiction, cannot be provided for \$64.52 per day in a community like San Diego.**

The success of more than 10,000 Veterans served throughout our Nation in 2022 in the GPD program, supported by a funding reimbursement rate commensurate with the actual cost of providing these services, have proven that we have the resources and strategies to overcome the most challenging of situations for Veterans who have served our country.

**Opportunity for congressional Action:** As a GPD provider facing the funding cliff May 12, 2023 will bring, we emphatically **support and advocate for passage of H.R. 491 – Return Home to Housing Act**, which would increase the maximum rate of per diem payments provided by the VA.

## **2) Homeless Prevention**

The VA's Supportive Services for Veteran Families provides a small amount of homeless prevention rental assistance, which in practice does not meet community need. Veterans and Veteran families proactively reach out to providers like Interfaith seeking to maintain their housing, but we often do not have the resources to prevent them from becoming homeless.

In San Diego County the Regional Taskforce on the Homelessness Homeless Management Information System reports that over a 12-month period, for every 10 persons who overcome homelessness 13 people became homeless for the first time. We cannot end Veteran homelessness in San Diego or in other communities unless we can do a better job of preventing more Veterans from becoming homeless in the first place. Interfaith currently addresses this need through limited amounts of donations from foundations, individual donors, and faith communities. That resource cannot scale up to meet societal need among Veterans. Additional Federal investment is needed.

**Opportunity for congressional Action:** Support increased homeless prevention rental assistance funding, which will leverage existing VA investments, and reduce longer-term need for homeless-focused housing and service interventions.

### 3) Supportive Housing for Medically Fragile Veterans

The VA's Healthcare for Homeless Veterans (HCHV) program supports critical functions nationwide for medically fragile Veterans:

- Outreach Services
- Case Management Services
- Contract Residential Service Programs

Interfaith currently operates a 32-bed post-hospitalization Recuperative Care program, which includes a 16-bed HCHV contract for Veterans being discharged from local hospitals. Interfaith has leveraged the success of this program to secure a \$9MM investment from the County of San Diego and \$5MM of private donations to purchase and renovate former motel site in Escondido, CA which will open in May 2023 as the 106-bed Abraham & Lillian Turk Recuperative Care Center.

Interfaith programs serving medically fragile, often older Veterans, also heavily refer to and utilize local CalVets Veteran Homes in San Diego (Chula Vista) and Barstow, which provide an array of long-term supportive housing options, including memory care and assisted living.

HUD-VASH provides critically needed permanent supportive housing, though there are a growing number of Veterans who require greater levels of support than most stand-alone, community-based, HUD-VASH housing provides. Additionally, there are not enough safe, dignified housing units locally for Veterans who have secured a HUD-VASH voucher.

#### Opportunity for congressional Action:

- Explore additional HCHV opportunities to leverage growing intersection between health and homelessness to increase Contracted Residential Services Programs for medically fragile Veterans, also strengthening Outreach Services to better utilize existing VA and civilian resources which can benefit medically fragile Veterans
- Support the creation of additional Veteran Homes for older and/or medically fragile Veterans, building off the success of CalVets Veterans Homes
- Provide longer term substance use disorder treatment programs geared toward Veterans

#### Conclusion

The Federal Government and its partners throughout the Nation have proven that ending Veteran homelessness is not only possible, but in communities like San Diego it is well within our grasp in the months and years ahead. Congress has the opportunity to build on the successes of the VA GPD program, Homeless Prevention, and Healthcare for Homeless Veterans. Doing so will support an end to Veteran Homelessness not just in San Diego County, but in communities throughout the United States.

I will close with words from a Veteran Interfaith has had the honor of serving, and who has found success through both the GPD program and Veterans Treatment Court:

*When I took off my uniform, I believed that my service had ended. The way that it ended is something that I have struggled with every day since. I remained in isolation believing my service had been dishonorable. I had not been able to reconcile my sense of duty and love for my country with this assumption. What I know now is that although I have taken off my uniform my service has not ended. What I will not do is take for granted those who have fallen and been lost to the wars within by giving up or retreating in isolation. I will honor them by continuing to serve to the best of my ability and all of the capacities for which I am most suited.*

*What I will not do is fall prey to the belief that I can find an easy way or quick fix. I will not turn to any substance or any other person to fill empty spaces within. I will not allow a bad day accumulate into bad weeks or months or years. I will not allow one person's disapproval or rejection of me convince me that it is a representation of the entire world viewpoint of me. I will not let one mistake represent total failure. I will not let one bad mood trick me into relapse. I will show myself grace and fill empty space with routine, consistency and accountability. I will soldier on.*

*Going back to school, getting a degree in criminal justice, starting as a paralegal, and allowing myself to find where I can be most effective in ensuring that no one is ever left behind; that is my path.*

Thank you for your time today, for inviting Interfaith to share our experiences and expertise helping Veterans and Veteran families overcome homelessness. We look forward to and offer anything that Interfaith Community Services can do to help this committee in your work.

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### Prepared Statement of Hanan Scrapper

- Good afternoon to the assembled members of this distinguished Committee and thank you to Congressman Levin for the kind invitation.
- I'm Hanan Scrapper, Regional Director for PATH San Diego, and it is my great honor to be here on behalf our organization.
- PATH is one of the most impactful homeless service providers in California, serving over **16 percent of the Golden State's unhoused population**.
- 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. We also operate a Veterans Justice Re-entry program funded through the County. Where we pick up each Veteran upon their release from custody and ensure they have immediate housing placement while providing the supportive services geared toward preventing re-entry.
- At any given time, we have a little over 400 Veterans enrolled in our programs, with an average age of 50.
- Veterans make up about 9 percent of our unsheltered and 7 percent of the sheltered population in the San Diego region. On average, there are about 900 individuals who are Veterans that experience homelessness each month.
- As a community we house about 80 Veterans a month with an average inflow of 130. To achieve functional zero, we need to house 100+ Veterans each month.
- San Diego has a strong collaboration with the VA, CoC, Veteran service providers and our public housing authorities, which has helped us in reducing Veteran homelessness by 30 percent as shown in the 2022 Point In Time Count data.
- However, the high cost of housing in our region makes it challenging for us to find viable affordable housing for our Veteran families. The average income for Veterans in our programs is \$1,654 per a month and the average cost of a 1 bedroom in San Diego is \$2,295. Based on these numbers we're finding Veterans to be rent burdened which is proven to place these households at high risk of eviction and financial instability.
- San Diego is one of the pilot communities to launch the Shallow Subsidy program through SSVF. Shallow Subsidy expands housing options and increases the Veteran households' ability to meet other costly living expenses while receiving a fixed rate of rental assistance.
- This program has been a tremendous help in bridging the gap of housing affordability for Veterans who meet the eligibility to receive the assistance. This also shows that SSVF is serving Veterans with high needs who may not be eligibility for HUD-VASH. It would be beneficial to consider a multidisciplinary team for SSVF that is geared toward meeting the needs of Veterans served in the program.
- We're also very excited to be a grantee for the HUD-VASH program in partnership with the VA and San Diego County. As the lead street outreach provider for the City and County with nearly 70 staff deployed across the region, our goal is to connect every Veteran we encounter on the streets to a permanent housing intervention.
- I wanted to share a Veteran family's story to demonstrate the level of collaboration that was needed to end their homelessness. I did change the names in this story to protect their identities.
- Veteran Angela was experiencing homelessness when she connected with our SSVF program. Angela had an 8-person household and was caring for two elderly members of the household. Due to their situation the household was spread across the County, some were in their vehicles and others were couch surfing.
- Once Angela and her family were enrolled in our SSVF program, we were able to place them in a hotel with emergency housing assistance. During this process, we connected them to HUD-VASH.

- Our housing specialist located permanent housing through SSVF and provided application fees, double security deposits and 5 months of rental subsidy until their HUD-VASH voucher took over the rental payments. The Veteran family is now happy and stably housed.
- Sadly, we know that not every Veteran household's story ends this way. We need to treat Veteran homelessness as a humanitarian crisis, which is why it is imperative that we maintain many of the waivers that were applied during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Some of the pandemic era waivers we found to be helpful are: expanding the length of rental assistance beyond nine months for SSVF, expanding eligibility for homeless prevention assistance and shallow subsidy, and increasing providers' flexibility to use hotels for GPD programs for Veterans who may be successful in non-congregate settings.
- 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 operating various Veteran programs 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.

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#### Prepared Statement of Dustin Potash

- Good Afternoon to the assembled members of this distinguished Committee. It is my great honor to be here on behalf of ADJOIN.
- I want to specifically thank Congressman Levin for inviting me here today and for his persistent pursuit to find solutions to end Veteran homelessness.
- My name is Dr. Dustin Potash and I have the honor of serving as the Veterans Director for ADJOIN.
- ADJOIN is one of the most impactful veteran homeless service providers in San Diego and Imperial County, serving over **4,000 homeless veterans since its inception in 2011.**
- I supervise several programs that focus on Veterans experiencing homelessness, including Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing, or HUD VASH; Supportive Services for Veterans Families, or SSVF; and the Veterans Affairs Shallow Subsidy Program; and I've been working with unhoused Veterans for a large portion of my career.
- The most significant point that I can share with you today is that San Diego is making great advances in reducing Veteran homelessness through the use of SSVF and Shallow Subsidy.
- This remarkable progress has come thanks to a meaningful focus and investment from Congress, our Federal partners, strong collaboration at the local level, and our dedication to the Housing First model.
- 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 military experiences.
- With nearly **12 years of work in this sector**, our organization is built upon the Housing First model, ensuring the goal of low barriers to entry for those in need.
- ADJOIN is a firm believer in this approach and is fully committed to this goal
- Greater adherence to the Housing First model in all SSVF programs across the nation can help to replicate San Diego's success in reducing Veteran homelessness.
- Most of our participants frequently have high barrier obstacles that make it harder for them to successfully get housed. We would encourage you to continue the landlord incentive program so that providers can continue to offer a greater variety of options to this important population.



- ADJOIN and our fellow grantees are here as a final line of defense when all other systems and policies fail.
- 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 client story; I did change the names in this story to protect identities.
- Emily is an Air Force veteran who received an honorable discharge. When she came into the program, she was living in an abandoned RV that had no running water or electricity.
- She had been asked to leave the RV as it was just parked on someone's property and Emily did not pay rent to live there.
- Emily was a registered nurse but at the time she came into the program, her nursing license was suspended.
- Emily had a service connection compensation of \$1100.00 per month from the VA. At the time of enrollment, Emily's money was spent paying for drug testing as required by the licensing board as part of her efforts to reinstate her license.
- Most of the time Emily was left with no money for other needs. Emily was in high crisis mode when she reached out to be enrolled in the SSVF program and it was often difficult to engage with her.
- Emily was constantly stressed due to not having a place to live and no money to cover her most basic needs.
- Emily was estranged from friends and family members due to her constantly asking them for money to sustain her needs.
- With the assistance of a SSVF housing coordinator, Emily found a unit that she liked and we helped move her in.
- Emily continued to work on completing all requirements with the licensing board and after being housed, she was able to apply for Cal-Fresh assistance and was approved.
- With the assistance of Adjoin with rent payment and utilities, Emily was able to concentrate on getting her nursing license reinstated.
- Emily completed all requirements, and her license was reinstated in January 2022. Emily was hired as a nurse and Adjoin assisted with her nurse uniforms and shoes.
- Emily is now a fulltime nurse at a local hospital, making \$36 an hour.
- Emily has since moved into our Shallow Subsidy program where she has been very successful.
- 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 in the hopes of replicating success stories like Emily.
- I do believe however, that there is still a gap in our system when it comes to a service member transitioning from the military into civilian life.
- When talking to many of our clients, many of them state that they were rushed out of the military with no plan in place which played a role in them becoming homeless.
- Since my separation from the military, I know this Committee and Congress has implemented the Transition Assistance Program to help servicemembers with resources, classes, and training but I believe it needs to go a step further.
- It is my belief that service members should **already** have a job, permanent housing, and VA disability income (if applicable) all secured **before** leaving the military.
- I don't know who that responsibility falls on to; the military or the community?
- One possible solution is to allow providers and grantees to be part of the transition process on military installations.
- I believe with this type of collaboration it would drastically reduce the number of homeless veterans not just in San Diego County, but nationwide.
- The rental rates here in San Diego are high and the available housing is low which is another barrier for our clients.
- A possible solution would be to allow SSVF and Shallow Subsidy providers to take over run down hotels and motels in undesired parts of the county and bring in development dollars to turn them into permanent housing units.
- Case Management and wrap-around services would be available onsite.

- It was a great honor to be here today to share our experiences with the SSVF and Shallow Subsidy programs 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 and with out of the box thinking.
- I look forward to answering your questions.
- Thank you.

**Prepared Statement of Sean Spear**

April 27, 2023

Office of U.S. Representative Mike Levin  
2204 El Camino Real, Suite 314  
Oceanside, CA 92054

2352 Rayburn HOB  
Washington, DC 20515

**RE: Veterans Affairs Economic Opportunity Subcommittee Field Hearing 5.4.23**

Dear Members of the Subcommittee:

Community HousingWorks (CHW) is a nationally-recognized, 35-year-old, 501(c)(3) non-profit organization headquartered in the City of San Diego. CHW believes that opportunity begins with a stable home, that pride of place translates to pride of self, and that the spirit of hope leads to the realization of dreams. Today, CHW owns more than 4,000 life-changing affordable apartment homes across California and Texas with resident-centered services for working families, seniors, people with disabilities, and veterans to forge stronger futures.

CHW currently has dedicated veteran units in four (4) of our housing communities, with additional self-identified veterans living within two (2) other CHW Supportive Housing (PSH) communities that are utilizing our partner-provided case management services. CHW is among the few large housing nonprofits in the country that supplement the often-limited project service fees with both individual donor and grant contributions to ensure that impactful service programs are provided without interruption. Our resident services are offered, whether it be from our staff or third party partners such as the Veterans Administration (VA), with the goal in mind to build "true communities," defined as communities in which residents develop a sense of belonging, camaraderie, and pride for one another and their community. For our veterans, it is important to allow them the space to share their stories, and with their lived experience, be able to help us shape strong resident services program offerings with veterans and formally homeless individuals specifically in mind.

Our Partnership with the Veterans Administration

Under the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) Program, our veteran dedicated units at properties like our recently completed Keeler Court and Amanecer Apartments are being directly served by VA case managers through an in-kind partnership with CHW. It is voluntary for each veteran to accept the level of care they choose with their assigned VA case manager. Additionally, general resident services for these communities are provided by our Achieve Resident Services staff or a third-party partner. General resident services include: adult skill building classes, Financial Well-Being coaching and education,



Health & Wellness linkage to resources that include food distributions, and CHW's annual VALOR scholarship program. At Keeler Court, a Resident Leadership Academy is also offered, which is an 8-week training that will encourage residents to organize and develop their leadership skills. Residents learn skills and best practices to address the issues that most affect their communities, and they work alongside their neighbors to help improve the quality of life where they live. Together with the VA, we are able to leverage each other's resources to offer a wide variety of life-improving services to the veterans of these communities.

Through its Achieve Resident Services team, CHW is apprised of any outstanding needs and concerns of the veterans through bi-weekly or monthly check ins. We have not experienced any persistent challenges based on the levels of care provided by the VA; **however, in general, chronic physical and mental health issues of veterans who are also older adults is of concern.** Continued use of trauma-informed care models is of utmost importance, and all resident service staff and partners are trained to be aware of key observation and communication tools that help us bring issues to the attention of the VA.

For our veterans within our PSH units, CHW contracts with wraparound service providers like Interfaith Community Services (ICS). ICS and others receive referrals from local veteran assistance programs and provide intensive case management to the veterans. The services are designed to build independent living and tenancy skills and connect the veterans with community-based health care, treatment and employment services. Additionally, general resident services can be provided by CHW through the year that include: adult skill building classes, Financial Well-Being coaching and education, Health & Wellness linkage to resources that include food distributions, and CHW's annual VALOR scholarship program.

#### Challenges and Opportunities

CHW has been able to maintain a strong and supportive relationship with the VA both during the initial VASH award process and the later post-move in stage. However, some notable issues do arise around the time of unit lease-up.

#### *TCO vs. CofO*

The negative impacts of the COVID Pandemic on the construction industry have been well-documented, creating significant construction completion delays for many affordable housing developers that prevent the veterans from being able to move into their units when originally promised. This issue is amplified for the veterans-serving units since the Housing Quality Standards (HQS) clearance process stipulates that veterans cannot move into their units until the final Certificate of Occupancy (CofO) has been provided. All other residents are able to move in once the Temporary Certificate of Occupancy (TCO) is received. Some veterans living in emergency or temporary housing are impacted when their shelter can't accommodate any additional time for an individual to stay. In turn, this causes the veteran to go into distress. It is not unheard of for veterans to back out because of too much perceived uncertainty. The full Certificate of Occupancy is virtually always eventually issued, though it may take a little longer to complete the punch list items and schedule the final inspections in comparison to pre-COVID days. **A solution would be to authorize move-in approval at the Temporary Certificate of Occupancy stage to reduce the anxiety and unnecessarily-increased housing vulnerability of the veterans.**



#### *Income Qualifications*

Receiving fully qualified renter referrals is another challenge. As for all affordable housing, owners must ensure that all potential residents are income-verified as being eligible for the unit to be leased. This includes confirming their identity and their source of income. Our veteran service provider partners can detail the challenges they experience in working on behalf of veterans to re-establish their identities via the Social Security Administration and other federal agencies, clearing the way for them to start to receive their full veterans benefits. On the housing provider side, delays in securing this documentation translate to delayed lease and move-in approvals. No one benefits from seeing veteran-serving housing units ready for occupancy lying vacant while waiting for legal documents to be issued.

That being said, a larger issue centers around the fact that while the U.S. Treasury and other agencies do not treat Federal Service Disability payments as household income, HUD does when calculating that household's annual income. Thus, a referred veteran who now receives full Disability may become ineligible for the affordable housing units built to serve them because they no longer income-qualify for them. **The solution here would be legislation that would specify that HUD adopt the same treatment as the Treasury Department on these benefits.**

#### *Supporting the Construction of New Affordable Housing for Veterans*

Many localities and states dedicate a variety of resources that provide opportunities to create more affordable housing to serve veterans in need. Despite these efforts, they all need the partnership of the federal government to also provide resources under its jurisdiction and control. In some cases, it is merely rethinking the usage of existing resources already approved by Congress:

- **Project-Based Contracts of VASH Rental Subsidy** – In many high rental cost regions of the country, veterans can be challenged to find market rate apartments charging a monthly rent below the maximum Fair Market Rent levels permitted for their VASH Voucher, and/or an owner willing to accept the voucher at all. Sadly, this also relegates VASH holders to lesser-resourced neighborhoods, contributing to 'pockets of poverty.' In alignment with federal Fair Housing policy goals, many states like California now prioritize projects located in high resource areas in their affordable housing funding programs. Like project-based Section 8 contracts from HUD, project-based VASH contracts can be leveraged to attract more bank financing to help more affordable housing be built. Encouraging the VA to use more of its VASH rental subsidy authorization in this way would produce more veteran-serving housing, potentially in communities with more supportive resources like good schools and other neighborhood services.
- **Adaptive Reuse of VA Real Estate** – Throughout the country, the VA has land and obsolete building assets that could be either repurposed or redeveloped jointly for affordable housing co-located with VA facilities. As exemplified by the 388-acre West LA VA Campus in Los Angeles, using existing VA real estate assets to provide much-needed affordable housing close to VA service facilities can be immensely beneficial to the veterans we both desire to serve.
- **Increasing Eligible Sites for PACT Act-Funded Housing** – Passed in 2022, the PACT Act expands VA healthcare and benefits for veterans exposed to toxic substances. The legislation includes funds that the VA may use for development of supportive



housing projects, with a large portion of these funds dedicated to the West LA VA Campus. Currently, the VA can only supply the land and pay for infrastructure. However, Congress could authorize this underutilized funding resource to be made available to cover infrastructure costs on equally-valuable veteran-serving supportive housing projects not on VA-owned properties.

- **The Affordable Housing Credit Improvement Act (AHCIA)** – Outlined in the Biden Administration’s 2023-24 Budget Proposal, and expected to be reintroduced in the 118<sup>th</sup> Congress, the AHCIA would reform the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit tax advantage program to be even more efficient and impactful. Chief among its provisions is the reduction of the “50% Bond Test” to 25%, which would free up more tax-exempt bonds to allow the building of more affordable housing in California, including housing for veterans.

Though most of these proposals have not been scored for impact on the federal budget, it can be generally assumed that they would present a relatively small fiscal impact. More importantly, the amount of additional private capital that would be attracted and leveraged to support more affordable housing for veterans would undoubtedly exceed the public cost. CHW wholeheartedly recommends that the Subcommittee consider these measures.

We at CHW have had the fortune of serving this country’s veterans and other residents in need through the affordable housing and services we provide. The VA and other various arms of the federal government play a critical role in these efforts, and we are most appreciative of their partnership. With thanks for the opportunity, we hope the information and proposals outlined above are helpful as you consider new and additive ways for all of us to serve those that have previously committed to serve our country.

Sincerely,

Sean L. Spear  
 President & CEO  
 Community HousingWorks  
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 San Diego, CA 92108  
 Ph: (619) 858-3519  
 Email: [sspear@chworks.org](mailto:sspear@chworks.org)



UNIDOSUS  
 AFFILIATE



## STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD

### Prepared Statement of San Diego Housing Commission



**Statement for the Record  
Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity Field Hearing  
submitted to the  
Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity  
Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
U.S. House of Representatives  
May 2, 2023**

Chair Van Orden, Ranking Member Levin, and Members of the Subcommittee:

The San Diego Housing Commission (SDHC) thanks you for the opportunity to provide comment to the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity (Subcommittee).

Addressing veteran homelessness continues to be a high priority in the City of San Diego, as reflected in the Community Action Plan on Homelessness for the City of San Diego and the collaboration of multiple local organizations participating in the national Built for Zero initiative to end veteran homelessness.

Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) vouchers are essential resources to create housing solutions for veterans experiencing homelessness. VASH vouchers are among the diverse resources SDHC has used through its homelessness action plan, HOUSING FIRST – SAN DIEGO. Since it launched November 12, 2014, HOUSING FIRST – SAN DIEGO has created more than 10,900 housing solutions for individuals and families experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness in the City of San Diego, including veterans. This includes the “Housing Our Heroes” initiative, which between March 1, 2016, and September 28, 2017, helped secure housing for 1,000 veterans experiencing homelessness. HOUSING FIRST – SAN DIEGO programs provide a continuum of housing solutions to address different needs, including homelessness prevention and diversion, rapid rehousing, landlord engagement and assistance, and permanent supportive housing.

SDHC currently administers 1,310 VASH vouchers to help pay rent for veterans experiencing homelessness in the City of San Diego. Of that total, 1,102 are leased, 107 are issued to recipients currently searching for housing, and 101 are currently unused. SDHC intends to submit a request for additional VASH vouchers through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) current registration of interest opportunity.

SDHC uses a portion of VASH voucher administrative funding to support leasing incentives and housing placement costs. SDHC’s Landlord Partnership Program (LPP) provides financial and support incentives to landlords who rent to Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program participants in the City of San Diego. SDHC’s Landlord Engagement and Assistance Program (LEAP) provides similar incentives and support for landlords who rent to individuals and families experiencing homelessness. These programs assist SDHC’s efforts to help VASH participants secure housing in a timely manner in safe, decent and quality dwelling units.

San Diego Housing Commission 1122 Broadway, Suite 300 San Diego, CA 92101 619.231.9400 [www.sdhc.org](http://www.sdhc.org)

However, numerous challenges affect SDHC's ability to attain its goal of 100 percent utilization rate for VASH vouchers. Historically, SDHC has received insufficient referrals from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), whose utilization goal is 90 percent. This hinders SDHC's ability to fully utilize all VASH vouchers in a timely manner. The VA recently stated that the Department will be reducing or ceasing referrals due to the number of veterans with VASH vouchers who are currently searching for housing; the VA prefers for existing, issued VASH vouchers to be leased up before it refers additional veterans.

In addition, SDHC's experience has demonstrated that VASH vouchers are best for low-acuity individuals who do not need a high level of health care, such as in-home care or assisted living. VASH vouchers do not cover the housing portion of costs in these types of living situations for high-acuity veterans who need that type of higher level of care.

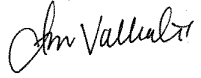
To address these challenges, SDHC provides the following recommendations for potential solutions:

- Provide funding for higher exception payment standards or the creation of a payment standard specific to assisted living. The payment standard is the maximum subsidy payment that a federal rental housing voucher, including VASH, would pay for an apartment or rental house, minus the applicable portion of the contract rent that the tenant pays.
- Increase funding for public housing authorities to onboard, provide support services to, and house veterans experiencing homelessness, with the ability to then transfer case management to the VA for ongoing supportive services with the Department committing to provide ongoing case management to high-acuity veterans.
- Expand the VA's contract with People Assisting the Homeless (PATH) – which will administer referrals, housing placement, and supportive services for approximately 100 to 200 County of San Diego VASH recipients – to include both the City of San Diego and the City of Oceanside so that the entire San Diego region prioritizes VASH voucher outreach and utilization.
  - Note, the last report indicates the VA is staffed at over 90 percent and that VA funding is available for services together with hundreds of unused VASH vouchers.
- Create additional models/programs like HUD-VA Supportive Housing and Assisted Living Facilities Model. These will provide use of the VASH voucher at housing locations with additional services to increase the housing success rate of veterans with higher needs.
- Mandate contracting when 15 percent of allocated VASH vouchers are unused in the previous fiscal year even when there are no case management positions open and/or if utilization rate goals are not met.
  - In January 2021, Congress passed the Johnny Isakson and David P. Roe, M.D. Veterans Health Care and Benefits Improvement Act of 2020. Section 4207 of this law made contracting mandatory for any HUD-VASH program when 15 percent of their allocated housing vouchers during the preceding fiscal year were unused, and when they had one or more case manager positions that were vacant for at least nine consecutive months. This new mandate went into effect at the start of Fiscal Year 2022.
- Lastly, further expand VASH eligibility to include Dishonorable and Bad Conduct Discharges to allow vouchers to assist some remaining currently ineligible veterans experiencing homelessness.



Thank you for your consideration of these important issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Azucena Valladolid". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Azucena Valladolid  
Executive Vice President of Rental Assistance and Workforce Development  
San Diego Housing Commission