

HVAC Testimony Script

Thursday, May 4th

- 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% 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 towards 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% of our unsheltered and 7% 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% 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 eligible for HUD-VASH. It would be beneficial to consider a multidisciplinary team for SSVF that is geared towards 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 five 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.