

The American Legion

Department of California

June 14, 2023

The Honorable Derrick Van Orden,, Chairman
Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity

The Honorable Mark Levin, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity

Subject: Concerns with “H.R. 3848, Housing our Military Veterans Effectively Act.”

Chairman Van Orden, Ranking Member Levin:

The American Legion (TAL), Department of California and our representative, Lawrence Van Kuran, have been closely involved with both the Master Plan and Veterans housing on the West Los Angeles VA campus since 2014. Beginning in 2015, when an agreement was reached in the “*West LA, CA Matter – Principles for a Partnership and Framework for Settlement By and Between the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs and Representatives of the Plaintiffs – Valentini v. McDonald.*” Our representative is a founding member and co-chair of the coalition of Congressionally Chartered Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs), formed based on discussion of the need for Veteran involvement with then Secretary McDonald, and working closely with the Secretary’s personal representative for development of the West Los Angeles VA Master Plan.

The members of the VSO Coalition combined represent well over half of the State of California’s 1.7 million veterans and of the over three hundred thousand veterans residing in the West Los Angeles VA catchment area. Thus, we are fully aware of the toll taken on the over three thousand homeless and in jeopardy of becoming homeless Veterans and their families.

After reviewing changes to Title 38 USC and Public Law 114-226 proposed within H.R. 3848, our TAL Department of California feels that this bill does not offer a reasonable level of confidence that such changes would be of benefit in developing a sound source of quality housing in communities’ homeless veterans are left unsheltered. This is significantly an issue in Los Angeles County and its surrounding sister Counties within West Los Angeles VA’s catchment area. Also, we are concerned that changes proposed in H.R. 3848 will present very real obstacles to progress in development of needed Veterans’ housing on the WLA VA campus.

In our review of H. R. 3848, we have determined that this bill does not reach a reliable level of surety that would be of benefit in creating a reliable source of quality housing in communities’ homeless veterans are left unsheltered. This is especially true in high-cost housing and rental markets like that of Los Angeles and the surrounding Counties within the West LA VA catchment area. This bill will also stymie further progress in the development of much needed

housing on the VA campus. There is a temptation here to be avoided: it mistakes an outcome for a process. Examples of our concerns include the following changes proposed in H.R.3848:

OIG Authority: The WLA VA campus has had a history of fraud, controversy and misuse of it's land. The OIG's authority regarding the WLA VA campus was established in H.R. 5936 (Mr. Marin, FL), becoming Public Law 114-226., the Los Angeles Homeless Veterans Leasing Act of 2016. H.R. 5936 gave the OIG oversight and accountability authority to ensure that leases on the WLA property principally benefit veterans.

After our review, it is TAL Department of California's opinion that changes proposed in H.R. 3848 will eliminate that OIG authority to the benefit of private interests.

In-Kind Consideration: A change proposed in H.R. 3848 would allow third-party holders of Enhanced Use Lease and Land Sharing Agreements to substitute "in-kind consideration" in lieu of cash money, the current form of lease payment. This change raises significant concern for TAL Department of California, since there would be a substantial likelihood that lease holders would profit financially under such an in-kind consideration and, in our mind, would establish the distinct possibility of lease holders offering nothing equivalent in equal value in return that meets the requirement established law to "principally benefit Veterans." Also of note is the fact that WLA VA campus is authorized to retain lease cash payments to directly fund significant Veteran programs and other resources; allowing "in-kind" considerations would significantly impact WLA VA's ability in this area.

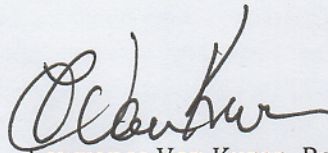
Per Diem: A provision within H.R.3848 dealing with the VA Grant and Per Diem programs proposes rates that are, in the opinion of TAL Department of California, significantly, significantly low. Also, it is our concern that rates discussed in H.R.3848 will inadequately reimburse Transitional Housing providers for their actual costs of care and services to homeless Veterans in traditionally higher-cost Los Angeles and surrounding Counties within the West LA VA catchment area. We are concerned that we cannot continue to afford to have a continuing loss of available providers in our communities should per diem rates be reduced as proposed in H.R;3848.

Mr. Chairman, TAL Department of California takes the position that we must deliver on promises put forth in the very successful Los Angeles Homeless Veterans Leasing Act of 2016. This for the benefit of homeless Veterans and their families, many of whom are in dire need of housing and life-changing benefits from the VA.

Respectfully and sincerely,

Jere L. Romano

Jere Lee Romano, Commander
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Lawrence Van Kuran, Past Commander
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