National Alliance to
End HOMELESSNESS

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IMPROVING POLICY | BUILDING CAPACITY | EDUCATING OPINION LEADERS
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The National Alliance to End Homelessness ("the Alliance"), which is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, mission-driven organization committed to preventing and ending homelessness, thanks Chairman Van Orden, Ranking Member Levin, and other distinguished members of the House Committee on Veteran Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, for including in today's hearing the End Veteran Homelessness Act of 2024 (H.R. 8560), which was recently introduced by Representatives Takano, Waters, and Levin. The Alliance testified before this Subcommittee on March 16, 2022, to discuss, among other things, an earlier draft of this bill. The Alliance appreciates the extensive consultation the sponsors have undertaken with Veterans, homeless services providers, homelessness groups, and veteran groups in drafting this legislation.

The Alliance is pleased to endorse the End Veteran Homelessness Act because it will update the HUD-VASH program, which has ended homelessness for thousands of Veterans with severe disabilities and has become a model for homeless services programs. We believe the legislation would allow HUD-VASH to continue to serve homeless Veterans with the most acute needs with both housing assistance and wraparound services, but also permit the program to use more vouchers more quickly and thus safely and securely house more homeless Veterans.

The HUD-VASH program has been one of the most important tools driving the reduction in homelessness among Veterans. It provides deep rent subsidies so that participants can afford housing no matter how low their incomes; along with intensive case management to ensure that participants can access the full range of healthcare, employment, and other services available through VA and other means.

This intervention model, known generically as permanent supportive housing (PSH), has been demonstrated in numerous studies to achieve excellent results, ending homelessness for people who most would be ready to give up on; reducing bad outcomes, including incarceration and death; and saving money for a range of systems, particularly healthcare.

HUD-VASH's PSH model has the greatest positive impact when used for people with the most severe problems. Relative to other homelessness interventions like rapid re-housing, it is an expensive model; but by stabilizing the housing and lives of people with severe physical and behavioral health issues who have been homeless for years, it vastly improves their lives, while saving money for the government, through reductions in spending on jails, shelters, emergency rooms, hospitalizations, and commitments to mental health facilities. There are other effective alternatives for homeless Veterans with less acute needs. However, for Veterans with severe disabilities, nothing works like HUD-VASH.

The concept of "chronic homelessness" has been developed largely to articulate which people are the appropriate participants in PSH, and VA has largely targeted HUD-VASH to these Veterans: those with severe disabilities, who have been homeless in shelters or unsheltered situations for at least a year. This targeting has been a large part of the cause for reductions in Veterans' homelessness. Decades of research show that when there is insufficient funding to assist everyone who needs help securing housing, reductions in homelessness are maximized by providing scarce housing resources to those who

are already homeless and have been homeless for the longest time, since they are least likely to escape homelessness without help.

The progress on Veterans' homelessness since 2008 has meant that some communities have essentially ended chronic homelessness among Veterans. At the same time, however, the most recent Point-in-Time count indicates there are 38,000 homeless Veterans on any given night and that veteran homelessness increased by more than 7% in 2023 because of the longstanding but worsening crisis in affordable housing. Moreover, 30,000 HUD-VASH vouchers are not being used. Clearly, the time has come to expand the eligibility for HUD-VASH in order to serve more homeless Veterans—but without allowing any reduction in the program's commitment to serve chronically homeless Veterans.
The Alliance believes that The End Veteran Homelessness Act allows the HUD-VASH program to successfully make this transition, using existing resources more economically to safely and securely house more homeless Veterans.

The legislation ensures HUD-VASH stays true to its mission by prioritizing for case management "vulnerable homeless Veterans, including Veterans who are homeless and who have disabilities (including chronic mental illness, chronic substance abuse disorders, or chronic physical disabilities".

However, the legislation would also allow for unused HUD-VASH vouchers to be used to house other Veterans who are homeless or at great risk of homelessness but currently ineligible for the program, including the elderly or heads of family with very low incomes; as well as Veterans "receiving assistance under another Federal housing assistance program", which frees up those resources to be used by non-Veterans.

Moreover, the legislation also endows HUD-VASH vouchers with special incentives that will allow them to be leased up more quickly. These incentives are inspired by Emergency Housing Vouchers, which were temporarily made available to communities in the early 2020s and they were generally successful because of the rapidity with which these vouchers housed people experiencing homelessness, even in tight rental markets, thanks in large part to the flexible funding provided to Public Housing Authorities for landlord incentives, security deposits, and housing navigation.

The End Veteran Homelessness Act would make better use of HUD resources, ensure that HUD-VASH continues to prioritize homeless Veterans with the greatest needs, while allowing the program to serve additional homeless Veterans with vouchers that will be leased up faster than ever—that's why the Alliance has endorsed this legislation. If the Committee has any questions about our views of the End Veteran Homelessness Act, please contact the Alliance's John Threlkeld (jthrelkeld@naeh.org).