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Testimony before the Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity entitled "Housing our Heroes: Addressing the Homeless Veterans Crisis"

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Summary:

My testimony with respect to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity entitled "Housing our Heroes: Addressing the Homeless Veterans Crisis" is given in my role and capacity as the San Diego Veterans Coalition President of the Board, though it is certainly informed by observations in my several other roles listed on my curriculum vitae.

The number of homeless veterans using the annual "Point in Time" method seems to always be met with challenges of being under reported, over reported, a subjective measure, using an unreliable method counting veterans on the streets early in the morning, and it use self-reports to interviewers with minor incentives.

It seems that with current technologies, we could develop and implement more sophisticated methods to have a more real-time estimate of the number and condition of our veterans who are homeless.

The SDVC has supported and promoted safeguarded, cross-sector data sharing that provides a much more reliable estimate to use to determine how much funding and programming is required, and where.

In SD County we have been using the SD United platform backbone system (powered by 2-1-1 SD) to screen, partially enroll, refer, and intake veterans into services.

This platform can provide a reliable number of how many veterans use a particular service and collect valuable demographic information to direct policy.

SD United is capable of being interoperable with a larger Community Information Exchange nationally that includes input from public health, the VA, community-based

providers, and private practices. I can compare profiles and aggregated report of how many veterans are homeless, and their services requests and usage, unmet needs, demographics, and geographic location.

Anecdotally, we hear there are veterans, especially female veterans, are functionally homeless going from one friend or family member to another, sleeping in their cars parked off street at a friend's, relative's, or a compassionate community member's residence, a business parking area, and other creative resourceful means.

An expanded Community Information Exchange would go a long way accurately determine how many veterans are homeless and using such means to survive.

We have come a long way in terms of programs and systems for veteran who homelessness, and successfully intervened and halted the trend, but there is one group of homeless veterans who are in desperate need of an immediate system change.

It has been widely reported that individuals with mental illness, substance use disorder, and homeless age much faster than their peers in the general population because of a variety of contributing factors; unsanitary living environments, poor hygiene, inability to self-manage and navigate healthcare, transportation, etc.

I have directly observed this in San Diego County in my work over the years as Logistics Coordinator and Site Supervisor of the San Diego Stand Down for Homeless Veterans and Their Families.

I am convinced that because homeless veterans age at a more rapid rate, and they are the leading of a growing general population of aging veterans.

At Stand Down for the past several years I have seen more and homeless veterans using canes, walkers, wheel chairs, assisted by a caregiver, and in need of geriatric medical services for foot and extremity care, and more extreme care for infections, and other cognitive ills associated with aging.

Many/most of these veterans leave stand down and return to the streets because they do not meet the criteria for current programs. These are incredibly poignant situations and some will die on the streets if we do not change the criteria to align with their needs and cognitive capacity.

I urge the Nation to act quickly to come alongside of these aging homeless veterans.