

Written testimony of Ginny Puddefoot, Executive Officer of the California Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council

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Good morning.

My name is Ginny Puddefoot and I am the Executive Officer of the Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council. The Council is under the California Business, Consumer Services and Housing Agency and is chaired by Alexis Podesta, Secretary of the Agency.

The California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet) is represented on the Council by Undersecretary Russell Atterberry, who was, until January 2019, the Vice Chair of the Council.

Before I get started, I'd like to give you some facts and figures about homelessness, and veterans' homelessness, in California.

California has 12 percent of the nation's population but 25 percent of the nation's homelessness.

We have the largest number of veterans of any state. That's about 8.5 percent of the nation's veterans, but we have about 28 percent of the nation's homeless veterans.

The homeless point-in-time count occurred early this year. While the final numbers from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) won't be coming out until the fall, the vast majority of local reporting agencies are reporting increases in their homeless populations.

However, we have been seeing progress in reducing veterans' homelessness. In January, Los Angeles County reported an overall increase of 12 percent in the total number of homeless but reported a slight drop in the number of homeless veterans.

And I know we're in San Diego County, but I want to acknowledge our neighbor Riverside County to the north. Riverside County is the first county in California to reach "functional zero" when it comes to the number of homeless veterans there. That means that homelessness among veterans in Riverside County is rare, brief, and non-recurring, and no veteran is forced to live on the street.

There is still a lot of work to do in addressing homelessness in general, and veterans' homelessness specifically.

Some of that work is underway.

In 2014, California voters approved Proposition 41, which created the Veterans Housing and Homelessness Prevention Program, and provided \$600 million to fund it.

It provides new affordable housing for veterans and their families, with an emphasis on developing housing for veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

It places a priority on projects that combine housing and supportive services, and encourages and fosters innovative financing.

The funding is administered by CalVet and the California Department of Housing and Community Development, in close consultation with the California Housing Finance Agency.

To date, 17 projects comprising 546 units have been completed and are currently occupied by veterans. Another 47 projects comprising 1,772 units are in the pipeline.

Last year, voters passed another ballot measure, Proposition 1, the Housing Programs and Veterans' Loans Bond.

Proposition 1 authorized \$4 billion in bonds, including \$1 billion for the CalVet home loan program.

They also approved Proposition 2, which allows revenue from 2004's Proposition 63 to be utilized for housing programs.

Specifically, this will fund the No Place Like Home program, which provides funding for development of permanent supportive housing for people who are in need of mental health services and who are experiencing homelessness, chronic homelessness, or who are at risk of chronic homelessness.

The process for getting that money out the door is underway.

More immediately, in 2018, \$500 million was appropriated to establish the Homeless Emergency Aid Program (HEAP), to give flexible block grants to the state's 11 largest cities and 43 Continuums of Care.

HEAP was designed to provide short-term help until larger programs come online.

HEAP money was to help local jurisdictions address their immediate challenges while allowing them optimal flexibility in determining how to spend it. The idea was that local communities know their homelessness issues best and should be the ones to decide how to spend money to address them.

HEAP came into being on July 1, 2018 – the start of the state’s fiscal year – and by the end of 2018, all \$500 million had been awarded to all 11 cities and 43 continuums of care, with all distributions completed by March of 2019.

In other words, the state moved very fast to both create a program and get the funding out to local jurisdictions.

The budget that took effect on July 1 of THIS year includes another \$650 million in one-time block grant funding through a new program – the Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention Program.

It, too, is bridge funding to help local jurisdictions until additional funding is available.

This money will go to California’s 13 largest cities, to Continuums of Care, and to California’s 58 counties. They can use it for expansion of emergency shelters and navigation centers, rapid-rehousing, permanent supporting housing, and other such efforts.

To get the money, the local jurisdictions must show how they will collaborate around a regional plan to address homelessness.

Earlier, I mentioned Riverside County and how it has achieved “functional zero” in terms of veterans’ homelessness.

One of the ways they did that was through the use of real-time data, which they used to come up with evidence-based solutions for veterans’ homelessness.

That’s an approach California will use.

The Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council is developing a State Strategic Action Plan to Address Homelessness to focus on how to prioritize its resources to efficiently and effectively address homelessness.

It will provide guidance on evidence-based actions that can be taken to quickly and significantly reduce the number of individuals and families experiencing homelessness, and reduce the duration and number of episodes of homelessness that people experience.

The work of creating that plan is underway. We have issued a request for white papers to get input and recommendations from experts, advocates and other stakeholders. We received 42 white papers which are currently under review.

This fall, we will have a list of recommended actions and best practices and will reach out to key players to solicit their help and input. By the end of the year, we will convene focus groups and meetings with stakeholders and begin drafting the plan.

By spring of next year, we hope to have a final plan to present to the Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council for their approval so that we can begin implementing the actions contained in the plan.

As you can see, we have a lot of irons in the fire and I'm optimistic that all of these efforts will make a serious dent in homelessness in general and veterans' homelessness specifically.

I am gratified that more attention is being paid to homelessness in recent years and that we are seeing the resources to make a positive impact on the problem.

Thank you.