

Legislative Priorities to End Homelessness Among Veterans

President Obama and Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) Secretary Eric Shinseki have made ending veterans homelessness a top priority, prompting Congress to explore several legislative solutions to the problem. In order to truly end homelessness among veterans, resources must be available to identify every veteran who is homeless or about to become homeless. Programs must be able to immediately secure the needed housing and services for that individual and/or their families.

Congress should enact the Zero Tolerance for Veterans Homelessness Act of 2009, S. 1547, and the Homes for Heroes Act of 2009, S. 1160 / H.R. 403. This is comprehensive legislation to:

1. Create a homelessness prevention and rapid re-housing program within the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

The VA must have the capacity to identify and provide assistance to all veterans who either have recently lost their housing or are in danger of doing so. The Zero Tolerance for Veterans Homelessness Act, S. 1587 authorizes the VA to provide homelessness prevention and rapid re-housing services, which include: working with landlords and family members to resolve conflicts; connecting veterans with needed employment, benefits, health care, and other income and services; and providing short-term financial assistance for rent and or eviction prevention.

2. Continue to expand the Department of Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing program (HUD-VASH).

The HUD-VASH program provides rental assistance through HUD's Section 8 voucher program; and case management, treatment and support services through the VA. It replicates the highly successful model of permanent supportive housing, getting veterans with the most severe, permanent disabilities off the streets and in to safe affordable housing. Congress has already funded 20,000 HUD-VASH vouchers, and Congress should pass S. 1547, which authorizes 10,000 new HUD-VASH vouchers each year to reach a goal of 60,000 vouchers—the number needed to provide housing for all homeless veterans in need of an intensive, long-term intervention.

3. Ensure an adequate supply of affordable housing for veterans with low incomes.

An increase in housing for veterans with low incomes is needed to prevent and end homelessness. The Homes for Heroes Act, S. 1160 / H.R. 403, would create a new program within HUD to develop supportive housing. The Homes for Heroes program is an essential

companion to the HUD-VASH program, and the bill would authorize 20,000 rental vouchers for veterans and their families who have severe housing cost burden (pay over 50 percent of their income toward housing).

4. Enhance existing VA homelessness programs.

Programs such as the Homeless Grant and Per Diem program—temporary housing assistance linked to support services—need policy adjustments in order to be part of a comprehensive system to end homelessness for veterans. Only through better alignment with other federal housing programs, more flexibility in service delivery, and a greater focus on outcomes and appropriate targeting can veteran homelessness be addressed to scale. The Zero Tolerance for Veterans Homelessness Act requires the VA to develop a comprehensive plan for ending veterans homelessness, and the bill makes essential policy adjustments so that plan can be fully implemented (*See: S. 1547 Summary*)

Current status:

In July, Senators Reed (D-RI) and Bond (R-MO) introduced the Zero Tolerance for Veterans Homelessness Act of 2009, S. 1547, and the bill currently has [11 additional co-sponsors](#). The Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs reviewed the legislation in a hearing on October 21. Advocates are working to move the bill forward quickly by getting as many co-sponsors on the legislation as possible. There is not yet a companion bill in the House, but the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs is considering several separate bills which address homelessness, some with similar provisions to S. 1547.

The Homes for Heroes Act of 2009, H.R. 403 / S. 1160, was introduced in the House by Representative Al Green (D-TX), and in the Senate by Senator Charles Schumer (D-NY). It passed overwhelmingly in the House for the second year in a row, with a vote of 417-2, and has been referred to the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs. The Senate bill, S. 1160, currently has [8 co-sponsors](#). Advocates are encouraging the Senate Banking Committee to hold a hearing on the bill to quickly move it through the Senate.