

IMPROVED UTILIZATION OF VASH VOUCHERS

POSITION: The Chamber's Public Committee voted to SUPPORT the package of proposed or yet-to-be-proposed changes to the eligibility and distribution of VASH Vouchers on September 10, 2019. The Chamber's Board of Directors voted to SUPPORT the legislation on September 26, 2019.

RATIONALE: Policy adjustments are worthwhile if it will result in moving homeless veterans off the streets of San Diego.

STATUS: Different portions of the various changes have varying status.

SUMMARY

The U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) has established a voucher that is specific to homeless veterans that meet certain criteria. This voucher is known as the veteran assisted supportive housing (VASH) voucher, of which San Diego receives 1,176 from the federal government. Due to some hurdles in determining eligibility, the VASH Voucher utilization rate is lower than the number of vouchers received by the region, meaning that there are homeless veterans who are unable to use the voucher to successfully become housed. The potential changes to improve utilization rates and lower barriers are:

- Eliminate time served requirement
- Include homeless veterans discharged under conditions other-than-honorable (but not dishonorable)
- Eliminate VA healthcare eligibility requirement
- Prioritize the chronic homeless status, but no longer require it
- Allow for community-based organizations to provide supportive services to voucher recipients
- Allow community-based organizations to make referrals for veterans to receive vouchers
- H.R. 2398 Veteran HOUSE Act (Peters)
- H.R. 2399 Homes for Our Heroes Act (Peters)

INDUSTRY/IES IMPACTED

Communities and businesses disproportionately impacted by homelessness, or working within the homelessness system, will be impacted by a change of policy.

SUPPORTERS

- San Diego Housing Commission

OPPONENTS

- None known

ARGUMENTS IN FAVOR

- San Diego's most pressing challenge is homelessness. If the programs designed to address the crisis are not working because of policy or technical hurdles, minor changes should be made so that programs are appropriately utilized and individuals are successfully connected to help.
- The allocation of VASH vouchers requires a certain level of utilization. If San Diego cannot find a way to adjust the program to

ARGUMENTS IN OPPOSITION

- Allowing changes to the VASH program for one jurisdiction, or even for the nation via federal policy, is indicative that the problem could be one of implementation. Local jurisdictions should be working first to address their own barriers.
- There could be a lack of control or transparency should some of the proposed changes be enacted, and the Department of Veteran's Affairs would have less oversight.

be more successful, the allotted vouchers are at risk.

MORE INFORMATION

VASH vouchers are currently underutilized for a variety of problems, but the seemingly largest one at the moment is arbitrary hurdles for eligibility. Requirements such as time served, and conditions other-than-honorable keep a homeless veteran who would otherwise benefit from being moved into stable housing via a voucher, homeless.

The two existing pieces of legislation outlined above are important to the larger picture, but do not include language at this time to address eligibility and referral processes, which is why the Chamber Public Policy Committee made clear that they wished to support the entire package of changes.

More specifically, the bills above will do the following:

- Veteran HOUSE Act, will adopt a new definition of “veteran” that does not require a specific length of service, and will require annual reports to Congress about VA homelessness services including the VASH program.
- Homes for Our Heroes Act, requires that HUD and the VA report to Congress data about the VASH voucher program, barriers, and how the VASH program functions in high cost areas (such as San Diego).