

Expansion of Eligibility for HUD-VASH

H.R. 2398/S. 2061

The Alliance strongly supports legislation that would expand eligibility for Housing and Urban Development-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) benefits to homeless veterans who have received an “other than honorable” (OTH) discharge. Although an OTH discharge is the most severe administrative discharge a veteran can receive, it is not a punitive discharge, and should not be confused with a dishonorable (“bad-conduct”) discharge.

Chronically homeless veterans who have been other than honorably discharged are not receiving the housing and services that would allow them to get off the streets and turn around their lives. At the request of the Alliance and its national partners, however, lawmakers are considering legislation that would expand eligibility for HUD-VASH to homeless veterans who received an OTH discharge.

Program Overview

The highly successful Housing and Urban Development- Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program combines a HUD Housing Choice Voucher with case management services provided through a VA Medical Center.

Current law requires veterans to be eligible for VA medical benefits in order to qualify for a HUD-VASH voucher. This requirement excludes many veterans with OTH discharges. According to the Department of Defense, approximately 7,700 servicemembers are discharged OTH each year, while approximately 10% of homeless veterans received OTH discharges.

Homeless veterans who received OTH discharges are eligible for assistance from VA’s other successful homelessness programs (Supportive Services for Veteran Families [SSVF] and Grant Per Diem [GPD]), but not the HUD-VASH program. The Congressional Research Service helpfully distinguishes between the missions of the HUD-VASH, SSVF, and GPD programs:

“HUD-VASH, GPD, and SSVH provide different types of housing subsidies to eligible veterans... HUD-VASH provides permanent supportive-housing assistance for homeless veterans, prioritizing chronically homeless and highly vulnerable veterans who have a high level of housing and service needs, such as those with high barriers to employment and self-sufficiency. In contrast, GPD provides transitional housing and SSVF focuses on short-term, crisis intervention when providing homeless prevention and rapid rehousing; both of these programs also provide supportive services for veterans who do not have as high a level of needs as those in the HUD-VASH program.”

The Alliance has repeatedly heard from providers of assistance to veterans experiencing homelessness that some homeless veterans discharged OTH have higher levels of need that would be best addressed by HUD-VASH, but they are not eligible for the VA case management services and the HUD housing vouchers.

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Current Status

The Alliance is working with Congressional lawmakers to address the concerns raised by providers. Legislation (H.R. 2398) introduced by Representative Scott Peters (D-CA) and 12 bipartisan cosponsors would make OTH discharged veterans eligible for HUD-VASH benefits. The lawmaker estimates that as many as 1,000 homeless OTH veterans in need could finally take advantage of HUD-VASH benefits.

The bill enjoyed strong, bipartisan support at a markup in May of the House Veterans Affairs Committee. The House Financial Services Committee, which also has jurisdiction over the legislation, may give additional consideration to the bill at a hearing in August.

Identical legislation (S. 2061) has been introduced in the Senate by Senators Jon Tester (D-MT), Todd Young (R-IN), and Chris Murphy (D-CT). That bill was referred to the Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs Committee.

Recommendation

The Alliance urges lawmakers to expeditiously approve H.R. 2398 and S. 2061 so that homeless veterans who were discharged OTH and are in acute need of help can become eligible for the HUD-VASH program.

In addition to the Alliance, the bipartisan Peters-Tester legislation has been endorsed by American Legion, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Veterans of Foreign Wars, AMVETS, National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, Community Solutions, and National Housing Law Project.



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