The Ending Homelessness Act of 2019 (H.R. 1856)

Summary

The Ending Homelessness Act of 2019 (H.R. 1856) would provide substantial additional funding for homelessness programs around the country outside of the regular annual appropriations process. The bill would add $2.65 billion in annual spending for new projects over a period of five years, with renewals of those projects potentially covered by different funding sources.

Overview

Annual funding for this bill would include:

- $1 billion for new homeless assistance projects, with 75 percent to be spent on permanent supportive housing, distributed to communities by formula, and renewed out of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) regular Continuum of Care (CoC) homeless assistance program competition (which would require additional appropriations each year).
- $500 million for new incremental Housing Choice Vouchers (also known as Section 8) for people who are homeless, distributed to communities according to need and renewed out of regular Housing Choice Voucher appropriations.
- $100 million for new outreach and service coordination grants, awarded competitively. Since these activities are eligible for HUD CoC funding, renewals could be done through the regular CoC competition, subject to additional appropriations.
- $1 billion in incremental funding for the National Housing Trust Fund to develop housing, with homeless people prioritized for the first five years.
- $50 million in incremental rental assistance funding to support National Housing Trust developments.

The bill would also permanently authorize HUD’s McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants account, and permanently eliminate the sunset clause for the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness.

An important aspect is that this bill’s funds would be provided through “mandatory” spending rather than through the “discretionary” funding handled by the Appropriations Committee. Using discretionary spending is one reason that HUD’s programs to house people with the lowest incomes have been inadequately funded for more than about three-quarters of eligible people. This bill can open a discussion about whether federal funding for housing should be provided to all eligible people through the mandatory spending process (as is the case with major federal programs providing food, medical care, and income for retirement).

Current Status

This bill was introduced by Rep. Maxine Waters (D-CA) along with 46 original cosponsors. It passed the House Financial Services Committee on a partisan vote. There is no current schedule for a floor vote in the House. There is no corresponding Senate bill, although some of the larger housing bills in the Senate include substantial increases for homeless assistance, using mandatory funding. The bill is, however, an important vehicle for talking about the need to substantially improve funding for homelessness interventions.

Recommendations

House Members should be encouraged to cosponsor this bill, as an indication of support for funding effective homelessness interventions to the scale needed. Senators should consider introducing a similar bill in the Senate.