

Veteran Need #1 (Naomi Trejo, TDHCA)

Homeless Veterans need assistance exiting homelessness

Background and Services

In 2015, Texas had the fourth highest homeless Veteran population (2,393) compared to other states. This statistic is from the annual point-in-time count, which is a federally-required count of unsheltered and sheltered persons experiencing homelessness during the last 10 days of January. While Texas had a high number of Veterans experiencing homelessness, the 2015 point-in-time count also showed that Texas had the fourth largest decline in Veteran homelessness between 2009 and 2015, with a 56.4% decrease.

The decrease in Veteran homelessness may be attributed to local and national initiatives to end Veteran homelessness. For example, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) released *Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness in 2010*. The first goal outlined in *Opening Doors* was to “prevent and end homelessness among Veterans in 2015.”¹ In June of 2014, First Lady Michelle Obama announced the USICH initiative of a Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness. Eight Texas cities took up the challenge, including Austin, Crystal City, El Paso, Fort Worth, Houston, Plano, San Antonio, and Waco.

After a three-year effort, Houston was the first city in Texas to announce it had effectively ended Veteran homelessness in June 2015. The term “effectively ending Veteran homelessness” means that there is a system of homeless services coordination between service providers and housing providers to provide shelter or housing within a specified period of time, such as 30 days after identification of the Veteran experiencing homelessness. Thirty-five agencies in Houston collaborated to house more than 3,650 Veterans.² Seven other Texas cities also aimed to effectively end Veterans homelessness by the end of 2015, with varying degrees of success. The City of Austin announced that it effectively ended Veteran homelessness in December 2015, though due to the high costs and low availability in the Austin rental market not all Veterans will be housed until a future date (as of this writing, that date is March 2016). Also, while not part of the Mayors’ challenge, many local initiatives exist throughout Texas to address the high number of Veterans experiencing homelessness.

During the 83rd Legislative Session, Senate Bill (SB) 1580, authored by Senator Sylvia Garcia, required the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA), in conjunction with the Texas Veterans Commission (TVC) and the Texas Interagency Council for the Homeless (TICH), to conduct a Study on Homelessness among

¹ United States Interagency Council for the Homeless. (2015). *Opening doors: federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness*. Retrieved from

http://usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/USICH_OpeningDoors_Amendment2015_FINAL.pdf

² Reyes, Anavid. (2015, June 1). Mayor announces end to veteran homelessness in Houston. Retrieved from <http://www.click2houston.com/news/mayor-announces-end-to-veteran-homelessness-in-houston>

Veterans. The Study on Homelessness among Veterans is due to the Texas Legislature on December 1, 2016. Per SB 1580, the study will result in recommendations to the State's approach and changes to State law to address Veteran homelessness.

The Study on Homelessness among Veterans' preliminary research found that, upon discharge, Veterans may have certain challenges which attribute to homelessness. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) released a research brief in 2013 showing that Veterans who were deployed had a 34% higher hazard of becoming homeless, and that 72% of homeless Veterans came from the lowest pay grades in the military before discharge.³ Nationwide, approximately half of Veterans experiencing homelessness have serious mental illness and 70% have substance use problems. This combination can lead to Veterans involvement in the criminal justice system, evidenced by the fact that approximately half of Veterans experiencing homelessness have a criminal record after being discharged from the military.⁴ While there has been a marked decrease in Veteran homelessness in some areas of Texas, homelessness remains an issue that still affects many Texas Veterans.

Through the Texas Housing Trust Fund, TDHCA provides loans and grants to finance, acquire, rehabilitate and develop decent and safe affordable housing. The Texas Housing Trust Fund currently administers three single family programs which are the Texas Bootstrap Loan Program, Amy Young Barrier Removal Program and the Contract for Deed Assistance Program.

The Texas Housing Trust Fund had offered a Texas Veterans Housing Support Program from 2007 through 2009. During the 82nd Legislative Session, the Legislature transferred the Veterans Housing Program from the TDHCA to TVC in order to increase the number of Veterans served. The Legislature determined that the Fund for Veterans Assistance would administer the program as of September 1, 2011. With a total of \$3 million for the program, the Veterans Housing Program was designated Homes for Texas Heroes (H4TXH) Program by Gov. Rick Perry. The H4TXH program was established in 2012, and through it, TVC awards grants to organizations that provide Veterans with permanent and temporary housing.

The 81st Legislative Session established the Homeless Housing and Services Program (HHSP), which was codified in statute by the 82nd Legislature. TDHCA administers HHSP funds to assist major urban areas identified in statute in providing housing and services to homeless individuals and families, as well as provide local programs to prevent and eliminate homelessness. The 84th Legislature appropriated \$10 million in General Revenue funds for the 2016-2017 biennium. Allocation is based on percentage

³ Metraux, S. (2013, November). Homelessness and risk factors for homelessness among veterans from the era of Afghanistan (OEF) and Iraq (OIF/OND) conflicts. VA National Center on Homelessness among Veterans and the United States Veteran Affairs. Research Brief.

⁴ United States Interagency Council for the Homeless. (2015). Opening doors: *federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness*. Retrieved from http://usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/USICH_OpeningDoors_Amendment2015_FINAL.pdf

of persons in poverty, Veteran population, persons with disabilities, and point-in-time count of homeless persons.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Draft: Creation of risk mitigation funds to supplement HUD VASH Vouchers.

Veteran Need #2 (Pam Maercklein, TVC)

Appropriate housing for female veterans and veterans with children as a special category of homeless veterans.

Background and Services

Review of HB 2914 – asking for exemption from ad valorem taxation of property owned by certain charitable organizations that provide affordable housing to low-income veterans and their dependents. This bill requires that properties are intended only for veterans and their dependents. This bill was introduced by Representative Carol Alvarado in the 84th Legislature. It had first reading and then referred to Ways and Means and it stopped there.

501(c)(3) organizations buy rundown buildings or apartment complexes and refurbish them. When organizations purchase these properties the property taxes are usually very low, but once the properties are refurbished the taxes go up anywhere from 20%-250%. Also, the cost of refurbishing/remodeling can cost up to millions of dollars. The increase in property taxes along with the burden of remodeling places an undue burden on non-profit organizations.

In the process of reviewing other major cities to see what their property tax laws are like

++ also working this topic in the Women Workgroup

Conclusions and Recommendations

Recommend there be same zoning standard across the state.

Recommend property owners to set aside 10% of their apartments just for women veterans and veterans with children.

Veteran Need #3 (Open)

Address transgender/gender identity transitional homeless veteran housing.

Background and Services

Conclusions and Recommendations

Veteran Need #4 (Christa Noland, Green Doors)

Improve the availability of accessible, affordable housing for all veterans.

Background and Services

Conclusions and Recommendations

1. Amend the homestead exemption for disabled veterans moving away from a fixed dollar amount exemption to a percentage of the home's value. (Bradley Barrett, TVC)

Veteran Need #5 (Charles Cloutman, Meals on Wheels & More)

Solutions that address aging veterans' needs so they can safely age in-place.

Background and Services

Conclusions and Recommendations