

Robert M. Carlson
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May 21, 2019

The Honorable Johnny Isakson
Chair, Committee on Veterans Affairs
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jon Tester
Ranking Member, Committee on Veterans Affairs
United States Senate
Washington D.C. 20510

Re: American Bar Association support for S.980, the Homeless Veterans Prevention Act

Dear Chairman Isakson and Ranking Member Tester:

On behalf of the American Bar Association, I write to express our strong support for S.980, the Homeless Veterans Prevention Act (HVPA). This bipartisan legislation would authorize proven strategies for removing chronic barriers blocking homeless veterans from receiving the promised benefits, services, and treatment they need for self-sufficiency and success. We applaud the Committee's historical support for this legislation, and we urge that you report the bill out favorably so that it may proceed to the full Senate, and to the House, and be signed into law this Congress.

The progress over the past decade in reducing the number of veterans on the street has been promising, in large part due to Congress' willingness to support programs that target specific obstacles veterans encounter. For nine years in a row, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs' Project CHALLENG (Community Homelessness Assessment, Local Education and Networking Groups), one barrier—unresolved legal problems—comprise half of the top ten unmet needs of veterans. Several of these legal problems arise as a consequence of living on the street, but each unresolved legal issue can either lead to homelessness or prevent those already homeless from benefitting from VA programs or support. Nonetheless, the VA is neither permitted to provide legal help nor permitted to enter into community partnerships to have others help resolve these problems for homeless veterans. For decades, pro bono and civil legal assistance lawyers have provided free legal services to veterans in their communities, but this is not a sustainable or systemic solution to the chronic need.

Section 3 of the HVPA would solve this problem in a budget-neutral way by allowing the VA Secretary to enter into suitable private-public partnerships to deliver legal services to veterans experiencing homelessness. In this way, the VA would be able to provide the national leadership and support necessary to better ensure that the right kinds of legal services are available where

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and when they are needed most. The VA is to be commended for the role it already plays in removing certain regulatory barriers, sharing data, educating and training lawyers, and helping to support innovative delivery models, such as medical-legal partnerships, homeless court at Stand Down, and law school clinical programs. These initiatives, and many others, illustrate what might be accomplished in meeting veterans' needs when closer collaboration between the VA and the legal community is authorized.

Unfortunately, according to the 2018 U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development "Point-in-Time Count," there are more unsheltered veterans today than there were two years ago. We should no longer tolerate legislative obstacles to ending the scourge of veteran homelessness, and Section 3 of S.980 would remove one such obstacle, allowing the development of a national strategy for removing several of homeless veterans' most persistently unmet needs. The legal community welcomes the opportunity for partnership, and the ABA stands ready to assist in support of this legislation and the collaborations it would make possible.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me or Kenneth Goldsmith in the ABA Governmental Affairs Office at (202) 662-1789 or kenneth.goldsmith@americanbar.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert M. Carlson". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Robert M. Carlson

cc: Members of the Committee on Veterans Affairs