

National League of Cities (NLC) Testimony to the U.S. Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs

Tuesday, October 6, 2015, 2:30 p.m.

Russell Senate Office Building, Room 418

Hearing: Pending Legislation

Written testimony prepared by NLC staff.

Oral remarks and testimony provided by:

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Background:

On behalf of the more than 19,000 cities, villages and towns represented by the National League of Cities (NLC), we thank the Committee for this opportunity to provide testimony regarding six pending pieces of legislation.

NLC is dedicated to helping city leaders build better communities. Working in partnership with the 49 state municipal leagues, NLC serves as a resource to and an advocate for municipalities on a range of issues. Examples include transportation, education, infrastructure, municipal finance, sustainability, public safety, health and nutrition, as well as housing and community development. Our work on veterans' issues has been grounded in this latter category.

NLC is the lead partner with the Administration for the [Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness](#). To date, more than 800 leaders have accepted this challenge, including 628 mayors, nine governors and 165 county and city officials. In addition, our program work supports national technical assistance initiatives that are accelerating local efforts to end veteran homelessness.

Given our organizational focus on veteran housing and homelessness, our testimony will remain concentrated on [S. 1885](#) and [S. 2013](#), but we welcome the opportunity to support the committee and its staff regarding all legislation under review.

As required by law, NLC discloses that Mr. Harig-Blaine currently serves as a member of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' Advisory Committee on Homeless Veterans.

S. 1885

Veteran Housing Stability Act of 2015

In December 2013, Phoenix, AZ became the first city in the United States to end chronic veteran homelessness. When announcing this milestone, Phoenix Mayor Greg Stanton said, “The strategies that we’re using to end chronic homelessness among veterans are the exact same strategies that we’re going to use to end chronic homelessness among the broader population. This model – doing right by our veterans – is exactly how we’re going to do right by the larger population.”

Since then, cities such as New Orleans; Houston; Binghamton, NY; Pocatello, ID; Las Cruces, NM; Mobile, AL; and Troy, NY have illustrated what the end of veteran homelessness looks like.

While the progress on veteran homelessness is unprecedented, improvements can still be made and S. 1885 is an acknowledgement of this reality. As discussed by Senator Blumenthal during his remarks while introducing this legislation, S. 1885 seeks to modernize housing programs provided by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), to ensure they are appropriately meeting the needs of homeless veterans and their families.

S. 1885 makes many needed amendments that will improve how VA can and should serve homeless veterans and their families, but we believe there are several opportunities to further enhance these proposals.

In Section 3, “Program on Provisions of Intensive Case Management Interventions to Homeless Veterans Who Receive the Most Health Care From the Department of Veterans Affairs,” S. 1885 would require VA to pilot intensive case management services in no less than six locations. The proposed legislation requires VA to issue a report analyzing the effectiveness of this program no later than December 1, 2018.

In delineating the content of this proposed report, S. 1885 requires VA to provide “An estimate of the costs the Department would have incurred for the provision of health care and associated services to covered veterans (as described in subsection (b) of section 2067 of such title, as added by subsection (a)(1)) but for the provision of intensive case management interventions under the program, disaggregated by provision of intensive case management interventions in locations described in subparagraphs (A) and (B) of subsection (c) of such section.”

NLC encourages the authors and co-sponsors of this proposed legislation to expand the requirements of VA in this section of the report to include costs beyond those incurred by the VA alone but for the provision of intensive case management interventions.

NLC encourages the collection of information regarding the costs of providing health care and associated services to veterans that are incurred by other entities including cities, counties and states, as well as costs that are not related to the provision of health care and benefits.

For example, costs associated by the interactions covered veterans have with the public safety, judicial and penal systems, while not incurred by the VA, should be measured to allow for a more robust cost-benefit analysis of the intensive case management intervention services that VA would provide as part of this program.

By documenting the costs incurred by entities outside of VA, the report required by S. 1885 can support municipal leaders in their efforts to ensure that limited local resources are used in the most cost-effective manner to end veteran homelessness.

In Section 4, “Program to Improve Retention of Housing by Formerly Homeless Veterans and Veterans at Risk of Becoming Homeless,” S. 1885 would give grants to providers who have successfully housed veterans in transitional housing programs to incentivize these organizations to convert facilities into locations that provide permanent housing.

To analyze the impact of this program, S. 1885 requires a report be submitted to the Committee’s on Veterans’ Affairs in both the House and Senate no later than June 1, 2019.

S. 1885 requires this report to review the proposed program using four overall assessment areas. NLC encourages a broadening of the information sought within each of these areas.

NLC encourages the review and analysis of this program to also capture de-personalized information regarding any mental health diagnoses of veterans, as well as any assessment regarding their histories of substance use and/or abuse. In collecting this information, it is hoped that a more accurate understanding can be developed about the impact mental health and substance abuse plays in the retention of housing.

In Section 6, “Outreach Relating to Increasing the Amount of Housing Available to Veterans,” S. 1885 directs the Secretaries of VA and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to collaborate with numerous entities in an effort to increase the number of housing units identified and committed for housing homeless veterans.

The recruitment of landlords to join collaborative community efforts to end veteran homelessness is both vital and challenging. Thanks to the Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness, community stakeholders are increasingly partnering with committed local leaders to use their platforms in order to raise public awareness about the need for landlords to be more actively involved in ending veteran homelessness. Successful landlord recruitment events have occurred in cities such as Los Angeles, Seattle, Chicago and Dallas. NLC is currently working with elected officials and community partners in Tucson, Charleston and Omaha to recruit landlords.

NLC recommends that S. 1885 require VA and HUD to separately, but not independently, provide a report to both the House Committee on Veterans’ Affairs and the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee on how they would execute this within their respective organizational structures and with key national partners.

In Section 7, “Establishment of National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans,” S. 1885 directs the Secretary of VA to establish and operate a center which carries out multiple functions, including the integration of “evidence-based and best practices, policies, and programs into programs of the Department for homeless veterans and veterans at risk of homelessness and to ensure that the staff of the Department and community partners can implement such practices, policies, and programs.”

NLC draws the committee’s attention to the latter portion of this direction.

As cities across the country begin to see what the end of veteran homelessness looks like, their ability to ensure this tragedy never returns becomes paramount. For veteran homelessness to be kept rare, brief and non-recurring, cities must be able to work with federal partners and ensure the proper resources are in place. The National Center on Homelessness Among Veterans’ work to aggregate data helps federal and

local officials make decisions about resource allocations allowing all stakeholders to know they *can* maintain their progress.

To allow the National Center to do this critical work, among its other activities, NLC urges the committee to work with Senate colleagues and provide permanent authorization for the center as quickly as possible.

S. 2013

Los Angeles Homeless Veterans Leasing Act of 2015

In January 2015, VA resolved a long-standing conflict with numerous community partners in the Los Angeles area regarding the use of the West Los Angeles Campus.

To ensure and support the execution of the agreement VA entered into, Senators Feinstein and Boxer joined Representative Lieu in sponsoring S. 2013 and filed a letter with the committee in August.

Support for S. 2013 has come from the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, Mayor Eric Garcetti, and Los Angeles Councilmembers Mike Bonin and Bob Blumenfield have also written letters of support, which NLC attaches to this testimony (see NLC testimony appendix A and B).

In addition, Councilmember Bonin has filed a resolution in support of S. 2013 for consideration and approval by the full city council. A copy of the resolution is attached with our testimony and it is expected the resolution will pass when voted upon on October 7 (see NLC testimony appendix C).

Given the high concentration of homeless veterans in Los Angeles and the report from earlier this year that the number of homeless veterans in the city has increased 6% since last year, NLC strongly urges the committee to advance this bill and work closely with colleagues in the House and Senate to have this legislation passed as soon as possible.



MIKE BONIN

City of Los Angeles
Councilmember, Eleventh District

September 25, 2015

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
United States Senate
11111 Santa Monica Blvd., Suite 915
Los Angeles, CA 90025

RE: Support for the *Los Angeles Homeless Veterans Leasing Act of 2015*

Dear Senator Feinstein:

Our streets and sidewalks and alleys are not suitable places for anyone to live - especially those men and women who have served our country in the armed forces. For years, we have collectively fallen short in efforts to house homeless veterans and have seen the problem exacerbate in neighborhoods throughout Los Angeles. We have been in need of both action and leadership, and I am grateful, excited and hopeful to know that you are providing both.

I write today proud to support your bill, the *Los Angeles Homeless Veteran's Leasing Act of 2015*, which would provide supportive housing to veterans at the Department of Veterans Affairs' West Los Angeles Campus. I support your proposal as it allows the VA authority, with strong oversight, to work with local governments and nonprofits to enter into long-term lease agreements to provide supportive housing to veterans on campus. This proposal would enhance the ability of the VA to end veteran homelessness by partnering with the private sector and all levels of government to provide veterans the best care possible in a timely manner. This is the leadership and action we have been waiting for and I sincerely thank you for your efforts.

As you well know, Mayor Eric Garcetti has pledged to end veteran homelessness in the City of Los Angeles by the end of 2015, and thus far, has overseen the housing of more than 4,000 veterans. The 387-acre West LA Campus sits ready to house and provide services to assist our homeless veterans and the time to act is now. Significant work remains to be done and every level of government has a role to play. Thank you again for your leadership on this issue and your continued commitment to those who so bravely served our country.

Regards,

MIKE BONIN

Councilmember, 11th District

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BOB BLUMENFIELD

Councilmember, Third District

September 25, 2015

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
United States Senate
SH-331 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Feinstein:

I applaud your ongoing efforts to address the needs of our nation's veterans and in particular to ensure that the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) West Los Angeles Medical Center provides the highest quality services to veterans. That is why I am writing you to extend my support on your bill, the Los Angeles Homeless Veterans Leasing Act of 2015, to authorize the VA to enter into enhanced-use leases (EUL's) to develop permanent supportive housing, with health, mental health, and related support services on this campus.

For too long we have seen homeless veterans suffering on the streets of Los Angeles. Homelessness has become a crisis in the city for families, children, individuals, and people with mental illness, all of whom deserve a safe place to live rather than making their home on the streets. The needs of those who have served our country can and must be met with dignity, and the West Los Angeles facility has not had the capacity to meet their needs. Allowing EUL's at the location will enable housing and services to be expanded to provide essential services on land that can and should be dedicated to the well-being of veterans.

The Los Angeles City Council has made support of your legislation an official position, following a resolution authored by Councilmember Mike Bonin. I know my colleagues and I stand ready to assist in your efforts to meet the needs of veterans and take advantage of the opportunities presented by this facility. Thank you for your efforts, and please do not hesitate to call on me if I can be of assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bob Blumenfield". The signature is stylized and written in cursive.

BOB BLUMENFIELD
Councilmember
City of Los Angeles

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, any official position of the city of Los Angeles with respect to legislation, rules, regulations or policies proposed to or pending before a local, state or federal government body or agency must have first been adopted in the form of a Resolution by the City Council with concurrence of the Mayor; and

WHEREAS, Mayor Eric Garcetti has pledged to end veteran homelessness in the City of Los Angeles, and has overseen the housing of nearly 4,000 veterans to date; and

WHEREAS, despite significant progress, homelessness in Los Angeles persists, with a recent report by the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority identifying a 6% rise in veteran homelessness; and

WHEREAS, a recent settlement by the Department of Veterans Affairs provides for the development of a Master Plan at their West Los Angeles Campus intended to advance veteran services in Southern California; and


WHEREAS, there is a critical need for long-term supportive housing on the West Los Angeles Campus and enhanced use leases are necessary to allow the Department of Veterans Affairs to work toward the goal of ending veteran homelessness in the City of Los Angeles; and

WHEREAS, federal legislation proposed by United States Senator Dianne Feinstein would authorize leasing authority for the West Los Angeles Campus in order to bring in community partners to provide important services that benefit veterans and help make the campus a veteran-centric community setting; and

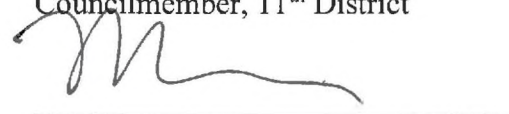
WHEREAS, this legislation would also permit the Department of Veterans Affairs to work with local governments and nonprofits to provide additional housing and services for homeless and disadvantaged veterans at the West Los Angeles Campus;


NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, with the concurrence of the Mayor, that by the adoption of this Resolution, the City of Los Angeles hereby includes in its 2015-16 Federal Legislative Program SUPPORT for Senator Dianne Feinstein's Los Angeles Homeless Veterans Leasing Act of 2015.

PRESENTED BY:


MIKE BONIN
Councilmember, 11th District

SECONDED BY:




AUG 19 2015

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