

POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE UPDATE: HVRP HURDLE FINALLY REMOVED

NCHV and its members make changes in federal law

Since the 113th Congress, NCHV has been pushing a “HVRP handshake” bill, which would make the Department of Labor’s Homeless Veteran Reintegration Program (HVRP) work more seamlessly with the Department of Veterans Affairs homeless programs. That means that we have been working on this bill for five years. NCHV is happy to report that in mid-December, Congress finally passed the bill.

The issue is simple: veterans who are rapidly housed through your excellent work sometimes receive their housing before they can be enrolled in HVRP for job training and placement. In these instances, the veteran no longer meets the statutory definition of “homeless veteran” and therefore is not eligible for the HVRP program. This bill would solve that by changing that definition to include a grace period, as well as specifically allow any veteran in the Housing and Urban Development – Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program or the Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program to qualify.

In a recent congressional press release, NCHV’s CEO Kathryn Monet described the situation like this: “HVRP is the best job training and placement resource we have for homeless veterans. For many years, however, a bureaucratic hurdle has made it impossible for veterans to qualify if they are housed before they can apply for employment assistance. This bill completely removes that hurdle, ensuring that this program is available for any veteran who needs a permanent home and a good job.”

When NCHV first started working on this bill, the language only included HUD-VASH because that’s what you, our members, brought to our attention as the biggest problem. But as the months wore on, it became clear that this problem existed for veterans who were housed outside of government programs as well. So, we added language that created the grace period. Then, before the reintroduction into the 114th Congress in 2015, members made it clear that SSVF also required a specific call-out, so that was added as well.

After failing to pass in the 113th and 114th Congresses due to concerns by Members of Congress about how to pay for the provisions, NCHV is happy to report that with support from four key Members those roadblocks were removed this year. In the House, Representatives Brad Wenstrup (R-OH-2) and Julia Brownley (D-CA-26), and in the Senate, Senators Boozman (R-AR) and Tester (D-MT) were our champions. They introduced two bills with nearly identical language that would solve the problem. Those bills were recently adopted into year-end veterans’ omnibus legislation (S. 2248) and passed through the House and Senate by voice vote and unanimous consent.

NCHV members played two vital roles in solving this bureaucratic hurdle with HVRP: first, you identified the problem in the field and reported it to us here on the policy side of the office, and secondly you helped advocate for it in conversations, emails, phone calls, and meetings with your elected officials and their staffs.

This process – though long and arduous – illustrates exactly why NCHV exists, and also illustrates that we rely on our members for their expertise, input, and participation. Thank you to all of you who helped in any way with this process. We couldn’t have done it without you!

We anticipate that the Department of Labor, who administers this program, will have an announcement soon about how they will roll out this change to policy. NCHV will be weighing in during that process as well. As always, please wait to hear from your federal leadership on the issue before making any changes to your program’s policies.

Get Involved! Shape Policy with the NCHV Advocacy Team

Do you want to share the value of your program with Congress, and help advance the goal of ending veteran homelessness? Do you have the desire, but don’t know where to start? Don’t worry, NCHV is here to help!

Email jstewart@nchv.org to get involved with the NCHV Advocacy Team.