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ACCOUNTABILITY AND ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW

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Accountability and Administrative Review Committee
Veterans Affairs Committee

BACKGROUND
Tuesday, November 19, 2019 at 11 a.m.
District Board Room, Coast Community College District,
1370 Adams Ave., Costa Mesa

Ending Veteran Homelessness in Orange County

Veteran Homelessness in Orange County

The 2019 point-in-time homeless count, which was conducted in January, found 311 homeless veterans in Orange County. Of those, 212 were counted as experiencing unsheltered or street-level homelessness. The remaining 99, who were staying in emergency shelters or transitional housing programs, were considered to be experiencing sheltered homelessness.

The total number of homeless veterans in the County has decreased by just more than 30% from 2015 to 2019. The County, along with local and regional partners, has pledged to end veteran homelessness in Orange County by December 2020.

Assistance for Veterans

Numerous programs exist at the local, state and federal level to support veterans' housing needs. Additional programs provide assistance related to health, education, and transition from the military. Major programs include:

- 1) **The Veterans Housing and Homeless Prevention Program** is a state program that allocates funds for the development of affordable housing for homeless veterans or

veterans with extremely low incomes. Funding of \$600 million for this program was approved by voters in 2014.

- 2) The California Department of Veterans Affairs (CalVet) operates **Veterans Homes of California** (VHC) in Yountville, Barstow, Chula Vista, Fresno, Redding, and Greater Los Angeles, Lancaster, and Ventura County. The VHC are long-term residential care facilities that provide California's aged or disabled veterans with rehabilitative, residential, medical, and support services in a home-like environment. The VHC is budgeted to house about 2,500 veterans this fiscal year.
- 3) **The CalVet Home Loan Program** allows veteran borrowers access to below market interest rates with low or no down payment requirements. It also provides homebuyer information.
- 4) **The California Transition Assistance Program** provides information about veteran benefits and connects veterans to their benefits, including those related to education, employment, entrepreneurship, and service providers.
- 5) **Supportive Services for Veteran Families** is a U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) program that provides services to very low income veteran families, including those who are at risk of becoming homeless. The program provides case management, connection to VA and public benefits, and temporary financial assistance that can be used to prevent homelessness.
- 6) **The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and VA supportive housing program**, known as HUD-VASH, provides vouchers to eligible veterans that can be used in private apartments or, in certain cases, to cover costs to live in housing developments, such as supportive housing built for veterans. The minimum eligibility requirements in Orange County specify that a veteran must be experiencing homelessness, have an income below the 50% Area Median Income, and be eligible for VA health care.
- 7) The VA administers the **GI Bill**, which helps cover education costs, including college, graduate school, and training programs for eligible veterans.
- 8) **The VA Transition Assistance Program** provides support and services for those leaving the military and transitioning to civilian life.
- 9) **The Veterans Health Administration** is the largest integrated health care system in the United States, with 170 VA medical centers and more than 1,000 outpatient sites. The system serves more than 9 million veterans who are enrolled in the VA health care program.

Strategies to End Veteran Homelessness

Orange County has seen a decrease in its homeless veteran population over the last several years. This is in line with decreases across the country. According to HUD, veteran homelessness has been cut in half nationwide since 2010. The HUD Secretary recently credited the HUD-VASH program, which began issuing vouchers in 2008, with much of this progress. The program has helped more than 150,000 formerly homeless veterans nationwide move into housing.

As of September 2019, 73 communities and three states (Connecticut, Delaware, and Virginia) have declared an effective end to veteran homelessness in their areas. Currently, Riverside is the only community in California to achieve this milestone.

The HUD-VASH program uses a housing first model, in which moving a veteran into stable housing is the first priority. After that, support is provided through VA case management that includes health care, mental health treatment, vocational assistance, and job development. Housing first became the policy of the HUD-VASH program in 2012. According to a VA study, this approach has reduced the time to place homeless veterans in housing under the program by 85%, increased housing retention rates, and decreased emergency room use for healthcare.

Best practices include a housing first approach and an emphasis on providing supportive services. In 2017, the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) released 10 strategies to end veteran homelessness that incorporate these concepts. The strategies include:

- 1) Start at the Top: Get state and local leaders to publicly commit to and coordinate efforts on ending veteran homelessness.
- 2) Implement a Housing First System orientation and response.
- 3) Implement a coordinated entry system.
- 4) Set and meet ambitious short- and long-term goals by deploying all resources effectively.
- 5) Improve transitional housing performance and consider adopting different models and/or converting or reallocating resources into supportive housing.
- 6) Engage and support private landlords as partners.
- 7) Identify and be accountable to all veterans experiencing homelessness.
- 8) Conduct coordinated outreach and engagement efforts.
- 9) Increase connections to employment.
- 10) Coordinate with legal services organizations to solve legal needs.

Ending Veteran Homelessness in Orange County

While there has been recent progress in reducing veteran homelessness in the County, work remains. As of October 25, 2019, there were 297 veterans on the veteran registry. Currently, 400 HUD-VASH vouchers are available countywide. If units are available and can be rented to those on the registry, these vouchers could provide support to all already-identified homeless veterans.

A number of efforts are underway across Orange County, including:

- Two veteran supportive housing developments, which are being built by nonprofit developers, are expected to be completed in 2020. Santa Ana Veterans Village with 75 units is scheduled to be completed in March and Placentia Veterans Village with 49 units is scheduled to be completed in August. Rents for these units will be subsidized by vouchers. The number of new units going online represent 43% of the number of homeless veterans on the registry.
- Orange County United Way's landlord incentive program recently received major funding. This program, called "Welcome Home OC" seeks private landlords who are willing to rent to homeless veterans with vouchers. The recently-funded \$2.9 million, secured by Assemblywoman Cottie Petrie-Norris in the 2019-2020 State Budget, will promote landlord participation and provide assistance to homeless veterans as they transition into permanent housing. For example, this could include providing security deposits or other initial fees related to renting a new apartment.

Focus Areas and Questions

- 1) What additional support and coordination is needed to prevent veteran homelessness in the first place and to assist veterans who are currently homeless?
- 2) With the goal to end veteran homeless in the County within a year, what milestones must be met to remain on track? What challenges are anticipated?
- 3) If the goal to end veteran homelessness is reached, how will we ensure that formerly homeless veterans remain housed and receive the support they need?
- 4) How can the state better partner with the federal government to leverage other sources of federal funds to support veterans locally?