

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3005

December 7, 2017

The Honorable David J. Shulkin
Secretary
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
810 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20420

Dear Secretary Shulkin,

As the Ranking Member of the Senate Subcommittee on Housing, Transportation, and Community Development, I write to express serious concerns over plans revealed yesterday to divert \$460 million in funding from the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) voucher program. The Administration's ill-conceived announcement is a cruel departure from longstanding departmental policy that leaves veterans on unstable ground. Although the Department attempted an about-face last night in the wake of public outcry, significant questions remain about this Administration's commitment to housing homeless veterans. As such, I request a clear and unequivocal commitment that the Department of Veterans Affairs will continue providing funding in the amounts and for the purposes instructed by Congress for HUD-VASH case management and supportive services. In addition, please provide detailed information on how the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) plans to meet its statutory obligations to ensure funding for case management and supportive services for veterans that receive HUD-VASH vouchers in fiscal years 2018 and 2019.

HUD-VASH has a proven track record of effectively pairing HUD rental assistance with case management and clinical services provided by the VA. In fact, the successful funding and implementation of the HUD-VASH program contributed to a nearly fifty percent decline in veteran homelessness from 2010 to 2016, along with the effective end of veteran homelessness in Bergen County, New Jersey in August 2016.¹ A study released last month by the Department of Housing and Urban Development confirms the success of the program.² However, soaring rents across the country present persistent challenges to veterans' ability to secure stable and affordable housing. As the HUD-VASH program demonstrates, identifying innovative and effective solutions for the most challenging housing needs requires a coordinated strategy and shared objectives among various federal, state, and local agencies. This is especially critical in light of the recently released HUD 2017 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress. The AHAR reports that New Jersey has seen an increase of 4.8 percent of homeless veterans from last year alone.³

¹ <https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/29697/federal-agencies-announce-veteran-veteran-homelessness-cut-nearly-half-down-47-percent-since-2010-cut-more-than-half-since-2010/>;

http://www.nj.com/bergen/index.ssf/2016/08/why_125_homeless_nj_veterans_now_have_a_place_to_live.html.

² <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/HUD-VASH-Exit-Study.pdf>.

³ <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2017-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>.

As you know, Section 5(a)(1) of the Homeless Veterans Comprehensive Assistance Act of 2001 requires the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs to ensure that every veteran who is provided a housing voucher through the HUD-VASH program is assigned to, and is seen as needed by, a case manager.⁴ If such a diversion or reallocation of funds limits the case management and supportive services such that veterans assigned vouchers do not receive appropriate services, the VA may not be in compliance with statutory requirements. However, it is my hope that you will continue funding case management and supportive services for veterans provided housing vouchers at the appropriate levels not only because it is a statutory mandate, but because it is the right thing to do for our veterans.

Please provide a response no later than December 18, 2017.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert Menendez". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "R" and a stylized "M".

ROBERT MENENDEZ
United States Senator

⁴ 38 U.S.C. § 2003(b).