

Date of Hearing: June 30, 2021

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES
Lisa Calderon, Chair
SB 678 (Rubio) – As Introduced February 19, 2021

SENATE VOTE: 40-0

SUBJECT: Unaccompanied Women Experiencing Homelessness Act of 2021

SUMMARY: Establishes “unaccompanied women” as a sub-population of the state’s homelessness population and requires the Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council (HCFC) to set measurable goals to prevent and end homelessness among unaccompanied women in the state. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Establishes the “Unaccompanied Women Experiencing Homelessness Act of 2021”.
- 2) Makes Legislative findings and declarations related to unaccompanied women experience homelessness.
- 3) Defines “unaccompanied woman” as an individual who identifies as a woman 18 years of age or older who is experiencing homelessness, as defined in the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, who is not accompanied by children or other dependents.
- 4) Adds “unaccompanied women” to several of the goals for the HCFC.
- 5) Requires the HCFC to set and measure progress towards goals to prevent and end homelessness among unaccompanied women in California by setting specific, measurable goals aimed at preventing and ending homelessness among unaccompanied women in the state, as specified; and, defining outcome measures and gathering data related to the goals.
- 6) Requires the HCFC to develop and collect data on county-level and statewide measures, including, but not limited to, the number of unaccompanied women experiencing homelessness in California and their family unit status, race, gender, age, geography, sexual orientation, and whether they have been a victim of domestic violence or intimate partner violence. Further, requires the HCFC to also include this data on unaccompanied women in the Homeless Data Integration System (HDIS), within 90 days of HDIS being operationalized.
- 7) Provides that data collection and sharing among state and county agencies and service providers shall be a condition upon the receipt of any state funding for programs related to homelessness and its prevention. All recipients shall be required to share with the HCFC any relevant data from their Homeless Management Information Systems (HMIS).
- 8) Requires a continuum of care (CoC) to share with the HCFC the results of the homeless point-in-time count submitted to United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) on the Homelessness Data Exchange website.
- 9) Requires the HCFC to seek data from any and all relevant sources, including the HMIS and homeless point-in-time (PIT) counts, if available, in order to meet the requirements of these provisions.

- 10) Requires providers of data to do either of the following:
- a) Redact the names, dates of birth, and addresses of victims of domestic violence prior to reporting data to the council; or,
 - b) Obtain informed consent from a victim of domestic violence and in accordance with all applicable state and federal confidentiality laws, before disclosing confidential information about that individual.
- 11) Requires the HCFC, in order to coordinate a spectrum of funding, policy, and practice efforts related to unaccompanied women experiencing homelessness, to do both of the following:
- a) Coordinate with unaccompanied women experiencing homelessness, the State Department of Social Services (CDSS), other appropriate state and county agencies and departments, the state advisory group, and other stakeholders to inform policy, practices, and programs; and,
 - b) To the extent that funding is made available, provide technical assistance and program development support to increase capacity among new and existing service providers to best meet statewide needs, particularly in areas where services for unaccompanied women experiencing homelessness have not been established, and provide support to service providers in making evidence-informed and data-driven decisions.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes the “United States Interagency Council on Homelessness” to coordinate a federal response to homelessness that involves a nationwide partnership between all levels of government and the private sector (42 United States Code Section 11311).
- 2) Defines, in federal statute, the word “homeless” for the purpose of housing assistance, to mean an individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence. (42 Code of Federal Regulations 91.5)
- 3) Establishes the HCFC to coordinate the state’s response to homelessness by setting measurable goals to prevent and end homelessness, including four that specifically call out youth experiencing homelessness. Also requires HCFC to create a statewide data system or warehouse that collects local data through HMIS. (Welfare and Institutions Code Section [WIC] 8257)
- 4) Requires the HCFC to use Housing First practices in pursuit of its stated goals. (WIC 8255)
- 5) Requires the HCFC to set and measure progress towards goals to prevent and end homelessness among youth in California, as provided. As well as coordinate a spectrum of funding, policy, and practice efforts related to young people experiencing homelessness by coordinating with young people experiencing homelessness, CDSS, and other appropriate state and county agencies and departments and provide technical assistance and program development, as provided. (WIC 8261)

- 6) Defines “Homeless Management Information System” as the information system designated by a CoC to comply with federal reporting requirements, as defined in current federal law. (Health and Safety Code Section 50216(i))

FISCAL EFFECT: According to the Senate Appropriations Committee on May 2, 2021, the HCFC estimates costs of approximately \$375,000 in the first year and \$359,000 annually thereafter from the General Fund for 2.0 person years of staff to set and measure specified progress goals, provide technical assistance, and coordinate funding, policy, and practice efforts specifically targeting homelessness among women.

COMMENTS:

Homelessness in California: In January 2021, HUD released the 2020 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress, which found that on a single night in January 2020, 580,466 people in the United States experienced homelessness. Of those individuals, 161,548 (28%) were in California, and more than half of the nation’s homeless population lived in four states: California (28%), New York (16%), Florida (5%), and Texas (5%). More than half of all unsheltered people (113,660) in the country were living in California in 2020. California also experienced a 6.8% increase in the number of individuals experiencing homelessness between 2019 and 2020.

According to a January 2021 report from the Legislative Analyst’s Office (LAO), “While homelessness is a complex problem with many causes, the high cost of housing in the state is a significant contributor. Rising housing costs that have exceeded growth in wages, particularly for low-income households, put Californians at risk of housing instability and homelessness.” The LAO report also found that Californians spent a larger share of their income on rent than households in the rest of the nation, and around 2.5 million low-income households spent more than 30% of their incomes on housing. Additionally, over 1.5 million low-income renters face even more dire cost pressures and spend more than half of their income on housing.

In recent years, the federal government has moved to a Housing First model, which is an approach to addressing homelessness that prioritizes moving people quickly into permanent, affordable housing without precondition and then providing supportive services in order to prevent people from returning to homelessness. In 2016, SB 1380 (Mitchell), Chapter 847, Statutes of 2016, created the HCFC, which is tasked with coordinating the state’s response to homelessness and implementing Housing First policies throughout the state.

Homelessness among subpopulations: The HUD PIT count identifies specific subpopulations within its data on homelessness, including homeless individuals, homeless families with children, unaccompanied homeless youth, homeless veterans, and chronically homeless individuals. For each population it reports those as sheltered or unsheltered. Of the more than 160,000 Californians experiencing homelessness in the January 2020 PIT count, the largest subpopulation (134,981) were “individuals,” or those who are experiencing homelessness as “households without children.” Of the total population of individuals and households experiencing homelessness, 53,505 identify as female, 105,737 identify as male, 1,601 identify as transgender, and 705 identify as gender non-conforming.

Although the PIT identifies a subpopulation as “individuals,” people within that category may not necessarily be experiencing homelessness alone. HUD categorizes people experiencing homelessness as being families with children (families) or persons without children (individuals).

Therefore, some of the individuals experiencing homelessness could be experiencing homelessness with a partner or other supportive person (but without children).

An October 2019 report by the California Policy Lab found that homeless, unsheltered women reported abuse and/or trauma as the cause of their homelessness at much higher rates (80%) than either unsheltered men (38%) or sheltered women (34%). While unsheltered individuals overall reported average wait times more than six times longer than sheltered people (2,632 days versus 410 days), unsheltered women reported an average of 5,855 days since they were last stably housed.

Los Angeles County recently passed a resolution to recognize unaccompanied women experiencing homelessness as a unique subpopulation with their own specific needs. The resolution, among other things, requires the Los Angeles Housing Authority (LAHSA) to begin collecting information on race, gender, age, geography, sexual orientation, Domestic Violence/Intimate Partner Violence status of unaccompanied women during the annual PIT count and additional HMIS data analysis; instructs LAHSA and the Chief Executive Officer of the Homeless Initiative to report back to the Board with a plan for conducting a countywide women's needs assessment; and, instructed the County's legislative advocates to support State legislative and budget proposals around the needs of unaccompanied women experiencing homelessness.

Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council: SB 1380 (Mitchell), Chapter 847, Statutes of 2016, created HCFC to coordinate the state's response to homelessness by overseeing the implementation of "Housing First" policies, guidelines, and regulations to reduce the prevalence and duration of homelessness in California. Agencies and departments administering state programs relating to homelessness are required to collaborate with HCFC to revise or adopt guidelines and regulations that incorporate core components of Housing First. HCFC is responsible for the administration of \$500 million in Homeless Emergency Aid Program (HEAP) block grant funds, which was created to provide one time funding to enable local governments to respond to homelessness. Those funds have been awarded to 43 CoCs and 11 large cities. Recipients of HEAP funding were required to designate a minimum of 5% of their HEAP allocation to establish or expand services meeting the needs of youth at risk of experiencing homelessness. HCFC is also responsible for the administration of \$950 million (between "Round One" and "Round Two" funding) in Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention (HHAP) funds to assist local governments in addressing homelessness. The HHAP program is a block grant that provides local jurisdictions with funds to support regional coordination and expand or develop local capacity to address their immediate homelessness challenges.

Homeless Management Information Systems & Homeless Data Integration System: At the local level, entities known as CoCs track, coordinate services for, and collect data on the local homeless population. CoCs are also designated to receive federal funding to address homelessness. CoCs are often led by a county or non-profit organization, though in some cases, they are led by a city. A CoC is composed of a number of representatives of organizations that serve individuals facing homelessness, such as nonprofit homeless providers, governments, victim service providers, mental health agencies, affordable housing developers, law enforcement, and hospitals, among others. A key responsibility of a CoC is to designate and operate an HMIS—a local information technology system that is used to collect client-level data related to individuals and families experiencing homelessness—as well as the provision of housing and services to those individuals and families. There are currently 44 CoCs in

California's 58 counties, and in 2019, HUD awarded approximately \$441 million to these entities to plan and coordinate funding for services to address homelessness.

Because the HMIS is composed of each CoC's database, the HCFC recently approved development of the HDIS. According to the Business, Consumer Services and Housing Agency—the state agency in which the HCFC is housed—“The HDIS is a technology solution that allows the State of California to access and compile standardized homelessness data collected by individual CoCs in order to make data-driven policy decisions aimed at preventing and ending homelessness in California. At first, HDIS will collect client information that is already required by HUD, as well as other information common to HMIS implementation. As proposed, after the initial data collection, other State departmental programs, such as CalFresh and CalWORKs could be integrated into HDIS to provide a fuller picture of the interaction between state, local, and federal efforts to address homelessness.”

Need for this bill: National homelessness PIT counts collected for HUD break down categories of people experiencing homelessness. Unaccompanied women, however, are not one of the subpopulations that are categorized. The lack of data therefore makes it difficult to assess the breadth of the problem unaccompanied women experiencing homelessness face and what programs and strategies could be established to address the specific needs of this subpopulation. This bill attempts to fill that gap in research and data for this subpopulation. This bill would require HCFC collect data on unaccompanied women experiencing homelessness, set measurable goals to prevent and end homelessness among unaccompanied women in California, and report these data to HDIS.

According to the author, “[This bill] is an important bill that will make California the first state in the nation to focus on the unique needs of unaccompanied women experiencing homelessness. These single women without children or dependents make up nearly one-third of homeless adults nationwide, and according to federal data, they wait on average over 10 years to access stable housing. Additionally, 80% of this group report trauma or abuse with an intimate partner as the cause of their homelessness. But despite this, there are no statewide programs that focus on their needs and experiences.

“The first step to solving our homeless problem is having accurate data about who is unhoused and what their needs are. [This bill] will require the Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council to collect data about this group from local Continuums of Care, and use this data to help set specific, measurable goals to prevent and end homelessness for this forgotten group of women.”

Double referral: This bill passed out of the Assembly Housing and Community Development Committee on June 22, 2021, with an 8-0 vote.

PRIOR AND RELATED LEGISLATION:

AB 83 (Committee on Budget), Chapter 15, Statutes of 2020, among other things, provided 300 million in grant funding for a Round Two of HHAP program funding

AB 2329 (Chiu) of 2020, would have required the HCFC to perform a homelessness statewide gaps and needs analysis by July 31, 2021. AB 2329 was held on the Assembly Appropriations Committee suspense file.

AB 101 (Committee on Budget), Chapter 159, Statutes of 2019, among other things, created the HHAP Program, requiring the HCFC to distribute \$650 million in funds to assist local governments in addressing homelessness.

SB 850 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review), Chapter 48, Statutes of 2018 allocated \$500 million in HEAP block grant funds, which was created to provide one time funding to enable local governments to respond to homelessness.

SB 1380 (Mitchell), Chapter 847, Statutes of 2016, created “The Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council” in order to implement Housing First policies throughout the state.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Downtown Women's Center (Sponsor)
 AIDS Healthcare Foundation
 Brilliant Corners
 California Catholic Conference
 California Partnership to End Domestic Violence
 California Women's Law Center
 Chrysalis
 Coalition on Homelessness, San Francisco
 Community Human Services
 Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH)
 County of Los Angeles
 County of Los Angeles Board of Supervisors
 Good Shepherd Center
 Honorable Eric Garcetti, Mayor, City of Los Angeles
 Honorable Kevin De Leon, Los Angeles City Councilmember District 14
 Honorable Mark Ridley-Thomas, Los Angeles City Councilmember District 10
 Honorable Nithya Raman, Los Angeles City Councilmember District 4
 Honorable Stephen Whitburn, Council President Pro Tem , City of San Diego
 Housing California
 Hub for Urban Initiatives
 LA Family Housing
 Little Tokyo Service Center
 Los Angeles County Chief Executive Office
 Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority
 Montecito Association
 National Association of Social Workers, California Chapter
 National Association of Women Real Estate Brokerages, - Women in Housing & Real Estate Ecosystem
 Orange County United Way
 PATH
 Peace Over Violence
 Rainbow Services, Ltd.
 REDF
 Safe Place for Youth
 San Diego Housing Federation

Skid Row Housing Trust
Social Model Recovery Systems
SSG/HOPICS
St. Joseph Center
The Midnight Mission
The People Concern
Union Rescue Mission
Union Station Homeless Services
United Way of Greater Los Angeles
Venice Community Housing Corporation
Weingart Center Association
WISEPlace
YWCA Greater Los Angeles

Opposition

California Cities for Local Control

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