

Statement of

Mary Cunningham  
Senior Research Associate  
Metropolitan Housing and Communities Center  
Urban Institute

Regarding H.R. 3073, Homelessness Prevention Program

To

The Committee on Veterans' Affairs  
United States House of Representatives

October 13, 2009

The views expressed are those of the author and should not be attributed to the Urban Institute, its trustees, or its funders.

Chairman Michaud and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for inviting me to share my views on ameliorating the plight of homeless veterans. I am a senior research associate at the Urban Institute, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization in Washington, D.C. Most of my policy research over the past decade has focused on affordable housing programs, particularly Housing Choice vouchers and public housing, and homelessness. I recently wrote a policy brief called “Preventing and Ending Homelessness—Next Steps for Policymakers.”

The committee has invited me to comment on several bills related to homelessness. Given my expertise, my testimony focuses on H.R. 3073, which would establish a grant program to assist veterans at risk of becoming homeless.

There is enormous need for resources to prevent homelessness among veterans. According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness (2007) and the Government Accountability Office (2007), approximately a half million low-income veteran renters have severe housing cost burden (paying more than 50 percent of their income toward rent), leaving them at risk for homelessness. Many of these veterans—though not all—will become homeless, which is why targeting resources to those at imminent risk for eviction, as outlined in the bill, is a sensible policy strategy.

This program could help veterans who are struggling financially stabilize their situation. The bill allows for up to three months of assistance in the form of payments to the “veteran’s landlord, mortgage company, or utility company for amounts of rent or mortgage that are in arrears, security deposits for rental properties, or utility bills or arrears.” Because it may take veterans longer to secure adequate employment or regain their financial footing, I would recommend that the duration of assistance be extended to 6 to 12 months.

The bill allows for rental payments or mortgage payments. Since there is such a large pool of low-income renters at risk and because there are already programs to help veteran homeowners who fall behind on their mortgage, I would recommend that the committee limit the focus of this program to low-income veteran *renters*.

The bill would authorize up to \$100 million for each of fiscal years 2011, 2012, and 2013. I commend the committee for making a commitment to preventing and ending veteran homelessness. This authorized amount, while not sufficient to prevent homelessness among all the men and women who have served in our armed forces, is a good start for initiating a strong homelessness prevention program.

## **Sources**

Government Accountability Office. 2007. "Rental Housing Information on Low-Income Veterans' Housing Conditions and Participation in HUD's Programs." Washington, DC: Government Accountability Office.

National Alliance to End Homelessness. 2007. "Vital Mission: Ending Homelessness among Veterans." Washington, DC: National Alliance to End Homelessness.