
SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Senator Hurtado, Chair
2021 - 2022 Regular

Bill No: SB 678
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Consultant: Marisa Shea
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Fiscal: Yes

Subject: Unaccompanied Women Experiencing Homelessness Act of 2021

SUMMARY

This bill defines “unaccompanied woman” for the purposes of creating unaccompanied women as a sub-population of the state’s homelessness population and requires the Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council (HCFC) to set specific, measurable goals aimed at preventing and ending homelessness among unaccompanied women in the state, among other things.

ABSTRACT

Existing Law:

- 1) Establishes the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness to coordinate a federal response to homelessness and create a national partnership at every level of government and with the private sector to end homelessness. (*42 USC 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, such as:
 - a. A primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including a car, park, abandoned building, bus or train station, airport, or camping ground;
 - b. A supervised publicly or privately operated shelter designated to provide temporary living arrangements (including congregate shelters, transitional housing, and hotels and motels paid for by charitable organizations or by federal, state, or local government programs for low-income individuals); or
 - c. Exiting an institution where he or she resided for 90 days or less and who resided in an emergency shelter or place not meant for human habitation immediately before entering that institution (*42 CFR 91.5*)

- 3) Establishes the HCFC and requires it to set and measure progress toward goals to prevent and end homelessness among youth in California by setting specific, measurable goals aimed at preventing and ending homelessness among youth in the state and defining outcome measures and gathering data related to the goals. (*WIC 8255 et seq.*)
- 4) 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*)
- 5) Under federal law, defines homeless children and youth as individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, and includes children and youth who are sharing the housing of other persons; children and youth who have a primary nighttime residence that is a public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings; children and youth who are living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar settings; and migratory children, as specified, who qualify as homeless because they are living in certain circumstances. (*42 USC 11301 et seq.*)
- 6) Establishes a state advisory group, as specified, in order to identify existing programs dealing with runaway and homeless youth, develop a directory of service providers, and compile statistics on runaway and homeless youth, among other duties and responsibilities (*WIC 1785-1786*)

This Bill:

- 1) Adds unaccompanied women to those whose needs should be considered by the HCFC when they are designing systems to address homelessness.
- 2) Adds the following to the existing goals of the HCFC:
 - a) Setting goals to prevent and end homelessness among California's unaccompanied women;
 - b) Working to improve the safety, health, and welfare of unaccompanied women experiencing homelessness; and
 - c) Leading efforts to coordinate a spectrum of funding, policy, and practice efforts related to unaccompanied women experiencing homelessness.
- 3) Defines "unaccompanied woman" as meaning an individual who identifies as a women 18 years of age or older who is experiencing homelessness, as defined, and who is not accompanied by children or other dependents.
- 4) Makes a variety of findings and declarations related to unaccompanied women experiencing homelessness, the number of unaccompanied women experiencing

homelessness in California, the lack of research on the unique needs of unhoused women, and the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) not including unaccompanied women in their official homeless subpopulations.

- 5) States that it is the intent of the Legislature in enacting the Unaccompanied Women Experiencing Homelessness Act of 2021 to formally recognize the unique needs of unaccompanied women experiencing homelessness, to improve research, prevention, early intervention support services, and to lower barriers to housing, sexual, and mental health resources for all women experiencing homelessness in California.
- 6) Requires the HCFC to set and measure progress towards goals to prevent and end homelessness among unaccompanied women in California by:
 - a) Setting specific, measurable goals aimed at preventing and ending homelessness among unaccompanied women, including but not limited to: measurably decreasing the number of unaccompanied women experiencing homelessness in California, decreasing the duration and frequency of experiences of homelessness among unaccompanied women, decreasing barriers to services and promoting cross-systems partnerships to increase access to services; and
 - b) Defining outcome measures and gathering data related to the goals, as provided.
- 7) Requires the council to seek data from any and all relevant sources, including the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and Point in Time (PIT) counts, and requires the providers of the data to protect the data of victims of domestic violence by either redacting identifying information or obtaining informed consents from the victims before disclosing their confidential information.
- 8) Requires the HCFC to coordinate with unaccompanied women experiencing homelessness, CDSS, other appropriate state and county agencies and departments, and stakeholder to coordinate a spectrum of funding, policy, and practice efforts related to unaccompanied women experiencing homelessness.
- 9) Requires the HCFC to provide technical assistance and program development support to increase capacity among new and existing service providers, particularly in areas where services for unaccompanied women experiencing homelessness have not be established, and provide support providers, to the extent that funding is made available for this purpose.

FISCAL IMPACT

This bill has not yet been heard by a fiscal committee.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION

Purpose of the Bill:

According to the author, “women who are on their own and experiencing homelessness are too often forgotten because there is a lack of specific programs to serve their needs.” The author reports that unaccompanied women make up nearly one-third of homeless adults nationwide, but no state, including California, classifies them as a distinct group. The author goes on to say “many of these women are dealing with trauma, including domestic violence and sexual assault, which contributed to their situation. The first step to solving our state’s homelessness problem is having accurate data about who is unhoused and what their needs are, and I’m proud to author this bill to accomplish that.”

Homelessness in California

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) 2019 Annual Point in Time Count Homelessness Report (Report) found that 151,278 individuals were experiencing homelessness on a single January night in California. The count is conducted by local community Continuums of Care (CoCs) and includes people experiencing homelessness who are “sheltered” – living in temporary shelters – and those who are “unsheltered,” or living out in the open. The PIT is required by HUD as a condition of receiving federal funding. The Report showed that, despite a nationwide decrease in homelessness, California’s numbers increased by 16.4 percent (21,306 individuals) over the prior year. Additionally, the Report found that:

- California has more than half of all unsheltered homeless people in the country, 53 percent or 108,432 individuals.
- Homelessness among California families with children increased by 7 percent or 1,537 more individuals;
- California has the largest number of unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness, 11,993 individuals, accounting for just over one-third of all unaccompanied youth, with the majority, or 9,465 individuals, found to be unsheltered; and
- Just under 30 percent of all veterans experiencing homelessness reside in California, 10,980 individuals, more than half of whom are unsheltered, or 7,719 unsheltered individuals.

While these numbers provide a snapshot of the state’s homeless population during a single night in 2019, they likely underestimate the scope of the crisis because: (1) the HUD PIT count only measures the homeless population on one day of the year, and (2) it does not capture everyone experiencing homelessness, as some do not wish to be counted, while others cannot be counted because their location is not known to the counters.

Homelessness has been correlated with a number of negative effects, including high rates of chronic disease and acute illness, a broad range of mental health and substance use issues, greater exposure to violence, malnutrition, extreme weather, and criminal charges. The health, personal, and economic challenges that chronically homeless individuals and families face and the lack of effective, coordinated services to address these problems often lead to a cycle of housing instability and health deterioration. Persistent homelessness impedes access to needed health and employment services. Additionally, the conditions of homelessness often make it

more difficult to exit homelessness, by creating barriers to the resources necessary to obtaining income through training, education, and employment.

Homelessness Across HUD Recognized Sub-Populations

The HUD PIT count breaks down its data on homelessness to report on the following subpopulations: 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. The chart below summaries California’s 2019 PIT counts by sub-population:

Breakdown of California’s Homeless PIT Count by Sub-Population (January 2019)	
Total People Experiencing Homelessness	151,278
Individuals	128,777
Families with Children	22,501
Unaccompanied Youth	11,993
Veterans	10,980
Chronically Homeless Individuals	41,557

This bill is focusing on women experiencing homelessness as individuals, or women without children experiencing homelessness.

As the above chart shows, in California 128,777 individuals were identified as experiencing homelessness in January 2019. Meaning of California’s estimated 151,278 people experiencing homelessness the vast majority are experiencing homelessness as households without children, i.e. as individuals. HUD further breaks down this PIT count data by gender, revealing that of those 128,777 individuals 37,324 are identified as female, 89,074 are identified as male, 1,751 are identified as transgender, and 628 are identified as gender non-conforming.¹ Although the PIT count categorizes these persons as individuals that is not to say they are experiencing homelessness alone. HUD categorizes people experiencing homelessness as being families with children (families) or persons without children (individuals). Thus, some of these individuals experiencing homelessness could be experiencing homelessness with a partner or other supportive person.

This bill seeks add unaccompanied women to existing law that applies to unaccompanied youth. Among other things, the bill requires HCFC to set goals to prevent and end homelessness, work to improve the safety, health, and welfare; and lead efforts to coordinate funding, policy and practice efforts pertaining to unaccompanied women.

It also proposes to define unaccompanied woman as an individual who identifies as a women 18 years of age or older who is experiencing homelessness and not accompanied by children or other dependents. While HUD collects data on the gender and age of people experiencing homelessness, HUD does not identify adults as unaccompanied or accompanied. Rather, HUD

¹This information can be found in the XLSX spreadsheet entitled 2007-2019 Point-in-Time Estimates by State available for download here: <https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/5948/2019-ahar-part-1-pit-estimates-of-homelessness-in-the-us/>

counts adults experiencing homelessness as individuals or in a family. Under HUD definitions, the term “unaccompanied” only applies to youth.

According to the author, this bill would result in California being the first state to treat unaccompanied women as a specific sub-population of people experiencing homelessness.

At the local level, Los Angeles County recently passed a resolution that recognized unaccompanied women experiencing homelessness as a unique sub-population with their own specific needs.² The resolution went on to: require 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; instructed LAHSA and the Chief Executive Officer Homeless Initiative to report back to the Board within a plan for conducting a countywide women’s needs assessment, including policy recommendations that included cross department collaboration; and instructed the County’s legislative advocates in Sacramento to support State legislative and budget proposals around the needs of unaccompanied women experiencing homelessness; among other things.

Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council (HCFC)

SB 1380 (*Mitchell, Chapter 847, Statutes of 2016*) created the HCFC to coordinate the state’s response to homelessness. The HCFC was created to identify mainstream resources, benefits, and services that can be accessed to prevent and end homelessness in California. Additionally, the HCFC was intended to create partnerships among state agencies and departments, local government agencies, participants in HUD’s CoC program, federal agencies, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, nonprofit agencies working to end homelessness, homeless services providers, and the private sector for purpose of arriving at specific strategies to end homelessness. Additionally, the HCFC, through SB 918 (*Wiener, Chapter 841, Statutes of 2018*), is required to set and measure progress towards goals to prevent and end homelessness among youth in California, as provided.

SB 850 (*Senate Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review, Chapter 48, Statutes of 2018*) allocated \$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. SB 850 made the HCFC responsible for the administration of HEAP funding. Those funds have been awarded to 43 CoCs and 11 large cities. Recipients of HEAP funding were required to designate a minimum of five percent of their HEAP allocation to establish or expand services meeting the needs of youth at risk of experiencing homelessness.

In 2019, AB 101 (*Committee on Budget, Chapter 159, Statutes of 2019*) created the HHAP Program. Requiring the HCFC to distribute \$650 million in funds to assist local governments in addressing homelessness. The HHAP program was initially a one-time block grant that provides local jurisdictions with funds to support regional coordination and expand or develop local capacity to address their immediate homelessness challenges. This funding is now referred to as Round One. In 2020, AB 83 (*Committee on Budget, Chapter 15, Statutes of 2020*) provided 300 million in grant funding for a Round Two of HHAP program funding. A program recipient of

² The full September 29, 2020 motion can be read here: <https://file.lacounty.gov/SDSInter/bos/supdocs/149243.pdf>

HHAP funding is required to use at least 8 percent of the funds for services for homeless youth populations.

Related/Prior Legislation:

SB 234 (Wiener, 2021) would establish the Transition Aged Youth (TAY) Housing program for the purpose of creating housing for TAY under 26 years of age, as defined, and requires the HCFC to award grants, in the form of forgivable deferred loans to local government agencies and nonprofit corporations for the purpose of capital development programs, as specified. This bill is waiting to be heard by the Senate Housing Committee.

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 1845 (Luz Rivas, 2020) would have created the Governor's Office to End Homelessness under the Direction of the Secretary of Homelessness and would have moved the HCFC from the Business Consumer Services and Housing Agency into the Governor's Office to End Homelessness. This bill was vetoed by the Governor.

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 (Senate Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review, Chapter 48, Statutes of 2018) allocated \$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.

SB 918 (Wiener, Chapter 841, Statutes of 2018) established the Homeless Youth Act of 2018 to better serve the state's homeless youth population and required the HCFC to take on additional related responsibilities that are focused on addressing the needs of youth experiencing homelessness.

SB 1380 (Mitchell, Chapter 847, Statutes of 2016) created the HCFC to coordinate the state's response to homelessness, as provided.

POSITIONS

Support:

Aids Healthcare Foundation
 California Catholic Conference
 California Partnership to End Domestic Violence
 California Women's Law Center
 Coalition on Homelessness, San Francisco
 Housing California
 Union Station Homeless Services

Oppose:

None received.

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