

Date of Hearing: August 3, 2022

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Chris Holden, Chair

SB 914 (Rubio) – As Amended May 19, 2022

Policy Committee:	Housing and Community Development	Vote:	8 - 0
	Human Services		7 - 0

Urgency: No      State Mandated Local Program: Yes      Reimbursable: Yes

**SUMMARY:**

This bill establishes the Homeless Equity for Left Behind Populations (HELP) Act and requires cities, counties, and continuums of care (CoCs) receiving state homelessness funding to take specified actions to address the needs of people fleeing domestic violence and unaccompanied homeless women. The bill also requires the Interagency Council on Homelessness (Cal-ICH) to establish goals to prevent and end homelessness among domestic violence survivors, their children, and unaccompanied women.

Specifically, this bill:

- 1) Requires cities, counties, and CoCs that receive state funding on or after January 1, 2023, to:
  - a) Take steps to ensure the needs of victim service providers and survivors of violence and a gendered analysis of the causes and consequences of homelessness, are incorporated into homelessness planning and responses.
  - b) Include families, people fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence, and unaccompanied women within the vulnerable populations for whom specific systems support is developed.
  - c) Ensure analyses and goals are completed following specified guidelines.
- 2) Prohibits victim service providers from being required to enter client-level data into the statewide Homeless Data Integration System (HDIS) or local Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), and instead allows funding that supports these data systems to be used to develop and maintain comparable databases.
- 3) Requires Cal-ICH to set and measure progress toward goals to prevent and end homelessness among domestic violence survivors, their children, and unaccompanied women, as specified. The initial goals must be set by January 1, 2025, and updated every two years,
- 4) 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.

**FISCAL EFFECT:**

- 1) Cal-ICH estimates General Fund (GF) costs of approximately \$328,000 in the first year and \$312,000 annually thereafter, for 2.0 personnel years (PY) of staff to set and measure specified progress goals and provide technical assistance specifically targeting homelessness among survivors of domestic violence, their children, and unaccompanied women.
- 2) Costs to cities and counties of an unknown, but likely significant, amount to coordinate with victim service providers, conduct additional analysis, collect and incorporate data, and take other specified actions to ensure specific supports are developed to address the needs of families, people attempting to flee domestic violence, and unaccompanied women. These costs are potentially reimbursable by the state, subject to a determination by the Commission on State Mandates.
- 3) Additional GF cost pressures, of an unknown amount, to provide additional resources to cities, counties, and CoCs to support development and maintenance of alternate data systems, and to provide additional resources to Cal-ICH for funding for technical assistance to support the development of local programs and plans.

#### COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose.** This bill seeks to address the lack of data and information regarding unaccompanied women experiencing homelessness and those fleeing domestic violence, in order to provide appropriate programs and strategies to address the specific needs of these intersecting subpopulations. According to the author:

Domestic violence is one of the leading drivers of homelessness for women, and unaccompanied women experiencing homelessness wait on average more than 10 years to access stable housing, a rate twice that of men. Despite making up a significant portion of the homeless population, our state's homelessness response does not appropriately consider the needs of these two intersecting groups.

- 2) **Background.** In January 2021, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Annual Point in Time (PIT) Count found, on a single night in January 2020, 161,548 people in California were experiencing homelessness. The majority (134,981) were "individuals," or those who were experiencing homelessness as "households without children." Of those, about 40% (53,505) identified as female. Los Angeles County recently passed a resolution to recognize unaccompanied women experiencing homelessness as a unique sub-population with their own specific needs.

An October 2019 report by the California Policy Lab found homeless, unsheltered women reported abuse 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. In 2019-20, California Office of Emergency Services' Domestic Violence Assistance Program served almost 19,000 individuals in their shelters, but reported nearly 28,000 unmet requests. For domestic violence survivors who recently left abusers, the need for housing is one of the most significant concerns.

- 3) **Cal-ICH.** Existing law establishes Cal-ICH (formerly the Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council), within the Business, Consumer Services, and Housing Agency. Cal-ICH is responsible for coordinating the state's response to homelessness. Cal-ICH is also required to set and measure progress toward goals to prevent and end homelessness among youth in California, as well as coordinate a spectrum of funding, policy and practice efforts related to young people experiencing homelessness. This bill adds domestic violence survivors and their children, and unaccompanied women experiencing homelessness to this required focus.
- 4) **Data Systems.** Cal-ICH is responsible for administering two significant programs dedicated to addressing homelessness—the Homeless Emergency Aid Program (HEAP) and the Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention (HHAP) Program. To access HHAP funding, eligible applicants (CoCs, counties, and eligible cities) are required to submit a Local Homelessness Action Plan demonstrating how HHAP funds and all local dollars for homelessness can reduce the number of people experiencing homelessness.

There are 44 CoCs in California's 58 counties. A Local Homelessness Action Plan is based on data collected by a CoC through its local HMIS—a local information technology system used to collect client-level data related to individuals and families experiencing homelessness. The state's HDIS was developed to compile and process data from all 44 CoC HMIS systems into a statewide data warehouse. Data in these systems is also used to secure federal program funding.

Domestic violence survivors often worry about their abusers trying to find them. Accordingly, data collected from domestic violence survivors is aggregated, and their client-level data is not incorporated into the HMIS. This means their data is also not in the HDIS, which is used by Cal-ICH to plan for future homelessness interventions. As a result, survivors may not be fully considered in the State's homelessness response.

In addition, unaccompanied, homeless women are not required to be tracked under current federal law. However, because of the growing prominence of unaccompanied women in the homeless population, counties like Los Angeles and San Bernardino have recently begun to track this data. In 2020, this data showed there were over 13,500 unaccompanied women in Los Angeles, amounting to 65% of all unhoused women. Around half of this population reported domestic violence or intimate partner violence.

This bill clarifies that victim service providers cannot be expected or required to enter client-level into the HMIS or HDIS systems. Instead, this bill allows funding provided to cities, counties, and CoCs to support HMIS or HDIS to be used to develop and maintain comparable databases outside of these systems. This will allow and assist cities, counties, and CoCs to gather more meaningful data about homelessness among unaccompanied women and domestic violence survivors, while preserving client confidentiality.

- 5) **Related Legislation.** SB 678 (Rubio) was similar to this bill but focused on unaccompanied women only. SB 678 was held on this Committee's suspense file.

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