News Releases

The latest news and announcements from Mayor Lee

Mayor Lee & Leader Pelosi Announce Increased Rental Housing Vouchers for Homeless Veterans Through U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development

Increased Voucher Amounts will Expand Housing Options for Homeless Veterans & Accelerate Placement in Safe Housing in San Francisco

Posted Date: 8/17/2015

Today Mayor Edwin M. Lee and U.S. House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi announced that the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has granted a City request to waive payment standards used to calculate the value of rental vouchers provided to homeless veterans. The waiver in HUD’s Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) program will allow the City to increase the value of rental vouchers provided to San Francisco veterans, so that they have more housing options and will speed the placement of veterans in stable, secure and safe homes in San Francisco.

"Increasing housing vouchers and streamlining the process means we can get our veterans housed faster," said Mayor Lee. "Our work is not done, as we know that every day, more veterans tragically fall into homelessness. But, we are setting up the proper systems to quickly aid our Nation’s heroes who fall on bad times. Working closely with Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi, other Federal partners, local non-profit service providers, the business community and small and large property owners, we will continue to ensure that our veterans who have served honorably and made tremendous sacrifices do not find themselves living on our streets."

"Helping homeless San Francisco veterans move from the streets to stable, secure housing becomes easier with the approval of a higher payment standard for rental vouchers authorized by Secretary Castro," said House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi. "Thanks to this action, Mayor Lee and the local Homes for Heroes Team can offer our veterans more housing choices by leveling the playing field in our competitive rental market."

San Francisco has identified 283 top priority households who have served in the U.S. military, which approximately 200 are eligible for HUD-VASH. These households are chronically homeless and highly vulnerable. In order to meet the President’s Mayoral’s Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness, 92 percent of veterans eligible for the HUD-VASH program must be housed this year.

Increasing the HUD-VASH payment will improve the rate of housing placement in the San Francisco HUD-VASH program, and will also decrease the waiting period for housing for veterans. In San Francisco, chronically homeless veterans are typically single adults seeking Single Room Occupancy (SRO), studio, or one-bedroom units. 2015 data show that the average rent for a one-bedroom apartment is more than $3,000 per month, while the current HUD-VASH payment standard for a one-bedroom apartment is only $1,798. This rate is too low to compete in our local rental market, and serves as a disincentive to landlords to participate in the program. The waiver will increase the voucher amount by allowing SFHA to establish new payment schedules based on a higher percentage of local fair market rents. The new payment schedule will apply to HUD-VASH participants who move into new units on or after October 1, 2015.

"We are extremely grateful to the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), for increasing our HUD-VASH payment standards," said Acting SFHA Executive Director Barbara Smith. "This enhanced Fair Market Value (FMV) will give our veterans looking for housing in San Francisco a far greater likelihood of finding stable, supportive homes in safe neighborhoods, near essential health and social services that veterans need to lead healthy, vibrant lives."

The President’s Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness was launched on June 4, 2014, by a compelling call to action by President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama to end veteran homelessness in their communities by the end of 2015. Ending homelessness among veterans is a national effort that requires the support of a variety of public and private organizations and agencies at all levels of government. The Mayor's Challenge is helping to generate public awareness and attention by increasing learning and information-sharing among stakeholder organizations and communities and by inspiring even greater progress, locally and nationally. The public commitments of mayors are helping to galvanize local efforts and foster more coordination of resources and strategies for the good of homeless veterans.
San Francisco defines ending chronic veteran homelessness as ensuring every homeless veteran who can be located is placed in permanent housing or in temporary housing with an identified permanent housing placement. Since the 2013 homeless count, San Francisco has been home to 607 chronically homeless veterans in need of supportive housing. After signing onto the President’s Mayors Challenge in 2014, the City has made tremendous strides toward achieving the goal. In strong partnership with the San Francisco Veteran’s Medical Center, the City has created hundreds of new supportive housing units dedicated to veterans. To do so, Mayor Lee has prioritized for veterans new and existing HUD Continuum of Care supported units, and helped lead a Citywide collaboration to issue 200 project-based vouchers in the coming year through the HUD-VASH program which combines rental assistance from HUD with case management and clinical services provided by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Since 2014, this includes $3.1 million in local funding and $4.2 million in federally supported HUD-VASH placements. In the FY 2015-16 and 2016-17 budget, Mayor Lee will provide funding to acquire the final new units needed for San Francisco to accomplish its goal of ending chronic homelessness among veterans.

A successful example of the City’s collaborative work to meet this goal is 250 Kearny Street, a property master-leased by the City dedicated to serving homeless veterans. 250 Kearny is an innovative collaboration between the City, HUD, SFVHC, the San Francisco Housing Authority, and Swords to Plowshares, and now provides high-quality housing for an additional 125 formerly homeless veterans in a safe neighborhood.

In May, Mayor Lee announced plans for a new 100-unit project to provide housing for 50 formerly homeless veterans and 50 low-income families at 1150 Third Street in Mission Bay. The project will be built on land dedicated to the City’s Office of Community Investment and Infrastructure for affordable housing and is supported with an initial $5 million in private contributions from technology and business leaders marshalled by the San Francisco Citizens Initiative for Technology & Innovation (sfcit).

While San Francisco is on track to meet the President’s Mayors Challenge, this progress does not signal an end to chronic homelessness among veterans in San Francisco. A relatively small number of chronically homeless veterans might live in the community due to turnover, new arrivals in the City, or wait times for housing placement. However, San Francisco now has the resources and systems in place to provide them with the help that they need once they are identified. Mayor Lee is committed to continuing his work with Federal, regional civic leaders, and local non-profits to ensure that these vulnerable individuals are quickly recognized and transitioned into permanent housing.

More News »