

This bill:

- 1) Explicitly adds “unaccompanied women” to HCFC goals.
- 2) Defines an “unaccompanied woman” as an individual who identifies as a woman 18 years 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.
- 3) Requires the HCFC to set and measure progress toward goals to prevent and end homelessness among unaccompanied women in California by:
 - a) Setting specific, measurable goals, including but not limited to: decreasing the number of unaccompanied women experiencing homelessness; decreasing the duration and frequency of experiences of homelessness among unaccompanied women; and decreasing barriers to services through promoting cross-systems partnerships to expedite access to those services, as specified.
 - b) Defining outcome measures and gathering county-level, state-level, and homeless management information system (HMIS) data related to these goals, as specified, as well as seeking data from any and all relevant sources. Data collection and sharing among state and county agencies and service providers shall be a condition of receiving state homeless funding. All recipients shall be required to share with the HCFC any relevant data from their HMIS systems, and Continuums of Care (CoCs) shall share point-in-time (PIT) count information with the HCFC. Specified information shall be redacted and consent shall be obtained from a victim of domestic violence prior to disclosing confidential information.
- 4) Requires the HCFC to:
 - a) Coordinate with unaccompanied women experiencing homelessness, the state Department of Social Services, other appropriate state and county agencies and departments, the state advisory group on runaway and homeless youth, and other stakeholders to inform policy, practices, and programs.
 - b) Provide technical assistance and program support, to the extent funding is made available, to increase capacity among new and existing service providers to best meet statewide needs and to provide support to service providers in making evidence-informed and data-driven decisions.

COMMENTS

- 1) *Author's statement.* "SB 678 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. SB 678 will require the HCFC 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."

- 2) *Homelessness in California.* According to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development's 2020 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress, in January 2020 California accounted for more than one-fifth of the nation's homeless population (28%, or 161,548 people). California also contains more than half of the nation's unsheltered homeless population (51%, or 113,660 people), including people living in vehicles, abandoned buildings, parks, or on the street. California experienced the largest increase in homelessness in the US, a 6.8% increase over 2019 (10,270 individuals). Los Angeles contains the highest number of homeless people in the nation, at 51,290 (followed by New York City at 36,394). In five major city continuums of care, more than 80% of homeless individuals were unsheltered: San Jose (87%), Los Angeles (84%), Fresno (84%), Oakland (82%), and Long Beach (81%).

While these numbers provide a snapshot of the state's homeless population, they likely underestimate the scope of the crisis because the HUD PIT count only measures the homeless population on one day of the year; moreover, it does not capture everyone experiencing homelessness, as some do not wish to be counted and others cannot be counted because their location is not known to those counting. People experiencing homelessness face a variety of challenges including food and income insecurity, as well as health problems; the homeless population faces a higher risk of exposure to communicable diseases such as COVID-19, influenza, strep throat, sexually transmitted diseases, Hepatitis C, HIV/AIDS, and tuberculosis, among others.

- 3) *Unaccompanied women experiencing homelessness.* The HUD PIT count breaks down its data on homelessness to report on specific sub-populations.

For each population it reports both sheltered and unsheltered individuals. The chart below summarizes California’s 2020 PIT counts by sub-population:

Breakdown of California’s Homeless PIT Count by Sub-Population (January 2020)	
Total People Experiencing Homelessness	161,548
Individuals	134,981
Families with Children	25,777
Unaccompanied Youth	12,172
Veterans	11,401
Chronically Homeless Individuals	48,723

As the chart shows, in California, 161,548 individuals were identified as experiencing homelessness in January 2020. Of these, the majority (134,981) are experiencing homelessness as “households without children,” e.g., individuals. HUD further breaks down the PIT count data by gender, revealing that of the 134,981 individuals experiencing homelessness, roughly 40% (53,505) are identified as female, the majority (78%) are identified as male, about 1% (1,601) are identified as transgender, and less than 1% are (705) are identified as gender non-conforming. Although the PIT count categorizes these persons as individuals, they may not be experiencing homelessness alone. HUD categorizes people experiencing homelessness as families with children (families) or persons without children (individuals). Thus, some of these individuals could be experiencing homelessness with a partner or other supportive person.

This bill proposes to define an “unaccompanied woman” as an individual who identifies as a woman 18 years of age or older who is experiencing homelessness and is not accompanied by children or other dependents. While HUD collects data on the gender and age of people experiencing homelessness, it does not identify adults as unaccompanied or accompanied. Under HUD definitions, the term “unaccompanied” only applies to youth.

- 4) *Why call out unaccompanied women?* An October 2019 report by the California Policy Lab found that 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.¹ Los Angeles County recently passed a resolution to recognize unaccompanied women experiencing homelessness as a unique sub-population with their own specific needs.

¹ Janey Rountree, Nathan Hess, Austin Lyke, *Health Conditions Among Unsheltered Adults in the US* (California Policy Lab, October 2019) <https://www.capolitylab.org/health-conditions-among-unsheltered-adults-in-the-u-s/>.

- 5) *The HCFC*. The HCFC was created in 2017 (SB 1380, Mitchell, Chapter 847, Statutes of 2016) to oversee the implementation of “Housing First” policies, guidelines, and regulations to reduce the prevalence and duration of homelessness in California. Housing First is an evidence-based model that focuses on the idea that homeless individuals should be provided shelter and stability before underlying issues can be successfully addressed. Housing First utilizes a tenant screening process that promotes accepting applicants regardless of their sobriety, use of substances or participation in services. This approach contrasts to the “housing readiness” model where people are required to address predetermined goals before obtaining housing. The federal government has shifted its focus to Housing First over the last decade, and housing programs under HUD utilize core components of this strategy. Since the implementation of the Housing First model, chronic homelessness in the U.S. experienced a 27% decrease between 2010 and 2016. Housing First was embraced by California in 2015 through SB 1380, which requires all state housing programs to adopt this model.
- 6) *Double referral*. This bill passed out of the Human Services Committee on a 5-0 vote on March 23, 2021.

RELATED LEGISLATION:

SB 234 (Wiener, 2021) — creates the Transition Aged Youth (TAY) Housing Program under the HCFC, to provide grants for the development of housing for TAY in the form of forgivable loans, as specified, and allocates \$100 million from the General Fund to the program. *This bill will be heard in the Housing Committee on April 15, 2021.*

FISCAL EFFECT: Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: Yes Local: No

POSITIONS: (Communicated to the committee before noon on Friday, April 9, 2021.)

SUPPORT:

Mayor Eric Garcetti, City of Los Angeles
California Partnership to End Domestic Violence
California Women's Law Center
Coalition on Homelessness, San Francisco
Corporation for Supportive Housing
Los Angeles County Chief Executive Office
Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority

National Association of Social Workers, California Chapter
PATH
Union Station Homeless Services
Venice Community Housing Corporation

OPPOSITION:

None received

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