

Coburn Amendment #1753 – To strike the extended authorization of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homeless Assistance from 2015 to 2020

This amendment would prevent an extended authorization of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homeless Assistance from 2015 to 2020.

- **We have the capacity to end homelessness but must reevaluate the federal response.**
- **Though in existence from 1987, the Council has not addressed the inefficacy of federal programs to target homelessness.**
- **Before being reauthorized, the US Interagency Council on Homelessness needs to evaluate programs and consider consolidation and streamlining to improve response.**
- **GAO has found that there are 8 federal agencies spending almost \$2.9 billion annually on 26 programs targeted to address the various needs of persons experiencing homelessness.**
- **This spending amounts to \$4,400 per homeless person in these programs alone, excluding other means-tested programs that serve the same population.**

Before being reauthorized, the US Interagency Council on Homelessness needs to evaluate programs and consider consolidation and streamlining to improve response.

The Interagency Council consists of 19 departments and agencies, including the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, and Veterans Affairs. In 2010, the Council released the “Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness,” calling for the end of chronic homelessness by 2015. This goal was excellent, and we should strive to end homelessness.

However, we will miss the mark. Chronic homelessness has decreased from 110,917 people in 2009 to 99,894 in 2012.¹ There are still almost 634,000 homeless people in America on any given day.² The number has only decreased by 38,000 in the last five years, or about 6 percent, despite billions of dollars in federal investment.

While the Council's five-year plan encourages "collaborative leadership at all levels of government," we need to go further.³ Collaboration will not be enough to solve this problem. The Council, together with Congress and GAO, need to examine ways to reengineer our response to homelessness after 2015. This response must include evaluating our current programs and identifying opportunities for a consolidated, streamlined, and more effective response.

Until the Council has laid groundwork for these steps, Congress should not reauthorize it for another five years.

Though in existence from 1987, the Council has not addressed the inefficacy of federal programs to target homelessness.

No person in American should be without shelter. Even the worst crises, the nation has shown constant conviction that the poor and vulnerable should be without life's essentials. A safety net has been put together that attempts to meet these needs. Homelessness is a complicated issue. The cycle of poverty in these cases can be extremely hard to break, but the lack of results over the last five years is inexcusable. We could be doing more with less by streamlining these programs.

Unfortunately, Congress's creation of dozens of programs has complicated the federal, state, and local response to homelessness.

¹ FY2014 Congressional Budget Justification for the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness.

² "The State of Homelessness in America 2013," *National Alliance to End Homelessness*, April 8, 2013, <http://www.endhomelessness.org/library/entry/the-state-of-homelessness-2013>.

³ "Opening Doors: Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness 2010," *United States Interagency Council on Homelessness*, <http://www.epaperflip.com/aglaia/viewer.aspx?docid=1dc1e97f828-84912a8932a3502c37c02>.

GAO has found that there are 8 federal agencies spending almost \$2.9 billion annually on 26 programs targeted to address the various needs of persons experiencing homelessness.⁴

This spending amounts to \$4,400 per homeless person in these programs alone, excluding other means-tested programs that serve the same population.

With this amount of resources going to the problem, the nation should be solving it. The problem is eight federal agencies manage this patchwork of 26 homelessness programs: HHS, HUD, the Departments of Education, Justice, Labor, Veterans Affairs, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and the General Services Administration.

Increasing the number of federal activities has actually made navigating the system more difficult for people. Case management – perhaps the most important element of handling homelessness – was one of the most obviously fragmented elements of our homelessness programs, GAO has found.

In interviewing local providers – those closest to the people being served – GAO wrote that “managing multiple applications and reporting requirements was burdensome, difficult, and costly.”⁵ These providers have observed how “persons experiencing homelessness have difficulties navigating services that are fragmented across agencies.”⁶

What is more, we do not even know how effective almost all of the 26 programs targeted to homelessness are. GAO found only 2 of the 26 programs had an evaluation to determine efficiency or effectiveness within the last 5 years.⁷

We have the capacity to end homelessness but must reevaluate the federal response.

⁴ “Homelessness: Fragmentation and Overlap in Programs Highlight the Need to Identify, Assess, and Reduce Inefficiencies,” Government Accountability Office, GAO-12-491.

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