

Date of Hearing: June 22, 2021

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

David Chiu, Chair

SB 678 (Rubio) – As Introduced February 19, 2021

**SENATE VOTE:** 40-0

**SUBJECT:** Unaccompanied Women Experiencing Homelessness Act of 2021

**SUMMARY:** Defines “unaccompanied women” as a sub-category of the state’s homeless population, and requires the Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council (HCFC) to establish measurable goals to prevent and end homelessness among unaccompanied women. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Defines “an 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 (42 U.S.C. Sec. 11302), who is not accompanied by children or other dependents.
- 2) Makes several findings related to the rate of homelessness among unaccompanied women in California, and declares the Legislature’s intent to recognize and address the unique needs of this sub-population of the state’s homeless population.
- 3) Establishes the *Unaccompanied Women Experiencing Homelessness Act of 2021* to do the following:
  - a) Requires the HCFC to measure progress towards preventing and ending homelessness among unaccompanied women by decreasing the number experiencing homelessness; decreasing the duration and frequency of homelessness among unaccompanied women; and decreasing barriers to services for unaccompanied women.
  - b) Requires the HCFC to develop and collect data at a county and state level on unaccompanied women experiencing homelessness as specified, and to include this data in the state’s Homeless Data Integration System (HDIS).
  - c) Requires the HCFC to seek data from all relevant sources, including local Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) and homeless point-in-time (PIT) counts, and make data collection and sharing among county agencies and service providers a condition of funding for homelessness-related programs.
  - d) Clarifies that data collection and sharing would be done in compliance with privacy and confidentiality laws, such as redacting the names of domestic violence victims.
  - e) Requires HCFC to do the following to coordinate funding, policy, and programs for unaccompanied women experiencing homelessness:
    - i. Coordinate with the State Department of Social Services (DSS), and other relevant agencies, departments, and stakeholders; and

- ii. Provide technical assistance and support, to the extent funding is available, to programs that exist or are being developed to provide data-driven services to this sub-population.

**EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) Establishes the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness to coordinate a federal response to homelessness that involves a nationwide partnership between all levels of government and the private sector (*Federal 42 USC 11311*).
- 2) Establishes the HCFC to coordinate the state's response to homelessness by setting measurable goals to prevent and end homelessness, including five that specifically call out youth experiencing homelessness. Requires the HCFC to use Housing First practices in pursuit of its stated goals (*Welfare and Institutions Code 8255*).
- 3) 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. (*Welfare and Institutions Code 8261*)
- 4) Defines "Housing First" to mean the evidence-based model that focuses on providing or connecting homeless people to permanent housing as quickly as possible. Housing First providers are those that offer services as necessary or as requested, and that do not make housing contingent on participation in services (*Welfare and Institutions Code 8255*).
- 5) Requires any agency or department that administers a state housing program created on or after July 1, 2017 to incorporate the core components of Housing First (*Welfare and Institutions Code 8256*).
- 6) Establishes the Homeless Emergency Aid Program (HEAP) block grant funds to provide one-time funding to local governments to address their homelessness challenges, and makes HCFC responsible for the administration of HEAP funding. Requires recipients of HEAP funding to designate at least five percent of their HEAP allocation to services geared toward youth at risk of homelessness (*Health and Safety Code 50211*).
- 7) Establishes the Homeless Housing Assistance and Prevention Program (HHAPP) to build on HEAP by providing additional funds to local jurisdictions to combat homelessness. Initially a one-time block grant program, HHAPP was funded again through a second round of grant funding. HHAPP is also administered by the HCFC, and requires grant recipients to dedicate at least 8 percent of funds to homeless youth services (*Health and Safety Code 50217*).

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Unknown**COMMENTS:**

**Author’s statement:** According to the author, “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 Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council 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.”

**Homelessness in California:** The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) releases an Annual Homeless Assessment Report, which provides a snapshot of the nation’s homelessness landscape by measuring the homeless population on one day in a given year. According to this report, in January 2020, California accounted for almost one-third of the nation’s homeless population, with 28 percent of the country’s homeless population, or 161,548 people. California is also home to 51 percent of the nation’s unsheltered homeless population (113,660 people), which refers to those living out in the open as opposed to within a homeless shelter. California experienced the largest increase in homelessness in the US, a 6.8 percent increase over 2019 (10,270 individuals). Los Angeles is home to 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 across California, more than 80 percent of homeless individuals were unsheltered: San Jose (87%), Los Angeles (84%), Fresno (84%), Oakland (82%), and Long Beach (81%).

These numbers, while a useful benchmark, likely underestimate the scope of California’s homelessness crisis given that the data is collected at one point in time, and that individuals may choose not to be counted, or may not be present during this counting process. People experiencing homelessness face a variety of challenges including food and income insecurity, as well as health problems. Additionally, the conditions of homelessness often compound the difficulty of exiting homelessness, by creating barriers to resources for obtaining income through training, education, and employment.

**Homelessness among recognized sub-populations:** The HUD PIT count categorizes data on homelessness by specific sub-populations. For each sub-population, it reports whether an individual is sheltered or unsheltered. This chart summarizes California’s 2020 PIT data:

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

Of the 160,000 plus Californians experiencing homelessness, the majority (134,981) are “individuals,” or those who are experiencing homelessness as “households without children.” A review of the data by gender reveals that of the 134,981 *individuals* experiencing homelessness, about 40 percent (53,505) identify as female.

***Considering the category of unaccompanied women:*** An October 2019 report by the California Policy Lab found that homeless, 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.<sup>1</sup> Los Angeles County recently passed a resolution to recognize unaccompanied women experiencing homelessness as a unique sub-population with their own specific needs.

***State Homelessness Data Integration System (HDIS):*** Continuums of Care (CoCs) are collaborate entities consisting of nonprofit organizations, local governments, and public housing agencies, designated to receive federal funding to address homelessness. CoCs manage HMIS, local information technology systems used to collect client-level data and data on the provision of housing and services to homeless individuals and families and persons at risk of homelessness. Each CoC is responsible for selecting an HMIS software solution that complies with HUD's data collection, management, and reporting standards. The HCFC has launched a state HDIS system that captures the data from local HMIS. All 44 CoCs in the state have entered into contracts to provide their HMIS data to the HCFC. HDIS is intended to give the state a more accurate picture of the local homelessness response system and inform the state's response to homelessness.

Because HUD does not break down the category of “individuals” to identify whether an individual is experiencing homelessness alone or with a partner or other supportive person, we have limited insight into the rate at which unaccompanied women experience homelessness. Given the absence of a specific sub-categorization for unaccompanied women in the PIT count, local governments and organizations may not consistently collect data on this population in their local HMIS. This could pose a challenge to the requirement in this bill that the HCFC evaluate data related to this population in the state's HDIS.

***HCFC:*** The HCFC was established by SB 1380 (Mitchell) in 2017 to coordinate the state's homelessness response by implementing “Housing First” policies to reduce and prevent homelessness. HCFC was tasked with establishing public and private partnerships across the state to develop and implement strategies to meet its stated goals. The Housing First model favors accepting applicants without consideration of their sobriety or participation in services that might accompany the housing, representing a contrast from “housing readiness” approaches that hold tenants accountable for meeting specified goals as a condition of their housing. Following a federal shift towards Housing First policy in the last decade, chronic homelessness in the U.S. decreased by 27 percent from 2010 to 2016.

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

***Comprehensive homelessness strategy:*** This bill proposes a strategy to address the needs of a unique sub-population of homeless Californians. While a step in the right direction, it is important to consider what a broader state strategy to address our homelessness crisis might look like. Several bills this year including, AB 1575 (Committee on Housing and Community Development), AB 71 (L Rivas) and AB 816 would task the HCFC to conduct or contract an entity to conduct a statewide gaps and needs analysis of our homelessness crisis. The Governor's May Revise builds on this concept by proposing a homelessness landscape. Both recent efforts represent steps toward forming a stronger understanding of our state's homelessness challenges, and how best to shape policy to address those issues. Both the Legislative Analyst's office and the State Auditor have identified the need for a comprehensive strategy at the state level to address homelessness.

Other states have succeeded in significantly reducing homelessness through state investment in targeted, effective interventions. For example, reductions in homelessness in large states like New Jersey and Michigan, which reduced homelessness by 49 percent and 70 percent, respectively, were preceded by comprehensive state strategies and funding to reduce homelessness. Federal and state funding for ongoing, comprehensive, evidence-based strategies to house veterans experiencing homelessness reduced homelessness among veterans by 50 percent over the last 10 years. Homelessness among veterans decreased by 40 percent in California, even while homelessness among other populations increased. Moreover, 30 years of studies shows providing people experiencing homelessness with housing and services not only reduces homelessness, it decreases public costs of hospital and nursing home admissions, recidivism to jails and prisons, and foster care placement.

***Double referral:*** This bill was also referred to the Assembly Human Services Committee, where it will be heard should it pass out of this committee.

***Arguments in Support:*** According to the Downtown Women's Center, the sponsors of this bill, "SB 678 is essential to combating women's homelessness in that for the first time ever, California will be collecting robust county and statewide data on a subpopulation that has been largely invisible to both policy makers and service providers. This data, collected by the Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council ("HCFC") in accordance with state and federal privacy and confidentiality laws and incorporated into the state's Homeless Data Integration, will serve as the foundation by which the HCFC will set specific and measurable goals aimed at preventing and ending homelessness among unaccompanied women."

***Arguments in Opposition:*** No opposition recorded.

***Related Legislation:***

AB 101 (Committee on Budget, Chapter 159, Statutes of 2019): Created the HHAP Program, which requires the HCFC to distribute \$650 million to assist local governments in addressing homelessness. *Chaptered.*

AB 1575 (Committee on Housing and Community Development): Would have tasked the HCFC with overseeing a statewide gaps and needs analysis regarding California's homelessness landscape. *This bill was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.*

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.*

SB 234 (Wiener, 2021): Would have established the Transition Aged Youth (TAY) Housing Program under the HCFC to provide grants for the development of TAY-focused housing in the form of forgivable loans, as specified, and allocate \$100 million from the General Fund to the program. *This bill was ordered to the Senate Inactive File at the request of the author*

SB 918 (Wiener, Chapter 841, Statutes of 2018): Established the Homeless Youth Act of 2018 to better serve youth experiencing homelessness, and required the HCFC to take on additional related responsibilities that focus on addressing the needs of youth experiencing homelessness. *Chaptered.*

## **REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

### **Support**

Downtown Women's Center (Sponsor)  
 Aids Healthcare Foundation  
 Brilliant Corners  
 California Catholic Conference  
 California Partnership to End Domestic Violence  
 California Women's Law Center  
 Chrysalis  
 Coalition on Homelessness, San Francisco  
 Community Human Services  
 Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH)  
 Good Shepherd Center  
 Housing California  
 Hub for Urban Initiatives  
 Kevin De Leon, Los Angeles City Councilmember District 14  
 LA Family Housing  
 Little Tokyo Service Center  
 Los Angeles County  
 Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority  
 Mark Ridley-Thomas, Los Angeles City Councilmember District 10  
 Mayor Eric Garcetti, City of Los Angeles  
 Montecito Association  
 National Association of Social Workers, California Chapter  
 National Association of Women REO Brokerages, -Women in Housing & Real Estate Ecosystem  
 Nithya Raman, Los Angeles City Councilmember District 4  
 Orange County United Way  
 PATH  
 Peace Over Violence  
 Rainbow Services

REDF

Safe Place for Youth

San Diego Housing Federation

Skid Row Housing Trust

Social Model Recovery Systems

SSG/HOPICS

St. Joseph Center

Stephen Whitburn, Council President Pro Tem, City of San Diego

The Midnight Mission

The People Concern

Union Rescue Mission

Union Station Homeless Services

United Way of Greater Los Angeles

Venice Community Housing Corporation

Weingart Center Association

WISEPlace

YWCA Greater Los Angeles

**Opposition**

None on file.

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