

S. 1547, the Zero Tolerance for Veterans Homelessness Act of 2009
(Introduced by Senators Reed (D-RI), Bond (R-MO), Murray (D-WA), Johnson (D-SD), Kerry (D-MA),
Durbin (D-IL))

The Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) estimates that more than 200,000 veterans experience homelessness each year. Veterans are particularly at risk of becoming homeless, and effectively meeting their needs requires a comprehensive approach. Below is a summary of the key provisions in S. 1547.

The Zero Tolerance for Veterans Homelessness Act expands the HUD-VA Supportive Housing (VASH) Program. Participating veterans receive housing vouchers, as well as case management services, including assistance locating housing and accessing benefits and health services. The bill would allow up to 30,000 vouchers in fiscal year 2010 and authorize the phase-in of up to 60,000 vouchers by 2013.

The legislation also authorizes \$260 million in fiscal year 2010 to:

- ***Institute Flexible Funding for Preventing Veterans Homelessness***
The bill would enable the VA to provide: short-term rental assistance, housing relocation and stabilization, security deposits, utility payments, and costs associated with moving. Similar rapid re-housing initiatives in various communities have been successful in providing stable, supportive housing for homeless or at-risk individuals.
- ***Allow Mixed Financing for Capital Projects***
The bill would make it easier for applicants to use both public and private financing to build supportive housing through the VA's Grant and Per Diem program.
- ***Better align health care services payment with actual costs***
The bill would require the VA Secretary to study the method used to determine payments for supportive services providers, develop an improved method for adequately reimbursing providers, and make recommendations to Congress.
- ***Create a Special Assistant for Veterans' Affairs within HUD***
The Special Assistant for Veterans Affairs within HUD would ensure that veterans have access to HUD's housing and homelessness assistance programs and also serve as a liaison with the VA.
- ***Provide for Better Data Collection on the Extent of Veterans Homelessness***
The VA, HUD, and the Interagency Council on Homelessness would be required to establish a method for accurately tracking the number of homeless veterans nationwide and the type of assistance received.
- ***Require a Comprehensive Plan for Ending Veterans Homelessness***
The VA Secretary would be required to develop a comprehensive plan for ending veterans homelessness within one year of the bill's enactment.

Current Status:

S. 1547 was introduced in July and referred to the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, which reviewed the legislation with a hearing in October 2009. In January 2010, the committee included language from S. 1547 in a comprehensive veterans homelessness bill, S. 1237, the "Homeless Veterans and Other Health Care Authorities Act of 2010." The committee passed S. 1237 but has not yet made a report available with the details of the legislation. Senators are urged to move S. 1237—including S. 1547 in its entirety—quickly to the Senate floor vote. There is not yet a companion bill in the House.