

United States House of Representatives
Committee on Financial Services
Washington, D.C. 20515

February 23, 2018

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G St, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

I am writing to request a comprehensive GAO study on the state of homelessness in America. Since the launch of *Opening Doors*, the nation's first strategy to prevent and end homelessness, we have made some progress toward our national goals. However, progress has been uneven across the country, across sub-populations, and has virtually stalled in the absence of new funding. In fact, according to the 2017 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress, homelessness increased for the first time in seven years, with over 553,000 people experiencing homelessness in the United States on a single night in January 2017.¹ In particular, estimates from this report indicate significant increases in homelessness in certain communities, including coastal communities and large cities like Los Angeles, New York, Seattle, and Portland. Further, the data document varied progress in ending homelessness for certain populations, with a slight decrease for families with children, but virtually stalled progress for veterans, as well as people who are experiencing chronic homelessness. These results appear to have been impacted significantly by limited supply and increasing rents in many large urban areas across the country.

In order to better equip us in our efforts to prevent and end homelessness in this country, I request that GAO conduct a review of the current state of homelessness in America, including both the progress made and challenges we still face in ending homelessness. Specifically, I request that your review respond to the following questions.

- 1) What is known about the factors influencing an increase in homelessness in certain locations, including increases we are seeing in coastal cities like Los Angeles?
- 2) What policies and tools, including funding levels for homeless assistance programs, need to be in place in order to ensure federal homelessness programs across the federal agencies are as effective as possible?
- 3) How are we currently meeting the needs of key sub-populations, including veterans, families with children, youth, adult individuals, individuals with substance abuse disorders, and the chronically homeless? What are considered to be the promising practices for reducing homelessness and serving their needs?

¹ 2017 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress (December 2017). U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Office of Community Planning and Development. Accessed at: <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2017-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>

- 4) What methods are used to determine the current numbers of people experiencing homelessness in the United States? Do existing methods provide insight into any significant trends over time, and what additional information, if any, should communities have in order to make progress?
- 5) How is the limited supply of affordable housing and increasing rents impacting homelessness in the United States? To what extent could funding levels for housing programs or housing policies be changed to address the dynamic of both inflow into homelessness as well as how to get people out of homelessness and into affordable housing?
- 6) What is known about federal homelessness programs' ability to leverage non-federal resources?

Thank you for your cooperation and attention in this matter. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact my staff, Theresa Dumais at Theresa.dumais@mail.house.gov or 202-225-4247.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maxine Waters". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

MAXINE WATERS
Ranking Member