

NATIONAL LAW CENTER ON HOMELESSNESS & POVERTY

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*Affiliations for identification
purposes only*

February 10, 2016

The Honorable William F. Shuster
Chairman
Committee on Transportation
and Infrastructure
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Jason E. Chaffetz
Chairman
Committee on Oversight
and Government Reform
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Shuster, Chairman Chaffetz, Ranking Member DeFazio and Ranking Member Cummings:

The National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty (the "Law Center") is pleased to support the Federal Assets Sale and Transfer Act of 2016 because it contains important provisions that will strengthen Title V of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. We appreciate your willingness to work with us to preserve and enhance Title V for the benefit of the homeless population as you consider changes to federal property disposal law.

Signed by President Ronald Reagan in 1987, Title V requires federal agencies to report excess, surplus, unutilized, or underutilized government property and provides homeless assistance organizations with a right of first refusal to acquire the excess property to provide housing and other services to the homeless. Title V has enabled service providers and local government agencies to acquire and use surplus property to provide meals, shelter, job training, childcare, medical care, substance abuse and mental health treatment for homeless Americans throughout the country. More than 2.4 million Americans receive assistance each year through the nearly 500 federal properties transferred since the law's inception.

The Honorable Peter A. DeFazio
Ranking Member
Committee on Transportation
and Infrastructure
United States House of
Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Elijah E. Cummings
Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight
and Government Reform
United States House of
Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Title V is not perfect. Accessing property through Title V involves a lengthy and burdensome application process involving two separate federal agencies—the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)—that often results in rejection of even meritorious applications. The Law Center has worked with Congress, HUD and other federal agencies, and sometimes through the courts, to ensure that properties are efficiently and effectively made available to assist the homeless.

First, the bill streamlines the Title V application process in a manner that will make it more efficient both for providers to apply for properties they will use and for the government to dispose of properties that are unsuitable for homeless assistance. Second, the legislation gives successful Title V applicants important flexibility in determining whether to take the property by deed or lease. Finally, the bill clarifies that permanent housing, with or without supportive services, is an eligible use of property acquired through Title V. While permanent housing with supportive services is an important solution to the problem of chronic homelessness, many homeless people with no substance abuse problems—such as violence victims—simply need housing for longer than local shelters can provide, but do not require supportive services.

We at the Law Center believe that all human beings have the right to a basic standard of living that includes safe, affordable housing, health care, and freedom from discrimination and cruelty. We envision a world where no one lacks these basic human needs. We enthusiastically support the changes to Title V contained in the legislation. We will also continue to seek improvements to the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act and other vital homeless assistance programs as we pursue our vision. We look forward to continuing to work with you to balance the goal of efficient federal property disposal with the legal and moral imperative to fight to eradicate homelessness and poverty in the United States.

Sincerely,



Maria Foscarinis
Founder & Executive Director

cc: Members of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure
Members of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform