

San Bernardino County looks to end veteran homelessness

By Joe Nelson , The Sun

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The San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday unanimously approved a recommendation by one of the nation's top experts on homelessness to implement a strategy to place the county's 401 homeless veterans into permanent housing.

The strategy, suggested by Philip Mangano, president and CEO of the American Round Table to Abolish Homelessness and the former executive director of the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness under former President George W. Bush, entails the formation of a strategy group composed of nine local agencies or county offices including the county CEO, Sheriff's Department, Department of Behavioral Health and Housing Authority.

Working in conjunction with the Homeless Veterans Community Planning Group, which formed in November at the VA Medical Center in Loma Linda, the group would examine the scope of the homeless veteran problem in the county, establish benchmarks to accomplish its mission, and identify the resources needed to accomplish the mission.

Supervisor Josie Gonzales said Tuesday's board action to end veteran homelessness in the county was unprecedented.

"I say today is an important day in the history of San Bernardino County," Gonzales said.

In her 11 years as a supervisor, Gonzales said she had never seen such collaboration to tackle an issue of such local and national importance.

"Homelessness is being called upon today to be abolished."

She said it was just the first step of a much taller ladder the county must climb as it continues in its efforts to provide housing for all the county's homeless.

"The tiny steps, cumulatively, will become a giant leap," Gonzales said. "I am so proud today,"

Tom Hernandez, homeless services manager for the county, and Daniel Nackerman, executive director for the county Housing Authority, gave Power Point presentations and statistics on the state of homelessness in the county.

From 2011 to 2013, the homeless population declined by 18 percent in the county, and it decreased by 8 percent from 2013 to 2015. Most of the county's homeless are clustered in the cities of San Bernardino, Victorville, Upland, Yucca Valley, Ontario and Barstow, Hernandez said.

Nackerman said the Housing Authority is the primary provider of permanent housing for the homeless or at risk of being homeless, and is prepared for the challenge of placing homeless persons in permanent housing.

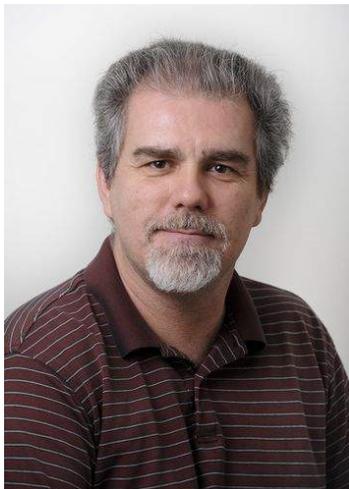
Since the formation of the Homeless Veterans Community Planning Group took off in November, 91 homeless veterans have been placed in housing, said Laurie Martell of the VA Medical Center in Loma Linda.

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In January, more than 400 volunteers fanned out across the county for the biennial point-in-time homeless count, the results of which were released in April in a 115-page report. The report concluded that the county's homeless population decreased by 8 percent since 2013, and that among the 1,302 counted homeless people living on the streets of San Bernardino County, there were 25 families with 58 children.

Board of Supervisors Chairman James Ramos said during Tuesday's board meeting that addressing the homeless veteran issue is merely a part of the much bigger homeless picture.

"We know that homelessness is a much larger issues," said Ramos. "If we're able to cross the finish line with this, there's so much more we can accomplish in other areas."



Joe Nelson

Joe Nelson covers San Bernardino County for The Sun, Daily Bulletin and Redlands Daily Facts. Reach the author at joe.nelson@langnews.com or follow Joe on Twitter: [@sbcountynow](https://twitter.com/sbcountynow).

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