

# JIMMY FREMGEN

## Democrat for Congress

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CA-07

### THE HOMELESSNESS CRISIS: LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

Every night, more than 580,000 individuals across the country experience homelessness, including at least 11,000 of our Sacramento County neighbors. Sacramento homelessness advocates predict that as a result of the COVID-19 Pandemic, this number may soon top 20,000 in our region. The number of individuals facing homelessness has grown in each of the last four years. This number will continue to rise unless we take decisive action to identify and address the failures of our current systems and work to build better ones for the future.

As a teacher who works with unhoused students and as a person who continues to struggle to find affordable housing, I understand the challenges of finding stable and affordable housing in our communities. By pinpointing inefficiencies, integrating more effective case management, and investing in each other, we can create a safer, healthier, and more equitable 7<sup>th</sup> Congressional District.

My major priorities upon entering office will be:

- Investigating inefficiencies, government waste, and abuse in our homelessness response
- Establish a local advisory council to inform my policy work on homelessness in Washington
- Build more housing and incentivise redevelopment to supportive housing communities
- Eliminate veteran homelessness by more effectively delivering services to this population
- Create a G.I. Bill for housing, to make sure that no veteran ever has to sleep outside again
- Support the creation of an integrated case management system

Here's how we can start this effort:

### INVESTIGATING INEFFICIENCIES & ENSURING POLICIES WORK AS INTENDED

Over 30 federal programs – as well as countless state, local, and private sector initiatives – currently exist to increase access to affordable housing and address homelessness. Despite the billions of dollars invested annually, these existing programs are failing to achieve their goals.

From the moment I take office, I will leverage the skills I honed while working as an investigator for the House Committee on Oversight and Reform. I will:

- Demand stronger oversight of our national housing policy by asking tough questions of agency leadership at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and others as necessary;
- Convene panels of city and state officials, local stakeholders, and others to determine major pain points in current federal homelessness policy;
- Immediately become involved in the Congressional Caucus on Homelessness;
- Launch a congressional investigation into gaps, duplication, and waste in our homelessness response; and

- Establish a CD-07 Congressional Homelessness Advisory Council to inform my policy work and ensure my legislative activity is based on issues affecting our district in real time.

Using this information, we can create a more detailed portrait of our investments so that we can root out areas of administrative waste, end inefficient initiatives, and learn how to more effectively allocate our resources.

## REINVESTING IN PEOPLE AND PLACES

Ultimately, creating the most effective approach to homelessness means investing in the wellbeing of our neighbors and our communities.

### *Build More Housing*

There is no way around it, Homelessness is being perpetuated by a lack of housing stock. In the 1930's-1970's the federal government built millions of units of housing, primarily aimed at working and middle class families. In the 1970's policy changed, leading to a process that relied on housing vouchers and expecting renters to identify their own housing in the existing market. In our modern era, families struggle to find a home that they can live in that will take their voucher, much less a home that they *want* to live in. According to the *Sacramento Bee*, Sacramento has the highest number of families living outdoors anywhere in the nation, second only to Long Beach, CA. In working in the community, I have met a number of these families, many of whom are on waiting lists more than two years long to use the vouchers they have been issued for housing.

In 1999, Congress passed the Faircloth Amendment, which requires that for every new single unit of public housing, another must be destroyed or sold to a private party. I support eliminating the Faircloth Amendment and removing the unnecessary hurdles and delays that discourage the development of affordable housing. Once elected to Congress, I will work to make sure that the federal government again gets into the business of creating good paying domestic jobs at the same time that we are housing the most vulnerable amongst us. This will drive economic development in communities across the nation, provide stability to those wavering in and out of homelessness, and provide job skills and workforce training that will benefit our country for a generation.

### *Opening Doors: Unlocking the Potential of Existing Infrastructure and Housing*

In Sacramento, we can have the infrastructure to be able to safely house everyone in our community if we reimagine our use of existing resources. At all levels of government, we should incentivize the rezoning and redevelopment of vacant properties for affordable housing. We can do this by increasing available tax credits and by bolstering federal grant support for such renovations.

I will also direct the Federal Housing Administration to study the feasibility of extending homeownership programs to include manufactured and "tiny" homes. This will decrease the barrier of entry to long term housing and increase personal buy-in for individuals and families working to build financial stability and personal security. I will work with local jurisdictions to identify federal funding sources to purchase or rezone land for the creation of these supportive housing communities.

## ENSURING OUR HOUSING POLICIES SERVE THOSE WHO SERVED OUR NATION

Those who serve our country should never have to sleep on the street. According to data from HUD, approximately 80,000 veterans – including approximately 500 in Sacramento County alone – experience homelessness each year. This is a problem with a solution, we can take action to fix this.

As a result of their service, veterans are entitled to certain federal benefits, including health care for service-connected conditions through the VA and educational benefits under the G.I. Bill. Unfortunately, we have yet to guarantee our veterans housing. My plan would change that.

Since its inception in 1944, the G.I. Bill has helped more than 25 million veterans and their families access an affordable education. Building on this success, in my first term, I will introduce a Housing G.I. Bill to help veterans access affordable housing. My Housing G.I. Bill will create a program within the VA to provide housing vouchers and other support to low-income veterans, leveraging the VA's existing information, expertise, and points of contact with veterans and their families. This will help increase knowledge of the program within the veteran population and ensure those who have interacted with the VA for healthcare, education, employment, or other purposes can be automatically connected to the program's benefits. Moreover, it will relieve unnecessary administrative and information technology sharing burdens that would exist if the program were housed at another federal agency.

Currently, HUD administers the HUD-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program to provide housing vouchers and VA case management services to eligible veterans located near VA medical centers and deemed to reside in areas of high need. While this program provides a good baseline, my Housing G.I. Bill will go beyond this to:

- Provide vouchers allowing veterans to live in any area of the country, even if they decline to participate in case management activities through the VA;
- Create a registry of accessible housing properties that will be continually updated with data from new veteran placements so that individuals can be more effectively paired with accessible housing based on their disability status; and
- Explicitly codify the waivers relating to criminal history, mental illnesses or substance use disorders, and allowances for short-term lease terms that currently exist in administrative regulations for the HUD-VASH program.

As noted above, one of the challenges with these vouchers is the lack of availability of housing inventory. To help increase the availability of housing to veterans experiencing homelessness, my bill would eliminate the Faircloth Amendment at the same time we pass this bill into law. We will simultaneously create a market and fill its need with the passage of this legislation.

My Housing G.I. Bill would also include additional flexibilities to address some of the most common challenges faced by housing voucher recipients. So that no veteran spends a night on the street, benefits may be used for short-term housing in hotels or similar properties, or – with proper verification and added safeguards – to reimburse family members for the expense of renting out an otherwise marketable room. To address issues arising from poor credit or employment histories or a lack of current income, the bill will also cover the full cost of rent for short durations in emergency circumstances. It will further address the issue of landlord acceptance of vouchers by providing financial support and a streamlined certification process for landlords who commit to renting to veterans for set durations of time or to setting aside certain shares of their properties for veteran housing.

#### *A Program Funded in Perpetuity That Will Save Money*

Finally, my Housing G.I. Bill will include annual reporting requirements and regular program audits to ensure efficient use of resources and, to pay for the program, establish a fee tied to every defense contract. If contractors are able to profit from the instruments necessary to send our servicemembers to war, we should also be investing in supporting them once they return home. Ultimately, providing

veterans safe, healthy spaces to live will reduce overall costs to the VA system by reducing acute medical needs exacerbated by unstable housing conditions and can serve as a model for delivery of similar housing solutions to broader populations.

### **ENSURING NO ONE FALLS THROUGH THE CRACKS**

Individuals experiencing homelessness often interact with a variety of government services including health care, employment, or educational services. However, our current system is not designed to recognize and remember individuals at each of these points of contact, meaning that oftentimes people must fill out duplicate paperwork either across service providers or when their records are lost between different trips to the same service provider.

#### *Integrating Case Management Tools Across Points of Service*

To prevent this, we must strengthen and integrate casework systems so that data can be better stored and shared between a variety of service providers. This will require investments in information technology and other systems, but the return on investment will be high. First, we must work to link federal data sources to one another so that individuals' records can be interconnected across housing, healthcare, and other agencies. We must also promote investments at the state and local level in such systems. By creating a matching federal grant program, we can work to provide funds for local health, education, workforce, and law enforcement or corrections departments to connect their data systems with one another and adopt federal interoperability standards so that individuals' records can better move with them across service providers, cities, or even state lines.

#### *Connecting Individuals to Opportunities*

Many times, individuals' housing insecurity is linked, at least in part, to their job insecurity. Therefore, if we want to promote better outcomes for individuals seeking stable housing environments, we must also promote connections to resources to secure and maintain stable employment.

To do this, federal agencies should support local and state agencies to develop programs that, upon conducting intake for voucher applicants or upon coming into contact with other individuals experiencing homelessness, automatically provide a referral to a registered job training or placement program. Such referrals could centrally occur through the state department of labor or an employment referral hub, which could be created through a partnership between the public sector and local job training centers, community colleges, or technical education facilities.