

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 15, 2020

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

Dear Comptroller General Dodaro,

We write to urge the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to initiate an investigation into best practices in counting the United States homeless population.

Each January, communities throughout the United States participate in the Point-in-Time (PIT) count in conjunction with the Department of Housing and Urban Development. The PIT count is used to measure the literal homeless population (i.e. those in shelter or unsheltered and living on the street) in the country. In the report released by HUD in 2019, there were a total of 567,715 homeless persons in all states, U.S. territories, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia.

Though the PIT count is a helpful tool in determining the population of those experiencing homelessness in the United States, it has limitations and is not an accurate picture of *all* homeless individuals living in the country. It is believed that the methodology allows for a significant undercount of the actual homeless population.

For a homeless individual to be counted in the PIT report, they must be visible by the volunteers and advocates who are counting, and they must be in shelter or unsheltered. Individuals who are staying in “not visible” locations, those who are “doubling up” by residing with family or friends, and those who are incarcerated will not be counted in the report. Furthermore, homelessness is transitory, and some researchers have expressed annual data may be more precise in capturing the flow of individuals moving in and out of homelessness throughout the year.

We request that the Government Accountability Office investigate best practices to ensure a more accurate Point-in-Time count take place in the upcoming year. We would further request that this evaluation include school data, Homeless Management Information Services data, and census data. We urge you to include homeless persons both eligible for Continuum of Care assistance programs and those who are not but are “doubled up” with friends or relatives. Additionally, we ask the GAO to discuss strengths and weaknesses of generating accurate community information for persons who are experiencing homelessness or on the verge of experiencing homelessness. We request GAO work in coordination with advocacy groups and appropriate government agencies to

derive findings and recommendations. We request that your recommendations include a cost estimate. Our offices look forward to hearing your findings.

Sincerely,

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Emanuel Cleaver, II
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Wm. Lacy Clay". The signature is stylized with a large, looping "W" and "C".

Wm. Lacy Clay
Member of Congress