



# Veteran Needs vs. Illegal Alien Costs

By Spencer Raley and Casey Ryan | April 2020

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## Fast Facts

- Total Number of Illegal Aliens: 14.3 Million<sup>1</sup>
- Total Spending on Illegal Immigration: \$132 Billion<sup>2</sup>
- Total Number of Veterans: 19.5 Million<sup>3</sup>
- Total Spending on Veterans in FY 2020: \$217 Billion<sup>4</sup>
- Estimated Amount of Money Necessary to Properly Resource Veteran Needs in FY 2021: \$243 billion<sup>5</sup>
- Total Number of Illegal Aliens Occupying Jobs: 7 million<sup>6</sup>
- Estimated Number of Veterans Unemployed/Underemployed: 1.2 million<sup>7</sup>
- Total Number of Veterans Homeless or At-risk of Becoming Homeless: 1.5 million<sup>8</sup>

## Introduction

What do veterans have to do with immigration? More than you might think. The War on Terrorism has resulted in more veterans who have experienced overseas combat deployments than at any time since the end of World War II. The net result is that more veterans than ever are in need of services from the country they served so well. But, due to America's foolhardy immigration policies, our government is now spending more and more money on services for illegal aliens – foreigners who have no right to be in the U.S. – resulting in a squeeze on resources available for the citizens and lawful immigrants who were prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice for their country.

For example, in April 2019, the New York state legislature set aside \$27 million in college tuition assistance for the children of illegal aliens but refused to add a few hundred thousand dollars to a program that funds university education for the children of deceased and disabled veterans.<sup>9</sup> That is perhaps the most egregious example of the way in which flawed immigration policies are putting veterans in competition with illegal aliens. Yet, other examples abound.

FAIR recently found that the ten states with the smallest immigrant populations spend \$454 million each year on illegal aliens.<sup>10</sup> As FAIR noted, "To put that figure into context, that \$454 million expenditure is more than 200 times what the state of Montana budgets for its entire Veterans Affairs program."

The federal government spends nearly \$780 million per year on travel costs and amenities for tens of thousands of refugee and asylee applicants – the vast majority of whom file dubious claims -- all while the Veterans Administration has struggled to acquire additional funding in order to meet the basic needs of veterans.<sup>11</sup>

## **The Epidemic of Homeless Veterans**

Unfortunately, politicians in numerous states also believe taxpayer dollars are better spent on illegal aliens who do not belong in the United States than on the men and women who bravely defended our freedom. There were 37,085 homeless veterans in January 2019. More than a quarter of them – 10,980 – lived in California. An additional 1,270 lived in New York, and 1,585 were in Washington.<sup>12</sup> Yet while homeless veterans roam the streets, these states spend billions of taxpayer dollars every year coddling their illegal alien populations.

For example, California spends more than \$23 billion on illegal aliens and their children annually. New York also spends about \$7.5 billion, while Washington spends an additional \$2 billion.<sup>13</sup> These three states are renowned for their insistence on protecting illegal aliens. California is home to more than a quarter of the nation's homeless veterans, yet the state's politicians insist on defying federal law. In fact, the entire state declared itself a sanctuary jurisdiction in 2017.<sup>14</sup>

Despite veterans making up only 6 percent of the U.S. population, they represent 8 percent of all homeless adults in the United States.<sup>15</sup> Twenty-seven percent of veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan also struggle to put food on their table.<sup>16</sup> An estimated 1.2 million veterans are either unemployed or underemployed.<sup>17</sup> In the meantime, 7 million illegal aliens are working in the United States.<sup>18</sup> Those are jobs that could – *and should* – go to jobless veterans.

So why exactly are these states spending billions of dollars to ensure illegal aliens are comfortable when substantial numbers of veterans struggle to survive? These illegal aliens knowingly broke the law to enter the United States and continue to break the law by remaining here. Meanwhile, the veterans who fought for our freedom are shafted and – quite literally – left out on the streets. But open-borders politicians just do not seem to care.

## **Providing Health Care for Illegal Aliens**

Veterans also receive subpar health care in the United States. Unfortunately, it can take months before they receive vital treatment at a primary care VA clinic. Take California, for example.<sup>19</sup> San Jose veterans wait an average of 50 days before receiving an appointment, and it gets much worse. The average wait time in Modesto, California, is 95 days.<sup>20</sup>

What was California's response to this problem? The state's lawmakers passed a bill in 2019 that granted taxpayer-funded health insurance to many illegal aliens between the ages of 19 and 25. This program will likely cost \$98 million in the first fiscal year.<sup>21</sup> So while veterans – including those who are homeless – struggle to receive health care, California is providing young illegal aliens with free health insurance.

And this preferential treatment to illegal aliens goes beyond the Golden State. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, at least 16 states offer some form of taxpayer-funded health insurance to illegal aliens.<sup>22</sup> Under the Affordable Care Act (ACA), low-income residents can

receive subsidies from the federal government to lower their expenses, but illegal aliens are not allowed to receive these benefits. However, the open-borders lobby is now advocating for an ACA expansion to include the low-income illegal population. This would cost approximately \$10 billion annually and could potentially reach a staggering \$23 billion.<sup>23</sup> In Fiscal Year 2018, \$71 billion was spent nationwide on medical care for veterans.<sup>24</sup> The funding that the government would spend on illegal aliens could provide a significant boost to the currently inferior care that our veterans receive.

When our own veterans struggle to receive proper health care, why should we provide illegal aliens with billions of dollars of taxpayer-funded health insurance? Every state that already offers some health care to illegal aliens could be spending that money on improving the systems already failing the men and women who risked their lives fighting for this country. Additionally, the funding required to expand the ACA to illegal aliens could be used to hire new employees at VA clinics, build better facilities for patients, and provide better care for veterans.

## **Defending Illegal Aliens While Veterans Suffer**

It is not just illegal alien health care that the open-borders lobby intends to fund. Sanctuary jurisdictions are now providing illegal aliens with taxpayer-funded legal aid to help protect them from federal law enforcement. Rather than protect and serve their own citizens, these jurisdictions are spending millions of dollars to ensure that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has a difficult time deporting illegal aliens. Veterans everywhere struggle with serious issues, such as PTSD, depression, and homelessness, yet open-borders politicians insist on using taxpayer dollars to ensure that illegal aliens are rewarded for their lawless actions.

For example, in 2018, officials in Oakland, California, created a \$300,000 fund for illegal aliens facing possible deportation.<sup>25</sup> Los Angeles created an even larger fund that has spent more than \$7 million so far providing illegal aliens with legal aid.<sup>26</sup> And unfortunately, open-borders advocates have begun similar funds all across the nation. In Maryland, Baltimore approved \$200,000 worth of spending in 2018 to protect illegal aliens from deportation, and Montgomery County set aside an additional \$370,000.<sup>27</sup> This is the same county where at least eight illegal aliens were accused of rape within the span of just over a month last year.<sup>28</sup>

It is irresponsible for jurisdictions to fund legal aid for illegal aliens when U.S. citizens, veterans among them, are living in communities plagued by illegal alien crime. Montgomery County is the home to more than 42,000 veterans and has an overall population of approximately 1.1 million people.<sup>29</sup> However, the county's politicians have chosen to spend scarce financial resources "defending" illegal alien criminals who appear content to prey upon the weak and vulnerable across the jurisdiction.<sup>30</sup> This would be offensive under the best of circumstances. When veterans in Maryland are in crisis, such actions move beyond offensive and verge on criminally negligent.

In Maryland, 78 veterans committed suicide in 2017.<sup>31</sup> As horrifying as this may sound for Maryland, the situation is even worse in the biggest sanctuary jurisdiction of them all – California. In 2017, 111 veterans committed suicide in San Diego, and an additional 93 took their own lives in Los Angeles County.<sup>32</sup> In total, 491 of the Golden State's veterans took their own lives that year.<sup>33</sup> Throughout the nation, more than 6,000 veterans chose to take their own lives in 2017.<sup>34</sup> These are the people who lawmakers should protect. If states cared more about veterans than illegal aliens, many of those 6,000 Americans may still be with us today.

The money that local officials wasted in vain efforts to “protect” illegal alien lawbreakers would have been more wisely spent on programs designed to assist veterans in getting back on their feet. Many veterans need mental health assistance, financial aid for their families, and job training to prepare them for the workforce. Instead, their elected representatives are choosing to ignore the veterans who have served our nation while preserving the interests of foreign nationals who have thumbed their noses at both our legal system and our way of life.

## Conclusion

Americans who care about the members of our armed forces should ask, “Why are we spending billions of dollars catering to illegal aliens when we aren’t properly taking care of the men and women who risk life and limb to protect us against all enemies foreign and domestic?”

There are 14.3 million illegal aliens in the United States, and that does not include their 4.8 million American-born children. In total, they pose a fiscal burden of \$132 billion to the United States every year.<sup>35</sup> That money pays for their education, health care, and various forms of welfare and subsidies.

By comparison, 19.5 million veterans live in the U.S., and the total expenditure for their needs in FY 2020 was \$217 billion.<sup>36</sup> The amount our nation spends on illegal aliens is 61 percent of what it spends on veterans. If the illegal population continues to grow, the cost to maintain them could soon surpass the total veteran expenditure.

But what exactly can elected officials do to reverse this course? First of all, rather than spending taxpayer dollars on foolhardy projects like legal aid for illegal aliens, they can create new programs, or expand existing ones, that train homeless veterans and prepare them for careers. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs offers job-training programs, but veterans need more help at the state and local level – help that is oriented toward local employment conditions and local economic needs.<sup>37</sup> The federal government does not have the capacity to know what works best within each community. That is where local governments need to step in and fill the gaps. They cannot achieve that goal when they are actively working against the federal government to protect illegal aliens.

So how can open-borders politicians justify their actions when so many veterans struggle to survive in the very country that they risked their lives to defend? The answer is simple: They can’t. Despite the fact that illegal aliens have no right to be in the United States, these lawmakers ignore their own struggling constituents in favor of people who continue to break the law by remaining in the country. However, it is not too late to reverse course. There is an obvious problem in our nation when so many veterans continue to suffer on a daily basis. It is far past time for our elected officials to act.

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<sup>1</sup> Matt O’Brien, Spencer Raley, and Casey Ryan, “How Many Illegal Aliens Live in the United States?” *Federation for American Immigration Reform*, September 2019, <https://www.fairus.org/issue/illegal-immigration/how-many-illegal-aliens-united-states>.

<sup>2</sup> Matt O’Brien, Spencer Raley, and Casey Ryan, “How Many Illegal Aliens Live in the United States?” *Federation for American Immigration Reform*, September 2019, <https://www.fairus.org/issue/illegal-immigration/how-many-illegal-aliens-united-states>.

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<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, “National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics,” Accessed February 2020, <https://www.va.gov/vetdata/Expenditures.asp>.

<sup>4</sup> Leo Shane III, “Another big boost for VA funding in latest federal budget deal,” *The Military Times*, December 19, 2019, <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2019/12/19/another-big-boost-for-va-funding-in-latest-federal-budget-deal/>.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, “President’s Budget Request – Fiscal Year 2021,” Accessed February 2020, <https://www.va.gov/budget/products.asp>.

<sup>6</sup> Matt O’Brien, Spencer Raley, and Jack Martin, “The Fiscal Burden of Illegal Immigration on United States Taxpayers (2017),” *Federation for American Immigration Reform*, September 27, 2017, <https://www.fairus.org/sites/default/files/2017-09/Fiscal-Burden-of-Illegal-Immigration-2017.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) does not track unemployment for veterans like it does for the general population. However, based on prevailing BLS data, and adjusting the proportion of underemployment in the general public to the veteran population, we believe that approximately 1.2 million veterans in the United States are either without work or working part time for economic reasons. Unemployment data for veterans are released by the Department of Labor, Veterans’ Employment and Training Service, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/vets/latest-numbers>, and unemployment figures for the general public are calculated by the BLS report, “Alternative Measures of Labor Underutilization,” <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t15.htm>.

<sup>8</sup> “Background & Statistics,” *National Coalition for Homeless Veterans*, Accessed March 2020, [http://nchv.org/index.php/news/media/background\\_and\\_statistics#:~:text=Although%20flawless%20counts%20are%20impossible,homeless%20on%20any%20given%20night](http://nchv.org/index.php/news/media/background_and_statistics#:~:text=Although%20flawless%20counts%20are%20impossible,homeless%20on%20any%20given%20night).

<sup>9</sup> Bernadette Hogan, “Dems Gave \$27M to Children of illegal immigrants – not vets,” *New York Post*, April 10, 2019, <https://nypost.com/2019/04/10/dems-gave-27m-to-children-of-illegal-immigrants-not-vets/>.

<sup>10</sup> Matt O’Brien, Spencer Raley, and Casey Ryan, “Small Migrant Populations, Huge Impacts,” *Federation for American Immigration Reform*, February 2020, <https://www.fairus.org/issue/societal-impact/small-migrant-populations-huge-impacts-even-states-few-immigrants-hit-costs>.

<sup>11</sup> Matt O’Brien and Spencer Raley, “The Fiscal Cost of Resettling Refugees in the United States,” *Federation for American Immigration Reform*, February 5, 2018, <https://www.fairus.org/issue/legal-immigration/fiscal-cost-resettling-refugees-united-states>.

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<sup>12</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, “The 2019 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress,” January 2020, <https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2019-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> Matt O’Brien, Spencer Raley, and Jack Martin, “The Fiscal Burden of Illegal Immigration on United States Taxpayers (2017),” *Federation for American Immigration Reform*, September 27, 2017, <https://www.fairus.org/sites/default/files/2017-09/Fiscal-Burden-of-Illegal-Immigration-2017.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> Jazmine Ulloa, “California becomes ‘sanctuary state’ in rebuke of Trump immigration policy,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 5, 2017, <https://www.latimes.com/politics/la-pol-ca-brown-california-sanctuary-state-bill-20171005-story.html>.

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<sup>15</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, “The 2019 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress,” January 2020, <https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2019-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>.

U.S. Census Bureau, Accessed February 2020, <https://www.census.gov/>.

<sup>16</sup> Rachel Widome, Agnes Jensen, Ann Bangerter, and Steven Fu, “Food insecurity among veterans of the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan,” *Public Health Nutrition*, April 2015, <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/public-health-nutrition/article/food-insecurity-among-veterans-of-the-us-wars-in-iraq-and-afghanistan/F03B64DD63287F2BE5F2067F3E5AC5FB>.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid 7.

<sup>18</sup> Matt O’Brien, Spencer Raley, and Jack Martin, “The Fiscal Burden of Illegal Immigration on United States Taxpayers (2017),” *Federation for American Immigration Reform*, September 27, 2017, <https://www.fairus.org/sites/default/files/2017-09/Fiscal-Burden-of-Illegal-Immigration-2017.pdf>.

<sup>19</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, “Average Wait Times at Individual Facilities,” Accessed February 2020, <https://www.accesstocare.va.gov/PWT/FindFacilities?LocationText=CA&ApptType=12&PatientType=1&SameDayServiceView=False&SortOrder=0&Radius=50&UserLatitude=-1&UserLongitude=-1&SameDayServiceView=false>.

<sup>20</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, “Average Wait Times at Individual Facilities,” Accessed February 2020, <https://www.accesstocare.va.gov/PWT/FindFacilities?LocationText=CA&ApptType=12&PatientType=1&SameDayServiceView=False&SortOrder=0&Radius=50&UserLatitude=-1&UserLongitude=-1&SameDayServiceView=false>.

<sup>21</sup> Frank Miles, “California OKs \$214.8B budget, including health insurance for illegal immigrants, money for homelessness,” *Fox News*, June 13, 2019, <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/california-oks-214-8b-budget-including-health-insurance-for-illegal-immigrants-money-for-homelessness>.

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<sup>22</sup> Samantha Artiga and Maria Diaz, “Health Coverage and Care of Undocumented Immigrants,” *Kaiser Family Foundation*, July 15, 2019, <https://www.kff.org/disparities-policy/issue-brief/health-coverage-and-care-of-undocumented-immigrants/>.

<sup>23</sup> Steven Camarota, Karen Zeigler, and Jason Richwine, “How Much Would It Cost to Provide Health Insurance to Illegal Immigrants?” *Center for Immigration Studies*, October 10, 2019, <https://cis.org/Report/Cost-of-Health-Insurance-for-Illegal-Immigrants>.

<sup>24</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, “National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics,” Accessed February 2020, <https://www.va.gov/vetdata/Expenditures.asp>.

<sup>25</sup> “Oakland Creates \$300K Fund To Provide Legal Aid For Immigrants Facing Deportation,” *KPIX 5*, July 17, 2018, <https://sanfrancisco.cbslocal.com/2018/07/17/oakland-creates-300k-fund-to-provide-legal-aid-for-immigrants-facing-deportation/>.

<sup>26</sup> Dakota Smith, “L.A. wary of adding money to legal defense fund for migrants and refugees,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 17, 2019, <https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-lj-justice-fund-budget-immigrant-migrant-legal-defense-20190517-story.html>.

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<sup>27</sup> Ian Duncan, “Baltimore approves spending of \$200,000 to pay lawyers to help immigrants fight deportations,” *The Baltimore Sun*, March 7, 2018, <https://www.baltimoresun.com/maryland/baltimore-city/bs-md-ci-deportation-lawyers-20180306-story.html>.

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<sup>28</sup> Matt O’Brien, “Montgomery County’s Illegal Alien Crime Wave,” *Federation for American Immigration Reform*, September 2019, [https://www.fairus.org/sites/default/files/2019-09/IssueBrief\\_Montgomery%20County%20Illegal%20Alien%20Crime%20Wave.pdf](https://www.fairus.org/sites/default/files/2019-09/IssueBrief_Montgomery%20County%20Illegal%20Alien%20Crime%20Wave.pdf).

<sup>29</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, Accessed February 2020, <https://www.census.gov/>.

<sup>30</sup> Matt O’Brien, “Montgomery County’s Illegal Alien Crime Wave,” *Federation for American Immigration Reform*, September 2019, [https://www.fairus.org/sites/default/files/2019-09/IssueBrief\\_Montgomery%20County%20Illegal%20Alien%20Crime%20Wave.pdf](https://www.fairus.org/sites/default/files/2019-09/IssueBrief_Montgomery%20County%20Illegal%20Alien%20Crime%20Wave.pdf).

<sup>31</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, “Maryland: Veteran Suicide Data Sheet, 2017,” Accessed February 2020, [https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/2017/Maryland\\_Veteran\\_Suicide\\_Data\\_Sheet\\_2017.pdf](https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/2017/Maryland_Veteran_Suicide_Data_Sheet_2017.pdf).

<sup>32</sup> Steve Walsh, “San Diego Tops The State For Veteran Suicides,” *KPBS*, December 14, 2018, <https://www.kpbs.org/news/2018/dec/14/san-diego-tops-state-veteran-suicides/>.

<sup>33</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, “California: Veteran Suicide Data Sheet, 2017,” Accessed February 2020, [https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/2017/California\\_Veteran\\_Suicide\\_Data\\_Sheet\\_2017.pdf](https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/docs/data-sheets/2017/California_Veteran_Suicide_Data_Sheet_2017.pdf).

<sup>34</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, “Mental Health – Veteran Suicide Data,” Accessed February 2020, [https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide\\_prevention/data.asp](https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/suicide_prevention/data.asp).

<sup>35</sup> Matt O’Brien, Spencer Raley, and Casey Ryan, “How Many Illegal Aliens Live in the United States?” *Federation for American Immigration Reform*, September 2019, <https://www.fairus.org/issue/illegal-immigration/how-many-illegal-aliens-united-states>.

<sup>36</sup> U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, “National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics,” Accessed February 2020, <https://www.va.gov/vetdata/Expenditures.asp>.

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<sup>37</sup> U.S. Department of Labor, “Homeless Veterans’ Programs,” Accessed February 2020, <https://www.benefits.gov/benefit/4767>.

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