

HOMELESSNESS AND POVERTY

WASHINGTON, DC

Who is Homeless?

- More than 15,000 people were homeless in Washington, DC over the course of 2010¹, one of the highest rates in the country. On a single night in 2011, 6,546 persons in the city were homeless, an increase of 14% since the economic downturn began in 2008.²
- People in homeless **families**, which make up 41% of the total homeless population in the District, increased by 6.5% between 2010 and 2011.³ This followed an increase of more than **25%** between 2008 and 2010. At least 2,024 DC families applied for emergency shelter over the course of 2010, yet only a small fraction of these families were served by emergency shelter services.⁴
- There are more than 2,000 homeless youth in Washington, DC over the course of a given year, far exceeding the 82 emergency shelter beds and 78 units of youth housing available. In a 2011 survey of 500 unaccompanied youth in D.C., **77% reported being homeless** within the past 2 weeks.⁵
- There were **1,620 children** in homeless families in D.C. in 2011, up 5.5% from 2010.⁶
- Among homeless individuals in Washington, DC, 37% report chronic substance abuse problems, 32% report severe mental illness, 33% suffer from chronic health problems, and 25% are physically disabled.⁷
- 7.8% of homeless people in Washington, DC are veterans.⁸
- 20% of homeless adults in Washington, DC were employed as of January, 2011, down from 24% in 2010.⁹ Of those, 47% work full-time, 46% have part-time employment, and the remainder are seasonal employees.¹⁰

Why are so many homeless?

- **29.4%** of DC children under 18 live at or below the poverty line, which is \$21,800 for a family of four.¹¹ The poverty rate for **all** D.C. residents increased in 2010 to **19.9%**, giving D.C. the **third highest poverty rate in the nation**.¹²
- In the District, a worker earning the Minimum Wage (\$8.25 per hour¹³) must work approximately **136 hours** per week, 52 weeks a year, **or** earn at least \$28/hour at 40 hours a week, to afford a 2-bedroom apartment at **Fair Market Rent**, which is **\$1,461** per month.¹⁴
- As of October, 2011, the unemployment rate in DC was **11%**, far higher than the national rate.¹⁵ Homeless individuals with no phone or address stand a slim chance competing for jobs in an already tight job market.
- DC's TANF (welfare) benefits are inadequate to meet the needs of District families, and have only increased *twice* since the 1980s, with a family of three now receiving \$428 a month.¹⁶ DC recently cut benefits by 20 percent for families that have received assistance for 60 months or longer from \$428 to \$342.¹⁷ In D.C., almost 16,000 families, including half of all homeless families, receive TANF as their sole source of income.¹⁸
- The maximum Food Stamps available in Washington, D.C. is \$200/month for 1 person; \$367 for 2 people; and \$526 for 3 persons, and is even less for those who get TANF or SSI. 17% of D.C.'s population and 35% of its children rely on Food Stamps as their only source of nutrition, an increase of **22%** since 2007.¹⁹
- Social Security Disability (SSI) benefits, the sole source of income for more than 12,000 disabled DC residents, is \$674/month, which constitutes only 16.8% of area median income and is equivalent to \$3.89/hour in wages.²⁰ It takes an average of 2 years after applying to obtain these benefits, yet the only D.C. benefits available for disabled adults is Interim Disability Assistance (IDA) of \$270/month, which has a wait list.

Is there enough shelter?

- Year round, there are approximately 2,400 emergency shelter beds for single adults in DC.²¹ For **families**, there are only **160** emergency shelter apt. units available, plus 153 overflow slots in congregate family shelter.²²
- For most applicants, the wait for *emergency* family shelter is at least 6 months, and as of March, 2011, there were **598 families on the wait list for emergency shelter**, a number which is increasing everyday.²³
- 15% of respondents in an April 2009 survey were forced to sleep on the streets due to shelters being full, and 40% refused to enter shelters due to overcrowding. On average, homeless individuals were turned away from emergency shelter 25 times each night.²⁴

Is there enough housing?

- Washington, DC is the second least affordable housing jurisdiction in the country, with median rents increasing 7% between 2007 and 2009 alone.²⁵ At the same time, D.C.'s rental market has only a 5% vacancy rate, the second lowest in the country, and market rents are unaffordable even for middle class workers such as police officers and teachers.²⁶
- **80%** of extremely low income residents of D.C. (incomes less than 30% of area median income), and almost **half** of **all** D.C. households, pay more than 30% of their income for rent, which by definition is unaffordable.²⁷

- As of December, 2011 there were approximately **40,200 households on the wait list** for the **DC Housing Authority's** Public Housing and Housing Choice Voucher Program, 19,000 of which are homeless. Yet, D.C.'s public housing stock has *decreased* by 4,000 units since 2000, to only 8,000 total. DCHA also has approximately 12,800 Housing Choice Vouchers, all of which are in use and rarely turn over.²⁸
- In DC, **60%** of renters are unable to afford the Fair Mkt. Rent for a 2-bedroom apartment.²⁹ Yet, the District's affordable rental housing stock has shrunk by more than **33%** since 2000.³⁰
- On the bright side, the number of formerly homeless persons in the DC region who now reside in Permanent Supportive Housing through "Housing First" programs has increased from 4,696 in 2007 to 7,702 in 2011.³¹

Last updated Dec 2011

¹ Email from Tom Fredericksen, The Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness (12/14/11) (between Oct. 2009 and Oct. 2010, 15,457 separate individuals used homelessness services in Washington, DC).

² Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOC), A Regional Portrait of Homelessness: The 2011 Count of Homeless Persons in Metropolitan Washington at 32 (May 2011).

³ Id. at 33.

⁴ The Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness, Tom Frederickson, email dated Oct. 17, 2011.

⁵ United States Department of Health and Human Services, Family and Youth Services Bureau, Report of Runaway and Homeless Youth Information System (2006); D.C. Alliance of Youth Advocates, From the Streets to Stability, Nov. 2011.

⁶ MWCOC Report. *Supra* note 2, at 33.

⁷ Id. at 33-34.

⁸ Id. At 34.

⁹ Id. at 35.

¹⁰ Id.

¹¹ Census Bureau, *2009 American Community Survey* (Sept. 2010);.

¹² US Census Bureau, Income, Poverty and Health Ins Coverage in US, Sept. 13, 2011.

¹³ United States Department of Labor, Minimum Wage Laws in the States (January 1, 2011), available at <http://www.dol.gov/esa/minwage/america.htm> (last accessed July 05, 2011) (In the District of Columbia, the rate is automatically set at \$1 above the Federal minimum wage rate if the District of Columbia rate is lower.).

¹⁴ National Low Income Housing Coalition, Out of Reach 2011, available at <http://www.nlihc.org/or/or2011> (last accessed July 05, 2011).

¹⁵ DC Dept. of Employment Services, www.does.dc.gov, July 05, 2011.

¹⁶ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Many States Cutting TANF Benefits Harshly Despite High Unemployment and Unprecedented Need, (May 19, 2011), available at <http://www.cbpp.org/cms/index.cfm?fa=view&id=3498> (last accessed July 05, 2011).

¹⁷ Id.

¹⁸ MWCOC Report, *supra* note 2, at 24; and DC Department of Human Services Memorandum, April 12, 2007, available at http://www.dc.gov/mayor/pdf/TANF_Parity.pdf (last accessed Jan. 29, 2009).

¹⁹ "Food Stamp Usage Across the Country", www.nytimes.com/interactive/2009/11/28/us/20091128-foodstamps.html (Nov. 28, 2009)

²⁰ Technical Assistance Collaborative, Priced Out in 2010: The Housing Crisis for People with Disabilities, (2010), available at <http://www.tacinc.org>

²¹ MWCOC Report, *supra* note 2, at 32.

²² Id.

²³ DHS Weekly Shelter and Housing Occupancy Report for Family Programs Week of March 21, 2011, www.ich.dc.gov.

²⁴ Homeless Emergency Response Workgroup, Unmet Shelter Need Assessment, June 17, 2009.

²⁵ National Low Income Housing Coalition, Out of Reach 2011: State Ranks Based on Two-Bedroom Housing Wage, States Ranked By Housing Wage, available at <http://www.nlihc.org/or/or2011/rankstable.pdf> (last accessed July 05, 2011).

²⁶ National Assn of Realtors, DC Rental Market Strong, GW Hatchet, 4/23/09; Center for Housing Policy, Paycheck to Paycheck, 3/23/10.

²⁷ DC Fiscal Policy Institute, Nowhere To Go, (Feb. 5, 2010).

²⁸ District of Columbia Housing Authority, Office of Client Placement, Waitlist Report Feb 2011.

²⁹ NLIHC Out of Reach 2009, *supra* note 12; and Neighborhood Info DC, District of Columbia Housing Monitor Winter 2008.

³⁰ DC Fiscal Policy Institute, Nowhere To Go, (Feb. 5, 2010).

³¹ MWCOC Report, *supra*, Note 2.

Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless, Inc.

True Reformer Building, 1200 U Street, NW, Third Floor, Washington, DC 20009
Tel: (202) 328-5500 ■ Fax: 328-5515 ■ e-mail: info@legalclinic.org ■ www.legalclinic.org

The Legal Clinic envisions a just and inclusive community for all residents of the District of Columbia, where housing is a human right and where every individual and family has equal access to the resources they need to thrive. Combining community lawyering and advocacy to achieve our clients' goals, our expert staff and network of volunteer attorneys provide low barrier, comprehensive legal services at intake sites throughout the District of Columbia, helping our clients to access housing, shelter, and life-saving services. Rooted in the experiences of this client work, we effectively blend system reform efforts, policy advocacy, community education and client engagement to advocate for long term improvements in local and federal programs that serve the low- and no-income community.