



July 11, 2014

The District Is Not Prepared to Shelter Families During the Next Hypothermia Season: A New Plan Is Needed

By Kate Coventry

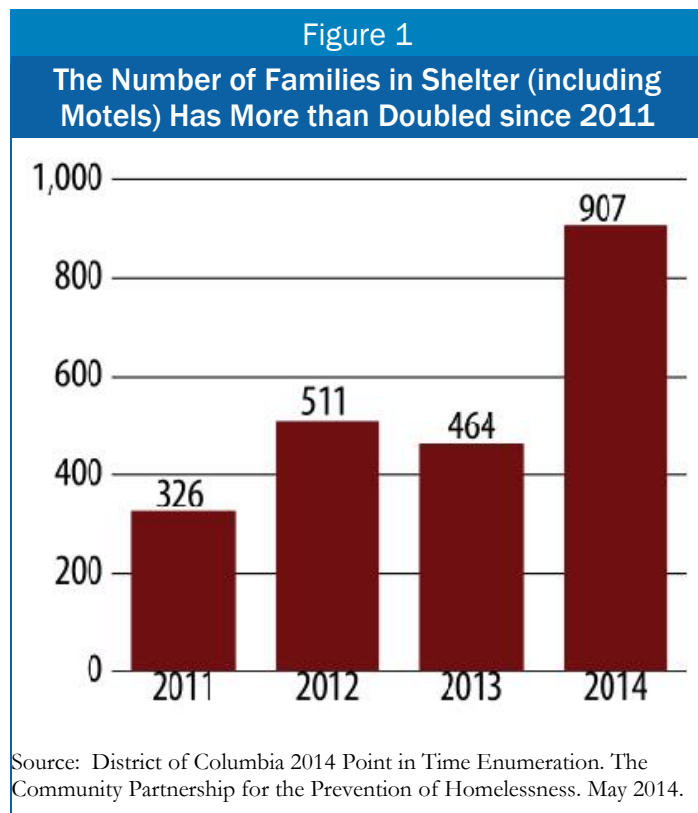
The District announced this week that it had identified more than 450 apartments suitable for homeless families, as part of its “500 Families: 100 Days” effort. The good news that the city almost met its goal to *find* suitable housing is tempered, however, by the fact that the city *moved* only 55 to 60 families per month out of shelter, far short of the goal of 100 per month. At that rate, the DC General Shelter will be almost full at the start of the next hypothermia season, and the shelter system could be once again overwhelmed. Yet the fiscal year (FY) 2015 budget provides fewer resources for homeless families than this year.

Given the almost certainty of another shelter crisis, Mayor Gray should develop a new plan, with adequate funding, for how the city will shelter all families safely in the upcoming winter.

Since 2010, the number of families with children in emergency shelter during the annual count has grown from 326 to 907 (see **Figure 1**). It is reasonable to expect similarly large, if not larger, need for family shelter in FY 2015.

But it isn't clear how DC will safely shelter all families that need it.

Like last winter, the DC General shelter is likely to be nearly full when cold weather arrives. At the current exit rate, between 230 and 254 families will be in shelter on November 1, close to its full capacity of 289. Because families have a right to shelter when it is cold, the system is likely to be quickly overwhelmed again.



Yet the Department of Human Services (DHS) could have fewer financial resources to meet the need. DHS will spend over \$9 million on motels this year using federal carryover dollars, but those funds are not likely to be available in FY 2015.

Beyond that, the DHS budget for FY 2015 contains no funding for motels and only funding for 150 families at DC General throughout the winter hypothermia season. This is not enough even to cover the costs of the approximately 254 units for the families who will already be in shelter at the start of the season.

Without adequate planning and funding, the city is setting itself up for another homeless crisis next year. This could lead once again to conditions that are harmful to children and families, such as removing families from shelter any day that is not expected to fall below 32 degrees, when there is no right to shelter.

Rather than allowing this to happen, the mayor and DHS should develop a plan detailing how they will shelter all families safely in the upcoming winter. There is no excuse for failing to prepare.