



DC's Family Homelessness Crisis Requires Urgent Action

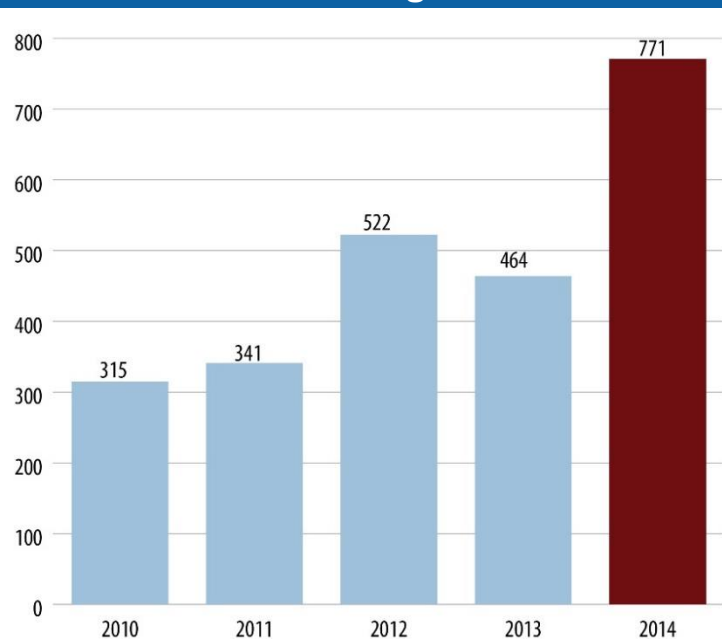
By Jenny Reed

The dramatic spike in the number of DC families seeking emergency housing this winter might have several causes, but what's clear is that we as a community need a solution. More than 750 families are jammed into DC General, various motels throughout the region, and most recently at city [recreation centers](#) — and much of that capacity will go away in several weeks when tourists come to claim the motel rooms for Cherry Blossom season. That's why almost everyone who testified at yesterday's DC Council roundtable — officials from DC's Department of Human Services, emergency housing providers, and lawyers for homeless residents — agree that the situation is catastrophic.

Time is of the essence. As David Berns, the Department of Human Services Director put it to the Washington Post [yesterday](#), "It sounds bad, and it's worse than it sounds."

A crisis of this magnitude — Berns told the Council 1,000 homeless families are expected to be in shelter by April 1— demands a clear, achievable plan. Yesterday, a group of providers and advocates — including DCFPI — presented such a proposal. The proposal reflected input from the Department of Human Services as well as the provider of much of the city's homeless services, The Community Partnership. But after yesterday's roundtable it isn't clear that the District government is ready to implement it.

The Number of Families in Emergency Shelter and Motels are at the Highest Level in Years



Sources: 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013 Point in Time Enumerations, Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments. Emergency Shelter Nightly Census 1/29/2014

We hope that Mayor Gray and the Department of Human Services will join advocates and providers to agree upon an immediate-response plan and that the administration will provide the leadership, focus and sense of urgency needed to ensure that the plan succeeds.

The Gray administration did not cause the dramatic spike in family homelessness, but it alone has the tools to bring both the community and the government agencies together to solve it.