



May 16, 2014

A Good Start, But a Long Way to Go to Combat the Rise in Homelessness in DC

By Jenny Reed

On Wednesday, that Washington Council of Governments put some [numbers](#) to what this year's harsh winter brought into focus: homelessness is a growing problem in DC. Their report found a 13 percent increase in homelessness across populations in the District and a staggering 25 percent increase in the number of homeless families in just the past year. (See **Figure 1.**) A lack of affordable housing, a tough job market for those without a college degree, and a lack of investment in programs aimed at helping the homeless get back on their feet are some of the major problems leading to the increase in homelessness in the District.

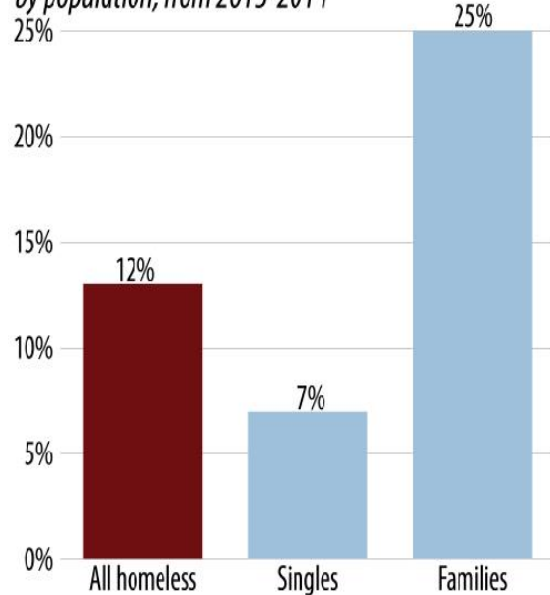
Yesterday, each DC Council Committee finished their mark-up which is where they make changes and give their final recommendations to the entire Council for how to move forward on the mayor's proposed budget for the agencies under their purview. The good news is that some of the Committees were able to identify funds for programs that will help ensure DC can start to tackle the rise in homelessness. Yet there is still a long way to go and the Council needs to hear [your voice](#) that funding programs for homeless residents is important.

The additional funding identified includes:

- The Committee on Human Services identified \$1 million to help fund programs aimed at addressing youth homelessness.
- The Committee on Economic Development identified \$1.5 million to continue to fund a Rapid Re-housing pilot program for homeless individuals. Rapid Re-housing provides short-term housing assistance and case management services to help end one's homelessness quickly.
- The Committee on Economic Development also identified \$500,000 for the Emergency Rental Assistance program which helps prevent homelessness by providing down payment assistance, first month's rent, and rent in arrears for families facing eviction or trying to secure a new home.

Figure 1

Increase in the percent of homeless in DC, by population, from 2013-2014



- The Committee on Education identified \$200,000 for an additional two staff at the Office of the State Superintendent of Education to help fund additional outreach and interventions for students who are homeless.

The Committee on Human Services also looked to remove \$3 million from the Department of Youth and Rehabilitative Services for permanent supportive housing for families and \$3.5 million for programs to address youth homelessness. Permanent supportive housing provides intensive case management and housing assistance to the chronically homeless, or those with significant mental health or chronic health conditions. However, neither of these funds could be certified by mark-up so it is unclear at this point if those items will be funded.

This a good start, but it unfortunately makes only a small dent in what is actually needed to help tackle homelessness in DC for [youth](#), [singles](#) and [families](#). So please, take a minute to tell the Council thank you for the funding they have identified, but [let them know](#) that if we truly want to tackle the rise in homelessness in DC, we need to invest more in proven strategies and programs to reduce it.