

For Immediate Release — April 12, 2016

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Annual Point-in-Time Count of Homelessness Shows Improvement

Vermont Homeless Service Providers Release New Report

MONTPELIER, VT – On a single night in January, 1,102 Vermonters were found to be homeless. The 2016 Point-In-Time Count, released today by the Vermont Coalition to End Homelessness and the Chittenden County Homeless Alliance, showed an overall decrease in homelessness by 28% compared to the 2015 Point-in-Time Count. Of the households counted statewide 156 had children, or 20% of total households counted. That is a decrease of 22% from last year.

Statewide, a decrease of 25% was seen in chronic homelessness. “Chronic homelessness” means that people have been homeless for longer periods of time (and often homeless more often) and, that they have a disability. (The full definition is available at <http://nlihc.org/article/hud-publishes-final-rule-definition-chronic-homelessness>). Over the past two years there have been many efforts to end chronic homelessness in Vermont such as the 100,000 Homes Campaign and an increase of Permanent Supportive Housing.

“Vermont experienced the “perfect storm” this winter, with help from the mild weather, low heating fuel prices and, most significantly, state and local investments over the last several years have helped alleviate and even prevent homelessness”, said MaryEllen Mendl, Co-Chair of the Coalition to End Homelessness.

The report comes from data collected for the Annual Point-in-Time (PIT) Count, an unduplicated count of persons experiencing homelessness on the night of January 26, 2016. The Count and its findings were supported by Vermont’s two Continua (Chittenden County and Balance of State). These networks are comprised of homeless and human service organizations, housing agencies, and other partners that strive to eliminate homelessness throughout Vermont, with coordination provided by the Vermont Agency of Human Services, the City of Burlington, the Vermont State Housing Authority, and United Ways of Vermont.

“While there can be issues of accuracy in counting those experiencing homelessness, the two year downward trend in the local point in time numbers seems to indicate that the collective efforts of those who have worked for many years to reduce homelessness, together with more recent partners such the UVM Medical Center, are bending the curve in the right direction. In Chittenden County, Harbor Place and the warming shelter have substantially reduced scattered site motel usage – meaning that those experiencing homelessness can be more effectively connected with services. People who have been homeless for years, often with substantial physical and mental health challenges, are being housed through the combination of a common assessment, a community wait list and the creation of new housing at Beacon Apartments. Credit also goes to the Burlington Housing Authority, which directs up to half of its rental assistance to homeless households. It’s rare that those households don’t find homes once they have that BHA assistance. BHA has also tripled its housing retention team, working to prevent people from becoming homeless,” said Margaret Bozik, Co-Chair of the Chittenden Homeless Alliance.

According to the 2015 Out of Reach Report, the Fair Market Rent (FMR) in Vermont for a two-bedroom apartment is \$1,075. In Vermont, the Fair Market Rent (FMR) for a two-bedroom apartment is \$1,075. In order to afford this level of rent and utilities — without paying more than 30% of income on housing — a household must earn \$3,585 monthly or \$43,017 annually. Assuming a 40-hour work week, 52 weeks per year, this level of income translates into an hourly Housing Wage of \$20.68 per hour. A large percentage of renters in Vermont do not earn enough to afford a two-bedroom unit at the average statewide Fair Market Rent. High rents and vacancy rates as low as 1% both continue to be barriers for finding and retaining housing.

Key Notes:

- Total persons found homeless on one night decreased by 28% from the 2015 count.
- 124 persons identified as chronically homeless. Chronic homelessness decreased by 25% statewide from the 2015 count.
- 156 households had children, or 20% of total households counted.
- 109 persons identified as veterans, 23% lower than last year's total of 141 persons.
- The number of unsheltered persons, those living outdoors or taking shelter in a place unfit for human habitation, was 156 persons. This is a slight increase from last year in total from 2015.
- 230 persons reported as victims of domestic violence; a 10% decrease over 2015. That count does NOT include children impacted - domestic violence is defined as between intimate partners so children are not counted.
- 371 households identified as being homeless for the first time, or 47% of total households counted.
- Significant portions of those who are homeless have disabilities. Persons in the count with disabilities may have more than one disabling condition.
 - 316 persons identified as having a serious mental illness, or 29% of the total persons
 - 212 persons identified as having a substance abuse disorder, or 19% of the total persons
 - 177 persons identified as having a physical disability and 50 persons identified as having a developmental disability, or 16% and 5% of the total persons counted respectively.

Every year, the Point-in-Time Count provides a snapshot of how many people are literally homeless on a single night. The findings are used by Vermont's two Continua of Care in their funding applications to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. In addition, the PIT Count provides local communities and state policy makers with an understanding of current challenges and need, areas to target limited funding for appropriate housing and services, and the ability to track overall progress. There are other, more expansive, definitions of homelessness which include those who are doubled up, at risk of losing their housing or otherwise precariously housed, and it's important to acknowledge that issues of housing security extend beyond those included in the PIT Count.

For additional information, visit: <http://helpingtohousevt.org/>.