

# MASSACHUSETTS YOUTH COUNT 2015:

2015

## METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS

AN INITIATIVE OF THE MASSACHUSETTS COMMISSION ON  
UNACCOMPANIED HOMELESS YOUTH, IN COLLABORATION WITH  
YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS ACROSS THE COMMONWEALTH AND  
THE MASSACHUSETTS CONTINUUMS OF CARE



# MASSACHUSETTS YOUTH COUNT 2015

## INTRODUCTION

Between January and March 2015, the Massachusetts Special Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth (“the Commission”) conducted the second annual Massachusetts Youth Count (Count) Survey (see Appendix A), a statewide survey of unaccompanied youth who are experiencing homelessness. The survey followed the groundbreaking 2014 Count, which was the first-in-the-nation statewide effort of its kind. Historically, the number of unaccompanied youth has been difficult to determine for a variety of reasons: limited resources to identify and count the population and fear among the youth related to being returned to a home they left and deem unsafe. Consequently, the federal government and communities across the country have been working over the past several years to develop methodologies for conducting a more comprehensive Count in order to understand the scope of homelessness among unaccompanied youth and connect them to appropriate housing and services.

This report provides an outline of the process for and outcomes of the 2015 Count.

For the purposes of this effort, the Commission defines an unaccompanied homeless youth as a person who:

- (1) Is 24 years of age or younger; and***
- (2) Is not in the physical custody or care of a parent or legal guardian; and***
- (3) Lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.***

## PURPOSE OF THE MASSACHUSETTS YOUTH COUNT

The Fiscal Year 2015 state budget included a line appropriation of \$150,000 at the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) to continue the State’s commitment to better understand the scope of homelessness among unaccompanied youth. As a continuation of the gains made from the 2014 Count, the ultimate goal is to use information obtained to effectively match housing and services with youth experiencing homelessness.

## STRUCTURE OF THE MASSACHUSETTS YOUTH COUNT

As with the 2014 effort, there were three key organizing entities supporting the 2015 Massachusetts Youth Count: the Special Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth (the Commission), the Identification and Connection Working Group (the Working Group) of the Special Commission and the local Continuums of Care (CoCs) (see Appendix B).

The ***Special Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth*** provided oversight of the overall initiative and is responsible for reporting on its progress annually to the Governor’s Office, the Legislature, and the Office of the Child Advocate. The Commission, chaired by the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, and at the time of the 2015 count, included 26 members, representing youth, state government, service providers, and advocates.

The ***Identification and Connection Working Group (Working Group)*** of the Special Commission organized and facilitated the Massachusetts Youth Count on behalf of the Commission. For the 2015

count, its primary responsibilities were to update the count methodology, edit the uniform survey tool based on feedback from youth, CoCs, providers, and Commission members, and to implement the count in partnership with Continuums of Care.

The ***Continuums of Care*** implemented the Youth Count at the local/regional level. Each CoC has a unique geographic area to cover, a mix of resources and providers, and high demand for homeless services.

The Commission, through its Identification and Connection Working Group, provided technical assistance to the 15 Continuums of Care (CoC) in Massachusetts that executed the Youth Count. There were two components to the Youth Count: (a) a point-in-time (PIT) count of unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness, and (b) a survey of unaccompanied youth that gathered demographic and service history information.

### **DEVELOPMENT OF THE MASSACHUSETTS YOUTH COUNT METHODOLOGY**

The Working Group built upon the methodology used in the 2014 count. The guiding concept was that the Youth Count would be implemented through a capacity-building framework leveraging the annual HUD Point in Time (PIT) counts conducted by CoCs. Building from that framework, there were two primary components to the methodology: (1) conduct a basic census of unaccompanied homeless youth coordinated with the annual PIT counts and using standard census forms, and (2) administer a uniform survey tool to unaccompanied homeless youth over the course of three to seven days immediately following the census count. For both of these components, CoCs were asked to work with diverse partners to identify connected and disconnected youth and to engage youth volunteers to assist with implementation. CoCs were directed to have youth complete the surveys themselves, rather than administering the survey interview-style, though volunteers should be on hand to answer questions about the survey. This was designed to limit potential reluctance associated with answering somewhat sensitive questions verbally. (Please see the Commission's September 2014 report entitled "Massachusetts Youth Count 2014: Overview and Analysis for more details on last year's methodology and its development.)

In addition to the basic methodology, the Commission articulated a set of recommended practices based on the experiences of other communities that had piloted counts. Recommended practices included forming a local planning committee, providing stipends to youth volunteers, conducting focused youth outreach and marketing of the count, trainings for all volunteers, engaging diverse partners, providing day-of coordination and quality control, and seeking creative ways to engage youth under 18.

In collaboration with youth, CoCs, providers, and advocates, the Working Group promoted statewide implementation of best practices and lessons learned from the 2014 count experience.

### **REFINEMENT OF THE UNIFORM SURVEY TOOL**

The Working Group started with the 2014 survey tool and worked to further refine the limitations, reduce confusion, and encourage completion of each question by survey participants. The Commission collaborated with advocates and providers to conduct a series of focus groups with youth across the state. The Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless led focus groups with youth at

LUK, Inc., the Somerville Homeless Coalition, and Bridge Over Troubled Waters in Boston. Homes for Families conducted an additional focus group in Boston with young parents meeting the state definition of unaccompanied homeless youth. Feedback from focus group participants was used by the Working Group to refine the survey tool.

Some highlights of changes made to the survey:

- The 2014 survey was unable to capture a youth's range of living situations over the past year, therefore the 2015 survey included a question to do that.
- The 2015 survey included a direct question "Are you currently experiencing homelessness?", with respondents asked to choose between the following possible answers: "Yes"; "No, but have experienced homelessness in the past"; "No, and never have experienced homelessness"; and "Don't know", with room for the youth to add a comment.
- The 2015 survey reworded the question on access to services to elicit the range of reasons a young person did not receive all of the help that was needed.
- The 2015 survey asked a combined question about race and ethnicity, with youth instructed to check all that applied, including Hispanic or Latino/a.
- Questions on gender identity and sexual orientation were slightly reworded for the 2015 survey. An additional question was added regarding sex assigned to the respondent at birth. These questions were updated based on feedback from the Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ Youth.

#### **CONTINUUM OF CARE ENGAGEMENT**

Once the methodology and survey tool were complete, the Working Group began outreach to the 16 Continuums of Care. Outreach included email and telephone conversations providing basic information about what the Working Group was hoping to accomplish, grant information, and an overview PowerPoint presentation that described the Commission and the proposed methodology. Shortly thereafter, CoCs were invited to attend a half-day MA Youth Count Conference at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, which was held on November 17, 2014 (see Appendix C). The Commission and Working Group's goal for the conference was to orient everyone to the initiative, provide information about the methodology and survey tool, and facilitate a discussion among CoCs about promising youth count practices.

The half-day conference proved to be successful with approximately 60 people in attendance, including at least one representative from each of the 15 CoCs/regions.

Following the MA Youth Count Conference, the Working Group co-chairs began providing ongoing technical assistance to each CoC. Additionally, each CoC was offered a one-time capacity building grant in the amount of \$4,750 by the Commission to help with financial costs of conducting the Youth Count.

## KEY PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES

The following chart summarizes key components of the youth count, as conducted within the 15 regions of the state.

Table 1: Summary of Key CoC Planning and Implementation Activities

| Continuum of Care                    | Planning Committee | Outreach to LGBTQ Youth                           | Outreach to Youth Under 18        | Length of Survey Period                 | Youth Ambassadors | Street Count | Service-Based Count |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|---|-----------------------------------|---|-------------------|--------------|---------------------|
| Attleboro/Taunton/Bristol County     | Yes                | Yes (limited)                                     | Yes                               | 1 day                                   | Yes               | Yes          | Yes                 |
| Balance of State                     | Yes                | No specialized outreach                           | No specialized outreach           | 7 days                                  | Yes               | Yes          | Yes                 |
| Boston                               | Yes                | Yes   | Yes                               | 14 days                                 | No                | Yes          | Yes                 |
| Brockton/Plymouth/Quincy/Weymouth    | Yes                | No specialized outreach                           | No specialized outreach           | 7 days                                  | No                | Yes          | Yes                 |
| Brookline/Newton/Watertown/Waltham   | Yes                | Yes   | Yes                               | 7 days                                  | No                | Yes          | Yes                 |
| Cambridge                            | Yes                | Yes   | Yes                               | 7 days                                  | Yes               | Yes          | Yes                 |
| Cape Cod and Islands                 | Yes                | Planned magnet event was cancelled due to weather | Yes                               | 8 days                                  | Yes               | Yes          | Yes                 |
| South Coast (Fall River/New Bedford) | Yes                | No specialized outreach                           | Yes                               | Range within region from 1 day - 6 days | Yes               | Yes          | Yes                 |
| Hampden                              | Yes                | Yes   | Yes                               | 10 days                                 | Yes               | Yes          | Yes                 |
| Lynn                                 | Yes                | Yes   | Yes                               | 3 days                                  | Yes               | Yes          | Yes                 |
| Lowell                               | Yes                | Yes   | Yes                               | 7 days                                  | Yes               | Yes          | Yes                 |
| North Shore                          | Yes                | Yes (limited)                                     | Yes                               | 7 days                                  | Yes               | Yes          | Yes                 |
| Somerville                           | Yes                | Yes   | Yes                               | 7 days                                  | Yes               | Yes          | Yes                 |
| Three County Rural                   | Yes                | Yes   | Yes                               | 7 days                                  | Yes               | Yes          | Yes                 |
| Worcester City and County            | Yes                | Yes   | Outreach cancelled due to weather | 7 days                                  | Yes               | Yes          | Yes                 |

## IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES CAUSED BY BLIZZARDS

Massachusetts Youth Count 2015 initially was scheduled to launch statewide on January 28, 2015, coinciding with the 2015 HUD point-in-time count. Unfortunately, Winter Storm Juno hit, leading to confusion and logistical challenges among CoCs. Many CoCs worked to seek waivers from HUD to move the date of their counts and to notify volunteers. While a few CoCs moved ahead with their youth count at the end of January, the majority of CoCs began their counts in late February (many along with their rescheduled PIT count on February 25<sup>th</sup>). While subsequent major winter storms still gripped the Commonwealth in late February, each region was able to implement their youth count, even if not all of the planned components were able to be implemented.

While there are many lessons to draw from the results of the Commonwealth's second statewide count, there are some limitations to the information presented. *The count was not intended or*

*designed in such a way as to reach every single unaccompanied homeless youth.* The goal was to treat this count as an opportunity where each CoC could continue exploring effective strategies for conducting a count that would be built upon for the future, while simultaneously giving the CoCs and the Commonwealth a better understanding of the extent and character of youth homelessness across the Commonwealth. Given this limitation and others discussed in the report, the Working Group recommends that the Commission consider the results as a sample, providing helpful yet incomplete information about the scope of unaccompanied youth homelessness and the opportunities and barriers those youth face.

## **YOUTH COUNT RESULTS AND ANALYSIS**

This section provides an account of the results of the youth count, detailing the data reporting process, results, and challenges. Two sources of data are included in the analysis: (a) Point-In-Time and (b) Massachusetts Youth Housing and Homelessness Survey. (Please see Table 2)

### **DATA ENTRY – DE-DUPLICATION AND REPORTING**

CoCs provided HUD Point in Time count data as well as paper and electronic survey responses to the Working Group immediately following the Youth Count. In total 2,195 surveys were completed and entered into the database for analysis. Once all surveys were entered into the database, duplicates were removed. If there was any question about whether the record actually was a duplicate, it was included in the database.

### **POINT-IN-TIME DATA AND ANALYSIS**

As recognized in the [Massachusetts Youth Count 2014 Overview and Analysis](#), the data captured in the PIT count, though valuable in many ways, provides an incomplete picture of homeless youth in Massachusetts.

Since the PIT count is a HUD requirement, each CoC is responsible for only counting individuals, families, and homeless youth that meet the federal definition of homelessness. The survey data, however, includes unaccompanied homeless youth that meet the slightly broader definition adopted by the Commission:

1. A person 24 years of age or younger,
2. A person who is not in the physical custody or care of a parent or legal guardian, and
3. A person who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.

Across Massachusetts, 11,099 households, or 21,135 persons, were identified as homeless on the night of the 2015 HUD Point in Time count. This total includes households that are residing in emergency shelter, transitional housing programs, domestic violence safe havens, and places not meant for habitation. These 11,099 homeless households include 8,565 homeless children under the age of 18 and 2,065 homeless youth (young adults) between the ages of 18 and 24. The PIT data available to the Working Group does not indicate the number of households headed by homeless youth, therefore, the focus of this report is on results garnered from the survey component of the MA Youth Count.

## MA YOUTH COUNT SURVEY DATA AND ANALYSIS

A total of 2,193 non-duplicate surveys were returned from the 16 CoCs from the 15 regional counts (with Fall River and New Bedford CoCs combining their efforts). Of those, 1,964 surveys were from youth under the age of 25. Those responses were then analyzed to determine the number that could be categorized as (1) currently meeting the definition of an unaccompanied homeless youth that was adopted by the Commission, as of the night of the count (516 youth); (2) currently meeting HUD's definition of homelessness, as of the night of the count (395 youth); or (3) had experienced homelessness (as defined by the commission) at some point in the previous year (610 youth).

Table 2: Homeless Responses by CoC

| Continuum of Care                         | # Survey Respondents Meeting State Definition the Night of the Count | # Survey Respondents Meeting HUD Definition | # Survey Respondents Meeting State Definition in the Previous Year |
|---|--|---|--|
| Attleboro/Taunton/Bristol County          | 6  | 2   | 7  |
| Balance of State                          | 59   | 51  | 88   |
| Boston                                    | 83   | 55  | 87   |
| Brookline/Newton                          | 0  | 0   |  |
| Cambridge                                 | 16   | 15  | 22   |
| Cape Cod and Islands                      | 3  | 3   | 5  |
| Fall River*                               | 11   | 14  | 28   |
| Hampden County                            | 174  | 150   | 174  |
| Lowell                                    | 1  | 0   | 1  |
| Lynn                                      | 57   | 22  | 57   |
| New Bedford *                             | 0  | 0   |  |
| North Shore                               | 2  | 2   | 2  |
| Quincy/Weymouth/ Plymouth City and County | 2  | 1   | 4  |
| Somerville                                | 13   | 4   | 13   |
| Three County Rural                        | 38   | 32  | 46   |
| Worcester City and County                 | 51   | 44  | 76   |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                              | <b>516</b>   | <b>395</b>                                  | <b>610</b>   |

\* Fall River and New Bedford coordinated efforts for this year's Youth Count.

This section will present the data from the survey responses that meet the state's definition of unaccompanied homeless youth, as adopted by the Commission.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

The survey asked several questions to understand demographic characteristics of the respondents. Overwhelmingly, the survey respondents meeting the state's definition of unaccompanied homeless youth were between the ages of 18 and 24. As indicated in Table 3 below, just over 10% of responses from those meeting the state's definition came from youth under the age of 18. It should be noted

that the question about experiencing homelessness in the past was not limited to the previous year (see Table 3 below), while responses to a separate question regarding the range of places a participant stayed in during the previous twelve months was used to determine how many youth experienced homelessness over the past year.

Table 3: Experiences with Homelessness by Age

| Currently Experiencing Homelessness      | 17 years and Younger | 18-24 years  | Total        | % of Total  |
|--|----------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|
| Yes                                      | 54                   | 462          | 516          | 26%         |
| No, experienced homelessness in the past | 332                  | 362          | 694          | 35%         |
| No, never experience homelessness        | 422                  | 214          | 636          | 32%         |
| No, past homelessness unknown            | 9                    | 5            | 14           | 1%          |
| Don't Know/Missing                       | 48                   | 56           | 104          | 5%          |
| <b>Total</b>                             | <b>865</b>           | <b>1,099</b> | <b>1,964</b> | <b>100%</b> |

Just slightly over 10% of the respondents who met the Commission’s definition of homelessness being 17 years old or younger indicates a need to increase future outreach efforts to identify youth under age 18 who might have been missed. However, we continue to expect that it is more likely unaccompanied homeless youth are over age 18 because of parental control of younger youth and mandated reporting laws that identify and refer youth under age 18 for state services.

The survey tool also contained questions to identify race and ethnicity. Respondents were able to select multiple options for race, and Chart 1 indicates the distribution of those responses. The majority of responses were from white youth, with African-American youth also comprising a significant proportion at 33%. Chart 2 shows that 37% of respondents identified as Hispanic/Latino/Latina.



Chart 1: Race Distribution of Survey Responses Meeting State Definition

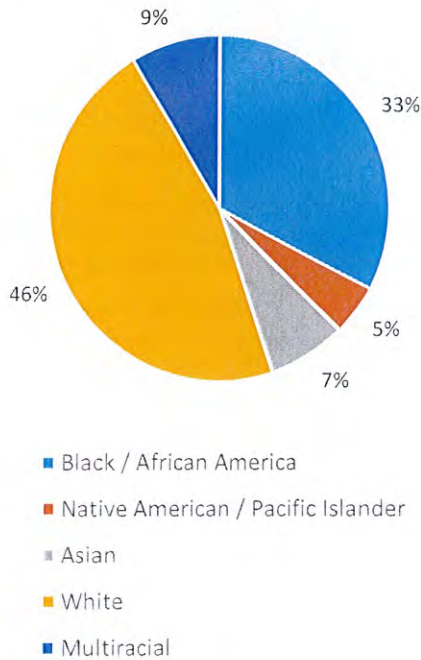
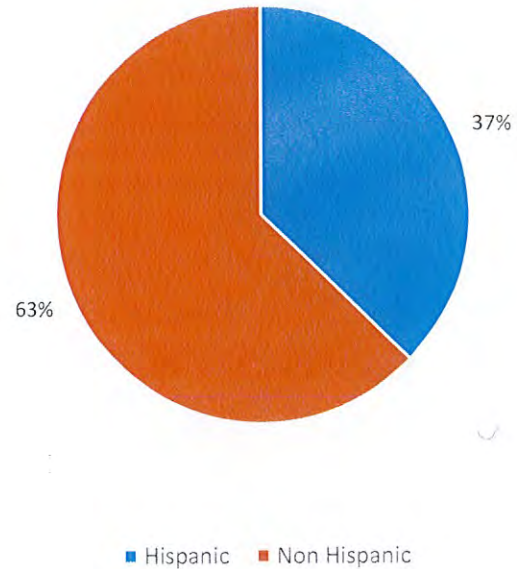
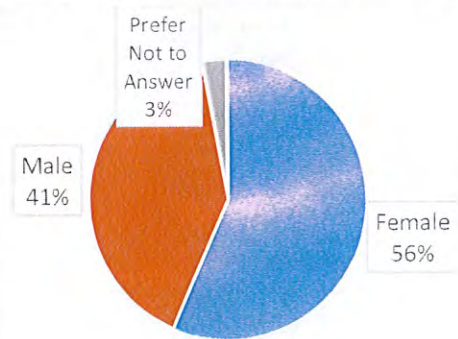


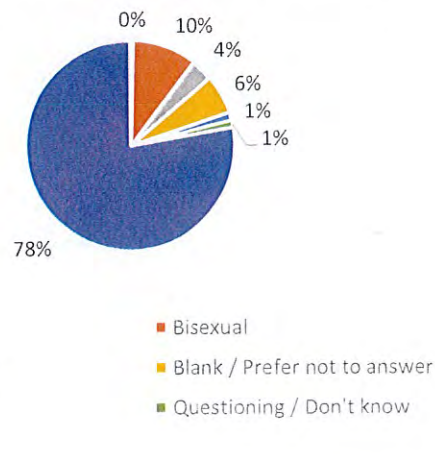
Chart 2: % Ethnicity distribution of Respondents Meeting State Definition



Of the 516 respondents meeting the state’s definition of homelessness, 287 identified as female. This represents 55.8% of the respondents. For the second consecutive year, this was higher than was anticipated, given national estimates that show homelessness among unaccompanied youth is higher among males. The Working Group attributes this high percentage of female respondents to the fact that several CoCs conducted outreach to pregnant and parenting youth who are being served by the state’s Emergency Assistance family shelter program. Participants in that program are overwhelmingly female, possibly skewing the results. This data suggests additional outreach may be necessary to more fully understand the population of street-involved youth. A total of 206 responses were from youth identifying as male, representing 39.7%. Those who failed to respond to the question or responded with “Prefer Not to Answer” made up 3% and those identifying as transgender, male to female (MTF); transgender, female to male (FTM). Agender and genderqueer made up less than 1% of total responses.



The Commission was charged with identifying the barriers for serving youth who identify as LGBTQ, and the



survey tool included a question about sexual orientation in order to better understand the scope of that population and any particular needs they have. The question was phrased in the following way in an attempt to garner accurate responses: “What is your sexual orientation? Please check the answer that best describes you.” Chart 4 shows the breakdown of responses. The most common response was straight, at 78% (or 401 people) of responses. Bisexual was the second most common at 10%. All responses for lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, questioning, and “other” total 12% of the total respondents meeting the state definition. National estimates for LGBTQ unaccompanied homeless youth range from 20-40% of that population, suggesting our results of 22% at the very bottom of those estimates may be an underestimate of the true extent of LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness here in Massachusetts.

Table 4 below outlines the differences between the 2014 and 2015 counts with regard to the demographics of those meeting the Commission’s definition. We urge caution interpreting annual changes as they may be attributable to differences in CoCs’ approaches to data collection over time.

Table 4: Demographic outcomes from 2014 and 2015

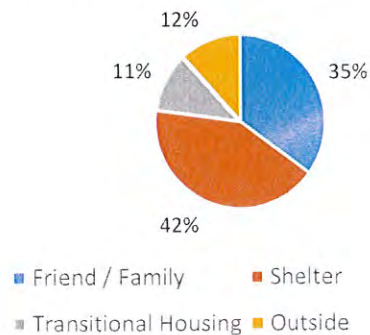
| Demographic                        | # Survey Respondents Meeting State Definition the Night of the Count |       |
|------------------------------------|--|-------|
|                                    | 2014   | 2015  |
| Under 18 Years Old                 | 6.3%   | 10.1% |
| 18 - 24 Years Old                  | 95.7%  | 89.1% |
| Black / African American           | 21.8%  | 33.0% |
| Native American / Pacific Islander | 3.6%   | 5.0%  |
| Asian                              | 2.8%   | 7.0%  |
| White                              | 42.1%  | 46.0% |
| Multiracial                        | 9.9%   | 9.0%  |
| Other                              | 15.3%  | 0.0%  |
| Hispanic / Latino / Latina         | 35%  | 37%   |
| Non-Hispanic                       | 53%  | 63%   |
| No Response                        | 11%  | 0%    |
| Female                             | 55%  | 56%   |
| Male                               | 41%  | 41%   |
| Transgender / Other                | 2%   | <1%   |
| Prefer Not to Answer               | 2%   | 3%    |

|                                     |     |     |
|-------------------------------------|-----|-----|
| <b>Straight</b>                     | 80% | 78% |
| <b>Gay / Lesbian</b>                | 7%  | 4%  |
| <b>Queer</b>                        | 1%  | 1%  |
| <b>Bisexual</b>                     | 8%  | 10% |
| <b>Asexual / Pansexual / Other</b>  | 2%  | <1% |
| <b>Questioning / Don't Know</b>     | <1% | 1%  |
| <b>Blank / Prefer Not to Answer</b> | 2%  | 6%  |

### STATUS AND HISTORY OF HOMELESSNESS

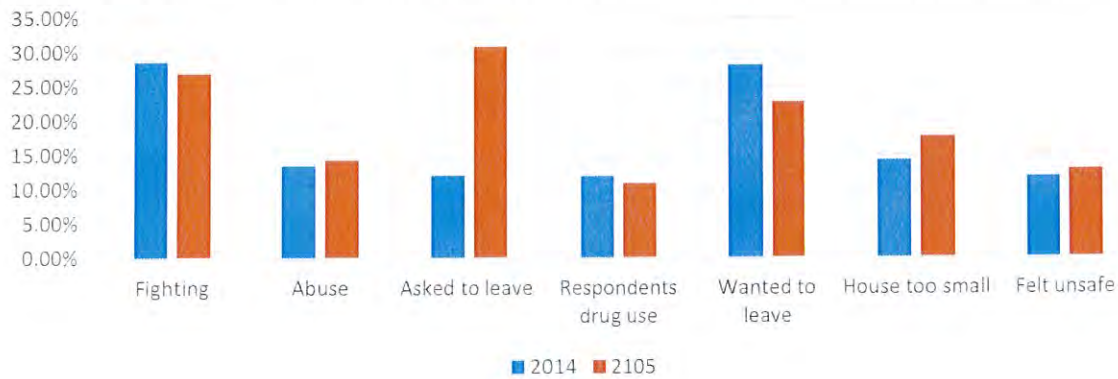
It was important to the Working Group to understand the circumstances surrounding respondents' homelessness, therefore, several questions were included to understand where the respondents were staying at night, why they were no longer with their parent or guardian, and whether there was a history of homelessness in their family or with their friends.

Chart 5 indicates that in 2015, 42% of those meeting the state definition had stayed at a shelter on the night of the PIT. This includes youth-focused shelters, adult family shelters, and single adult shelters. The next most common response was that the youth had stayed with a family or friend, with 35% of respondents indicating this location. This is in line with national estimates that unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness often couch-surf, particularly given a lack of emergency shelters targeting youth. The majority of CoCs focused their Youth Count outreach through service-based strategies, and the percentage identified on the street mirrors that 12%, indicated they stayed outside or another place not meant for human habitation.



The survey tool included a question to understand why the youth was no longer with their parent or guardian, in order to understand a little about the path to homelessness. The survey provided 16 options, and respondents could select as many of those as they wanted. The seven most common reasons are depicted in Chart 6 below.

Chart 6: Most Common Reasons Respondent is No Longer with Parent/Guardian 2014 and 2015



It is interesting to note the dramatic increase in those reporting in 2015 having been asked to leave their parents residence. However, we urge caution interpreting this and other annual changes as they may be attributable to differences in CoCs’ approaches to data collection over time.

Results indicate that 43% of respondents meeting the state definition had a parent that had previously experienced homelessness. However, 21.9% indicated they did not know if their parent had ever experienced homelessness, so the number with a parental history of homelessness may be even higher. The majority (62.2%) of respondents meeting the state definition have a friend currently experiencing homelessness. Considering the high number of respondents being served in emergency shelter or transitional housing alongside other people, it makes sense that a similarly high proportion would have a friend also experiencing homelessness.

### EDUCATION AND INCOME

Questions regarding school enrollment, educational attainment and income were included to understand how youth experiencing homelessness are connected to education and employment, and also to provide information about some of the challenges these youth may experience in achieving self-sufficiency into the future. 35% of youth meeting the state’s definition indicated they were currently enrolled in some type of educational program. The majority of those, 72%, were either in high school or a GED program. Another 14% were enrolled in college. This clearly signals the benefit of partnering with educational institutions in future efforts to support unaccompanied homeless youth. This has proven difficult to date, given federal privacy requirements under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and other confidentiality standards within schools. The Commission continues to work with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to address these concerns while engaging more youth experiencing homelessness, supplement data, and expand best practices in reaching unaccompanied youth. Appendix D includes additional data from outside of the Youth Count process on unaccompanied youth enrolled in Massachusetts high schools and colleges.

Chart 7: Current Educational Enrollment of Respondents Meeting State Definition

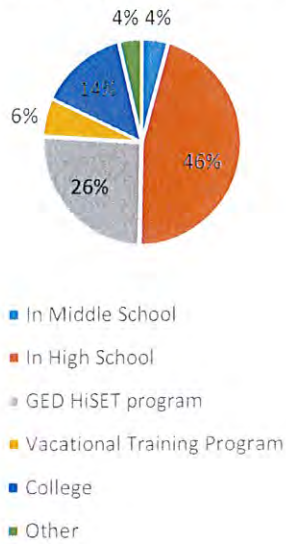
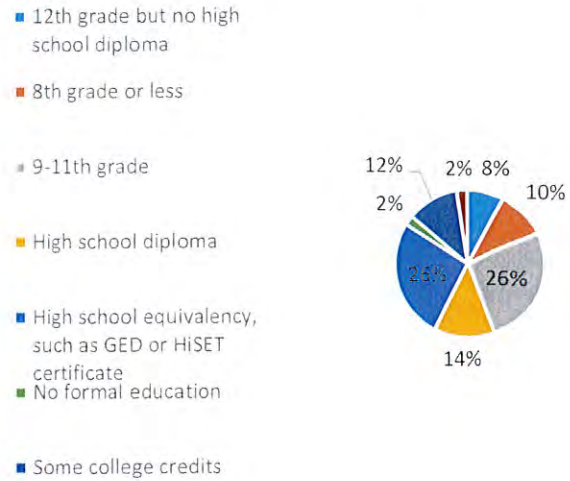


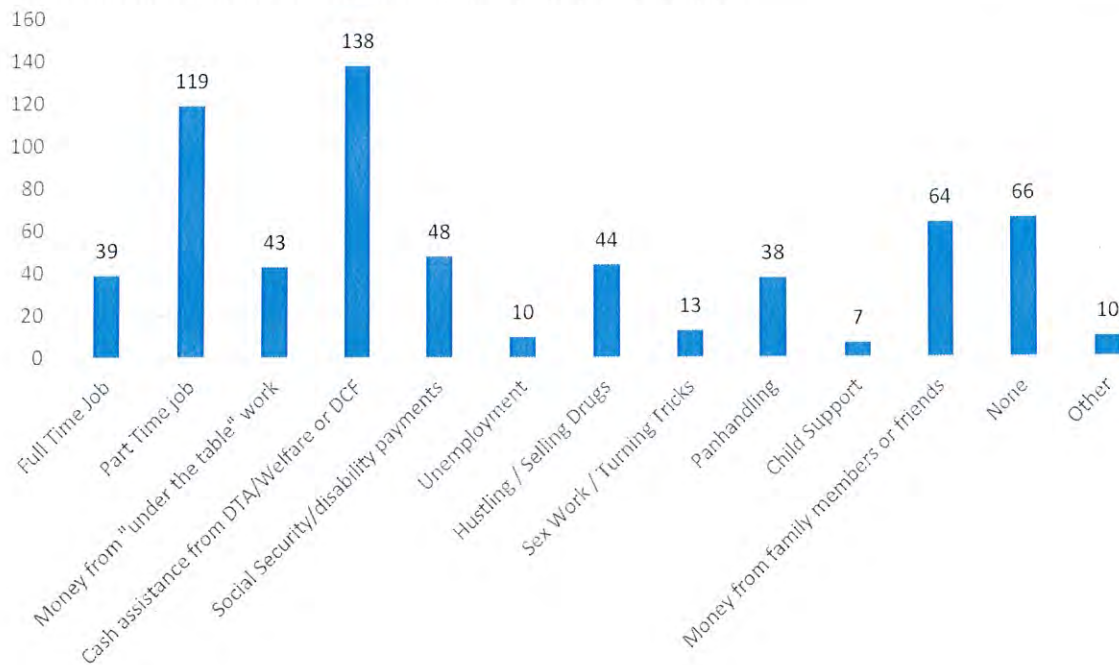
Chart 8: Highest Educational Attainment of Respondents Meeting State Definition



Of the respondents meeting the state’s definition for unaccompanied homeless youth, 87.3% reported having some form of income. The survey included 11 options for income source, which can be seen in Chart 9 below. Respondents were asked to select all income sources they had. Most commonly youth are working part-time or are receiving cash assistance benefits. The Working Group believes that the frequency of income from hustling, panhandling, and sex work may have been underreported. National estimates<sup>1</sup> are higher than what these results show, and youth may have been reluctant to disclose sensitive information if the survey was being administered by someone they did not know or trust.

<sup>1</sup> [http://usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset\\_library/BkgrdPap\\_Youth.pdf](http://usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/BkgrdPap_Youth.pdf)

Chart 9: Income Sources for Respondents Meeting State Definition



## SUBPOPULATIONS

The survey tool was also designed to garner information about certain subpopulations in order to begin to understand potential additional challenges, opportunities, or vulnerabilities. The tool gathered information about the number of youth who were pregnant or parenting, and who had histories of involvement with foster care, group homes, and detention facilities.

First, the survey tool included a question asking whether the respondent was pregnant. Of the 516 youth who met the state definition, 290 indicated they were female or transgender, FTM (female to male). The Working Group included transgender, FTM youth in the analysis in order to be inclusive of anyone who was pregnant regardless of their gender identity. Of the 290 respondents, 36 (12.4%) indicated they were currently pregnant.

In addition to the question about pregnancy, the survey included questions about whether the respondent has children, and if so, whether those children are living with them. Well over a third, 213 respondents (41.3%), have a child or children, and 68.1% of those have a child or children living with them. Given the state definition includes young families and some family shelter programs were targeted as partners in the count, the results are not surprising. This likely is an underrepresentation of the number of parenting youth who would meet the state's definition. Not all CoCs targeted family shelters in their outreach strategies. Future counts that more fully include young families being sheltered through the state's Emergency Assistance program would likely result in a higher number and percentage of youth who report they are pregnant or parenting.

Previous studies indicate that nationally an estimated one-quarter of former foster care youth experience homelessness within four years of exiting placement.<sup>2</sup> The survey tool asked respondents whether they had ever been in foster care. Of the 516 responses meeting the state definition, 152 youth (29.5%) reported they had foster care experience at some point during their lives. The survey did not ask for any other specific information about their involvement, so some of those respondents may have aged out whereas others may have had a more time-limited foster care placement. Regardless, the results indicate a significant portion of unaccompanied homeless youth have foster care histories, which should be taken into account in the development of housing and service models.

In order to identify a potential veteran subpopulation, the survey included the following question: “Have you ever served in the military?” Ten (1.9%) respondents indicated they had served in the military. People who are determined to meet the definition of veteran by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs are often able to access additional financial, health care, and housing supports not available to non-veterans. Such resources can be valuable in assisting with rehousing and stabilization. Increased awareness of this subpopulation and potential resources is important.

The survey tool also included a question to identify the number of respondents who had ever lived in a group home or residential program. This could include programs funded through the Department of Mental Health, the Department of Disability Services, Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission, Department of Education, or other private programs. Of the respondents meeting the state definition, 115 (22.3%) had at some point lived in a group home or residential program. Similar to the data on the number of youth with foster care histories, this suggests that a significant segment of unaccompanied homeless youth have engaged with various systems of care in the past.

The survey included two questions to garner information about respondents’ histories of incarceration:

- “Have you ever stayed overnight or longer in juvenile detention – a secure facility or residential program for young people – as a result of criminal behavior or police involvement?”
- “Have you ever stayed overnight or longer in an adult jail or prison?”

Charts 10 and 11 show that one-quarter (22%, 114 youth) of respondents meeting the state definition had an interaction with the juvenile detention system, and just under one quarter (29%, 125 youth) had an interaction with the adult correctional system.

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<sup>2</sup> [http://usich.gov/usich/resources/fact\\_sheets/opening\\_doors\\_homelessness\\_among\\_youth](http://usich.gov/usich/resources/fact_sheets/opening_doors_homelessness_among_youth)

Chart 10: Juvenile Detention History among Respondents Meeting State Definition

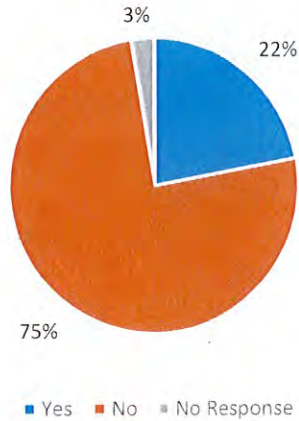
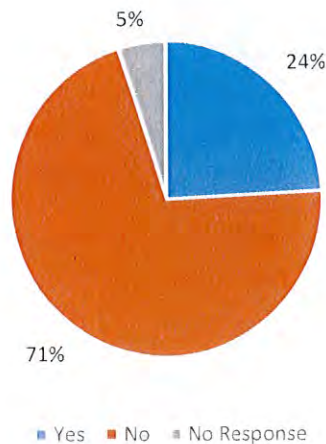


Chart 11: Adult Jail/Prison History among Respondents Meeting State Definition



## SERVICES

One of the goals of conducting the MA Youth Count is to gain a better understanding of the kinds of services from which unaccompanied homeless youth could benefit. The survey tool included three questions related to this. First, it provided a list of 11 service types as well as an “other” category, and respondents were directed to indicate which they had previously sought. There also was an option for respondents to indicate they had not tried to access help. Chart 12 shows the distribution of responses. Notably, just 11.8%, or 61 of the 516 respondents meeting the state definition, reported they had sought family support services, though four of the top seven reasons a youth was no longer with their parent related directly to some form of family conflict.

Only 17.4% of respondents thought they received all the help they needed. It also is important to note that 8.5% of respondents did not answer that question.



Chart 12 Received the Help Requested by Respondents Meeting State Definition

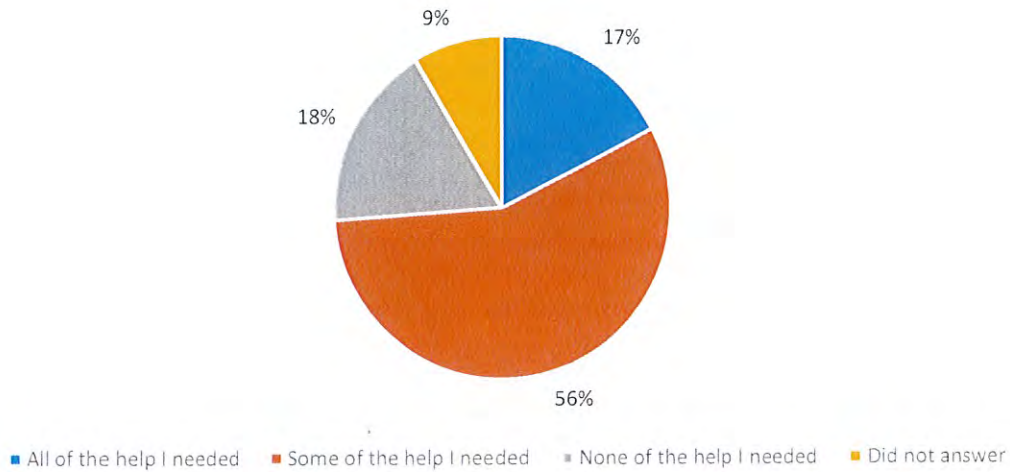
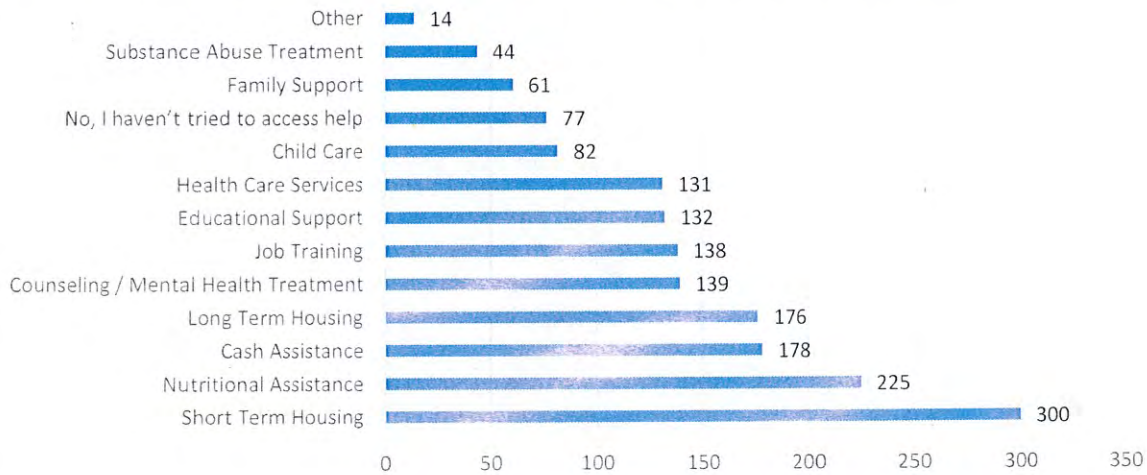
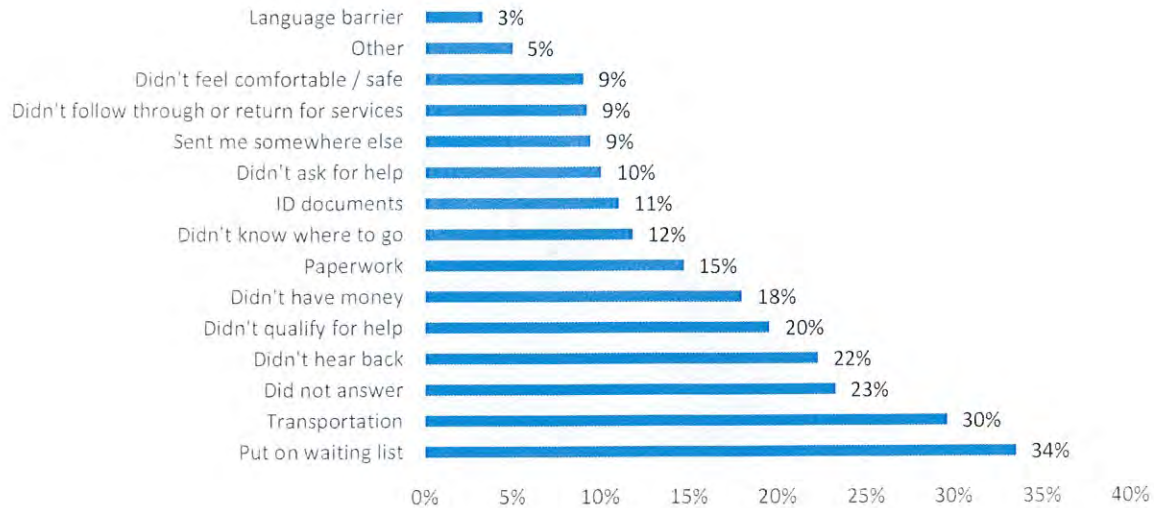


Chart 13: Types of Help Previously Requested by Respondents Meeting State Definition



The third survey question designed to understand service needs asked respondents to select any of 14 options as to why they did not receive the help they needed. The most common responses were that the youth had been put on a waiting list, did not have adequate transportation, and did not hear back.

Chart 14: Reasons Respondents Did Not Receive Help They Needed



## CONCLUSION

The Identification and Connection Working Group of the Massachusetts Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth is grateful to all of the Continuums of Care, youth-serving organizations, youth ambassadors, community partners, and other Commission members who made the 2015 Massachusetts Youth Count possible.

Building upon the state's 2014 Youth Count, the 2015 Youth Count marked a step forward in better understanding the experiences and needs of youth and young adults who are experiencing homelessness and housing instability. While the weather was a major barrier, the CoCs and other partners shared positive feedback that they were able to more fully engage youth and community members in the 2015 Youth Count. While much work remains to be done, the state is moving closer toward achieving a more accurate representation and count of unaccompanied youth who are experiencing homelessness.

As this report is being prepared, the 2016 Youth Count is underway. Also, EOHHS has signed contracts with eight regional networks across the state to address youth homelessness. The Commission looks forward to reporting on these endeavors to the Administration, Legislature, and the full range of stakeholders in the months and year ahead. The Commission seeks to continue to strengthen the collective work to address and end unaccompanied youth homelessness in the Commonwealth.

# APPENDIX A

## MASSACHUSETTS YOUTH COUNT SURVEY – 2015

2014/2015 Massachusetts Youth Housing and Homelessness Survey

This survey is being administered by the Massachusetts Special Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth and the local Continuum of Care so that the state and local providers can better understand the housing and service needs of youth and young adults under the age of 25. Your answers will remain confidential. We greatly appreciate your participation!

1. Which city/town are you in right now, taking this survey? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Have you taken this survey already this week?  Yes  No
3. What is your date of birth? (month/day) \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ 4. Please select your age category:  17 and younger  18-24  25 and older
5. Where were you born?  In this city/town  Another place in Massachusetts  Outside of Massachusetts, but within the United States  Outside the U.S.
6. Have you been staying overnight in the city/town where you are taking this survey?  Yes  No, I am staying in \_\_\_\_\_ (city/town)

7. Please check all of the places where you stayed...

- a. In a house or apartment with my immediate family (parent or guardian) that we rent or own.
- b. At the house or apartment of my foster parent
- c. At the house or apartment of another family member, friend, partner/girlfriend/boyfriend
- d. At my own apartment or in a room that I rent
- e. At a shelter or motel paid for by a government-funded program (federal/state/local) or by a non-profit organization
- f. In a transitional housing program
- g. In a group home
- h. Outside in the park, on the street, in a tent, transit station, car, inside in an abandoned building, squat, porch, basement, hallway, etc.
- i. In a treatment or medical facility (such as a hospital, detox)
- j. Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

| A. The night of January 28th (Wednesday) | B. In the past 12 months    |
|--|-----------------------------|
| a. <input type="checkbox"/>              | a. <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. <input type="checkbox"/>              | b. <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. <input type="checkbox"/>              | c. <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. <input type="checkbox"/>              | d. <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e. <input type="checkbox"/>              | e. <input type="checkbox"/> |
| f. <input type="checkbox"/>              | f. <input type="checkbox"/> |
| g. <input type="checkbox"/>              | g. <input type="checkbox"/> |
| h. <input type="checkbox"/>              | h. <input type="checkbox"/> |
| i. <input type="checkbox"/>              | i. <input type="checkbox"/> |
| j. <input type="checkbox"/>              | j. <input type="checkbox"/> |

8. How long have you stayed/lived in the place you stayed last night?  Fewer than 6 months  6-12 months  More than 12 months
9. Are you still living with your parent/guardian/foster parent?  Yes  No
10. If not, what are the reasons you are not living with a parent/guardian/foster parent? Please check all that apply.
  - a.  I was fighting with my parent/guardian/foster parent
  - b.  I left foster care and could not return home
  - c.  I was released from jail or a detention facility
  - d.  My parent/guardian/foster parent or another household member was abusive (sexually, physically, or emotionally) or neglected me
  - e.  My parent/guardian/foster parent told me to leave
  - f.  My parent/guardian/foster parent was experiencing homelessness and/or my family lost its housing
  - g.  My parent/guardian/foster parent abused drugs or alcohol
  - h.  I was/am pregnant or got someone pregnant
  - i.  My sexual orientation and/or gender identity
  - j.  My use of drugs or alcohol
  - k.  I wanted to leave
  - l.  My house was too small for everyone to live there
  - m.  I did not feel safe because of violence or unsafe activities in my house
  - n.  My parent/guardian/foster parent died/passed away.
  - o.  Other: \_\_\_\_\_
11. Have you ever left home and been out on your own?  Yes, I left when I was \_\_\_\_ years old, and have not returned home  I left home when I was \_\_\_\_ years old, but later returned home  I still am with my parent/guardian/foster parent, and have not left home yet
12. Have your parents/guardians ever experienced homelessness?  Yes, but I was not with them  Yes, and I was with them  No  Don't know
13. Do you have friends who currently are experiencing homelessness?  Yes  No  Don't know
14. Are you currently experiencing homelessness?  Yes  No, but have experienced homelessness in the past  No, and never have experienced homelessness  Don't know Comment: \_\_\_\_\_
15. Are you currently in school?  Yes  No
16. If yes, are you in:  Middle school  High school  GED/HiSET program  Vocational training program  College  Other
17. What is the highest grade or year of school that you have completed? Please check one.
 

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. <input type="checkbox"/> No formal education</li> <li>b. <input type="checkbox"/> 8<sup>th</sup> grade or less</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>f. <input type="checkbox"/> High school equivalency, such as GED or HiSET certificate</li> <li>g. <input type="checkbox"/> Some college credits</li> </ol> |
|---|---|

→ Please continue the survey on back!

- c.  9-11<sup>th</sup> grade
- d.  12<sup>th</sup> grade but no high school diploma
- e.  High school diploma
- h.  College degree
- i.  Post-secondary training

As a reminder, all of your answers will remain confidential. Thank you for completing this survey!

18. What are your sources of income? Please check all that apply.

- a.  Full-time job
- b.  Part-time job and/or temporary job
- c.  Money from "under the table" work
- d.  Cash assistance from DTA/Welfare or DCF
- e.  Social Security/disability payments
- f.  Unemployment benefits
- g.  Hustling/selling drugs
- h.  Sex work/turning tricks
- i.  Panhandling/spanging
- j.  Child support
- k.  Money from family members or friends
- l.  None
- m.  Other

19. Are you pregnant?  Yes  No/not applicable  Don't know

20. Do you have children?  Yes  No  Don't know 21. If yes, do they live with you?  Yes  No

22. Have you ever served in the U.S. Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force or Coast Guard?  Yes  No

23. Have you ever been in foster care?  Yes  No  Don't know

24. Have you ever lived in a group home or residential program?  Yes  No  Don't know

25. Have you ever stayed overnight or longer in juvenile detention—a secure facility or residential program for young people—as a result of criminal behavior or police involvement?  Yes  No

26. Have you ever stayed overnight or longer in an adult jail or prison?  Yes  No

27. In the last year, have you tried to get help from any of the following services/programs? Please check all that apply.

- a.  Shelter or short-term housing (such as a transitional living program)
- b.  Long-term housing (such as Section 8 or public housing)
- c.  Educational support (such as enrolling in school or GED/HISET program)
- d.  Job training, life skills training, and/or career placement
- e.  Health care services, including emergency room services and care to help with health conditions/disabilities
- f.  Family support (such as conflict mediation or parenting support)
- g.  Child care
- h.  Nutritional assistance (such as Food Stamps/SNAP or free meals)
- i.  Cash assistance (such as DTA/Welfare benefits or Social Security Disability benefits)
- j.  Counseling or other mental health care services
- k.  Substance abuse/alcohol treatment program
- l.  No, I haven't tried to access help
- m.  Other

28. Did you get the help you needed?  Yes, all of the help I needed  Some of the help I needed  No, none of the help I needed

29. If you did not receive all of the help you needed, why was that? Please check all that apply.

- a.  Transportation
- b.  Sent somewhere else
- c.  Language barrier
- d.  Put on waiting list
- e.  Paperwork
- f.  I.D./documents
- g.  Didn't hear back
- h.  Didn't know where to go
- i.  Didn't qualify for help
- j.  Didn't feel comfortable/safe
- k.  Didn't follow through or return for services
- l.  Didn't ask for help
- m.  Didn't have money
- n.  Other \_\_\_\_\_

30. What is your race/ethnicity? Please check all that apply.

- Black/African American
- Native American
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- White
- Multiracial
- Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_
- Hispanic or Latino/a

31. What is your gender identity?  Female  Male  Transgender, FTM  Transgender, MTF  Genderqueer  Agender  Other \_\_\_\_\_  
 Prefer not to answer

32. What was the sex assigned to you at birth?  Female  Male  Other \_\_\_\_\_

33. What is your sexual orientation? Please check the answer that best describes you.

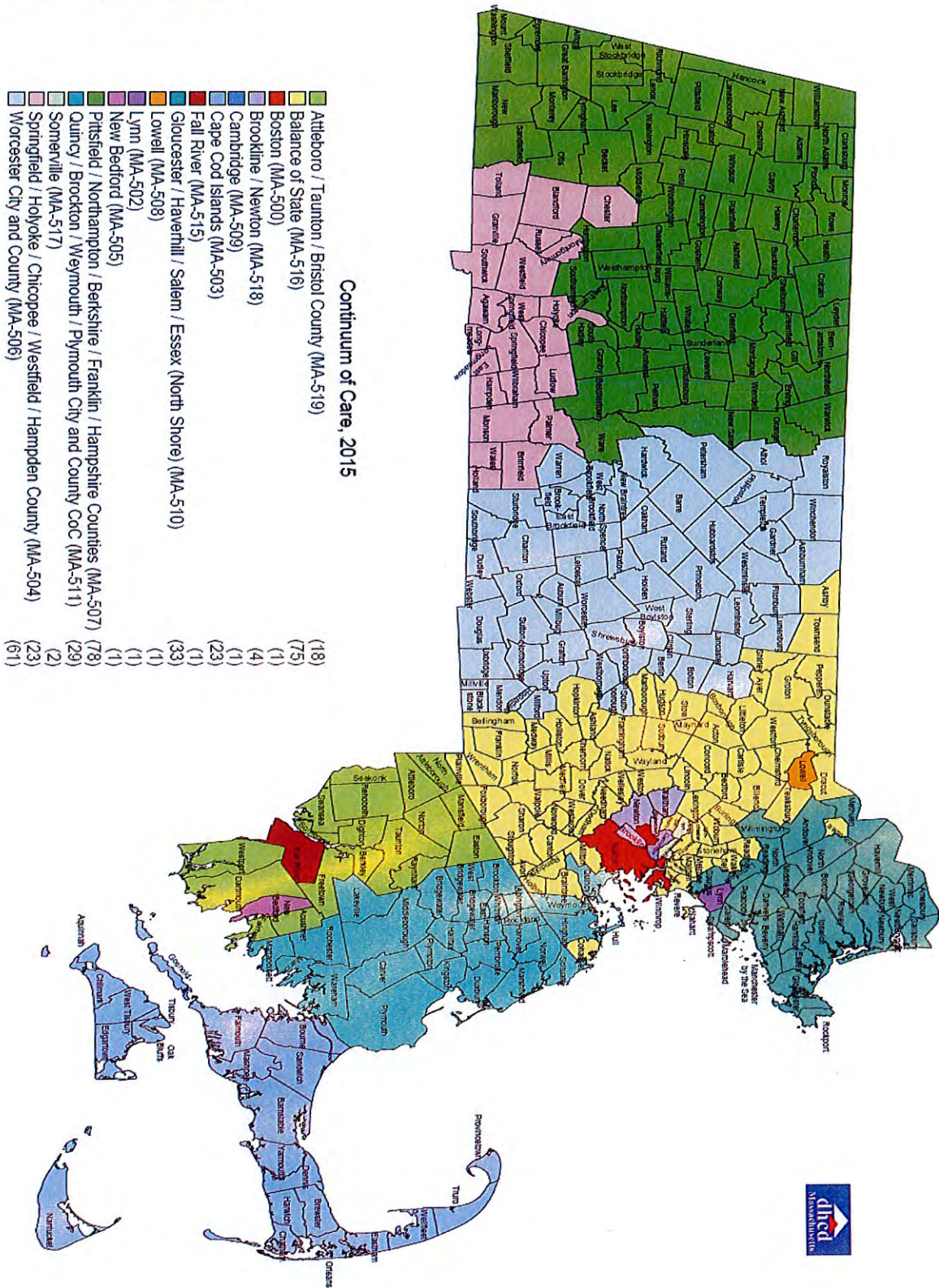
- Straight
- Lesbian
- Gay
- Bisexual
- Queer
- Questioning/don't know
- Asexual
- Other \_\_\_\_\_
- Prefer not to answer

34. What are the first and last letters of your first (given) name? \_\_\_\_\_ 35. What are the first and last letters of your last (family) name? \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey! Is there anything you would like to share to help us better serve you and other young people like you?

FOR OFFICIAL USE ONLY—UNIQUE IDENTIFIER: \_\_\_\_\_  
Code: First and Last Letters of First Name/ Last Letter of First Name/First and Last Letters of Last Name/ Gender Code [0=Female; 1=Male; 2=Transgender Female to Male; 3=Transgender Male to Female; 4=Genderqueer; 5=Agender; 6=Other; 7=Prefer Not to Answer/ Date of Birth (2-digit month/2-digit day/2-digit year)/CoC code

# APPENDIX B CONTINUUMS OF CARE



**APPENDIX C**  
**YOUTH COUNT CONFERENCE AGENDA**

**2015 Massachusetts Youth Count:  
A Dialogue and Conference for Partners**

- I. **Welcoming Remarks** – Kathy Betts, Assistant Secretary for Children, Youth and Families, Executive Office of Health and Human Services
  
- II. **Commitment from the Legislature** – Representative Jim O'Day
  
- III. **Youth Ambassador Experience** – Kevin Lilly
  
- IV. **Presentation of 2014 Youth Count Findings** – Liz Rogers, Department of Housing and Community Development
  
- V. **Presentation of Revised Survey Tool and Practice Priorities** – Kelly Turley, Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless; Sarah Slautterback, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education; Tina Giarla, Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless; Mark McLaughlin and Claire Winship, Bridge Over Troubled Waters

**BREAK – 11:00 a.m.**

- VI. **Panel Discussion: Learning from our Neighbors** – Facilitator, Linda King, City of Lowell, *Panelists:* Lizzy Ortiz, Hampden County CoC; Lisa Goldsmith, Three County Rural CoC; Janet Richardi, South Coast Regional Network to End Homelessness

**LUNCH – 12:15 p.m.**

- VII. **Discussion: Status of CoC Youth Count Planning and Progress** – Facilitator: Caitlin Golden, Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance

## APPENDIX D

### EDUCATION INFORMATION

#### UNACCOMPANIED HOMELESS YOUTH IN MASSACHUSETTS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Massachusetts Public Schools have adopted the definition of homelessness from the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act. This includes children and Youth who lack a fixed regular and adequate night time residence. Students are further identified as unaccompanied if they are out of the physical custody of a parent or legal guardian. The recently adopted state definition of unaccompanied homeless youth aligns closely with the definition schools are already using.

For many years the number of unaccompanied homeless youth (UHY) was thought to be small; particularly for those that are school age. However, the experience of youth service providers has suggested unaccompanied homelessness is a growing issue for youth under eighteen as well as older youth. In 2005 the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) added a housing status question to the bi-annual Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) in an effort to better understand the impact of homelessness on children and youth, their risk behaviors and protective factors. Responses allowed for living arrangements that met the definition of homelessness when students were living with their parents and when they were unaccompanied. Results have over the years indicated as many as four to five thousand children and youth may be unaccompanied and homeless during any school year or approximately 1.7 - 2.1% of the high school student population.

Public schools are required to report the number of homeless students identified and enrolled by their living arrangements over the course of a school year. This is a cumulative count for a school year and does not track changes in living arrangement after identification. In 2005-2006 (the first year data was collected), schools identified a total of 201 unaccompanied homeless youth in Massachusetts. The enrollment number of unaccompanied homeless youth reached a peak of 935 during the 2012-2013 school year and declined slightly to 861 during the 2014-2015 school year. Of that total, 781 students were in high school.\*

#### IDENTIFICATION OF UHY

Massachusetts rolled out Youth Count! in 2014 and again in 2015. Many providers and advocates have urged schools to participate in Youth Count! to ensure inclusion of younger unaccompanied homeless youth that are still in school. However, both federal and state laws protect a student's housing status, prohibit schools from sharing personally identifying student information and require parental consent for participation in surveys making it impossible for schools to participate in the Youth Count! Survey directly. In lieu of Youth Count! Data (ESE) has state-level data regarding unaccompanied homeless youth that provides some information on who these young people are and how they are doing educationally.

When looking at data for students experiencing homelessness it is important to remember the context in which these students are attending school. Loss of housing is rarely an overnight event and is often accompanied with multiple moves, food insecurity and disruptions of social networks

that normally support families, children and youth. The stigma of homelessness also adds to the barriers of accessing the services that families and their students may find most helpful. This loss of support further compounded by the lack of parental support unaccompanied homeless youth experience. Despite these challenges unaccompanied homeless students are graduating from high school - though there is much work to be done before we see them graduating at the same rate as their housed peers.

### **DEMOGRAPHICS**

Students identified as unaccompanied homeless youth are 46% female and 54% male and make up 4.39% of all homeless students. They are disproportionately students of color; 54% Hispanic, 11% Black, and only 30% white.

### **ACADEMIC DATA**

During the 2014-2015 school year unaccompanied homeless high school students were identified in the following grades 224 in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, 127 in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, 127 in 11<sup>th</sup> grade and 303 in 12<sup>th</sup> grade. This distribution across grades may be reflective of 9<sup>th</sup> grade being a transition year and a grade where students are often retained when not meeting academic standards or credit requirements. Many 12<sup>th</sup> graders turn 18 years old during their senior year and are susceptible to being displaced from their homes by either being asked to leave home or leaving on their own.

Unaccompanied homeless youth are also disproportionately identified for special education services at 19.97% and as English Language Learners (ELL) at 40.58%.

### **GRADUATION RATES \*\***

Homeless students have a graduation rate of 63.4%. Unaccompanied homeless students who are out of the physical custody of a parent/legal guardian have a slightly higher graduation rate of 67%. For these students, school is a day shelter and their ability to find a place to stay may hinge of their being in school in ways that are different from their homeless peers who remain with their parents. It may be that adults who are willing to take youth in are willing to do so only if the youth are in school during the day. It may also be that staying in school, connected to peers and services helps unaccompanied homeless youth find a place for the night. This may also explain why, though considered chronically absent, unaccompanied homeless youth have a slightly better attendance rate, 86.73%, compared to their homeless peers with parents 85.53%.

The high mobility of homeless students and particularly those who are unaccompanied often results in time out of school and loss of credits. As a result many need a fifth year to complete graduation requirements. For homeless students in general the retention rate is 17% compared to the state average of 11%. Interestingly, unaccompanied homeless students are slightly less likely to stay on for a fifth year at 13%. However, staying on for a fifth year of high school boosts the overall graduation rate for unaccompanied homeless youth. In the class of 2013, 67% of unaccompanied youth graduated in four years but given an additional year a total 74.8% graduated with a high school diploma; an indication of remarkable resilience.



## DROPOUT

National literature often cites a 75% dropout rate for homeless students. This data is gleaned primarily from street youth who may have been homeless for some time in contrast to all homeless youth including those that may be sheltered or couch surfing. Among homeless students in Massachusetts the dropout rate is 6.2% compared to the state average of 2.2%. Numbers for unaccompanied homeless youth are too small to calculate a dropout rate.

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\* Students in grades Preschool thru 8 that are identified as unaccompanied are often left behind when parents are hospitalized, incarcerated or deported and are taken in by friends or relatives who have no legal decision making rights for them.

\*\* The Class of 2013 is the first cohort for which 4- and 5-year graduation rates, retention and dropout rates are available for homeless students.

## STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS AT UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS BOSTON

### OFFICE OF URBAN AND OFF CAMPUS SUPPORT SERVICES (U-ACCESS)

Post-secondary homeless students among the homeless population are the most invisible group. There is not enough empirical evidence or description about the scope of homelessness among the post-secondary student population due to their reluctance to self-identify and the lack of support services. The Office of Urban and Off Campus Support Services (U-ACCESS) and the Department of Psychology and School Counseling at UMass Boston recently conducted a campus-wide survey regarding housing stability and food insecurity among UMass Boston students.

The *Housing Stability & Food Insecurity Survey* was carefully created by the Office of U-ACCESS and a cohort of 8-10 doctoral students in the Department of Counseling and School Psychology over a six-month period, in accordance with federal regulations upheld by UMass Boston's Institutional Review Board ("IRB"). The purpose of the survey is to understand issues of housing and food insecurity among students at UMass Boston. This project explored student vulnerabilities which may act as barriers to academic success in public urban universities.

According to the data collected in the study, 5% of respondents reported being homeless since starting college and approximately 5% of respondents either could not or did not know whether they could continue sleeping in their current place for 2 weeks. Nearly a quarter of respondents also reported some form of food insecurity over the past year. Furthermore, nearly 6.4% of participants reported severe food insecurity that they often or sometimes did not eat for a day or two because they did not have enough money for food. (Silva, et al., 2015)

The study further explored the correlation between food insecurity and homelessness impact the students' school performance. The result indicated that close to 50% of students with housing insecurity were affected to attend class. While 81% of them indicated the impact of housing insecurity affected their performance in classes from somewhat to very affected. For those students with food insecurity, close to 60% indicated the food insecurity affected their ability to attend class while 87.5% of students reported the impact affected their performance in class. (Silva, et al., 2015)

Please contact Shirley Fan-Chan at [shirley.fanchan@umb.edu](mailto:shirley.fanchan@umb.edu) for further inquiries.

#### Reference

- Silva, M. R., Kleinert, W., Sheppard, V., Cantrell, K., Freeman-Coppadge, D., Tsoy, E., . . . Pearrow, M. (2015). The Relationship Between Food Security, Housing Stability, and School Performance Among College Students in an Urban University. *Journal of College*
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