

# Massachusetts Youth Count 2016

## **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



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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

In May 2016, the Massachusetts Special Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth (“the Commission”) conducted the third annual Massachusetts Youth Count (Count), a statewide initiative to survey unaccompanied youth who are experiencing homelessness. 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.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts understands that to ensure the health and wellbeing of unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness—undoubtedly one of society’s most vulnerable populations—it is critically important to determine the scope of the problem. To that end, the 2016 Count builds on momentum from the groundbreaking 2014 Count, which was the first statewide effort of its kind in the United States. The 2014 Count also establishes a baseline against which progress in addressing homelessness among unaccompanied youth can be measured. The Fiscal Year 2016 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<sup>1</sup>. This report is being submitted to comply with that requirement. The ultimate goal of the Count is to produce information that will guide the development of policies and programs to reduce homelessness among unaccompanied youth. This report presents the process and outcomes of the 2016 MA Youth Count.

### **2016 MA Youth Count: *At A Glance***

**# of unaccompanied homeless youth:** 502

% under 18: 1%

% LGBTQ: 19%

#### **Top 3 reasons no longer with parent/guardian:**

- Fighting with parent/guardian
- Was told to leave
- Wanted to leave

#### **Top services sought:**

- Housing
- Nutrition assistance
- Cash assistance

#### **Main barriers faced accessing services:**

- Wait list
- Transportation
- Didn’t hear back from the provider

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<sup>1</sup> The General Appropriations Act language (4000-0300) states: “\$150,000 shall be expended for the work of the Massachusetts unaccompanied homeless youth commission to determine the scope of need among unaccompanied youth and young adults ages 24 and younger who are experiencing homelessness, and to identify and implement potential models for appropriate service delivery to unaccompanied homeless youth in urban, suburban, and rural areas of the commonwealth; and provided further, that not later than January 18, 2016, the executive office of health and human services shall submit a report to the house and senate committees on ways and means detailing the methodology used to project caseload and utilization in fiscal year 2015 and fiscal year 2016”

## 1.1 STRUCTURE OF THE MASSACHUSETTS YOUTH COUNT

Three key organizing entities supported the 2016 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 14 of the local Continuums of Care (CoCs).<sup>2</sup>

The ***Special Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth*** provides oversight for the 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 2016 count, included 26 members, representing youth, state government, service providers, and advocates (see Attachment 1 for members of the Special Commission).

The ***Identification and Connection Working Group*** of the Special Commission organized and facilitated the Massachusetts Youth Count on behalf of the Commission. For the 2016 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 CoCs.

The **CoCs** 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.

## 2.0 YOUTH COUNT METHODOLOGY

The Commission, through the Working Group, provided technical assistance to 14 of the participating CoCs in Massachusetts that executed the Youth Count survey in 2016. The Count’s uniform survey tool was administered during a 2-week period in May 2016. Administering the Count in May was a major shift from 2015. Attempts to align the timing of the Youth Count with the HUD Point-in-Time (PiT) count were disrupted by two significant snow events in 2015<sup>3</sup>. The combination of the weather-related disruptions and feedback from young people that a better time to engage youth is in the spring, led the Commission and CoCs to move the Youth Count to the first two weeks of May.

The Working Group developed guidelines for CoCs to work with diverse partners to identify connected and disconnected youth and to engage youth volunteers to assist with implementation. For example, the Working Group recommended that youth complete the surveys themselves to limit potential reluctance associated with answering somewhat sensitive questions verbally. However, the Working Group also recommended that CoCs have volunteers on hand to support young people if they needed help with the survey. (Please see the Commission’s September 2014 report entitled “Massachusetts

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<sup>2</sup> A Continuum of Care (CoC) is a regional or local planning body that coordinates housing and services funding for homeless families and individuals.

<sup>3</sup> The HUD Point-in-Time (PIT) count is a count of sheltered and unsheltered homeless persons on a single night in January

Youth Count 2014: Overview and Analysis” for more history on the Count’s methodology and its development <http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/docs/eohhs/cyf/mayouthcount2014.pdf> ).

The Working Group formulated 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, training all volunteers, engaging diverse partners, providing day-of coordination and quality control, and seeking creative ways to engage youth under 18.

## 2.1 REFINEMENT OF THE UNIFORM SURVEY TOOL

To develop the 2016 uniform survey tool, the Working Group started with the 2015 survey tool and worked to further address limitations, reduce confusion, and encourage completion of each question by survey participants. Additionally, Suffolk County was selected to participate in Chapin Hall’s national Voices of Youth Count initiative, which led the Working Group to add questions to the tool to be in line with other participating counties across the country (To learn more about the Voices of Youth Count and Chapin Hall, see <http://voicesofyouthcount.org/voices-of-youth-count/>).

For the 2016 Youth Count, the Commission also collaborated with the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless and participants in the Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance’s Leadership Development Program to seek additional feedback on the survey tool from young people. The Working Group also reached out to CoCs for their feedback as the updated tool was developed.

Some highlights of changes made to the 2016 survey:

- An open-ended question was added about primary language and whether the survey was administered in the respondent’s primary language.
- Young people were asked if they have a safe place to stay for at least the next 14 days.
- In addition to Date of Birth, respondents were asked directly “How old are you?”.
- Questions about education and employment were substantially shortened to only ask if respondents had a high school diploma or GED, if they are currently attending school or another educational program, if they are currently employed at a job for which they receive a pay check/pay stub, and whether they had ever exchanged sex for a place to stay, money, or other necessities. These changes were made to bring the survey more in line with the Voices of Youth Count survey.
- Questions about being in juvenile detention and adult jail were combined into one question.
- Questions about being pregnant and parenting were combined into one question.
- Questions about gender identity and sexual orientation were reworded to be more inclusive.
- To be in line with the Voices of Youth Count, unlike prior years, the 2016 survey did not include a question about whether there was a history of homelessness in their family or if the respondent has friends experiencing homelessness.
- Choosing from a list of options, the 2016 survey only asked about where the respondent slept the night before, but not if they slept in each of the options in the past 12 months. This change

was made because the formatting of the 2015 version of the question seemed to cause confusion for some respondents.

- The revised paper version was reformatted to be more readable and included more detailed explanations for why questions were included on the survey. The resulting tool actually had fewer questions than 2015, but appeared longer due to formatting.

CoC feedback indicated that the revised tool worked well. Some felt it was too long and heard from some youth that some of the questions felt invasive (See Attachment 2 for the final 2016 tool).

## 2.2 CONTINUUM OF CARE ENGAGEMENT

Once the methodology and updated draft survey tool were complete, the Working Group worked with the CoCs to develop the outreach strategies. Engagement with the CoCs during this phase 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.

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 March 8<sup>th</sup> 2016. 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—with a particular focus on integrating Youth Ambassadors and outreach strategies to LGBTQ youth. The half-day conference proved to be successful with approximately 40 people in attendance, including at least one representative from each of the CoCs. 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 \$5,600 by the Commission to help with financial costs of conducting the Youth Count. Not all CoCs accepted the grant and were able to administer the survey with other resources.

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### 2.2.1. KEY PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES

Table One summarizes key components of the Count, as conducted within 14 regions of the state.

**Table One: 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	Yes	Yes	Yes	14 days	Yes	Yes	Yes
Balance of State	Yes	No	No	14 days	Yes	No	Yes
Boston	No	Yes	Yes	14 days	Yes	Yes	Yes
South Shore	No	No	No	14 days	No	No	Yes
Newton	Unknown*	Unknown*	Unknown*	1 day	N/A	Unknown*	Yes
Cambridge	No	Yes	No	13 days	Yes	Yes	Yes
South Coast (Fall River/New Bedford)	Yes	No	Yes	3 days	No	Yes	Yes
Hampden	Yes	Yes	Yes	One week	Yes	No	Yes
Lynn	Yes	Yes	Yes	6 days	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lowell	Yes	No	Yes	5 days	Yes	Yes	Yes
North Shore	Yes	No	No	10 days	Yes	No	Yes
Somerville	Yes	Yes	Yes	14 days	Yes	No	Yes
Three County Rural	No	Yes	No	Unknown	No	No	Yes
Worcester City and County	No	No	No	14 days	Yes	Yes	Yes

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### 2.2.2. IMPLEMENTATION SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES

Debriefing calls were conducted with representatives from the CoCs about their experiences conducting the surveys. Themes from the debriefing calls provide context to understand findings and will be revisited in a separate report to be shared with the Commission on the MA Count Methodology.

#### **Partner Engagement**

Several CoC representatives discussed the momentum they have been able to achieve with the Youth Count. Many have been able to maintain a core group of partners in the Count effort. The energy behind the Count has also allowed some communities to bring new partners to the table. Several CoC representatives discussed the expertise particular partners have brought with regards to street outreach in general and in engaging young people under 18 and LGBTQ youth.

While many discussed how partner engagement was strength of the process, several CoC representatives also discussed challenges. One common challenge was getting surveys back from partners. CoC representatives were hopeful that the online version of the survey could help rectify this. An almost universally mentioned challenge was connecting with the schools as a partner. Many CoC

representatives discussed that schools were more willing to get the word out about the survey in 2016. Some CoCs have been able to engage superintendents about the issue, which has led to more dialogue about unaccompanied youth homelessness. In spite of this positive movement, the schools have not been a common site for survey administration. This greatly limits the amount of data able to be collected about young people under the age of 18. Federal guidelines about confidentiality and privacy, as well as taking time away from learning to do the survey, are the main reasons why the survey is not able to be completed in schools. Ways to de-identify the survey tool may be one step that can be taken to allow the tool to be administered in schools in the future.

### **Youth Engagement**

CoC representatives discussed several strategies they used to engage youth both in the process of the 2016 Count as well as to fill out surveys. Youth Ambassadors were discussed positively by many CoCs. Offering young people training and a stipend to do outreach to other young people did help get surveys completed. Many CoC providers alluded to the fact that unaccompanied homeless youth tends to be a population that does not want to be found and therefore believe youth-to-youth outreach may be a more effective way to connect. Youth Ambassadors also provided CoCs with important feedback and advice about the Count process.

Some CoC representatives discussed challenges with the Youth Ambassadors—such as keeping them engaged. These CoCs had better luck at getting surveys returned via providers. “Magnet events” (i.e. events designed to attract young people experiencing homelessness who do not use shelters or who are difficult to reach on the street to administer surveys) also got mixed reviews. Some were well attended, others were not. It was not clear how many surveys were collected overall or from unaccompanied homeless youth specifically from these events.

Some CoC representatives mentioned other initiatives they were a part of that allowed them to connect more directly with youth experiencing homelessness. These types of initiatives allowed for the building of relationships beyond the count. Some CoC representatives mentioned the importance of being careful with language and sensitive questions. It was raised that youth may not consider themselves homeless and so using that language can turn young people off. It was also reported that some youth felt uncomfortable with the questions on gender, race, ethnicity, and parenting status.

### **Logistics and Planning**

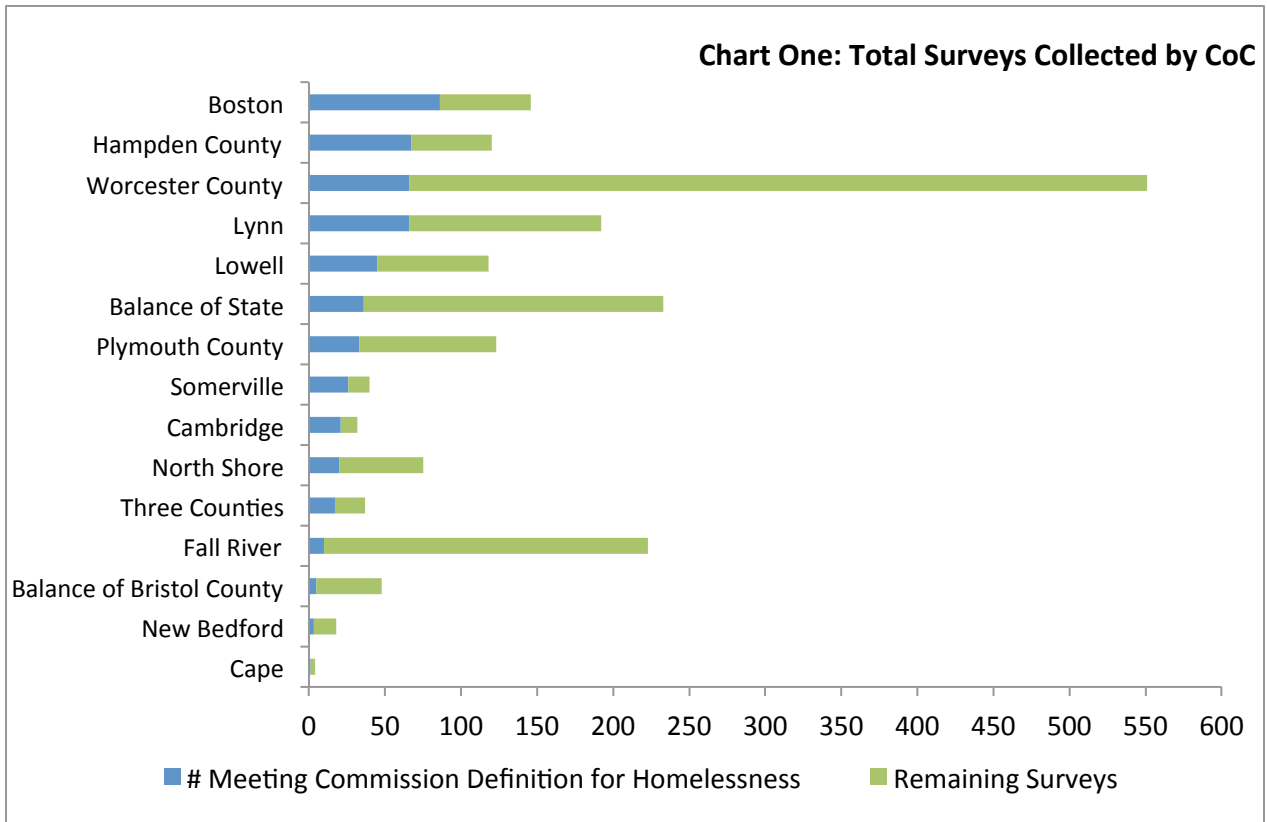
While CoC representatives were committed to the process and felt that the planning behind them generates needed momentum, they also raised some issues around logistics that make the process challenging. CoCs reported to be stretched thin, preventing the creation of regional Count working groups in some cases. Others raised whether CoCs are the right body to receive the capacity building grants and suggested youth development agencies might be more appropriate. Some CoCs have identified effective outreach strategies to connect with younger youth—such as conducting the survey at school bus stops—but lacked personnel to handle the large numbers of youth at one time. Some suggested that more funding is needed to do outreach more comprehensively and that educational materials and advertising resources from the state could ease the load on the CoCs.

Geography was mentioned on several occasions as well. CoCs that cover a large number of cities and towns; a large physical space; and/or contain rural, suburban, and urban communities faced challenges coordinating the whole effort. Finally, timing was discussed. Most CoCs thought May was preferable to January for the Count. Yet, several CoCs mentioned that their seasonal shelters had closed by the time the Count started and others discussed May as a challenging time due to grant applications being due. For these reasons and ultimately to be able to include more youth under 18, several mentioned the fall as a better time.

### 3.0 YOUTH COUNT RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

In total, 2,169 surveys were completed and entered into the database for analysis. Respondents over the age of 24, duplicates, and surveys with ambiguous housing status were removed (i.e. if a respondent chose multiple, contradictory items to the question, “Where did you sleep last night?”). If there was any question about whether the record actually was a duplicate, it was included in the database. A total of 1,965 surveys were included in the final analysis.

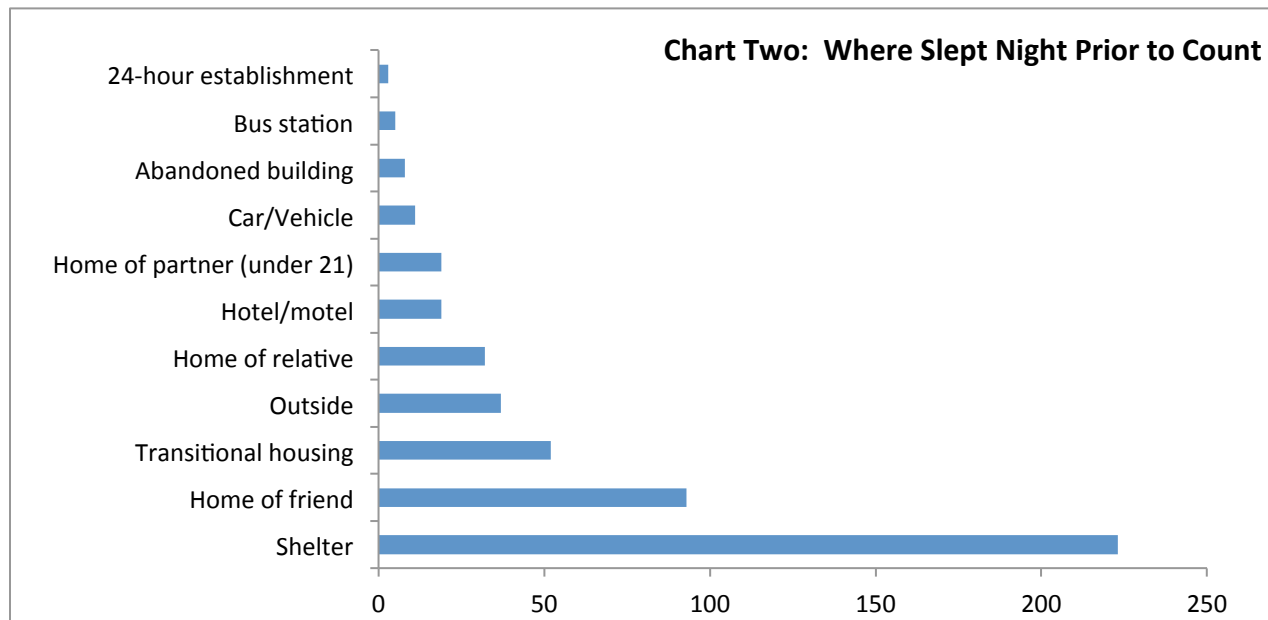
These 1,965 responses were analyzed to determine the number that met the definition of an unaccompanied homeless youth that was adopted by the Commission (See Section 1.0 Introduction). In 2016, a total of 502 survey respondents met the Commission’s definition. Chart One presents the total number of included surveys that were collected by each of the CoCs and the number of survey respondents meeting the Commission’s definition. As a point of reference, 358 total respondents met the HUD definition of homelessness (i.e. slept in an emergency shelter, transitional housing programs, domestic violence safe havens, and places not meant for habitation the prior night). Additionally, 104 youth and young adults were currently homeless, but were accompanied by a parent or guardian. Of the housed youth, 384 of them reported being homeless at some point in the past and 74 housed youth reported not having a safe place to stay for the next 14 days. These additional data points suggest a higher level of housing instability than numbers of youth and young adults meeting the Commission’s definition. The 1,463 surveys that did not meet the definition of an unaccompanied homeless youth were analyzed to provide a housed youth point of comparison for several of the variables of interest (e.g. in education and employment).



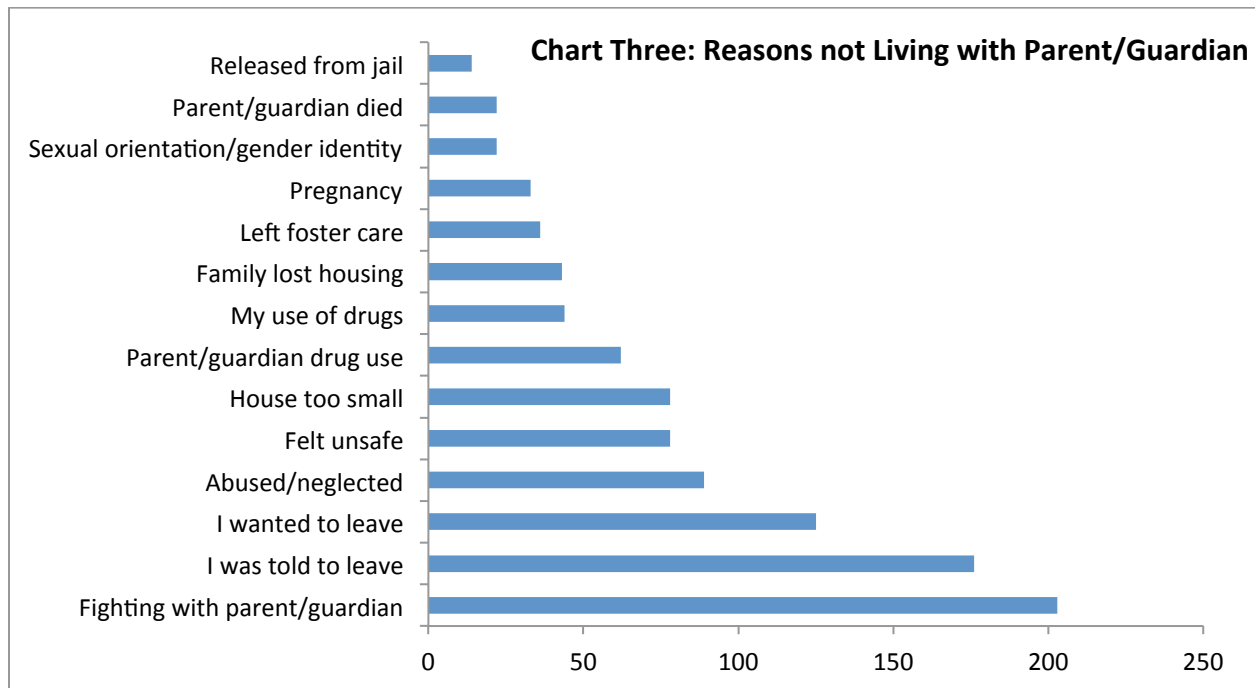
### 3.1 HOUSING STATUS AND REASONS FOR HOMELESSNESS

Chart Two provides information on where the youth and young adults meeting the state definition had slept the night before. In 2016, 223 out of the 502 (44%) respondents meeting the state definition had stayed at a shelter on the night before the Count. This includes youth-focused shelters, adult family shelters, and single adult shelters. This is slightly higher than the prior year, in which 42% of homeless youth and young adults were in shelters.

Like in 2015, the next most common response was staying with a family, partner, or friend, with 144 or 27% of respondents. It is important to note that 51% of these young people (74 youth) did not or were not sure if they had a safe place to stay on a regular basis for the next 14 days. Sixty-four youth and young adults reported staying outside or another place not meant for human habitation; at 13% of respondents, this is one percentage point higher than last year's count. Most CoCs conduct their counts through service-based strategies and only seven reported doing street-based outreach, which in part explains the relatively low number of unaccompanied homeless youth and young adults who reported living on the streets.



In order to gain some insight into young people's path to homelessness, the survey included a question about why the respondent was no longer with their parent or guardian. As presented in Chart Three, the survey provided 16 options, and respondents could choose as many of those as were relevant to their situation.



Like in 2015, the top reasons unaccompanied homeless youth and young adults were not living with their families was due to family conflict. Respondents' written comments on the surveys provide deeper understanding about the types of family conflicts young people faced. What follows is a sampling of representative comments:

- “I didn’t want to deal with my father anymore, so instead of being disrespectful and making scene between father and son I decided to leave and still have somewhat of a father”
- “I am allowed to stay with my dad for now but need to find alternative arrangements soon because of issues”
- “I have a newborn and they told me I had to be on my own”
- “I left when I was fourteen due to abuse and then from there went house to house til I turned the age 18 thank god I had my social worker to help me out I consider all my social workers as family they are the reason I'm still going to school and pursuing my dream.”
- “My mother's drama with her boyfriend put me out on the streets too many times. They were unreliable to live with and would blame me for their problems”

A second cluster of reasons homeless youth and young adults were not living with their families had to do with resource constraints and changes in families’ living situations. Again, the youth’s comments provide more insight into how resource constraints drove young people into homelessness:

- “Mom moved to Puerto Rico w/o me”
- “Mother eviction”
- “My father moved away, grandmother sold her house and lives in assisted living now, and I never had a relationship with my mother due to her past drug use”
- “My mother abandoned me in Dominican Republic. After 2 years I came back to America but to my aunt’s house. She said I had to leave because there was not enough space. ”
- “My mother died 10 years ago, and I feel very uncomfortable and unwelcome in the home that my father shares with his new wife. She's controlling and it's a very tense and stressful environment. Many friends have offered to house me, but I don't want to burden anyone, so I've slept in my car many times now, in various places across Massachusetts. ”
- “My parents were evicted and we separate so that we could try to find a place for everyone to sleep while they look for a new apartment”
- “The house had caught fire. ”
- “The house was condemned. ”

Mental health issues and drug use represented a third cluster of reasons why the respondents were not with their families:

- “I chose to sell drugs in the street.”
- “Mental issues, breakdowns”

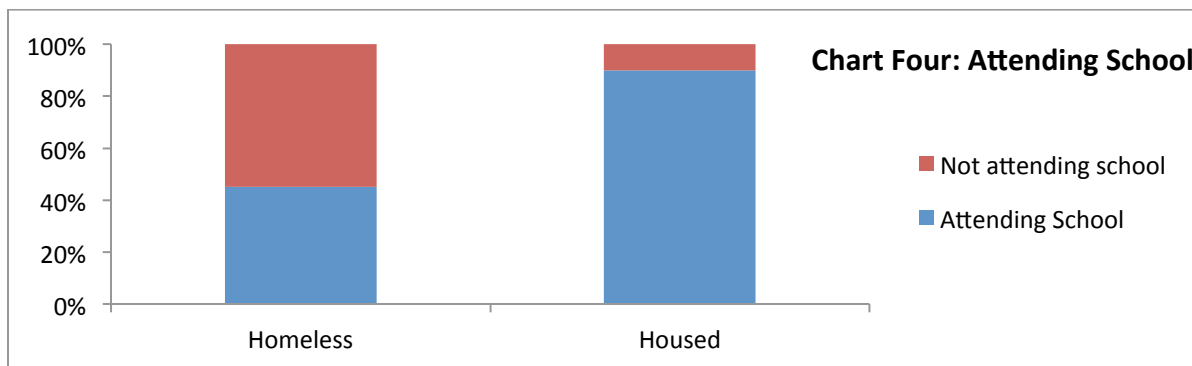
Finally, some youth left home for an opportunity such as college, but still became homeless.

### 3.2 EDUCATION AND INCOME

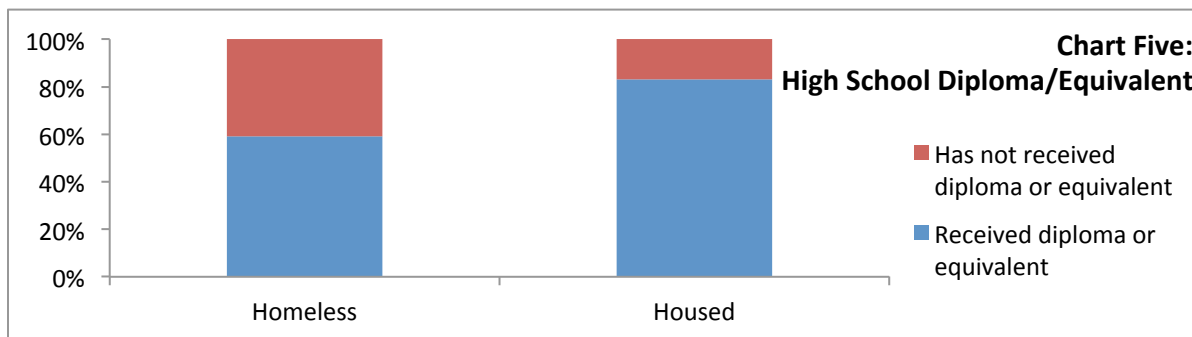
The Working Group included questions regarding school enrollment, educational attainment and income. These questions provide insight into challenges homeless youth may experience in achieving housing and economic stability in the future. The education and employment questions asked in 2016

differ significantly from 2015 to be in line with the Chapin Hall survey and so comparisons to last year are not given.

Roughly 50% of young people who completed a survey were under 20. Ninety-three of these respondents met the Commission's definition of homelessness. We found that 55% of the homeless youth under 20 years old were not attending school. As a point of comparison, only 10% of housed youth under 20 years old were not attending school (See Chart Four). We focused on young people under 20 as this is the age group most likely to still be connected to school.



Roughly 57% of young people who completed a survey were over 18 years old. Of these, 428 met the Commission's definition for homelessness (22%). We found that 41% of respondents over 18 who met the Commission's definition did not have high school diploma or equivalent. Only 17% of respondents over 18 and housed did not have a high school diploma or equivalent (See Chart Five). We focused on young people over 18 as this is the age group most likely to have completed high school.

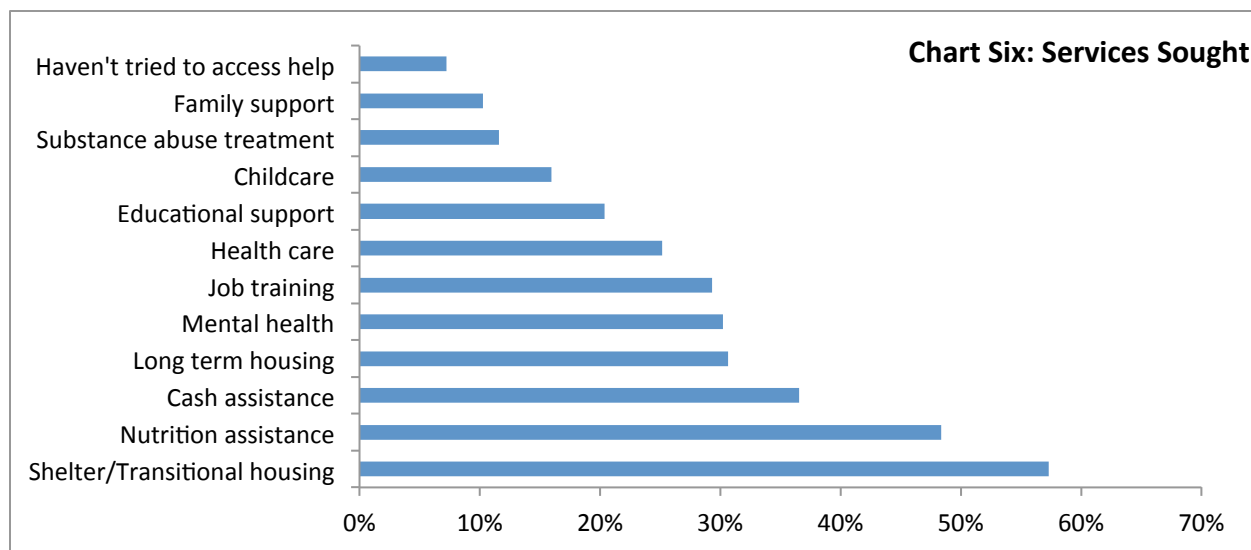


In 2016, respondents were asked if they were working at a job for which they received a check/pay stub. They were also asked if they had ever exchanged sex for food, a place to stay, money or other necessities. We learned that 32% of youth meeting the Commission definition were working at a job for which they receive a check/pay stub, while 47% of housed youth were working. Yet, we also learned that 14% of homeless youth and young adults had ever exchanged sex for money or other necessities, while only 2% of housed youth had.

The differences in school attendance, educational attainment, and income sources between homeless and housed youth is worrisome and demonstrate some of the challenges young people experiencing homelessness face in achieving housing and economic stability in the future.

### 3.3 SERVICE UTILIZATION BY UNACCOMPANIED HOMELESS YOUTH

A major goal of the MA Youth Count is to gain a better understanding of the kinds of services unaccompanied homeless youth need and the challenges they face accessing them. The survey tool included three questions related to service utilization. First, respondents could indicate services they have previously sought from a list of 11 service types. Respondents could indicate they had not tried to access help. Chart Six shows the distribution of responses.



Ninety-six percent of unaccompanied homeless youth did seek help. The top six most sought out services remained the same in 2016 as compared to 2015. Not surprisingly, housing continues to be the most frequently sought after service, followed by nutrition and cash assistance. Similar to last year, just 10.3%, or 52 of the 502 respondents meeting the state definition, reported seeking family support services, though a major reason a young person was no longer with their parent was due to some form of family conflict. While the percentage is similar, the actual number of youth seeking family support decreased as compared to last year (i.e. 47 respondents in 2016 vs. 61 respondents in 2015). Health care moved up to the seventh most sought out service. More youth sought help for substance abuse this year than last as well (55 in 2016 and 44 in 2015).

Chart Seven shows that slightly over one quarter of the unaccompanied homeless youth and young adults (26%) felt they received all the help they needed. The majority only received some of the help they needed and 16% reported receiving none of the help they needed.

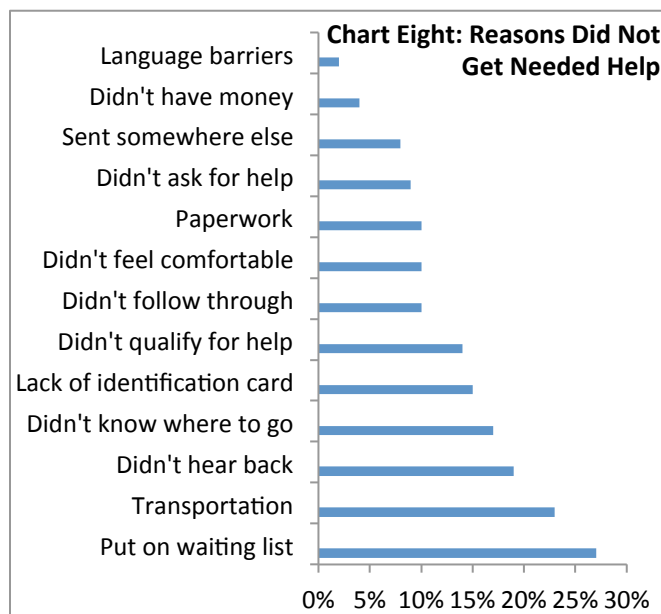
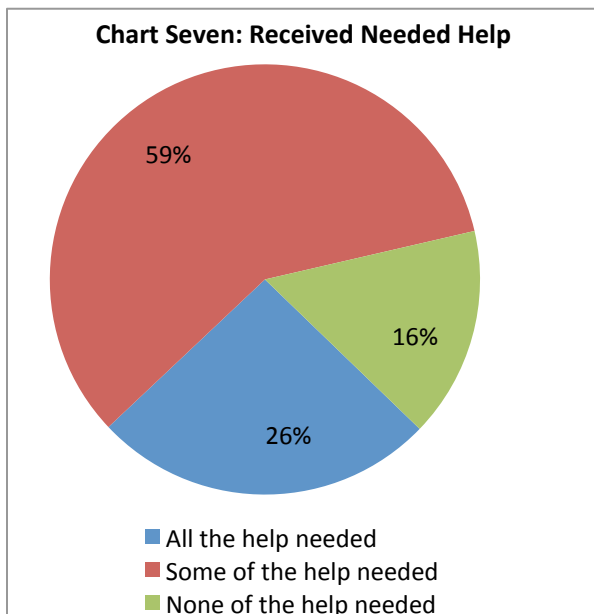


Chart Eight provides the reasons why the young people did not get the help they needed. The top three reasons remained the same from last year—waiting lists, transportation, and not hearing back from the provider. Cost of services dropped considerably as a reason the youth didn't get the help they needed (18% in 2015; 2% in 2016). This year, youth were less likely to report being sent somewhere else and paperwork as reasons they did not get help. These two reasons declining as barriers is encouraging, as it may indicate that providers are changing their practices to be more helpful to unaccompanied youth who are experiencing homelessness.

### 3.4 SUBPOPULATIONS

As the Commission was interested in learning more about the experiences of vulnerable subpopulations, the survey tool contained questions to determine the number of youth who were pregnant or parenting, who had system-involvement histories, and those with veteran status.

#### 3.4.1 PREGNANT OR PARENTING

Of the 502 youth who met the state definition, 32% were pregnant or parenting. Eighty-five percent of these young people had custody of their children. Only 11% of housed youth and young adults were pregnant or parenting.

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### 3.4.2 SYSTEMS INVOLVEMENT

Twenty-eight percent of homeless youth and young adults had ever been in foster care. Only 9.2% of housed youth and young adults had ever been in foster care, further affirming the vulnerability to homeless those who have experienced foster care face.

Thirty-eight percent of homeless youth and young adults had ever lived in a group home or residential program. Again, this can be compared to the 11.5% of housed youth and young adults who had ever lived in a group home.

Finally, we learned that 28% of homeless youth and young adults had ever been in juvenile detention or been incarcerated. The same disparity between homeless and housed youth emerges in incarceration as only 8.2% of housed youth and young adults have ever been detained.

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### 3.4.3 EVER SERVED IN THE MILITARY

Nine of the unaccompanied homeless youth had ever served in the military, constituting 2% of homeless youth in the survey. Twelve housed youth had served in the military, constituting less than 1% of housed youth.

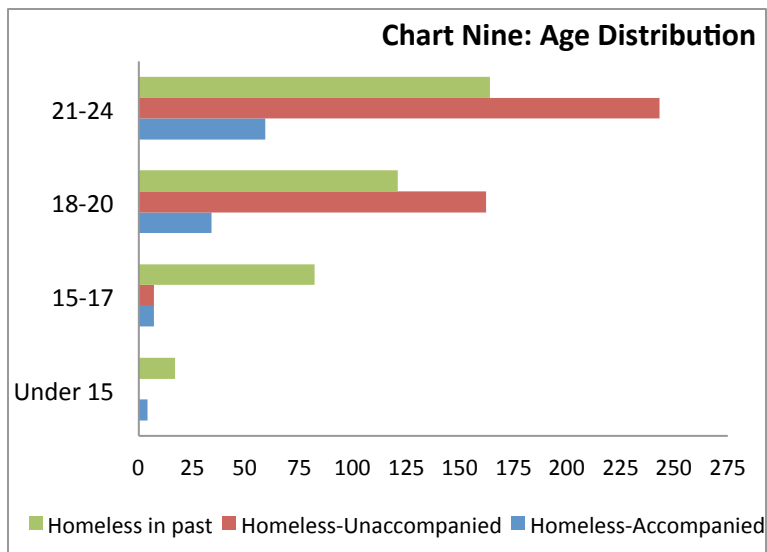
## 3.5 DEMOGRAPHICS

The Commission included several questions to understand demographic characteristics of unaccompanied homeless youth and young adults. In this section, information about the age, race/ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, and place of birth are provided.

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### 3.5.1 AGE

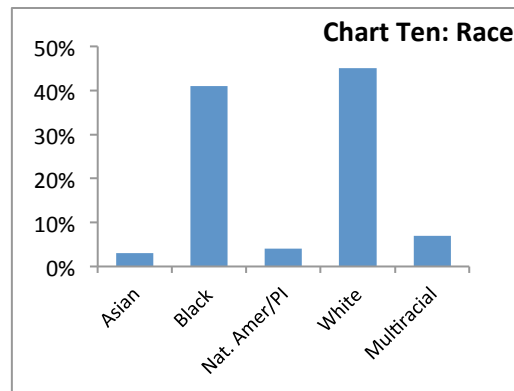
Similar to last year, the vast majority of survey respondents meeting the state's definition of unaccompanied homeless youth were between the ages of 18 and 24. Roughly 1% of responses from those meeting the state's definition for homelessness came from youth under the age of 18 (See Chart Nine). While there was a relatively low number of unaccompanied homeless youth under 18, sixteen housed respondents who were under 18 years old reported that they did not have or were unsure if they had a safe place to stay for the next fourteen days.



Only 7 of the CoCs did targeted outreach to youth under 18. Yet still, roughly 30% (543 respondents) of all surveys were from young people under 18 years old. This could indicate that outreach efforts are reaching younger youth, but not necessarily unaccompanied homeless youth. MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) data suggest that there are significantly more unaccompanied homeless youth under 18 in the public schools across the state. More research into why CoC outreach efforts are not reaching unaccompanied homeless youth under the age of 18 is needed.

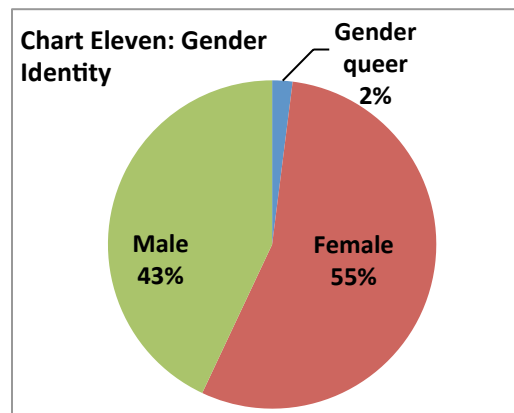
### 3.5.2 RACE/ETHNICITY

The survey tool contained questions to identify race and ethnicity of the youth. Respondents were able to select multiple options for race. Chart Ten indicates the distribution of those responses. White and African-American youth comprised 45% and 41% respectively. Identical to 2015, 37% of homeless youth and young adults identified as Hispanic/Latino/Latina.



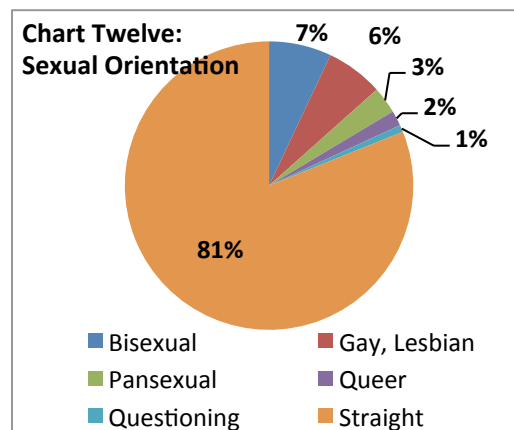
### 3.5.3 GENDER

Of the 502 homeless youth and young adults, 55% identified as female. This is roughly the same rate as in the 2015 survey. Roughly 43% of respondents identify as male. Three percent of respondents identified as transgender. These youth were integrated into the male and female categories on Chart Eleven. Those who failed to respond to the question, responded with “Prefer Not to Answer”, or as gender queer made up 2% of the total responses (See Chart Eleven). Worcester and Boston had the largest number of gender non-conforming homeless youth or young adults.



### 3.5.4 SEXUAL ORIENTATION

In order to better understand the experiences of unaccompanied homeless youth by sexual orientation, the survey tool included the following question: “What is your sexual orientation? Please check the answer that best describes you.” The phrasing and response categories were designed to be as inclusive as possible. Chart Twelve shows the breakdown of responses. The most common response was straight, at 81% of responses. All responses for lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, questioning, and “other” total 19%. Boston, Worcester, Springfield, and Cambridge had the



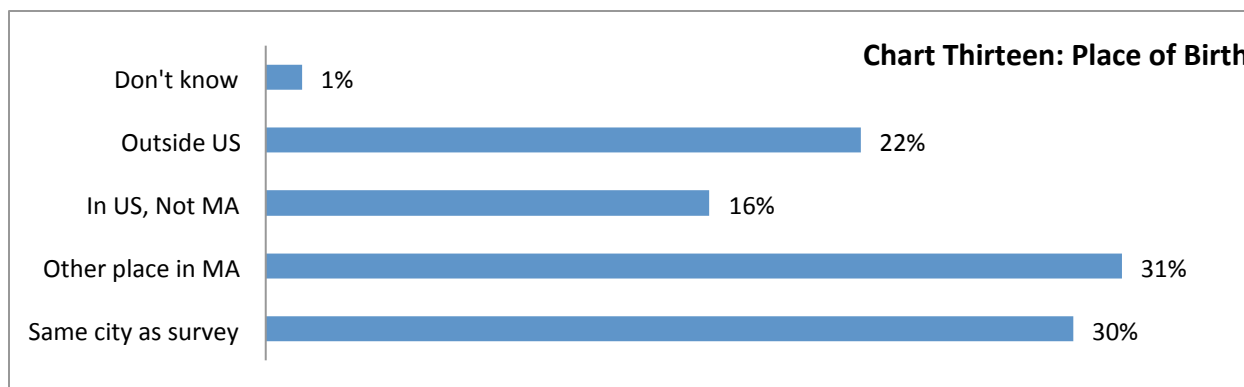
largest numbers of youth who identified as not straight. Three out of these four CoCs conduct targeted outreach to include LGBQ youth.

Of the housed youth and young adults, 81% also identify as straight, suggesting that LGBQ, pansexual, and questioning youth do not appear to be overrepresented among homeless youth and young adults in the Count. Yet, national estimates for LGBTQ unaccompanied homeless youth range from 20-40% of that population<sup>4</sup>, suggesting our results of 19% may be an underestimate of the true extent of LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness in Massachusetts. In debrief discussions some CoCs discussed challenges in outreach to LGBTQ youth—either not knowing how to reach these young people, or potential partners who work with the population being unresponsive to requests for help with the Count.

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### 3.5.5 PLACE OF BIRTH

Of the 502 respondents meeting the Commission’s definition of homeless youth and young adults, 61% were born in MA. In fact, 30% of respondents were born in the same city or town in which they took the survey (See Chart Thirteen). Forty of the homeless unaccompanied respondents who were born outside of MA had been staying in the same place for more than 12 months. These responses suggest that the homelessness youth and young adult population in MA tends not to be highly transitory.



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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.naehcy.org/educational-resources/youth>

### 3.5.6 DEMOGRAPHIC SUMMARY

Table Two provides a summary of demographic characteristics of youth meeting the Commission definition over the past three years. Due to differences in CoCs' approaches to data collection, we urge caution in attributing annual changes to trends in the unaccompanied homeless youth population.

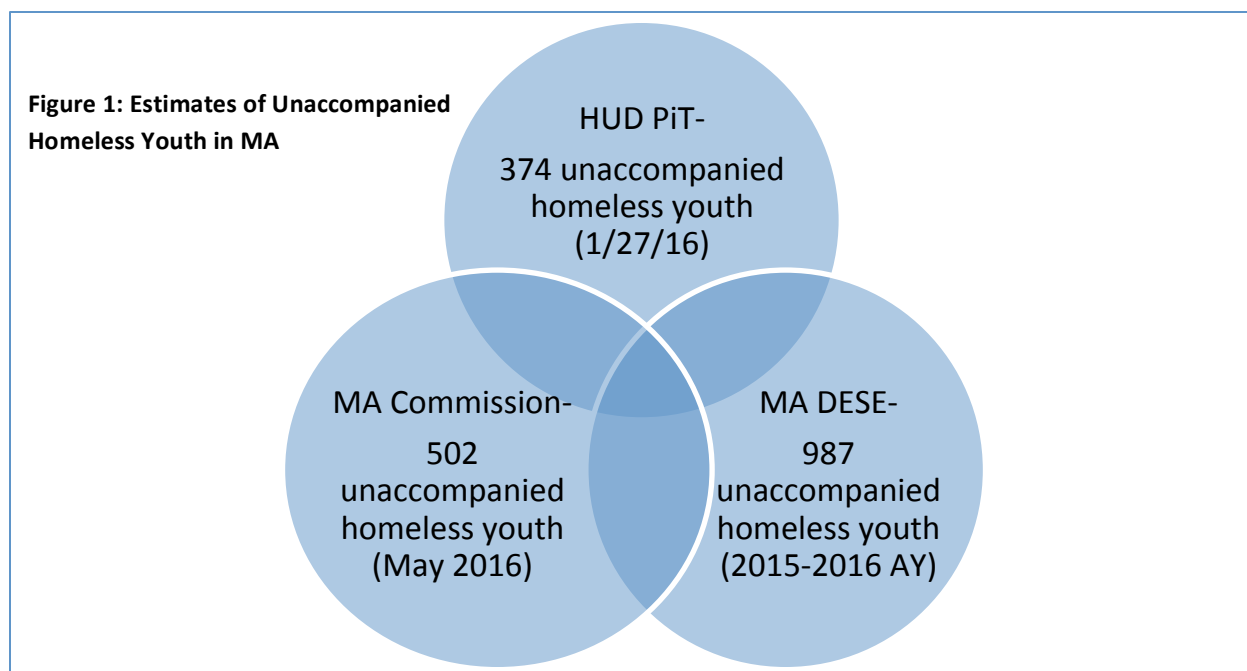
Table Two: Demographic Characteristic	# Survey Respondents		
	2014	2015	2016
Under 18 Years Old	6.3%	10.1%	1%
Black / African American	21.8%	33.0%	41%
Native American / Pacific Islander	3.6%	5.0%	4%
Asian	2.8%	7.0%	3%
White	42.1%	46.0%	45%
Multiracial	9.9%	9.0%	7%
Other	15.3%	0.0%	0.0%
Hispanic / Latino / Latina	35%	37%	37%
Non-Hispanic	53%	63%	63%
Female	55%	56%	55%
Male	41%	41%	43%
Transgender / Other	2%	<1%	2%
Straight	80%	78%	81%
Gay / Lesbian	7%	4%	6%
Queer	1%	1%	2%
Bisexual	8%	10%	7%
Asexual / Pansexual / Other	2%	<1%	3%
Questioning / Don't Know	<1%	1%	1%

### 3.6 OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION ON YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULT HOMELESSNESS IN MA

The data captured in the MA Youth Count is extremely valuable as it provides insight into the extent of unaccompanied youth homelessness and information about the causes and current circumstances of these young people. As valuable as this information is, the data captured in the MA Youth Count provides an incomplete picture of homeless youth in Massachusetts. The HUD PiT Count and MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) are two other sources of data on unaccompanied homeless youth.

In 2016, the PiT HUD Count was able to identify 374 unaccompanied homeless youth (Note: youth here means under age 25). Of these, 54 were unsheltered and six of these unsheltered youth were under 18. MA DESE recorded 987 unaccompanied homeless youth in their Homeless Student Program in 2015-2016 Academic Year. Of these unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness, 12-15% of them are in elementary and middle school and the remainder are in high school.

Figure One illustrates these three samplings of unaccompanied homeless youth in Massachusetts:



MA public schools capture the largest number of unaccompanied homeless youth under the age of 18. While issues of consent, privacy, and federal confidentiality standards would need to be addressed, administering the MA Count survey in the schools would allow for a much deeper understanding of circumstances and experiences of these very vulnerable young people.

#### 4.0 CONCLUSION

The 2016 MA Count of Unaccompanied Homeless Youth and Young Adults has revealed similar trends to prior years. Factors associated with unaccompanied youth homelessness include family conflict, instability, and resource constraints. Unaccompanied youth who experience homelessness are less likely to be connected to education and employment and are more likely to have systems involvement—including prior incarceration—than their housed counterparts living with parents or guardians. The vast majority of these young people do seek help but unfortunately most of them face barriers accessing the resources they need. Informed by findings from the Count data, the Commission’s Demonstration Working Group is implementing pilot programs and tracking results. These pilots are designed to address the barriers young people face when attempting to access housing and other resources. The 2017 Count will allow an opportunity to see how these pilots impact key indicators in unaccompanied youth homelessness in Massachusetts.

## 5.0 APPENDICES

1. Members of the Special Commission
2. Final 2016 Uniform Survey Tool

## Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth

Seat	Name	Designee
Secretary of Health and Human Services or Designee- CHAIR	Secretary Marylou Sudders	Linn Torto
Department of Children and Families	Commissioner Linda Spears	Amy Mullen
Department of Elementary and Secondary Education	Commissioner Mitchell Chester	Sarah Slaughterback
Department of Public Health	Commissioner Monica Bharel	
Department of Mental Health	Commissioner Joan Mikula	Joe Vallely
Office of Medicaid	Assistant Secretary Daniel Tsai	
Department of Transitional Assistance	Commissioner Jeffrey McCue	
Department of Housing and Community Development	Undersecretary Chrystal Kornegay	Gordie Calkins
Department of Youth Services	Commissioner Peter Forbes	Rebecca Moore
Direct Service Provider who works with Unaccompanied Homeless Youth- Appointed by the Governor	Lisa Goldsmith, DIAL/SELF	
Direct Service Provider who works with Unaccompanied Homeless Youth- Appointed by the Governor	Kevin Lilly, Samaritans Steps	
Direct Service Provider who works with Unaccompanied Homeless Youth- Appointed by the Governor	Lisa Goldblatt Grace, My Life My Choice	
Senate Chair of Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities	Senator Jennifer Flanagan	
House Chair of Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities	Representative Kay Khan	
1 Member of the Senate	Senator Harriette Chandler	
1 Member of the House	Representative James O'Day	

1 Member Appointed by the Senate Minority Leader	Senator Bruce Tarr	Maureen Flatley
1 Member Appointed by the House Minority Leader	Representative Brad Jones	Rep. Kate Campanale
Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless	Kelly Turley	
Massachusetts Task Force on Youth Aging out of DCF Care	Erin Bradley	
Massachusetts Appleseed Center for Law and Justice	Deb Silva	
MassEquality	Deborah Shields	
Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance	Caitlin Golden	
Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition	Mason Dunn	
Boston Alliance of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Youth	Grace Sterling-Stowell	
Youth who has experienced homelessness-Appointed by the Child Advocate	Lauren Leonardis	
Youth who has experienced homelessness-Appointed by the Child Advocate	Kitty Zen	
Youth who has experienced homelessness-Appointed by the Child Advocate	Jamila Bradley	

## 2016 Massachusetts Youth Count Housing and Homelessness Survey

This survey is being administered by the Massachusetts Special Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth and the local Continuum of Care, in collaboration with Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, 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 in Massachusetts. Over the past two years, the results of similar surveys have helped the Legislature to invest \$2 million for housing and services for young people who have experienced housing instability. Your answers will remain confidential. There are 29 questions. Please respond to all of the questions you feel comfortable answering. We greatly appreciate your participation!

\*\*\*\*\*

1. Have you already taken this survey in the past two weeks? ☐ Yes ☐ No
2. What are your initials (the first letter of each of your names)? \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ (first/middle/last)
3. What is your date of birth? \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ (month/day/year)
- 4a. What is your primary language? \_\_\_\_\_
- 4b. If your primary language is one other than English, are you taking this survey in your primary language?
  - ☐ Yes, someone is reading the questions to me in my primary language
  - ☐ Yes, this paper or electronic version has been translated into my primary language
  - ☐ No, I am taking this survey in a language that is not my primary language

***We are asking the following set of questions to better understand your housing situation.***

5. Where did you sleep last night?

**[CHECK ONE OPTION THAT BEST MATCHES YOUR ANSWER]**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shelter (emergency, temporary)       | <input type="checkbox"/> Car or other vehicle   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Transitional housing                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Abandoned building/vacant unit/squat                                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hotel or motel                       | <input type="checkbox"/> On a train/bus or in train/bus station                               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Own apartment or house               | <input type="checkbox"/> 24-hour restaurant/Laundromat or other business/retail establishment |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parent or guardian's home            | <input type="checkbox"/> Anywhere outside (street, park, viaduct)                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other relative's home                | <input type="checkbox"/> Hospital or emergency room   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Foster family's home                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Residential treatment facility                                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Home of friend or friend's family    | <input type="checkbox"/> Juvenile detention center or jail                                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Home of boyfriend/girlfriend/partner | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please specify: _____)  |

6. How long have you stayed/lived in the place you stayed last night?

☐ Fewer than 6 months ☐ 6-12 months ☐ More than 12 months

7. Do you have a safe place where you can stay on a regular basis for at least the next 14 days?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure

8. Are you currently experiencing homelessness?

☐ Yes ☐ No, but I have experienced homelessness in the past ☐ No, and I never have experienced homelessness  
☐ Unsure Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

(Please continue onto the next page.)

***We are asking the following set of questions to learn if you are “accompanied”, that is living with your parent or guardian, and your history of being out on your own.***

9. 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

10. If you are **not** living with your parent/guardian/foster parent now, what are the reasons?

**[CHECK ALL THAT APPLY]**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> I was fighting with my parent/guardian/foster parent                 | <input type="checkbox"/> I left foster care                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My parent/guardian/foster parent abused drugs or alcohol             | <input type="checkbox"/> I was released from jail or detention facility |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My parent/guardian/foster parent died                                | <input type="checkbox"/> I was/am pregnant or got someone else pregnant |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My house was too small for everyone to live there                    | <input type="checkbox"/> My sexual orientation and/or gender identity   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I was abused or neglected (physically, emotionally, or sexually)     | <input type="checkbox"/> My use of drugs or alcohol                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I did not feel safe due to violence or unsafe activities in my house | <input type="checkbox"/> I was told to leave                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> My family lost our housing   | <input type="checkbox"/> I wanted to leave                              |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____                                   |

***We are asking the following set of questions to better understand your demographics (place of birth, age, education, income, etc.), as well as your experiences in trying to access needed resources.***

11. Where were you born?

- ☐ In this city/town    ☐ Another place in Massachusetts    ☐ Outside of Massachusetts, but in the U.S.
- ☐ Outside the U.S.    ☐ Don't know

12. Which city/town are you in right now, taking this survey? \_\_\_\_\_

13. Have you been staying overnight in the city/town where you are taking this survey?

- ☐ Yes                      ☐ No, I am staying in \_\_\_\_\_ (city/town)

14. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_ years

15. Do you have a high school diploma or GED?

- ☐ Yes                      ☐ No

16. Are you currently attending school or another education program?

- ☐ Yes                      ☐ No

17. Are you currently employed at a job for which you receive a pay stub or paycheck?

- ☐ Yes                      ☐ No

(Please continue-- two pages to go!)

18. Have you ever exchanged sex (including sexual intercourse, oral sex, or any sexual interaction) for food, a place to stay, money, or other necessities?

☐ Yes ☐ No

19. Have you ever served in the U.S. Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force or Coast Guard?

☐ Yes ☐ No

20. Have you ever been in foster care?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure

21. Have you ever lived in a group home or residential program?

☐ Yes ☐ No

22. Have you ever been in juvenile detention, prison or jail?

☐ Yes ☐ No

23a. Are you pregnant or parenting?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Unsure

23b. If you are parenting, do you have custody of your child(ren)? In other words, are you responsible for caring for your child(ren) on a day-to-day basis?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not applicable

24. In the last year, have you tried to get help from any of the following services/programs?

**[CHECK ALL THAT APPLY]**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shelter or short-term/transitional housing                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Nutritional assistance (such as Food Stamps/SNAP or free meals)                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Long-term housing (such as Section 8 or public housing)          | <input type="checkbox"/> Cash assistance (such as DTA/Welfare benefits or Social Security Disability benefits) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Educational support (enrolling in school or GED/HiSET program)   | <input type="checkbox"/> Counseling or other mental health services  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Job training, life skills training, or career placement          | <input type="checkbox"/> Substance abuse/alcohol treatment program   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Health care services   | <input type="checkbox"/> No, I haven't tried to access help  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family support (such as conflict mediation or parenting support) | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Child care   |  |

25. 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

26. If you did not receive all of the help you needed, why was that? **[CHECK ALL THAT APPLY]**
- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation      | <input type="checkbox"/> Didn't know where to go                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sent somewhere else | <input type="checkbox"/> Didn't qualify for help                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Language barrier    | <input type="checkbox"/> Didn't feel comfortable/safe                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Put on waiting list | <input type="checkbox"/> Didn't follow through or return for services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Paperwork           | <input type="checkbox"/> Didn't ask for help                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I.D./documents      | <input type="checkbox"/> Didn't have money                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Didn't hear back    | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____                                 |

27. What is your race/ethnicity? **[CHECK ALL THAT APPLY]**
- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> White                    | <input type="checkbox"/> American Indian / Alaskan Native |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black / African American | <input type="checkbox"/> Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic/Latino          | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify: _____)           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asian                    |   |

28. How would you describe your gender identity?
- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Female                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Genderqueer/Gender-Nonconforming |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Male                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify: _____)           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Transgender – Male to Female |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Transgender – Female to Male |   |

29. Which of the following best fits how you think about your sexualorientation? **[CHECK ALL THAT APPLY]**
- |                                       |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gay, Lesbian | <input type="checkbox"/> Questioning            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bisexual     | <input type="checkbox"/> Pansexual              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Straight     |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Queer        | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify: _____) |

\*\*\*\*\*

**THANK YOU!**

**As noted above, all of your answers will remain confidential. Your participation is deeply appreciated and a key contribution in helping Massachusetts better understand housing instability among youth and young adults.**

**For more information about this survey and the work to expand housing and resources for youth and young adults experiencing housing instability, please contact the Massachusetts Special Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth, [massachusettsyouthcount@gmail.com](mailto:massachusettsyouthcount@gmail.com).**