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***Homeless Youth Priority for #NJCounts 2017***  
***#NJCounts 2017 Reaches out to Homeless, Families, Youth and Veterans***

**January 23, 2017** – #NJCounts 2017 – The statewide Point-in-Time count of the homeless will take place across the state counting individuals and households who experience homelessness on January 25, 2017. Exact times of the count may vary by county.

Organizations, agencies and others that plan community efforts to end homelessness will conduct the local counts. Local count contacts are available [here](#). For the fourth year, Monarch Housing Associates is coordinating the statewide NJCounts.

NJCounts 2016 found 8,941 homeless men, women and children across the state of New Jersey. This showed a decrease of 1,270 persons (12.4%) from 2015. Statewide and individual county NJCounts 2016 reports are available [here](#).

“NJCounts 2017 is an important part of local communities’ work to end homelessness because it illustrates the depth and breadth of the need for housing resources. Many NJ communities are making great strides in ending homelessness using a Housing First approach, Rapidly Re-Housing homeless households, and implementing Coordinated Assessment to strategically prioritize scarce resources,” said Jay Everett, an associate with Monarch Housing which is directing NJCounts 2017.

“However, there are still thousands of our fellow New Jerseyans who do not have a home in the middle of winter. This year, the State of New Jersey’s new Housing First Initiative, Moving On Initiative, and some small increases of federal Dept. of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Continuum of Care (CoC) funds will help some of our disabled homeless neighbors. However, our resolution to end homelessness for everyone in our state calls for understanding the need through NJCounts, wisely utilizing our existing resources, and advocating for what is needed to finish the work.”

Monarch Housing expects to make the final report available in spring 2017.

“New Jersey is setting a national trend in reducing homelessness,” said New Jersey Department of Community Affairs Commissioner Charles A. Richman. “This year, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development ranked New Jersey as one of the top five states with decreases in overall homelessness, homeless single individuals, families, and chronically homeless individuals. We are proud that our efforts to increase the number of permanent supportive housing units have helped so many. NJCounts 2017 will help us to identify homeless individuals and families who still need our help.”

“One of HUD’s top priorities is housing the homeless population and the yearly Point-in-Time Count is essential to let us know our progress and the work still to be done,” said Maria Maio-Messano, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) New Jersey Field Office Director. “I thank the Continuums of Care, advocates, and the hundreds of volunteers that go out into the night and spend time counting and interacting with the men, women, youth, and children that need a place to call home; they are essential to our efforts of eradicating homelessness in the Garden State.”

HUD mandates that local communities conduct a sheltered count each year and additionally an unsheltered count every other year. 2017 is a mandated unsheltered count year. This year, getting an accurate count of youth experiencing homelessness to use as a baseline number is a priority. “We know all-too-well at Covenant House – in New Jersey and across the United States -- the critical need

to identify and engage young people who find themselves on the streets and homeless," said Covenant House President and CEO Kevin Ryan. "Every second matters when young people are in dangerous circumstances forced to do whatever it takes to survive. That's why NJCounts2017 is so important and why we're glad HUD is bringing a focus to ending youth homelessness."

According to Monarch Housing Associates, factors that will contribute to this year's count of homeless families, youth and veterans include:

- Shelters reporting lack of capacity to house homeless families throughout 2016; New Jersey state emergency assistance no longer reimburses shelters,
- A shortage of rental housing driving up demand and costs,
- Failure by Congress to increase funding for the federal Housing Choice Voucher program harming progress in creating affordable and supportive housing,
- New Jersey continues to have a higher than national average foreclosure rate; foreclosures cause many owners and renters to lose their homes, and
- Too many jobs in New Jersey do not pay a living wage and those that do pay a living wage are leaving the state.

"The NJ Counts 2017 event is critical to understanding the homeless conditions individuals and families in New Jersey experience," says Laura Rodgers, LCSW, Chief Program Officer, Jewish Family Service of Atlantic & Cape May Counties. "Each year, this day is spent listening to stories of poverty and struggle while counting those who do not have a home. This annual count event combined with the daily outreach and services provided at coordinated entry centers for the homeless gives us our charge to target advocacy efforts to end homelessness."

According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC), in 2015, a family in New Jersey must earn a housing wage of \$26.52/hour to rent a two-bedroom apartment and the Fair Market Rent for a two-bedroom apartment in is \$1,379/month.

"Recent figures show that homelessness is trending downward across the country and state. In New Jersey, Middlesex and Bergen Counties have been federally certified as having reached functional zero for veterans homelessness," said Everett. "We need to fight cuts to federal funding that ends homelessness. I urge service providers, advocates and concerned citizens to join Monarch Housing in Washington, D.C. in July to advocate for increased federal funding for vouchers and homeless services."

The solution to homelessness includes creating the necessary supply of supportive housing – permanent, affordable and independent rental housing with available support services. The NJCounts 2016 results will help to implement and expand on strategies proven to be best practices in ending homelessness.

Volunteers will seek out homeless residents who spent the night of January 24, 2017 in shelters, in the woods, under bridges, in vacant buildings and at other locations where they are forced to live because there is insufficient affordable or supportive housing. On January 25, 2017, many local communities will hold Project Homelessness Connect events that connect homeless individuals with a hot meal, warm clothes, services and housing applications.

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For more information about Monarch Housing's work to ensure that every person will have quality affordable, permanent supportive housing that fosters freedom, independence and community integration, visit <http://www.monarchhousing.org>