

## ***Ongoing Government Shutdown, Affordable Housing Crisis and Code Blue to Impact #NJCounts 2019 Reaching out to Families, Individuals, Youth and Veterans in NJ Experiencing Homelessness***



**January 18, 2019** – On Wednesday, January 23, 2019, NJCounts 2019, the statewide Point-in-Time count of the homeless will take place across the state counting individuals and households who experience homelessness. Exact times of the count vary by county and a list of local county press contacts is available [here](#).

Organizations, agencies and others planning efforts to end homelessness conduct the local counts. For the sixth year, Monarch Housing Associates coordinates NJCounts.

NJCounts 2018 found 9,303 homeless men, women and children, in 6,982 households, across the state of New Jersey. This number increased by 771 persons (9%) from 2017. Individuals who were homeless on the night of January 23, 2018 were counted. Click [here](#) for the NJCounts 2018 reports.

“While communities across the state are working tirelessly to end homelessness, NJCounts 2019 provides an opportunity to better understand the depth and breadth of the need for housing resources throughout New Jersey” said Taiisa Kelly, CEO of Monarch Housing Associates, which directs NJCounts 2019. “Many NJ communities are making great strides in ending homelessness by focusing on proven strategies such as implementing a systemwide Housing First approach, rapidly re-Housing homeless households, implementing coordinated assessment to strategically prioritize scarce resources, and exploring partnerships with key community partners. Information gathered from NJCounts has been valuable in understanding and exploring the impact of homelessness, supporting new partnerships with hospitals to create housing for some of the highest cost users in the system.”

“However, there are still thousands of our fellow New Jerseyans who do not have a home, a fact highlighted on bitterly cold nights when Code Blue warming centers are activated” said Kelly. “New Jersey’s Code Blue legislation ensures that our unsheltered neighbors have a warm place to go to on the coldest nights, but it is only the start of the process. 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 funding to create the affordable housing that is needed to finish the work.”

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) mandates the statewide Point-in-Time count of the homeless. HUD mandates that local communities conduct a sheltered count each year and additionally an unsheltered count every other year. This year is a mandated unsheltered count year.

“HUD continues to prioritize eradicating homelessness and sadly the Point-In-Time count results for New Jersey confirm we have more work to do,” said Lynne Patton, HUD Regional Administrator for New York and New Jersey. “I urge all New Jerseyans to give their time to assist this very important endeavor and we will continue to advocate for additional resources to make homelessness a thing of the past.”

The factors expected to impact an increase or decrease from NJCounts 2018 numbers include:

- The ongoing, longest ever shutdown of the federal government impacts housing and homelessness programs funded by the U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), puts furloughed government workers living pay check to pay check at risk of eviction and foreclosure and leaves programs receiving HUD funding worrying about making payroll;
- More specifically, formerly homeless persons housed through HUD funded rental assistance vouchers face increased risk of losing their housing and once again becoming homeless as the government shut down freezes agencies’ ability to drawdown rental assistance funding for those individuals and families increasing the likelihood of eviction. The National Low Income Housing Coalition reports that in New Jersey, 62 rental assistance contracts with 2,952 project-based rental assistance contracts expired or will be expiring between December 2018 and February 2019;

- Even when the federal government is open and all workers are receiving their paychecks, many jobs in New Jersey do not pay a living wage and jobs with living wage are leaving the state;
- A shortage of affordable rental housing funding in New Jersey drives up both demand and costs;
- A growing body of data shows the connection between poor health outcomes, increased health system costs and homelessness. As hospital systems look into this issue more closely, we hope to see increased participation from local hospitals in NJCounts; and
- As more communities work to refine their Code Blue response system and provide warming center services to unsheltered persons coupled with the cold temperatures for this winter, the overall NJCounts numbers will likely be impacted.

“New Jersey is working hard to reduce the number of people experiencing homelessness and we are leading the way with one of the top performing housing voucher programs in the nation according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development,” said Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliver, who also serves as Commissioner of the Department of Community Affairs. “The annual Point in Time Count provides us valuable information about the demographic make-up of those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless so that we can better target the programs and services we offer to help those most in need.”

“Housing has a direct impact on health, particularly for those who are homeless and may be frequent users of hospital ER services,” said New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency (NJHMFA) Executive Director Charles A. Richman. “Through our Hospital Partnership Subsidy Pilot Program, we will be working with hospitals to provide affordable housing in their communities not only for families but that also helps residents who are most in need maintain better health through permanent housing.” NJHMFA funds NJCounts 2019.

According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC), in 2017, a family in New Jersey must earn a housing wage of \$28.17/hour to rent a two-bedroom apartment and the Fair Market Rent for a two-bedroom apartment in is \$1,465/month. The State of New Jersey has the opportunity to support the creation of new affordable housing across the state through the enforcement of the Council of Affordable Housing (COAH.)

Over 157,000 low-income households in New Jersey use federal rental assistance to rent modest housing at an affordable cost according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities and at least 72 percent have extremely low incomes. The ongoing government shutdown puts these households at risk of losing their housing. In July 2019, advocates plan to return to Washington, DC for a Congressional Reception to push Congress increase and sustain its commitment to ending homelessness.

“We need to protect federal funding to end homelessness against cuts,” said Kelly. “I urge service providers, advocates and concerned citizens to join Monarch Housing Associates 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 2019 results will help to implement and expand on strategies proven to be best practices in ending homelessness. NJCounts data has helped to shape state initiatives creating permanent supportive housing including Housing First and Moving On initiatives and project-based voucher programs.

As communities work to develop housing strategies to address homelessness, NJCounts data highlights the need to ensure our solutions include a lens of racial equity. NJCounts 2018 found that racial disparities are evident in the population experiencing homelessness with persons identifying as Black or African American making up 48.1% of the total population counted as homeless and 24% of the state population living in poverty, and only 12.7% of the general state population.

“The annual point-in-time count of the number of New Jersey residents facing homelessness is an incredibly important call to action for our state to address poverty and inequality,” said Demelza Baer, Senior Counsel and Director of the Economic Mobility Initiative at the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice. “Last year’s count uncovered that homelessness is increasing, and that there are stark racial disparities, with Black people comprising half of those experiencing homelessness despite being only about 15% of the state’s population. We must work together to expand access to affordable housing in New Jersey, and to ensure that structural racial inequality is addressed.”

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Volunteers will seek out homeless residents who spent the night of January 22, 2019 in shelters, in the woods, under bridges, in vacant buildings and at other locations as well as those staying in shelter and transitional housing programs where they are forced to live because there is insufficient affordable or supportive housing. On January 23 and 24, 2019, many local communities will hold [Project Homelessness Connect events](#) that connect homeless individuals with a hot meal, warm clothes, services and housing applications.

Monarch Housing expects to make the final report available in spring 2019. 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>