

HOMELESSNESS EMERGENCY RESPONSE WORK GROUP

July 2, 2009

Via: Hand Delivery and Facsimile
The Honorable Adrian M. Fenty
Mayor of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20004

Dear Mayor Fenty:

We the undersigned are writing to urge you to take action on the shelter capacity crisis facing the city. We represent a diverse coalition of service providers, consumers, religious groups, advocacy organizations, and other community groups, which formed in response to alarming reports of emergency shelter bed shortages by both consumers and service providers. We know that ending homelessness is one of your top priorities and we thank you for your commitment to this goal. We have held several community sessions to gather information on this current crisis and develop some suggested solutions that we hope to work closely with your Administration to implement. We write to ask you to meet with us to develop an immediate response to the current crisis.

We have learned that homelessness among singles and families is on the rise and that our shelters are not able to accommodate the increased numbers. Well after hypothermia season has ended, there are few if any vacancies in the emergency shelter system for singles or for families. People are being denied shelter and being forced to stay in unsafe places.

One elderly woman reported at a community meeting that she was turned away from shelter on a rainy evening and consequently spent the remainder of the night huddling in fear of any man who approached her. Unfortunately, her story is not unique. Another woman expressed guilt about being the last admitted into a shelter when there was a line of at least a dozen women trailing behind her. Two shelters reported that they are seeing more people than ever before and that they have nowhere else to refer them because the entire system is at capacity. Both shelter and day service providers have expressed that this is one of the worst years they have experienced in terms of increased need for services. Unlike in past years, the demand for shelter has not decreased this year with the warmer weather.¹

Family homelessness in the District has risen 25% since last year, and over 200 families remain on the waitlist for emergency shelter. Meanwhile, capacity at D.C. General has been

¹ In May of 2009, shelters in the individuals emergency system were in overflow on 18 of 31 nights and were filled to capacity on 16 of 31 compared to zero nights in May of 2008. Nightly Census Data, The Community Partnership for the Prevention of Homelessness.

reduced from 75 beds to 35 beds even as families report that they are being turned away due to a lack of capacity in the system.²

You must act now to solve this problem. Emergency shelter is vital to the District's safety net and is currently underfunded, leaving many singles and families in unsafe situations during this economic downturn. The District needs both increased shelter capacity AND increased affordable housing resources. We support the Housing First initiative and applaud the District for expanding funding for this important affordable housing program for chronically homeless individuals and families. However, Housing First has usually to a large extent been unable to provide housing to a family the day the U.S. Marshals evict them or to a single person the day his apartment building is condemned. Only shelters can provide immediate safety from freezing temperatures and heat or from crime on the streets. Shelters can mean the difference between life and death for people living with chronic health conditions such as HIV/AIDS and for women and children trying to flee domestic violence. Until there is enough affordable housing for all, shelters must be funded at a level to ensure adequate capacity for every single person and family that has no safe place to live.

In light of the urgent nature of this issue, we ask the Mayor's office to implement the following recommendations:

I. Increase the number of shelter beds in order to meet the increased demand.

A. Individual Emergency Shelter

This year, District funding for hypothermia shelter beds ended on April 1st, leaving hundreds of individuals with no safe place to stay. Until the District can implement a long-term plan to prevent these women and men from being forced to stay on dangerous streets, it should open short-term emergency shelter beds immediately at locations that are accessible to those who are homeless. We urge that additional sites be identified so as not to overcrowd further existing shelters.

B. Family Emergency Shelter

While communal shelters are not ideal for families, they are better than sleeping on the streets or being doubled up in unsafe situations. The District should work toward creating more apartment-style shelters for families and, until this happens, the District must ensure that every family with no safe and stable place to stay is allowed into the system. One short-term solution is to operate D.C. General at its hypothermia capacity (75 family units) until the city can accurately determine the extent of the need and the right number and size of replacement capacity.

² Of 16 families surveyed by six homeless services agencies on April 23, 2009, 3 (or 19%) had slept on the street the night before because they could not get into family shelter. "Unmet Shelter Need Assessment," an independent report compiled by the Homelessness Emergency Response Workgroup.

II. Track the unmet demand and determine the right size of replacement shelter.

The balance between housing and shelter is not an “either...or” proposition; the District needs to adequately fund shelter until a decrease in demand is documented. Moreover, some emergency shelter capacity may always be needed even at some future time when adequate affordable housing stock exists. The District needs to develop a process to assess how much shelter space will be needed if affordable housing and homelessness prevention resources are regularly and annually increased, while taking into account fluctuations in the economy that may increase or decrease homelessness. The Homeless Services Reform Act charges the Mayor with the task of collecting and distributing up-to-date information on the “unmet demand” for shelter beds, units, and support services.³ We ask that the District begin collecting this information immediately and for the sake of transparency, make the information available to the public.

Once this data is collected and released, decisions about the appropriate amount and location of replacement shelter should take place through an open, public process. Without this process in place, the District runs the risk of repeated capacity crises like the one we are experiencing now and a continuing inability to meet the needs of a growing population of citizens who are homeless.

III. Improve and monitor shelter conditions more closely.

We must invest in the improvement of the physical conditions of our shelter facilities. In addition to ensuring that there are sufficient beds to meet the demand for shelter, the District must also ensure that the shelters are humane places for our fellow citizens. An independent survey of consumers conducted by seven homeless services agencies reveals that 40% of those surveyed view overcrowding as a major barrier to accessing shelter, 20% responded that they refuse to go into shelters due to unsanitary conditions, and 16% stated that they refuse to go into shelters because of the violence and crime that take place in such facilities.⁴ We cannot help people move to housing if our shelters are large, overcrowded, unsanitary and unsafe, and if residents do not have access to readily available services. We ask that the Mayor commit both in budgetary investment and in monitoring resources to transform our homeless shelter facilities into more humane, clean, safe, sanitary, smaller and innovative facilities.

Conclusion

If D.C. truly wants to be a Human Rights City⁵ that provides leadership in securing, protecting, and promoting human rights for all people, then the District must acknowledge that housing is a basic human right. An important step towards acknowledging this right is to ensure

³ H.S.R.A. § 4-753.02 (d) : “The Mayor shall operate a computerized information system to collect, maintain, and distribute up-to date information regarding the number of beds or units available in shelter and supportive housing in the District, the availability of supportive services, and the current usage and unmet demand for such beds, units, and services.”

⁴ “Unmet Shelter Need Assessment,” a report compiled by The Homelessness Emergency Response Workgroup.

⁵ In December 2008, on the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the City Council proclaimed D.C. the first Human Rights City in the United States.

that appropriate funds are designated for all three prongs of housing preservation: adequate prevention, safe and sanitary emergency shelters, and affordable housing.

We strongly believe that these recommendations will significantly improve our homeless services system, curb the current shelter shortfall, and prevent a similar crisis from occurring in the future. We look forward to working with the Administration to realize these goals and request an opportunity to speak to you in person as an initial step towards this end. Please contact Adam Rocap, 202-452-8926 ext. #5 or Adam@miriamskitchen.org to schedule a meeting with the Homelessness Emergency Response Workgroup coalition.

Sincerely,

Organizations:

Access Housing, Inc.
American Friends Service Committee-D.C
Asian Pacific American Legal Resource Center
Bread for the City
Bridge to Freedom Foundation
Capital Area Food Bank
Capital Area Immigrants' Rights (CAIR) Coalition
The Children's Law Center
Church of the Pilgrims
Coalition for Responsible Government
Consumer Leadership Forum
DC Affordable Housing Alliance
DC Alliance of Youth Advocates
D.C. Behavioral Health Association
D.C. Catholic Conference
D.C. Coalition Against Domestic Violence
DC Fiscal Policy Institute
DC Health Care Coalition
D.C. Hunger Solutions
DC Law Students In Court Program
DC Statehood Green Party
DC Women's Agenda
District Alliance for Safe Housing (DASH), Inc.
Emmaus Services for the Aging
Fair Budget Coalition
FAIR Fund
Green Door
Gray Panthers of Metropolitan Washington
The Homeless Children's Playtime Project
Ida Mae Campbell Resource and Wellness Center
Jews United for Justice
Latin American Youth Center
Legal Aid Society of the District of Columbia
Legal Counsel for the Elderly

Martha's Table, Inc.
Metropolitan Washington Public Health Association
Miriam's Kitchen
National Black Church Initiative
National Coalition for the Homeless
National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty
Neighbors' Consejo
New Endeavors by Women
N Street Village
Out The Boat Ministries, Inc.
People for Fairness Coalition
Positive Force D.C.
Rachael's Women's Center
SOME, Inc. (So Others Might Eat)
Survivors and Advocates for Empowerment (SAFE), Inc.
Thrive D.C.
Travelers Aid Washington D.C.
University Legal Services
Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless
The Washington Peace Center
We Are Family
Wheeler Creek Community Development Corporation
Women Empowered Against Violence (WEAVE)
The Women's Collective

Individuals*:

Many of the individuals who have signed on below are currently homeless residents of the District of Columbia and have first-hand experience with shelter capacity issues.

Carlos Acevedo
Dorothy Adams, Executive Director, Consumer Leadership Forum (CLF)
Donna Addkinson
Fonda Allen
Richard Allen
Junior Almozard
Dennis Anderson
Tony Anderson
Kristen Arnold
James Babtist
Jesse E. Barfield
Steven Barger
Clarence Barnes
Leroy Battles
M. Bennett

* Organizations listed next to individual signatures are for identification purposes only and are not endorsements by the organizations named.

Fred Benjamin
Susan D. Bennett, Director, Community and Economic Development Law Clinic
Jennifer Berger
Marta Beresin
Alyssa Best
Charles Bethea
Marc Borbely
Frank Branwell
Rebecca Brink
Mary Brittingham, Executive Director, DC Law Students In Court Program
Christopher Brown
Juan Brown
Tomar Brown, DC Resident
Vernon Bryant
Rosemary Bush-Jones
Gray Burten
Jerome Bures
John Byrne
Kenny Carter
Keith Cartwright
Nick Casalbore
The Rt. Rev. John Bryson Chane, D.D. Bishop of Washington
The Rev. Randolph C. Charles, Rector, Church of the Epiphany
Cassandra Clifford
Thomas F. Clifford, S.J., Pastor, St. Aloysius Church
Nancy Conley
Jeff Crier
Johnnie Curter
Anthony Davis
Larry Davis
Dale Demonio
Vanessa Dixon
Loryn Doggett Sr.
Paula Dyan, Homeless Outreach Coordinator
Marian Douglas-Ungaro, Native Washingtonian & International Human Rights Consultant
Jackie Durham
Ken Durham
James Dillhurt
Jennifer Di Toro
Linda Plitt Donaldson, National Catholic School of Social Service
Dan Dolan, Board Member of My Sister's Place
James Eads
David Edwards
Natalie Ellerbe
Jenefer Ellingston
Richard Embden

Uta von Eckartsberg
Sarah Epstein
Josie Eskow
Rev. Anthony Evans
Gary Feldon
Gerard Ferguson
Laura M. Flegel
Samuel Floyd
A. Ford
F. Ford
Bro. L Foster-El
Patty Mullahy Fugere, Executive Director, Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless
Carlton Harris
Danee C. Gaines Adams
Maurice Gamble
Shakira Gantt
M. Garnett Jr.
Bernard Gathers
Harshaw Geralp
Melanie Gerber, Patton Boggs, LLP
Joe Giffe
Martina Gillis-Massey
David Gochman
Trevor S. Goodchild
David Gry
Josh Gupta-Kagan
Rech H.
Katie Hanson, LICSW, Permanent Supportive Housing Program, Community Connections
Amber W. Harding
Brenda Ford Harding
Laura Hartz
Steven Head
Robert Henry
Wesley R. Heppler, Davis Wright Tremaine LLP
Lawrence Herndon
A. Karen Hill, Exelon Corporation and Board of My Sister's Place
Patricia Hill, Thrive D.C.
Ann-Marie Holloway
Julien Holson
Stanley Hughs
Michael Ingram
Mike Jackson
Reginal Jeel
Joseph Jenkins
Gilchrest Jhon
Wills Johns

Alonzo Johnson
Anthony Johnson
James Johnson
Jerry Johnson
John Johnson
Judith Johnson, Green Door
Michael Jones
Ronnie Jones
Calvin Joseph
Terry Junior
Barbara Kagan, Steptoe & Johnson LLP
Jerry Kasunic, D.C. Long-Term Care Ombudsman
Tony Keener
Brandon E. Kennedy
Rev. Jeff Krehbiel, Pastor, Church of the Pilgrims
Ralph Lancaster
Bryant Lashley
Lori Leibowitz
Warren Lewis
Joseph Liyang
Jim Love
Jesse Lovell, DC for Democracy
David Lucas
Mary Ann Luby, Outreach worker
Shawn Luzaki
Abra Lyons-Warren
Kristine Lyons
Jessica Macleod
Toto Makilele
Glen Makle
Clayton Mansfield, DC for Democracy
Ken Marshall
Nechama Masliansky
Curtis Matthews
Attiva Mayers
Iden Campbell McCollum-Ida Mae Campbell Foundation, Founder/CEO
D. McCrey
Harold McLean
Scott McNeilly
Ed McNicholas, Sidley Austin LLP
Pooja Mehta, DC Resident
Jana Meyer, Minister of Missions, Foundry United Methodist Church
Nathan Mishler
Elias Molla
Dennis Morgan
Lamont Morre

Heather Morris-Glass, Board of Directors My Sister's Place
Richard Morton
Nassim Moshiree
Joella Mosley
Ravenna Motil-McGuire
Gabrielle Mulnick
Richard Myers
Robert F Murray Jr., MD, MS
Rodney Nelson
Mark Norman
John O'Neal
Lauren Onkeles
David Palmer
Eric Pegues
Jeff Pennington
Carl Perry
Sharron Pickett
Karyn L. Pomerantz, MLS, MPH
David Porterfield
Andrea Powell, FAIR Fund
Carl Powell
Heather Powers
Frank K. Prais
Raymond Ragland
Rabbi Elizabeth Richman
Laura N. Rinaldi
Joseph Robinson
Adam Rocap, Miriam's Kitchen
Caitlin Reardon
Joseph Richards
George Rick
Todd Riggins
Tony Ross
Paul S. Ryan, volunteer attorney with the Washington Legal Clinic for the Homeless
Judith Sandalow
Stacy Sanders
Eugene Sanford
James Satterwhite
Joseph Savoy
Michael Scott
Ray Shapping
Danielle Robertshaw, MD, Unity Health Care, Inc. Medical Director, Homeless Outreach
Services
David Schwartzman, DC Statehood Green Party
John Shaw
Eric Sheptock

Aaron Siebert
Eric Silas
Gregg Simmons
Shawn Simmons
Raymond Simmons
Michael Smith
John Smith, Jr.
Veronica Soto
Albert Spencer
Steven Lloyd Spencer
Lauren Staley
Dawn E. Swan
Robert H. Swart
Randy Smith
Trenett Smith
Moses Stafford
Stephanie Stines, D.C Concerned Providers Coalition
Aaron Swirenga
Eric Tars, Human Rights Program Director, National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty
Tim Taylor
Seth Tetteh
Rand Thomas
Mary W. Thuell
Nicole Tosh, Intern, National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty
Albert Townsend
Pete Tucker
Patsy Uzzell
Derek Vailzas
Celeste Valente, University Legal Services
Vytas V. Vergeer
Jennafer Dorfman Wagner
Kermit Walker
Phillip Waller
Mary Wanyama
Robert Warren
Gregory Washington
Roger Washington
Benson Webster
Derrick White
Jerry Wilkerson
Billy Williams
David Williams
Donnell Williams
D. Willis
Edward Wilson
Frank Wilson

Michael Wilson
Rev. John W. Wimberly, Jr., Pastor, Western Presbyterian Church
Lavern Worrell
Ray Woodard
Walter Wooden
The Reverend Luther Zeigler

cc: Neil Albert, City Administrator
Clarence Carter, Director, D.C. Department of Human Services

Council Chair Vincent Gray
Councilmember Yvette Alexander
Councilmember Marion Barry
Councilmember Michael Brown
Councilmember Kwame Brown
Councilmember Muriel Bowser
Councilmember David Catania
Councilmember Mary Cheh
Councilmember Jack Evans
Councilmember Jim Graham
Councilmember Phil Mendelson
Councilmember Harry Thomas
Councilmember Tommy Wells

Enclosure: "Unmet Shelter Need Assessment" report

Homeless Emergency Response Workgroup

Unmet Shelter Need Assessment

April 1 – June 17, 2009

Overview of the Unmet Shelter Need Assessment

In April 2009, a broad group of homeless individuals, advocates, and providers began a series of community meetings in response to urgent concerns about the lack of shelter capacity in DC being voiced by people who are homeless as well as service providers. The following comments are representative of the urgent concerns being voiced:

“My first stop during my road to transition was the Virginia William Resource Center. I will never forget. I sat there and there was no shelter space for me and my granddaughter to go to. I could feel myself just falling apart.” - Patricia

“Twice in the past month when it was raining, I went to shelters and was turned away. It was raining, but they didn’t open any space. I had to take the bus all night, going back and forth. After the buses closed, I wanted to walk to stay awake, but it was raining. I had to find a balcony to sleep under. I was sick at the time, so I was very angry.” - Aaron

“I went to John L. Young and Open Door Shelters last night. I was told to wait until 8 pm, based on first-come, first-served, but was turned away. I slept outside on a bench in the rain. I cried, felt upset, and was emotional.” - Maranetta

In response to the concerns being heard, the Homeless Emergency Response Workgroup used several methods to assess unmet shelter need since the end of the hypothermia season on March 31. The Workgroup compiled an Expanded Unmet Shelter Need Assessment, which provides a detailed picture of the unmet shelter need in the District for a 9-day period from April 22-30. In addition to the daily shelter census reports, the Workgroup collected daily reports of individuals turned away from full shelter facilities and conducted a one-day survey of how many individuals wanted shelter but did not try to obtain shelter due to fears of overcrowding. The one-day survey also gathered individual stories about problems with capacity and comments on shelter conditions. These additional steps capture additional information on unmet shelter need that the daily census reports can not provide.

An urgent need to address significant unmet shelter need is demonstrated by the results of the April 22-30 survey. During this time, there were little or no shelter vacancies. Individuals were turned away from shelters as high as 79 times in one evening, and individuals were turned away an average of 25 times each evening. 15% of survey respondents reported sleeping on the street due to a lack of capacity or perceived lack of capacity on a given day. 40% of survey respondents stated that they did not go to a shelter because of overcrowding at shelters.

Daily shelter census reports provided by The Community Partnership were also examined from April 1 – June 17, which gave a general picture of shelter usage and demand. The census reports show that a major issue with shelter capacity exists in the District, especially in comparison to the capacity available in Spring 2008. In particular, a lack of capacity for women and families has been a persistent problem.

Expanded Unmet Shelter Need Assessment April 22-30

Several methods were used to assess unmet shelter need during the Expanded Unmet Shelter Need Assessment: daily shelter census reports, daily reports of individuals turned away from full shelter facilities, and a one-day survey of how many individuals wanted shelter but did not try to obtain shelter due to fears of overcrowding.

Turn-aways at Shelters

Due to the high demand for shelter, shelter providers in April were compiling information on how many people presenting at shelters were turned away due to lack of capacity. Between April 22 and April 30, the number of times people were turned away from shelters ranged from 79 on the highest evening to 1 on the lowest evening. People were turned away from shelters an average of 25 times per night. Turn-away numbers were available from New York Ave., 801 East, Adam's Place, John Young, Nativity, and Harriet Tubman. See the table below for a detailed description of how many people were turned away from each shelter where data were available.

Shelter Turn-aways										
<u>Shelter Name</u>	<u>4/22</u>	<u>4/23</u>	<u>4/24</u>	<u>4/25</u>	<u>4/26</u>	<u>4/27</u>	<u>4/28</u>	<u>4/29</u>	<u>4/30</u>	<u>Shelter Total</u>
Low Temperature ¹ :	46°	46°	43°	55°	60°	63°	64°	51°	50°	
Men										
New York Ave	57	7	0	0	8	0	0	20	16	108
801 East	9	9	9	0	0	0	0	12	0	39
Adam's Place	13	9	10	0	0	0	0	9	12	53
Women										
John Young	0	3	0	1	5	4	0	0	0	13
Nativity	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	3	5
Harriet Tubman	0	1	1	0	6	0	0	0	0	8
Nightly Total	79	29	20	1	19	4	1	42	31	Overall Total 226

Nightly Average: 25 Range: 1 to 79

¹ Taken from National Weather Service Forecasts Office archives for Washington, DC Reagan National Airport

The turn-away numbers do not represent unique individuals, so the numbers may have some duplication. For example, one individual may have been turned away from more than one shelter in an evening or more than one shelter over the course of April 22-30. Since turn-away numbers were not available from all low-barrier shelters in the District, however, the number of times individuals were turned away from shelter is likely higher than what is provided in this report. Data were not available from Central Union Mission (men), La Casa (men), House of Ruth (women), or Open Door (women).

The official policy in the District is to shelter families who have no safe place to sleep, but at this time there is no available public data to verify that no families were turned away during this period. The survey of unmet need by social services agencies found that of the 16 families surveyed, 3 (or 19%) had slept on the street the night before because they could not get into family shelter. It is known that DC General, one of the main family shelters with emergency capacity, is slated to close. The Census reflects a continuous closing down of family units (units shrunk from 185 on April 22 to 178 units on April 30), despite the fact that there were no family vacancies other than on the night of April 22.

Daily Shelter Census Reports

Daily shelter census reports released by The Community Partnership show that little or no vacancies existed for women or families during April 22-30. Significant vacancies for men were only available during a four-day period of unseasonably warm weather from April 24-27. On April 30, the last day of our assessment time period, no vacancies were available for men, women, or families.

See Appendix A for detailed census reports from April 22-30.

Unmet Shelter Need Survey – 4/23/09

Summary

On Thursday, April 23, 2009, six homeless services agencies conducted a survey to gauge the amount of unmet shelter need that exists in DC. The survey asked individuals where they stayed the previous evening, a night when there were no vacancies in the emergency shelter system for singles and only four vacancies in the emergency shelter system for families. So Others Might Eat also conducted the same survey on Friday, April 24th, and found similar results to Thursday's surveys.

People who reported that they stayed on the street the previous night were asked whether they would have stayed in a shelter if there was space available. During both survey days, 15% of respondents reported that they slept on the street the previous night and would have gone into a shelter if space were available. Full details of the survey answers are available in the following section.

People who reported staying on the street were also asked to offer some of the reasons that they did not sleep in a shelter the previous night. Many common themes emerged: overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, fear of violence and crime in the shelter, and difficulty with transportation. A breakdown of respondents' answers and examples of representative comments are provided in the last section.

Results from the Unmet Shelter Need Survey

Participating Agency	Number of Participants
Hermano Pedro	24
Miriam's Kitchen	134
Rachel's Women's Center	20
Thrive DC	170
Bethany Women Center	20
First Helping	26
Total	394

Number of Respondents from all agencies:

Total: 394

Male: 257

Female: 137

Single: 378

Family: 16

15% of respondents (56 individuals and 3 families) reported that they slept on the street last night and would have gone into a shelter if space were available. SOME surveyed 100 people on Friday April 24, 2009, and found that 15% of respondents (15 individuals) would have gone into a shelter if space were available as well.

Many homeless individuals and families were not reached to participate in this survey, so more individuals and families likely slept on the street on the evening of April 22 due to lack of shelter capacity or perceived lack of shelter capacity. Although some individuals surveyed may have been included in April 22 turn-away numbers, many individuals reported that they never even tried to seek shelter that evening and would not have been included in the turn-away numbers.

Comments of People Staying on the Street

People who reported that they stayed on the street were asked to offer some of the reasons that they did not sleep in a shelter the previous evening. 127 individuals offered reasons as to why they did not sleep in a shelter last night.

40% stated their frustrations with issues of overcrowding.

16% stated they are often turned away due to lack of capacity.

25% stated they refuse to go to shelters because of overcrowding.

20% stated that they refused to go into a shelter due to unsanitary conditions.

13% stated that shelter facilities are not clean.

7% stated issues with bed bugs or other infestations.

16% stated that they refused to go into a shelter due to violence and crime.

9% stated that they try to stay away from the violence.

7% indicated that they fear that their belongings will be stolen.

6% stated that they have issues with transportation to and from the shelter.

Representative comments include:

“[I am] scared of losing my belongings.”

“[There is] not enough space and [there are] bed bugs.”

“[Shelters are] filthy and insecure.”

Individual Testimonies on the Impact of Shelter Capacity Problems

Autumn

“I personally haven’t been homeless long. When Hurricane Ike hit Houston I lost everything. Afterward my grandmother whom I had told about her husband molesting me since I was four years old, so I decided I could not stay with her anymore. The rest of the family followed suit being upset that I had upset the family dynamic, and destroyed the careful illusion that everything was o.k., its horrible feeling to be blamed for something that you as a child could not help or stop. It’s a helpless feeling to be in that situation so I left. I made it to Tennessee and my uncle house, yet with things how they are his job was in question, so I could not stay with him anymore. So I end up here, I’ve been here since January.

“I have a service dog there for the PTSD that I suffer from due to the abuse. The shelter kicks us out at 7 am, leaving people to their own devices. It’s upsetting to see all these people and things that are happening to them by being on the street and not a day program or a shelter to stay at. Most days I go out and job hunt but on days when I am sick or tired I don’t have any where to go. It’s upsetting because it’s hard to maintain the drive, when you can’t relax, even inside the shelter at high it’s chaos to many people in a small space leads to almost constant arguments.

“I used to go out to my car to sleep and read if I was turned away from a shelter but I lost my car, so now to have to sleep in the streets or a park with my service dog.”

Patricia

“A year ago I was a happy grandparent raising my 5 year old granddaughter. My husband and I were enjoying the fruits of our labor of a home, car, and the little bit of money and peace of mind. Our only concern was to her safety. My down hill effect began on October 9, 2008. I was walking across the street and was hit by a car. While recovering my husband became ill and two days later he was admitted into Howard University Hospital. Despite doctor’s orders I was walking my

granddaughter to and from school and catching the bus daily to visit my husband and going to my physical therapy. My husband passed on December 22, 2008.

After an experience of living with family members and being tossed out when my money was gone, realities set in: 'I'm homeless.'

"My first stop during my road to transition was the Virginia William Resource Center. I will never forget. I sat there and there was no shelter space for me and my granddaughter to go to. I could feel myself just falling apart.

"After a week of running around and trying to find a shelter for us, reality set in again that we will have to be separated for me to be able to place in a shelter for single women with no kids. I had to make arrangements for my grand daughter to live with a family member until I can get back on my feet.

"I walked the streets looking for shelters waiting in long lines only to be turned away. At that time I had to sleep out side. This was a very scary feeling sleeping outside, having to watch your surrounding and not being in a safe place.

"Again I'm still a homeless, disabled widow without my life line (my granddaughter). I am asking for some type of help for the homeless populations we are in need of afford housing, 24 hour shelters, and more transitional housing for family. If the homeless does not get the appropriate assistance we are going to see a lot more homeless falling short while the government is not taking care of the homeless population who are in the most need."

Patricia Hill
Formerly the pre-k for all dc deputy managers

Maranetta

"I went to John L. Young and Open Door Shelters last night. I was told to wait until 8 pm, based on first-come, first-served, but was turned away. I slept outside on a bench in the rain. I cried, felt upset, and was emotional."

Maureen

"I went to John L. Young two weeks ago around mid-day, and was told to return at 6 pm. They took down my name, but staff said they were at capacity. They called to different shelters but they were also full. I slept outside near Union Station. I wasn't able to sleep and it was physically wearing."

Attiba

Attiba, a 59 year-old man, was turned away from shelter at Adam's Place at least six times during May and June. Being turned away meant that he did not sleep inside those nights, and lost sorely needed money traveling by bus to and from the shelter.

"I took the bus to Adam's. I spent my money to get there. I arrived early, at 5:45. I stood in line, and the assistant director told me they wouldn't have space for me even though I was twelfth in line, because they were waiting for the vans. I didn't get a sheet or a bed. They said they would call the van, but after waiting for an hour, I decided to leave. I wouldn't sleep at NY Ave. Shelter because of the bugs. I took the bus back to Dupont Circle and slept outside."

"I spent my limited resources and time to get there and back. I am handicapped and it hurts physically to travel that far. Sleeping on the concrete is very painful. But I would rather be outside than sleep in a place like NY Ave."

"Now I think, 'Why should I even try to go back to Adam's if the same thing is going to happen again?'"

Aaron

Aaron, a 37 year-old man, has been turned away from shelter at New York Ave. at least twice in May and June. He has been studying hard for his English classes in the evenings, and every night that he loses shelter due to the lack of capacity means that he has tremendous difficulty in school the next day.

"Twice in the past month when it was raining, I went to shelters and was turned away. I went to NY Ave. at 10:30 PM after my classes, and they told me there was no space. They said they would call the van, but no van ever came. I took the bus myself to 801 East. I arrived at 11:20 PM, and there was no space. It was raining, but they didn't open any space."

"I had to take the bus all night, going back and forth. After the buses closed, I wanted to walk to stay awake, but it was raining. I had to find a balcony to sleep under. I got up early to find food."

"I was sick at the time, so I was very angry. I take classes to learn English, and I was so tired that I was falling asleep in classes the next day. The lack of sleep also interfered with the medicine I take."

Martha

Martha shared that shelters have turned her away in the past. As a result, "I went to sleep on the streets. I went to the Judiciary Building until the police chased me away. I was upset and disturbed."

Kathy

Kathy shared that she has tried to go to the Harriet Tubman women's shelter at DC General every night for the past month, but was turned away due to lack of space. When turned away from the shelter, "I slept out by Union Station or a park, which made me sleep deprived, irritated, and upset."

Shelter Census Reports April 1-June 17, 2009

An analysis of the daily shelter census reports provided by The Community Partnership shows that an urgent shelter capacity problem exists in the District. There have been little or no vacancies available for women since the end of hypothermia season on March 31, 2009. While more vacancies have been available for men since May 2009, there have still been a significant number of nights when little or no shelter capacity was available for men, often during inclement weather.

Below are significant findings from the census reports from April 1- June 17, 2009:

- Women's emergency shelter system has had zero vacancies on 30/78 days (38%)
- Women's system has had less than 4 vacancies on 54 of 78 days. (70%)
- Women's system has had 5 or less vacancies on 62 of 78 days. (79%)
- Women's system has had 10 or less vacancies on 75 of 78days. (96%)
- Shelters in the women's system have been in overflow¹ on 40 of 78 days. (51%)

- Men's emergency shelter system has experienced zero vacancies on 26 of 78 days. (33%)
- Shelters in the men's system have been in overflow on 20 of 78 days. (26%)

A comparison of emergency shelter capacity and vacancies for the months of May 2008 and May 2009 demonstrates the increase in unmet shelter need that has occurred since April 2009.

Nightly Emergency Shelter Capacity - Individuals

	May 2009	May 2008
Men	980	1250
Women	352	372
Total	1332	1622

Number of Nights With Zero Emergency Shelter Vacancies for Individuals

	May 2009	May 2008
Men	10	0
Women	6	0
Total	16	0

Number of Nights Individual Emergency Shelters Used Overflow Capacity

	May 2009	May 2008
Men	11	0
Women	17	0
Total	18	0

¹ "Being in overflow" means that these shelters, while not required to by law, accepted more individuals than their normal capacity would allow on the nights in question.

The daily shelter census reports only provide a partial picture of unmet shelter demand, since there is not consistent tracking of individuals turned away from shelters. After hypothermia season ends, there is significantly less transportation assistance available to travel between shelters if one shelter is full. As a result, if the daily census report shows that there were four vacancies for men in the entire system, it does not necessarily mean that the shelter system met the need of everyone who asked for shelter that evening. An individual may have been turned away from a full shelter but did not have the means to travel to a shelter with available capacity. In addition, shelters are not required to accept any individuals beyond their capacity level. The fact that the shelter system for both men and women was over capacity on a significant percentage of evenings demonstrates that the emergency shelter system is stressed.

A Note On Families

An analysis of census data for the family shelter system is missing from this report simply because there is currently no meaningful way to assess movement in the family system by looking at the census data. The family system is structured differently from the individuals system, with one central intake center for all families and shelters that are generally open 24 hours a day (as opposed to the more common 12 hour shelters in the individuals system). As of the date of this report's release, the District has not tracked information about the number of families seeking shelter on a daily basis and how many of these families are turned away at the central intake center, or if it has, has not made this information readily available to the public.

What is apparent from the census data is that all of the year-round apartment style family shelters have been full, and the District has kept D.C. General, the hypothermia shelter for families, open past hypothermia season to accommodate the increased need for shelter in the family system.

Report compiled,
with the help of many, by:

Adam Rocap, LGSW
Director of Social Services
Miriam's Kitchen

April 23

Bed Availability

	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Ward 6	Ward 7	Ward 8
Men's Beds by Ward	90	0	0	0	510	0	0	380
Women's Beds by Ward	20	0	0	0	0	332	0	0
Total Beds by Ward	110	0	0	0	510	332	0	380
Total Family Units by Ward	61	0	0	28	0	69	0	28

Men's beds	980
Women's beds	352
Total beds	1,332
Family Units	186

Clients Served

	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Ward 6	Ward 7	Ward 8
Men	90	0	0	0	510	0	0	380
Women	21	0	0	0	0	332	0	0
Total Single Persons	111	0	0	0	510	332	0	380
Total Families	61	0	0	27	0	69	0	28

Single Adult Men	980
Single Adult Women	353
Total Individuals	1,333
Families	185

Vacancies

	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Ward 6	Ward 7	Ward 8
Men	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Singles beds vacancies	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Family unit vacancies	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0

Men's beds	0
Women's beds	0
Singles beds	0
Family units	1

Overflow

	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Ward 6	Ward 7	Ward 8
Men	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Women	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Singles beds overflow	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Family unit overflow	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Men's beds	0
Women's beds	1
Singles beds	1
Family units	0

April 24

Bed Availability

	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Ward 6	Ward 7	Ward 8
Men's Beds by Ward	90	0	0	0	510	0	0	380
Women's Beds by Ward	20	0	0	0	0	332	0	0
Total Beds by Ward	110	0	0	0	510	332	0	380
Total Family Units by Ward	62	0	0	28	0	64	0	27

Men's beds	980
Women's beds	352
Total beds	1,332
Family Units	181

Clients Served

	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Ward 6	Ward 7	Ward 8
Men	88	0	0	0	481	0	0	295
Women	20	0	0	0	0	332	0	0
Total Single Persons	108	0	0	0	481	332	0	295
Total Families	62	0	0	28	0	64	0	27

Single Adult Men	864
Single Adult Women	352
Total Individuals	1,216
Families	181

Vacancies

	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Ward 6	Ward 7	Ward 8
Men	2	0	0	0	29	0	0	85
Women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Singles beds vacancies	2	0	0	0	29	0	0	85
Family unit vacancies	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Men's beds	116
Women's beds	0
Singles beds	116
Family units	0

Overflow

	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Ward 6	Ward 7	Ward 8
Men	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Singles beds overflow	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Family unit overflow	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Men's beds	0
Women's beds	0
Singles beds	0
Family units	0

April 25

Bed Availability

	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Ward 6	Ward 7	Ward 8
Men's Beds by Ward	90	0	0	0	510	0	0	380
Women's Beds by Ward	20	0	0	0	0	332	0	0
Total Beds by Ward	110	0	0	0	510	332	0	380
Total Family Units by Ward	61	0	0	28	0	64	0	26

Men's beds	980
Women's beds	352
Total beds	1,332
Family Units	179

Clients Served

	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Ward 6	Ward 7	Ward 8
Men	85	0	0	0	455	0	0	287
Women	18	0	0	0	0	329	0	0
Total Single Persons	103	0	0	0	455	329	0	287
Total Families	61	0	0	28	0	64	0	26

Single Adult Men	827
Single Adult Women	347
Total Individuals	1,174
Families	179

Vacancies

	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Ward 6	Ward 7	Ward 8
Men	5	0	0	0	55	0	0	93
Women	2	0	0	0	0	3	0	0
Singles beds vacancies	7	0	0	0	55	3	0	93
Family unit vacancies	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Men's beds	153
Women's beds	5
Singles beds	158
Family units	0

Overflow

	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Ward 6	Ward 7	Ward 8
Men	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Singles beds overflow	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Family unit overflow	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Men's beds	0
Women's beds	0
Singles beds	0
Family units	0

April 26

Bed Availability

	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Ward 6	Ward 7	Ward 8
Men's Beds by Ward	90	0	0	0	510	0	0	380
Women's Beds by Ward	20	0	0	0	0	332	0	0
Total Beds by Ward	110	0	0	0	510	332	0	380
Total Family Units by Ward	61	0	0	28	0	64	0	26

Men's beds	980
Women's beds	352
Total beds	1,332
Family Units	179

Clients Served

	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Ward 6	Ward 7	Ward 8
Men	85	0	0	0	510	0	0	330
Women	19	0	0	0	0	332	0	0
Total Single Persons	104	0	0	0	510	332	0	330
Total Families	61	0	0	28	0	64	0	26

Single Adult Men	925
Single Adult Women	351
Total Individuals	1,276
Families	179

Vacancies

	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Ward 6	Ward 7	Ward 8
Men	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	50
Women	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Singles beds vacancies	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	50
Family unit vacancies	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Men's beds	55
Women's beds	1
Singles beds	56
Family units	0

Overflow

	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Ward 6	Ward 7	Ward 8
Men	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Singles beds overflow	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Family unit overflow	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Men's beds	0
Women's beds	0
Singles beds	0
Family units	0

April 27

Bed Availability

	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Ward 6	Ward 7	Ward 8
Men's Beds by Ward	90	0	0	0	510	0	0	380
Women's Beds by Ward	20	0	0	0	0	332	0	0
Total Beds by Ward	110	0	0	0	510	332	0	380
Total Family Units by Ward	60	0	0	28	0	64	0	26

Men's beds	980
Women's beds	352
Total beds	1,332
Family Units	176

Clients Served

	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Ward 6	Ward 7	Ward 8
Men	90	0	0	0	483	0	0	325
Women	19	0	0	0	0	332	0	0
Total Single Persons	109	0	0	0	483	332	0	325
Total Families	60	0	0	28	0	64	0	26

Single Adult Men	898
Single Adult Women	351
Total Individuals	1,249
Families	176

Vacancies

	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Ward 6	Ward 7	Ward 8
Men	0	0	0	0	27	0	0	55
Women	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Singles beds vacancies	1	0	0	0	27	0	0	55
Family unit vacancies	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Men's beds	82
Women's beds	1
Singles beds	83
Family units	0

Overflow

	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Ward 6	Ward 7	Ward 8
Men	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Singles beds overflow	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Family unit overflow	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Men's beds	0
Women's beds	0
Singles beds	0
Family units	0

April 28

Bed Availability

	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Ward 6	Ward 7	Ward 8
Men's Beds by Ward	90	0	0	0	510	0	0	380
Women's Beds by Ward	20	0	0	0	0	332	0	0
Total Beds by Ward	110	0	0	0	510	332	0	380
Total Family Units by Ward	61	0	0	28	0	64	0	26

Men's beds	980
Women's beds	352
Total beds	1,332
Family Units	179

Clients Served

	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Ward 6	Ward 7	Ward 8
Men	90	0	0	0	510	0	0	362
Women	20	0	0	0	0	332	0	0
Total Single Persons	110	0	0	0	510	332	0	362
Total Families	61	0	0	28	0	64	0	26

Single Adult Men	962
Single Adult Women	352
Total Individuals	1,314
Families	179

Vacancies

	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Ward 6	Ward 7	Ward 8
Men	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	18
Women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Singles beds vacancies	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	18
Family unit vacancies	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Men's beds	18
Women's beds	0
Singles beds	18
Family units	0

Overflow

	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Ward 6	Ward 7	Ward 8
Men	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Singles beds overflow	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Family unit overflow	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Men's beds	0
Women's beds	0
Singles beds	0
Family units	0

April 29

Bed Availability

	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Ward 6	Ward 7	Ward 8
Men's Beds by Ward	90	0	0	0	510	0	0	380
Women's Beds by Ward	20	0	0	0	0	332	0	0
Total Beds by Ward	110	0	0	0	510	332	0	380
Total Family Units by Ward	61	0	0	28	0	60	0	26

Men's beds	980
Women's beds	352
Total beds	1,332
Family Units	175

Clients Served

	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Ward 6	Ward 7	Ward 8
Men	90	0	0	0	510	0	0	368
Women	20	0	0	0	0	332	0	0
Total Single Persons	110	0	0	0	510	332	0	368
Total Families	61	0	0	28	0	60	0	26

Single Adult Men	968
Single Adult Women	352
Total Individuals	1,320
Families	175

Vacancies

	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Ward 6	Ward 7	Ward 8
Men	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12
Women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Singles beds vacancies	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	12
Family unit vacancies	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Men's beds	12
Women's beds	0
Singles beds	12
Family units	0

Overflow

	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Ward 6	Ward 7	Ward 8
Men	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Singles beds overflow	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Family unit overflow	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Men's beds	0
Women's beds	0
Singles beds	0
Family units	0

April 30

Bed Availability

	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Ward 6	Ward 7	Ward 8
Men's Beds by Ward	90	0	0	0	510	0	0	380
Women's Beds by Ward	20	0	0	0	0	332	0	0
Total Beds by Ward	110	0	0	0	510	332	0	380
Total Family Units by Ward	62	0	0	28	0	60	0	28

Men's beds	980
Women's beds	352
Total beds	1,332
Family Units	178

Clients Served

	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Ward 6	Ward 7	Ward 8
Men	90	0	0	0	510	0	0	383
Women	20	0	0	0	0	332	0	0
Total Single Persons	110	0	0	0	510	332	0	383
Total Families	62	0	0	28	0	60	0	28

Single Adult Men	983
Single Adult Women	352
Total Individuals	1,335
Families	178

Vacancies

	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Ward 6	Ward 7	Ward 8
Men	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Singles beds vacancies	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Family unit vacancies	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Men's beds	0
Women's beds	0
Singles beds	0
Family units	0

Overflow

	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Ward 6	Ward 7	Ward 8
Men	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Women	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Singles beds overflow	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
Family unit overflow	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Men's beds	3
Women's beds	0
Singles beds	3
Family units	0