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March 19, 2024

Report Pursuant to Chapter 450 of the Acts of 2014 Regarding the MA Special Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth

Legislative Mandate

The following report is issued pursuant to Chapter 450 of the Acts of 2014, which reads as follows: *The commission shall submit an annual report by December 31 to the governor, the clerks of the house of representatives and the senate, the joint committee on children, families and persons with disabilities and the office of the child advocate. The report shall include, but not be limited to, the commission's findings and any recommendations for regulatory or legislative action, with a timeline for implementation, cost estimates and finance mechanisms, and shall detail the extent of homelessness among unaccompanied homeless youth in the commonwealth and the progress made toward implementing the commission's recommendations and any other efforts to address the needs of this population.*¹ In accordance with this requirement, the MA Special Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth respectfully submits this report.

Background

The Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth (a.k.a. Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Commission or UHYC, see Appendix A), within the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS), was established through Chapter 450 of the Acts of 2014. The purpose of the UHYC is to study and make "... recommendations relative to services for unaccompanied homeless youth, with the goal of providing a comprehensive and effective response to the unique needs of this population." The focus of the UHYC's work includes, but is not limited to: "... (i) an analysis of the barriers to serving unaccompanied homeless youth who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender; (ii) an analysis of the barriers to serving unaccompanied youth under 18 years of age; (iii) an assessment of the impact of mandated reporting requirements on unaccompanied homeless youths' access to services; (iv) the commonwealth's ability to identify

¹ [Session Law - Acts of 2014 Chapter 450 \(malegislature.gov\)](http://malegislature.gov)

and connect with unaccompanied homeless youth; and (v) recommendations to reduce identified barriers to serving this population. The UHYC, in formulating its recommendations, shall take into account the best practices and policies in other states and jurisdictions.”² This legislative language drives an overarching goal of the UHYC to **make experiences of youth homelessness in MA rare, brief, and non-recurring**.

In addition, Chapter 450 directs EOHHS to enter into performance-based contracts with organizations to provide housing and support services to address the needs of unaccompanied homeless youth. “...In entering into such contracts, [EOHHS] shall take into consideration the recommendations of the commission on unaccompanied homeless youth established in section 16W on identifying, connecting and serving unaccompanied homeless youth, in general, and unaccompanied homeless youth under the age of 18 and youth who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, in particular....”³ The legislature appropriated \$9.5 million in the FY23 budget and \$11 million in FY24 via line item 4000-0007 to EOHHS to conduct such activities. In FY24, EOHHS has contracts with 10 providers (and 22 affiliated subcontractors) across the Commonwealth to administer these funds. (See Appendix A: Map of EOHHS Funded Homeless Youth Program Regions). The Homeless Youth Services providers include:

Agency	Amount	Region
Bridge Over Troubled Waters Inc	\$1,575,000	Metro Boston
Catholic Charities of Fall River	\$529,974	Bristol County
City of Springfield	\$776,589	Hampden County
Community Action Pioneer Valley, Inc.	\$785,749	Berkshire, Franklin and Hampshire Counties
Community Teamwork Inc	\$798,000	North Middlesex
County of Barnstable	\$672,000	Cape Cod and the Islands
Father Bill's & Mainspring, Inc.	\$750,000	Plymouth and East Norfolk County
L U K Crisis Center Inc	\$848,000	Worcester County
Lynn Housing Authority	\$759,000	Essex County
South Middlesex Opportunity Council Inc.	\$712,340	Metro West

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

Additionally, EOHHS provides \$562,960 in funding to the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education to provide shelter and services to college students who are experiencing homelessness.

Strategic Plans: *MA State Plan to End Youth Homelessness and Furthering the Work*

In 2018, the UHYC released the [Massachusetts State Plan to End Youth Homelessness](#), (the Plan), a document collaboratively developed by over 250 stakeholders outlining the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' next steps to make homelessness a rare, brief, and non-recurring experience among youth and young adults (YYAs). There are six primary recommendations in the plan: (1) Implement a coordinated statewide response to youth homelessness; (2) Expand the current spectrum of accountable and evidence-informed models of housing and services; (3) Enhance early identification, connection, and outreach systems to improve young people's connection to existing resources; (4) Improve education, employment, and credentialing opportunities in order to support young people's access to long-term, sustainable employment and income; (5) Create systematic outcome measurement systems and data-sharing opportunities; and (6) Create a structure to support authentic youth and young adult involvement statewide.

Building off the Plan, the UHYC undertook a Community Needs Assessment (CNA) process that would meet the state-level need to better understand the specific data and regional capacity. The report, [Furthering the Work](#), compiled data from ten regional CNAs to create a more accurate statewide picture of our needs and resources. Key areas of state-level recommendations that emerged were: housing, early identification and awareness (including minors), data coordination and collection, transportation, substance use and mental health support, and employment.

The UHYC continues to implement the recommendations within these plans and uses annual data to inform progress. Massachusetts efforts have been nationally recognized. The "[State Index of Youth Homelessness](#)," sponsored by National Homelessness Law Center and True Colors United, currently ranks Massachusetts as #1 in the nation regarding laws and policies related to preventing and addressing youth homelessness.

MA Youth Count: Data that leads to impact

EOHHS conducted a first-in-the-nation statewide survey of youth experiencing homelessness in 2014. Since that time, the UHYC has conducted [the MA Youth Count](#) in eight out of the past ten years⁴. The 2022 Youth Count was held from April 4th through May 4th; a total of 1,083 usable surveys from 145 different cities and towns were collected through a range of outreach strategies. Of these surveys, 634 from 111 cities and towns met the UHYC's definition of an unaccompanied youth currently experiencing homelessness. In 2023, the UHYC paused the MA

⁴ Due to COVID, there was no Youth Count survey in 2020. However, the UHYC did not want this historic year to go by without a report that could signal areas for action and investment. So, in 2020 the UHYC released a special report on progress being made on recommendation areas in the MA Plan to End Youth Homelessness as well as others areas of unmet need.

Youth Count for one year to conduct a more rigorous study of key findings from the 2022 Youth Count and recommended actions. This report includes a status update on these findings and recommendations, and the UHYC is pleased to submit this status report on our work.

Prevalence

UHYC estimates that in FY23 on a given night, approximately 1,000 unaccompanied youth and young adults experienced homelessness in Massachusetts⁵, and over the course of that same year approximately 3,000 youth and young adults experienced homelessness⁶. Of these young adults, EOHHS-funded homeless youth providers stabilized approximately 600 individuals into housing and an estimated additional 2,250 young adults were served for prevention of homelessness in FY23.

The 2022 Youth Count data highlighted three groups who were more vulnerable to longer experiences of homelessness and had more significant barriers to service than other unaccompanied homeless youth in MA: 1) minors, 2) youth who are not in school and without a diploma, and 3) unsheltered minors and young adults. Prevalence and additional data on each of these are presented below.

1. MINORS



*“When we're young, nobody takes us seriously. They think we're a joke. They see us as less important, that we're not valuable to the community. But when we're younger, and these things are happening, **the first thing we are is afraid.** We don't have the resources or the knowledge to actually figure out: **where do we go? how do we start? where do we start?** And me as a minor, there was a lot I had to figure out. There was a lot that I didn't know, which is why help wasn't available to me because I wasn't even sure what I was doing. I didn't know where to start.”* —Youth Count Focus Group Participant

In every year of the MA Youth Count, one-third of unaccompanied homeless youth (UHY) have reported that they left home permanently before the age of 18, generally, before their 16th birthday. The 2022 Youth Count was no exception, **and 34% of UHY reported that they left home permanently and began experiencing homelessness as minors.** Those who left home as minors were more than twice as likely to be unsheltered, 2.5 times less likely to have a high school degree, less likely to receive help, and twice as likely to have no income sources at all than all UHY. Those who left home as minors were more likely to be Black, indigenous, or other

⁵ The recently released 2023 US Housing and Urban Development point in time count identified 829 unaccompanied youth and young adults experiencing homelessness, and this count is widely accepted as being an undercount. https://files.hudexchange.info/reports/published/CoC_PopSub_State_MA_2023.pdf.

⁶ EOHHS funded Homeless Youth services providers reported serving 2,391 young adults experiencing homelessness in FY23, and this number does not consider young adults staying in adult shelters nor those who have not yet sought help or are in other systems of care.

people of color (BIPOC) and less likely to identify as LGBTQ+. Due to their age, minors face barriers that other populations experiencing homelessness or housing instability do not have to navigate.

2. EDUCATION

After several years of the MA Youth Count reporting steady increases in school completion among UHY, this progress reversed. **In 2022, more than one in four UHY respondents reported not being in school and without a high school diploma, representing a 36% increase since before the pandemic.**



Those not in school and without a diploma were more than twice as likely to begin experiencing homelessness as minors and more than twice as likely to be unsheltered. National research shows that not having a high school diploma is the single biggest predictor of homelessness, and in the 2017 national study “Voices of Youth Count” Morton, Dworsky, and Samuels indicated that youth who had less than a high school diploma were 346% more likely to experience homelessness.⁷ Additionally, the 2022 MA Youth Count data showed that of the youth not in school and without a diploma, 41% reported foster care involvement (vs. 35% of all UHY) and 83% were BIPOC as compared to 60% of all youth experiencing homelessness or 38% of all YYA living in MA. Also noteworthy, UHY who were not in school and without a diploma were the least likely to be doubled up, suggesting that this subgroup may have less access to formal and informal resources and networks, even though 60% were from the same city/town where they were taking the survey (compared to 48% of all UHY).

Youth Count respondents not in school and without a diploma reported that the most significant barriers to accessing education were (in order of significance): transportation, not having money, not knowing where to go, paperwork, being put on a waiting list, and feeling too overwhelmed to seek help. Youth not in school and without a diploma reported that getting help with education was as difficult as obtaining help for long-term housing.

3. SHELTER AND HOUSING



“... if I'm homeless I'm more looking for a place to stay long term instead of a place just for the night. If you're telling me I can only sleep there one night, I'd rather sleep in my car and make sure my stuff is safe.”

-Young adult focus group participant, Age 21

“... youth need more knowledge on where to go if they ever need help with housing... a lot of young people don't know where help is or how to even go about asking for it.” -Youth Count participant

⁷ Morton, M., Dworsky, A., and Samuels, B. (2017) *Missed Opportunities: Youth Homelessness in America*. Retrieved from <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/Voices-of-Youth-Report.pdf>

The UHYC also looked at the shelter and housing needs of youth and young adults in Massachusetts. There is a significant unmet need for accessible and safe shelter among youth and young adults experiencing homelessness, and the problem appears to be intensifying. **Compared to 2019, the percentage of unsheltered youth in 2022 was 34% higher;**⁸ the percentage of youth who were sheltered in 2022 was 13% lower than it was in 2019.⁹ Interestingly, in 2022, LGBTQ+ respondents were slightly more likely to be sheltered (53 % vs 49% of all UHY). LGBTQ+ respondents who sought help with shelter were more likely to say they received all of the help they needed than respondents as a whole.

A significant number of unsheltered youth reported that they did not know where to go or how to access shelter. In focus groups, UHY underscored this and reported that limited access to transportation options or limited awareness of existing options was a barrier to getting shelter and services. If young people cannot access shelter, they are more vulnerable to violence, victimization, and exploitation, and less likely to be connected to other stability-promoting resources such as employment, education, and food.

If young people cannot access transitional or permanent housing, they may not be able to exit emergency shelter in a timely way. In addition to the extended lack of stability for these individuals, longer shelter stays mean a reduced turnover in available shelter space for other young adults in need of emergency interventions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To make experiences of youth homelessness in the Commonwealth rare, brief, and non-recurring the UHYC recommends in FY24 and FY25:

- Conduct the Youth Count and use this data to inform targeted interventions and best practices.
- Promote communication strategies that provide information on how and where unaccompanied minors and young adults can safely reach out for help.
- Continue funding for EOHHS Homeless Youth Services and the UHYC, (line items 4000-0007 and 4000-0300).

In the upcoming year, the UHYC looks forward to exploring collaborative strategies among state, federal and local stakeholders to prevent homelessness and strengthen crisis housing and shelter for minors and young adults. Given the impact of education on homelessness, the UHYC is eager to continue collaboration with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Department of Higher Education and other state youth serving agencies to promote services that support housing stability and address academic success. Additionally, the UHYC will

⁸ In 2019, of the 529 young people experiencing homelessness, 65 reported being unsheltered; in 2022, of the 634 young people experiencing homelessness, 104 reported being unsheltered.

⁹ In 2019, of the 529 young people experiencing homelessness, 300 reported being sheltered; in 2022, of the 634 young people experiencing homelessness, 314 reported being sheltered.

engage stakeholders to identify and promote case management and financial empowerment resources plus housing connections for young adults who access shelter; so young adults have resources and tools to obtain and maintain housing. The UHYC will also focus on supporting a geographically equitable statewide safety net, including transportation to services.

The UHYC also recognizes the need to work across secretariats to develop and strengthen policies that impact a minor's ability to access services, support interagency practices on behalf of homeless, unaccompanied and transition age youth, and include data collection on the housing status of unaccompanied homeless youth.

APPENDIX A

FY24 MA Special Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth	
Seats	Current Appointment or Designee
Secretary of Health and Human Services or Designee- CHAIR	Alice Colegrove, designee
Senate Chair of Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities	Sen. Robyn K. Kennedy
House Chair of Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities	Rep. Jay Livingstone
Member of the Senate	Sen. Lydia Edwards
Member of the House	Rep. James O Day
One member Who Shall be Appointed by the Senate Minority Leader	Sen. Patrick O'Connor
One member Who Shall be Appointed by the House Minority Leader	Rep. Hannah Kane
The Commissioner of Children and Families (DCF) or a designee	Teona Beromelidze, designee
The Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) or a designee	Shirley Fan-Chan, designee
The Commissioner of Department of Public Health (DPH) or a designee	Jennifer Halstrom and Stacy Lynch, designees
The Commissioner of Mental Health (DMH) or a designee	Heidi Holland, designee
The Director of Medicaid or a designee	Madeline Wachman, designee
The Commissioner of Transitional Assistance (DTA) or a designee	Kamaria Moore-Hollis, designee
The Under Secretary for Housing and Community Development (Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities) or a designee	Gordon Calkins, designee

The Commissioner of Youth Services (DYS) or a designee	Rebecca Moore, designee
Direct Service Provider who works with Unaccompanied Homeless Youth- Appointed by the Governor	(appointment pending)
Direct Service Provider who works with Unaccompanied Homeless Youth- Appointed by the Governor	(appointment pending)
Direct Service Provider who works with Unaccompanied Homeless Youth- Appointed by the Governor	(appointment pending)
Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless, Inc.	Kelly Turley
The Mass Taskforce on Youth Aging out of DCF Care	Rachel Gwaltney
Massachusetts Appleseed Center for Law and Justice	Deb Silva
Mass Equality Org, The Campaign for Equality Inc.	Deborah Shields
Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance	Caitlin Golden
Boston Alliance of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Youth	Aaron Gonzales
Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition, Inc.	Tre'Andre Carmel Valentine
Youth who has experienced homelessness- Appointed by the Child Advocate	Thaliana Paulino
Youth who has experienced homelessness- Appointed by the Child Advocate	Brianna Howland
Youth who has experienced homelessness- Appointed by the Child Advocate	Deandre Avant

APPENDIX B

Map of EOHHS Homeless Youth Funded Program Regions

