
Report to The Vermont Legislature

GENERAL ASSISTANCE; EMERGENCY HOUSING REPORTS

In Accordance with Act 50, Sec E.321.2,
An act relating to making appropriations for the support of government.

Submitted to: House Committee on Appropriations
House Committee on General, Housing and Military
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Contents	Page Number
Introduction	3
General Assistance Housing Program Management	3
New Program Resources	4
Data Collection Processes	5
Health and Safety Assurances	5
New Program Rules	6
Cold Weather Exception	6
Appendix	7 - 12
A. Vulnerable Populations Eligibility Criteria	
B. Aggregate GA Housing Data (August – December 2013)	
C. GA Housing Denial Data (August – December 2013)	
D. GA Housing Data Tables (Statewide: August – December 2013)	
E. Primary Stated Cause of Homelessness	
F. GA Emergency Housing (2008-2013 Overview)	

Introduction:

Act 50 required the Department for Children and Families (DCF) in the Agency of Human Services (AHS) to develop:

- (1) An intake system for individuals and families receiving emergency housing services including collection of basic statistical information about the clients served;
- (2) A system to track payments to motels; and
- (3) A system for ensuring the safety and health of clients who are housed in motels.

The act also required new General Assistance housing reports to be submitted to the legislature in January and July of each year with data specific to these key program areas:

- demographic information,
- de-identified client data,
- shelter and motel usage rates,
- clients' primary stated cause of homelessness, and
- the average lengths of stay in emergency housing by demographic group and by type of housing, and such other relevant data as the Secretary deems appropriate.

Below, and included in the appendices, are data and information related to these statutory mandates.

I. General Assistance Housing Program Management

As of July 1, 2013, the intake and eligibility determination for General Assistance emergency housing was returned to the Economic Services Division's (ESD) twelve district offices.

Vermonters seeking emergency housing apply at the local ESD office where they are seen for an intake interview and eligibility determination the same day. Emergency housing applicants are seen on a first come, first serve basis. Vermont 2-1-1 handles after-hour and weekend calls. Applicants seeking emergency housing after hours or on weekends are provisionally housed by Vermont 2-1-1 if they meet basic eligibility criteria, and are required to go to an ESD office to receive subsequent emergency housing authorizations. Those who fail to appear in the ESD office are denied additional housing until they comply with this program requirement.

Local ESD offices communicate daily with 2-1-1 and local homeless shelters. Each morning, ESD staff contact local shelters to learn the number of available beds for that night. This information is shared at the end of each day with 2-1-1 so that they know which shelters have available beds. This system is working well and assures that shelters, where they exist, remain the first resource for homeless families and individuals needing emergency shelter.

II. New Program Resources

- a. **Harbor Place:** ESD and the Agency of Human Services Director of Housing worked over the summer and fall of 2013 to build greater shelter capacity throughout the state, especially in Chittenden County which is the primary driver of the GA emergency housing budget. On November 1, 2013, the Harbor Place (HP) transitional program began sheltering and serving its first families. The facility was opened under the management of Champlain Housing Trust with significant financial investments from DCF. These funds supported the renovation of the facility from its former use as a motel and secured access to 30 rooms at a cost of \$38 per room. This arrangement guarantees ESD a minimum number of beds in Chittenden County at about 40% savings compared to motel costs. Additionally, community partners such as Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity (CVOEO), Women Helping Battered Women (WHBW) and Safe Harbor have committed case management and other resources to help residents identify and address underlying needs and barriers to securing housing. There are weekly check-in calls with community partners, 2-1-1, CHT, Harbor Place and DCF Economic Services Division. Early in its operation there are many reasons for optimism that this model will not only save money but also provide critical and timely services for families in need, reducing the likelihood these families will seek GA housing support in the future.
- b. **Burlington Hostel:** In the fall of 2013, ESD negotiated with the Burlington Hostel to secure beds for women and their children under age 12. This facility operates as a supportive shelter and has begun serving between six and 12 individuals most nights. It is especially needed during cold weather nights when Burlington shelters are at capacity.
- c. **Warming Shelters:** Several communities are setting up local warming shelters with AHS and DCF support. Among communities now offering warming shelters for homeless individuals to have a warm and safe place to sleep are: North Springfield, Brattleboro, St. Albans, Barre, N. Walpole (Bellows Falls) and White River Junction.

These new resources provide alternatives to motels, help reduce costs, and offer enhanced services to homeless families and individuals. Prioritization of emergency housing referrals for persons experiencing homelessness in Chittenden County looks like this:

1. Shelter
2. Harbor Place
3. Burlington Hostel
4. Motel

In other regions of the state, family, individual and warming shelters continue to play a significant role in providing bed capacity and options within the local homeless Continuum of Care.

III. Data Collection Processes

The twelve ESD district offices collect the following data daily and submit a weekly spreadsheet to ESD central office for a monthly and year-to-date statewide compilation:

- Total number of emergency housing requests
- Emergency housing requests granted/denied
- Number of singles granted/denied housing
- Number of families granted/denied housing
- Number of adults and children in households requesting and granted housing
- Number of eligible catastrophic requests/number granted
- Number of categorically-eligible vulnerable population requests/number granted
- Number of eligible vulnerable points requests/number granted
- Total number of nights authorized/average cost per night/total cost for authorized nights
- Number of Cold Weather Exception grants/number of adults granted under CWE/number of children granted under CWE
- Number of Cold Weather Exception nights authorized/average cost per night/total cost for CWE nights authorized

The above data are collected manually in the district offices and central office as DCF's ACCESS system is not designed to collect this data. Payments for emergency housing are made based on motel billings on ESD authorization forms. Once billing is received from a motel by ESD, the local district office authorizes payment through the ACCESS system which generates payment to the motel. The Department for Children & Families Business Office generates a monthly report that reflects all payments made for emergency housing.

IV. Health and Safety Assurances

ESD sought the assistance of the Vermont Department of Health (VDH) regarding health and safety standards for those motels ESD uses for emergency housing. VDH conducts routine sanitation inspections at licensed lodging establishments. In addition, VDH responds to complaints received in the program about licensed food or lodging establishments. VDH now furnishes ESD with inspection reports going back to July 2012 that were done on lodging establishments utilized by ESD for emergency housing.

V. New Program Rules

Expedited Vulnerable Population Rules for emergency housing were put into effect August 1, 2013. The rule is included in the Appendices of this report (*see Appendix A*). A summary of emergency housing requests for the period of August to December 2013 follows:

- 5,869 General Assistance housing applications were received.
- Of these 5,869 emergency housing applications:
 - 3,611 were granted. 2,258 were denied.
 - 2,627 singles were granted. 1,564 singles were denied.
 - 984 families were granted. 694 families were denied.
 - Of 7,175 adults in households requesting emergency housing, 4,784 were granted.
 - Of 3,465 children in households requesting emergency housing, 1,687 were granted.
 - 1,311 were found eligible under catastrophic criteria. 1,008 were granted.
 - 1,461 were found categorically-eligible under vulnerable population categories. 822 were granted.
 - 44 were found eligible under vulnerable points (*see eligibility criteria*). 25 were granted.
- 14,731 bed nights were paid for at an average cost of \$65.17/night.

VI. Cold Weather Exception

Cold Weather Exception (CWE) nights started on October 28. There was one CWE night in October, and 23 CWE nights in November. In December there were 28 CWE nights resulting in a total of 52 CWE nights through the end of 2013.

CWE nights in 2013 are 3.5 times higher than the same period in 2012. From October 28 through the end of December 2013, DCF spent an estimated \$197,242 on cold weather exceptions. This figure represents 3,338 nights at an average cost of \$59.09/night.

APPENDIX A: Vulnerable Populations Eligibility Criteria

2652.3 Emergency Housing for Vulnerable Populations

Emergency housing is intended to provide up to 28 days of shelter for vulnerable populations who are without housing and do not qualify for temporary housing under rule 2652.2. Applicants shall qualify for emergency housing if all other eligibility criteria are met and the household has a member who is:

- A. 65 years of age or older;
- B. in receipt of SSI or SSDI;
- C. a child six years of age or younger; or
- D. in the third trimester of pregnancy.

Applicant households, without a member belonging to one of the above vulnerable populations, shall qualify for emergency housing if all other eligibility criteria are met and the household has a member belonging to one or more of the vulnerable populations listed below and has been assessed a total of 4 or more points according to the following point system:

Vulnerable Population Category	Points
Disabled Veteran (as defined in 38 U.S.C. § 4211)	1
Individual with an open case receiving services from the Family Services Division	1
SSI or SSDI applicant with medical documentation of disability	1
Child(ren) between the ages of 7 and 17	2
Individual discharged from a 48-hours or more inpatient hospital stay, within the past 30 days, who has an ongoing medical need related to the hospitalization	2
Individual over 18 years of age discharged from the custody of the department for children and families within the past 3 years	1
Reach Up recipient	1
Individual on probation or parole with the department of corrections who has been incarcerated for 12 consecutive months and released within the past 6 months	1

Applicant households shall be assigned points only once within any vulnerable population category.

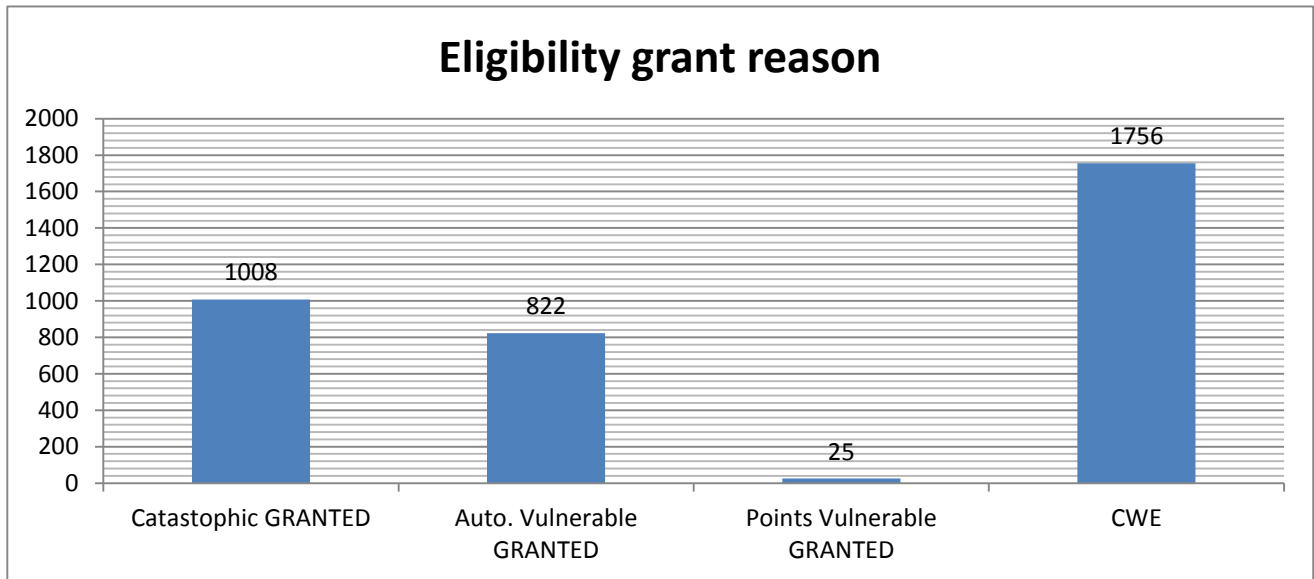
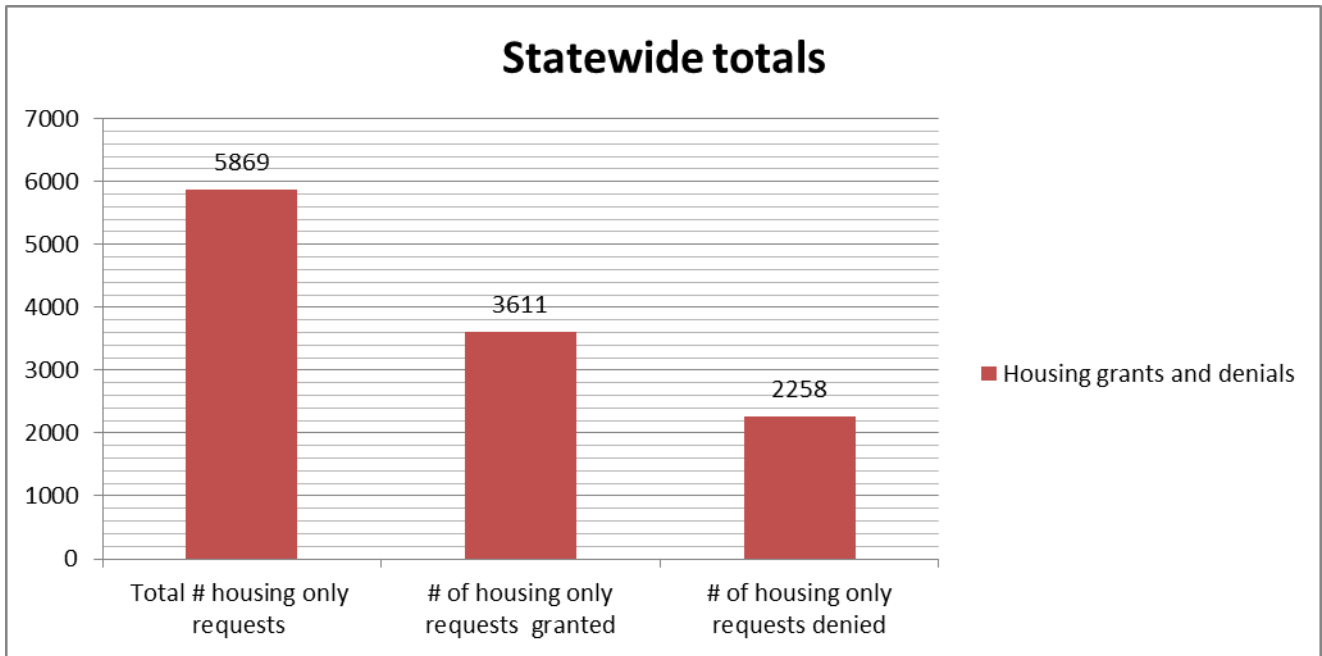
APPENDIX B: Aggregate GA Housing Data (August – December 2013)

5,000 foot view **			2,000 foot view of just housing								
Total # GA housing requests	# of GA housing requests granted	# of GA housing requests denied	# singles GRANTED housing	# singles denied housing	# families GRANTED housing	# families denied housing	# of adults GRANTED	# of children GRANTED	Catastrophic GRANTED	Auto. Vulnerable GRANTED	Points Vulnerable GRANTED
5,869	3,611	2,258	2,627	1,564	984	694	4,784	1,687	1,008	822	25
# of Total Nights Paid For	Average cost per night	Average Total Costs	CWE	#adults	#children	# nights					
	AVERAGE	TOTAL									
14,731	\$65	\$960,019	1,756	1,859	226	3,338					
Potential Denial Reasons						*** 4 Auto Criteria					
Used Max days 28/84						65 Years of Age or older					
No Verification provided						In receipt of SSI/SSDI					
Not meeting with worker/ CM						A Child 6 years of age or under					
Not spending 50% to meet housing need						In 3rd Trimester of Pregnancy					
Didn't follow up with Housing provider											
						**** = 4 Points or more					

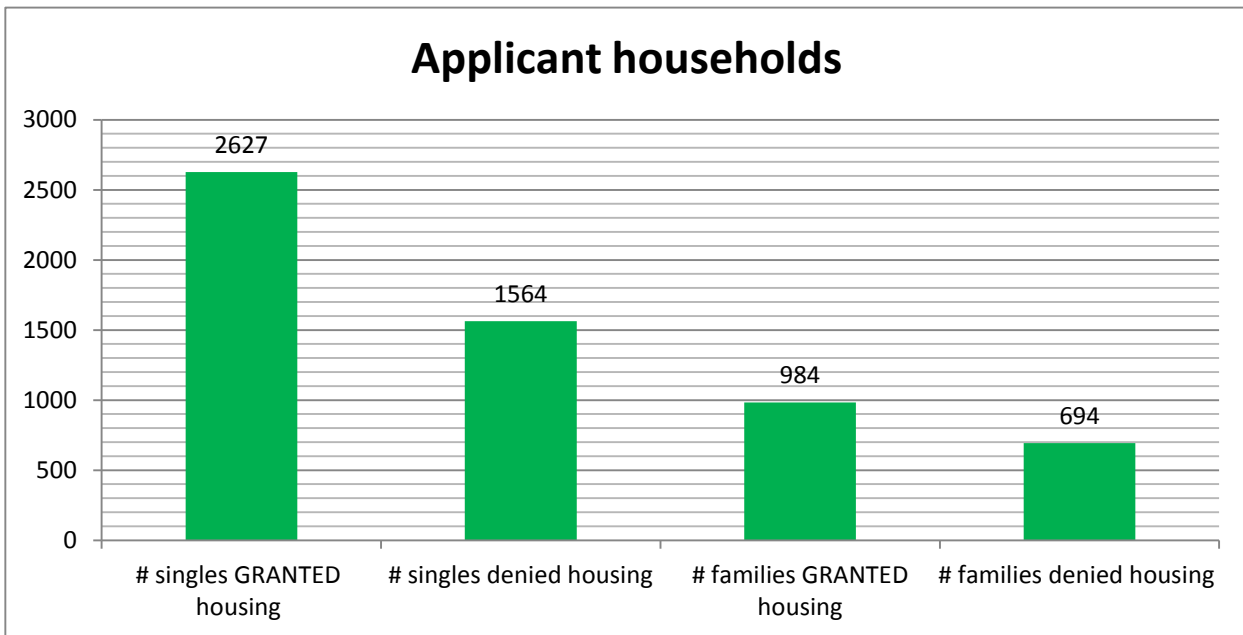
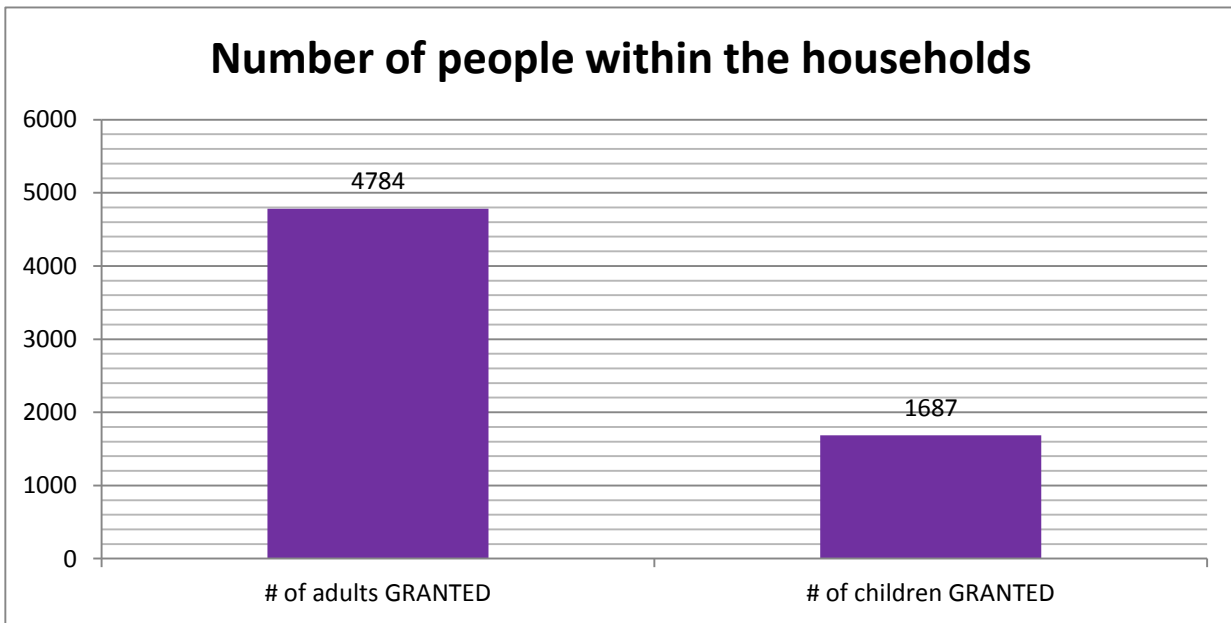
APPENDIX C: GA Housing Denial Data (August – December 2013)

August - December YTD GA/EA Denials							
Total Denied Applications							
2192							
Adults ONLY households				Households with Child(ren)			
		1525	70%			667	30%
Top 5 Denial Reasons				Top 5 Denial Reasons			
1	No Category	511	34%	1	Caused own eviction/homelessness	144	22%
2	Caused own Eviction/homelessness	199	13%	2	Other Housing Options	128	19%
3	Verification Needed	195	13%	3	Verification Needed	121	18%
4	Other Housing Options	195	13%	4	Available Resources	63	9%
5	Shelter Space Available	131	9%	5	Max Nights	42	6%
	Total	1231	81%		Total	498	75%

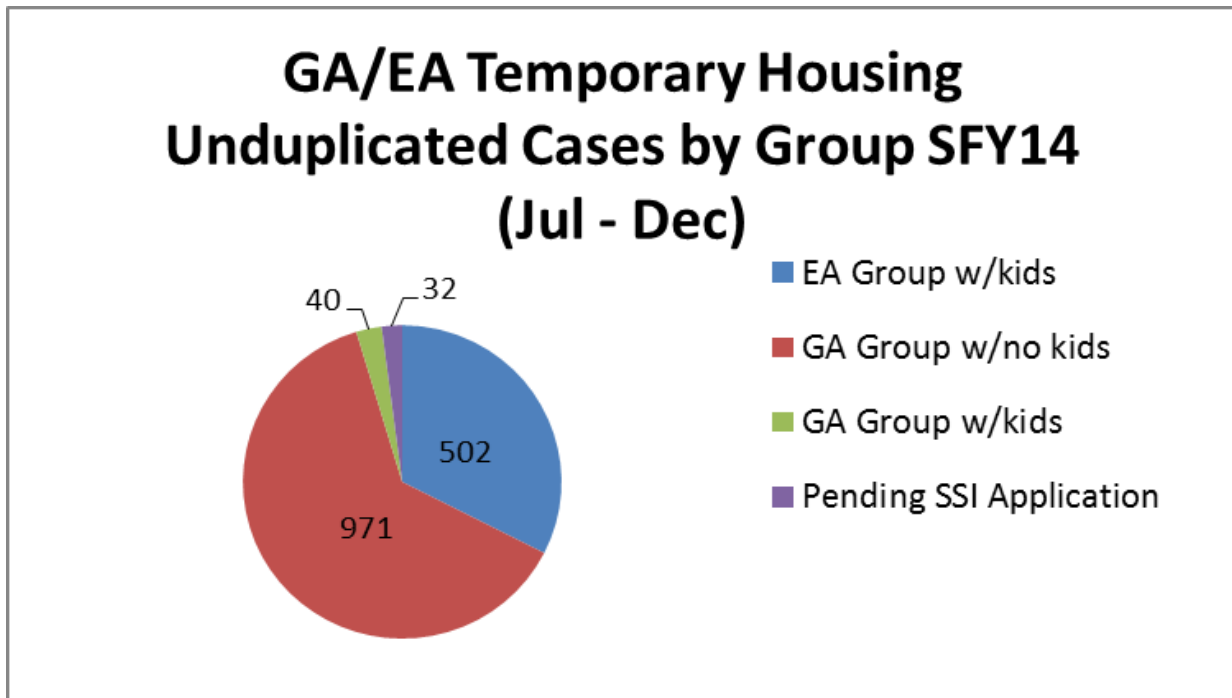
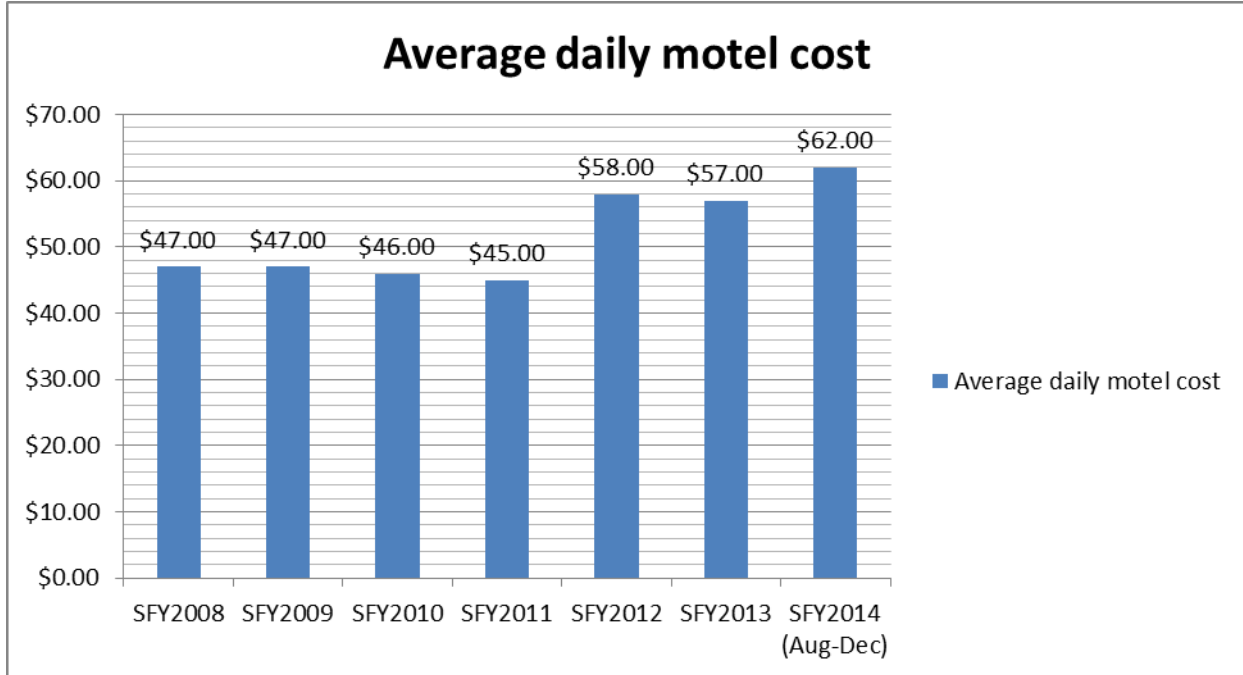
Statewide temporary housing data for August - December 2013



Statewide temporary housing data for August - December 2013



Statewide temporary housing data for August - December 2013



APPENDIX E: Primary Stated Cause of Homelessness

Primary Stated Cause of Homelessness	St. Albans	Burlington	Rutland	Middlebury	Barre	Morrisville	Bennington	Brattleboro	Newport	St. Johnsbury	Springfield	Hartford	Statewide Ranking	Combined Districts rankings across state in each category of Homelessness (top 4 areas only)
Job Loss/Unemployment/ Underemployment											3	3		2
Unexpected Expenses (Including car repair)					4									1
Could not afford housing						4						2		2
Eviction with cause	3		3		2	1		4	3	1			3	7
Eviction without cause/ Non-renewal		4	4	2						2				4
Domestic Violence/Child Abuse	2	1	2	1	1	3	1	1	2	3	4	4	1	12
Household conflict or change in size	1	2	1	3			4				1	1	2	7
Overcrowded/Under-housed		3					3		4					3
Natural Disaster				4				2	1					3
Constructive Eviction	4				3	2	2	3		4	2		4	7
Quick look														
* 50% of the District Offices say that DV is the top stated reason for Homelessness.														

STATEWIDE - Top Four Stated Causes of Homelessness for persons applying for GA Temporary Housing	
Domestic Violence/Child Abuse	1
Household conflict or change in size	2
Eviction with cause	3
Constructive Eviction	4

APPENDIX F: GA Emergency Housing (2008-2013 Overview)

State Fiscal Year	Unique cases	Total Days	Ave Days	Ave. cost per night
SFY2008	548	10,468	19	\$47
SFY2009	1,140	25,516	22	\$47
SFY2010	1,740	23,564	14	\$46
SFY2011	1,448	31,934	22	\$45
SFY2012	1,954	38,350	20	\$58
SFY2013	2,851	71,770	25	\$57
SFY2014 (Jul-Dec)	1,545	23,704	15*	\$62

*Only five months of data. This figure is expected to exceed the 2013 average.