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**Report to**  
**The Vermont Legislature**

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**GENERAL ASSISTANCE; EMERGENCY HOUSING REPORT**

**In Accordance with 2014 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

**Submitted by:** Hal Cohen, Secretary, AHS

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**Report Date:** January 27, 2015



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## Executive Summary

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.

## General Assistance Housing Program Maintenance

Intake and eligibility for General Assistance emergency housing is determined in each of the Economic Services Division's (ESD) 12 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 authorization. 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.

Subsequent to discussions with Legal Services Law Line of Vermont, Inc. and Disability Rights Vermont, the Department for Children and Families decided to pilot block scheduling in the Burlington district office for people with disabilities or for those who cannot wait in a public waiting room for safety reasons. Applicants are given an appointment window of two hours and meet with an eligibility worker within that time frame. During this pilot time period, the request for a scheduled appointment must be made through an advocate

acting on the client's behalf, at one of our community partner organizations (e.g. CVOEO, Women Helping Battered Women, and Vermont Legal Aid). The pilot was put into place mid-October and a memo was sent out alerting interested parties of the pilot and the availability of this scheduling option. As of December, no one had accessed this pilot.

## New Program Resources

Current program resources include:

### I. **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, particularly 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 investment from DCF. These funds supported the renovation of the facility from its former use as a motel and secured DCF access to 30 rooms at a cost of \$38 per night. This arrangement guarantees ESD a minimum number of beds in Chittenden County at about 40 percent 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 Harbor Place residents identify and address underlying needs and barriers to securing housing. There are bi-weekly check-in calls with community partners, 2-1-1, CHT, Harbor Place and DCF Economic Services Division.

Harbor Place has now been in operation 13 months. In addition to the 30 contracted rooms, Harbor Place has 20 rooms potentially available at an average cost of \$38 per night. The average Burlington area motel costs \$52 per night. The following data reflect the average number of beds used per night for the contracted rooms:

During the months of July, August, September and October, 90% of the 30 rooms were used on average each night at an average cost of \$1,026 per night.

During the Cold Weather Exception (CWE) months of November and December, 90% of the 30 rooms were used on average each night for a total average cost of \$1,026 per night.

Note: The number of CWE nights in Burlington in the months of October, November and December 2013 were greater than the number of CWE nights in Burlington during those same months in 2014.

### II. **Warming Shelters:**

Several communities are setting up local warming shelters for homeless individuals to have a warm and safe place to sleep with AHS and DCF support. The Middlebury and Springfield communities are now offering warming shelters with some funding from the Community Housing Grants (CHG). All together DCF currently supports seven warming shelters. Other

communities working to establish warming shelters with some CHG funding are Newport, St. Johnsbury and Rutland.

With a high level of coordination and communication between Economic Services and local shelters (warming and year-round), these 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 is currently set-up as follows:

1. Shelter
2. Harbor Place
3. 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.

The increased need for day shelters in communities with warming shelters has become ever more apparent as people experiencing homelessness, who often have medical needs, require a warm, safe place during the day.

### **Data Collection Processes**

The 12 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 and central offices as DCF's ACCESS system is not designed to collect this data. Payments for emergency housing are made based on motel billing through 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 reflecting all payments made for emergency housing.

## Health and Safety Assurances

ESD sought the assistance of the Vermont Department of Health (VDH) regarding health and safety standards for motels ESD uses for emergency housing. VDH conducts routine sanitation inspections at licensed lodging establishments. As VDH is scheduled to do yearly inspections, ESD will request inspection reports for motels in December of each year. We requested and received current inspections for all lodging establishments used by Economic Services for the calendar year 2014.

## Program Rules

Expedited vulnerable population rules for emergency housing were put into effect August 1, 2013. These are within this report as *Appendix A*. A summary of emergency housing requests, including catastrophic and vulnerable populations, for the period of July – December 2014 follows:

- **9,536** emergency housing applications were received, of these:
  - **6,154** were granted; **3,381** were denied.
  - **4,124** singles were granted; **2,403** singles were denied.
  - **2,030** families were granted; **978** families were denied.
  - Of the **10,682** adults in households requesting emergency housing, **6,836** were granted.
  - Of the **5,380** children in households requesting emergency housing, **3,629** were granted.
  - **2,234** were found eligible under the catastrophic criteria; **2,080** were granted.
  - **1,681** were found categorically-eligible under the vulnerable population categories; **1,134** were granted.
  - **44** were found eligible under vulnerable points (see eligibility criteria); **44** were granted.
- **21,761** bed nights were paid for at an average cost of **\$70/night**.

## Cold Weather Exception

The following data reflects the Cold Weather Exception (CWE) nights for July –December, 2014. There were no CWE nights in October, 15 CWE nights in November and 26 CWE nights in December, resulting in a total of 41 CWE nights through December 31. CWE nights in 2014 are slightly lower than the same period in 2013 with 55 nights. From November 1 through the end of December 2014, DCF spent an estimated \$263,322 on cold weather exceptions. This figure represents 3,802 nights at an average cost of \$69/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:

<b>Vulnerable Population Category</b>	<b>Points</b>
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 (July - December 2014)**

Total # housing only requests	# of housing only requests granted	# of housing only requests denied	# singles GRANTED housing	# singles denied housing	# families GRANTED housing	# families denied housing	# of adults GRANTED	# of children GRANTED	Catastrophic GRANTED
9,536	6,154	3,381	4,124	2,403	2,030	978	6,836	3,629	2,080
Auto. Vulnerable GRANTED	Points Vulnerable GRANTED	# of Total Nights Paid For	Average cost per night	Average Total Costs	CWE	#adults	#children	# of nights paid for	
1,134	44	21,761	\$70.32	1,530,282.	2,887	3,097	551	3,802	

**Potential Denial Reasons**

- Used Max days 28/84
- No Verification provided
- Not meeting with worker
- Not spending 30% towards meeting housing need
- Didn't follow up with Housing provider

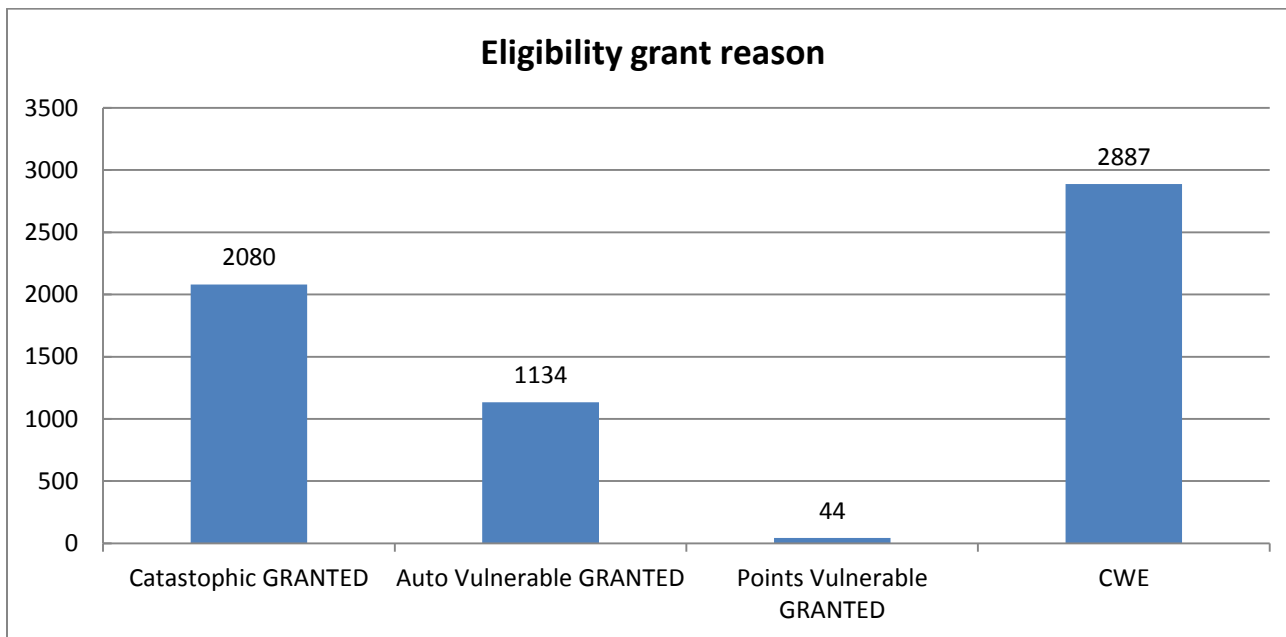
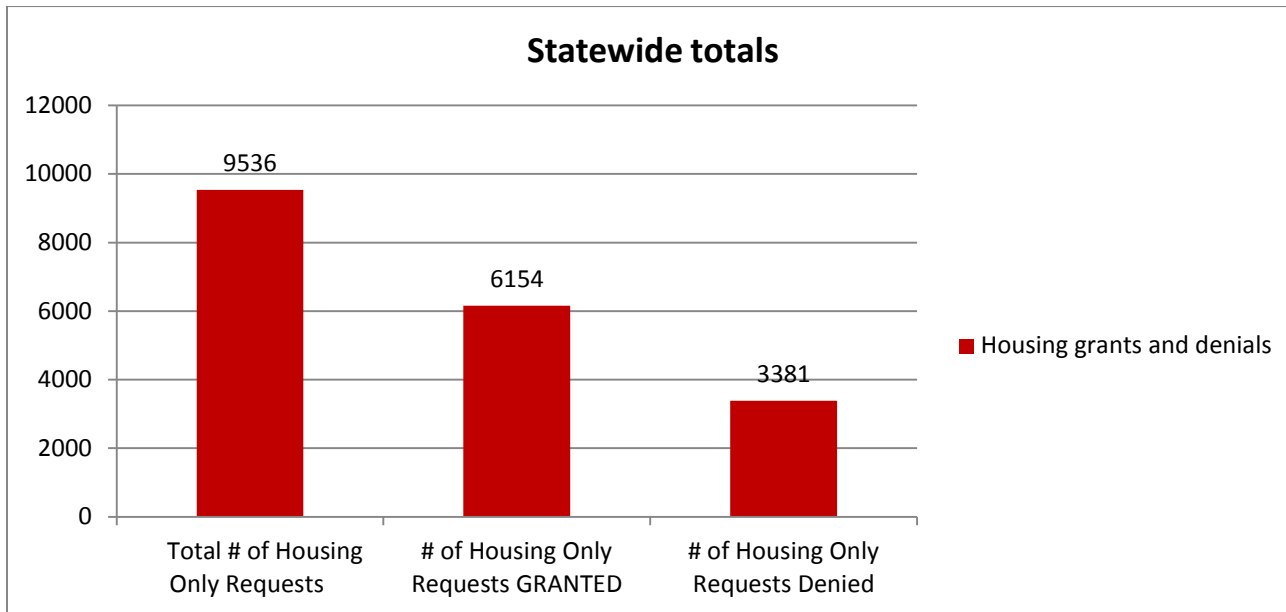
**APPENDIX C: GA Housing Denial Data (July - December 2014)**

July 2014 - December 2014 GA/EA Denials							
Total Denied Applications							
3384							
Households with Adults ONLY				Households with Child(ren)			
	2405	71%			979	29%	
Top 5 Denial Reasons				Top 5 Denial Reasons			
1	Ineligible	883	37%	1	Has Other Housing Options	279	28%
2	Has Other Housing Options	487	20%	2	Caused Homelessness	203	21%
3	Caused Homelessness	199	8%	3	Ineligible	151	15%
4	Verification Required	147	6%	4	Verification Required	96	10%
5	No Interview	137	6%	5	Available Resources	50	5%

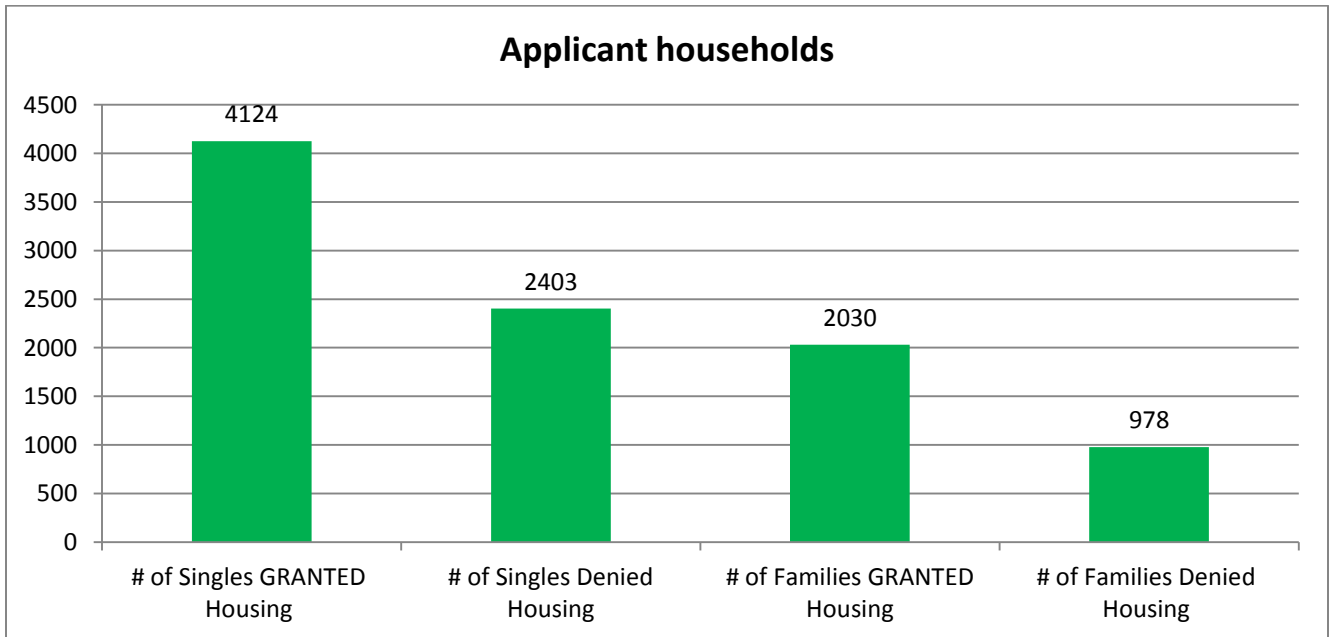
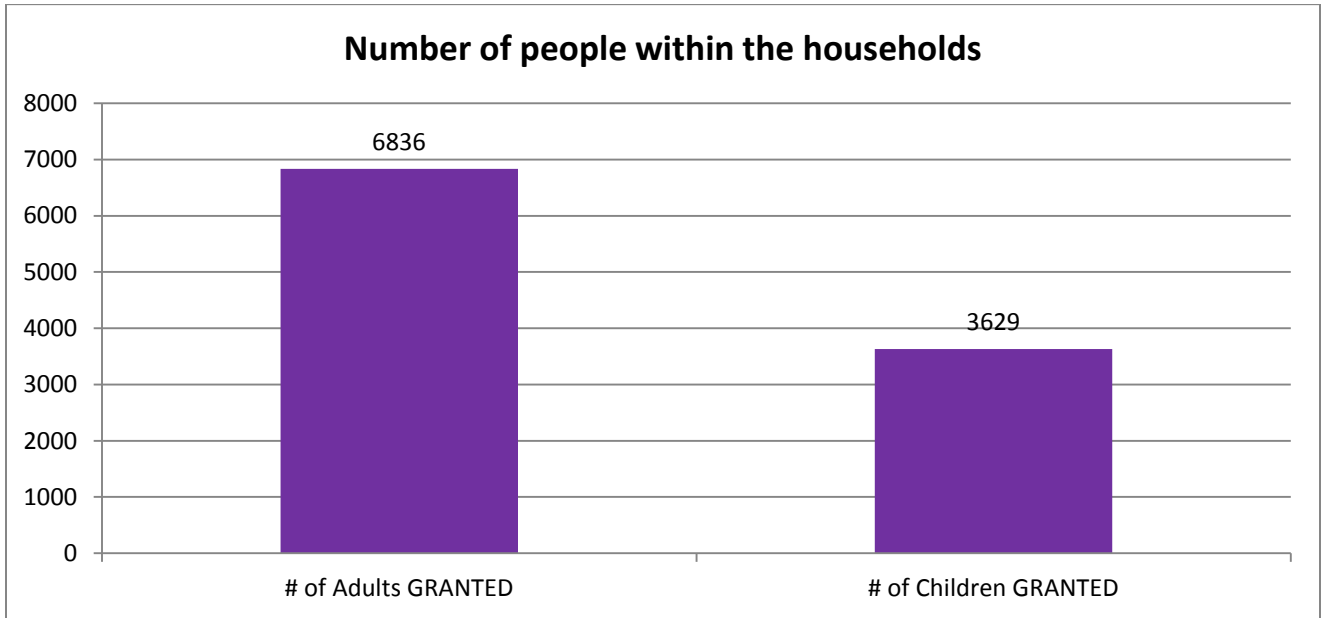


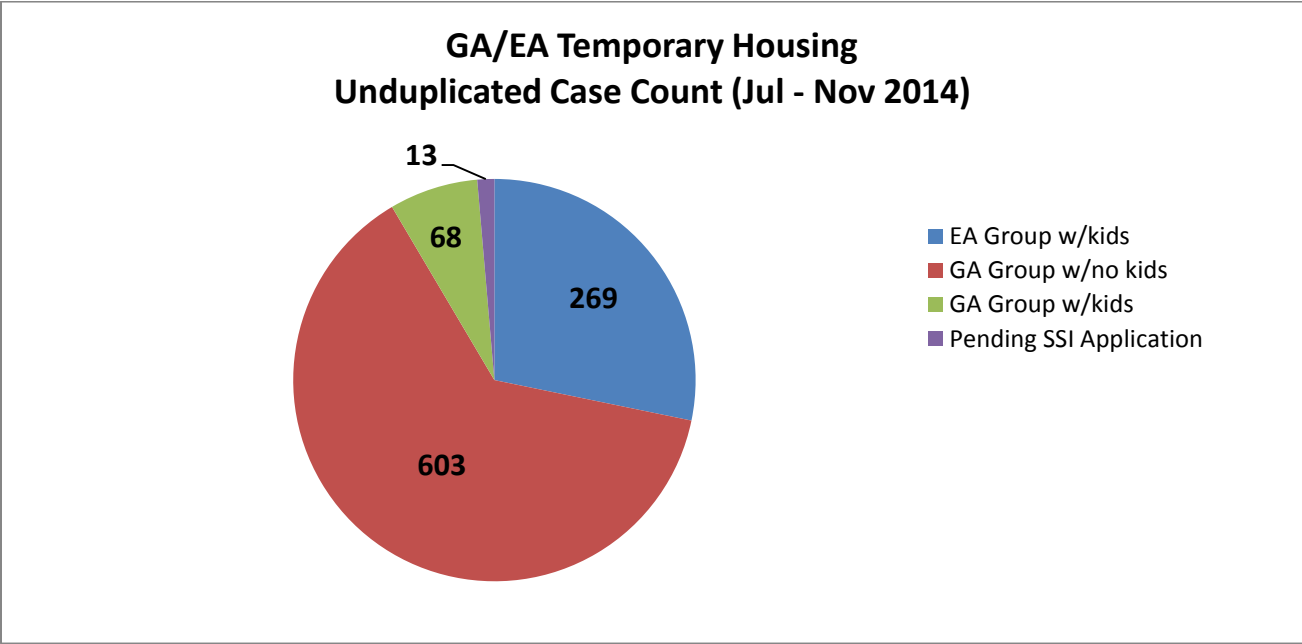
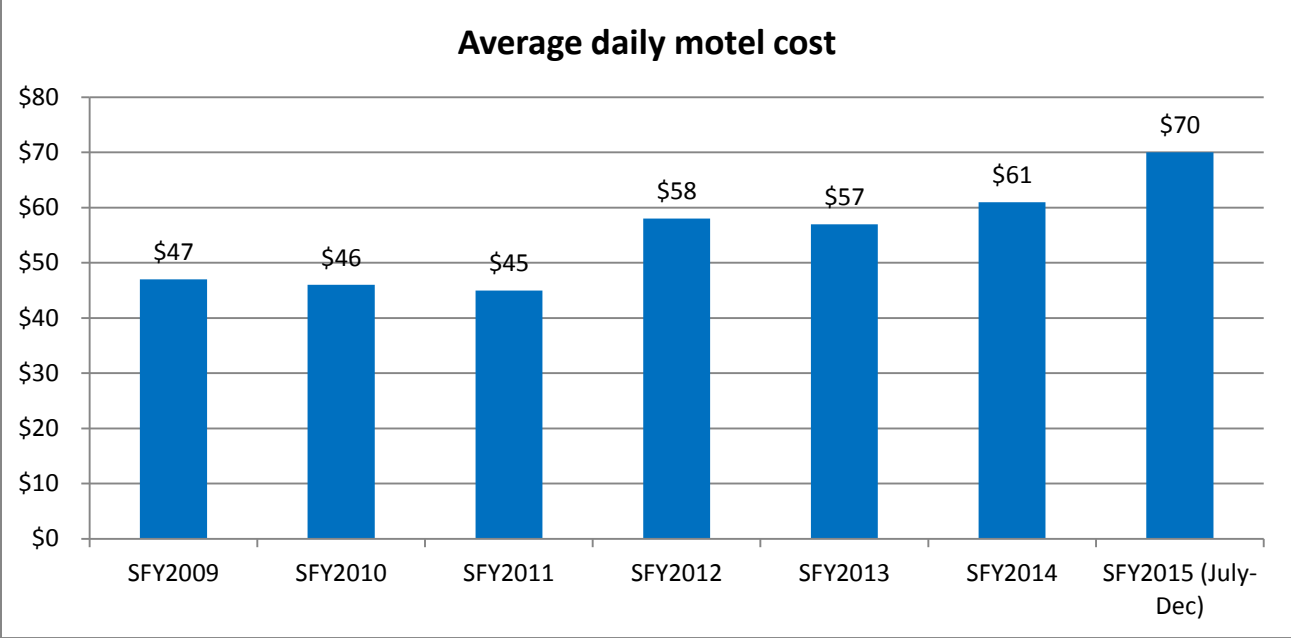
**APPENDIX D: GA Housing Data Tables (Statewide: July - December 2014)**

**Statewide temporary housing data for July - December 2014**



**Statewide Temporary Housing Data for July - December 2014**





## APPENDIX E: Primary Stated Cause of Homelessness

Primary State Cause of Homelessness	St. Albans	Burlington	Hartford	St. Johnsbury	Brattleboro	Barre	Newport	Rutland	Springfield	Brattleboro	Morrisville	Middlebury	Statewide Ranking	Combined Districts ranking across state in each category of Homelessness (top 4 areas only)
Benefit Issues (SSI, UC, CS, Voucher, St Assistance)														0
Chronically Homelessness	2	1	2	1	3	1	2	3	4	1	1		1	11
Could not afford housing		4	5		2		3	4					5	5
Domestic Violence/Child Abuse	3	2	1	3	1	2	1	1	3	3		1	1	11
Eviction with Cause	4			4		5			1		3		4	5
Eviction without Cause/Non-renewal	5	5	4	5	4	4		5	2		3		3	9
Job Loss/Unemployment/Underemployment														0
Kicked out of Family/Friends	1	3	3	2	5	3	3	2	5	2	2	2	2	12
Overcrowded/Underhoused														0
Unexpected Expenses (car repair)														0
<b>STATEWIDE - Top Four Stated Causes of Homelessness for persons applying for GA Temporary Housing</b>														
Chronically Homelessness	1													
Domestic Violence/Child Abuse	1													
Kicked out of Family/Friends	2													
Eviction without Cause/Non-renewal	3													
Eviction with cause	4													

## APPENDIX F: GA Emergency Housing (2009-2015 Overview)

	Unique cases	Total Days	Ave Days
<b>SFY2009</b>	1140	25516	22
<b>SFY2010</b>	1740	23564	14
<b>SFY2011</b>	1448	31934	22
<b>SFY2012</b>	1954	38350	20
<b>SFY2013</b>	2851	71770	25
<b>SFY2014</b>	2796	52087	19
<b>SFY2015 (Jul - Nov)</b>	1008	16060	16