



**Family Promise of Bergen County**  
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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**HUD Homeless Data Don't Add Up: Children and Youth Pay the Price**  
***Public Schools Report Highest Number of Homeless Students on Record, But HUD Claims Reduction in Family and Youth Homelessness***

RIDGEWOOD, N.J. - Dec. 18, 2018 – Data released this week by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development grossly underestimate family and youth homelessness, according to service providers, educators, and child advocates.

HUD's 2018 Annual Homeless Assessment Report estimated that on a single night in January 2018, more than 180,000 parents and children were experiencing homelessness. According to HUD's numbers, this is a 2% decrease from 2017, and a 23% decrease since 2007.

But people who actually work with the homeless say these numbers only reflect the number of parents and children living on the streets or in cars, motels or shelters. It overlooks the majority, who are doubled and tripled up with relatives or friends, or are in other, similarly tenuous housing arrangements.

Kate Duggan, executive director of Family Promise of Bergen County, said the HUD data does not show the true picture of homelessness, particularly for families. "Let's agree on a common sense definition of homelessness," said Duggan, whose organization is the only one in Bergen County that focuses on helping homeless working families with children. "People aren't homeless only if they're sleeping on the street or in their car. They're homeless if they don't have a permanent place to call home. Period."

Other public agencies, in fact, report significant increases in child and family homelessness. For example, the U.S. Department of Education reported that public schools identified 1,354,363 homeless children and youths enrolled in the 2016-2017 school year. That was a 4% increase from 2015-2016 and a 70% increase from 2007-2008, the school year with the highest number on record.

Head Start programs also reported seeing record levels of homeless children -- 52,764 in 2016-2017, up from 26,200 in 2007-2008. That's a 100% increase.

In Bergen County, Duggan noted, there was a 24% increase in the number of homeless students in the 2017-18 school year over the previous year. The HUD report also claims that 36,361 unaccompanied youth under age 25 were experiencing homelessness.

HUD's data and methodology account for only a fraction of families and youth experiencing homelessness, because HUD's "point in time" count only measures the number of people who are in shelter or transitional housing, or who are seen during street counts.

But most homeless families and youths do not stay in shelters, transitional housing, or on the streets. Of the 1.3 million homeless children and youth identified by public schools, for instance, only 3.7% were unsheltered, and 13.9% were staying in shelters. The rest were in motels, or staying temporarily with others due to lack of alternatives.

Last year, a first-of-its kind study on unaccompanied youth homelessness in America, *Missed Opportunities: Youth Homelessness in America*, found that 4.2 million young people experienced unaccompanied homelessness over a 12-month period.

The report found that, of the 3.5 million 18-24 year-olds and 700,000 13-17 year-olds who experienced homelessness, nearly three quarters stayed with others – a form of homelessness not included in HUD's methodology.

A lack of appropriate shelter options, fear of child welfare and safety, and reductions in transitional housing explain why most homeless families and youths are not in shelter or on the streets. Shelters and transitional housing are often full; unable to serve families as a unit; don't accept unaccompanied minor youths; or, in many places, simply don't exist. When families and youth aren't able to access this kind of shelter, they're less likely to be included in HUD's counts.

"Family homelessness is a complex issue," said Duggan. "There is no single answer. We should be looking for ways to help all families who are without a permanent place to call home -- not using a narrow definition which excludes so many who need help."

Family Promise of Bergen County's vision is to break the cycle of poverty and homelessness for working families in Bergen County. For more information please visit [bergenfamilypromise.org](http://bergenfamilypromise.org) or contact 201-833-8009.

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