

**HOMELESS ENUMERATION  
FOR THE  
WASHINGTON METROPOLITAN REGION  
2004**

**Prepared by:**

**The Homeless Services Planning and  
Coordinating Committee**

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## Introduction

Since 2001, the Homeless Services Planning and Coordinating Committee of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments has conducted a regional enumeration of the “homeless” population. The annual report tracks the number of persons found on the streets, in emergency shelters, in transitional and permanent supportive housing, or otherwise homeless and in need of help to obtain safe shelter. These data represent persons served by what is commonly called the “Continuum of Care” for homeless persons, including outreach to those who are living on the streets. The COG enumeration takes a point-in-time snapshot of persons served by that Continuum of Care, including those persons who are now living in permanent supportive housing created with local or federal funds used to end the homelessness of persons with disabilities and special needs.

Given the wide circulation of this report and its extensive use by the media and philanthropic community in saying how many “homeless” there are in our region, the Committee concluded that the summary number issuing from this report was not representing the problem or its solution as accurately as it could. In order to correct that, the Committee undertook the enumeration in a different way this year to more clearly delineate these differences with the hope that it will serve policymakers better than the reports issued in the past.

### **Presenting a More Accurate Picture of the Problem *and* Its Solution**

This enumeration includes persons who were homeless but are now *permanently* housed in supportive housing that is part of the Continuum of Care. For these persons, homelessness has effectively ended, but many (if not most) of these individuals would quickly become homeless again if their supportive housing were no longer available. Including this number in the count, however, obscures the number of persons who truly do not have a home and masks the increasingly successful efforts to end homelessness by producing permanent supportive housing. This report in the past has noted the difference between the “literally” and “formerly” homeless persons who are included in the count, and cautioned against thinking of the one summary number as being all homeless persons in the literal sense of that word. Nevertheless, the tendency has been to use the summary number in exactly that way.

To better address this issue, this year the report establishes two new baselines that more accurately reflect the number of persons who are “literally” homeless, both sheltered and unsheltered, and the number of largely disabled permanently supported homeless persons whose homelessness has effectively ended because they now have permanent housing with supportive services that helps them to remain stably housed.

#### *Baseline 1: The literally homeless*

In January 2004 there were **11,386** persons in the Washington region who were “literally homeless,” meaning that they had no home of their own and one of the following described their situation:

- They had NO shelter at all, or
- They were in emergency shelters temporarily, or

- They were in transitional housing temporarily, or
- They were in precarious housing and at imminent risk of losing it.\*

Baseline 2: The permanently supported homeless

In January 2004 there were **3,151** persons counted as permanently supported homeless, meaning that:

- They were in permanent supportive housing, but
- They would be at risk of becoming homeless again without this housing because of extreme poverty or serious mental and/or physical disabilities.

The term “formerly homeless” is not used with this population because they continue to receive services as part of the Continuum of Care and would likely become homeless again without those services. The “permanently supported homeless,” however, have reached a stable housing setting which represents part of the *solution* to homelessness, rather than part of the problem that remains. This group, therefore, should not be counted as part of the literally homeless – those who have no permanent place to live.

These new baseline data are possible this year because every COG jurisdiction reported not only “how many” individuals and persons in families they counted but also “where” they counted them. Instead of summary data from each jurisdiction, COG jurisdictions broke out the data into persons found on the streets, in emergency shelters (even distinguishing year-round shelters from winter-only), transitional housing and permanent supportive housing. By doing so, it is now possible to track the number of literally homeless that everyone wants to see decrease, even as we track the number of permanently supported homeless with supportive housing that is part of the solution.

Table 1 on the following page shows the breakout of literally and permanently supported homeless (Singles and Persons in Families) in each jurisdiction and in the Washington region. It also shows the percentage of those persons who were counted in permanent housing.

It is particularly crucial to see the point-in-time picture this way since the immediate work that lies ahead for all COG jurisdictions – work that we want to accomplish and that is mandated by federal policy – is to reduce the number of “chronically homeless” persons.<sup>†</sup> That task will mean increasing the number of permanent supportive housing units available to each Continuum of Care. Over the next few years the total number of single persons in Table 1 may not fall significantly, but the number of literally homeless should decrease while the number of permanently supported homeless in permanent housing should increase and become more than 21.7% of the whole. This point-in-time report will then be tracking not only the problem but also a major solution to the problem.

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\* HUD excludes this group from its definition of “homeless,” but the District of Columbia chose to include as part of its homeless count the 194 eligible families with 607 persons living in precarious housing who were actively seeking shelter on the day of the 2004 point-in-time enumeration.

<sup>†</sup> HUD defines a chronically homeless person as “An unaccompanied homeless individual with a disabling condition who has either been continuously homeless for a year or more OR has had at least four (4) episodes of homelessness in the past three (3) years.”

<b>Table 1</b>										
<b>A New Baseline for Tracking Literally and Permanently Supported Homeless</b>										
	Literally Homeless			Permanently Supported Homeless			Overall Homeless	Percent in Permanent Housing		
	All	Singles	Persons in Families	All	Singles	Persons in Families		Total	All	Singles
District of Columbia	<b>6,105</b>	3,553	2,552	<b>2,148</b>	1,464	684	<b>8,253</b>	<b>26.0%</b>	17.7%	8.3%
Montgomery County	<b>1,036</b>	500	536	<b>464</b>	172	292	<b>1,500</b>	<b>30.9%</b>	11.5%	19.5%
Prince Georges County	<b>1,111</b>	482	629	<b>260</b>	153	107	<b>1,371</b>	<b>19.0%</b>	11.2%	7.8%
Alexandria	<b>414</b>	213	201	<b>35</b>	25	10	<b>449</b>	<b>7.8%</b>	5.6%	2.2%
Arlington County	<b>408</b>	279	129	<b>0</b>	0	0	<b>408</b>	<b>0.0%</b>	0.0%	0.0%
Fairfax County/City & Falls Church	<b>1,700</b>	615	1,085	<b>226</b>	198	28	<b>1,926</b>	<b>11.7%</b>	10.3%	1.5%
Loudoun County	<b>92</b>	36	56	<b>8</b>	6	2	<b>100</b>	<b>8.0%</b>	6.0%	2.0%
Prince William County	<b>520</b>	157	363	<b>10</b>	10	0	<b>530</b>	<b>1.9%</b>	1.9%	0.0%
In the Region	<b>11,386</b>	5,835	5,551	<b>3,151</b>	2,028	1,123	<b>14,537</b>	<b>21.7%</b>	14.0%	7.7%

Before saying more about the chronically homeless single adults, it should be noted that COG jurisdictions will be tracking families placed into permanent supportive housing even though the HUD definition of chronically homeless does not include families. The Committee members believe that some families experience repeated or long-term homelessness and will need permanent supportive housing in cases where mental illness, HIV/AIDS, substance abuse and other serious disabilities make complete self-sufficiency unlikely. Thus Table 1 includes persons in families (adults plus children) among the permanently supported homeless. Persons in families, however, are not included in the discussion of chronically homeless that follows.

According to the 2004 enumeration, there are 2,200 chronically homeless adults in the metropolitan region. Not surprisingly, some 1,500 (68%) of these persons are concentrated in the District of Columbia, where about 61% of the region's literally homeless adults are found.<sup>‡</sup> Within the District's homeless population, the chronically homeless are 42% of all literally homeless adults and 45% of all adults using emergency shelters (see Table 2, next page). The chronic homeless population as a percent of literally homeless adults is also significant in other jurisdictions – hovering around 50% in both Arlington County and Fairfax County/City and Falls Church. Table 2 on the following page shows that the chronically homeless are a significant proportion (19%) of all literally homeless persons, an even higher proportion (38%) of the literally homeless single adults, and account for 2-in-5 (40%) of single adults using the region's emergency shelters.

These data matter because a growing body of research shows that this population of chronically homeless adults uses about half of all emergency shelter resources and exacts a great cost on

<sup>‡</sup> The 2003 COG enumeration showed 1,939 persons as chronically homeless, which were noted at the time as “probably too low.” Even the 2,200 figure may be low as it is based on provider observations and not on hard data that tracks length of stay and disabilities. The Homeless Management Information Systems coming into use in all COG jurisdictions should provide more precise data on chronic homelessness.

other public systems as well.<sup>§</sup> Since this is a relatively static population – with people tending to remain homeless over several years – providing permanent housing will relieve the burden on emergency shelters and reduce the human tragedy and public costs of people living in the streets.

<b>Table 2</b>				
<b>Chronically Homeless Adults: Percentage of All Literally Homeless Adults and Single Adults Using Emergency Shelters</b>				
	<b>Total Chronic Homeless</b>	<b>as % of Literally Homeless Single Adults</b>	<b>Chronic Counted in Emergency Shelters</b>	<b>% Chronic among Single Adults in Emergency Shelters:</b>
District of Columbia	<b>1,505</b>	42%	1,211	45%
Montgomery County	<b>132</b>	26%	93	39%
Prince Georges County	<b>71</b>	15%	0	0%
Alexandria	<b>76</b>	36%	34	32%
Arlington County	<b>139</b>	50%	11	24%
Fairfax County/City & Falls Church	<b>293</b>	48%	89	44%
Loudoun County	<b>12</b>	33%	5	25%
Prince William County	<b>6</b>	4%	6	10%
	<b>2,234</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>1,415</b>	<b>40%</b>

Tracking our region’s success in ending homelessness will require a focus on what happens to these 2,200 persons over the next few years as housing with supportive services is created with enough capacity to bring them inside. This should result in a steady decrease of the literally homeless counted on the streets and in shelters. The point is: we cannot observe both sides of the picture – the remaining need and the degree of success – without tracking both kinds of data in reference to the new baselines that this year’s report has established.

### **Historical Comparison**

In past reports the two numbers of literally and permanently supported homeless were aggregated into one number that was interpreted by media and many others as how many “homeless” there are in the region. For the sake of continuity with past reports, this report compares this larger number to the similar number that was generated in previous years for the region and each jurisdiction (Table 3). The table shows a small overall increase in the aggregate number, with variations both up and down in the numbers in the participating jurisdictions. There was not a consistent pattern across the region, with increases in the number of homeless singles in some jurisdictions, decreases in others, and converse patterns in the number of homeless persons in families. In addition, there have been capacity changes in the availability of permanent supportive housing. Even so, anyone counted in permanent housing is no longer literally homeless (that much is clear). This report recommends that the COG Board begin to

<sup>§</sup> See the landmark study: “The Impact of Supportive Housing for Homeless Persons with Severe Mental Illness on the Utilization of Public Health, Corrections and Emergency Shelter Systems: The New York/New York Initiative” in Housing Policy Debate, May 2001.

look more closely at trends in the count of literally homeless to see whether or not this number is reduced over the coming years.

<b>Table 3: Tracking Both Literally and Permanently Supported Homeless Over Four Years</b>							
<b>Jurisdiction</b>	<b>Total Number Counted</b>				<b>Annual Rate of Change</b>		
	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2001-2002</b>	<b>2002-2003</b>	<b>2003-2004</b>
District of Columbia	7,058	7,468	7,950	8,253	5.8%	6.5%	3.8%
Montgomery County	1,089	1,250	1,208	1,500	14.8%	-3.4%	24.2%
Prince Georges County	1,218	1,551	1,558	1,371	27.3%	0.5%	-12.0%
Alexandria	543	604	515	449	11.2%	-14.7%	-12.8%
Arlington County	419	471	453	408	12.4%	-3.8%	-9.9%
Fairfax County/City & Falls Church	1,935	2,067	1,944	1,926	6.8%	-6.0%	-0.9%
Loudoun County	167	242	133	100	44.9%	-45.0%	-24.8%
Prince William County	421	329	515	530	-21.9%	56.5%	2.9%
	<b>12,850</b>	<b>13,982</b>	<b>14,276</b>	<b>14,537</b>	<b>8.8%</b>	<b>2.1%</b>	<b>1.8%</b>

### **Unsheltered Homeless**

The count (more accurately, an estimate) of unsheltered individuals – that is, the men, women and unaccompanied youth who fit the most common public image of homelessness – is another number that policymakers and the public want to see reduced each year as the winter season point-in-time enumeration is conducted. It is difficult to get a precise number based strictly on direct observation on the night of the enumeration. Most jurisdictions conduct a street count, but the District of Columbia asks outreach providers from all over the city to report the number of persons who are normally on the streets and tend not to use shelters. Thus the count of 857 individuals on the street may be a little high since a few of the 316 such persons that the District reported as on the street may have been in a shelter that night. However, based on the estimate of unsheltered individuals as 857 persons, Figure 3 shows that these persons account for no more than 6% of all the literally and permanently supported homeless.

One must bear in mind that the count of unsheltered individuals taken in the winter is reduced by the opening of 1,037 additional beds during the winter season. Thus “street homelessness” would be higher in the warmer months throughout the region. Opening the additional beds does reduce the number of persons exposed to life-threatening cold. For example, Figures 4 and 5 at the end of this report appear to show that the District’s large proportion (73%) of additional beds that are open in the region only during the winter did significantly reduce its proportion of adults on the streets, which was estimated at 38% of all unsheltered adults even though (as Figure 1 shows) the District counted 53% of the region’s literally homeless persons.

### **The Washington Region’s Current Continuum of Care**

The region’s inventory of facilities to shelter the homeless has moved far beyond the 1980’s focus on “emergency” shelters to provide a multi-faceted continuum of care. Table 4 below

shows the 2004 distribution of emergency, transitional, and permanent supportive housing beds for individuals and persons in families. This year the table shows explicitly the configuration of the region’s continuum of care both in the winter months when the point-in-time enumeration is done and during the warmer months (April-October). By tracking beds in this manner it will be possible over time to see the growth of the permanent supportive housing inventory and the expected diminishment of emergency shelter beds both winter-only and year-round. \*\*

<b>Continuum of Care: Winter and Year-Round Inventory of Beds in the Washington Region</b>						
	Beds for Individuals	Beds for Persons in Families	<b>All Beds: Winter</b>	% Distribution in Winter	<b>All Beds: Warm Months</b>	% Distribution in Warm Months
Hypothermia/Overflow Beds	1,037	493	1,597	11%		
Emergency Shelter Beds	3,165	1,638	4,803	32%	4,803	36%
Transitional Housing Beds	1,625	3,316	4,941	33%	4,941	37%
Permanent Supportive Housing Beds	2,376	1,135	3,511	24%	3,511	26%
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>8,270</b>	<b>6,582</b>	<b>14,852</b>	100%	<b>13,255</b>	100%

## Conclusion

Reliable data are necessary for elected officials in the region to consider new policy directions for addressing affordable housing and homelessness issues. The Homeless Services Planning and Coordinating Committee works to ensure that local, regional and federal policymakers, as well as the general public, will be better informed by the data in this report and thus able to debate and shape policies more effectively.

The Committee hopes that this report advances our knowledge of the Washington region’s homeless issues with the establishment of two baselines for tracking the incidence of homelessness: 1) the numbers of literally homeless (persons on the street, in shelters, or in transitional housing); and 2) the numbers of permanently supported homeless, whose successful housing is an important part of the solution.

## Recommendations

The Council of Governments Homeless Services Planning and Coordinating Committee recommends that the COG Board continue the recommendations from the 2003 Enumeration, as restated below, with the addition of one new recommendation related to adoption of the two baseline approach to tracking homeless persons and solutions to homelessness.

**Recommendation #1:** The COG Board should endorse the use of the dual tracking approach outlined in this report, in order to separately account for the

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\*\* This table aggregates inventory figures supplied by all COG jurisdictions and based upon the “Gaps Analysis” chart that is part of the Consolidated Plan and the annual “Continuum of Care” application to HUD for McKinney/Vento Act competitive homeless dollars. COG Board members can find their jurisdiction’s information in either of these other public documents.

literally homeless -- those who are unsheltered, in emergency shelter or transitional housing, but do not have a permanent home – and the permanently supported homeless – those who were homeless but now have a place to live that is permanent and provides the necessary supports to help maintain stability and prevent a return to homelessness.

***Recommendation #2:*** The COG Board should encourage and support the eight Continuum of Care jurisdictions to continue implementation of a homeless management information system in each jurisdiction, to be operational in the fall of 2004, and to expand the coverage of these systems to additional organizations in order to maximize the benefits for planning homeless services and programs.

***Recommendation #3:*** The COG Board should continue to encourage member jurisdictions to collaborate with Continuum of Care providers and advocates to produce a practical plan with achievable objectives, clear timelines, and assignment of responsibilities to end chronic homelessness by 2012.

***Recommendation #4:*** The COG Board and member jurisdictions should modify and update regional housing policy to include, quantify, and provide for both the preservation and development of rental units for the extremely low income, including permanent supportive housing for disabled adults and single resident occupancy (SRO) units closely tied to public mainstream services delivered by social and medical safety net systems.



Figure 1

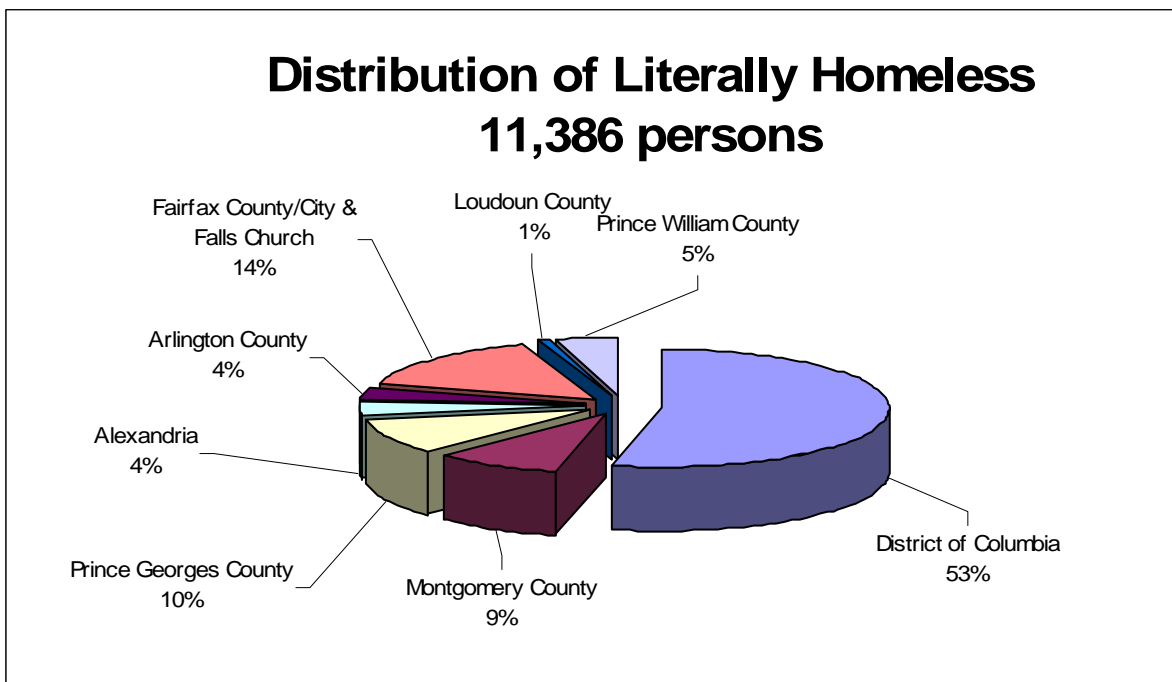


Figure 2

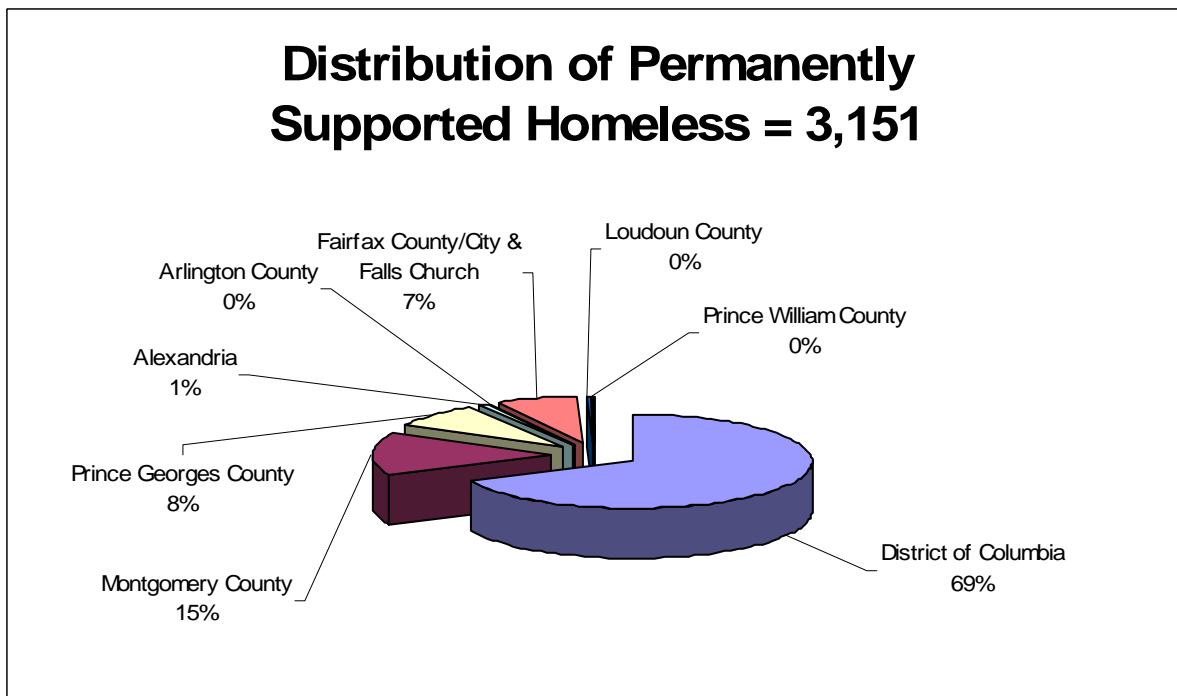


Figure 3

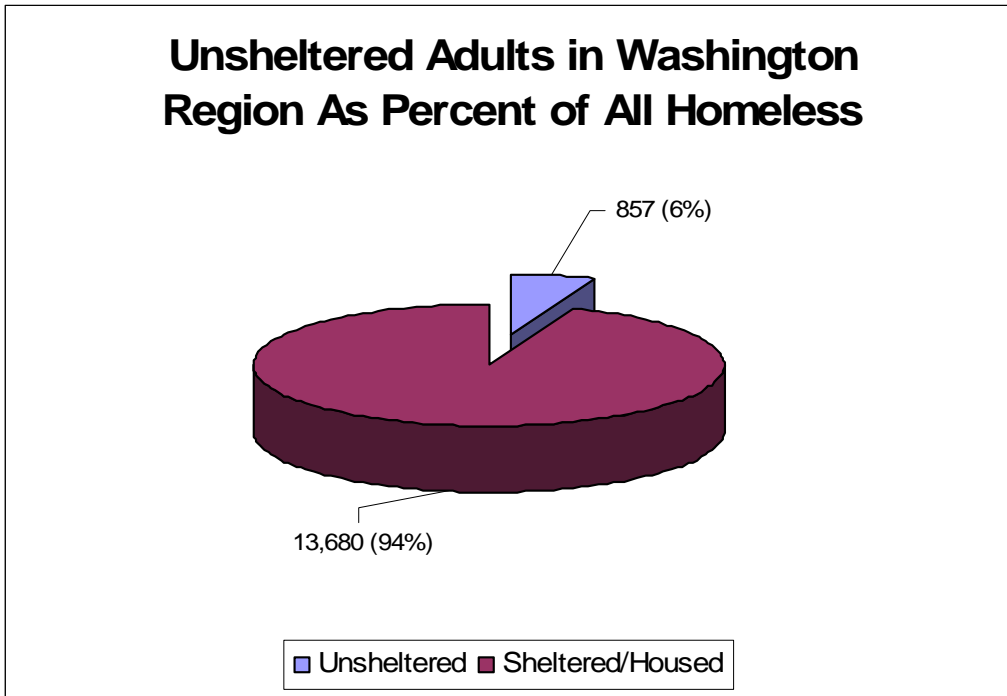


Figure 3A

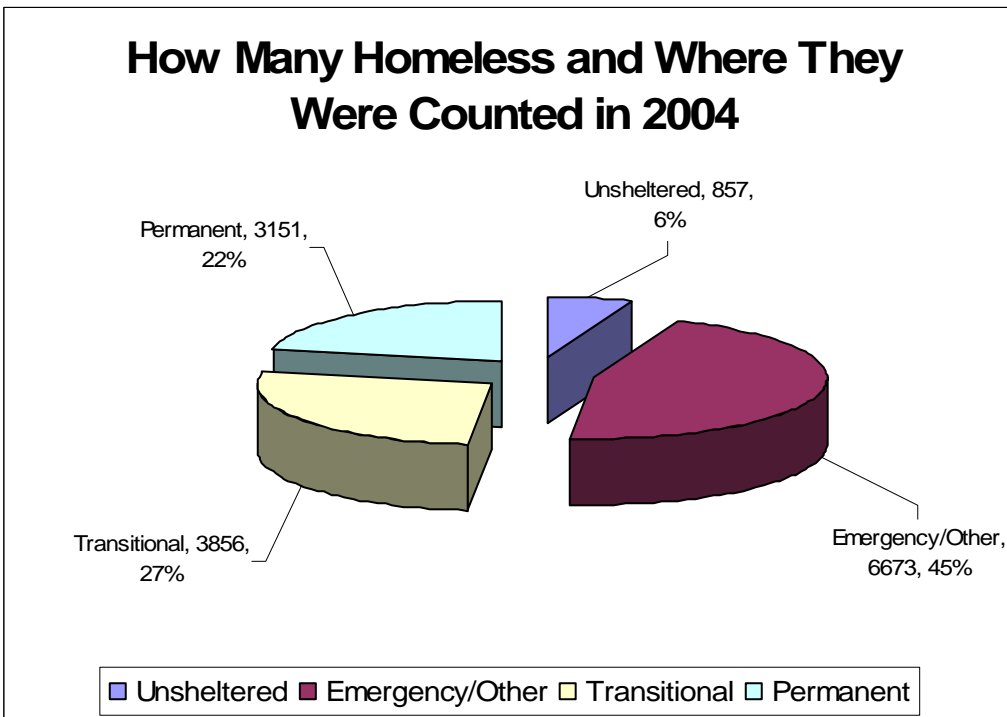


Figure 4

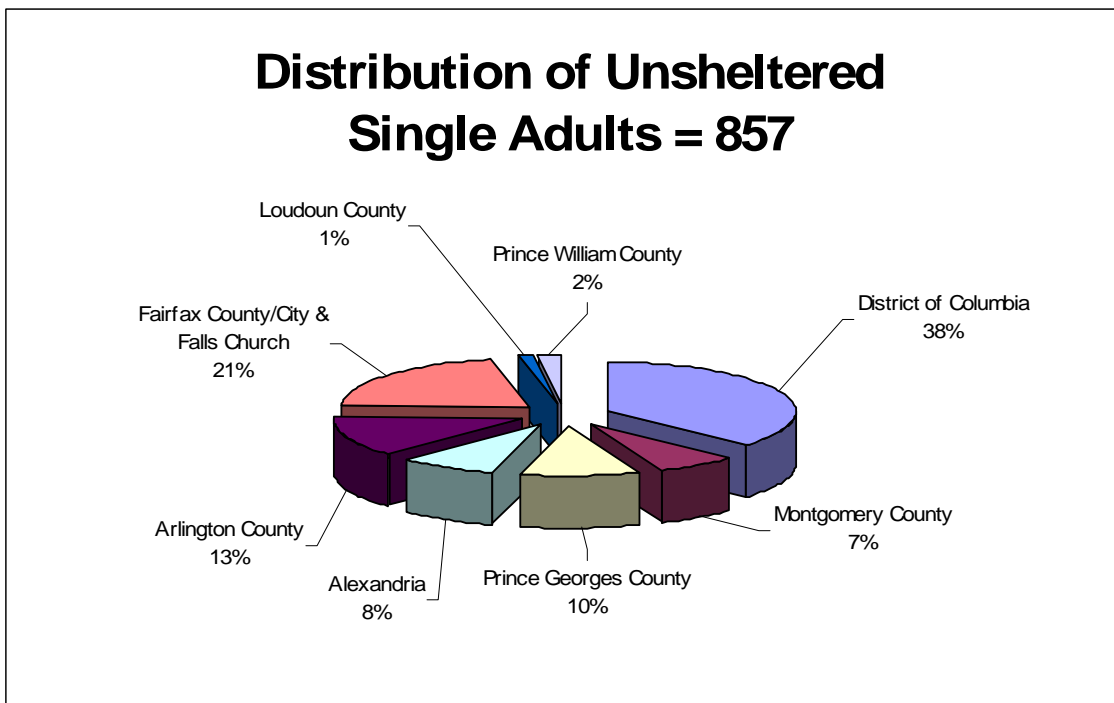


Figure 5

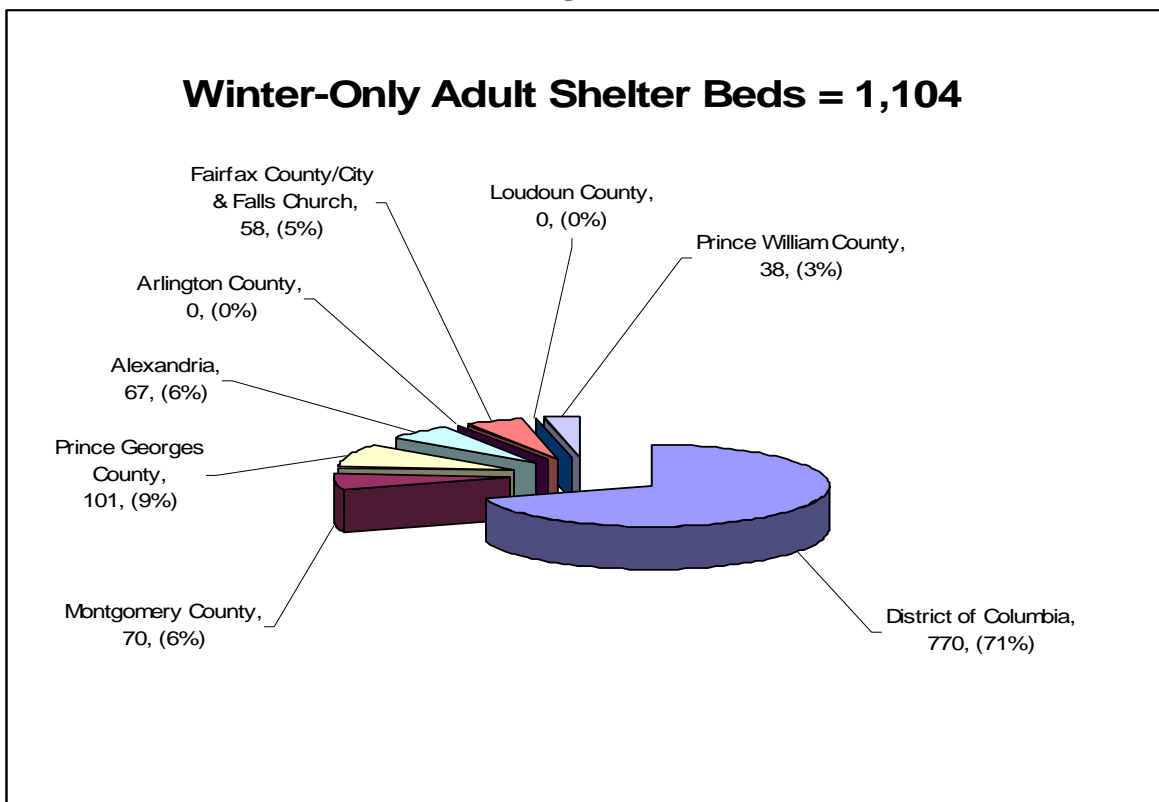


Figure 6

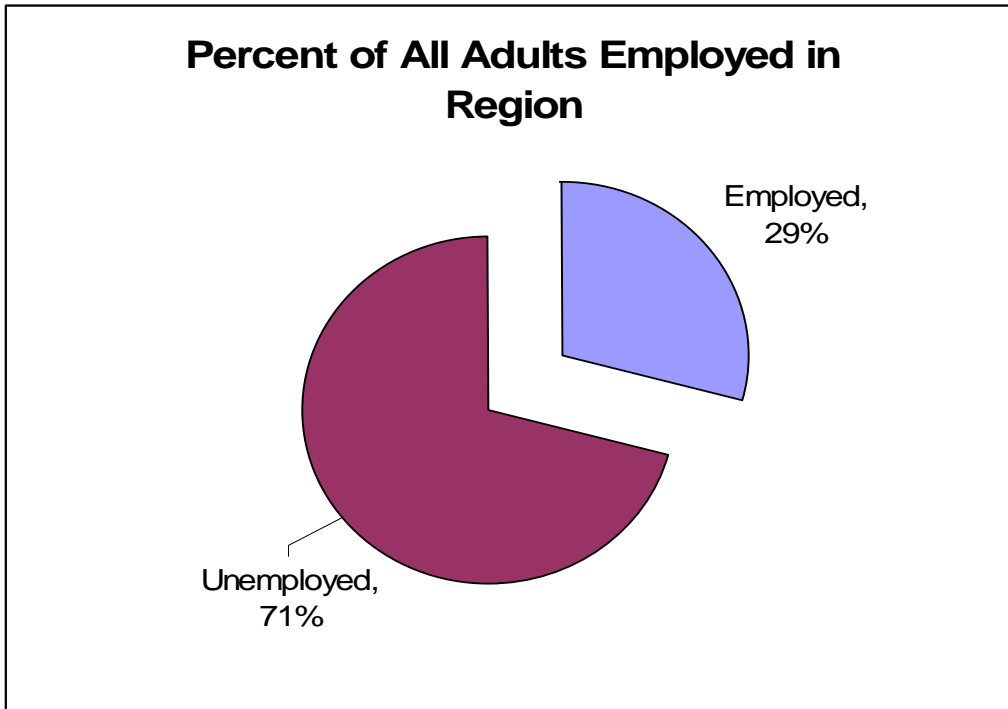


Figure 6A

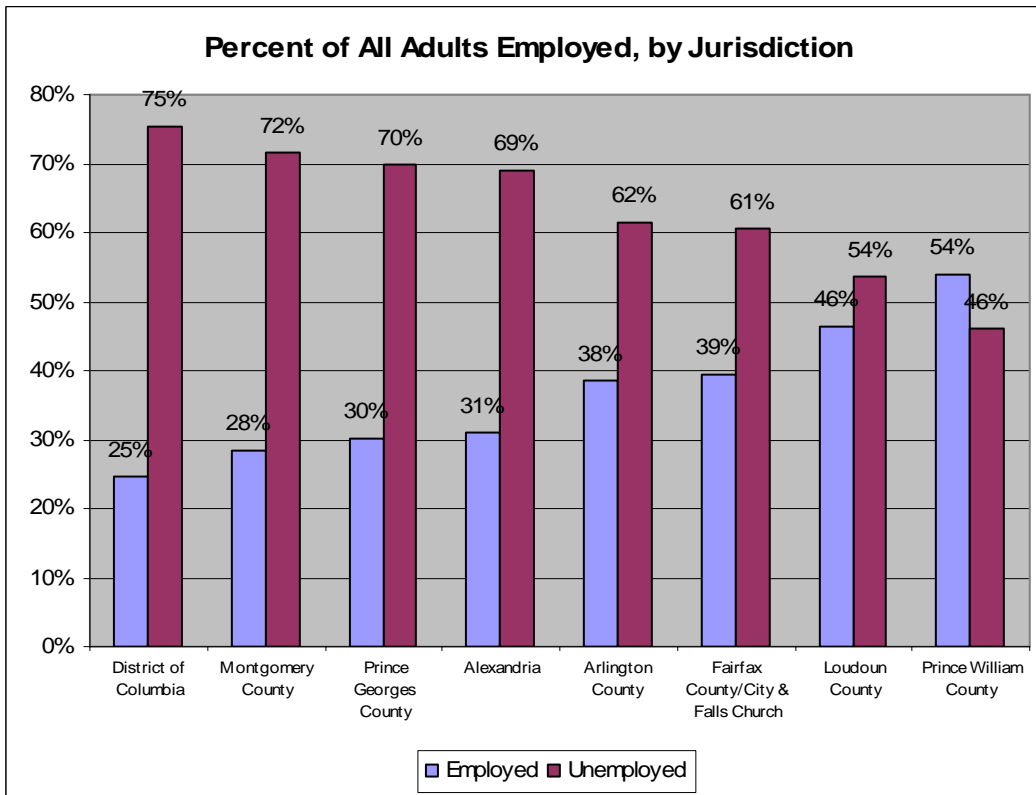


Figure 6B

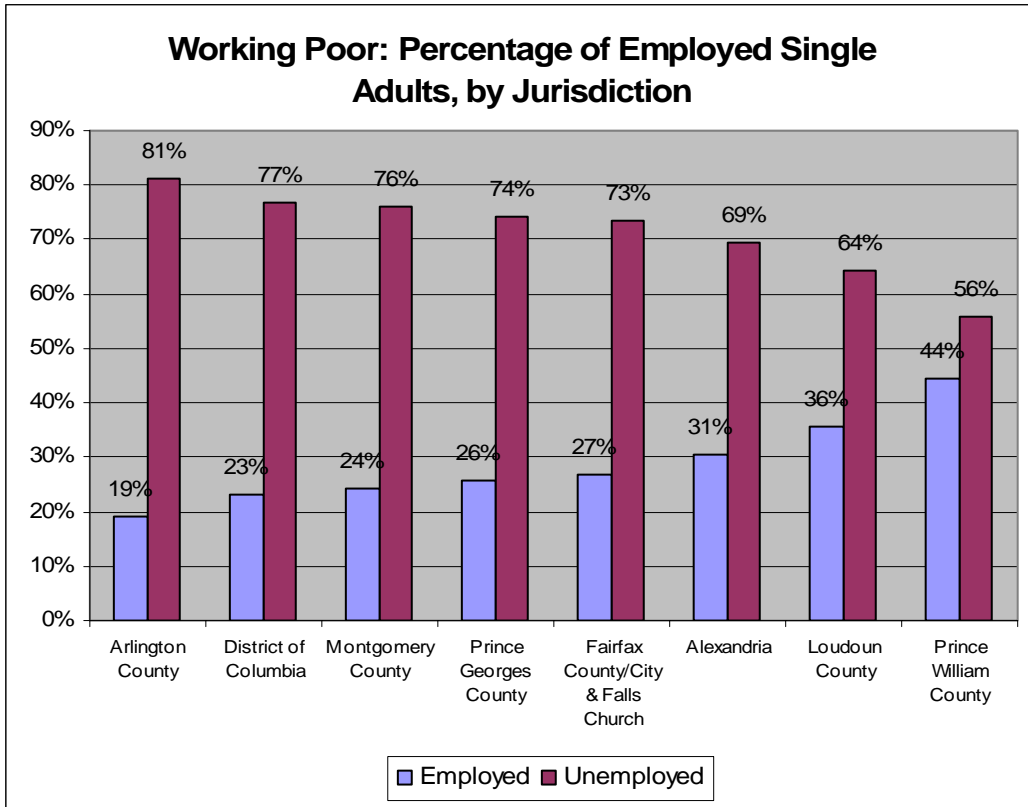


Figure 6C

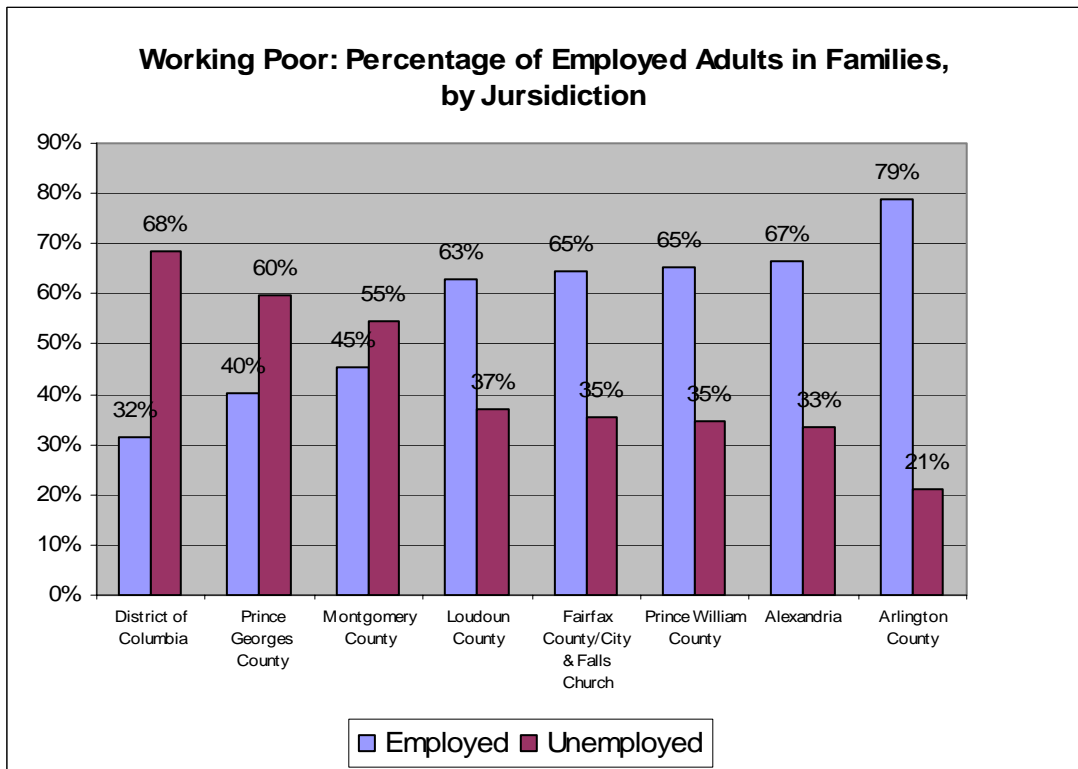


Figure 7

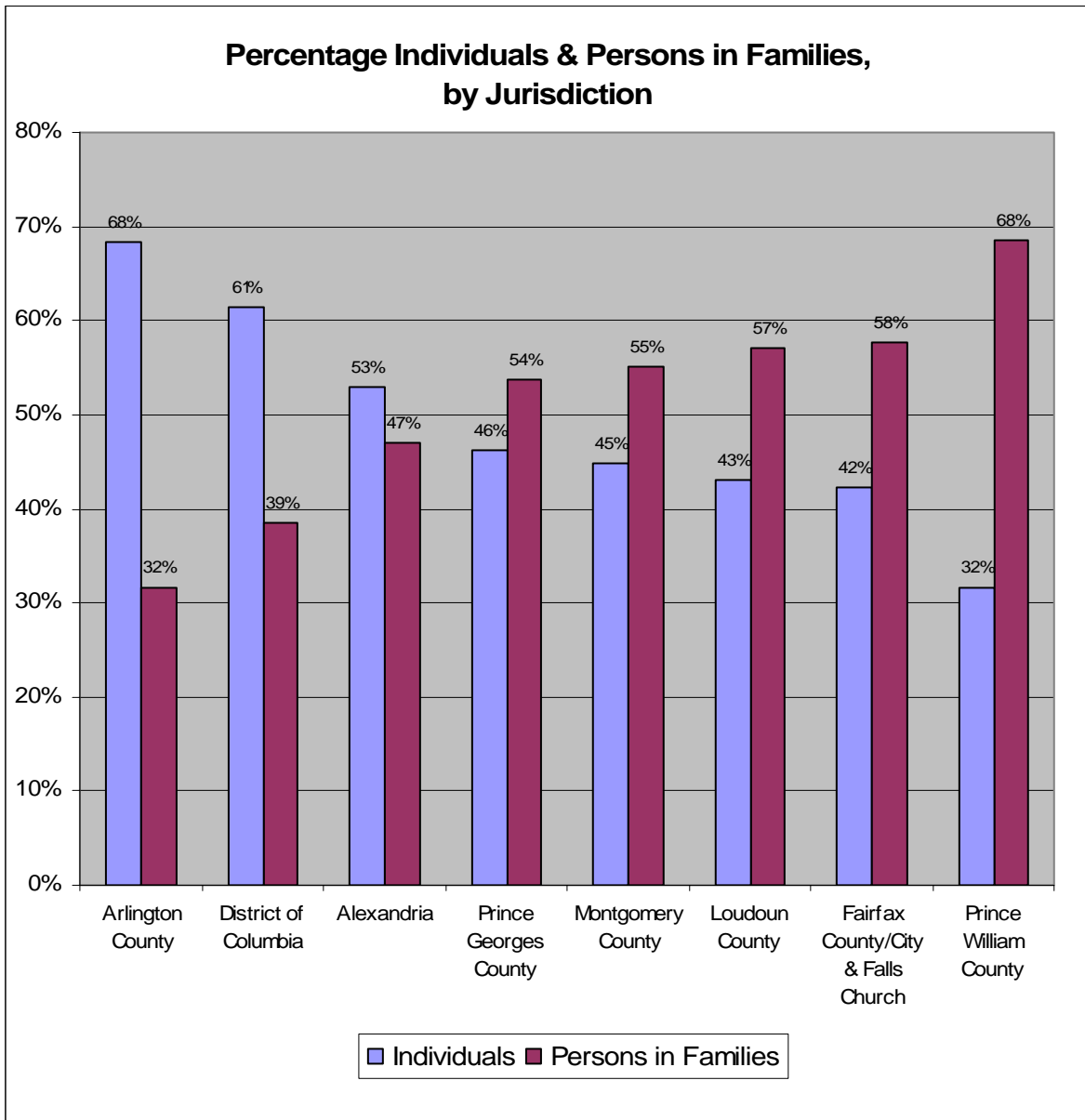


Figure 8

## Homeless Subpopulation Totals for the Region 2001-2004

