

Homelessness MATTERS



February 26th, 2026

IN THIS EDITION:

- **Opportunity for Action:** *Protect Mixed-Status Families' Housing*
- **Featured Updates:** *Highlighting Gov. Sherrill's Transition Team report on lowering housing costs; Coalition's partnership with DHMAS brings behavioral health training to homeless services staff*
- **New Jersey Homelessness in the News:** *Meet the Paterson Team that Braved the Blizzard to Help Homeless Residents; Dr. Stephen Cha to lead NJ Department of Human Services*
- **News From Around the Country:** *Another avenue for federal homelessness funding, SNAP changes could increase risk of homelessness for many Americans*

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION



[Tell HUD: Keep Families Together - Don't Push 80,000 Families Toward Homelessness](#)

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has proposed a rule that would force up to 80,000 mixed-status families to make an impossible choice: break the family apart to keep their housing or stay together and lose their housing assistance— putting nearly 37,000 children at risk of homelessness. This harmful policy would create new bureaucratic barriers, strip families of critical housing support, and push vulnerable households into crisis.

Today, the law has not changed, and families with mixed immigration status still have the right to stay in HUD housing if they choose to, but we must ensure that it stays this way.

We have until **Tuesday, April 21st** to speak out and submit comments opposing this proposed rule. [Tell HUD to withdraw this proposal: Families should never have to choose between separation and homelessness.](#)

FEATURED UPDATES

Governor Sherrill's Transition Team Report on Lowering Housing Costs

The [Sherrill-Caldwell transition team's report on lowering housing costs and expanding homeownership](#) identified some of the pressing challenges of New Jersey's severe affordable housing shortage, especially as our state faces its highest level of homelessness in over a decade. Homelessness has risen 57% in New Jersey over the past 3 years.

The transition report makes several recommendations to strengthen New Jersey's homeless service system, quickly increase the housing supply, and address regulatory barriers to building more housing quickly.

This report is a promising beginning, and we look forward to working with Governor Sherrill and her administration to come up with a bold response to our homelessness crisis that meets the moment.



Coalition and DMHAS Bring Be BOLD Training to Homeless Services Staff: Bridging Homelessness and Behavioral Health

For too long, the behavioral health system and homeless services system have operated in parallel, even though we are often serving the very same individuals and families. Our frontline providers have always known this. The systems just haven't always been built to reflect it.

Thanks to sustained advocacy, including the steady leadership of our own Mary Gay Abbott-Young, we're starting to see that gap narrow.

The Coalition was proud to partner with the NJ Department of Human Services' Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) to bring the Be BOLD training to shelter and outreach staff across New Jersey. The training focuses on practical, real-world strategies to better support individuals experiencing homelessness who are also navigating behavioral health challenges.

More than 200 individuals registered for last Tuesday's training, a powerful reminder of both the need and the commitment of this workforce.

We'll offer another opportunity to participate in Be BOLD on March 17th. If you're interested, please reach out to Jess Cantermen: jcantermen@njceh.org



[Meet Team That Braved Blizzard to Help Paterson's Homeless Residents](#)

NJ.com

During one of the worst blizzards in decades, outreach workers Emily Rolon and James Brown of Ruby's Vision braved icy streets in Paterson to bring homeless residents to a warming center, ultimately transporting eight people to safety. The effort is part of a partnership with Black Lives Matter through the Paterson Housing Alliance, which provides rides on "Code Blue" nights when temperatures drop below freezing. Despite dangerous conditions and the emotional toll of the work, the team says their mission is simple: help save lives, one person at a time.

**Note: The Coalition is proud to be part of the Paterson Housing Alliance and to work alongside Ruby's Vision and Black Lives Matter Paterson to provide transportation to the warming center that is on the outskirts of Paterson.*



[NJ Foster Kids Are Sleeping in Motels, Offices Amid Housing Crisis. 'It Places Everyone at Risk.'](#)

NJ.com

A severe shortage of foster homes in New Jersey is leaving vulnerable teens and children with special needs sleeping in motels and even state offices. This emergency situation is creating a hidden homelessness crisis, putting children—and staff—at serious risk. Advocates warn immediate action is needed to expand foster placements, supportive housing, and mental health resources. Without swift intervention, more children could face unsafe, unstable living conditions while the system struggles to keep up.

[Op-Ed: The Family That Just Lost Their Home Could Be Yours](#)

NJ Spotlight

In an op-ed for NJ Spotlight News, Kate Duggan of Family Promise of Bergen County highlights the growing number of working families facing homelessness, noting a 15% rise in Bergen County over the past year. She shares the story of a single mother who, after a car accident cost her her job and housing, rebuilt her life with support from the organization's housing and job-training programs. Duggan urges readers to rethink stereotypes about homelessness, emphasizing that many families living paycheck to paycheck could find themselves in the

same situation without community support.



Senate Panel OKs Doctor to Lead NJ Human Services Department

New Jersey Monitor

State lawmakers advanced Gov. Mikie Sherrill's nomination of Dr. Stephen Cha to lead New Jersey's Department of Human Services, the \$33.5 billion agency that oversees Medicaid, mental health, addiction treatment, food aid and other safety-net programs that many people experiencing homelessness rely on to survive. As federal Medicaid changes under Donald Trump threaten to push more than 300,000 residents off coverage and strip billions in federal funding, advocates warn the strain could deepen housing instability and increase homelessness statewide. Cha, who previously volunteered at a homeless shelter, told lawmakers his immediate focus will be preventing eligible residents from losing Medicaid, calling it critical to keeping vulnerable people from "falling off" essential health and social service support.



Akeem Cunningham Assumes Key Role at DCA

Insider NJ

Former campaign aide Akeem Cunningham has joined the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs as Chief of External Affairs and Strategic Initiatives, where he will spearhead outreach tied to housing, rental assistance, homelessness prevention, and supportive housing programs. The role places him at the center of efforts to address housing instability and homelessness by coordinating with residents, landlords, and advocates and shaping policy based on community feedback. A former leader in Gov. Mikie Sherrill's 2025 campaign and a liaison to Ras Baraka on affordable housing issues, Cunningham now shifts from electoral organizing to tackling the structural housing challenges driving homelessness across the state.



Transitional Housing Shelter to Be Discussed in Toms River

Jersey Shore Online



How Homeless Couple Survive the Snowy Cold of the Ocean County Woods

A six-bedroom home in Toms River that has provided transitional housing for women and children for nearly three decades will go before the township zoning board for approval to continue operating under updated land-use rules — a decision that could determine whether the program can remain at that location. Operated by Interfaith Family Services and owned by St. Joseph’s Roman Catholic Church, the house serves up to 14 people at a time in a county with limited shelter beds and rising housing costs that are pushing more working families into homelessness. If the board denies the application, one of Ocean County’s few small, family-focused homelessness programs could be forced to close or relocate, further straining an already thin safety net.

As Rob Zahn, 61, and his girlfriend Jen, 48, struggled to survive a brutal winter in tents in the Ocean County woods—relying on donated sleeping bags and propane heaters while recovering from illness and living on disability—their story reflected a broader crisis. More than 1,200 people are homeless across Ocean and Monmouth counties, as rising rents, long housing waitlists, poor credit barriers, and a lack of permanent shelters leave many with few options beyond encampments and full warming centers. Even as they hope for Social Security income and work to secure housing, their experience underscores how limited resources and soaring housing costs are pushing more people into prolonged homelessness.

NEWS FROM AROUND THE COUNTRY



What to Know About Congressionally Directed Spending

NAEH

As federal homelessness funding grows tighter and competition for programs like HUD’s Continuum of Care intensifies, advocates are being urged to consider another avenue: Congressionally Directed Spending (CDS), also known as earmarks. Through the annual appropriations process, members of Congress can request funding for specific local projects — such as shelter construction, supportive housing developments, or capital improvements — helping communities address one-time gaps in their homelessness response systems. While highly



New SNAP Changes Could Increase Risk of Homelessness

Spectrum News 1

New federal SNAP work requirements set to take effect could push struggling households closer to housing instability, as families may have to divert limited resources from rent and utilities to cover food. Food pantries in New York are already seeing unprecedented demand, with advocates warning that benefit reductions and stricter documentation rules could increase the risk of evictions and homelessness. The changes highlight how tightly connected food assistance and housing security are for low-income families.

competitive and limited to non-operational costs, CDS offers providers a structured, transparent way to secure targeted federal investment at a time when rising housing costs and unmet needs continue to strain local resources.



[Appropriations Update: Final FY2026 THUD Funding Summary](#)

Bipartisan Policy Center

Congress approved the FY2026 Consolidated Appropriations Act, providing \$77.3 billion for HUD—\$7.2 billion more than FY2025—despite proposed cuts in the Trump budget. Key increases include tenant- and project-based rental assistance, supportive housing for seniors and people with disabilities, and \$4.4 billion in Homeless Assistance Grants, helping protect people at risk of or experiencing homelessness. The bill also includes \$3.6 billion in earmarks and funding for community development, signaling continued federal support for housing stability nationwide.



[Senate Democrats Introduce the American Homeownership Act to Stop Wallstreet's Housing Grab and Get Homes Back into the Hands of Families](#)

United States Senate

Democratic Senators led by Elizabeth Warren and Jeff Merkley are introducing the American Homeownership Act to combat corporate control of the housing market, which contributes to rising rents and housing instability that fuel homelessness. The bill would end tax breaks for Wall Street landlords and reinvest those savings into building affordable homes, helping families secure stable housing and reducing the risk of homelessness. By limiting speculative buyouts and expanding affordable housing supply, the legislation aims to make homeownership and safe rental options accessible to more Americans.



[Does Micro-Housing for Homelessness Work?](#)

Intelligent Living

Frustrated by Chronic Homelessness and Severe Illness, They Found An Answer Hiding in Plain Sight

Los Angeles Times

In San Diego and across California, homelessness intersects with severe mental illness and addiction, yet current systems often fail the people who need help most. Under Section 5150 of the Lanterman-Petris-Short (LPS) Act, individuals deemed “gravely disabled” or a danger to themselves or others can be held involuntarily for up to 72 hours for psychiatric evaluation—but these short-term holds often leave people cycling through hospitals, jails, or the streets without coordinated care. Section 5200, a lesser-known part of the same law, provides a more thorough evaluation and a coordinated discharge plan, yet it is rarely used; advocates argue implementing it could provide lifesaving, structured treatment for the gravely ill and help address the gaps in California’s homelessness and behavioral health systems.

Across the U.S. and parts of Europe, cities are experimenting with insulated, lockable micro-housing—pods, modular units, and tiny homes—as a harm-reduction approach for people living unsheltered. Evidence shows these non-congregate shelters improve sleep, psychological safety, and health outcomes, while providing structured pathways into social services and permanent housing. While not a replacement for deeply affordable housing, well-designed micro-housing demonstrates how emergency shelter can move beyond temporary fixes to stabilize lives and reduce crisis-level exposure to extreme weather.



A Multi-Faceted Approach to Homelessness - Without Government Funding

The Daily Sentinel

Even financially stable, independent adults can be pushed into homelessness when unexpected medical crises and mounting expenses overwhelm them—a reality affecting thousands of older Americans nationwide. Programs like the Joseph Center’s Golden Girls initiative in Colorado provide a model for addressing this crisis, offering women over 50 transitional housing, meals, financial management support, and guardianship services for those who lose the ability to manage their own affairs. By combining immediate relief with long-term stability tools, these community-based programs highlight the urgent need for holistic, locally driven solutions to help older adults avoid prolonged homelessness.



Mace's Bill Bars Federally Funded Shelters from Serving or Housing Registered Sex Offenders

Office of Congresswoman Nancy Mace

Congresswoman Nancy Mace introduced the Safe Shelters for Survivors Act of 2026, legislation aimed at protecting domestic violence survivors and people experiencing homelessness by barring individuals required to register on the federal National Sex Offender Registry from

entering or receiving services at federally funded shelters. The bill would make noncompliant shelters ineligible for federal funding, require sex offenders to disclose their status if they enter such shelters, and authorize fines or imprisonment for violations, taking effect 180 days after enactment. Advocates say the measure addresses safety concerns in South Carolina, where thousands rely on federally funded shelters amid high rates of domestic violence and homelessness.



Letter to the Editor: Homelessness: Evictions Are Not Always to Blame

The Seattle Times

A recent letter advocating funding for Washington's "right to counsel" eviction program frames evictions as a major driver of homelessness, but experts note that the root causes of homelessness are far broader, including substance abuse, mental health challenges, disabilities, domestic violence, unemployment, and housing scarcity. While legal protections for tenants are important, a small share of nonpaying tenants has contributed to rising housing costs, strained nonprofit projects, and reduced the supply of affordable units as small landlords sell properties. The debate highlights how eviction policies intersect with broader housing and homelessness challenges, but preventing homelessness requires addressing the underlying systemic issues, not just legal representation in eviction cases.



Which US Cities Are Solving Homelessness?

INDEPENDENT INSTITUTE

Across the U.S., some cities are quietly demonstrating that homelessness can be reduced through a combination of enforcement, transitional programs, and preventative housing strategies. Successful cities, like Houston, coordinate federal funds, nonprofits, and local agencies to move people quickly into permanent housing while maintaining behavioral standards, and they complement these efforts with abundant, affordable housing to prevent homelessness in the first place. By contrast, cities that tolerate encampments and restrict new construction see persistent street homelessness, showing that incentives, regulation, and strategic intervention largely determine outcomes.

We love to share news about the accomplishments, events job opportunities and noteworthy activities of NJ's homelessness service agencies. If you have something to share, please send it to us at info@NJCEH.org

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