

ADDRESSING HOMELESSNESS



A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF STATE POLICIES, FUNDING, AND RESPONSES TO FEDERAL CHANGES

*Insights and strategies to inform New Jersey's
approach to ending homelessness.*



PREPARED FOR

**New Jersey Coalition
to End Homelessness
(NJCEH)**



PREPARED BY

**Rutgers University–New Brunswick
Master of Public Policy
Practicum Research Team**

Luke Burston, Fiorela Caro, Emily Evers,
Tiffany Motachwa, Gabrielle Rubinstein,
Maria Skidmore and Ra'Zulu Ukawabutu

FACULTY ADVISOR:

Professor Julia Sass Rubin



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Executive Summary

Homelessness in New Jersey has increased 70% between 2021 and 2025 (Point in Time Counts). This exponential rise in homelessness can be attributed to rising housing costs, a shortage of affordable housing, and changes in federal homelessness funding policy (NJDC, 2025; HUD, 2021). Recent changes to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Continuum of Care (CoC) Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) have also introduced deep concerns regarding the long-term stability of federal funding, particularly for permanent supportive housing and rapid re-housing programs.

This report was developed for the NJ Coalition to End Homelessness (NJCEH) as part of a Rutgers University — New Brunswick Master of Public Policy Practicum to examine how New Jersey compares to selected peer states in allocating and structuring state funding for homeless services, responding to federal funding changes, and addressing issues related to the criminalization of homelessness.

New Jersey spends significantly less on homeless services than all but one state in the study.

Five states were ultimately selected for deeper analysis: Connecticut, Illinois, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Vermont. The analysis found that New Jersey's current investment in homelessness services remains notably low relative to four of the five states in the study, with only Rhode Island spending less. Several states examined allocate substantially more state funding toward homelessness-specific programs than New Jersey — with Massachusetts and Connecticut allocating nearly double the amount New Jersey does per unhoused individual on their homelessness response systems.

State Spending on Services for the Unhoused

	PIT Count 2025	State Budget FY2026 (in Billions)	State \$ Spent to Address Homelessness	% of State Budget Spent to Address Homelessness	State Spending per Unhoused Person (PIT)
Massachusetts	28,196	\$61.0	\$750,653,686	1.23%	\$26,622
Connecticut	3,735	\$27.1	\$97,597,991	0.36%	\$26,130
Vermont	3,386	\$9.1	\$74,199,990	0.82%	\$21,914
Illinois (FY2025)* **	14,571	\$53.1	\$272,077,585	0.51%	\$18,673
New Jersey	13,748	\$58.8	\$186,362,000	0.32%	\$13,556
Rhode Island	2,373	\$14.9	\$20,297,740	0.14%	\$8,553

* Illinois figures are for FY2025 rather than FY2026. The state produces a comprehensive report every other year, which details its allocations to address homelessness. The last available report is for FY2025, however, state officials indicated that there was not a significant change in the funding totals from FY2025 to FY2026.

** Illinois state spending total does not include an additional \$75,992,210 in city funds that Chicago spends, which is equal to an additional \$10,198 per Chicago unhoused person.

States are playing an increasing role in planning proactive responses to instability in federal CoC funding. States examined in this report describe efforts to coordinate with local Continuums of Care, reallocate existing funding streams, enhance data systems, and implement temporary funding measures to maintain continuity of services during periods of uncertainty. Some states also report increased communication and coordination with municipalities and nonprofit providers regarding changes to federal funding requirements.

The analysis also examines state approaches related to the criminalization of homelessness, particularly following the Supreme Court’s decision in *City of Grants Pass v. Johnson*. Three states included in this report — Rhode Island, Connecticut, and Illinois — had enacted Homeless Bills of Rights or similar protections establishing rights related to access to public spaces and nondiscrimination for individuals experiencing homelessness. For each of those states, the legislation was passed over a decade ago, before the Grants Pass decision by the U.S. Supreme Court, so these laws do not account for the new spate of municipal-level ordinances prohibiting encampments or targeting other survival acts in public places, such as sleeping, using blankets, panhandling near transit areas, or living in vehicles, following the Grants Pass decision. Illinois, Connecticut, Vermont, Massachusetts, and New Jersey are all currently considering bills to limit the power of municipalities to criminalize homelessness. For Vermont and Massachusetts, this legislation would also include a bill of rights for people experiencing homelessness.

The research utilized a mixed-methods approach that included policy analysis and qualitative interviews with public officials, nonprofit leaders, and advocates. The five peer states were selected based on factors including participation in the *State of Washington v. United States Department of Housing and Urban Development* lawsuit in response to the 2025 CoC NOFO and broader policy comparability to New Jersey.

Overall, the analysis identifies common themes across the selected states, including increased state involvement in homelessness funding, expanded coordination across agencies and service providers, and growing attention to system planning and data infrastructure. The findings also reflect the challenges states are facing as homelessness increases and federal funding policies continue to evolve. These case studies provide context for understanding how different states structure and support homelessness response systems within changing fiscal and policy environments.

Introduction

Homelessness in New Jersey is occurring within a rapidly shifting policy and funding landscape. Recent changes at the federal level, particularly related to Continuum of Care (CoC) funding, have introduced new uncertainty into systems that have historically relied on stable federal support. At the same time, rising housing costs and worsening affordability are increasing demand for services, placing additional strain on state and local homelessness response systems.

This report was developed as part of a Master of Public Policy Practicum at the Rutgers University–New Brunswick Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy for the New Jersey Coalition to End Homelessness (NJCEH). It presents a framework for how New Jersey can respond to these challenges. It draws on a set of comparative case studies examining how other states structure funding, coordinate services, and adapt to federal policy changes, providing context and identifying potential strategies that may be applicable to New Jersey.

New Jersey Coalition to End Homelessness

The New Jersey Coalition to End Homelessness (NJCEH) is a statewide 501(c)3 organization whose mission is to lead the charge for systemic change and “boots on the ground” solutions to ensure that homelessness in New Jersey is rare, brief, and non-recurring. The coalition was formed in the early 2010s following a successful legal and advocacy effort that secured protections for a large homeless encampment, including an injunction preventing its demolition and the provision of housing for those living there (New Jersey Coalition to End Homelessness, n.d.). This moment catalyzed the creation of NJCEH to expand advocacy efforts and advance the rights of individuals experiencing homelessness across the state.

Today, NJCEH operates as a social impact organization focused on advocacy, education, and coalition building. Over more than a decade of work, NJCEH has played a key role in shaping homelessness policy and response efforts in New Jersey. However, its strategic focus is evolving in response to changes in the federal policy and funding landscape. As federal resources have become less stable, NJCEH is increasingly prioritizing efforts to expand state-level funding and policy support. This shift is intended to ensure continuity of services and improve access to housing, including essential resources for individuals experiencing homelessness in New Jersey.

Background on Notice of Funding Opportunity

In the United States, worsening housing affordability has contributed to rising rates of homelessness and increased demand for shelter services. In response, federal and state homelessness systems have increasingly adopted the Housing First model, which prioritizes rapid access to permanent housing and has been widely associated with improved housing stability and reductions in chronic homelessness (National Low-Income Housing Coalition, 2023). Recent federal policy changes have introduced new uncertainty into this framework. On November 13, 2025, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) issued a new Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for the Continuum of Care (CoC) Program, significantly altering funding priorities (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2025b). Most notably, the NOFO significantly reduces the proportion of funding that CoCs can allocate to permanent housing programs. This represents a substantial shift from prior practice,

in which the majority of CoC funding has been directed toward permanent housing interventions.

The potential consequences of this policy shift are significant. Thousands of individuals and families rely on CoC-funded programs to remain housed, and reductions in permanent housing funding could increase the risk of returns to homelessness. Service providers may also face operational challenges, particularly if funding disbursements are delayed, creating the potential for significant service disruptions (National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2025).

In response, New Jersey, along with 19 other states and the District of Columbia, filed a lawsuit titled *State of Washington v. United States Department of Housing and Urban Development* challenging the legality of HUD's revised NOFO (Civil Rights Litigation Clearinghouse, 2025). A federal court subsequently issued an injunction temporarily halting implementation of key provisions, including elements of the funding cap (National Housing and Rehabilitation Center, 2025). While this ruling provides short-term relief, it does not resolve the broader policy uncertainty surrounding the future of CoC funding. As a result, states are operating in an increasingly unstable federal funding environment. This uncertainty underscores the need for proactive, state-level strategies to stabilize funding streams and maintain continuity of care for vulnerable populations.¹

Focus on Funding, NOFO Response, and Criminalization

While this analysis initially intended to focus on state responses to recent federal NOFO changes, the scope of the analysis shifted and expanded to reflect the evolving needs and priorities of the New Jersey Coalition to End Homelessness (NJCEH). It became particularly clear that understanding state-level funding structures would be critical in this current funding environment, where federal resources are becoming increasingly uncertain. Examining how other states structure, allocate, and adapt their own funding streams provides important insight into how homelessness response systems can remain stable despite these ongoing federal shifts. The NOFO remains an important contextual factor, and a brief discussion is included on state responses, but it is now considered as one component of the larger and evolving policy landscape.

Additionally, this research incorporates an analysis of policies related to the criminalization of homelessness. This focus is particularly relevant in light of the 2024 *City of Grants Pass v. Johnson* decision, in which the Supreme Court clarified that enforcement of certain local ordinances regulating activities such as sleeping in public spaces does not inherently violate the Eighth Amendment's prohibition on cruel and unusual punishment. This ruling has contributed to a broader national trend of increased local regulation of unsheltered homelessness, including ordinances targeting encampments and public sleeping. In this context, this analysis reflects the priorities of the NJCEH by examining how state and local legal frameworks may shape the experiences of individuals facing homelessness. Understanding these dynamics is critical to assessing both the risks associated with criminalization and policy opportunities available to mitigate its impacts.

¹ The federal government released the FY2026 CoC NOFO on June 1, 2026, subsequent to the completion of this report.

New Jersey Policy Context

Homelessness in New Jersey is growing. Between 2021 and 2025, the number of individuals identified as experiencing homelessness rose by more than 70%. 42,654 people experienced homelessness in New Jersey in 2025, according to the state's Homeless Management Information System. However, this report will utilize the 2025 Point in Time count numbers moving forward for the purposes of using a standardized measurement of homeless populations for interstate comparison — which identified 13,748 unhoused individuals in New Jersey on a given night in January.

Of those counted, 1,995 were unsheltered (Monarch Housing Associates, 2025). This figure reflects only those counted during the annual Point-In-Time (PIT) Count, a statewide snapshot that does not include people who are couch-surfing or living doubled-up temporarily with friends or family. As a result, the true number of unhoused and unsheltered individuals in New Jersey is significantly higher. During the 2025 PIT Count, 86% of individuals were staying in sheltered settings including motels, emergency shelters, or transitional housing. Families with children represented 33% of those counted. Several demographic groups are disproportionately represented among New Jersey's homeless population: 47% identify as Black, 45% reported having at least one disability, 10% had experienced domestic violence, and 5% are veterans (Monarch Housing Associates, 2025).

New Jersey also faces heightened risk due to potential changes in federal funding. Continuum of Care (CoC) dollars support temporary rental assistance and other critical programs across the State. A loss of these funds could result in as many as 2,500 households returning to homelessness (Matthau, 2026). Despite these risks, New Jersey currently invests substantially less in homelessness services compared with peer states.

In FY2026, New Jersey invested \$186.3 million in homelessness services and programs, just 0.32% of the State's \$58.8 billion budget (NJCEH, personal communication, May 10, 2026). On an annual basis, \$164.722 million is allocated to recurring programs that fund programs and services including the Office of Homelessness Prevention (Department of Community Affairs - DCA), shelter support, Code Blue (Department of Human Services - DHS), and the New Jersey Homeless Youth Act (Department of Children and Families - DCF).

Table 1. New Jersey's Recurring Homelessness Expenditures		
Program	Administering Agency	Total State Funding
Office of Homelessness Prevention	Dept. of Community Affairs	\$4,750,000
Social Services for the Homeless	Dept. of Human Services	\$16,220,000
Code Blue	Dept. of Human Services	\$2,500,000
Case Management Services	Dept. of Human Services	\$5,000,000
New Jersey Homeless Youth Act	Dept. of Children and Families	\$2,627,000
Emergency Assistance	Dept. of Children and Families	\$84,000,000 ***

Shelter Support	Grants-in-Aid	\$2,300,000
Prevention of Homelessness	Grants-in-Aid	\$4,360,000
State Rental Assistance Program	Grants-in-Aid	\$31,965,000
Bringing Veterans Home	NJ Affordable Housing Trust Fund	\$11,000,000
Total Funding		\$164,722,000

*** This may include federal dollars.

In FY2026, an additional \$21.64 million in spending supported allocations to the Affordable Housing Trust Fund and grants to service providers to support their initiatives.

Table 2. FY2026 Specific Budget Expenditures	
Item	Amount Budgeted
Continuum of Care Homelessness Initiative	\$5,500,000
NJ Coalition to End Homelessness, Shelter Support and Staffing	\$4,040,000
Robert Wood Johnson Barnabas Health	\$5,000,000
Volunteers of America Delaware Valley	\$2,800,000
Hudson County, Housing First Pilot Program	\$500,000
Newark, Homeless Housing Program	\$2,400,000
Turning Lives Around	\$200,000
HomeFront NJ	\$250,000
United Community Corporation	\$800,000
Trinity Center for Community	\$150,000
Total Funding	\$21,640,000

While New Jersey has made targeted investments through appropriations, current spending per unhoused individual remains comparatively low at approximately \$13,556, relative to peer states and represents a small fraction of the overall State budget. With increasing demand and diminishing federal support, the State's homelessness response system will require strengthened and flexible resources to support housing stability for residents. Strategic investments are critical to maintaining programs, protecting vulnerable households, and creating a more sustainable homelessness response.

Methodology

The study examines how states with political and policy contexts similar to New Jersey are addressing homelessness, with the goal of identifying strategies that may be applicable to New Jersey. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, including policy analysis and qualitative interviews with public and nonprofit leaders.

Research Scope and Program Inclusion

The analysis focuses on state-funded programs that directly support individuals experiencing homelessness. Programs were included in the analysis if they provided services including, but not limited to: emergency shelter (including shelter development), temporary housing, transitional or supportive housing, permanent supportive housing, medical respite care, or services targeted to specific populations (e.g., youth, veterans, individuals with disabilities, survivors of domestic violence). Investments in system administration, research, and data infrastructure for relevant programs or department/agencies were also considered.

Programs not directly tied to homelessness service delivery, including general rent or mortgage assistance, housing vouchers, affordable housing development, eviction prevention, diversion services, or workforce programs, were excluded in order to maintain a consistent focus on homelessness-specific interventions.

Case Study Selection

In coordination with the New Jersey Coalition to End Homelessness (NJCEH), the research team conducted an initial analysis of 15 states: Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Virginia, Washington, and Vermont. These states were selected based on two primary criteria: (1) having experienced a Democratic trifecta, defined as unified Democratic control over the governorship and both legislative chambers, for a majority of the past five years, and (2) participation in the *State of Washington v. United States Department of Housing and Urban Development* lawsuit (Ballotpedia, n.d.; Hapgood, 2025; Kramer, 2023). A Democratic trifecta was included in the criteria because it allows for single-party control over the policymaking process, and creates an opportunity for a policy window, in which policies are most likely to be passed (Mozeley & Whelan, n.d.).

New York and California were not included in the initial analysis despite meeting both selection criteria. This decision was made in partnership with the NJCEH due to the scale and complexity of these states' homelessness systems, which are heavily influenced by their respective large urban centers. Including them may have skewed the analysis, which would have limited comparability with smaller or more demographically similar states. Our preliminary review suggests that New York and California invest substantial resources in homelessness-related programs and warrant a more substantive analysis.

Vermont was included in this analysis despite not cleanly meeting both selection criteria. While Vermont does not have a Democratic trifecta, as its executive branch is led by a Republican governor and its legislature by Democrats, it was selected due to its strong policy alignment with other states in the sample and its proactive approach to homelessness policy. Vermont has

made notable state-level investments and implemented policy comparable to those in states with unified Democratic control, making it a valuable case for understanding a broader range of approaches.

The initial analysis of the 15 states included review of state legislation, policy documents, government reports, and relevant media coverage to identify funding amounts in each state. Based on this review, five states were selected by the client for further analysis: Connecticut, Illinois, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Vermont. As two of the largest cities in the United States, case studies were also conducted for Chicago, Illinois and Boston, Massachusetts to understand how the large cities of the selected states may influence or supplement state-level homelessness responses.

Interviews with Public and Non-Profit Organizational Leaders

Following case selection for further analysis, qualitative interviews were conducted with public and nonprofit leaders from all five states. These interviews were intended to supplement and validate findings from the initial analysis. Interviews were designed to last approximately one hour and followed a standardized protocol while allowing for flexibility and follow up questions based on participant responses.

Participants selected to be interviewed were identified through various sources: publicly available reports, media coverage, staffing websites, cold calls, cold emails, and recommendations from other interviewees (i.e., snowball sampling). Outreach was conducted via both email and phone. Interviews were conducted with individuals representing a mix of state agencies, nonprofit organizations, and advocacy groups. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and annotated to help identify key trends, strategies, and challenges. Confidentiality was required but was ensured for those who requested this.

Limitations

This methodology is subject to several limitations. First, publicly available and accessible data on state programmatic funding and structure varies in quality and completeness across states. Additionally, due to criteria selection, innovative or unique policy interventions in other states may not be captured in the analysis. The semester-long time constraint also limited the ability to independently verify data sources and policy details for states not selected for in-depth analysis.

Finally, the Point-In-Time (PIT) Count data was used to estimate the number of individuals experiencing homelessness in each state. The PIT Count represents a count of “all people experiencing homelessness on a single [winter] night” as measured by those in shelters or on the street (Office of Community Planning and Development, n.d.). Therefore, it does not represent the total number of individuals experiencing homelessness over the course of the year and likely substantially undercounts the total number of individuals experiencing homelessness. Additionally, various factors can impact the count. For example, cold weather conditions can increase the number of unsheltered individuals accepting shelter and warming center referrals, and individuals experiencing homelessness may have temporary housing during the PIT Count (City of Chicago & University of Illinois Chicago, 2025, p. 8).

Case Studies

Connecticut

State Overview

Connecticut has a total population of 3,688,496 residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024b). According to the January 27, 2026 Point-In-Time (PIT) Count, the state's unhoused population was estimated at 3,735 individuals (Connecticut Homeless Management Information System, 2026). This corresponds to roughly one in every 1,000 Connecticut residents experiencing homelessness on a given night (Brone, 2025).

Structure of Government

Connecticut operates under a Democratic trifecta, with the executive and legislative branches controlled by the Democratic Party (Ballotpedia, n.d.). The General Assembly consists of a 151-member House of Representatives and a 36-member Senate, both of which currently hold Democratic majorities (State of Connecticut, n.d.). The governor, Ned Lamont, is also a Democrat (State of Connecticut, 2024).

Unlike many states, Connecticut does not have county level government. Sub-state governance is organized through municipalities (State of Connecticut, n.d.).

Unhoused Population Statistics

Homelessness in Connecticut has increased significantly in recent years. Between 2021 and 2026, the number of individuals experiencing homelessness rose by more than 47%, reaching approximately 3,735 individuals (Connecticut Homeless Management Information System, 2026).

During the 2026 PIT Count, 2,902 individuals (77%) were staying in sheltered settings including motels, emergency shelters, or transitional housing (Connecticut Homeless Management Information System, 2026). The remaining 833 individuals (22%) were unsheltered (Connecticut Homeless Management Information System, 2026). Families with children comprised 27% of the unhoused population (Connecticut Homeless Management Information System, 2026).

Several demographic groups are disproportionately represented among Connecticut's homeless population. In 2024, 35% of people experiencing homelessness were Black, African American, or African; 46% were White; and 33% were Hispanic/Latino; and 4% were multi-racial (Office of Community Planning and Development, 2024, p. 76-79; Office of Policy Development and Research, 2024). This stands in contrast to the overall demographics of Connecticut, with 13.3% of the state as Black, 77.3% is White, 19/2% is Hispanic/Latino, and 2.9% is multi-racial (U.S. Census Bureau, 2025). Additionally, 2% were experiencing chronic patterns of homelessness, 16% of individuals reported experiencing domestic violence, and 5% are veterans (Office of Community Planning and Development, 2024, p. 76-79; Office of Policy Development and Research, 2024; Connecticut Homeless Management Information System, 2026). These disparities highlight the intersection of homelessness with structural inequities, trauma, and prior service needs.

Structure of Services

The Connecticut Department of Housing serves as the lead agency overseeing the state’s homelessness response system. It is primarily responsible for administering and implementing the majority of housing and homelessness-related programs across the state (Connecticut State Department of Housing, n.d.).

Several other agencies play critical supporting roles. The Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services provides substantial funding for housing-related supports, particularly for individuals experiencing mental health and substance use disorders (Office of Fiscal Analysis, 2025). The agency is also leveraging opioid settlement funds to expand wraparound housing services, including recovery-oriented supports for individuals with opioid use disorders experiencing housing instability (Office of Fiscal Analysis, 2025). Additionally, the Department of Social Services provides funding for domestic violence shelters and related services, contributing to the broader safety net for individuals and families experiencing or at risk of homelessness (Office of Fiscal Analysis, 2025)

Funding Overview

Connecticut’s total FY2026 budget is \$27.1 billion (Office of Fiscal Analysis, 2025). Of this, roughly \$97,597,991 was allocated to homelessness-related programs in FY2026 (Office of Fiscal Analysis, 2025). This equates to an estimated \$26,131 in state funding per unhoused individual. All state funding for homelessness is derived from general funds, with no dedicated taxes or earmarked revenue streams specifically allocated to homelessness initiatives (Office of Fiscal Analysis, 2025).

Federal funding also represents a significant portion of the state’s homelessness response. In FY2024, Connecticut received approximately \$95 million in federal Continuum of Care (CoC) funding, an increase from \$81 million in FY2023 (Office of Policy Development and Research, 2024; U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2023). When combined with state investments, federal funding accounts for approximately 43% of total homelessness resources in Connecticut.

Table 3 summarizes Connecticut’s primary state-funded homelessness programs, their administering agencies, and funding levels for FY2026 (Office of Fiscal Analysis, 2025). A significant portion of funding is concentrated within a small number of agencies, particularly the Department of Housing (DOH) and the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS), reflecting a centralized, state-led approach to homelessness services.

Table 3. State Funding for Homelessness in Connecticut			
Program	Administering Agency	Total State Funding (\$)	State Funding Type
Domestic Violence Shelters	Department of Social Services	\$8,829,030	General Fund

Housing Supports and Services	Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS)	\$30,499,469	General Fund
Housing and Homeless Services	Department of Housing (DOH)	\$40,000,000*	General Fund
Housing and Homeless Services - Municipality	Department of Housing (DOH)	\$708,826	General Fund
Housing Empowering Recovery from Opioids	Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS)	\$14,250,000	Opioid Settlement
Homeless Youth Program	Department of Housing (DOH)	\$3,310,666	General Fund
Total Funding			\$97,597,991

* The State's Housing and Homelessness Services total allocation is \$110 million. Of this, roughly \$40 million is specifically allocated towards serving unhoused individuals.

The Department of Social Services (DSS) administers \$8.8 million in funding for domestic violence shelters. These funds are distributed to nonprofit organizations that provide emergency shelter for survivors of domestic violence at the local level (Connecticut Social Services, n.d.).

The largest and most central funding stream is the Housing and Homeless Services line item within the Department of Housing (DOH). While the total appropriation for this category is approximately \$110 million, only about \$40 million is specifically allocated to programs service individuals experiencing homelessness. The remainder primarily supports the state's Rental Assistance Program (RAP), which serves a broader low-income population, including seniors and individuals with disabilities. The homelessness-specific portion of this funding supports a wide range of interventions, including emergency shelters, rapid rehousing, coordinated access networks, shelter diversion programs, permanent supportive housing, youth transitional living programs, and street outreach (S. DiLella, personal communication, March 13, 2026). A smaller subset of this funding, Housing and Homeless Services: Municipality, allocates approximately \$708,816 directly to municipalities, specifically Hartford and Danbury, for shelter operations. These municipalities typically subcontract service delivery to nonprofit providers (S. DiLella, personal communication, March 13, 2026).

The Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) manages two major funding streams. Housing Supports and Services provides nearly \$30.5 million in funding to support individuals experiencing mental health, substance use, and housing-related challenges (S. DiLella, personal communication, March 13, 2026). Housing Empowering Recovery from Opioids is funded through opioid settlement dollars and allocated \$14.25 million annually. This program combines housing assistance with recovery supports, including case management, peer support, and move-in assistance (S. DiLella, personal communication, March 13, 2026). In total, \$58.6 million in settlement funds will be distributed over four years to nonprofit providers

implementing this model (Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, 2025).

Finally, the Homeless Youth Program, administered by DOH, provides \$3.3 million in matching funds for the federal Youth Homelessness Demonstration program. These funds are distributed to nonprofit organizations to deliver youth-specific services, including shelter, transitional housing, and group home placements (S. DiLella, personal communication, March 13, 2026).

Factors Contributing to Funding

Connecticut's current homelessness response system is shaped in large part by early leadership from philanthropic and nonprofit organizations. Prior to significant state investments, these actors played a central role in both advocacy and system design (S. DiLella, personal communication, March 13, 2026). Philanthropic organizations conducted cost-benefit analyses to evaluate the fiscal and social impacts of homelessness, with a particular focus of identifying cost-effective interventions (S. DiLella, personal communication, March 13, 2026). This work helped establish permanent supportive housing as a key strategy, demonstrating that it could reduce long-term expenditures while improving outcomes for individuals experiencing homelessness (S. DiLella, personal communication, March 13, 2026). These findings were instrumental in motivating the state to increase its financial commitment to homeless services.

Another major institutional development was the establishment of the Department of Housing in 2015. Prior to its creation, responsibility for homelessness policy and programming was fragmented across multiple agencies (S. DiLella, personal communication, March 13, 2026). Advocacy efforts, including the Reaching Home campaign led by nonprofit and philanthropic partners, pushed the state to adopt a more coordinated and centralized approach. The creation of the DOH marked a turning point, enabling the state to scale and formalize its homelessness response system.

Role of Cities

Municipal governments in Connecticut play a relatively limited role in funding and administering homelessness services. While cities may receive federal funding through programs such as Community Development Block Grants (CBDG), these resources are not a primary driver of homelessness policy or service delivery (S. DiLella, personal communication, March 13, 2026). In most cases, municipalities act as intermediaries, passing funding and implementation responsibilities along to nonprofit organizations (S. DiLella, personal communication, March 13, 2026). This demonstrates the broader system structure of the state leading funding and policy decisions, while implementation is largely carried out by nonprofit providers. However, there are ongoing efforts at the state level to increase municipal engagement in both funding and service delivery.

Role of Philanthropic and Faith-Based Organizations

The role of philanthropic and faith-based organizations has evolved over time. While they were once central to advocacy and system development, their role has diminished following the establishment of the Department of Housing and the expansion of state funding (S. DiLella, personal communication, March 13, 2026). Today, philanthropic organizations are more

focused on research, evaluation, and policy intervention. They continue to influence the system by generating evidence, piloting new approaches, and advocating for policy change, rather than directly funding or delivering services at scale (S. DiLella, personal communication, March 13, 2026).

Faith-based organizations remain more directly involved in service delivery, though their financial contributions are relatively limited (S. DiLella, personal communication, March 13, 2026). These organizations often partner with the state or larger nonprofit providers, such as Catholic Charities, to deliver case management and supportive services.

Response to NOFO

Connecticut has been actively preparing for and responding to changes in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Continuum of Care (CoC) Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO). Connecticut has two CoC's operating in the state: the Balance of State and Fairfield County. The Balance of State CoC is one of the top ten funded in the country, receiving \$55 to \$65 million in federal dollars annually (S. DiLella, personal communication, March 13, 2026). While the state has concerns, they do not believe that drastic changes will seriously impact service delivery (S. DiLella, personal communication, March 13, 2026). Since there is a large investment in state resources, the Department of Housing (DOH) and other agencies are preparing to move dollars around to plug any funding gaps in existing programs (S. DiLella, personal communication, March 13, 2026). The state has been working closely with their HUD Regional Director to explain the need for funding and how gaps could create unnecessary strain.

The State is prepared to adapt to any changes in federal CoC funding as evidenced by its emergency backfill in 2025. When the State was faced with early funding gaps from lack of CoC funding, advocates were able to advocate for funding to be leveraged from the state's emergency coffers (S. DiLella, personal communication, March 13, 2026). This was provided to organizations on the condition that when CoC funds were eventually released, recipients would transfer them to the state to refund the emergency fund. Roughly \$6.9 million was released from emergency funding to organizations via the State (S. DiLella, personal communication, March 13, 2026). The primary driver of this from the advocates was the significant impact the state would face from a potential lapse in CoC resources (S. DiLella, personal communication, March 13, 2026). Providers were planning to close and residents would have lost their housing supports overnight.

Criminalization of Homelessness

Connecticut's policies surrounding the criminalization of homelessness has also shifted. The state's Homeless Bill of Rights, passed in 2013, establishes that individuals experiencing homelessness have the right to move freely in public spaces, receive equal treatment from state/municipal agencies, and maintain privacy of personal property, while prohibiting discrimination in employment, ensuring access to voting, and emergency medical care (Connecticut General Assembly, 2013). This was successful because of a significant push by advocates, specifically the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness (S. DiLella, personal communication, March 13, 2026).

In today's policy environment, the state has been more hesitant to push forward on further anti-criminalization policy (S. DiLella, personal communication, March 13, 2026). State officials believe they are at risk of being penalized and losing federal funding if they speak out against criminalization issues. Advocates do not believe risking federal funding is worth the protections that would be granted by any further anti-criminalization policy (S. DiLella, personal communication, March 13, 2026). Advocates and state officials think anti-criminalization efforts may be more successful at the municipal level rather than broader state policy or legislation that would accomplish the same goals.

Illinois

State Overview

Illinois has a total population of 12,719,141 residents (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.-a). According to the 2025 Point-In-Time (PIT) Count, an estimated 14,571 people were experiencing homelessness (Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2025, p. 9). This corresponds to approximately 0.11% of Illinois residents experiencing homelessness on a given night.

Structure of Government

Illinois operates under a Democratic trifecta, with the executive and legislative branches controlled by the Democratic Party. The General Assembly consists of a 118-member House of Representatives and a 59-member Senate, both of which currently hold Democratic majorities (Illinois General Assembly, 2026a; Illinois General Assembly, 2026b). The governor, JB Pritzker, is also a Democrat (Illinois Office of the Governor, n.d.).

Unhoused Population Statistics

Homelessness in Illinois has increased in recent years. Between 2021 and 2025, the number of individuals experiencing homelessness identified through the annual Point-In-Time (PIT) counts rose from 7,958 to 14,571, an increase of approximately 83% (Office of Policy and Development Research, 2024; Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2025, p. 9).

Illinois experienced a sharp increase in its unhoused population between 2023 and 2024, when the PIT Count more than doubled from 11,947 to 25,832 individuals experiencing homelessness. This spike was largely driven by trends in the City of Chicago, where reports indicated that a significant factor for this increase was the arrival of asylum seekers, many of whom relied on the city's shelter system (Hernandez & Miller, 2025). This pattern aligns with broader national trends: homelessness across the United States increased by approximately 18.1% in 2024 (Hernandez & Miller, 2025).

Several demographic patterns are notable among the state's unhoused population. According to the 2024 PIT Count, 10% of individuals experiencing homelessness were unsheltered, 52% were people in families with children, 2% were veterans, and 7% were experiencing chronic patterns of homelessness (Office of Community Planning and Development, 2024, p. 76-79; Office of Policy Development and Research, 2024). The racial composition of Illinois' unhoused population was primarily comprised of Hispanic/Latino (57%); Black, African American, or African (27%); White (28%); and 1% multi-racial individuals (Office of Policy Development and Research, 2024).

Structure of Services

The Illinois Office to Prevent and End Homelessness (OPEH) is the primary agency responsible for addressing homelessness in Illinois. OPEH is an interagency office housed within the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) and works across multiple state agencies to align policy and programmatic response (Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2024, p. 53). It is led by the Chief Homelessness Officer, who serves as the state's lead official for preventing homelessness (Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2024, p. 52-53).

The Chief Homelessness Officer oversees both the Interagency Task Force on Homelessness and the Community Advisory Council on Homelessness (Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2024, p. 52-53). The Interagency Task Force on Homelessness is responsible for coordinating across state agencies to align resources, policies, and programs aimed at addressing homelessness (Illinois Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 4, 2026). Its membership includes leadership from key state entities, including the Community College Board, Department of Corrections, Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Department of Human Services, and members of the General Assembly (Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2024, p. 51-52). The Community Advisory Council on Homelessness provides guidance and input to the Interagency Task Force. Its membership includes individuals with lived experience, individuals with disabilities, advocates, statewide organizations, local units of government, and local continuums of care (Illinois Department of Human Services, 2026; Illinois Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 4, 2026). This structure is intended to ensure that state-level decision-making is informed by both service providers and individuals directly affected by homelessness (Illinois Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 4, 2026).

The Office to Prevent and End Homelessness (OPEH) also developed *Home Illinois: Illinois' Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness*, the state's interagency strategic plan for guiding investments and policy toward preventing and ending homelessness in Illinois. The plan is updated biennially, with annual reports published that track implementation progress (Illinois Department of Human Services, n.d.-d). Additionally, Illinois is one of the few states that conducts homeless-specific mortality and morbidity reports (Illinois Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 4, 2026). These reports, published by the Illinois Department of Public Health, analyze death records and hospitalization data to assess the health impacts associated with homelessness and housing instability (Illinois Department of Public Health, n.d.).

Illinois currently has one federally recognized Native American tribe, the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation (Medlin, 2024; Illinois Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 4, 2026). Although the state does not currently have programs to address Native American homelessness, the state recently launched its Racial Equity Roundtable on Native American Indigenous Homelessness and anticipates the development of a report with recommendations that will help guide its strategies to address Native American homelessness in Illinois (Illinois Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 4, 2026).

Funding Overview

The Office to Prevent and End Homelessness (OPEH) shares its in-depth analysis of the state budget every other year through its *Home Illinois: Illinois' Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness*. Its most recent report, dated October 2024, outlines detailed budget allocations for funding individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness; therefore, FY2025 budget allocations were used for this analysis. There was not a significant change in the funding total from FY2025 to FY2026 (Illinois Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 4, 2026).

Illinois' total FY2025 budget is \$53.07 billion (Illinois Governor's Office of Management and Budget, 2024b). Of this, approximately \$272,077,585 was allocated to homelessness-related programs in FY2025 (Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2024, p. 90-97). This

equates to an estimated \$18,673 in state funding per unhoused individual. Specific state funding sources were unable to be identified for each program in Table 4. However, programs are funded through a variety of state funding sources and are primarily funded through state general funds (Illinois Governor’s Office of Management and Budget, 2024a; Illinois Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 4, 2026). Illinois also has a Homelessness Prevention Revenue Fund, which is funded through statutory transfers and state lottery funds (Illinois State Comptroller, n.d.). Illinois has a dedicated state lottery ticket that uses a portion of funds to fund state homelessness prevention and assistance programs (Illinois Lottery, n.d.).

Federal funding represents a portion of the state’s homelessness response. In FY2024, Illinois received \$182,457,651 in federal Continuum of Care (CoC) funding (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Public Affairs, 2025a).

Table 4 summarizes Illinois’ primary state-funded homelessness programs, their administering agencies, and funding levels for FY2025 (Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2024, p. 90). A significant portion of funding is concentrated within specific agencies, particularly the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS). Although only programs that met the research methodology were included in Table 4, the *Home Illinois: Illinois’ Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness* report estimated its total state funding for preventing and ending homeless is \$547,229,440 (Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2024, p. 90).

Table 4. State Funding for Homelessness in Illinois		
Program	Administering Agency	Total State Funding (\$)
Homeless Prevention	Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS)	\$38,000,000
Emergency & Transitional Housing Funds	Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS)	\$52,383,700
Rapid Rehousing	Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS)	\$25,000,000
Shelter Diversion	Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS)	\$4,700,000
Shelters and Other Supports	Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS)	\$57,500,000
Triage Shelters	Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS)	\$9,102,222
Permanent Supportive Housing Services	Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS)	\$23,994,841
Scattered Site Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH)	Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS)	\$12,500,000

Substance Use Prevention and Recovery (SUPR) Permanent Supportive Housing	Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS)	\$9,000,000
Housing Navigator Emergency Room Pilot	Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS)	\$1,000,000
Medical Respite Capacity Building Initiative	Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS)	\$3,500,000
Justice Involved Flexible Housing Pool	Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA)	\$1,000,000
Higher Education Homeless Liaisons	Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE)	\$2,000,000
Community College Technical Assistance	Illinois Community College Board (ICCB)	\$250,000
Stability Investment for Family Housing Pilot	Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS)	\$7,000,000
Discharge/after care support coordination	Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice (IDJJ)	\$127,000
Homeless Youth Services	Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS)	\$12,403,100
Prince Home	Illinois Department of Veteran Affairs (IDVA)	\$1,170,300
Veterans Cash Grant Program	Illinois Department of Veteran Affairs (IDVA)	\$300,000
Home Illinois Communications, Pilots, and Research	Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS)	\$2,134,137
Data collection infrastructure	Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS)	\$1,000,000
One System Initiative	Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS)	\$5,000,000
SOAR Technical Assistance; Homelessness Education Technical Assistance Center	Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS)	\$2,412,285
Homelessness Mortality and Morbidity Report	Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH)	\$600,000
Total Funding		\$272,077,585

Homeless Prevention, administered by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), is allocated \$38,000,000 in state funding (Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2024, p. 93). This provides “rental/mortgage assistance, utility assistance, approved case management and approved supportive services directly related to the prevention of homelessness to eligible individuals and families who are in danger of eviction, foreclosure, or homelessness, or are currently homeless. The program is designed to stabilize individuals and families in their existing homes, shorten the amount of time that individuals and families stay in shelters, and assist individuals and families with securing affordable housing” (Illinois Department of Human Services, n.d.-e).

Emergency and Transitional Housing Funds, administered by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), is allocated \$52,383,700 in state funding (Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2024, p. 92). This provides “immediate and comprehensive shelter services to homeless persons and persons at risk of becoming homeless” (Illinois Department of Human Services, n.d.-c).

Rapid Rehousing, administered by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), is allocated \$25,000,000 in state funding (Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2024, p. 94). The program provides “short-term (up to three months) and medium-term (4-24 months) tenant-based rental assistance and supportive services to households experiencing homelessness” (Illinois Governor’s Office of Management and Budget, n.d.-b).

Shelter Diversion, administered by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), is allocated \$4,700,000 in state funding (Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2024, p. 94). The purpose of the program is to prevent “homelessness at the front door of the homelessness response system by helping people identify immediate alternative housing arrangements and, if necessary, connecting them with services and financial assistance to help them remain in or return to permanent housing” (Illinois Department of Human Services, n.d.-m).

Shelters and Other Supports, administered by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), is allocated \$57,500,000 in state funding (Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2024, p. 94). Triage Shelters, administered by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), are allocated \$9,102,222 in state funding (Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2024, p. 94). Triage Shelters render “immediate and comprehensive shelter services to homeless individuals and families or individuals and families at imminent risk of homelessness. The program provides food, shelter, and supportive services through local not-for-profit agencies” (Illinois Governor’s Office of Management and Budget, n.d.-c).

Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) Services, administered by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), is allocated \$23,994,841 in state funding (Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2024, p. 93). The program assists eligible individuals “find a permanent home and also get local mental health services but only if and when they need that help” (Illinois Department of Human Services, n.d.-k).

Scattered Site Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH), administered by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), is allocated \$12,500,000 in state funding (Illinois Interagency Task Force

on Homelessness, 2024, p. 94). The program offers “permanent housing in which housing assistance (e.g., long-term leasing or rental assistance) and supportive services are provided to assist households with at least one member with a disability in achieving housing stability” (Illinois Department of Human Services, n.d.-l).

Substance Use Prevention and Recovery (SUPR) Permanent Supportive Housing, administered by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), is allocated \$9,000,000 in state funding (Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2024, p. 94). This program funds permanent supportive housing (PSH) for individuals with substance use disorders or co-occurring disorders (Illinois Department of Human Services, n.d.-g).

The Housing Navigator Emergency Room Pilot, administered by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), is allocated \$1,000,000 in state funding (Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2024, p. 93). This is “a pilot test of intensive case management for people experiencing homelessness initiated in hospital emergency departments to connect them to housing and necessary social services” (Illinois Governor’s Office of Management and Budget, n.d.-a).

The Medical Respite Capacity Building Initiative, administered by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), is allocated \$3,500,000 in state funding (Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2024, p. 93). This initiative funds “29 community organizations across Illinois that are expanding access to Medical Respite Care for people experiencing homelessness” (Illinois Public Health Institute, n.d.).

The Justice Involved Flexible Housing Pool, administered by the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA), is allocated \$1,000,000 in state funding (Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2024, p. 91). The program provides “housing for individuals who are high utilizers of the hospital emergency department, jail systems, and shelters and are also facing homelessness” (Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority, n.d.).

Illinois also offers programs to address homelessness among students. Higher Education Homeless Liaisons, administered by the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE), is allocated \$2,000,000 in state funding (Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2024, p. 91). Illinois Public Act 102-0083, the Higher Education House and Opportunities Act, was enacted in 2022 and requires higher education institutions “to designate a member of staff to serve as the Housing and Opportunities that are Useful for Students’ Excellence Liaison (HOUSE Liaison) (Illinois Community College Board, n.d.). Community College Technical Assistance, administered by the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB), is allocated \$250,000 in state funding (Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2024, p. 91). This provides “technical assistance to community colleges providing support to students experiencing homelessness as part of administering the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century, as well as in support of the [Housing and Opportunities that are Useful for Students’ Excellence Liaison (HOUSE)] Liaisons” (Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2025, p. 58).

There are various programs that aim to address homelessness in youth and families, including the Stability Investment for Family Housing Pilot, discharge/after-care support coordination, and homeless youth services. The Stability Investment for Family Housing Pilot, administered by

the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), is allocated \$7,000,000 in state funding (Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2024, p. 94). The pilot offers a one-time cash transfer of \$9,500 to “help families experiencing homelessness flexibly address their own barriers to stable housing and exit emergency shelter more quickly” (Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2024, p. 84). Families are given the autonomy to determine how to use the assigned funds (Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2024, p. 84).

Discharge/after care support coordination, administered by the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice (IDJJ), is allocated \$127,000 in state funding (Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2024, p. 95). This aims to “better understand youth experiences of homelessness after discharge from State systems of care” (Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2024, p. 54). Homeless Youth Services, administered by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), is allocated \$12,403,100 in state funding (Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2024, p. 93). This program increases “the safety of youth ensuring that their basic survival needs are met while also providing safe and stable housing; education and employment services, and the life skills necessary to become self-sufficient” (Illinois Department of Human Services, n.d.-f).

The Illinois Department of Veteran Affairs (IDVA) administers several programs to address veteran homelessness, including Prince Home and the Veterans Cash Grant Program. Prince Home is allocated \$1,170,300 in state funding and offers “housing and supportive services to as many as 12 homeless veterans in Illinois” (Illinois Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.; Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2024, p. 96). The Veterans Cash Grant Program is allocated \$300,000 in state funding and supports “agencies providing homeless services, employment, and training programs to veterans” (Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2024, p. 72, 96).

Illinois has several investments in system administration, research, and data infrastructure for homelessness-related programs and agencies, including Home Illinois Communications, Pilots, and Research; Data Collection Infrastructure; the One System Initiative; SOAR Technical Assistance and the Homelessness Education Technical Assistance Center; and the Homelessness Mortality and Morbidity Report. Home Illinois Communications, Pilots, and Research, administered by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), is allocated \$2,134,137 in state funding (Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2024, p. 92). This funds communications, pilots, and research for Home Illinois, the state’s “interagency plan to drive state investments and policy toward preventing and end homelessness” in Illinois (Illinois Department of Human Services, n.d.-d). Data collection infrastructure, administered by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), is allocated \$1,000,000 in state funding (Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2024, p. 92). This funds data collection infrastructure projects, such as internal dashboards for Home Illinois, to understand progress on reducing homelessness in Illinois (Illinois Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 4, 2026; Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2024, p.60). The One System Initiative, administered by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), is allocated \$5,000,000 in state funding (Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2024, p. 93). This initiative is a “community-led planning process to align the efforts supporting people experiencing homelessness and new arrivals in Chicago” (Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2024, p. 61). SOAR

Technical Assistance and the Homelessness Education Technical Assistance Center, administered by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), are allocated \$2,412,285 in state funding (Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2024, p. 94). These programs provide “training, education, technical assistance, and systems-level coordination related to homelessness and housing to the State and its partners” (Illinois Department of Human Services, n.d.-h). Lastly, the Homelessness Mortality and Morbidity Report, administered by the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH), is allocated \$600,000 in state funding (Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2024, p. 95-96). These reports are developed through a partnership between the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) and the University of Illinois Chicago School of Public Health. The reports “utilize death records and hospitalization data to examine the effects of being unhoused or in unstable housing has on health” (Illinois Department of Public Health, n.d.).

Illinois has several additional programs with a component that addresses homelessness, such as the Community Outreach and Recovery Support Program, the Peacekeeper Housing Stability Fund, and the Healthcare and Housing Partnerships Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) Development Program. However, the specific state funding total allocated towards just homelessness was unable to be identified; therefore, the fund amounts were not included in the estimated state funding dedicated to homelessness. The Community Outreach and Recovery Support Program, administered by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), is allocated \$5,000,000 in state funding (Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2024, p. 92). Program services are provided by peer support workers (PSWs) or persons with lived experiences (PLEs). Program activities include “outreach to individuals experiencing homelessness or housing instability; peer and recovery coaching to promote recovery from [opioid use disorder (OUD)]; connections to treatment, recovery, housing, and other supports; and collaboration with community partners” (Illinois Department of Human Services, n.d.-a). The Peacekeeper Housing Stability Fund, administered by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), is allocated \$2,000,000 in state funding (Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2024, p. 93). The program aims to advance “violence prevention street outreach work by engaging young people living in neighborhoods at high risk for violence” (Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2025, p. 51). Moreover, the program provides rental and emergency housing assistance, ongoing job placement support, and financial literacy programming (Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2025, p. 51). The Healthcare and Housing Partnerships Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) Development Program, administered by the Illinois Housing Development Authority (IDHA), is allocated \$15,000,000 in state funding (Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2024, p. 97). The program funds the development of permanent supportive housing (PSH) for individuals and families experiencing chronic homelessness and/or who are medically fragile (Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2025, p. 25).

Factors Contributing to Funding

A key factor in securing state funding to address homelessness in Illinois has been the sustained commitment of Governor JB Pritzker to developing a coordinated, statewide response. This momentum emerged following the COVID-19 pandemic, where the administration launched the largest emergency housing assistance program in the country to support the state’s

unhoused residents (Illinois Office of the Governor, 2021). In 2021, the Governor expanded on these efforts by signing Executive Order 2021-21, which established key governance structures, including the Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, the Community Advisory Council on Homelessness, and the position of State Homelessness Chief (Illinois Department of Human Services, n.d.-i; Illinois Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 4, 2026).

Executive Order 2021-21 further laid the foundation for expanded policy development and program funding to address homelessness (Illinois Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 4, 2026). In 2023, Governor JB Pritzker signed Public Act (PA) 103-0269 (HB2831), which codified these entities, including the Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, the Community Advisory Council on Homelessness, the Chief Homelessness Officer, and the Office to Prevent and End Homelessness (OPEH), into state law. Additionally, it also requires annual reporting to the Governor and the Illinois General Assembly, outlining progress toward ending homelessness, which has since become the Home Illinois implementation report (Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2024, p. 51). Ultimately, these actions institutionalized the state's approach, enabling the state to expand its financial commitment, with state funding for homeless-related programs approximately doubling between FY2023 and FY2025 (Illinois Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 4, 2026).

Although Illinois has been successful in allocating increased funding to address homelessness, advocacy organizations have continued to work with the state to address concerns relating to underspending and ensure that appropriate funds are fully utilized (B. Palmer, personal communication, April 10, 2026). Housing Action Illinois has played a leading role in these efforts, advocating for the preservation and expansion of funding in collaboration with partners such as the Chicago Coalition to End Homelessness, Illinois Shelter Alliance, the Supportive Housing Providers Association, and homeless service providers across the state (Housing Action Illinois, 2025-a).

These advocacy efforts have been instrumental in securing funding, even in difficult budget environments, and in advancing policies aimed at strengthening the state's homelessness response. Key initiatives that Housing Action Illinois has helped advance include expanding affordable rental housing with property tax incentives, reforming the tax sale system to protect home equity, eliminating state matching fund requirements for shelters and supportive housing, and advancing broader tenant protections (B. Palmer, personal communication, April 10, 2026).

Role of Cities

Cities in Illinois play a more limited role in addressing homelessness when compared to the state government. While local governments do contribute financially, their role is described as relatively minimal in comparison to state-level investments. These local contributions remain important, as they can supplement state programs and address specific community needs (B. Palmer, personal communication, April 10, 2026). Overall, the state is the primary founder of the City of Chicago's homeless response system. The city then provides funding via grants to provide services (e.g., shelter) (Illinois Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 4, 2026).

Despite their limited financial role, cities are still significant actors in shaping how homelessness is experienced and managed at the local level. Municipal governments are responsible for enacting and enforcing ordinances that directly impact individuals experiencing homelessness, including policies related to public space use and encampments. The state remains in communication with local governments, which allows for coordination between state-led initiatives and city-level implementation. In addition, major cities such as Chicago have developed their own initiatives to address homelessness, often working through local agencies, Continuum of Care (CoC) systems, and partnerships with nonprofit and philanthropic organizations. These efforts may include outreach programs, shelter coordination, and targeted services for specific populations such as youth or individuals experiencing chronic homelessness. Overall, cities function as supporting actors within the broader system, with their primary impact stemming from policy implementation, coordination with the state, and localized program delivery rather than large-scale financial investment (B. Palmer, personal communication, April 10, 2026).²

Role of Philanthropic and Faith-Based Organizations

In Illinois, both faith-based organizations and philanthropic organizations play important roles in addressing homelessness. Faith-based organizations often provide direct services at the local level; however, their role within the formal, state-coordinated homelessness response system is not clearly defined. While some faith-affiliated nonprofits, including Catholic Charities and The Salvation Army, receive state funding, other faith-based organizations operate parallel to, rather than fully integrated within the state system. However, faith-based organizations have had success in implementing the Public Action to Deliver Shelter (PADS) model, in which individuals rotate among participating congregations for overnight shelter (Illinois Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 4, 2026). While this model is significant in meeting local immediate needs, it is not consistently incorporated into statewide planning or data systems.

Philanthropic organizations, in contrast, play a more formalized role in funding and coordination. The Chicago Funders Together to End Homelessness (CFTEH) brings together over 40 unique funders to support service providers, advance policy solutions, and strengthen system-level coordination (Michael Reese, n.d.). In some cases, this organization's investments have also supported state capacity, including funding for positions focused on housing insecurity (Illinois Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 4, 2026).

Response to NOFO

In response to recent changes in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Continuum of Care (CoC) Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO), Illinois has implemented a series of coordinated strategies to stabilize its homelessness response system. A key component of this strategy has been increased funding flexibility across state-funded programs, particularly permanent supportive housing and rapid rehousing. For example, where rapid rehousing funds were underspent, the state allowed resources to be reallocated to support permanent supportive housing programs, enabling a more adaptive use of available

² See "City of Chicago, Illinois" for more information about the City of Chicago's role in addressing homelessness.

funding (Illinois Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 4, 2026). The state also prioritized municipal outreach and worked closely with mayors and city managers to ensure awareness of NOFO changes and to clarify how local governments could participate in and support implementation efforts (Illinois Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 4, 2026).

The state also worked to strengthen its engagement with its 19 Continuums of Care (CoCs) through the creation of the Illinois Homeless Response Collaborative, which focuses on building a more coordinated and resilient homelessness response system by improving data use, preventing homelessness, and stabilizing resources (Illinois Department of Human Services, n.d.-b; Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness, 2025, p. 28-29). The state worked closely with CoCs to navigate evolving federal policy, initially convening weekly meetings to share information, identify challenges, and adjust policies in real time. To further support state-level system capacity, Illinois invested \$2 million in CoC infrastructure, including enhancements to the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), to improve data systems and coordination (Illinois Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 4, 2026). The state also conducted detailed mapping of CoC funding streams to identify expiring grants and households at risk of losing assistance, creating opportunities for targeted interventions and supplemental funding to maintain service continuity (Illinois Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 4, 2026).

Illinois also implemented targeted programmatic adjustments to improve access to housing. This included temporary changes to the Statewide Referral Network, which connects individuals to permanent supportive housing developed through Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC). By modifying waitlist prioritization criteria for these units, the state was able to prioritize individuals participating in CoC programs for newly available or developed permanent supportive housing units, facilitating smooth transitions into more stable housing (Illinois Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 4, 2026).

Criminalization of Homelessness

In Illinois, concerns about the criminalization of homelessness have intensified in recent years, following the *City of Grants Pass v. Johnson* decision. Municipalities across the state began to adopt ordinances targeting unsheltered homelessness (e.g., banning camping) (Illinois Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 4, 2026). Illinois has approximately 30-35 municipal ordinances criminalizing homelessness, ranking Illinois second in the nation in the number of municipalities passing such ordinances (Chicago Coalition to End Homelessness, n.d.-a).

Despite this shift at the local level, the state has maintained a policy framework aimed at protecting the rights of individuals experiencing homelessness. The Illinois Bill of Rights for the Homeless Act (BRHA), enacted in 2013, establishes the right to access public spaces without discrimination or criminalization (Chicago Coalition to End Homelessness, n.d.-b). In response to the increase in ordinances, state agencies and officials have testified at city council meetings, engaged in one-on-one meetings with mayors, met with city councils to educate about the alternatives to incarceration, and provided guidance to local municipalities about the BRHA (Illinois Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 4, 2026). More recently, legislators have introduced HB 1429, which prevent “the further criminalization of homelessness, without

restricting pre-existing municipal powers” (B. Palmer, personal communication, April 10, 2026; Housing Action Illinois, 2025-b).

City of Chicago, Illinois

While this analysis primarily focuses on state-level funding structures, Illinois warrants additional analysis at the municipal level. Chicago is one of the largest cities within the United States and thus may independently shape the homelessness funding landscape through local appropriations. For this reason, Chicago is included as a case study to understand how the large cities of the selected states may influence or supplement state-level homelessness responses.

City Overview

The City of Chicago has a total population of approximately 2,721,308 residents (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.-b). According to the January 2025 Point-In-Time (PIT) Count, the city's unhoused population was estimated at 7,452 individuals (City of Chicago & University of Illinois Chicago, 2025, p. 10). This corresponds to approximately 0.27% of the city's population.

Structure of Government

The City of Chicago's executive branch is led by the mayor, Brandon Johnson (City of Chicago, n.d.-a; City of Chicago, n.d.-e). The legislative branch is the City Council, comprised of 50 alderpersons elected from 50 wards (City of Chicago, n.d.-a).

Unhoused Population Statistics

Homelessness in the City of Chicago has increased in recent years. Between 2021 and 2025, the number of individuals experiencing homelessness increased by approximately 66% (City of Chicago & University of Illinois Chicago, 2025, p. 10).

During the 2025 Point-In-Time (PIT) Count, an estimated 7,452 individuals were experiencing homelessness. Of this population, 82.3% of individuals were in sheltered settings, and 17.7% of individuals were in unsheltered settings (City of Chicago & University of Illinois Chicago, 2025, p. 10-11).

Several demographic patterns are notable among the city's unhoused population. The racial composition of the City of Chicago's unhoused population is primarily comprised of Black (53.2%), Hispanic/Latino (no race reported) (34.8%), and White (8.7%) individuals (City of Chicago & University of Illinois Chicago, 2025, p. 14). More than half of unhoused individuals are men (60.2%) (City of Chicago & University of Illinois Chicago, 2025, p. 14). Additionally, an estimated 15.5% of individuals have a substance use disorder, 29% have a mental health disorder, 29% are survivors of domestic violence, 21.5% have a physical disability, and 34.4% were formerly incarcerated (City of Chicago & University of Illinois Chicago, 2025, p. 15, 22-24). An estimated 26.1% of individuals experiencing homelessness are under 18 years old, and there were an estimated 1,018 households with adults and children (City of Chicago & University of Illinois Chicago, 2025, p. 15, 26).

Structure of Services

The Chicago Department of Family and Support Services' Homeless Services Division oversees funding for services for the unhoused (City of Chicago, Illinois Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 20, 2026). The City of Chicago's Homeless Outreach and Prevention (HOP) team conducts direct outreach to individuals experiencing homelessness. Additionally, the City

of Chicago provides grant funding to service providers (i.e., delegates). The city releases a Request for Proposals (RFP), and organizations can apply for funding. The city will then fund selected delegates to provide services, including outreach, shelter, and drop-in work (City of Chicago, Illinois Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 20, 2026). The city outlined its plan to address homelessness in *City of Chicago: The Five-Year Blueprint on Homelessness 2026-2031* (City of Chicago, 2026, p. 5).

In recent years, there has been increased state coordination and support in addressing homelessness, largely due to continued state investments. The state's streamlining of trainings, increased funding, and expanded access to state support (e.g., technical assistance) have improved coordination between the state, county, city, and delegates. For example, the Illinois Office to Prevent and End Homelessness (OPEH) partnered with the City of Chicago in establishing the Shelter Placement Resource Center for the One System Initiative. Together, they reviewed sites, identified partners, and coordinated the transition (City of Chicago, Illinois Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 20, 2026). Furthermore, the increased state funding and support has improved the city's operational capacity. This is exemplified by increased city staffing enabling the city to have the resources to provide technical support to delegates. The city hosted monthly shelter provider meetings to ensure consistent messaging and check-ins (City of Chicago, Illinois Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 20, 2026). However, data sharing between government entities and social service agencies continues to be a challenge (City of Chicago, Illinois Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 16, 2026).

Funding Overview

The City of Chicago's FY2026 budget is approximately \$16.8 billion (City of Chicago, 2025, p. 530). Of this, approximately \$75,992,210 was allocated to homelessness-related programs in FY2026 (See Table 5) (City of Chicago, 2025, p. 239, 243, 245, 247, 526; City of Chicago, Illinois Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 20, 2026). This equates to an estimated \$10,198 per unhoused individual. City funding for homelessness is primarily derived from the City Corporate Fund (i.e., city general operating funds), the Homeless Services Fund, and Chicago Transportation Authority (CTA) funds (City of Chicago, n.d.-d; City of Chicago, Illinois Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 20, 2026). The Homeless Services Fund is funded through the Homeshare Surcharge, a four percent "Hotel Tax surcharge on vacation rentals or shared housing units" (City of Chicago, Illinois Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 20, 2026; Paler-Ponce, 2023).

Table 5 summarizes the City of Chicago's primary city-funded homelessness programs, their administering agencies, and funding levels for FY2026. Funding is concentrated within the Chicago Department of Family and Support Services (City of Chicago, 2025, p. 239, 243, 245, 247, 526; City of Chicago, Illinois Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 20, 2026).

Table 5. City Funding for Homelessness in the City of Chicago, Illinois			
Program	Administering Agency	Total City Funding (\$)	City Funding Type
Homeless Services	Chicago Department of Family and Support Services	\$55,035,497	City Corporate Fund
		\$2,299,314	City Corporate Fund
		\$11,192,277	Houseshare Surcharge – Homeless Services Fund
Transit and Homelessness Support	Chicago Department of Family and Support Services	\$3,200,000	Chicago Transportation Authority (CTA) Funds
Homeless Services for Youth	Chicago Department of Family and Support Services	\$1,540,979	City Corporate Fund
Operating Funds for Administration	Chicago Department of Family and Support Services	\$973,241	Houseshare Surcharge – Homeless Services Fund
Domestic Violence Shelters	Chicago Department of Family and Support Services	\$495,000	City Corporate Fund
Aviation	Chicago Department of Family and Support Services	\$1,255,902	City Corporate Fund
Total Funding			\$75,992,210

Homeless Services is allocated \$68,527,088 in recurring city funding. This is comprised of \$57,334,811 from the City Corporate Fund and \$11,192,277 from the Houseshare Surcharge – Homeless Services Fund (City of Chicago, 2025, p. 243, 245, 247; City of Chicago, Illinois Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 20, 2026). The program funds homeless shelters, street outreach programs, drop-in centers, programs that connect households to shelter, housing programs (e.g., rapid rehousing, permanent supportive housing), and homeless prevention programs (City of Chicago, Illinois Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 20, 2026).

Transit and Homelessness Support is allocated \$3,200,000 in recurring city funding through Chicago Transportation Authority (CTA) Funds (City of Chicago, 2025, p. 539; City of Chicago,

Illinois Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 20, 2026). The program supports two outreach service provider delegates that conduct homelessness outreach and several homeless shelter beds (City of Chicago, Illinois Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 20, 2026).

Homeless Services for Youth is allocated \$1,540,979 in recurring city funding through the City Corporate Fund. This funds programs that focus on youth in the city, including street outreach, drop-in centers, and shelters (City of Chicago, 2025, p. 243; City of Chicago, Illinois Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 20, 2026).

Operating Funds for Administration is allocated \$973,241 in recurring city funding through the Houseshare Surcharge – Homeless Services Fund (City of Chicago, 2025, p. 526; City of Chicago, Illinois Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 20, 2026). This funding supports “housing dedicated for individuals experiencing chronic homelessness and families experiencing homelessness (City of Chicago, Illinois Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 20, 2026).

Domestic Violence Shelters are allocated \$495,000 in recurring city funding through the City Corporate Fund. This provides funding for beds in domestic violence shelters for individuals that are experiencing domestic violence and need shelter (City of Chicago, Illinois Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 20, 2026).

Aviation is allocated \$1,255,902 in recurring city funding through the City Corporate Fund. This provides funding for beds for individuals experiencing homelessness at the O’Hare Line Terminal (City of Chicago, Illinois Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 20, 2026).

Factors That Contributed to Securing Funding

Three key factors that led to an increase in funding for the unhoused are the state government’s emphasis on homelessness prevention, the One System Initiative, and increased advocacy for shelter infrastructure improvements.

First, the state government’s emphasis on homelessness prevention, particularly by catching people “upstream” before they get to a place where they are experiencing homelessness, has enabled the city to secure funding (City of Chicago, Illinois Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 16, 2026). The Illinois Homelessness Prevention Revenue Fund has enabled the city to provide rent, mortgage, and utility assistance for individuals about to experience homelessness. Additionally, the city’s diversion services assist individuals through funding and counseling to resolve housing crises before they enter the Coordinated Entry System (City of Chicago, Illinois Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 16, 2026). The City’s Coordinated Entry System is a centralized process that assesses and prioritizes individuals already experiencing homelessness for housing and services, making upstream prevention and diversion investments critical to reducing strain on the system (City of Chicago, n.d.-b).

Second, Chicago’s homelessness response system underwent significant restructuring following the 2023 surge of individuals being bused into the city from the southern border of the United States, creating an immediate and substantial increase in demand for shelter and services (City of Chicago, Illinois Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 20, 2026; Weber, 2023). In response, the city launched the New Arrivals Mission, an emergency effort designed to provide short-term shelter and support for asylum seekers through intergovernmental coordination,

partnerships with faith-based and philanthropic organizations, and the provision of wraparound services (City of Chicago, Illinois Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 20, 2026; City of Chicago Mayor's Press Office, 2024). As new arrivals and the increased need for shelter slowed, the state and city acknowledged that they needed to condense the shelter system. This resulted in the integration of the systems through the One System Initiative, which integrated services for both newly arrived migrants and longer-term residents experiencing homelessness into a single, coordinated system, reducing fragmentation and aligning resources across both populations (Illinois Department of Human Services, n.d.-j). Prior to this merger, families seeking shelter waited between several days to a week for an available bed (City of Chicago, Illinois Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 20, 2026). However, the city continues to struggle with the availability of housing for single individuals, particularly single men. Although there is lack of community support for this type of intervention, the city is exploring opportunities to address this (City of Chicago, Illinois Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 20, 2026).

Lastly, there has been increased advocacy by non-profit group organizations to allocate funding for shelter infrastructure upgrades. This is due to the identified need to make shelters compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and convert shelter sites from congregate to non-congregate shelter (City of Chicago, Illinois Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 20, 2026). The City of Chicago works closely with the Chicago Coalition to End Homelessness to educate the City Council about the issue of homelessness. In 2024, the Bring Chicago Home referendum was introduced; however, it was rejected by voters (City of Chicago, Illinois Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 16, 2026). The referendum would have restructured real estate taxes to create dedicate revenue to fund services for the unhoused (Wall, 2024).

Role of Philanthropic and Faith-Based Organizations

Service providers in Chicago are primarily funded through city and state resources, with philanthropic and faith-based organizations eligible to apply for municipal grant funding. However, due to grant award caps at the municipal level, the city encourages organizations to diversify their funding streams. As a result, many providers supplement funding with support from philanthropic and faith-based organizations to enhance service delivery and address funding gaps (City of Chicago, Illinois Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 20, 2026).

In 2025, All Chicago launched an Interfaith Collaborative to strengthen the involvement of faith-based organizations within the Continuum of Care (CoC). Faith-based organizations are critical community partners in homelessness related service delivery and often play a key role in building trust and engaging individuals who may not interact with formal service systems. The Interfaith Collaborative aims to improve coordination between faith-based organizations and expand their outreach to individuals experiencing homelessness (City of Chicago, Illinois Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 16, 2026).

Response to NOFO

The City of Chicago has been working closely with the state in response to potential changes in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Continuum of Care (CoC)

Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO). The City of Chicago and the Illinois Office to Prevent and End Homelessness (OPEH) have collaborated to align messaging, determine if funding should be redirected, and identify how to support the city, its delegates, and individuals experiencing homelessness. The city is assessing potential impacts on its delegates and adjusting its response as new information and guidance emerge. Currently, the city anticipates federal funding reductions impacting service provision for permanent supportive housing (City of Chicago, Illinois Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 20, 2026).

City of Chicago: The Five-Year Blueprint on Homelessness 2026-2031 acknowledges the evolving federal landscape. The city has increased local investments in response to potential federal funding reductions and policy changes (City of Chicago, 2026, p. 14). The city has also focused efforts towards homelessness prevention in order to reduce the number of individuals entering the homelessness system (City of Chicago, Illinois Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 16, 2026).

CoCs are preparing providers to adjust case management approaches and program models by shifting resources from permanent supportive housing towards transitional housing. This is driven by the NOFO requirements that limit the proportion of funding that can be allocated to permanent supportive housing. As a result, these changes may destabilize individuals currently in permanent supportive housing and alter the composition of the population experiencing homelessness, rather than addressing the underlying cause (City of Chicago, Illinois Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 16, 2026).

Criminalization of Homelessness

The City of Chicago does not remove encampments “unless there is a safety issue, a policy change, or a project by another City, State or private partner that requires relocation and closure” (Chicago Department of Family and Support Services & Chicago Department of Housing, 2025, p. 21). However, there are policies that indirectly disrupt encampments, such as street and sidewalk cleanings and developing a new bike lane to limit space for tents (City of Chicago, Illinois Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 20, 2026). Furthermore, there are encampment policies that are developed and enforced by state parks. This creates confusion as different city parks implement different policies. Therefore, increased coordination is needed between Illinois State Parks and the Homeless Outreach and Prevention (HOP) team to ensure that individuals are aware of the different policies (City of Chicago, Illinois Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 20, 2026). Moreover, there is increased community pressure about how to address encampments. Some community members are vocal about closing encampments, whereas others recognize the need to bring wraparound services to encampments (City of Chicago, Illinois Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 20, 2026).

The City of Chicago has focused efforts on conducting encampment outreach. The HOP team and delegate agencies are responsible for engaging with individuals living in unsheltered locations (e.g., railroad tracks, bridges, the Chicago River, Chicago Parks) and encampments. They assist individuals in accessing housing and shelter services and coordinating encampment cleanups (City of Chicago, n.d.-c; City of Chicago, Illinois Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 20, 2026). Furthermore, the Chicago Department of Family and Support

Services hosts Accelerated Moving Events (AME). At the events, individuals eligible for housing meet with the service provider and complete the entire matching process in one day rather than over an extended period of time (City of Chicago, Illinois Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 20, 2026; City of Chicago Mayor's Press Office, 2025).

Massachusetts

State Overview

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts had a population of 7,154,084 in 2025, making it the third most densely populated state in the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2026a). In 2025, an estimated 28,196 people in Massachusetts were unhoused (Jankovic, 2025). It is important to note that the 2025 PIT Count is preliminary data based on internal data from local CoCs that was compiled by the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) and reported to Massachusetts Housing Partnership, and has yet to be officially released to the general public (Jankovic, 2025).

Structure of Government

Massachusetts currently has a Democratic trifecta, with Democrat majorities in the state assembly and senate (Ballotpedia, 2026). Similarly to Connecticut and Vermont, Massachusetts operates primarily through the state government and municipal governments. While the state is divided into fourteen geographic counties, only seven have governments, none of which are involved with homelessness services (Massachusetts Citizen Information Service, n.d.).

Unhoused Population Statistics

The 2025 Point-In-Time (PIT) Count accounted for 28,196 people in Massachusetts experiencing homelessness, a decrease from 29,360 in 2024 (Jankovic, 2025).

In 2024, 76% of people experiencing homelessness in Massachusetts were part of families with children experiencing homelessness (Office of Community Planning and Development, 2024, p. 76-79; Office of Policy Development and Research, 2024). Families experienced an increase in homelessness of 74% from 2023 to 2024, while unaccompanied adults experienced an increase of 12% in the same year (Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities, 2025a). Massachusetts is unique in that it is the only state in the U.S. that offers a legal right to shelter for families with children and pregnant people (Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities, 2025a). While this does not apply to individuals, the overall proportion of all people experiencing homelessness who were unsheltered in 2024 was 5.6%, the third lowest in the U.S., behind New York and Vermont (De Sousa & Henry, 2024). Roughly 7% are people experiencing chronic patterns of homelessness (Office of Community Planning and Development, 2024, p. 76-79; Office of Policy Development and Research, 2024).

Of the people experiencing homelessness in 2024, 55% were Black, African American, or African; 31% were White; 30% were Hispanic/Latino, and 2% were multi-racial (Office of Community Planning and Development, 2024, p. 76-79; Office of Policy Development and Research, 2024). This stands in contrast to the overall Massachusetts population, which is roughly 13% Black/African American and 12.6% Hispanic/Latino (Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities, 2025a). Veterans made up roughly 2% of the population experiencing homelessness (Office of Community Planning and Development, 2024, p. 76-79; Office of Policy Development and Research, 2024).

While longstanding demographic trends continue to shape homelessness in Massachusetts, recent migration patterns have added new pressures to an already strained housing and shelter

system. Joyce Tavon, CEO of the Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance, explained, “There was a pretty significant humanitarian migrant crisis, and a lot of desperate families were coming to Massachusetts” (J. Tavon, personal communication, March 20, 2026). Following a steep decline in immigration between 2017-2021, the total number of new immigrants to Massachusetts grew from 16,475 in 2021 to 72,892 in 2022, an increase of more than 342% (Strate et al., 2024). Growth slowed to 2% in 2023 with 74,610 new immigrants, then rose again to 20% with a record-breaking 90,217 new immigrants, the “highest levels of immigration seen since at least 1990.” (Strate et al., 2024). Many new residents arrived in Massachusetts with insufficient resources to secure housing. Between 2023 and 2024, there was roughly a 54% increase in homelessness (Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities, 2025a). This rapid growth has been attributed to a number of federal policy changes, including expansions to the Humanitarian Parole program in January 2023 (Miroff and Sacchetti, 2023).

In response to growing demand for emergency shelter, Governor Maura T. Healey declared a state of emergency on August 8, 2023 citing “rapidly rising numbers of migrant families arriving in Massachusetts in need of shelter and services and a severe lack of shelter availability in the state” (Office of Governor Maura Healey, 2023). This directive led to the allocation of an additional \$85 million for the emergency family shelter system through in the state’s supplemental budget (Damiano, 2023).

While the humanitarian migrant crisis drove an acute homelessness emergency for Massachusetts, additional factors including high costs, stagnant wages, and low vacancies have contributed to rising homelessness over the course of the past decade. Massachusetts had the third highest cost of living among U.S. states in 2025, 41.2% higher than the national average (World Population Review, 2026). Housing prices are particularly high, 96.2% higher than the national average, with the median single family home price in 2024 at \$610,000, (Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities, 2025b). Since 2000, home prices have risen by 73%, while incomes have only grown by 4%, adjusting for inflation (Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities, 2025b). At the same time, housing supply has not kept up with demand, particularly for those seeking to rent. The rental vacancy rate was 3.5% in 2025, after falling to a low of 2.5% in 2023, the lowest in the U.S. for that year (U.S. Census Bureau, 2026b).

Structure of Services

Massachusetts’ legally established right to shelter, as it only applies to pregnant women and families, creates a dual system of homelessness services: one for families and one for unaccompanied adults. This dual structure exists at all levels of need, including prevention, emergency services, and short-term and long-term housing (J. Tavon, personal communication, March 20, 2026).

The primary provider of programs serving people experiencing homelessness is via the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC), formerly the Department of Housing and Community Development before its promotion to cabinet level in 2023 (J. Tavon, personal communication, March 20, 2026). EOHLC functions to expand housing supply, reduce costs for residents across Massachusetts, allocates funding to municipalities, manages the state-supported public housing system, and administers the state’s Emergency Assistance (EA) Family Shelter programs for families and individuals. EOHLC’s programs directly serving people

experiencing homelessness or at risk of experiencing homelessness include homelessness prevention support through rental subsidies and vouchers, temporary, short term, rapid re-housing, and long-term supportive housing supports, housing assistance for individuals transitioning from incarceration, and a flexible aid program (Executive Office for Administration and Finance, 2025).

Massachusetts funds additional homelessness programs through five departments within the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, namely the Executive Office of Aging and Independence, the Department of Public Health, the Department of Mental Health, and the Department of Transitional Assistance (Executive Office for Administration and Finance, 2025). The state also administers homelessness services for veterans through the Executive Office of Veterans Services (Executive Office for Administration and Finance, 2025).

Funding Overview

The total state budget for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for FY2026 was \$60.97 billion of which approximately \$750.65 million was allocated for programs serving people experiencing homelessness (Executive Office for Administration and Finance, 2025). This funding is equivalent to roughly \$26,622 per unhoused person.

The primary source of homelessness funding comes from the state General Fund. Additional Funding comes from the Marijuana Regulation Fund, while a smaller portion comes from the Behavioral Health Outreach, Access and Support Trust Fund (Executive Office for Administration and Finance, 2025). Specific funding allocations for homelessness programs are listed in the table that follows this section.

In addition to state funding, Massachusetts receives substantial federal funding. There are 11 federal CoCs in Massachusetts, which were allocated a total of \$136,303,738 in 2024 (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, n.d.). These funds are allocated to rental assistance and preventative programs, emergency shelters, including those specifically for domestic violence survivors, as well as temporary/short-term housing and permanent/long-term supportive housing. The Balance of State CoC is managed by the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities, while the others are locally administered (Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities, 2026b).

Some of the services associated with permanent supportive housing programs are billable to MassHealth, Massachusetts' Medicaid program. The Community Supportive Program for Homeless Individuals (CSP-HI):

Offers a range of supportive services from intensive housing search to ongoing tenancy supports to help individuals chronically experiencing homelessness or homeless with frequent acute health services successfully transition from homelessness into permanent supportive housing and achieve long-term housing stability. (Massachusetts Housing & Shelter Alliance, 2025)

Currently, the only eligible recipients for the Community Support Program for Homeless Individuals (CSP-HI) are MassHealth members “who have found a permanent supportive housing opportunity and will be moving into that housing within 120 days” (MassHealth, 2025).

However, a staff member at the Boston Public Health Commission's Homelessness Services Bureau says there is work being done to expand the services covered to include "housing search navigation and case management" in addition (Boston Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 16, 2026).

Table 6. State Funding for Homelessness in Massachusetts			
Program	Administering Agency	Total State Funding (\$)	State Funding Source
Emergency Assistance Family Shelters and Services	Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities	\$276,421,903	General Fund
Homeless Individual Shelters	Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities	\$113,327,398	General Fund
Home and Healthy for Good Program	Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities	\$8,890,000	General Fund
Sponsor-Based Permanent Supportive Housing	Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities	\$10,072,875	General Fund
New Lease for Homeless Families Program	Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities	\$250,000	General Fund
Local Housing Program Earmarks	Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities	\$600,000*	General Fund
HomeBASE	Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities	\$57,322,001	General Fund
Homeless Individuals Rapid Re-Housing Program	Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities	\$5,000,000	General Fund
Housing Assistance for Re-Entry Transition	Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities	\$3,120,000	General Fund
Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT)	Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities	\$207,477,715	General Fund

Elder Homeless Placement	Executive Office of Aging and Independence (Executive Office of Health and Human Services)	\$286,000	General Fund
Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Services	Office of the Secretary of Health and Human Services (Executive Office of Health and Human Services)	\$10,645,850	General Fund
Safe and Successful Youth Initiative	Office of the Secretary of Health and Human Services (Executive Office of Health and Human Services)	\$500,000*	General Fund
Bureau of Substance Addiction Services	Department of Public Health (Executive Office of Health and Human Services)	\$7,500,000*	General Fund (28.88%) Marijuana Regulation Fund (71.12%)
Statewide Homelessness Support Services	Department of Mental Health (Executive Office of Health and Human Services)	\$26,709,879	General Fund (98.55%) Behavioral Health Outreach, Access and Support Trust Fund (1.45%)
Adult Mental Health and Support Services	Department of Mental Health (Executive Office of Health and Human Services)	\$250,000*	General Fund (98.55%) Behavioral Health Outreach, Access and Support Trust Fund (1.45%)
Secure Jobs Connect	Department of Transitional Assistance (Executive Office of Health and Human Services)	\$5,000,000*	General Fund
Veterans' Outreach Centers Including Homeless Shelters	Executive Office of Veterans Services	\$8,800,000*	General Fund

Assistance to Homeless Veterans	Executive Office of Veterans Services	\$4,636,315	General Fund
New England Shelter for Homeless Veterans	Executive Office of Veterans Services	\$3,843,750	General Fund
Total Funding			\$750,653,686

*Partial dollars exclusively for homeless programs have been separated from total line-item dollars.

Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities

For fiscal year 2026, the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities' total enacted budget was \$1.1 billion (Executive Office for Administration and Finance, 2025). Approximately \$682.5 million, or 59.2%, were allocated to fund 21 different programs serving people experiencing homelessness. Below is a detailed outline of these programs and its respective funding allocations.

EOHLC offers several rental subsidy and voucher programs, as well as the flexible aid program, Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT). RAFT is the second largest funded program for homelessness resources, receiving \$207,477,715 in FY26, and is known to be “among the most utilized government assistance programs” in the state (Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities, 2025). Rental assistance has been a critical tool for preventing homelessness, and a focus of organizations such as the Massachusetts Coalition to End Homelessness, says Associate Director Kelly Turley. She credits the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program as inspiration for the Federal Section 8 program (K. Turley, personal communication, April 2, 2026).

Massachusetts's emergency shelter programs for both individuals and families are administered by EOHLC. The Emergency Assistance (EA) Family Shelters and Services program “funds emergency shelter placements as well as homelessness prevention, diversion, and rehousing supports for eligible families” (Executive Office for Administration and Finance, 2025). Family shelters are the largest funded program by the EOHLC, totaling \$276,421,903 for FY2026 (Executive Office for Administration and Finance, 2025).

As the number of people experiencing homelessness rose rapidly, “the Emergency Assistance (EA) system reached its 7,500-household cap for the first time since the inception of the right-to-shelter law” in November 2023 (Jankovic, 2025). In response to the systems being over capacity, changes were made to the Emergency Assistance Family Shelters and Services program requirements in 2025. A plan was set to reduce the cap to 4,000 by the end of the year. Families would newly be required to prove eligibility before being placed in a shelter and would now be subject to a maximum length of stay of 6 months, where there previously was none (Jankovic, 2025).

EOHLC also administers the Homeless Individuals Assistance program, which “pays providers for shelter, transitional housing, and services to help individuals avoid shelter entry or exit shelter quickly” (Executive Office for Administration and Finance, 2025). It's the third largest funded program, receiving \$113,327,398 in FY2026. The individual shelter system relies on non-profit

organizations to fill funding gaps much more than family shelters do, according to Tavon (J. Tavon, personal communication, March 20, 2026).

EOHLC also administers temporary/short-term housing programs both for families and for individuals. HomeBASE “provides short-term housing help and stabilization services to move eligible families out of emergency shelter and into stable housing” (Executive Office for Administration and Finance, 2025). HomeBASE is the fourth largest funded program by the EOHLC, receiving \$57,322,001 in FY2026 (Executive Office for Administration and Finance, 2025).

The Homeless Individual Rapid Re-Housing Program, which received \$5,000,000 for FY2026, “funds rapid rehousing supports to move individuals from homelessness to permanent housing (through contracted shelter providers)” (Executive Office for Administration and Finance, 2025). Long-term supportive housing programs administered by EOHLC include the sponsor-based Permanent Supportive Housing Program, \$10,072,875, and the Home and Healthy for Good program, \$8,890,000, which work to reduce chronic/long-term homelessness, including targeted support for LGBTQ+ unaccompanied young adults (Executive Office for Administration and Finance, 2025).

Executive Office of Health and Human Services

Separately from EOHLC, the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) administers seven homelessness service programs targeting specific populations.

The Department of Mental Health administers Statewide Homelessness Support Services, with a budget of over \$26,000,000 (Executive Office for Administration and Finance, 2025). Housing support in this program requires that recipients accept mental health services as well, a distinction from programs within EOHLC that Tavon identified as a barrier to access for some (J. Tavon, personal communication, March 20, 2026).

Within the Department of Public Health, the Bureau of Substance Addiction Services allocates \$7.5 million of its budget toward “expanding low-threshold housing, employing a ‘Housing First’ model, for homeless individuals with substance use and mental health disorders at risk of HIV” (Executive Office for Administration and Finance, 2025).

The Office of the Secretary of Health and Human Services administers the Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Services program, allocating over \$10 million for “prevention and rehousing services” (Executive Office for Administration and Finance, 2025). Additionally, as part of the Safe and Successful Youth Initiative, \$500,000 was also appropriated to a variety of supportive services designated for LGBTQ+ homeless youth (Executive Office for Administration and Finance, 2025).

The Executive Office of Aging and Independence, administratively housed under the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, administers the Elder Homeless Placement program, supporting homeless and at-risk older adults (Executive Office for Administration and Finance, 2025).

Executive Office of Veteran Services

The Executive Office of Veterans' Services (EOVS) plays a central role in administering homelessness services for veterans. In FY2026, approximately \$17.3 million is allocated to support a range of services, including shelter and housing assistance as well as behavioral health care delivered through case management networks (Executive Office for Administration and Finance, 2025). In recent years, Massachusetts has demonstrated a sustained commitment to supporting veterans and reducing homelessness among this population.

In 2024, Governor Healey launched the End Veterans Homelessness campaign, alongside the introduction of the HERO Act (An Act Honoring, Empowering, and Recognizing Our Servicemembers and Veterans). The campaign represents a coordinated effort between EOVS and the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) to identify all veterans experiencing homelessness, implement evidence-based prevention and intervention strategies, and ultimately reach functional zero (Governor Healey Proposes Significant Changes to Right to Shelter Law, 2025). A key component of this effort is the HOPE program, a rapid rehousing initiative funded at \$7 million over 30 months. Similar in structure to the federal Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) program, HOPE combines direct street outreach with coordinated efforts to identify veterans experiencing homelessness, provide housing counseling, and deliver case management and housing search services. The program also supports veterans through the voucher application process, offers case navigation, and connects individuals to wraparound services to promote long-term housing stability (Massachusetts Interviewee 3, personal communication, April 10, 2026).

The HERO Act also expanded and modernized the state's Chapter 115 program, a longstanding safety net for Massachusetts veterans. With an FY2026 budget of \$81.8 million, Chapter 115 is notable for its flexibility in addressing a wide range of needs, including daily living expenses, medical costs, rental assistance, dependent support, and behavioral health services. It can also support homelessness prevention and response efforts, such as emergency hotel stays and move-in costs for veterans exiting homelessness (Executive Office of Veterans Services, 2025)

While it is difficult to isolate the exact portion of Chapter 115 funding dedicated specifically to homelessness services, insights from the HERO Act highlight several relevant enhancements. These include expanded access to outpatient behavioral health care through reimbursement, an increase in the Disabled Veteran Annuity from \$2,000 to \$2,500 for eligible individuals, greater local flexibility to expand property tax exemptions, and an updated definition of "veteran" that aligns with federal standards. Together, these changes strengthen the state's capacity to prevent and address veteran homelessness within a broader system of support (Massachusetts Interviewee 3, personal communication, April 10, 2026).

Factors Contributing to Funding

Massachusetts has historically been among the strongest funders of homelessness services in the U.S., a source of pride and part of Massachusetts' progressive state identity, as noted by Kelly Turley, Associate Director of Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless. (K. Turley, personal communication, April 2, 2026). In Governor Healey's emergency declaration letter, she

said that many families are drawn to Massachusetts “because we are and proudly have been a beacon to those in need” (Office of Governor Maura Healey, 2023). Still, funding is still not sufficient to provide adequate resources for the entire unhoused population. Advocacy, led by the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless, the Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance, and their partner organizations, focuses both on traditional policy campaigns as well as systems change work to increase funding to fully meet existing need, and to improve the efficiency of how resources are used (J. Tavon, personal communication, March 20, 2026).

With several agencies investing significantly in homelessness services, Massachusetts’ record shows ongoing attention on the issue. There exists a robust, lasting network of advocates and providers working to address and reduce homelessness from all angles and in multiple fields of service (Massachusetts Housing & Shelter Alliance, n.d.).

Role of Cities

Massachusetts’ largest city and state capital is Boston, with a population of 673,458 in 2024 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024c). Surrounding the Greater Boston area are Massachusetts’ “gateway cities,” former major industrial areas now facing increased poverty and the difficult housing market (Brinker, 2025). Tavon described an “uneven” landscape, created by a “system that depends on the nonprofits to step forward” (J. Tavon, personal communication, March 20, 2026). While some of these cities have strong nonprofit organizations administering shelters, supportive housing, or other assistance, some do not, which stands in stark contrast to the shelter system administered by the city of Boston itself. In fact, Boston’s unsheltered homelessness PIT Count was lower in 2024 than that of Fall River, a city one-seventh its size. (J. Tavon, personal communication, March 20, 2026; U.S. Census Bureau, 2024c; U.S. Census Bureau, 2024d).

Movement among Massachusetts’ many municipalities, particularly displacement out of Boston, has led to an increased emphasis on a “more regional approach,” notes Turley, both “to make sure that the resources are shared, but also that people don’t get lost when they’re crossing the Charles River and going between cities” (K. Turley, personal communication, April 2, 2026).³

Role of Philanthropic and Faith-Based Organizations

Non-profit, philanthropic, and faith-based organizations as well as private donors serve a critical role in homelessness services (J. Tavon, personal communication, March 20, 2026). They provide both upstream and downstream services. In particular, the Massachusetts Housing & Shelter Alliance (MHSA), a statewide alliance of 100 community-based organizations dedicated to providing solutions to end homelessness, plays a critical role in advocating for the rights of unhoused individuals (Massachusetts Housing & Shelter Alliance, n.d.). Additionally, the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless partners with service providers and government agencies on several projects, and advocates for systemic policy change at the state level (Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless, n.d.).

³ See “City of Boston, Massachusetts” for more information about Boston’s role in addressing homelessness.

Response to NOFO

Massachusetts began to seek HUD CoC funding relatively early compared to other states and thus has been disproportionately reliant on it for a longer period of time (J. Tavon, personal communication, March 20, 2026). The state now has 11 CoC networks, receiving a total of over \$136 million annually (Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance, 2026). A February 2026 update from MHSA highlights the impact of the shifting policy agenda of HUD: “The 2025 NOFO made it clear HUD is moving away from evidence-based supportive housing models – which have been used by HUD for many years with bipartisan support – toward criminalization of homelessness and shorter-term services that typically do not provide enough support to prevent someone from returning to homelessness,” (Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance, 2026).

There is urgent concern about the loss of funding for programs that people who were previously homeless rely on to stay in their homes. Much of the HUD funding currently funds preventative and long-term support services, such as rental assistance, that support vulnerable residents after they leave emergency shelters and short-term housing programs and are proven to reduce chronic homelessness (Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance, 2026). People with disabilities will disproportionately be impacted as well, as two-thirds of total CoC funding in MA (\$91 million) is currently allocated for supportive housing for people with disabilities who have experienced homelessness, including through rent support for over 3,800 households (Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance, 2026).

In order to prepare for the expected reduction in funding, agencies, service providers, and advocates are working to stabilize service provision and to leverage flexibility to find alternative resources. This is not an individual issue for each CoC and provider, Tavon emphasized, but rather a statewide challenge, requiring collaboration and “contingency work on many fronts” to solve (J. Tavon, personal communication, March 20, 2026).

Criminalization of Homelessness

Although Massachusetts has a strong network of resources and supports for people experiencing homelessness, it does not have a Homeless Bill of Rights. For the last 12 years, the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless and its partners and allies have advocated for a Bill of Rights for people experiencing homelessness (K. Turley, personal communication, April 2, 2026). While they have been met with barriers in each legislative session, the campaign continues (K. Turley, personal communication, April 2, 2026).

Criminalization efforts exist primarily at the municipal level. Encampment bans have passed in Boston, Salem, Brockton, Lowell, Somerset, and Fall River, and have been proposed elsewhere (Brinker, 2025). Outcomes to proposed criminalization efforts have varied across and within communities. Turley described “some signs of hope, where communities have rejected [homelessness criminalization] efforts that have come before their city councils or town meetings” (K. Turley, personal communication, April 2, 2026).

The Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless supported the National Homelessness Law Center’s development of the Gloria Johnson Act, template legislation designed to help states and municipalities proactively codify protections for people experiencing homelessness in the

face of the Supreme Court decision in *City of Grants Pass v. Johnson* (Housing Not Handcuffs, 2025).

City of Boston, Massachusetts

The City of Boston's administration of homelessness services is shaped not only by the consistently substantive funding from the Massachusetts state government, but by historic and innovative programs that have set a standard for cities across the US. Two particularly notable programs highlighted here are Boston's City Safety Net of low-threshold shelters and the Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program.

City Overview

The City of Boston has an estimated population of 673,458 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024d). According to the 2025 Point-In-Time (PIT) Count, the city's estimated unhoused population was 5,506 (Mayor's Office of Housing, 2025). This translates to approximately 0.82% of Boston's total population.

Structure of Government

For the last five years, The City of Boston has been led by Democratic Mayor Michelle Wu (Mayor's Office, 2026). The City Council is the legislative body of the City of Boston. Elected biannually, there are four at large city counselors that represent the entire city, and nine district counselors that represent specific areas in the City of Boston (City Council, 2026).

Unhoused Population Statistics

The City of Boston's 2025 homelessness census identified 5,506 individuals experiencing homelessness, representing a 4.3% decrease from 2024 (Mayor's Office of Housing, 2025). This decline was driven primarily by reductions among families, while the number of single adults in shelter increased slightly (Mayor's Office of Housing, 2025).

Boston continues to stand out for its low rate of unsheltered homelessness. In 2025, approximately 2.4% of the city's unhoused population was unsheltered, far below the national average of 35.5%. Since 2007, Boston has reduced unsheltered homelessness by 56.9%, even as unsheltered homelessness has increased nationally by 7.2% (Mayor's Office of Housing, 2025).

However, service provider perspectives suggest that recent declines in homelessness do not reflect reduced system strain. The Homelessness Services Bureau "went from being significantly over capacity to just normal over capacity", and although migrant overflow has significantly decreased since January 2025, shelters remain "dangerously over capacity" (Boston Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 16, 2026).

According to a 2023 analysis of the homelessness landscape in the Greater Boston area, Black residents disproportionately experience higher rates of homelessness compared to Latino, White and Asian groups (Ciurczak et al., 2024). In 2023, although Black residents made up about 8% of the Greater Boston area, an estimated 52% of the unhoused population were Black (Ciurczak et al., 2024). In terms of age groups, the analysis found that youth under the age of 18, both unaccompanied and part of families, experienced the highest rates of homelessness in the Greater Boston area, making up approximately 31% of the unhoused population (Ciurczak et al., 2024).

Structure of Services

Boston's Homeless Services Bureau (HSB) is under the jurisdiction of the Boston Public Health Commission. Its services include emergency shelter, housing, behavioral health, workforce development, harm reduction, triage, and community engagement (Budget Management Office, 2025).

A primary focus of HSB's work is the direct management of "a congregational shelter system of approximately 600 beds per night across two sex-segregated shelters" (Boston Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 16, 2026). They do not turn anyone away, even if they are at bed capacity, and supply the cafeteria and other overflow space with chairs and mats to ensure that anyone seeking shelter can be in a safe, temperature-controlled space, as well as access to the range of services BPHC provides (Boston Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 16, 2026). The shelters "operate at the lowest possible threshold, having very few admission barriers," serving "as the city safety net for those who may not be able to access more traditional congregate shelter settings" (Boston Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 16, 2026).

The Mayor's Office of Housing (MOH) Supportive Housing Division is the lead agency for the Boston Continuum of Care, as well as Boston's Homeless Management Information System and Coordinated Entry program (Mayor's Office of Housing, 2026; Boston Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 9, 2026). A staff member at the MOH Supportive Housing Division described the division's role as primarily "policy planning and resourcing of housing pathways for people that are experiencing homelessness in Boston" (Boston Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 9, 2026). The breadth of issues addressed by MOH has led the office to "collaborate really closely with all of our nonprofit partners, shelter agency, street outreach, and other non-profit providers that are working in the space with a focus on housing interventions" (Boston Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 9, 2026).

The Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program (BHCHP) began with a 1985 grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, which Boston received along with 18 other cities, following a needs assessment conducted the prior year by a community coalition of homelessness service providers, healthcare providers, governments, and advocates (O'Connell et al., 2010). In 1987, the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act made BHCHP a federally qualified health center, funded by the Health Resources and Services Administration's Bureau of Primary Health Care (Office of Policy Development and Research, 2012). There are over 200 similar programs across the US (O'Connell et al., 2010). BHCHP is now a team of 600 staff and service providers, with over 30 clinic sites (Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program, 2026). BHCHP provides behavioral health and medical care services, family and youth services, case management, and specialized services for targeted populations including veterans, people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, and people living with HIV and/or Hepatitis C (Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program, 2026).

Funding Overview

The city of Boston's total budget for FY2026 was \$4.8 billion (Budget Management Office, 2025a). Roughly 71.7% of Boston's revenue is property taxes, 16.7% is local revenue, 10.8% is state aid, and 0.8% is non-recurring aid (Budget Management Office, 2025a).

The FY2026 operating budget for the Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC) was \$145,073,120.40, of which 9%, or 50.7 million, was federally funded (Budget Management Office, 2025b). From the BPHC budget, \$13,528,856 or less than 1% was allocated to the Homeless Services Bureau (HSB) (Budget Management Office, 2025b). HSB is primarily funded by the state, approximately 90.53%, with the City of Boston spending an estimated \$1,281,604 or 9.47% (Budget Management Office, 2025b). This equates to an estimated \$232.77 spent per unhoused individual, when taking the 2025 PIT Count into account.

The Mayor's Office of Housing also contributes funding toward specific homelessness programs. Primary contributions include funding for the Youth Housing Navigator, whose role is dedicated to assisting people ages 18-24 in their process of finding safe housing, as well as the peer navigation program, which "employs people with lived experience to help people that are in shelter" (Boston Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 9, 2026).

Separately, the federal government allocated roughly \$48 million to the Boston CoC in 2025 (Department of Housing, 2025).

Table 7 summarizes the BPHC and Mayor's Office of Housing homelessness programs and funding levels for FY2026.

Table 7. City Funding for Homelessness in Boston, Massachusetts			
Program (or line item?)	Managing Agency/ Department	Funding Amount (\$) - City	Funding Type
Long Term Stayers Housing	Boston Public Health Commission - Homeless Services Bureau (HSB)	\$587,544	CITY – BPHC (and FED – US HUD not shown)
PSI Housing Works	Boston Public Health Commission - Homeless Services Bureau (HSB)	\$301,560	CITY – BPHC (and FED – US HUD not shown)
Peer Housing Navigators	Boston Public Health Commission - Homeless Services Bureau (HSB)	\$270,000	CITY -- Mayor's Office of Housing
Youth Housing Navigator	Boston Public Health Commission -	\$122,500	CITY -- Mayor's Office of Housing

	Homeless Services Bureau (HSB)		
Total Funding			\$1,281,604

Factors that Contributed to Securing Funding

The City of Boston has a similar philosophy around homelessness response to Massachusetts as a whole. Boston’s homelessness funding is shaped not only by the scale of state support, but by coordination across funding streams. City and state partners work collaboratively to align federal Continuum of Care (CoC), state, and local resources (Boston Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 9, 2026).

In addition to this funding coordination, Boston has embedded homelessness response into its housing development strategy. Through its long-standing “homeless set-aside” policy, the City requires a portion of units in larger residential developments to be reserved for individuals and families exiting homelessness. This policy has produced over 2,200 dedicated units and serves as a critical mechanism for scaling permanent housing placements (Boston Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 9, 2026). Together, these strategies illustrate how Boston leverages both funding alignment and housing policy tools to sustain its homelessness response system.

Response to NOFO

"Contingency planning" for the 2026 NOFO began in late 2025, when discussions first began regarding which programs to prioritize in the face of cuts (Boston Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 9, 2026).

The MOH Supportive Housing Division is leveraging existing relationships with the Boston Housing Authority, which already offers preferential support for people graduating from supportive housing programs, to explore more potential options for those “clients that are in PSH that are stable and could potentially move on to other housing opportunities” (Boston Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 9, 2026). The office also works with federally funded affordable housing developers through a partnership with the New Lease for Homeless Families and hopes to expand to similar "move-on programs" for individuals (Boston Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 9, 2026). PSH case managers are receiving increased training, “so they can start getting their clients on lists if they aren't already on sort of BHA [Boston Housing Authority] lists or other affordable housing lists” (Boston Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 9, 2026).

As a general rule, there is a critical need for solidifying requirements for CoC and PSH providers to bill Medicaid for eligible services (Boston Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 9, 2026). Boston is also seeking to strategically leverage Massachusetts's consistent and substantial funding for emergency shelter, street outreach, and other related programs, to fill gaps lost from HUD (Boston Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 9, 2026).

HSB's primary focus on emergency shelter may leave it "slightly in a better position" compared to agencies that largely focus on permanent supportive housing programs, which are facing the bulk of HUD's proposed targeted cuts (Boston Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 16, 2026). Still, HSB's role in the ecosystem of Boston's homelessness services will be impacted by funding cuts to permanent supportive housing. The increase in attention on transitional housing models could offer flexibility from which HSB could further utilize its own unique resources. The Boston city shelter system, and the physical spaces it provides, offer the potential such that "maybe a congregate transitional housing model is something that is an option for us, that may not be an option for others" (Boston Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 16, 2026). Still, despite the efforts to mitigate the impacts of funding cuts, HSB anticipates "significant risk, significant hazard for most of our folks" (Boston Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 16, 2026). Specifically: "Either we'll be seeing an organic rise in homelessness because of those things, or we'll be seeing our clients who are in permanent, supportive housing now returning to homelessness, unfortunately, which we would like to avoid" (Boston Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 16, 2026).

Role of Philanthropic and Faith-Based Organizations

Similarly to the rest of Massachusetts, non-profit organizations are essential partners for Boston's homelessness programs. Each CoC is required to match 25% of its HUD funding, and while each provider and program varies, philanthropic organizations sometimes assist in meeting those match requirements (Boston Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 9, 2026).

Other city programs rely on partnerships with nonprofits to providing services, including healthcare, short- and long-term supportive housing, and much of the shelter system outside of the city-run shelters. Pine Street Inn is a notable partner, with a street outreach team, four shelters, 40 supportive housing locations, and many more services including workforce development, recovery services, and legal support (Pine Street Inn, n.d.) Friends of Boston's Homeless runs several Community Supportive Housing Programs as well as Housing and Career Start-Up Funds (Friends of Boston's Homeless, n.d.). Bridge Over Troubled Waters and Youth to Youth both partner with Boston for services for young people experiencing homelessness (Bridge Over Troubled Waters, n.d.; Youth to Youth Network, n.d.).

Criminalization of Homelessness

The intersection "Mass. and Cass" is considered Boston's "epicenter" both for unsheltered homelessness and for drug use, as an area with a "high concentration of treatment programs and shelters" (Boston Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 9, 2026 and Becker, 2025). People who are not unhoused come to the area for drug use, and the unsheltered population and drug-using population in Mass and Cass, while overlapping, are distinct (Boston Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 9, 2026). The safety net shelter programs have brought essential services to the community, while the city has worked through challenges as the shelters operate as part of the residential community. With a focus on diversion, the city of Boston seeks to balance the rights and wellbeing of people experiencing homelessness with broader community interests, particularly relating to drug use in public spaces (Boston Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 16, 2026). In the case of public illicit drug use,

Boston police are expected to connect with the Mayor's Office's Coordinated Response Team, to offer alternatives to arrest, including BPHC treatment programs as well as the lower-threshold shelters (Boston Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 16, 2026).

Rhode Island

State Overview

Rhode Island has a state population of 1.11 million people according to the 2025 Census (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.-e). According to the 2025 Point-In-Time (PIT) Count, conducted by the Rhode Island Coalition to End Homelessness, Rhode Island identified 2,373 people as being homeless (Rhode Island Coalition to end Homelessness, 2025).

Structure of Government

Rhode Island is a Democratic trifecta; the governorship, state senate and the state house are controlled by the Democratic party (Ballotpedia, n.d.). The Rhode Island General Assembly has a total of 113 people which consists of 75 members in the House of Representatives and 38 members in the senate. Dan McKee is the current governor (Rhode Island General Assembly, 2021).

Unhoused Population Statistics

Between 2020 and 2024, the number of adults experiencing homelessness in Rhode Island rose from 723 to 1,565, while family homelessness increased from 381 to 877, demonstrating that both individual and family populations grew (City of Providence, 2025). Chronic homelessness also grew during the same time period; from 226 to 936 persons, indicating a growing proportion of individuals with long-term housing instability (City of Providence, 2025). Based on the 2025 Point-In-Time (PIT) Count, 2,373 persons in Rhode Island were experiencing homelessness, representing a 2.8% decrease from 2024, and the first overall decrease in total homelessness since 2019 (Shea, 2025). However, this topline decrease masks more concerning underlying trends. The number of unsheltered individuals increased by more than 15%, with many of those individuals also classified as chronically homeless (Shea, 2025). While total homelessness may have recently declined slightly, growth within chronic homelessness and within unsheltered homelessness continue to be significant components of Rhode Island's overall trend. As a result, individuals with the highest needs are prioritized for limited housing placements, while others remain unsheltered or experience longer durations of homelessness (Housing Network of Rhode Island, personal communication, March 19, 2026).

The demographic composition of Rhode Island's unhoused population reflects the disproportionate impact of homelessness on communities of color, with Black (24%); Hispanic/Latino (25%); and mixed-race (10%) individuals accounting for a majority of the unhoused. Twenty-two percent of the individuals experiencing homelessness in Rhode Island were unsheltered, the largest percentage of the five states. Veterans accounted for 5 percent of the unhoused and families for 36 percent (HUD, 2024–2025).

There is growing acknowledgement in Rhode Island that homelessness intersects directly with public health and safety. Service providers in the state identified limited affordable housing availability, rising housing costs, and housing production constraints as major contributors to housing instability and homelessness (Housing Network of Rhode Island, personal communication, March 19, 2026). At the same time, many residents have struggled to keep pace with increasing housing costs, further increasing the risk of homelessness. According to

service providers, there is a large correlation between instability of housing and health-related concerns, such as physical and mental health issues (Rhode Island Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 14, 2026). Those who are homeless are more likely to be diagnosed with physical illnesses and/or mental illnesses, chronic medical conditions, and substance abuse disorders. Many of these diagnoses are due to housing instability (Crossroads Rhode Island, 2025).

State agencies in Rhode Island have begun to respond through more integrated approaches, including coordination with behavioral health and transportation services. In addition, while the amount of specific state-wide data available that directly links crime to those who are homeless is limited, there is broader research that shows that a disproportionate number of people who are homeless are involved with the justice system because of their mental health or substance abuse and as a result, are likely to be victims (R Street Institute, 2024). Other research shows that those who are homeless are at a much higher risk of being a victim of crime when compared to those who do not experience homelessness (Nilsson et al., 2020).

Overall, the composition of homelessness in this most recent period has remained relatively consistent with earlier structural patterns, however, a growing number of populations are experiencing the effects of rising housing costs and housing instability. Black and Hispanic/Latino residents continue to be disproportionately represented within the homeless population compared to their share of Rhode Island's overall population, highlighting the ongoing structural inequities that shape both access to stable housing and long-term economic security within the state (HUD, 2024–2025). While single adults still make up the majority of individuals counted in the Point-In-Time surveys, family homelessness remains a significant concern, particularly because families are often more vulnerable to sudden disruptions in temporary or transitional housing arrangements. Taken together, these trends demonstrate how Rhode Island's homelessness landscape in 2026 is being increasingly driven by broader housing market pressures, while longstanding structural disparities continue to place the same vulnerable populations at heightened risk over time (HUD, 2024–2025).

Funding Overview

The homelessness funding landscape in Rhode Island is characterized by a hybrid model that combines state appropriations with a heavy reliance on federal funding streams and capital investments. While state leadership has demonstrated a willingness to invest in housing and homelessness programs, Rhode Island's smaller tax base limits the scale of available funding, leaving the system structurally dependent on federal and non-recurring resources. This equates to approximately \$8,553 in state funding per unhoused individual.

At the core of the state's funding structure is approximately \$20.29 million in annual state spending dedicated to homelessness services (Rhode Island Executive Office of Housing, personal communication, April 10, 2026). This funding is primarily distributed through the Consolidated Homeless Fund, which serves as the state's main mechanism for funding direct services (e.g., emergency shelter, outreach, supportive programs, housing problem-solving). However, this level of funding reflects a notable decline from pandemic-era levels. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Consolidated Homeless Fund operated at roughly \$4 million annually

but expanded significantly to approximately \$40 million at its peak due to temporary federal relief sources, including State Fiscal Recovery Funds and Emergency Rental Assistance. As these temporary resources expired, funding levels declined from pandemic-era highs; however, Rhode Island has still increased its long-term investment in the Consolidated Homeless Fund to nearly five times its pre-pandemic level in order to help address ongoing homelessness needs (Rhode Island Executive Office of Housing, personal communication, April 10, 2026). Within the broader budget context, homelessness funding represents only a small portion of the state's total budget (Office of Management and Budget, 2026). Given Rhode Island's smaller overall budget and tax base, even with strong policy interest and legislative support, the total amount of funding that can be dedicated to these programs remains limited. As a result, federal funding continues to play a critical and stabilizing role in Rhode Island's homelessness response system. Allocations through HUD's Continuum of Care (CoC) program support key functions such as rapid rehousing. These resources are essential to maintaining system capacity, particularly for long term housing solutions. Rhode Island's housing and homelessness funding model can be further characterized across three primary categories.

First, state general fund appropriations provide limited but consistent baseline support, primarily through the Consolidated Homeless Fund.

Second, special and dedicated funding sources, most notably housing bonds and conveyance tax revenues, play a major role in financing housing development and preservation. The state has passed multiple housing bonds in recent years, including a \$120 million bond aligned with its strategic housing plan, with additional bond initiatives under consideration (Governor's Office, State of Rhode Island, 2025). These investments, largely administered through Rhode Island Housing, have enabled substantial capital deployment for affordable housing production and preservation. Because bonds are not recurring revenue sources, they do not typically support ongoing service delivery; however, this year, Rhode Island is addressing this by dedicating \$5 million of the housing bond to a revolving loan fund to help provide more continuous support (Rhode Island Executive Office of Housing, personal communication, April 10, 2026).

Third, federal and other temporary funding sources, particularly those expanded during the COVID-19 pandemic, have filled critical gaps but are unreliable over the long term due to their temporary nature. Altogether, Rhode Island's funding structure reflects a multifaceted funding landscape. On the one hand, the state has demonstrated strong commitment through creative financing mechanisms, legislative action, and the strategic use of federal funds. At the same time, while the system continues to rely on non-recurring funding streams and federal support, Rhode Island has taken steps to strengthen sustainability through dedicated revenue tools such as the conveyance tax, a fee collected when property is sold or transferred which helps fund housing programs, homelessness prevention efforts, and municipal services. The increase in the conveyance tax rate from 0.46% to 0.75% in 2025 further reflects an effort to generate more consistent, long-term funding to support system stability and growth (Rhode Island Conveyance Tax, 2025).

Table 8 summarizes the state's primary funding for homelessness programs and funding recipients for FY2026(Rhode Island Executive Office of Housing, 2024).

Table 8. FY2026 Rhode Island Consolidated Homeless Fund (CHF) Allocations		
CHF Recipient	Administering Agency	FY2026 Allocation (\$)
Amos House	Executive Office of Housing	\$4,951,665.60
Better Lives RI	Executive Office of Housing	\$605,800.00
Blackstone Valley Advocacy Center	Executive Office of Housing	\$481,466.67
Catholic Social Services	Executive Office of Housing	\$720,000.00
Child and Family	Executive Office of Housing	\$134,265.00
Community Care Alliance	Executive Office of Housing	\$819,670.21
Crossroads RI	Executive Office of Housing	\$4,554,589.90
DV Resource Center	Executive Office of Housing	\$60,500.00
Elizabeth Buffum Chace Center	Executive Office of Housing	\$198,000.00
Family Services of Rhode Island	Executive Office of Housing	\$375,000.00
Foster Forward	Executive Office of Housing	\$211,722.98
Haus of Codec	Executive Office of Housing	\$163,283.56
House of Hope	Executive Office of Housing	\$1,196,027.47
Lucy's Hearth	Executive Office of Housing	\$824,591.97
McCauley Ministries	Executive Office of Housing	\$55,270.11
Newport Mental Health	Executive Office of Housing	\$210,233.07
Open Doors	Executive Office of Housing	\$1,832,700.10
Pawtucket Housing Authority	Executive Office of Housing	\$190,414.00
Rhode Island Coalition to End Homelessness	Executive Office of Housing	\$478,000.00
Sojourner House	Executive Office of Housing	\$668,007.00
Rhode Island Legal Services	Executive Office of Housing	\$400,000.00
Thrive	Executive Office of Housing	\$270,000.00
Turning Around Ministries	Executive Office of Housing	\$53,000.00
Washington Square Services Corp	Executive Office of Housing	\$145,000.00
WARM	Executive Office of Housing	\$1,180,000.00
Total Funding		\$20,297,740

Structure of Services

There are two primary agencies in Rhode Island's housing and homelessness system: the Rhode Island Executive Office of Housing and Rhode Island Housing.

The Executive Office of Housing serves as the primary agency for overseeing and administering homelessness programs and services. It manages key funding streams such as the Consolidated Homeless Fund and is responsible for aligning state and federal resources to support shelter, housing problem solving, and supportive services. It works closely with the Rhode Island Coalition to End Homelessness, which plays a critical supporting role by managing the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), leading data collection efforts, and operating the coordinated entry system used for housing placements (Rhode Island Executive Office of Housing, personal communication, April 10, 2026).

Rhode Island Housing serves as the primary agency for housing finance and Continuum of Care (CoC) coordination. It acts as the collaborative applicant for the Continuum of Care (CoC), oversees planning processes, and manages affordable housing development, bond financing, and the administration of key programs such as housing vouchers and federal housing funds, including in municipalities without local housing authorities (Rhode Island Housing, 2026). However, it is not responsible for direct program administration. In terms of service access, Rhode Island has recently transitioned away from a fully centralized coordinated entry system to a hybrid model. While coordinated entry is still used for housing placements, shelter referrals are now managed through a Regional Access Network, which provides decentralized, in person entry points with case management to better connect individuals to shelter, housing, and services (Rhode Island Executive Office of Housing, personal communication, April 10, 2026). Although this shift has improved accessibility and reduced barriers to entry, the system remains a work in progress, with ongoing challenges related to aligning intake processes, program coordination, and long-term housing placement. Overall, Rhode Island's system reflects a collaborative structure with clearly defined roles, and continued improvements in coordination and service alignment will help further strengthen long term outcomes.

Role of Cities

At the municipal level, cities such as Providence use these state-allocated resources alongside federal block grants and local investments to support emergency shelter systems, affordable housing initiatives, and homelessness prevention efforts (City of Providence, 2025). While municipalities do not control the majority of funding, they play a central role in implementing programs funded through state and federal budgets, including managing shelter capacity, coordinating with nonprofit providers, and responding to seasonal or emergency needs. Overall, the FY2026 budget indicates that Rhode Island's cities function less as primary funders and more as operational partners, translating state-level funding decisions into on-the-ground services and interventions aimed at reducing homelessness (Rhode Island Office of Management and Budget, 2026).

Role of Philanthropic and Faith-Based Organizations

Philanthropic and faith-based organizations play a supporting role in Rhode Island's homelessness system, helping to fill gaps left by limited funding. Philanthropic contributions

come primarily from actors such as the Rhode Island Foundation and the United Way which provide flexible funding for programs and pilot initiatives, though leaders in the state emphasize that these resources are modest in scale and insufficient to meet system wide needs (Housing Network of Rhode Island, personal communication, March 19, 2026). Private sector partners, specifically banks, are also engaged in the system but often oversubscribed due to high demand. Faith-based organizations also play a limited role in emergency shelter services, including overflow beds, warming and cooling centers, and drop-in spaces. They are also a very new emerging partner in housing development through efforts such as the “Yes in God’s Backyard” model, which utilizes church owned land to expand affordable housing and helps overcome local opposition to new development (Housing Network of Rhode Island, personal communication, March 19, 2026). While neither philanthropic nor faith-based contributions can substitute sustained public investment, they remain necessary complements, particularly in expanding service capacity and addressing immediate shelter needs.

Response to NOFO

Rhode Island stakeholders indicated that recent changes to the federal Continuum of Care (CoC) Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) have caused significant uncertainty into the state’s homelessness funding landscape. A primary concern that was discussed by Rhode Island Housing stakeholders is the potential disruption to permanent supportive housing funding. Given the NOFO’s shift in priorities, including constraints on funding allocations and changes in scoring criteria, housing leaders in the state are actively working to restructure project portfolios to meet criteria under the new NOFO so that service delivery can continue (Rhode Island Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 1, 2026). They emphasized that temporary funding interruptions could have destabilizing effects, particularly for chronically homeless individuals who rely on long-term housing and supportive services. In response to anticipated federal funding changes, Rhode Island has also begun exploring state level mitigation strategies, though these efforts remain in the early stages. A key proposal under consideration as discussed with the Housing Network of Rhode Island is the creation of a \$25 million state-funded rental assistance program, intended to offset potential reductions in federal housing support and stabilize vulnerable households (State of Rhode Island, 2026). This proposal has received strong backing from legislative leadership, signaling recognition at the state level of the need to supplement federal funding gaps if necessary (Rhode Island Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 1, 2026). Additionally, state agencies and partners are exploring ways to align state investments with evolving federal requirements. However, these efforts are occurring within the context of limited fiscal capacity, which constrains the scale of potential state intervention. Rhode Island is also participating in a broader, multi-state response to the NOFO changes. Alongside other states, it has supported legal action challenging the revised NOFO, which has resulted in a temporary injunction (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2026). This injunction provides short-term relief by pausing implementation of the new funding criteria, allowing existing funding structures to continue while litigation proceeds. Despite this development, the injunction does not eliminate long-term uncertainty. Instead, it reinforces the need for Rhode Island to prepare for multiple funding scenarios, including the possibility that federal priorities may shift again in future funding cycles.

Criminalization of Homelessness

Rhode Island enacted a Homeless Bill of Rights in 2012, which is intended to protect individuals experiencing homelessness from discrimination and ensure equal access to public spaces, services, and legal protections. However, according to homelessness advocates in the state, many of its provisions remain largely aspirational, with limited enforcement mechanisms and inconsistent implementation at the local level (Housing Network of Rhode Island, personal communication, March 19, 2026). Stakeholders also indicated that some municipalities have continued to pursue policies that effectively criminalize homelessness, such as ordinances related to loitering, camping, or panhandling. These measures can negatively impact unhoused individuals, creating ongoing tension between state-level protections and local enforcement practices. Rhode Island's advocacy community has played a critical role in pushing back against punitive approaches. Coalitions of legal advocates, service providers, and grassroots organizations have actively challenged harmful policies, raised public awareness, and supported impacted individuals (Housing Network of Rhode Island, personal communication, March 19, 2026).

Why include Rhode Island?

While Rhode Island has significantly lower total homelessness spending than many peer states in this study, its inclusion offers important comparative value. Unlike larger states with complex systems, Rhode Island's small size creates a uniquely interconnected policy environment where agencies, providers, and policymakers operate within close professional networks. This "everyone knows everyone" dynamic can accelerate decision making, increase accountability, and allow homelessness to remain a visible and prioritized issue within state leadership circles. This narrative was evidenced in all of the interviews that we conducted. Despite limited fiscal capacity, Rhode Island has made a deliberate and coordinated effort to reduce homelessness through system level innovation rather than scale alone. The state has emphasized a holistic, cross-sector approach, integrating housing policy with transportation access, behavioral health services, youth systems, and other supportive services (Rhode Island Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 14, 2026). This reflects a strategic understanding that homelessness is not solely a housing issue, but one that requires alignment across multiple state systems. Additionally, Rhode Island has focused on improving system efficiency through structural reforms. The adaptation of a Regional Access Network represents a significant step toward streamlining entry, assessment, and service matching, reducing fragmentation that often characterizes homelessness response systems. This approach prioritizes coordination and navigation, ensuring individuals are more effectively connected to appropriate resources. Importantly, state leadership has expressed growing confidence in the direction of Rhode Island's homelessness response system. A senior staff member within the Executive Office of Housing expressed that system improvements have strengthened the state's ability to address homelessness, reflecting optimism about the effectiveness of expanded service strategies (Rhode Island Executive Office of Housing, personal communication, April 10, 2026). Stakeholders across state government also expressed optimism that future legislative efforts could further increase recurring appropriations for affordable housing and homelessness services, signaling continued political support for addressing homelessness in Rhode Island (Rhode Island Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 1, 2026). In this context, Rhode

Island serves as a valuable case study, a low resource, high coordination model. Its system allows for understanding of how governance structure, system integration, and policy agility can influence outcomes independent of overall funding levels.

Vermont

State Overview

Vermont has a total population of 644,663 residents (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.-f). According to the January 2025 Point-In-Time (PIT) Count, an estimated 3,386 individuals were experiencing homelessness on any given night (Housing and Homelessness Alliance of Vermont, Chittenden County Homeless Alliance, & Vermont Balance of State Continuum of Care, 2025, p. 2). This corresponds to approximately 0.53% of Vermont's population.

Structure of Government

Vermont operates under a divided government. The executive branch is led by Governor Phil Scott, a Republican, while the legislature holds Democratic majorities in both chambers (National Governors Association, n.d.; State of Vermont, n.d.-a; State of Vermont, n.d.-b). The General Assembly consists of a 50-member House of Representatives and a 32-member Senate (State of Vermont, n.d.-a; State of Vermont, n.d.-b). Vermont does not have county-level government. Instead, sub-state governance is organized through municipalities (Vermont Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 14, 2026).

Unhoused Population Statistics

Between 2021 and 2025, the number of individuals experiencing homelessness in Vermont increased from 2,591 to 3,386, an increase of approximately 30.7% (Office of Policy Development and Research, 2024; Housing and Homelessness Alliance of Vermont, Chittenden County Homeless Alliance, & Vermont Balance of State Continuum of Care, 2025, p. 2).

During the 2025 Point-In-Time (PIT) Count, 3,386 individuals were experiencing homelessness, representing a 2.08% decrease from 2024. However, there was a 62% increase in unsheltered homelessness (Housing and Homelessness Alliance of Vermont, Chittenden County Homeless Alliance, & Vermont Balance of State Continuum of Care, 2025, p. 2). Vermont's Housing and Homelessness Alliance explained that 2024 policy changes may have partially contributed to the increase. In 2024, the General Assistance Emergency Housing Program, which provides motel vouchers, implemented more restrictive eligibility requirements. These changes ultimately reduced access to shelter for some previously qualifying individuals. At the same time, changes in local conditions may have affected the PIT Count. In January 2025, Burlington opened an extreme cold weather shelter, which may have temporarily reduced unsheltered homelessness across Chittenden County on the night of the PIT Count. As a result, the true number of unsheltered individuals on a normal weather night may be understated (Housing and Homelessness Alliance of Vermont, Chittenden County Homeless Alliance, & Vermont Balance of State Continuum of Care, 2025, p. 5).

Several demographic patterns are notable among the state's unhoused population. According to the 2024 PIT Count, 5% of individuals experiencing homelessness were unsheltered, 38% were people in families with children, 3% were veterans, and 19% were experiencing chronic patterns of homelessness (Office of Community Planning and Development, 2024, p. 76-79; Office of Policy Development and Research, 2024). The racial composition of Vermont's unhoused population was primarily comprised of Hispanic/Latino (4%); Black, African American,

or African (8%); White (86%); and 4% multi-racial individuals (Office of Policy Development and Research, 2024).

Structure of Services

Housing and homeless services in Vermont are primarily administered through the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), which operates within the Department for Children and Families under the Vermont Agency of Human Services. OEO is responsible for implementing housing programs statewide and coordinating service delivery with community-based providers (Vermont Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 14, 2026).

This work is supported by a broader network of departments within the Vermont Agency of Human Services that collaborate to address homelessness. Key partners include the Department for Children and Families and the Department of Mental Health (Vermont Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 14, 2026).

Funding Overview

Vermont’s total FY2026 budget is approximately \$9.1 billion (Stewart, 2025). Of this, approximately \$74,199,990 was allocated to homelessness-related programs (A. Duracak, personal communication, April 17, 2026; Vermont General Assembly, 2025, p. 54, 95, 201; Vermont Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 14, 2026). This equates to an estimated \$21,914 in state funding per unhoused individual. State funding is derived from the General Fund, Medicaid, and the Global Commitment Investment (GCI) (A. Duracak, personal communication, April 17, 2026; Vermont Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 14, 2026).

Federal funding also represents a portion of the state’s homelessness response. In FY2024, Vermont received \$7,872,214 in federal Continuum of Care (CoC) funding (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Public Affairs, 2025a).

Table 9 summarizes Vermont’s primary state-funded homelessness programs, their administering agencies, and funding levels for FY2026 (A. Duracak, personal communication, April 17, 2026; Vermont Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 14, 2026). A significant portion of funding is concentrated within a small number of agencies, particularly the Department for Children and Families’ Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO).

Table 9. Funding for Homelessness in Vermont			
Program	Administering Agency	Total State Funding (\$)	State Funding Type
Family Supportive Housing	Department for Children and Families’ Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO)	\$849,364	General Fund and Medicaid
		\$29,423,061	General Fund

Housing Opportunity Grant Program (HOP)	Department for Children and Families' Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO)	\$2,000,000	General Fund
		\$1,322,141	General Fund
Permanent Supportive Housing	Department for Children and Families' Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO)	\$848,424	Medicaid Waiver
Extreme Cold Weather Shelter Program	Department for Children and Families' Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO)	\$1,100,000	General Fund
General Assistance Emergency Housing Program	Department for Children and Families' Economic Services Division	\$38,500,000	General Fund
Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH)	Department of Mental Health	\$157,000	Global Commitment Investment (GCI)
Total Funding			\$74,199,990

Family Supportive Housing, administered by the Department for Children and Families' Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), is allocated \$849,364 in state funding (Vermont Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 14, 2026). The program is funded through recurring state general funds and Medicaid. Furthermore, it receives \$2,254,320 in federal funding via Medicaid (Vermont Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 14, 2026). The purpose of the program is to provide "long-term intensive home-based service coordination and case management to help families experiencing homelessness transition into and sustain permanent affordable housing" (Vermont Agency of Human Services, n.d.).

The Housing Opportunity Grant Program, administered by the Department for Children and Families' Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), is allocated \$32,745,202 in state funding. This is comprised of general funds, including \$29,423,061 in recurring funds, a \$2,000,000 one-time appropriation for shelter capacity expansion, and \$1,322,141 in a mid-year budget adjustment (Vermont General Assembly, 2025, p. 54, 95, 201; Vermont General Assembly, 2026a, p. 54;

Vermont Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 14, 2026). Additionally, the program receives \$1,522,944 in federal funding, which includes \$800,000 in Opioid Settlement Funds for emergency shelters and \$722,944 from the Emergency Solutions Grant (Vermont Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 14, 2026). The program funds emergency shelter operations, essential shelter services, transitional housing, rapid rehousing, and homelessness prevention. Moreover, the program “implements coordinated entry to streamline client access to resources and administers the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)” (Vermont Department for Children and Families, n.d.-c).

Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH), administered by the Department for Children and Families’ Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), is allocated \$848,424 in state funding. The program is funded through recurring state Medicaid funds, specifically Vermont’s Medicaid waiver; the program also receives \$479,533 in federal Medicaid funds. PSH began at the end of 2025; therefore, the program was permitted to carry over funds into 2026 (Vermont Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 14, 2026). The purpose of the program is to provide “housing navigation and long-term housing stabilization support to adults who live with disabilities” (Vermont Department for Children and Families, n.d.-d).

The Extreme Cold Weather Shelter Program, administered by the Department for Children and Families’ Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), is allocated \$1,100,000 in state funding. The program is funded through a one-time appropriation of state general funds (Vermont Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 14, 2026). The purpose of the program is to support “community-based emergency shelter operations during periods of extreme cold for individuals experiencing homelessness who have no other safe housing option” (Vermont Department for Children and Families, n.d.-b).

The General Assistance Emergency Housing Program, administered by the Department for Children and Families’ Economic Services Division, is allocated \$38,500,000 in state funding. The program is funded through recurring state general funds (Vermont Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 14, 2026). The purpose of the program is to assist individuals with temporary housing in emergency situations (Vermont Department for Children and Families, n.d.-a).

Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH), administered by the Department of Mental Health, is allocated \$157,000 in state funding and is funded through recurring state Global Commitment Investment (GCI) funds. The program also receives \$300,000 in federal funding (A. Duracak, personal communication, April 17, 2026). The purpose of the program is to “reduce unsheltered homelessness for persons with serious mental illnesses (SMI) and co-occurring disorders (COD)” (A. Duracak, personal communication, April 17, 2026). Providers include Community Health Centers, Helping Overcome Poverty’s Effects (HOPE), Groundworks Collaborative, Northeast Kingdom Community Action (NEKCA), the Homeless Prevention Center, and Good Samaritan Haven (A. Duracak, personal communication, April 17, 2026).

Factors Contributing to Funding

Vermont has increased state funding over the last 6 years, largely due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the post-pandemic landscape, and extensive advocacy. The COVID-19 pandemic, the post-pandemic landscape, and subsequent media attention illuminated the issue of homelessness in Vermont, including state demographics and structural issues (e.g., the number of individuals living in hotels). During this time, there was increased sentiment of unity and connection, resulting in residents looking for ways to address the issue together. Collaboration also increased between the governor and the legislature, particularly in how investments would be made. Ultimately, this momentum led state leaders to invest in long-term solutions, such as permanent supportive housing (PSH) and expanding family supportive housing. However, the state government currently has differing views on how to maintain these investments (Vermont Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 14, 2026). Extensive advocacy has also helped to secure state funding. Advocacy groups have conducted outreach to amplify the voices of individuals experiencing homelessness who rely on shelter programs, elevating their perspectives through legislative testimony and direct communication with policymakers. They have also engaged local media to raise public awareness of Vermont's homelessness landscape (Vermont Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 6, 2026).

Although Vermont has increased funding to address homelessness, there are concerns that resources are not being utilized efficiently. In Vermont, the legislature tends to fund either homelessness or housing; however, various factors contribute to its decision-making. For example, the governor has sought to defund emergency housing. These policy changes lead to a cycle of sheltering and unsheltering individuals, as well as indirect state costs when someone becomes unsheltered, such as long-term hospital stays. Ultimately, homelessness and housing are linked and should be addressed simultaneously (Vermont Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 6, 2026). Additionally, non-congregate shelter is important because people having a place where they can lock their door and be alone is important to their healing and wellbeing (Vermont Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 6, 2026).

There have been numerous policy changes, particularly for emergency housing (e.g., hotel/motel programs), over the last several years. These policies are created in session law; therefore, they can change every July in the new fiscal year budget. This creates unpredictable service provision and funding year-to-year (Vermont Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 6, 2026). For example, there were fewer emergency housing qualification restrictions in 2023 compared to 2025. Additionally, in spring 2025, Governor Scott's Executive Order 03-25 kept certain people sheltered, but not others. This resulted in certain groups, such as medically vulnerable individuals and children, being required to exit shelter on July 1, 2025 despite initially being told that their time in emergency shelter did not count towards the emergency shelter time limit (State of Vermont Executive Department, 2025; Vermont Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 6, 2026). To address this, advocacy agencies develop and share educational materials to explain the policy changes (Vermont Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 6, 2026).

Legislators are currently working on a state statute, rather than session law, to create one cohesive system to administer emergency shelter. However, the state statute would reduce the

limit to an individual's time in emergency shelter from 80 days to 70 days and would reduce the number of hotel rooms available for emergency shelter. There are concerns that this would increase the number of unsheltered individuals (Vermont Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 6, 2026). Alternatively, H938, An Act Relating To Establishing the Vermont Homeless Response Continuum, proposed a continuum of services (Vermont General Assembly, 2026c, p. 1; Vermont Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 6, 2026). Services would include (a) prevention and diversion services; (b) highly structured shelter services; (c) low-barrier shelter services; (d) specialized service services; (e) permanent supportive housing services; (f) hotels and motels; and (g) other emergency housing services (Langweil, 2026, p. 2). Although the bill develops a consistent structure, there are notable concerns, including reduced access to shelter, particularly in winter months, as well as a lack of clear fraud and misconduct parameters (Vermont Interviewee 1, personal communication, May 11, 2026).

Role of Cities

In Vermont, the state is the primary funder of homelessness services, with resources flowing to nonprofit service providers. Local governments play a more limited financial role, though some may make small contributions to shelters, food shelves, and other emergency services. Thus, service delivery is largely coordinated at the state level with local governments providing supplementary support where possible (Vermont Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 6, 2026).

Role of Philanthropic and Faith-Based Organizations

Philanthropic and faith-based organizations play an important, though less formalized, role in Vermont's homelessness response system. Many organizations provide shelter services, which rely on a combination of funding from state, philanthropic, and faith-based organizations. In some cases, shelters may operate with no state funding and instead rely entirely on private donations and volunteer networks from faith-based communities (Vermont Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 14, 2026). However, most organizations are primarily funded through state and federal grants (Vermont Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 6, 2026).

Faith-based organizations also provide targeted, short-term emergency support for a small number of individuals. For example, an organization may raise shelter funds for pregnant individuals who have reached their 80-day limit for an emergency shelter stay. While their direct service role varies, faith-based organizations are more engaged in advocacy efforts regarding homelessness policy (Vermont Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 6, 2026). These actors help fill some funding and service gaps, though they are not as integrated into the formal state system.

Response to NOFO

In response to anticipated changes in federal funding, Vermont began planning in Fall 2025. This included developing transition plans, identifying populations most at risk of losing assistance, and working with CoC providers to project potential service impacts. The state also explored strategies to mitigate these risks and to assess budgetary implications (Vermont Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 14, 2026).

However, uncertainty in Vermont remains high. As federal funding decisions and policy continue to evolve, the state is monitoring all developments and delaying response until further information is available. Additionally, service providers have also expressed concern about possible funding scrutiny for organizations that serve specific marginalized communities, including LGBTQ+ individuals and immigrants (Vermont Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 6, 2026). Some organizations report uncertainty about whether to pursue applications for federal funding due to concerns that programs could be flagged or restricted based on associations with diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives (Vermont Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 6, 2026).

At the same time, broader federal policy shifts beyond specifically homelessness, including potential reductions in Housing Choice Vouchers, shifts away from rapid rehousing and harm reduction models, and institutionalization of veterans with disabilities, are expected to increase pressure on Vermont's homelessness system if pursued (Vermont Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 6, 2026). These changes could contribute to longer durations of homelessness and increased demands for services.

State officials and stakeholders have suggested that Vermont's limited tax base and significant reliance on federal funding, approximately 1/3 of the total state budget, will constrain the state's ability to fully offset from potential federal funding losses. As a result, the state may be required to prioritize certain programs while attempting to backfill others where feasible (Vermont Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 6, 2026).

Criminalization of Homelessness

There are no statewide policies criminalizing homelessness in Vermont. However, the criminalization of homelessness varies by town, and some towns are introducing exclusionary practices (Vermont Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 14, 2026). Following the *City of Grants Pass v. Johnson* decision, communities "feel emboldened" to develop these policies and clear encampments (Vermont Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 6, 2026). For example, Newport City introduced a camping ban in 2025 and Brattleboro sought to remove encampments in 2025 (Barber, 2025; Page, 2026). If requested by a municipality, state government agencies have engaged in conversations with municipalities requesting guidance about state resources, referrals, working with service providers, and public safety interventions (e.g., substance use). There are no state-driven or state-organized conversations (Vermont Interviewee 2, personal communication, April 14, 2026).

A key challenge is the lack of understanding of how banning and restricting encampments forces individuals experiencing homelessness to "hide in the shadows" (Vermont Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 6, 2026). This makes it more difficult to conduct outreach and to assist individuals experiencing homelessness in accessing services. Advocacy groups, such as End Homelessness Vermont, are making a concerted effort to educate city councils and select boards about homelessness, including its demographics and how individuals become homeless. Some representatives want to compromise, but proposed policies may have disproportionate negative impacts on certain marginalized groups. For example, if municipalities restrict encampments by allowing people to live in the woods, individuals in wheelchairs may not be

able to access the encampment for shelter (Vermont Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 6, 2026).

At the state level, Representative Jubilee McGill introduced a “right to rest” bill, H.885, in February 2026 (Vermont General Assembly, 2026b; Vermont Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 6, 2026). The bill “proposes to prohibit the municipal and county governments from regulating the use of municipal or county property for life-sustaining activities, except in specific instances in which a municipality has otherwise made public land within designated downtowns or growth centers available for these activities” (Vermont General Assembly, 2026b, p. 1). It also seeks to add housing status to the designated life-sustaining activities (Vermont General Assembly, 2026b, p. 1).

Cross - State Findings

Response to NOFO

Despite the federal court's injunction to the NOFO, federal funding for homelessness programs remains unstable and under threat. As a result, states are preparing a number of proactive strategies with the goal of stabilizing funding streams and maintaining continuity of care for vulnerable populations.

Across the board, there has been a push to increase direct engagement with CoCs and municipalities, to determine and meet specific needs. To varying extents, states and municipalities are also seeking to retain some or all of CoC funding by modifying programs to better meet new federal standards. This involves shifting investment away from permanent supportive housing and prevention services and instead focusing more heavily on emergency shelter and transitional housing. While this strategy may protect CoC funding, there is concern for how the shift in program investment may destabilize individuals currently in permanent supportive housing, and lead to people falling back into homelessness, rather than addressing the underlying cause and reducing the number of people losing their homes in the first place.

States are also examining their budgets for homelessness programs and determining where funds can be shifted to fill gaps caused by losses in federal funding. For example, in Illinois, rapid rehousing funds were underspent. The state allowed resources to be reallocated to support permanent supportive housing programs.

States have also sought funding from alternative sources in their budgets. As an example, in Connecticut, in the face of early funding gaps from lack of CoC funding, advocates were able to push for funding to be leveraged from the state's emergency funds. In Massachusetts, there is an ongoing effort to expand the use of Medicaid funding through the Community Support Program for Homeless Individuals.

Finally, states are continuing to invest state dollars into homeless services as a strategy to protect against the volatility of federal funding.

Rights and Criminalization

This report examined how each of the five states addresses criminalization of homelessness, an issue of particular importance in light of the Supreme Court decision in *City of Grants Pass v. Johnson* (2024), which held that enforcement of local ordinances regulating activities such as sleeping in public spaces does not inherently violate the Eighth Amendment's prohibition on cruel and unusual punishment (*City of Grants Pass v. Johnson*, 2024). This ruling has contributed to an increased trend throughout the nation of local regulations criminalizing unsheltered homelessness, including ordinances targeting encampments and public sleeping (National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2024).

There are only three states in the U.S. with a Bill of Rights for People Experiencing Homelessness: Rhode Island, Connecticut, and Illinois (National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, 2014). For each of those states, the legislation was passed over a decade ago, before the Grants Pass decision by the U.S. Supreme Court, so these laws do not account for the new

spate of municipal-level prohibitions. As a result, there is still criminalization at the municipal level even in the states with these protections, with ordinances against survival acts, such as sleeping on public streets, using blankets, panhandling near transit areas, or living in vehicles. Illinois, for example, has a Bill of Rights for People Experiencing Homelessness but is also the state with the second-highest number of anti-homeless municipal ordinances in the U.S., approximately 30-35 at last count (Chicago Coalition to End Homelessness, 2025).

Illinois, Connecticut, Vermont, Massachusetts, and New Jersey are all currently considering bills to limit the power of municipalities to criminalize homelessness (Brone, 2026; Clark and Sorenson, 2025; H.498, 2025; H. 2261, 2025; Homeless Bill of Rights, 2026). For Vermont and Massachusetts, this legislation would also include a bill of rights for people experiencing homelessness.

State Spending on Services for the Unhoused

As our case studies document, New Jersey’s overall fiscal capacity is comparable to peer states, but its investment in homelessness services is notably lower relative to both need and spending. For FY2026, New Jersey’s total state budget of \$58.8 billion is similar to Illinois (\$53.07 billion) and Massachusetts (\$60.97 billion), indicating that differences in homelessness funding are not simply related to overall budget size.

	PIT Count 2025	State Budget FY2026 (in Billions)	State \$ Spent to Address Homelessness	% of State Budget Spent to Address Homelessness	State Spending per Unhoused Person (PIT)
Massachusetts	28,196	\$61.0	\$750,653,686	1.23%	\$26,622
Connecticut	3,735	\$27.1	\$97,597,991	0.36%	\$26,130
Vermont	3,386	\$9.1	\$74,199,990	0.82%	\$21,914
Illinois (FY2025)* **	14,571	\$53.1	\$272,077,585	0.51%	\$18,673
New Jersey	13,748	\$58.8	\$186,362,000	0.32%	\$13,556
Rhode Island	2,373	\$14.9	\$20,297,740	0.14%	\$8,553

* Illinois figures are for FY2025 rather than FY2026. The state produces a comprehensive report every other year, which details its allocations to address homelessness. The last available report is for FY2025, however, state officials indicated that there was not a significant change in the funding totals from FY2025 to FY2026. ** Illinois state spending total does not include an additional \$75,992,210 in city funds that Chicago spends, which is equal to an additional \$10,198 per Chicago unhoused person.

Despite its comparable fiscal capacity, New Jersey allocates \$186.4 million to homelessness, significantly less than Illinois (\$272.1 million) and far below Massachusetts (\$750.7 million). As a share of total state spending, New Jersey dedicates approximately 0.32% of its budget to homelessness. This is lower than Illinois (0.51%), Connecticut (0.36%), Vermont (0.82%), and substantially below Massachusetts, which allocates the most, approximately 1.23% of its total budget, nearly four times New Jersey's share. Only Rhode Island spends a smaller proportion at 0.14%.

When adjusted for need, these differences become even more disproportionate. New Jersey's 2025 PIT count of 13,748 individuals is comparable to Illinois (14,571), yet Illinois invests substantially more overall and on a per-person basis (\$18,673) and the state spending is substantially augmented by the \$10,198 in city funds that Chicago allocates to serving its unhoused. New Jersey spends approximately \$13,556 per unhoused individual, roughly half of Massachusetts' (\$26,622) and Connecticut's (\$26,130) spending per-person and well below Vermont (\$21,914). Only Rhode Island spends less per person (\$8,553). When we examine per capita spending, New Jersey's \$19.52 per resident also falls below most peer states.

Collectively, these comparisons reflect that New Jersey's funding approach is more conservative, relative to both the scale of homelessness and the level of investment seen in comparable states. While the state's overall budget is on par with others, its lower share of spending, combined with lower per-person and per-capita investment, indicates a lack of commitment, particularly when contrasted with states like Massachusetts and Connecticut that have made more substantial, sustained funding investments to their respective homelessness systems.

These differences raise an important question: what drives stronger state investment in homelessness systems response? For the states in our study, several factors consistently contributed to higher levels of state funding. Most notable was strong state leadership and a clear commitment to systematically addressing homelessness. For example, in Illinois, the governor's commitment to addressing homelessness led to the development of The Office to Prevent and End Homelessness, a coordinated, statewide response and an approximate doubling of its funding for homeless-related programs between FY2023 and FY2025 (Illinois Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 4, 2026).

In addition to strong commitment from the state government, consistent, long-term investment from nonprofit advocacy organizations play a significant role in funding programs for the unhoused. For example, Connecticut's Coalition to End Homelessness partnered with philanthropic organizations to advocate for the state to develop a more centralized approach to homelessness funding and service delivery, resulting in the 2015 development of Connecticut's Department of Housing (S. DiLella, personal communication, March 13, 2026). In Vermont, advocacy groups facilitated direct communication between legislators and people relying on shelter programs (Vermont Interviewee 1, personal communication, April 6, 2026). Massachusetts's Coalition for the Homeless was a lead organization to establish Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) which provides up to \$7,000 per 12-month to families so they can remain in their home or move to a new one. The Coalition continues to

advocate to maintain funding to scale, advocating to increase RAFT funding currently from \$208 million to \$300 million for FY2027 (K. Turley, personal communication, April 2, 2026).

These examples demonstrate that higher levels of homelessness funding are not solely a product of fiscal capacity, but rather the result of states' willingness to address homelessness, leveraged by strong advocacy ecosystems. States with robust investments, such as Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Illinois, show consistent alignment between state leadership, nonprofit advocacy, and long-term system planning. These elements reinforce one another, enabling states to both scale funding and sustain it over time.

New Jersey has the fiscal capacity to expand its homelessness response but lacks the level of sustained policy commitment demonstrated by higher-investing peer states. In addition to increasing state investments in homelessness prevention, shelter, supportive housing, and long-term housing stability programs, New Jersey needs to be prepared to address service gaps created by potential reductions in federal funding. Ultimately, a stronger and more coordinated state funding strategy will be critical to ensuring that New Jersey can effectively respond to the scale and complexity of homelessness statewide.

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