



News Release

CONTACT: Ryan Shannahan
PHONE: 410-706-6694

For Immediate Release

COUNTING UNACCOMPANIED YOUTH ACROSS MARYLAND ***Youth REACH MD collects data September 28 through October 4 in six regions***

Baltimore, Md., September 23, 2015 -- The Youth REACH MD Coalition will soon launch Maryland's first ever survey and census of youth and young adults who are experiencing homelessness. This innovative pilot will identify the number of unaccompanied youth and young adults ages 24 years or younger who are not living with a parent or guardian and who do not have a fixed, stable, permanent place to call home. State and local agencies, nonprofits and volunteers will work intensively during Youth REACH Week -- September 28 through October 4 -- to connect with youth and young adult in seven counties and Baltimore City through street counts and other special "magnet" gatherings.

The count will take place in Annapolis/Anne Arundel County, Baltimore City, Baltimore County, Hagerstown/Washington County, Prince George's County and Somerset/Wicomico/Worcester counties. Local public and nonprofit agencies are collaborating to organize each region's stakeholders, including youth, service providers and schools, to plan and carry out the surveys and counts.

"Getting an accurate count of the number of homeless youth in our state is Maryland's first step forward in assuring that every young person enjoys the benefits of a safe, secure and nurturing home," said Governor Larry Hogan.

Youth REACH MD (REACH stands for Reach out, Engage, Assist and Count to end Homelessness) represents the work of a coalition of state and local public officials and agencies, nonprofits and volunteers to identify the real needs of a vulnerable but difficult to reach population. The effort was established by the Maryland General Assembly in 2014 (Chapter 425 of House Bill 794). The Institute for Innovation & Implementation at the University of Maryland

School of Social Work (the Institute) is coordinating Youth REACH activities with funding support from the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), the State's lead agency overseeing the project.

"Addressing youth homelessness is a high priority of the department," said Kenneth Holt, secretary of the Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development. "In order to fully understand the scale of the problem, we are involving key advocates and researchers to conduct an in-depth review and offer meaningful solutions so that we might help these struggling young lives."

When the counts are completed, the Institute will analyze the data with assistance from the Maryland Department of Planning and will issue a report to the legislature.

"We have heard countless stories from child advocates and, more importantly, youth themselves, that homelessness is the reality for far too many of Maryland's young people. With the launch of Youth REACH MD, we will collect, for the first time, information about their lives and their numbers, demonstrating the path forward to achieve the goal of ending homelessness for unaccompanied youth," said Delegate Mary L. Washington, Ph.D., the lead sponsor of the legislation that created and funded Youth REACH MD. "This issue has been at the heart of my legislative agenda for over three years, and I'm so pleased to be working with committed experts and volunteers in the field to develop real solutions."

A 2009 report, titled "America's Outcasts: State Report Card on Child Homelessness," found that one child in 50 is homeless in the United States (or more than 1.5 million each year). These youth, this "invisible population," may not be detectable on the streets or in shelters. They may be working or going to school, but they lack a safe, stable, permanent place to call home.

One of the challenges in addressing youth homelessness is knowing how many youth and young adults are homeless. Experts agree that there is a need for a coordinated and consistent approach. Some work has been done to understand how many youth are impacted by homelessness. A 2011 point-in-time count by Johns Hopkins University found 640 unaccompanied homeless youth on any given night in Baltimore City and three consecutive counts in Prince George's County (2011, 2012 and 2013) revealed an average of 160 youth in similar circumstances.

How they got to this place is varied--some have left abusive situations, did not get along with their parents or may have aged out of the foster care or juvenile justice systems. Regardless of how they got there, all homelessness is fundamentally associated with poverty and a lack of safe and affordable housing.

Homeless youth and young adults are at increased risk for victimization and traumatization, and they are more likely to experience severe physical and behavioral health problems and incarceration in the long term.

Youth REACH MD exceeds the scope of similar efforts in other states and large cities. It is designed to track the size and scope of homelessness among Maryland's youth and young

adults over time, better understand the current support system available to serve this population, and, ultimately, will design targeted resources to help young people experiencing homelessness. The vision for this work is to end and prevent homelessness for Maryland's youth and young adults, and to that end, Youth REACH MD has the following three goals:

The first is to engage youth, young adults, local community members and federal, state and local constituencies in preventing and ending youth homelessness through participation in the design and implementation of the youth count and the associated policy and evaluation activities.

The second is to conduct an effective count as an ongoing way for federal, state and local constituencies to track progress in understanding and meeting the needs of unaccompanied homeless youth and young adults that will result in programmatic, budgetary and policy changes to end and prevent youth homelessness.

The third goal is to incorporate housing and homeless services and programs into the multi-agency data collaborative at the University of Maryland to provide quality, up-to-date, longitudinal data and information related to overall program efficiency and effectiveness in serving the children, youth and families of Maryland.

Youth REACH MD has built upon the groundbreaking work of nonprofit service providers in Baltimore City and by Prince George's County government, which have stimulated development of a service capacity for youth and young adults experiencing homelessness and unstable housing. It supports the work being done by Maryland's Interagency Council on Homelessness; Thrive@25, Maryland's initiative to end homelessness for youth with foster care histories on the Eastern Shore; and the Joint Committee on Homelessness in the General Assembly. Youth REACH MD is tied to a larger national effort to end youth homelessness in the United States by 2020.

For more information, visit youthreachmd.org, and follow #icount.

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