

MIAMI HOMES FOR ALL, INC.  
SHIMBERG CENTER FOR HOUSING STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

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# **STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS IN FLORIDA: UPDATES + SOLUTIONS**

AUGUST 2019

MADE POSSIBLE BY:  
**JPMORGAN CHASE & CO.**

# INTRODUCTION

Miami Homes For All, Inc. and Shimberg Center for Housing Studies are pleased to provide this update to their previous report: Homelessness and Education in Florida: Impacts on Children and Youth. The update describes the experiences of Florida's public school students during the 2017-18 school year. This is the most recent year for which full data sets are available.

The bad news: in the past decade, the reported number of students experiencing homelessness in Florida has almost tripled to a total of **95,873** in the 2017-18 school year.

Florida's shortage of affordable housing is the root cause of students' housing instability. In recent years, this problem has been exacerbated by catastrophic hurricanes. Also, schools have improved their identification of vulnerable students and increased outreach to them. Together, these factors have led to the mounting numbers we see today.

The good news: there are solutions. At the heart of those solutions are cross-sector collaboration, a youth- and family-centered service approach, and increasing federal, state, and local funding levels for affordable housing.

Last, but not least, this updated report was made possible with the generous support of JPMorgan Chase & Co. We are grateful for your continued support.

Updated August 2019.



# DEFINITIONS

How we define experiences of homelessness matters. Why? Because it triggers whether students and families can access services. This report mostly uses the federal **Education for Homeless Children and Youth Program** definition. Homeless assistance programs from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the State of Florida also have their own definitions and regulations.



## PLACE OF NIGHTTIME RESIDENCE

## UNACCOMPANIED YOUTH

If families or unaccompanied youth lack a **fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence**, they are experiencing homelessness. That includes:

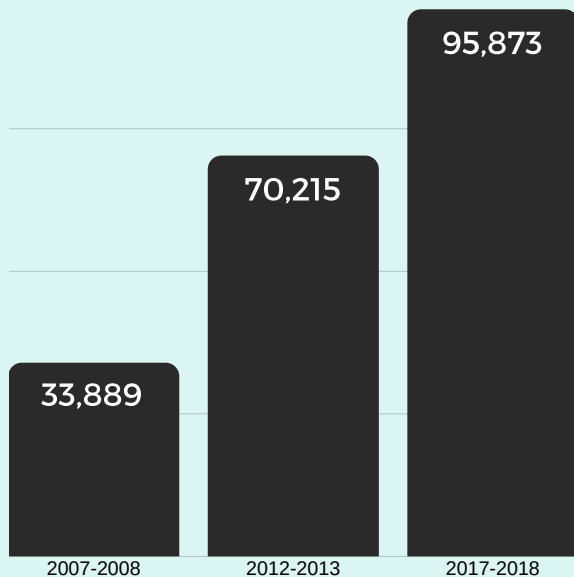
- Doubled-up
- Couch surfing
- Living in motels, hotels, FEMA trailers, or camp grounds
- Living in emergency shelters
- Living in transitional housing
- Living in abandoned in hospitals
- Staying in cars, parks, public spaces, vacant buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or other places not designed for sleeping

**"Unaccompanied" youth** is generally a minor or young adult who is not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian. The National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty lists examples of these youth to include:

- Were asked to leave home by a parent
- Left home with the consent of a parent
- Do not have formal custody papers or arrangements while their parents are in the hospital, jail, or a rehabilitation center
- Ran away from home



# 2017-18 FLORIDA DATA:



*The number of students experiencing homelessness has nearly tripled in the past decade*

SOURCES: FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION;  
SHIMBERG CENTER FOR HOUSING STUDIES

## 95,873 STUDENTS EXPERIENCED HOMELESSNESS



88,023  
LIVING WITH  
A PARENT OR  
GUARDIAN



7,850  
UNACCOMPANIED  
YOUTH

### WHY?

#### AFFORDABLE HOUSING SHORTAGE

Only 23 rental units are affordable and available for every 100 extremely low-income renters

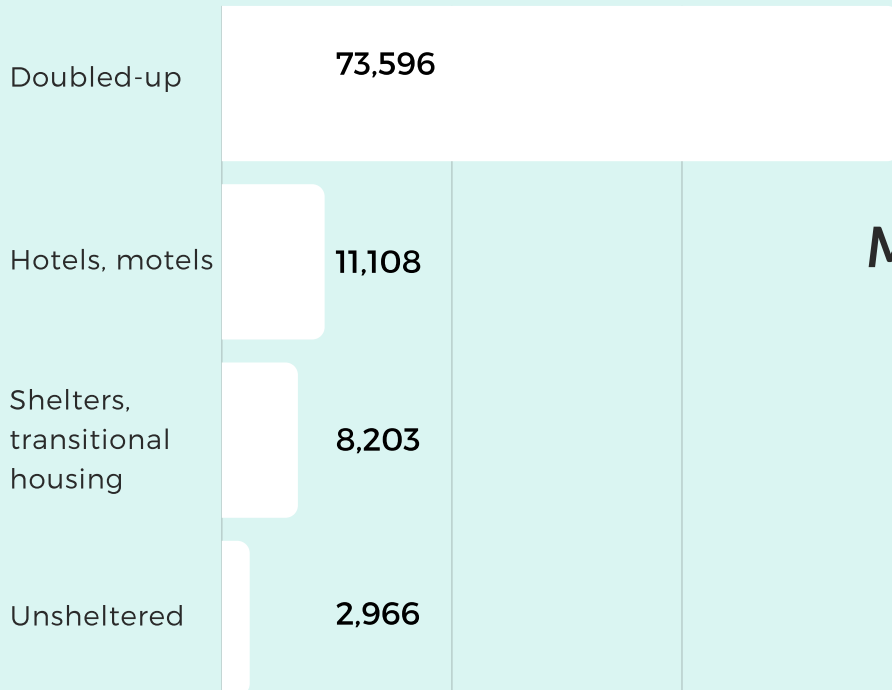
#### BETTER IDENTIFICATION

School staff are reaching out to students who are doubled-up or in shelters and motels

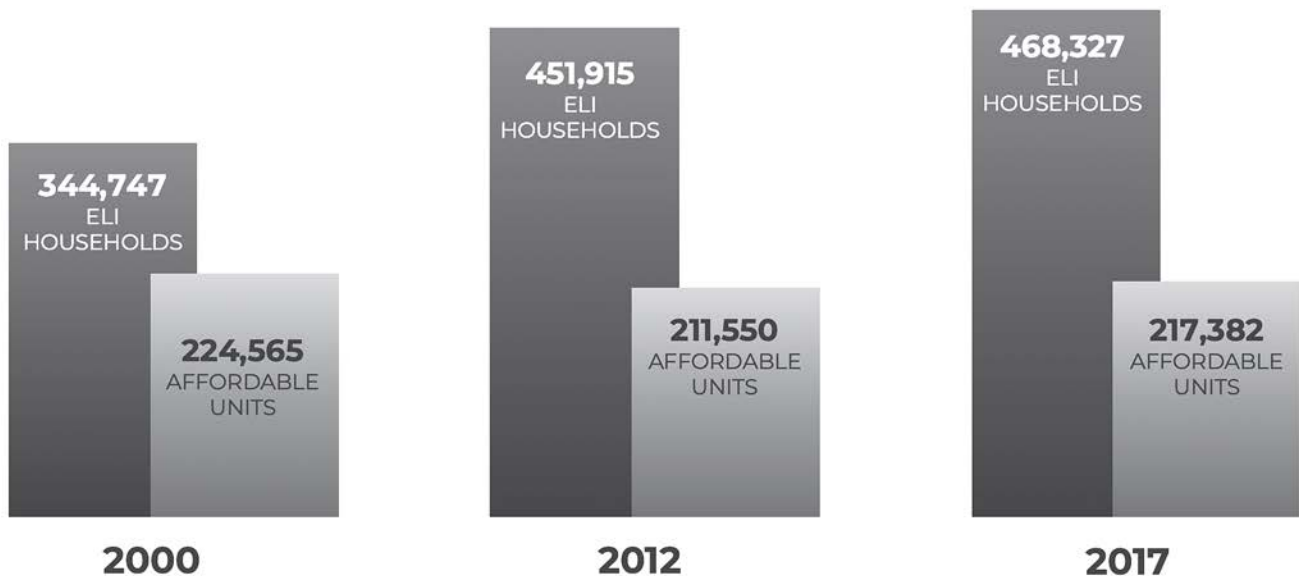
#### NATURAL DISASTERS

1 out of 5 students in Florida experienced homelessness as a result of hurricanes, including students moving to Florida from Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria

# FLORIDA'S AFFORDABLE HOUSING SHORTAGE IS THE ROOT CAUSE OF STUDENT HOMELESSNESS



*Most students with housing struggles are doubled-up with family and friends*



*In the past two decades, extremely low-income households have increased by 36% and units affordable and available to them have decreased by 11%*

# 19,721

*Total number of students in Florida that experienced homelessness because of hurricanes in the 2017-18 school year*

# 11,968

*Number of these students who moved to Florida from Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria*

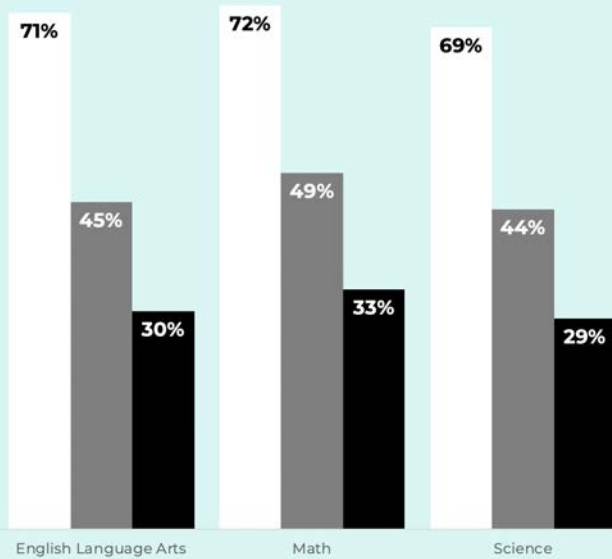
# 738 → 4,720

*Students experiencing homelessness that Bay County schools identified before Hurricane Michael*

*Students that Bay County schools identified experiencing homelessness after the storm, as of January 2019*

# STUDENTS WITH HOUSING STRUGGLES LAG BEHIND THEIR PEERS

## FLORIDA STANDARDIZED TEST SCORES OF 3 OR HIGHER



Legend:  
White bar: Housed, not economically disadvantaged students  
Dark gray bar: Housed, economically disadvantaged students  
Black bar: Students experiencing homelessness

## HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES

**74%** Students experiencing homelessness

**82%** Housed, economically disadvantaged students

**91%** Housed, not economically disadvantaged students



SOURCE: FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

# SOLUTIONS

## **INCREASE FUNDING FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

Increasing federal, state, and local funding to build and preserve affordable housing is at the core of preventing and ending homelessness in Florida – especially for those households earning extremely low incomes. In Florida, the bulk of affordable homes for households earning extremely low incomes comes from the Housing Choice Voucher program, HUD and USDA multifamily housing, and public housing. If we do not maintain those buildings and extend the government contracts that provide deep subsidies, we risk permanently losing this stock.

Every year, the Florida Legislature must fully appropriate all Sadowski Affordable Housing Trust funds for their intended purpose: desperately needed housing programs. Sadowski was created to be a dedicated, renewable source of revenue for affordable housing via a state documentary stamp tax on deeds. Most of these funds are used by local governments to promote affordable housing through the State Housing Initiatives Partnership (SHIP) program. Funds are also used to increase Florida's supply of affordable multifamily housing in partnership with private developers. However, for over a decade, the Florida Legislature has consistently swept funds from Sadowski into the general budget for purposes other than affordable housing. This must stop.

A new tool that communities are using to prevent the loss of public housing is the federal Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) program. It not only allows for one-to-one replacement of the extremely low-income units, but also allows local communities to leverage other funding sources to significantly increase density.

## **COORDINATED ENTRY SYSTEMS**

The Continuum of Care (CoC) is a regional or local planning body that coordinates housing and services for families and individuals experiencing homelessness. Each CoC should establish a

Coordinated Entry System (CES) to ensure that these families and individuals are quickly identified, assessed, and referred to housing assistance based on their strengths and needs. Best practices for a CES include:

- Prioritizing rapid rehousing and permanent supportive housing.
- Stabilizing families experiencing housing struggles by addressing their workforce needs (training, job placement, childcare, etc.).
- Ensuring that the CES incorporates services specific to the needs of youth and families with minor children and places their unique needs on equal footing with those of single adults.
- Creating a youth-friendly process within the CES. This includes "Youth Access Points," which are agencies that work with young people but that have not traditionally been part of the CoC.

## **YOUTH POINT IN TIME COUNT**

CoCs conduct an annual Point in Time Count (PIT Count) of individuals and families experiencing homelessness, but they typically undercount unaccompanied youth or miss them entirely. A separate youth-centered PIT Count is essential to establishing an understanding of these young people's needs.

In Miami, iCount is the youth-centered PIT Count that takes place for an entire week after the CoC's general count. Youth ambassadors are paid to administer the surveys and responding youth receive grocery store gift cards. In 2019, iCount Miami surveyed 714 young people with housing struggles between the ages of 13-24. Of them:

- 50 were unsheltered, living primarily on the street, in cars, parks, under bridges, and in empty buildings.
- 237 were in shelters, transitional housing, youth shelters, hotels, motels, and couch surfing.
- The remaining respondents reported a wide variety of temporary arrangements, including living with their parents in unstable housing, finding their own apartments, doubling up with others, or living in group homes.



# SOLUTIONS

## HOUSING UNACCOMPANIED MINOR YOUTH

Before thinking about how to provide housing for unaccompanied minor youth, a community must first improve outreach and identification efforts that will ascertain their needs. This is why the youth-centered PIT Counts are so important. In part, they show whether young people are leaving home for short periods of time or whether they are unable or unwilling to return.

In the current system, host homes, group homes, respite housing, and emergency shelters are all options for unaccompanied minors. Each has its benefits and drawbacks. However, in the absence of laws giving young people agency to obtain housing, it is extremely difficult to design a uniform system for unaccompanied minor youth because their situations, needs, and strengths vary greatly.

For unaccompanied minor youth that need a temporary break from their families, some communities have “respite housing.” This is a safe place where young people can stay for a few days while families work through crises to avoid permanent separation. Parents generally retain custody, even if temporary legal guardians are established. Miami Bridge Youth and Family Services has two locations in Miami and Florida Baptist Children’s Homes has six locations across Florida with these services.

For unaccompanied minor youth that need longer-term housing, legal barriers and the fear of child welfare involvement limit their housing options. That is why numerous states have passed laws that allow unaccompanied minors to: obtain shelter without parental consent; obtain their own birth certificates and IDs; open bank accounts; and, contract for housing, employment, and other services. Missouri, Tennessee, and Hawaii are just a few. Eliminating these barriers gives service providers the ability to intervene without lengthy, sometimes ineffective legal processes, like emancipation. That said, these are not one-size-fits-all processes and the laws generally try to balance

the safety of young people with what is in their best interest. These laws are typically triggered when: parents or legal guardians consent to the youth living independently; or, consent is implied when the parents or guardians force the youth out of the home, refuse to provide financial support, or when abuse or neglect occurs or is suspected.

Florida needs similar laws for unaccompanied minors who need longer-term housing. Florida already has laws allowing unaccompanied minors to consent for routine medical care. Adding their ability to secure shelter, housing, other basic necessities, and legal and gender marker changes would remove significant barriers to their safety and well-being.

## BY-NAME LISTS AND MEETINGS

Maintaining an up-to-date list of families and individuals experiencing homelessness – a “by name list” – is crucial to meet their needs in a comprehensive way. CoCs should use these lists to monitor families’ and young people’s health, education, employment, and housing situations at regular meetings, with service providers present to respond immediately to changes and needs. In between meetings, the CoC should be using a uniform data system to monitor progress and track outcomes.

## YOUTH-LED ACTION BOARDS

Youth-led action boards provide the CoC with feedback about how it can better address young people’s needs. Members are typically between the ages of 13 and 24 who have experienced homelessness or are at risk of it. Ideally, they are paid for their time to serve in this capacity, and meetings are set outside of business hours to accommodate their school, work, and caregiving responsibilities.

# SOLUTIONS

## CDBG-DR STATE ACTION PLANS

In the wake of a disaster, states often receive federal Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Relief (CDBG-DR) funding. Each state must create a CDBG-DR State Action Plan that lists “vulnerable populations” eligible for post-disaster housing assistance. Florida should explicitly list families with children, unaccompanied youth, and youth aging out of foster care as vulnerable populations with corresponding funding set-asides.

## LOCAL HOMELESS PREVENTION POLICIES

Preventing the conditions that lead to homelessness is a far more effective strategy than addressing them after the fact. Once households have an eviction or a high unpaid utility bill on record, it can negatively affect their credit, make it difficult to find a new apartment, or prevent them from getting into public housing or a subsidized apartment. A number of local policies can be instrumental in preventing homelessness among families and youth.

First, local governments can enact preventive legislation. One example is to extend the required notice before a landlord terminates a month-to-month rental agreement. State law requires only 15 days; but, 30 days’ notice to tenants would give them extra time to find new homes in competitive rental markets. Another example is a repair-and-lien ordinance, where the municipality can repair apartment buildings that the landlords fail to maintain and then place a lien on the property for the repair costs. These ordinances help prevent families from being forced to leave their housing due to substandard conditions.

Second, local governments should devote the maximum allowable amount of SHIP funds to eviction prevention, security and utility deposit assistance, and temporary rent subsidies. These types of bridge assistance can prevent families from becoming homeless. Florida law allows for up to 25% of a municipality’s SHIP funds for these purposes.

Lastly, financial resources should be paired with legal services to maximize their effectiveness. CoCs can fund local legal aid programs to represent households and young people who need to negotiate settlements with landlords to avoid evictions, resolve pending eviction proceedings, or file simple bankruptcies to clear barriers in accessing housing.



# SOLUTIONS

## SUMMARY

SOLUTIONS	FAMILIES WITH STUDENT CHILDREN	UNACCOMPANIED YOUTH
<p>→ <b>INCREASE FUNDING FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING</b>            Increase public funding sources to build and preserve subsidized and naturally occurring affordable housing, especially for those households earning extremely-low incomes.</p>	✓	✓
<p>→ <b>COORDINATED ENTRY SYSTEMS</b>            Prioritize rapid rehousing and permanent supportive housing. Ensure that the CES centers families with minor children and unaccompanied youth. Create youth-friendly processes that include "Youth Access Points."</p>	✓	✓
<p>→ <b>YOUTH POINT IN TIME COUNT</b>            Separate from the general PIT Count.</p>		✓
<p>→ <b>HOUSING UNACCOMPANIED MINOR YOUTH</b>            Host homes, group homes, respite housing, and emergency shelters are all options. Need to assess needs of unaccompanied youth that need a temporary break from their families versus those that need longer-term housing. Florida needs to remove barriers in order to allow unaccompanied minors to secure shelter and other basic services without emancipation.</p>		✓
<p>→ <b>BY-NAME LISTS AND MEETINGS</b>            Monitor and address families' and young peoples' needs in real time.</p>	✓	✓
<p>→ <b>YOUTH-LED ACTION BOARDS</b>            Provide the CoC with feedback about how it can best address young people's needs.</p>		✓
<p>→ <b>CDBG-DR STATE ACTION PLANS</b>            Include families with children, unaccompanied youth, and youth aging out of foster care as vulnerable populations.</p>	✓	✓
<p>→ <b>LOCAL HOMELESS PREVENTION POLICIES</b>            Enact preventive legislation (extending termination notice time, repair-and-lien ordinances). Devote maximum funding to eviction prevention. Pair funding resources with legal services.</p>	✓	✓



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