

Rhode Island Emergency Food and Shelter Board

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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While total figure drops slightly

Number of homeless RI veterans and children increases

Providence, RI (March 21, 2008) – For the first time in six years, the total number of people served by Rhode Island’s emergency shelter system has declined. However, the number of veterans and long-term homeless citizens increased.

According to a report issued by the Rhode Island Emergency Food and Shelter Board, 6,773 people used a shelter in the State between July 1, 2006 and June 30, 2007 – the second highest figure since the report was first issued in 1990. Of the total, 1,558 were children and 626 identified themselves as veterans. 63% of those veterans have long-term disabilities.

In 2005-2006, there were 6,889 homeless citizens; 1, 3788 were children and 518 were veterans.

“Homelessness remains a human tragedy that we simply cannot ignore, if we are to move forward as a State” said David McCreddie, chair of the Food and Shelter Board and Executive Director of New Hope for Families, a shelter in Pawtucket

There are also more long-term homeless citizens in the shelter system than ever before. For the current reporting period, 10% have been homeless for two years or more. Two-thirds of these Rhode Islanders have long-term disabilities and over 70% reported incomes below \$5,000 per year.

The estimated 230,282 nights of shelter provided to Rhode Island’s homeless men, women and children in 2006-2007 was a 2% decrease over the previous fiscal year’s total of 234,226. The number of families also decreased from 882 to 790, still the second highest number recorded. In 1997–1998, the first year these specific statistics were recorded, there were 471 homeless families and 890 homeless children.

Almost half of the homeless veterans (48.8%) are receiving some form of veteran's services. More than 60% (63.4%) suffer from a long-term disability; nearly a third (31.6%) are chronically homeless. Thirty-four are women.

“With the slight decrease in the overall homeless population, we're beginning to see the impact of initiatives like the Neighborhood Opportunities Program (NOP), the Housing First supportive housing pilot, and other programs that are using creative and effective approaches to address Rhode Island's homeless crisis,” said Eric Hirsch, Professor of Sociology at Providence College and author of the report. “If given time, these efforts will bring about a permanent solution.”

“The increasing number of homeless children and veterans is disturbing,” said Jim Ryczek, Executive Director of the RI Coalition for the Homeless and a member of the Emergency Food and Shelter Board. “While no one ‘deserves’ to be homeless, it is especially upsetting to see our most vulnerable and those who were willing to make the ultimate sacrifice caught in this crisis.”

“Though prices have declined, we can't expect the housing market to solve the homeless crisis,” added Nellie Gorbea, Executive Director HousingWorks-RI. “Assuming renters can afford to pay 30% of their income for housing, an annual income of \$47,000 is needed to afford the average apartment. Eighty-two percent of those who were homeless last year reported a family income of less than \$10,000.”

The Rhode Island Emergency Food and Shelter Board was founded in 1988 with the support of the United Way of Rhode Island. The Board issues a report annually on the status of homelessness in the state. In addition to United Way of Rhode Island, the Rhode Island Department of Human Services and the Rhode Island Community Development Block Grant Program provided funding for the report.

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