



IN THE CITIES AND COUNTIES: NEW COST ANALYSIS FROM CINCINNATI AND HAMILTON COUNTY, OHIO UNDERSCORES EXPENSE OF HOMELESSNESS AND RANDOM RICOCHETING THROUGH PUBLIC SYSTEMS

CINCINNATI, OHIO. A data match of over 1,000 homeless individuals in Cincinnati has revealed that, in a one-year period, the population - about one-third of the 3,300 enumerated locally as homeless - spent an annual average of 41 nights in jail and 35 nights in shelter. ". . . it suggests that the jail was on many days a high-priced shelter for the homeless - and that's not good for either the homeless or the taxpayers," said a story in the Cincinnati *Enquirer*.

Cincinnati's preliminary data is the latest to emerge among more than 65 Council-inspired cost studies that have generated unprecedented political will to reinvest in innovative strategies.

Of those jailed, half have been identified as having a mental illness. The number was higher (71 percent) for women, and higher as a whole (61 percent) for those who were jailed more than three times. Of those jailed, 58 percent of women and 41 percent of men had mental health and substance abuse problems. About 56 percent were identified as chronically homeless. The total number of jail nights was 15% higher than the number of shelter nights.

"If the jail is a solution for homelessness, we've got a problem," Hamilton County Commissioner David Pepper said after a discussion of the data. "In this case, we have a system already at capacity and the idea that we're cycling homeless people in over and over again - it just doesn't make sense. (It) is not a good use of dollars and does not solve the underlying problem." Hamilton County Commissioners had to lay off workers and cut services to balance the budget last year.

The City Council of Cincinnati passed an emergency ordinance with the theme of "Homeless to Homes" in October 2008 directing the local Continuum of Care to "address the inadequacies of the current provision of services for single homelessness individuals" and "to put into place a comprehensive plan" that would be "based on nationally recognized best- practice methods and which would guide public resource investment in the future to be outcome- oriented. The recommendations are due to the city and county by March 31.

To create the analysis, which will be presented in March to the city and county, data was provided to The Partnership Center, Ltd. (PCL) by the Hamilton County Justice System on all persons arrested and incarcerated from October 1, 2005 through September 30, 2008. PCL unduplicated the jail data and then matched it to HMIS data. The data is part of a larger study by the Cincinnati/Hamilton County Continuum of Care for the Homeless.