

JOURNEY TO JOBS

**Understanding and
Eliminating Barriers
Imposed on Homeless
Jobseekers**



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ABOUT THE JOURNEY TO JOBS PROJECT

Journey to Jobs is a three-year, systems-level collaborative effort advancing a key priority of the Baltimore City Continuum of Care by improving access to employment and economic opportunity for homeless jobseekers. Journey to Jobs expands existing partnerships to understand and reduce barriers to economic opportunity for people experiencing homelessness, including those who are involved with the criminal justice system.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Journey to Jobs is a three-year, systems-level collaborative project to advance a key priority of the Baltimore City Continuum of Care's effort to make homelessness rare and brief - improving access to employment and economic opportunity for homeless jobseekers. To this end, Journey to Jobs introduced new metrics, matched cross-system data, collected surveys, and conducted focus groups to understand the precise nature of interconnections between homelessness, economic instability, criminal records, and racial disparities. This analysis demonstrates the monumental barriers faced by many homeless jobseekers, and informs recommendations for racially equitable, sustainable, and collaborative solutions to connect individuals and families experiencing homelessness to employment.

Key Findings

In Baltimore City, people experiencing homelessness want to work, and many in fact do work, but do not earn enough to remain stably housed.

- ▶ Over two-thirds of people experiencing street homelessness expressed interest in looking for employment.
- ▶ Thirteen percent of people experiencing homelessness indicated they were employed at the initial point of assessment.
- ▶ Homeless jobseekers report multiple obstacles to obtaining and sustaining employment due to housing instability and associated stigma. Challenges are exacerbated by insufficient wages, untenable schedules, and the lack of career advancement opportunities.

Homeless jobseekers face multiple, intersecting barriers that increase vulnerability and impede one's ability to access resources and gain housing and economic stability. Criminal records, in particular, have a pervasive, long-lasting, and demoralizing impact for many people experiencing homelessness.

- ▶ Forty-three percent of homeless individuals have at least one expungeable record.
- ▶ Over half of all cases amongst the dataset of individuals in the homeless service system are expungeable.
- ▶ The vast majority of charges (81%) are misdemeanors, and only 11% of all charges resulted in a conviction within district court.

At every level of analysis, people who identified as Black or African American were disproportionately represented and negatively impacted. Representing 64 percent of Baltimore City residents, they comprise:

- ▶ Seventy-nine percent of the homeless service system and 87 percent of the homeless young adult population.
- ▶ Eighty-two percent of individuals in the homeless service system with criminal cases.

Key Recommendations

- ▶ Racial equity strategies are essential to every effort within the homeless service and workforce systems, including all cross-sector efforts to support homeless jobseekers.
- ▶ Interagency collaboration, resource alignment, and shared competencies are imperative to overcoming the multiple, intersecting barriers to economic stability.
- ▶ The homeless service system must be equipped to understand and respond to the vocational aspirations of people experiencing homelessness.
- ▶ Improved metrics and cross-sector data matching are instrumental to understanding the needs and goals of homeless jobseekers.



INTRODUCTION

In Baltimore City, people experiencing homelessness want to work, and many in fact do work, but do not earn enough to remain stably housed. Most people express these aspirations even while experiencing the traumas and challenges of an immediate housing crisis. But for homeless jobseekers, the current systems are difficult to navigate and resources are challenging to access. Systemic and intertwined barriers, including the criminalization of homelessness, create additional challenges and continue to disproportionately impact people of color and other disenfranchised populations. It is an economic and ethical imperative to address the historic and current practices and policies that perpetuate inequality and constrict access to economic opportunity and housing stability for homeless jobseekers.

While there is substantial evidence at a national and local level about the individual impacts of homelessness, unemployment, criminal justice system involvement, and racial discrimination, it has been difficult to ascertain how these barriers may overlap in Baltimore City. The Journey to Jobs project analyzes key gaps in our understanding of how multiple systems interact to compound racial disparities and exacerbate barriers faced by homeless jobseekers. This report articulates those findings and recommends strategies for increasing access to economic opportunity and promoting racial equity for homeless jobseekers within our public systems.

BACKGROUND

Homelessness in Baltimore City

Homelessness persists, both nationally and locally, for many individuals and families, as the need for affordable housing continues to grossly exceed the available opportunities and housing costs continue to outpace wages. Only one-fourth of eligible households nationwide receive federal rental assistance.¹ To afford a two-bedroom apartment in Baltimore, a household would need full-time employment paying \$26.46 an hour, the equivalent of working 2.9 full-time jobs at minimum wage.² As a result, more than fifty percent of Baltimore renters live in housing they can't afford and 33 percent are spending more than half of their income on housing.³

Estimates of homelessness in Baltimore City also indicate that the need for housing outstrips the available resources within the homeless service system. According to preliminary data analysis of currently available resources and assessments submitted to the Coordinated Access system, only two in ten households experiencing homelessness will have access to a permanent housing intervention.ⁱ

The Point-in-Time (PIT) Count is one measure of homelessness that captures the number of people estimated to be homeless at a single moment in time. In Baltimore City, on January 22, 2017, 2,669 people were identified as homeless, including 699 people experiencing chronic homelessness. The PIT Count included 158 homeless families with 321 minor children.⁴ Youth REACH MD is a similar time-limited effort to identify and survey youth and young adults experiencing homelessness.

i. See Appendix A for definitions and more detailed explanations of terminology.

During the 2017 Youth REACH Count, 1,690 unaccompanied homeless youth were identified in Baltimore City.⁵

Other estimates are developed over longer periods of time through cumulative analysis of the Baltimore City Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) data. For example, 5,250 people were documented as homeless in emergency shelters, safe havens, and transitional housing throughout FY16.⁶ The average length of stay in homelessness was 181 days.⁷

Unemployment in Baltimore City

The 2017 unemployment rate in Baltimore City, at 6.1 percent, remains significantly higher than the statewide rate of 4.1 percent.⁸ Furthermore, when accounting for overall labor force participation, nearly one-third of working age residents are unemployed and this rate increases to almost 50 percent in some areas of the city.⁹ The challenges can be even more acute for the city's homeless jobseekers. As measured within HMIS, only 16.6 percent (522 people) of adults in FY16 maintained or increased employment income.ⁱⁱ Furthermore, recent HUD System Performance Measures indicate that only 25 percent of adults exiting Continuum of Care-funded programs have increased their earned income during FY16, and only 9 percent of adults staying in those programs increased earned income during that same reporting period.¹⁰ Eighteen percent of youth experiencing homelessness surveyed during the Youth REACH Count reported having a part-time or full-time job.¹¹

ii. This only includes Emergency Shelter, Transitional Housing, Safe Haven, Rapid Rehousing and Permanent Housing (Baltimore City Local Performance Measure 6.3).


Criminalization in Baltimore City

National and local research has demonstrated how homelessness,^{12 13 14} poverty,^{15 16} and mental illness¹⁷ are criminalized. People experiencing homelessness are often forced to do in public view what is typically done in private, including eating and sleeping. Despite having fewer emergency shelter beds than homeless residents, many cities nationwide have outlawed sleeping or camping in public, sleeping in vehicles, and sitting or lying down in particular public places. Additional prohibitions against panhandling, loitering, or even sharing food with people living on the street criminalize behavior undertaken to survive.¹⁸ People who are already vulnerable to over-policing become even more at risk of arrest when their mere presence on the street can be a crime. Locally, 33 percent of homeless youth and young adults surveyed via the Youth REACH Count reported having stayed in jail.¹⁹

Additionally, the Department of Justice's 2016 report on its investigation of Baltimore City's Police Department indicate how Baltimore City residents, particularly African American men, have been systematically negatively impacted by law enforcement policies and practices. Several

key findings from that report indicate widespread misconduct and unconstitutional arrests by the Baltimore City Police Department. For example, more than 11,000 charges over five years were determined to lack probable cause or did not warrant prosecution.²⁰

Consequences of a criminal record, even in the absence of convictions, extend far beyond the obvious punishments such as prison, probation, or fines. Additional unforeseen sanctions are detrimental to housing and family stability. Nationally, public housing agencies and private landlords institute criminal background screening policies that create significant barriers to housing.^{21 22 23} Furthermore, while employment is a key predictor of successful reentry after incarceration,²⁴ a criminal record is detrimental to employment opportunities. In Maryland, 549 employment-related collateral consequences are attached to criminal convictions, placing additional burdens on people trying to work.²⁵ These include prohibitions or limits on access to jobs, training, and occupational licensing, sometimes for entire industries and the majority of employers use criminal background checks to make hiring decisions.²⁶



“
I didn't have a
problem getting
jobs, until I got
arrested.”



“
They didn’t hire
me – I swear
it’s because I’m
Black.”

Racial Disparities: Homelessness, Employment, and Criminal Justice System Involvement

The historic and current impact of racial discrimination and bias is apparent when examining trends in housing and employment. A recent national study of six homeless service systems identified significant racial disparities that cannot be explained by the impact of poverty alone.²⁷ In that study, almost two-thirds of people experiencing homelessness are Black, compared to only 28 percent who are White. Overall, 78 percent of people experiencing homelessness in that study are people of color. This discrepancy is even starker among homeless youth (18-24 years old), 78 percent of whom are Black, and 89 percent of whom are people of color. In a separate national study, Black youth were found to be 83 percent more likely to experience homelessness than other youth.²⁸ A local survey of Baltimore City youth found that 81 percent of homeless youth identified as African American,²⁹ compared to 60% of all young adults in Baltimore City.³⁰

The impact of racial bias on employment, and hiring in particular, is well established.³¹ One critical study found that Black men without criminal records are less likely to receive job offers than White men with criminal records.³² In Baltimore City, the unemployment rate for workers of color is three times the rate of White workers and the median income for Black workers is half that of White workers,³³ and these disparities persist across industries.³⁴

The effects of racial discrimination throughout the criminal justice system have also been documented extensively.^{35 36 37 38} This has been further substantiated locally, as demonstrated by the enormous disparities in police stops and arrests highlighted in the Department of Justice’s 2016 report. Officers stopped one Black man 30 times in less than four years, without issuing a citation or criminal charge.³⁹ From 2010 to 2015, Black individuals made up 91 percent of those arrested for trespassing or failure to obey, and 84 percent of those arrested for disorderly conduct.⁴⁰



JOURNEY TO JOBS FINDINGS

While substantial evidence exists about the impact of homelessness, unemployment, and criminal records, the relevant systems have not traditionally interacted or shared information in ways that allow us to understand the precise nature of the interactions between barriers faced by homeless jobseekers. In order to promote better policies and practices, Journey to Jobs first endeavored to understand these intersections through a multi-pronged approach to analysis including 1) the introduction of new metrics, 2) data-matching, 3) surveys, and 4) focus groups.ⁱⁱⁱ

1. Integrating Employment Metrics to Understand Homeless Jobseekers

Homeless jobseekers need to, want to, and can and do work. Data collection, analysis, and planning efforts in the workforce and homeless services system must be improved to reflect these interconnected housing and employment goals. The integration of employment metrics within existing data collection processes is a key strategy

iii. See Appendix B for the methodology section that provides additional details on analyses.

to demonstrate the degree to which individuals experiencing homelessness are interested in seeking employment, and enables systems to anticipate the associated demand for workforce development services.

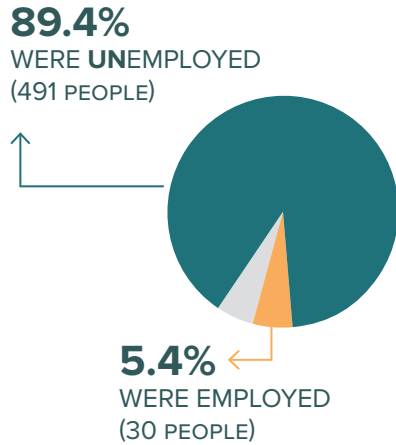
In 2017, the Journey to Jobs project collaborated with key stakeholders to introduce new metrics to the Point-in-Time Count and Coordinated Access system. This newly established data analysis capacity enables the homeless service system to measure employment status and interests and utilize this data to drive ongoing system planning efforts.

2017 Point-in-Time (PIT) Count

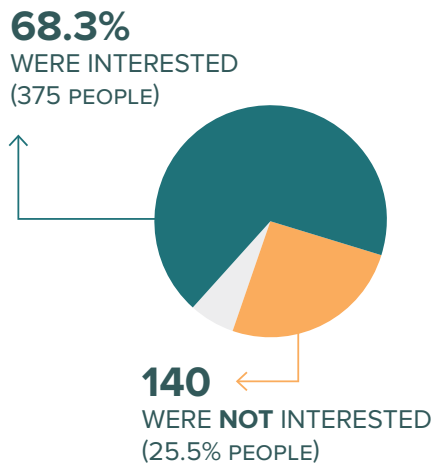
The Point-in-Time (PIT) Count is a count of sheltered and unsheltered homeless individuals conducted on a single night in January by the Baltimore City Continuum of Care, organized through the Mayor's Office of Human Services. In 2017, additional questions were incorporated into the street homelessness survey to assess employment status and interests. Consistent with national research, the results indicate that the majority of individuals experiencing homelessness will immediately identify employment as a key goal.

The 2017 PIT Count surveyed 549 unsheltered homeless individuals in Baltimore City, and recorded these responses:

EMPLOYMENT STATUS



EMPLOYMENT INTEREST



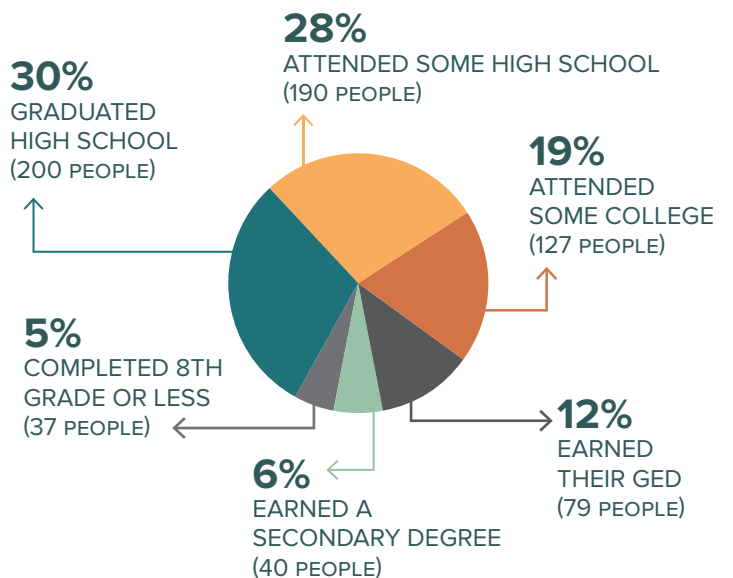
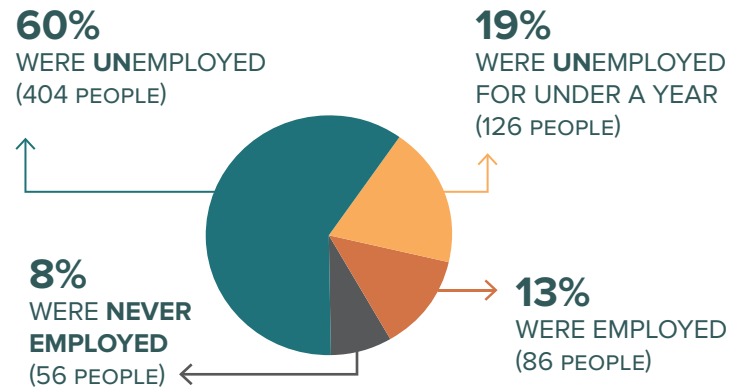
Coordinated Access

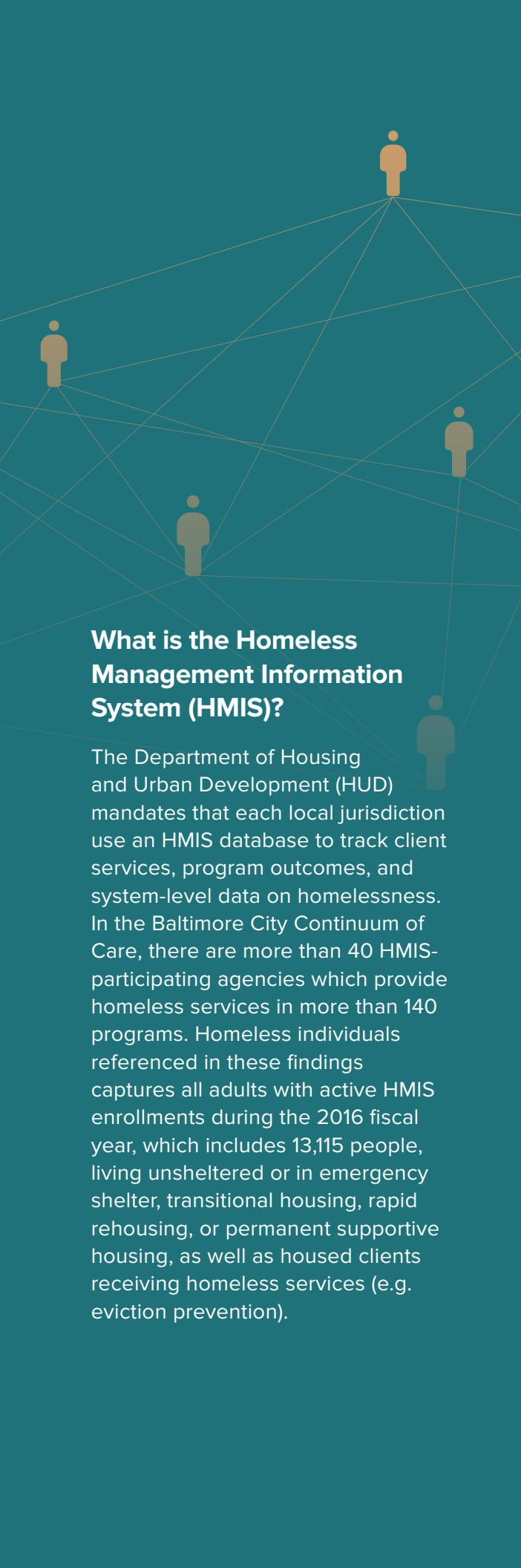
In 2017, the Baltimore City Coordinated Access system was re-envisioned and launched to utilize a common assessment and referral process that prioritizes existing Continuum of Care resources for households based on their experience of homelessness and relative vulnerability. The Coordinated

Access vulnerability assessment was designed to incorporate five questions that record the employment status, goals, and interests of homeless households. For the first time, at the point of entry into the system, we can analyze employment-related data and begin to anticipate and eventually streamline access to the workforce system.

This analysis further indicates that the majority of individuals are interested in employment, and additionally, demonstrates that many individuals experiencing homelessness are employed or only recently lost employment. Analysis of this data is ongoing, and preliminary employment assessment data has been collected from 672 individuals.

EMPLOYMENT STATUS AND EDUCATION





What is the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)?

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) mandates that each local jurisdiction use an HMIS database to track client services, program outcomes, and system-level data on homelessness. In the Baltimore City Continuum of Care, there are more than 40 HMIS-participating agencies which provide homeless services in more than 140 programs. Homeless individuals referenced in these findings captures all adults with active HMIS enrollments during the 2016 fiscal year, which includes 13,115 people, living unsheltered or in emergency shelter, transitional housing, rapid rehousing, or permanent supportive housing, as well as housed clients receiving homeless services (e.g. eviction prevention).



2. Data-Matching: Criminal Records and Homelessness

To better understand how homeless jobseekers have been impacted by interactions with law enforcement and the criminal justice system, Journey to Jobs launched a cross-sector data comparison effort. These data provide valuable new insight into criminal records, case outcomes, and expungeability^{iv} for Baltimore City residents, and particularly people who have experienced homelessness, and demonstrate the potential of cross-sector data-sharing to inform collaborative efforts.

The following data resulted from the Journey to Jobs data-sharing agreements between the Mayor's Office of Human Services, Baltimore City Continuum of Care, Maryland Volunteer Lawyers Service (MVLS), and The Holland Law Firm (Holland), cross-referencing:

1. Baltimore City's Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) FY2016 data, and
2. The Client Legal Utility Engine (CLUE) database of criminal records maintained by MVLS.

What is the Client Legal Utility Engine (CLUE) database?

CLUE is a searchable database of publicly-available criminal record data created and maintained by MVLS. At the time of data-matching, this database included over 4.4 million criminal cases from Maryland District Courts in every county except Anne Arundel, going back to 1985.^v

iv. Expungement is a court-ordered process to remove case information from court and law enforcement records. Eligibility for expungement differs by jurisdiction. Expungement removes legal barriers for (1) someone who was arrested but found to be not responsible for a crime, or (2) someone who has completed sentencing and fulfilled all other legal obligations resulting from the crime.

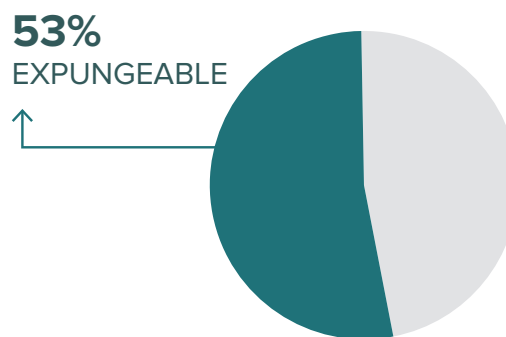
v. Each case may consist of one or more charges.

Data-Matching Phase I: Cases and Expungeability (1994-2015)

In the first phase, MVLS matched the HMIS dataset to an analysis of cases and expungeable cases from 1994 to 2015 that includes both district and circuit court cases from Baltimore City and Baltimore County. The following analysis demonstrates the profound reach of the criminal justice system.

- ▶ 50,410 total cases amongst individuals in the homeless service system, of which 26,619 (53%) are expungeable.
- ▶ 48% of homeless individuals (6,334) have at least one case.
 - › 7.96: average number of cases per individual with a record.
- ▶ 43% of homeless individuals have at least one expungeable case.
- ▶ 1,716 homeless individuals have records in which every identified case is expungeable.

50,410 TOTAL CASES



ALMOST
1 IN 2
HOMELESS INDIVIDUALS
HAVE **AT LEAST ONE**
EXPUNGEABLE CASE

Data-Matching Phase II: Cases, Expungeability, Charge Types, and Outcomes (2008-2017)

In order to better understand the nature of these criminal records, Journey to Jobs conducted a second phase of data-matching in partnership with Holland, using the same HMIS dataset to provide more extensive analysis of the types of expungeable cases, types of charges, and outcomes. This dataset includes only district court case outcomes and is based on a shorter period of time, from 2008-2017. It includes all Maryland counties except Anne Arundel.

This additional analysis demonstrates that the vast majority of charges are for low-level nonviolent crimes, including some charges that have since been decriminalized. The data also show 1,717 nuisance charges, as classified under Maryland law, such as loitering, sleeping on park benches, panhandling, and public urination, which criminalize behavior necessary to meet basic needs. Although approximately three-fourths of nuisance charges are later dismissed or declined prosecution, charges still remain on individuals' records. Seventy-eight percent of these charges are currently expungeable.

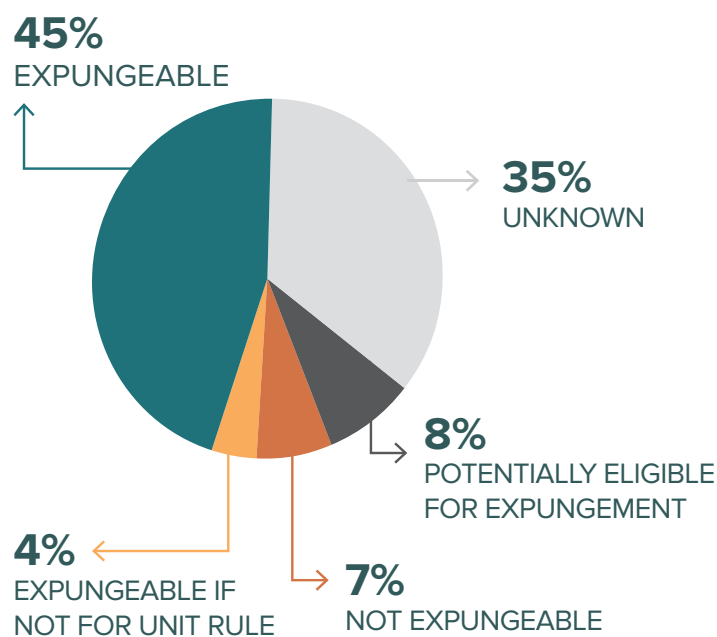
The inclusion of additional charges that often stem from homelessness or extreme poverty yielded 4,240 charges, of which 64 percent are currently expungeable.^{vi} This includes charges such as trespassing, public intoxication, and selling loose cigarettes, as well as charges that may be associated with mental health symptoms, such as disorderly conduct, disturbing the peace, and failure to obey a reasonable and lawful order.

vi. See Appendix B for more details on the methodology of identifying nuisance crimes.

Total Charges and Expungeability

- ▶ 31,803 total charges
- ▶ 14,357 (45%) that are expungeable
- ▶ An additional 1,411 charges would be expungeable if it were not for the unit rule^{vii} and an additional 2,695 charges may become eligible for expungement under the Justice Reinvestment Act (JRA).
- ▶ The JRA allows for additional charges to become eligible for expungement if the individual completes a pre-determined waiting period without a subsequent conviction.

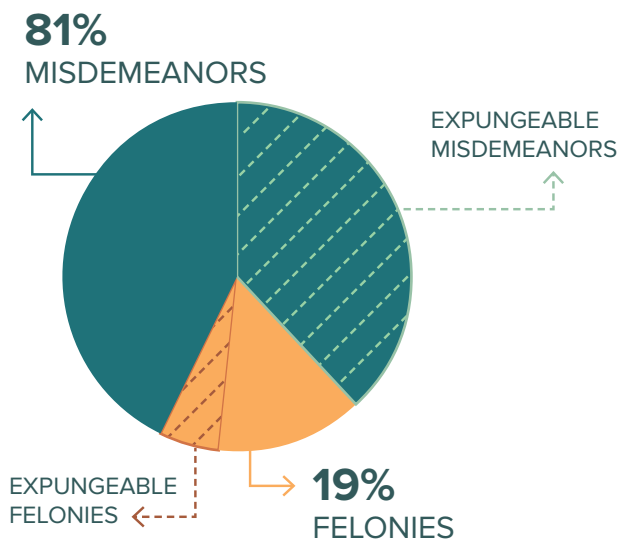
31,803 TOTAL CHARGES



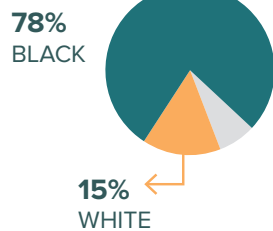
vii. Under Maryland law, for a charge to be expungeable, every charge within the same case must also be expungeable. In a case with multiple charges, if one charge cannot be expunged, then no charges from that case can be expunged, even if those charges would have been eligible on their own.

Categorization

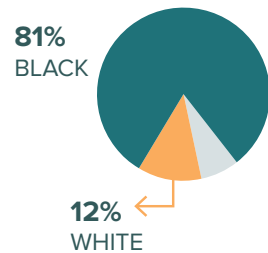
- ▶ 81% of charges are misdemeanors.
 - › Homeless individuals with misdemeanor charges: 78% Black, 15% White
 - › 47% of misdemeanor charges are expungeable.
- ▶ 19% of charges are felonies.
 - › Homeless individuals with felony charges: 81% Black, 12% White
 - › 28% of felony charges are expungeable.



MISDEMEANOR CHARGES



FELONY CHARGES

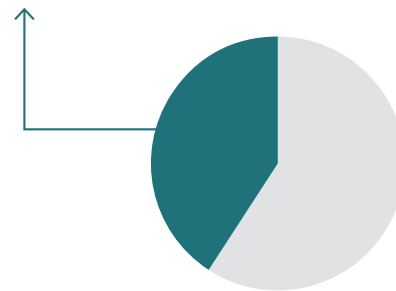


Seriousness^{viii}

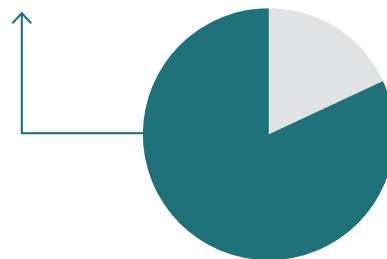
- ▶ 41% of homeless individuals' charges are Category VII (the least serious category).
- ▶ 82% of homeless individuals' charges are Categories V-VII (the bottom 3 least serious categories).

OUT OF ALL HOMELESS INDIVIDUALS' CHARGES

41%
ARE CATEGORY 7,
THE LEAST SERIOUS



82%
ARE THE BOTTOM
LEAST SERIOUS
CATEGORIES



viii. Seriousness Category classification is a tool issued by the Maryland State Commission on Criminal Sentencing Policy (www.msccsp.org) to determine sentencing guidelines in circuit courts. Categories range from Category I (most serious) to Category VII (least serious).

Outcomes of Charges, 2008-2017

For Baltimore City residents and the subpopulation of people experiencing homelessness, the vast majority of charges do not result in convictions. Only 11% of these charges resulted in conviction within district court.^{ix}

	Homeless Individuals	Baltimore City Residents
Nolle Prosequi ^x	13,183 (41%)	280,562 (36%)
Unknown ^{xi}	11,091 (35%)	350,167 (44%)
Guilty	3,567 (11%)	55,848 (7%)
Stet ^{xii}	2,259 (7%)	46,856 (6%)
Dismissed	535 (2%)	21,949 (3%)
Probation Before Judgment (unsupervised)	324 (1%)	9,527 (1%)
Probation Before Judgment (supervised)	238 (1%)	5,051 (1%)
Acquittal	228 (1%)	5,587 (1%)
Other ^{xiii}	65 (<1%)	1,692 (<1%)
TOTAL	31,803	788,932

ix. Circuit court outcomes were unavailable at the time of this analysis. The inclusion of those additional data would likely change the distribution of outcomes as a preliminary count of Baltimore City Circuit Court dispositions indicated that 34.4 percent resulted in convictions.

x. Nolle prosequi means the State has decided to drop the charges and not prosecute the defendant.

xi. The outcomes of these charges are unknown within this dataset because they are either pending or have been moved to a different court not included in this analysis. The availability of circuit court outcomes would alter the distribution of outcomes. See Appendix B for more details on the methodology.

xii. Stet is an outcome in which a case becomes inactive for a period of time, usually while the defendant completes any agreed-upon conditions, such as community service. The defendant does not enter a plea, and is not convicted or given a sentence.

xiii. This category includes merged, abated by death, not criminally responsible, and compromised.

Demographics

The disaggregation of data is critical to understanding disparate experiences of homelessness within our community and guiding efforts to reform practices, improve policies, and create an equitable system. In addition to information on homelessness and criminal records, Journey to Jobs also analyzed data based on race, gender, and age.^{xiv, xv} At every level of analysis, people who identified as Black or African American were disproportionately represented and negatively impacted.

Race

Analysis of HMIS data indicates that Black individuals are disproportionately represented in the homeless service system. While 64 percent of Baltimore City residents are Black,⁴¹ 79 percent of individuals in HMIS in FY16 self-identified as Black or African American. When population data is matched to criminal record data, the disparities increase further. Eighty-two percent of individuals in HMIS with cases identify as Black or African American.

	Black	White	People of Color ^{xvi}	Non-Responses ^{xvii}
Baltimore City Residents	63.7%	29.6%		
Baltimore City Cases (2008-2017)	84.2% (301,671 Cases to Black residents)	13.5% (48,342 Cases to White residents)		
Homeless Individuals	78.9% (10,349)	12.9% (1,686)	81.1% (10,633)	6.1% (796)
Homeless Individuals with Cases (1994-2015)	82.0% (5,196 Black individuals)	12.8% (814 White individuals)	84.0% (5,322 People of Color)	

xiv. Based on self-reported data in HMIS.

xv. Because less than 0.1 percent of individuals reported their ethnicity as Hispanic or Latino, analysis of ethnicity has been excluded from this report. Additional analysis is recommended to identify the needs and barriers associated with other populations.

xvi. This includes the following options for self-identifying race in HMIS: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Multi-racial, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.

xvii. Includes all non-responses: didn't know, refused, or the data wasn't collected.

Gender xviii, xix

Additionally, while 47 percent of Baltimore City residents are male and 48 percent of individuals in HMIS identify as male, they represent 79 percent of Baltimore City residents with cases and 57 percent of individuals in HMIS with cases.

	Female		Male		Trans-gender	No responses
Baltimore City Residents	52.9%		47.1%			
Baltimore City Cases (2008–2017)	21.1% (75,582 Cases to Females)		78.6% (Cases to Males)			
Homeless Individuals	51.2% (6718 Females)	84.2% Black 10.1% White 86.5% POC	48.3% (6339 Males)	73.7% Black 15.8% White 75.8% POC	27	31
Homeless Individuals with Cases (1994-2015)	42.5% (2692)	84.5% Black 10.8% White 86.8% POC	57.0% (3611)	80.5% Black 14.5% White 82.4% POC		

Young Adults (Ages 18-24)

The disaggregation of data by age enables analysis of outcomes for the subpopulation of young adults, including the intersection with race. As compared to the general adult population, this analysis indicates even more significant racial disparities for young adults in the homeless service system, generally, and also with criminal justice system involvement.

Baltimore City Young Adults ⁴²	78,110	59.8% Black 30.6% White	
Homeless Young Adults	1,084	87.4% Black (947) 6.5% White (70) 89.5% POC (970)	58.9% Female (639) 40.2% Male (436)
Homeless Young Adults with Charges (2008-2017)	250	87.6% Black (219) 6.8% White (17) 90.8% POC (227)	46.8% Females (117) 52.4% Males (131)
Homeless Young Adult Charges (2008-2017)	1,978		
Homeless Young Adult Expungeable Charges (2008-2017)	690 (34.9% of homeless young adult charges)		

xviii. This includes the following HMIS options for self-identifying gender: Female, Male, Trans Female (MTF or Male to Female), Trans Male (FTM or Female to Male), Gender Non-Conforming, Client doesn't know, Client refused, and Data not collected.

xix. Because only 27 individuals reported a gender option other than female or male, analysis of other categories has been excluded from this report. Additional analysis is recommended to identify the needs and barriers associated with other populations.

3. Surveys

Journey to Jobs partnered with four local agencies across eight sites to collect surveys from clients and providers to explore how and to what extent people experiencing homelessness are also dealing with barriers to employment, particularly due to criminal records or child support payments. Surveys are a valuable tool for soliciting direct feedback from individuals experiencing homelessness and collecting cross-sector data that may otherwise be unavailable. For instance, the gap in the number of individuals who reported having been arrested and reported having a criminal record suggests that many people may not be aware of having a criminal record.

When this project was designed, there were no reliable employment-related data for homeless individuals. Because the newly integrated employment metrics within the PIT Count and Coordinated Access are more reliable and include larger subsets of individuals, these new analyses are highlighted more prominently than the survey results.^{xx}

4. Focus Groups

Journey to Jobs conducted client focus groups at three different agencies and one provider focus group to supplement the quantitative data with direct experiences and expertise of homeless jobseekers and the providers that serve them. The following themes highlight the personal examples of how homeless jobseekers are experiencing barriers to employment.^{xxi}

Criminal Records Limit Access to Economic Opportunity.

- ▶ The impact of criminal records and associated stigmatization on training and employment opportunities is pervasive, long-lasting, and demoralizing. Not only does a record create additional challenges for the job search process, it also inhibits career growth and access to livable wages.
- ▶ Expungement services are valuable, but the process can be time-consuming, costly, and confusing to navigate. The charges currently eligible for expungement are too limited to be useful in many cases.

Navigating employment while experiencing homelessness is a monumental, though not insurmountable, challenge.

- ▶ Homeless jobseekers must find a way to perform adequately on the job while also meeting basic needs (i.e. getting rest, finding food, maintaining a phone), cultivating a support system, and addressing recovery goals.
- ▶ Homeless jobseekers must be able to navigate a complex maze of barriers when seeking employment. Maintaining documents, navigating the application and interview process, and addressing gaps in employment can be much more difficult when one experiences homelessness.

CRIMINAL RECORDS



xx. See Appendix B for details about the survey collection process.

xxi. See Appendix B for details about the focus group process and additional details on the results.


- ▶ Existing and accessible employment opportunities present new challenges for homeless jobseekers. Employment opportunities often come with schedules that are difficult to manage, wages are often insufficient to meet basic needs, and many positions do not provide opportunities to seek advancement or increased wages.

Providing employment services to homeless jobseekers requires substantial investment.

- ▶ Providing employment services to homeless jobseekers requires substantial programmatic investment. Providers must be able to engage employers and assist homeless jobseekers with a broad spectrum of employment-related activities, which necessitates dedicated employment positions and flexible funding.
- ▶ Meaningful employer investment, including the willingness to be flexible with employees and make individual accommodations, is incredibly valuable.
- ▶ Performance measures and goals are not always aligned across jobseekers, providers, and funders.

Racial discrimination imposes additional barriers on homeless jobseekers.

- ▶ Racial discrimination imposes additional barriers on homeless jobseekers. Racial discrimination is a common experience for Black people, and jobseekers can indicate specific instances when they experienced bias and were denied opportunities.



**“
People look at me
– young, Black
female...You don’t
know me.”**

RECOMMENDATIONS

The interconnections between homelessness, economic instability, criminal records, and racial discrimination demonstrate the monumental barriers faced by many homeless jobseekers. The burden must not lie solely on each individual jobseeker to navigate the complex maze of barriers and potential resources. Sustainable and racially equitable solutions to homelessness necessitate a systems-level, collaborative approach to connect workforce development and economic stability resources with services for individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

The following recommendations, to be interpreted and implemented with a focus on racial equity, provide concrete strategies and commitments for workforce and homeless service professionals, nonprofits, government agencies, employers, advocates, philanthropists, and other critical stakeholders.

Racial Equity

A focus on racial equity is essential to every effort within the homeless service and workforce systems, including all cross-sector efforts to support homeless jobseekers. It is imperative that the homeless service system understands and accounts for the historic and current practices and policies that disadvantage Black residents and other vulnerable populations in Baltimore City. While additional planning is necessary to design and implement a racial equity lens, it should include:

- ▶ Specific and measurable goals for practice and policy changes to support homeless jobseekers of color;
- ▶ Dedicated resources, including positions, technical assistance, trainings, and programming, focused on advancing a racial equity agenda;

- ▶ A plan to track and report on system performance measures related to racial disparities within the homeless service and workforce systems, including additional analysis to better understand the needs of people of color and intersections with gender, sexual orientation, and other key factors that may lead to discrimination and disparate outcomes; and
- ▶ Analysis of the demographic characteristics of organizations and systems serving homeless jobseekers to identify opportunities for professional development and advancement for people of color and people with experience of homelessness, and increase diversity within organizations, workgroups, and leadership boards.

1. Systems Collaborations: Workforce, Criminal Justice, and Homeless Services

Homeless jobseekers face multiple, intersecting barriers that increase vulnerability and impede one's ability to access resources and gain housing and economic stability. The challenges of homelessness are further compounded by the far-reaching impact of criminal records. Cross-sector collaborative efforts are imperative to overcome these barriers.

Workforce and Homeless Service Systems

- 1.1** Align Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and other public and private workforce funding to more effectively target and track outcomes for subpopulations facing multiple barriers to employment, including homeless jobseekers and individuals of color.

1.2 Jointly propose and secure funding for robust, evidence-based transitional jobs programs, employment navigation projects, and other innovative models that proactively target and serve homeless jobseekers, including mechanisms to streamline access to workforce opportunities for rapid rehousing clients. A strong transitional jobs program should:

- › Include paid wages, job skills training, and supportive services to remove barriers and ensure long-term outcomes; and
- › Incorporate job placement and retention support to build linkages to stable, unsubsidized employment and strong career pathways.

1.3 Cross-train workforce and homeless service providers to ensure shared competencies necessary to serve homeless jobseekers, including access to specialized vocational services (i.e. supported employment).

1.4 Develop resources for dedicated staff positions who serve as specialists at the intersection of homelessness and employment.

1.5 Ensure workforce initiatives (i.e. mobile job units, job fairs) target and effectively serve homeless jobseekers with supportive partnerships from the homeless service system.

1.6 Ensure cross-sector board and committee participation of workforce and homeless service leaders.

1.7 Develop strong partnerships with the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) and establish direct liaisons to homeless service projects to expedite the referral process for eligible homeless jobseekers.

1.8 Develop a collaborative strategy for connecting homeless young people to YouthWorks and other youth-focused employment and housing projects.

Criminal Justice and Homeless Service Systems

1.9 Identify resources for formal partnerships and education to connect providers and clients to legal services, including expungement opportunities.

1.10 Engage a law enforcement and criminal justice community that is informed about the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness, and better equipped to serve justly and humanely.

- › Inform training for law enforcement officers to be able to intervene and connect people experiencing homelessness to services rather than subject them to arrest and prosecution.
- › Provide training, resources, and guidance to prosecutors on working with homeless individuals, using discretion in charging, and enhancing public safety without inadvertently criminalizing homelessness.
- › Build partnerships with local jails and prisons, identify people most at risk of homelessness upon reentry, improve discharge plans, and coordinate intake and service referrals before release.

1.11 Advocate to end enforcement of nuisance crimes and existing laws that criminalize nonviolent behavior that stems from homelessness.

1.12 Advocate for expanding the charges and convictions eligible for expungement and simplify the process to understand and access expungements.

- 1.13** Advocate for improved enforcement of policies that limit criminal background screenings.
- 1.14** Revise tenant and hiring practices to remove barriers related to criminal backgrounds and homelessness.
- 1.15** Pursue Second Chance Act grants and other funding sources that can be used to provide housing or supportive or workforce services to homeless jobseekers with criminal records.

2. Homeless Service System: Capacity-Building

2.1 Rapid Rehousing (RRH) and Employment

- › Design and message RRH as an employment intervention, creating employment-related guidance for providers and potential clients, examining contracts to ensure adequate planning and funding for employment-related staffing and services, and tracking outcomes accordingly.
- › Use RRH project cohorts as the piloting ground for system change efforts and partnership development (i.e. workforce system employment specialists, vocational rehabilitation counselors, supported employment providers, and benefit specialists) to streamline referral processes and improve access.
- › Support St. Vincent de Paul's RRH Employment Navigation Pilot to learn from their progress, successes, and challenges, and identify opportunities to sustain and expand this effort.

2.2 Vocationalizing Coordinated Access

- › Educate providers on the changes that they may anticipate in their client population and their employment needs based on emerging Coordinated Access assessment data.
- › Develop co-located entry and service points (i.e. utilize one-stop centers as Coordinated Access entry points) and cross-train key staff at one-stop centers and community job hubs to act as navigators for Coordinated Entry.
- › Build out an active referral process to connect Coordinated Access to the workforce system.

2.3 Increase capacity and streamline access to Supported Employment services for individuals in the homeless service system, including focused interventions within Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) programs.

2.4 Launch a learning community to provide the homeless service system with training and resources to promote employment and economic stability, including strategies to understand and address barriers.

2.5 Establish a flexible fund for employment and job training expenses, including transportation stipends.

2.6 Launch a public initiative to recruit potential employers and identify opportunities to improve job quality for homeless jobseekers.

2.7 Plan and implement a series of trainings and resources that can be provided to major employers to address housing instability of employees.

- 2.8** Develop and support strategies to ensure living wages, viable transportation, and flexible child care resources, all critical to the long-term stability of homeless jobseekers.

3. Data Driven Planning

The vision and infrastructure for data analysis established by Journey to Jobs provides compelling new ways to understand the needs of homeless jobseekers and the performance of our public systems. This is instrumental to understanding how homelessness may limit access to resources and opportunities while increasing one's vulnerability and involvement with more punitive and detrimental systems.

Integrated employment metrics allow for improved data collection and analysis within the homeless service system, and increased capacity to understand and respond to employment patterns and goals and combat the stereotypes of people experiencing homelessness as unable, unwilling, and uninterested in work.

- 3.1** Incorporate shared metrics across the workforce and homeless service systems to improve the analysis of outcomes. This means systematically tracking the housing status, services, and outcomes of workforce clients and the employment, education, and income status and interests of homeless service clients.
- 3.2** Utilize the established HMIS data matching capacity with housing, workforce, child support, criminal justice, and other systems to inform cross-sector collaborations, resource alignment, and barrier removal efforts.
- 3.3** Utilize future analysis to deepen our understanding of causal relationships and establish cost estimates.

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A homeless person is just someone who is unfortunate in getting what you need.”



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Journey to Jobs:
Understanding and Eliminating Barriers
Imposed on Homeless Jobseekers