



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**2026 Point-in-Time Count Shows Progress in Shelter and Family Homelessness,
Signals Urgent Need to Address People Living Outside**

*Unsheltered homelessness jumps 43% as CSB and the Continuum of Care call for
scaled investment in outreach, non-congregate shelter (hotels), and permanent housing*

[Columbus, OH, May 6, 2026] — The Community Shelter Board (CSB) today released the results of the 2026 Point-in-Time (PIT) Count. The annual census identified 2,587 people experiencing homelessness in Columbus and Franklin County, a 1.2% increase over 2025, continuing the upward trend from the 7.4% increase recorded the year before. Behind that number are two sharply different stories: a system making incremental progress for people in shelters and families, and a 43% surge in the number of people living outside.

Overall, sheltered homelessness decreased by 8%, with 165 fewer community members in emergency shelters and transitional housing compared to 2025. Family homelessness declined 3.8%, the second consecutive year of reduction driven by targeted prevention and diversion programs, an effective rapid rehousing system, increased successful housing placements by shelter providers, and the Direct Cash Transfer program. These reductions are the result of sustained, coordinated investment across the system.

Predictive modeling from the 2024 Community Assessment projected a 68% increase in unsheltered homelessness by 2028 without additional investment in diversion, rapid rehousing (RRH), and permanent supportive housing (PSH). The 2026 count is tracked with that projection. The path forward is known. What is required now is investment at the scale the moment demands.

"On a single day in January, this community pauses and bears witness to our neighbors living outside. This year, 651 of our community members were counted, a 43% increase from last year," said Shannon TL Isom, President + CEO of CSB. "We are making incremental progress, especially for families. We continue to focus on transitioning our community members out of the shelter system quickly. But we cannot let those gains obscure what is happening for those experiencing unsheltered homelessness. The gap between need and available resources is growing, and closing it requires a regional, coordinated investment from public, private, and community partners at a scale that matches this moment. Our coordinated work matters. It is urgent, and we stand ready to meet this moment together."

Key findings from the 2026 Point-in-Time Count include:

- Unsheltered homelessness increased 43%, from 455 in 2025 to 651 in 2026 — the largest single-year increase since 2023.
- Family homelessness declined 3.8%, the second consecutive year of decline.
- Unaccompanied youth ages 18-24 decreased 23%.
- Parenting youth decreased by 40%. For the second consecutive year, no parenting youth were identified as unsheltered.
- Chronic homelessness increased 16.4%.
- Individuals with severe mental illness increased 42%.
- Survivors of domestic violence increased 32%.
- Chronic substance use increased 53%.
- Veterans remained essentially flat, with 96 identified in 2026 compared to 97 in 2025.
- Individuals with HIV/AIDS increased 75%.



The divide between declining sheltered homelessness and rising unsheltered homelessness runs consistently across every demographic group. People with the most complex needs, those experiencing chronic homelessness, severe mental illness, domestic violence, and substance use disorders, are increasingly living outside and not accessing traditional shelter. Reaching them requires a different approach: more street outreach workers, non-congregate shelter options that meet people where they are, and a clear path from the street to permanent housing.

The 2025–2026 Extreme Weather Response Strategy demonstrated what targeted investment can produce. During the winter months, 44 community members living outside with histories of chronic homelessness were moved into permanent housing through a Street-to-Housing model at the North Warming Center, using Winter Warming Center funding. The average length of homelessness for that cohort was nine years. CSB estimates that continued, year-round non-congregate shelter funding at this scale could permanently house 200 to 300 unsheltered community members annually. Securing just three hotel-based non-congregate shelter sites could reduce family homelessness by 48% by 2028.

“The Point-in-Time Count gives us the clearest picture we have of where this community stands,” said Michael Wilkos, Chair of the Columbus and Franklin County Continuum of Care. “What it tells us in 2026 is that progress and urgency can exist at the same time. We are serious about ending homelessness in this region, and that means we cannot celebrate what is working without confronting what is not. Expanding street outreach, shelter, and permanent housing options is not aspirational. It is what the data requires. We are calling on our city, county, state, and federal partners to invest accordingly.”

To address the rise in unsheltered homelessness, CSB and the Continuum of Care are calling for:

- Expansion of Housing-Focused System-Funded Street Outreach. Franklin County currently has only four outreach workers covering the entire county.
- Year-round non-congregate shelter capacity as a bridge to permanent housing, building on the Street-to-Housing model proven effective this past winter.
- Increased housing options and efficiency, including further reduction of process barriers and continued targeted use of PSH to address chronic and unsheltered homelessness.
- Continued investment in prevention, diversion, and rapid rehousing for single adults, youth, and families, in partnership with the City of Columbus Resilient Housing Initiative.
- Continued policy advocacy at the local, state, and federal levels for deeply affordable housing.

The annual Point-in-Time Count is a federally mandated census of people experiencing homelessness, conducted on a single day in January in Columbus and Franklin County, in accordance with HUD guidance. The full 2026 report is attached, and more information is available at www.csb.org/pit.

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About the CSB

Community Shelter Board (CSB) leads the coordinated, community-wide response to homelessness in Columbus and Franklin County as the federally designated Unified Funding Agency (UFA). CSB brings together public, private, and philanthropic resources to fund, align, and oversee a network of nonprofit partners delivering prevention, outreach, shelter, and housing solutions. By connecting data, dollars, and partnerships into a single, outcomes-driven system, CSB works to make homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring.