
Providing Eviction Prevention:

Direct Client Services at VLJ

ABOUT VLJ

Volunteer Lawyers
for Justice

Taking Cases. Changing Lives.



OUR HISTORY & MISSION

HARNESSING THE
POWER OF PRO BONO
FOR OVER 20 YEARS

VLJ's mission is to ensure access to justice for people experiencing poverty .

VLJ was founded in 2001 to provide direct legal representation to the residents of Essex County, New Jersey. Today, the organization has 8 pro bono programs, 25 trustees, a panel of over 1,700 volunteers, and hundreds of donors all working together to ensure that justice is available to everyone, regardless of their income.

OUR ACTION TEAMWORK MAKES THE JUSTICE DREAM WORK



To fulfill its mission, VLJ mobilizes volunteers to work alongside staff to address critical legal needs across New Jersey, advancing racial, social, and economic justice for the most vulnerable members of our community.

VLJ believes that legal services have the ability to effectuate profound change, including economic stability and prosperity, and our volunteers play a vital role in bringing about that profound change.

OUR TEAM SUPPORTING THOSE WHO SERVE OUR CLIENTS

VLJ's team is comprised of 22 highly skilled, legal professionals who support and oversee eight pro bono programs, and who work alongside a dedicated panel of volunteer attorneys and paralegals to meet the unmet civil legal needs of New Jerseyans experiencing poverty.



TENANCY TEAM

VLJ's tenancy program began in 2017, with one staff attorney handling a monthly clinic, providing limited scope services to tenants facing eviction in Essex County.



In 2020, the VLJ tenancy program grew exponentially, with funding from the Network's Pandemic Relief Fund. Today, there are six staff attorneys in house with the tenancy team and two legal assistants, providing a range of services from brief legal advice through full representation. VLJ also works with hundreds of volunteers, donating their time to assist with tenancy cases pro bono.

Tenancy Services

VLJ gets tenancy clients through a number of channels.

- Through partnerships with community organizations
- Through our advisory clinics, for Essex County tenants
- Through word of mouth!

Each time we open a new case, the client will be screened for eligibility, and then scheduled for a call with one of our staff attorneys. The staff attorney will then do a substantive review of the case, gather background information, review any filings, scan the case for possible defenses or strategies that may help the client. At a minimum, all of our clients receive an in depth review of their individual eviction action, and detailed legal advice.

Tenancy Services

After the client has gotten advice, depending on availability of attorneys, VLJ may assist on a limited scope or full representation basis!

The sooner we get in touch with a client the better, which is why good referrals are SO important to our work.

We are actively looking for clients with eviction actions filed in Essex County, who have upcoming trial dates. If your organization works with clients who fit this description, please reach out to us!

Tenancy Services

In addition to providing legal services ranging from advice to representation in trials, VLJ works with various community organizations in partnership to get our clients connected with resources; housing counseling and rental assistance are two of the biggest ones.

We have been able to assist many tenants and prevent their eviction through referrals to our partners, working together to secure rental assistance and negotiate settlements that keep our clients housed safely.

Volunteer Lawyers
for Justice

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THANK YOU!

Connect with Us



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Supporting CEDD and Cross Collaboration

Office of Homelessness Prevention – HCDNNJ – Under One Roof 2023

Date: October 20, 2023

Office of Homelessness Prevention (OHP)

Department of Community Affairs

Presented by: T. McGill, Programs Team Lead, OHP/DHCR/DCA

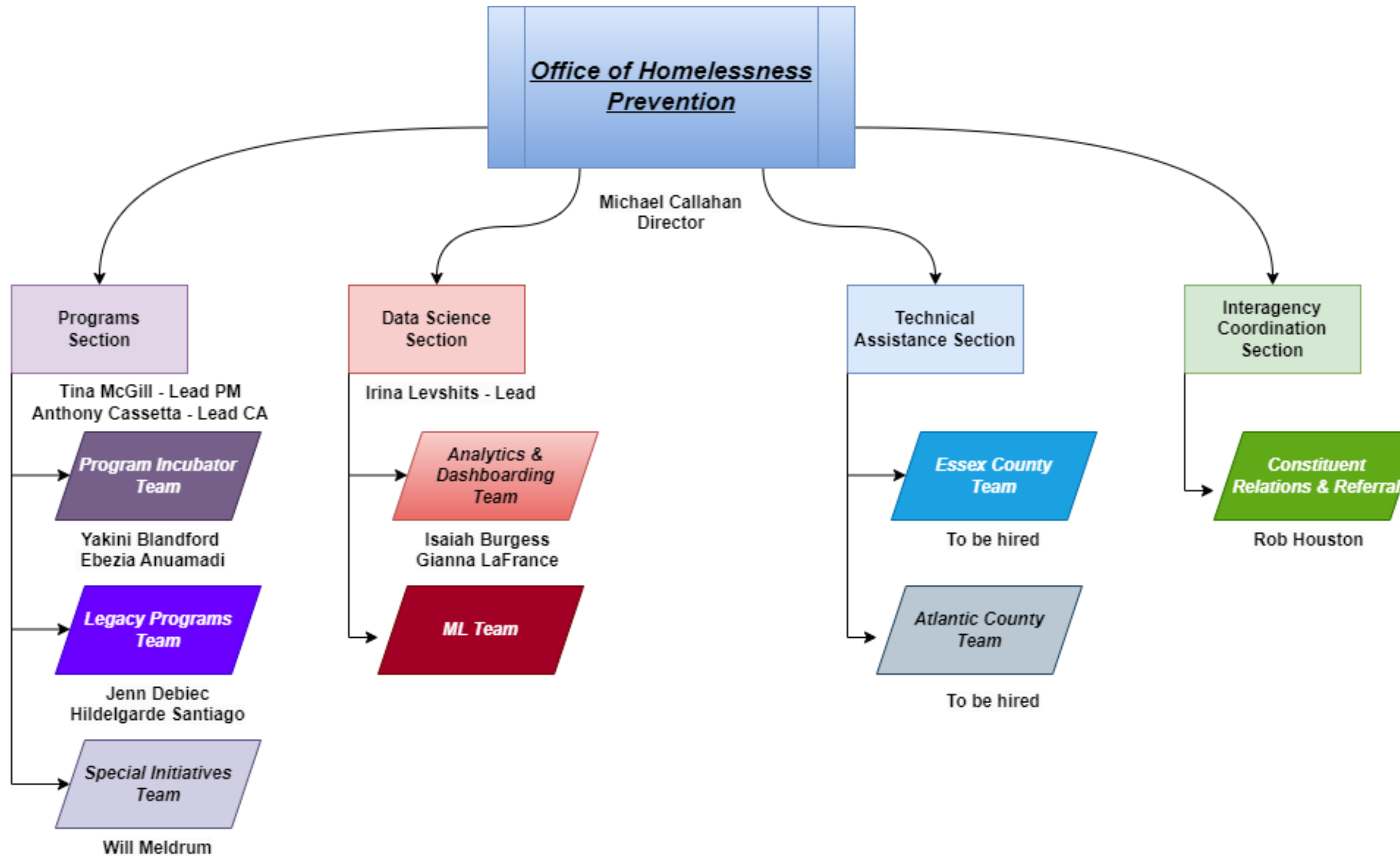
Prepared by: M. Callahan, Director, OHP/DHCR/DCA

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I. What does OHP do?

OHP – SFY24 Overview



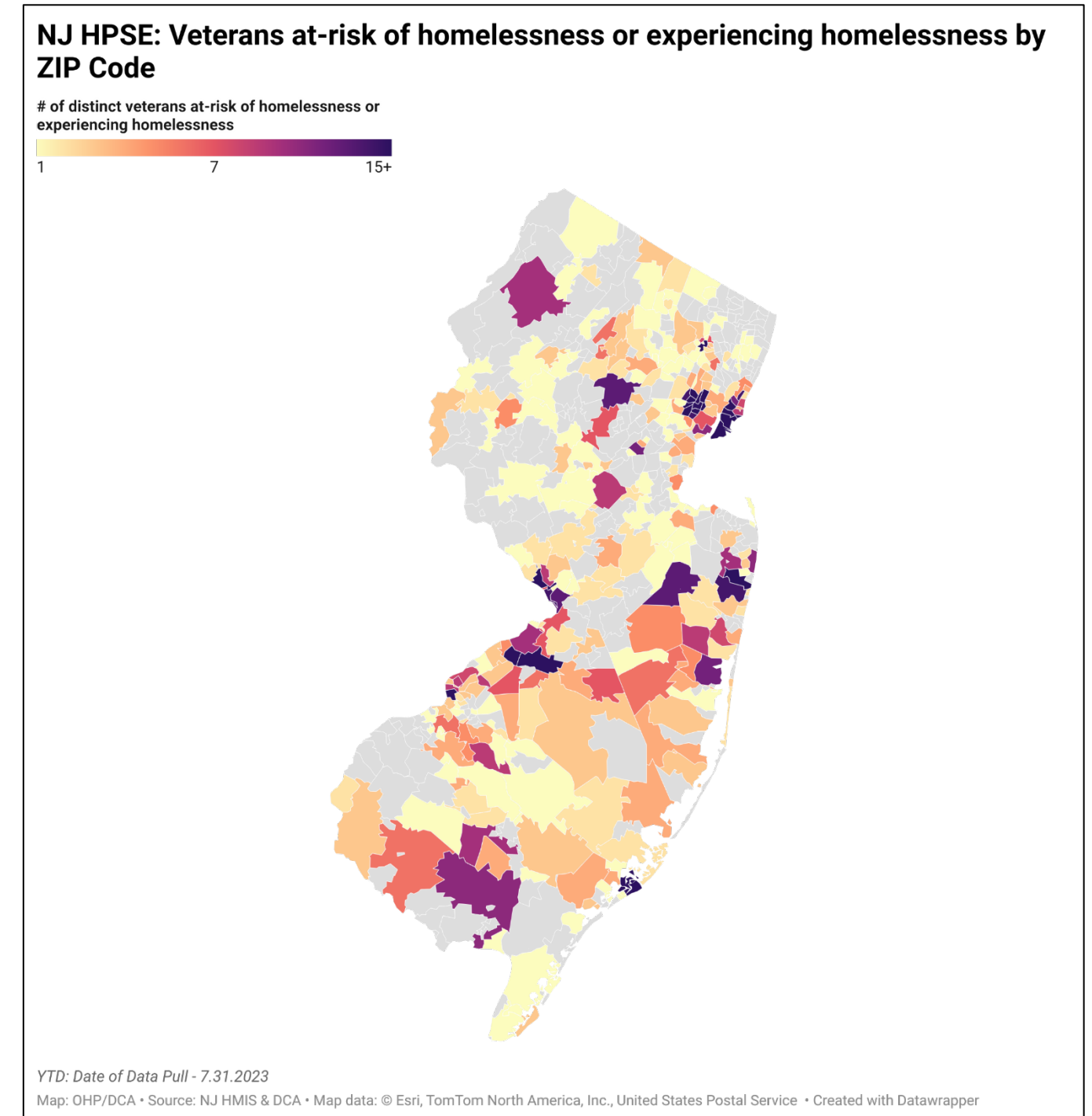
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I. What does OHP do? (con't)

OHP – SFY24 Overview

- 1. Advancing emerging and innovative practices from across the country to address homelessness**
- 2. Using data to drive decision-making and policy at the state and local levels**
 1. Data-Driven Decision-making Initiative
 2. Data Technical Assistance
 3. Dashboards and reports
- 3. Convening stakeholders and providing technical assistance and training at the local level**
 1. Meetings with state and local officials, practitioners, and other stakeholders
 2. Staff technical assistance to local communities and presentations on NJ's programs
 3. Addressing and troubleshooting constituent issues
 4. Convening stakeholders with lived experience of homelessness
- 4. Administering DCA's prevention programs**

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Why does upstream prevention and diversion work matter?

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NJ HPSE: Causes of Homelessness - through Q2 2023

% of persons experiencing homelessness by grouped cause - through end of Q2 2023

Homelessness Cause (Current Episode)	% of persons experiencing homelessness?
Asked to Leave Shared Residence	20.84%
Benefits Loss/Reduction	3.95%
Domestic Violence	4.13%
Drug/Alcohol Abuse	3.6%
Eviction	16.17%
Foreclosure - Owned Property	0.81%
Foreclosure - Rented Property	0.79%
Household Breakup / Death in Household	3.53%
Illness	1.93%
Impact from COVID-19	0.15%
Injury	0.53%
Job Income Loss/Reduction	10.95%
Mental Illness	0.59%
Natural Disaster	1.6%
Other	12.87%
Release from Hospital	0.99%
Release from Prison/Jail	4.71%
Release from Psych. Facility	0.51%
Relocation	6%
Rent Increase / Insufficient Income	1.22%
Sexual Orientation	0.01%
Substandard Housing	0.46%
Unknown	3.66%

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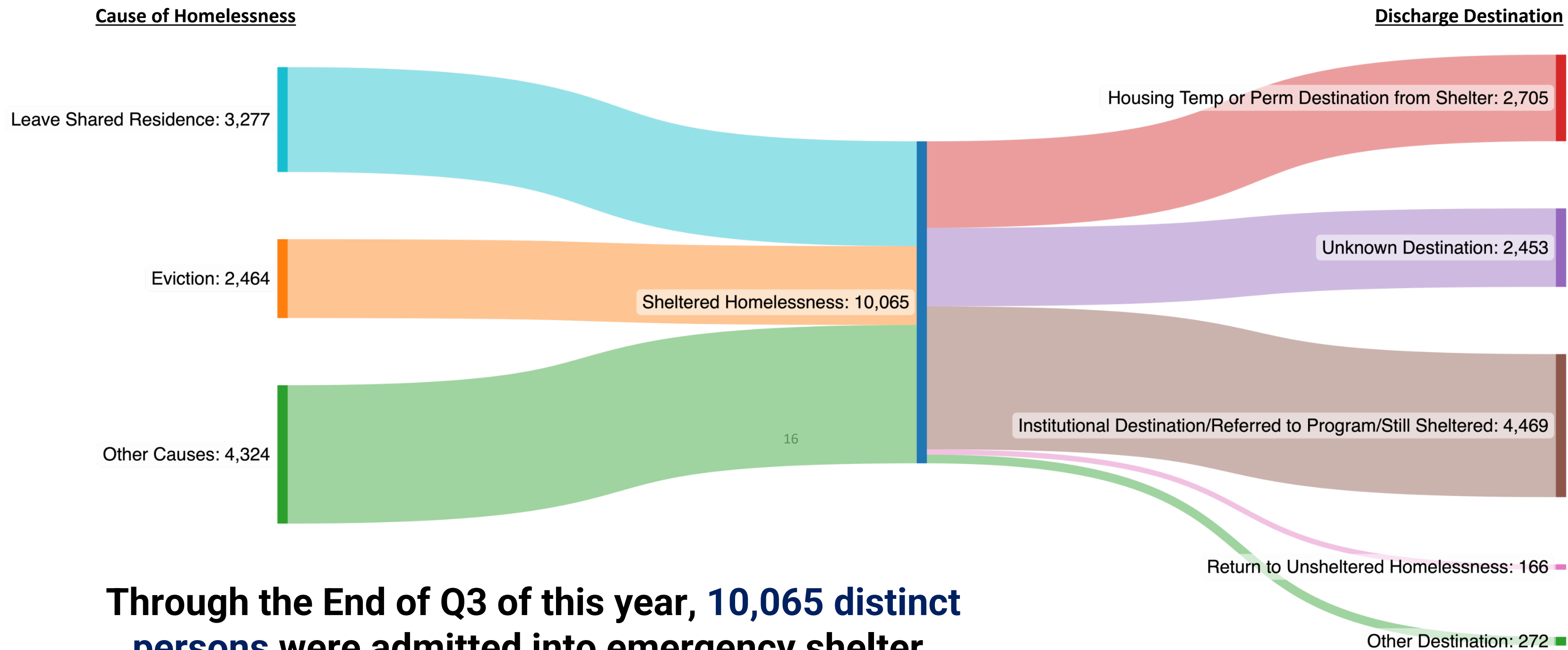
In 2023, nearly 4 out of every 10 people experiencing sheltered or unsheltered homelessness are unhoused because of an eviction or being asked to leave a shared residence.

Table: OHP/DCA • Source: NJ HMIS & DCA • Created with Datawrapper



I. Sheltered Homelessness Inflow – End of Q3 2023

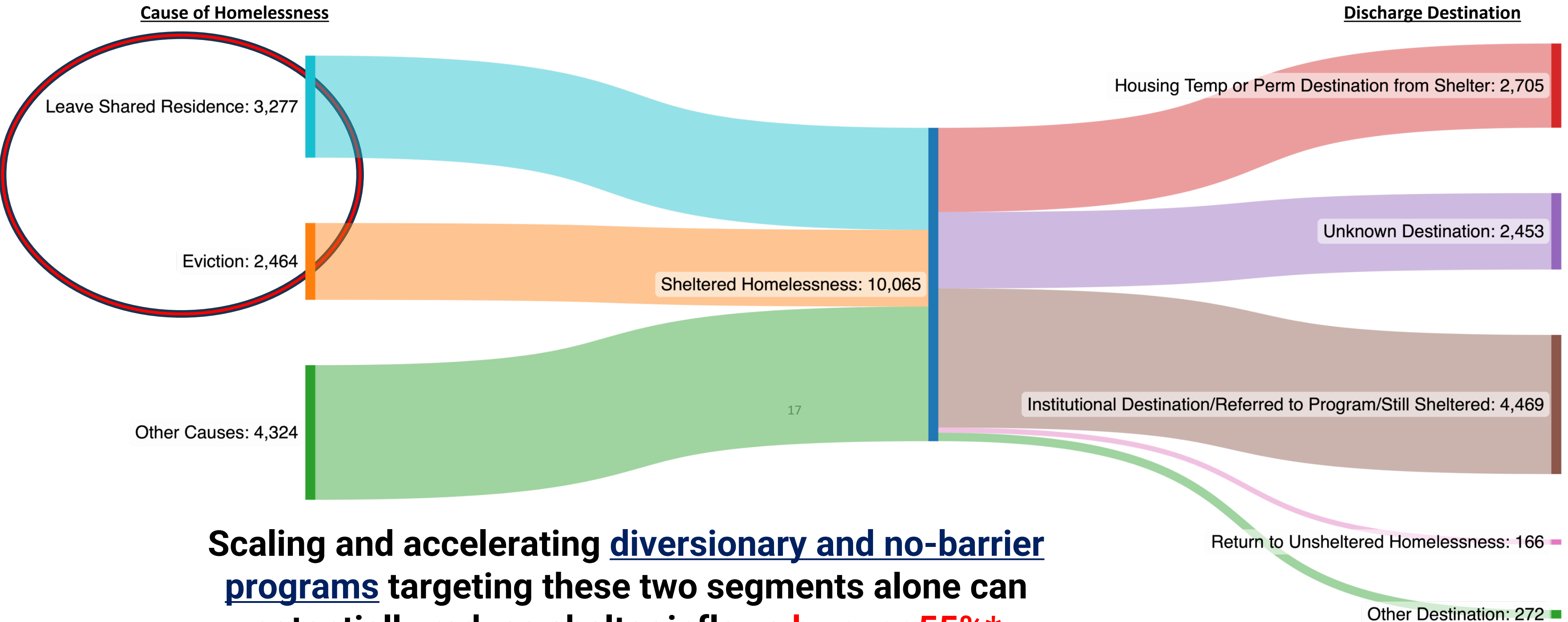
OHP – SFY24 Overview



Through the End of Q3 of this year, 10,065 distinct persons were admitted into emergency shelter.

II. Sheltered Homelessness Inflow – End of Q3 2023

OHP – SFY24 Overview



Scaling and accelerating diversionary and no-barrier programs targeting these two segments alone can potentially reduce shelter inflows by over 55%*

Through the end of the 3rd quarter of 2023, DHCR (OEP & OHP) programs have assisted **over 15,000 persons with ending or prevention of homelessness.**

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II. OHP Consumer Facing Programs enhancing CEDD

OHP – FY24 Programming Overview

1. Homelessness Prevention Program (**HPP**)
2. Homelessness Prevention & Rapid Rehousing Program – 2 (**HPRP2**)
3. Homelessness Diversion Pilot (**Diversion**)
4. Rural & Suburban Outreach Program (**R/S Outreach**)
5. Integrated Homelessness Prevention & Services Program (**IHPS**)

For Provider Listings, please go to: <https://www.nj.gov/dca/dhcr/offices/dhcrohp.shtml>

II. OHP Consumer Facing Programs enhancing CEDD

OHP – FY24 Programming Overview

Homelessness Prevention Program (HPP)

- **Available in all 21 Counties**
- **Provides up to three months of assistance to pay past due rent to households in imminent danger of eviction due to temporary financial problems beyond their control.**
- **80% AMI**

II. OHP Consumer Facing Programs enhancing CEDD

OHP – FY24 Programming Overview

Homelessness Prevention & Rapid Rehousing Program – 2 (HPRP2)

HPRP2 provides assistance to households in imminent risk of homelessness due to an eviction summons and temporary rapid re-housing assistance to individuals and families living on the streets, in places not meant for human habitation (e.g., encampments and vehicles) and in emergency shelters (up to 90 days) to obtain permanent housing.

Purpose:

- Financial assistance to help pay for housing
- Case management and services to maintain housing

Targets two Populations:

- Homelessness Prevention Assistance to households in imminent risk of homelessness due to an eviction summons. (Must have a summons or warrant of removal from landlord-tenant court - court papers must have a docket number and a court date and must be no more than 6 months old)
- Temporary rapid re-housing assistance to individuals and families living on the streets or in emergency shelters (up to 90 days) obtain permanent housing.

Income: Maximum gross annual income 30% of AMI

II. OHP Consumer Facing Programs enhancing CEDD

OHP – FY24 Programming Overview

Homelessness Diversion Pilot

- **Available in 11 Counties – Expanding to 16 in Q4 2023**
- **Purpose:** The Homelessness Diversion Pilot deploys rapid housing stabilization case management paired with flexible funding to rapidly prevent and exit eligible households from risk of unsheltered homelessness and shelter placement.
- **14 day service cycle (optimal)**
- **Expectation most services will be 120% AMI or below (however, must demonstrate no/lack of resources to prevent/exit homelessness)**
- **No immigration restrictions**

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II. OHP Consumer Facing Programs enhancing CEDD

OHP – FY24 Programming Overview

Rural and Suburban Outreach

- **Available in 8 Counties – Expanding to 10 in Q1 2024**
- **Purpose:** The Rural and Suburban Street Outreach program utilizes mobile case management and no-barrier direct client assistance to exit households experiencing homelessness from unsheltered conditions in order to stabilize housing situations and enter into permanent housing.
- **Expectation most services will be 120% AMI or below (however, must demonstrate no/lack of resources to prevent/exit homelessness)**
- **No immigration restrictions**

II. OHP Consumer Facing Programs enhancing CEDD

OHP – FY24 Programming Overview

Integrated Homelessness Prevention and Services (IHPS)

- **Available in 5 Counties – Expanding to 8 in Q2 2024**
- **Purpose:** The Integrated Homelessness Prevention and Services Program deploys wrap-around homelessness services (Street Outreach, Diversion, Homelessness Prevention, and Rapid Rehousing) to targeted areas in the state to enhance local efforts working to accelerate exits from homelessness and reduce system recidivism.
- **Blends two non-traditional and two traditional service types (SO/Diversion & HP/RRH/Diversion)**
 - **Intent is deployment of programs that are inclusive of presenting needs vs. exclusive of certain segments**
- **Unsheltered Homelessness Services (Street Outreach)**
- **Homelessness Prevention & Rapid Rehousing – 50% AMI (30% after 9/30)**
- **Homelessness Diversion – Expectation most services will be 120% AMI or below (however, must demonstrate no/lack of resources to prevent/exit homelessness)**

III. Referring Consumers

OHP – FY24 Programming Overview

- **Constituent Issue – Homelessness or Risk of Homelessness:** **Email** to Robert Houston – Robert.Houston@dca.nj.gov
 - Backups: Tina McGill (Tina.Mcgill@dca.nj.gov) or Anthony Cassetta (Anthony.Cassetta@dca.nj.gov).
- **Other Escalation:** Reach out to Mike Callahan, DIR/OHP, directly via Email: Michael.Callahan@dca.nj.gov .

Questions?

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Effective Strategies for Eviction
Prevention:
The Waterfront Project's Eviction
Diversion Project





The Waterfront Project, Inc.

The Waterfront Project is a free legal and housing counseling agency serving Northern New Jersey.

Services offered:

- Free legal representation to tenants facing eviction
- HUD- Certified Housing Counseling services
- Eviction Diversion services
- Foreclosure Prevention assistance
- First-Time Home Buyer Courses
- The Survivor Project

How Jersey City's new right-to-counsel program will work and what to expect in court

Updated: Jun. 20, 2023, 3:47 p.m. | Published: Jun. 20, 2023, 2:47 p.m.



The Need:

As per the Eviction Lab, there were an average 417 eviction filings per day in Nw Jersey in 2018. We know that this number has increased since the eviction moratorium ended.

90% of landlords have legal representation; only 3% of tenants ever do!



Why become a diversion provider?

For over a decade, The Waterfront Project has been providing free legal representation and counseling services in New Jersey.

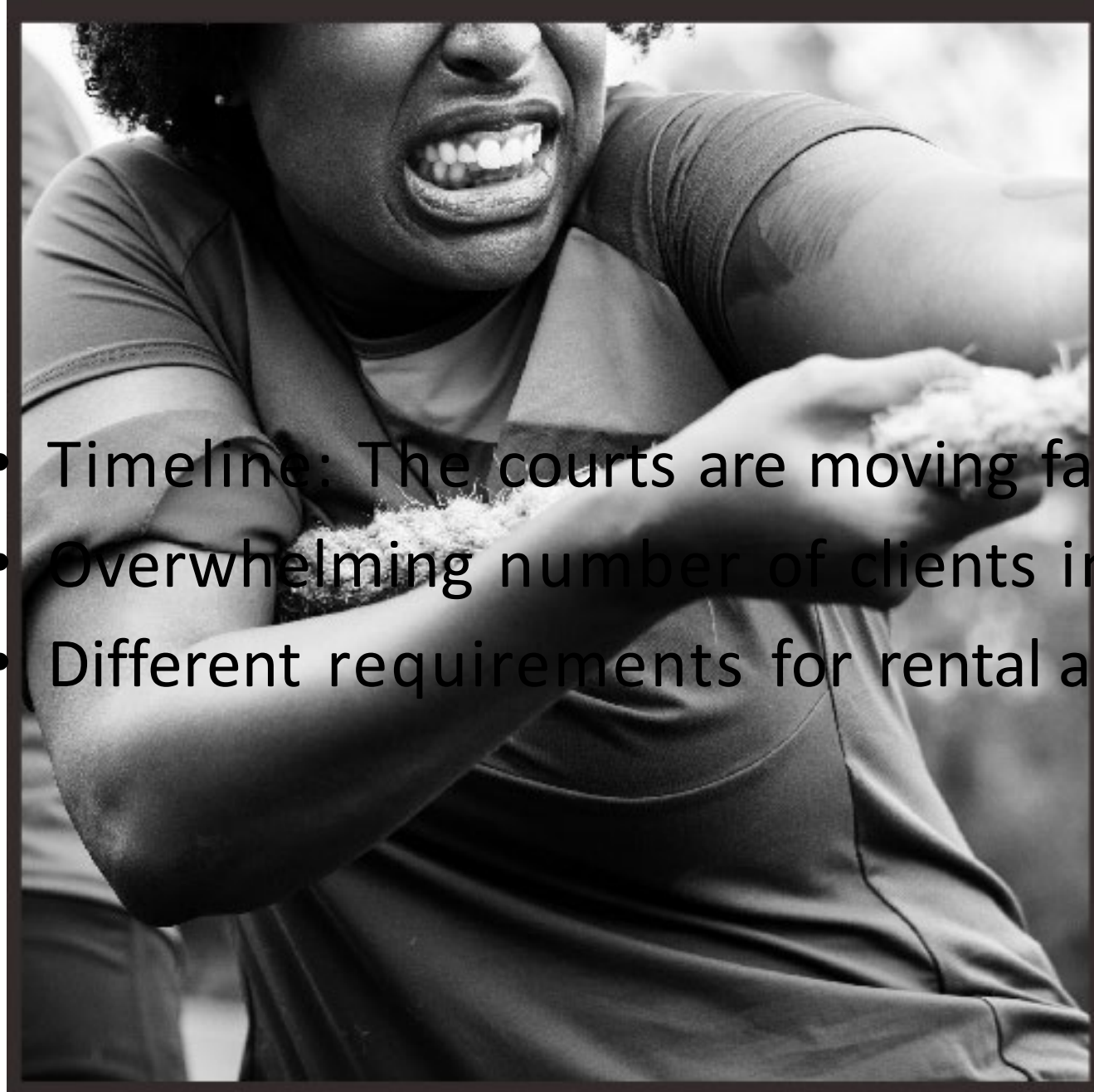
What was missing?

1. Direct referrals for clients facing evictions
2. Flex funds
3. Collaboration



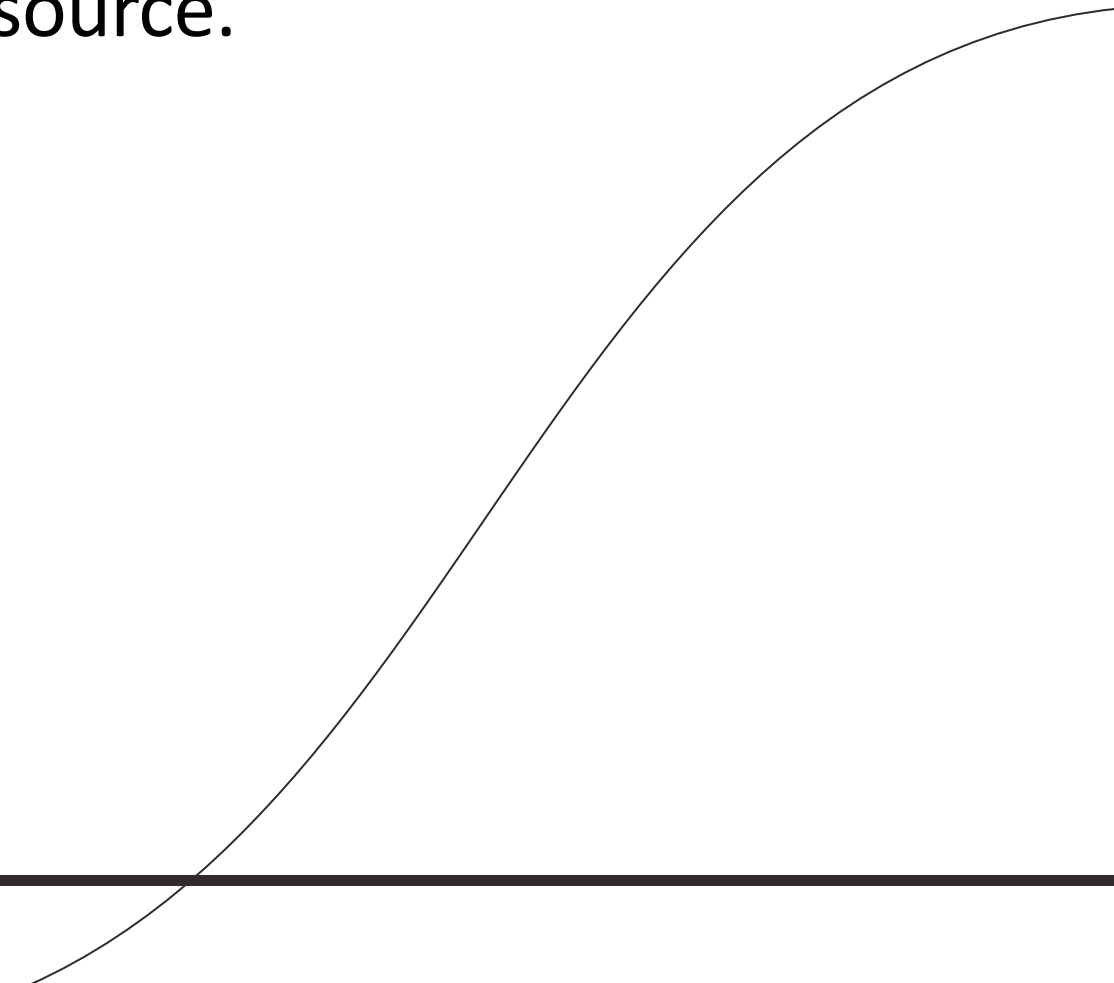
Working with the Courts

- ◆ Judges have been receptive to our involvement.
- ◆ Resource navigators noticed issues with adjournments and evictions during the protected period.
- ◆ When we shared these findings and offered assistance, tenants were taken more seriously by judges.
- ◆ Our relationship with judges allowed us to secure more time for the tenants we serve and access updates on rental assistance applications.



Challenges

- ◆
- ◆
- ◆
- Timeline: The courts are moving faster! One size does not fit all.
- Overwhelming number of clients in crisis.
- Different requirements for rental assistance by County or funding source.



What does success look like?

The greatest success to date is the ability to disperse Flex Funds. In the past year we've distributed over \$425,000 in Flex Funds!

- ◆ 650 households served
- ◆ 78% of households had children.
- ◆ 62% of households served have successfully avoided eviction.
- ◆ 26% of flex funds used for relocation costs
- ◆ 12% of flex funds used to cover households' fees not covered by other social services



Thanks to DCA and their committment to Eviction Diversion programs across the state, hundreds of households have been able to stay housed and avoid homelessness.

Do you have any questions?
director@thewaterfrontproject.org
551-256-7578 ext 120
www.thewaterfrontproject.org
