

**Homelessness  
on  
Martha's Vineyard**

**Rural Health Scholars  
Report  
October 2015**

# Our Purpose

- Define “homeless” on Martha’s Vineyard
- Map out available resources to address homelessness
- Identify gaps in resources
- Consolidate main themes from our interviews
- Research approaches used by other rural communities
- Develop a survey to be used as a data collection tool for agencies/people

# Methods and Outcomes



# Challenges faced in collecting data

- Homeless do not live in defined areas within a rural settings
- Lack of consistent data
- Seasonality of the problem on Martha's Vineyard



# Interviewees

- Oak Bluffs Affordable Housing Committee
- Island Housing Trust
- Island Wide Youth Collaborative
- Council on Aging, Island Elder Services, Island Elderly Housing
- Department of Veterans Affairs
- NOAH shelter in Hyannis
- Daybreak Center
- Food pantries
- South Coastal County Legal Services
- Duffy Health Center
- Island Counseling Center
- Wampanoag tribe
- Law enforcement and EMS
- School systems and town librarians
- Housing assistance corporation
- Vineyard Healthcare Access Program
- MV Community Services
- Board of Health agents
- Cape and Islands Regional Network for Homelessness
- Social workers at DCF and hospital
- Morgan Woods
- Substance abuse Committee
- Community advocates

# Homeless: State and Federal Definitions

- 1987 McKinney-Vento Act
- “Lacks a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime shelter”
- “Has a primary nighttime residence that is designed to provide temporary living accommodations (includes hotels, shelters and transitional housing)”
- “Resides in a shelter or place not meant for human habitation”
- Individuals and families who are fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence, or sexual assault.

These are the definitions used by HUD to provide funds for homelessness

Average  
Age of a  
Homeless  
Person in  
MA



8  
Years  
Old

# Who is homeless on the Vineyard?

## Numbers that we've heard

- Most interviewees reported 3-5 chronically homeless
- Although, estimates ranged from 1- 150
- 2015 PIT estimate was 15

## Demographics that we've heard

- Families
- Women and children; particularly single mothers
- Youth ages 16-25
- Older single men

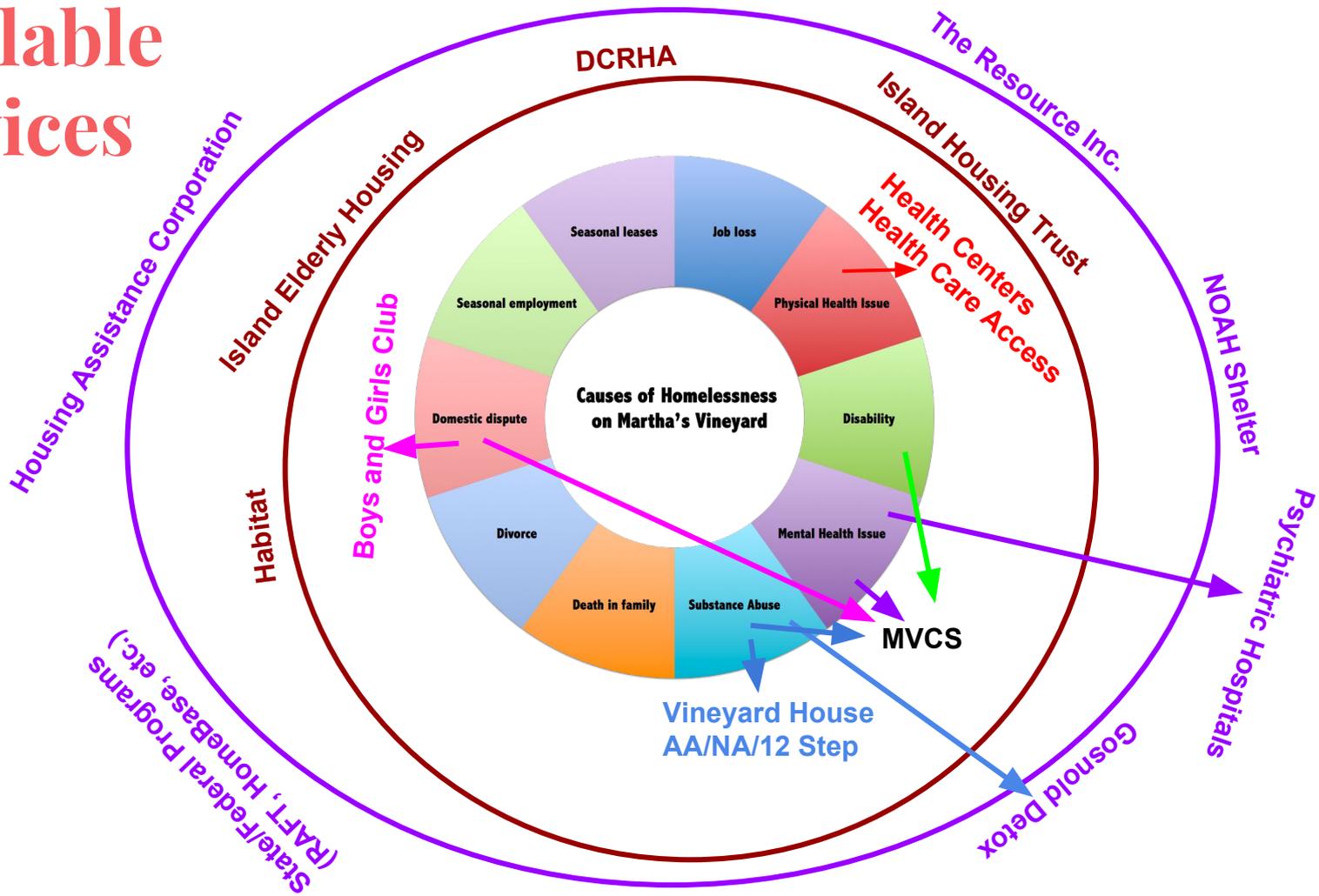
## Where are they?

- Couch surfing
- People living in tents
- People living in their cars

# Causes of Homelessness on Martha's Vineyard



# Available Services



# Where are the holes?



- Seasonality of employment and housing opportunities
- Lack of inpatient mental health or detox facilities
- Lack of transitional housing

# Is homelessness a problem here?

It depends on how you define “problem.”

- On a population level, we’re talking about less than 1% of the population.
- However, it is clear that there are homeless individuals on the island and many community members have expressed concern.

# How can we better quantify homelessness?

- Point in time - a one-day count held each January
  - Perhaps in summer?
  
- Rural health scholars designed a survey to be used throughout the year to better capture the variations in the situations of homelessness on the Island

## New Survey

How old are you?

Age in years: \_\_\_\_\_

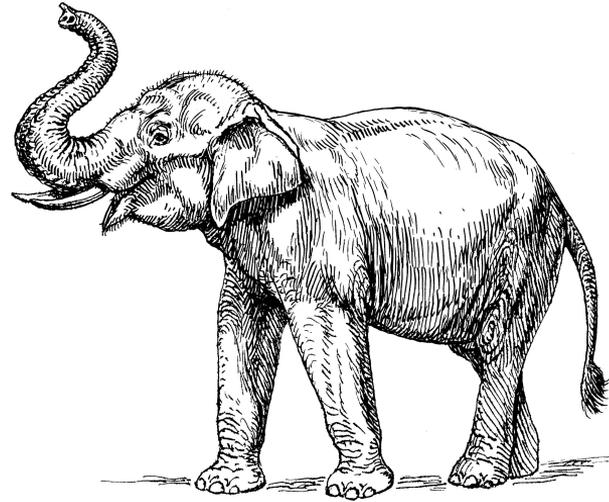
What is your gender: Male Female Don't know  
Refused

Where are you sleeping tonight?

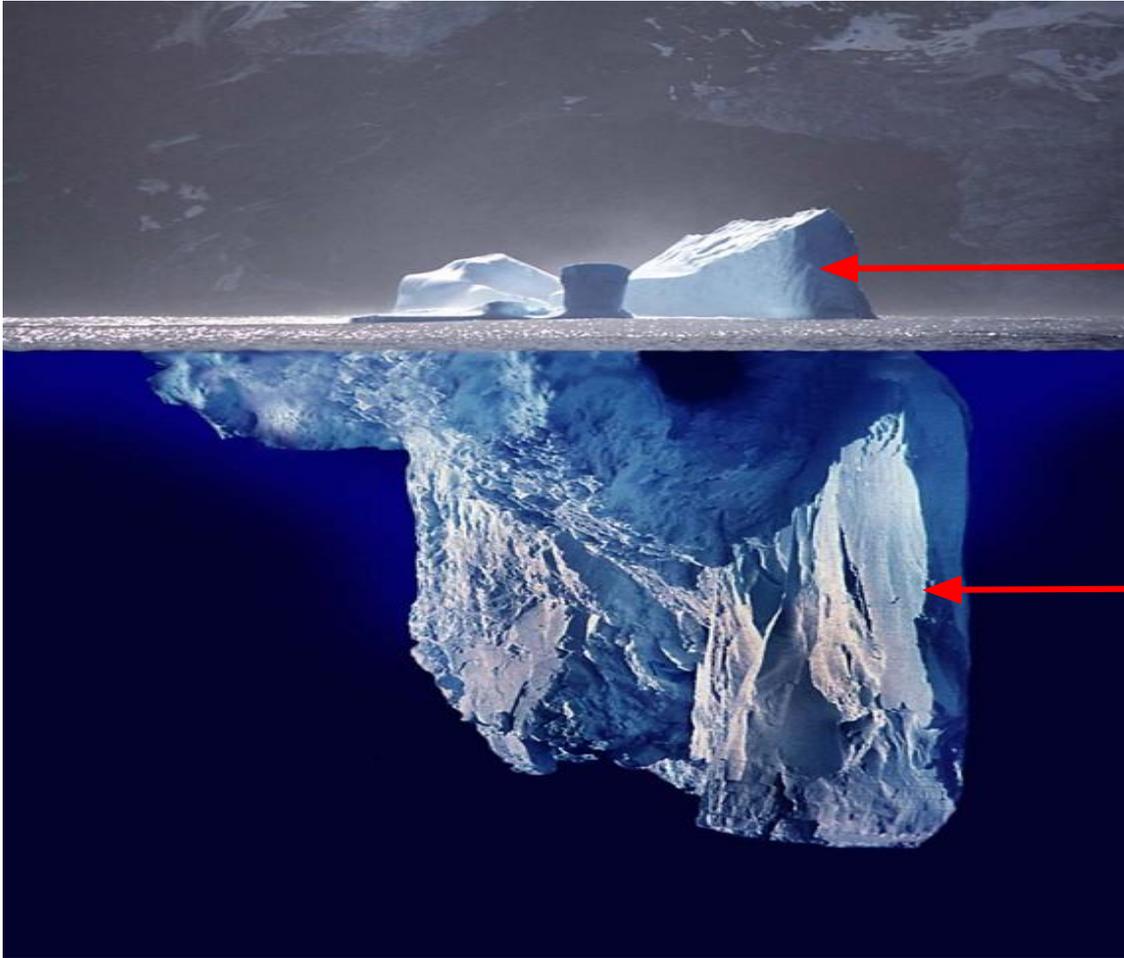
1. Street or sidewalk
2. Vehicle (car, van, RV, Truck)
3. Park or cemetery
4. Abandoned Building
5. Bus station, airport
6. Woods, outdoor encampments
8. Motel/hotel



**The**



**in the room**



Homelessness

Lack of Affordable  
Housing

# Housing on MV: By the Numbers

<b>Year-Round Population</b>	<b>16,460</b>
<b>Population At or Below Poverty Level</b>	<b>8.8%</b>
<b># Housing Units</b>	<b>16,973</b>
<b>Housing Occupied Year round</b>	<b>43%</b>
<b>Affordable housing units</b>	<b>411</b>
<b>Affordable housing units % year round</b>	<b>5.2%</b>
<b>Housing Affordability Gap</b>	<b>\$225,000</b>

\*Source: Martha's Vineyard Commission, 2008

# Affordable Rental Housing: Who's Looking?

Area Median Income (=\$87,400 for a family of four)

Household Income (% of Area Median Income)	Percentage of Households
0-20%	17
<b>21-40%</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>41-60%</b>	<b>33</b>
61-80%	15
<b>Total</b>	100 (Total number is <b>240 families</b> )

\*Source: Dukes County Regional Housing Authority, 2015



# Interview Themes

# Keep 'em here or Kick 'em off?

“Even if there is just one person needing shelter, that is one too many to not have a place to send them.”



"It's *Martha's Vineyard*, how many services do you really want here?"

*“If you build it, they will come.”*

# A Choice? A Right? Who Gets to Say?

“I might want to live in Hawaii, but I don’t have the money to live there.”



**Does Everyone  
Have A Right  
To Live Here?**

**What Happens  
If You Decide  
The Answer Is  
No?**

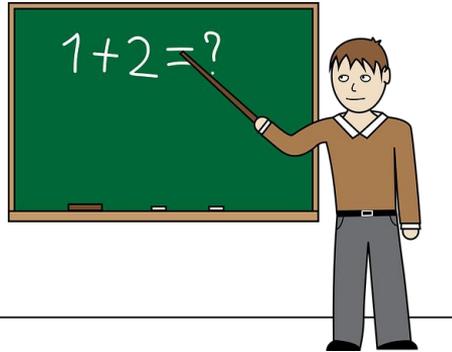
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# A Lost Generation

“This is your home, where you were raised- your church, your school, your community, your family.... Where do you move to if everything you’ve ever known is here?”



"The people who are leaving are the ones who sustain the island. The ones they're chasing off make the island what it is."



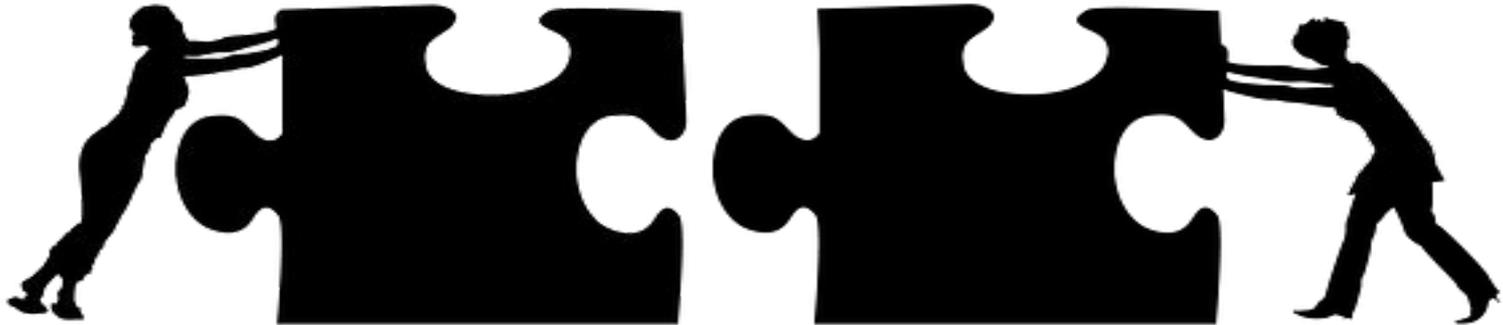
TOO BAD, YOUR END IS  
SINKING!



# Cooperation (Or Lack Thereof)

“The Vineyard has more people working on homelessness than homeless people.”

“I wouldn’t know who to call if I had a client that needs help. There needs to be a phone number.”



“If we don’t get the phone calls, we’re not really needed and we’re not going to come over and be like ‘hey we’re here’.”

“Nothing’s trickling down and no one knows where we are”



“The  
Portuguese  
take care of  
their own.”



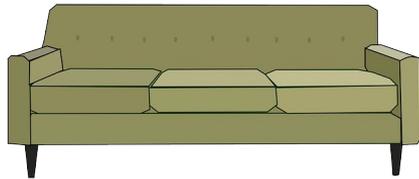
# Homeless: A Local Conversation

We were asked to make a local definition - so the question becomes how would a local definition be different from the HUD definition?

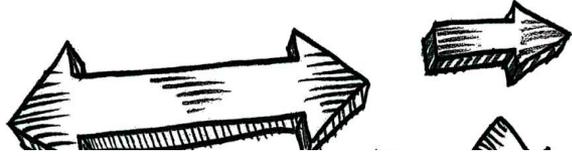
What makes the Island different?

- Seasonality of homelessness
  - Is everyone in the shuffle homeless? What differentiates those who *could* stay in their homes all summer but shuffle to make extra money, from those who *cannot* stay in their homes?
  - Are people choosing to live in tents? Is it really a choice?
- School officials estimate that housing is negatively influential in the lives of two kids in an average classroom of twenty.
- Negative health impacts due to increased stress levels related to unstable

housing

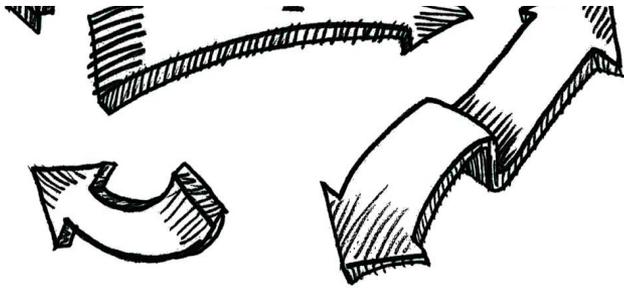


# Homeless: (stab at) A Local Definition



Persons or families who lack stable nighttime housing. are involuntarily

## This is essentially the HUD definition



meant for human habitation on either a year round or seasonal basis. This includes individuals 'couch surfing,' camping, or living in cars due to a lack of an acceptable alternative.

So, What Can Be Done?

# How is Nantucket Coping?

Affordable housing on Nantucket is <1% of all housing growth  
They are at 2.5% of the required 40B 10% metric

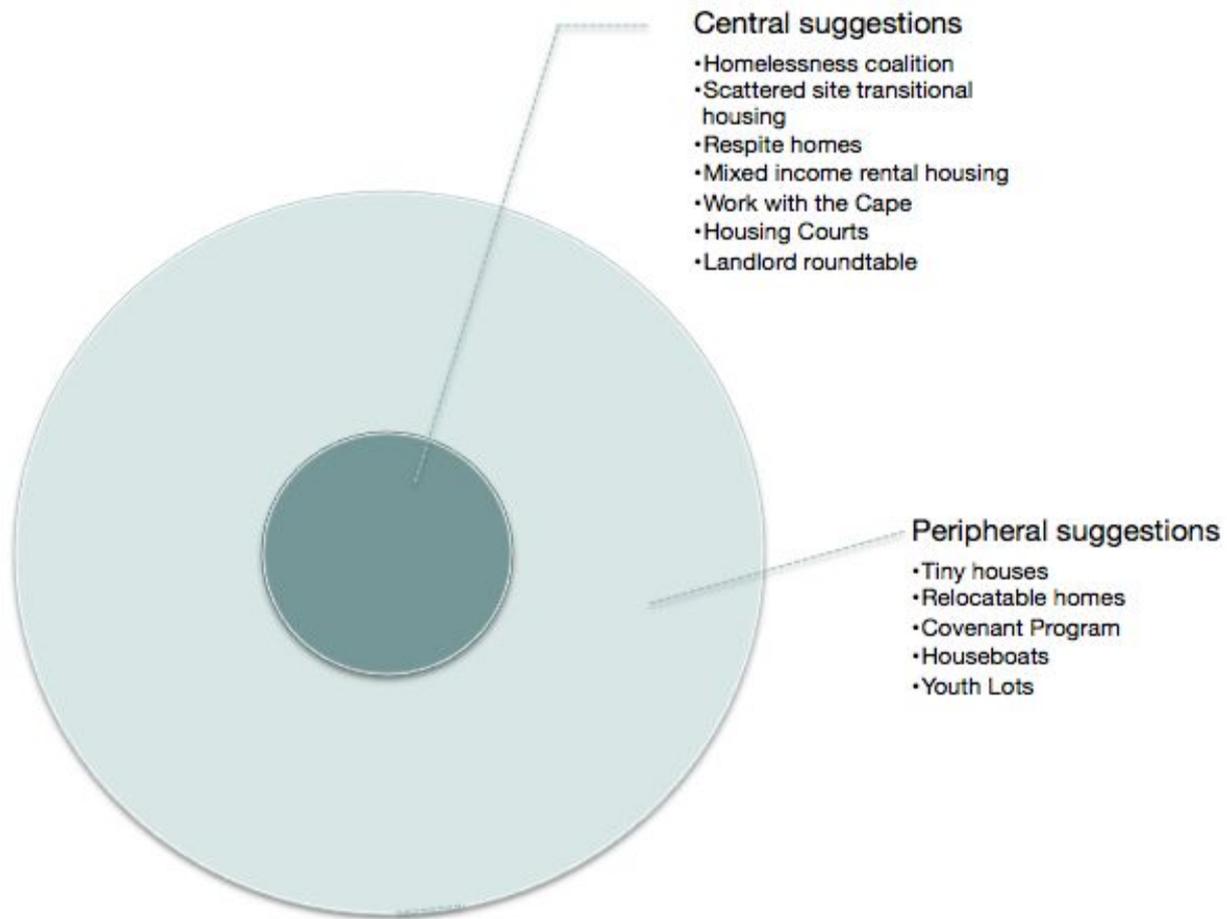
## Their Solutions

- **Sachem's Path:** Affordable housing units up to 150% AMI
- **Covenant Homes:** An extra home on a property can be sold for a permanently affordable price (max sale price \$675K in 2015 for someone <150% AMI), buyers must occupy home 10 months of the year and cannot rent out the house as a whole
  - 55 homes created thus far
- **Relocatable Homes:** A good home can be bought instead of being knocked down, but they buyer still needs to have land and money to purchase and move the home

## Major Differences between MV and Nantucket

- The population of Nantucket is young
- **Nantucket is both a town and a county - no cooperation necessary!**

**“ Nevertheless, the force of Nantucket’s housing market and shrinking supply of developable land have simply overpowered the noble efforts of housing advocates and the Town.”**



# Central Recommendation

## Homelessness Coalition: Makeup and Role

- Increase membership and diversity of background (police, school, thrift store, etc.)
- They are the “point person” - take shifts to be “on call”, coordinate immediate assistance, set up a hotline
  - Caseworker could be the leader of this coalition
  - Could recruit high schoolers as well
  - Case worker follows up with callers
- Create a pocket-book pamphlet of options and opportunities for EMS and police

# Central Recommendation

## Scattered Site Transitional Housing

- The Homelessness Coalition, in conjunction with other community organizations would be responsible for:
  - Securing community homes for transitional housing from private donors
  - Recruit social workers and obtain grants for them to either live-in or continually check-in as “managers” of these homes
    - Could offer them guaranteed housing rent-free, they work part time on the island and part time as manager in the house
  - Maintain a “Transitional Housing Clearinghouse” database where homeless individuals can be screened for placement into these homes

# Central Recommendation

## Respite Homes

- Temporary housing for youth on the island
- Offered by local families, coordinated through Island Youth Services and guidance counselors

# Central Recommendation

## More Mixed Income Rental Housing

### Benefits of Mixed Income Housing

- More culturally diverse
- More economically diverse
- Decrease stigma
- Neighbors lifting each other up
- Community

“In the past when summer residents came to the island, they would hang out with the locals, today the wealthy are more secluded from the community”



# Central Recommendation

## Work more effectively with the Cape

“Nothing’s trickling down and no one knows where we are”

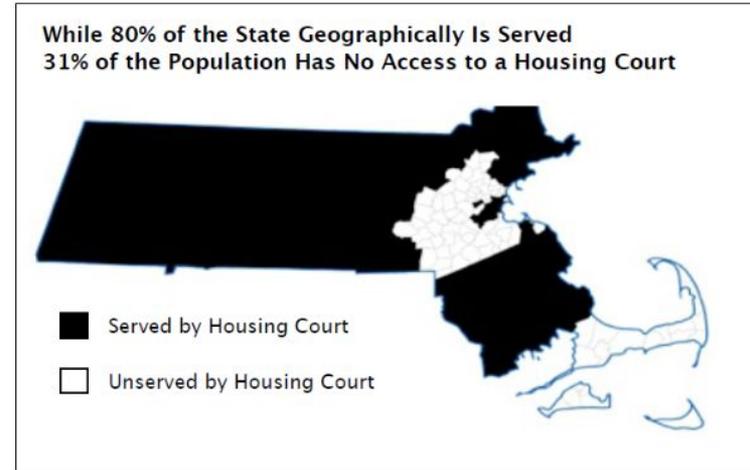
- Attend Cape and Islands Regional Network on Homelessness meetings
- DCF, DTA and other support agencies
- Free legal help
- Utilize technology to make this happen (video conferencing)



# Central Recommendation

Support the current MA legislation to extend Housing Courts for the Cape and Islands

There is currently legislation on the floor for the 2015-16 session



<sup>1</sup> The total population in the cities and towns not covered by a Housing Court is 2,047,000, which represents 31% of the state's total population of 6,547,629. Source: 2010 Census, Office of the Secretary of Commonwealth at <http://www.sec.state.ma.us/census/index.htm>.

# Central Recommendation

Host a Landlord Round Table to explore ways to address affordable housing

What are the barriers landlords see?

What are the barriers tenants see?

How can we mitigate damage here?

# Peripheral Recommendations

Tiny Houses

Relocatable Houses

Covenant Program

House Boats

Barracks Housing

Expansion of Youth Lots





Jessica Fortin, Richard Gallagher, Blair Robinson, Luke Latario,  
Rebecca Kasper, Kristin Bevington, Kamrie Costello & Elizabeth Tamaro