



## **HAWAI‘I COUNTY COUNCIL - DISTRICT 2**

25 Aupuni Street • Hilo, Hawai‘i 96720

DATE: June 12, 2024

The recent [Homeless Point-in-Time Count \(PITC\)](#) results for Hawai‘i County indicate a significant reduction of 285 individuals or 28% in our unhoused population and should be celebrated. Yet this positive step may seem contrary to what many experience daily in downtown Hilo. Moving forward, it’s important to examine these seeming contradictions and the complexity of homelessness to continue securing long-term housing and reducing the unhoused population on our island.

First, some people experience many more challenges securing shelter than others. Those who have experienced homelessness for many years, very large families, or those with other major contributing factors like addiction or mental/physical health issues struggle to stay housed. Except for the very large families, these are the people we are most likely to see sleeping in the doorways in downtown Hilo and Kona. Although they make up a small percentage overall, just 4% based on service utilization over the past year, new arrivals to the island who become unhoused and may not have social and familial connections tend to be highly visible in our urban spaces. Families and individuals who have recently lost their housing, have some source of income, and those who stay in their cars or with family and friends intermittently, tend to be less visible. These folks are often easier to connect to housing if they can be located when it becomes available.

For instance, the data shows a 52% reduction of unhoused families with children between 2018 and 2024. For those who are born and raised on Hawai‘i Island and experiencing homelessness, there may also be a strong sense of shame that keeps them out of public view.

In 2022, the Hawai‘i County Council created the Homelessness and Housing Fund via Ordinance 26-22 which appropriates \$9 million to \$10 million annually through 2027 for homeless support services and housing. To continue the positive trend of reducing the number of unhoused people on our island and especially in the urban core areas, we must continue providing support services in coordination with our efforts to expand housing. Mental health care, substance abuse treatment, job training, and access to healthcare are indispensable components of a holistic approach to ending homelessness.

Finally, addressing homelessness requires a coordinated, many-pronged approach. Expanding our housing stock to include adequate and obtainable housing remains the most important strategy for consistently keeping our residents housed. Providing short-term shelter to get people off the streets and connect them with our service providers is also key. This can include programs like the overnight cot shelter at the Salvation Army, a Kau Hale, and a safe camping area in Hilo.

In conclusion, while the reduction in our unhoused population as indicated by the 2024 PITC results are a step in the right direction, we are far from done. We must remain vigilant and committed to enacting meaningful, long-term changes that address the multifaceted nature of homelessness in our community.