URBAN WIRE

More Affordable and Available Housing Would Mean Fewer Children and Young People Experiencing Homelessness

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Over the past 17 years, the number of students in prekindergarten to 12th grade experiencing homelessness increased nearly 80 percent, to about 1.2 million. These students face significant barriers accessing education, including a rate of chronic absenteeism more than twice that of students overall and high school graduation rates markedly lower than those of students from families with low incomes who are stably housed.

Student homelessness is also a barrier to exiting poverty and accessing sustained upward mobility because housing security is tied to psychological stability for children and families. That means housing insecurity prevents families from building autonomy and a sense of belonging in their community—two things people need to reach long-term social and economic mobility.

In this blog post, we explain the connection between the supply of affordable and available housing and homelessness among young people, using the most recent county-level data from the Upward Mobility Data Dashboard. We also offer policy solutions, such as enacting tenant protections and expanding the use of Low-Income Housing Tax Credits. Local policymakers can use the dashboard to understand these conditions in their own communities and determine the policy actions best suited to address the root causes of homelessness.
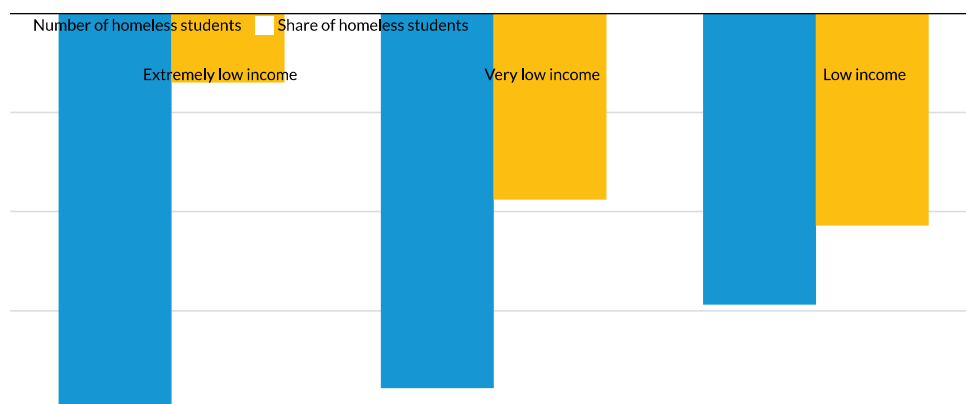
What's the relationship between affordable and available rental housing and student homelessness?

For all US counties, we examined the number and share of public school children who are ever homeless during the school year and the supply of affordable and available housing for households at three levels of low income (low, very low, and extremely low). Both are Mobility Metrics accessible via the Upward Mobility Data Dashboard.

We found that counties with more affordable and available rental housing consistently have a smaller number and share of students experiencing homelessness. For example, there is a significant negative correlation (–0.20) between the number of housing units that are affordable and available per 100 households with extremely low incomes (defined as 30 percent of the area median income) and the number of homeless students. This pattern also holds true for other households with low incomes.

Counties with More Affordable and Available Rental Housing Have Fewer Students Experiencing Homelessness

Correlations between affordable and available rental housing and student homelessness, by household income level, 2022

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Source: 2025 Upward Mobility Data Dashboard, using 2022 data for affordable and available housing units and share and count of students experiencing homelessness.

Notes: AMI = area median income. Income groups are defined for a local family of four. Extremely low–income households are those at 30 percent of AMI, very low income is 50 percent of AMI, and low income is 80 percent of AMI. A unit is affordable and available at a given income level if (1) the monthly costs do not exceed 30 percent of a household's monthly income and (2) it is either vacant or occupied by a renter with the same or a lower income. Students experiencing homelessness are those age 3 through grade 12 enrolled in public schools and reported by local education agencies as having one of the following as their primary nighttime residence at any time during a school year: a shelter, transitional housing, or awaiting foster care placement; unsheltered (e.g., a car, park, campground, temporary trailer, or abandoned building); a hotel or motel, because of the lack of alternative, adequate accommodations; or in other people's housing because of a loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason. Data on students experiencing homelessness tend to be undercounts, especially in rural areas.

Which counties face particularly high or low student homelessness and access to affordable housing?

Among counties in the top 10 percent of affordable and available housing units, those with the lowest shares of students experiencing homelessness include Roanoke County, Virginia; Geauga County, Ohio; and Union County, Ohio. Roanoke has enough affordable and

Among counties in the bottom 10 percent of affordable and available housing units, those with the highest shares of students experiencing homelessness include San Bernadino County, California; Bay County, Florida; and San Luis Obispo County, California. San Luis Obisbo's supply of affordable and available housing meets less than one-third of the need for households with very low incomes, and 8.8 percent of its public school students experience homelessness.

Counties with the Most and the Least Affordable and Available Housing for Households with Very Low Incomes Have Drastically Different Student Homelessness Rates

County	Number of affordable and available housing per 100 very low–income households	Share of public-school children experiencing homeless
High affordable and available housing, low homelessness		
Roanoke County, VA	101	0.4%
Geauga County, OH	113	0.5%
Union County, OH	92	0.5%
Low affordable and available housing, high homelessness		
San Bernardino County, CA	31	6.5%
Bay County, FL	35	7.0%
San Luis Obispo County, CA	28	8.8%

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Source: 2025 Upward Mobility Data Dashboard, using 2022 data for affordable and available housing units and share and count of students experiencing homelessness.

Notes: AMI = area median income. The most and least affordable housing supply are indicated by those at the top and bottom 10 percent of counties. Income groups are defined for a local family of four. Very low–income households are at 50 percent of the AMI. A unit is affordable and available at a given income level if the monthly costs do not exceed 30 percent of a household's monthly income, and it is either vacant or occupied by a renter with the same or a lower income. Students experiencing homelessness are those ages 3 through grade 12 enrolled in public schools and reported by local education agencies as having one of the following as their primary nighttime residence at any time during a school year: a shelter, transitional housing, or awaiting foster care placement; unsheltered (e.g., a car, park, campground, temporary trailer, or abandoned building); a hotel or motel, because of the lack of alternative, adequate accommodations; or in other people's housing because of a loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason. Data on students experiencing homelessness tend to be undercounts, especially in rural areas.

What policies could increase affordable and available housing and improve housing stability?

The relationship between affordable housing and student homelessness may be influenced by factors that drive both outcomes, such as income inequality or general housing market dynamics. But communities with high shares of students experiencing homelessness must specifically assess their housing and land-use policies. Local policymakers can consider the following evidence-based solutions for increasing the supply and availability of affordable housing, depending on their community's needs.

Enact tenant protections, such as just-cause eviction policies. These policies create procedures a landlord must follow to evict a tenant and limit the number of reasons meriting eviction (usually including nonpayment of rent, intentional damage to the unit, or other material noncompliance with the lease).

Expand the use of the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit to help produce and preserve affordable rental housing. Research shows the development of affordable housing through the program significantly reduces homelessness.

Reform local zoning regulations to reduce restrictions and expand opportunities to increase the supply of affordable housing. Research shows restrictive local land-use regulations are directly related to increases in homelessness among adults. Permitting accessory dwelling unit construction, allowing for taller apartment buildings in proximity to public transit, and reducing minimum parking requirements are all options for increasing access to affordable housing.

Preserve and support the affordability of manufactured homes. Such homes are a lower-cost housing solution, and manufactured housing communities, such as informal subdivisions (PDF), are shown to sustain affordability.

who need it most—is a necessary and meaningful step toward reducing homelessness among students, ensuring that more children have the stability they need to succeed in school and beyond.

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