

# RURAL RESEARCH NOTE

## HOUSING ASSISTANCE COUNCIL

The Housing Assistance Council (HAC) is a national nonprofit organization that supports affordable housing efforts in rural areas of the United States. HAC provides technical housing services, seed money loans from a revolving fund, housing program and policy assistance, and research and information services. HAC is an equal opportunity lender and provider.



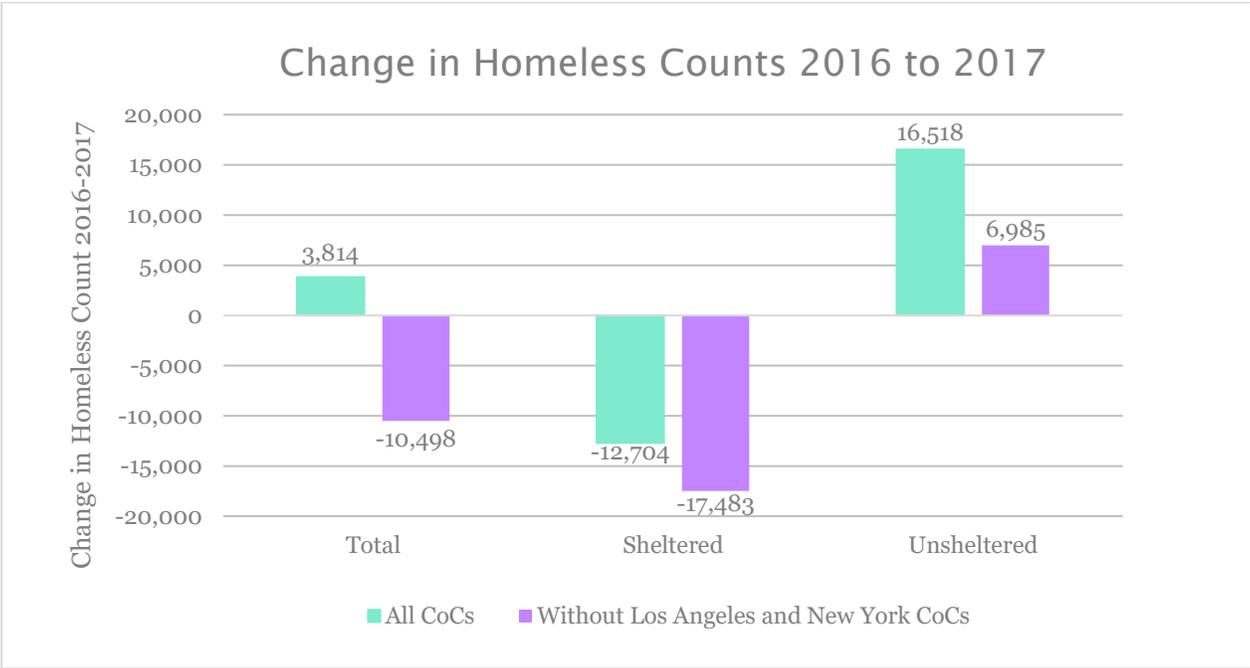
December 2017

## HOMELESS RATE INCREASES NATIONALLY: RURAL DATA REMAINS UNCLEAR

HUD's 2017 point-in-time numbers show the homeless count increased by 0.7% nationally since 2016, which is the first increase since 2010. The overall number has actually decreased when excluding several large cities that have experienced extreme spikes in homeless populations. Homeless counts in rural communities continue to be hard to capture. The following discussion highlights the impact of these highly populated areas on the overall homeless count and points out the difficulty in counting the rural homeless population.

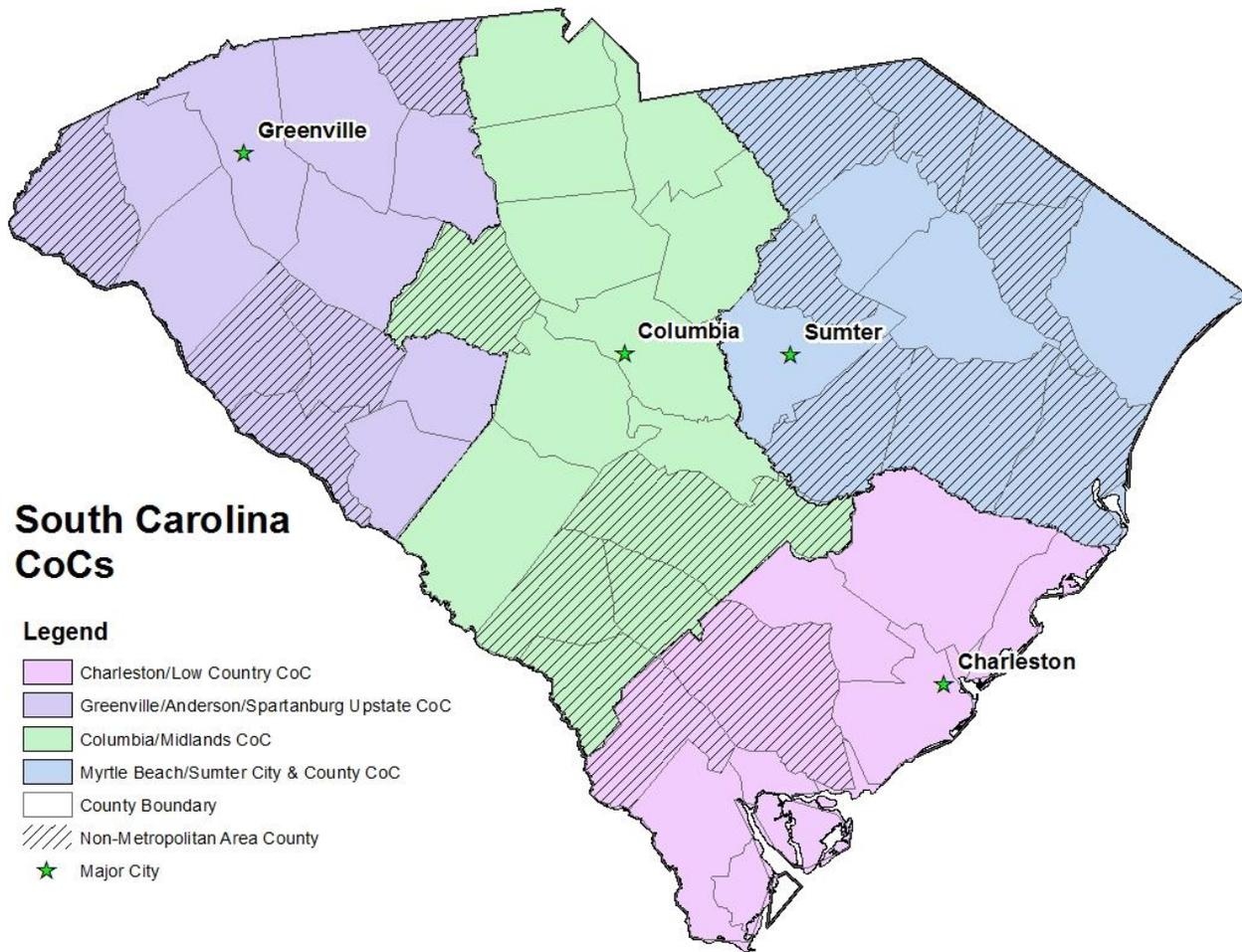
### A Few Large Cities Shape Homeless Count

Reported homelessness increased dramatically this past year in several communities, particularly Los Angeles and New York City, according to HUD's 2017 point-in-time. Because a quarter of all homeless people identified in the HUD point-in-time count live in either the Los Angeles or New York City CoCs, these increases greatly shape the trends for the entire population resulting in a very slight uptick in HUD's overall homeless count, the first time it has increased in seven years. Excluding these two highly populated CoCs, the overall homeless count decreased by 2.5 percent since last year. This aggregate number, however, obscures important variation and growing levels of need across communities. While almost 60 percent of CoCs nationwide had decreased homeless counts, the 40 percent of CoCs with increased homelessness arguably should receive increased attention and funding. There are still over 550,000 people in this country without homes, almost 200,000 of which, are unsheltered.



### Rural Homeless Counts Unclear

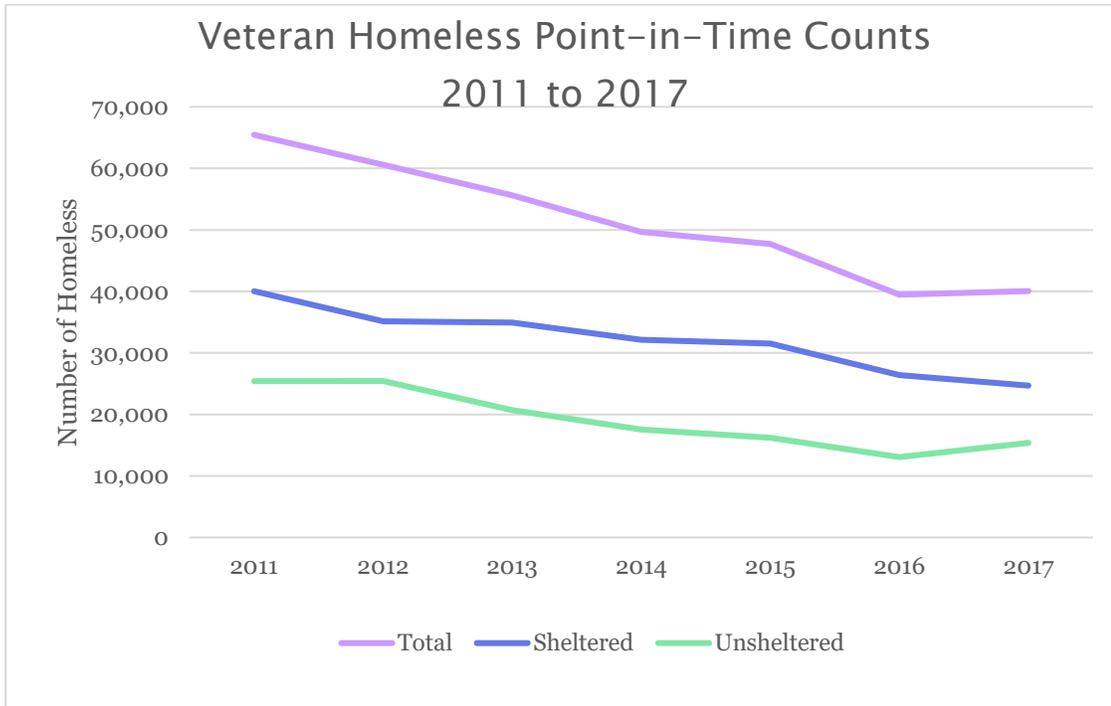
Using HUD’s data, homeless counts in rural areas decreased by 1.4 percent using balance of state or statewide CoC estimates as a proxy. However, attempting to equate the balance of state totals with rural areas is an imperfect measure, as balance of state areas often include rural and urban/suburban areas. For example, the entire state of Rhode Island, which the OMB classified as entirely metropolitan, has a single statewide CoC so the proxy would consider all of Rhode Island rural. On the other hand, the state of South Carolina, which has 20 of its 47 counties classified as outside of a metropolitan area, has no balance of state CoC and therefore would not be considered rural at all. (See South Carolina CoC map.) Improving CoC homeless population counts so they clearly identify the rural share would be helpful. Efforts have been underway to expand on the HUD point-in-time data so that, for each CoC, it identifies a count of the rural homeless population.



Given the large, sparsely populated geography of rural America, where homeless persons have less access to shelters and services, local, rather than national counts, may provide the best approach for homelessness assessment. The Housing Assistance Council provides a [tool kit](#) for counting the homeless population on tribal lands, but the report’s information and insights on assessing local homeless rates can be applied to rural communities in general.

### 40,000 Veterans Still Homeless

Veterans, which make a disproportionately large share of the rural population<sup>i</sup>, also experienced increased overall numbers in the 2017 point-in-time count, however, just as with the overall population, once Los Angeles and New York City CoCs are taken out a slight decrease occurred since 2016. Still, after lowering the homeless veterans count by 39 percent since 2011, approximately 40,000 were counted as homeless in 2017 and over 15,000 were unsheltered. The goal of ending veteran homelessness will be difficult to reach without increased resources and support.



<sup>i</sup> Housing Assistance Council. “Soldier’s Home: A Closer Look at the Department of Veteran Affairs’ (VA) Home Loan Program.” <http://www.ruralhome.org/storage/documents/publications/rrreports/rrr-vethomeloanmortgage.pdf>



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