

BLACK HOMELESSNESS IN ILLINOIS: STRUCTURAL DRIVERS OF INEQUALITY

Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy

Research that Makes a Difference

Executive Summary of *Black Homelessness in Illinois: Structural Drivers of Inequality*

Authored by Iván Arenas, William Scarborough, Aïsha Lehmann, Karlia Brown, and Amanda E. Lewis.

Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy (IRRPP)

University of Illinois Chicago

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For a pdf of the full report, go to **https://tinyurl.com/IllinoisBlackHomelessness** or follow this QR code

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PREFACE & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The mission of the Institute for Research on Race and Public Policy (IRRPP) at the University of Illinois Chicago is to increase society's understanding of the root causes of racial and ethnic inequality and to provide the public, organizers, practitioners, and policy makers with research-based solutions. Since 2017, IRRPP has been analyzing racial inequities in the Chicagoland Metropolitan region as part of our State of Racial Justice in Chicago series of reports (accessible at irrpp.uic.edu). Across the United States, racial inequality is pervasive, persistent, and consequential, affecting the lives of people in every community, city, county, and state. These racial inequities have spatial outlines that affect where people can live, work, go to school, and access healthcare. They have deep historical roots; they are embedded in all our social institutions; they impact social interactions; and they have powerful effects on the lived experiences and opportunities of all U.S. residents.

In January of 2023, IRRPP began a partnership with the Illinois Office to Prevent and End Homelessness (OPEH) to assess the structural causes of Black Homelessness in the state. OPEH was created in September of 2021 to coordinate statewide efforts to ensure that there is a safety net and a path to permanent housing for Illinois residents facing homelessness or coping with housing insecurity. As part of this effort, the OPEH convened a roundtable of experts on the Black unhoused population. The Racial Equity Roundtable on Black Homelessness met bi-monthly to inform the design of the research, provide support for the data collection, provide feedback on the analysis and report drafts, and develop recommendations for action.

IRRPP could not have completed this report without the guidance and support of the Racial Equity Roundtable on Black Homelessness, the support of the Illinois Office to Prevent and End Homelessness, and the many homelessness support agencies across Illinois that helped the research team to conduct listening sessions, focus groups, and interviews across the state. We are grateful for the dedication and tireless work that the Roundtable, OPEH, and homelessness support agencies do daily to support Black Illinoisans who are unhoused and housing insecure.

RACIAL EQUITY ROUNDTABLE ON BLACK HOMELESSNESS

Bobby Watts, Chief Executive Officer,National Healthcare for the Homeless Council
Carolyn Ross, President and Chief Executive Officer, All Chicago
Caronina Grimble, Director, Office of Strategy, Equity, and Transformation, Illinois Department of Human Services
Christine Haley, Chief Homelessness Officer, Illinois Office to Prevent & End Homelessness
Elgie Sims, State Senator, 17th District, Illinois House of Representatives
Garien Gatewood, Executive Director, Illinois Justice Project
Gianna Baker, Co-Executive Director, Chicago Area Fair Housing Alliance
Jackie Newman, Executive Director, Springfield Housing Authority
Jawanza Malone, Executive Director, Wieboldt Foundation
Jehan Gordon-Booth, State Representative, District 92, Illinois House of Representatives
John Herring, Executive Director, Illinois Centers for Independent Living
Kim Hunt, Executive Director, Pride Action Tank
Peggy Bailey, Vice President for Housing and Income Security, Center for Budget & Policy Priorities (Washington D.C.)
Rev. Dwight Ford, Executive Director, Project NOW
Rev. Ronnie Woods, St. Paul AME / Bethel AME
Richard Rowe, Senior Program Manager, Corporation for Supportive Housing
Rita Ali, Mayor, City of Peoria
Sherri Allen Reeves, Executive Director, Phoenix Foundation Chicago
Sol A. Flores, Deputy Governor, Office of Illinois Governor JB Pritzker
Susan Campbell, Director, Planning and Development, Cook County, Bureau of Economic Development
Teri Campbell, Deputy Commissioner, Administration and Finance, Chicago Public Library
Toni Muhammed, Executive Director, Catholic Urban Programs
Traci Sanders, Chicago Director, Enterprise Community Partners

Please note that this is the composition of the roundtable as it came together at the start of 2023. Some members of the roundtable have changed their jobs and organizations but their commitment to the work remained the same.

We are especially grateful to the unhoused and formerly unhoused Black individuals who spoke with us for this report and shared not only their experiences with homelessness but also their vision and hopes for better futures for themselves, others that are facing housing insecurity and homelessness, and all residents of Illinois. While they are not identified by name in the report, the experiences and insights they shared provide the foundation for our analysis and for the work ahead to decrease and end not just racial disparities in homelessness but to achieve the vision of OPEH and Governor Pritzker of functional zero homelessness where the state can provide services and shelter for all people who become homeless so that homelessness is rare and brief for those that become unhoused.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In the state of Illinois, Black residents are almost eight times more likely to be homeless than white residents. This racial disparity in homelessness is not unique to Illinois. There is not a single state where Black residents are not disproportionately represented among the unhoused. But the gap in Illinois is one of the worst in the country, double the national rate, where Black residents are four times more likely to be homeless than white residents.

While much of the conversation about homelessness in U.S. culture focuses on narratives of individual responsibility and personal choice, the Illinois Office to Prevent and End Homelessness (OPEH), which commissioned this report, charged the Institute for Research on Race & Public Policy (IRRPP) with investigating the structural factors driving racial disparities in Black homelessness in Illinois. We did this work guided by a Racial Equity Roundtable on Black Homelessness convened by OPEH and composed of Black leaders and experts from around the state doing work to support the homeless population in Illinois. In addition to the roundtable, OPEH organized seven listening sessions across the state with community members, homelessness service professionals, and individuals with lived experience of homelessness in order to ensure the study design was informed and guided by community needs and perspectives.

Drawing on the insights from the Racial Equity Roundtable and listening sessions, IRRPP compared data from Point in Time (PIT) counts of homelessness from the 19 Continuums of Care (CoC) in Illinois and the 382 national CoCs that the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has tasked with coordinating a comprehensive plan of services for unhoused individuals and families. We analyzed the PIT counts in conjunction with data on other social conditions like rates of eviction, incarceration, and unemployment to determine how social conditions affect rates and patterns of homelessness among Black and white Illinoisans. Additionally, we facilitated ten focus groups with people who had lived experience with homelessness. These focus groups, hosted in different regions of Illinois, allowed us to gain deeper

insights into how structural factors contributed to our focus group participants becoming unhoused. In addition, the full report includes portraits of nine Illinoisans who have lived experience with being unhoused and excerpts from interviews with them. These portraits provide further insights and a personalized look at how homelessness and the structural conditions that the report highlights are impacting Black residents in Illinois.

Findings from the Report and Recommended Action Plan

The Relationship of Affordable Housing to Homelessness

Our quantitative analysis found that rent burden is a major driver of Black homelessness. For every 10-percentage point increase in the share of Black residents experiencing rent burden in Illinois, Black homelessness grows by 1.7 percent. While rent burden is a driver of Black homelessness, white homelessness remains unchanged as the share of white residents experiencing rent burden grows or contracts over time. This means that the gap between Black and white homelessness grows as housing costs increase. Not only does rent burden have a larger impact on Black residents' risk of homelessness, but Black residents are more likely to experience rent burden than white residents. Statewide, 63 percent of Black renters in Illinois were rent burdened in 2022, compared to 51 percent of white renters.

Action Plan Related to Affordable Housing

The Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) has a statewide Homeless Prevention Program that helps households facing temporary economic crises from becoming homeless. The program provides rental/mortgage and utility assistance as well as approved case management and support services for those in danger of eviction, foreclosure, or homelessness. Currently, there is a cap on services equal to the dollar value of six months of the applicant's rent or mortgage.

Given the proven benefits of averting homelessness through financial assistance and case management, we recommend the state build on the success of the Illinois Homeless Prevention Program

and work to ensure that all eligible applicants to Homelessness Prevention Call Centers throughout the state are provided with the services and benefits of the IDHS Homeless Prevention Program.

The Relationship of Eviction Filing Rates to Homelessness

Our quantitative analysis shows that eviction filings have a detrimental effect on both Black and white homelessness. As eviction filings increase, so do rates of Black and white homelessness. As the rate of eviction filings increase over time and across CoCs, the data shows that both Black and white homelessness increase at similar rates, but because the baseline levels of Black homelessness are so much higher, the absolute increases are larger for Black than white homelessness.

Action Plan Related to Evictions

The Illinois Housing Development Authority (IHDA) manages the Illinois Court-Based Rental Assistance Program (CBRAP). This program provides up to $25,000 in emergency rental payments for up to 15 months of past-due rent and 3 months of future rent payments to prevent eviction. Additionally, the Illinois Equal Justice Foundation (IEJF) Grant Program provides legal information, advice, representation, and mediation services through its Eviction Help Now program which, since its launch in 2020, has served more than 430,000 Illinoisans.

Illinois has already taken important steps to address evictions. We recommend the state build on the success of these existing programs by increasing the capacity of the IEJF grant program as well as ensuring that tenants and landlords are connected to the funding provided by the Illinois Court-Based Rental Assistance Program (CBRAP) through mediation services. We also recommend that the state consider expanding support for tenants under CBRAP for

instances when landlords do not wish to participate in the program, potentially by requiring landlords with tenants who meet the low-income criteria of the program to apply for CBRAP when filing an eviction.

The Relationship of Incarceration to Homelessness

Incarceration is another major driver of Black homelessness. Within Illinois' CoCs, an increase in the Black jail incarceration rate of one for every 1,000 residents leads to an increase in Black homelessness of about 1 percent. The effect of prison incarceration is about twice as large: for every additional one in 1,000 Black residents in prison, Black homelessness increases by 1.8 percent. However, across both jail and prison, rates of incarceration are unrelated to white homelessness. This suggests that, on the whole, white residents have access to resources and support that mitigate their incarceration becoming a path to homelessness.

Action Plan Related to Incarceration

The 2018 Illinois Public Act 100-0575 called on the Illinois Housing Development Authority (IHDA) to "create a Frequent Users Systems Engagement (FUSE) Re-Entry rental subsidy supportive housing program for the most vulnerable persons exiting the Department of Corrections" (IDOC). Illinois Public Act 100-0575 also called on IDOC to "engage in reentry planning to include individualized case planning for persons preparing to be released to the community." Echoing PA 100-0575, we heard from focus group participants, homelessness agency staff, and members of the Racial Equity Roundtable on Black Homelessness that there is an acute need for coordinated reentry programs and a standard, statewide information packet and orientation for individuals exiting from jails and prisons that has details on housing, employment, healthcare, and education services.

We recommend the state build on its current efforts and accelerate the work of IDOC and related state agencies in living up to the

commitments of Public Act 100-0575. Multiple studies have found that the social, material, and human costs to repeatedly incarcerating individuals far exceeds the cost and investment required to scale up supportive housing programs which can ensure that individuals do not cycle in and out of jails, prisons, hospitals, shelters, and the streets.

The Relationship of Unemployment to Homelessness

The effect of unemployment on Black homelessness is substantial. For every one percentage point increase in Black unemployment within CoCs, Black homelessness increases by 1.43 percent. As Black unemployment rises, not only does the overall rate of Black homelessness increase, but racial disparities in homelessness also increase. Underlying this difference are the racialized conditions which make Black residents more at risk of unemployment and less protected from the financial hardships of unemployment. For example, longstanding racial wealth disparities mean that, comparatively, white individuals more often have family members to lend financial support during periods of hardship. White residents are also more likely to reside in neighborhoods or cities with more economic activity and available jobs, reducing the length of unemployment spells and their severity. Black residents, facing the accumulated legacies of structural racism, have higher unemployment rates and access to fewer resources to support them in moments of crisis.

Action Plan Related to Unemployment

In October of 2023, the U.S. Department of Labor granted the Illinois Department of Employment Security (IDES) an $11.25 million dollar grant to strengthen, modernize, and redesign their unemployment insurance program. As part of this grant, the Office of Unemployment Insurance Modernization made available technical assistance that includes: making applications accessible through mobile phones, simplifying complexity through plain language, automating workflows, adopting modular systems that are easy to maintain, and remote public options for ID proofing.

We found that greater availability of unemployment benefits leads to a reduction in Black homelessness. More specifically, for every one percentage point increase in the share of unemployed residents receiving unemployment benefits, the Black homelessness rate falls by 0.51 percent.

We commend the work that IDES is doing to increase accessibility to unemployment benefits and recommend that they ensure that the Unemployment Insurance Modernization grant considers feedback from housing insecure and unhoused individuals in the application improvement process; simplifies the steps to apply; and provides low-barrier ways to verify the identity and application documents of individuals.

The Relationship of Healthcare to Homelessness

There has been a recognition in the health profession that an individual's health is shaped by factors beyond their personal behavior – factors which are often termed the "social determinants of health." Researchers and healthcare advocates have pointed to significant disparities in access to and availability of nutritious food; health care providers; pharmacies; safe and affordable housing; affordable and reliable public transportation; and clean water and air, as drivers of disparate health outcomes between racial groups. Racial discrimination and discrimination against unhoused individuals by healthcare services further compound the challenges that Black unhoused individuals face in accessing and receiving quality physical and mental health services. As participants in our focus groups made clear, health challenges complicated their full employment and made access to insurance more difficult. The lack of access to affordable healthcare in addition to the expenses of medical bills, medicines, and care for chronic conditions, were a significant driver in their housing instability or homelessness.

Action Plan Related to Healthcare

In May of 2023, the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services (HFS) publicized their request for a five-year extension of the Section 1115 Demonstration Waiver from the federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services to expand its Medicaid services. Part of the benefits that HFS sought with the extension of Medicaid in Illinois were "housing supports including pre-tenancy and tenancy sustaining services for individuals and families experiencing or at risk of homelessness; medical respite for those experiencing or at risk of homelessness to avoid or step down from higher levels of care; [and] justice involved community reintegration to connect adults and youth with vital services and supports in the months preceding release from incarceration."

Housing First programs do not make housing for unhoused individuals conditional in their participation in other support services. We recommend the state ensure that Housing First principles and programs are prioritized in all aspects of healthcare treatment under the five-year extension of Section 1115 of Medicaid. This would include paying for housing-related services using providers that employ a Housing First model for unhoused individuals with chronic health problems and opioid use disorder in hospitals, jails, and shelters. It would also include pre-tenancy and tenancy sustaining services for individuals and families at risk of or experiencing homelessness and connecting youths and adults with services and supports in a timely manner before they are released from incarceration. We also encourage the state to use Medicaid extension funds or other sources of funding to address the bureaucratic barriers that keep Black unhoused individuals from accessing healthcare.

The Relationship of Foster Care to Homelessness

Youth aging out of foster care face unique challenges that make them particularly vulnerable to homelessness. Previous research reports that anywhere from 20 to 30 percent of these individuals experience homelessness in the years immediately following their exit from foster care. Absence of familial support, isolation from community resources, unstable housing, and limited support from social workers who emphasize self-sufficiency are some of the major challenges facing youth who age out of foster care. Research also shows that Black youth aging out of foster care are at even greater risk of becoming homeless than white youth.

Our analysis found that both supervised independent living and mentoring services reduce both Black and white homelessness, though the effect is larger for Black residents, thus shrinking the racial disparities between Black and white youth transitioning out of foster care. However, in 2018, just 18 percent of Black youth aging out of foster care in Illinois received supervised independent living services and just under a third received mentoring.

Action Plan Related to Foster Care Transition

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 mandated that "during the 90-day period immediately prior to the date on which the child will attain 18 years of age, […] a caseworker on the staff of the State agency, and, as appropriate, other representatives of the child provide the child with assistance and support in developing a transition plan that is personalized at the direction of the child." However, a 2021 Department of Children & Family Services (DCFS) report shows that waiting until 90 days before a young person turns 18 is not enough time for them to develop a suitable and actionable transition plan that can ensure their success.

We recommend that DCFS ensure that all young people in their care complete their transition plan by age 17 and that, as part of that transition plan, DCFS provides easy to understand information

to young people about the programs for which they are eligible, what they need to be able to access those programs, where they can apply, and how they can get support from a caseworker. Moreover, transition plans should also include a comprehensive plan for how DCFS and other state agencies will support the young person in their journey towards adulthood.

Executive Summary Conclusion

Addressing the root causes of racial disparities in homelessness will require comprehensive measures that include not only short-term solutions like continued financial assistance for Black families that are housing insecure, but also long-term strategies that dismantle systemic barriers contributing to racial inequities in homelessness such as ending the mass incarceration of Black people. To achieve this, we urge legislators and public officials to prioritize targeted initiatives that address the unique challenges faced by Black residents across our 19 Continuums of Care. In conjunction with the Racial Equity Roundtable on Black Homelessness, we set out a series of action steps that should serve as a focal point for this work in the short term. We also urge policy makers and state agencies to commit to ongoing data collection and analysis to monitor and assess the effectiveness of interventions, ensuring that progress is sustained, and disparities are systematically reduced.

An Illinois that works for all, where all residents have access to safe, dignified, and affordable housing, where all residents can earn a living wage and benefit from readily available and culturally competent medical and mental health services, is possible only if we intentionally create policies and practices that address racial inequities and the needs of our most vulnerable residents. This is not only a matter of racial justice but a pragmatic approach to building an Illinois where every individual, regardless of their background, has the opportunity to thrive.

Action Plan for Racial Equity From Illinois Office to Prevent and End Homelessness

In response to the recommendations made by the Racial Equity Roundtable on Black Homelessness, the Illinois Office to Prevent and End Homelessness (OPEH) presents the following action plan. In Governor Pritzker's FY25 Proposed Budget, $50M is allocated to support the implementation of this Action Plan for Racial Equity (APRE).

APRE includes commitments made by OPEH and state agency leaders in State Fiscal Years 2025 and 2026. The framework of APRE includes three pillars of Home Illinois, the state plan to prevent and end homelessness: build affordable and permanent supportive housing, bolster the safety net, improve financial stability and close the mortality gap. Activities are categorized as a process, policy or program.

BUILD AFFORDABLE AND PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

Agency	Type	Activity
IHDA	Policy	As a work group of the Illinois Affordable Housing Taskforce, survey the housing policies that other states are implementing and/or considering to reduce racial disparities in housing and homelessness; Provide recommendations to the Governor's Office for consideration
OPEH	Process	With leadership at the Governor's Office, convene municipal leaders about local data and analysis included in the report
IDHS	Process	Create community engagement and communications campaign to change the narrative on the root causes of homelessness
OPEH	Program	Support capacity building and curriculum development for communities to address "Not In My Back Yard" (NIMBY) challenges in shelter and permanent supportive housing development

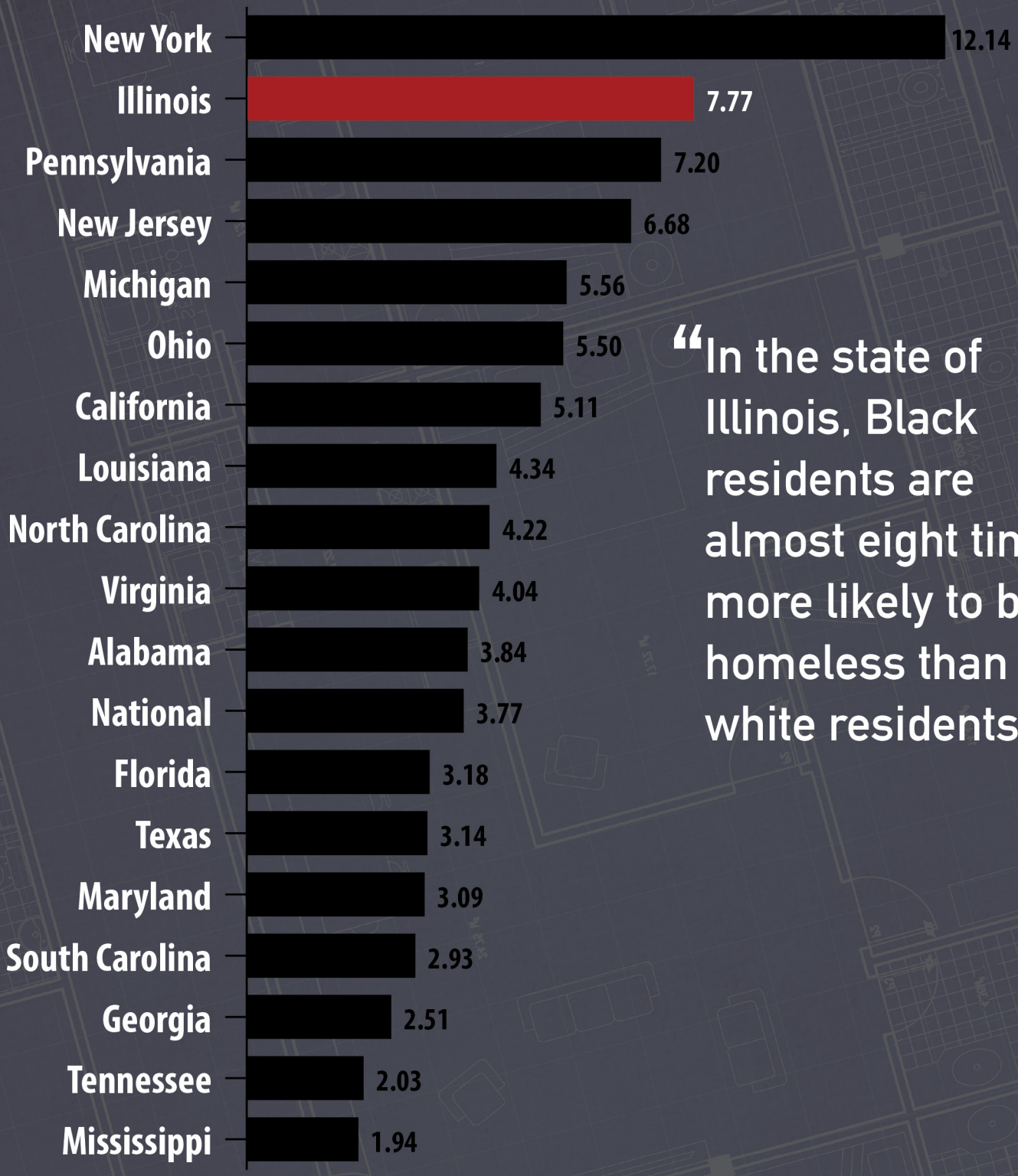
BOLSTER THE SAFETY NET

Agency	Type	Activity
IDHS	Process	Create community engagement and communications campaign on how to access homeless prevention and shelter resources
IDHS	Process	Create community engagement and communications campaign to engage landlords to rent to unhoused households
OPEH	Process	Support communities in reaching their goals in ending veterans' homelessness, by providing data and technical assistance support
OPEH	Process	Create a position within OPEH to coordinate implementation of the action plan
OPEH	Process	Further internal data analysis infrastructure to understand impact of investments to address Black-White disparities in homelessness
OPEH	Process	Explore state oversight mechanisms for persons experiencing homelessness to resolve complaints in homeless housing and services programs
DCFS	Program	Launch a pilot program to support the housing and mentorship needs of youth transitioning out of DCFS care; Evaluate the impact on housing stability
IDHS	Program	Launch a pilot to support the housing and services needs of unhoused persons living with a mental health disability and discharged from the Madden Mental Health Center
IDHS	Program	Provide outreach and end education services to Black communities on how to access services for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities
IDOC	Program	Apply the learnings from Returning Home Ohio program in Illinois, by launching and/or expanding a permanent supportive housing pilot for returning citizens

INCREASE FINANCIAL STABILITY

Agency	Type	Activity
IDHS	Program	At shelters, provide outreach and enrollment support for state administered benefits, such as Medicaid and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
IDHS	Program	Continue Access to Counsel program that provides legal aid services to households in eviction court
IHDA	Program	Continue the Court Based Rental Assistance Program with state funding, supporting households in eviction court

RATIO OF BLACK TO WHITE HOMELESSNESS IN 2022 IN STATES WITH AT LEAST 1 MILLION BLACK RESIDENTS



"In the state of Illinois, Black residents are almost eight times more likely to be homeless than white residents."