



ULSTER COUNTY OFFICE OF THE COMPTROLLER

Ulster County Emergency Housing Snapshot

Released April 2025

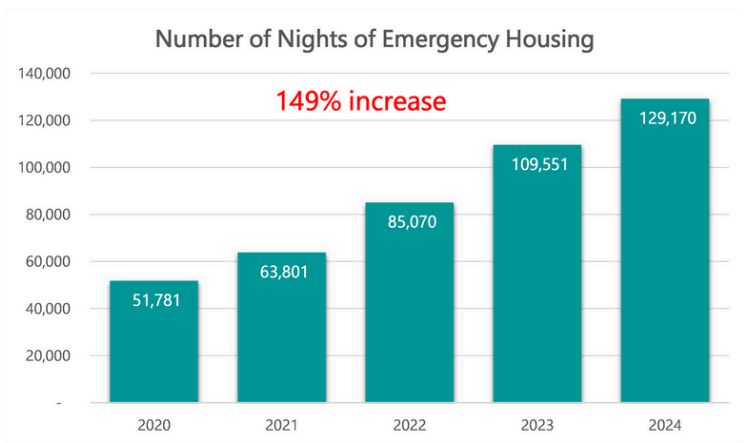
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Ulster County has been experiencing a housing crisis as a result of many factors which include: a lack of housing development over the last 25 years,¹ the explosion of the short-term rental market,² more people moving into the area during and after COVID,³ the purchase of several large rental housing complexes by new owners,⁴ a subsequent increase in rent,⁵ and the closure of three area boarding houses that provided 150 beds.⁶ The result of these changes is a dire need for both permanent and emergency housing.

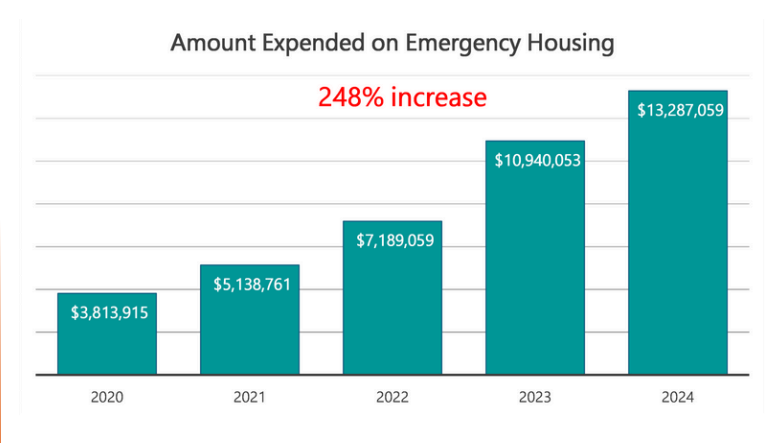
Emergency Housing Need Grows

The County contracts with Family of Woodstock to operate two emergency shelters: Darmstadt Shelter for individuals and Family Inn for families. In addition, the County works with area hotels to rent rooms for emergency housing needs. A review of more recent data provided by the Department of Social Services shows a sharp increase in emergency housing needs in Ulster County.

By 2024, Ulster County residents spent a staggering 129,170 nights in emergency housing, an increase of 149% from the 51,781 nights recorded in 2020.



Source: Data aggregated by Ulster County Department of Social Services.



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This increase in the number of nights of emergency housing has driven up costs significantly. Ulster County's emergency housing costs have skyrocketed from \$3.8 million in 2020 to \$13.3 million in 2024, marking a 248% increase in just five years.

In 2024, the number of hotels who take emergency housing clients decreased to 24 from 38 in the prior year, while the quantity of nights grew. With limited rooms available, Ulster County has had to work with hotels outside of Ulster County to meet the nightly demand. These distant placements in Newburgh, Poughkeepsie, and Monticello create additional burdens on families.

The cost per night in 2020 was \$73.65, and it has steadily increased each year to \$102.86 by 2024. It is important to note that these increases occurred during a period of substantial inflation. The combination of additional nights needed for emergency housing and the increase in price over the five-year period explains the increased costs. Emergency housing in Ulster County is funded primarily through three programs: Safety Net, Family Assistance, and Emergency Assistance for Adults. The data reveals a clear rise in Safety Net and Family Assistance.

Emergency Housing Costs, Nights and Cost per Night			
Year	Costs	Nights	Per Night
2020	\$ 3,813,915	51,781	\$ 73.65
2021	5,138,761	63,801	80.54
2022	7,189,059	85,070	84.51
2023	10,940,053	109,551	99.86
2024	13,287,059	129,170	102.86

Emergency Housing Expenditures

Calendar Year	2021	2022	2023	2024
Total Expenditures	5,138,761	7,189,059	10,940,053	13,287,059
Family Assistance	1,538,085	2,096,317	3,221,693	4,038,377
Safety Net	1,033,466	1,465,098	2,233,489	2,646,471
Safety Net- Federally Participating	1,300	47,754	26,036	125,280
Emergency Aid for Adults	8,541	3,332	3,615	6,261
Total Reimbursement	2,581,392	3,612,501	5,484,833	6,816,389
Total Local Share	2,557,369	3,576,559	5,455,220	6,470,671
Reimbursement %	50.23%	50.25%	50.14%	51.30%
County Local Share %	49.77%	49.75%	49.86%	48.70%

Ulster County's "local share" of the costs of emergency housing has stayed at roughly 50% and in fact even declined in 2024 to 48.7%, but as overall costs of the program have increased, so has the burden on local taxpayers. The amount and type of state and federal support is very case specific based on certain qualifying criteria discussed in our [2021 Emergency Housing Snapshot](#). Department of Social Services staff make a determination of program eligibility for each client for each night of emergency housing. County funds are used when a client is not eligible for state or federal funding streams.

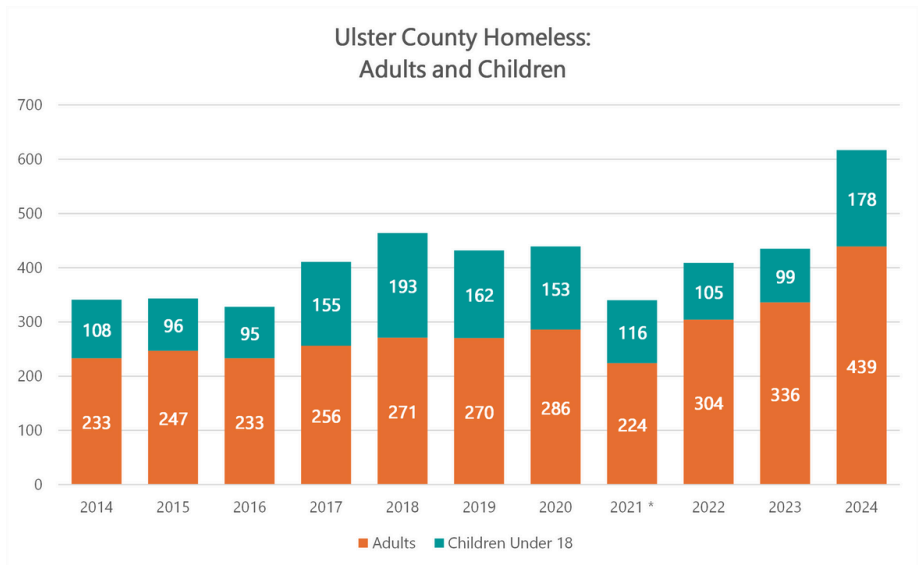
The selection of hotels and the rates per night are negotiated by the Department of Social Services. Individual hotel vendors do not enter into contracts with the County for these services, which means that vendors paid more than \$50,000 per year are paid without legislative approval. These payments are made through the Welfare Management System and are not approved by the Comptroller's Office.

The County's general ledger chart of accounts is not currently set up in a way that the expenditures and revenues for emergency housing can be easily determined by the Comptroller's office without the assistance of DSS staff. We recommend that DSS work with the Budget Department to separate the emergency housing portion of the revenues and expenditures from other expenditures for budgeting and analysis purposes.

Homelessness Trends: Point-in-Time Count Data

To get a better perspective on how homelessness has changed in Ulster County, we reviewed population data from the annual Point-in-Time (PIT) Count, a survey sponsored by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). This count, overseen by the Ulster County Continuum of Care, takes a snapshot of sheltered and unsheltered people experiencing homelessness on a single night in January.

Over the last decade, the PIT Count shows that the overall number of homeless people in Ulster County has increased 81% since 2014. The number of homeless adults has increased 88%, while the number of homeless children has grown by 65%.

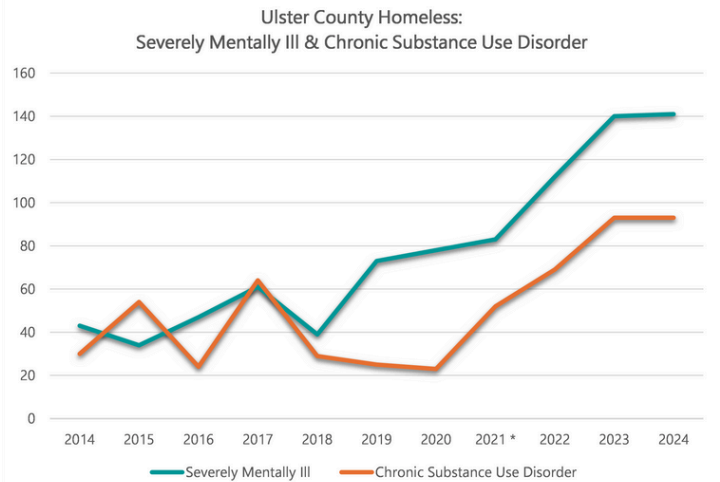


*In 2021, an in person survey was not conducted to mitigate the potential risk of COVID-19 transmission, so the total homeless counts reported for this year may be missing data.

Source: data aggregated by the Comptroller's Office from 2014-2024 HUD Continuum of Care Homeless Assistance Programs Homeless Populations and Subpopulations available at https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/coc/coc-dashboard-reports/?filter_Year=&filter_Scope=CoC&filter_State=NY&filter_CoC=NY-608&program=CoC&group=DASH

The PIT Count also tracks mental health and substance use among the homeless population. The number of severely mentally ill homeless adults has risen by 228%, while the number of homeless adults struggling with chronic substance use disorders has jumped by 210%. It is important to recognize that people can identify in both categories. These numbers are self-reported by homeless individuals and a person may be both severely mentally ill and have a chronic substance use disorder.

Source: data aggregated by the Comptroller's Office from 2014-2024 HUD Continuum of Care Homeless Assistance Programs Homeless Populations and Subpopulations available at https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/coc/coc-dashboard-reports/?filter_Year=&filter_Scope=CoC&filter_State=NY&filter_CoC=NY-608&program=CoC&group=DASH



Addressing the Housing Crisis: County Initiatives and Programs

Ulster County has recognized the severity of the housing crisis and has undertaken a number of initiatives to address the issue.

- **Local Law No. 3 of 2023:** In 2023, Ulster County formally recognized housing as a County purpose. Although the County was undertaking housing support prior to this local law, since 2023, the work has expanded greatly. This change created the statutory support needed to justify using County funds for housing projects and programs.
- **Housing Smart Communities Initiative:** This program provides guidance and support to local communities, encouraging them to adopt both short and long-term actions to develop and secure affordable housing for all residents.
- **Housing Action Fund:** In 2023, the County formally assigned \$15 million of previously unassigned General fund balance to support the construction, development and redevelopment of affordable housing. \$2 million of funding was awarded to five projects in 2024. Another \$1 million funding opportunity was announced by the County Executive in February of 2025.
- **New Program Support:** The County has begun funding new programs such as eviction prevention, and housing support to find permanent housing for those in emergency, and housing homeowner assistance to upgrade rental units.
- **Continued Program Support:** The County continues to provide support for the Continuum of Care activities which monitor homelessness and prepare HUD required reports.
- **Plus One ADU Home Program:** The County has partnered with RUPCO and New York State to provide funds to assist Ulster County low-moderate income property owners with grants of up to \$125,000 to construct or rehab code-compliant accessory dwelling units (ADU).

The Comptroller's Office is aggregating program and financial information on all of the County's current housing projects and programs that will be issued in a separate report this year.

Conclusion

Due to a variety of factors, Ulster County is experiencing a housing crisis with limited inventory available for permanent housing and a substantial increase in homeless individuals and families. More homeless individuals and families has resulted in more nights of emergency housing and more nights of emergency housing placement have resulted in greater costs. The County has undertaken a number of initiatives to address this growing need but it will take time for these programs and projects to have impact on the overall availability of permanent housing in Ulster County.

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[2] Office of the Ulster County Comptroller. (2022, July). Short-Term Rental Snapshot. <https://comptroller.ulstercountyny.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/Short-Term-Rental-Snapshot.pdf>
[3] US Census Bureau. Ulster County Quick Facts, Population Estimates 2024. Accessed March 24, 2025 from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/ulstercountynynewyork/PST045223>
[4] Daily Freeman. New owners of Kingston, Esopus apartment complexes pledge long-term commitment. (July 21, 2021). <https://www.dailyfreeman.com/2021/07/21/new-owners-of-kingston-esopus-apartment-complexes-pledge-long-term-commitment/>
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[5] Ulster County Planning Department. 2023 Ulster County Rental Housing Survey. https://ulstercountyny.gov/sites/default/files/documents/planning/2023_Rental_Survey_Report.pdf
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