

**STILL SERVING TIME:  
STRUGGLING WITH HOMELESSNESS,  
INCARCERATION & RE-ENTRY  
IN BALTIMORE**

OCTOBER 2011



**HEALTH CARE**  
for the **HOMELESS** INC.

## Acknowledgements

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## Executive Summary

**Incarceration is Costly:** Rates of incarceration in the United States have increased significantly over the past four decades, and Maryland has not escaped this trend. Baltimore City, in particular, has one of the highest rates of detention in the country; approximately 28,000 City residents are involved with the corrections system on any given day in jail or prison, on probation, and/or on parole. Public expenditures to support this system are significant. The FY 2012 allowance for the Maryland Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services is \$1.3 billion. The allocation for the Department of Corrections is more than \$800 million, and two new detention facilities are planned at a cost of \$280 million.

**Incarceration & Homelessness:** The connection between homelessness and incarceration is bidirectional: incarceration can lead to homelessness, and homelessness often results in incarceration. More than 4,000 people experience homelessness on any given night in Baltimore, and – based upon estimates of those served by and turned away from shelter – at least 30,000 individuals will experience homelessness over the course of a year in Baltimore (and at least 50,000 statewide). Laws that criminalize homelessness by regulating private activity in public spaces are a contributing factor to arrest and re-arrest.

In its 2010 Interim Report, the Governor’s Task Force on Prisoner Re-entry identified the lack of affordable housing, difficulty obtaining and/or reinstating public benefits, limited financial aid for education, and issues around child support as critical barriers to successful prisoner re-entry in Maryland. While the state has increased resources to accommodate the rising population of incarcerated individuals, funding for pre-release services has declined. Limited resources for housing and re-entry services increase homelessness and contribute to recidivism.

**Purpose & Design of Survey:** This survey was designed to obtain consumer-focused information from very low-income Baltimore City residents related to housing and employment stability, and their experiences of incarceration and re-entry. The intent of this report is to expand knowledge on the connections among homelessness, incarceration, and re-entry; inform policy makers about the needs of City residents; and promote more responsive, effective, and efficient public policies. Survey questions explored frequency of incarceration, history of homelessness, and experiences with re-entry from both jail and prison. Respondents also were asked about time of release, completion of a home plan, and self-perception of what may have prevented their incarceration.

From June 15th to July 29, 2011, HCH staff, interns and *B-more Housing for All* members conducted 429 surveys throughout Baltimore City. All survey respondents had been released from jail or prison in Maryland within the last ten years.

## Survey Results

- **Experience with incarceration:** Half the survey population (50%) had been incarcerated in both jail and prison during their lifetimes, while 41% had only experienced jail, and a smaller proportion (11%) had only been in prison. One-third (33%) were first incarcerated prior to the age of 18, and 35% were detained between the ages of 18 and 24, thus making prevention among youth and young adults a clear priority for policy makers and service providers.

One-third (32%) of respondents had been incarcerated five to ten times, 14% 11 to 20 times, and 6% more than 20 times. This frequency of arrests highlights not only the cyclical and costly nature of recidivism, but it also points toward multiple opportunities to conduct re-entry planning.

Lengthy periods of incarceration offer a window of opportunity for accessing services while in detention. Approximately 37% of respondents reported that their longest single period of incarceration lasted over three years. More than 40% of those surveyed spent a combined total of five or more years behind bars over multiple periods of incarceration. One-quarter (25%) spent more than 10 years total in jail or prison. Age at first arrest is correlated with total time spent incarcerated over a lifetime; those arrested prior to age 18 were more likely to have spent 10 or more years incarcerated (58%).

- **Housing and employment:** One-third (35%) of those surveyed reported housing instability prior to their most recent incarceration. This number almost doubled upon re-entry, with 63% of respondents unable to access stable housing six months after release. Two-thirds (67%) lacked stable housing at the time of the interview. Nearly half (49%) reported being employed prior to incarceration, but this number declined to 40% after release.
- **Services needed while incarcerated and after release:** While incarcerated, 57% of those needing it received education assistance, while job training was available to 42%. Health care services were also limited. Drug treatment and mental health care was offered to 59% of those needing it. Despite a Constitutional guarantee for such services, medical care was received by less than two-thirds of those in need (62%). Dental care was delivered to 58% of those in need, and 72% received needed prescription drugs. After release, access to education and job training for those who identified a need for these services also remained low, at 50% and 44%, respectively. Identification—a critical need for obtaining services in the community after release—was only made available to two-thirds of those surveyed (64%), which is disappointing given long-term efforts at the state level to ensure that those leaving detention have valid IDs.
- **Barriers to stable housing:** Those experiencing homelessness at the time of the survey were asked to identify the barriers they faced to obtaining stable housing. Respondents most frequently cited the inability to find work (57%), a criminal record (56%), and an inability to afford a security deposit (46%) as the top three barriers. People surveyed also identified health problems – such as drug or alcohol use (39%), mental health issues (37%), and physical disability (33%) – as major barriers to housing stability. Other factors included bad credit, living expenses, debt, and family problems.
- **Perceived factors preventing incarceration:** When asked about the factors that would have prevented their incarceration, respondents most frequently identified employment, housing,

and substance abuse treatment (61%, 56%, and 55%, respectively). Other responses included family support, job training, mental health treatment, transportation, and medical treatment.

The authors of this report advocate the following series of policy recommendations in order to prevent incarceration, to provide adequate and quality programs to those who are incarcerated, and to better assist those re-entering the community. The ultimate goals are a more effective use of limited public dollars, better outcomes for individuals, and stronger communities across the City and State.

### **Recommendations to Prevent Incarceration**

1. *Provide behavioral health treatment as an alternative to incarceration.* Recommendations include expanding access to substance abuse and mental treatment programs, reallocating funds from the corrections system toward prevention, and providing alternatives to incarceration for individuals convicted of non-violent, drug-related offenses.
2. *Increase the supply of affordable housing.* Priorities include the expansion of innovative supportive housing models, legislative efforts to prevent discrimination, increased availability of affordable units at all income levels, the set-aside of public funds for additional housing, and the maintenance of current housing stock.
3. *Create employment opportunities.* Recommendations include raising current wages, reducing unemployment, increasing education and job training, and expanding transportation.
4. *Focus prevention efforts on youth.* Since most of those in this survey were incarcerated before the age of 24, additional priority should be given to the state's *Ready by 21* initiative (lead by the Department of Human Resources), and local agencies serving youth should place a particular focus upon families in unstable housing.
5. *Decriminalize homelessness.* Recommendations include discontinuing nuisance crime arrests and citations for actions related to lack of housing, and training police on techniques to effectively engage individuals and families experiencing homelessness.

### **Recommendations to Assist Individuals Who Are Incarcerated**

1. *Conduct comprehensive needs assessments and provide needed medical treatment.* Recommendations include increasing the availability and quality of health care services needed by those currently incarcerated, coordinating ongoing care with community providers, and the distribution of condoms to reduce disease transmission.
2. *Expand education and job training programming.* Priorities include ensuring that incarcerated individuals are engaged in case management and can build skills to enhance employment opportunities after release.

## Recommendations for Successful Re-entry

1. *Create guidelines for release.* Recommendations include prohibiting release during late night/early morning hours when service providers are typically closed, and creating service centers for those in need of re-entry assistance.
2. *Provide comprehensive case management before release.* Everyone leaving corrections systems should be connected to health and social services benefits and to community service providers in order to promote continuity of care. All those re-entering society from jail or prison should have completed a home plan that addresses comprehensive needs (to include housing and employment).
3. *Expand employment opportunities.* Recommendations include removing questions about convictions from initial job applications, shielding non-violent convictions from public view past a certain time, incentivizing businesses to hire and train those with criminal records, and expanding educational and job-training programs to assist individuals with criminal records.

The authors of this report seek to expand the existing body of knowledge and provide sound policy recommendations based upon the experiences of people released from jail or prison in Maryland – many of whom have struggled with poor health and housing stability before and after incarceration. There appear to be strong relationships among homelessness, incarceration, and re-entry that have significant importance for policymakers. In an era of limited public resources, it is critical to develop cost-effective interventions that reduce incarceration and recidivism.

Often, those re-entering society from jail or prison have difficulty accessing affordable housing, comprehensive health and social services, and incomes necessary to meet their basic needs. Such resources and supports reduce recidivism; survey respondents themselves acknowledged that stable housing, health services (to include addictions treatment), and employment could have prevented their incarceration. Unfortunately, such resources often were unavailable when needed or requested – and, too often, people found themselves in a cycle of arrest, release, and re-arrest.

Table 1. Demographics of Survey Population, By Housing Status at Time of Survey

	<b>Homeless</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Housed</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>%</b>
Survey Total	n = 291	67.8%	n = 138	32.2%	n = 429	100%
<b>Gender</b>						
Male	226	69.1%	101	63.6%	327	78.8%
Female	56	30.9%	32	36.4%	88	21.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>282</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>415</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Age at Survey</b>						
< 18	0	0%	2	1.5%	2	0.5%
18 – 24	19	6.8%	12	9.1%	31	7.5%
25 – 40	69	24.6%	45	34.1%	114	27.6%
41 – 50	108	38.4%	38	28.8%	146	35.4%
51+	85	30.2%	35	26.5%	120	29.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>281</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>413</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Age at First Incarceration</b>						
< 18	96	33.2%	43	31.4%	139	32.6%
18 – 24	92	31.8%	57	41.6%	149	35.0%
25 – 40	74	25.6%	30	21.9%	104	24.4%
41 – 50	19	6.6%	4	2.9%	23	5.4%
51+	8	2.8%	3	2.2%	11	2.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>289</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>426</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Number of Times Incarcerated</b>						
One Time	38	13.3%	34	25.0%	72	17.1%
2 – 4 Times	92	31.8%	41	30.1%	132	31.3%
5 – 10 Times	102	35.7%	32	23.5%	134	31.8%
11 – 20 Times	39	13.6%	21	15.4%	60	14.2%
20+ Times	16	5.6%	8	5.9%	24	5.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>422</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Longest Period of Incarceration</b>						
< 1 Week	12	4.1%	19	13.8%	31	7.2%
1 Week to 3 Months	47	16.2%	18	13.0%	65	15.2%
> 3 Months to 1 Year	54	18.6%	24	17.4%	78	18.2%
> 1 Year to 3 Years	68	23.4%	30	21.7%	98	22.8%
> 3 Years to 7 Years	64	22.0%	18	13.0%	82	19.1%
7+ Years	46	15.8%	29	21.0%	75	17.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>291</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>429</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Total Time Spent Incarcerated Over Lifetime</b>						
< 1 Month	17	5.9%	21	15.2%	38	8.9%
1 to 6 Months	47	16.2%	16	11.6%	63	14.7%
6 Months to 2 Years	47	16.2%	28	20.3%	75	17.5%
> 2 Years to 5 Years	53	18.3%	22	15.9%	75	17.5%
> 5 Years to 10 Years	54	18.6%	18	13.0%	72	16.8%
10+ Years	72	24.8%	33	23.9%	105	24.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>290</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>428</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Released From Jail and/or Prison</b>						
Jail Only	99	38.8%	52	44.8%	151	40.7%
Prison Only	27	10.6%	15	12.9%	42	11.3%
Jail and Prison	129	50.6%	49	42.2%	178	50.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>255</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>371</b>	<b>100%</b>

	Homeless	%	Housed	%	Total	%
Survey Total	n = 291	67.8%	n = 138	32.2%	n = 429	100%
<b>Veteran Status</b>						
Veteran	41	14.6%	9	6.8%	50	12.1%
Not Veteran	239	85.4%	123	93.2%	402	87.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>412</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Connection with Family as a Result of Incarceration</b>						
Better	62	22.1%	68	49.6%	130	31.1%
Worse	102	36.3%	22	16.1%	124	29.7%
Unchanged	117	41.6%	47	34.3%	164	39.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>281</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>137</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>418</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Stably Housed Before Incarceration</b>						
Yes	160	56.7%	115	83.3%	275	65.5%
No	122	43.3%	23	16.7%	145	34.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>282</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Stably Housed Within 6 Months of Incarceration</b>						
Yes	66	23.2%	91	66.9%	157	37.3%
No	219	76.8%	45	33.1%	264	62.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>421</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Where People Unstably Housed Were Spending the Night 6 Months After Incarceration</b> (multiple responses possible)						
Doubled Up	104	46.8%	23	51.1%	127	47.6%
Transitional Housing or Rehab	58	26.1%	10	21.7%	68	25.4%
Homeless Shelter	90	40.5%	22	48.9%	112	41.9%
Street	68	30.6%	14	31.1%	82	30.7%
Abandoned Building	42	18.9%	8	17.8%	50	18.7%
Other	15	6.8%	1	2.2%	16	6.0%
<b>Completed a Home Plan</b>						
Yes	67	24.5%	48	37.5%	115	28.6%
No	207	75.5%	80	62.5%	287	71.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>274</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>402</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Released between 8pm-5am</b>						
Yes	198	70.5%	79	61.2%	277	67.6%
No	83	29.5%	50	38.8%	133	32.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>281</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>410</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Employed Before Most Recent Incarceration</b>						
Yes	129	46.2%	73	56.2%	202	49.4%
No	150	53.8%	57	43.8%	207	50.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>279</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>409</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Employed Since Most Recent Incarceration</b>						
Yes	91	33%	70	53.4%	161	39.6%
No	185	67.0%	61	46.6%	246	60.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>276</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>407</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Completing a Job Application If Asking about Criminal Record</b>						
Very Likely	170	62.7%	92	72.4%	262	65.8%
Somewhat Likely	49	18.1%	18	14.2%	67	16.8%
Not Very Likely	22	8.1%	7	5.5%	29	7.3%
Unlikely	30	11.1%	10	7.9%	40	10.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>271</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>398</b>	<b>100%</b>

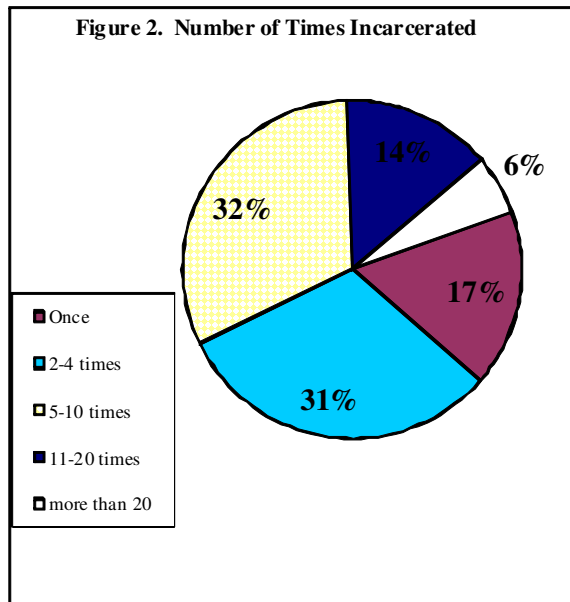
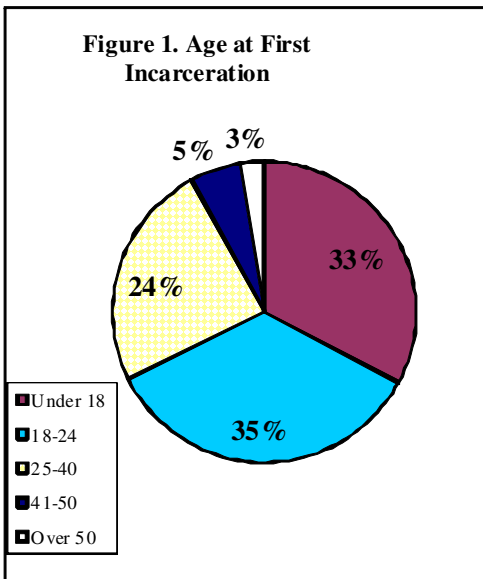


Figure 3. Total Time Spent Incarcerated over Lifetime Stratified by Age at First Incarceration

