



Shelters fill up as motels empty: Homeless families' tally rises

By Kevin Rothstein

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Pressure to keep homeless out of hotels and motels has led to a 24 percent jump in the number of families living in Boston shelters, results from the city's homeless census show, prompting Mayor Thomas M. Menino to call for permanent housing for the poor.

"We didn't solve our housing crisis, we figured out how to get people out of hotels and motels," said Jim Greene, acting director of Boston's Emergency Shelter Commission.

Results of the city's annual homeless census released yesterday found 6,365 men, women and children on the street and in shelters — a 9 percent jump from last year. Among the homeless, the number on the street fell 13 percent, to 261 from 299.

But the biggest jump was in the number of homeless families. City officials said family shelters have swollen with homeless formerly housed in hotels and motels but who don't have rental subsidies to get them into housing of their own.

"That's too many homeless families. That's our Katrina," said Menino, who called on the state to release \$25 million in aid appropriated but not spent on displaced victims of Hurricane Katrina.

Nilaya Montalvo, 26, has been living in a shelter's single room with her now 4-year-old daughter for 19 months, nearly half of her daughter's life. Her little one wants a room of her own so badly she pretends she has one when she plays make-believe.

"She calls everything her room," Montalvo said.

Life at Project Hope's shelter in Roxbury is better than the week and a half she spent at a motel when she first became homeless. She and her daughter, Caridad Hescocock, lived out of two bags and swapped crackers and juice boxes for some meals.

"I filled out every (housing) application on the planet but most of them have a 2- to 5-year wait list," she said.

The homeless census, conducted Dec. 19, showed a 39 percent increase in the number of homeless children compared to a decade ago, to 1,355 from 976.