

Reentry Partnership Housing

**Georgia Department of Community Affairs/Georgia Housing and
Finance Authority**

Special Needs Housing: Housing for Persons with Special Needs

HFA Staff Contact

Davia Rose Lassiter

communications@dca.ga.gov

The State of Georgia, A Trailblazer in Criminal Justice Reform

Georgia had a huge problem. In the 1990s, the get tough on crime approach and the three strikes and you are out initiatives caused the prison population to explode. Georgia's prisons were already very overcrowded with facilities filled beyond capacity. Georgia was at a boiling point and needed to find alternative solutions rather than building new prisons. There was a need to innovate.

The Reentry Partnership Housing Program (RPH) was expanded as part of the Justice Reinvestment Act to expand alternative sentencing options for judges, strengthen probation officers' ability to respond to violations, relieve local jail overcrowding through streamlined information transfers and effective use of probation detention centers, and develop broad scale reforms that will improve outcomes for returning citizens under the Georgia Prisoner Reentry Initiative (GA-PRI). These reforms saved taxpayers at least \$264 million dollars by reducing the prison population by nearly 5,000 beds over five years. Using these anticipated savings, Georgia invested more than \$17 million annually into Accountability Courts, residential substance abuse treatment programs, and prisoner reentry.

RPH was created in 2006 to provide housing and parole for homeless inmates past their tentative parole month. In 2015, the program increased services to include homeless probationers and in 2018, the population was expanded to offer RPH to felony Accountability Court Participants. Over the past two years, Georgia has focused and prioritized what can be accomplished for returning citizens under this program. "From a national vantage point, Georgia continues to set a very high bar for other states in both the approach it's taken and the results it's getting," said Adam Gelb, who directs The Pew Charitable Trusts' public safety performance project. "What's happening here resonates loudly in capitals across the country where people understand the significance of a large, conservative Southern state making such aggressive and comprehensive reforms."

The purpose of the RPH program is to provide short-term housing assistance for up to six months to help stabilize a person's reentry process. The target populations are individuals who would remain in prison after reaching their tentative parole month without a valid residence plan. RPH can also assist with housing for those individuals under supervision with either the Georgia Department of Community Supervision or the Accountability Courts of Georgia that are homeless or do not have a valid residence plan. The goal of the program is to enhance his or her ability to remain crime free by providing stable housing. Without a residence, the target population cannot participate in Accountability Court programs, resulting in increased incarceration for persons who would otherwise benefit from this innovative program.

This program involves a unique collaboration between several State agencies including the Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA), the Georgia Department of Community Supervision (DCS), the Georgia Department of Corrections (GDC) and the Georgia Council of Accountability Court Judges (CACJ). Participants in the program can access resources, pursue employment, and participate in programs under DCS or Accountability Court supervision. Most individuals in the program successfully integrate back into society by obtaining employment and accessing stable housing upon their release from the program. This is an incredible and unique partnership where all agencies are working in unison to ensure the program's success.

Results

The results of Georgia's criminal justice reform have been significant and quantifiable. Under Governor Nathan Deal, who served from 2011 to 2019, who at the beginning of his term, Georgia led the nation in probation and parole supervision. The state was spending over 1 billion a year on the prison system. As a result, reforms were made and laws were changed to help reduce the prison population and non-violent offenders were diverted to treatment-oriented programs and Accountability Courts. There was a paradigm shift focused on enhancing positive outcomes for those under supervision to prevent future incarceration. The average cost to incarcerate an individual in the Georgia prison system is \$66 per day compared to \$2 per day under supervision which resulted in massive savings.

A news article reported that since 2009, the peak year of incarcerations, the number of offenders sent to Georgia's prisons has plunged by almost 19 percent, according to state records. During the same time, the number of African Americans being locked up dropped by even more — 30 percent. In fact, the 9,298 African Americans entering the prison system in 2017 was the lowest level in more than three decades. The number of African Americans being locked up in Georgia's prison system has dropped to historic lows, reflecting a monumental shift in the way Georgia is punishing nonviolent offenders. This savings also allows the state to put more resources into monitoring the most violent offenders on parole and probation.

Accountability Courts

Prior to January 2018, only DCS could make referrals to the RPH program for persons that were under supervision, either on parole or probation. Beginning in January 2018, referrals are now also being accepted from Accountability Courts. The RPH program accepts referrals from Mental Health Courts, Drug Courts, Veteran Courts, and Family Treatment Courts.

Some of the individuals referred by Accountability Courts may already be under supervision, but many will not be. For those who are not under official supervision, RPH coupled with the Accountability Court system becomes a form of diversion that helps persons with special needs, like severe mental illness, avoid unnecessary incarceration. Having a stable housing plan is a key to being able to successfully participate in the Accountability Court process, so historically persons with special needs who are experiencing homelessness have been disproportionately excluded from this alternative to institutionalization. The RPH program can be a valuable, temporary housing solution for this population; one which provides enough time (up to 6 months) to identify more permanent, stable housing through the options available in the Unified Referral process.

In 2002, there were only three Accountability Courts in Georgia, currently there are over 150 statewide. Georgia is a leader in Accountability Courts since a study conducted by the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government found that recidivism rates for graduates of Accountability Courts are about 10 to 15 percentage points lower than those of similarly situated defendants who did not participate. "Just being in an Accountability Court — whether you graduate or don't graduate — significantly reduces your chances of re-offending again," Judge Jason Deal, a Superior Court Judge in a northern Georgia circuit said. "This has all been enormously, enormously successful. It's been good for Georgia."

Georgia's Accountability Courts increased the number of active participants served by 12% in 2019, which has effectively utilized the RPH program.

Program Outcomes

The Reentry Partnership Housing (RPH) Program reduces barriers to offender reentry by providing them an opportunity for stability and a “fresh start”, while engaging community stakeholders and freeing up space in prisons for violent and repeat offenders. Since the program’s inception in 2006, over 7,000 individuals have been approved and placed with RPH providers throughout Georgia.

Currently, there are 44 active Reentry Partnership Housing (RPH) providers in all of Georgia’s Judicial Districts, which is an increase from 29 providers in FY 2017 (July 2016 to June 2017). Six providers in five Georgia counties are approved for persons with severe and persistent mental diagnosis who are released from prison. Approximately 75% of individuals placed in an RPH program are employed and successfully reunite with family or move to stable housing after their stay in the program. The number of individuals in the program has nearly tripled over the last four years.

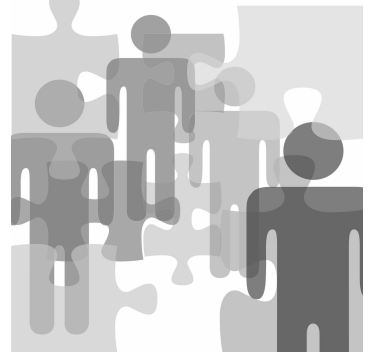
- FY 2017 (July 2016 to June 2017): 488 individuals placed in an RPH program.
- FY 2018 (July 2017 to June 2018): 758 individuals placed in an RPH program.
- FY 2019 (July 2018 to June 2019): 1,030 individuals placed in an RPH program.
- FY 2020 (July 2019 to May 2020): 1,413 individuals have been placed in an RPH program.

Final Thoughts

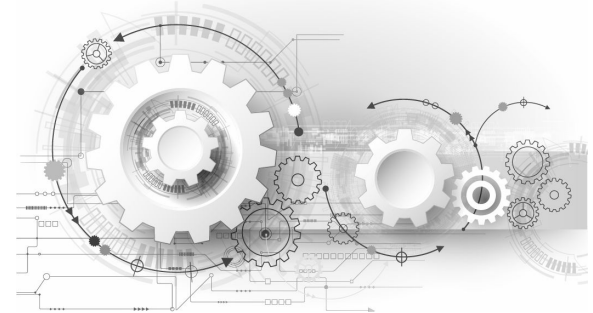
Georgia has created a program that should be a model nationally while reforming its criminal justice system. State Supreme Court Justice Michael Boggs, who has co-chaired Governor Nathan Deal’s reform council said, “By any reasonable measure, our efforts in correcting inequities within our criminal justice system over the past several years have proven to be an enormous success”. This success included the RPH program.

The RPH program is also innovative and replicable. The State of New Hampshire is utilizing the Georgia RPH program as a model to start a similar program in their state. A common obstacle to reentry is stable housing and housing is the stabilizing force that provides access to employment, healthcare and treatment, and is the first step towards allowing an individual to successfully reenter society. Furthermore, according to DCS statistics, the State of Georgia saved over \$850,000 from 2017 to 2019 for parolees, not including other individuals under supervision, by utilizing the RPH program. Many of the RPH providers provide wrap-around services to RPH participants to provide them access to treatment, employment, counselling and housing reunification plans.

The RPH program can help transform lives, and in closing, a success story... “EL came to the Chattahoochee Jail Ministry in March from prison. He hit the ground running and was so committed to having a real life and never being incarcerated again that he got two jobs to stay busy and earn more money. He became a role model to others in the program of how to change and have a great life. He moved into permanent housing. He is now engaged to be married. Last year, he got his truck-driving license and is now driving long haul trucks earning big money. He comes back around when he is in town to encourage new arrivals and show them that a new life is possible for them too”. Georgia looks forward to leading the way with more criminal justice reform initiatives.



Reentry Partnership Housing (RPH)



Reentry Partnership Housing (RPH)

A collaboration between the Department of Community Supervision (DCS), Department of Corrections (GDC), Department of Community Affairs (DCA), and the Council of Accountability Court Judges of GA (CACJ).

- ❑ A Justice Reinvestment collaborative program designed to cut spending, reinvest savings, and promote public safety.
- ❑ Georgia funds & oversees temporary housing with approved community providers for eligible participants.
- ❑ Participants have the opportunity to access resources, pursue employment, & participate in programs under DCS or Accountability Court supervision.

RPH Timeline

- ❏ 2006 - RPH created to provide housing and **parole** for homeless inmates past their tentative parole month
- ❏ 2015 - Increased services to include homeless **probationers**
- ❏ 2018 - Expanded to offer RPH to felony **Accountability Court Participants**

Savings

RPH Beds v. Prison beds

\$2	Per person per day cost for supervision
\$66	Per person per day cost for incarceration

Intangibles

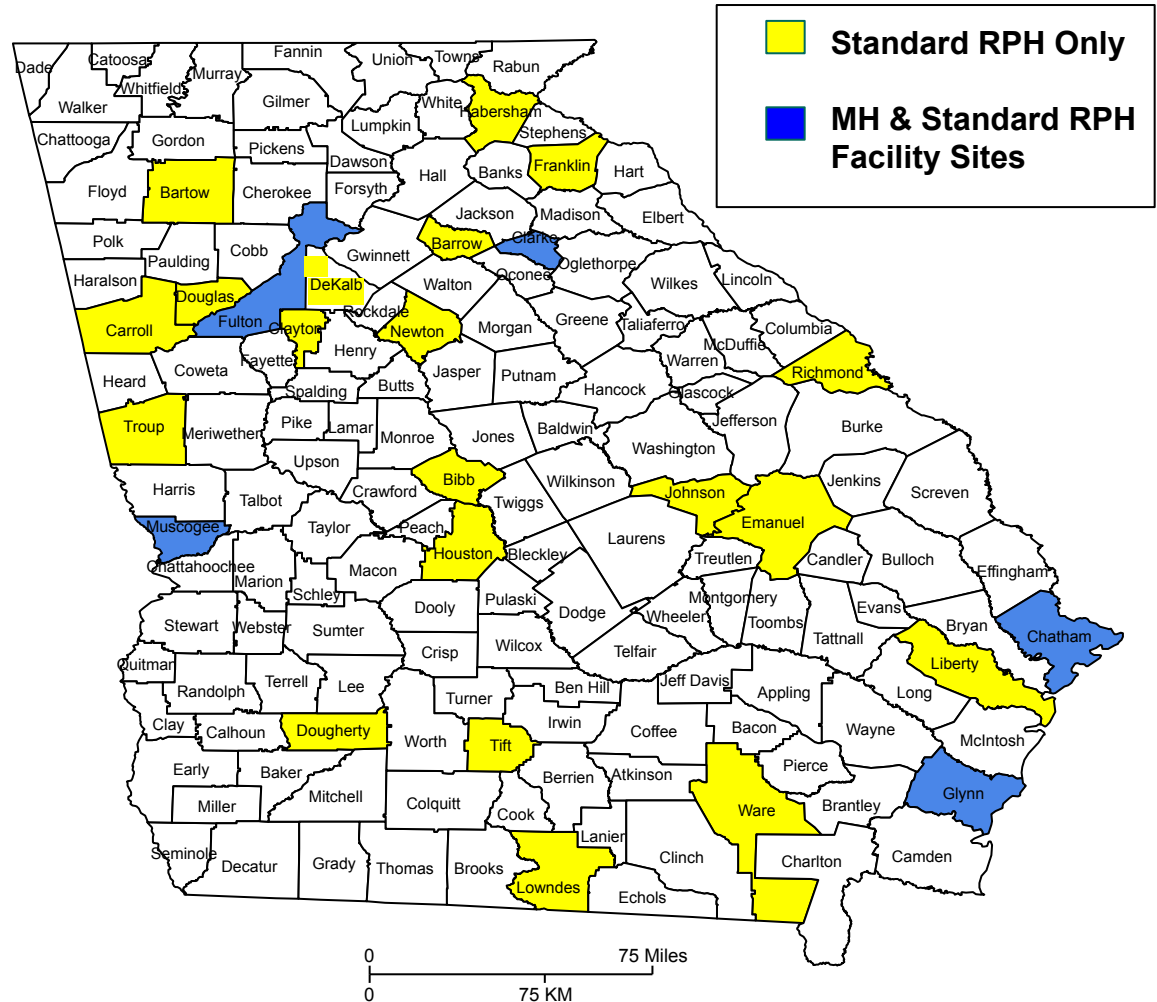
Additional RPH Benefits

- ❑ Reduces barriers to offender reentry.
- ❑ Provides opportunity for stability and “fresh start.”
- ❑ Engages community stakeholders.
- ❑ Frees up “hard beds” for violent and repeat offenders.

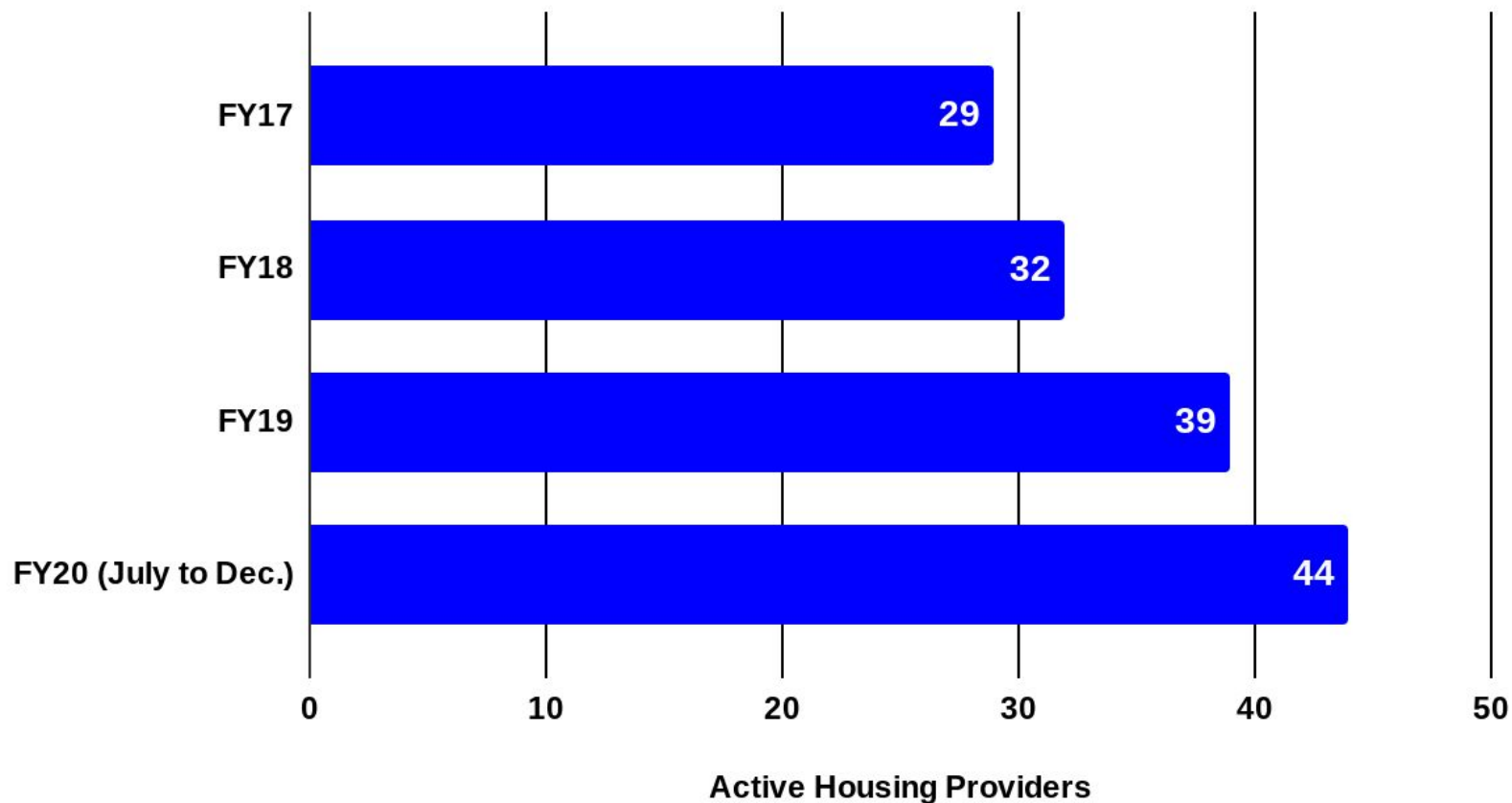
RPH Providers:

44 Active RPH Providers

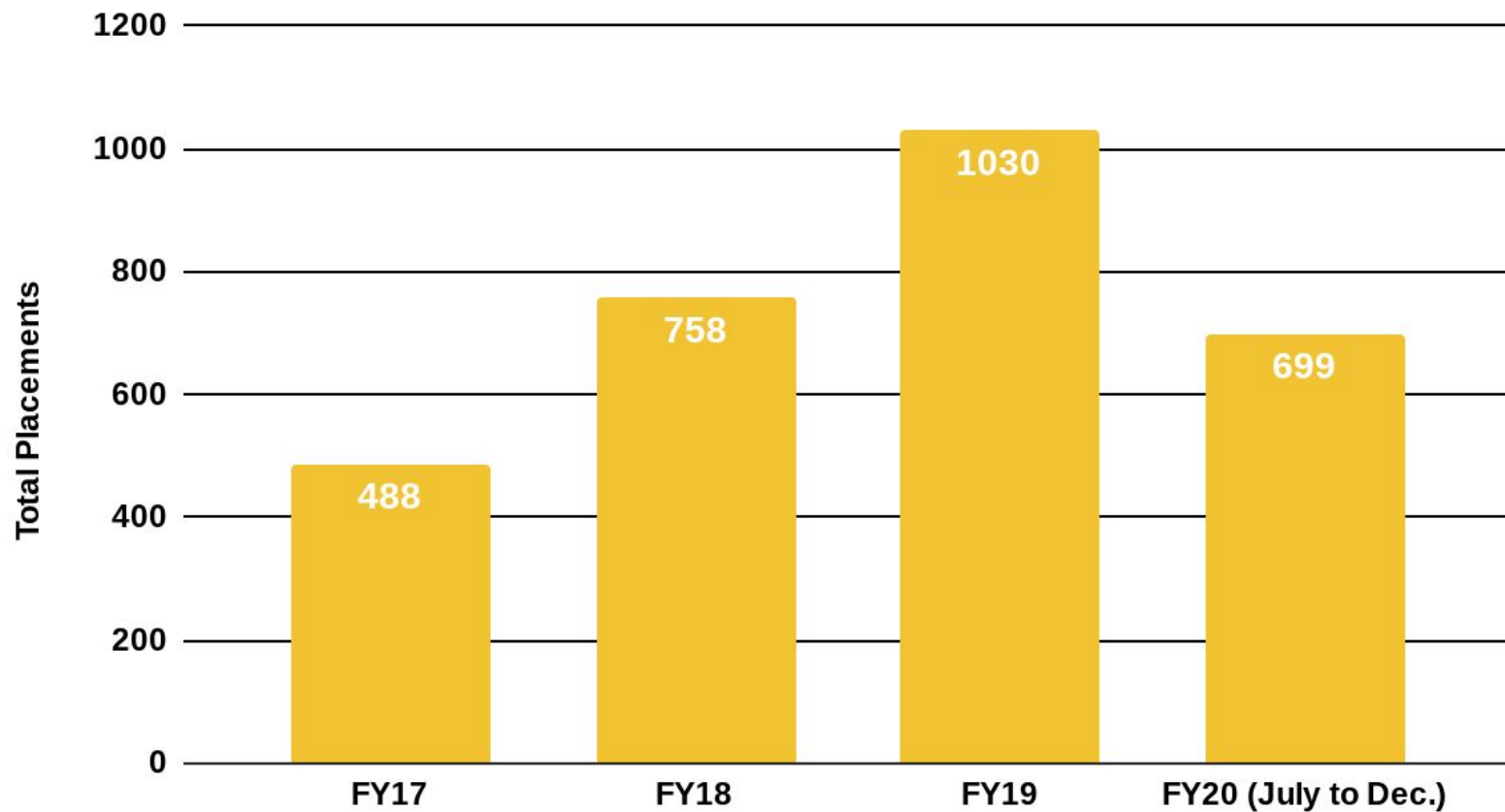
- ❑ All Judicial Districts
- ❑ 25 Counties and 24 Judicial Circuits
- ❑ Six facilities in five counties are approved for persons with severe and persistent mental diagnosis releasing from prison.
- ❑ Additional facilities are providing housing to accountability mental health courts



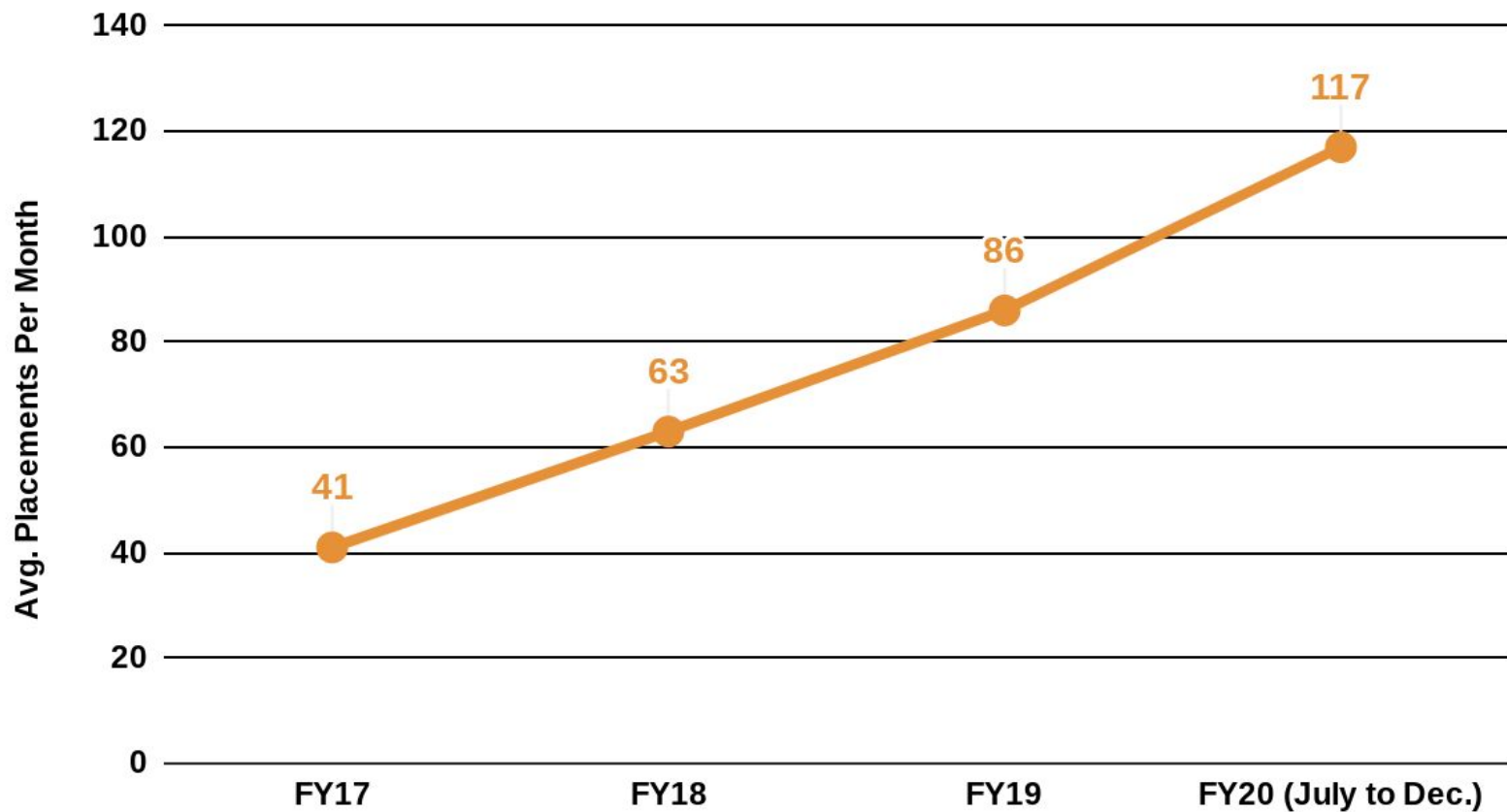
Active Housing Providers by FY



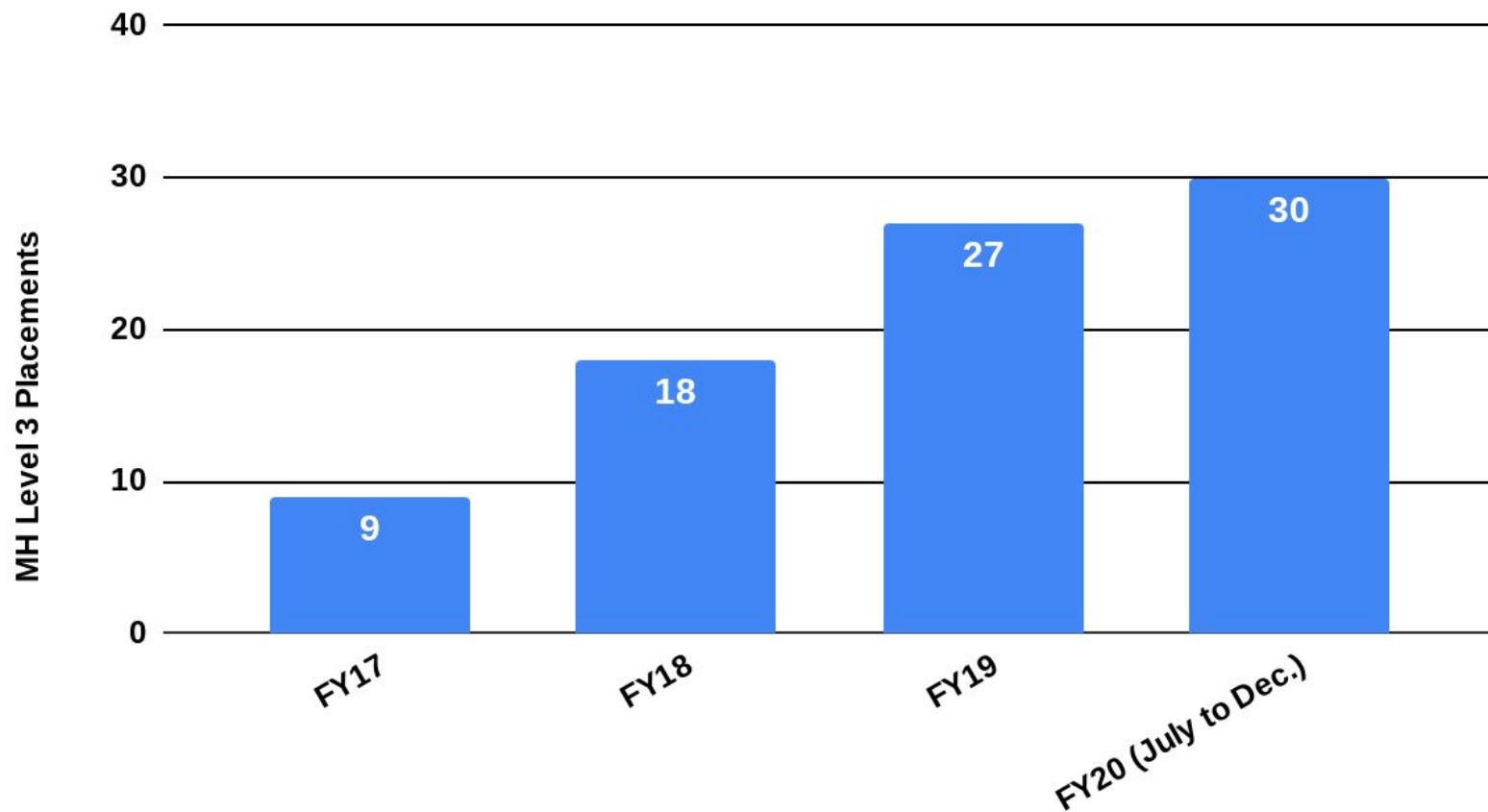
Total Placements by FY



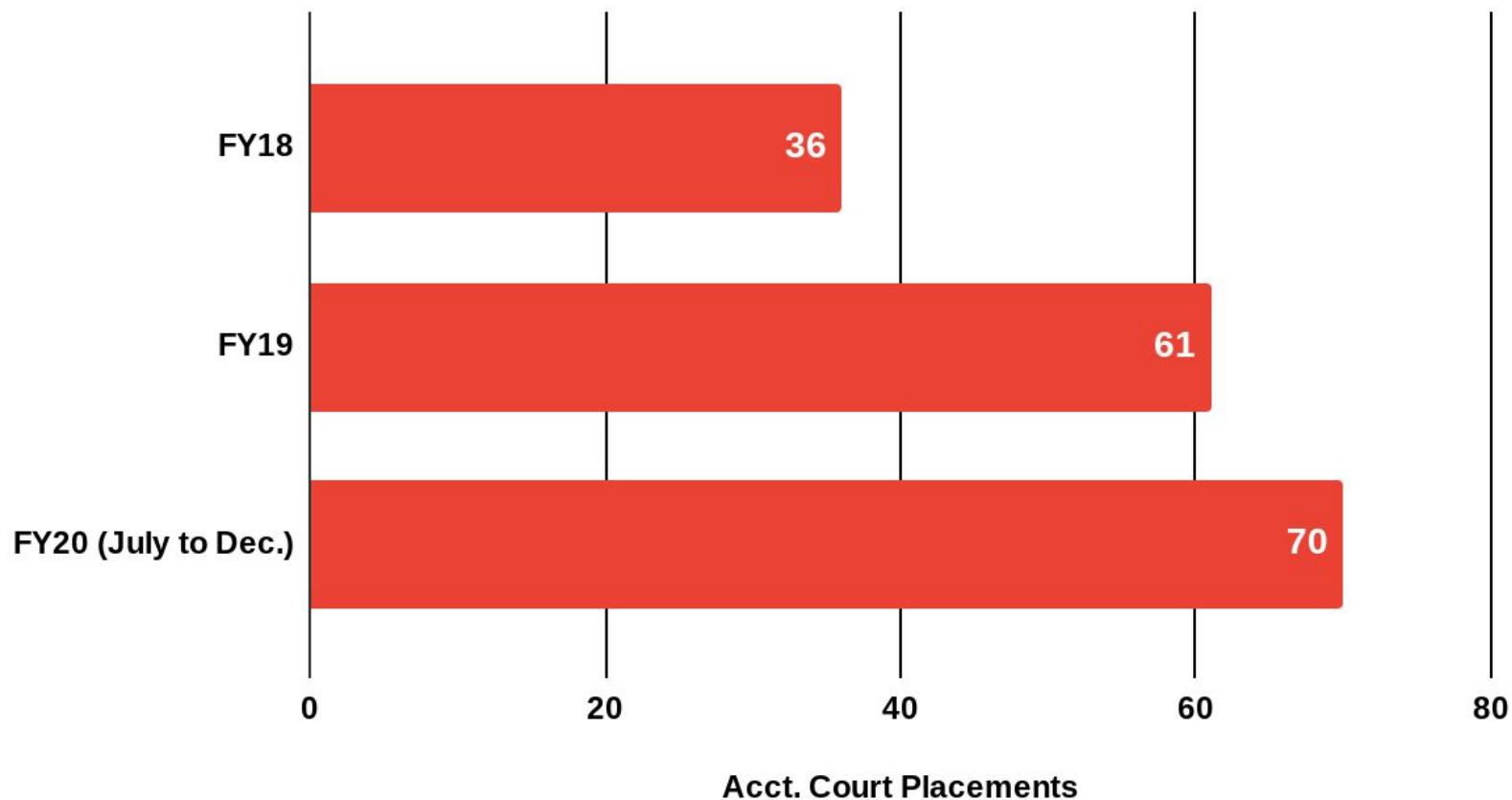
Avg. Placements Per Month by FY



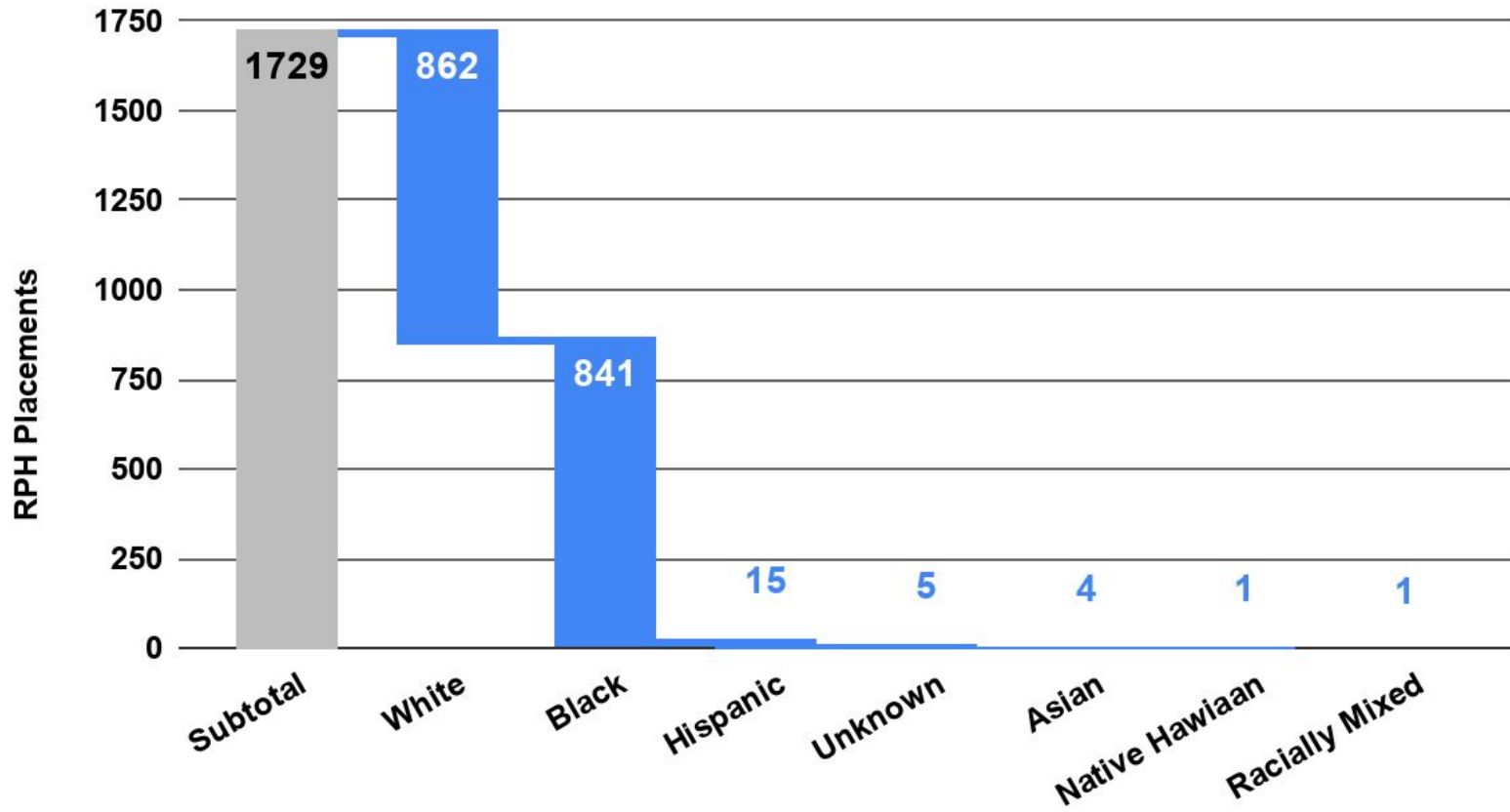
MH Level 3 Placements by FY



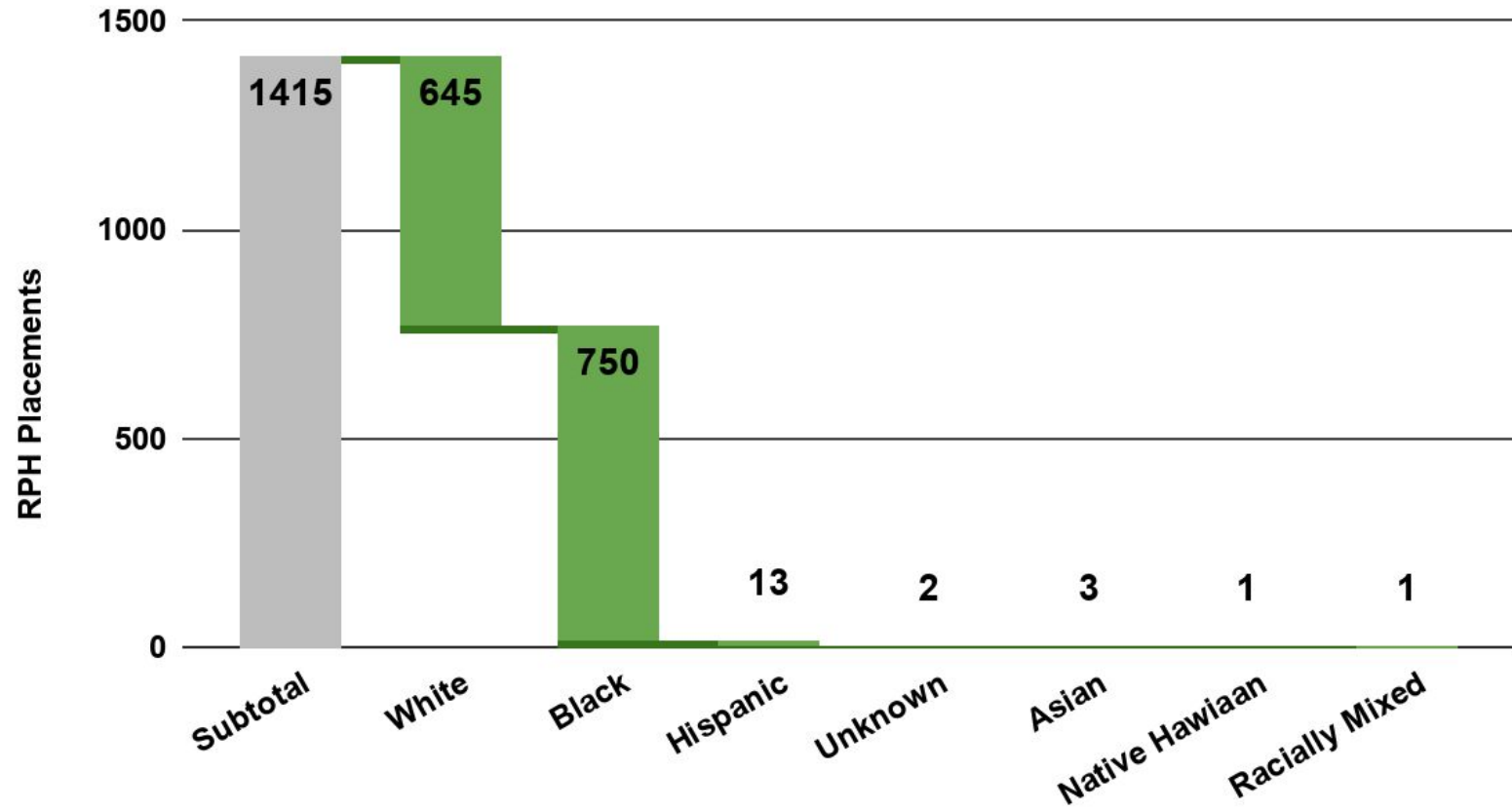
Acct. Court Placements by FY



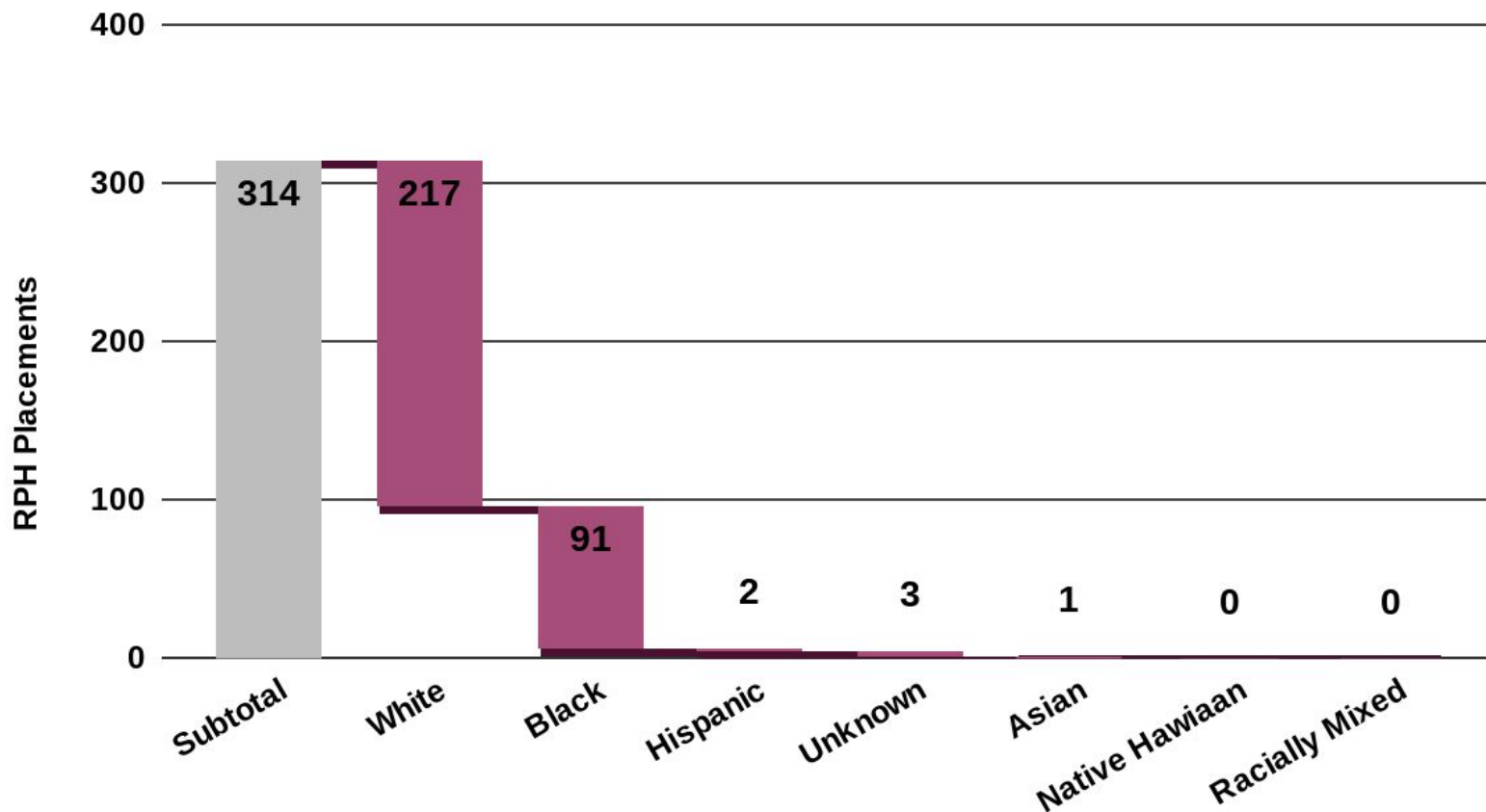
FY19-FY20 RPH Placement Demographics



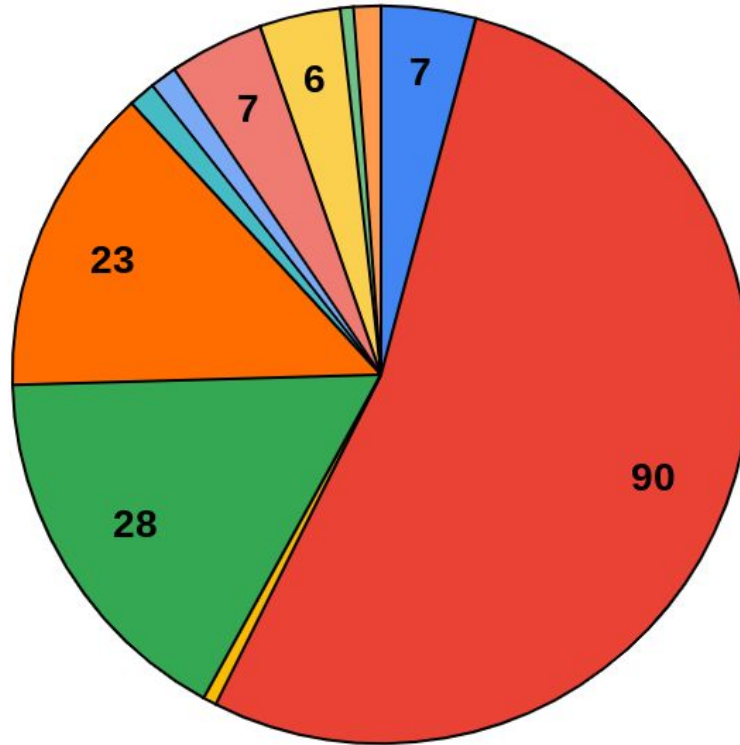
Male RPH Placement Demographics FY19-FY20



Female RPH Placement Demographics FY19-FY20

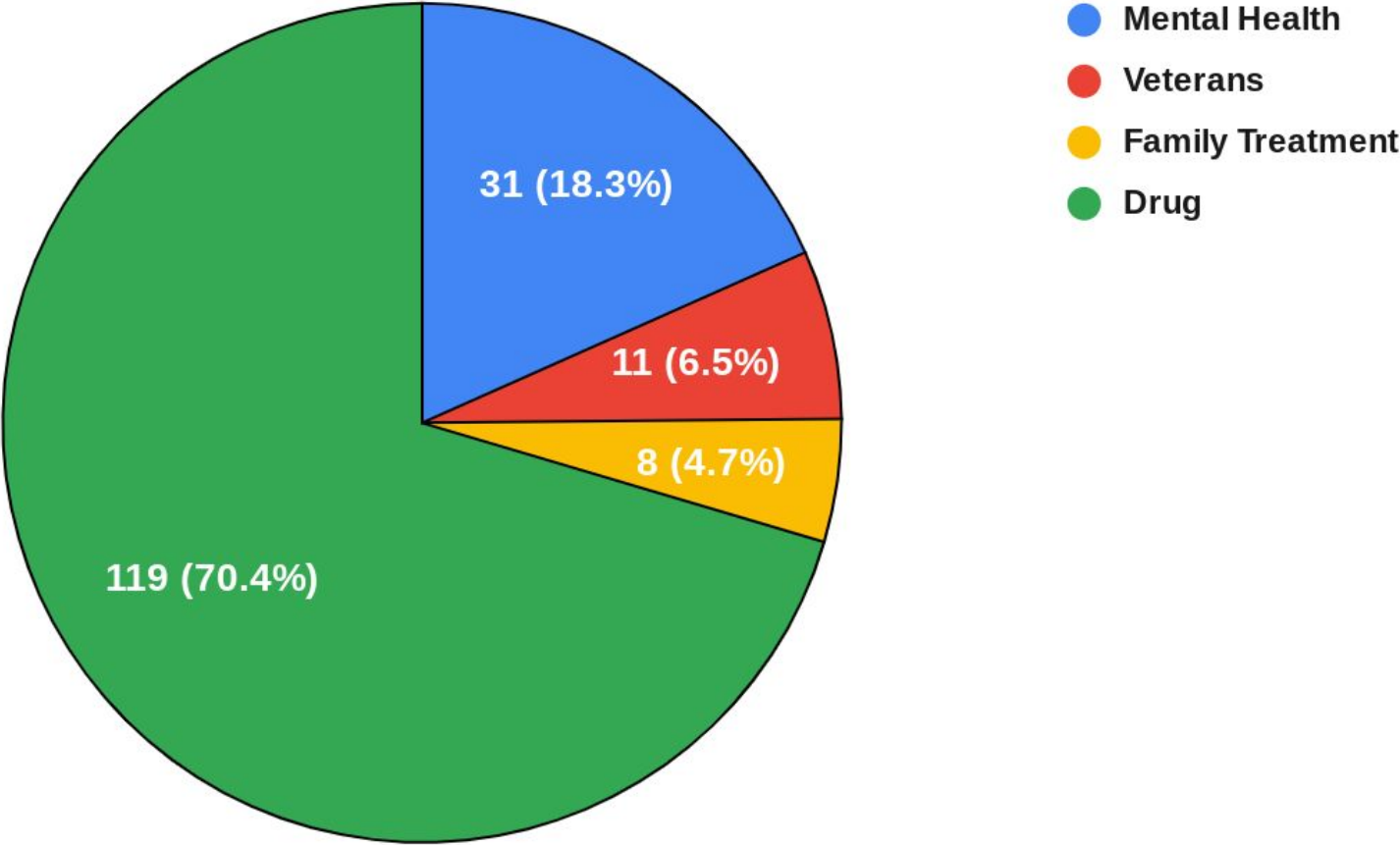


Acct. Court RPH Placements by Judicial Circuit



- Alcovy
- Atlanta
- Chattahoochee
- Cherokee
- Douglas
- Eastern
- Macon
- Mountain
- Rockdale
- Waycross
- Western

RPH Placements by Acct. Court Type



RPH Guidelines Clarification

- ❑ Grantees should be able to demonstrate experience in providing housing and/or related supportive social services to special needs populations.
- ❑ Proof of active business compliance with the Secretary of State's Office/2 year requirement removed.
- ❑ Housing Policy modified to reflect ESG Habitability Standards.

RPH Guidelines Clarification

- ❑ Food Policy must address food access
 - ❑ Staff preparing meals for residents in a kitchen.
 - ❑ Providing access to food/groceries that the residents may cook for themselves.
 - ❑ Assistance with resident application for food stamps.

RPH Guidelines Clarification

- ❑ Resident In-House Work-Related Criteria modified
 - ❑ General maintenance to maintain current habitability is permitted.
 - ❑ Restricted labor examples would include major renovations, building additions or other forms of site construction.

RPH Guidelines Clarification

- ❑ Provision of electronic monitoring at the RPH location is **not mandatory**
- ❑ Transportation is **not a mandatory service** requirement
- ❑ During an active investigation of a provider, accountability court personnel may review any and all documentation regarding suspension/removal of providers.
- ❑ Participants are placed with RPH providers according to need.
 - ❑ AC participants not required to participate in tx components unless ordered by judge.
- ❑ House manager requirement is **optional**, unless the grantee is providing housing services to sex offenders.
