

Rising Numbers of Young Children Experiencing Homelessness in Pennsylvania



10,158 young children were identified in 2023, an 11% increase from 2022

Prepared by the **Children Cannot Wait Campaign** of the Policy Department of HopePHL

- January 2025

Introduction

A new report from the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) shows the increase in young children experiencing homelessness in Pennsylvania.

Highlights include:

- Overall, the PDE identified 10,158 children (more than the seating capacity of Palestra Arena in Philadelphia) aged birth to Kindergarten as homeless in 2023, an 11 percent increase from 2022, and an 8 percent increase from 2020.
- These young children represent 22 percent of all of Pennsylvania's homeless children and youth.
- Of the four age categories used by PDE, infants and toddlers are the largest group of these young children, representing 35 percent of the 10,158 young children.
- The largest percentage increase was in Pre-Kindergarten at 34 percent since 2022 and 49 percent since 2020.

This report seeks to inform practitioners and policy makers about young children experiencing homelessness in Pennsylvania. HopePHL's series called the **"Children Cannot Wait Campaign"** (see www.hopephl.org/policy--advocacy) aims to increase awareness of children and youth experiencing homelessness.

We provide a summary which identifies children in various categories, using recently published data from the PDE of its the Education of Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness (ECYEH) program.

Find the full [PDE report here](#).

Who Should Read This?

- We encourage policy makers, their staff, funders, child service agencies, school personnel, family advocates and others to read this document, gain an understanding of the data, and consider expanding efforts to reach out to children and youth who experience homelessness.
- HopePHL commends educational leaders who work to support all children experiencing homelessness.



Good News/Bad News

The increased numbers provide both good and concerning news. The following are our observations.

- The numbers increased in part because the education system has been more effective since 2016 due to improved coordination with multiple human service systems at the county level and an infusion of resources from the American Rescue Plan that were not previously available.
- The numbers may be rising due to improved state collaboration via the 'OCDEL McKinney Vento Advisory Group' led by the Pennsylvania Head Start State Collaboration Office. This group brings together leaders from county, state government, and nonprofit communities to discuss how to improve the identification of young children experiencing homelessness using systems designed to provide support and education. In addition, the ECYEH regional coordinators continue to expand their networks supporting children.
- Finally, the state's 'Early Learning Resource Centers' serve as regional hubs to coordinate childcare and other services.
- The **unwelcome news** is that family homelessness continues to rise due to many factors, including the withdraw of federal COVID funding that supported homeless prevention strategies, the elimination of transitional and emergency housing, and the prohibitive cost of rental housing for low- and moderate-income families.

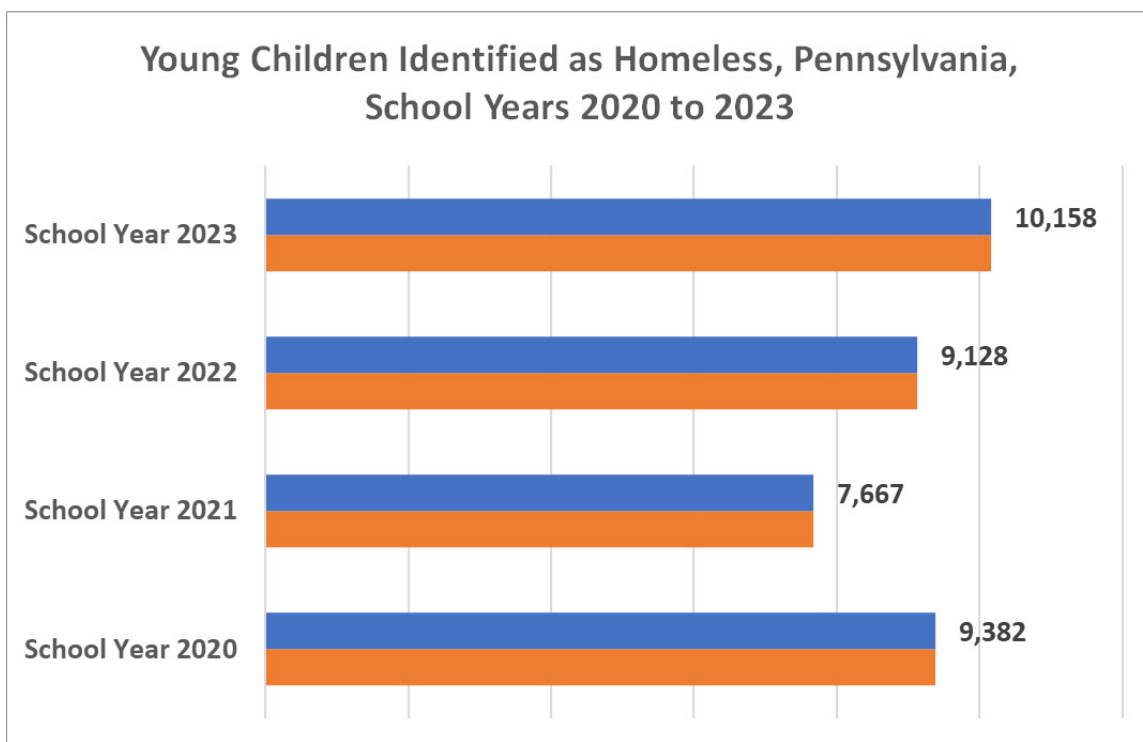


Figure 1



The PDE uses four age categories for young children. Figures 2 and 3 show the number of children in each category from School Year (SY) 2020 to SY 2023.

Pennsylvania	School Year 2020	School Year 2021	School Year 2022	School Year 2023	% Change '22 v '23	% Change '20 v '23
Birth to age 2	3,803	2,814	3,378	3,599	7%	-5%
Age 3-5, Not Pre-K	1,862	1,935	2,036	2,142	5%	15%
Pre-K	1,205	1,290	1,346	1,797	34%	49%
Kindergarten	2,512	1,628	2,368	2,620	11%	4%
TOTAL	9,382	7,667	9,128	10,158	11%	8%

Figure 2

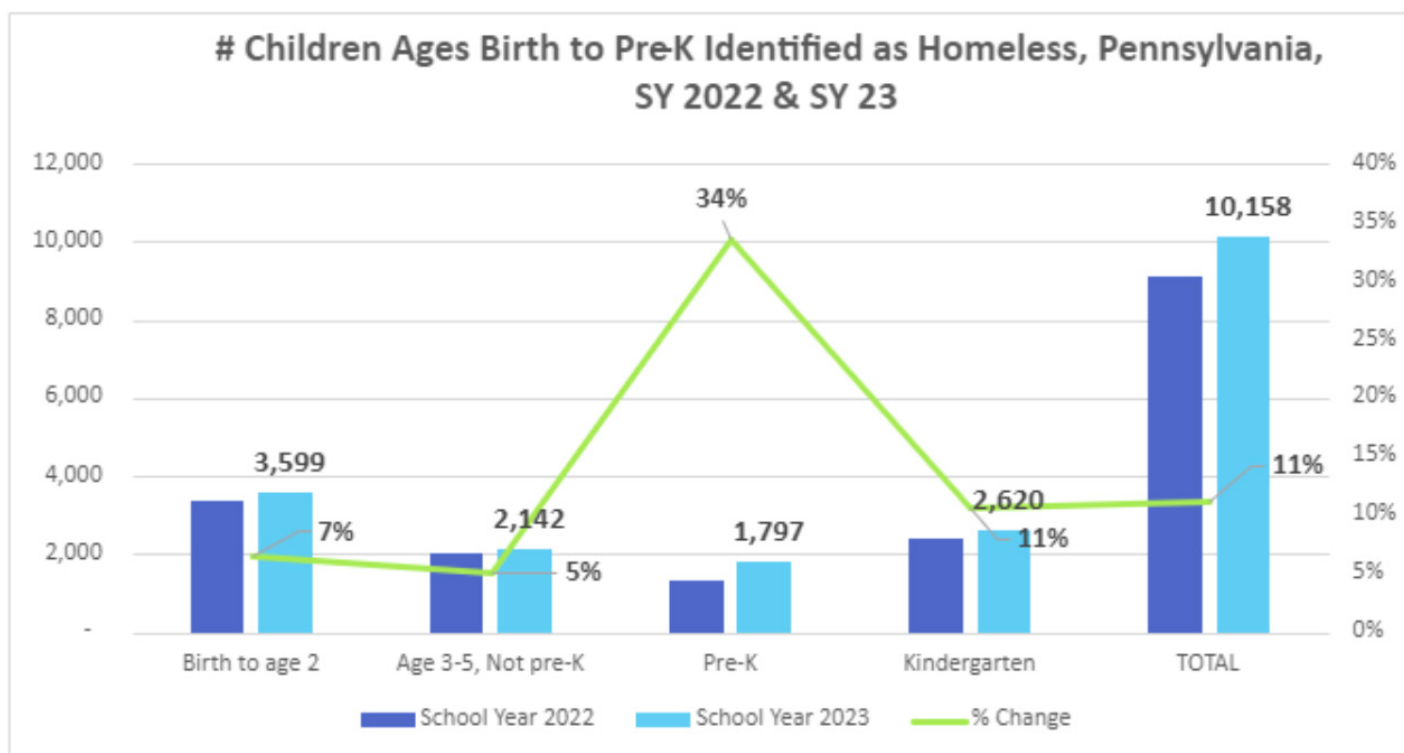


Figure 3

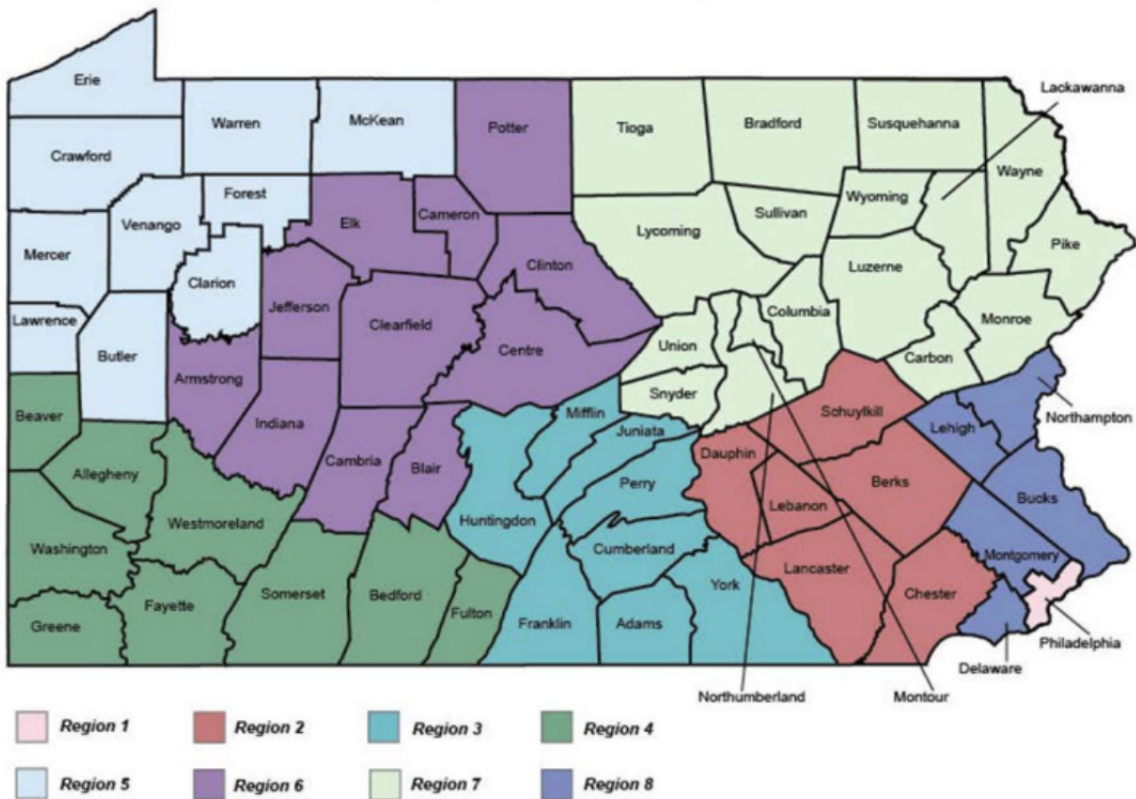


- **The PDE’s “Education for Children and Youth Experiencing Homelessness” (ECYEH)** is a federally funded program designed to eliminate barriers to education for students experiencing homelessness. PDE contracts with eight regions in the Commonwealth for local implementation. The regions use funds to train school personnel in 499 school districts and 176 charter and cyber schools. These funds provide direct services like transportation, mentoring, summer programming, school supplies, school uniforms, and more. The education system is the only federal agency required by statute to report on children and youth experiencing homelessness. PDE publishes an annual evaluation which is the source of this data. **Below are data points specific to each of the eight regions. A map is included to help readers understand the counties in each numbered region.**



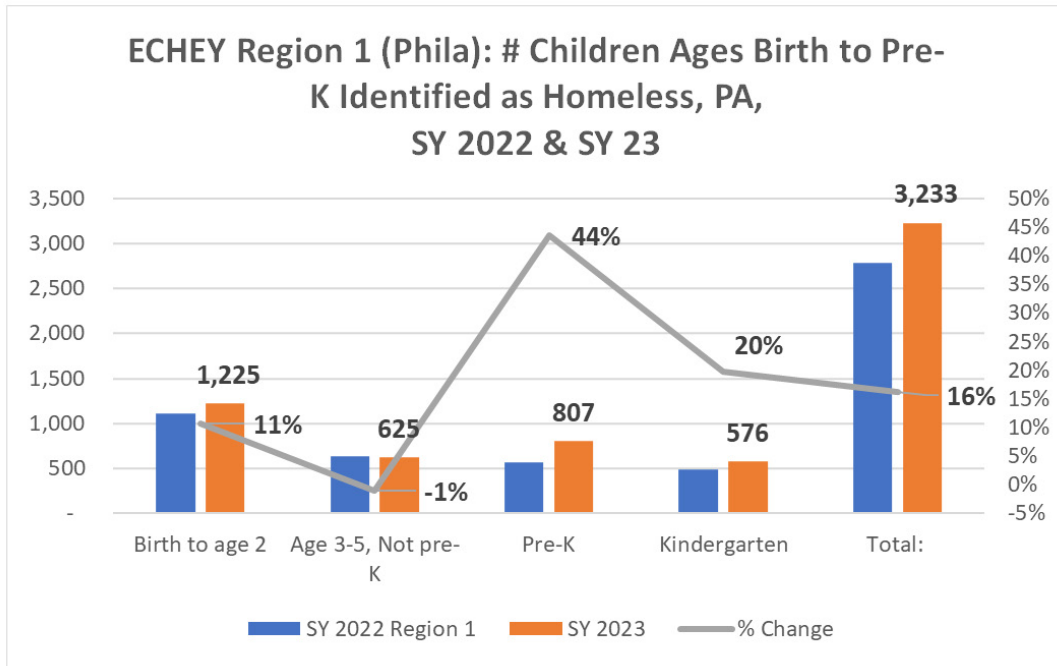
Below are data points specific to each of the eight regions. A map is included to help readers understand the counties in each numbered region.

Figure 1. ECYEH Program Regional Map



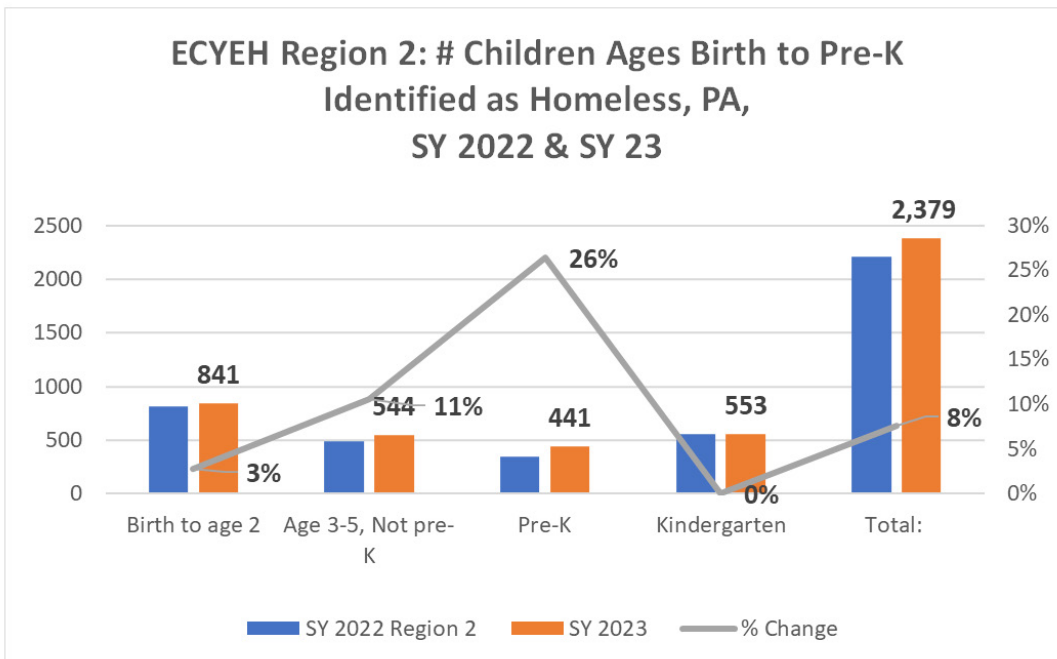
Region 1 is Philadelphia; highlights include:

- Overall, there was a **16 percent increase** in the number of young children identified as homeless.
- There was a **44 percent increase** in Pre-K identification of children as homeless.



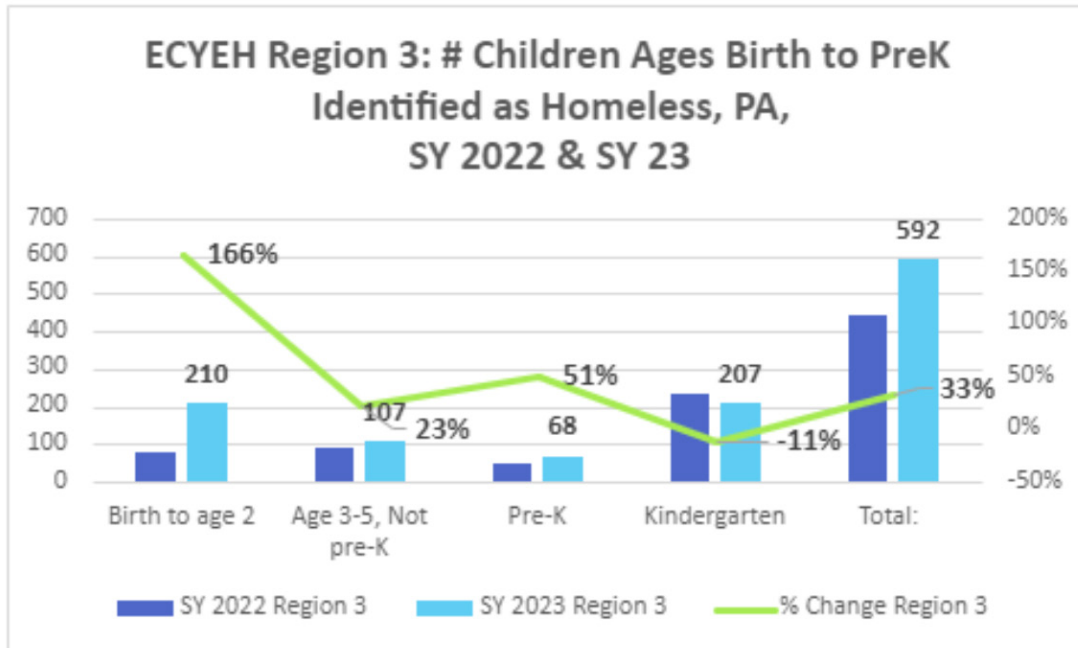
Region 2 includes Berks, Chester, Dauphin, Lancaster, Lebanon, and Schuylkill counties. Highlights include:

- **8 percent increase** in the number of young children identified as homeless.
- **26 percent increase** in the number of Pre-K children identified as homeless.



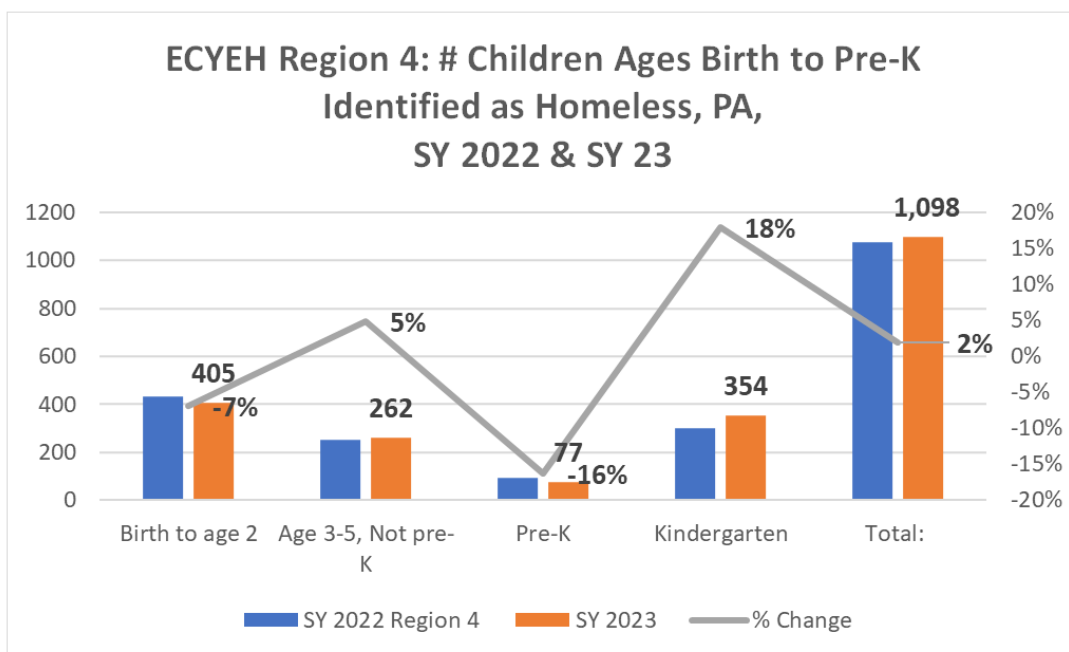
Region 3 includes Adams, Cumberland, Huntingdon, Juniata, Franklin, Mifflin, Perry, and York counties. Highlights include:

- Region 3 had the **highest percentage increase at 33 percent** in the number of young children identified as homeless, including a **166% increase** in the number of infants and toddlers identified.



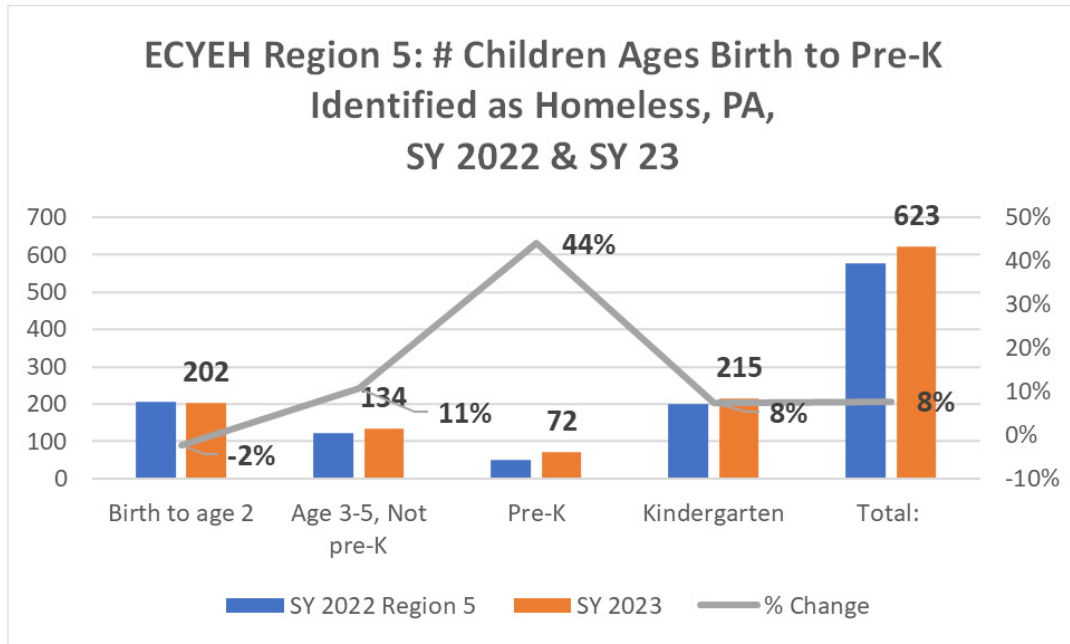
Region 4 includes Allegheny, Beaver, Bedford, Franklin, Fulton, Greene, Somerset, Washington, and Westmoreland counties. Highlights include:

- An overall **2 percent decrease** in all children identified as homeless, including a **16 percent decrease** in the number of Pre-K children.
- There was an **18 percent increase** in the number of kindergarten children.



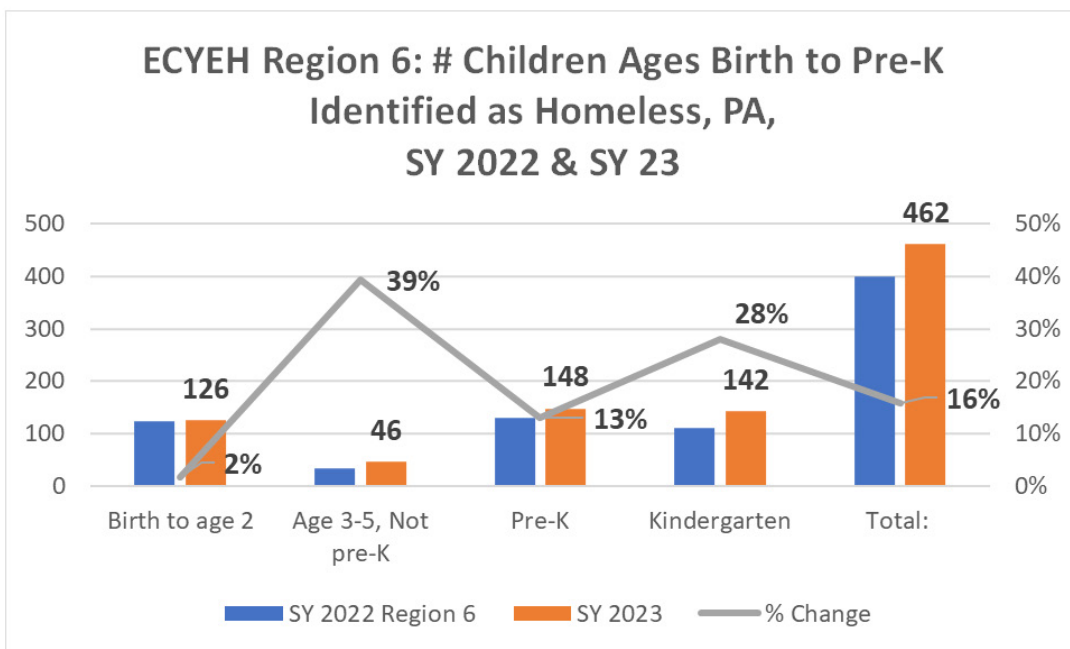
Region 5 includes Butler, Clarion, Crawford, Erie, Forest, McKean, Mercer, Venango, and Warren counties. Highlights include:

- Region identified **44 percent more** Pre-K homeless children than in 2022.
- Region 5 was one of only three regions that identified fewer infants and toddlers as homeless.



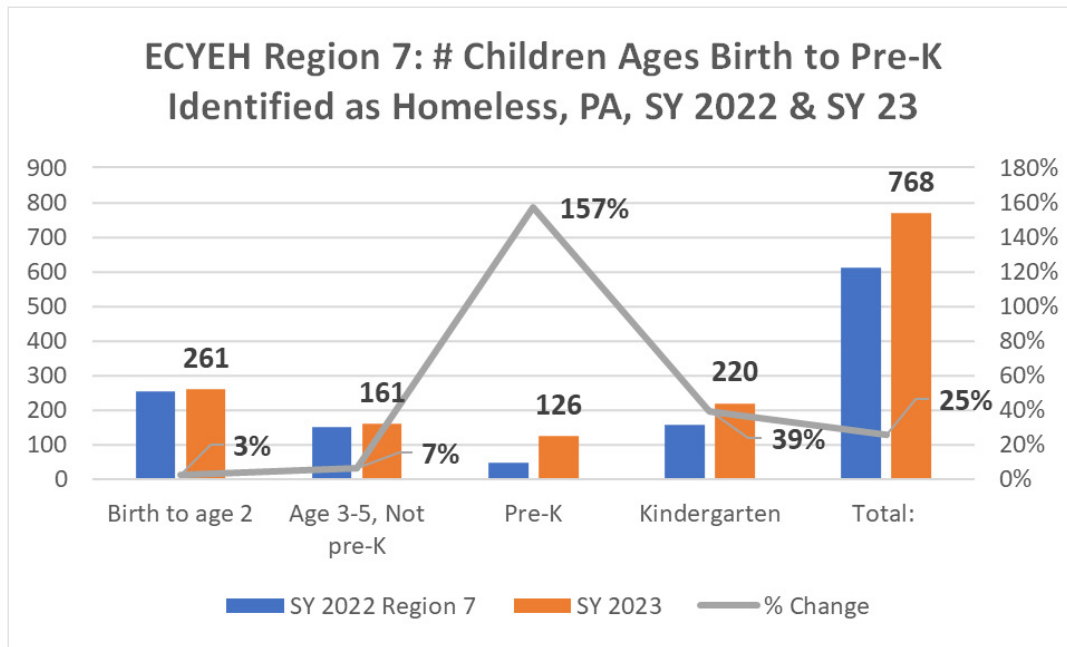
Region 6 includes Armstrong, Blair, Cambria, Cameron, Centre, Clearfield, Clinton, Elk, Indiana, Jefferson, and Potter counties. Highlights include:

- A **16 percent increase** overall in the number of children identified as homeless.



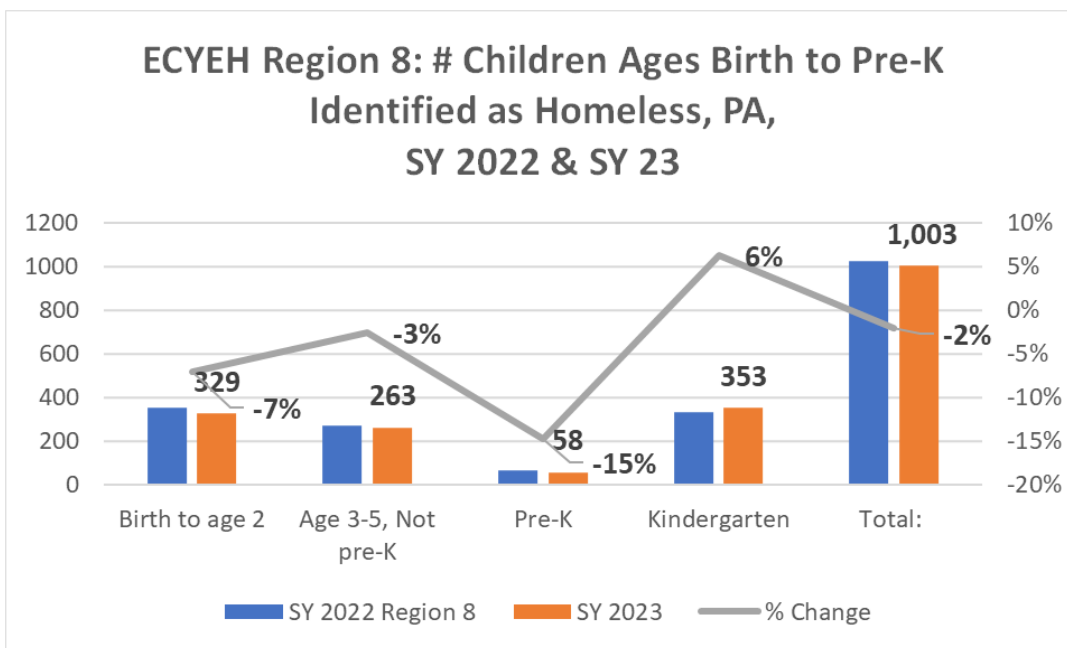
Region 7 includes Bradford, Carbon, Columbia, Lackawanna, Luzerne, Lycoming, Monroe, Montour, Northumberland, Pike, Snyder, Sullivan, Susquehanna, Tioga, Union, Wayne, and Wyoming counties. Highlights include:

- Region 7 achieved the **highest percentage increase** in the number of Pre-K children experiencing homelessness comparatively.
- A **25 percent increase** overall in the number of children identified as homeless.



Region 8 includes Bucks, Delaware, Lehigh, Montgomery, and Northampton counties. Highlights include:

- Region 8 is **the only region to experience a decrease** in the overall number of young children.

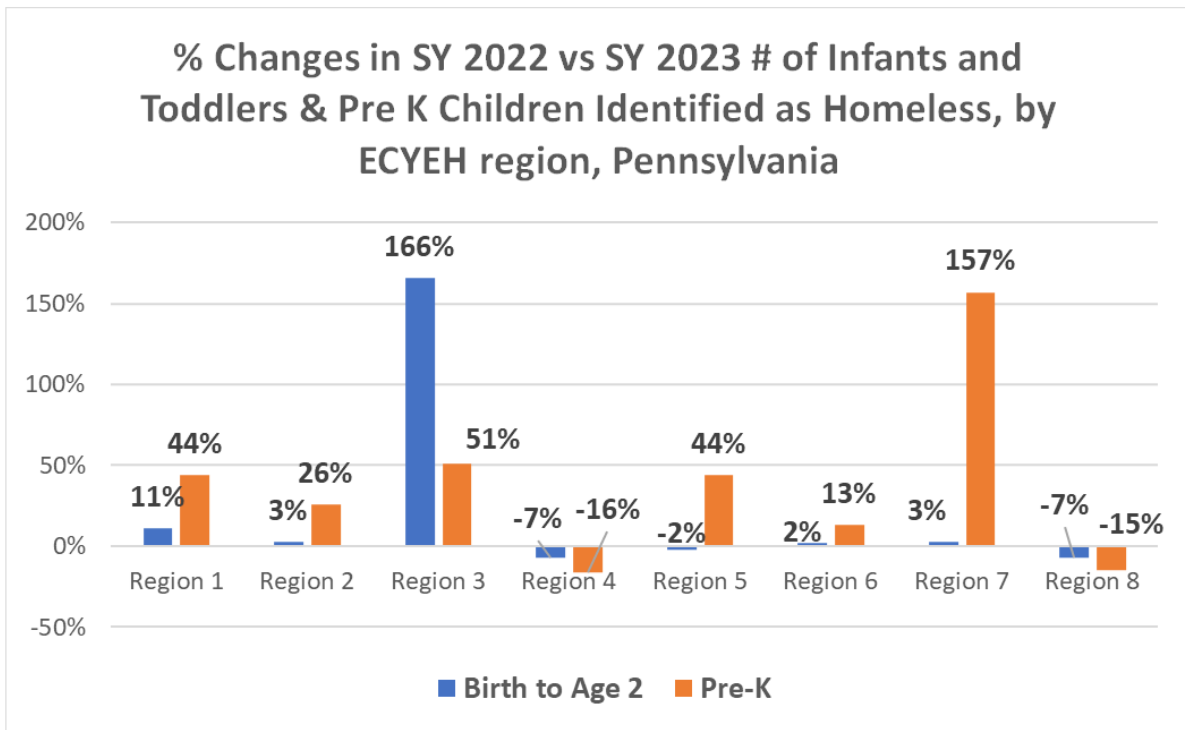


Infants and Toddlers and Pre-K

- We examined the percentage change in infants and toddlers because they are the most numerous of children in the four categories birth to kindergarten and because of the recent expansion of home visiting programs. We also looked at percentage changes in Pre-K children because of many known state and local strategies to reach out to this population, especially through the Head Start system and the expansion of Pre-K programming throughout the Commonwealth.



- Overall, three regions (Regions 4, 5 and 8) identified fewer homeless infants and toddlers than in the previous year, and 3 regions identified fewer. Two regions (Regions 4 and 8) identified fewer Pre-K children.
- For the past five years there has been a decline in early childhood education programs due to the lingering effects of COVID that closed hundreds of programs and reduced the workforce; and due to the loss of qualified teachers due to poor compensation.



HopePHL Recommendations:

All HopePHL's policy briefs in this series propose the following recommendations:

1. The **Shapiro Administration** and the **Pennsylvania General Assembly** need to provide \$10 million to the ECYEH program to continue the expanded set of services and supports originally funded by the American Rescue Plan.
2. Locally, the **homeless housing and the education systems** need to **cooperate** to connect families experiencing homelessness to housing, **especially** for those living **doubled up**, with multiple families in one home.

About HopePHL

HopePHL™ (pronounced “hopeful”) was founded through an integration of two human service organizations in Philadelphia, PA: People’s Emergency Center (PEC) and Youth Service, Inc (YSI). Leveraging 120 years of combined service experience, it is HopePHL’s mission to inspire Philadelphia’s children, youth, families and communities to thrive by providing housing, advocacy, and trauma-responsive social services designed to promote equity, resilience, autonomy, and well-being.

HopePHL advocates for urgently needed public policy changes on behalf of families and youth experiencing homelessness and the neighborhoods we serve.

Learn more at www.hopephl.org.

HopePHL thanks the following who provided input to this paper:

- Dr. Grace Whitney
- The ‘Temple Education Policy Team’ of Erica Breitbarth, Melissa Schepers, Madison Kerney, and Allison Htay.

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