

ST. LAWRENCE COUNTY FAIR HOUSING TASK FORCE

*c/o St. Lawrence County Planning Office
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stlawco.org/Departments/Planning/AdvisoryBoards/FairHousingTaskForce



Meeting Minutes

February 24, 2022
Via Zoom

1. **Call to Order and Determination of a Quorum.** Chair Fred Hanss called the meeting to order at 9:09 AM.

Members Present: Fred Hanss, Chair; Andrea Montgomery; Chris Nyman; Jim O'Neill; John Tenbusch; Courtnie Toms. Matilda Larson attended as staff. *No quorum was established.*

Others Present: Bob Beckstead, NNY Newspapers; Rachel Hunter, Gouverneur Tribune; Kateri Huska, United Helpers; Sally Santangelo, CNY Fair Housing.

Matilda reported that Diana Dufresne has resigned from the FHTF, since she has assumed responsibility as a judge in the Village of Massena. As a result, there is a vacancy on the Task Force for a representative from Real Estate.

2. **Adoption of the Agenda.** The agenda was accepted by consensus.
3. **Approval of Meeting Minutes, November 18, 2021.** Due to lack of quorum, the Minutes of the previous meeting could not be approved.
4. **Old Business**

- a. Update on administration of Rent Relief programs.

- Matilda shared tabular data concerning the Emergency Rent Assistance Program (ERAP). The data show that, in the period from 10/19/21 to 2/8/22,
 - 161 applications for assistance were submitted to ODTA through ERAP.
 - o This includes 128 applications for rent arrears assistance, and 33 applications for utilities arrears assistance.
 - Since ERAP began, in St. Lawrence County 701 applications for assistance (rent and/or utilities) have been submitted to ODTA. Payments have been made on behalf of 261 applicants; this represents payments in 28% of applications.
- Matilda shared a map showing in what zip codes these ERAP payments have been made. **See attached.**

- Courtney Toms reported that applications submitted after September 2021 will not be assisted, due to lack of funding.
 - Applications for rental assistance may still be filed, since the application will provide protection from eviction.
- b. Update regarding status of evictions in St. Lawrence County.
 - John Tenbusch noted that Diana Dufresne had reported:
 - There are approx. 350 eviction applications currently scheduled for trial in St. Lawrence County.
 - Tenbusch also mentioned that Amy Casiuk, of Legal Services, had reported that her office has not seen a “tsunami” of eviction cases, as had been feared.
 - See attached memo.

5. New Business.

- a. Discussion of recent racial incident(s) in St. Lawrence County.
 - Tenbusch discussed several handouts regarding racial incident(s) in Heuvelton, including an article and an editorial from the Watertown Daily Times, a statement from the Heuvelton School Board, and excerpts from the St. Lawrence County Community Survey from October 2020. Each of these spoke about the need for community involvement to resolve racial issues in our communities.
 - Larson recalled past FHTF digital outreach activities asking people to report if they felt discriminated against in seeking housing. This outreach could be repeated.
 - o Sally Santangelo suggested that digital advertising might be effective. She felt that such advertising might recognize that racism continues to be an issue in communities, and might emphasize resources such as the FHTF for assistance.
 - Larson suggested that we approach sympathetic lenders to post digital ads.
 - Larson also noted that the most recent Community Survey will be released sometime in March. That Survey may provide insights regarding perceptions of racism.
 - o Tenbusch noted that, in the Community Survey materials (from October 2020) that had been distributed for this meeting, it was reported that 68% of respondents felt that systemic racism and social injustice were a major problem in the County. See attached.
 - o Larson will look for updated ads prepared by HUD.
 - Santangelo recommended the National Fair Housing Alliance as a resource for outreach and ads.
- b. Plan public event(s) for Fair Housing Month in April.
 - Tenbusch reported that he, Matilda and Sally had discussed some topical areas for a workshop to be held in April:
 - The hot housing market (sales and rentals)
 - o Tenbusch reported that the County has suspended its Direct Homeownership Assistance Program (DHAP), because LMI clients have been getting priced out of the market.
 - The eviction moratorium ending, and unanticipated impacts, such as retaliatory lease non-renewals, substantial rent increases, etc.

- In all subsidized properties, landlords need “good cause” to remove tenants.
 - Zoning reform bills, to legalize accessory dwelling units (just removed from Gov. Hochul’s budget).
 - There was general discussion on this topic.
 - Larson asked whether discussion at the FH event might be focused on how communities can increase supply of affordable housing.
 - Tentative date for this FH event was set for April 28th in the afternoon (2 PM?).
- c. Candidates for the FHTF. Matilda reported that, since Diana Dufresne has resigned from the Task Force, there is an opening for someone in real estate.
- Fred Hanss suggested Katie Geidel, from Sandstone Realty.
 - Andrea Montgomery suggested Philip Page, from NoCo Realty.
 - Tenbusch reported that there is also an opening for a representative from organized labor.

6. Reports.

a. Updates from FHTF members

- Courtnie Toms reported that MILC is now providing rental assistance (security assistance, rental arrears), now that the eviction moratorium is finished.
 - Cannot overlap with ERAP assistance.
 - Can only cover 6 months of arrearages.
 - MILC is swamped with applications.
- Chris Nyman reported that CDP is accepting applications for housing through the Housing Choice voucher program.
 - There is a preference to serve homeless persons.
- Sally reported that her organization is still pursuing a discrimination case in Potsdam.
- Tenbusch reported that the Planning Office had received an award from NYS CDBG for housing rehabilitation.
 - He also reported that the Planning Office has submitted another application for housing rehabilitation.

7. Announcements.

- a. The Fair Housing Month event will be held on April 29th at 2:00 PM.
- b. Next Meeting date: Thursday, May 19, 2022 at 9:00 AM.
- Tenbusch invited Kateri Huska to introduce herself. She works for United Helpers, and is looking to learn more about housing issues so she can better assist her clients.
 - Tenbusch asked members of the press if they had any questions; they replied “No.”

8. Adjourn. The meeting adjourned by consensus at 10:00 AM (Tenbusch/Toms).

Respectfully submitted,

John Tenbusch

Planner II

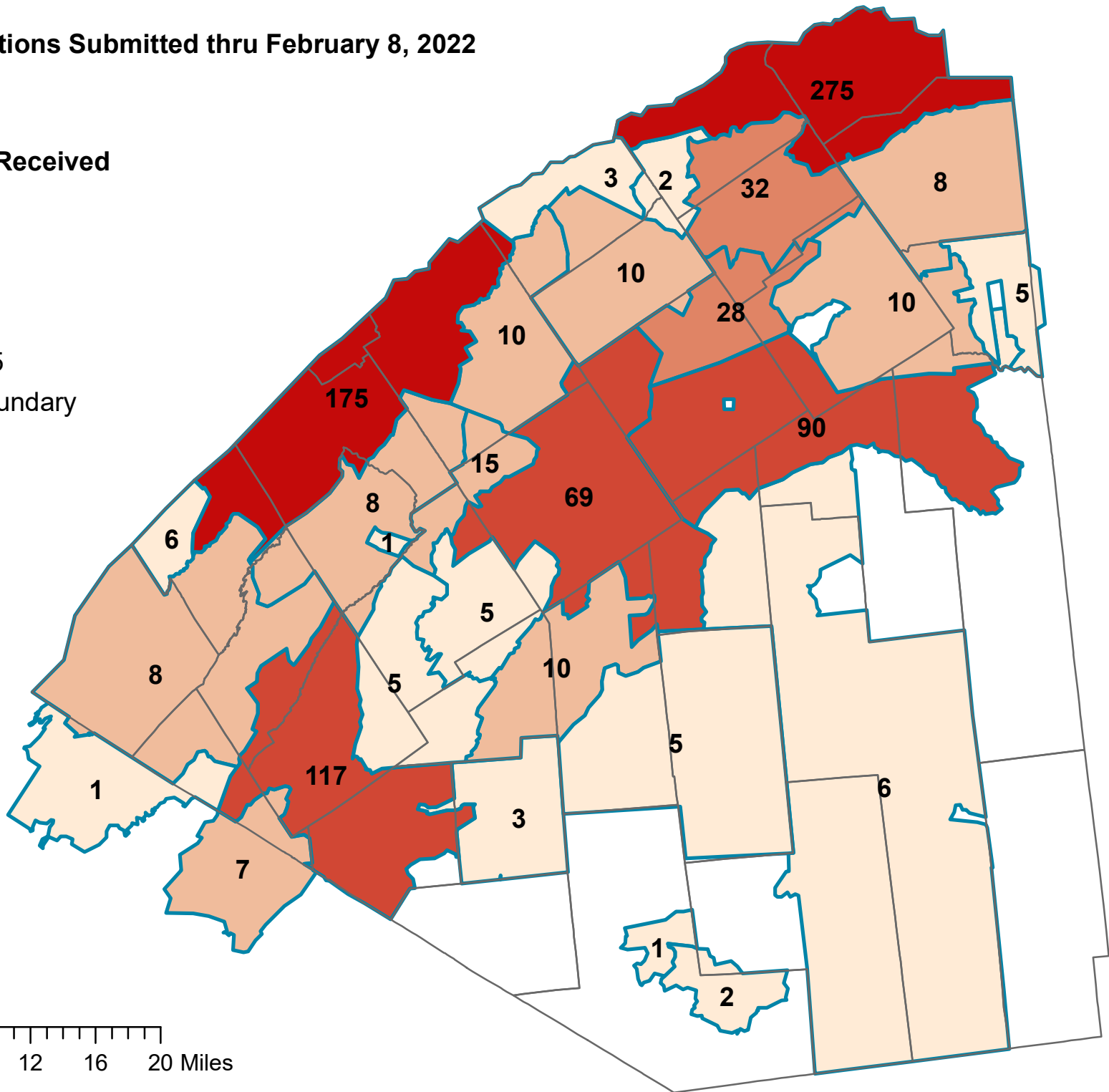
ERAP Applications Submitted thru February 8, 2022

N

Legend

Applications Received

- 0 - 6
- 7 - 15
- 16 - 32
- 33 - 117
- 118 - 275
- Town Boundary



0 2 4 8 12 16 20 Miles

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MEMORANDUM

To: Fair Housing Task Force
From: Matilda Larson, John Tenbusch
Date: February 24, 2022
Re: Brief Update regarding the Eviction Crisis in St. Lawrence County

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the Fair Housing Task Force has been following the issue of renters falling behind on their rent, and the expected rise in eviction proceedings. At both the federal and state levels, moratoria were enacted that prevented most evictions. However, at present most of the regulations preventing evictions have expired. The following is a brief summary of current conditions in St. Lawrence County.

Diana Dufresne, Village Justice in Massena and Associate Director of the Rural Law Center, reported that there are more than 350 eviction applications scheduled for trial across the County.

Amy Casiuk, Staff Attorney at the Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York – Canton office, reports that moratoria preventing evictions have been expired since the middle of January.

She noted that the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP), which provided financial assistance to renters and landlords whose incomes were impacted by COVID, has been expended, replenished, and expended again. Currently there are no funds available for ERAP assistance. However, renters are still being encouraged to apply, because protections against evictions still are triggered by the act of application.

Casiuk also reported that landlords are beginning to bring applications for eviction against tenants for non-payment of rent. She noted, however, that she has not seen the significant increase in eviction proceedings that had been predicted.

**The Center for Community Studies
at Jefferson Community College**

Presentation of Results:

Sixth Annual



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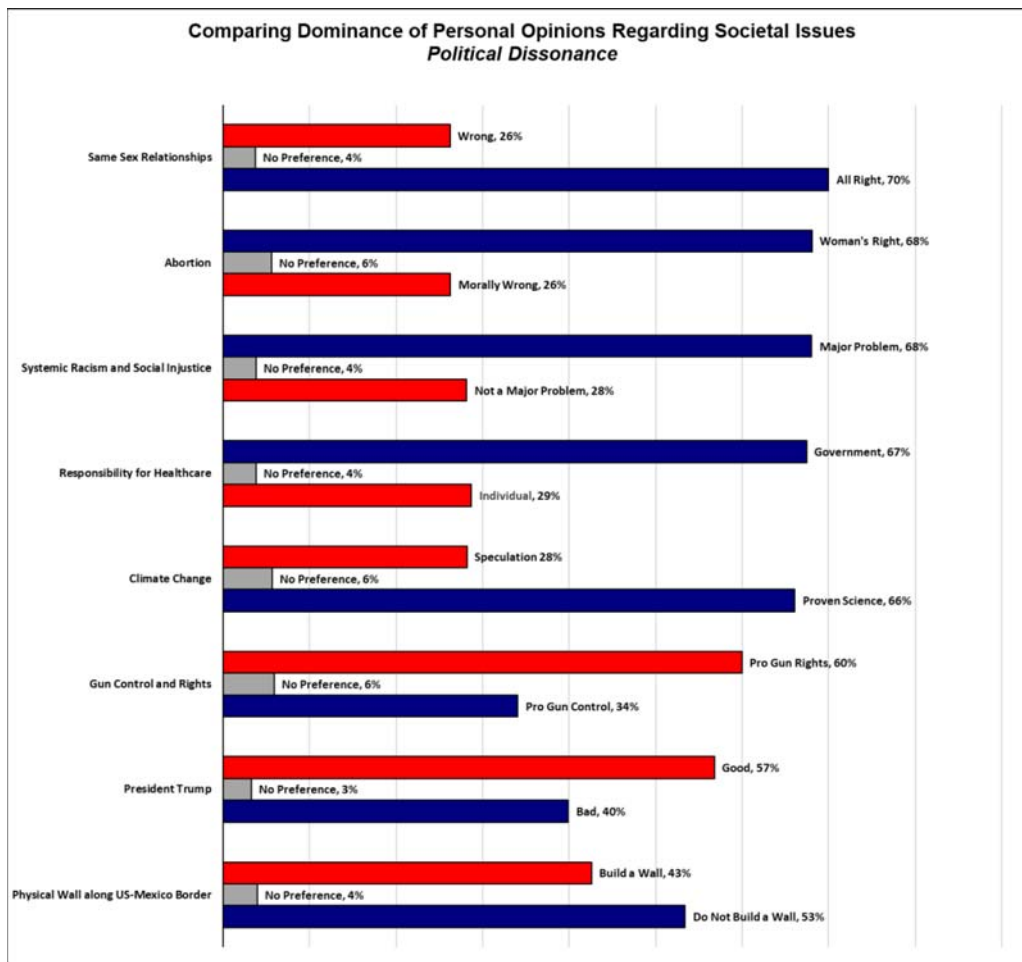
October 2020



Mr. Joel LaLone, Research Director
Mr. Larry Danforth, Research Coordinator

Section 2.3 – Personal Opinions – Issues in Our Society and Communities

Figure 3 – Comparing Dominance of Personal Opinions Regarding Societal Issues



2.3 – Key Findings/Observations (Tables 18-27)

Current Levels:

A section of eight survey items that relate to personal opinions of residents regarding issues that typically are of great importance to residents of any community and society was included in this annual for the second consecutive year in 2020. The issues studied in 2020 include healthcare funding, the role of government, Presidential approval, gun control and rights, abortion, same-sex relationships, social injustice, and the building of a physical wall on the U.S.-Mexico border. The goal has been to learn what the overall predominate opinions are among the St. Lawrence County adult community. The results in 2020 are summarized in the graph above, with some themes that may typically be considered as a conservative stance and others that are typically considered as a liberal stance being dominant among county adult residents at times.

Among the eight studied issues, a majority of residents favor the moderate (blue) stance for six of the eight issues, while a majority of residents favor the conservative (red) stance for two of the eight issues. The issues that result with the most dominant or singular opinion include (at least twice the support of the opposing viewpoint): 70% believe same-sex relationships are all right, 68% believe that abortion is a woman's right, 68% agree that systemic racism and social injustice are major problems in our country, 67% believe social security is the responsibility of the government, and 66% believe that climate change is proven science.

When asked the *largest* issue facing our *nation* at the current time, the most common response is "jobs and the economy" (40%), followed closely by the "coronavirus" (37%).

Trends:

Among the eight personal opinion issues studied in 2020 seven were also studied in 2019; the current levels of support for varying views have remained very consistent for six of the seven issues but a significant change can be seen in the approval for President Trump. The rate reporting that the President is good for the county increased from 43% in 2019 to 57% in 2020.

Table 27 – Of the following five issues, which do you believe is the most important issue facing the nation right now?

2020 St. Lawrence County Results:

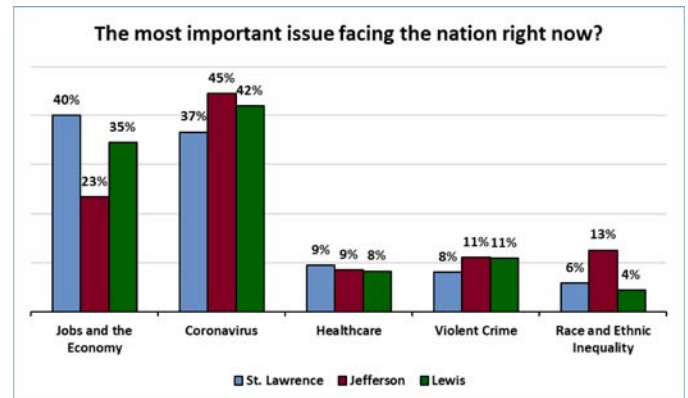
	Unweighted Frequency	Weighted Percentage
Health care	39	9.4%
Coronavirus	192	36.6%
Jobs and the Economy	140	40.0%
Violent Crime	35	8.1%
Race and Ethnic Inequality	20	5.9%
Totals	426	100.0%

Trend Analysis:

Not measured in earlier St. Lawrence County studies.

Northern New York Regional Comparison:

		County		
		St. Lawrence	Jefferson	Lewis
The most important issue facing the nation right now?	Health care	9.4% ^a	8.5% ^a	8.3% ^a
	Coronavirus	36.6% ^b	44.5% ^a	42.0% ^{a,b}
	Jobs and the Economy	40.0% ^b	23.3% ^a	34.5% ^b
	Violent Crime	8.1% ^a	11.1% ^a	10.9% ^a
	Race and Ethnic Inequality	5.9% ^b	12.6% ^a	4.4% ^b
	Totals:	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Unweighted n:		426	584	469



St. Lawrence County Cross-tabulations (2020):

	Countywide All Participants	Gender		Annual Household Income					
		Male	Female	Up to \$25,000	\$25,001-\$50,000	\$50,001-\$75,000	\$75,001-\$100,000	Over \$100,000	
The most important issue facing the nation right now?	Health care	9.4%	11.8% ^a	7.1% ^a	6.1% ^a	3.4% ^a	6.3% ^a	5.0% ^a	7.7% ^a
	Coronavirus	36.6%	34.2% ^a	37.2% ^a	22.3% ^a	38.1% ^{a,b}	49.0% ^b	46.6% ^{a,b}	28.0% ^{a,b}
	Jobs and the Economy	40.0%	38.2% ^a	43.3% ^a	53.9% ^{a,b}	48.9% ^{a,b}	30.5% ^a	29.6% ^{a,b}	54.7% ^b
	Violent Crime	8.1%	7.8% ^a	8.3% ^a	17.0% ^a	4.4% ^a	5.4% ^a	16.0% ^a	3.7% ^a
	Race and Ethnic Inequality	5.9%	8.0% ^a	4.0% ^a	0.7% ^a	5.2% ^a	8.7% ^a	2.8% ^a	5.9% ^a
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Unweighted Sample Size		426	167	247	42	79	84	61	68

	Age Groups			Education Level			Political Beliefs			
	18-39	40-59	60+	HSG or less	Some college	4YD or more	Conservative	Neither	Liberal	
The most important issue facing the nation right now?	Health care	13.6% ^a	6.7% ^a	7.8% ^a	8.8% ^a	7.5% ^a	14.1% ^a	7.0% ^a	7.5% ^a	8.1% ^a
	Coronavirus	22.3% ^a	35.0% ^a	50.9% ^b	34.6% ^a	36.1% ^a	38.2% ^a	21.0% ^a	43.1% ^b	50.6% ^b
	Jobs and the Economy	46.7% ^a	48.2% ^a	26.4% ^b	38.8% ^a	47.4% ^a	32.7% ^a	52.7% ^a	40.7% ^a	18.7% ^b
	Violent Crime	4.9% ^a	6.8% ^a	12.8% ^a	11.2% ^a	6.5% ^a	4.3% ^a	14.7% ^a	5.6% ^b	1.3% ^b
	Race and Ethnic Inequality	12.5% ^a	3.3% ^b	2.0% ^b	6.6% ^{a,b}	2.6% ^a	10.8% ^b	4.6% ^a	3.1% ^a	21.3% ^b
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Unweighted Sample Size		45	131	238	103	166	146	120	189	86