

Testimony in support of H 5953

Dear Chairman Casey and members of the House Committee on Municipal Government and Housing

We are writing to support H 5953. Our observation as residents of Providence over this past winter was that far too many people were unsheltered with no room at the local “warming centers” for overnight protection against sub-freezing weather. We watched and participated as the city attempted to open up 2-3 day “pop-up” warming centers that quickly filled to capacity and stretched staffing and \$ resources to the breaking point. It was sad and shocking to learn about how some of these overnight “warming centers” were not allowed to let people lay down to sleep (due to fire codes), and then to add insult to inhumanity would send them back outdoors at 7:00 AM when temperatures were well below freezing.

We asked the state authorities for a copy of the standards being used to decide when more such sheltering is needed, only to be told it is being developed. The crisis continued to drag on as one of the coldest winters in recent years punished those unfortunate souls left outside in the cold.

We all – the legislators, state and local leaders and municipal officials, and private citizens who make up our communities – can do better. H 5953 sets a standard for when basic sheltering must be activated in order to reduce the deadly and debilitating impact of prolonged exposure to extreme temperatures.

Though H 5953 will demand more from state and local authorities to implement, we are simply holding our policy and service systems accountable for what is a basic humane response to the urgent need of unhoused people to be protected from injury or death during inhospitable weather. In addition, **state and local budgets must include funding to implement these basic sheltering protections, and the contracting steps for readiness need to be in place before the harsh weather arrives.** Let’s get beyond inadequate reaction and move towards planned protective action while we have the privilege of a seasonal pause between periods of predictable weather emergencies.

Respectfully submitted,

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Residents, Providence, RI

