

4/2/25

House Municipal Government and Housing Committee

Re: HB 5953 "Warming Center Alert"

Chairperson Casey and Committee Members:

I am writing to you in strong support of HB 5953. My name is Michelle McKenzie. I am a public health researcher and have conducted HIV and opioid overdose prevention research for more than 25 years. Since 2006 I have directed the program Preventing Overdose and Naloxone Intervention (PONI), which provides overdose prevention training and naloxone distribution in partnership with community organizations throughout Rhode Island.

I have the honor of working closely with organizations such as House of Hope, Project Weber Renew, Safe Haven at Community Care Alliance and other organizations that provide outreach services to people who are unhoused. While these organizations provide a myriad of services, addressing the consequences of homelessness looms large for each of them. When temperatures are extremely cold or extremely hot, then scrambling to ensure that people are sheltered in a way that they don't die on the street disrupts all other activities.

It is honestly disgraceful that we, as a society, have not managed to find ways for all of our residents to have a safe place to live. Creating a the infrastructure to ensure that people are protected from weather-related exposure and possible death is the very least we can do until there is access to affordable housing for all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michelle McKenzie". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Michelle McKenzie, MPH
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Providence, RI 02905
401-487-2194