

February 13, 2026

Subject: Clarification Regarding Testimony on Bills H7225 and H7044

Chairman Casey and Honorable Members of the House Municipal Government & Housing Committee:

I am writing on behalf of Crossroads Rhode Island in response to testimony recently provided to the Committee regarding bills H7225 and H7044. I am grateful for the Committee's attention to ensuring that individuals and families experiencing homelessness are treated with respect, dignity, and compassion — principles that are fundamental to our mission and embedded in every aspect of the services we provide.

As the state's leading provider of housing and related services to those experiencing homelessness, last year Crossroads served more than 4,800 men, women, and children across our programs. Of those, more than 3,800 found a new place to call home or maintained their housing. Additionally, over 1,500 adults and children found a safe place to stay in one of our five temporary emergency shelters statewide. These outcomes reflect our deep commitment to both immediate safety and long-term housing stability.

With that in mind, I respectfully offer clarification on several points in the testimony of Mr. Bernie Boudreau and Mr. Vincent Marzullo, which appear to conflate the functions of Warming Centers and Homeless Shelters.

Temporary Emergency Shelter vs. Warming Center

In his testimony, Mr. Boudreau stated that individuals staying at a Crossroads shelter are required to sleep seated at tables. Let me assure you, this characterization is incorrect. All five of Crossroads' temporary emergency shelters provide beds, meals, and a range of supportive services designed to ensure safety, dignity, and stability for those we serve. Our shelter programs operate in accordance with established standards of care and are structured to support individuals on a pathway toward housing.

By contrast, a Warming Center serves a fundamentally different purpose. As defined by the Providence Emergency Management Agency (PEMA), "...a [Warming Center](#) provides temporary relief from extreme cold temperatures. It is not designed or equipped to function as a shelter. Warming Centers do not offer housing, medical, or behavioral health services, nor do they provide food. While bottled water may be available, distribution is not guaranteed."

By definition, a Warming Center is intended as a last-resort, life-saving intervention during severe weather events — places such as libraries, rec centers, police station lobbies and Crossroads' Community Room — where individuals can seek immediate protection from dangerous temperatures. Their primary goal is to prevent cold-related injuries and fatalities,

such as those tragically reported recently in both Boston and Providence, and in an important distinction, Crossroads is one of only a few Warming Centers statewide that offers overnight warming.

In addition to providing a place to come in out of the cold, Crossroads' Warming Center also provides access to showers and laundry facilities. Staff actively engage guests, encouraging them to accept referrals to available shelter beds and inviting them to participate in a housing assessment — which is often the critical first step toward securing stable housing. While the Warming Center is a temporary, weather-driven intervention, it serves as an important point of engagement for individuals who may not otherwise seek services.

During the recent polar vortex, for instance, nearly 100 people stayed at Crossroads' Warming Center, in either our Community Room or Dining Room, which we open up when the need is particularly high. While maximum capacity of both spaces is 80 people, we can't in good conscious turn anyone away in such life-threatening conditions.

Some of Mr. Boudreau's testimony suggested that Warming Centers should operate more like shelters by providing cots, meals, and expanded services. While well-intentioned, it is important to recognize the operational implications of such changes. Adding cots would significantly reduce overall capacity, limiting the number of individuals who could access protection during extreme weather. In emergency conditions such as those we recently experienced, maximizing safe occupancy is often critical to preventing loss of life.

It's more than just semantics. Clear distinctions between these two types of interventions are essential for informed policy decisions. Shelters and Warming Centers each play vital but distinct roles within the broader continuum of care for individuals experiencing homelessness.

In closing, Crossroads remains committed to working collaboratively with policymakers, advocates, and community partners to develop solutions that are both compassionate and effective. I welcome any opportunity to provide additional information that may be helpful to the Committee, including a briefing at the Statehouse or a visit here at Crossroads to provide more insight into the scope of our programs and services.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and continued leadership around helping those who are most in need in our community.

Respectfully,



Michelle Wilcox
President & CEO