



RIEMA

RHODE ISLAND
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

Daniel J. McKee, Governor
Marc R. Pappas, Director

April 7, 2026

The Honorable Evan P. Shanley, Chair
House State Government and Elections Committee
82 Smith Street
Providence, RI 02903

Re: 2026 – H – 7987, An Act Relating to Military Affairs and Defense – Emergency Management

Dear Chair Shanley,

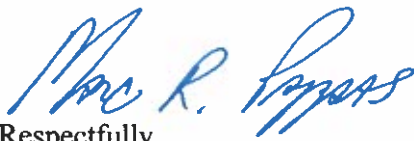
2026 – H – 7987, An Act Relating to Military Affairs and Defense – Emergency Management, requires the Rhode Island Emergency Management Agency (RIEMA) to 1) work with the Rhode Island executive office of housing and the Rhode Island League of Cities and Towns to develop guidelines for municipalities for the preparation of local extreme weather emergency action plans; 2) review and approve these plans with the cooperation of the Rhode Island executive office of housing; 3) supply, through coordination and donations, blankets, cots, mats, meals and beverages for shelters open for 24 hours or more and; 4) develop a statewide notification system in coordination with the National Weather Service to initiate warming or cooling center alerts.

This legislation appears to conflate warming and cooling centers with shelters. Warming and cooling centers provide short term relief from excessive heat or severe cold because they offer a seat in a heated or air-conditioned building. These centers, established by municipalities, usually consist of libraries, community centers, senior centers, and city or town halls, and their hours of operation are limited. RIEMA consistently monitors National Weather Service forecasts and in the event that extreme weather is predicted, organizes calls with state and municipal leaders to provide weather and planning updates. Municipalities have the capability to notify the public of the opening of these centers through press releases, press conferences, social media, websites, cell phone text messages and automated telephone calls, and may request assistance with same from RIEMA. In addition, RIEMA provides the locations and hours of operation of these centers on its website and social media channels.

Shelters provide intermediate or longer term needs and include temporary sleeping arrangements, food, beverages, toilets, showers, and other essential provisions. Shelters are commonly operated by the American Red Cross, religious organizations, and social services organizations. RIEMA has no expertise in establishing, operating, or staffing shelters, or in providing social services to shelter residents. If shelters are opened, RIEMA provides the locations of the shelters on its website and social media channels.

RIEMA maintains a supply of blankets, cots, and mats for displaced people in the event of a disaster. For public health reasons, blankets, cots, and mats are single use only; they are not returned to RIEMA for reuse. On occasion RIEMA has assisted municipalities with supply deficits, but RIEMA does not have funding to purchase and store shelter supplies for the municipalities.

In summary, RIEMA does not have the staff, resources, experience, or expertise to develop shelter plan guidelines or to review thirty-nine plans. Municipal leaders, and not RIEMA, should be responsible for approving municipal plans. RIEMA's cots and bedding resources are limited, and notification processes for centers and shelters are already in place. For these reasons, RIEMA is opposed to this legislation.



Respectfully,
Marc R. Pappas
Director

cc: The Honorable Members of the House State Government and Elections Committee
The Honorable Teresa A. Tanzi
Nicole McCarty, Chief Legal Counsel to the Speaker of the House

