

To: The House Commission on Housing Affordability  
From: Bernie Beaudreau, community volunteer  
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Re: Services for and Winter Response Homelessness  
Date: March 11,2026

As the agenda for the March 12 meeting of the Commission includes two reports, ***Services Available to RI's Homeless Population*** and ***RI's Winter Response to Homelessness***, I want to share my thoughts and reflections on the topics in advance of the meeting. I look forward to the reports of Michelle Wilcox and Michelle Brophy as they are recognized as two well-respected leaders and professionals on the issue of homelessness in our state with literally decades of experience.

As I volunteer and become aware of the scope of services available to the homeless, I have learned that some services are not reported, or are underreported. Some shelters have had to accept more homeless overnight guests than licensed/approved. Volunteers are providing fuel and other life supporting supplies to unsheltered homeless living outside on the streets or in tents. When the weather has been a threat to human survival, it is known that our shelters, warming centers, other service providers and volunteers have had to quietly break the rules or go against the advice of others to literally save lives.

For example, my friends and I provided a service in response to several desperate requests of encamped homeless for heating assistance. Since mid-December, friends and I have refilled and distributed 84 tanks of propane for heating and cooking to just nine (9) encampment sites in East Providence, Pawtucket and Providence. We tried employing the DIY copper coil alcohol heaters with a few tent folks but they didn't throw enough heat against the extreme cold weather. A few friends have donated cash and in-kind donations totaling more than \$4,000 for this ongoing service to unsheltered homeless.

Pat Ford of Cumberland has kept his ongoing deliveries of drinking water to many encamped homeless. Lewis Pryor of Scituate has continued his weekly deliveries of food and water to encamped homeless. Providing a weekly forum for hearing and recording the voices and perspectives of the homeless on public policy matters is also an unreported and valued service that has been maintained by Eric Hirsch, a Rhode Island advocate for the homeless since the mid-1980s. To my knowledge, these important to

note impactful, caring services provided by members of communities are not reported in any statistics or reference by the EOH or any other public office.

In regard to the services provided this winter, it is acknowledged and noted that Executive Office of Housing (EOH), in response to the greater than anticipated need, expanded the existing shelter system by funding winter seasonal and emergency “pop-up” shelters, engaging the RI Council of Churches to open three church sites which provided about 75 shelter beds during the coldest nights of the winter. Even with this expanded effort, we know of three weather-related fatalities—the mother and son who perished in the Miriam parking lot and the young man who froze to death on the Washington Street sidewalk. There are likely more fatalities that have not yet been reported or discovered but we don’t really know.

It is important to acknowledge that the **EOH’s Emergency Shelter Data Dashboard** is as an imperfed and often erroneous homeless shelter bed availability indicator. On several occasions I have been told by EOH staff and others that the Dashboard shows that there are plenty of unused shelter beds available and that anyone who wants a shelter bed can find one. Yesterday’s Dashboard report for March 9, summarizes that statewide there were *“87 Individual Shelter Beds Not Utilized Last Night”* suggesting that beds were available to the homeless who chose not to go to the shelters. While it is well known that many unsheltered homeless will not seek an available shelter bed for a range personal and often legitimate reasons, the general implication that there are plenty of shelter beds to meet the need is erroneous.

The EOH itself admits the problem with the data. The small print note on the Dashboard website indicates why this summary information is meaningless:

*“Beds/Units may be unoccupied on a given night for a variety of reasons including, but not limited to: bed/unit reservation system, unit repairs/turnover issues, specific population set asides, or other reasons. Data included in this dashboard is used for planning purposes.”* In its current form and practice, the Dashboard is not all that useful.

These EOH’s Dashboard note render the data impossible to interpret. “Unused” doesn’t indicate the **availability** of any of the 87 beds unutilized. It doesn’t answer the supply and demand question: **How many of the beds were unused due to the lack of homeless seeking shelter (demand) and how many were unused for the shelter management reasons for making them unavailable (supply)?**

A shelter's decision to limit the number on any given night could also relate to staffing/volunteer attendance, the added challenge of operating at full capacity, or the flexibility exercised in reserving beds based on a guest's pattern of staying or their request to hold their spot. But we don't know from the data presented.

The Dashboard data, when viewed over many nights, illustrates the varying routines and

<b>2026 EOH Emergency Shelter Data Dashboard</b>				
Summary of data from 18 nights: 2/1, 2/2, 2/3, 2/4, 2/5, 2/8, 2/10, 2/11, 2/12, 2/17, 2/18, 2/24, 2/26, 3/2, 3/3, 3/5, 38, 3/9				
county	SITE	18 nights average		
		Total Beds	Utiliz Rate	Empty Beds
Prov	P01	112	89%	13
Prov	P02	102	100%	0
Prov	P03	100	99%	1
Prov	P04	63	85%	11
Prov	P05	45	93%	3
Prov	P06	50	96%	2
Prov	P07	41	96%	2
Prov	P08	40	99%	0
Newport	P09	41	99%	0
Prov	P10	30	88%	4
Prov	P11	20	56%	9
Wash	P12	23	80%	5
Wash	P13	19	100%	0
Prov	P14	20	97%	1
Prov	P15	10	86%	1
Prov	P16	18	72%	5
Wash	P18	8	38%	5
Wash	P19	6	67%	2
Wash	P20	5	100%	0
Prov	P21	6	39%	4
Wash	W01	60	86%	8
Prov	W02	23	100%	0
Prov	W03	40	87%	5
Prov	W05	10	99%	0
<b>STATE Total</b>		<b>892</b>	<b>91%</b>	<b>79.7</b>
<b>Providence Total</b>		<b>730</b>	<b>92%</b>	<b>59.4</b>
<b>Balance of State</b>		<b>162</b>	<b>87%</b>	<b>20.3</b>

reporting policies of the shelter providers. "Unused beds" reported means different things to different providers/shelters.

The table presented here was extracted from EOH Dashboard based on the average of eighteen (18) nights of daily reports in February and early March. February 15 was not used as EOH indicated there was a reporting error for one of the projects/shelters, P02. Also, P17 was not included as EOH indicated that it had been closed for a few months.

Of the 24 individual project sites, the table below identifies eight (8) providers/shelters consistently reporting 99% or 100% bed utilization rate (shaded in yellow). See: P02, 03, 08, 09, 13, 20, w02 and w05. It raises the questions: Is this likely to be an accurate reporting of available beds? Wouldn't shelter management

have some nights where a few beds wouldn't be available due to any of the reasons noted on the Dashboard webpage: *"bed/unit reservation system, unit repairs/turnover issues, specific population set asides, or other reasons"*?

There are another eight (8) project sites/shelters P01, P04, P11, P12, P16, P18, W01 and W03 (shaded in blue) that have averaged between 5 and 13 unused beds nightly. In total, there were an *average* of 80 (79.7) empty beds nightly over the course of these eighteen nights. Should EOH and the helping community be focused on helping these eight under-used shelters to fill their beds?

### **The Need for Accurate Shelter Bed Availability Data**

There is an urgent need for publicly accessible shelter bed availability for each of 24 homeless shelter sites in the state, on a daily basis, in order to aid in the placement of the unsheltered homeless. This information is vital for use by shelters as well as helping agencies and community volunteers who work with the unsheltered homeless population.

Experience working with the Regional Access Points (RAPs) since October 1 has demonstrated the difficulty in finding available shelter beds for new homeless clients on any given day. RAP staff don't seem to have the specific real time information available to them in order to direct those seeking shelter, or others seeking a shelter bed on behalf of an unsheltered homeless person, as to where to go for a shelter bed.

Can we bridge this gap of information and services assisting the homeless? It would be most beneficial and efficient if the RAP receptionists/intake staff, and community volunteers, to have up-to-date, accurate bed availability information to assist homeless folks seeking shelter.

We ask EOH to consider two recommendations that would expand outreach resources using volunteers and helping agencies to help connect more homeless individuals with available shelter beds and provide a more accurate daily count of available unused shelter beds.

**Recommendation #1:** We ask EOH to consider allowing volunteers, advocates and helping agencies who work every day with the homeless on the streets and in encampments to **have access to the site-specific data**, to know the names, contact

information and locations of underutilized project sites/shelters to assist in the placement of unhoused homeless. This would increase the bed utilization rate and serve more of the homeless. These volunteers and agencies seeking access to EOH's project/shelter information would be required to agree to use the data for referral purposes only.

**Recommendation #2:** We ask EOH to consider replacing "Individual Shelter Beds Not Utilized" with "Individual *Available* Shelter Beds Not Utilized" and add six other data points.

The current public Dashboard presents these data points for each project/shelter site:

"Total Number of Beds"  
 "Individuals Served"  
 "Bed Utilization Rate"

In order to show the **availability** of beds for each of the 24 sites, we recommend displaying the following six data points for each project/shelter to include in the daily report:

1. Total Maximum Number of Potential Beds
2. Total Beds Available
3. Availability Rate = #2 divided by #1
4. Total Available Beds Utilized (Individuals Served)
5. Available Bed Utilization Rate = #4 divided by #2
6. Total Number of Available Beds Not Utilized = #2 minus #4

The column total for #6 would be the TOTAL statewide number of **Available Beds Not Utilized**.

We acknowledge that there are also barriers for many of the unsheltered homeless to accessing available shelter beds. These include:

- Lack of transportation to the shelter,
- Negative past experiences with shelters,
- lack of accommodations for homeless couples,
- BCI requirements,

- behavioral health and substance abuse issues, etc.

Like EOH, many community volunteers and non-profit services want to ensure that anyone seeking a shelter bed on any given day can find one available by the evening. It is appreciated that experiences from the field are considered to address the actual concerns of the unsheltered homeless.