

2026 - Testimony in support of S 2264

Dear Chairman Bissailon and members of the Senate Committee on Housing and Municipal Government

We are writing to support S 2264. During the harsh winter of 2025/26 the city of Providence 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” would send these unhoused people back outdoors at 7:00 AM when temperatures were well below freezing.

We asked the state authorities in 2025 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. The proposed version of S 2264 sets a temperature standard for when basic sheltering must be activated to reduce the deadly and debilitating impact of prolonged exposure to extreme temperatures.

S 2264 includes requirements for sheltering once specific temperatures are reached, which will demand more from state and local authorities to implement. This is needed in order to hold 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 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