

March 24, 2026

Dear Chairman Bissaillon and Members of Senate Housing and Municipal Government Committee:

I am writing to express my strong support for S 2264, which would provide for warming and cooling centers during extreme weather. I thank the Chairman for his sponsorship of this critical legislation.

My name is Megan Smith, and I am an outreach worker and the Experiential Education Coordinator with Rhode Island Street Medicine. Rhode Island Street Medicine affirms the worth and dignity of all individuals and believes that access to health care is a human right. Our goal is to provide accessible, high quality health care to people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in Rhode Island that promotes both personal wellness and systems transformation. I am also an Assistant Professor of Social Work at Rhode Island College. I have been doing outreach in Rhode Island for 19 years.


Rhode Island Street Medicine currently follows approximately 250 people, the vast majority of whom are experiencing unsheltered homelessness. This winter was particularly brutal, and many of our patients suffered, some lastingly, as a result. Some lost toes due to frostbite, and others have cold-related wounds that are not fully healed, causing them ongoing pain and mobility and functional limitations. As was reported in the press, our state also had multiple people die of cold exposure.

The warming centers that we did have this year were life-saving. To share one specific example of this, I work with an older adult who was staying outside through much of the winter. She is on multiple housing lists, and was also checking in with the regional access points regularly about shelter placement. However, despite her diligent efforts, nothing was available for her. She was staying in a dilapidated tent by herself. Immediately before the first significant snowstorm, she called me to say that she was afraid that her tent was going to collapse on top of her with the weight of the snow. This time, I was able to reach out to Donn King and secure her a spot at a warming center. I drove her there and introduced her to Donn and his coworkers, who warmly welcomed her. The next morning, she texted me to say that she'd gotten the best sleep in years because she finally felt safe.

However, there was not nearly enough space for everyone to be accommodated as this individual was. This proposed legislation ensures that everyone who needs a life-saving place to stay will have access to one. I cannot understate how critical this is, both for immediate safety and for the ability of these individuals to connect with needed resources and rebuild trust with supportive people and organizations who can assist them with their identified goals.

Thank you very much for your time and for your consideration of this critical bill. I appreciate the opportunity to share my perspective and would be glad to discuss this further. Please feel free to call me at (401) 484-0234 or email me at msmith57@brownhealth.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Megan Smith". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Megan Smith, PhD MSW
Outreach Worker & Experiential Education Coordinator
Rhode Island Street Medicine
Assistant Professor
Rhode Island College School of Social Work