



HCDNNJ Testimony on S2429/A3540

Senate Health, Human Services, and Senior Citizens Committee, November 30, 2023

Good afternoon, Chairman Vitale and members of the committee. My name is Matthew Hersh, director of policy and advocacy at the Housing and Community Development Network of New Jersey. I am proud to represent nearly 300 community development corporations, individuals and other organizations that support the creation of affordable homes, economic opportunities, and strong communities. The Network is also the state's largest, funded HUD-certified housing counseling intermediary serving NJ exclusively.

We are here representing our membership in support of S2429, which would require making available spaces for all residents during extreme heat. As another summer has passed and extreme weather conditions are now less extreme and more mainstream, this essential legislation can save lives.

The Network and its members helped to create the original Code Blue law and later, helped to improve its guidelines and increase its funding. We know the state takes these issues seriously and are pleased that we are moving toward acknowledging the real dangers facing our unhoused populations, seniors, children, and everyone in between.

However, while our members are supportive, we have received considerable feedback from them and have submitted that feedback to the bill sponsors.

- Name the Office of Homelessness as the state agency responsible for setting guidelines for municipalities. As we saw during Code Blue before the law was improved, a lack of uniformity or a tiered temperature system leads to at best confusion and obfuscation and at worst an excuse for a city to evade its obligation.
- Specify a right to shelter in all circumstances where it is unhealthy to be living outside. There should be flexibility for that declaration to be made locally since there may be local or regional factors that require available shelter;
- Each municipality that has homeless based on HIMIS data, not just the Point in Time count, should have a plan to shelter the homeless in weather emergencies. The County should work with municipalities to help develop the plan. HIMIS is HUD's Homeless Management Information System, a local information technology system used to collect client-level data and data on the provision of housing and services to individuals and families at risk of and experiencing homelessness. Our county Continuum of Care programs, or CoCs, is responsible for this data collection, management, and reporting.

We applaud the legislature's effort to implement shelter provisions during extreme heat. This bill is one of the Network's HouseNJ priorities because it provides a baseline protection for vulnerable residents during times of extreme weather. Thank you for taking this critically important step toward achieving healthy, stable communities.

Respectfully submitted,

Matthew Hersh
Director of Policy and Advocacy
Housing and Community Development Network of NJ

P 609.393.3752 145 West Hanover Street Trenton, NJ 08618

Like us: www.facebook.com/hcdnnj www.hcdnnj.org Follow us: @hcdnnj