



Office of the City Clerk

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Legislation Text

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Committee on Health and Human Relations
March 24, 2021 City Council Meeting

RESOLUTION

To rapidly shelter Chicago's unhoused population in the event of extreme cold.

WHEREAS, the City of Chicago ("the City") offers housing alternatives, including Emergency Shelter, on a year-round basis for residents that are unhoused or housing insecure through the City's Continuum of Care and delegate agencies; and,

WHEREAS, in 2020, the City had a total of 5,390 people experiencing homelessness, of which 3,861 were in shelters while the remaining 1,529 were living on the street or a location "not meant for human habitation", as described in the DFSS' 2020 Point in Time (PIT) Report; and,

WHEREAS, when temperatures are at 32 degrees or below, the City may activate one or all of its six Department of Family and Support Services' (DFSS) community service centers as warming centers from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, for which availability may be extended as determined by the Office of Emergency Management and Communications (OEMC), in addition to activating Chicago Police Department (CPD) stations and Chicago Public Library (CPL) branches as warming areas; and,

WHEREAS, according to the National Weather Service, the City recorded the following number of days at or below 32 degrees: 30 days in 2017, 32 days in 2018, 50 days in 2019, 19 days in 2020, and 28 days in 2021 through January and February; and,

WHEREAS, while the City has approximately 3,895 Emergency Shelter beds, as summarized in the 2020 Housing Inventory Count (HIC) Report, this leaves approximately 1,495 unhoused residents without access to Emergency Shelter, in the event of an extreme cold advisory; and,

WHEREAS, the City's current extreme cold weather response calls on DFSS staffing to activate weekend and overnight hours for the City's warming centers but DFSS staffing alone is not sufficient in the event of an extended extreme cold weather advisory and is unable to shelter the 1,495 people that cannot be served through Emergency Shelter; and,

WHEREAS, though CPD stations and CPL branches are activated as warming centers during operating hours in the event of extreme cold, the City does not deploy support staff or resources to manage the additional traffic in these spaces, which especially strains CPL branches that are already informally utilized as warming centers and day centers in the winter by unhoused or > housing insecure residents; and,

WHEREAS, the City's current extreme cold weather response does not meet the need for our unhoused residents and poses a serious public health risk for our most vulnerable; and,

WHEREAS, when the City of Chicago is able to respond efficiently and equitably to our city's most vulnerable residents living on the street, the City benefits by creating an access point for service delivery and relationship building that homelessness service providers need to leverage services and outreach, which include but are certainly not limited to: housing assessments, behavioral health assessments, assistance with income streams (e.g., SSI, SSDI, and SNAP), and needed medical attention; and,

WHEREAS, the City can activate larger vacant venues or facilities to temporarily house Chicago's unhoused population through the extreme cold and/or the City can evaluate the feasibility of issuing emergency hotel vouchers that would allow the City's unhoused residents the opportunity to seek shelter at pre-selected partner hotels through the extreme cold weather advisory as defined by OEMC.

NOW BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF CHICAGO,

The City of Chicago shall rapidly shelter Chicago's unhoused population in the event of extreme cold. .

NOW BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, the City Council shall convene a hearing between the following City departments: DFSS, OEMC, and the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH), to discuss the City's current policy and procedures in the event of extreme cold and to prioritize a more robust emergency response to rapidly shelter Chicago's unhoused population in the event of extreme cold. The hearing should include but may not be limited to the following topics:

Daniel La Spata Alderman, 1st Ward

1. DFSS' current staff capacity and their most recent experience in maintaining the warming centers open through the weekend and overnight as Chicago experienced a cold weather advisory during the recent snowfall in February 2021.
2. OEMC's current policy in activating the City's warming areas and extended hours for these warming areas.
3. An overview of 311 data for calls of service made for transportation to a shelter or warming center in the event of extreme cold weather for the last three years, including 2021 to-date.