

Public Health Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No: SB-364 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

Title: AN ACT CONCERNING EXTREME WEATHER PROTOCOLS.

Vote Date: 3/9/2026

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 3/4/2026

File No.: 54

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Public Health Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

Given the harsh summer and winter seasons we have endured recently, and the resulting difficulties in coordinating services for homeless citizens, SB 364 requires the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP) and Homeland Security to work with the governor's office and municipal authorities to:

1. Standardize hot and cold weather protocols, including temperature standards, that will require state and municipal leaders to open cooling and warming centers when standards are exceeded and,
2. Improve communications of these openings and improve access to the centers.

SB 364 requires these protocols be posted on the DESPP website and be made available to the United Way 2-1-1 Infoline.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE (IF APPLICABLE):

None submitted.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Ronnell Higgins, Commissioner, DESPP:

The state's existing weather protocols are designed to protect vulnerable populations by providing access to information and state funding under certain circumstances, through the efforts of state agencies, and are activated based on pre-established triggers during extreme weather events. The Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (DEMHS),

within DESPP, would have significant concerns with standardizing and codifying specifics of either protocol, as it would limit our ability to respond effectively to evolving or atypical weather conditions. Instead, it would require waiting until the legislature is back in session to make any statutory modification(s). Before codifying or standardizing requirements to extreme weather protocols, we strongly encourage proponents to consult with 2-1-1, municipalities, and impacted state agencies to gain a full understanding of current capacity, the ability to sustain prolonged operations, and the associated fiscal implications.

Andrea Barton Reeves, Commissioner, Department of Social Services (DSS):

DSS has concerns about this legislation. Were these protocols to be in place on a more frequent basis, the Non-Emergent Medical Transportation (NEMT) utilization would rise above normal capacity, leading to increased costs and decreased availability across the system. Furthermore, as the Department is currently in the NEMT procurement process, legislation expanding services may conflict with the final contractual agreement. For these reasons, DSS cannot support this bill.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Kelly Fitzgerald, Greater New Haven Coordinated Access Network, United Way of Greater New Haven:

We support S.B. 364 because it addresses what we experienced this winter. It establishes standardized extreme hot and cold weather protocols with clear triggers - temperature, wind chill, and heat index - that would prompt required opening of warming and cooling centers statewide. It also requires transportation access and public communication, including coordination with 2-1-1. The enhanced clarity from the protocols will allow us to:

- Schedule staff in advance instead of scrambling same day.
- Coordinate with outreach teams before temperatures drop.
- Alert clients earlier so they can prepare.
- Work with municipal partners to secure space and staffing.
- Reduce confusion in the community.

Connecticut has seen homelessness increase 44% since 2021, with the number of unsheltered homeless individuals rising 45% in the past year alone. That means more people are exposed to dangerous weather conditions. And when you consider cold weather, extreme heat at 90°F and above, and severe storms, we could face up to 121 activation days in a year.

SB 364 will drive a better understanding of when to activate a protocol, improved coordination of services, and will reduce the risk of strain on response times and center availability.

Claudette Kidd, Downtown Evening Soup Kitchen (DESK):

Extreme weather is no longer occasional. It is predictable. Connecticut must be prepared with a consistent, statewide response so people can come inside during extreme cold, extreme heat, and severe weather—every time, and in every community. The scale of unsheltered homelessness continues to grow. The number of unsheltered homeless individuals has increased by 45% in one year (574 to 833). This means more people are exposed to dangerous outdoor conditions night after night.

Catherine Zall, Executive Director, New London Homeless Hospitality Center:

This winter, Connecticut activated the Severe Cold Weather Protocol for 46 days. That meant extended shelter hours, overflow coordination, transportation planning, late-night intakes, and

street outreach in below freezing conditions. For the system to work at its best, we need both financial support for winter warming centers and a cold weather protocol that is predictable and clear. For those in need of shelter, last-minute notice also creates confusion and stress. I support S.B. 364 because it addresses the issues that impacted our experience this winter.

Lisa Tepper Bates, President & CEO, United Way of Connecticut (UWCT):

During periods of extreme weather, the 211 Housing Crisis Hotline becomes a frontline emergency response system. Extreme weather events are happening more frequently and lasting longer. The increasing activations of our emergency response systems reflect that reality. The development of standardized extreme hot and cold weather protocols will improve safety, strengthen coordination, and reduce confusion. It is critical to note that extreme weather activation triggers a resource-intensive response. Ensuring that appropriate lifesaving services are available to all Connecticut residents, in every community across the state, requires adequate, sustained investment. We urge support for this bill and the resources necessary to fully implement its intent.

Others in Support of SB 364:

Katie Jennings, Director, Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness

Atique Mirza, MD., President, Hartford County Medical Association

Sarah Fox, Chief Executive Officer, Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness

Jaime Parker, Eastern Coordinated Access Network Project Manager, Thames Valley Council for Community Action

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None expressed.

Reported by: David Rackliffe

Date: March 12, 2026