

SENATE HEALTH, HUMAN SERVICES AND SENIOR
CITIZENS COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

SENATE, No. 2346

with committee amendments

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: JUNE 20, 2024

The Senate Health, Human Services and Senior Citizens Committee reports favorably and with committee amendments Senate Bill No. 2346.

As amended, this bill establishes a three-year pilot program State Office of Emergency Management in the Division of State Police in the Department of Law and Public Safety under which participating counties are to formulate plans for issuing a Code Red alert on extreme heat days and during air quality events to municipal governments, social service agencies, and non-profit organizations that provide services to certain at-risk individuals. A county governing body may apply to participate in the pilot program in a form and manner determined by the State Office of Emergency Management. The State Office of Emergency Management will select 10 counties in the State to participate in the pilot program.

Each participating county's office of emergency management will be required to coordinate with municipal emergency management coordinators in municipalities with a documented homeless population of at least 10 people in developing consistent Code Red alert plans throughout the county that provide for communication and outreach, cooling centers, and transportation during implementation of a Code Red alert plan. This plan may be carried out by designated volunteer organizations, which are to receive cooperation and logistical support from the municipal coordinator but are to operate autonomously. The bill requires each municipality, social service agency, and non-profit organization to report the location of its cooling centers to the Department of Environmental Protection to be included in the Heat Hub NJ's Chill Out NJ public resource.

The bill requires a county emergency management coordinator to declare the Code Red alert when the National Weather Service declares a heat advisory for that county's region or reports an Air Quality Index of 151 or higher.

The bill requires the State Office of Emergency Management to submit a report to the Governor and Legislature on the pilot program and to recommend whether or not to make the program permanent.

The bill provides “Good Samaritan” protection from civil liability to the State and local governments and their employees, as well as to volunteer organizations and their members who, during implementation of a Code Red alert plan, provide emergency cooling centers to at-risk individuals.

The bill appropriates from the General Fund to the State Office of Emergency Management the sum of \$5,000,000 to implement the provisions of the bill. The office will issue a grant in the amount of \$500,000 to the governing body of each county selected to participate in the pilot program to effectuate the provisions of the bill.

COMMITTEE AMENDMENTS:

The committee amended the bill to:

- revise the requirements of the pilot program, which is to be established in the State Office of Emergency Management (office), instead of each county governing body, and under which counties will apply to participate;
- requires the office to select 10 counties in the State to participate in the pilot program;
- specify the requirements of the Code Red alert plan;
- require each municipality, social service agency, and non-profit organization to report the location of all cooling centers in the municipality to the Department of Environmental Protection from inclusion in the database of cooling centers across the State;
- revise the requirements for when a coordinator should declare a Code Red alert;
- provide that when a Code Red alert is declared, the county coordinator of a participating county, or the coordinator’s designee, may coordinate with NJ 211;
- specify that a county, municipality, social service agency, or non-profit organization may operate cooling centers and other heat related mitigation strategies when a Code Red alert is not required by the bill;
- in lieu of allowing county governing bodies to submit a reimbursement request for the costs of implementing the pilot program, provide an appropriation of \$5 million to the office to implement the provisions of the bill;
- require the office to issue a \$500,000 grant to the governing body of each county selected to participate in the pilot program; and
- make technical changes to correct formatting.