Sponsored by:
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SYNOPSIS
Requires county emergency management coordinators to establish Code Blue Program to shelter homeless during severe weather events.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT
Introduced Pending Technical Review by Legislative Counsel.
AN ACT concerning emergency shelters for at-risk individuals during severe weather events and supplementing chapter 9 of Appendix A.

BE IT ENACTED by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:

1. a. As used in this act, “At-risk individual” means an individual living outside, or in a building not meant for human habitation or which the person has no legal right to occupy.

“Coordinator” means the county emergency management coordinator appointed pursuant to section 12 of P.L.1953, c.438 (C.App.A:9-42.1).

“Severe weather event” means, but is not limited to, a snow emergency, excessive cold or heat, storms or other weather-related conditions, which may include temperatures equal to or below 40 degrees Fahrenheit.

b. Each coordinator shall establish a Code Blue Program for at-risk individuals who require shelter during a severe weather event. The purpose of the Code Blue Program shall be to identify at-risk individuals prior to, or during, a severe weather event and assist those individuals in voluntarily finding appropriate shelter.

c. A coordinator shall declare a code blue alert within 24 hours prior to the onset of a severe weather event. The code blue alert shall continue until 8 a.m. the following day after the declaration, unless the severe weather event worsens or continues for a prolonged period of time. Upon the declaration of a code blue alert, the coordinator shall inform each municipal law enforcement agency in that county as well as the county police department, as appropriate, of the need to identify and locate at-risk individuals who may be in need of shelter during a severe weather event. Following the code blue alert, each municipal law enforcement agency and county police department shall conduct patrols to locate at-risk individuals, and transport or arrange for the transportation of those individuals to an appropriate shelter. In conducting patrols, law enforcement officers shall give specific attention to areas where at-risk individuals may congregate.

d. Following the declaration of a code blue alert, the coordinator shall inform each county and municipal welfare agency responsible for placing homeless families and persons in shelters of the need to increase bed capacity within each shelter. During a code blue alert, each county shall establish, in addition to existing shelters for the homeless, emergency shelters which have been authorized by a public officer of a municipality or the Department of Community Affairs to provide shelter, or food and shelter, to a specified number of individuals because of a severe weather event.
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e. Each county office of emergency management shall conduct a public awareness campaign, utilizing the Internet and any other available resources, to inform the general public of the code blue program and the importance of identifying at-risk individuals prior to a severe weather event so that appropriate preparations may be made to ensure that these individuals receive shelter.

2. This act shall take effect on the first day of the fourth month following enactment.

STATEMENT

This bill requires county emergency management coordinators to establish a Code Blue Program for at-risk individuals who require shelter during a severe weather event. The purpose of the Code Blue Program is to identify at-risk individuals prior to, or during, a severe weather event and assist those individuals in voluntarily finding appropriate shelter.

The bill defines at-risk individual as an individual living outside, or in a building not meant for human habitation or which the person has no legal right to occupy. The phrase “severe weather event” is defined to include a snow emergency, excessive cold or heat, storms or other weather-related conditions, which may include temperatures equal to or below 40 degrees Fahrenheit.

Under the Code Blue Program, county emergency management coordinators are required to declare a code blue alert within 24 hours prior to the onset of a severe weather event. Upon the declaration of a code blue alert, the county emergency management coordinator is to inform each municipal law enforcement agency in that county as well as the county police department, if appropriate, of the need to identify and locate at-risk individuals who may be in need of shelter. Municipal law enforcement agencies and county police departments would then conduct patrols to locate at-risk individuals, and transport or arrange for the transportation of those individuals to an appropriate shelter.

The bill also requires county emergency management coordinators to inform each county and municipal welfare agency responsible for placing homeless families and persons in shelters of the need to increase the shelter bed capacity. The bill further requires counties to establish emergency shelters for the homeless, which have been authorized by a public officer of the municipality or the Department of Community Affairs, to provide shelter, or food and shelter, to a specified number of individuals in excess of its licensed capacity because of emergency conditions.

Finally, the bill requires each county office of emergency management to conduct a public awareness campaign, utilizing the Internet and any other available resources, to inform the general
public of the code blue program and the importance of identifying at-risk individuals prior to a severe weather event so that appropriate shelter preparations may be made.