

# TESTIMONY

## Testimony before Assembly Appropriations Committee January 8, 2026

**Introduction and Thanks:** My name is Taysha Milagros Clark-Reid, and I am the Public Policy Director for Volunteers of America-Northern New Jersey (VOA-NNJ). I would like to thank Chair Swain, Vice Chair Reynolds-Jackson, and members of the Assembly Appropriations Committee for the opportunity to submit testimony.

**About Us:** Volunteers of America-Northern New Jersey (VOA-NNJ) provides innovative housing, health, and wealth-building services to youth and adults who are experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness. Through programs in Middlesex, Union, Hudson, Bergen, and Passaic Counties, we help more than 400 people achieve housing stability each year, with a focus on behavioral health services for adults and independent living programs for youth working toward self-sufficiency. VOA-NNJ is a division of Volunteers of America-Greater New York—an anti-poverty organization working to end homelessness in the region.

### **Addressing Heat-Related Illnesses for vulnerable populations:**

**S2346/A2258** is critical legislation that would require the establishment of cooling centers for individuals experiencing homelessness and other at-risk populations during periods of extreme heat and poor air quality. It exemplifies the kind of sensible policy needed to safeguard our most vulnerable communities. As a result of climate change, extreme heat events are expected to grow in both frequency and severity. New Jersey State Health Assessment data shows that the state is warming faster than the global average, with 2024 ranking as the second warmest year on record and 15 of the 20 hottest years occurring since 2000<sup>1</sup>. This legislative body has already taken meaningful action to protect vulnerable populations, including through the passage of Code Blue. We now need its counterpart, Code Red, to ensure that our response protects lives while reflecting the environmental realities we face today.

According to Point-in-Time (PIT) data, 1,995 individuals experienced unsheltered homelessness in our state in 2025, representing a 15 percent increase from 2024<sup>2</sup>. As our already strained social safety net faces mounting challenges, this number is likely to

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www-doh.nj.gov/doh-shad/indicator/summary/HeatHosp.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://monarchhousing.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/PIT-Report-2025-New-Jersey.pdf>



**Volunteers  
of America**<sup>®</sup>  
NORTHERN NEW JERSEY

A Division of Volunteers of America-Greater NY

continue rising, along with the risk of heat- and air-quality–related illnesses and fatalities. These outcomes are entirely preventable, which makes S2346/A2258 not only sensible, but a policy choice with the potential to save lives.

At VOA-NNJ, our staff work directly with individuals experiencing homelessness, many of whom have diagnosed mental health conditions and are compliant with their prescribed psychiatric medications. Many commonly prescribed psychiatric medications interfere with the body’s ability to regulate temperature by impairing sweating, thirst perception, and thermoregulation, thereby increasing the risk of hyperthermia, dehydration, and other heat-related illnesses. Consequently, our clients are particularly susceptible to the very harms that S2346/A2258 is designed to prevent.

**Closing:** VOA-NNJ supports the timely passage of **S2346/A2258**, which will help prevent avoidable medical emergencies and fatalities by providing access to life-saving shelter. We are grateful for the opportunity to testify and look forward to working with this body to increase supports for at-risk populations. Should you have any questions, I can be reached at [treid@voa-gny.org](mailto:treid@voa-gny.org).

Respectfully submitted by:

Taysha Milagros Clark-Reid  
Public Policy Director  
Volunteers of America-Northern New Jersey