

CHAPTER 297

AN ACT concerning Code Red alert plans to shelter at-risk individuals during certain pilot period, and making an appropriation.

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

1. As used in P.L.2025, c.297:

"At-risk individual" means an individual living outdoors, on the streets, in the parks, or in poorly insulated settings, and who is at risk for weather-related exposure and possible death.

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

"County governing body" means the board of county commissioners, or in the case of those counties organized pursuant to the provisions of the "Optional County Charter Law," P.L.1972, c.154 (C.40:41A-1 et seq.), the board of county commissioners and the county executive, the county supervisor, or the county manager, as appropriate.

"Department" means the Department of Community Affairs.

"Pilot program" means the three-year pilot program established pursuant to section 2 of P.L.2025, c.297.

2. a. There shall be established a three-year pilot program for issuing Code Red alerts by counties participating in the pilot program.

b. A county governing body, through its office of emergency management or other appropriate office, agency, or department, may participate in the pilot program by establishing and implementing a plan consistent with the provisions of this act for issuing a Code Red alert to municipalities, social service agencies, and non-profit organizations that provide services to at-risk individuals and are located within the county's borders.

c. A county may apply to the Department of Community Affairs in a form and manner determined by the department for eligible funds pursuant to subsection d. of this section.

d. The five counties in the State with the highest documented homeless population, as noted in the most recent Annual Point in Time Count, shall be eligible to participate in the pilot program. If one or more eligible counties decline participation in the pilot program, then one or more other counties shall be eligible to participate, with priority going to each county with the next-highest documented homeless population. The governing body of any county eligible to participate in the pilot program, and that does not decline participation, shall establish and implement a plan consistent with this section as a condition of receipt of a \$500,000 grant. The department may, in its discretion, distribute such funds prior to the submission and implementation of a plan.

e. Each participating county's office of emergency management, or appropriate office, agency, or department, in consultation with the Department of Community Affairs, shall coordinate with municipal emergency management coordinators in municipalities with a documented homeless population of at least 10 sheltered or unsheltered people, as noted in the most recent Annual Point In Time Count, in developing consistent Code Red alert plans throughout the county that provide for communication and outreach, emergency cooling centers, and transportation during implementation of a Code Red alert plan. This plan may be carried out by designated volunteer organizations. Volunteer-organized Code Red efforts shall receive cooperation and logistical support from the coordinator, but shall operate autonomously, provided that the volunteer organizations operate in response to an alert and pursuant to the Code Red alert plan. The Code Red alert plan, as overseen by the governing body of the county, shall include: (1) the operation of cooling centers; (2) the necessary

response to an alert by a municipality, social service agency, or non-profit organization; (3) a plan to coordinate with local groups within the county to implement the Code Red alert plan; (4) an outreach plan to vulnerable populations; (5) the availability of other heat- and air quality-related mitigation strategies; (6) an implementation plan; and (7) a plan to coordinate any necessary transportation to cooling centers. Each municipality, social service agency, and non-profit organization shall report the location of cooling centers to the Department of Environmental Protection for inclusion in the Heat Hub NJ public resource.

Each county and municipality shall be responsible for, but not limited to, making information on the Code Red alert plan available to the public on each county and municipality Internet website.

f. The provisions of section 20 of P.L.1942, c.251 (C.App.A:9-52) shall be applicable, but not be limited, to establishing or developing a Code Red alert plan pursuant to P.L.2025, c.297, or implementing, carrying out, or providing services under a Code Red alert plan pursuant to the provisions of P.L.2025, c.297.

3. a. A coordinator of a county participating in the pilot program shall declare a Code Red alert during the time of the three-year pilot program when the National Weather Service office for that county's region declares a heat advisory for the area or reports an Air Quality Index of 151 or higher. This section shall not be understood to prohibit a county, municipality, social service agency, or non-profit organization from operating a cooling center or other heat related mitigation strategy when a Code Red alert is not required by this section.

b. Prior to declaring a Code Red alert pursuant to subsection a. of this section, the county coordinator of a participating county, or the coordinator's designee, shall monitor the municipality in the participating county with the highest documented homeless population and shall use the weather forecast and advisory produced by the National Weather Service for that municipality as an indicator for the declaration of a Code Red alert in the county.

c. When a Code Red alert is declared pursuant to subsection a. of this section, the county coordinator of a participating county, or the coordinator's designee, may coordinate with NJ 211, which may include identifying cooling center locations and transportation options in the county.

4. There is appropriated from the General Fund to the Department of Community Affairs the sum of \$2,500,000 to implement the provisions of subsection d. of section 2 of P.L.2025, c.297.

5. This act shall take effect immediately and shall expire three years thereafter.

Approved January 20, 2026.