



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor and Council Members

THROUGH: Stephanie Hayden-Howard, LMSW, Assistant City Manager SHH

FROM: David Gray, Homeless Strategy Officer DG

DATE: November 21, 2024

SUBJECT: Changes to Cold Weather Shelter Operations

The City of Austin Homeless Strategy Office (HSO), with contracted support from the Austin Area Urban League (AAUL), is committed to providing safe Cold Weather Shelters to individuals experiencing homelessness during extreme cold weather. Based on feedback from stakeholders, HSO and AAUL are implementing several changes to Cold Weather Shelter operations this winter. HSO believes these changes will enhance accessibility and support for those in need.

Simplified Activation Threshold

HSO will activate Cold Weather Shelters when forecasted overnight temperatures at Camp Mabry are expected to reach 35 degrees or below. This change eliminates the previous multi-tiered activation system, which required temperatures at Camp Mabry to be 32 degrees or colder overnight, 35 degrees with rain, or 35 degrees with wind chill of 32 or colder. The new activation threshold simplifies the process for ease of understanding and allows for more frequent activations during cold weather cycles.

Earlier Notification of Activations

HSO can activate Cold Weather Shelters up to one day in advance of an event. This changes the previous procedure that only allowed same-day activations. This adjustment gives the City and stakeholders more time to notify community members about Cold Weather Shelters, and it gives AAUL and City staff more time to prepare for clients. A decision to activate Cold Weather Shelters is final and will not be canceled, even if the weather forecast improves to above threshold during the extended notification period.

After-Hours Embarkation Service

Normal registration for shelter will continue to occur between 6 and 8p.m. at One Texas Center (OTC), 505 Barton Springs Road, which acts as the central embarkation point. This year, HSO and AAUL will offer an After-Hours Embarkation Service to ensure that individuals seeking shelter after normal registration hours can access the Cold Weather Shelter facilities. This service is critical for those in need of shelter after embarkation closes.

Enhanced Meal Service

HSO and AAUL are prepared to enhance the meal quality for Cold Weather Shelter clients, ensuring nutritious and satisfying food during their stay. Clients will receive dinners at Cold Weather Shelters and breakfast or snacks the morning following activation. HSO and AAUL will make every effort to accommodate various dietary preferences.

Families with Children

During the embarkation period, families with children and unaccompanied minors seeking shelter will be provided with vouchers for hotel accommodations. This ensures they have a safe, comfortable place to stay during the Cold Weather Shelter activation. Each voucher will cover the cost of lodging for a designated period, with the option for extensions based on availability and need.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at David.Gray@austintexas.gov or 512-974-7846 if you have any questions.

cc: T.C. Broadnax, City Manager
CMO Executive Team