



Governor Murphy Signs Legislation Allowing Mental Health Care Providers to Play a Crucial Role within Homeless Shelters

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TRENTON – As part of ongoing efforts to address the mental health needs of New Jersey residents, Governor Phil Murphy today signed a bill (A-4755) to permit mental and behavioral health care providers to operate within emergency shelters that serve people experiencing homelessness.

"The stress individuals often face when experiencing homelessness can unfortunately lead to or exacerbate existing mental health challenges," said Governor Murphy. "This law reflects my Administration's belief that every New Jerseyan deserves access to the mental health care they need and builds upon our work to expand these services throughout our state. Allowing mental and behavioral health care providers to offer critical services within shelters will provide much-needed care directly to more New Jerseyans."

"People experiencing homelessness can face multiple barriers to safe and stable housing, including health challenges. This legislation makes it easier for people in emergency shelters to receive care, if they so choose, from behavioral and mental health care providers because it brings the care right to them," said Lt. Governor Sheila Oliver, who serves as **Commissioner of the Department of Community Affairs**. "We're hopeful that facilitating access to health care can improve the health of people experiencing homelessness and help them obtain long-term housing."

"Mental illness and housing insecurity can often go hand-in-hand," said **Human Services Commissioner Sarah Adelman**. "I thank the Governor for signing this legislation and commend the bill sponsors. Making behavioral health care accessible for unhoused individuals will make a meaningful difference in their lives and in our communities - and will help build better futures."

Under the new law, licensed psychiatrists, psychologists, clinical social workers, marriage/family therapists, substance use disorder treatment providers and other practitioners otherwise authorized to provide mental or behavioral health care are allowed to provide services to individuals in these settings on a part-time or full-time basis, in addition to emergency circumstances.

Behavioral health care services in emergency shelters would not be mandatory, but, if made available, must be made available to any resident in the shelter in need of these services. The services must also be provided at a location within the shelter that offers privacy for the residents receiving this care.

Sponsors of the bill include Senator Renee Burgess and Assemblywoman Yvonne Lopez, as well as Senate President Nicholas Scutari and Assembly members Bill Moen and Shanique Speight.

"Greater access to mental and behavioral healthcare programs for residents with disabilities, mental health concerns, or substance use disorders will help to address underlying issues that contribute to homelessness," said **Assemblywoman Lopez**. "Enabling homeless shelters to provide these services will allow us to meet the pressing needs of our residents. This measure aims to promote housing stability for New Jersey residents with coordinated steps to bridge the gaps in critical healthcare services."

"The byproducts of homelessness affect every aspect of a person's life, including their mental and emotional health. A greater emphasis needs to be placed on the provision of behavioral health services to homeless persons in order to create and maintain permanent solutions," said **Senator Burgess**. "This law is a crucial first step to opening the door for service providers to work within shelters; but, it is even more critical because the law provides homeless persons with the choice and access to efficient and holistic care."

"This legislation is an important step in the right direction to provide the wraparound services people experiencing homelessness throughout our state so desperately need," said **Connie Mercer, CEO of NJ Coalition to End Homelessness**. "Addressing the mental health needs of individuals in emergency shelters will ultimately give them a greater opportunity to thrive and become more independent members of society. We thank Assemblywoman Lopez, Governor Murphy, Senator Burgess and the other legislative sponsors for recognizing the importance of these services and working to help vulnerable New Jersey residents."

"We applaud the passage and signing of A-4755 which allows mental health providers to offer services within a shelter setting," said **Taisa Kelly, CEO of Monarch Housing Associates**. "If we as a state are truly committed to ending homelessness, as I believe we are, it is important we eliminate barriers people face trying to access the supports that they need. Whether we are talking about accessing shelter, mental health services, or a stable home, this legislation moves us closer to our efforts to create opportunity for all and end homelessness in New Jersey. We look forward to continued efforts to support our neighbors in recovery and stability as they work to secure a permanent place to call home."

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