

STAFF REPORT REGULAR MEETING

AGENDA DATE: June 20, 2023

DEPARTMENT: Vice Mayor

TITLE:

Resolution No. 20-2023 – Requesting Modifications to the Palm Beach County Cold Weather Shelter Policy brought forward by Vice Mayor McVoy

SUMMARY:

This Resolution would establish the City of Lake Worth Beach's support for science-based protection of residents from the dangers of hypothermia during periods of cold weather. It requests two modifications to existing Palm Beach County policy. The first modification would bring the temperature criteria for opening in line with Broward and Miami-Dade Counties and in line with best available science. The second modification would reduce the risk of hypothermia by requesting 24-hr advance notice of opening to increase the likelihood that at risk individuals can in fact reach the shelters in time.

BACKGROUND AND JUSTIFICATION:

Hypothermia is a dangerous condition that occurs when an individual's body temperature drops only a few degrees below the homeostasis temperature of 98°F. Lethal hypothermia can occur even at air temperatures as high as 60 or 70°F (Brody 2007). Most cases occur during air temperatures of 30-50°F (Brody 2007). For the 1979-2004 period, hypothermia caused an average of about 350 deaths per year in the U.S. (Spencer 2015). While cases are better known in colder climates, deaths due to hypothermia have occurred in Florida, including in Jacksonville, Tampa, Miami and Palm Beach County (Spencer 2015, Osbourne 2022).

Cold weather shelters open in Miami-Dade and Broward Counties when air temperatures are expected to fall below 50°F. Shelter openings are announced 24 hours in advance. In contrast, the Palm Beach County policy is to open only when temperatures are expected to fall below 40°F, and opening decisions are announced at 11 AM on the day of opening. Both policies increase the risk of hypothermia. Requests have been made to alter these policies, but it appears more formal requests are needed, as included in this resolution. In addition to improving health outcomes and reducing hospitalization costs, the policy improvements requested in this Resolution would also reduce the likelihood of individuals intentionally breaking the law so as to be incarcerated in a heated cell.

References:

Brody, J. 2007. New York Times, Health. Jan 9, 2007.

Osbourne, M. 2022. Autopsy Finding. Office of the District Medical Examiner, Palm Beach County.

Spencer, J. 2015. The Geography of hypothermia in the United States: An analysis of mortality, morbidity, thresholds, and messaging. Ph.D. Diss. Kent State Univ.

MOTION:

Move to approve/disapprove Resolution No. 20-2023 – Requesting Modifications to the Palm Beach County Cold Weather Shelter Policy

ATTACHMENT(S):

Resolution 20-2023