



## WARMING STATION OPENING POLICY

*Updated November 7, 2025*

### Purpose

To provide temporary relief and shelter for individuals in Anniston, Alabama, during extreme cold weather conditions, protecting those at risk of cold-related health issues, particularly vulnerable populations. This policy outlines the criteria for opening, operating, and closing a warming station based on weather forecasts from the National Weather Service (NWS).

### Scope

This policy applies to *Martha's Hope: The Martha Vandervoort Center to End Homelessness*, which serves as the official warming station for the City of Anniston.

### Definitions

- **Warming Station:** A temporary shelter providing warmth, basic necessities, and safety during periods of extreme cold.
- **Vulnerable Populations:** Individuals at higher risk of cold-related illnesses, including the homeless, older adults, and individuals without reliable heating.
- **Extreme Cold:** Weather conditions with temperatures or wind chills that pose a risk of hypothermia or frostbite.

### Activation Criteria

The warming station will open under the following conditions, based on forecasts from the National Weather Service (NWS):

1. Temperature Thresholds
  - a. Nighttime temperatures are forecast to drop to 32°F (0°C) or below for two or more consecutive hours.
  - b. Daytime temperatures are forecast to remain at or below 32°F (2.2°C) when accompanied by precipitation (freezing rain, sleet, or snow).
2. Wind Chill Factor
  - a. Wind chill values making it feel like 32°F (0°C) or lower, even if the actual temperature is higher.
3. Severe Weather Events

- a. Snowstorms, freezing rain, or any severe winter weather event that increases the risk of cold-related injuries or exposure.
4. Prolonged Cold Events
  - a. Extended periods of two or more days where daytime high temperatures remain below 32°F (0°C).

### **Decision & Announcement Timeline**

- **9:00 AM – Forecast Check:** United Way staff will review the National Weather Service forecast for the upcoming evening in Anniston to determine whether activation criteria are met.
- **12:00 PM – Public Announcement:** If activation criteria are met, United Way will announce opening the same day for that evening through social media and partner channels.
- **5:00 PM – Doors Open:** When activated, the warming station opens to guests at 5:00 PM.

### **Warming Station Location**

The warming station will be hosted at *Martha's Hope: The Martha Vandervoort Center to End Homelessness*, 1431 Gurnee Avenue, Anniston, Alabama 36201, ensuring accessibility for individuals experiencing homelessness and other vulnerable members of the community.

### **Operating Hours & Checkout**

- When activated, the warming station opens at 5:00 PM and typically operates overnight until 9:00 AM.
- Checkout for all guests is at 9:00 AM the following morning.
- In severe or prolonged cold weather conditions, the station may remain open during the daytime at the discretion of leadership.

### **Procedures for Activation**

- **Weather Monitoring:** The National Weather Service (NWS) will be the official source for monitoring weather forecasts. Martha's Hope staff check the NWS forecast each morning at 9:00 AM to determine activation.
- **Internal and Public Notification:**
  - Internal: The Program Director will notify staff, volunteers, and security upon activation.
  - Public: By 12:00 PM, announcements will be posted on social media and shared with partner agencies for broad distribution.

- **Coordination with Local Agencies:** United Way will coordinate with emergency management services, local law enforcement, and community agencies for transportation and additional support for individuals in need.
- **Resources Provided:** The station will offer blankets, warm drinks, and food.

### **Staffing**

Facility Monitors and volunteers will be present during the station's operating hours. Staff will receive training in de-escalation techniques, mental health first aid, and basic first aid.

### **Health and Safety**

- **Amnesty Box:** Guests will be required to dispose of dangerous items in the amnesty box at the entrance.
- **Security Screening:** All guests entering the warming station will be required to undergo security screening using metal detectors and contents searches of personal belongings to ensure the safety of all individuals.

### **Eligibility & Trespass Policy**

- Individuals formerly trespassed from 1431 Gurnee Avenue are ineligible for warming station services.
- For the purpose of this policy, trespassed individuals are those who have demonstrated or threatened violent behavior against a staff member or fellow guest.
- Due to state restrictions under the Alabama Sex Offender Registration and Community Notification Act (ASORCNA), and this facility's proximity to a licensed childcare facility, registered adult sex offenders are ineligible for warming station services. See Ala. Code § 15-20A-11 (residence restrictions within 2,000 feet of a school or childcare facility) and § 15-20A-17 (loitering/presence restrictions related to schools and childcare facilities).

### **Guest Expectations**

- **Respect for Others:** All guests must treat each other with respect and dignity, regardless of background, beliefs, or personal circumstances. Harassment, intimidation, violence, or any form of discrimination will not be tolerated.
- **No Drugs or Alcohol:** The use or possession of drugs or alcohol on the premises is strictly prohibited. Any violation will result in disciplinary action. An Amnesty Box is provided for disposal of any drug paraphernalia or alcohol.
- **No Re-Entry:** To prevent the exchange of drugs and drug paraphernalia after check-in, guests may not exit and re-enter the facility until checkout. Exceptions may be made only for medical or safety emergencies at staff discretion.

- **No Weapons:** Weapons of any kind are not allowed on the premises. An Amnesty Box is provided for disposal of any weapons.
- **Quiet Hours:** Quiet hours are from 9:00 PM to 7:00 AM. During this time, guests must keep noise to a minimum to ensure a peaceful, restful environment for everyone.
- **Curfew:** Guests must be inside the facility by 5:00 PM unless prior approval is given by staff.
- **Cleanliness:** Guests are expected to maintain a clean and sanitary living space, including personal areas and shared facilities such as bathrooms.
- **Cooperation with Staff:** Guests must cooperate with staff members and follow their instructions at all times.
- **Personal Belongings:** Guests are responsible for their own belongings. Beds are equipped with lockable storage. The facility is not responsible for lost, stolen, or damaged items.
- **Emergencies or Medical Needs:** Guests must promptly notify staff of any emergencies or medical needs.
- **Pets:** At this time, we are unable to accommodate pets other than service animals accompanied by the appropriate documentation.

Any violation of this agreement may result in disciplinary action or termination of the guest's stay and/or legal action.

### **Closing Procedures**

The warming station will close when:

- Daytime high temperatures rise above 32°F (2.2°C) and overnight lows are forecast to remain above 32°F (0°C) for at least the next 24 hours.
- Severe weather conditions have ended, and the forecast shows no further risk of extreme cold.

Notifications: Staff, volunteers, and the public will be notified as soon as feasible of the plan to close, typically through the same channels used for activation.

### **Review and Update**

This policy will be reviewed annually before the cold-weather season to ensure it aligns with best practices, local needs, and changes in weather patterns.