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Lawmakers want accurate homeless count, possibly tent cities

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South Carolina will study the possibility of state-purchased tent cities for the homeless if the House of Representatives next week approves a proposed resolution.

Rep. Wendell Gilliard, D-Charleston, and 10 other lawmakers have introduced the resolution, which is aimed at discovering how many people are homeless in each of the Palmetto State's counties, and the capacity of homeless shelters. If there is a shortage, the resolution would require a state study to determine the feasibility of buying tents to be used as temporary shelter.

Gilliard fears the homeless problem could grow worse as the recession continues. In downtown Charleston, for example, one shelter estimates that there are nearly 3,000 homeless people living on the peninsula, but the only two shelters can house just 176 people.

Among about 150 people sleeping at Crisis Ministries on Meeting Street are a steel worker laid off from his job in February. Star Gospel Mission, also on Meeting Street, has had professionals with advanced degrees pass through its doors.

Advocates for the homeless say a study would require officials to reach out to the homeless in their encampments for a true count.

Read more in Saturday's editions of The Post and Courier.