



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Winter Shelter to Open Every Night for Individuals Experiencing Homelessness *Shelter Open November 15, 2016 thru March 15, 2017, 7 p.m. to 7 a.m.*

PITTSBURGH (November 10, 2016) – The [Allegheny County Department of Human Services](#) and [Pittsburgh Mercy's Operation Safety Net](#)® are pleased to announce that for the first time, the Winter Shelter for individuals who are experiencing homelessness, formerly known as the Severe Weather Emergency Shelter, will open every night regardless of the weather. When the Winter Shelter opens at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, November 15, 2016, it will remain open from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. every night through March 15, 2017. In previous years, the shelter opened only on nights that were 25°F or below, when the windchill factor was below 15°F, or when there was a 50 percent or greater chance of freezing precipitation.

The men's Winter Shelter will again be located at the [Smithfield United Church of Christ](#) at 620 Smithfield Street, Downtown. The women's Winter Shelter will be in a different location in Uptown Pittsburgh this year. The location of the women's shelter is made known only to persons served and health and human service providers.

"Between November 15, 2015 and March 15, 2016, the Winter Shelter opened 46 nights, 27 fewer nights than the winter of 2014-2015, the second coldest winter on record for Southwestern Pennsylvania," stated [Brian Matous](#), Winter Shelter team leader for Pittsburgh Mercy's Operation Safety Net, an innovative, award-winning Pittsburgh Mercy outreach program to people who are experiencing homelessness. "Last winter, we assisted 499 individuals at the shelter – 424 men and 75 women."

Matous said organizers changed the name from Severe Weather Emergency Shelter to Winter Shelter because the program now operates not only during periods of severe winter weather, but also the entire winter season.

Individuals who present to the Winter Shelter are usually those who are often in the most need of services, according to Matous. "Many of the individuals we serve at the shelter have multiple, complex needs." Matous said shelter participants receive overnight accommodations, a hot meal coordinated by [Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank](#) member agencies, a shower, winter clothing, access to health and human services, as well as assistance with applications to housing and other vital benefit programs.

"By opening every night, we believe the Winter Shelter will allow us and other providers with whom we partner to offer improved continuity of care to an even greater number of individuals rather than fragmented, episodic care around an ever-changing weather forecast," stated [Sharon Sumansky](#),

homeless services director, Pittsburgh Mercy's Operation Safety Net. "We'll be able to spend more time empowering individuals and working alongside them to develop care plans that focus on housing and other essential supports."

Additionally, representatives from the [Allegheny Link](#), a free service of the Allegheny County Department of Human Services, will be available at the shelter several nights each week to offer information, referrals, counseling, application assistance, service coordination, and follow-up services to offer Allegheny County residents who have a disability, are over the age of 60 years (with or without a disability), or are experiencing or at risk for homelessness.

Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank is seeking member agencies to donate time, food, and/or resources to the Winter Shelter. Volunteers are needed to prepare hearty meals for up to 150 individuals. Meals must be hot and must consist of a starch, a vegetable, and a protein. Member agencies who volunteer to prepare meals for the Winter Shelter may order food from the Food Bank's inventory at no cost. Member agencies who are interested in volunteering to prepare meals are asked to contact their agency network coordinator for additional details and to schedule dates that are convenient to their organization.

Organizations, corporations, and individuals who do not have the capacity to prepare meals are encouraged to consider donating money toward the cost – or to cover the cost – of purchasing a balanced, hot meal for 150 individuals. Monetary donations may be made via Pittsburgh Mercy's website, www.pittsburghmercy.org; mailed to Pittsburgh Mercy, Development Office, 101 Bradford Rd., Wexford, PA 15090; or by contacting [Connie Murray](#), director of Development at Pittsburgh Mercy, at CMurray@pittsburghmercy.org or 724-934-3537. Do not mail cash. Please designate the gift for the Winter Shelter.

In-kind donations of new hats, scarves, gloves, socks, boots, winter coats, toiletries, and hygiene items for distribution to participants at the Winter Shelter are also greatly appreciated. For logistical reasons, the Winter Shelter accepts donations only by appointment. To schedule an appointment, please email operationsafetynet@pittsburghmercy.org or call 412-232-5739. Please place "Winter Shelter In-Kind Donation" in the subject heading line. Messages are returned within 24-48 business hours.

Funding for the Winter Shelter is made possible by the Allegheny County Department of Human Services, Pittsburgh Mercy's Operation Safety Net, an Allegheny County Economic Development Emergency Solutions Grant, the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Food and Shelter Program, and Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield.

Winter Shelter organizers also acknowledge the contributions of Smithfield United Church of Christ, the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank, Catholic Men's Fellowship, Shepherd's Heart Fellowship, and countless volunteers, providers, funders, and donors without whose collaboration and support the shelter would not be possible.

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About Allegheny County Department of Human Services

[Allegheny County Department of Human Services](#) is responsible for providing and administering publicly-funded human services to Allegheny County residents. DHS is dedicated to meeting these human services needs, most particularly for the county's most vulnerable populations, through an extensive range of information exchange, prevention, early intervention, case management, crisis intervention, and after-care services.

About Pittsburgh Mercy's Operation Safety Net®

[Pittsburgh Mercy's Operation Safety Net®](#) is an innovative, award-winning medical and social service outreach program for the unsheltered homeless population in Allegheny County. It strives to address the circumstances which undermine the mental and physical health of persons served by creating avenues for people who are homeless to access the medical and social services necessary to improve quality of life. Since its founding in 1992, Operation Safety Net has reached approximately 10,000 homeless individuals with more than 68,000 visits where they live – in camps along riverbanks, in alleyways, or beneath bridges and highway overpasses – and has successfully helped more than 1,400 individuals who were once homeless to find homes of their own. In doing so, Operation Safety Net not only assists with providing health care and affordable housing, but also offers this vulnerable population

hope, dignity, and a sense of community. [Operation Safety Net](#) is part of Mercy Community Health, [Pittsburgh Mercy](#), and [Trinity Health](#), serving in the tradition of the Sisters of Mercy. To learn more or to make a donation in support of Operation Safety Net's important work in the community, visit www.pittsburghmercy.org.

About Pittsburgh Mercy

[Pittsburgh Mercy](#), a part of [Trinity Health](#) and serving in the tradition of the Sisters of Mercy, is one of the region's largest health and social service nonprofits and also one of its largest employers. Pittsburgh Mercy includes Bethlehem Haven, McAuley Ministries, Mercy Behavioral Health, Mercy Community Health, Mercy Intellectual Disabilities Services, Mercy Parish Nurse and Health Ministry Program, Operation Safety Net®, and Pittsburgh Mercy Family Health Center. Together, these Pittsburgh Mercy programs and 1,700 employees serve more than 33,000 individuals annually at more than 60 locations in Southwestern Pennsylvania. To learn more about Pittsburgh Mercy or to make a donation in support of its important work in the community, visit www.pittsburghmercy.org.

About Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank

[Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank](#), a member of [Feeding America](#), is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1980 that distributes more than 31 million meals annually throughout a network of nearly 400 member agencies across 11 counties in Southwestern Pennsylvania. For more information on hunger in our region or how to get involved, visit www.pittsburghfoodbank.org.

MARC CHERNA, DIRECTOR

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