



COUNTY OF ALLEGHENY

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ALLEGHENY COUNTY AND OPERATION SAFETY NET® PREPARE THE SEVERE WEATHER EMERGENCY SHELTER FOR INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE STREET HOMELESS

PITTSBURGH (November 6, 2014) – The Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) Office of Community Services and Pittsburgh Mercy Health System’s Operation Safety Net® will again operate the Severe Weather Emergency Shelter (SWES) this winter for the safety of people who are street homeless.

Located at the Smithfield United Church of Christ, 620 Smithfield Street, Downtown, the shelter provides temporary, overnight accommodations, professional social services, medical care, and protection from frigid temperatures to people who typically do not use other existing shelter resources during periods of severe winter weather.

The SWES will operate from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m., November 15, 2014 through March 15, 2015, when the temperature drops to 25 degrees Fahrenheit or below, or when dangerous winter weather exists or is predicted by the National Weather Service. As in previous years, additional nights will be added, as needed. Persons served and referring organizations can find out if the SWES is activated on a given evening by calling 412.779.1329. The message is updated by noon each day. This phone line is not staffed; therefore, messages should not be left at this number.

In addition to providing basic health and human services, Operation Safety Net coordinates clinical professionals, case management representatives, and volunteers at the shelter. The case management representatives help individuals who come to the shelter to access needed services, secure benefits, and find permanent housing. In the past five years, Operation Safety Net has successfully connected more than 1,000 of the individuals it serves to housing, several of whom previously received services at the SWES.

During the winter of 2013-2014, one of the coldest on record, the SWES operated 79 nights, an increase of 17 nights from the previous winter (2012-2013). The shelter served an average of 104 people each night. Overall, 870 unduplicated individuals benefited from the shelter's activation, up from 643 individuals the previous winter. The highest census of the 2013-2014 SWES season was recorded on February 11, 2014; 156 individuals were served that night. The low temperature that day was 1 degree Fahrenheit.

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DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES – OFFICE OF COMMUNITY RELATIONS
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Allegheny County and Operation Safety Net prepare the Severe Weather Emergency Shelter **Page 2 of 2**

The SWES is made possible by funding from Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS), the Allegheny County Department of Economic Development, The City of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh Mercy Health System (PMHS) and its Operation Safety Net, the National Emergency Food and Shelter Program, Highmark Blue Cross Blue Shield, and donations from private groups and individuals. Allegheny County Police, Smithfield United Church of Christ, Shepherd's Heart Fellowship, Catholic Men's Fellowship, and the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank are important service partners.

Monetary donations in support of the Severe Weather Emergency Shelter are welcome. Donations may be made online at www.pmhs.org or mailed to Pittsburgh Mercy Health System's Development Office, 101 Bradford Road, Suite 320, Wexford, PA 15090. Please make checks payable to Pittsburgh Mercy Health System and specify that the gift is intended for Operation Safety Net's Severe Weather Emergency Shelter (SWES). To make a donation by telephone, contact [Connie Murray](mailto:CMurray@pmhs.org), executive director, Pittsburgh Mercy Health System Development, at 724.934.3537 or CMurray@pmhs.org.

For more information about the SWES, please contact Stephanie Chiappini, program manager, Operation Safety Net, at 412.246.2980.

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About the 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 Operation Safety Net[®]

[Operation Safety Net[®]](#) is [Pittsburgh Mercy Health System's](#) award-winning, innovative medical and social service outreach program for the unsheltered homeless population in Allegheny County. Operation Safety Net 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 that are necessary for them to improve their 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 1,200 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 Health System, and CHE Trinity Health, serving in the Sisters of Mercy. To learn more about Operation Safety Net or to make a donation in support of its important work in the community, visit www.pmhs.org.

About Pittsburgh Mercy Health System

[Pittsburgh Mercy Health System](#) (PMHS), part of CHE Trinity Health, serving in the tradition of the Sisters of Mercy, is one of the region's largest health and human services nonprofits and also one of its largest employers. PMHS includes A Child's Place at Mercy, 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 PMHS programs and its 1,700 employees serve more than 26,000 individuals annually at 60+ locations in Southwestern Pennsylvania. To learn more about PMHS or to make a donation in support of its important work in the community, visit www.pmhs.org.

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