



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Severe Weather Emergency Shelter Prepared to Again Serve Homeless

PITTSBURGH – This winter, the Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) Office of Community Services and Pittsburgh Mercy's Operation Safety Net® will again operate the Severe Weather Emergency Shelter (SWES) for the safety and well-being of people who are experiencing street homelessness. A men's shelter, located at the Smithfield United Church of Christ, 620 Smithfield Street, Downtown, and a women's shelter, located in Uptown, provide them with temporary overnight accommodations, professional social services, basic medical care, protection from frigid temperatures, and meals. The vulnerable individuals served at the SWES typically do not use other existing community shelter resources during periods of severe winter weather.

The SWES will operate from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. November 15, 2015 through March 15, 2016, when the temperature drops to or below 25 degrees Fahrenheit, or when dangerous winter weather exists or is predicted by the National Weather Service. As in previous years, additional nights will be added, if needed. Persons served and referring organizations can find out if the SWES is open on a given evening by following DHS and Pittsburgh Mercy on social media or by calling 412.779.1329. The pre-recorded phone message will be 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, Pittsburgh Mercy's Operation Safety Net coordinates clinical professionals, volunteers, and care managers to help individuals who come to the shelter access physical and behavioral health services, secure benefits, and find permanent housing. In the past several years, Operation Safety Net has successfully connected more than 1,200 of the individuals it serves to housing, many of whom previously accessed services at the SWES.

February 2015 was the second coldest February on record, according to local meteorologists. The average daily temperature was 18 degrees Fahrenheit, more than 12 degrees below normal. During the winter of 2014-2015, the SWES operated 73 nights, nine fewer nights than the previous winter, and

served 647 unduplicated individuals; seven percent were over age 60. On an average night, the shelter served 90 individuals; 88 percent were men, 12 percent were women.

The Severe Weather Emergency Shelter (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's Operation Safety Net, the National Emergency Food and Shelter Program, as well as monetary donations and volunteers from individuals and corporate, civic, and faith-based organizations. Allegheny County Police, Smithfield United Church of Christ, Shepherd's Heart Fellowship, Catholic Men's Fellowship, and the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank are vital service partners.

Monetary and in-kind donations (goods and services) in support of the SWES are welcome. Monetary donations may be made online at www.pmhs.org or mailed to Pittsburgh Mercy Development, 101 Bradford Road, Suite 320, Wexford, PA 15090. Please make checks payable to Pittsburgh Mercy and specify that the gift is intended for Operation Safety Net's Severe Weather Emergency Shelter (SWES). To make a monetary donation by telephone, contact [Connie Murray](mailto:ConnieMurray@pmhs.org), executive director, Pittsburgh Mercy Development, at 724.934.3537 or email CMurray@pmhs.org. To coordinate in-kind donations or learn more about the SWES, please contact [Operation Safety Net](mailto:OperationSafetyNet@pmhs.org) at 412.232.5739 or email OperationSafetyNet@pmhs.org.

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About the Allegheny County Department of Human Services

[Allegheny County Department of Human Services](http://www.allegheycounty.org) 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®

[Operation Safety Net®](http://www.operation-safety-net.org) is [Pittsburgh Mercy's](http://www.pittsburghmercy.org) 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 that undermine the mental and physical health of people experiencing homelessness and create avenues to access the 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's community health division, and [Trinity Health](http://www.trinityhealth.org), 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. Operation Safety Net founder and medical director Dr. Jim Withers is a Top 10 finalist for "CNN Hero of the Year." Vote for him once a day, every day through November 15, 2015 at www.cnnheroes.com.

About Pittsburgh Mercy

[Pittsburgh Mercy](http://www.pittsburghmercy.org), part of [Trinity Health](http://www.trinityhealth.org) and serving in the tradition of the Sisters of Mercy, is one of the largest health and human services nonprofits and employers in Southwestern Pennsylvania. Pittsburgh Mercy includes 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 programs and 1,700 employees serve more than 33,000 individuals annually at 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.pmhs.org.

MARC CHERNA, DIRECTOR

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