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OOTC Deputation

To whom it may concern,

I am the Director of the Out of the cold program at Yorkminster Park Baptist Church. Our program has been serving marginalized and homeless people for over 20 years. We learned this year that we are now the only Out of the cold service available south of Steeles on Wednesday nights. You can imagine the impact on our services. Since starting our program this year (November 4) each week we have gone above our capacity and once have run out of food.

This is very concerning. I have been a director for three years in this program. Each year, we are at capacity. This equates to 63 mats per night. We also serve people meals who are forced to choose between paying rent and buying food. In addition to providing overnight shelter for guests, we also provide dinner and a breakfast to an additional 40 people.

Out of the colds were initiated as a stop gap measure to provide an interim support system for the city to address the need. It was NEVER MEANT to be a permanent solution. It is shameful that in a country as wealthy as ours that these programs even have to exist.

I have recently been approached to increase our numbers permanently, so that instead of hosting 63 guests each Wednesday, we would host 70 guests. This demonstrates that there is an absolute need. This also demonstrates that the city has not adequately responded to this need. Guidelines from Shelter Support and Housing state that there must be designated spaces between cots. If we increase our numbers we will not be able to meet this standard.

Our program is a busy one. We fill up early and thus we send people to Peter Street to ensure that they get shelter for the night. There are no guarantees that a shelter bed will be found, despite our best efforts. This happens on average ten times per night. This is just from our site. I imagine that other sites experience the same issues.

My question is quite basic. What is the emergency plan from the city to support those who are most vulnerable? If we increase our numbers, what flexibility does that give us during extreme cold alerts? What provisions are to be done on behalf of those who are most at risk of freezing to death? Previously designated extreme weather beds have now been absorbed into the total bed count, thus decreasing the availability of emergency shelter.

It is up to the city to respond to the need. Bottom line: the City needs to provide safe supportive shelter for people who need it. Until the time that supportive stable housing is available, it is up to the City to provide supportive shelter.

Respectfully,



Joyce Rankin RN MN MBA  
Director – Out of the Cold  
Yorkminster Park Baptist Church