



February 13, 2023

Dear Mayor Mowen and Ephrata Borough Council members,

On behalf of the Lancaster County Homelessness Coalition's (LCHC) Steering Committee, please accept this letter as our expressed concern regarding potential zoning ordinance changes that may jeopardize Good Samaritan Service's winter shelter program. We are aware of a proposed change that may prevent Borough churches and other organizations from operating a temporary shelter for people experiencing homelessness, and in turn, reduce much needed services that protect the health and safety of our most vulnerable in Lancaster County.

Winter shelter programs are a critical component of addressing a series of large, complex problems which have been exacerbated by the state of our nation's economy and are hindered by the dire lack of affordable housing throughout the county, state, and country. Winter shelter is essential to protecting the health, safety, and wellbeing of both individuals in need of support and mitigating the impacts of homelessness on the broader community. For individuals, winter shelter can be a life-sustaining service protecting homeless individuals and families from the danger of freezing temperatures and harsh weather conditions. For the community, lack of available shelter at both the municipal and county-level typically leads to several unwanted negative community impacts - this includes congregation in public parks and spaces, difficulty managing resulting litter and waste, and associated negative perceptions and attitudes from residents and visitors.

In many Lancaster County communities, including Ephrata, the winter shelter system has been very successful with minimal issues, largely due to the commitment of faith-based organizations. In collaboration with county-wide network of community partners, churches, synagogues, trained volunteers, and professional staff, the LCHC has worked to create safe and warm environments for our county's most vulnerable citizens. Furthermore, shelter is often a conduit for connecting individuals to much needed housing, social, medical, and mental health services. Good Sam's Winter Shelter Program is a prime example of such a program that provides immediate relief to individuals through emergency shelter, seeks long-term solutions through connections and collaboration with a broader network of partners, and serves their broader community by working to ensure shelters are safe and secure and accessible to those in need of help.

The members of the LCHC Steering Committee urge you to continue your strategic work with LCHC and key community leaders to develop an improving system rather than eliminating winter shelter in the Borough's jurisdiction.

Sincerely,

*Andrea Heberlein, Chair*

*Craig Walt, Vice Chair*

LCHC Steering Committee

CC: Nate Hoffer, Good Samaritan Services