



## OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

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June 9, 2023

Dear friends and colleagues,

This morning, I declared a houselessness and sheltering State of Emergency. In the face of rising homelessness and a failure of state and federal government to act or provide resources, the City of Missoula must act immediately to assist our nonprofit provider community with financial resources, facilities, and technical assistance to provide indoor emergency sheltering.

We're facing an unprecedented humanitarian crisis in Missoula, around Montana, throughout the Northwest, and around the country. An increasing number of people in our cities and towns are living without shelter—in cars, tents, RVs, on the streets, and in our public spaces—because they have nowhere else to go. These are people in our community living in crisis.

Over decades, states and the federal government have abdicated their traditional responsibilities to provide for the basic needs and dignity of residents living on the margins.

Cities around the country are facing this increase in unsheltered people, and cities in the West are most affected. Pandemic pressures on housing prices have been most acute in the West. In 2017, the Montana State Legislature cut mental health case management funding, setting up thousands of people around the state for failure.

Over the course of the pandemic, the federal government provided one-time funds through programs like the American Rescue Plan Act to assist local governments with issues like homelessness and housing scarcity. Missoula utilized these funds to operate innovative and important programs: our emergency winter shelter and the Mobile Support Team, to name a few. These one-time funds are nearly exhausted.

On April 10, 2023, the Emergency Winter Shelter closed for the season, and we simply don't have enough indoor shelter beds to meet our community demand. More than 100 people are on the waiting list for the Temporary Safe Outdoor Space. As a result, our houseless neighbors are camping in parks, on trails and in rights of way. Our Urban Camping Policy Team is working diligently on solutions that ease suffering, balance competing needs, and meet community expectations, but these solutions are Band-Aids on a gaping wound.

The declaration of a State of Emergency allows the City to levy up to two mills to address houselessness and sheltering. Several weeks ago, I directed City staff to draft plans for opening a year-round emergency shelter.

In order to do this, we needed to identify funding sources and ensure an operational plan with Missoula County and our nonprofit partners, primarily the Poverello Center. The annual operation of a year-round shelter is approximately \$2.1 million annually, including security. The City and Missoula County, with

help from the emergency levy, have identified funding for this shelter for one year, and we will have to work on ongoing strategies to maintain sheltering facilities if this houselessness trend continues.

The recent Emergency Winter Shelter facility on Johnson Street is the only option we have in the short term, and that site needs some improvements to meet the needs of the residents and the surrounding neighborhoods. This includes things like additional bathrooms and more private outdoor space with fencing. Our staff are already working with professionals to prepare the building as soon as possible. We're committed to being mindful of the impact this shelter can have on the surrounding neighborhoods to mitigate those impacts as best we can.

The Poverello Center will also need to grow their team to support these operations as the City works to get other operational support in place like security. The Poverello Center board of directors voted this morning to authorize the organization to move forward in collaboration with the City, and we will move as quickly as possible with an anticipated timeline of 90 days.

This emergency declaration sets the stage for important work in the short term, but we need to keep our eye on the long-term goal: we need to build more housing. This includes the need for permanent supportive housing. We also need to support the nonprofit sector in the creation of a permanent second shelter in our community.

In the coming weeks and months, this community conversation about a second permanent shelter will continue. We will need to decide, as a community, where to site this facility, who will operate it, and how it will be funded. And we will, of course, continue our work to implement our housing policy, A Place to Call Home.

Lastly, this issue requires action at all levels of government and through business and nonprofit partners. We'll continue to engage with our local business community, with our service providers partners, and with our state and federal elected officials.

Thanks for all you do to support this important work. I'm grateful for Council's resolve to compassionately invest in our community.

With Gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jordan Hess', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Jordan Hess  
Mayor