Pittsburgh City Council

Proclamation

WHEREAS, **Dr. Jim Withers**, a full time employee of the Pittsburgh Mercy Health System, Assistant Clinical Professor of the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, and faculty of the Mercy Hospital of Pittsburgh, devotes his time and energy week after week to the homeless population of the Pittsburgh region through his program **Operation Safety Net**; and

WHEREAS, born in Hanover, Pennsylvania, Jim was raised making house calls alongside his father, a family practitioner, and after receiving his undergraduate degree at Haverford College, completed his own medical education at the University of Pittsburgh in 1984; and

WHEREAS, **Dr. Withers's** experiences in Central American and in India with Dr. Jack Preger, founder of relief agency Calcutta Rescue, led him to embrace "street medicine," a worldwide movement predicated on providing medical care directly to those living and sleeping on the streets who are unable to reach, or who are actively denied, care through traditional methods; and

WHEREAS, in 1992, under the auspices of the Pittsburgh Mercy Health System, **Dr. Withers** founded **Operation Safety Net**, the first full time, comprehensive medical service of its kind focused on providing care to the unsheltered homeless population of Pittsburgh; and

WHEREAS, **Dr. Withers** and his colleague **Mike Sallows**, a formerly homeless person himself, began taking to the streets of Pittsburgh in 1992, first facing bitterness and fear from Pittsburgh's homeless population—who are typically ostracized by our economic system and whose struggles with illnesses both mental and physical are not adequately addressed by our society; and

WHEREAS, in addition to delivering care out onto the streets, **Operation Safety Net** also runs the Severe Weather Emergency Shelter located at the Smithfield United Church of Christ downtown and fulfills the role of case worker, enrolling patients into the health insurance system and securing housing for them; and

WHEREAS, through **Dr. Withers's** founding of the Street Medicine Institute a decade ago and the annual International Street Medicine Symposium, Pittsburgh's **Operation Safety Net** inspires and collaborates with more than 90 cities across the nation and the world to ensure that street medicine programs become jewels in the crowns of every community; and

WHEREAS, **Dr. Withers's** life's work has been covered by local and national media, including *Pittsburgh Magazine*, NPR, CBS News, *People* Magazine, Dateline, *Reader's Digest*, *The Huffington Post*, Gawker, various medical publications, and recently in the stirring short video "Street Doctor" by local filmmaker Julie Sokolow; and

WHEREAS, for over 20 years, **Dr. Withers** and **Operation Safety Net** have set out onto the streets, providing medical care to over 1,000 homeless people a year, and have over the years helped almost 1,000 people find housing and countless more access insurance and other social programs that are all too frequently denied to them.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that, bucking the trends of the mainstream corporate health care industry, **Dr. Jim Withers** and the staff and volunteers of **Operation Safety Net** strive to embrace the most vulnerable in our society and, here in Pittsburgh, put into practice their mission that nobody should fall through the cracks and that nobody should suffer or die on our streets.

THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Council of the City of Pittsburgh does hereby declare Tuesday, January 21, 2014 to be **Dr. Jim Withers and Operation Safety Net Day** in the City of Pittsburgh.

Sponsored by Councilwoman Natalia Rudiak

Co-Sponsored by Council President Bruce Kraus and Councilmembers Rev. Ricky V. Burgess, Daniel Gilman, Deborah L. Gross, Darlene M. Harris, Theresa Kail-Smith, R. Daniel Lavelle, and Corey O'Connor

Natalia Rudiak
Councilwoman Natalia Rudiak

Attest: Linda Johnson-Wasler
Clerk of Council

Bruce Kraus
President of Council