

OPINION

WRITING LETTERS OR OP-EDS: Letters of up to 200 words may be submitted by filling out the form at static.cincinnati.com/letter/ or emailing letters@enquirer.com. Include name, address, community and daytime phone number. Op-eds are submitted the same way except they should be 500-600 words and also include a one-sentence bio and head shot. Submissions may be edited for space and clarity.

Defunding homeless care is a cost we cannot afford



Your Turn
Laurel Nelson
Guest columnist

Over 10,000 people experience homelessness on any given day just in the Greater Cincinnati area. Those who experience homelessness are at much greater risk of illness and don't have a place to call home and recover.

Now, Medicaid and government funding have diminished. This means that a large swath of the population may go without treatment or care. The mechanism by which medical institutions get paid is faltering, and this harms the overall community and the facilities that provide care.

You may not come across impacted individuals in peril in your everyday life. However, many of them are actively cleaning the places you visit, working in convenience stores, picking produce, preparing food at local restaurants, and providing janitorial services. These are our neighbors, community members and friends. And they are at risk.

This is not a Democratic or Republican

issue – it is a human issue. Hamilton County is a microcosm of the United States. What is happening here is happening everywhere.

What is Center for Respite Care?

To achieve greater health equity and overall stability for our clients, the Center for Respite Care provides adults experiencing homelessness with intensive, individualized medical care and case management designed to address a systemic lack of resources and knowledge. Our clients depend on us for warm beds, meals, resources, guidance and the support needed to develop strong foundations for their newfound independence post-discharge.

The Center for Respite Care saves area hospitals as the cost to care for an individual (at the center) is \$250 per bed night, while hospitalization is estimated to cost between \$3,000 to \$6,000 per bed night. The Center for Respite Care (like many other area organizations) provides cost savings that benefit the community at large. While cost savings is important, many of the facilities in Hamilton County, including the center, work hard to educate and provide pathways to com-

munity supports and care for consumers that can reduce overuse of our increasingly scarce resources.

Who are the clients we serve?

Charles has been in residence at the Center for Respite Care since June 2024. Like many people experiencing homelessness, he confronted life challenges and then became severely ill. This included four cardiovascular stents as well as chemotherapy medication. Without a family to call upon and a place to call home, he relied upon the center.

Charles explains, *"I can say it was truly a godsend – I am so grateful that the Center for Respite Care exists, and the people here have treated me very well. It's nice to have a bed to sleep in where you feel safe."*

He has been cared for by professionals and surrounded by others in situations like his own. Further, when asked about the possibility of social services being diminished, he paused and explained the detriment that would mean to so many.

Once he's completed the program, Charles would like to return to the center to work with other clients and offer guidance. He wants to give back.

Who provides services?

Numerous Hamilton County organizations (like the Center for Respite Care) are potentially at risk as funding and budget cuts loom. While the impact will be immense to many on an individual level, it will likely impact all Hamilton County residents. On March 13, the Freestore Foodbank announced that it stands to lose \$2 million from a federal program that allows it to purchase food from local farmers. Other losses will inevitably come to our region.

We ask you to consider the following:

- Attend meetings convened by elected officials and let them know where you stand.
- Volunteer at local organizations, as funding is tight and staff are diminished.
- Donate in-kind and financially.
- Advocate.

While this is about Charles, it is also about all of us and our collective will. We ask you to stand up, speak out, say something, and do something. Your voice matters.

Laurel Nelson is the CEO of the Center for Respite Care and chair of the steering committee for the Respite Care Providers Network.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Recycle and compost before garbage winds up in your backyard

Everyone needs to recycle and compost, or the result of today's throwaway society may end up in your backyard as the Bond Road landfill. Ours just happened to earn the state of Ohio \$80 million for the dumping of PCBs, which are likely to include phenols, formaldehyde, acrylonitrile, styrene, dioxins, heavy metals and other toxic materials linked to many negative health effects.

Oh, and there's that possible styrene leak in Cleves from Ineos that we were

blessed to have caught the attention of Enquirer reporter Patricia Gallagher Newberry. Newberry's time and attention to our plight around the Bond Road landfill in Whitewater Township were sorely needed. We are very grateful to Rumpke for reconsidering this hazardous decision, and we have to believe it was partly due to this courageous, informative piece of journalism.

Lisa Wynn, Harrison

Title IX must also defend gender nonconforming students

In classrooms across the country, gender non-conforming students are forced

to play roles they never auditioned for. They are pressured to fit into outdated scripts about what boys and girls should look and act like. It's a reality that brings to mind "The Catcher in the Rye's" Holden Caulfield: a young person suffocating under society's expectations, longing for authenticity in a world full of "phonies." But while Holden had the privilege to rebel, Gender non-conforming youth today face harassment, fear and institutional neglect simply for showing up as themselves.

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 prohibits sex-based discrimination in federally funded schools. Recent legal interpretations, including *Bostock v.*

Clayton County (2020), have made it clear that this includes gender identity and expression. Yet, enforcement remains patchy and inconsistent, and schools too often resort to silence instead of safety.

We need the U.S. Department of Education to strengthen enforcement and training, Congress to stand firm against rollbacks, and, above all, the public to understand that this isn't about politics. It's about giving every child the freedom to learn without fear, no matter who they are or how they dress.

No student should be punished for refusing to fit into someone else's story.

Elisabeth Sebastian, Fort Wright, Ky.