





Dear UN Rapporteurs and Commissioners,

In 2021, Hurricane Ida destroyed a 124-unit low-income housing development located on the bridge between Norristown and Bridgeport. Hurricane Ida also damaged and destroyed numerous other housing units throughout Norristown, rendering many units uninhabitable and causing prices for habitable units to rise. Norristown Township Council voted against restoring the affordable housing units, and created stricter zoning codes where once affordable housing was located.

Hurricane Ida and inflation in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the affordable housing crisis. From 2018-22021, the number of children that were reported homeless in Montgomery County increased by 33% spike. From 2020-2021 there were 1,310 children unhoused throughout Montgomery County, and Norristown had one of the highest rates of childhood homelessness. In the aftermath of Hurricane IDA and COVID-19, people experiencing homelessness for the first time throughout Norristown and Montgomery County increased by over 41%. 400 homeless individuals are on the waitlist for housing vouchers with Montgomery County Housing Authority, and the waitlist is closed. There are 622 total public housing units across five municipalities in Montgomery County. 24,000 people are on the waitlist for these housing units. Norristown is currently destroying its stock of affordable housing and creating barriers to the development of any new affordable housing.

In June 2022, during a steady spike in the number of homeless children, families, and individuals, the Coordinated Homeless Outreach Center in Norristown—the only year-round homeless shelter for single adults in all of Montgomery County—closed permanently.

The lack of a shelter option means that unhoused residents in Norristown and throughout Montgomery County usually have no choice but to sleep outside.

The Montgomery County census has approximately 318 unhoused households with 451 people homeless, with half of the census coming from Norristown. All, or at least the vast majority, of these unhoused residents simply have nowhere else to go.

Over the last year, as both housing and shelter options have dissipated for people living unhoused, Norristown has taken an increasingly punitive, aggressive stance towards unhoused residents.

**In 2022, the Norristown Municipal Council adopted Ordinance 22-02, which prohibits being “on any Municipal Park/parkland or Municipal recreation area or recreation facility except between sunrise and sunset,” except in limited circumstances.**

**Any individual who stays in parks or recreation areas outside of those hours “shall be guilty of a summary offense and upon conviction thereof shall be liable for a fine” of up to $300 “or, in default thereof, to imprisonment for not more than five days.”  Borough of Norristown Code § 225-5.**

**The purpose of Ordinance 22-02 was to enable Norristown Police Department (“Norristown PD”) officers to “hold over [unhoused residents’] . . . head[s]” the threat of a criminal citation when Norristown PD officers demand that they relocate.**

**Following Ordinance 22-02’s enactment, the Norristown PD has engaged in a policy and practice demanding that unhoused residents relocate from the forested park where they sleep, or face fines, fees, or arrest.**

Unhoused residents displaced during the regular homeless encampment sweeps do not receive an offer of local shelter bed space because no shelter bed space is available anywhere in Montgomery County, and there is no plan to add additional shelter beds. The regular sweeps disperse residents without adequate resources and access to alternative shelter; the Norristown police take, destroy, or deprive unhoused residents of property that protects them from the elements; they force unhoused residents to live in areas that are less well-lit and well-trafficked; and separate residents from a community that provides them with safety, mutual protection, and social capital. This creates danger and possible death to unhoused Norristown residents located on public property.



Stephanie Sena

Villanova University Charles Widger School of Law Faculty