

MEDIA ALERT

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Portland gathers for Homeless Persons' Memorial Vigil

Annual commemoration honors those who have died

Friday, December 20, 4:30pm at the Preble Street Resource Center and Monument Square

PORTLAND, ME (December 17, 2019) — A vigil to remember friends from the Greater Portland homeless community who have died begins at **4:30pm** on **Friday, December 20** in the courtyard of the **Preble Street Resource Center**, on the corner of Preble and Portland Streets.

Portland's Annual Homeless Persons' Memorial Vigil coincides with the winter solstice, the longest night of homelessness all year. For 25 years, Portlanders have gathered at the vigil to mourn lives that were cut short, and to reaffirm a commitment to ensuring that everyone who needs a home finds one.

"The life expectancy of our friends who endure chronic homelessness is 28 years shorter, on average, than that of people who are housed. The human toll of allowing these vulnerable neighbors to slip through the cracks is devastating, not only to those of us who knew and loved the 43 people we've lost so far this year, but to our community as a whole," said Mark Swann, Preble Street Executive Director.

The gathered crowd will proceed by candlelight accompanied by a bagpiper to Monument Square for a commemoration ceremony. Ryan Beckford, Peer Support Specialist at Spurwink, Pastor Jeff Logan of Grace Church Ministries, and a person who has experienced homelessness will offer remarks, followed by the lighting of candles to honor each member of the homeless community who has died in the past year.

The public is encouraged to assemble at the Preble Street Resource Center at 4:30pm for the street procession, or at Monument Square at 4:45pm when the ceremony begins.

The annual event is sponsored by the City of Portland Health and Human Services Department, Greater Portland Health, Maine Medical Center, Mercy Hospital, and Preble Street.

Number of deaths in Portland homeless population by year	Of those who died in 2019
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2008: 21 • 2009: 20 • 2010: 25 • 2011: 22 • 2012: 30 • 2013: 20 • 2014: 35 • 2015: 43 deaths <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Average age = 49 • 2016: 34 deaths • 2017: 40 deaths – 29 men; 11 women <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Average age = 48 • 2018: 36 deaths – 26 men; 10 women <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Average age = 48 • 2019: 43 deaths – 31 men; 12 women <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Average age = 55 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The youngest was 35 and the oldest was 75; 2/3 never made it to 60 • One was a veteran who froze to death while sleeping outside • One was a longtime advocate with Homeless Voices for Justice and recently married • Other causes of death are similar to those who aren't homeless — chronic medical conditions, cancer, overdoses, stroke, pneumonia, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, heart complications, and liver disease
<p>Just last night:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 188 people sought emergency shelter at the City of Portland Oxford Street Shelter • Preble Street Florence House and Milestone Recovery were all at capacity • Preble Street Joe Kreisler Shelter for youth and Through These Doors sheltered teens and victims of domestic violence • There were 95 people in the city's family shelter overflow, 50% of them children 	

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Preble Street is a nonprofit human services, anti-poverty agency serving the most vulnerable people in Maine since 1975 through innovative, best-practice, client-centered programs that respond to and prevent hunger and homelessness. In addition to the largest emergency food service program in northern New England, Preble Street operates over a dozen low-barrier programs throughout Maine providing 24/365 services for individuals and families living in poverty, including homeless youth, women, veterans, and victims of human trafficking, driven by its mission to meet urgent needs, empower people to move beyond the crises in their lives, and advocate for solutions to homelessness, hunger, and poverty. www.preblestreet.org