

CITY OF BETHLEHEM

City Council Memorandum

SUBJECT: Protecting the Economic Security of Residents and Local Businesses During the COVID-19 Pandemic

TO: Members of Council

FROM: J. William Reynolds, Member of Council

DATE: March 17, 2020

In addition to the public health dangers presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, the virus presents potentially profound threats to the economic health of the City of Bethlehem and the financial security of our families and local businesses.

The attached resolution also encourages the Mayor's Administration to investigate options for protecting our residents and local businesses in response to the COVID-19 health emergency, including working closely with the federal and state government, financial institutions, educational institutions, and non-profits to identify and publicize economic assistance options and other programs for our residents and local businesses.

I ask that you consider adopting this resolution at the March 17, 2020 City Council meeting.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.



J. William Reynolds, Member Council

CC: R. Donchez, Mayor

RESOLUTION NO. 2020 - _____

Resolution calling upon the City Administration to investigate initiatives to help protect the economic survival of our residents and local businesses in response to the COVID-19 health emergency.

WHEREAS, Bethlehem City Council recognizes that economic security is fundamental to public health in the context of the current COVID-19 emergency, and that as a city, we are only as healthy as our most vulnerable and least economically secure residents. Thus, we must do all we can, at this moment, to help our residents maintain their basic economic security so that they can remain in their residences, take care of themselves, and endure a quarantine or treatment, if necessary;

WHEREAS, The World Health Organization has declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global pandemic, defined as the worldwide spread of a new virus for which most people do not have immunity;

WHEREAS, On March 6, 2020, Governor Wolf issued an emergency disaster declaration specifically noting a “threat of imminent disaster and emergency” with the potential to “cause significant adverse impacts” throughout the Commonwealth. More cases of the virus are being confirmed daily in the Commonwealth;

WHEREAS, on March 13, 2020, the President of the United States declared the COVID-19 outbreak in the United States a national emergency;

WHEREAS, A global pandemic presents not only a public health crisis, but also an economic one. While some workers are afforded the option of working from home and can continue to both care for themselves and participate in the workforce, many others-including workers in the gig economy, hourly and part-time employees, and service sector workers-may not have this privilege. In the event of illness, or even possible quarantine, they are especially susceptible to further economic instability;

WHEREAS, Housing stability is crucial in a public health emergency in which containment and treatment rely on individuals staying indoors and not being forced to seek shelter or experience homelessness. Significant reductions in working hours, wages, or travel restrictions pose a hardship to many Bethlehem residents who already struggle to make rent or mortgage payments. When financially struggling residents cannot pay their monthly mortgage or rent payments, they become vulnerable to losing their apartments and homes through court-filed evictions and mortgage foreclosures;

WHEREAS, Utility shut-offs also pose a significant risk to the health and safety of financially vulnerable Bethlehem families, leading to housing instability. Even more, in the event of quarantine, residents must be guaranteed access to utilities that make their homes habitable, including access to heat, light and water as well as telephone and internet services that provide essential connectivity;

WHEREAS, As communities deal with the spread of COVID-19, it is incumbent for local governments to lead an efficient and bold response that protects public health, but also attempts to protect economically vulnerable residents and businesses from economic calamity; and

WHEREAS, While COVID-19 presents severe public health challenges for the City of Bethlehem, it also presents serious financial threats to our restaurants, entertainment establishments, bars, and businesses of all sizes, including family-owned small businesses. Many Bethlehem residents work for local businesses and the financial health and the continued survival of these businesses is essential to protecting the overall economic health of our City and the financial security of our families. The economic resiliency of our City following cessation of this emergency depends on doing everything in

our power, now, in this moment, to find innovative ways to help our local businesses survive the economic peril caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT:

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, THAT THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF BETHLEHEM encourages the Mayor's Administration to investigate any and all feasible options for helping to protect the survival of our residents and local businesses in response to the COVID-19 health emergency, including working closely with the federal and state government, financial institutions, educational institutions, and non-profits to identify and publicize economic assistance options for our local businesses, including without limitation, emergency loan programs and programs to help businesses modify their operations to comply with social distancing and other new public health practices.

Sponsored by _____

ADOPTED by Council this day of , 2020.

President of Council

ATTEST:

City Clerk