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Elgin Man Told to Stop 'Slumber Parties' for Homeless During Cold, He Says

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A suburban Chicago resident who was offering up “slumber parties” in his basement for homeless people in his neighborhood during dangerously cold weather says city officials have given him an

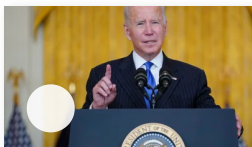


Stop the “slumber parties” or the house will be condemned.

Greg Schiller, of Elgin, said he began letting a group of homeless people sleep in his unfinished basement last month during brutally cold nights, offering them food, warm beverages and a cot to sleep on while watching movies.

“I would stay up all night with them and give them coffee and stuff and feed them,” he said, adding that no drugs or alcohol were allowed inside his residence during the evening events.

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Last winter, Schiller offered up his garage to area homeless, but said he was told he could no longer do so after EMTs were called to help a man with a heart condition. That’s when he had the idea to move them to his basement – complete with all the activities needed to consider them simply “slumber parties.”

Schiller believed city code allowed for slumber parties, but officials said there are "sleeping regulations" for basements and Schiller's basement doesn't meet those requirements.

"While we appreciate those who volunteer to provide additional resources in the community, Mr. Schiller's house does not comply with codes and regulations that guard against potential dangers such as carbon monoxide poisoning, inadequate light and ventilation, and insufficient exits in the event of a fire," city spokesperson Molly Center said in a statement.

Schiller said city officials and police officers came to his home with a warrant Tuesday and went into his basement. There, he said they found his ceiling height too low and windows too high and too small to be an egress.



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several cots with sleeping bags for everybody – or they'll condemn the house.

Center confirmed that Schiller was given 24 hours to clear the basement in an emailed statement, adding, "If not, the City will take additional enforcement action to compel the removal of the unlawful basement sleeping area."

Officials had earlier threatened citations for other violations at the home, which is owned by Schiller's girlfriend, including a broken window, a fold-up trailer on the property and a portable toilet he had set up for the group to use, Schiller said.

"I'm trying to help these people get out of the cold," he told NBC 5. "There's not a lot of help for them as far as places to lay their heads."

Schiller said he only opened up the basement when an area shelter wasn't available.

He noted that some shelters in the area require homeless to meet a specific set of criteria and others open only when temperatures reach a certain level.

PADS of Elgin confirmed that there are requirements to be eligible for their services, but declined to specify what that criteria included.

An emergency shelter at First United Methodist Church of Elgin, operated by the organization Matthew 25:40, opens when the temperature outside is 15 degrees or less.

Schiller said he hosted his "slumber parties" when wind chill values were 15 degrees or less, but would not offer up the basement if the emergency shelter was open.

"It's cold enough to freeze to death," he said.

Matthew 25:40 did not immediately respond to NBC Chicago's request for comment Tuesday.

"Elgin has lawful shelters that provide a safe space for people to go throughout the year," Center said in a statement. "In times of extreme temperature, temporary locations open within the community that all conform to regulations and codes."



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A full list can be found [on the city's website](#).

Temperatures Tuesday in Elgin were forecast to reach a high of only 6 degrees, meaning area shelters should open. They aren't expected to warm above the threshold again until this weekend, when they could rise back into the upper-20s. It's not clear if shelters plan to remain open.

Schiller said that while he does plan to stop hosting his slumber parties, he's working to find other options for taking care of the homeless he now knows so well.

"Somebody's going to die," he said.

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62°

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