



March 8, 2022

Chair Jim Abeler  
95 University Avenue W.  
Minnesota Senate Bldg., Room 3215  
St. Paul, MN 55155

Re: SF3140 (Senjem) Emergency shelter facilities grant program

Dear Chair Abeler and members of the committee,

Avenues for Youth appreciates the opportunity to share written testimony regarding our strong support for SF3140 which would establish an emergency shelter facilities grant program.

Minnesota is facing an unsheltered homelessness crisis. Avenues and our partners work every day to address that crisis, but shelter capacity statewide is not even close to enough to meet the need. Avenues partners with youth experiencing homelessness to achieve their dreams. We do this by providing emergency shelter, short-term housing and support for youth experiencing homelessness in a safe and nurturing environment. Through such support, Avenues seeks to help youth achieve their personal goals and to make a positive transition into young adulthood. Every year we support more than 300 youth experiencing housing instability or homelessness. However, youth homelessness continues to grow. In Minnesota, an estimated 13,300 youth will experience homelessness every year; 73% of them are Black, Indigenous & People of Color. 30% of youth experiencing homelessness report they stayed in an abusive situation because they had no other housing options.

Youth experiencing homelessness have distinct needs that are different from those of single adults or families. Youth need shelters that provide youth-specific mental health, physical health, education, employment and case management supports. When provided these supports, youth can successfully move into stable housing and thrive as young adults. Shantasia is a perfect example. Shantasia, who has allowed me to share her story, came to Avenues after living in an abandoned house and couch hopping. She felt depressed, angry, and suicidal. Over time she opened up to staff about her dream to become a nurse and took full advantage of the education and employment resources Avenues offers. While living at Avenues, she became a Certified Nursing Assistant. She moved into her own apartment and is pursuing a career as a registered nurse. She says "I feel like I can accomplish everything now."

Youth like Shantasia need a home to call their own, and shelters can provide that home as they prepare for more permanent options. Since 2014, Avenues has operated a shelter and transitional housing program in Brooklyn Park, called Brooklyn Avenues. That shelter was built specifically to be a youth shelter and the design supports trauma-informed care and developmentally appropriate services. Every year 80% or more of the youth who live Brooklyn Avenues move into stable housing. Avenues also

operates a shelter in North Minneapolis, known as Minneapolis Avenues. Minneapolis Avenues was built in 1934 and has served many purposes over the years, before being converted to a shelter in 1997. The space does not adequately meet the needs of youth recovering from the trauma of experiencing homelessness and crowded conditions have forced us to reduce capacity during the COVID-19 pandemic, a reduction that we can ill-afford when the need is so great.

Drawing on the lessons we have learned from Brooklyn Avenues, we are planning to build a new building for our shelter and transitional housing program in Minneapolis. A new building will also allow us to grow our programming to fill the gap between the needs of youth experiencing homelessness and current shelter capacity. However, financing shelter capital projects is difficult. From the Federal government down to city governments, there are minimal funding options, requiring braiding multiple funding streams of small amounts over the course of a multi-year campaign. This is Minnesota's opportunity to make an unprecedented and historic investment in this critical infrastructure that saves lives. If we wait, youth like Shantasia are couch-hopping, living on the streets, or staying in abusive situations.

The emergency shelter facilities grant program is an important step in providing funding for safe and accessible shelters for our homeless youth in Minnesota. Thank you again for this opportunity to support this crucial investment. Please contact me at [kmeerse@avenuesforyouth.org](mailto:kmeerse@avenuesforyouth.org) if I may provide further information on this deeply important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Katherine Meerse', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Katherine Meerse  
Executive Director