



VIOLENCE INTERVENTION PROJECT

SERVING VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN NORTHWEST MINNESOTA

March 4, 2022

***Sent via Email**

The Honorable Representative Abeler, Chair

RE: Support for SF 3140

Dear Chair Abeler and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for hearing SF 3140.

Violence Intervention Project (VIP) urges your support for this legislation to provide shelter capital funding. There is significant need across MN to support individuals, youth, and families experiencing homelessness because of relationship and family violence, and state investment will help meet these temporary housing needs.

VIP is an emergency shelter in Thief River Falls, MN. We serve victims of domestic and sexual violence in 5 counties in NW MN, and two tribal nations. We are the only Domestic Violence shelter in our service area. We also provide advocacy support and resources, supervised visitation and safe exchanges, outreach and education, and housing programs. In 2020, we sheltered 23 families including 43 children and housed 23 families.

VIP is working on an expansion project to increase our shelter capacity. Without this funding, we will not be able to expand. We currently have 2 shelter rooms with 4 beds and one bathroom, each. We also have 2 on-site apartments. We want to add three new shelter rooms with individual bathrooms, and four on-site apartments. Our shelter rooms are for shorter stays, although many of our residents stay for over 60 days, as it's challenging to find housing in our area, especially for families with children.

Our on-site apartments are for victims that need more time to transition into permanent housing because of barriers such as poor or no rental history, substance abuse, large rental arrears, no income and undocumented immigrants. Families can live in these apartments for up to two years to build positive rental history and credit and obtain education and/or employment. These on-site apartments are more successful than offsite apartments because we are better able to support survivors, connect them with resources, ensure children are enrolled in school, provide transportation to medical appointments, and secure permanent housing when they are ready.

Currently, we have 5 families living in our shelter, including 8 children. We have a mother with a small child that is sleeping in our common living room area on a pull-out couch. If we receive any more requests, we will have to turn them away. Victims that can't find adequate shelter or housing will often return to unsafe and dangerous situations that can even lead to death.

Thank you for your consideration to invest state funding for the urgent need for shelter capital funding throughout the state. In Northwest Minnesota, it can actually save the lives of the victims of relationship and family violence. Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions.

Sincerely, Carmen Zuniga, Executive Director
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