



March 31, 2022

Re: SF3249 Shelter-Linked Mental Health

Dear Chair Abeler and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to share Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota's (LSS) support of SF3249 for investment in shelter-linked mental health to effectively and holistically support the needs of resilient youth experiencing homelessness and mental health challenges.

LSS is a provider of essential services across all 87 counties, serving 1 in 65 Minnesotans every year. We believe that behavioral health builds the foundation for health and well-being, and our services provide individuals and families with critical access to mental health care in communities across the state. This includes over 40 years serving youth experiencing homelessness, providing shelter and supportive housing services for youth experiencing homelessness in 8 geographic locations across the state.

Integrating a mental health provider into LSS youth shelter locations in St. Louis County has already linked 36 youth to mental health services and had a positive impact on both the youth and the teams who support them. Fostering the normalization of mental health supports has helped to break through the barriers of stigma and fear associated with traditional services. For our shelter team, it has provided unique opportunities for staff training on the integration of mental wellness into everyday shelter activities. This has led to greater engagement with youth, expanded coping skills, and improvements in goal achievement and stability for the youth we serve.

Youth supported through LSS' shelter services experience challenging life situations, untreated mental health concerns and a negative view of mental health services. Youth at risk of homelessness and sexual exploitation experience mental health and chemical health challenges at higher rates. We see that a large portion of youth being served in programs are experiencing depression and anxiety, which has only been exacerbated by the pandemic. The flexibility of shelter-linked mental health funds allows for building rapport with a mental health provider to work through barriers to supportive services.

Thank you, again, for this opportunity to share the impact of the Shelter-Linked Mental Health Grants. With your support of SF3249, together we can build resiliency and hope with youth across Minnesota. If we can be of service on these issues, please reach out to us or our Advocacy Manager, Jeru Gobeze, at [jeru.gobeze@lssmn.org](mailto:jeru.gobeze@lssmn.org).

Sincerely,

Dawn Shykes, MSW

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dawn Shykes".

Sr. Director of Youth, Children and Family Services

Trevor B. Johnson, MSW, LICSW

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Trevor B. Johnson".

Sr. Director of Behavioral Health