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April 5, 2022

Senator Jim Abeler
 Chair, Human Services Reform Finance & Policy Committee

Re: Emergency Shelter Workforce & Human Services Reform Omnibus Bill

Chair Abeler and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis, thank you for your commitment to supporting Minnesota's long-term care workforce, which is vital to making sure PCAs, direct support professionals and others are available to support individuals choosing to remain living independently and stably in their homes. As discussions on the Human Services Reform omnibus budget bill move forward, we urge you to include support for another workforce supporting some of Minnesota's most vulnerable individuals: that of the state's emergency shelter workforce (SF3143).

The emergency services program (ESP) is the state's most flexible funding source for shelter operations—everything beyond the physical construction of the shelter and day service centers that is needed to keep our doors open to provide individuals experiencing homelessness with basic, essential services. Providing these services requires a skilled, dedicated workforce in order to meet clients where they are, with trauma-informed care that supports and helps them navigate a path toward housing stability. Like others, however, the emergency shelter workforce is facing urgent staffing challenges and in need of state support.

Emergency shelters were operating beyond capacity before COVID-19. The pandemic added a crisis on top of a crisis, and the stress and strain this has put on the shelter workforce has made it difficult to recruit staff. Those who have stayed are burned out and at risk of leaving, and all of this threatens our ability to effectively and compassionately serve those experiencing homelessness, including seniors and individuals with increasingly challenging cases of mental illness and chronic health conditions.

Emergency shelters and day service centers are critical to supporting another workforce, too—that of individuals experiencing homelessness who are working to build financial independence. Our staff will tell you that there are people lined up outside every morning when they open, many of whom are coming in after their night shift for a shower, a hot meal, and a change of clothes from their storage locker before heading out for the day to find a place to rest. Others are coming in for a hot shower and meal before they go to work or to make use of employment navigation services.

Holding a steady job is difficult when you don't have a safe place to sleep and access to essentials like food and a shower. By investing in ESP/SF3143, the state has an opportunity to support those experiencing homelessness and housing instability who are trying to work and build self-sufficiency, as well as the emergency shelter staff that support them. As budget negotiations continue, we ask you to include this critical workforce.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Lorna Schmidt'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'Lorna' being larger and more prominent than the last name 'Schmidt'.

Lorna Schmidt, Public Policy Manager
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