



March 20, 2023

Senate Capital Investment Committee Chair and Members  
Minnesota Senate Building  
95 University Ave. W  
St. Paul, MN. 55103

Dear Chair and Members of the Capital Investment Committee,

I am writing this letter in strong support of SF 1534. This bill would provide critically needed support for The Link to sustain and expand their current programming and housing for youth experiencing homelessness and / or who have been sex trafficked.

This building which will be located in north Minneapolis would provide expanded supportive services and programming space that will enable The Link to sustain and expand our support for youth and families who are struggling with some of our community's most difficult crisis-homelessness, sex trafficking, mental health issues, abuse and much more. The building will also allow The Link to expand our housing for young families and youth by 45 units.

On any given night in the state of Minnesota there are 4,872 unaccompanied youth who are experiencing homelessness. Additionally, the 2019 Minnesota Student Survey (MSS) included a question for high school youth about whether they have traded sex for anything of value. The initial findings revealed that almost 2% of Minnesota 11th-grade girls reported having traded sexual activity to receive money, food, drugs, alcohol, a place to stay, or anything else. This can be extrapolated to an estimate of at least 5,000 youth in Minnesota experiencing some form of sexual exploitation. Our state greatly needs additional housing and services to help these young people out of homelessness and sex trafficking.

Avenues for Youth partners with The Link every day, providing and accepting referrals. Sadly, with the lack of housing for youth and young families, we are often both full and scrambling to find other options for youth. This new building, with its expansion of housing, is desperately needed.

Thank you for your support of SF 1534. This bill if passed would have a life changing and saving impact on the youth and young families in our community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Katherine Meerse", written over a thin horizontal line.

Katherine Meerse  
Executive Director