



February 1st, 2023  
Chair Wiklund  
Members of the Health & Human Services Committee

Dear Chair Wiklund and members of the Health & Human Services Committee,

Connections Shelter is writing to express support for SF388. As a shelter provider in Southern Minnesota, we are so thankful that this bill is being heard at this time. Since COVID, we have seen a significant increase in the need for shelter beds. We know that shelter saves lives and housing ends homelessness. Two items in this bill have a direct impact on the growth and sustainability of our shelter to meet the needs across our region.

#### **\$150 million for Emergency Shelter Facilities**

While MCH is advocating for \$200 million in funding, we are very pleased with \$150 million being included in SF388. Unfortunately, according to the Homelessness Management Information System, 80 of our 87 counties have either no shelter beds or lack enough shelter beds to meet the need. In our own region, as one of the few shelters that is able to provide low barrier shelter to single men, women, and families, we are constantly at capacity and have a waiting list of over 25 individuals and families sleeping in their cars or places not meant for human habitation while they wait for shelter beds to open. With money earmarked for shelter capital, we can work to meet the increasing needs for shelter beds with innovative and flexible shelter models. We are currently working on plans with the City of Mankato and Blue Earth county to develop a new shelter that would increase bed space in the region by 30 beds. There is currently no funding for shelter capital. Passage of this legislation would allow us to move forward with our plans quickly to meet an ever growing need.

#### **\$40 million in 2024/25 and \$70 million in 2026/27 for the Emergency Services Program (ESP)**

We are thrilled that SF388 includes the full request for ESP. This funding allows organizations such as ours meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness through supporting shelters, outreach, motel vouchers, and other key resources and services. This increase will be key to supporting both new and existing shelters in providing services to people experiencing homelessness. As a shelter provide, access to funding is crucial. In order to have people centered, safe shelter, we need to staff appropriately and have the capacity to address issues like COVID when they cause a change in our model. For us, increased access to funding will mean we can move from a seasonal shelter to a year round shelter which has a direct impact on the health, safety, and wellbeing of those experiencing homelessness in our community.

#### **\$9 million for the Transitional Housing Program (THP)**

Along with responding to our unsheltered homelessness crisis, SF388 includes funding for THP which is vital for many individuals and families leaving shelter. THP helps individuals and families obtain stable housing where they can develop good rental history while finding a permanent housing destination.

In addition to the above priorities, MCH supports the remaining items included in HF444:

- **Homeless Management Information System**
- **Homeless Youth Act**
- **Homeless youth; chosen family grants**

We applaud the leadership for bringing this bill forward. Shelter saves lives and housing ends homelessness.

Sincerely,  
Rev. Erica Koser  
Director, Connections Shelter

220 E Hickory St Mankato, MN 56001 507-720-6907