



March 23, 2023

RE: SF1839

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

Thank you for the opportunity to share Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota's (LSS) support of SF1839. Increased investment in Safe Harbor will strengthen programs that effectively and holistically support the needs of youth at risk of or experiencing sexual exploitation.

LSS is a provider of essential services across all 87 counties with more than 2,400 employees who serve one in 65 Minnesotans every year. We are committed to innovative, person-centered service delivery that promotes resilience and long-term stability for people in all stages of life. This includes services for survivors and victims of sex trafficking as well as preventative supports through increased community awareness across Minnesota.

We connect with youth who have been sexually exploited and offer services to help them find a safe place to stay, get basic necessities like food and clothing, and access individualized support to rebuild their lives. Currently, LSS provides these services in several communities across the state, including Brainerd and the surrounding 3-county region, St. Cloud and the surrounding 4-county region, Kandiyohi County, Mankato, Rochester, and Willmar. We also provide training statewide for youth workers who support sexually exploited youth.

The need for these services is much greater than currently available resources. Increasing investment in Safe Harbor programs will help increase prevention of sexual exploitation while helping more youth feel a sense of belonging and have opportunities to confront and cope with past traumas. LSS and other service providers would be able to strengthen a seamless continuum of services for youth that build on youth's assets and strengths, connect them with supportive adults to ensure stability, and create a future that fulfills their potential. Youth are able to succeed in life despite their histories of abuse, exploitation, neglect or abandonment.

Please support SF1839. Thank you, again, for this opportunity. Please contact Erin Sutton, LSS' Senior Director of Advocacy, at erin.sutton@lssmn.org if we may provide further information on this deeply important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karen P. Kingsley".

Karen Kingsley
Senior Director of Youth & Family Services

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

Dawn Shykes
Senior Director of Youth & Family Services