

March 31, 2023

Chair Wiklund
Vice Chair Mann
Members of the Health and Human Services Policy & Finance Committee

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

In addition to the letter that was submitted on behalf of the Minnesota Coalition for the Homeless (MCH), our advocates and partners, we also wanted to ensure that you can hear directly from community members in their own words about the impact of including homeless priorities in your proposed budget. **We hope you will reconsider SF2995 and make the critical and long overdue investments into ending homelessness.**

We asked advocates that have survived or are currently living through homelessness about the proposed historic investments to shelter capital, the Emergency Services Program, Homeless Youth Act, Chosen Family Justice and Transitional Housing Program included in the **Pathway Home Act** (SF 388 authored by Senator Dibble), asking them, **“What does it mean to you for lawmakers to make these proposed investments into ending homelessness?”**

Here are their responses:

“It would mean that my voice is being heard. That my experience of homelessness is helping lawmakers and others to understand there are issues with how things need to change to have others not end up without a home/place to live. It's time for a change, it's time to end homelessness and make things better for all people.”

- Cheryl B from Rural Central Minnesota

“It is in our commonality we bear our humanity. Investing in ending homelessness reflects our commonality.”

- Dawn Bjoraker, Minnesota Tribal Collaborative Coordinator

“This is one of the best things to hear! This is going to help a lot of people with mental health as well. It all works together.”

- Ronnie K from Central Minnesota

“An investment into homeless programs is a way to save lives”

- Randi Wickham from Brainerd, MN

“It means the world to me that lawmakers are listening to what the people want and need to end homelessness. We must continue to work together to invest into these changes. Thank you lawmakers.”

- Alexis Kramer from No More Streets Parent Advocate in Maplewood, MN fighting for Minneapolis and Saint Paul residents

“For lawmakers to invest into ending homelessness means that they are thinking about the most marginalized and oppressed communities and working towards ending one big barrier to folks getting their life on track. Housing is the first step to stability and a lot of other things.”

- Lateesha Coleman from Whittier, Powderhorn, South Minneapolis, MN

As an adult who currently works for the organization that helped me overcome homelessness 25 years ago as a teen, I have both experienced first hand the difference funding for programs make, as well as had the privilege of seeing the difference it continues to

make in our youth's lives. Holistic, trauma informed, and harm reductive care matters. Housing first matters. Young people's success matters."

- G Hissam from St. Paul, MN

"It would mean that lawmakers are recognizing that their constituents are human beings whose lives have meaning. That homelessness affects us all!"

- Patrick Presley from Minneapolis, MN

"It means there will be less human suffering in our communities, and my resilience has won the battle against trauma."

- Meriem LeClair

"It means stability and a better future. It means peace of mind for families. It means our youth have a better chance of creating a future for themselves, one that has meaning (to them) and purpose. "

- Michelle from Anoka County, MN

"Another life will be saved. "

- Jonda Crum from St. Paul, MN

"Your investment in ending homelessness is worth every dollar amount that will be given. It will mean even more than any dollar amount to a 13 year old child who is sleeping in a car with her momma and baby sister because they have nowhere else to turn. I once was that 13 year old child. The adult in me now thanks you from the bottom of my heart for investing in putting an end to homelessness such as I faced."

- Michelle Raiter from Shevlin, MN

"It would mean a better community. It would mean a meaningful opportunity for people to feel whole and start to thrive to be better than they are now. Just give people the spot to rest their head and watch us grow"

- Dominique Buffet from Northeast Minneapolis

"It means to me that my family and I will never have to experience homelessness again, it also means to me the unsheltered homeless people will get the help they need if they want it."

- Sister Janelle R Dodd from Rondo Neighborhood, St. Paul, MN

"People need a foundation to build on"

- Stacey Blunt from St. Paul, MN

"Investing in ending homelessness means that lawmakers understand that there is a great need to allocate resources to provide affordable housing and services to people who need a stable home and people who are at risk of becoming homeless. These resources should include, providing ongoing emergency shelters, transitional housing and permanent supportive housing."

- Claudette McDowall from Robbinsdale, MN

"All forms of health and success require stable housing. Once we end unstable housing we can focus better on school, employment, civic engagement, and well being."

- Rebecca Saito from Minneapolis, MN

"Ending homelessness and despair will foster, feed and encourage hope and new energy."

- Lindalee Soderstrom from Rural Southeast MN

"Everything! This is a key transition point that either creates a debilitating cascade of additional trauma and barriers or provides an opportunity for a person or family to quickly and more meaningfully stabilize. "

- Stephanie Saji, Survivor

"It would have been helpful to have a shelter to go to for safety and resources when I was homeless."

- Jj Rihley from Burnsville, MN

"Homelessness affects all of society and must be eradicated as such, we must have the courage to implement the right action. Don't wait until it comes close to home!!"

- Ms. Jeweleen Jackson from Minneapolis, MN

"Peace. Infrequent Crime. Safety. If done right. Until transition to having a home. It is a horrifying disease. Cancer or osteopenia. Odd. I have lived there."

- Mary Manning

"Lawmakers invest in those who are human and deserve the same chance as you, or anyone else who made a bad choice in life or were impacted by a system that you have no control over. If you have ever felt helpless, and everyone has at some point. Invest this money toward ending homelessness because we are just as human as you, the person next to you and everyone in this world. We deserve a chance to live, love, and be a participating member of society!"

- Heather West from Anoka County, MN

"It is a blessing to have a place called home."

- Candace Bailey from Minneapolis, MN

"It means the difference between being warm and cold every month, between having food or not. I'm helping to make these decisions now, and I am still not in a space where I can get these things safely for myself."

- Kathy Fabel from Anoka County, MN

"Everybody deserves a safe place to put themselves and precious things in a place they can call a home"

- Angela Hutchins from Brainerd, MN

"Ending homelessness is a way to create a safe space for singles, youth, and families."

- Raya Jones, SMAC Governing Board

"It means a lot to me, everyone deserves a roof over their heads."

- Jessica Holmes from Washington County, MN

"You can help stop this progression for other people. I needed a place to go to that would really help take care of me. It's really important that "solutions" for homelessness include People with Disabilities and Older People and their concerns."

- Ms. Kim Annette Pettman, Metro currently. Some experiences in Metro and Greater MN.

"It would show that they want to take active steps to eliminate a longtime problem instead of bloviating about it."

- Chad Frink from Brainerd, MN

"What it will do to my soul and spirit, lawmakers investing to diminish homelessness. The investment into diminishing homelessness will invest into humanity. Saving this planet Earth from the traumatic devastation of the impact of homelessness to those of us who endured this. To those who are enduring this now. And prevent those in the future from enduring this."

- Mz. Marla Dotson

"It means you're helping someone who can't help themselves. Your speaking and guiding those who need guidance. You have a heart and compassion. It makes me feel there is comfort and hope and there is light. Makes me feel proud of you."

- Melissa Bringsthem from South Minneapolis

"Many of the women and young people we worked with over the last year were sexually assaulted while experiencing homelessness and living in one of the many homeless encampments located throughout the Twin Cities. Many of those survivors became homeless"

because they were fleeing a previous domestic violence situation. Unless there is a concerted effort to end homelessness, we will see violence victims going back into toxic and dangerous situations.”

- Comfort Dondo

“Every human being has an innate right to be sheltered!”

- CL Carrizales from Northfield, MN

“There is no surplus when people are hungry and homeless in our communities. Use our abundance for the common good by meeting our people's basic needs in Minnesota”

- Sue Watlov Phillips from the Metro & Itasca County

“Lawmakers investing in ending homelessness, especially via the Homeless Youth Act, shows to me they are willing to invest in giving young people the chance at achieving their goals and overcoming their current struggles. Providing low barrier support during these formative years can help end the common cycle of becoming unsheltered, developing unhealthy and damaging coping skills, being unable to navigate the network of services available or comply with program rules due to said coping skills, and again becoming unsheltered. This cycle often continues long into adulthood. All young people deserve this chance, and there are zero reasons to not make this investment in them.”

- Anonymous

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- Mz. Marla Dotson

“It will benefit individuals, families, and society. There are many talented people just trying stay alive in the hope to once again be productive and contributing Americans. I can attest this to be true as I was once homeless and through programs have gotten back to living a stable life and directly working with current homeless communities to offer hope and real life proof that it will get better. Thank you”

- Jacki Yellowflower, Turtle Island

“This investment will break the cycle of the revolving door, we can invest in more staff and spaces that will aid us in making sure no one has to go without a place to call home as I had to for the majority of my adult life. There is no reason to continue to turn our heads and think it will fix itself or go away. We need staff and affordable housing with low to no barriers. No one belongs without a place to call home.”

- Jason Urbanczyk, Moorhead, Clay County