

Thank you, Senators, for allowing us to speak to you today about the important roles that shelters play in rural Minnesota. My name is Reed Olson. I am the executive director of the Nameless Coalition for the Homeless. We operate an overnight shelter called the Wolfe and daytime shelter called the New Day Center. The Wolfe has been open for eight years. Last year was our busiest year and this year we are already shattering last year's record numbers. Attendance in October, November and December is up 65%. We have 24 beds and routinely see upwards of thirty people each night. Our day center only opened a little over a year ago and we now welcome over 100 unique guests per month who are seeking the services they need to find greater stability.

Even more pressing is the increase in people experiencing housing instability. Bemidji is now a majority renter community. We have an anemic housing market. The rental market runs a 1% vacancy rate. We do not have enough housing to house our community. As a result, our most marginalized neighbors find themselves unsheltered.

Staff burnout is a real concern. We ask staff to do more and more. From administering Narcan to helping people suffering from incontinence. Also, we are concerned about the expanding demographics of the people we serve. We see our population aging and suffering from more mental and physical ailments. We don't have enough staff, nor are we trained to handle such difficult-to-serve guests.

Minnesota needs to build more housing. We also need to increase our mental health care capacity dramatically and rapidly. But in the meantime, we must properly fund the crowded shelters that keep people alive while they wait for housing and treatment.

The Nameless Coalition is struggling to keep its shelter doors open. We have doubled our staff and the buildings we operate with little increase in revenue. We operate at a fraction of what it would cost the state if we did not exist. I like to tell people who don't understand the important role we play in our community that you may not appreciate our existence, but you will surely notice our absence.

Every day local law enforcement and healthcare use us for support. We keep people out of the ER and out of the county jail. We are also the ersatz detox in our community. While we are used as the alternative to much more expensive options, without adequate funding, we will be unable to continue to provide our essential services.

Thank you.