

## MN Senate Labor Committee Testimony (3/23/23)

Good afternoon, Madame Chair and Members of the Committee. My name is Colleen Diemer. I am a volunteer advocate and a friend of those who have experienced homelessness. I am testifying in support of bill 2471.

Almost two years ago I had the privilege of meeting my good friend whom I'll call Jonathan, who at the time was living in a tent encampment a short distance away from where we're sitting now. We were introduced by mutual friends following a street outreach event grilling hot dogs near the Cathedral. In the months that followed Jonathan and I talked nearly daily and met frequently. We have shared laughter and tears on many occasions, in hospital emergency rooms and courtrooms, around the Thanksgiving table with my family, playing in weekly community softball games together, attending my kids' basketball games while eating lots of pumpkin bars, and doing life together week by week. We remain good friends to this day and Jonathan's journey continues.

What I've learned through Jonathan's experience is that government and social service programs offer valuable support including healthcare, treatment, and basic humanitarian assistance. It is also clear that these institutions are not designed to love people well – it's not their purpose. Research has shown that the leading cause of chronic homelessness is the catastrophic loss of family, often as a result of generational trauma. Therefore, any sustainable solution must first restore the root of what has been lost, which is our most basic shared human need to be known, loved, and belong. This bill enables faith communities, along with intentional neighbors and genuine friendship, to fill in the gaps. Because none of us can go it alone.

In closing, this bill addresses the root cause of homelessness, it allows faith communities to live out their mission, and does all of this with zero government funding. Please support this bill. Thank you.