



Letter of Support for S.F. 3748

Dear Chair Port and Members

Violence Free Minnesota, Standpoint, and the Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault write jointly today in support of S.F. 3748. Safe and stable housing is key for victim/survivors of domestic and sexual violence in all of its forms. Minnesota has the opportunity to help victim/survivors of gender-based violence to leave dangerous living environments, and start over somewhere safe and dignified. This bill provides several fixes that we support:

- Updates statute to reflect how Qualified Third Parties provide services. The current language requires that a Qualified Third Party (licensed healthcare professional, domestic abuse advocate, or sexual assault counselor) have “in-person contact” with the victim/survivor in order to provide the Qualified Third Party statement. This is important because there has been a significant shift toward telehealth and remote services since the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the lack of funding for domestic and sexual violence advocacy organizations in Minnesota has resulted in a significant decrease in domestic and sexual violence advocates throughout the state. As a result, advocates are overwhelmed and not able to meet victim/survivors in person, and the time-sensitive nature of a lease break is crucial to a victim/survivor’s safety plan. The proposed amendment reflects the reality of how these services are very often provided (telehealth, virtual, hotlines, etc.), making early lease termination due to fear of violence more accessible for victim/survivors.
- Updates requirement for how victim/survivors provide required early lease termination documentation to their landlord. The statute as currently written requires a victim/survivor to provide required documentation via mail, fax, or in person. The suggested changes will allow a victim/survivor to provide this documentation via any form of communication regularly used by the tenant and landlord, including email or text, making early lease termination due to fear of violence safer and more accessible for victim/survivors.
- Establishes penalties for confidentiality violations. The current statutory scheme does not include penalties for landlords who violate the confidentiality provision in this section. Confidentiality for victim/survivors of domestic and sexual violence is crucial and often life-saving. Confidentiality violations often result in physical and financial harm to the victim/survivor. The addition of penalties for violations of this section will serve as a remedy for the extensive harm caused by inappropriate disclosure of sensitive information.
- Establishes mandatory expungement if an eviction is filed in violation of this section.
- Clarifies when the lease terminates pursuant to this provision. As currently written, some landlords misinterpret that the lease terminates when the victim/survivor vacates the property (i.e. when they are forced to flee for safety). However, victim/survivors are often forced to flee violence very quickly, before having time to seek help and connect with domestic and sexual violence advocates for safety planning, get protective orders, or make decisions about their housing. The suggested amendments are intended to clarify that the lease terminates according to the date provided in the required early lease termination documentation.



Please support this bill and these practical solutions. Domestic violence and sexual assault are not merely a problem between a victim/survivor and the person who does them harm. The reverberating effects of domestic and sexual violence touch every single part of a victim/survivor's life, especially their ability to maintain safe and stable housing. According to data from Homeless Management Information Systems, 46,961 Minnesotans who experienced homelessness between January 1, 2005 and September 4, 2019 also experienced domestic violence. The Wilder Research Center has additionally identified domestic violence as one of five leading causes of homelessness. A victim/survivor should never have to choose between their safety, their housing, and their economic stability. This bill brings us one step closer to a Minnesota where everyone can feel safe at home.

Sincerely,

Guadalupe Lopez
Executive Director
Violence Free Minnesota

PaHoua Vang
Interim Executive Director
Minnesota Coalition Against Sexual Assault

Thi Synavone
Executive Director
Standpoint