



March 19, 2024

The Honorable Lindsey Port
Chair, Housing and Homelessness Prevention Committee
3213 Minnesota Senate Bldg.
St Paul, MN 55155

Via email

Re: Support for S.F.4704

Dear Chair Port and members of the Housing and Homelessness Prevention Committee:

We, the co-conveners of the Minnesota ERASE campaign, write in support of H.F. 4556, which would implement the recommendations of the Workgroup on Expediting Rental Assistance (WERA) including, specifically, improvements to the application approval times. The Minnesota ERASE Campaign (End Rental Arrears and Stop Evictions) is a campaign to eliminate rental indebtedness, prevent evictions, and create support for long term policy changes to end housing instability and homelessness.

Evaluation of emergency housing assistance programs, including conversations with direct users of these programs, reveal that while this assistance is critically needed and works to keep people in their homes, many programs present significant barriers to receiving assistance. The Minnesota ERASE campaign has conducted renter and property owner focus groups, and interviews with people with lived experience, that have identified many similar issues. See Emergency Rental Assistance During the COVID-19 Pandemic, May 2023, at https://mhponline.org/wp-content/uploads/ERA_Report_V6_06.15.23.pdf.

- We fully agree with HF 4556's provisions that support easier and faster access to financial assistance programs like Family Homeless Prevention Assistance Program (FHPAP), Emergency Assistance (EA) and Emergency General Assistance (EGA). Ensuring quick delivery of emergency assistance.
- We encourage consideration of a faster timeline for making improvements to program speed of providing assistance than what is now reflected in H.F. 4556 (Jan 15, 2027).
- We agree that Minnesota needs accurate forecasting of the need for emergency rental assistance, which will help lawmakers and community leaders better assess the resources needed to help Minnesota families and children maintain stable housing. The Minnesota ERASE campaign has advocated for years that Minnesotans need assistance that matches the need for emergency housing assistance.
- We strongly support efforts to create a centralized application system for the multiple programs that provide direct financial assistance, prioritizing ease of use and simplicity for program participants. People with lived experience, direct users of assistance programs, service providers and local government have consistently identified this reform as necessary to ensure those who need assistance receive it, rather than being turned away by red tape and confusing processes.
- We want to emphasize the important role of community-based organizations to program success by supporting equitable access to emergency housing assistance. Community based organizations help

build trust in assistance programs, provide valuable in-person assistance to renters and property owners, and enhance program visibility to marginalized community members.

- We urge that people with lived experience of housing instability and homelessness, as users of these systems, are directly consulted in efforts to create a coordinated system, in addition to service providers and local government and Tribal government entities, which are referenced in the bill.

Thank you for your attention. We are happy to respond to any questions.

Sincerely,

Nelima Sitati Munene, Executive Director
African Career Education & Resource Inc.

Margaret Kaplan, President
Housing Justice Center

Elizabeth Glidden, Deputy Executive Director
Minnesota Housing Partnership