

March 3, 2025

To: Chair Port and members of the Senate Housing & Homelessness Prevention Committee

From: Monica Nilsson, thirty year leader in homeless and housing programs

Dear Chair Port and Committee Members,

Homeless people are mostly men. They are located mostly in Minneapolis and St. Paul. Most of those homeless have drug or alcohol problems.

These conclusions can often be what Minnesotans believe without data. It's what we think we see because we don't know how to point to a 10 year old and say, "There's a homeless person."

The reality is Minnesota is finding an increase in older adults who are homeless, 4 of 10 homeless Minnesotans are children and youth and 47% of homeless Minnesotans are families. Most sadly, 33% of people experiencing homelessness in Minnesota don't even have safe sleep in a formal shelter. In 2023, there was a smaller proportion of people not in a formal shelter in the Twin Cities metro (18%), compared to greater Minnesota (32%).

How do we know this? Because of the work of Wilder Research. As a leader in direct service programming to people experiencing homelessness, a community educator and frequent media contact, I am writing to express strong support for SF 2214/HF 2276, appropriating funding for the Minnesota Homeless Study led by Wilder Research. I have been in the work of moving children and adults out of homelessness for over 30 years. I have watched the impact Wilder Research data has, in educating the public, the media, philanthropy and elected officials.

Since 1991, Wilder Research data has provided non-partisan information for decision makers, donors and volunteers to understand where support is needed. Data has been especially important in suburban, rural and greater Minnesota communities where homelessness isn't a group of people under a bridge or people living with severe mental illness walking in isolation.

In my time leading programs, conducting community engagement and educating leaders, whether a new legislator, Pastor or reporter, I have relied on Wilder Research to provide unbiased information. Data is not subjective.

As Board Chair of the statewide Minnesota Coalition for the Homeless for nearly a decade, I found the Minnesota Homeless Study and the companion Reservation Homeless Study to be the most comprehensive data source in Minnesota-and the most trusted.

99.8% of Minnesotans will have a safe place to sleep tonight. We can improve the issue of homelessness in our state and it starts with having data we respect and trust. I ask the committee to pass SF 2214/HF 2276 to ensure that the state continues to benefit from the insights provided by Minnesota Homeless Study data.

Sincerely,

Monica Nilsson