

Madam Chair and Members of the Committee. My name is Jill Johnson, I am Executive Director for Change Inc., the parent organization of GAP School. Thank you for this opportunity.

I strongly support Senate File 2792, which adds contract alternative schools as eligible recipients of the Minnesota housing challenge program.

GAP School is a contract alternative school of Saint Paul Public Schools through Minnesota's Graduation Incentives Program. This program was enacted by the Minnesota legislature in 1987 to encourage students struggling in traditional education to re-enroll in alternative programs, offering a path to graduation for those facing various challenges. GAP School has operated as a contract alternative since 1987.

In 1994, we added the YouthBuild model into the school. YouthBuild provides contextualized technical education in career pathways as part of the curriculum. This programming allows students to earn an industry recognized credential while completing their high school diploma. We currently offer construction and healthcare career pathways.

As part of our construction pathway, students learn and develop construction skills while building single family homes. Over the past 30 years, we have built over 20 homes in the West Side neighborhood of Saint Paul and sold them to low-income families.

Today, GAP School has a diverse enrollment of 140 students including 96% students from communities of color, 86% from low-income families, and 51% are English Language Learners. Approximately 50 students are enrolled in our construction pathway. The pathway's work of building homes for low-income families and preparing opportunity youth to enter the workforce aligns with the Minnesota housing challenge program's goals and objectives. Unfortunately, contract alternative schools are ineligible to apply at this time. Approving Senate File 2792 would update the eligibility to include GAP School and many other schools like it. Participation would greatly benefit our students, our organization, and our community. I appreciate your consideration.

Thank you, Madam Chair and Members of the committee.