

Bring It Home, MN. HF 40 / SF 333. Authors: Rep. Howard/Sen. Dziezic

Dear Chair Hausman and Members of the Housing Finance and Policy Committee

My name is Billy Brownlee and I am resident at Aeon, an affordable housing non-profit that creates and saves affordable homes in the Twin Cities. I support the Bring it Home, MN, HF 40,(Howard) bill that would create a Minnesota rent subsidy program so all low-income renters can afford their home. I hope after reading my testimony you to do the same.

I have been an Aeon resident since 2014. Since then, my life has grown immensely. But I want to share with you what is in my past, and what people in our community are experiencing right now. And that is homelessness. I'm here today because of what's behind me: an opioid addiction that put me in prison, left me living in shelters and on the street, and nearly killed me.

I had a will and desire to live, so I chose to find treatment. It was there that I learned about Aeon. I learned about one of their properties meant for people in recovery. After months on the wait list, I finally got in. The property had subsidized units, and this gave me and my neighbors a chance to find stability. It gave us the support to build our future.

For me, it was something as small as getting my drivers' license, to something as HUGE as getting promoted to Manager at my job. Having an affordable place to live is what gave me the chance to change my life. I am now a Resident Connections Coordinator at Aeon and I have been helping people in our community who are in the same place as I was back then.

In my role, I see first-hand the struggle this pandemic is having on low-income renters. It is only getting worse as the crisis continues. Working families are doing everything they can to make ends meet. My resident services team is doing what we can to support our properties right now, but a long-term solution needs to be created immediately. I know just how vital the importance of a subsidy can be to give someone a chance to thrive in life.

I am now on the path to homeownership and I would not be here if it wasn't for living in a subsidized Aeon property. I know a lot of people do not get this opportunity and that is exactly why I support this bill. Because I've been there, and I know exactly how difficult it is to get out of that hole. So many are living so close to the edge. They are paying way too much of their income toward rent.

This rent subsidy policy can change everything. It is an investment in our future, our community and an investment for someone like me – and you can give that hope to someone today. This bill is more than just giving someone access to a home. It is giving someone the possibility to live and have a future in this state. I am just one example of how this bill can benefit our community. Let's Bring it Home, Minnesota!

Thank You,
Billy Brownlee