

January 19, 2023
Chair Noor
Members of the Human Services Finance Committee

Dear Chair Noor and members of the Human Services Finance committee,

West Central MN Communities Action is writing to express support for HF444. WCMCA has been advocating towards ending unsheltered homelessness and providing shelter and rental assistance programming for several years. This package will make it that much closer to becoming a reality. We know that shelter saves lives and housing ends homelessness. We want to lift up three of the items listed in the legislation, but we fully support everything included.

\$150 million for Emergency Shelter Facilities

While WCMCA is advocating for \$200 million in funding, we are very pleased with \$150 million being included in HF444. Unfortunately, according to the Homelessness Management Information System, 80 of our 87 counties have either no shelter beds or lack enough shelter beds to meet the need. Being in rural Minnesota without an actual shelter within any of the 5 counties our agency serves, we have created innovative shelter options. With those shelter options, we are an agency where there is never enough space for the homeless households we serve. Minnesota Coalition for the Homeless completed a statewide survey to gauge the needed state resources to build, acquire, or renovate shelters to meet the need. They identified nearly \$200 million in capital needs statewide that would create or preserve over 3,400 shelter spaces. Every region in the state needs access to additional shelter spaces, and this statewide funding source would provide opportunities for shelters to generate new models to meet the need such as those that are culturally responsive, gender affirming, accessible, and are low barrier; shelter is the first step to finding permanent housing for families, individuals, and seniors experiencing homelessness.

\$40 million in 2024/25 and \$70 million in 2026/27 for the Emergency Services Program (ESP)

We are thrilled that HF444 includes our full request for ESP. This funding will allow organizations and local communities to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness through supporting shelters, outreach, motel vouchers, and other key resources and services. This increase will be key to supporting both new and existing shelters in providing services to people experiencing homelessness. WCMCA utilizes ESP funding for our shelter programming. We have created a program we named Launch Pad but never got a day without having a household in need to utilize the program and always have a long list waiting for placement on Coordinated Entry. This funding would allow the expansion of programming and more households to be served.

\$9 million for the Transitional Housing Program (THP)

Along with responding to our unsheltered homelessness crisis, HF444 includes funding for THP which is vital for many individuals and families leaving shelter. THP helps individuals and families obtain stable housing where they can develop good rental history while finding a permanent housing destination. WCMCA also utilizes THP funding the need for additional funding is always great.

In addition to the above priorities, WCMCA supports the remaining items included in HF444:

- **Homeless Management Information System**
- **Homeless Youth Act**
- **Homeless youth; chosen family grants**

We applaud the leadership for bringing this bill forward. Shelter saves lives and housing ends homelessness.

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