

April 15, 2026

Women's Foundation of Minnesota Supports HF 4738

Minnesota House Taxes committee members,

As the President and CEO of the Women's Foundation of Minnesota, I am writing to express our support for HF 4738, a bill that would appropriate money for sexually exploited youth for Safe Harbor shelter and housing. For over 40 years, the Women's Foundation has invested more than \$60 million in organizations across the state, and advanced policies to create a state where women, girls, and their families can thrive. The Women's Foundation advocated for the original 2011 Safe Harbor legislation and paid the \$12,000 fiscal note that helped enable its passage. Almost a decade and a half later, we're here again to advocate for this critical program.

In the 2017 report we funded, Mapping the Demand: Sex Buyers in the State of Minnesota, we know that youth exploitation is a crisis happening in all of our communities. A 2019 study on Safe Harbor found that the vast majority of participants were female, six percent were male, and three percent were transgender or gender-expansive. The National Human Trafficking Hotline received 335 calls from Minnesotans in 2021. A total of 98 cases were identified with 148 victims. Seventy-seven percent of cases involved sex trafficking. Responses to a question in the Minnesota Student Survey also funded by our organization revealed that almost two percent of Minnesota eleventh grade girls and five percent of nonbinary and transgender students surveyed in Minnesota public schools reported having traded sexual activity to receive money, food, drugs, alcohol, a place to stay, or anything else.

Youth exploitation can have far-reaching impacts on housing. Our 2026 Status of Women and Girls report found 42 percent of unhoused Minnesota women experienced sexual abuse as a child. Nationwide, approximately one in three homeless women experienced childhood sexual trauma. Youth in Minnesota who have survived sexual exploitation are often trapped in violent cycles unless critical interventions are made. According to a meta-analysis of 80 different studies, almost half of survivors are likely to experience sexual violence repeatedly. Without expanded outreach services, too many will find themselves in unstable housing or unhoused, struggling with mental health issues including addiction, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder or even back in the hands of those who are exploiting them. Survivors, and those at risk of exploitation, need safe housing, care, respect and dignity to rebuild their lives. We appreciate the work of Representative Keeler and the many co-authors of HF 4738 for bringing this bill forward and we urge the committee's support.



Gloria Perez  
President & CEO