

May 4, 2021

Chair Michelle Benson
Chair Tina Liebling
Members of the HHS Conference Committee

Re: Minnesota Coalition for the Homeless Health and Human Services Budget Recommendations

Dear Chair Benson, Chair Liebling, and Members of the Health and Human Services Conference Committee:

The Minnesota Coalition for the Homeless would like to relay the following recommendations for final passage in the Health and Human Services budget bill. These investments will make significant strides toward ending our homelessness crisis and providing the resources and infrastructure necessary to achieve that goal.

Senate Positions:

- **Increasing the Housing Supports Program base rate by \$100/month and allowing for longer periods of absence for individuals seeking medical treatment** - This provision would increase base rate funding by \$100 per month, allowing providers to work directly with private market landlords across the state to create more pathways to stable housing. With its focus on community settings—those places where individuals have their own lease—it represents a unique public-private partnership serving nearly 5,000 individuals at-risk of homelessness, with the potential to serve more in all regions of the state. The Senate proposal also includes a provision allowing extended Housing Support absences for individuals seeking healthcare treatment—a much needed policy update that will ensure tenants with chronic medical conditions or a history of substance use or mental illness can get the treatment they need without fear of losing their housing in the process. We are grateful that the House has adopted a similar provision on absences and support an agreement that at minimum meets the terms of the Senate provision.

House Positions:

- **\$9M/year in Emergency Services Program Grants** - The Emergency Services Program is the State's best response to homelessness. It provides resources for shelter operations, but also mental and behavioral health care, child care, employment counseling, transportation, and more. These resources are critical across the state, but have historically been so underfunded that providers have fleeting access to the funds. Making this a reliable source of funding will help providers plan for these resources and offer the services needed to get people into stable housing quickly.
- **\$2.5M/year in Shelter Capital Costs** - This investment is critical in getting our existing shelters more accessible. Across the state, shelters are not able to keep up with their maintenance costs, and many have outstanding safety issues that need to be addressed, such as stairways, windows, and heat failures. This money can also be used to expand shelter capacity where there is not enough or is non-existent. Currently, 80 of our 87 counties lack enough shelter beds to meet the need. With this investment, we will be able to expand our shelter capacity to meet the needs of our State.

We know that shelter saves lives and housing ends homelessness. We appreciate the dedication each of you has shown toward improving the lives of Minnesotans, particularly those experiencing homelessness, housing instability, or at-risk of housing instability. The investments outlined in this letter will stabilize and address our homelessness crisis. We encourage you to ensure that people have access to appropriate shelter and housing options across the state.

If you have questions on any of the above provisions, please reach out to Zack Eichten at zack@mnhomelesscoalition.org or at 651-829-0888.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rhonda". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letter 'R' being particularly large and stylized.

Rhonda Otteson
Executive Director