



March 16, 2022

Re: HF3613 Shelter Linked Mental Health

Dear Chair Gomez and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to share Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota's (LSS) support of HF3613 for investment in shelter-linked mental health to effectively and holistically support the needs of resilient youth experiencing homelessness and mental health challenges.

LSS is a provider of essential services across all 87 counties with more than 2,500 employees serving one in 65 Minnesotans. We believe that behavioral health builds the foundation for health and well-being, and our services provide individuals and families with critical access to mental health care in communities across the state. This includes over 40 years serving youth experiencing homelessness. LSS provides shelter and supportive housing services for youth experiencing homelessness in 8 geographic locations across the state.

Youth supported through LSS' shelter services have experienced challenging life situations, untreated mental health concerns and a negative view of mental health services. A youth at one LSS shelter location told an integrated mental health provider: *"Everyone says I need mental health or I have some kind of diagnosis. But I'm tired of people saying there is something wrong with me...I don't want therapy."* Through integrated mental health, the provider found opportunities to stay connected to the youth and build trust. The flexibility of shelter-linked mental health funds allows for building rapport for future services. Overtime, youth start to share and work through what led to their homelessness and how past experiences created their aversion to mental health services. Shelter-linked mental health grants create opportunity for youth to build connection with a mental health provider and work through barriers to supportive services.

Integrating a mental health provider into LSS youth shelter locations in St. Louis County has already linked 36 youth to mental health services and had a positive impact on both the youth and the teams who support them. Fostering the normalization of mental health supports has helped to break through the barriers of stigma and fear associated with traditional services. For our shelter team, it has provided unique opportunities for staff training on the integration of mental wellness into everyday shelter activities. This has led to greater engagement with youth, expanded coping skills, and improvements in goal achievement and stability for the youth we serve.

Thank you, again, for this opportunity. If we can be of service on these issues, please reach out to us or our Advocacy Manager, Jeru Gobeze, at jeru.gobeze@lssmn.org.

Sincerely,

Dawn Shykes, MSW

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dawn Shykes".

Sr. Director of Youth, Children and Family Services

Trevor B. Johnson, MSW, LICSW

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Trevor B. Johnson".

Sr. Director of Behavioral Health