



CATHOLIC CHARITIES
of St. Paul and Minneapolis

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February 3, 2021

Representative Aisha Gomez
Chair, Preventing Homelessness Division
Via Electronic Delivery

Re: Support for H.F. 42 (Emergency Services Program, Isolation Spaces & Housing Support)

Chair Gomez and Members of the Committee:

Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis offers its strong support for H.F. 42, a bill providing COVID-19 aid to continue and expand critical emergency shelter and housing operations for those in need during this pandemic, and we thank Representative Howard for his leadership on this issue.

Catholic Charities is a housing, emergency shelter and direct services provider supporting over 23,000 men, women, children and families each year. Even before COVID, the need for our services was pushing our capacity to its max. In just two years, we experienced a 32 percent increase in clients seeking our assistance; one in five were over the age of 55. Our emergency shelter on the Dorothy Day Campus, just blocks from the Capitol, was at absolute maximum capacity, sheltering 356 guests every night—up from 280 when it first opened in 2017.

Since March 2020, the pandemic has put even greater strain and demand on our services. Early changes needed to ensure we could keep our doors open and continue serving clients safely cost our agency more than \$1 million per month. We repurposed spaces, fully revamped our food service, and adapted other program designs to promote physical distancing and preventive hygiene measures.

With our public partners, we reduced census numbers in our shelters by relocating hundreds of the most vulnerable to hotels. Where we could, we expanded our hours to keep services open 24/7 so that individuals have a warm and safe place to shelter indoors at any time during these coldest months of the pandemic. With support from the community, we distributed nearly 30,000 face masks and, as of December, delivered nearly 300,000 pounds of food to residents in our housing sites who could no longer use our dining halls or public eating locations due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Our frontline staff have worked tirelessly throughout this all, and they've gone even further to prove themselves as a critical part of the healthcare system. Our staff consistently screen more than 1,600 adults and children *each day* across our 18 sites and are frequently the first point of referral for those requiring treatment for COVID-19. They have played a central role in contact tracing and coordinating

Catholic Charities serves those most in need. We are a leader at solving poverty, creating opportunity, and advocating for justice in the community.

testing events to prevent community spread. They stand alongside registered nurses to assist with intake and registration at every testing event held at our sites, and they are now supporting outreach and coordination for vaccination clinics for priority individuals.

More than ever before, this pandemic has shown the need to recognize emergency shelters as core community infrastructure, just like hospitals and emergency rooms. Emergency shelters save lives. They can't suspend services or work off-site. They help comprise the fabric of our state's safety net; if they fail, our healthcare system will not be able to manage the additional pressures.

The quick actions of the Minnesota Legislature and Congress early in the pandemic provided critical funding to help shelters and housing support providers continue serving individuals safely and without interruption, and we are incredibly grateful for your past support. Those dollars will soon run out, however, and the uncertainty of additional federal action makes it difficult for providers like us to meet current demands and plan for continuity of operations.

Increased and sustained public funding is crucial moving forward; and in these extreme times, additional emergency aid also is needed to meet the significant and increased costs required of the pandemic response.

The one-time COVID-19 relief proposed in H.F. 42 for the Emergency Services Program (ESP), isolation spaces, and Housing Support would give the resources and certainty needed for service providers in every corner of the state to continue providing life-saving services to individuals in need. We respectfully ask for your support so that we may continue supporting others.

Sincerely,



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