



Saint Louis County

Public Health and Human Service Department – www.stlouiscountymn.gov

Linnea Mirsch
PHHS Director

March 21, 2023

Chair Pinto and Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee Members,

Thank you for your time and consideration of HF 2008. My name is Laura Birnbaum and I work for St. Louis County Public Health and Human Services, supervising our Housing and Homelessness Programs Team. I apologize that I am not able to be there in person with you today but I am excited, hopeful, and grateful to express my support and encourage yours for HF 2008.

We know that young adults ages 18 - 24 are overrepresented when it comes to facing homelessness. This is true not only in metro areas but also in greater Minnesota rural communities, like those found in St. Louis County. At the end of last week, 178 people ages 18 - 24 were unhoused in St. Louis County. This includes 131 single people of which six are pregnant and 41 families. The number of young people in our coordinated entry system is not decreasing, despite active efforts to expand permanent supportive housing and related programming.

In St. Louis County, we see young people leaving unsafe situations, doing their best and due to not feeling safe in traditional shelter spaces; will most often stay with friends/"couch hop," or find shelter in places not meant for human habitation.

We also see young people return to homelessness due to financial struggles that are no fault of their own. Young people are connected to benefits that provide a basic level of support (e.g., food support – SNAP, and health insurance - MA); however, this doesn't get anywhere near addressing the need for young people to access housing. Herein lies the gap that direct cash transfers could empower young adults to address.

Young people need more tools where they can have ownership, more choices and flexibility to be able to utilize creativity in determining their own housing solutions; where they can move out of crisis and surviving into thriving, breaking cycles of poverty and homelessness. And we would be able to learn from this project to replicate what works across the State due to the critical research component with Chapin Hall.

Innovative programming that is responsive to young people's voices and experiences is the solution. They are the experts. Please support HF 2008 - this is an amazing opportunity for you, for Minnesota, to champion and lead in ending youth homelessness.

Sincerely,

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