

March 28, 2022

Re: HF3377/SF3155 – support for Host Homes for Youth

Kathy Dunmire
9079 Alger Court
Inver Grove Heights, MN 55077

I am writing in support of the bill for a Pilot Program for Chosen Family Hosting. My perspective on this issue has been formed by my work as a domestic violence shelter advocate where I supported youth impacted by domestic and sexual violence. In addition, I served as a community member on a group attempting to bring a Host Home program to Dakota County. My husband and I also hosted 2 different youth as a pilot host home in that effort. We were matched, as strangers, with our first young person. Introduced to the second youth by our initial hosted youth – more of a Chosen Host.

I support this bill for a number of reasons.

Young adults are a part of our “invisible” homeless population. Sometimes adult based shelters and options don’t provide the unique support needed by youth and often don’t feel safe. The infrastructure cost of buildings and the time required to make it happen will be shortened substantially by Chosen Host Homes.

Making the transition into adulthood is hard. My own children needed advice, support, cheerleading etc. as they made decisions to establish themselves as contributing adults. The investment made at this transition time sets a strong foundation for our youth, which benefits our community. While shelter and food is important, through my domestic violence work and pilot host home experience, I’ve become convinced that one aspect youth want and need most is connection and feeling loved and accepted. Chosen Host Home programming meets that need. The second youth who stayed with us stated “I received an overwhelming amount of support from them including advice, resources, comfort, and wisdom. This has been very helpful for me and I would love to continue to receive this type of emotional support.”

While I am a firm supporter of Host Home programs in general, I strongly believe a Chosen Host program is more effective, scalable, and better addresses the needs of our diverse community. By supporting someone as a host that the youth already trusts, we are able to provide better, faster support. For youth who feel betrayed by many adults in their life, trust is huge. By providing financial, rental, structural, programmatic or other supports to chosen hosts, we open up a network of willing hosts who might otherwise need to say “no” because of financial hardships, rental limits, or a concern about their own capabilities to provide what’s needed. In our efforts in Dakota County we had willing youth, but could not recruit hosts. Hosts from the BIPOC community were particularly hard to reach. By helping a youth explore who they already know, where they last felt safe, options emerge in diverse communities. By pledging support and barrier removal to the Chosen Host, opportunities for the host to say yes are increased. The ongoing support of this relationship provides a better structure for success.

Minnesota has a number of providers who have focused on supporting youth and running different types of host home programs. By providing financial support and the structure of a pilot program, we can build capacity and develop a deeper understanding of best practices that can be spread across providers, better serving our youth and supporting those who care for them.