



I am submitting this informative statement to share our organization's recent data and field experience regarding high-performance residential construction. For over 30 years, our affiliate has served the Itasca County area by providing safe, decent, and affordable housing. As the legislature considers the current bill regarding the acceleration of residential energy codes, Itasca County Habitat for Humanity takes a neutral position; we neither support nor oppose this specific legislation. We believe, however, that our recent transition to near net-zero building standards offers a helpful case study on the intersection of energy efficiency, construction costs, and resident health.

In 2025, Itasca County Habitat for Humanity completed its first near net-zero home in Cohasset, deliberately building to meet the statutory goal of a 70% reduction in annual net energy consumption. Our primary finding from this project was that building to these advanced standards proved to be cost-neutral compared to the traditional energy-efficient homes we were previously constructing. By utilizing high-performance components such as triple-pane windows, R-45 wall insulation, and R-70 roof insulation, and right-sizing our mechanical systems. Additionally, the overall project cost remained stable in part due to a grant utilized to install the solar array on the home and donated 2x10 lumber from a local lumber manufacturer, which was essential in reaching our energy goals without increasing our construction budget.

Our data suggests that these efficiency measures are a critical component of long-term housing affordability. While mortgage payments are a fixed cost, energy expenses are often the most volatile part of a low-income family's budget. Residents in our high efficiency builds benefit from significantly lower and more predictable operational costs, which provides essential financial stability. Furthermore, we have observed a measurable impact on resident well-being. For example, the youngest child in our first near net-zero home previously suffered from a chronic cough and required daily use of medicated inhalers; however, since moving into the new home in mid-December, which features enhanced air filtration and moisture control, the child no longer requires daily medication.

We provide this information not to advocate for or against the pending bill, but to illustrate that high-performance building standards can be implemented in a way that remains cost-neutral for builders while improving the long-term affordability and health outcomes for Minnesota residents. We hope these insights from the field are useful as you deliberate the future of the state's residential energy codes. Thank you for your time and your dedication to the housing needs of our state.

Sincerely,

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