

January 19, 2023  
Chair Noor  
Members of the Human Services Finance Committee



Dear Chair Noor and members of the Human Services Finance committee:

**The Bridge for Youth is writing to express support for HF444.** The Bridge for Youth has been advocating for *ending youth homelessness since 1970* and this package will make it that much closer to becoming a reality. We know that shelter saves lives and housing ends homelessness. We want to specifically applaud three of the items listed in the legislation, but we fully support everything included in HF444.

#### **Homeless Youth Act (HYA)**

We celebrate the investment of \$25,000,000 to strengthen and expand our collective ability to support youth experiencing homelessness. Homelessness is often preceded by adverse childhood experiences (ACEs); 84% of youth experiencing homelessness have experienced at least one ACE, and 59% have experienced three or more ACE's before turning 18. Amongst these youth, 61% lived with a substance abuser, 60% witnessed abuse as a child, 59% lived with a parent or guardian with mental illness, 48% were physically mistreated or abused, and 31% were sexually mistreated or abused. It's further alarming that 64% of youth experiencing homelessness reportedly have a serious mental illness.

Working with youth with this level of trauma takes its toll on youth workers and we need to invest more resources to care for their secondary trauma. We also need to increase wages and total compensation of the direct service staff supporting youth. No longer can we struggle to compete with government and private employers. We need to increase our minimum wage to match theirs so we can maintain a full and highly skilled roster of employees. We continue to hear from our government funders that our contracts can't be increased because their funding is flat. An increase in the HYA is one solution to this employment crisis and we celebrate it!

#### **\$150 million for Emergency Shelter Facilities**

We are very pleased with \$150 million being included in HF444. Unfortunately, every region in the state needs access to additional shelter spaces and renovation to existing spaces, especially for pregnant and parenting youth. This statewide funding source would provide opportunities for shelters to generate new models to meet the need such as those that are culturally responsive, appropriate for youth who are pregnant/parenting, gender affirming for LGBTQ+ identifying youth, accessible and are low barrier.

#### **\$40 million in 2024/25 and \$70 million in 2026/27 for the Emergency Services Program (ESP)**

We are thrilled that HF444 includes funding for ESP. This increased funding will allow organizations and local communities to meet the needs of youth experiencing homelessness through supporting youth shelters, outreach, and to provide access to other key resources and services.

We applaud the leadership for bringing this bill forward. For youth across Minnesota, outreach prevents crisis, shelter saves lives, and housing ends homelessness. If we invest in youth now, we prevent adult homelessness. Let's work together to get this done. [www.bridgeforyouth.org](http://www.bridgeforyouth.org)

Sincerely,  
Lisa Mears  
Executive Director, The Bridge for Youth  
612-508-1279