



June 14, 2020

Representative Tina Liebling  
Chair, Health and Human Services Finance Division  
*Via Electronic Delivery*

**RE: Support for Extending DHS Waivers**

Chair Liebling and Members of the Health and Human Services Finance Division:

We write in support of the DHS waivers and modifications authorized by Executive Order and in support of the efforts to codify and extend these flexibilities through legislative action during this Special Session.

Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis began its mission of serving those most in need 150 years ago. We currently operate 29 programs across three direct service areas: Individuals Experiencing or At Risk of Homelessness, Older Adults & People with Disabilities, and Children & Families. Collectively, our work helps nearly 23,000 people annually, regardless of faith, background or circumstance.

More than two-thirds of our clients (67%) identify as people of color or indigenous, and about one out of every three is over the age of 55. Many have chronic conditions, mental and chemical health challenges, or other disabilities which require special care. And all are at increased risk of contracting or spreading COVID-19 and other communicable diseases.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we have continued to serve our clients safely and without interruption, even as social distancing requirements and health guidance pushed us to reinvent how we do our work. This would not be possible without the waivers and modifications granted by DHS during the peacetime emergency.

Each of our direct service areas has benefited from one or more DHS waivers, and in that way so have many of the individuals we serve. For example, **flexibilities for telehealth services** have allowed staff to stay connected to our elderly clients, people with disabilities, and families so that they can continue to receive long-term care assessments, case management, and family home visiting. **Acceptance of electronic signatures** and consent via phone has helped ensure individuals don't lose their benefits if they are unable to safely meet in-person. And exemptions for temporary absences from **Housing Support** have protected individuals from re-entering homelessness at a time when staying home is still considered to be the best way to stay healthy. This last example is particularly noteworthy for its impact during the pandemic and as our state continues to grapple with a housing and homelessness crisis.

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

Current law limits the number of days Housing Support recipients can be absent from their residence. If an individual is gone more than 18 days, they lose their housing. With the waiver issued by DHS, Housing Support payments may continue for individuals in quarantine or hospitalized due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This gives reassurance that individuals who have been exposed to and/or contracted COVID-19 don't have to choose between seeking medical treatment and keeping their housing. Failure to extend this waiver could result in already vulnerable individuals being thrown back into homelessness after being discharged from treatment. It would also pose a risk to the public's health by discouraging residents from seeking care – thereby creating conditions that could promote community transmission of the virus.

The COVID-19 pandemic has threatened to exacerbate Minnesota's inequities, and as our state begins to turn the dial on its COVID-19 response, the individuals we serve remain at heightened risk. We all have a responsibility to protect and promote the health and well-being of the most vulnerable in our communities so they don't end up further behind as we move toward recovery. The extension of DHS waivers with sufficient time to transition services safely and responsibly after the peacetime emergency ends is critical to that work. We ask for your support.

If you have questions or if we can be of greater assistance, please feel free to contact Lorna Schmidt, public policy manager, at [lorna.schmidt@cctwincities.org](mailto:lorna.schmidt@cctwincities.org) or (920) 242-2748.

Sincerely,



Wendy Underwood  
Vice President of Social Justice Advocacy and Engagement  
Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis