May 10, 2022

Sen. Jim Abeler Rep. Tina Liebling

Sen. Paul Utke Rep. Jennifer Schultz

Sen. Michelle Benson Rep. Dave Pinto

Sen. Mark Koran Rep. Aisha Gomez

Sen. John Hoffman Rep. Tony Albright

RE: Heading Home Ramsey Continuum of Care emergency shelter request

Dear Members of the Health and Human Services Conference Committee:

**On behalf of the Heading Home Ramsey County Continuum of Care, we write to ask for your support of at least $8 million in a final human services agreement to address emergency needs in our homeless populations.** Without this support, Ramsey County emergency shelters will close on June 22, 2022.

We are the leaders of housing, emergency shelter and direct services across Ramsey County and come together as the HUD-federally mandated Continuum of Care we call Heading Home Ramsey. Local government and community partnerships have been critical to our ability to provide homeless shelter operations safely during the pandemic. Over the last two years, Ramsey County and the City of Saint Paul have invested over $53 million to bolster a temporary emergency response to the homelessness and pandemic crisis in order to stand up emergency shelters and services. These investments have been critical to filling gaps in our system and providing hundreds of Minnesotans with safe, dignified shelter options.

But, we can’t solve homelessness without thinking about how to move individuals and families toward stability through affordable housing. Last fall, Ramsey County and Saint Paul announced a combined $74 million investment of our ARP dollars in deeply affordable housing. It will take time for this investment to come to fruition. As a result, we have a fiscal cliff and we are asking the state to help address the critical needs of our region’s residents. We strongly believe this is not just a Ramsey County problem – we know that only 42% of the individuals currently using Ramsey County COIVID emergency shelters identify Ramsey County as their county of residence prior to experiencing homelessness.

At the start of this session, we presented this request to the Legislature in HF3950/SF3710 (Moran/Senjem) which would appropriate $14.5 million (FY22) and $58 million (FY23-25) for bridge funding as these housing investments come online and we continue to provide supportive services and dignified shelter for those in crisis. We thank the House for its position in SF4410 to include $8 million for this request. With these dollars, our Continuum of Care Governing Board would prioritize continuation of the 100-bed single room occupancy adult shelter with wrap-around services for 1 year. But, to be clear, these dollars do not meet the identified need. If additional funds are allocated, we would be able to move ahead with operations of the 100-bed family shelter ($2M), then day shelter ($1M), and the Familiar Faces pilot program($2.5M). We strongly believe that all of these elements are necessary to fill the critical gaps in our homeless response resources and provide hundreds of Minnesotans safe and dignified shelter until the aforementioned affordable housing developments can be completed.

**The Ramsey County COVID emergency shelters will close on June 22 if state dollars are not committed.** Current emergency shelter providers have been notified those services will discontinue without further state funding. As local government partners, we have turned over the proverbial couch cushions and stretched our budgets as far as they can go to meet this need. We need your help. In the absence of additional funds from the state we will see homeless individuals become unsheltered throughout the capital city and Ramsey County by the end of June.

We thank members of the conference committee that have signed onto this bill: Senator Abeler, Representatives Pinto and Albright. We’d also like to thank House Chairs Gomez, Liebling and Schultz for including these critical funds in their funding proposals.

We recognize that this conference committee has incredible decisions to make this session as you prioritize critical community needs. Heading Home Ramsey strongly encourages you to consider the negative consequences for individuals and families that will result if this request is not funded. We look forward to working with you to develop meaningful solutions to address these needs.

Sincerely,

 

Deputy Mayor Jaime Tincher, Commissioner Trista MatasCastillo

City of Saint Paul, Chair Ramsey County, Vice Chair

**Heading Home Ramsey Governing Board Heading Home Ramsey Steering Committee:**

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Anil Hurkadii, St. Paul & Minnesota Foundation Sara Liegl, Interfaith Action/Project Home

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Lt. Tim Lawrence, Metro Transit Police/Homeless Action Team Chris Michels, Catholic Charities

Tiffany Scott Knox, St. Paul Promise Neighborhood Dominic Mitchell, St. Paul Public Housing Agency

Ruby Lee, CLUES Gail Moerke, Ramsey County Corrections

Councilmember Rebecca Noecker, City of St. Paul Jesse Mollner, St. Paul Police Department

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DeBorah Smith, Project for Pride in Living Dave Sena, Union Gospel Mission

Terri Smith, HRA Director for Metropolitan Council Kenya Walker, Ramsey County

Wendy Underwood, Catholic Charities Ben Weiss, SMRLS

Lucy Zanders, Theresa Living Center Lucy Zanders, Theresa Living Center