

March 27, 2023

Chair Pinto

Members of the Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee

Minnesota House of Representatives

100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.

St. Paul, MN. 55155

Dear Chair Pinto and members of the Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee,

My name is Bukola Oriola, Executive Director of The Enitan Story, a survivor-led nonprofit organization with a mission to advocate for victims and empower survivors of human trafficking and domestic violence.

I also served on the U.S. Advisory Council on Human trafficking for two consecutive terms under President Obama and President Trump's administrations to provide recommendations using the lived experience subject matter expert to help meet the needs of individuals who have experienced sex or labor trafficking in the U.S. and specifically in the state of Minnesota. In addition, I provide subject matter expertise to the MN DHS Child Safety and Prevention Unit of the Human Trafficking Child Protection Program.

The Enitan Story is writing to express support for HF 444, the Pathways Home Act. We are a Safe Harbor grantee providing culturally responsive direct services to youth who have experienced sex trafficking or sexual exploitation in Minnesota through the state's Safe Harbor Law and No Wrong Door Response. Although we are based in Fridley, we serve victims of sex trafficking from all areas of the state-inner city, suburbs, rural areas and tribal communities because, unfortunately, sex trafficking is happening in all of these communities.

Majority of the youth we serve are homelessness which can result in re-exploitation or re-trafficked for sex or labor. We know that shelter saves lives and housing ends homelessness. We want to lift up the Homeless Youth Act listed in the legislation but we fully support everything that is included in the Pathways Home Act.

Youth homelessness is a crisis in our state! On any given night there are 4,872 unaccompanied youth who are experiencing homelessness. These are young people who become homeless due to many reasons-we see youth who are kicked out due to their sexual orientation or gender identity, youth who's family can't afford housing large enough for the whole family so the older youth are finding alternative housing; youth who are falling through the cracks or aging out of our foster care system and more.

We see youth who are then forced to make horrible decisions to survive-some having to live in a car, go between libraries and public transportation, live in an encampment, find a doorway of a building or an abandoned building to live out of, or trade sex for a place to sleep.

These young people deserve a safe and stable place to live and support with accomplishing the goals that they have for themselves! And we as a state have an opportunity to do this! We can reduce and end youth homelessness-an investment in the state's Homeless Youth Act is the way to do this!

The Homeless Youth Act provides a continuum of services (street outreach, drop-in center, homeless prevention, emergency shelter, host homes and all models of housing) that can provide young people with what they need and deserve to get out of homelessness! Please support the Pathways Home Act which includes a \$25 million increase in 2024/2025 and \$40 million in 2026/2027!

In addition to the above priorities, YSN supports the remaining items included in HF 444:

- Homeless Management Information System
- \$9 million for the Transitional Housing Program
- \$40 million in 2024/25 and \$70 million in 2026/2027 for the Emergency Services Program
- \$150 million for Emergency Shelter Facilities
- Chosen Family Pilot

We cannot thank you enough for your incredible support of all people experiencing homelessness in our state-including unaccompanied youth and young families.

Sincerely,



Bukola Oriola

Executive Director, The Enitan Story/ Former Member, U.S. Advisory Council on Human Trafficking