

HENNEPIN COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

March 21, 2023

Chair Dave Pinto, Children and Families Finance and Policy Committee
503 State Office Building
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr Blvd
Saint Paul, MN 55155

Dear Chair Pinto and Committee Members,

Thank you for considering HF 135 (Feist), Hennepin County's Emergency Shelter request. Hennepin County is proud to have reversed the unsheltered homelessness trend we saw rising in 2018 using local funds and leveraging nearly 40% of federal pandemic aid into program supports and homelessness response. Those federal pandemic dollars will run out in 2024, at which point we will be forced to close effective programming and needed shelters.

Our county represents more than 40% of Minnesota's shelter capacity. We are proud to have worked with non-profit partners to maximize affordable and supportive housing production, shelter capacity, wrap-around support services, and limited competitive grant dollars to address the unsheltered homelessness crisis in our state. We need the state to join us as a partner in this work.

Anything short of fully funding the request in HF 135 will result in:

1. The end of most 24/7 shelter – 320 people a day across Agate, Simpson, Catholic Charities and Salvation Army shelters will once again have no choice but to return to the streets every morning and wait for shelters to open again every night, undermining their ability to work on long term housing.
2. Closure for Avivo Village – we will lose a 100-bed shelter and the State will lose its most intensive emergency response for people struggling with unsheltered homelessness and chemical health needs.
3. Closure for Homeward Bound – we will lose a 50-bed shelter and Hennepin will lose its only 24/7 culturally specific shelter responding to the disproportionate impact of unsheltered homelessness on the Native American community.
4. The end of Catholic Charities diversion programming – since the start of the year 77 families and 96 single adults have found safe alternatives to shelter through this programming. Without this service, demand for shelter will increase at the same time capacity reduces.
5. The end of Hennepin County's housing focused case management – in just over a year this team has moved 423 people from homelessness to permanent housing. Without this service these people would still be on the streets or in shelter. The end of this service will see the numbers on the streets and needing shelter increase once more.

Additionally, the Agate Housing and Services and Simpson Housing Services construction projects that will provide modern shelter and housing projects are in jeopardy if they cannot source the remaining capital needed as a matter of urgency.

Hennepin County property tax dollars alone – already stretched by existing shelter commitments including the shelter-all commitment for families that is supporting more than 250 families and more than 500 children a night - cannot solve this problem.

Sincerely,



Irene Fernando, Chair
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