



**1919 University Avenue West, Suite 400, St. Paul, MN 55114 Tel. 651-645-2948 or 888-NAMIHELPS www.namimn.org**

December 8, 2020

Dear Members of the House Health and Human Services Finance Committee:

NAMI Minnesota is writing to express our support for both COVID-19 relief bills being considered today. Everyone is facing challenges due to COVID-19, but these burdens are not felt equally. People experiencing homelessness and people receiving treatment in long-term care facilities have faced significant hardships and require additional support. The need is urgent, COVID-19 cases are surging in Minnesota, and the legislature cannot wait until the 2021 legislative session to act.

Minnesota shelters were underfunded and overcrowded before the public health emergency. The funding in this legislation will be a lifeline to the homeless community and will ensure that people have a safe and secure place to stay that does not put their health at risk. Ensuring access to cleaning supplies, expanding access to motel vouchers, developing isolation spaces for those who need to quarantine, and hiring additional staff are all important steps to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among people experiencing homelessness. NAMI Minnesota also supports the temporary rate increase for Housing Supports providers. These providers are facing significant financial challenges. This funding will ensure that people with mental illnesses and others who have experienced homelessness will have access to a safe and decent place to live during this pandemic.

The Legislature must also to continue efforts to offer emergency staffing relief for long-term care providers, including mental health and substance use disorder programs. With an existing workforce shortage, individual providers do not have the capacity or financial resources to quickly find a substitute should a member of their team need to quarantine due to COVID-19. This program has not been perfect, but it is a vital lifeline for programs experiencing a staffing crisis. NAMI Minnesota also supports appropriating additional, one-time resources to ensure adequate COVID-19 testing and contact tracing for long-term care providers, as well as staffing support to ensure that facility policies prevent the transmission of COVID-19.

While there are reasons for hope including the development of a COVID-19 vaccine, Minnesota’s health system is approaching its maximum capacity and we need to take action now. Providing targeted support for people experiencing homelessness and Long-Term care residents – many of whom live with mental illnesses – offers the chance to go upstream and prevent even more people from requiring hospitalization.

Sincerely,

Sue Abderholden, MPH Sam Smith

Executive Director Public Policy Coordinator