



March 9, 2022

Re: Letter of Support for HF3661 and HF3599

To Whom It May Concern:

Every night in Minnesota, **4,876** youth experience homelessness. Experiencing homelessness puts youth at significant risk of becoming pregnant due to abuse or assault. Minor-age youth experiencing homelessness are 14 times more likely to have been pregnant or gotten someone pregnant. Alarming, in Minnesota 35% of youth experiencing homelessness are pregnant/parenting, and in Hennepin County this increases to nearly 50%.



There is a way to reduce and end youth homelessness by investing in the Minnesota Homeless Youth Act – **HF3661**. The Homeless Youth Act provides state-wide service organizations the opportunity to provide a continuum of services that are trauma-informed and allows for innovation and flexibility, including emergency shelter, housing, case management and supportive services, drop-in services, and street outreach for youth. **Included in HF3661 is a one-time investment of \$300K for a comprehensive study on the prevalence and impact of pregnancy amongst youth experiencing homelessness.** There is no current data state-wide that is consistent for capturing this data; this study seeks to improve maternal and infant health outcomes by understanding the need and aligning programming to best serve these youth.

In 2011, Minnesota passed the Safe Harbor Law and No Wrong Door Response, which decriminalized “prostitution” offenses for minor-age youth and provides a continuum of trauma-informed and specialized programming, shelter, and housing to survivors of sexual exploitation. This legislation ensures that trafficked youth are not treated as criminals but as survivors who need trauma-informed services and support. The need exceeds available services, and because of COVID-19, these youth have become even less visible.

Minnesota has a budget surplus of more than \$9.25B, but there is no surplus when youth are trafficked and/or experiencing homelessness. NOW is the time to fully fund the Homeless Youth Act – **HF3661** and Safe Harbor – **HF3599**. An investment of \$50M in the Homeless Youth Act and \$20M in Safe Harbor will move us closer to becoming the first state to end youth homelessness and exploitation.

If you would like to schedule a visit to The Bridge for Youth in Minneapolis, I welcome your call or email. Thank you in advance for your support.

Sincerely,

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# Homelessness Amongst Pregnant and Parenting Youth

## Pregnant and Parenting Youth in Minnesota

Youth are disproportionately affected relative to their population, making up nearly half (46%) of the homeless. Nearly three-quarters (73%) of youth experiencing homelessness identify as BIPOC, compared to just 26% of all Minnesota youth. Alarming 35% of youth experiencing homelessness are pregnant/parenting, and in Hennepin County this increases to nearly 50%<sup>i</sup>. In Minnesota, the birth rate of youth who identify as BIPOC is three times higher than that of white youth, and youth with the highest percent of subsequent birth are from BIPOC communities<sup>ii</sup>. Amongst adults experiencing homelessness, 36% experienced homelessness as children<sup>iii</sup>.

## Risks and Challenges for Pregnant and Parenting Youth Experiencing Homelessness

Experiencing homelessness puts youth at significant risk of becoming pregnant due to abuse or assault. Minor-age youth experiencing homelessness are 14 times more likely to have been pregnant or gotten someone pregnant<sup>iv</sup>. Over half (54%) of youth experiencing homelessness reported that they had been physically abused, sexually abused, or neglected at some point in their childhood, and 48% reported having been in a social-service placement as children<sup>v</sup>. Parenting is challenging enough in the best of circumstances, but for parenting youth experiencing homelessness, the difficulties facing them can be overwhelming. These youth are at increased risk for exposing their children to substances in-utero, premature births, low birth rates, child abuse or neglect, limited access to critical supports, removal of their children into the child protection system and exposure to violence and abuse. Research shows experiencing homelessness as an infant or toddler can have life-long repercussions; early developmental trauma (child abuse, neglect, and disrupted attachment) is often a direct pathway to homelessness. Homelessness itself also involves further trauma and increases the risk of cyclical victimization and re-traumatization<sup>vi</sup>.



## Specific Programming and Mental Health Services Critically Needed

Of the minor-age youth who are pregnant or have gotten someone pregnant, 49% reported a significant mental health issue<sup>vii</sup>. Youth experiencing an unplanned pregnancy are dealing with decisions with long term repercussions, that are compounded in complexity when they are dealing with mental health issues and homelessness. Timely and specific programming is key to providing the services they need, when in fact studies show that youth are much more likely to engage with support such as counseling when they feel their voice is heard. A critical aspect of youth feeling understood is them viewing their service providers as being able to relate to them through similar socio-demographic identity and experiences.<sup>viii</sup>

## Disrupting the Cycle of Inter-generational Homelessness

Recognizing an urgent and growing need for housing for pregnant and parenting youth experiencing homelessness, in 2019 The Bridge for Youth opened Marlene's Place, the first and only site-based transitional housing program specifically for pregnant/parenting youth (ages 16-20) and their children (ages 0-3) currently or at risk of experiencing homelessness in Hennepin County. Marlene's Place provides housing, comprehensive case management, access to healthcare, and parenting education for up to five families. In 2020, programming expanded with the opening of Gloria's Place, the only emergency shelter in Minnesota for pregnant/parenting youth (ages 15-17) and their children (ages 0-3), providing emergency shelter, case management, access to healthcare, and parenting education for up to six families. By providing immediate housing stability for young families in crisis, collectively Marlene's Place and Gloria's Place address the unique needs of parenting youth and their children and provide individualized support to secure safe and stable long-term housing. Together, these two innovative programs disrupt the cycle of intergenerational homelessness, involvement in child protection, foster care and other systems, and foster housing stability across two generations – both parenting youth and their children.

### The Bridge for Youth

The Bridge for Youth centers youth voice, justice, and equity in all we do and empowers youth experiencing homelessness through safe shelter, basic needs, and healthy relationships. Our vision is a community where all youth feel safe, accepted, and supported. Since 1970, The Bridge has provided over 50,000 youth safety and stability through emergency shelter, as well as transitional housing for youth – including parenting youth and their young children; individual, family and group counseling; specialized case management for crime victims and youth who identify as LGBTQ+; phone/text crisis intervention; as well as street, site, and mobile outreach. The Bridge is at the forefront of addressing youth homelessness in Minnesota, positively impacting the lives of the most vulnerable youth in our community, through youth-centered programs that offer a pathway out of poverty and chronic homelessness.



### For more information, contact:

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- i <http://mnhomeless.org/minnesota-homeless-study/reports-and-fact-sheets/2015/2015-homeless-youth-4-17.pdf>
- ii Wilder Study – Homeless in MN – Youth on Their Own
- iii US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
- iv <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childabuseandneglect/riskprotectivefactors.html>
- v Voices of Youth Count, an Initiative of Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. <https://voicesofyouthcount.org/>
- vi <https://ojs.uwindsor.ca/index.php/csw/article/download/5882/4872?inline=1>
- vii [https://rhyclearinghouse.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/21\\_Sohn\\_2021.pdf](https://rhyclearinghouse.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/21_Sohn_2021.pdf)