



Feb 23, 2022

To: Members of the House Preventing Homelessness Division

RE: HF3599 (Keeler) and HF3661 (Keeler)

Dear Chair Gomez and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to share Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota's (LSS) support of HF3599 and HF3661. Increased investment in the Homeless Youth Act and Safe Harbor will strengthen programs that effectively and holistically support the needs of resilient youth experiencing homelessness or sexual exploitation.

LSS is a provider of essential services across all 87 counties with more than 2,500 employees who serve one in 65 Minnesotans every year. We are committed to innovative, person-centered service delivery that promotes resilience and long-term stability for people in all stages of life. This includes more than 40 years serving youth experiencing homelessness. Currently, LSS supports youth statewide with programs rooted in 41 counties in the following communities and their surrounding areas: Duluth, Brainerd, Willmar, St. Cloud, Mankato, Rochester, and the seven-county metro area.

We are thankful for investments made over the past decade supporting development and growth of services serving youth statewide. Unfortunately, due to a number of factors, the number of youth who are homeless on their own has continued to increase. According to Wilder's Homelessness in Minnesota 2018 study, an estimated 6,000 Minnesota youth who are on their own experience homelessness on any given night. Additionally, youth are under-represented in the study as they are often not found inside the shelter system. Young people experiencing homelessness are also disproportionately Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) at 73% and youth who identify as LGBTQIA+ at 23%. Additionally, these youth experience childhood histories of trauma and high rates of mental health issues.

The need is much greater than currently available resources. Increasing investment in the continuum of services funded by Homeless Youth Act and Safe Harbor grants will help more youth feel a sense of belonging and have opportunities to confront and cope with past traumas. LSS and other service providers would be able to strengthen a seamless continuum of services for youth that build on their assets and strengths, connect them with supportive adults to ensure stability, and create a future that fulfills their potential.

These programs have demonstrated success and merit further investment. In 2021, 970 youth experiencing homelessness received LSS' services and support across the state. More than 90% of youth leaving a homeless youth shelter or transitional living program exited to a stable living environment.



We believe youth are resilient, full of hope, dreams and potential. They're able to succeed in life despite their histories of abuse, exploitation, neglect or abandonment. **Please support HF3599 and HF3661 and increase investments in Homeless Youth Act and Safe Harbor grants.** This is critical to improve access to service, build community connection, and remove barriers to health and well-being for our neighbors. It is also a strong solution that helps all Minnesotans thrive in healthy, accessible and equitable communities by addresses long-standing social and racial inequities.

Thank you, again, for this opportunity. Please contact Erin Sutton, LSS' Senior Director of Advocacy, at erin.sutton@lssmn.org if we may provide further information on this deeply important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karen P. Kingsley".

Karen Kingsley
Sr. Director
LSS Youth, Children and Family Services

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dawn Shykes".

Dawn Shykes
Sr. Director
LSS Youth, Children and Family Services