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 cctwincities.org

February 23, 2022

Representative Aisha Gomez
 Chair, House Preventing Homelessness Division
Via Electronic Delivery

Re: Support for HF3661 (Homeless Youth Act)

Chair Gomez and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis, I write to offer our strong support for HF3661 and the Homeless Youth Act. We thank Representative Keeler for her leadership on this important issue.

Catholic Charities' is a regional leader of housing, emergency shelter and direct services, serving over 23,000 men, women, children, and families annually. This includes nearly 360 youth and young adults who sought shelter and services at Hope Street Emergency Services for Youth in the last year.

Hope Street provides vital support for individuals who are ages 18 – 24 and experiencing homelessness. Along with a safe place to sleep, it provides basic needs like food, clothing, and medical care while aiding in de-escalating the crisis that is homelessness and helping youth build a stable foundation for themselves. This is done in an environment that nurtures trusting relationships and helps young people develop the skills they need for future success.

Youth experiencing homelessness are statistically more likely to have experienced poverty, family conflict, abuse, racism, and homophobia. Hope Street's trauma-informed care model reflects the need to create a safe space for these young people to receive supportive services such as crisis counseling, case management, mental health and chemical dependency counseling, medical care, Independent Living Skills training and one-to-one educational assistance. Such services and support are critical to ensuring a young person does not fall into systemic homelessness, and they are made possible with funding from the Homeless Youth Act.

The Homeless Youth Act is Minnesota's dedicated investment for addressing the state's youth homelessness crisis. It supports young people who would otherwise have to go to large single-adult shelters or be outside, and it offers shelter providers flexibility to tailor services to the unique needs of this age demographic. Like other investments in the state's shelter system, however, Homeless Youth Act funding has not met the scale or urgency of the situation. In fact, Catholic Charities alone is forced to turn away almost 1,000 youth each year.

Our state is at a turning point. More than any other year, Minnesota has an opportunity to make bold investments that can disrupt trends in homelessness. The Homeless Youth Act (HF3661) is one of them,

Catholic Charities serves those most in need. We are a leader at solving poverty, creating opportunity, and advocating for justice in the community.

and by supporting some of our most vulnerable shelter guests—our youth—it has the potential to create a lifetime of stability and opportunity for thousands in need. I ask for your support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Keith Kozerski". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Keith" and last name "Kozerski" clearly distinguishable.

Keith Kozerski
Senior Division Director, Children & Family Services