

February 3, 2021

Dear Chair Schultz and Members of the House Human Services Finance & Policy Committee:

We are writing in support of HF 42 (Howard) and HF 315 (Howard) which provide additional funding for the emergency services grant program (ESP).

The City of Rochester City Council passed [legislative priorities](#) earlier this year that include **“supporting targeted funding for temporary homeless sheltering, warming houses and other support, including increased mental health and chemical dependency treatment programs to reduce future growth in homelessness and to protect our residents struggling with these issues. This include support for the Emergency Services Grant Program (ESP).”**

Cities around the state are impacted by homelessness, and Rochester (pop. 119,000) is no different. We have seen the impact that a lack of shelter space has on people experiencing homelessness, residents, and visitors in the community. People experiencing homelessness were forced to seek shelter in unsafe and unsanitary spaces including skyways, parking ramps, and other similar places in the city.

In 2019, the City was involved as a partner with Olmsted County in the development of the Rochester Community Warming Center, which Catholic Charities of Southern Minnesota operates. The Warming Center emergency shelter is open from 8p.m.-8a.m. and 42 beds are available for individuals to have a warm place to sleep, shower, utilize laundry and received food each night.

In March 2020, during the onset of the pandemic, several community organizations serving people experiencing homelessness were forced to close. The City quickly transformed the Mayo Civic Center, which was already closed to public events, into a collaborative day center to provide a safe space and basic needs for people experiencing homelessness.

In October 2020, the City allocated the one-time federal Coronavirus Relief Relief/CARES funding to retrofit a former fire station into a temporary Day Center space. The Day Center is operated by The Landing MN, a local nonprofit, and provides food, laundry, and showers to an average of 59 guests each day. Please see the enclosed handout for more information.

Both the Warming Center and the Day Center utilized ESP funding during 2020 to operate. Additional ESP support is needed for these services to continue further into 2021. We are trying to do what we can with the limited resources we have, especially now with the pandemic, but **we need additional assistance.**

Thank you for your work and consideration on these important resources during the pandemic, and beyond,



Mayor Kim Norton
City of Rochester



Brooke Carlson
Council President, Rochester City Council