

February 3, 2021

Chair Jennifer Schultz  
Members of the Human Services Finance & Policy Committee  
*Via Electronic Delivery*

**Re: Support for Emergency Services Program Funding, HF315 and HF42**

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

Violence Free Minnesota (VFMN) submits this letter to emphasize the great need for increased funding for the Emergency Services Program (ESP), and to express our support for HF315 and HF42. VFMN is a statewide coalition of 90-member programs working to end relationship abuse. VFMN member programs provide domestic violence shelter and related services throughout the state, and see first hand the intense need for shelter resources to assist survivors.

Domestic violence has been identified as one of the top five reasons why Minnesotans experience homelessness. Yet, there is a consistent shortage of funding for shelter space and services, leaving many domestic violence shelters chronically at capacity, and survivors without options and in danger. The VFMN Safe Housing Survey, conducted on January 22, 2020 with the assistance of victim service providers (VSPs) throughout the state, found that on that evening there were approximately 1,515 people in Minnesota who were fleeing or attempting to flee a violent situation and did not have access to shelter or another housing option. On that same evening, the Minnesota Point in Time Count identified 942 persons 18 and older in Minnesota who were fleeing a domestic violence situation while experiencing homelessness in a sheltered or unsheltered situation.

During the pandemic the lack of shelter for survivors has become an increasingly serious issue. For VSPs across Minnesota, ESP has been an essential source of funding to support the needs of survivors fleeing domestic violence during the pandemic. Continuing the funding throughout the pandemic is needed to ensure that survivors can continue to be safely sheltered – from COVID and from violence. Also, an investment in increased base funding for the program is also needed. ESP funding allows programs to not only provide shelter space, but an array of support services to help a survivor transition to permanent housing, making it a unique and much needed funding source. The amount of funding currently allocated in no way meets the need. ESP funding remains a critical resource during the pandemic and will continue to be needed into the future.

Along with this letter urging you to support for increased ESP funding, we have included the attached document that addresses the need for ESP funding to be part of the State's investment in survivors. We urge you to pass this much needed legislation as a step towards ensuring that survivors, and all those facing homelessness in Minnesota, can find the refuge and support they need from Minnesota's emergency shelter system on their path to safe permanent housing.

Sincerely,

Liz Richards  
Executive Director  
Violence Free Minnesota

Katie Kramer  
Policy Director  
Violence Free Minnesota