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Youthworks
Testimony in support of SB 2014
House Appropriations - Government Operations Division Appropriations Committee
March 20, 2025

Chairman Monson and Members of the Committee:

My name is Mark Heinert, and I am here today to deliver testimony in support of SB 2014. I have been a licensed social worker in North Dakota for 34 years, serving homeless youth for the last 28. I am the Assistant Executive Director and Homeless Programs Manager at Youthworks, a private, non-profit, youth-serving agency in North Dakota. I am also a member of the North Dakota Coalition for Homeless People, and the Missouri Valley Coalition for Homeless People, currently serving on the board of directors for both organizations.

Youthworks supports the appropriation of \$10 million for the North Dakota Homeless Grant (NDHG). We also support funding the Housing Incentive Fund (HIF) and would advocate increasing the amount from its current \$25 million appropriation to \$50 million. Requests for HIF funding in the last biennium were \$47 Million. This, along with the rising construction costs, account for the justification for the increase. Both programs are administered through the North Dakota Housing Finance Agency.

Youthworks believes that all youth deserve to have a safe place to belong and be heard. One way of fulfilling this mission is to provide housing and support services to homeless young adults (ages 18 – 24) and their children. We provide transitional housing and support services in Bismarck, Minot, and Fargo. Youth from all parts of

the state come to these locations for transitional housing. Many youth come from outlying areas to receive housing and other support.

Youthworks has a history of successfully raising federal funds, which require local matches. Without the support of the NDHG (or other local funds), Youthworks is in jeopardy of losing over \$1.1 million in federal grant funds annually, which are dedicated to serving homeless youth. Last year, Youthworks was able to receive \$50,000 of NDHG funds to support this work. Although helpful, there is a need for over five times this amount (\$266,690) to match the federal dollars that are now committed to Youthworks.

As homeless providers coordinate housing and services for the homeless, the most vulnerable in our population are served first, which includes victims of domestic violence, people with disabilities, trafficking victims, and former foster youth. One out of every three homeless young adults served by Youthworks are former foster youth.

Each day in North Dakota, we have 865 unique individuals identified as homeless. Investing in emergency shelters and supportive housing can help people transition into longer-term stability and achieve their hopes and dreams for a better future. I ask each of you to consider investing in our homeless youth who have the same dreams and aspirations that youth who have stable homes to live in have. We often hear that poor mental health and addiction contribute to the problems of homelessness. We know that people who feel “less than” and that they don’t matter

to anyone are at extreme risk for suicide, depression, and addiction. Please pass SB 2014 and send a strong message to the youth in North Dakota that they matter.

Passing SB 2014 is a good step towards dealing with the “big picture” of homelessness in North Dakota. Investing in shelter and supportive housing can help people transition into longer-term stability and achieve their hopes and dreams for a better future. I urge this committee to recommend a “do pass” on SB 2014.