

Written Testimony pursuant to House Bill 1012 (2021)  
Appropriations – Human Resources Division  
Senate Appropriations  
Chairman: Senator Ray Holmberg  
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Submitted by: Dwight Barden, Executive Director – Burleigh County Housing Authority (BCHA)  
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Burleigh County Housing Authority has partnered with Beyond Shelter, Inc. in Fargo to develop a permanent supporting housing project for the homeless in Bismarck called Edwinton Place. It is located at 1121 S. 11<sup>th</sup> Street, Bismarck just south of Cash Wise on Expressway. This project has 40 – one bedroom apartments. This was developed under the Federal Housing First model. The intent is to get these homeless individuals housed and in a stable environment. Most of these tenants, coming from homeless situations are dealing with mental illness and/or drug/alcohol addictions and are in need of supportive services. BCHA is the landlord we are not a service provider. But without the services, this type of project could not survive.

Edwinton Place has been open for just over one year. We have served 45 individuals during that time. 67% of the individuals are age 45 or older with 83% White, 12% American Indian/Alaska Native and 5% Black. Persons identifying as having a disabling condition due to mental health is 74% and alcohol and drug abuse is 76%. Over half the individuals identified as having 3 or more disabling conditions. 100% came from emergency shelters or unsafe housing environments. 56% identified as having no income at move in. All individuals have extremely low income which means an annual income of less than \$20,200.

Our first tenant that moved in was a Veteran and he moved in on Veterans Day 2019. Another tenant has been able to reconnect with her daughters because she has been clean and sober for several months and living in a stable environment.

We have contracted with the Dacotah Foundation to provide 24/7 Housing Support Specialist staff. They are Mental Health Technicians, certified by DHS, and they provide year-around 24/7 front door coverage, as well as the necessary tenancy supports and interventions to create and maintain a safe and supportive environment for tenants. They screen visitors, track tenants coming and going, establish limits and monitor alcohol being brought in, do wellness checks if they haven't been seen each day, engage with tenants and give staff updates on behaviors that may need some attention, de-escalate situations when they can and call for back up when they need it.

In addition to the 24/7 support, we have also provided space for support services to come in such as West Central Human Services, Housing and Employment Specialists from Community Options, Sanford Health provides case management and assists the tenants in accessing and maintaining health insurance. On-site staff coordinate food bank drop offs from Great Plains Food Bank and meals on wheels.

Edwinton Place is housing for tenants that are similar to the ones that live at Cooper House in Fargo and LaGrave on 1<sup>st</sup> in Grand Forks. In the 2019 legislative session, you were supportive and funded the 24/7

staff at Cooper House and LaGrave on 1<sup>st</sup> with Section 22 of SB 2012. Edwinton Place has not received any of this funding due to not being under construction at that time.

With Edwinton Place, we did expect that the Medicare provision of section 1915i, which you passed last legislative session, would be available to cover these qualified costs. At this time the funds are still not available and these costs are no longer part of the State 1915i plan. These would be eligible costs only if the housing supports are made available through a daily rate rather than 15 minute units with a maximum of 8 hours daily, for a total of 78 hours per 6 month period. The other issue to this is that the housing crises do not always happen from 8 to 5 therefore providing tenancy supports is needed 24/7.

The tenants do receive housing assistance. But due to the restrictions on the Federal Voucher Program and allowable rents from some of the funding sources that were used to develop this project, there is not enough funding available to pay for the 24/7 support services that are needed.

I do not have the funding numbers for Cooper House and LaGrave on 1<sup>st</sup> but the Cost at Edwinton is \$640,000 per biennium or \$667.00 per individual per month.

Thank you for your time and support. This funding investment truly helps those most in need and the most vulnerable of our States population.

I also reach out and offer if you have questions or would like to see Edwinton Place to please contact me.

I oppose HB1012 as it currently is written as it does not include funding for these much needed supports.