

Mark Heinert
Homeless Programs Manager, Youthworks
Testimony in support of HB 1014
Senate Appropriations Committee – E&E Division

March 9, 2023

Chairman Sorvaag and Members of the Committee:

My name is Mark Heinert, and I am here today to deliver testimony in support of HB 1014. I have been a licensed social worker in North Dakota for 30 years, serving runaway and homeless youth for the last 26. I am the Assistant Executive Director, and Homeless Programs Manager at Youthworks, a private, non-profit, youth serving agency serving Runaway and Homeless Youth in North Dakota. I am also involved in North Dakota and West Central Minnesota's Coordinated Access Referral and Evaluation System (CARES) for the homeless, serving as the past chair of the governing board.

The North Dakota Homeless Grant (NDHG), which began in 2013, has provided funding to assist agencies in providing housing and support services for the homeless. The funding began with \$2 million for the 2013 – 2015 biennium, then provided \$1.5 million for the 2015 – 2017 biennium. This amount was reduced by 80% to \$300,000 in 2017 – 2019 before returning to \$1.2 million for 2021-2023. Youthworks has utilized funding from NDHG to provide housing and support services to approximately 60 young adults (age 18 – 21) and their children annually from 2013 to 2017 and 2019 to 2022. An additional 80 - 100 youth received homeless prevention services and other supports.

Youthworks has a history of success raising funds from federal sources which require local match. Without the support of the NDHG (or other local funds),

Youthworks is in jeopardy of losing upwards of \$500,000 in federal grant funds, which are dedicated to serving homeless youth.

As homeless providers coordinate housing and services for the homeless, the most vulnerable in our population are served first. This includes the elderly, victims of domestic violence, trafficking victims, former foster youth, Black, Indigenous People of Color, LGBTQ+ youth, people with disabilities, and all children. One out of every three homeless young adults served by Youthworks are former foster youth.

I encourage you to consider the needs of the most vulnerable in our population first. The most cost-effective way of helping vulnerable homeless people is to provide supportive housing, which is what Youthworks and other agencies are using NDHG funds for.

“On an annual basis it costs between \$12,000 and \$25,000 to place homeless people in supportive housing. In contrast, it costs about \$35,000 to \$150,000 for the person to remain homeless. This is based on the cost of emergency room visits, police calls, emergency shelter, food, etc.”

- Former HUD Secretary Shaun Donavon – 2012

Passing HB 1014 with increased funding to the NDHG and HIF is a good step towards dealing with the “big picture” of homelessness in North Dakota. We must invest in providing emergency and supportive housing and supports, so that we can help people transition into longer term stability. It is the right thing to do both from a humanitarian perspective, but also from a fiscal perspective. I therefore urge this committee to recommend a “do pass” on HB 1014, and fund the NDHG at \$5,000,000.