

North Dakota Senate Appropriations Committee - Human Resources Division
In Support of SB 2012 - DHHS Budget - Behavioral Health

January 26, 2023

Good morning, Chairman Dever and members of the committee,

My name is Katie Jo Armbrust and I work for the Grand Forks Housing Authority. I'm here to support the Behavioral Health Division budget within SB 2012, specifically the Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) Grant.

As the primary provider of affordable housing in Region 4, the Grand Forks Housing Authority (GFHA) is all too familiar with the need for services to support tenants in many areas of their lives, including housing. With community collaboration and support, our organization was a co-developer of LaGrave on First which opened in August of 2018, and today we manage the property, the voucher administration, and services on-site. LaGrave on First is a 42 unit apartment complex in Grand Forks for individuals who were experiencing chronic homelessness. The one-bed/one-bath apartments are on the second through fourth floors with the entire first floor designated for resident amenities including office space for services provided on-site, community room, free laundry, kitchen and dining, computer room, exercise room, and even an incentive closet. LaGrave on First utilizes Housing First, an approach endorsed by the federal government to end homelessness by reducing barriers such as requiring tenants to be sober prior to moving in or having a good credit score, and uses the Coordinated Entry System to receive referrals when a unit opens up, which ensures we are serving the most vulnerable population of individuals experiencing chronic homelessness. LaGrave on First offers Permanent Supportive Housing: permanent meaning there are no restrictions on the length of tenancy, we utilize standard 12-month leases that you and I would have; supportive meaning there are voluntary services offered on-site and coordinated for off-site to help tenants meet their goals and keep them housed; rents are affordable to each tenant through Federally funded Project-Based Vouchers, each tenant pays approximately 30% of their monthly income towards rent.

The Behavioral Health Division's PSH Grant was created during the last session and has been instrumental in helping provide the best support for the people who live at LaGrave on First. The PSH Grant has supported our Housing Support Specialists, the 24/7 staff that are key for tenants: they provide a wide variety of services from reading and helping tenants understand letters from the landlord, to providing de-escalation and intervention when situations arise, to simply listening to tenants that need help when it's 3:00am and suggesting additional services. When acquiring or creating services that meet the needs of our tenants, it can be difficult to begin with due to the later hours that some tenants are more active. This grant has enabled us to secure LACs coming during off-hours, outside of Monday to Friday 8-5, and it has been wonderful to watch the process of tenants slowly becoming engaged, building trust with professionals who don't judge and are there to meet our tenants where they are at - both in a physical sense and in the sense of where they're at in relation to their behavioral health

condition. We did our research in the very beginning, and continue to do so by reflecting on what is or is not working for the tenants. In recent months we partnered with the UND Occupational Therapy (OT) department to have their students intern on-site; the notable improvements have demonstrated the benefit of OT for tenants in many ways; we're currently in the process of hiring a full time Occupational Therapist.

In closing, we've done our best to secure funds to provide fully comprehensive services that meet tenants needs, this grant is exactly what we needed. The Behavioral Health Division has been doing things the right way over the last several years by encouraging the use of evidence-based practices and demonstrating the need for resources to cover the full continuum of care from prevention to recovery, and the PSH Grant is a great example of a program to be supported within that continuum.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here, I'll stand for any questions.

Respectfully submitted,

Katie Jo Armbrust