



MINNESOTA INTERAGENCY COUNCIL ON HOMELESSNESS

Mary Tingerthal, Co-Chair
Minnesota Housing

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DATE: December 1, 2014

TO: The Honorable Carlos Mariani, Chair
House Education Policy Committee
381 State Office Building

The Honorable Sondra Erickson, Ranking Member
House Education Policy Committee
209 State Office Building

The Honorable Tina Liebling, Chair
House Health and Human Services Policy
Committee
367 State Office Building

The Honorable Tara Mack, Ranking Member
House Health and Human Services Policy Committee
345 State Office Building

The Honorable Gene Pelowski, Jr., Chair
House Higher Education Finance and Policy
Committee
491 State Office Building

The Honorable Bud Nornes, Ranking Member
House Higher Education Finance and Policy Committee
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The Honorable Karen Clark, Chair
House Housing Finance and Policy Committee
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The Honorable Paul Anderson, Ranking Member
House Housing Finance and Policy Committee
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The Honorable Joe Mullery, Chair
House Early Childhood and Youth Development
Policy Committee
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The Honorable Pam Myhra, Ranking Member
House Early Childhood and Youth Development Policy
Committee
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The Honorable Paul Marquart, Chair
House Education Finance Committee
597 State Office Building

The Honorable Kelby Woodard, Ranking Member
House Education Finance Committee
221 State Office Building

The Honorable Patricia Torres Ray, Chair
Senate Education Committee
309 Capitol

The Honorable Carla J. Nelson, Ranking Member
Senate Education Committee
117 State Office Building

The Honorable Kathy Sheran, Chair
Senate Health, Human Services and Housing
Committee
Capitol, Room G-12

The Honorable Michelle Benson, Ranking Member
Senate Health, Human Services and Housing
Committee
115 State Office Building

The Honorable Terri E. Bonoff, Chair
Senate Higher Education and Workforce
Development Committee
325 Capitol

The Honorable Jeremy R. Miller, Ranking Member
Senate Higher Education and Workforce Development
Committee
135 State Office Building

FROM: Mary Tingerthal, Co-Chair, Interagency Council on Homelessness
Lucinda Jesson, Co-Chair, Interagency Council on Homelessness

RE: Update on the Progress to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness

On behalf of the Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness, thank you for this opportunity to provide an update on Minnesota's efforts to prevent and end youth homelessness, pursuant to the [Laws of Minnesota 2013, chapter 108, article 3, section 45](#). The purpose of this memorandum is to update the relevant legislative committees on these efforts and the specific recommendations of the Council to support the prevention and elimination of youth homelessness. This memorandum has sections describing key definitions and context; the creation of Minnesota's plan to prevent and end homelessness; the specific strategies and recommendations on youth homelessness included in the plan; and actions of Council agencies to advance progress.

I. Definitions and Context

The definition of who counts as youth experiencing homelessness varies across programs and government agencies. For the purposes of this update and for the State's plan to prevent and end homelessness, we have adopted the broadest, most inclusive definition of youth, including people through age 24. In terms of homelessness, we have included those whose living situation may involve "couch hopping" or other temporary arrangements of staying with friends, family members, or others. While some programs use narrower definitions for youth or homelessness, we feel this broader frame is essential to reflect the unique dynamics and features of youth homelessness, and to ensure that our strategies respond to those unique qualities and to the full range of youth experiencing homelessness. While the focus of the Council includes children and youth living with a parent, the focus of this update is on youth *without* connection to an identified parent, either because youth and parent are estranged or because there is no adult in a parental role. While this group is often called "unaccompanied youth," it is worth noting that significant portions of this population are youth who are themselves pregnant or parenting children.

II. Creation and Adoption of *Heading Home: Minnesota's Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness*

In 2013, the Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness requested that the State Director to Prevent and End Homelessness identify actions with the greatest potential to advance progress on the Council's core objectives. **One of these four core objectives is to prevent and end homelessness for unaccompanied youth by 2020.** The Director worked with leaders and key staff within the 11 Council agencies, as well as a broad group of community stakeholders, to create a two-year action plan for the Council.

As part of the community stakeholder feedback process, a group of professionals who serve youth from multiple sectors was brought together by staff to the Council to form the Emerging Adults Advisory Committee. This committee was tasked with recommending specific actions to prevent youth homelessness that would inform the creation of the two-year action plan.

On December 19, 2013, the Interagency Council reviewed and adopted the two-year action plan titled *Heading Home: Minnesota's Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness*. In adopting this plan, the Council committed its 11 state agencies to work together to implement the plan's strategies and actions, in partnership with local government, community, philanthropic, and private sector partners. The overarching vision of the plan is *housing stability for all Minnesotans*, where homelessness represents the most egregious form of housing instability. The plan is available in its entirety at www.headinghomeminnesota.org/our-plan.

III. Strategies and Recommendations to End Youth Homelessness

Heading Home identifies 12 priority areas of focus, 23 strategies, and 100 specific actions. Given the focus of the update requested, this memo summarizes the plan's youth-specific strategies and actions. It is important to note, though, that the plan as a whole will help prevent and end youth homelessness, including the activities that are not youth-specific. For example, youth experiencing homelessness will benefit from the plan's focus on improving housing stability for communities disproportionately impacted by homelessness, improving data on homelessness, and maximizing health care funding and services, even though these strategies and actions are not directed only toward youth. Put simply, preventing and ending youth (and all forms of) homelessness requires a systemic focus on ensuring housing stability for all Minnesotans, not just population-specific efforts.

The plan's youth-specific priorities and their corresponding strategies include:

A. *Improve the transitions of young people from foster care, juvenile corrections, or other systems.*

- Plan exits from youth systems starting at time of entry, but no later than by age 16.
- Identify youth served in foster care and juvenile corrections who are most likely to become homeless and connect them to needed resources.

B. *Identify homeless and highly mobile students and connect them and their families with services.*

- Work with local school districts to increase the impact of homeless school liaisons.
- Create an intentional link between schools, community mental health resource, and liaisons.

C. *Support students experiencing homelessness to succeed in higher education*

- Learn best practices for identifying and supporting students who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness.
- Work with higher education institutions to develop a process to identify homeless students registered at their postsecondary institution, connect them to existing resources and track outcomes.
- To facilitate retention and better opportunity for future employment, work with postsecondary institutions to develop policies and procedures to effectively support students who are homeless or at risk of being homeless while pursuing postsecondary education.

D. *Minnesota's youth workforce system will partner with human services staff and social workers to provide high-quality services to youth aging out of foster care*

- Identify promising practices for serving youth experiencing or at risk of homelessness in Minnesota's workforce system. Identify specific practices that are culturally responsive.

Since the launch of the plan nearly a year ago, the Council, its member agencies, and many partners and stakeholders have made significant progress on maximizing the impact of these strategies on youth homelessness. The following section describes some of these actions.

IV. Actions of Council Agencies

- A.** Work to *improve the transitions of young people from foster care, juvenile corrections, or other systems* have been led by two parallel efforts:

First, on October 1, 2013, the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) was selected as one of 18 recipients nationally for a Federal planning grant to develop a model intervention for youth with child welfare involvement who are at-risk of homelessness. This funding from The

United States Department of Health and Human Services' Administration on Children, Youth, and Families is intended to build the capacity of child welfare systems to prevent homelessness among the most at-risk youth/young adults with child welfare involvement.

Under the auspices of this 18-month grant, DHS hired a Project Director, organized a working group on youth at risk of homelessness, and is conducting analyses and assessments intended to inform how Minnesota's child welfare systems can best identify and respond to youth at risk of homelessness. Through a first-ever match of disparate administrative data sets, these analyses found that one in five Minnesota youth in the foster care system between ages 14 and 17 experiences homelessness before their 21st birthday. The outcome of this planning grant will include a set of specific recommendations for Minnesota's child welfare system, and an application for a follow-on Federal grant to provide additional resources for implementing these recommendations.

Second, in partnership with a collaborative of Minnesota philanthropic organizations engaged in supporting the *Heading Home* plan, an independent consultant was commissioned to interview experts in the child welfare, juvenile justice, and children's mental health systems to recommend strategies that prevent youth and young adults leaving these systems from becoming homeless. While this effort is intentionally interdisciplinary in nature, it has focused particularly on youth involved with the juvenile justice system. The recommendations being developed will identify ways that these systems can adopt a shared Sequential Intercept Model that views each encounter with any of these systems as an opportunity to reduce risk for future homelessness. The recommendations will include both service-level recommendations for each intercept point, as well as system-level recommendations.

- B. Minnesota's activities to **identify homeless and highly mobile students and connect them and their families with services** includes the following specific actions: On November 7, 2014, the Minnesota Department of Education and the Minnesota Office to Prevent and End Homelessness convened a statewide conference of school homeless liaisons (who are responsible for identifying students experiencing homelessness), Early Education and Post-Secondary State staff, community partners, and local Continuum of Care coordinators (who are responsible for organizing community-level efforts to end homelessness). This conference was the first time such a broad group of stakeholders have been convened to increase the effective partnerships and linkages between school districts and community-based programs and services focused on ending homelessness. This activity has significant potential to increase the efficacy and impact of homeless school liaisons in identifying and intervening in youth homelessness, as these district-level school staff are typically responsible for large numbers of students confronting homelessness (in schools or districts with high concentrations) and/or perform numerous other roles and responsibilities alongside their homelessness-related responsibilities (in many school districts). By ensuring that these school liaisons are connected to the local resources that can support students and their families experiencing homelessness, this convening has better equipped school liaisons to intervene effectively and increased meaningful community-based partnerships to end youth homelessness. More importantly, for many communities, this conference represents the beginning of local working relationships needed to sustain effective responses to youth homelessness for young people identified at school.
- C. Working in tandem with our K-12 partners to identify homeless children and youth and connect them to resources, the Minnesota Department of Higher Education has begun working with

higher education institutions across the State to **support students experiencing homelessness to succeed in higher education**. One of the surest ways out of homelessness for unaccompanied homeless youth is to ensure they get a strong education, stay in college, and complete their program of study. With 74% of future jobs in Minnesota requiring some type of postsecondary certificate or degree, graduating from a post-secondary institution is a critical step to youth experiencing homelessness becoming permanently stable. In June and October of 2014, the Minnesota Department of Higher Education brought together higher education staff, elected officials, nonprofit partners, K-12 homeless school liaisons, and government staff to dialogue about the barriers and needs of students experiencing homelessness in higher education as well as the gaps in supports and services for these students within the education community. The Minnesota Department of Higher Education will continue to lead these state-wide conversations with the goal of creating best practices around identification protocol, student engagement, and connection to resources. Currently, only 7 higher education institutions across Minnesota track who in their student body is experiencing homelessness, so the scope of the problem is currently hard to grasp. Minneapolis Community and Technical College estimating that 10% of their student body is homeless, so we know that identifying these students and connecting them to critical resources to keep them in school is a necessary first step to future success.

- D. Work to *identify promising practices for serving youth experiencing or at risk of homelessness in Minnesota's workforce system*** has been led by our partners in the Philanthropic Community. The Pohlad Foundation, in partnership with the Department of Employment and Economic Development and community organizations, are examining potential opportunities to increase use of the federal Supplemental Nutrition and Assistance Program (SNAP) Employment and Training to expand employment supports to young adults served at the Youth Opportunity Center and the Safezone Drop-In Center for Homeless Youth. These efforts are aimed at increasing youth-specific employment and training services for unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness in 2015.

In conclusion, *Heading Home* charts a path for Minnesota's efforts to prevent and end homelessness for all Minnesotans, including homelessness among unaccompanied youth. The plan's youth-specific activities summarized above and additional efforts to advance the plan as a whole, will advance our efforts to ensure that every young person in Minnesota has safe and stable housing.

The need for urgent action is clear. Current estimates suggest that over 600 youth experience homelessness in Minnesota on any given night and, as noted in the plan, this population is often underestimated because it is difficult to count. Successfully ensuring that all youth have access to the supports needed to achieve and maintain stability and obtain education and employment needed to complete successful transitions to adulthood will rightly remain among the highest priorities of the Interagency Council on Homelessness.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide this update. Cathy ten Broeke, State Director to Prevent and End Homelessness, would be happy to answer questions and provide any additional information the Interagency Council's efforts to prevent and end homelessness for youth and all Minnesotans. Ms. ten Broeke can be reached at 651.296.6344.