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Court Administrator

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By BH Deputy

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TO: Special Master, the Honorable Kathleen Blatz
FROM: Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota
Designated Speaker, Susan Phillips, Director, Metro Homeless Youth Programs
Witness, Patrice O'Leary, Operations Director, Brainerd Housing, Youth & Energy Assistance
Witness, Kirsten Anderson-Stembridge, Director of Advocacy & Volunteer Services
RE: Housing and youth services during a state government shutdown and background studies
DATE: Tuesday, July 5, 2011

Background Studies

LSS provides services to vulnerable adults and children and are mandated by statute, and required before a caregiver can have direct contact with a client. Judge Gearin's order does not specifically require funding of background studies. We will not hire individuals or utilize new volunteers without a background check by DHS; this will adversely impact our delivery of services for these individuals. Background checks are also required for our adoption process.

Homeless Youth

Programs addressing homelessness are core functions of government as they address the health, welfare and safety of Minnesota citizens and would be included on page 9 in paragraph 27 of Judge Gearin's ruling under "maintenance of public safety and immediate public health concerns".

On any given night in Minnesota, 2,500 *unaccompanied* youth, 21 years of age and under, experience homelessness (Wilder, 2010). Alone, reeling from the abuse and neglect they have suffered, they are extremely vulnerable. Many non-profits across the state serve thousands of these youth with very limited resources. Many receive funding to target homeless populations from the state sources at DHS and Minnesota Housing. You heard testimony from MCH so we will not go into the details of these services again here (listed below).

We support the DHS position that the following be deemed critical services:

- **The Long-Term Homeless Supportive Services Fun (Minn. Stat. 256K.26)**
- **The Transitional Housing Program (THP) (Minn. Stat. 256E.33)**
- **The Runaway and Homeless Youth Program (Minn. Stat. 256K.45)**
- **The Family Homeless Prevention and Assistance Program (FHPAP) (Minn. Stat. 462A.204)**
- **Emergency Services Grants (Minn. Stat. 256E.36)**

Additionally, we support the DHS position that the **Healthy Transitions Program (HTP) (Minn. Stat. 256K.26)** is a critical service under **Exhibit A** of Judge Gearin's ruling. HTP was developed to address the critical need for specialized programming to prevent youth aging out of the child welfare system from exiting into homelessness. Nearly 1,200 youth across the state are provided with critical support systems and rental assistance to transition into stable independence through this program.

The children and youth served by these programs are extremely vulnerable. They often suffer from post-traumatic stress syndrome, low self-esteem, and mental health and developmental challenges resulting from childhood experiences that were no fault of their own. They are susceptible to sexual exploitation and recruitment into trafficking. Without outreach, shelter, and supportive housing options these youth health, welfare and safety are further jeopardized. Surviving without services can mean engaging in illegal activities in order to eat or sleep. Common survival activities threaten the health and safety of homeless young people and the ongoing trauma creates new barriers to recovery.

The suspension of homeless and transition services for youth means that thousands of currently served youth will fall back into homelessness. It also means youth currently in crisis eligible for assistance will remain homeless. Each day on the streets is a threat to their health, welfare, and safety.

Housing and services in Greater Minnesota

In greater Minnesota, there are significant numbers of citizens who rely on an even narrower field of resources to stabilize their housing than their urban counterparts. Youth, children and families in greater Minnesota face even greater risks to their safety, welfare and health because of the few resources that exist to assist them are almost exclusively state funded (as mentioned above: specifically Family Homeless Prevention, Transitional Housing, Emergency Services Grant, Runaway and Homeless Youth and Healthy Transitions programs).

In smaller counties, the FHPAP funds go directly to non-profits or community action agencies. In large urban counties, there may be county intervention to uphold the services temporarily, this is unlikely in greater Minnesota. For LSS programs serving the homeless in Crow Wing, Todd and Morrison counties, each month without state funding will result in certain homelessness for at least 35 individuals, families and youth. The resulting problems of homelessness including job loss, family disruption, and exploitation of youth are well documented.

The total number of beds available from federal funding in the entire region remaining open to serve the homeless is limited to 4 beds for homeless youth and up to 6 families. The point in time survey for Crow Wing County conducted on Jan. 26, 2011 revealed a record number of homeless individuals on the night of the count at 166 with 29 of those individuals being without any shelter.

Included in the narrow field of resources in rural Minnesota are ongoing federal programs that should fall under the Supremacy clause of the U.S. Constitution in paragraph 24 of Judge Gearin's ruling. These programs ensure the health, safety and welfare of Minnesotans. These are the **Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program** (Department of Comm.), **Homeless Prevention and Rapid Rehousing program** and a **federal demonstration project for Support Services for Rural Homeless Youth** (both deemed critical by DHS). These programs have been forced to suspend activity as a result of the shutdown.