



CATHOLIC CHARITIES
of St. Paul and Minneapolis

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August 9, 2021

Representative Ryan Winkler, Chair
Senator Karin Housley, Chair
Frontline Worker Pay Working Group
Via electronic submission

Re: Frontline Emergency Shelter and Supportive Housing Workers

Chair Winkler, Chair Housley and Members of the Frontline Worker Pay Working Group:

Catholic Charities of St. Paul and Minneapolis is one of the region's most comprehensive social service agencies, serving nearly 23,000 men, women, children and families each year, with a focus on achieving and maintaining housing stability for those most in need. Our frontline staff provide more than 530,000 nights of housing and emergency shelter and serve more than 1.2 million meals annually.

The impact of the daily actions of our direct service staff typically go unnoticed by anyone but those facing the darkest moments in their lives. Throughout the past year, however, COVID-19 and the pandemic response have called attention to their role as essential workers in a profound way. **As you consider frontline worker pay and future pandemic aid, we ask for your support in recognizing the risks taken and the contributions made by the frontline staff who comprise our state's emergency shelter and supportive housing workforce.**

Emergency shelter and supportive housing staff were deemed essential workers by executive order early in the pandemic. While others had the luxury of working from home, these frontline staff continued to show up every day to support those without one and those at greatest risk of losing one—individuals who were often also at greatest risk of contracting COVID-19 due to poorer health histories.

For the past year and a half, these frontline staff have been forced to pivot quickly and repeatedly to ensure hygiene and physical distancing protocols were met in settings that were not designed for physical distancing. And while much of Minnesota celebrated with the easing of COVID-19 restrictions earlier this summer, these same frontline staff remained diligent in their safety protocols, fully aware of the increased risk posed to our clients and staff in congregate settings as the pandemic continued.

Because of their efforts, Catholic Charities has been able to continue offering emergency shelter, day services and supportive housing every day of the pandemic, **while minimizing to just 1% the positive test rate across all our single adult programs.** What we are doing is working, but with the threat of variants and another wave of COVID-19, we know we can't let up efforts now.

While we are immensely grateful for past state and federal investments that supported some enhanced pay and response efforts for emergency shelter workers, we know that these investments were not enough to reach all shelters and all frontline staff. We also know that frontline workers supporting tenants at permanent supportive housing sites were not covered by this relief.

Catholic Charities serves those most in need. We are a leader at solving poverty, creating opportunity, and advocating for justice in the community.

Like emergency shelter staff, supportive housing staff were deemed essential workers, and they continued to show up every day to perform wellness checks, deliver meals, and provide case management and support to individuals otherwise at risk of homelessness—many of whom also were dealing with complex health needs, including mental health and substance use, which worsened with the stress and isolation brought on by COVID-19. The stress felt by these tenants has created additional challenges for compliance with safety protocols, which have added to the health and safety risks faced by frontline staff (and other tenants), and which have taken a toll on their own mental well-being, too.

Catholic Charities was able to provide enhanced pay for frontline housing staff for a limited period—a step we knew was necessary to acknowledge the increased personal risk they were taking by continuing to show up and provide our essential services. However, there has been no reimbursement or relief to support these staffing costs.

Minnesota’s emergency shelter and supportive housing workforce has been on the frontlines of the COVID-19 response non-stop, and we are counting on them to continue to show up as our state faces yet another pandemic wave moving into the fall.

As Minnesota continues to respond to the pandemic and build toward recovery, we ask for your support in recognizing these essential frontline workers and the unique role they and nonprofit social service agencies play as the fabric of our state’s safety net.

Sincerely,



Wendy Underwood
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