



Greater Twin Cities
United Way
gtcuw.org

March 24, 2022

Dear Members of the Minnesota Senate Housing Finance and Policy Committee:

We write in support of Senate File 3994 to provide funding to expand the *Homework Starts with Home* program to serve younger children and pregnant families experiencing, or at-risk, of homelessness.

At Greater Twin Cities United Way, our mission is to unite changemakers, advocate for social good and develop solutions to address the challenges no one can solve alone. Together with our partners, we touched over 500,000 lives across the nine-county metro area last year. We fund over 100 nonprofits and coalitions through multi-year general operations grants, innovation initiatives and supportive funds directed toward our partners' most pressing needs in the areas of Household Stability, Educational Success and Economic Opportunity. Above all, we know a stable home provides the critical foundation that all Minnesotans need to thrive, supporting better health, education, and employment outcomes.

Expanding the *Homework Start with Home* grant program to include early childhood would provide critical supports to younger children when they are most vulnerable to environmental stress and adverse childhood experiences. Building positive relationships, along with a sense of safety, stability and security are vital to a child's healthy development. By age three, a child's brain produces more than one million connections each second, with up to 90 percent of development occurring by age five.

Yet nearly 20,000 individuals and families experience homelessness on any given night - in every region across the state. Additionally, due to the ongoing COVID 19 pandemic, these needs grew even more urgent and widespread. **In 2021, Greater Twin Cities United Way's 2-1-1 resource helpline received more than 485,000 calls related to housing needs, representing 60% of all resource requests.**

As Minnesota continues to experience a significant labor market shortage, investing in successful programs, such as *Homework Starts with Home*, are critical. **A recent survey from the Minneapolis Federal Reserve Bank found that a lack of access to affordable housing and quality affordable early childhood care were the top two reasons why individuals were unable to join the workforce.** We know investments that improve housing stability result in lasting impacts and improved long-term outcomes. Even more importantly, we know these investments lead to multi-generational impacts, benefitting whole families, including their young children.

Greater Twin Cities United Way supports the expansion and increased funding of *Homework Starts with Home* to include our state's youngest children. Stable housing provides a vital foundation that enables thriving children, families and communities.

Sincerely,

Kristen Rosenberger
Director, Advocacy & External Engagement
Greater Twin Cities United Way