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**Securing Minnesota's Housing Future/Governor's Task Force on Housing
Housing and Opportunity Working Group
Statement of Tim Marx, President and CEO Catholic Charities, June 4, 2018
*Preventing and Ending Homelessness Must Remain a Top Priority for Minnesota***

Introduction

Co-Chairs Kiscaden and Williams, thank you for the opportunity to provide a brief statement as this Working Group and the Task Force works to conclude its work and shape its final recommendations.

My name is Tim Marx. Since 2011 I have been the President/CEO of Catholic Charities of Saint Paul and Minneapolis (CC). I served as Commissioner of the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency from 2003-2008, and from 2008-2011 was Executive Director of Breaking Ground (f/k/a Common Ground), which is the largest provider of supportive housing for the formerly homeless and street outreach services in New York City. I am also on the Board of Directors of the National Alliance to End Homelessness and am currently its Vice-Chair and Chair of the Program Committee.

Over the last several days, I have reviewed the materials presented to this Working Group and the summaries of your meetings. The depth and breadth of the work you and the Task Force as a whole are performing and the data and analysis which support it are impressive. For the foreseeable future, your work will inform and advance the imperative of a safe, decent, affordable home for everyone and the broader economic and social benefits stable housing offers to individuals, families, communities and the entire state.

In this statement I will: (1) provide a summary of CC's housing related work and the trends we are experiencing; (2) offer reflections on the recent and successful collaborative efforts to prevent and end homelessness in Minnesota; and (3) request that this Working Group and the full Task Force recommend as a top priority the aggressive implementation of "Heading Home Together—Minnesota's 2018-2020 Action Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness" (HHT).

The Work of Catholic Charities to Prevent and End Homelessness

Housing stability and related opportunity services are the largest direct service area of CC. We provide 475,000 nights of shelter and housing each year and serve more than one million meals annually. CC has capacity to provide shelter and homes for more than 1,800 people. This includes homes and shelter at both Higher Grounds (Minneapolis and St. Paul), homes for young adults including those at Hope Street in Minneapolis, which also serves as the region's largest shelter for youth experiencing homelessness and single adults and families at the Ramsey County Family Service Center, which provides a safe place for families to grow.

HHT rightfully lauds the progress that Minnesota has made in reducing homelessness since Heading Home Minnesota was launched in 2014 (pp. 8-10.) HHT also notes recent increases in the unsheltered population (p. 10), which is consistent with what CC is experiencing. Our shelters are full every night and often over-subscribed. Higher Ground St. Paul is an example. The initial shelter capacity was set at 280, with a contingency plan for an additional 40, which we hoped would never be used. But the 320 capacity was reached and *exceeded* by May, just four months after opening. And for the winter months of 2017-2018, CC operated on behalf of Ramsey County and the City of St. Paul a

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low barrier “winter safe space” with the capacity to provide mats for 50 adults. Moreover, Metro Transit reports that more than 250 people use the light rail trains as a shelter many nights.

This trend and the broader housing market challenges for those with low incomes well documented by the Task Force, portends a reversal of recent progress and overall increases in homelessness and the resulting human tragedies and collective social and economic consequences.

You may have recently read that CC has revised its strategy and will focus on a partnership with Hennepin County to address major challenges in our overwhelmed child protection system. This will not diminish our commitment to retaining housing stability and opportunity for those most in need as a core function of CC. (Although it is unlikely that an initiative the scale of Dorothy Day Place will be advanced in the foreseeable future.) Our work with children and families and housing stability are inextricably linked. Wilder’s 2015 statewide survey showed that more than half (54%) of the nearly 1500 youth surveyed that night reported having been physically or sexually abused or neglected; 54% experienced an out-of-home placement. The U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services reports that youth who experience violence at home between family members were 2.23 times more likely than other youth to experience five or more years of homelessness. Clearly, housing stability is a key element of child and family well-being.

Reflections on Minnesota’s Performance and Leadership to Solve Homelessness

It is rare for bipartisan, state-wide, multi-sector public/private collaborations to maintain a high level of performance and the ongoing commitment of key stakeholders. But for 15 years this has been true for the state’s effort to prevent and end homelessness. In 2003, the legislature asked Governor Pawlenty to develop a business plan to end long-term homelessness. In 2004, the plan was completed and set a goal of creating 4,000 housing opportunities. In 2006 the Wilder Survey, for the first time since its inception in the 1990s, showed a slight reduction in homelessness. With hundreds of millions of federal, state, local and philanthropic resources invested (including the precursor to today’s Housing Infrastructure Bonds), the 4,000 housing opportunity goal was reached in 2013. While the Great Recession caused homelessness to increase, the rate of increase and the resulting hardship were lessened because implementation of the plan continued.

In 2013 Governor Dayton reinvigorated the State Interagency Council on Homelessness which developed the first state-wide plan that sought to broadly prevent and end homelessness overall. Continued multi-sector investment and collaboration reached new levels and produced record reductions in homelessness, which is all well documented in HHT. What is more difficult to document, but is just as real, is the culture of tenacity and high performance, rigorous use of data and commitment to continuous improvement, all of which are contagious. I have no doubt that CC’s Dorothy Day Place, the largest public/private partnership in housing and social services in state history, owes its existence and its promise of continued success to the many, who for so long, did so many things so well and together to provide the dignity of a home.

We Must Not Give Up—Continue to Aggressively Implement and Invest in Solving Homelessness

The 2004 Business Plan could not predict or overcome the Great Recession. But it did mitigate its impact. HHT cannot control the broader economic and housing market trends that could increase homelessness. But the aggressive implementation of and investment in HHT will position Minnesota to be on a sustainable path to solving homelessness as broader housing and social challenges are confronted.

After 15 years, it could be tempting to slow down, lose focus, curtail investments, move on. While there is no doubt that other urgent housing policy and investment efforts must advance, it would be a tragedy to lose focus on where there has been sustained success in what has been accomplished, for whom, and also in *how* it has been accomplished. I urge you to keep preventing and ending homelessness at the top of Minnesota’s housing policy agenda by making it a top priority of this Working Group’s and the full Task Force’s recommendations. Thank you.

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