
Interim Report to the Legislature

Task Force on Shelter
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Project Team

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Introduction

The task force on shelter is required to submit two reports to the legislature: one no later than February 1, 2022, and one no later than August 31, 2022. This report will describe the work accomplished to date, and the second report will include recommendations to the legislature.

About the task force

In 2021, the Minnesota legislature authorized a task force on shelter. The legislature charged the group to:

1. Examine existing shelter policies and practices in shelters of all types, including shelter in the seven-county metropolitan area, suburbs, and greater Minnesota, and shelter for single adults, families, and survivors of domestic violence.
2. Engage stakeholders, which include but are not limited to:
 - i. shelter providers
 - ii. people who have experienced homelessness and resided in shelter
 - iii. relevant state and local agencies
 - iv. other persons or organizations with expertise in homelessness
3. Make recommendations to the legislature regarding standards that will strengthen the shelter system and ensure that shelters have the ability and resources to provide safe and appropriate shelter services to those who need them.

The task force consists of twenty-four members, including state, city, and county representatives, public members who have experienced homelessness, advocacy organization representatives, and shelter provider representatives. See Appendix A on page 10 for the full legislation, and Appendix B on page 13 for a list of task force members.

Work to date

The full task force met six times between August 2021 and January 2022. This section describes what the group has accomplished so far.

Developing a group process

The first two task force meetings were dedicated to establishing a group process. The group elected a chair, agreed to a meeting schedule, created ground rules, and discussed how to make final decisions. The task force also created values for how they plan to operate, which are shared below.

Values

1. **Liberation:** We believe in freedom for people residing in all kinds of shelter and experiencing homelessness outside of shelter. We support the creation of liberating structures and removing barriers that oppress.
2. We will **center those closest to the experience** in our work, how we listen, and recommendations we put forward. This means listening to people with lived experience and deferring to and giving more weight to people who have historically been disenfranchised. We value a human-centered, not system-centered approach where people are seen holistically.
3. We value and are committed to **actionable solutions across the State**. We know that homelessness is a statewide issue and that each community has a need to balance the universal rights of people experiencing homelessness with the specific challenges within their community. We will share what we learn, educate, and advocate.
4. **Trust:** To do our work authentically and create change, we need to build relationships, which require trust. Only then are we able to foster and support transformation.
5. **Dignity:** Persons who are experiencing homelessness and residing in shelter are entitled to a basic set of rights, dignity, accessibility, and **safety** as defined by people experiencing homelessness themselves.
6. **Responsiveness:** We value and are committed to **inclusivity**, engaging with an open mind, and will strive to understand with **empathy**.
7. **Equity:** We will practice **cultural responsiveness and humility**, acknowledging that homelessness and housing instability disproportionately affect People of African heritage, Black people, Indigenous people, People of Color, LGBTQIA2S+ people, and people with disabilities.
8. **Responsibility:** We understand the importance of this work and are accountable to people served and our broader communities in the decisions we make, and recommendations we put forward. We are responsible for holding meetings in an accessible way and operating accessibly (physical and sensory accessibility).

Establishing common knowledge

In the fall, the taskforce worked to establish common knowledge around the topic. Members developed a list of questions they would need answers to in order to develop standards and oversight structures, and then they shared their collective knowledge to answer each other's questions. Topics included what shelters look like in Minnesota, how oversight currently works, and what sorts of policies shelters currently have. The next three sections provide an overview of some of the information the group has collected to date.

About shelters

Broadly speaking, shelters are temporary residences for people experiencing homelessness. It is unclear how many shelters operate in Minnesota because they are not all currently licensed facilities, and because there is some gray area in what counts as a shelter. For example, some programs that operate as supportive housing could also be considered shelter programs. The Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) provided a list of 172 shelters in the state that staff are aware of, but these are likely not all the shelters that exist.

Shelters can generally be described in three ways:

1. By populations served:
 - a. Families with children
 - b. Childless adults
 - c. Unaccompanied youth
 - d. Survivors of domestic violence (these typically serve both families and individual survivors)
2. By physical setup:
 - a. Self-contained, 24-hour facilities (these typically serve families and domestic violence survivors)
 - b. Overnight-only facilities (these typically serve childless adults)
 - c. Rotating churches (these may be associated with a day center)
 - d. Hotels paid by a government body or nonprofit, including hotel vouchers
3. By funding model:
 - a. Directly operated by a government body
 - b. Nonprofit funded by and contracted with a government body
 - c. Privately operated with no government funding; these are typically church-affiliated

Access to shelter varies widely across the state. Some areas have a coordinated access and prioritization system for shelters; others do not or have no physical shelter provider at all. Outside of the Twin Cities, local government is rarely involved in providing or managing shelter funding and access.

Shelter oversight

Shelters are subject to different oversight requirements and systems depending on their location, their services, and their funding. Oversight may occur at a local, state, and/or federal level.

Some shelters are currently licensed at a state level. They may be licensed by the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) and/or by DHS. MDH or a local delegated government entity provides board and lodging licenses

to some facilities, but those are only facility licenses for health and safety. DHS does require licenses for shelters that provide services to minors and enforces statutory standards for those facilities, their staff, and their services. Adult shelters receiving Housing Support funds are required to have a license or registration.

The state also has some oversight of shelters that receive certain types of funding. For example, shelters receiving grants from the DHS Office of Economic Opportunity must submit written standards that are developed by the provider or local Continuum of Care. These standards include eligibility, intake, length of stay, and discharge/appeals policies. DHS must approve these standards, and enforces them through staff monitoring visits, periodic file reviews, and reporting. Providers who consistently fail to meet the agreed-upon standards are required to develop a quality improvement plan in conjunction with DHS.

In another example of state oversight, shelters receiving standard Housing Support funding typically have a Housing Support agreement, which is signed and managed at the county or tribal level. A Housing Support agreement requires compliance with Minnesota Statute 256I and, by extension, applicable licensing standards for the location/authorization (this often means boarding and lodging license requirements). County and tribal planners are responsible for reviewing policies and managing compliance. Counties and tribes may have separate agreements with providers with additional standards that exceed or are not covered in the Housing Support agreement.

On top of state oversight, shelters may also be subject to some federal requirements. Some standards about accessibility and discrimination—such as the Fair Housing Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, and Title III of the Americans with Disabilities Act—should in theory apply to most shelters. Other federal standards depend again on the facility's services and funding.

Cities or counties may add their own requirements to shelter providers in their area. For example, the City of Minneapolis has zoning requirements covering proximity to other shelters, physical characteristics of the building, and an approved management plan. Hennepin County includes performance standards in the contracts of shelter providers that are receiving county funding, which are modeled on the Street Voices of Change Shelter Bill of Rights.

Shelter policies

Shelter policies vary widely. As discussed earlier, some shelters must have certain policies approved by a governmental entity.

Some example topics covered by shelter policies are listed below. This is not an exhaustive list and is only meant to give an idea of what types of policies exist.

- **Service animals and pets:** What types of animals can residents bring with them?
- **Length of stay:** How long can a resident stay at a shelter? Can they re-enter a shelter?
- **Shelter staff hiring and training:** What are the requirements for shelter staff to be hired? What training must they go through after hiring?
- **Physical environment:** How accessible are facilities to people with disabilities? How can residents store personal belongings?
- **Supportive resources:** Do residents get a case manager? Do they get support to transition to more permanent housing?

- **Financial policies for residents:** How much and how do residents pay for their stay, if at all?
- **Resident grievances:** What happens when a resident has a complaint?
- **Separation from shelter:** What happens when a resident transitions to another housing situation? Under what situations can a resident be asked to leave the shelter?

State law dictates some of these policies at a high level for shelters serving minors, which are currently licensed by DHS. For example, license holders must document specific information about residents at or after intake, have no eject policies, and follow certain rules about managing residents' property.

Developing the ideal state

The taskforce discussed what the ideal shelter experience should be like for residents. This conversation will inform how they approach developing standards and how they evaluate their eventual recommendations. The conversation centered the point of view of a hypothetical resident. The themes from the conversation are below.

In my ideal shelter experience:

- I am safe throughout my experience.
- I feel:
 - Hopeful
 - Cared for, valued
 - Heard
 - Treated with dignity
 - Like I can be my full self; my experiences and my cultural background and practices will be respected and valued
- I receive holistic services; I get help connecting to other resources/more permanent housing solutions.
- I can fully access services and facilities, regardless of any disabilities I have or languages I speak.
- No wrong door process: I get transitioned to a place that better meets my needs if necessary.
- I have privacy: I have a place for personal belongings, a place that feels more my own.
- My identity is protected in those spaces.
- There is a paperwork trail of my time there: for voting, about discipline, etc.

Creating standards

Members have started drafting standards for the provision for shelter. They are working in small groups between task force meetings to create and revise language. They will continue to provide feedback to each other to refine the standards, and will adjust the language based on stakeholder feedback.

Engaging stakeholders

The task force intends to conduct stakeholder engagement throughout the rest of the group's existence. So far, some members have reached out to shelters to learn about their policies and oversight to help the group come to a common understanding.

As a first phase of engagement, the task force's stakeholder engagement subgroup has planned listening sessions with providers and people who have experienced homelessness. The subgroup is also coordinating with existing, external groups to attend their meetings in January and February 2022. In addition to those approaches, the group has created phone, email, mail, and online form options for stakeholders to share their thoughts. The task force is launching a GovDelivery email list of stakeholders who might like to know about upcoming input opportunities. The task force will revise its approaches as it gains more experience in engaging the public.

Given the disproportionate impact of homelessness on Indigenous persons in Minnesota, and the lack of a seat for tribal governments on the taskforce, members intend to deliberately connect with tribal nations on this issue.

Future work and request for the legislature

The legislation enabling the task force states that the group must submit its final report by August 31, 2022. The group is concerned that it will not be able to accomplish the large task in front of it by this date, and requests a legislative extension to submit its report by December 31, 2022. Members believe the additional time will allow the group to conduct better stakeholder engagement and to discuss how their recommendations may need to be adjusted for geographical regions and different populations.

The task force will continue to meet through August 2022, and beyond if the legislature approves the request for extension. Future work includes further developing standards, conducting more stakeholder engagement, and exploring oversight options. The August report will include the recommendations required by law.

Appendix A: Authorizing legislation

Laws of Minnesota 2017, 1st Spec. Sess. chapter 8, article 6, section 1. Task Force on Shelter.

Subdivision 1. Definitions.

- a) For purposes of this section, the following terms have the meanings given.
- b) “Director” means the state director of the Minnesota Interagency Council on Homelessness.
- c) “Homeless” or “homelessness” means lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.
- d) “Resident” means a person residing in a shelter, including all members of a family unit.
- e) “Shelter” means an indoor sleeping and sanitary dwelling, whether in a fixed or rotating location, intended for individuals and families experiencing homelessness, provided by a unit of government, a nonprofit organization, or a place of worship.

Subdivision 2. Establishment.

A task force on shelter is established to:

- 1) develop standards for the provision of shelter; and
- 2) examine the need for, and the feasibility and cost of, establishing state oversight of shelter.

Subdivision 3. Membership.

- a) The taskforce consists of the following 24 members appointed by the director:
 - 1) the commissioner of human services, or a designee;
 - 2) the commissioner of corrections, or a designee;
 - 3) the commissioner of health, or a designee;
 - 4) the commissioner of public safety, or a designee;
 - 5) the commissioner of transportation, or a designee;
 - 6) the commissioner of veterans affairs, or a designee;
 - 7) three public members who have experienced homelessness and resided in a shelter, at least one of whom has resided in a shelter in greater Minnesota;
 - 8) one public member who has experienced homelessness and chose to remain unsheltered;
 - 9) one representative of Street Voices of Change;
 - 10) one representative of Freedom from the Streets;
 - 11) two representatives from organizations that advocate on behalf of persons with disabilities;
 - 12) one representative from an organization that advocates on behalf of persons experiencing homelessness;
 - 13) one representative from an organization that provides legal services to persons experiencing homelessness;
 - 14) four representatives of organizations representing shelter providers, two of which must provide shelter in the seven-county metropolitan area, two of which must provide shelter in greater Minnesota, one of which must also provide shelter to families, and one of which must also be a

victim service provider that is funded to provide shelter to survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault;

15) two representatives from cities, one representing a metropolitan city and the other representing a city in greater Minnesota; and

16) two representatives from counties, one representing a metropolitan county and the other representing a county in greater Minnesota.

- b) Appointments must be made no later than August 1, 2021.
- c) Taskforce members shall serve without compensation, except for public members. Members eligible for compensation shall receive expenses as provided in Minnesota Statutes, section 15.059, subdivision 6.
- d) Vacancies shall be filled by the director consistent with the qualifications of the vacating member required by this subdivision.

Subdivision 4. Meetings; officers.

- a) The director shall convene the first meeting of the task force no later than August 15, 2021, and shall provide physical or virtual meeting space as necessary for the task force to conduct its work.
- b) At its first meeting, the task force shall elect a chair and vice-chair from among the task force members and may elect other officers as necessary.
- c) The task force shall meet at least once every two months.
- d) Meetings of the task force are subject to Minnesota Statutes, chapter 13D.

Subdivision 5. Duties.

The task force must:

- 1) examine existing shelter policies and practices in shelters of all types, including shelter in the seven-county metropolitan area, suburbs, and greater Minnesota, and shelter for single adults, families, and survivors of domestic violence;
- 2) engage stakeholders, which include but are not limited to:
 - i. shelter providers;
 - ii. people who have experienced homelessness and resided in shelter;
 - iii. relevant state and local agencies; and
 - iv. other persons or organizations with expertise in homelessness; and
- 3) make recommendations to the legislature regarding standards that will strengthen the shelter system and ensure that shelters have the ability and resources to provide safe and appropriate shelter services to those who need them.

Subdivision 6. Administrative support.

The Minnesota Housing Finance Agency must provide administrative support and meeting space for the task force.

Subdivision 7. Report.

- a) No later than February 1, 2022, the task force shall submit an initial report to the chairs and ranking minority members of the house of representatives and senate committees and divisions with jurisdiction over housing and preventing homelessness on its findings and recommendations.
- b) No later than August 31, 2022, the task force shall submit a final report to the chairs and ranking minority members of the house of representatives and senate committees and divisions with jurisdiction over housing and preventing homelessness on its findings and recommendations.

Subdivision 8. Expiration.

The task force expires the day following submission of the final report under subdivision 7.

Appendix B: Task force members

The following members were appointed to the task force. As of report writing, two positions are vacant.

Member name	Designated seat	Other organization affiliation
Andrea Simonett	Department of Human Services	-
Ariana Daniel	Shelter Provider (Greater MN)	Servants of Shelter in International Falls
David Hewitt	County representative (Metro area)	Hennepin County
Jonda Crum	Public member—experienced homelessness and resided in a shelter	-
Judy Moe	Organization that advocates on behalf of persons with disabilities	Richfield Disability Advocacy
Julie Jeppson	City representative (Metro area)	Blaine City Council
July Vang	Public member—experienced homelessness and chose to remain unsheltered	-
Kate Erickson	Department of Corrections	-
Kevin Formo	Public member—(Greater MN) experienced homelessness and resided in a shelter	Churches United Shelter
Kristin Frye	Freedom from the Streets	-
Laura Birnbaum	County representative (Greater MN)	St. Louis County
Lauren Ryan	Department of Public Safety	-
Mary Manning	Department of Health	-
Mary Riegert	Organization that advocates on behalf of persons experiencing homelessness	Minnesota Tribal Collaborative
Nancy Bokelmann	City representative—Greater MN	City of Mankato
Paul Williams	Veterans Affairs	Veterans Affairs
Reed Olson	Shelter Provider (Greater MN)	Nameless Coalition in Bemidji
Rinal Ray	Shelter Provider (seven-county metro area)	People Serving People in Minneapolis
Ron Elwood	Organization that provides legal services to persons experiencing homelessness	Legal Services Advocacy Project
Sam Juneau	Transportation	Transportation

Member name	Designated seat	Other organization affiliation
Sam Smith	Organization that advocates on behalf of persons with disabilities	National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Minnesota
Sherry Shannon	Public member—experienced homelessness and resided in a shelter	-
Tamara Stark	Shelter Provider (seven-county metro area)	Tubman in Minneapolis
Tyra Thomas	Street Voices of Change	-