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**City Clerk, City of Regina**

**Written submission for City Council Meeting**

**Date: June 15<sup>th</sup>**

**Motion: MN22-3: Ending Homelessness**

Please accept this letter as a written submission for City Council on June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022 regarding Motion MN22-3: Ending Homelessness.

SOFIA House provides long-term supportive housing for families who are experiencing violence. We offer 20 private and secure apartment suites in two buildings throughout two wards in the city. We provide one on one and group counselling for both women and children, and also provide cultural programming, advocacy, support, transportation and anything else families need during their time at SOFIA House. During most of our over 30-year history, SOFIA House has operated its programming in a building operated by the Regina Housing Authority. SOFIA House has had significant growth as an organization over the past few years and in July of 2020, we were able to expand to a second building through a partnership with Avana. Both buildings are almost always full, and we consistently have a waitlist of between 15 – 20 families at any given time. The need in the community for long-term supportive housing is very high.

In addition to the high need for our services, we are consistently seeing more and more families who have a higher complexity of needs including mental health and addiction issues, who often face barriers to entry to traditional housing systems. This has prompted us to pivot to a low-barrier model that diverts people from having to use emergency shelters and prevents bottleneck in shelter systems, while providing 24/7 support within our long-term housing model. This allows us to move beyond the traditional services that are provided to those experiencing violence and homelessness and better respond to the needs of the community. Since our low-barrier supportive housing pilot began in July of 2020, we have had a high rate of success. There have been 97 women and children that have accessed long-term shelter in our new building (26 women and 71 children), and we are able to keep people housed and provide support, with most of our families are staying for longer than a year. This shows the success of long-term, supportive housing models in our community.

**Motion MN22-3 towards ending homelessness is fully supported by SOFIA House. We believe that operational funding towards housing first, supportive housing models will be detrimental to helping end homelessness in the city.**

Funding for supportive, long-term housing models is a very important step in ending homelessness. The current lack of space and availability in both emergency shelters and current long-term supportive housing models create a bottleneck in the system that exacerbates current homelessness issues. In our line of work, this means that some families cannot get into emergency shelters because there is no space, while other families cannot leave because they have nowhere else safe to go due to the lack of safe housing, leading to the risk they will end up back in the emergency shelter system. Without safe housing and support services available, those experiencing violence run the risk of returning to an abusive partner simply because they have nowhere else to go. They also risk moving to an unstable or unsafe housing situation which is not long-term in nature. This increases the risk that families will end up back in a crisis shelter or homeless. Funding for long-term, supportive housing helps to negate this issue. Creating more spaces and supporting the needed operational funding for long-term supportive housing can help with the current bottleneck in the crisis shelter system and lead to better outcomes. If women and their children are able to move out of a crisis shelter quickly and into a long-term housing placement, or can bypass the emergency shelter system entirely, this results in less turnaways for crisis shelters and more people being able to sleep in safe, long-term beds at night.

SOFIA House is in a unique position of seeing homeless from a verity of different lenses. We see the intersects between violence, homelessness, and poverty on a daily basis. Many families who come to us are experiencing homelessness because of violence, and many others have experienced violence BECAUSE of homelessness. We also see a growing population of families fleeing violence that crisis shelters do not see who are facing immediate homelessness or imminent risk of homelessness. For example, our recent statistics show us that over 40% of our referrals are self-referrals from women who do not feel comfortable accessing emergency shelter with their children. Therefore they will remain at home in an unsafe situation until they can get into their own apartment at SOFIA House, or are a part of the hidden homelessness population where they stay temporarily at a friends or with families members until they can get into SOFIA House. By being able to house this population quickly into long-term housing, we can prevent future homelessness as well. Providing long-term housing for families BEFORE they are in crisis means that supports can be put in place before families end up homeless, children end up in care, and families end up separated.

Saskatchewan is one of only two provinces in Canada who does not provide operational funding for second stage, long-term housing models like SOFIA House. SOFIA House continues to be a strong advocate to all levels of government for operational funding for places like ours. This motion, calling for specific operational funding for long-term supportive housing models, allows the City of Regina to be a progressive leader in tackling homelessness and become an example for all communities.

Respectfully submitted,



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