

Covenant House

To Anchorage Health Department:

Covenant House Alaska (CHA) would like to express our continued support of the Municipal Action Plan's strategies to increase affordable housing for young people, to prevent youth homelessness, to help youth who are experiencing homelessness move out of congregate-care settings and into permanent housing quickly as possible.

Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Investment

We support the Plan's goals to invest in CHA's project that will construct 25 new affordable housing units for young adults experiencing homelessness. In the 2020 Draft Action Plan, \$470,700 in CDBG funds were allocated towards "Covenant House Construction" in section 4a. This "Bridge to Success" project is moving forward as planned with a projected start date in April 2021. This CDBG investment will leverage additional investments including an Indian Housing Block Grant, a Federal Home Loan Bank of Des Moines grant, an Alaska Mental Health Authority grant, and investments from other private funder. This project will quickly move youth and young adults who are experiencing homelessness OFF the streets, OUT of congregate-care shelter and INTO long-term stable housing. With our partner, Cook Inlet Housing Authority, all investments will be spent and project will be complete by Summer 2022.

The Bridge to Success Project will help meet our city's Anchored Home Plan Pillar 2 goal to "build and maintain a robust and coordinated system of housing, case management and other supports adequate to house the people who need it, with connections to meaningful work and community." Not only will Bridge to Success residents have their own apartment to call home, they will have full access to on-site case management, education and employment opportunities, health care, counseling and other supports offered at CHA's Youth Engagement Center, which will be attached to the Bridge to Success housing project.

This project will also help meet COVID goals of moving people out of congregate care settings and into their own homes where they can quarantine and maintain social distance as needed. The Bridge to Success design will be informed by our learnings from the COVID-19 pandemic, including how to properly design shared space, ensure the security of spaces, and implementation of proper ventilation and filtration systems. In addition, all residents will have quick access to rapid testing, diagnosis and treatment as needed at the on-site Wellness Center, operated by CHA's partner Southcentral Foundation.

Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) Investment

There is currently no public dollar investment in dedicated emergency shelter for youth and young adults (ages 13 to 21) who are experiencing homelessness, exploitation and trafficking in Anchorage. It is important to recognize that an ESG investment will be a fundamental investment in our effort to keep community's young people safe, housed and on a path to stability so that we can stop cycles of poverty and chronic homelessness. Because the majority of public dollars goes towards the extremely worthwhile cause of tackling chronic homelessness, we also stress the importance of upstream interventions in order to stop chronic homelessness before it occurs. The average age at CHA's emergency youth shelter is 18, a

critical point in a young person's life in which we can have a tremendous impact. At CHA, the emergency youth shelter at the Youth Engagement Center includes a full continuum of robust services to help a young person attain stability including:

- Access to a host of on-site partners including Nine Star Education and Employment Services, Volunteers of America substance abuse/mental health counseling, the Southcentral Foundation Wellness Center, an Anchorage School District on-site classroom and others,
- Comprehensive Education + Employment Services (including job placement and on-site internships)
- On-site arts, music, cultural and recreation opportunities
- Human Trafficking Prevention & Intervention program,
- Permanency Navigator long-term, community-based, mobile support for young people,
- Rapid Re-Housing to quickly move young people out of shelter and into their own apartments.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, CHA has been able to fulfill a critical need of providing a safe place for young people to stay. Since the beginning of the pandemic, CHA has implemented strict protocols including enhanced cleaning, enhanced facility filtration, mask distribution, regular weekly testing for ALL youth and staff, immediate screening and testing as needed through the Anchorage Health Department and Southcentral Foundation. CHA has spent considerable resources in setting up dedicated quarantine and isolation locations that have optimal staffing to keep young people safe.

CHA is grateful for our partnership with the Municipality and appreciates the opportunity to participate in community initiatives and conversations. We will continue to advocate for vulnerable young people in Anchorage, and with the support of the Municipality, we can continue to work towards our goal of making young people's experience of homelessness *brief, rare and non-recurring*.

Thank you for accepting these comments.

Alison E. Kear
Chief Executive Officer



PO Box 100620
Anchorage, AK 99510-0620
TEL: 907-272-1255
DIR: 907-339-4203
CELL: 907-227-2096
akear@covenanthouseak.org