

The Free Press

Advocates hope for special session to secure key homelessness funding

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- May 25, 2022

MANKATO — While homelessness advocates earned some victories in Minnesota’s recently concluded legislative session, they’re supporting calls for a special session to secure more funding.

The Minnesota Coalition for the Homeless’ 2022 policy agenda included requests for \$500 million in housing bonds, \$100 million for homeless shelter capital projects and \$9 million for transitional housing programs, among other needs.

Representing 70 organizations across the state, the coalition’s leaders were hopeful funding for key programs would come through in the weeks leading up to Sunday’s session end.

Once the clock ran out, the coalition posted an update on its website stating the session fell short.

“The unfortunate news is that when it came time to meet for negotiations, members of the Minnesota House and Senate could not reach an agreement to fund key priorities around homelessness,” the update read.

The post did note a few provisions made it into the Health and Human Services, or HHS, policy bill, which still needs to be funded. One would extend transitional housing support to individuals from 24 to 36 months.

An extension would give nonprofits more time to help clients as they transition from homelessness to long-term housing, said Jen Theneman, executive director at Partners for Housing in Mankato. A longer window would better account for the many hurdles that can pop up for people who’ve been homeless, sometimes right before the 24-month deadline arrives.

“These programs tend to be more cookie-cutter assuming everyone has similar needs, and that’s definitely not the case,” Theneman said. “It gives more freedom for us to determine what each person needs.”

Another provision in the HHS policy bill would raise the max funding for youth shelter capital projects from \$100,000 to \$200,000, according to the coalition. The third provision included in the bill would extend the Minnesota shelter task force’s deadline to finish its work through December.

The list of provisions still in limbo is longer. Lawmakers didn’t pass HHS funding, didn’t approve the bill that would include bonds for public housing rehab and the

building of new homes, didn't pass a housing policy and funding bill, and didn't pass a tax bill overhauling renters' credits, according to the coalition.

Gov. Tim Walz and Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan supported more housing funding, Theneman said, so there's a decent chance the governor will call a special session to get it and other unresolved bills over the finish line. Advocates could use the time to convince on-the-fence lawmakers to come around on homelessness funding, she added.

"Continued conversation is a little bit of a light at the end of the tunnel," Theneman said. "Maybe there's the possibility of it."