



Office of the
County Board

September 6, 2018

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Mayor James P. Francis
City of South St. Paul
123 3rd Avenue North
South St. Paul, MN 55075

Dear Mayor Francis,

People with all types of disabilities have more opportunity now to live and work in settings of their choosing. At Dakota County, we embrace our responsibility to support people in the community and not in institutions. There are thousands of people with disabilities and mental health challenges living successfully and peacefully in communities across the County.

There are also people who struggle. In those situations, we are concerned for the individuals' safety as well as that of first responders and the general public. We also have concern for the safety of social workers who often have similar interactions with people in crisis on a regular basis, but without the accompaniment of first responders. Still, it's important we remember that an encounter between a person in crisis and first responders doesn't mean that individual shouldn't live in our community, but it does require a specialized, individualized and collaborative response.

Group homes have proven to be successful settings

Dakota County Community Services/Social Services works closely with South St. Paul and other cities to build relationships and address issues involving your residents who are living with disabilities or mental health challenges. All large cities in Dakota County are home to State-licensed group homes with around-the-clock, on-site staff and services. South St. Paul has 21 licensed group homes. That is nine percent of the 230 total group homes in the County. Group homes licensed with the State have proven to be successful settings for many residents who need assistance.

Minnesota State data shows the number of people with these disabilities who receive services in integrated homes rather than in an institutional setting rose Statewide from 42 percent in 2012, to 62 percent in 2016. Counties, just like cities, are responding to this change.

State-registered housing provides independent living opportunities

In addition to group homes, some people with disabilities or mental health challenges live in housing that is registered through the State Department of Health. There are 109 of these properties with housing service agreements located throughout Dakota County, and eight of them are located in South St. Paul. That is seven percent of these



properties. A misconception some have is that these buildings are fully occupied with people who have disabilities or mental health challenges. That is not true. In some cases, not all units in these buildings are rented to people who receive services and supports. The County has been working closely with our care providers to develop a more integrated model of housing for people with disabilities and mental health challenges that relies less on the use of these registered, multi-unit properties.

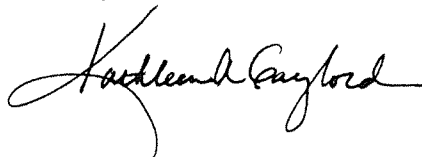
We're doing more together

All of us must adapt our services to the new reality of more people facing challenges living in the community. We all are responsible for a piece of the puzzle and we can't do this in isolation; the best results come from a response involving all partners. We're proud of our long-standing dedicated resources and partnerships, including the 24/7 Crisis Response Unit. We have also added resources for Countywide efforts, including more County crisis workers and City/County liaisons. We need to keep doing more together.

The County has also been exploring integrated models of police/social worker services for the last two years. In 2018-2019, Social Services will dedicate a mental health coordinator to partner with the Cities of South St. Paul and West St. Paul to create a pilot model of co-response and service coordination. We appreciate that South St. Paul is planning to hire a mental health liaison in 2019 to support these efforts.

We, like you, all want to make our community safe and healthy. As we discussed at our meeting in July, we believe one way to work toward that end is through a collaborative approach involving first responders and social services. We look forward to working with all of you to embrace the opportunity to develop better and more lasting solutions to these complex issues, drawing on the many strengths and resources in our community.

Sincerely,



Kathleen Gaylord, Chair
Dakota County Board of Commissioners

cc: Dakota County Board of Commissioners
Matt Smith, Dakota County Manager
Tim Leslie, Dakota County Sheriff
Kelly Harder, Community Services Division Director
South St. Paul City Council
Joel Hanson, South St. Paul City Administrator
William Messerich, South St. Paul Police Chief