

Milwaukee County Exec Abele: Calls on County Board to reverse their cuts to homeless shelter funding

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Milwaukee, Wisconsin — As temperatures fall below freezing this winter, and homelessness funding is at risk nationally, County Executive Chris Abele is calling on the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors to reverse their cuts to important social safety net services, starting with \$200,000 in funding for homeless shelters.

In just two short years the Housing First initiative has placed more than 200 chronically homeless individuals in permanent housing and reduced the overall rate of homelessness in Milwaukee County by more than 40 percent, the most significant drop in the past decade and one of the largest decreases in the country. Without adequate funding, the initiative cannot maintain this level of progress.

County Executive Abele has been one of the key leaders for eradicating homelessness in Milwaukee County, increasing efforts, resources, and partnerships year after year. His 2018 budget proposal continued that support.

However, on a vote of 15-3, the County Board in November voted to implement \$15 million in deep service cuts to transit, public safety, parks, and social services – despite being cautioned clearly and repeatedly by County officials that such a sizable funding cut would have severe consequences, and with full knowledge of the specific service cuts that would result from their action. Among those cuts is a

\$200,000 reduction in homeless shelter funding.

Sadly, these cuts will take effect in the winter months when the need for housing is often the greatest, and at the same time that President Donald Trump is ending a successful homeless veterans housing program started by President Barack Obama.

“We have a moral responsibility to care for and empower our most vulnerable residents, which is why the budget I proposed included enough revenue to fully fund the County’s efforts to eradicate homelessness,” County Executive Chris Abele said. “I am deeply concerned about the negative impact the County Board’s budget cuts will have on these vulnerable residents, and on the community as a whole. I am calling on the County Board to reconsider their \$15 million budget cut immediately, starting by restoring homeless shelter funding.”

The Department of Health and Human Services, which oversees the Housing Division, received a 5.3 percent budget cut as a result of the County Board’s action this year, including the \$200,000 reduction for homeless shelter funding, on top of the one percent budget cut the Board gave them last year. To the extent that budget savings and efficiencies exist, the department has already implemented them in years past.

All of the County’s programs are important and many of them, like our shelter funding, support and empower some of our most vulnerable residents. This is particularly true for the Department of Health and Human Services, which provides critical services for people who are experiencing homelessness, people with mental illness, people battling addiction, and people with disabilities. The county executive believes all of these services are priorities, which is why he fully funded them in his budget proposal.