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Rural Rental Housing Preservation and COVID-19

Coronavirus is impacting Minnesota's rural communities, just as its urban areas. Many rural communities never fully recovered from the Great Recession, and the challenges of COVID-19 will exacerbate these pre-existing harms. Rural rental housing, already struggling for attention and resources prior to COVID-19, is needed more than ever to ensure the health and safety of families in Greater Minnesota communities, including our elders and individuals with disabilities.

In the fall of 2019, rural housing advocates and community members met to talk about solutions to a variety of rural rental housing challenges. Even within the context of a world coping with the effects of COVID-19, the recommendations from this group remain relevant, with identified needs magnified. The discussion included a focus on Minnesota's unique portfolio of USDA Rural Development 515 properties, or rural rental housing that supports residents, elders and families with very low income averaging \$16,500 annually. Participants also focused on Minnesota's manufactured home communities, 65% of which are located in Greater Minnesota.

Immediate needs include

- **Protect low income renters with housing assistance.** In Minnesota, state leaders must provide housing assistance of at least \$100 million through the Family Homeless Prevention Assistance Program (FHPAP) or another rental assistance program. At the federal level, \$100 billion in emergency rental assistance (to include renters in USDA financed rental housing) is necessary.

Additional critical needs:

- **Preserve the USDA rental housing portfolio**, with funding to ensure ongoing safe maintenance, operations, and rehabilitation
- **Capacity building and technical assistance** for owners and prospective owners of rural rental housing
- Ensure **long term affordability** and **opportunities for resident ownership in manufactured home** communities
- **Engagement of people and communities in Greater Minnesota** to ensure that the people most affected by our rural housing challenges are at the table when decisions are made.

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