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Formerly Homeless Youth Propose Policy Change to Congressman Ellison

“We Don’t Want to Choose between Housing and Education”

St. Paul, Minn. (December 18, 2008) – Today, formerly homeless youth asked Congressman Keith Ellison to help them change a federal rule that restricts them from being full-time students. The youth took the Minnesota lawmaker on a tour of a building which many of them now call home and then presented him with their proposal. The young students hope that Ellison, who agreed to look into the problem after hearing their testimony last month, will sponsor a bill which will allow them to keep their apartments while they finish their high school and college degrees.

The youth live in either St. Barnabas or Archdale apartments, two Aeon buildings which are federal Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) properties. The LIHTC program is used to develop rental properties for low-income individuals and families. Units funded by the LIHTC program cannot be occupied by single tenants if they are in school full-time, even if they are high school students. The original intent of the rule was to prevent use of funds for construction of dormitories. However, this program rule prevents formerly homeless youth who live in these properties from rigorously pursuing their education, sometimes sacrificing higher-learning scholarships in the process.

“How can youth move forward, toward greater stability, when they can’t pursue a full-time education? Education plays a vital role in their future,” said Sara Armstrong-Nathan, Site Manager for Aeon which developed the properties.

“I don’t know any path better than education,” said Lalise, one of the youth residents at St. Barnabas who spoke to Congressman Ellison. “Education means a better life, a better future, better hope.” Because of this rule, she said she “had to stop my dream.”

Students are forced to forego scholarships, loans, and grants when the awards are dependent upon full-time study. Frequently, youth end up occupying scarce spots in the properties for a

longer time period than they would otherwise, because as part-time students, their high school, college, or technical school graduations take longer.

The event was hosted by Aeon, the property owner, YouthLink, which provides supportive services to the youth, and Minnesota Housing Partnership, which advocates for better federal housing policy. Both St. Barnabas and Archdale Apartments were built by the non-profit affordable housing developer Aeon.

The Minnesota Housing Partnership is a statewide nonprofit organization that advances the preservation and creation of housing affordable to low- and moderate-income people as a means of strengthening communities and families. MHP provides local governments and nonprofit housing organizations access to loans, grants, and technical expertise to plan and construct housing, in addition to advocating and educating people on sound housing policies. MHP's work in Greater Minnesota is primarily supported by The McKnight Foundation.

YouthLink, incorporated as a private non-profit in 1978, provides a continuum of services focused on homeless and precariously housed young people. On any given night, more than 550 young people are homeless in Minnesota. The agency's goal is to help the young people served achieve empowerment, self-sufficiency and healthy connections. YouthLink provided more than 2,500 young people with basic needs resources, supportive housing, education and employment support and services during 2008. YouthLink's crisis multiservice center, located at 41 N.12th Street in Minneapolis, is the place where the end of youth homelessness and poverty begin for youth served.

Aeon (formerly Central Community Housing Trust) is an award-winning nonprofit provider of high-quality apartments and town homes for the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area. Established in 1986, Aeon has since built or renovated 1,669 units of affordable homes. The organization serves more than 2,700 people annually. Aeon's mission is to create and sustain quality affordable homes that strengthen lives and communities. Learn more at www.aeonmn.org.

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