

Good Afternoon, my name is Jamie Kirsch and I am a current Board Member of Journey On and an employee of the Rapid City Police Department where I serve as non-law enforcement in community engagement. I don't represent the Native community but I do represent a Native organization. Journey On selected me to testify today because of my special knowledge of its Street Outreach Program and my experience with the federal grants processes in the area of houselessness. I was directly involved in establishing Journey On's Street Outreach Program, serve on the Black Hills Regional Homeless Coalition and am a member of the South Dakota Housing and Development Authority Policy and Advisory Committee.

Journey On was incorporated as a nonprofit in 2018 by Founder and President Tracy Sigdestad who is a member of the Mohawk tribe. In early 2020, Journey On was focused on youth mentorship and substance abuse recovery programming in Rapid City's Native American community. Realizing the need for greater collaboration and coordination with Native led organizations after participating in its 2018-2020 Collective Healing Initiative, the Rapid City Police Department (RCPD) approached Journey On to see if they would consider building capacity for a community-initiated response to Rapid City's growing houseless community.

As part of RCPD's 2020 Community Based Crime Reduction Grant through the Bureau of Justice Administration, which was developed as a continuation of the Collective Healing Initiative, it was essential to address houselessness given that approximately 65 percent of the calls for service to RCPD were generated by the houseless community. Many of these calls for service required social service responses, not criminal justice responses, through violence and victimization very much follow this community. The high call volume related to the houseless community resulted in low morale among patrol officers because officers are not equipped with the tools needed to address the varied causes of houselessness or the resources needed to provide sustainable solutions. In short, these calls were creating burn out at the individual level and resource drain at the institutional level. Given these factors, RCPD felt Journey On was a much-needed partner for its post-CHI focus on public safety strategy.

Over the next year and a half, a core group of partners from Journey On, the City, RCPD and The University of South Dakota applied for a Housing and Urban Development Emergency Solutions Grant—Cares Act Funding to launch Journey On's Street Outreach Program. Journey On was successful in securing ESG-CV funding and until recently, this grant has funded over 75 percent of its outreach efforts. In January of 2021, the Mayor of Rapid City and the City Council approved a contract with Journey On to expand the role of Journey On in the City's emergency response strategy, funding three full-time positions dedicated to responding to calls for service and two City vans to conduct outreach in. This contract marked the first time City emergency services were handed over to a community organization; a point that cannot be overstated given its essential role in advancing Collective Healing Initiative priorities of allowing for greater roles for Native-led organizations in the city's power and resource infrastructure.

Since early December 14th, 2021, Journey On has been responding to calls for service through 911 dispatch and has taken 4,877 calls for service involving the houseless community through July 9th of this year. The call types that Journey On responds to are welfare checks, intoxicated subjects, panhandling and other low-level calls. Journey On operates as part of a larger co-response team that includes the Rapid City Police Departments Quality of Life Unit (a small team of ununiformed officers and non-law enforcement staff), the Rapid City Fire Departments Mobile Medic and Co-Response Coordinator, Native-led Great Plains Tribal Leaders Health Board (behavioral health support), Pennington County

Health and Human Services and Volunteers of America—Northern Rockies (for housing navigation and case management).

Journey On methods of outreach engagement follow three main paths:

1. Journey On is dispatched as a co-responder serving Rapid City through Pennington County Emergency Communications (the 911 system). We work under a contract with Rapid City and are responsible for calls for service from the community to the 911 system in the areas of intoxicated persons, welfare checks, unwanted persons, and public disturbances. In responding to these calls for service we are helping to reduce the reliance on law enforcement to respond to situations that are better handled by community responses to community public health and public safety challenges.
2. Journey On is accessible to the entire community through calls for service to the Journey On telephone number. We maintain internal dispatch operators handling the many calls to the Journey On phone line each day. From these calls, outreach teams are dispatched, resources are navigated, and solutions are sought that serve our community in reducing violence and victimization. All calls to the Journey On phone line that require an outreach response by a Journey On outreach team are coordinated with the 911 system to avoid the stacking of multiple calls on any single outreach team.
3. Journey On conducts proactive outreach. We are out in the street six days per week seeking to support our relatives and assist our co-responder partners. Most of our proactive outreach is designed as early intervention work, identifying potential needs for community responses, and preventing later calls for service to the 911 system or the Journey On phone line. A small percentage of our proactive outreach involves holding meetings to share our model with community stakeholders, businesses, and similarly focused service providers to ensure effective collaboration and the broadest understanding of our mission and available services.

(Please see attachment 1 for a breakdown of the estimated cost savings to the City)

Currently, Journey On has 13 employees on its Street Outreach Team. All but one of these team members is Native American; all have lived experience with homelessness, the criminal justice system or addiction; most are from the North Rapid area, where the largest percentage of the Native American community resides. Each of Journey On's Street Outreach Team members are considered credible messengers and use a culture forward approach to service individuals and families in need. Team members provide community members with access to sage burning (or smudging), cultural music, and familiar ways of interacting. Journey On's Outreach Program has a plethora of community partners they can refer to who have Inipis, Talking Circles, and a host of other culturally relevant services to offer those who desire cultural as a cure or as solace from behavioral and developmental health disabilities. The lived experience and the culture-forward approach is what makes Journey On's Street Outreach Team so well-positioned to respond to the homeless community.

The Journey On Outreach Program is a human-to-human contact program, providing folks first with an opportunity to develop a trust-based relationship with someone who can help them navigate the service system when they are willing and ready to make that choice. The model for the program was informed by Community Violence Intervention (CVI) work done by the Newark Community Street Team developed by Aqeela Sherrills that puts public safety in the public's hands. It is a community based public safety

model. Sherrills was first invited to Rapid City as a technical assistance provider for the Collective Healing Initiative and has been providing technical assistance, networking and mentoring to RCPD and Journey On for over 2 years now. More can be learned about community safety partnerships that adopt this model, including in Los Angeles, CA, Newark, NJ, and Rapid City, SD by reading the research reported submitted in support of this testimony in Attachment Three: “Collective Healing and Community Safety Partnerships.”

Most of Journey On’s Board members (with the exception of two) are Native American, one of whom is a young person who once served on the Youth Advisory Board. The current Director of Operations, Toby McCloskey, is also Native American. Our Native American community members don’t believe in the stigmas that come with the concept of homelessness and prefer the terms houselessness, houseless relatives. Journey On currently operates Monday through Saturday from 7:30am to 10:30pm and is looking for ways to extend their work 24/7/365.

Engaging the broader community and involving them in solutions was an essential step for Rapid City. Partnering with Journey On as a viable option for folks to call on to respond to issues involving the houseless community has improved community and RCPD officer moral, it has proved a successful intervention for the houseless, and is becoming part of a successful national movement of community safety partnerships.

Locally, through the partnership with Volunteers of America, Journey On, Rapid City Police Department, and The City of Rapid City, our community developed the “We Connect Business Toolkit” to guide community responses to many challenges presented by houselessness in Rapid City. The 29-page booklet focuses on educating members of our community about the houseless population, Native American culture, mental health challenges, appropriate responses, and many other topics. Included in the toolkit was a quick reference response guide, displaying who to call in what situations, and a window cling with a QR Code to direct folks on how to donate or get more involved. Since many of our calls involving the houseless community are generated by the business community, it was important that they see themselves as part of the solution and to know that they have tools that they can utilize. (Please see Attachment Two: “We Connect Business Toolkit”).

Journey On is also working on expanding its programs to include a Safe Passage program to guide and provide support for youth going to and from Rapid City’s most vulnerable schools and a Youth Homeless Demonstration Project grant to support houseless community members who are under 24 years old. Both new programs are deeply rooted in the community safety partnership model working formally and collaboratively with both Native and non-Native community partners of LGBTQ family Connections Center, Wambli Ska, and Volunteers of America.

Key Challenges

Working with the houseless community is very difficult and creates high burn out among outreach staff. Federal funding does not allow for staff to receive paid time off, mental health days, and provides no avenue for health care or retirement benefits. The 10 percent De Minimus rate is far too low to accommodate the needed staffing resources to run a team effectively or to meet the administrative burden created by data tracking requirements of federal grants. Federal grants also don’t support important executive roles and other administrative staff needs, as federal grants with reimbursement structures only pay for services rendered.

Journey On struggles to offer competitive salaries to executive staff, especially when the organization also cannot provide benefits. The federal grants that fund Journey On don't allow for team members to take advantage of training or professional development as they usually only pay for services rendered. The reimbursement-based nature of these federal grants makes it very difficult for organizations -- especially those that are small, minority led, and exist in rural or smaller urban settings -- to secure federal grants and maintain them. In Tribal, Native urban, and in rural setting -- there are typically no corporate, or university connections like in larger urban settings. For programs like Journey On, the upfront investment dollars just aren't there.

Very few of the local corporations or philanthropic organizations can invest the start up money needed to support younger community organizations. The one local philanthropic organization that can fund larger amounts won't fund any organization that hasn't been a registered 501(c)3 for at least 5 years. And then, once you reach that threshold, the largest grant you can secure in the first year is \$25,000, which isn't even enough to cover the cost of one full-time outreach position for Journey On. Lastly, while the HUD ESG-CV grant was the primary source of funding for Journey On over the last 2 years, that will no longer be the case because the CV dollars that have facilitated Journey On's successful start are gone. South Dakota will resume getting its traditional \$630,000 to \$640,000 per year for the entire state with a cap on grant amounts at \$80,000 this year. This funding level is far below what Journey On secured to start the Street Outreach Program and is substantially less that what it needs to sustain its vital services to the community at-large. The greatest challenge to Journey On over the next several months will be capacity/staff development, funding, and continued/responsible growth.

Developing organizational and operational capacity for community-based organizations like Journey On is incredibly difficult and time consuming. When Journey On agreed to develop a Street Outreach Program for Rapid City, they had one employee, no functioning Board members, and no sustainable revenue streams. Journey On did not have an employee handbook or any operational policies and protocols. Over the last 2 years, a collective group of working board members have invested an incredible amount of time to develop capacity for Journey On. This is still very much a work-in-progress. Journey On is one of three local organizations working with the White House on the Community Violence Intervention Collaborative (CVIC). Through CVIC, Journey On, Wambli Ska, and I Am Legacy are receiving technical assistance and mini-grant support to grow their capacity. This initiative started at the beginning of 2022 and is set to end in December. CVIC has helped somewhat, but capacity building is a hands-on mentoring process that requires a great deal of resources. Like with any new business venture or innovative idea, the upfront financial and capacity investment is important, though, we don't often think of investing in innovation in our nonprofit/community sector quite like we do in the private sector. The White House CVIC initiative needs much more funding over a much longer period of time to support the types of local innovations it has set out to create and support.

Community organization capacity building is just one piece of the equation—there are system-wide gaps that need to be addressed to truly reduce the need for emergency response/emergency room department visits and create to sustainable solutions for the houseless community. Some examples of gaps:

1. We have very few options for emergency housing. Volunteers of America is able to help a few folks with emergency housing vouchers but it is limited at best. According to the 2022 Point in Time Count, there was a 30-40% increase in the amount of houseless individuals/families in South Dakota. The total number of unsheltered houseless individuals in our state is 342. Rapid

City reported 35% (120) of that total, whereas Sioux Falls reported 6% (20) of that total. The overall number of houseless counted in the state was 1389. Just Rapid City's portion of that was 31% (458) and Sioux Falls was 29% (407). For reference, the population size of Rapid City is 74,703 according to the 2020 census and Sioux Falls reports a population size of 192,517—that is more than 2.5x the population size of Rapid City. This communicates a clear sheltering gap in West River, South Dakota communities. Additionally, for the 2021-2022 school year, the Rapid City Area Schools McKinney Vento program identified 760 youth enrolled in the RCAS school district that did not have homes. Traditionally, West River Communities secure only 6% of the federal funding coming to the State of SD to address homelessness. There are many barriers to accessing this funding. One such barrier is that the cost of administering this funding is sometimes greater than the overall awarded amount to an agency.

2. It is our understanding that the Federal Government has disinvested in transitional housing. While we understand the housing first model, some folks are not ready to go straight into permanent housing—even supported permanent housing from the street. Folks who are not used to living in a home on their own need to re-learn (or learn for the first time) how to care for their home, they need to create new social networks, and they need to learn new routines and methods to comply with rules. To achieve any of these individually, it is important for folks to have structure and daily mentorship. When those in need of these services are scattered across several different housing structures across town it can be nearly impossible to keep up with the supports needed for success.
3. Affordable housing is nonexistent in Rapid City. Rapid City is 3,000 affordable housing units short of what it needs to serve those who need homes. The current waiting list for the South Dakota Housing and Development Authority's rehousing programs is 180 people long and Pennington County Housing has maintained a waitlist of 3,200 people for years. The majority of those placed into SDHDA housing programs are single female led households (66%), with 65% reporting a disability. In Rapid City it is nearly impossible to incentivize developers to get involved in affordable housing projects. Market rate apartments are going at such a premium and developing in the Black Hills is cost-heavy. There are very few federal incentives that developers can take advantage of to develop enough inventory to address the affordable housing needs. The result is extremely long wait lists that provide no practical solutions for most of our houseless community members.
4. Houseless prevention is an important component of the spectrum of houseless services. It is far more cost effective to keep individuals housed than it is to respond to them once they become houseless. Helping folks remain housed prevents youth from being exposed to this form of trauma and the ongoing impacts it has on a young person into their adult lives.
5. The Point In Time Count does not allow communities, especially tribal communities in Western South Dakota, to capture those who are housing insecure settings. More, the PIT Count certainly does not allow us to capture houselessness in the way that our Native American community members experience it. In Rapid City, only 15% of those who were identified during the 2022 PIT Count in South Dakota were considered chronically displaced as defined by a report of homeless for 3 years or more. Most of our houseless community is living in hotel or slum housing from week to week, are couch surfing or are doubled up. Many of those living in our tribal areas don't have access to any form of emergency shelter and are living sometimes 20 people to a one-bedroom home. Some of these homes are not fit for human habitation, having

no roof or siding to keep it safe from the elements. In Tribal communities some locations used as housing don't have plumbing, running water, electricity or trash collection.

6. Once a person makes the choice to address their addiction, it can sometimes take up to 6 weeks to get individuals in for a drug and alcohol assessment, which means folks are, in most cases, living on the street trying to stay sober while waiting for their assessment. As you can imagine, we lose quite a few people to this gap. Additionally, we have very few options for local addiction recovery programming. Most options are several hours away and many have no transportation to get to these programs. Very few recovery programs will accept children, meaning we have to separate families or folks choose not to go to recovery. We also have no options for Native-led or culture forward inpatient addiction recovery programming.
7. Medicine management is key to helping folks stabilize both medically and mentally. It is incredibly difficult to address housing insecurity if someone is in a mental health crisis or isn't managing their diabetes well. In Texas, they have a program designed to address high utilizers of 911 and 35% of their clients are simply just needing help managing their medications. Having the ability to address this need through a co-response or crisis response effort would have a significant impact on reducing emergency responses or presentations to emergency departments.