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## **Safe Haven: Preventing Housing Instability for Queer Youth in Minneapolis**

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COUN 6785: Social Change in Action:  
Prevention, Consultation, and Advocacy  
**Social Change Portfolio**  
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## Contents

Below are the titles for each section of the Social Change Portfolio. To navigate directly to a particular section, hold down <ctrl> and click on the desired section below.

**Please do not modify the content section, nor remove the hyperlinks.**

[Overview](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Scope and Consequences](#)

[Social-ecological Model](#)

[Theories of Prevention](#)

[Diversity and Ethical Considerations](#)

[Advocacy](#)

[References](#)

[ScholarWorks Contributor Agreement](#)

## OVERVIEW

**Keywords:** LGBTQ+ youth, TGNC youth of color, housing instability, Minneapolis, trauma-informed care, culturally responsive prevention, youth advocacy

### Safe Haven: Preventing Housing Instability for Queer Youth in Minneapolis

**Goal Statement:** The goal of this Social Change Portfolio is to prevent unaccompanied housing instability among LGBTQ+ youth in Minneapolis through trauma-informed, culturally responsive strategies that strengthen family and community supports, improve mental health outcomes, enhance educational engagement, and promote long-term stability.

**Significant Findings:** Nationally, LGBTQ+ youth represent 40% of the homeless youth population, despite comprising less than 10% of the general youth demographic (Morton et al., 2018). In Minneapolis, TGNC youth of color face especially high risks due to intersecting barriers like racial discrimination, family rejection, and lack of affirming services (Houghtaling et al., 2024). Housing instability leads to adverse outcomes in mental and physical health, educational attainment, and economic mobility. However, protective factors, such as supportive relationships, culturally competent care, and identity-affirming environments, can mitigate these risks (Shank & Troshynski, 2024).

**Objectives/Strategies/Interventions/Next Steps:** This project proposes a coordinated prevention plan that includes: (1) implementing LGBTQ+ cultural competency training for staff in schools, shelters, and service agencies; (2) collaborating with LGBTQ+ and BIPOC-led organizations to co-create affirming, locally relevant interventions; (3) expanding access to peer-led programs like Proud & Empowered; (4) promoting family-based services like the Family

Acceptance Project to reduce rejection and support reunification; and (5) advocating for inclusive data collection, equitable policy reforms, and sustained funding for wraparound services.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Safe Haven: Preventing Housing Instability for Queer Youth in Minneapolis

Housing instability among LGBTQ+ youth, particularly transgender and gender nonconforming (TGNC) youth of color, represents a pressing public and social equity crisis in Minneapolis, Minnesota. This crisis is fueled by intersecting forces such as family rejection, systemic discrimination, and economic hardship, which collectively increase the likelihood of youth being forced from home or disconnected from stable housing. National data indicate that LGBTQ+ youth account for a disproportionate share of the homeless youth population, despite being a minority within the overall youth demographic (Morton et al., 2018). In Minnesota, similar disparities persist; LGBTQ+ youth and youth of color experience disproportionately high rates of homelessness and housing instability compared to their peers (Houghtaling et al., 2024). In Hennepin County, these disparities are compounded by racial income inequality and rapidly rising housing costs, making it increasingly difficult for marginalized youth to access safe and affirming shelter (University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, 2022). These structural barriers not only jeopardize immediate safety, but also threaten long-term health, educational, and economic outcomes.

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## PART 1: SCOPE AND CONSEQUENCES

### Safe Haven: Preventing Housing Instability for Queer Youth in Minneapolis

Unaccompanied housing instability among LGBTQ+ youth in Minneapolis is a persistent and deeply rooted issue with serious implications for health, education, and long-term well-being. Although homelessness affects youth across all backgrounds, LGBTQ+ youth—particularly TGNC youth of color—face unique and disproportionate risks due to the combined effects of identity-based rejection, discrimination, and systemic inequities (Houghtaling et al., 2024).

Nationally, LGBTQ+ youth comprise approximately 40% of the homeless youth population despite representing less than 10% of the overall youth demographic (Morton et al., 2018). Between 3.3% and 9.1% of high school students report experiencing homelessness (Cutuli et al., 2020). The 2019 Minnesota Student Survey found that LGBTQ+ youth and youth of color in Minnesota experience significantly higher rates of unaccompanied homelessness and running away compared to their white, cisgender, heterosexual counterparts (Houghtaling et al., 2024). In Hennepin County, racial income disparities and rising housing costs further limit access to stable shelter and affirming services (University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, 2022; Wilder Research, 2024).

Unstable housing has severe and multifaceted consequences for queer youth. Mental health challenges such as depression, anxiety, PTSD, suicidality, and substance use are significantly more common due to chronic stress, minority stigma, and lack of support systems (Zimmerman et al., 2015; Houghtaling et al., 2024). Physical health risks include malnutrition, exposure to violence, and limited access to healthcare, all of which contribute to long-term health

complications (Cutuli et al., 2020). Educational disruptions are also common, with unstable housing leading to chronic absenteeism, reduced academic performance, and disengagement; factors that significantly hinder future educational and vocational opportunities (NCHE, 2023).

Many LGBTQ+ youth face rejection not only from their families, but also from the institutions meant to support them. Shelters, schools, and service agencies often lack inclusive policies and cultural competency, leading to misgendering, denial of services, or overt hostility—particularly toward TGNC youth. These factors erode trust and create barriers to safety and stability (Shank & Troshynski, 2024). Economically, housing instability limits access to employment and job training, increasing the likelihood of long-term financial insecurity and dependence on under-resourced public systems (Cutuli et al., 2020).

Interrupting this cycle requires intentional, equity-centered approaches. Culturally affirming, trauma-informed strategies are essential to reduce housing instability and promote resilience among LGBTQ+ youth. The goal of this Social Change Portfolio is to prevent unaccompanied housing instability among LGBTQ+ youth in Minneapolis through trauma-informed, culturally responsive strategies that strengthen family and community supports, improve mental health outcomes, enhance educational engagement, and promote long-term stability.

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## PART 2: SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL MODEL

### Safe Haven: Preventing Housing Instability for Queer Youth in Minneapolis

To address and prevent housing instability among LGBTQ+ youth in Minneapolis, it is essential to understand the multiple, overlapping factors that place them at risk. The Social-Ecological Model (SEM) provides a valuable framework for examining these influences across four interconnected levels: individual, relationship, community, and societal (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024). By identifying both risk and protective factors at each level, prevention strategies can be more effectively tailored to promote housing stability, mental health, and long-term well-being.

### **Individual**

#### **Risk Factors**

At the individual level, LGBTQ+ youth often contend with internalized stigma, identity-related stress, and mental health challenges such as depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. These challenges are frequently intensified by past trauma and familial rejection, increasing vulnerability to homelessness (Zimmerman et al., 2015). Some youth may preemptively leave home due to fear of rejection, while others are forced out after coming out (Morton et al., 2018; Houghtaling et al., 2024). These risks are especially acute for TGNC youth of color, who experience intersecting forms of marginalization (Houghtaling et al., 2024).

#### **Protective Factors**

Protective factors at this level include self-acceptance, resilience, and access to identity-affirming, culturally competent mental health care. Programs that provide educational outreach and early intervention can foster emotional resilience, raise awareness of legal rights, and connect youth to supportive networks (The Trevor Project, 2020). These interventions help mitigate psychological harm and support positive identity development (Zimmerman et al., 2015).

### **Relationships**

**Risk Factors**

Moving from individual to interpersonal dynamics, relationships with caregivers, peers, and mentors significantly shape outcomes for LGBTQ+ youth. Family rejection is one of the most powerful predictors of youth homelessness. According to the 2019 Minnesota Student Survey, low parental care strongly correlates with unaccompanied homelessness among LGBTQ+ youth, particularly youth of color (Houghtaling et al., 2024). Peer bullying, social exclusion, and intimate partner violence also increase vulnerability (Cutuli et al., 2020).

**Protective Factors**

Conversely, affirming relationships with family members, mentors, and peers can serve as powerful protective buffers against adversity. Family-centered interventions that promote understanding and reconciliation, along school-based mentoring and peer support networks, help build safer environments for identity exploration and personal growth (Zimmerman et al., 2015; Le & Rew, 2025).

**Community****Risk Factors**

At the community level, LGBTQ+ youth often experience exclusion in schools, shelters, and health or social services. Discrimination, misgendering, and a lack of culturally competent staff may cause youth to disengage from essential services (Morton et al., 2018). For TGNC youth of color, this marginalization is often compounded by racism and transphobia, increasing the likelihood of chronic instability (Houghtaling et al., 2024).

**Protective Factors**

Protective environments can be cultivated through affirming community-based resources, such as LGBTQ+-inclusive drop-in centers, trauma-informed care programs, and Gay–Straight Alliances (GSAs). GSAs, for instance, are linked with lower victimization and improved school

connectedness (Heck et al., 2011). When these efforts involve both youth and their families, they reinforce institutional trust and long-term resilience.

## **Societal**

### **Risk Factors**

At the broadest level, societal structures and policy landscapes often reinforce systemic inequities such as racism, transphobia, and heteronormativity. Structural racism, transphobia, and heteronormativity continue to shape access to housing, healthcare, education, and employment. This places TGNC youth of color at greater risk due to policies that fail to account for intersecting forms of oppression (Cutuli et al., 2020; Houghtaling et al., 2024). national data systems continue to undercount LGBTQ+ youth, leaving them excluded from decision-making processes and underfunded in programs designed to support them (National Center for Homeless Education, 2023).

### **Protective Factors**

Efforts to mitigate these risks include anti-discrimination legislation, inclusive data collection practices, and equitable funding for affirming services. The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act has improved access to education for homeless youth, but it lacks explicit mandates for gender identity and sexual orientation protections—often leaving LGBTQ+ youth vulnerable to exclusion and harm (NCHE, 2023). Inclusive policies and federal data reforms are necessary to ensure that LGBTQ+ youth are accurately counted and supported.

The Social-Ecological Model highlights how housing instability among LGBTQ+ youth in Minneapolis is influenced by interconnected layers of risk and protection. Factors like identity-based stigma, family rejection, institutional discrimination, and policy exclusion often intersect, amplifying vulnerability—particularly for youth who occupy multiple marginalized identities. The Social-Ecological Model underscores the need for multi-level strategies to address

housing instability among LGBTQ+ youth in Minneapolis. By investing in multilevel prevention strategies rooted in cultural responsiveness and community empowerment, we can build a future where queer youth don't just survive but truly thrive.

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## PART 3: THEORIES OF PREVENTION

### Safe Haven: Preventing Housing Instability for Queer Youth in Minneapolis

To develop effective prevention strategies for housing instability among LGBTQ+ youth in Minneapolis, it is essential to ground interventions in behavioral theory. Theories provide a lens to understand individual behavior in context, anticipate barriers to change, and guide interventions that promote resilience, self-efficacy, and social support (National Cancer Institute, 2005). Two theories that offer particularly strong frameworks for this population are Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) and the Transtheoretical Model (TTM). Together, they provide complementary strategies: SCT focuses on social learning and environmental reinforcement, while TTM emphasizes readiness to change and behavioral progression.

#### **Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)**

Social Cognitive Theory explains behavior as the result of dynamic interactions between individuals, their actions, and their environments. Key constructs include self-efficacy, observational learning, outcome expectations, and reinforcement (National Cancer Institute, 2005). These principles help explain how LGBTQ+ youth, particularly those experiencing rejection, develop coping behaviors based on modeled experiences in their environments—whether from family, schools, or peer networks.

For LGBTQ+ youth at risk of housing instability, SCT supports interventions that build coping skills, highlight affirming social models, and promote a sense of agency. Zimmerman et al. (2015) found that sexual minority youth who had access to affirming mentors and communities reported greater resilience and stronger self-concepts. Likewise, Shank and Troshynski (2024) emphasized that TGNC youth benefit when families, educators, and peers consistently model affirming behaviors, helping reduce minority stress and strengthen identity development.

In practical terms, SCT can guide the design of identity-affirming environments—such as shelters, classrooms, and drop-in centers—where youth can safely observe and internalize inclusive behaviors. Staff who model respect for pronouns and inclusion in daily routines, for example, reinforce safe norms and help LGBTQ+ youth feel seen and supported. SCT also informs the design of preventive interventions by promoting vicarious learning and empowerment, particularly in school or shelter settings where youth may lack familial support. Programs grounded in SCT encourage active participation, positive feedback loops, and modeling of affirming behaviors—key to promoting housing stability and psychosocial wellbeing (National Cancer Institute, 2005).

As Wulfert (2024) notes, sustained behavior change also requires changing the environments that shape cognition and behavior. Applying SCT to LGBTQ+ youth homelessness means pairing individual-level interventions with structural change—such as training providers, improving institutional policies, and shifting community narratives through media and education campaigns.

Evidence-based programs like Proud & Empowered and the Family Acceptance Project exemplify SCT in action. These programs engage youth and families in environments that emphasize peer modeling, affirmation, and coping skill development (Goldbach et al., 2023;

Ryan et al., 2010). By using social learning to shift behavior and expectations, they empower youth and reduce displacement-related risk factors.

### **Transtheoretical Model (TTM)**

The Transtheoretical Model, also known as the Stages of Change Model, conceptualizes behavior change as a progressive process occurring through five distinct stages: precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance (National Cancer Institute, 2005). While SCT focuses on how social environments shape youth behaviors, the Transtheoretical Model complements it by helping prevention practitioners navigate family systems where readiness to change may vary.

This model is particularly useful for working with families of LGBTQ+ youth, where readiness to affirm a child's identity may vary. Le and Rew (2025) emphasize that family rejection often stems from fear, misinformation, or cultural conflict, rather than malice. Using TTM, counselors and advocates can assess a caregiver's stage of readiness and tailor engagement strategies accordingly—gradually building understanding and motivation for affirming behavior.

TTM is also relevant for public education efforts aimed at shifting community attitudes. Messaging and interventions can be designed to match the community's stage of readiness — from increasing awareness in the precontemplation stage, promoting dialogue in contemplation, and supporting policy action in later stages. This allows for culturally sensitive pacing in both individual and systemic change.

Incorporating TTM into prevention programming supports both cultural sensitivity and developmental pacing, particularly for families in conservative or marginalized communities where acceptance may evolve gradually. The model acknowledges that behavior change is not immediate and allows space for families to process complex emotions and beliefs. Rather than expecting abrupt transformation, TTM emphasizes sustained engagement, increasing the

likelihood that families will reach the maintenance stage of affirming behaviors (National Cancer Institute, 2005).

### **Evidence-Based Programs**

The Family Acceptance Project powerfully demonstrates the integration of SCT and TTM. It provides culturally responsive counseling to families of LGBTQ+ youth, helping them understand how their behaviors impact their child's mental health, and supporting them through the stages of acceptance (Ryan et al., 2010). In Minneapolis—where family rejection is a primary driver of LGBTQ+ youth homelessness (Houghtaling et al., 2024)—FAP's trauma-informed, identity-affirming model is especially relevant.

While FAP strengthens family-based protective factors, it is important to recognize that not all LGBTQ+ youth can safely engage with their families. Programs like Proud & Empowered fill this gap by offering school-based peer support, coping strategies, and resilience tools for youth navigating adversity without family support (Goldbach et al., 2023). Together, these programs reflect a theory-driven, multi-pronged approach to preventing homelessness and promoting long-term stability among LGBTQ+ youth.

While FAP focuses on strengthening family support, it's important to acknowledge that not all LGBTQ+ youth can safely involve their families in prevention efforts. A critical gap exists for youth who face rejection or cannot disclose their identities at home (Heck et al., 2011). To address this, complementary programs such as Proud & Empowered provide essential school-based support, equipping youth with coping strategies and peer-based resilience tools when family engagement is not possible (Goldbach et al., 2023).

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## PART 4: DIVERSITY AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

### Safe Haven: Preventing Housing Instability for Queer Youth in Minneapolis

Addressing housing instability among LGBTQ+ youth in Minneapolis requires prevention strategies that are not only trauma-informed, but also deeply attuned to issues of cultural identity, systemic inequity, and ethical responsibility. While all LGBTQ+ youth experience elevated risks, transgender and gender-nonconforming (TGNC) youth of color face the most significant barriers due to the compounded effects of racism, transphobia, and structural discrimination (Houghtaling et al., 2024). These intersecting identities shape how youth navigate services and must be central to prevention planning.

In Hennepin County, where the population is racially and ethnically diverse, with 14.7% of residents identifying as Black or African American, 7.9% as Hispanic or Latino, and 7.6% as Asian (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023), interventions must reflect the lived realities of youth from multiple cultural backgrounds. Local data show that TGNC youth of color are more likely to experience homelessness and exclusion from affirming services (Shank & Troshynski, 2024), highlighting the need for intersectional approaches that are both culturally and developmentally appropriate.

#### **Mechanisms to Increase Cultural Relevance**

To respond effectively, prevention programs should be adaptable and responsive to local needs. Reese and Vera (2007) emphasize that culturally relevant prevention must explicitly address racial disparities, avoid one-size-fits-all models, and involve community participation. Youth of color often face heightened scrutiny and skepticism when seeking support—experiences that stem from structural racism and bias embedded in housing, educational, and

healthcare systems (Cutuli et al., 2020). Programs that ignore these dynamics risk perpetuating the very inequities they aim to solve.

Behavioral theory offers important guidance here. Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), with its emphasis on vicarious learning and modeled behavior, supports the use of identity-affirming peer mentorship and adult role models from similar cultural backgrounds. Programs like Proud & Empowered emphasize these mechanisms by using school-based supports to normalize LGBTQ+ resilience and coping (Goldbach et al., 2023). Similarly, the Family Acceptance Project incorporates the Transtheoretical Model (TTM) to support caregivers through the stages of acceptance, acknowledging the emotional and cultural complexities that shape readiness to change (Ryan et al., 2010).

Collaborative, community-led design is also essential. Prevention initiatives are more effective when co-developed with LGBTQ+ youth, BIPOC leaders, and culturally embedded organizations that can identify hidden barriers and foster trust (Goldbach et al., 2023). These partnerships embody the ethical value of shared decision-making, as emphasized in the ACA Code of Ethics (§ A.1.d), and support culturally grounded interventions aligned with youth needs.

### **Core Ethical Considerations**

Ethical practice also demands special attention to informed consent, confidentiality, and cultural humility. For LGBTQ+ youth who may be estranged from their families or not out to caregivers, it is critical to ensure developmentally appropriate consent processes that protect autonomy and safety (§ A.2.a, A.2.c). Confidentiality is equally vital; disclosing a youth's sexual orientation or gender identity without consent can result in significant harm, including housing loss, violence, or rejection (§ B.1.c). Counselors must take extra care in safeguarding youth privacy, particularly in unsupportive environments.

Cultural humility should guide every phase of prevention, from outreach to implementation. Practitioners are ethically obligated to challenge their own biases, seek feedback, and ensure services are responsive to diverse cultural norms and identities (§ A.4.b; § E.5.c). This is especially critical when working with TGNC youth of color, who may encounter discrimination within both mainstream services and LGBTQ+ spaces. Ethical prevention is not neutral—it requires a proactive stance against systemic injustice.

Finally, advocacy is a core ethical responsibility. Counselors must engage in efforts to change the systemic conditions that produce housing instability—whether by pushing for institutional reform, supporting inclusive policies, or amplifying youth voices (§ A.7.a, A.7.b). These actions should reflect both SCT’s emphasis on shifting environments and TTM’s attention to developmental readiness for change.

When ethical commitments are integrated with behavior theory and cultural responsiveness, prevention becomes more than a service—it becomes a vehicle for justice. In the context of LGBTQ+ youth homelessness, this means centering those most marginalized, designing with—not for—communities, and holding systems accountable for equity and inclusion.

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## PART 5: ADVOCACY

### Safe Haven: Preventing Housing Instability for Queer Youth in Minneapolis

As this Social Change Portfolio shifts from theoretical exploration to applied action, advocacy becomes an essential vehicle for disrupting systemic barriers and enacting social justice. This responsibility is emphasized in both the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling

Competencies (MSJCC; Ratts et al., 2016) and systemic advocacy models that highlight the counselor's ethical role in social change (Toporek et al., 2009). Grounded in Domain IV of the MSJCC, counselors are called to intervene at the micro, meso, and macro levels to challenge inequities and promote wellness for marginalized populations. For LGBTQ+ youth in Minneapolis—particularly TGNC youth of color—housing instability reflects deeply rooted social inequities and requires coordinated, multilevel advocacy.

### **Micro-Level Advocacy**

At the micro level, counselors can target change within the institutions that directly serve LGBTQ+ youth. TGNC youth in shelters, schools, and service settings often encounter misgendering, exclusion, and bias, which can result in emotional distress and disengagement (Shank & Troshynski, 2024; Houghtaling et al., 2024). One key action is implementing mandatory LGBTQ+ cultural competency training for all staff. Research shows that staff who receive this training are significantly more likely to affirm and protect LGBTQ+ students (McCabe & Rubinson, 2008). These efforts align with Social Cognitive Theory, which emphasizes the importance of modeled behavior and environmental reinforcement. They also reflect the ethical imperative, as outlined in the ACA Code of Ethics (2014), to prevent harm and empower clients. Locally, Hennepin County's Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP) advances these goals through inclusive service planning and staff development initiatives (Hennepin County, n.d.). When TGNC youth lack the power or safety to advocate for themselves, counselors must step in to reduce harm—an "acting on behalf of" approach emphasized in the MSJCC.

### **Meso-Level Advocacy**

Building on institutional reform, meso-level advocacy focuses on collaboration with community partners. TGNC youth of color often encounter fragmented services and exclusion

from decision-making. Counselors can address these gaps by co-developing programming with LGBTQ+ advocacy groups, BIPOC-led initiatives, and grassroots collectives. These collaborations foster trust and ensure that services reflect the lived experiences of those they aim to support. When youth take leadership roles in these efforts, they are empowered not only as clients but as agents of change. This approach affirms client agency and reflects SCT's emphasis on learning through social networks and role modeling (Goldbach et al., 2023). It also mirrors the MSJCC's "acting with" approach, which emphasizes shared leadership in the development of culturally responsive services.

### **Macro-Level Advocacy**

At the systemic level, advocacy targets broader policies and funding structures that impact LGBTQ+ youth. Barriers such as inadequate funding, lack of inclusive data collection, and policy blind spots perpetuate disparities in housing and mental health services. Counselors are called to advocate for increased funding for LGBTQ+-inclusive wraparound services and for comprehensive data collection that includes sexual orientation and gender identity. These data are essential for ensuring that TGNC youth are accurately represented in policymaking and resource allocation (James et al., 2016). Toporek et al. (2009) underscore that counselors have an ethical obligation to influence legislation and challenge inequitable systems. Here, theory becomes action: SCT frames systemic conditions as modifiable environmental factors, while TTM guides efforts to shift public readiness and attitudes. Counselors may need to both partner with advocacy organizations and advocate on behalf of marginalized youth—a dual role consistent with the MSJCC's flexible approach to justice-oriented practice.

### **Conclusion**

Advocacy is where prevention becomes practice. Informed by the MSJCC, SCT, and TTM, this portfolio outlines a path for counselors to address housing instability among LGBTQ+

youth at multiple levels. From fostering inclusive institutional climates to co-creating affirming community spaces and influencing policy, advocacy must be intentional, collaborative, and equity-driven. The ultimate goal is to cultivate systems that affirm and protect LGBTQ+ youth, ensuring that all young people—regardless of gender identity, race, or background—have the opportunity to thrive.

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**SIGNATURE:** Tessa Loeffler

**DATE:** 5/1/2025

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