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PROTEST

Vicksburg Lane fills with 'ICE out' chants on Sunday

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Edina's win over Minnetonka rocks the house

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Thursday, January 15, 2026 $2



(SUN PHOTO BY NATALIE TRIMBLE)

The Helping Paws "D-Uber" picks up assistance dogs in training from homes all across the Twin Cities area.

All aboard the D-Uber: Helping Paws offers pick-up services with dog transportation van

Helping Paws launched D-Uber as part of its Four Paws Forward strategic plan in 2025

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A new chapter of training, volunteering and partnerships has begun at the Helping Paws headquarters in Eden Prairie, with the organization launching its Four Paws Forward strategic plan in 2025 to strengthen its assistance dog program and enhance services.

Developed by staff, volunteers and the board of Helping Paws, the Four Paws Forward plan supports the organization's mission of assisting individuals with physical disabilities, veterans and first responders with post-traumatic stress disorder, and facility partners in health care, justice and education.

As part of the strategic plan, Helping Paws launched its own transportation service designed to assist host families with getting their dogs to and from the training facility. Coined the "D-Uber," the organization's van picks up dogs participating in the Blue Coat Academy (BCA) training program from host homes across the Twin Cities, allowing each dog to receive

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Local officials sign national statement asking ICE to leave Minneapolis

Letter says signers 'stand in an unwavering solidarity with the people of Minneapolis'

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Some familiar faces from Minnesota local government signed a joint statement with more than 200 elected officials nationwide calling for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement to withdraw its presence from Minneapolis after an ICE agent shot and killed 37-year-old Renee Nicole Good on Jan. 7.

By Wednesday night, a draft of the letter was ready to go and was sent out to elected officials across the country to sign onto. Within a day, the letter amassed its 200 signatures. Opportunities for more officials to sign later came, and over the weekend, the total grew to around 250, including more Minnesota signatures.

"The shooting of an unarmed legal observer is a clear and deliberate attempted by the federal government to violently silence dissent in the Twin Cities," according to the letter. "This act is not only an attack on one individual, but on the fundamental rights of all people to speak out, to organize and to demand justice without fear of retaliation."

The idea behind the letter originated from Jonathan Guzman, a school committeeman at-large from Lawrence, Massachusetts. The letter says that the signers "stand in an unwavering solidarity with the people of Minneapolis during this dark time" and called

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professional instruction several times per week.

"The Blue Coat Academy is kind of like a day program where folks either drop off their dogs in the morning or we pick them up in the D-Uber," Jonathan Kramer, marketing manager at Helping Paws, said. "We have three professional in-house assistance dog trainers, and we average 10 to 15 volunteers who help make that day program run."

Each dog involved in the program receives at least 90 minutes of training each day with one of the trainers. Community volunteers assist with a variety of tasks around the facility, including taking dogs on daily walks, participating in playtime, and providing lunch and bathroom breaks.

The Herman Puppy Enrichment Center is also attached to the Helping Paws facility, where dogs as young as 3 days old are exposed to gentle touch, scent introductions and sensory activities designed to stimulate neurological development, according to helpingpaws.org. Within five to six weeks, the dogs are introduced to car rides and problem-solving games, receiving early socialization.





(SUN PHOTOS BY NATALIE TRIMBLE)

LEFT: Jordy Stradtman picks up pup Akiro from his host family's home in Minneapolis, Jan. 9. **RIGHT:** Stradtman secures pup Alfie into his seat in the D-Uber van.

The organization's host home model is designed to strengthen training routines and reduce barriers for volunteers. Host homes provide a temporary living environment for dogs enrolled in the Helping Paws training program. Host families are not required to participate in weekly training classes. Dogs placed in host homes attend full-day drop-offs at the BCA, where they work with professional trainers to develop the skills needed for assistance work.

Demand for assistance dogs continues to grow, with the organization maintaining a three-year waitlist for individuals seeking a service dog. Helping Paws is expanding resources for graduate partnerships, including a grooming center with a professional-grade washing tub and a year-round indoor dog park. Graduates are individuals who are matched with a Helping Paws assistance dog after completing the required training.

Helping Paws expects three additional litters of puppies this spring and is seeking additional volunteers for host homes and D-Uber drivers.

Those interested in driving for the organization must be at least 18, hold a valid driver's license, pass background and driving record checks, and follow organizational policies and procedures.

To participate in the host home program, the primary host must be at least 18, pass a background check, transport the assistance dog to BCA training at least three days per week or follow the D-Uber schedule, acknowledge Helping Paws' full ownership of the dog, and use only positive reinforcement training methods.

"Service dogs are life-changing," Kramer said. "They increase independence and quality of life for members of our communities, and I'm proud to be part of a group of volunteers who give their time and energy. Whether it's driving the van, raising a puppy or providing a temporary home, it helps make a life-changing service dog possible."

Visit helpingpaws.org for more information about the organization and volunteer opportunities.

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