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Governor Scott Walker
Secretary Eloise Anderson

Secretary's Office

Date: February 20, 2014

To: Members of the Assembly Criminal Justice Committee

From: Fredi-Ellen Bove, Division of Safety and Permanence Administrator
Randy Keys, Chief Legal Counsel

Re: Department Position on AB 776 – For Information Only

Representative Kleefisch and Assembly Criminal Justice Committee members,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on AB 776. My name is Fredi-Ellen Bove and I am the Administrator for the Division of Safety and Permanence within the Department of Children and Families (DCF). With me is Randy Keys, the Chief Legal Counsel for DCF.

The Department applauds the efforts of Representatives Kleefisch and Johnson in working to address the problem of child sex trafficking. We share their desire to find better ways to protect the victims of these terrible crimes. The Department has been actively working on finding a solution that will provide the appropriate services to these children that will help them heal physically and emotionally while not re-victimizing them by placing them in the juvenile justice or adult criminal system.

Currently, most sex trafficked children do not enter the child welfare system. AB 776 will increase the number of cases of sex trafficked children entering the child welfare system, which currently lacks the funding and the specialized services needed to effectively treat these victims. The bill does not include funding and the Department does not currently have resources to fund the bill, therefore creating a new unfunded mandate.

In the Department's fiscal estimate, we estimate the cost to place these children into out of home care settings, which are high cost placements. Please note that our estimated costs associated with providing trauma-informed services for this population are lower than other states' costs. For example, New Jersey estimates a daily cost of \$430 per youth in a specialized residential sex trafficking program compared to Wisconsin's estimated daily cost of \$319 per youth.

However, while funding the out of home placements is an issue that must be addressed, the larger issue is that there currently is little to no capacity to provide the specialized services these children need. Children and youth who have been subject to this type of abuse are in need of specialized trauma-informed counseling and other services. Another challenge is finding a suitable location that prevents the victims from running away and reuniting with their abusers.

The Department understands the importance of increasing the capacity of the child welfare system to provide services to sex trafficked victims and has been working towards that goal. Last September, the Department worked with an experienced service provider, Lad Lake, to establish a small residential program for adolescent girls who have been the victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation. The Lad Lake program in Dousman, Wisconsin is designed to serve five young women at any point in time. Through this program, participants receive intensive individual therapy that provides the necessary supports for these complex traumas as well as participate in therapy groups that promote emotional health and skill building in a safe and nurturing environment.

In addition to the victims, Lad Lake's treatment team works with their families to build the skills and necessary safeguards so that these young women can successfully transition back home. Our goal for this program is to reunite these women with their families with the supports and skills needed to remain free from human trafficking.

Simply sending children into the child welfare system without the resources to help them heal does not solve the problem. As we learn from the Lad Lake project we are hopeful that it will prove to be a successful model that could be replicated in other parts of the state and that we can expand our service capacity in the next budget.

With this in mind, we have started discussions with stakeholders in efforts to consider the policy and program issues related to sex trafficking. We need to ensure that the child welfare system aligns and collaborates with the Departments of Justice and Corrections' efforts to meet the needs of victims and prosecute their abusers.

Should the committee move forward with AB 776, the Department requests sufficient time to develop the appropriate programs and services for sex trafficked children and youth and the funding to support development and implementation of services. This will ensure that the victims receive the services that they need in the appropriate setting to aid in their recovery and successful transition back into the community.