

Alberta Darling

Wisconsin State Senator

Co-Chair, Joint Committee on Finance

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT, MILITARY
AFFAIRS, AND SENIOR ISSUES
Senator Alberta Darling
Wednesday, May 24, 2017

Thank you, Chairman Testin and committee members for holding a public hearing on Assembly Bills 234, 235, 236, and 237. It's my hope this package of bills will be instrumental in ending and preventing homelessness in Wisconsin.

In 2016, the Federal Housing Administration estimated that at any given time there are approximately 5,685 citizens in Wisconsin who are experiencing homelessness. In order to combat this problem, the bills focus on collaboration, allowing agencies more flexibility to work together to best fight homelessness, and ensuring that resources are going to those most deeply in need.

The first step to addressing homelessness is to provide stable housing for our most vulnerable citizens. That's why Assembly Bills 235 and 236 reform WHEDA's waitlist and grant systems. Assembly Bill 235 strikes the word "transitional" from the statutes relating to housing in order to create more flexibility in the administration of housing grants. Assembly Bill 236 creates a two year pilot program to prioritize Wisconsin's chronically homeless population on the waitlist for the Federal Housing Choice Voucher Program. Both of these bills work in tandem to enable housing resources for those who are most deeply in need.

While it is crucial to provide a stable place to sleep, this does not go far enough to address the underlying traumas affecting Wisconsin's homeless families. Assembly Bill 234 and 237 focus on creating partnerships and collaboration to provide wraparound services. Assembly Bill 237 creates a \$75,000 grant for a municipality to connect homeless individuals with permanent employment and additional support services. Assembly Bill 234 creates the Interagency Council on Homelessness to ensure that all of our agencies work together to combat homelessness, instead of working in different silos. Both of these bills will facilitate delivering wraparound services to Wisconsin's homeless in the most efficient way possible.

I'd like to thank Lieutenant Governor Kleefisch and Representatives Steineke, Rodriguez, Pronschinske, and Snyder for their leadership in developing this important package of bills.

Thank you again committee members for your time and consideration. I hope I can count on your support for Assembly Bills 234, 235, 236, and 237.



TREIG E. PRONSCHINSKE

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 92nd ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

**Testimony on Assembly Bill 236
Senate Committee on Workforce Development, Military Affairs and Senior Issues
May 24, 2017**

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Assembly Bill 236.

Senator Darling and I have brought forth this proposal as a part a bill package aimed at helping to end homelessness in Wisconsin. Assembly Bill 236 would allow the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA) to pilot a program which would prioritize those who are arising out of homelessness for Housing Choice Vouchers. This is an innovative proposal which would give WHEDA real flexibilities in how the program would operate.

According to WHEDA reports, there approximately 4,900 individuals on the waitlist for the Federal Housing Choice Vouchers, commonly known as Section 8 vouchers. The wait to receive a voucher can last anywhere from a few months to five years.

In many cases, individuals on the path from homelessness spend time in a facility that offers intensive wraparound services, including programs for those struggling with addiction, mental health issues, or disabilities. Because space is limited in these facilities, if those who are ready to move out do not have a place to go, it holds up everyone else that is in need of the facility or program. This proposal would help to free up existing space in those programs, while also allowing for a smoother transition from homelessness to stable housing.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this proposal.