



Amy Loudenbeck

REPRESENTING WISCONSIN'S 31ST ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Testimony before Senate Committee on Universities, Technical Colleges, Children and Families
Senate Bill 61
Rep. Amy Loudenbeck
April 23, 2019

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and committee members for the opportunity to testify in favor of Senate Bill 61. This bill would allow a minor who is 17 years of age and is confirmed to be both unaccompanied (not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian) and homeless (living situation is not "fixed, regular, and adequate") to contract for admission to a shelter facility or transitional living program.

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (Title X, Part C of the No Child Left Behind Act) requires every school district and charter school to designate an appropriate staff person as the Local Educational Agency liaison. AB 53 requires that this designated liaison verify that the minor is an unaccompanied and homeless youth and is not under the supervision of another social services agency or court jurisdiction. In terms of numbers, approximately 2,283 homeless and unaccompanied youth were identified statewide in 2017. *Data by individual school district is available on the DPI website - [The Homeless Student Enrollment by Public School District \(current as of 2/28/2018\)](#).*

These are youth that may be living alone or with family member or friend who is not a parent or guardian, in an unstable setting such as a vehicle or other substandard housing. The reasons that the youth become detached from their parents are numerous, but could include drug or alcohol addiction, domestic violence, mental illness, incarceration, death or extreme economic hardship. These kids are from homes that are broken and under current law they have no practical options to receive emergency shelter services without the consent of a parent or guardian. The verification by the McKinney-Vento liaison is a rigorous process that is already in place under current law, so there is no additional documentation required on the part of the school district. *A flowchart for making determination is available at*

<https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/homeless/pdf/Homeless%20Eligibility%20Flowchart%20Update%202017.pdf>

Unaccompanied and homeless youth are vulnerable to human trafficking, exploitation, and abuse. Often disconnected from family and friends, these youth are particularly susceptible to traffickers who will lure them with the promise of food, warmth, and even false love. Providing these young people with an opportunity for safe shelter and other supports so they can complete their education and become self-supporting adults will reduce their risk for negative outcomes.

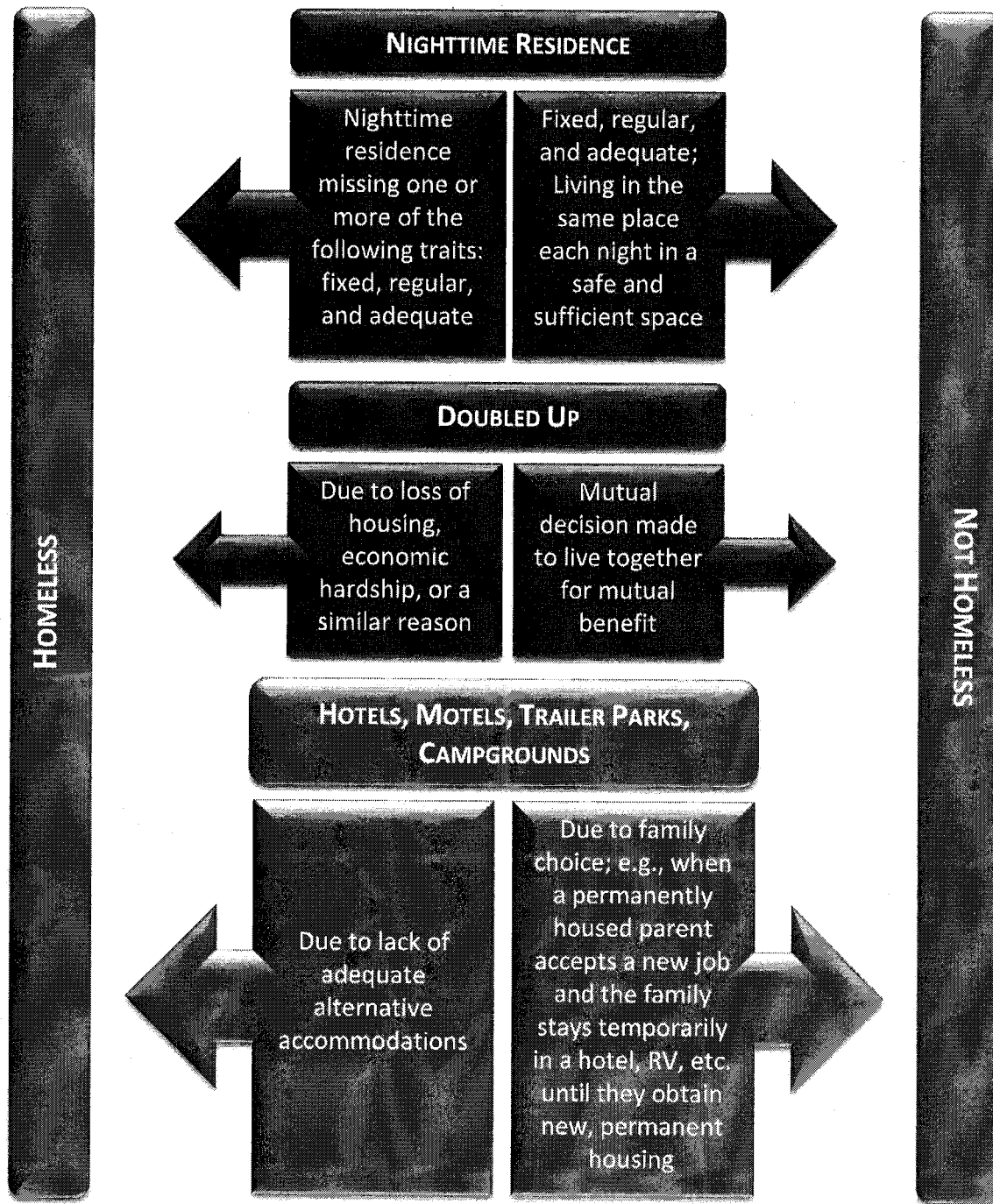
This bill provides a much-needed mechanism for homeless and unaccompanied 17 year old trying to finish high school to access safe and stable housing at a shelter facility or transitional living program.

Thank you for your time today, I would be happy to answer any questions at this time.

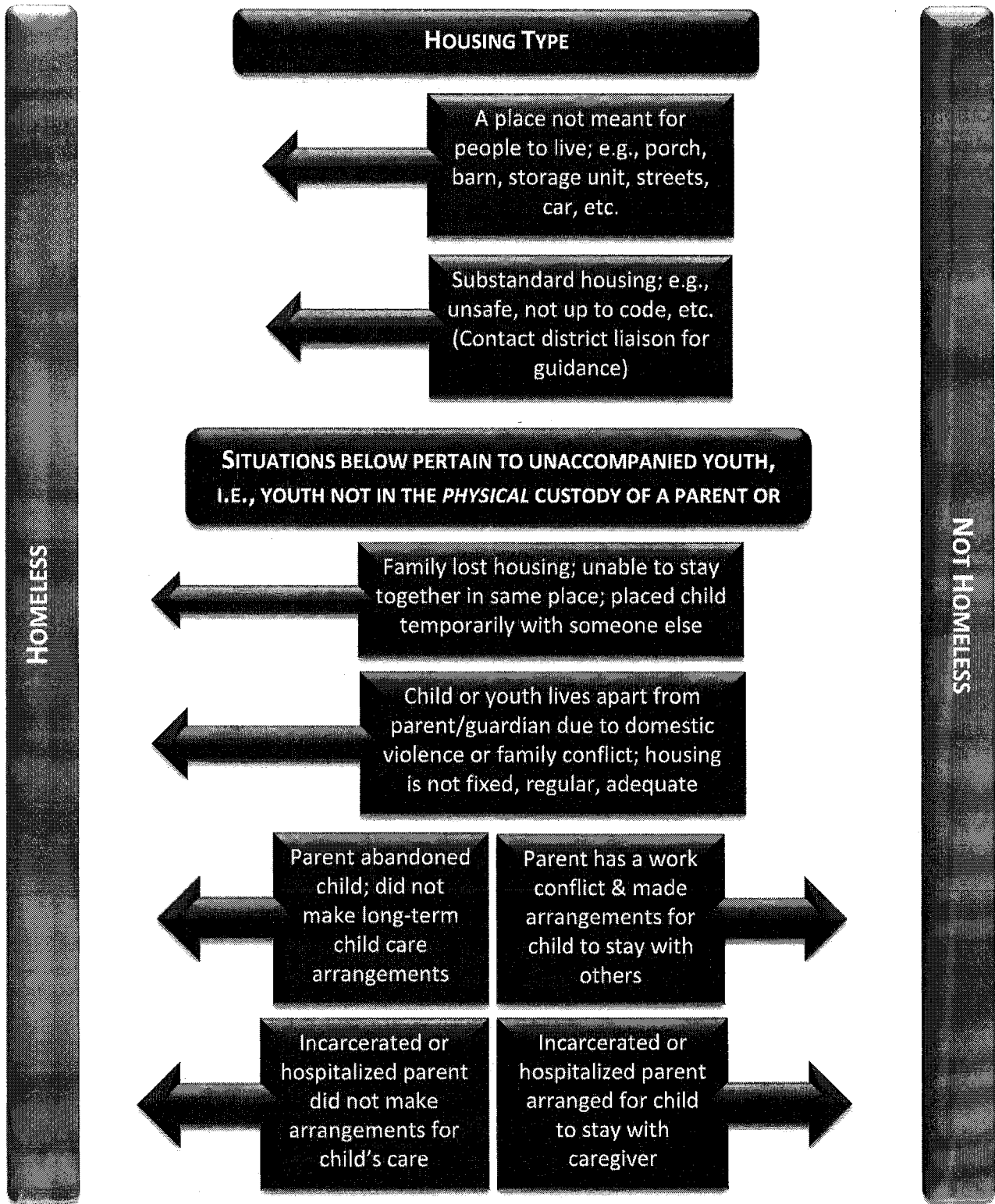
Who Is Homeless?

A Flowchart for Making Determinations for Education Services

This flowchart is meant to aid you in making decisions about a student's eligibility as homeless under the education subtitle of the McKinney-Vento Act (42 U.S.C. 11431 *et seq.*), but it may not capture every housing situation. For the complete definition of *homeless*, visit <https://nche.ed.gov/legis/mv-def.php>. For more information on making determinations, see the related issue brief from the National Center for Homeless Education: https://nche.ed.gov/downloads/briefs/det_elig.pdf.



*Note: Children and families who qualify for education services based on this definition may or may not qualify for housing and related assistance. Contact your local housing programs for more information.



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Alberta Darling
Wisconsin State Senator
Co-Chair, Joint Committee on Finance

Senate Committee on Universities, Technical Colleges, Children and Families

Senate Bill 61

Tuesday, April 23, 2019

Thank you Chair Kooyenga and committee members for taking the time to hear Senate Bill 61. The bill before you today allows our state's homeless and unaccompanied minors to consent for transitional housing.

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act requires every school district and charter to designate a staff person as an educational liaison for homeless and unaccompanied pupils. According to the Department of Public Instruction, there are approximately 2,283 unaccompanied youth in Wisconsin in 2017. As minors are unable to enter a contract, these youth are unable to consent to enter into a contract for transitional housing.

Senate Bill 61 allows a minor who is 17 years old to contract for admission to a shelter facility or transitional living program. The minor must be confirmed to be unaccompanied, homeless, and not under the supervision of a social services agency.

This change to law is needed for Wisconsin's homeless and unaccompanied youth who are still trying to finish school but need a stable place to sleep. The bill removes a real barrier that exists for these kids to keep a roof over their head.

Additionally, we know that homeless and unaccompanied youth are targets for human traffickers. According to research done by the University of Pennsylvania, over two thirds of homeless females report being solicited for paid sex. In a report from the National Institute of Justice, nearly 75% of underage survivors of sex trafficking identified housing as a major area of need. This bill will help get kids off the street and away from the purview of potential traffickers.

It is incredibly unfortunate that so many Wisconsin kids do not have parents who are able to provide for them. We have to help these kids get the resources they need, and this bill allows them access to a safe living space. I'd like to thank Representative Loudbeck for her work on this issue. I'd also like to thank the many advocates for Wisconsin's homeless and unaccompanied youth who support this bill and worked to craft a thoughtful amendment to address technical concerns.

I hope to count on your support for this bill.



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Governor Tony Evers
Secretary Emilie Amundson

Secretary's Office

TO: Chairman Kooyenga and Members of the Senate Committee on Universities, Technical Colleges, Children and Families

FROM: Emily Coddington, Section Chief, Bureau of Youth Services
Fredi Bove, Policy Initiatives Advisor

DATE: April 23, 2019

SUBJECT: 2019 Senate Bill 61

Chairman Kooyenga and Members of the Senate Committee on Universities, Technical Colleges, Children and Families:

My name is Fredi Bove and I am the Policy Initiatives Advisor for the Department of Children and Families. I am accompanied by Emily Coddington, Section Chief with the Bureau of Youth Services for the Division of Safety and Permanence. Emily Coddington will be providing testimony for informational purposes about 2019 Senate Bill 61.

DCF appreciates legislative interest in issues affecting vulnerable youth. Senate Bill 61 underscores the importance of seeking additional solutions to the issue of youth homelessness in our state and the positive steps being made through legislation.

The DCF Bureau of Youth Services is charged with the responsibility of administering the state's funding for runaway and homeless youth programming and partnering with public and private agencies to identify ways to best serve some of our most vulnerable youth. DCF would like to present the Committee with some areas to consider in improving this legislation.

Improve access to safe shelter options. With more than 2,200 students identified as unaccompanied minors in the 2016-2017 school year¹ and only four formal youth shelters within the state, there is a gap in shelter services available to our youth. When a youth is unaccompanied, the gap is even more pronounced, as it is currently impossible to offer shelter services to this population because of the parental consent requirement.

¹ Retrieved from <https://dpi.wi.gov/homeless/data>

Senate Bill 61 is an important first step in ensuring vulnerable unaccompanied homeless youth can access safe shelter alternatives when in need. Additional funding for formal youth shelters is also encouraged.

Provide developmentally-appropriate housing with services for youth. “Youth who experience homelessness are especially vulnerable to criminal victimization, sexual exploitation, labor and sex trafficking or traumatic stress,”² because of their circumstances, but also because of their developmental stage. “Adult homeless shelters typically lack developmentally appropriate solutions for young people. In addition, HUD-funded programs frequently lack the capacity to serve the homeless population within their communities, and new coordinated entry systems often fail to provide access or appropriate solutions for young people experiencing homelessness.”³

DCF recommends using qualified service providers such as state and federally funded runaway and homeless youth programs, or domestic violence shelters, and Transitional Living Programs (TLP) while working to expand formal youth shelter options.

Define shelter facility and Transitional Living Program. To help ensure youth are accessing developmentally-appropriate and safe housing and services, DCF recommends defining the places young people can seek shelter to licensed facilities, such as shelter care facilities (as defined in Ch. 48.02(17), Wis. Stats.), group homes (as defined in Ch. 48.02(7), Wis. Stats.), and runaway homes (as defined in Ch. 48.227, Wis. Stats.). Domestic violence shelters may be viable options for some young people as well. Similarly, DCF recommends restricting the TLP definition to those programs receiving funding from the Federal Family and Youth Services Bureau.

DCF sincerely thanks the legislators who introduced and sponsored the bill and the entire committee for their commitment to improving outcomes for unaccompanied homeless youth in Wisconsin. We have been in communication with legislative offices about our suggestions and are dedicated to continue working with legislators in support of Wisconsin’s youth.

We would be glad to answer any questions from the committee. Thank you.

² Retrieved from <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Ending-Youth-Homelessness-Promising-Program-Models.pdf>

³ Retrieved from <https://www.nn4youth.org/wp-content/uploads/NN4Y-Policy-Brief-2017.pdf>

Testimony



Date: April 23, 2019

From: Adrienne Roach, Policy and Research Program Director

Re: SB 61

Chairperson Kooyenga and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 61 (SB 61). End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin (End Abuse) is the statewide organization that represents domestic violence survivors and their children, as well as local domestic violence victim shelters and service providers. As End Abuse's Policy and Research Program Director, I focus on issues related to child welfare and housing, which gives me a unique perspective on this bill. It is undeniable that there is still more work to do to address youth homelessness in Wisconsin. The fact that the best we can do for our kids in these terrible situations is allow them to stay in a shelter, designed primarily with adults and families in mind, is unfortunate. However, we strongly believe this bill is a step in the right direction to give youth a viable alternative to sleeping on the street or returning to a potentially unhealthy or dangerous home situation.

First, I want to recognize the work that was done by Rep. Loudbeck on this bill in the Assembly. End Abuse, along with some of our partner organizations, raised an issue related to the availability of the local educational liaison to verify whether a youth is unaccompanied. Rep. Loudbeck responded to our concern and drafted an amendment allowing shelter intake staff to verify that the youth is unaccompanied if the educational liaison cannot be reached. We also want to thank Senator Darling for offering the same amendment to the Senate version of the bill. To speak to the need for this amendment, local educational liaisons are not on call 24/7, 365 days a year. They are often teachers or other educational staff, who many not be available during the summer, or Spring Break. As I'm sure you all know, homelessness does not follow a set schedule. The longer a 17-year old is homeless or on the street, the higher the chance their safety will be further compromised. Shelter staff who are responsible for intake are highly trained professionals who have the knowledge and resources to make quality decisions regarding the youth's situation if the educational liaison cannot be reached.

To conclude, this is an important bill, in that it provides an additional option and route to safety for youth who are in some of the most dangerous and precarious situations. As the coalition that represents domestic abuse advocates and survivors, we feel that we cannot end the cycle of abuse and trauma that permeates our society, if we do not properly care for our children. We urge you do vote in favor of this bill and Amendment 1, offered by Senator Darling, to give our youth the opportunity to utilize currently existing services and avoid further danger and uncertainty in their lives.

Thank you again for considering our views. Please feel free to contact me at 608.237.3446 or adrienner@endabusewi.org with any additional questions.