



WISCONSIN LEGISLATURE

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February 12, 2014

To: Members of the Assembly Committee on Children and Families
From: Representative Jessie Rodriguez
Re: Assembly Bill 741

Good morning Mr. Chairman and committee members. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Assembly Bill 741 is legislation that would replace two existing unfilled positions on the Child Welfare Partnership Council of Milwaukee County with the presiding Children's Court Judge in Milwaukee and the Milwaukee district attorney or their designee.

The Child Welfare Council is comprised of volunteer members that review Child Protective Services in Milwaukee County. They are charged with the duties such as submitting annual reports to the federal children's bureau and recommending policies and plans that would improve CPS and make them more efficient.

The Council currently has two positions that remain vacant that were originally intended to be filled by two members of the Children's Service Network. Since the Council's creation, the Children's Service Network has dissolved leaving spots open for further input on this important Council. The judge and the District Attorney already are members, but are not allowed to vote. Both of these representatives have intricate knowledge of the situations that arise in Milwaukee County, and would provide a valuable asset to the Council.

It is important to note that the amount of positions on the Council would remain the same, this bill simply replaces the two vacancies with representatives from the legal community that deal with cases regarding the well-being of children.

I encourage you all to support AB 741. Thank you for your consideration.



Testimony on Assembly Bill 741 Partnership Council

Thank you Representative Krug and committee members.

Since the creation of the Milwaukee Child Welfare Partnership Council in 1995, it has helped to build a stronger and more responsive child welfare system in Milwaukee County. This bill will allow the presiding Children's Court Judge in Milwaukee and the Milwaukee District Attorney (or designee) to be members of the Partnership Council for the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare.

Currently, neither the court system nor the DA are required to attend. They are invited to the meetings, but do not hold a voting membership. I believe the Partnership Council will benefit greatly from the advantage of their expertise and their votes would be of great value.

The council needs a highly informed and comprehensive view of the child welfare system to continue to improve and provide excellent care to the children of Milwaukee. The addition of these seats would provide that overarching view point and allow the Council to take advantage of the considerable expertise that the DA and Children's Court Judge will bring to the table.

This bill does not increase the size of the council because the two seats were originally created for the Children's Network, which no longer exists.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Assembly Bill 741. I would be glad to answer any questions the committee may have.

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Governor Scott Walker
Secretary Eloise Anderson

Secretary's Office

Date: February 12, 2014

To: Members of the Assembly Children and Families Committee

From: Sara Buschman, Assistant Deputy Secretary

Re: Department Position on AB 741 – In Support

Representative Krug and Assembly Children and Families Committee members,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on AB 741. My name is Sara Buschman and I am the Assistant Deputy Secretary at the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF). With me is Fredi-Ellen Bove, the Administrator for the Division of Safety and Permanence within DCF.

The Milwaukee Child Welfare Partnership Council, which was formed in 1995, serves as an advisory body to the State and as a citizen review panel for Child Protective Services (CPS) for Milwaukee County. Its mission is to aid in supporting a strong, effective, and high quality child welfare system in Milwaukee County, which is administered by the state through the Department of Children and Families Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare.

The Child Welfare Partnership Council meets every other month and reviews a wide range of issues related to the performance, structure, policies and programs of the child welfare and related systems. The Council solicits public input about the child welfare system and recommends to the Department of Children and Families policies and plans for improvement and funding priorities. The Partnership Council has been an important and valuable vehicle for the Department to receive input and advice from members of the Milwaukee community who have a broad range of views and expertise. We express our appreciation to the individuals who have served on the Partnership Council for devoting their time, attention, and energy to improving the lives of children and families in the Milwaukee community.

AB 741 eliminates the requirement in state law that each Wisconsin Works (W-2) agency establishes a children's services network. Many of the networks were never formed or they were dissolved over time as programs evolved and the networks were no longer needed. When this provision was adopted into state law nearly 20 years ago, the W-2 and child welfare programs were under different departments' purview. Today, both programs are under the oversight of DCF, and numerous mechanisms are in place to coordinate child welfare and W-2.

Current state law requires the Council to have two members who are nominated by a children's services network established in Milwaukee County and who are residents of the W-2 geographical area served by the network. This network was never established in Milwaukee County; as a result, the two designated spots have been vacant since the Council was established.

AB 741 changes the designation of these two positions to the presiding Children's Court Judge in Milwaukee and the Milwaukee District Attorney or designee. Both of these parties play important roles in the child welfare system. Currently, the presiding judge and the district attorney are invited to meetings, but are unable to vote on issues before the Council. Their addition will strengthen the Council by ensuring that the views of these parties are considered in the decisions and recommendations of the Council.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this legislation. We thank Representative Rodriguez and Senator Darling for authoring their bill and thank the Chair for holding a hearing and exec so quickly. We are happy to answer any of your questions.

Milwaukee Child Welfare Partnership Council

Unless otherwise provided by law, the governor shall appoint the members of councils for terms prescribed by law. Fixed terms shall expire on July 1 and shall, if the term is for an even number of years, expire in an odd-numbered year. Unless otherwise provided by law, at its first meeting in each year every council shall elect a chairperson, vice chairperson and secretary from among its members. (15.09)

Purpose: The 19-member Milwaukee Child Welfare Partnership Council makes recommendations to the Department of Health and Family Services and the legislature regarding policies and plans to improve the child welfare system in Milwaukee County, including a neighborhood-based system for delivery of services. It may also recommend funding priorities and identify innovative public and private funding opportunities. [15.207(24)]

Membership: The 15 non-legislative members are appointed to 3-year terms, and the governor designates one of the public members as chairperson. Three members of the Milwaukee county board nominated by the Milwaukee County executive, one representative to the assembly appointed by the speaker of the assembly, one representative to the assembly appointed by the minority leader of the assembly, one senator appointed by the president of the senate, one senator appointed by the minority leader of the senate, and ten members who are residents of the state, not less than six of whom shall be Milwaukee County residents. [15.207(24)]

Appointed by Governor: 10* (approves 5 other positions)

Number of Members: 19

Term: 3 Year

Confirmation of the Senate: No

Aligned to: DCF (15.207)

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Governor Scott Walker
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Division of Safety and Permanence
Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare

February 12, 2014

To: Members of the Assembly Children and Families Committee
From: Linda Davis, Chair, Partnership Council for the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare
RE: AB 741 – In Support

Dear Representative Krug and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for your consideration of AB 741 which would affect the membership of the Partnership Council for the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare. Thank you as well for allowing me to submit written testimony on behalf of the Partnership Council.

As a matter of introduction, I have served as a community member of the Council since my appointment in 2002. I was appointed Chair of the Council in 2011. I am a full time volunteer. I have been a student of child welfare since 1993. I founded and chair the Child Welfare Philanthropy Group of Milwaukee in 2000. This is a group of private funders who invest in effective philanthropy to support child welfare systems. I have also served as a volunteer on a variety of state, local and national boards, councils and projects on behalf of children in the child protective system. I also currently serve on the Department of Children and Families Secretary's (statewide) Council on Child Welfare.

All the members of the Council volunteer their time and talents to improving the lives of children who have been abused and neglected.

As you know, the Partnership Council was created in statute in 1995 when the State of Wisconsin assumed responsibility for Milwaukee County child welfare services. The role of the Council is to advise the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare and the Department of Children and Families on policies, procedures, spending priorities and concerns regarding child welfare services in Milwaukee. We also work with our legislative partners on a variety of budget and legislative issues.

The Partnership Council is a federally designated Citizen Review Panel which allows the Council members to review child deaths and egregious events that may have any connection to the Bureau. This designation allows the Council to review confidential information with the goal of systems improvement in mind. Recommendations from the Critical Incident Committee are shared with the public and tracked at each of our meetings.

The Council is comprised of citizens, four (4) legislators, and three (3) Milwaukee County board members.

The Council also hosts two meetings each year to inform the Community of progress made by the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare.

When the Council was created, two positions were designated to be filled by "Children's Network" members. These networks were to be created in coordination with the W-2 providers/regions at the time. The "Children's Network" was not created in Milwaukee; and hence, these positions have never been filled. A variety of other changes have also occurred since the original designation of two "Children's Network" members on the Council. The most significant of these changes has been the consolidation of W-2 and Child Welfare under one department, the Department of Children and Families. This consolidation has led to much greater coordination between W-2 and child welfare agencies.

The child welfare system, as you know, is unique in many ways, not the least of which is the involvement of all three branches of government. The Executive, Legislative and Judicial branches all play critical roles in the effectiveness of child welfare in any community. To that end, it is critical that these systems join with citizens to continuously remove barriers and improve services for the children who have been abused and/or neglected through no fault of their own.

In order to strengthen and insure communication and problem solving, the Partnership Council for the Bureau of Milwaukee Child Welfare will provide an even stronger forum for the judiciary and the District Attorney's office if AB 741 is passed. The bill allows the Presiding Children's Court Judge in Milwaukee and the District Attorney (or his/her designee) to sit as a full voting member on the Partnership Council.

Current practice is that the DA's designee and the Presiding Children's Court Judge are invited to Partnership Council meetings. Their participation is inadequately guaranteed through this current process. We would like to institutionalize these two critical partners' participation rather than the current informal invitation.

The Partnership Council and the Bureau have created great working partnerships with both the DA's office and the Children's Court. We would like to strengthen that partnership and honor the role both of these critical systems play in the lives of the children we touch. These two partners play a vital role in finding permanence, stability and well-being for the children. Working even more closely together will only serve the children more effectively.

This bill does not require any budgetary support nor does it change the size of the Council. This bill merely replaces two memberships that have never been used with two members who are vital to the work of child protective services.

Thank you for your consideration.