



# JULIE LASSA

## STATE SENATOR

**Testimony on Senate Bill 25**  
**Senate Committee on Workforce Development, Forestry, Mining, and Revenue**  
**Wednesday, March 5, 2014**  
**425 Southwest**

Chairman Tiffany and committee members, thank you for allowing me to testify before you today on Senate Bill 25, a proposal to expand the WISCAP Skills Enhancement Program. This program improves the incomes of low-wage workers in Wisconsin, 94% of whom are low-income parents, by providing educational opportunities so they can obtain the skills they need to get family-supporting jobs.

Skills Enhancement emphasizes short-term, demand-driven, job-focused training, mainly at community and technical colleges. Along with assistance with tuition and fees, the program also helps with child care and transportation costs, helping low-income families overcome barriers to education. Staffs work with participants to help develop individualized training goals that reflect both the participants' skills and local job opportunities.

From the time state funding was approved for this program as part of the CORE Jobs Act in 2010, 299 participants completed training. Of these, 227 report obtaining new jobs that have increased their annual income an average of \$9,020 – a great return on the program's investment of \$1,062 per participant. Skills Enhancement Program graduates are conservatively projected to earn \$320,000 more on average throughout their working lifetimes. As earnings increase, they pay more income taxes and rely less on public resources. In addition, Skills Enhancement graduates report a fivefold increase in access to employer-sponsored health care benefits.

The funding increase proposed in this bill would enable an additional 151 participants over the biennium to graduate and obtain better paying jobs. Their cumulative increase in incomes is estimated to be over \$3 million.

Thank you for holding a hearing on SB 25 and for allowing me to speak before you today. I would be happy to answer any questions.



March 5, 2014

**TO: Senator Thomas Tiffany, Chair**  
**The Senate Committee on Workforce Development, Forestry, Mining & Revenue**

**FROM: Jonathan Bader, Programs Manager**  
**Wisconsin Community Action Program Association (WISCAP)**

**RE: Testimony in support of SB 25 to increase funding for the Community Action Skills Enhancement Program**

I'm testifying today in support of increasing state funding for the Community Action Skills Enhancement Program (SEP). We thank Senator Lassa for introducing SB 25 and for her tireless advocacy to provide economic opportunities to low-income citizens and to Representative Pasch for introducing the companion bill AB 49 in the Assembly.

The Skills Enhancement Program - which was created in 2010 with bipartisan support - is designed to improve the incomes of low-wage workers in Wisconsin by providing educational opportunities so they can obtain the skills they need to get better paying jobs with benefits. Skills Enhancement emphasizes short-term, demand-driven, job-focused post-secondary training, mainly at community & technical colleges.

SEP helps participants - most of whom are low-income parents - overcome barriers to education by providing financial assistance to help pay tuition & fees, child care & transportation to attend classes. Staff provides comprehensive case management, and work with participants to develop individualized training goals that reflect their interest, aptitude and local job opportunities. Increasing Wisconsin's investment in Skills Enhancement makes sense because:

- Skills graduates **substantially increase their incomes**. Since June 2010 when GPR & FSET<sup>1</sup> funds became available, 299 participants have completed training. Within 9 months of finishing training 237 graduates (79%) have reported new jobs that pay an average of **\$2.95 more per hour** and **pay \$9,020 more in annual wages** – a **75% increase** during the worst economic cycle in memory.
- Skills graduates are conservatively projected to **earn \$320,000 more** on average throughout their working lifetimes. As earnings increase they pay more in income and sales taxes & rely less on public resources.
- Skills graduates report a **370% increase in access to employer-sponsored health care benefits** (rising from 10% before to 47% after graduation), reducing reliance on publically-funded health care.

<sup>1</sup> SEP outcomes in the first 5 bullets are for all GPR & FSET funded clients combined. 79% of clients are solely funded by GPR; an additional 5% are partially funded by GPR.

- Comprehensive case management contributes to a **SEP graduation rate (57%) that's higher than the national average for community colleges (45%)**, despite the challenge of managing work, school and family responsibilities on a limited income.
- **SEP directly leverages other educational funds by a factor of 4:1.** Statewide SEP pays an average of \$1,062 per successful graduate for tuition, fees, books, child care and transportation, while other educational sources pay \$5,097.
- Current state funding is sufficient to serve only a limited number of participants in 40 counties (less than \$15,000 GPR per agency). Increasing the investment to \$500,000 annually (from \$250,000) would enable Community Action Agencies to increase staffing levels, double the number of participants and reach more Wisconsin counties.
- A \$250,000 GPR increase over 5 years would be expected to produce **377 more graduates**, of which 305 (80%) would be expected to get better paying jobs within 9 months of graduation. By 2020 the accumulated increased earnings of these better paid graduates is projected to total **\$8.18 million dollars<sup>2</sup>** - from an increased GPR investment of \$1.25 million.

### **Skills Enhancement Client Testimonials**

*"When I went to back to school I was on FoodShare, BadgerCare, child care assistance, and energy assistance. I am now self-sufficient. Since obtaining my job I have gotten off all community assistance programs, purchased a new vehicle, and just recently received a promotion to charge nurse. I owe all of this to the Skills Enhancement Program... Me and my children thank you!"* **Skills Enhancement Graduate: Jessica Hadley**

*"...(Skills Enhancement) helped me get on the right track with my schooling. Financially, there is no way I could have been able to finish the Respiratory Program. . . I love being a Respiratory Therapist! Thank you for making my dreams come true!"* **Skills Enhancement Graduate: Anonymous**

*"...(Skills Enhancement) is an unbelievable program and I was very fortunate to have the chance to be a participant. I am so thankful for their assistance and owe them so much. So from the bottom of my heart, thank you, thank you, thank you. The hard work paid off and I did it."* **Skills Enhancement Graduate: LaKisha Jackson**

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<sup>2</sup> This estimate is based on the average graduation, employment and increased earnings rates of GPR-funded participants during the 42 month period from July 2010 to December 2013.



**DATE:** March 5, 2014

**TO:** Senator Thomas Tiffany, Chair,  
The Senate Committee on Workforce Development, Forestry, Mining, and Revenue

**FROM:** Lynn Jones, Employment & Training Director,  
Community Action, Inc. of Rock and Walworth Counties

**RE:** Testimony in support of Senate Bill 25 for the Community Action Skills  
Enhancement Program

Thank you, on behalf of our local Community Action and as a WISCAP partner agency, for this opportunity to testify on the impact of the Skills Enhancement program and the opportunity that you have to assist many Wisconsin citizens through Senate Bill 25.

As an anti-poverty agency, our federal mandate relates to determining the needs of the low income residents and developing effective programs and services that provide opportunities to move households toward self-sufficiency. In 2006, we were drawn to outcomes of the Skills Enhancement Program started by CAP Services and replicated this initiative in Rock and Walworth Counties.

Having been involved with employment and training programs in southern Wisconsin for more than 20 years, I support that this is truly a unique job training opportunity for low-wage workers to take that first step up the ladder toward career pathways in demand occupations. I'd like to take a few moments to reflect on these aspects of the program:

- Participants are low-wage workers, individuals are working and per the program requirements at least 20 hours per week. But these wages are below 150% of poverty and FoodShare is essential in order to meet the needs of their families. The families that express interest in Skills Enhancement want to be self-sufficiency but lack the skills to obtain jobs with higher earning potential. For our program, this means that most participants are in entry level jobs and they simply need the opportunity to access job training that would increase their wages and gain employer supported benefits, thereby reducing the burden on public assistance.
- Career pathways are explored. First, through various interest and aptitude assessments, training needs are identified. Even when individuals come through the door with clear understanding of a career or training interest, we explore options with the potential participants. It is essential for us to ensure that the resources we provide will support their career direction.

- Training provided in demand occupations. Staff align individuals with career pathways to demand occupations based on the local labor market information and workforce needs. This includes collaborating with the local Workforce Development Boards, area employers and economic development efforts such as Fast Forward.
- Extensive case management staff review training and financial options. Factors that need consideration include backgrounds, transportation and potential earnings. This means that as short term training is identified in career pathway plans, other funding options have been explored, which may include financial aid, Workforce Investment Act training resources and even personal finances. The Skills Enhancement resources then address training related gaps, such as child care, transportation, tuition and fees.
- Collaborations with employment and training resources are essential for a successful program. In order to maximize the funding we need to have active partnerships. I have already mentioned the Workforce Development Boards, employers and economic development, but also technical colleges, community and faith based organizations.

At Community Action we assist approximately 60 households annually through the Skills Enhancement Program. Program to date we have an average hourly increase in earnings of \$3.62 and an annual wage increase of \$10,826.02. The training opportunities are focused on short term and varied, health care is the largest training segment, however welding, information technology, and truck driving have all been viable training options.

The households are diverse. The program is not a hand out but a ladder up to career potential. I'd like to close with an example of this: Ann came to our program after completing her Certified Nursing Assistant training and having obtained employment at \$9.40 per hour for 24 hours per week. Unfortunately her success was not accepted by her husband and he became violent, she choose to remove herself from the domestic situation, but knew that she could not support her three young children on her current wages. She heard about the Skills Enhancement program through a family member and met with staff to explain her life challenges and hopes to become a registered nurse. Ann entered the program in 2007, she was fortunate with her coursework and became a registered nurse in 2009. Her placement at the time of leaving the program was at \$24/hr. and 40 hours per week. Last week I received a note from her asking me to attend her pinning on May 3 at George Williams College. You see, she didn't stop with her associate's degree but went on to earn her bachelor's degree with the support of her employer. Ann is a proud and very successful women, an amazing role model for her children (who are all outstanding students by the way), she is now a home owner and recently bought a new car. We stay connected and are very pleased that we could be a part of her successful journey...which I'm sure is not over yet! She is also up to \$30/hr. and recently accepted a new position.

This is only one example of many, our participants are working, going to school and juggling multiple family responsibilities. The Skills Enhancement Program does well in providing both guidance and resources. I therefore support providing this opportunity to even more low-wage workers who may reach their potential and make a difference in their lives, their community and reduce the need for public assistance.



# CAP Services

*Transforming People and Communities*

Human Development

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www.capservices.org

March 5, 2014

Senator Thomas Tiffany, Chair  
Senate Committee on Workforce Development, Forestry, Mining, and Revenue

Good afternoon Senator Tiffany and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to talk to you today about SB 25. My name is Andrew Konkel and I'm with CAP Services' Skills Enhancement Program.

CAP Services established the Skills Enhancement Program in 1991 to assist working poor individuals and families stuck in low-paying jobs with little room for advancement and most likely without employee benefits many of us enjoy. To support working-poor individuals in becoming more economically and emotionally self-sufficient, the program increases access to short-term post-secondary education, such as an associate's degree or technical diploma, and develop skills that will help them compete for living-wage jobs with employer-sponsored benefits.

CAP Services started the program initially in the Fox Cities (Outagamie County) area and expanded to include Portage, Waupaca, and Waushara County by the year 2000. In the last three years, CAP has served an average of 260 individuals per year, with an average of 41 graduates per year. In fact, CAP recognized its 700<sup>th</sup> program graduate last year.

While there is no typical Skills Enhancement Program participant, they are all in low-income situations and struggle to get ahead without other assistance available to them. Roughly 60 to 70% of our participants are single mothers that can barely make ends meet without the additional costs of school, transportation, and child care.

The Skills Enhancement Program provides funding assistance for tuition, books, and other training-related needs, as well as the costs of training-related child care and mileage. Working with staff, a training plan is constructed and approved, ensuring it will provide access to a career job with increased wages and employer-sponsored benefits. Skills staff provide one-on-one emotional support as well, incorporating a holistic approach that recognizes most low-wage-earners face multiple barriers to becoming self-sufficient.





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In 2013, 44 individuals in CAP's four county service area successfully completed their training plan and increased their self-sufficiency. The average hourly wage increase of these completers was \$6.06 per hour and the average annual increase was just over \$17, 200. 70% or 31 out of the 44 completers now have access to employer-sponsored health benefits as well. These 44 completers were enrolled for an average of 33.5 months. An average of \$4,241 was spent in direct participant expenses, resulting in more than a 4 to 1 return on investment. And consider the value of increased payroll taxes on the higher wage. CAP's overall success rate for 2013 was 89%. I'm attaching profiles of some of our grads, along with testimonials on the value of the program.

We all understand the value of a good job. This program has demonstrated its value in helping low-income individuals better compete for the kinds of jobs that increase self-sufficiency. Because of the program's results over the past 2 decades, the network of community action agencies saw fit to find ways to expand the model statewide.

Please consider supporting SB 25. Doing so will help increase the numbers served statewide and lead to an even greater impact on the working poor individuals and families throughout the great state of Wisconsin. It's truly a win for individuals, employers and the community at large!

Thank you,

Andrew Konkel,  
Assistant Director



**CAP Services**  
Transforming People and Communities

## SKILLS ENHANCEMENT PROGRAM

CAP Services, Inc. often receives requests from our funders for testimonials from participants who have successfully completed the Skills Enhancement Program. Please use this space to share your testimonial or any successes (personal or professional) that you have had since completing the Skills Enhancement Program.

When I went back to school I was on food share,  
budget care, child care assistance, + energy assistance.  
I am now self sufficient, since obtaining my  
job at select I have gotten off all community  
assistance programs, purchased a new vehicle and  
just recently received a promotion to charge  
Nurse. I owe all of this to the skills enhancement  
program through Cap Services, me and my  
children thank you!

I hereby give consent to CAP Services, Inc. to share my success story with others who want to learn how the Skills Enhancement Program can benefit others.

Signature Jessica Hedley

Date 4-7-12

I wish to remain anonymous in all materials

I would like to receive a copy of all materials in which my story is included

Participant is a female head of household with two children living in Appleton (Calumet County). Upon enrollment in the Skills Enhancement Program, she was working as a CNA at a health care facility 20 hours per week, earning \$13.00 per hour, without benefits. She was receiving BadgerCare, WIC, child care assistance, and FoodShare. She attended FVTC, and earned an associate degree in nursing, graduating in December 2009. She was hired as an RN at a hospital, working 36 hours per week, earning \$28.36 per hour, with benefits. She is no longer receiving public assistance. This is an increase in her hourly wage of \$15.36 and an annual increase of over \$39,500! She was enrolled in the Skills Program for 25 months. Skills assisted with tuition, books, child care, and mileage, totaling \$5,312.95.

Jessica Hadley



# CAP Services

*Transforming People and Communities*

## Testimonial Request

CAP Services, Inc. often receives requests from our funders, such as the United Way or Boldt Corporation, for testimonials from participants who have ~~been~~ successfully been through the Skills Enhancement Program or are currently in the program. In many instances these organizations have the desire to share your success story with their staff, community, local legislators, and even other local organizations and businesses.

We are asking you to write a brief testimonial on behalf of the Skills Enhancement Program. You may want to write about how you and/or your family benefited from CAP Services and the Skills Enhancement Program. Explain how the services that were offered to you affected your life by sharing some details of your life before and after the Skills Program. Please be sure to sign and date the consent statement at the bottom of this form as well. *If you need more room please use the back of the paper.*

*My life before CAP Svcs was a single mom<sup>of 4</sup> working 40 hrs a week making \$10.50/hr and not able to afford living. CAP Svcs paid for me to go to school to become an RN by providing reimbursement for mileage, books, and even my uniform & state testing fees. Now I am making more than double my previous salary and doing what I was meant to be doing - helping others - like CAP Svcs.*

On behalf of the individuals whose lives have been touched by reading your message of success, thank you!

*THANK YOU!!*

Name: Terry Cotter

Address: 307 Amsterdam Ct, Kimberly

Phone: 920-470-1823

I hereby give consent to CAP Services, Inc. to share my success story with others who want to learn how the Skills Enhancement Program can benefit others.

Terry Cotter  
Signature

3/18/12  
Date

- I would like to receive a copy of all materials that include my story  
 I wish to remain anonymous in all materials

Participant is a female head of household with four children living in Kimberly (Outagamie County). Upon enrollment in the Skills Enhancement Program she was working as a teller at a bank 22 hours per week, earning \$10.25 per hour, without benefits. She was receiving BadgerCare and now receives no public assistance. She graduated in December 2011 from FVTC with an associate's degree in the RN program. She is now working as an RN at a healthcare facility 40 hours per week, earning \$22.43 per hour, with benefits. This is an increase of \$12.18 per hour and an annual increase of over \$34,900 per year! She was enrolled in the Skills Enhancement Program for 27 months. Skills assisted with tuition, books, exam fees, and mileage, totaling \$2,769.13.

Terry Cotter

November 26, 2013

Ashley Sweedy  
910 W. Pine Street  
New London, WI 54961

CAP Services  
101 Tower Road  
Waupaca, WI 54981

RE: Skills Enhancement Testimony

To Whom It May Concern:

Since completing the CAP Services Skills Enhancement Program, I have gained more confidence in my professional career and have adapted many of the skills learned to my work and personal life. I was able to walk out of Fox Valley Technical College with an Associate's Degree in Business Management, Phi Theta Kappa membership and Dean's List Honors - all made possible by having CAP Services backing and support. CAP Services not only provided financial support but they also gave encouragement and direction. It was like having a personal life coach rooting in your corner and giving you the resources to get your goals accomplished! I couldn't have asked for anything more from them and the experience set me up for all the success in the world!

Sincerely,

Ashley A. Sweedy

Participant is part of a two parent household with one child living in New London (Waupaca County). Upon enrollment in the Skills Enhancement Program she was working as a partner in a family business 20 hours per week, earning \$6.50 per hour, without benefits. At enrollment she was receiving BadgerCare, FoodShare, and WIC. She now receives no public assistance. She earned an associate's degree in the business management program from FVTC in December 2012. She is now working three different jobs, with two of the jobs being for the same employer. She is working as an administrative assistant at a police department 15 hours per week, earning \$11.00 per hour, without benefits; and, another 2 hours per week at \$10.00 per hour. She is also working for the county court system 10 hours per week, earning \$11.00 per hour, without benefits. This totals 27 hours per week, earning an average of \$10.93 per hour. This is an increase in her wages of \$4.43 per hour and an annual increase of over \$8,500. She was enrolled in the Skills Enhancement Program for 57 months. Skills assisted with tuition, books, and mileage, totaling \$8,914.55.

Ashley Sweedy