

STATE REPRESENTATIVE
BETH MEYERS

Rep. Meyers Testimony for AB 783: Relating to: a committee to study and make recommendations on the caseloads of child welfare workers.

Wednesday, January 17, 2018
10:00 AM
415 Northwest
Wisconsin State Capitol
Madison, WI

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for agreeing to hear this bill. It was an honor to serve on the Speaker's Task Force on Foster Care.

Assembly Bill (AB) 783 would create a committee to determine effective standards for social workers' caseload sizes and ratios of social workers to supervisors, as well as the funding required to implement those standards.

This proposal is designed to address the number one issue we heard from stakeholders at public hearings for the Speaker's Task Force on Foster Care: Wisconsin's social workers are overworked and need help in order to meet the needs of the children they serve. Wisconsin social workers and case workers have caseloads higher than the national average. Large caseloads lead to burnout and turnover. Social worker turnover makes it harder to achieve permanency for kids.

As proposed by the Wisconsin County Human Service Association (WCHSA), AB 783 will establish a caseload study committee to make a recommendation to the Legislature on adequate caseload standards for the state and what that would cost. The committee will be co-chaired by the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and the Wisconsin County Human Service Association, with representation from DCF, county human service directors, DCF's Milwaukee Bureau, and a tribal representative. The committee's final report will go to the Joint Finance Committee and the appropriate standing committees.

Our goal is that this committee's work will lead to new caseload standards for social workers and the funding needed to implement those standards. A reduction in caseloads would allow social workers to spend more time with each family and make them less likely to burn out, leading to fewer costly staff turnovers, better continuity of care for children, and overall better outcomes for the foster care system.

AB 783 has the support of the Wisconsin Association of Family and Children's Agencies, as well as strong bipartisan support in the Legislature. I am proud to work with my colleagues in both parties, including Representative Neylon, Senator Testin, and many others, on this legislation.

Again, thank you for your consideration of this important proposal. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.



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PATRICK TESTIN

STATE SENATOR

DATE: January 17, 2018
RE: Testimony on 2017 Assembly Bill 783
TO: The Assembly Committee on Children and Families
FROM: Senator Patrick Testin

I would like to thank Chairman Kitchens and fellow members of the Assembly Committee on Children and Families for allowing me to testify today on Assembly Bill (AB) 783.

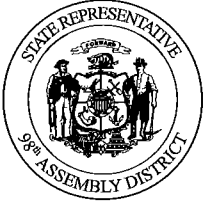
Last year, while the Speaker's Task Force on Foster Care traveled the state, one of the biggest issues mentioned was the rising number of children in out-of-home care and the increasingly high caseloads of case workers. In Wisconsin, social workers/case workers have caseloads higher than the national average. This has led to high turnover rates, which have negative impacts on the children and the families they serve, including an impact on a child's path to permanency.

The biggest obstacle in solving this problem is that if a caseload standard were implemented, counties would be forced to hire more social workers to adequately cover all of their cases. However, counties would be unable to absorb these extremely high costs to continue to serve their increasing number of out-of-home placements.

AB 783 seeks to alleviate these problems by creating a committee, named the "Wisconsin Task Force to Create Effective Child Welfare Caseloads," to study and report on recommended caseload standards for child welfare workers. The committee would be co-chaired by the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and Wisconsin County Human Service Association (WCHSA), with representation from DCF, county human service directors, DCF's Milwaukee Bureau, and a tribal representative.

This bill directs the committee to complete a final report no later than April 1, 2019 and send it to the Governor, the Joint Finance Committee and the appropriate standing committees. The report must include recommended standards for the maximum average caseload sizes for child welfare workers who perform access, initial assessment, ongoing services, or foster parent support functions. The bill requires the committee's report to include an outline of how the recommended standards could be implemented, including the funding needed for implementation.

Establishing a caseload standard for case workers could improve the current situation and relieve the burden from caseworkers so they can provide higher quality services to children and families. Thank you again Chairman and members of the committee for hearing my testimony. I hope you will join me in supporting AB 783.



Adam Neylon

State Representative • 98th Assembly District

DATE: January 17, 2018
FROM: State Representative Adam Neylon
TO: Assembly Committee on Children and Families
RE: Supporting Assembly Bill 783

As you know, the Speaker's Task Force was created to develop ideas to improve the child welfare system. In our meetings across the state, the Task Force heard testimony from many people involved in the foster care system, from state administrators to foster parents. One of the most talked-about issues was that of the increasing number of children in out-of-home care, which results in the increasingly high caseload of child welfare case workers. One important fact to keep in mind is caseload rates in Wisconsin exceed the national average.

Assembly Bill 783 seeks to address this problem by requiring the Department of Children and Families to create a committee, comprised of 16 members, including representatives from the Wisconsin County Human Service Association, DCF, and a federally recognized Indian tribe. This committee, the Wisconsin Task Force to Create Effective Child Welfare Caseloads, will study and report on recommended caseload standards for child welfare workers.

AB 783 requires this committee to submit its report to the governor, the Joint Committee on Finance, and the appropriate standing committees of the legislature. This report must base its recommendations on a review of caseload standards in other states and jurisdictions, and it must include recommended standards for the maximum average caseload here in Wisconsin.

Assembly Bill 783 is an important first step towards standardizing child welfare case worker caseloads, which will have a direct impact not only on case workers, but on the children they serve.

Thank you for your time, and feel free to contact me or my office with any questions.



National Association of Social Workers

TESTIMONY BY MARC HERSTAND, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SOCIAL WORKERS, WISCONSIN CHAPTER FOR INFORMATION PURPOSES ON ASSEMBLY BILL 783 ON JANUARY 17, 2018 BEFORE THE ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND FAMILIES.

Reducing caseload sizes and supervisor to staff ratios would be a tremendous benefit to children and families in the foster care system. It would enable social workers to be able to spend the time with children and families, and provide the support needed for reunification or if necessary a timely permanency plan. Effective case management requires frequent client contact and a significant amount of worker time. On the other hand excessive caseload sizes and poor supervision can lead to burnout, high levels of job dissatisfaction, poor outcomes for children and high workforce turnover.

There have been a number of national studies over the last fifteen years that have shown a clear link between excessive caseloads, staff turnover and the consequent poor outcomes for children and families. In 2003 the US Government Accountability Office (GAO) examined the relationship between CFSR (Child and Family Services Review) findings from 27 states and their agencies' staff turnover rates (GAO, 2003. High agency turnover was associated with failure to meet established standards for investigation response, timely investigation completion, case plan completion, worker contact with children and families, maltreatment recurrence and timely permanence. (GAO, 2003)

An Illinois study found that to complete all statutory and policy requirements for foster care cases, workers could have no more than 15 foster care cases per month. Investment in law caseloads was offset by reduced child removal, reductions in residential placements and shorter lengths of stay in foster care (McDonald, 2003)

Results of a 2004 survey of state public child welfare administrators found that high caseload and/or workloads are among the top reasons for preventable turnover. This same study identified reducing supervisory ratios, along with reducing caseloads and workloads as the most important action for child welfare agencies to take to retain qualified frontline staff. (APHSA, 2005)

A study in 2005 by the National Council on Crime and Delinquency found a link between agency permanence and workforce capability. ((National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD), 2005). Also in 2005 a study of private foster care agencies in Milwaukee in 2005 found that high case manager turnover for a family increased the time required to achieve permanency for children. (Flower, McDonald & Sumski, 2015)

In addition a comparison of high turnover and low turnover counties in New York State in 2005 found that low turnover counties have lower median caseloads than higher turnover counties. (Lawson, et al, 2005)

In 2006 three separate reports or studies were released regarding the relationship between caseload size, turnover and client outcomes. First, the United States Department of Health and Human Services analyzed case review findings from 50 states and found that the frequency of worker case contacts with parents and children had a significant positive correlation with placement stability, receipt of child mental health or educational services and the timely achievement of permanency. (Administration for Children and Families, 2006) Secondly the National Conference of State Legislatures reported that evidence was mounting that high staff turnover and decreased worker-client contact have a negative impact on critical client outcomes. Third in August 2006 the Children's Defense Fund and Children's Rights published a paper entitled, "Components of an effective Child Welfare Workforce to Improve Outcomes for Children and Families: What does the Research Tell Us?" This paper presented the following statements based upon a summary of research findings:

- 1) Due to high caseloads, caseworkers have less time to interact with the child, families and providers, prepare accurate and individualized assessments and case plans, provide services, and engage in meaningful supervision with their supervisors
- 2) High caseloads have been found to contribute to the re-entry of children into foster care.
- 3) Caseworkers with social work degrees have been found to be more successful in developing permanency plans and dealing with complex problems
- 4) Children's multiple placements while in foster care are associated with caseworker turnover
- 5) Caseworker turnover results in families' receipt of fewer services and has been found to be a major factor in failed reunification efforts, longer lengths of stay for children in foster care and lower rates of finding permanency homes for children. (Children's Defense Fund and Children's Rights, August 2006)

A 2016 study of the Connecticut child welfare system found that the quality of the Social Worker's case management and documentation is negatively impacted as caseloads increase. (Connecticut Department of Children and Families, 2017)

In addition to these many studies I have spoken with child welfare supervisors in both Dane and Brown counties who have emphasized the link between manageable caseload sizes and quality services to clients.

Assembly Bill 783 is an important step in improving the child welfare system in Wisconsin and outcomes for children and families.

References

Administration for Children and Families (2006) Summary of the results of the 2001-2004 Child and Family Services Review. Washington, DC: US Department of Health and Human Services Retrieved April 30, 2008, from <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ch/cwmonitoring/results/genfindings04/genfindings04.pdf>

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Survey. State Agency Findings. Washington, DC.

Children's Defense Fund and Children's Rights, "Components of an Effective Child Welfare

Workforce to Improve Outcomes for Children and Families: What does the research tell us?" August 2006

Connecticut Department of Children and Families, "Time Study of DCF Social Work staff During March 2016 as Requested by the Department of Children and Families' Administration and AFSCME Local 2663, February 28, 2017

Flower, C. McDonald, J., & Sumski, M. (2005) Review of turnover in Milwaukee County: Private agency child welfare ongoing case management staff, Bureau of Milwaukee County, WI Retrieved February 21, 2008, from <http://www.uky.edu/Social/Work/cswe/documents/turonoverstudy.pdf>

Lawson, H. Clairborne, N, McCarthy, M. Strolin, J., Briar-Lawson, K., Caringsi, J., Auberbach, C, McGowan, B., Dorn, N., Sherman, R. (2005) Retention Planning to Reduce Workforce Turnover in New York State's Public Child Welfare System. Albany, NY: New York State Social Work Education Consortium, University at Albany School of Social Welfare

McDonald J. (November 4, 2003) Workload is key to CPS performance. Arizona Capital Times. National Council on Crime and Delinquency (2005). The relationship between staff turnover, child welfare system functioning and recurrent child abuse Retrieved February 21, 2008 www.cornershtone4kids.org/images/need_relationships_306pdf

Social Work Policy Institute, (January 2010) High Caseloads: How do they Impact Delivery of Health and Human Services? National Association of Social Workers

United States Children's Bureau, (July 2016) Caseload and Workload Management, Issue Brief



MEMORANDUM

TO: Honorable Members of the Assembly Committee on Children and Families

FROM: Chuck Price, Director, Waupaca County Health and Human Services Department;
President, Wisconsin County Human Service Association

Jason Witt, Director, La Crosse County Human Services Department

Katie Herrem, Executive Director, Wisconsin County Human Service Association

Sarah Diedrick-Kasdorf, Deputy Director of Government Affairs, Wisconsin Counties Association

DATE: January 17, 2018

SUBJECT: Support for Assembly Bill 783 – a committee to study and make recommendations on the caseloads of child welfare workers

The Wisconsin County Human Service Association (WCHSA) and Wisconsin Counties Association (WCA) support Assembly Bill 783 which requires the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to create a “Wisconsin Task Force to Create Effective Child Welfare Caseloads” to study and report on recommended caseload standards for child welfare workers. The task force will consist of 16 members: 10 representatives from WCHSA, five representatives from DCF, and one tribal representative.

The task force must submit a written report to the governor, Joint Committee on Finance, and the appropriate standing committees of the legislature by April 1, 2019. The report must include recommended standards for the maximum average caseload sizes for child welfare workers who perform access, initial assessment, ongoing services, or foster parent support functions, over which it is not reasonable to expect a worker to be effective at conducting certain model practices while at the same time meeting the federal and state mandates that govern his/her work, and the maximum ratio of supervisors to frontline workers over which it is not reasonable to expect a supervisor to provide effective guidance and direction.

Child Welfare System Background

State statute requires all counties, except Milwaukee County, to provide child welfare services and employ personnel who devote all or part of their time to child welfare services. Child welfare services include initial assessment of reports received, investigation, the provision of services to children and families, as well the removal of children from their homes to ensure their safety (see attached).

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) distributes Children and Family Aids to counties for services related to child abuse and neglect and to unborn child abuse, including prevention, investigation, and treatment. Funding may also be used for community-based juvenile justice services. Base funding for the Children and Family Aids allocation is approximately \$73 million annually. Counties allocate an additional \$100 million plus annually.

States across the nation, including Wisconsin, are seeing an uptick in the number of individuals using, and ultimately becoming addicted to, substances such as heroin, other opiates, and methamphetamines. The drug-addiction epidemic is increasing the need for child welfare services across Wisconsin.

As an example, the number of Child Protective Services (CPS) referrals has increased significantly over the past several years. The following chart lists the number of CPS referrals from 2007 to 2016.

| Calendar Year | Number of CPS Referrals |
|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| 2007 | 55,895 |
| 2008 | 56,934 |
| 2009 | 56,619 |
| 2010 | 61,763 |
| 2011 | 64,132 |
| 2012 | 70,266 |
| 2013 | 68,943 |
| 2014 | 72,698 |
| 2015 | 76,442 |
| 2016 | 78,382 |

The chart reflects a 40 percent increase in child welfare referrals since 2007.

The Need to Examine Caseloads

Increasing child welfare caseloads have had a detrimental impact on county child welfare staff. Caseworkers are having a difficult time managing the demands of their increased caseloads.

Increased caseloads, coupled with increased case complexity (parental substance use), is leading to high rates of turnover and negative impacts on children and families.

A 2016 workforce study by the University of Minnesota found that 83 percent of child protection caseworkers across Minnesota reported experiencing secondary traumatic stress, while 45 percent had looked for new jobs within the past year. If that study were replicated in Wisconsin, it is highly likely that Wisconsin would see similar results.

Unfortunately, many child welfare workers feel that they are continuously operating in “crisis mode” with an inability to fulfill the new Wisconsin Child Welfare Model of Practice.

Wisconsin is not the only state where child welfare worker caseloads and supervisor to worker ratios appear to be an issue. In 2014, the Colorado Office of the State Auditor contracted with an outside organization to complete a workload study for child welfare staff across the state. Delaware, Nebraska, and California have all considered legislation on child welfare standards. Legislation has also been introduced at the federal level that requires states to create guidelines for the maximum size of child welfare caseloads and caseworker to supervisor ratios.

Counties across the nation have also been subjected to litigation over their child welfare caseload sizes. According to the Child Welfare League of America, there were 32 states between 1995 and 2005 that faced child welfare class action litigation. Issues commonly addressed in consent decrees and court orders relating to actions in the 32 states include:

- Placement issues such as recruitment, retention, licensing and training foster parents, relative placements and group homes (77 percent of cases).
- Caseworkers, namely adequate staffing, maximum caseloads, and enhanced training and supervision (66 percent of cases).

In 2017, Hennepin County and the State of Minnesota were sued, alleging that the system is underfunded and has too few caseworkers.

Foster families have also reported that due to the increased caseloads, they are not receiving the type of support they need from counties across the state.

Conclusion

The child welfare system, from the county perspective, is underfunded. Counties will continue to come to the state and request additional funding in the children and family aids allocation as a county’s ability to allocate property tax dollars to the child welfare system is limited. However, counties also believe it makes sense to have data supporting the need to fund increased child welfare positions across the state. The task force will allow counties and DCF to gather this critical data.

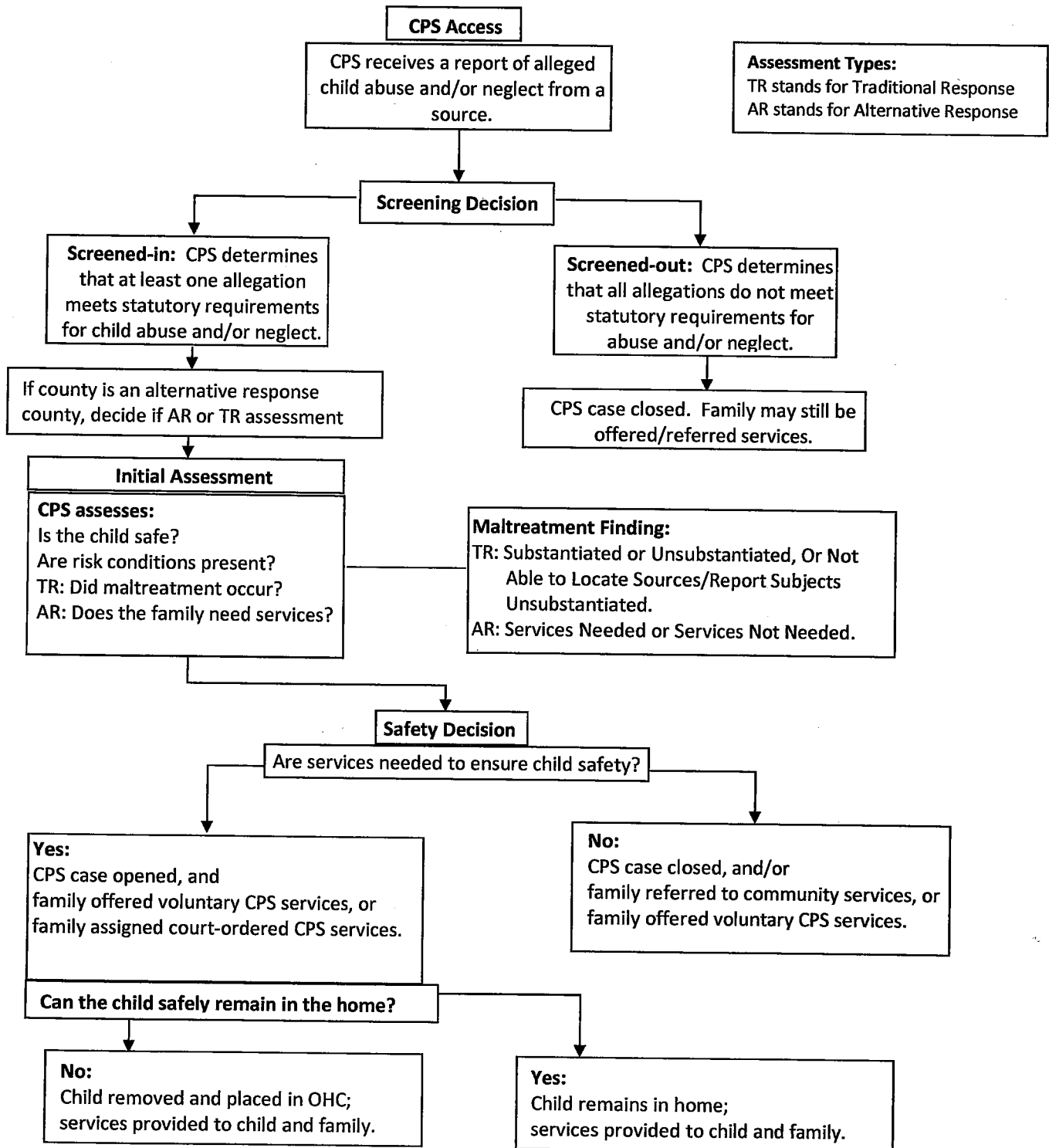
Assembly Bill 783
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The goal at the end of this process is to assist children in reaching permanency faster, allow families to have more quality contacts with social workers, as well as insulate child welfare workers from secondary trauma. Support for this legislation is the first step in meeting these critical goals.

WCA and WCHSA respectfully request your support for Assembly Bill 783.

Thank you for considering our comments.

An Overview of the CPS Process



Paul Farrow
County Executive

Antwayne M. Robertson
Director



January 17, 2018

To: Assembly Committee on Children and Families
RE: Support of Assembly Bill 783
From: Lisa Roberts, Child and Family Services Division Manager, Waukesha County Department of Health and Human Services

Dear Committee Members:

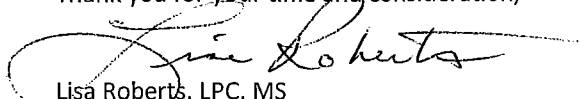
I am writing to express my support for Assembly Bill 783 which creates a committee to study and make recommendations on child welfare workers' caseloads. There is a national epidemic of social worker turnover. Most national research studies indicate that 30% to 45% of child welfare staff exit the field within 2 years of employment. Social Workers report leaving the field due to caseload size, case complexity and lack of support, particularly supervisory support. However, it is important to note social workers having a BSW or MSW degree are more likely to remain in the field more than 2 years versus those individuals without a social worker certification or a related degree. Wisconsin has not been immune to this turnover epidemic and has struggled to meet the ever increasing demands placed on counties human services child welfare staff.

Flower, McDonald and Sumski (2005) discovered that an increase in the number of social workers assigned through the life of a case, decreases the chances of timely permanence for children. For example, within a cohort of children who had only one social worker, 74.5% achieved timely permanence, with the percentage drastically dropping to 17.5% if the child had two social workers. In fact, there is a negative impact on both length of stay in foster care and achieving reunification if changes of social workers to the family are the pattern (Ryan, Garnier, Zyphur & Zhai, 2006). At a time when Wisconsin children are requiring out of home care more than ever, in large part due to the opioid epidemic, a consistent, stable workforce is critical to offset the increasing costs of out of home care placements and to assist children and families in achieving permanency timely.

Wisconsin has never initiated a child welfare caseload review or generated requirements around caseload sizes. Counties are left to make these decisions independently without "best practice" guidelines to support case decisions or defend the need for additional staff.

The creation of this committee through Assembly Bill 783 will make it a priority in Wisconsin to examine studies and research conducted in this area around the country, create case load standards for workers as well as supervisor to worker ratio and forward additional recommendations that will positively impact worker retention, and determine fiscal needs for sustainability.

Thank you for your time and consideration,



Lisa Roberts, LPC, MS
Waukesha County Department of Health and Human Services
Child and Family Services Division Manager



January 17, 2018

Assembly Committee on Children and Families

2018 Assembly Bill(s) 783, 779, 785, 787

Dear Representative Kitchens and committee members,

Thank you for this opportunity. It is my privilege to share part of my family's story in order to shed light on the personal impact of the foster care legislation before you today.

My name is Diane Behm, my husband Mike and I are former foster parents and current adoptive parents. I have served on the board of Connecting Bridges, the foster and adoptive parenting support group in the Milwaukee area, for the past six years. I am also a Program Supervisor with the Coalition for Children, Youth and Families for the Post Adoption Resource Center.

My husband and I have fostered eight children, and adopted five children. I'd like to speak to Bill 783 first. Our daughter Charley, came to us at eight weeks old. She weighed only five pounds at two months old, less than her birth weight, for no medical reasons. Charley's biological parents still had her older brother in their home and we believed she would be able to return home quickly after some education on feeding and development. That never happened. Charley's case lingered for over four years. In that time, we had five different caseworkers.

You may know the statistics for turnover in Milwaukee County, but the impact that has on children and families is enormous. This study of worker caseload will directly impact retention of foster families and permanency for children. When a caseworker changed, we had to start from the beginning. Reading case notes doesn't give a worker a real life picture of the people and child involved. We would have to start our first meeting with the caseworker by introducing ourselves, our home, and our family all over again. Then we had to give them an update on what we believed were the most important parts of what was going on with Charley, whether that was concerns about visitations, upcoming medical tests, or other topics. The fifth and final caseworker literally said, "It was like starting all over." That was in year three. The majority of case managers we had over the eight years we fostered were wonderful caseworkers, doing the best they could with way too many children.

Every time we would hear, "I'm so sorry, but I have to tell you I'm leaving for another job," or "I'm moving to licensing," or "I'm sorry, she's no longer with the organization, your new worker will give you a call soon," it was *heartbreaking*. We knew that meant that our, now, daughter, would have to wait longer for her answers. Her mother would have to start all over building a relationship with a worker she, by nature, didn't trust at all. This isn't just numbers, and it's not about the caseworkers who work too many hours, as I'm sure others here will testify to. Rather this is about the children and families that we are supposed to be teaching, supporting, and helping to reunify; they are the ones who suffer as well.

Coalition for Children, Youth & Families
Formerly Adoption Resources of Wisconsin

When our case came to an end for Charley, the only consistent person on her case from start to finish was us. Not visitation workers, not parent aids, not supervisors, and not case managers. I have no doubt that, if her caseworkers had been around, they would have been able to make decisions about her safety and would have had more confidence to make the decision for her permanency. The other outcome that would have been different would have been for her mother. Her mother, after four-and-a-half years, followed through with a voluntary termination of parental rights on the morning of the first day of her trial. She loves her daughter very much, and she loves her son, whom she still has in her home. This whole family, and mine, waited too long for permanency. This study is not just about workers, but they need to be allowed to do their jobs, so the children and families don't have to suffer because the caseworkers are too busy to build relationships and heal families.

Someone once said to me "the human condition is insatiable." It is hard enough to live and work in this world, where children are being hurt by the ones meant to protect them. It is near impossible to do it well with the amount of lives caseworkers are entrusted with.

I would also like to state my support for Bills 785 and 779. Two of our children are biological siblings. Their mother suffers from mental health issues and, in turn, addiction. She was capable of being clean—she proved that time and again, as she was clean the entire third trimester of each pregnancy. If she had more information, and the resources to help her manage her mental health, she may have been able to maintain her sobriety. Any resources that provide support, information, and prevention are still needed, and should be offered.

Lastly, I would like to address bill 787. I have spent eight years as a licensed foster parent, and six years on the board for the foster and adoptive parent support group in Milwaukee, with over 1,500 members. Every day I see foster parents reach out on social media for help. Foster parents who decide to take in siblings when they had only been planning to care for one child. Foster parents who decide to take in a child substantially older than their desired age range. These are the foster parents that you as legislators, and members of your community, want to keep. The foster community in Milwaukee steps up every time, whether it's clothes, a crib, pack and play, shoes, a coat for a middle school child removed in the middle of the night. There is not one day that goes by that we don't see a need. Our community in Milwaukee is one I'm incredibly proud of. But there are counties that don't have that same network. The small things that foster parents need can often be provided by the community, whether it's other foster parents or local community. The need is greater than possessions. The need is for more education to understand trauma; more resources for camps, programs, and connections for youth in care.

Thank you for your consideration and efforts to support the children, families and professionals connected with and touch by our state's foster care system.

Sincerely,



Diane Behm
Adoptive Mother
Program Supervisor, Coalition for Children Youth and Families, Inc.



January 17, 2018

Assembly Committee on Children and Families

2018 Assembly Bill(s) 776, 779, 783, 785, 789⁸⁷⁰²

Dear Representative Kitchens and committee members,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the foster care legislation before you today. We would like to extend our gratitude to Representatives Snyder and Doyle for their excellent leadership as co-chairs of the Assembly Speaker's Task Force on Foster Care

The Coalition for Children, Youth & Families, Inc. is a non-profit organization funded in part by grants from the State of Wisconsin Department of Children and Families. We consider ourselves the single source for neutral, objective, and current information about every aspect of foster care and adoption in Wisconsin; a trusted and continuing presence through every stage of a family's foster or adoption experience.

The unique role of the Coalition for Children, Youth & Families is to

- Advocate for the most vulnerable children,
- Coach foster and adoptive families to achieve resilience, and
- Lead by balancing the needs and interests of all those touched by the foster and adoption ecosystem – children, families, agencies, caseworkers, policymakers, and others.

As an ongoing advocate for children and families touched by foster care and adoption, the Coalition for Children, Youth & Families, Inc., wants to offer support for the legislation before you today. Specific comments on each bill are as follows:

AB 776- Foster Care Licensing

The Coalition supports all efforts to ensure that foster care licensing does what it is intended to do, which is to ensure the safety and well-being of children and youth when they are unable to remain with their birth families. We believe this bill recognizes the complexities and works to remediate issues while always ensuring Wisconsin's children and youth in foster care are safe and thriving.

AB 779: Referral to Community-Based Services

Foster families need information and support to provide quality care to children. As a provider of information, referral and support specific to the foster care and adoption community, the Coalition recognizes the importance of families having access to timely and easily accessible information. Both as an organization, and as a member of the larger foster and adoption community, we support any efforts to help build awareness of available resources and services to a broader range of families, especially birth families who are struggling. We have found over 34 years of engaging in this type of work, that many bigger challenges can be averted if individuals and families simply know where to turn.

Coalition for Children, Youth & Families

Formerly Adoption Resources of Wisconsin

AB 783: Child Welfare Caseload Study

Child welfare caseworkers are a very critical part of the foster care system. As the Task Force members learned during public hearings, caseworker retention is critical to helping limit the time children spend in foster care. Equally, worker caseload affects the ability of an individual worker to respond to the needs of foster and birth families. A child welfare worker's ability to engage positively with all caretakers is critical. Birth parents need support and encouragement to keep them engaged and working towards reunification of their children. Foster families often become discouraged when they cannot reach child welfare workers and, over time, a lack of access to child welfare workers can impact placement stability and foster parent retention levels.

AB 785: Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Grants:

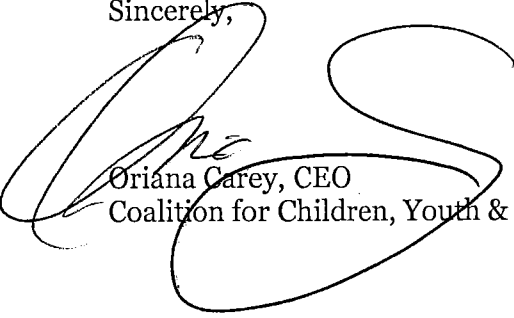
The Coalition supports all efforts to prevent children and youth being placed in the foster care system. Foster care placement is a traumatic event in the life of a child, youth, and his or her parents and extended family. We are fortunate in Wisconsin to have quality foster and adoptive families who have worked tirelessly to provide care, support, and advocacy for children and families in need; however, the demand for these families is high and increasing. We support and advocate for efforts to increase funding and mechanisms for innovative and creative ways to lessen the need for foster care.

AB 789^a: Support for Foster Parents and Children in Foster Care:

One of the primary focuses of the Coalition is to continually assess and look for ways to support and retain families who help provide safety and well-being when needed. An ongoing challenge facing the foster care system is the lack of foster homes. The number of children in out-of-home care has been on a steady increase in Wisconsin and across the country and the number of individuals and families choosing to foster is not keeping up. The needs of foster and adoptive families are great. In their report, *A Movement to Transform Foster Parenting*, The Annie E. Casey Foundation sums up these needs into several categories: finding and keeping quality caregivers, ensuring quality caregiving, and forging strong relationships. We support AB 789 because we believe that Wisconsin foster families need to know they are supported and appreciated for their service and commitment. Retention efforts need to be individualized and unique and we believe this bill allows for that type of flexibility.

Thank you for your consideration and continued support of children, youth, and families touched by foster care and adoption.

Sincerely,


Oriana Carey, CEO
Coalition for Children, Youth & Families, Inc.



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Governor Scott Walker
Secretary Eloise Anderson

Secretary's Office

Date: January 17, 2018
To: Members of the Assembly Committee on Children and Families
From: Lonna Morouney, Legislative Liaison
Fredri Bove, Administrator, Division of Safety and Permanence
Re: 2017 Assembly Bill 783

Chairman Kitchens and Members of the Assembly Committee on Children and Families:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify about Assembly Bill 783, one of the recommended legislative proposals from the Speaker's Task Force on Foster Care. My name is Lonna Morouney and I am the Legislative Liaison for the Department of Children and Families. I am accompanied by Fredri Bove, Administrator for the Division of Safety and Permanence for the Department.

Assembly Bill 783 requires DCF to create a committee to study child welfare caseloads. The committee is comprised of 16 members including representatives from the Wisconsin County Human Services Association (WCHSA), DCF and one tribal member. The committee is established to study child welfare caseloads for child welfare worker functions of Access, Initial Assessment, Ongoing Services and Foster Parent Support, and set maximum caseload standards for maintaining model child welfare practice standards. In addition the committee will study the maximum ratio of supervisors to frontline child welfare workers.

The Department is committed to data-driven analysis and policy and program development. We view that the child welfare caseload study proposed in this bill has the potential to provide county-administered agencies and the Department with better information about the connection between workload and the effectiveness of child welfare workers and supervisors in carrying out their critical roles, as well as how this may change over time.

Assembly Bill 783 requires DCF to submit a written report about the findings of the committee to the Governor, Joint Finance Committee and standing committees of the Legislature no later than April 1, 2019. The report will outline how recommended caseloads standards could be implemented and funding needed for implementation. DCF and WCHSA representatives have already begun to meet to discuss the committee workplan and goals.

We are pleased to answer any questions you may have.