

ANDRÉ JACQUE

STATE SENATOR • 1ST SENATE DISTRICT

Phone: (608) 266-3512

Fax: (608) 282-3541

Sen.Jacque@legis.wi.gov

State Capitol · P.O. Box 7882

Madison, WI 53707-7882

Testimony before the Assembly Committee on Education

State Senator André Jacque

April 20, 2023

Chairman Kitchens and Members of the Assembly Committee on Education,

Thank you for holding this hearing and the opportunity to testify before you today in support of Assembly Bill 24, posting the child abuse and neglect reporting hotline in school buildings.

Children are the future of Wisconsin. In instances of abuse or neglect, children should have the resources to protect themselves when the adults in their lives do not.

Assembly Bill 24 requires a school board, the operator of an independent charter school, the governing body of a private school participating in a parental choice program or in the Special Needs Scholarship Program to post in a conspicuous public location in each school building a sign that contains the telephone number for the local county or state agency that is responsible for receiving reports of, and conducting investigations regarding, child abuse or neglect. A sample of what such a poster could look like from the Child Advocacy Center, based on what is in use in other states, is attached to my testimony. The message is clear, positive, easy to comprehend and appropriate for all ages, and schools can download and print it at no cost.

Requiring schools to post a child abuse hotline number where students frequent is a helpful mechanism to accomplish 4 goals:

1. It gives students the knowledge they are valued
2. It gives students the knowledge they have the right and power to self-report abuse
3. It gives students the mechanism to report abuse while in the safe environment of the school, without having to look an adult in the eye to make the initial report
4. It puts predators on notice (A significant percentage of the children who are abused are abused by older more powerful children/students)

According to the Center for Child Advocacy:

- The median age of a child who is sexually abused is 9 years old
- 60% of women who are incarcerated had been sexually abused
- 45% of pregnant teens report a history of sexual abuse
- Drug and Alcohol dependency-70% preceded by sexual abuse
- Sexually transmitted diseases-60% preceded by sexual abuse

(MORE)

Assembly Committee on Education
State Senator André Jacque
Assembly Bill 24 Testimony
April 20, 2023

The National Conference of State Legislators wrote a brief in support of this legislation in January 2015, calling it a concrete, simple and inexpensive way for school children to seek help in a safe environment.

There are 43 states that have the child abuse hotline number in schools. Assembly Bill 24 was introduced in identical form last session as 2021 SB 238/AB 222 and was formally supported by both the Wisconsin Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board and the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. SB 238 passed the Senate Education Committee by a vote of 6-1, the full Senate on a voice vote, and the Assembly Education Committee by a unanimous 12-0 vote, but unfortunately was not taken up by the full Assembly before adjournment.

Thank you for your consideration of Assembly Bill 24.



CAC POSTER.pdf

IT'S OK TO TELL!

If someone hurts you:

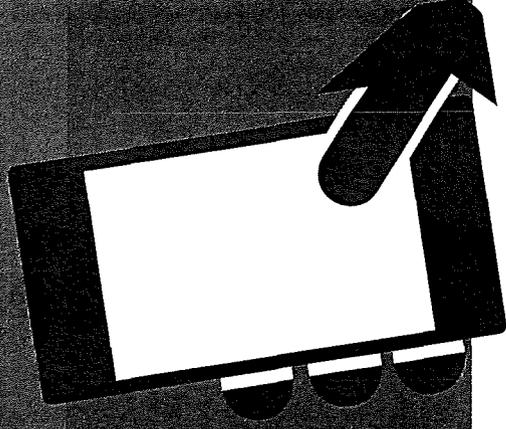
Say
NO

GO

to a safe place

TELL

a trusted adult



Call

for help or **911** for emergencies

For more information:

Don't ever keep a secret that upsets you!



April 20, 2023

Assembly Committee on Education
Department of Public Instruction Testimony
2023 Assembly Bill 24

I want to thank Chairman Kitchens and members of the committee for the opportunity to give written testimony on Assembly Bill 24 (AB 24). My name is Kevyn Radcliffe, Legislative Liaison for the Department of Public Instruction (DPI).

DPI takes a neutral position on AB 24.

According to a 2022 Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) fact sheet, at least one in seven children have experienced child abuse or neglect in the year prior. In 2020, 1,750 children died of abuse and neglect in the United States. School staff in Wisconsin are mandatory reporters and make the most, or second most, number of reports.

If the purpose of hanging posters is to ensure that children know there is a means to access help when they (or someone they know) is being abused, it may be more effective to ensure students know how to access school staff to report abuse - especially pupil services staff, who can form relationships with students, talk with them about their concerns, connect to the family, and connect families to resources in the community. School staff could then make a report if one is warranted based on statutory definitions.

The committee may wish to consider expanding the information on the signage to include community and school based mental health, alcohol and drug abuse, and suicide prevention services. Students who are being abused may not recognize the behavior as abuse. However, they may seek help for problems resulting from the abuse. For example, a student may use alcohol or drugs to self-medicate in response to the abuse. They may recognize their alcohol or drug abuse as the problem and seek help for that rather than the underlying abuse.

The bill does not specify any requirements for the sign beyond the phone number, e.g., size of the sign or a description of the local agency's work. For example, other helpful information might include alternative ways (besides a phone number) to contact services.

Page 2

Additionally, any signage should provide the information in English and languages other than English that are predominant in the school district.

School mental health services and supports are an effective means of addressing the mental health needs of children and improving the learning environment. Comprehensive school mental services help educators prevent and respond to crises while fostering a school climate that supports teaching and learning. Schools can improve student outcomes through social and emotional supports by building positive relationships and increasing school engagement to help concentrate on learning. Families are critical in their children's education and school staff must be able to address mental health needs. Partnerships between schools, youth, families, and mental health providers can result in improved academic outcomes. DPI provides more information on [School Mental Health](#) on our website.

DPI takes a neutral position on AB 24. If you have questions or would like additional information, please contact Kevyn Radcliffe, Legislative Liaison, at Kevyn.radcliffe@dpi.wi.gov or (608) 264-6716.