



Legislative Fiscal Bureau

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Joint Committee on Finance

Paper #265

Domestic Abuse Services (Children and Families -- Child Welfare)

[LFB 2023-25 Budget Summary: Page 105, #1]

CURRENT LAW

Domestic violence is willful abuse as part of a pattern of power and control perpetrated by one spouse or partner against another. It includes battery, rape, other acts of physical and sexual violence, economic manipulation, threats and other verbal abuse, and emotional and psychological abuse. Domestic abuse, domestic violence, and intimate partner violence are generally interchangeable terms for this behavior.

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) currently contracts with local agencies in every county to provide services to people experiencing domestic abuse and their children. Base funding for these programs consists of a GPR appropriation of \$12,434,600 per year, federal funding the state receives under the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act, which provided \$2,178,400 in federal fiscal year 2022, and PR funds received from a court surcharge imposed for offenses related to domestic abuse of approximately \$600,000 per year. Current law requires that DCF use these funds to provide advocacy and counseling for victims, 24-hour phone support, community education, and/or shelter facilities or private home shelter care. Shelter providers must provide all four of those services, as well as emergency transport to the shelter, food, referral and follow-up services, and arrangements for education for school-age children.

In addition to contracting with local agencies to provide those services, current law requires DCF, from the same GPR and PR fund sources, to provide all of the following annually: (a) \$995,000 in grants for domestic abuse services for children; (b) \$563,500 to the Refugee Family Strengthening Project for domestic abuse services for the refugee population; (c) training and technical assistance related to the judicial system and providing pro bono legal services, expending at least \$69,700 per year; (d) \$20,700 for an organization to coordinate and provide information on housing, job training, and transitional living programs; (e) grants to enhance support services,

such as by providing case management, children's programming, employment assistance, and training and activities promoting self-sufficiency; (f) grants for domestic abuse services for members of underserved communities, including members of racial minority groups and people with mental illness or developmental disabilities; and (g) a grant to the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence to assist domestic abuse victims in accessing legal services.

All grants awarded under the current program require grantees to provide matching funds of \$1 for every \$4 received.

DISCUSSION POINTS

1. Assembly Bill 43 and Senate Bill 70 would provide \$20,217,300 GPR annually, consisting of \$14,000,000 in a new appropriation to fund the Living Independently through Financial Empowerment (LIFE) program to provide direct assistance to survivors of domestic abuse and \$6,217,300 to increase funding distributed under the current domestic abuse shelter and services grant program.

2. According to the federal Department of Justice, domestic violence accounts for 20% of all violent crime nationwide. In Wisconsin, 36% of women and 32% of men report experiencing intimate partner rape, other physical domestic violence, and/or stalking in their lifetimes. In contrast to other violent crime, domestic abuse is often hidden from public view and often goes unreported. There were 30,999 incidents of domestic abuse reported to law enforcement in Wisconsin in 2018, the most recent year for which information is published, resulting in 21,960 arrests.

3. Nationwide, 24% of those who report domestic abuse are younger than 18, or were younger than 18 when they first experienced domestic abuse. People with limited English proficiency or precarious financial situations are also at higher risk of domestic abuse, as abusers can exploit these situations to wield power over their partners or limit their ability to leave the relationship.

4. Domestic violence can cause significant and long-lasting physical injuries, severe mental health problems, and death. Nationwide, approximately 20% of all homicides -- and over half of all murders of women -- are perpetrated by a spouse or intimate partner of the victim. The CDC estimates that the financial cost to society of domestic violence against women, including lost productivity, criminal justice system costs, and medical care, is on average \$103,800 per case.

5. Programs that provide services to domestic abuse survivors seek to reduce these negative outcomes and to provide safe shelter and other resources necessary to enable people to leave abusive relationships, preventing abuse from continuing or worsening. In Wisconsin in 2020 (the most recent year for which data is published) the 42 domestic abuse shelters across the state provided shelter to 5,722 people, including 2,451 children. They reported a total of 20,682 additional requests for shelter that were unmet due to insufficient capacity.

6. Wisconsin programs providing 24-hour crisis hotlines answered 122,141 calls in 2020, and programs provided advocacy services to 22,599 people, individual or group counseling to 18,042 people, legal assistance to 16,409 people, and crisis intervention services to 16,149 people.

7. In 2021, DCF implemented a new program to support economic independence and provide a financial safety net for people experiencing domestic abuse, known as Living Independently through Financial Empowerment (LIFE), using Wisconsin's allocation under the one-time Pandemic Emergency Assistance Fund (PEAF) created by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). Under federal law, the PEAF provided funding for programs to provide time-limited financial assistance to families experiencing a crisis or other short-term need; Wisconsin received \$14.5 million.

8. The LIFE program, administered by Wisconsin Works agencies, offered short-term cash assistance to low-income parents and expecting parents experiencing domestic abuse. Eligibility was limited to applicants who were receiving or had received one or more public benefits (such as FoodShare, TANF, Wisconsin Shares, Medicaid, or supplemental security income, among others) in the past 12 months, or had income at or below 200% of the federal poverty level. Wisconsin Works agencies were charged with evaluating immediate and long-term safety and stability concerns and needs of the applicant, providing information regarding local housing and emergency financial resources, and making appropriate referrals to assist applicants in meeting immediate and long-term care needs.

9. Cash payments provided under the program were intended to enable individuals to secure safe and stable housing away from the abusive partner, meet basic needs such as food and utilities during the period of upheaval caused by an unplanned move, replace necessities and possessions destroyed by the abusive partner, offset medical expenses, provide a transition period to end financial dependence on an abusive partner's income, and otherwise meet financial needs associated with crises caused by domestic abuse. To eligible applicants, the program provided \$1,500 in the first month followed by \$1,000 in each of the two following months. Support did not extend beyond three months.

10. The LIFE program was announced on November 8, 2021. By December 17, local Wisconsin Works agencies had approved 2,819 applications, scheduled an additional 1,981 application appointments, and had a backlog of 11,553 phone calls initiating applications. This demand far exceeded the \$14 million PEAF funding budgeted to fund 4,000 recipients, and the application was closed. DCF ultimately provided funding to 4,031 people, totaling \$14,108,500 in benefit payments.

11. DCF estimates that 10,000 of the applicants in the backlog would have been eligible, bringing the total to 14,000 eligible applicants in the single month the program was available. Although it is difficult to estimate the annual number of eligible applications that would be received if this were an ongoing program, the evidence from this month suggests that many domestic violence survivors would meet the eligibility requirements and seek this assistance. The number of eligible applicants could be similar to or higher than the 24,000 requests for shelter received by domestic abuse shelters in 2020.

12. ARPA also provided several one-time supplements to the grants awarded under the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act, including for general domestic abuse services and for certain costs related to COVID-19, such as coordinating with testing and vaccination providers and making certain domestic abuse and sexual assault services available via phone and video when face-to-face contact was unsafe. Wisconsin received \$7.9 million for services for domestic violence

survivors. From this funding, DCF allocated \$5.6 million to pilot a program to provide safe and stable housing to people experiencing domestic abuse. The program began in December, 2021, and DCF has allocated funding through calendar year 2024. DCF used the remaining \$2.2 million to support and expand domestic abuse services in 2022 and 2023, including maintaining grant funding for existing shelter care providers and agencies providing advocacy, counseling, legal assistance, and crisis intervention services; and funding new grantees to ensure these services are available in every county.

13. The Committee could create separate appropriations to expand the current domestic abuse shelter and services grant program and/or fund the LIFE program, could authorize DCF to fund the LIFE program as part of the current domestic abuse program and provide combined funding (Alternative B4), or could take no action. AB 43/SB 70 includes statutory provisions defining the LIFE program, but the Committee could also include authorization for DCF to promulgate administrative rules implementing the program and exempt these rules from emergency rule procedures. DCF recommends this additional authorization to ensure that eligibility criteria can be established in rule and properly enforced. Further, the rule-making process would provide the Legislature additional opportunity to review key features of the program, including program eligibility, payment amounts, and administrative procedures. Each of the alternatives presented in this paper that include funding for the LIFE program also include the program definition in AB 43/SB 70 and the rulemaking authority.

14. The Committee could provide \$6,217,300 GPR annually to expand the existing domestic abuse grants program. This reflects a 50% increase to the current funding level for the domestic abuse grants program. [Alternative A1]

15. Alternatively, the Committee could provide any greater or lesser amount for domestic abuse shelter and services. As an example, Alternative A2 provides half that amount. [Alternative A2]

16. The Committee could determine that the current level of services for domestic violence survivors is appropriate and maintain current funding of \$12,434,600 GPR annually. [Alternative A3]

17. The Committee could create a separate appropriation for the LIFE program funded with \$14,000,000 GPR annually, as proposed under AB 43/SB 70. Funding the LIFE program at this level would fund assistance for 4,000 applicants per year, one sixth of the number of families requesting shelter in the most recent year. [Alternative B3a]

18. The Committee could also provide more or less funding for the LIFE program than the amount that would be provided in AB 43/SB 70. In light of the anticipated high number of eligible families experiencing domestic abuse, the Committee could, for example, provide funding for assistance to 12,000 families per year, reflecting half of the number of families requesting shelter (Alternative B1) or 8,000 families per year, reflecting one-third of this population (Alternative B2). Or, seeing as this would be a new state-funded program, a lesser amount, \$7,000,000 annually, could be provided than that of AB 43/SB 70 (Alternative B4). In this case, in implementing the program DCF may need to establish lower payment amounts per family to be able to provide payments to a larger fraction of eligible applicants.

19. As an alternative to GPR funding, the Committee could support the LIFE program with funding under the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. Because the LIFE program would limit assistance to three months and restrict eligibility to parents and expecting parents with low income, it meets the requirements for TANF funding. Alternatives B1b, B2b, B3b, and B4b, would provide the same example levels of funding using TANF instead of GPR.

20. As an alternative to creating a separate GPR appropriation or TANF allocation for the LIFE program, the Committee could define the program in statute as an additional authorized use of the existing domestic abuse services funds and provide combined funding. This would enable DCF to allocate funds to the highest priority services and interventions, including allocating this funding differently between the LIFE program and domestic abuse shelter and services. Any GPR amount described above could be selected under this alternative. [Alternative B5]

ALTERNATIVES

A. Domestic Abuse Shelter and Services Grant Program

1. Provide \$6,217,300 GPR annually, increasing total annual GPR grant funding under the domestic abuse shelter and services program from \$12,434,600 to \$18,651,900.

ALT A1	Change to Base
GPR	\$12,434,600

2. Provide \$3,108,700 GPR annually, increasing total annual GPR grant funding under the domestic abuse shelter and services program from \$12,434,600 to \$15,543,300.

ALT A2	Change to Base
GPR	\$6,217,300

3. Take no action on the domestic abuse shelter and services grants program, maintaining current funding of \$12,434,600 GPR annually.

B. LIFE Program

Provide one of the following amounts, or any other specified amount, to fund the LIFE program. For all options except B5 (take no action), define the LIFE program in statute as a program to provide short-term assistance to individuals who are survivors of domestic abuse, specify that DCF may contract with a Wisconsin Works agency to administer the LIFE program, authorize DCF to promulgate administrative rules implementing the program, and exempt these rules from emergency rule procedures.

1. Provide \$42,000,000 annually.
 - a. Create a separate GPR appropriation to fund the LIFE program.

ALT B1a	Change to Base
GPR	\$84,000,000

- b. Create a new TANF allocation to fund the LIFE program.

ALT B1b	Change to Base
FED-TANF	\$84,000,000

2. Provide \$28,000,000 annually.
 - a. Create a separate GPR appropriation to fund the LIFE program.

ALT B2a	Change to Base
GPR	\$56,000,000

- b. Create a new TANF allocation to fund the LIFE program.

ALT B2b	Change to Base
FED-TANF	\$56,000,000

3. Provide \$14,000,000 annually.
 - a. Create a separate GPR appropriation to fund the LIFE program.

ALT B3a	Change to Base
GPR	\$28,000,000

- b. Create a new TANF allocation to fund the LIFE program.

ALT B3b	Change to Base
FED-TANF	\$28,000,000

4. Provide \$7,000,000 annually.
 - a. Create a separate GPR appropriation to fund the LIFE program.

ALT B4a	Change to Base
GPR	\$14,000,000

- b. Create a new TANF allocation to fund the LIFE program.

ALT B4b	Change to Base
FED-TANF	\$14,000,000

5. Provide any of the GPR amounts described above in the existing GPR appropriation for domestic abuse grants to provide combined funding for the LIFE program and the current shelter and services grant program.
6. Take no action on the LIFE program.

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