

Senate Committee on Education
April 21, 2021

**Department of Public Instruction Testimony
in Support of Senate Bill 238**

The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) appreciates the opportunity to provide this written testimony to Chairwoman Darling and members of the committee in support of Senate Bill 238, which would require the posting of the child abuse and neglect reporting hotline in schools.

Background

School staff in Wisconsin are mandatory reporters under state law. Within the first six months of hire and at least every 5 years thereafter all school staff are required to receive training in child maltreatment and reporting suspicion of child maltreatment to child protective services or local law enforcement under Wis. Stats. 118.07(5). DPI provides an online module¹ for all staff, as well as a supplemental module and training materials are available on the DPI website for local facilitators to use in place of the online training.

Public schools are also required to provide instruction on protective behaviors, including: recognizing, avoiding, preventing and halting physically or psychologically intrusive or abusive situations, to all elementary age students under Wis. Stats. 118.01(2)(d)8.

In addition to statutory requirements, DPI has invested in additional efforts to address child abuse and neglect including:

- Publishing a guide to School's Role in Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect². This guide provides additional best practice in preventing and responding to child maltreatment.
- Curating resources on our webpage Reducing and Responding to Sexual Violence³.
- Partnering with the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and the Wisconsin Safe and Healthy Schools (WISH) Center to offer trainings for facilitators of youth lessons in the prevention of human trafficking. The facilitator guide for the youth lessons was created by DPI. Mandated reporters must report suspicions of human trafficking.
- Creating a new online training module for mandated reporters that will be released soon covering best practices in using the Indicator and Response Guide⁴ for reporting human trafficking.
- Engaging in an ongoing workgroup that meets regularly to collaborate on child maltreatment prevention and best practices in mandated reporting.

¹ The online module is available at <https://dpi.wi.gov/sspw/pupil-services/school-social-work/contents/child-abuse/child-abuse-and-neglect>.

² This School's Role in Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect can be accessed at <https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/sspw/pdf/sswchildabuse2018.pdf>.

³ This webpage can be accessed at <https://dpi.wi.gov/sspw/safe-schools/resources-reduce-and-respond-sexual-violence-schools>.

⁴The Indicator and Response Guide can be accessed at https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/sspw/pdf/Wisconsin_Child_Sex_Trafficking_Indicator_and_Response_Guide_May_2017_002.pdf.

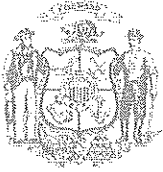
- Creating a flier⁵ and webinar on mandated reporting in a virtual environment during the pandemic.
- Representing K-12 education on the Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board.
- Participating in the Awareness to Action committee. Awareness to Action (<https://www.a2awisconsin.org/>) is an initiative focused on preventing child sexual abuse by helping adults and communities take action to protect children through: Awareness, Education, Prevention, Advocacy, Action
- Collaborating with Children's Hospital of Wisconsin to promote and encourage school staff to engage in policy and procedure training to prevent child abuse at school.

Analysis

SB 238 will build on existing efforts to better protect children by increasing awareness of the hotline, another place people can turn to for help, in schools.

If you have questions about this testimony, please contact Grant Huber, Legislative Liaison, at grant.huber@dpi.wi.gov.

⁵ The flier can be accessed at <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/files/press/2020/cw-covid-edu.pdf>.



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*Testimony before the Senate Committee on Education
State Senator André Jacque
April 21, 2021*

Chair Darling and Members of the Senate Committee on Education,

Thank you for holding this hearing and the opportunity to testify before you today in support of Senate Bill 238, 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.

Senate Bill 238 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



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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. This proposal has previously received support from the Wisconsin Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers, and has just received the formal support of Wisconsin's Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board.

Thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 238.