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WISCONSIN STATE REPRESENTATIVE

41<sup>ST</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

AB 456: reporting on county performance on providing core mental health services and requiring the exercise of rule-making authority.

Testimony of State Representative Joan Ballweg

Assembly Committee on Health

October 22, 2013

Thank you, Chair Severson and members of the Health Committee for hearing Assembly Bill 456. This legislation will require the Department of Health Services to collect from counties which mental health services and programs they provide, and to promulgate rules to create a mechanism for reporting.

This bill was a recommendation from the Speaker's Task Force on Mental Health and will give us a way to find what counties do that are additional to the mandated core services. By gathering and centralizing a list of what mental health services and programs are provided by counties, we will be able to better develop best practices and regional collaboration of care.

It is my intention to write Secretary Rhoades at DHS to request that the department gather this information and make it available to the legislature by January 1, 2015. AB 456 requires rules to be promulgated by January 1, 2016. This will serve us well in the future, but I feel it is important to have counties report their programs and services before 2016 so that information can be used during the next budget cycle.

Thank you for considering this legislation. I'm happy to answer any questions at this time.

# WISCONSIN HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION, INC.



October 22, 2013

**To: Members of the Assembly Health Committee**

**From: Matthew Stanford, WHA VP Policy & Regulatory Affairs, Associate General Counsel**  
**Kyle O'Brien, VP Government Relations**

**Re: WHA Supports Assembly Bill 456**

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The Wisconsin Hospital Association (WHA) supports Assembly Bill 456 which will help Wisconsin to better understand the availability and accessibility of mental health services county government is providing to meet its statutory responsibilities for the treatment and care of persons with mental illness. Without such accurate data, it is difficult for policy makers at the state level to identify what is and what is not working under Wisconsin's mental health system.

The Legislative Fiscal Bureau in January 2013 published LFB Paper #50 which among other items described the responsibility of counties under Wisconsin's mental health act – Chapter 51 - for providing services for individuals with mental illness who reside in their county. The Legislative Fiscal Bureau describes counties' responsibilities as follows:

*“Each county is responsible for the treatment and care of persons with mental illness who reside in the county. Counties must also ensure that persons who need immediate emergency services receive them. Statutes specify that counties are responsible for the program needs only within the limits of available state and federal funding, and county matching funds. Each county establishes its own program and budget for these services. Counties may limit service levels and establish waiting lists to ensure that expenditures do not exceed available resources. **For these reasons, the type and amount of available services varies among counties.** (Emphasis added)”*

Other states, such as Iowa, have established a minimum core set of mental health services that a county or region must make available. Iowa has also established performance metrics that counties/regions must meet in providing such core services. The Department of Health Services (DHS) has also preliminarily identified a set of “core” services in a mental health and substance abuse collaborative pilot that several counties in western Wisconsin are currently participating in.

As noted by multiple members of the Speaker's Mental Health Task Force one disadvantage of Wisconsin's county-based mental health system is that mental health is provided in 72 different ways depending on each county's interpretation of Chapter 51. Furthermore, a significant barrier to incremental or systemic mental health policy change has been a lack of basic, comparable, and accessible data regarding how all 72 counties are meeting their obligations under Chapter 51.

**Assembly Bill 456 is a good and necessary step for Wisconsin to take to better understand the availability and accessibility of county-provided mental health services, and ultimately improve Wisconsin's mental health system.**

We ask to you to vote in support of Assembly Bill 456. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Kyle O'Brien ([kobrien@wha.org](mailto:kobrien@wha.org)) or Matthew Stanford ([mstanford@wha.org](mailto:mstanford@wha.org)) at 608-274-1820.