

Alberta Darling

Wisconsin State Senator

Co-Chair, Joint Committee on Finance

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT, MILITARY
AFFAIRS, AND SENIOR ISSUES

Senator Alberta Darling
Wednesday, May 24, 2017

Thank you, Chairman Testin and committee members for holding a public hearing on Assembly Bills 234, 235, 236, and 237. It's my hope this package of bills will be instrumental in ending and preventing homelessness in Wisconsin.

In 2016, the Federal Housing Administration estimated that at any given time there are approximately 5,685 citizens in Wisconsin who are experiencing homelessness. In order to combat this problem, the bills focus on collaboration, allowing agencies more flexibility to work together to best fight homelessness, and ensuring that resources are going to those most deeply in need.

The first step to addressing homelessness is to provide stable housing for our most vulnerable citizens. That's why Assembly Bills 235 and 236 reform WHEDA's waitlist and grant systems. Assembly Bill 235 strikes the word "transitional" from the statutes relating to housing in order to create more flexibility in the administration of housing grants. Assembly Bill 236 creates a two year pilot program to prioritize Wisconsin's chronically homeless population on the waitlist for the Federal Housing Choice Voucher Program. Both of these bills work in tandem to enable housing resources for those who are most deeply in need.

While it is crucial to provide a stable place to sleep, this does not go far enough to address the underlying traumas affecting Wisconsin's homeless families. Assembly Bill 234 and 237 focus on creating partnerships and collaboration to provide wraparound services. Assembly Bill 237 creates a \$75,000 grant for a municipality to connect homeless individuals with permanent employment and additional support services. Assembly Bill 234 creates the Interagency Council on Homelessness to ensure that all of our agencies work together to combat homelessness, instead of working in different silos. Both of these bills will facilitate delivering wraparound services to Wisconsin's homeless in the most efficient way possible.

I'd like to thank Lieutenant Governor Kleefisch and Representatives Steineke, Rodriguez, Pronschinske, and Snyder for their leadership in developing this important package of bills.

Thank you again committee members for your time and consideration. I hope I can count on your support for Assembly Bills 234, 235, 236, and 237.

JESSIE RODRIGUEZ

STATE REPRESENTATIVE ★ 21ST ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

AB 237/SB 206: Connecting Homeless Individuals with Permanent Employment

Testimony of State Representative Jessie Rodriguez Committee on Workforce Development, Military Affairs and Senior Issues May 25, 2017

Good morning,

Chairman Testin and committee members, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 206, legislation that will provide tools for municipalities to connect homeless individuals with permanent employment.

Today, we are introducing an innovative package of bills to tackle homelessness. The three bills you have heard already are aimed at getting people off the streets and into housing. There is another key part of an individual's path out of homelessness.

The legislation before you today, takes a unique approach to ending homelessness by providing individuals with tools needed to find stable employment and begin contributing to their community.

This bill creates a pilot grant program, modeled after Albuquerque's "There's a Better Way" initiative, that provides homeless individuals with work experience and jobs designated by their local municipality, with the goal of transitioning into permanent employment.

To qualify for the grant, municipalities must provide a match of \$50,000. The Department of Administration must give preference to municipalities that partner with nonprofit organizations that provide services to individuals beyond the requirements of the program.



JESSIE RODRIGUEZ

STATE REPRESENTATIVE ★ 21ST ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

There's a Better Way, a similar model developed in Albuquerque, New Mexico, has demonstrated tremendous success, with nearly 2,000 day jobs provided since the program began in June 2015. Furthermore, eight more communities throughout the country have adopted similar programs.

Finding stable employment is arguably the most crucial step to ending homelessness. Many in this population have never received job training. This is a fiscally responsible approach to help people find work experience and job skills that will lead to permanent employment and reduce homelessness across Wisconsin. I encourage your support for this legislation

Thank you for your time.