



STATE REPRESENTATIVE

KATHY BERNIER

May 31, 2017

Assembly Committee on Children and Families

Testimony on Assembly Bill 290 – relating to counties entering into contracts to perform child protective services functions

Good morning Chairman Kitchens and committee members. Thank you for scheduling Assembly Bill 290 for this public hearing and allowing me time to present testimony in favor of the bill.

The proposal before you today is a common-sense measure that has garnered bi-partisan support and has been reviewed and vetted by the Department of Children and Families. In addition to the efforts of state government, counties directly impacted by this proposal have worked together to establish a process that will address the need to promote efficient and cost-effective methods of doing business, while ensuring child protective services (CPS) remain proactive and serve those children and families in need.

Last year, County Human Services Directors from Chippewa, Pepin, Taylor and Monroe brought area legislators together to discuss a concern they had with a statutory barrier that prevented them from fully collaborating to provide child protective services among and between their four counties. We are here today to fix that.

Counties are responsible to provide for the safety and well-being of residents. The ability to share and collaborate to provide high quality services at a reasonable cost is an important and reliable way to provide for public safety and to protect our most valuable resource (our children).

In many cases, counties and municipalities share services. The state legislature has always encouraged collaboration and consolidation where possible and when cost-effective. Current law allows for collaboration involving child protective services, except when it comes to the investigative and intake processes.

Assembly Bill 290 provides counties with statutory authority to contract with one or more county departments. Child Protective Service responsibilities will be provided to the children of these counties through collaboration and cooperation. This will certainly provide efficiency, but the necessary protections children need to count on is of the utmost importance in this model. In addition, Department of Children and Families (DCF) will review and approve this kind of arrangement to assure accountability.

Such CPS duties and responsibilities include: receipt, documentation, and evaluation of a report, investigation or assessment of the report, and provisions of services including protection of a child. In addition, under this proposal, counties entering into a consortium arrangement will have the flexibility to contract with a licensed child welfare agency for independent investigations, which will help ensure that such investigations can be completed in a timely and quality manner.

Again, thank you Mr. Chairman and committee for the opportunity to speak in favor of AB 290. We have many experts in the field of child protective services here today that comment and speak to specific impacts of the bill on county-offered services. With that in mind, I will conclude my testimony and will be happy to answer any questions I can.

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ROB SUMMERFIELD

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 67th ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

May 31, 2017

Representative Kitchens, Chair
Representative Gannon, Vice-Chair
Members of the Assembly Committee on Children and Families

Testimony on 2017 Assembly Bill 290

*Relating to the authority for counties to enter into contracts
to perform child protective services functions*

Dear Chairman Kitchens, Vice-Chairman Gannon, and Committee Members:

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to testify at today's Assembly Committee on Children and Families' hearing on 2017 Assembly Bill 290. I appreciate your time and consideration of this important legislation.

In 2014, Chippewa, Monroe, Pepin, and Taylor counties began working together, along with the Department of Children and Families (DCF), to form and perfect a group (the "Western Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting Partnership") to help carry out Child Protective Services (CPS). Counties may already contract with each other for a variety of services; however, under current law, they are unable to contract with each other to perform CPS.

AB 290 would get rid of this burdensome law and allow for counties to contract with each other to perform CPS. Additionally, it would allow a county, with the permission of DCF, to contract with a licensed child welfare agency to conduct unbiased, independent investigations into reports of child abuse and neglect. While it would immediately impact the previously mentioned counties, it could also open the door for similar partnerships to be created throughout the state.

Many times, especially in rural Wisconsin, our human services departments are understaffed and overworked. However, by allowing counties to contract with one another to perform CPS, we are able to have our communities come together and address these problems as a group; streamlining the process while also providing local, quality services. Children are our future, and as a parent myself, I cannot think of a more commonsense solution to many of the barriers we are experiencing in Wisconsin when it comes to tackling child abuse and neglect.

Before closing, I would also like to thank Representative Bernier, Senator Moulton, Chippewa County Human Services Director Larry Winter, and many others for their hard work and dedication to this issue. Their help and support was crucial for the creation of the bill before you today. Thank you again for listening, and I implore you to seriously consider the passage of this positive and necessary legislation.



TERRY MOULTON



WISCONSIN STATE SENATOR

23RD SENATE DISTRICT

From: Senator Terry Moulton

To: Assembly Committee on Children and Families

Re: **Testimony on Assembly Bill 290**
Relating to: the authority for counties to enter into contracts to perform child protective services functions.

Date: May 31, 2017

This bill comes at the request of local officials in Chippewa, Monroe, Pepin and Taylor counties who expressed interest in multi-county cooperation among their Child Protective Services to more efficiently receive, document and evaluate reports of suspected or threatened child abuse or neglect.

Under current law, counties are not allowed to contract for Child Protective Services functions. Assembly Bill 290 would provide statutory authority for a county social services or human services department to contract with one or more counties to delegate their CPS responsibilities for the purpose of fulfilling them jointly with approval of the Department of Children and Families. Such CPS duties and responsibilities include: receipt, documentation, and evaluation of a report of child abuse or neglect, investigation or assessment of the report, and provisions of services including protection of a child. In addition, under the proposal, counties who contract to delegate services will have the flexibility to contract with a licensed child welfare agency for independent investigations, which will help ensure that such investigations can be completed in a timely manner.

We worked extensively with the Department of Children and Families on this legislation to ensure that both rural and urban counties will benefit from the flexibility this bill provides. Considering the importance of county child protective services in keeping children safe and healthy across the state, I ask you to please recommend the passage of Assembly Bill 290 and give county CPS departments the tools they need to collaborate, increase efficiencies and better serve Wisconsin families. Thank you for allowing me to submit testimony today.

Serving the 23rd Senate District



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Governor Scott Walker
Secretary Eloise Anderson

Secretary's Office

Date: May 31, 2017

To: Members of the Assembly Committee on Children and Families

From: Michelle Rawlings, Director for the Bureau of Safety and Well-Being
Division of Safety and Permanence

Re: Department Position on AB 290 – In Support

Representative Kitchens and members of the Assembly Committee on Children and Families,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on AB 290. My name is Michelle Rawlings and I am the Director of the Bureau of Safety and Well-Being in the Division of Safety and Permanence (DSP) within the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF). The Department supports the bill.

AB 290 authorizes county human and social service agencies to contract with one another to perform specific child welfare duties on behalf of the agency. This statutory change will enable local county child welfare agencies to achieve cost efficiencies and improve the quality and timeliness of child welfare services. In addition, AB 290 specifies that a county human or social service agency may contract with a licensed child placing agency to perform the independent investigation function. This is necessary when an employee, licensed placement provider or individual in the agency may introduce bias in the child welfare agency's ability to carry out its child protective service (CPS) responsibilities.

As this Committee may be aware, four Wisconsin county child welfare agencies- Pepin, Monroe, Chippewa, and Taylor initiated a proposal to contract with one another to jointly and on each agency's behalf carry out the CPS reporting duties for their local communities. While the four counties initiated and are leading this effort, the Department is supportive of this regionalized Child Abuse and Neglect (CAN) Reporting Partnership. Their proposal is a way to respond to county interests to generate cost efficiencies and ensure quality service delivery. At the invitation of the four counties, the Department has been actively working with the CAN Partnership counties on the planning and pre-implementation details of its proposal. As part of that process, the Department is making any needed adjustments at the state level, for example, in the state child welfare information system, to accommodate this regionalization approach. The Department appreciates the positive and productive partnership with the four CAN Partnerships county agencies.

In summary, this bill explicitly authorizes local county child welfare agencies, with the necessary and appropriate oversight and approval of the DCF, to work with one another in collaborative and innovative ways to create both local and potentially system-wide efficiencies and quality improvements in carrying out child welfare responsibilities. For these reasons, the bill is expected to strengthen outcomes for the children and families served by our child welfare system.

The Department thanks Representatives Bernier and Summerfield and Senator Moulton for authoring the bill and thanks the Chair for holding this hearing. We also very much thank the county agency leaders- Paula Winter, Ron Hamilton, Larry Winter and Tammy Steinmetz- as well as their local supervisors, staff and other leaders, for their thoughtful efforts in the development of their proposal. Finally, thank you to the Committee for your consideration of the Department's comments. I am pleased to answer any of your questions.

**2017 - Assembly Bill 290 – Legislation
Public Hearing 415 Northwest**

To: Committee on Children and Families

From: Directors of Human Services Chippewa, Monroe, Pepin, and Taylor Counties

Date: May 31, 2017

Subject: Child Abuse & Neglect Partnership

In June of 2014 the counties of Chippewa, Monroe, Pepin and Clark (Clark did not continue - Taylor joined in 2016) began discussion on the potential for a multi-county model of providing child protection ACCESS and screening services. The conditions that prompted this are as follows:

- Child Protective Services (CPS) standards require a higher degree of expertise to provide the protection that children deserve.
- ACCESS and screening disparities exist across county systems.
- Medium (fewer than 65,000) and smaller counties (Pepin 7,425) have social workers assigned to multiple roles within a Human Service Department. This legislation will allow less populous counties to form partnerships and create the depth of expertise that medium (greater than 65,000) to large counties enjoy because social workers have a focus rather than being forced to juggle multiple responsibilities i.e. juvenile justice, CPS initial assessment, carrying a caseload, and on call for mental health crisis.
- Financial resources are not keeping pace with the real economics that it takes to adequately meet the operational needs of CPS. Therefore, counties must be prudent with the funding constraints at the federal, state, and county levels.

With that said, Chippewa, Monroe, Pepin, and Taylor counties request your support of 2017 AB – 290 giving counties the option

to contract with each other to perform CPS. Those we serve will benefit by:

- Consistent decision making at the point of ACCESS and screening regardless of geographical location.
- Increase child safety for counties with fewer than 65,000 citizens by freeing social workers to focus entirely on ACCESS and screening duties.
- A seamless process for ACCESS information gathering allowing details on children and families to be gathered immediately resulting in well thought out screening decision by a social workers or manager/supervisor.
- The alleged maltreater will receive an unbiased screening decision based on the information at the initial access point rather than an outcome being clouded by prior contacts on a family or historical bias.

Passage of this bill will allow Chippewa, Monroe, Pepin, and Taylor the opportunity to achieve the following outcomes:

- Supervision and staff depth resulting in ACCESS and screening expertise regardless of geographical location.
- The State of Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF) can study the feasibility of information gathering at the point of ACCESS leads to improving a screening decision.
- Meet the CPS standards established by DCF and Wisconsin State Statute 48.
- Improve information gathering leading toward the highest degree of screening reliability resulting in children being safe to grow and blossom.

Passage of 2017 AB – 290 will ensure that at each step of the CPS system will be operated by the most qualified, knowledgeable, and skilled social workers to increase child safety and provide a timely response by all counties in the state. On behalf of Chippewa, Monroe, Pepin, and Taylor counties we extend our thanks to this committee allowing us to provide reasons, the benefit, and the outcomes that will be achieved.

Larry Winter

Director Chippewa County DHS

Ron Hamilton

Director Monroe County DHS
County Department of DHS

Steinmetz

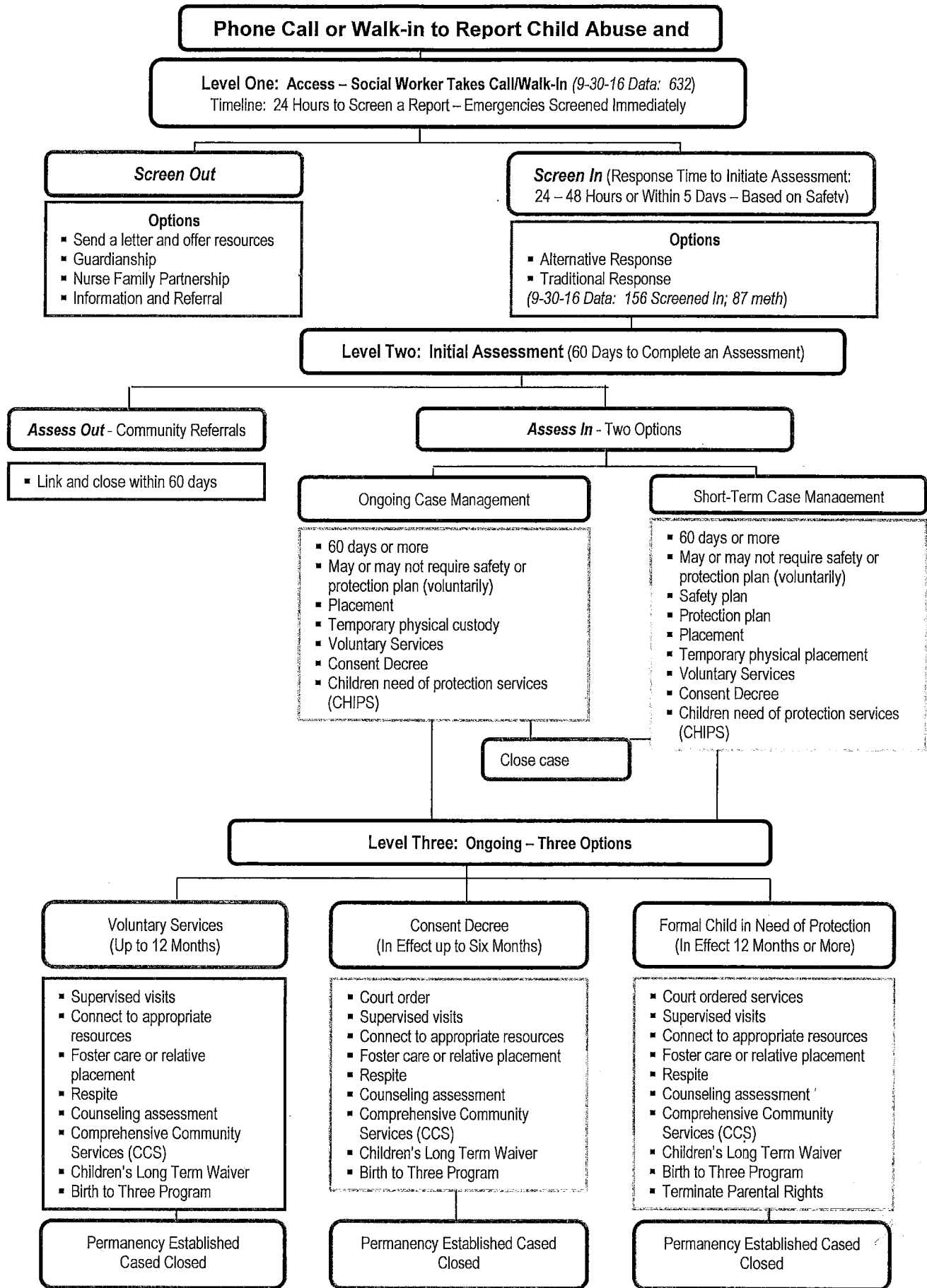
Paula Winter

Director Pepin County DHS

Tammy Tom

Director Taylor

Mapping – Child Protective Services



**Testimony for Public Hearing
Committee on Children and Families
May 31, 2017**

**Connie Oates
Pepin County Department Human Services
740 7th Avenue West
Durand, WI 54736**

Assembly Bill 290- The authority for counties to enter into contracts to perform child protective services functions.

Good Afternoon Committee Chairman and Members. My name is Connie Oates and I am a social worker at Pepin County Department of Human Services. I have worked in rural county child protective services for thirty-two years.

I am in support of AB 290, which will allow county departments to contract among each other to perform the critical duties of protecting children and strengthening families. Small rural counties in Wisconsin often provide these services to their residents with very limited staff and resources. This can be as few as 1-2 social workers to perform the duties of receiving child maltreatment reports, investigating allegations, placing children in care and providing ongoing services. This becomes even more demanding when a rural county experiences staff reduction due to resignations, family leave, or transferring to other units within the agency. Counties are then relying on staff that may be less experienced in the complexity of child protective service functions, standards, and unique family needs.

An example of where this occurs in smaller counties, is around the Access function of receiving and screening reports of child maltreatment. This is one of the most critical areas of child protective services as it is the gate keeping function of who does or does not receive intervention or services. Smaller counties tend to rotate this function among various workers

and positions. This can lead to inconsistent information and decision-making, especially when the workers primary function is not child protection.

Yesterday as I prepared to come to Madison I needed to find available workers within the agency to fulfill my duties of receiving Access reports. Due to limited staff within the agency, today Access in Pepin County is being performed by several workers covering different portions of the day. Each of these workers do not perform child protective service duties, and are not experts in interviewing reporters about child maltreatment. AB 290 will allow the counties of Chippewa, Monroe, Pepin and Taylor to formulate an Access partnership to have dedicated, consistent, specifically trained staff to interview and gather critical information around child maltreatment. Over the past several years our counties have been developing this Access partnership to meet the requirements of Wisconsin statutes, DCF Standards, and best practice. It is our hope that this partnership will provide a successful example for other counties to also implement collaborative services to the children and families in Wisconsin, whether it be around Access, investigating maltreatment or providing ongoing services.

Thank you for your time, consideration and opportunity to speak with you today.

AB 290

Ron Hamilton, Director, Monroe County Department of Human Services, testifying in favor of AB 290.

As Director of one of the four counties identified with an interest and a plan to develop a multi-county Access and Screening partnership, the passage of this bill, creating statutory language change which will allow counties to work together for CPS Initial assessment is essential.

Although we may be bringing attention to this current issue, the passage of this bill could be beneficial to any county throughout the entire state. Often counties, especially smaller counties are short staffed in CPS and specifically in trained staff able to perform elements of the Initial Assessment. This change would also allow neighboring counties to assist in periods of high caseloads or staffing shortages. This cannot occur with the current state statutes. This would also allow for more long-term partnership arrangements such as the CAN REPORT Partnership (Chippewa, Monroe, Pepin and Taylor).

Potential benefits to developing partnerships:

- Increased safety to our children as we can develop expertise. Medium and small counties are unable to support the Screening, Access and Initial Assessment to provide the highest quality service to our families. Social Work Supervisors are often responsible for numerous programs within any given county, therefore limiting the ability to develop in depth expertise. I personally supervised the Children and Families programs in Monroe County for over 12 years before I became Director. I know how incredibly difficult it is to manage multiple programs at the same time. I always hoped that whatever screening decision I made was the right one.
- Currently there is significant disparity in screening decisions by counties throughout the state. This will allow us to at least gain consistency throughout our partnership and aligned with state expectations. Expertise in Access workers and Screening Social Work staff will lead to more consistency.
- Creating a better product, while remaining fiscally neutral. Our goal is to increase safety to children, develop expertise in Access and Screening and become more consistent and unbiased yet remain cost neutral.

I would implore you to support AB 290 as it will create opportunities for better CPS practice, enhanced safety, expertise and consistency. The state has opened the doors for many regional partnerships in a wide range of service areas. The proposed statutory language change in this bill reduces barriers and allows for greater possibilities.

Thank you for your consideration.



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MEMORANDUM

TO: Honorable Members of the Assembly Committee on Children and Families

FROM: Kyle Christianson, Director of Government Affairs

DATE: May 31, 2017

SUBJECT: Support for Assembly Bill 290

The Wisconsin Counties Association (WCA) supports Assembly Bill 290, which allows counties to work cooperatively on certain child protective services functions.

County governments work hard daily to provide a high level of services to the citizens of this state, while at the same time trying to do so in an efficient manner. However, state statutes often get in the way making it difficult, if not impossible, for counties to achieve efficiencies through innovative collaborations. Assembly Bill 290 will make it possible for four counties – Chippewa, Monroe, Taylor, and Pepin – to implement a multi-county access and screening partnership, improving their implementation of, and outcomes in, the child welfare system.

The proposed Child Abuse and Neglect (CAN) Partnership is an excellent example of counties working together to find efficiencies and provide services more effectively. However, it is yet another example of how state statutes stifle the ability of counties to work together. This is the third bill counties have had to introduce in the last few legislative sessions to allow counties to provide services in a cooperative manner. The first bill allowed two counties, Jackson and Clark, to share a highway commissioner. The second bill eliminated statutory impediments, clearing the way for the counties of Ozaukee and Washington to share a public health department.

WCA has been working with members of the administration and Legislature on the creation of a “joint agency statute” to make it easier for counties to work together by eliminating the statutory impediments to joint service delivery. Until the “joint agency statute” is enacted, counties will need to continue to come to the Legislature, as have the counties in the CAN Partnership, to seek statutory permission to provide services in a more efficient and effective manner. Counties, and the citizens they serve, however,

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should not have to wait for the implementation of separate legislation each and every time counties seek to work together to implement efficiencies in service delivery.

WCA supports the innovation proposed by the CAN Partnership and respectfully requests your support for Assembly Bill 290.

Thank you for considering our comments.