



PATRICK SNYDER

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 85th ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Testimony in Support of AB 787: Grants to Support Foster Parents and Foster Children

Thank you Chairman Kitchens and fellow members of the Assembly Committee on Children and Families for holding a public hearing on Assembly Bill 787. It has been an honor working with my colleague, Representative Lisa Subeck, on a proposal that will provide additional supports for foster parents and the children in their care.

Over the past few months, the bipartisan Speaker's Task Force on Foster Care has traveled the state to gain feedback from different communities on ways we can improve our foster care system. Time and time again, foster parents from all areas, rural and urban, testified before the committee and shared their insight on areas in which improvements could be made.

A common theme we heard from caregivers is the need for additional supports for foster parents. Contrary to what most may assume, foster parents stressed that the answer to this problem is not to simply increase the foster care payment. Many feared additional increases would begin to incentivize future foster parents for the wrong reasons. What foster parents were looking for was additional resources to help them fulfill the task we as a state are asking them to do- temporarily open their hearts and their homes for these children in one of the most difficult times of their lives.

Similar to the prevention grant funding proposed by the committee, this program gives counties, non-profit organizations, and tribes the ability to get creative with the purpose of supporting foster parents and providing normalcy for the children in their care. Qualifying expenses include efforts to retain foster parents, enhance foster parent education opportunities, and reimburse foster care related expenses such as a new backpack, a pair of gym shoes, or a new set of sheets.

The Department of Children and Families will administer the grant program and be responsible for conducting an evaluation of the effectiveness in achieving its stated goals. DCF will submit a report to the appropriate standing committees no later than June 30, 2021.

Thank you for your time and consideration on Assembly Bill 787 and the number of other foster care proposals before you. At this time, I would be happy to take any questions.



Luther S. Olsen

State Senator

14th District

TO: Assembly Committee on Children and Families
FROM: Senator Olsen
DATE: January 17th, 2018
SUBJECT: Testimony for Assembly Bill 787

Thank you Chairman Kitchens and members of the Assembly Committee on Children and Families for holding a hearing and allowing me to testify in support of Assembly Bill 787 (AB 787). This legislation is part of the Foster Forward legislative package that was developed by the Speaker's Task Force on Foster Care.

When foster families try to provide a normal lifestyle for foster children often times these families stumble across unexpected expenses like field trip and extra-curricular costs. Through the basic foster care payment that they receive, families often find it hard to fund these unexpected expenses. With the number of children in out-of-home care on the rise, Wisconsin continues to struggle to retain foster families, and situations like this do not help Wisconsin to gain families.

To support foster families in providing a normal lifestyle for foster children, AB 787 has been introduced. This legislation provides \$400,000 in grants through the Department of Children and Families (DCF). The grants would be for counties, tribes, and nonprofits to support these foster families with unexpected expenses to continue to provide a normal life for foster children.

Again, thank you for holding a hearing today on this legislation. I ask for your support on AB 787 and would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

Lisa Subeck

STATE REPRESENTATIVE

To: Assembly Committee on Children and Families
From: Representative Lisa Subeck
Date: January 16, 2018
Subject: Testimony in support of Assembly Bill 787, relating to funding for grants to support foster parents and foster children and making an appropriation.

Chairman Kitchens and members of the Assembly Committee on Children and Families:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Assembly Bill 787, which would provide \$400,000 in funding to the Department of Children and Families to administer grants with the goal of supporting foster families.

Throughout the public hearings held by the Speaker's Task Force on Foster Care, we heard from foster families, county administrators, and advocates about the dwindling number of foster homes available to the rising number of children in out-of-home care. One of the important points these individuals and groups stressed was that they did not believe the solution to this problem was to simply increase the foster care rate; many believed that this would attract the wrong individuals who were only in the program for financial gain. That said, it was also clear that more assistance is needed for current and future foster families to best meet the unique needs of each foster child and provide foster children with a sense of normalcy.

While the foster care payment is intended to cover the basic costs of care for a child, foster children, like all children, incur unexpected expenses that are not covered by the basic foster care payment. These expenses can include participation in extra-curricular activities like sports fees or an instrument and band uniforms, field trip costs, or other expenses that a foster family may not be able to cover without assistance.

AB 787 would create a grant program that counties, non-profits and tribes can apply for to fund initiatives that support foster families as they strive to provide normalcy for Wisconsin's foster population. In addition to covering expenses related to providing normalcy for foster children, grant funds under this bill could be used to assist efforts in retaining existing foster families or expanding education for foster families.

The program will be administered by the Department of Children and Families (DCF). Additionally, DCF will submit a report to the appropriate standing committees on the effectiveness of the grant program by June 30, 2021.

With the number of foster families needed in Wisconsin continuing to climb, these funds will help ensure that foster families are prepared, trained and have the necessary resources for their critical work.

Thank you again for your time and your consideration of Assembly Bill 787. I would be happy to answer any questions.

78TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

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Governor Scott Walker
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Secretary's Office

Date: January 17, 2018
To: Members of the Assembly Committee on Children and Families
From: Lonna Morouney, Legislative Liaison
Fredri Bove, Administrator, Division of Safety and Permanence
Jonelle Brom, Chief, Out-of-Home Care Section
Re: 2017 Assembly Bill 787

Chairman Kitchens and Members of the Assembly Committee on Children and Families:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Assembly Bill 787, one of the recommended legislative proposals from the Speaker's Task Force on Foster Care. My name is Lonna Morouney and I am the Legislative Liaison for the Department of Children and Families. I am accompanied by Fredri Bove, Administrator for the Division of Safety and Permanence and Jonelle Brom, Section Chief for the Out-of-Home Care Section.

Assembly Bill 787 creates a new grant program funded with \$400,000 GPR to be administered by DCF for the purpose of supporting foster parents and providing normalcy for children placed in out-of-home care. The grants will be available to counties, nonprofit organizations and tribes and may be used for incentives for foster parent retention, enhancing foster parent education and reimbursing foster parents for expenses. The bill requires DCF to conduct an evaluation of the grant program and submit a report to the legislative standing committees by June 30, 2021.

DCF recognizes and expresses deep appreciation for foster parents who open up their homes and their hearts to provide a safe and nurturing home for children in need. As of the end of 2017, on a daily basis over 7700 children in Wisconsin are in out-of-home care, most of whom are living with foster families. We also recognize the importance of retaining and supporting foster parents so they can continue to fulfill their critical role in the child welfare system. This new grant program will support efforts by the Department, counties, and licensing agencies to continuously improve support for foster parents in ways that best meet their needs and promote positive outcomes for the children in their care.

The Department sincerely thanks the authors of the bill, and the entire Task Force for their commitment to improving the foster care system in Wisconsin.

We are pleased to answer any questions you may have.