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Wisconsin State Senator
Co-Chair, Joint Committee on Finance

Testimony before the Senate Committee on Local Government, Small Business,
Tourism, and Workforce Development

Tuesday, June 18, 2019

Senate Bill 122

Thank you Chair Jacque and committee members for taking the time to hear Senate Bill 122. The bill before you today is part of the homelessness package. This important package of bills derive from the recommendations of the Interagency Council on Homelessness's preliminary report, *A Hand and a Home: Foundations for Success*.

In 2017, a total of 21,906 people experiencing homelessness received services and shelter in Wisconsin. The Interagency Council on Homelessness also reported that 17,905 people stayed in emergency shelters in 2017.

Wisconsin currently funds a State Shelter Subsidy Grant (SSSG) program. This program provides funds for a shelter's operating budget, the expansion of existing shelter facilities, and renovation of existing buildings into a shelter. Currently, this program is funded at \$1,000,000 per year.

Senate Bill 122 increases the funds to this important program by \$500,000 per year. Notably, this increase in funds is the only true increase to the program over the past 25 years. Additionally, the bill creates performance metrics for the new money in order to incentivize shelters to responsibly transition individuals into permanent housing.

Emergency shelters are critical to our state's homeless population. As a true safety net, these shelters provide a meal and safe space to sleep, particularly during Wisconsin's frigid winter months. Senate Bill 122 is critical to continuing to invest in our emergency shelters, enable them to renovate and expand, while still creating accountability and transparency in how these state dollars are spent.

I'd like to thank Representative Steineke, the Interagency Council on Homelessness, and Wisconsin's many advocates for the homeless for their work on this initiative. I hope to count on your support for Senate Bill 122.



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Testimony on Senate Bill 122

Grants to homeless shelters and modifying administrative rules promulgated by the DOA

Chairman Jacque and members,

I'd like to thank you for hearing this bill and discussing the issue of homelessness in Wisconsin and the crucial steps we've put forward to move towards the end goal of everyone in Wisconsin having a place to call home.

In April of 2017, I joined Representatives Pronschinske, Rodriguez, and Snyder in releasing a series of bills to address homelessness in a statewide, comprehensive way. It was the first major attention the issue had received at the state level in decades.

One of the bills introduced created a new statutory body, the Interagency Council on Homelessness. The Council contained secretaries or directors of eight state agencies, the four continuum of care organizations in Wisconsin, and a designee of the governor. The creation of the council was seen by advocates and stakeholders as a turning point for combatting homelessness in Wisconsin, as it would allow for coordination of the state's resources and goals.

After the Assembly passed the first set of bills, we set out to learn more about the issue of homelessness around the state. We held bipartisan tours of homeless facilities, warming shelters, food pantries, and more throughout the summer of 2017. These experiences reinforced what we as legislators already knew to be true: continuing the conversation beyond our initial bills was going to be crucial in addressing this state-wide issue.

In the fall of 2017, the bill creating the Interagency Council on Homelessness was signed into law. Exactly one year later, the council released its 2019-2022 action plan, "A Hand and a Home: Foundations for Success," which was touted as the state's "most coordinated, deepest attempt to prevent and curtail homelessness." From the plan, I worked with my Republican colleagues in the Assembly and Senate to identify eight distinct legislative priorities, including new programming and \$3.75 million in new spending.

Among those eight bills is SB 122, which adds \$500,000 annually to the State Shelter Subsidy Grant program, a 50% increase to the fund and its first major increase since its creation in 1994.

Shelters are a crucial piece of the homeless response system. Most recent data from 2017 shows that of the 21,906 individuals around the state that year that received homelessness services, 17,905 of them stayed in shelters. Even further, more than 10,000 individuals utilized shelters outside of Milwaukee, Dane and Racine counties.

The State Shelter Subsidy Grant program is the sole funding source the state uses to support shelters, making SB 122 a critical component to combatting homelessness in Wisconsin.

As we look to continue our state's efforts to provide safe, reliable housing for every man, woman and child, I believe this legislation helps move us closer towards that goal.

Thank you for your consideration of SB 122 and hearing my comments today.

Testimony



Date: June 18, 2019

From: Adrienne Roach, Policy and Research Program Director

Re: SB 122

Chairperson Jacque and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Senate Bill 122 (SB 122). We also support SB 123, but will only provide testimony on SB 122. End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin (End Abuse) is the statewide organization that represents domestic violence survivors and their children, as well as local domestic violence victim shelters and service providers. As End Abuse's Policy and Research Program Director, I focus on issues related to housing, which gives me a unique perspective on this bill. I want to recognize the work that was done by the Interagency Council on Homelessness last year. The Interagency Council's work provides a framework to address homelessness in Wisconsin and this bill represents a critical part of that work. Increasing the amount of funding provided for shelter facilities is critical for those in crisis.

Homelessness is an issue that affects many different populations, including victims of domestic abuse and their children. According to Safe Housing Partnerships, the national Domestic Violence and Housing Technical Assistance Consortium, 80% of homeless women and children have previously experienced domestic violence, and 57% of homeless women report that domestic violence is the immediate cause of their homelessness. This is a population that cannot be ignored or prohibited from accessing vital services. Lack of shelter is often the main factor that stands in the way of a victim's safety.

According to the Department of Children and Families, from October 2017 through September 2018, domestic violence victims made 24,373 requests for emergency shelter that went unfulfilled, largely due to a lack of available shelter beds. This was an increase of over 45% from the previous year. And, this number does not include the victim's children, which we know account for about 45-50% of individuals currently in shelter. For victims of domestic violence who are facing potentially life-threatening situations, easy access to an emergency shelter is vital to their safety and well-being. That's why we are encouraged to see that this bill increases shelter funding by \$500,000 per year. This could go a long way toward providing more access to shelter for survivors throughout the state. In the Assembly, Rep. Steineke offered an amendment to eliminate an outdated prohibition on DV shelters applying for this funding source. Senator Darling has offered the same amendment, Amendment 1. We strongly support this bill with Amendment 1, to allow domestic abuse shelters access to this important resource.

End Abuse works collaboratively with the Balance of State Continuum of Care (BOSCOC) to address homelessness holistically. Additionally, domestic abuse service providers throughout the state work collaboratively with local housing programs and on local homelessness

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