



NANCY VANDERMEER

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 70TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

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

FROM: State Representative Nancy VanderMeer

DATE: October 28, 2015

SUBJECT: Testimony in Support of AB 351

Thank you Chairwoman Rodriguez and members of the Assembly Committee on Children and Families for holding a hearing on Assembly Bill 351 today. As the author of this legislation, along with Senator Lassa, I am pleased to testify before you and to take any questions that committee members may have.

Wisconsin's Children First Program, administered by the Department of Children & Families, assists non-custodial parents who are unemployed or underemployed obtain jobs. Non-custodial parents may be court-ordered to participate in the Children First Program if they are unable to meet their child support obligations.

Under current law, a non-custodial parent can only be referred to a Children First Program in the county in which they reside if that county agrees to enroll the parent in the program. However, not all Wisconsin counties have a Children First Program. This creates a problem because non-custodial parents currently cannot be court ordered to participate in a Children First Program outside of the county in which they reside.

At the request of our county child support agencies, this legislation will modify current statutes so that judges may order non-custodial parents living in a county without a Children First Program to attend the program in a neighboring county if the judge determines it is within reasonable driving distance.

In closing, I ask that you join Senator Lassa and myself in support of this legislation. Thank you for the opportunity to testify here today, I would be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.



JULIE LASSA

STATE SENATOR

Assembly Committee on Children and Families
Wednesday, October 28, 2015

Chairwoman Rodriguez and members of the Assembly Children and Families Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to you today in support of Assembly Bill 351, relating to the residence of noncustodial parents ordered to register for a work experience and job training program.

This bill was drafted at the request of child support directors in Monroe and Ashland counties, as well as the Department of Children and Families, to resolve a problem that judges often face when considering whether to send a non-custodial parent to a Children First Program.

Wisconsin's Children First Program, administered by the Department of Children and Families, assists non-custodial parents who are unemployed or underemployed obtain jobs. Non-custodial parents may be court-ordered to participate in the Children First Program if they are unable to meet their child support obligations and "graduate" from the program when they make timely child support payments for three consecutive months, or participate in the Children First Program for 16 weeks. Children First Programs may be administered by a county child support agency, a county human or social service agency or a W-2 agency.

Many times, the county where the support order is based does not have a Children's First Program. This creates a problem because it prohibits a judge from ordering a non-custodial parent to participate in the program with the goal of helping the parent to meet their child support obligations. Child support agencies are requesting that current statutes be modified so that judges may order non-custodial parents living in a county without a Children First Program to attend the program in a neighboring county if the judge determines it is within reasonable driving distance.

This legislation will give judges and county Children First Programs the ability to order a greater number of non-custodial parents to participate in a Children First Program outside of their home county if it is determined to be within reasonable driving distance. Assembly Bill 351 will help ensure that non-custodial parents get the assistance they need to obtain a job and meet their child support obligations.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of this legislation. Please feel free to contact me at any time should you have questions regarding this legislation.



Wisconsin Child Support Enforcement Association

Dear Representative Rodriguez and Members of the Assembly Committee on Children and Families,

The Wisconsin Child Support Enforcement Association (WCSEA) supports the passage of AB351, and is grateful for this Committee's consideration of this bill.

The Wisconsin Child Support program and Wisconsin's 71 Child Support Agencies frequently have cases with unemployed or underemployed non-custodial parents with child support orders. Although Wisconsin law allows the court to order a work search in such cases, many non-custodial parents need the extra assistance of, and benefit greatly from, the Children First program when trying to find gainful employment.

Unfortunately, as the law currently stands, if a non-custodial parent lives near, but not in, a county with a Children First program, they may not be ordered to attend that program. This legislation would correct that by allowing parents to be ordered into Children First programs irrespective of county residency if the program is available within a reasonable driving distance for that parent. Our Association believes this change will extend utilization of the Children First program, and that it will help parents satisfy their child support obligations.

Research has shown that children who receive regular child support see the non-custodial parents more and have more positive relationships, are less likely to be the subject of maltreatment or child protective services referrals, and have higher academic achievement and high school graduation rates. For these reasons, any opportunity to help a non-custodial parent find employment and support their children is important and merits support!

Thank you again for your consideration of AB351. Please feel free to contact us with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Janet Nelson', written over a faint horizontal line.

Janet Nelson
President - WCSEA
414-278-5269