



Amy Loudenbeck

REPRESENTING WISCONSIN'S 31ST ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

**Testimony before Assembly Committee on Children and Families
Assembly Bill 52
Rep. Amy Loudenbeck
March 27, 2019**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and committee members for the opportunity to testify in favor of Assembly Bill 52. This bill would allow a minor who is 17 years of age and is confirmed to be both unaccompanied (not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian) and homeless (living situation is not "fixed, regular, and adequate") to contract for admission to a shelter facility or transitional living program.

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (Title X, Part C of the No Child Left Behind Act) requires every school district and charter school to designate an appropriate staff person as the Local Educational Agency liaison. AB 53 requires that this designated liaison verify that the minor is an unaccompanied and homeless youth and is not under the supervision of another social services agency or court jurisdiction. In terms of numbers, approximately 2,283 homeless and unaccompanied youth were identified statewide in 2017. *Data by individual school district is available on the DPI website - The Homeless Student Enrollment by Public School District (current as of 2/28/2018).*

We pulled the information for the home district for each of the committee members, for those of you in smaller communities, we may have had to pick another community in your district, as not all districts have homeless and unaccompanied youth.

Rep. Snyder in DC Everest there are 39 youth.
Rep. Ramthun in Campbellsport there is one youth.
Rep. Kerkman in Kenosha there are 46 youth.
Rep. Ballweg in Markesan there is one youth.
Rep. Vorpapel in Sheboygan there are 11 youth.
Rep. Pronschinske in Black River Falls there are 11 youth.
Rep. Gundrum in West Bend there are 6 youth.
Rep. James in Eau Claire there are 35 youth.
Rep. Subeck in Madison there are 83 youth.
Rep. Billings in LaCrosse there are 30 youth.
Rep. Bowen in Milwaukee there are 741 youth.
Rep. Vining in Wauwatosa there are 2 youth.

These are youth that may be living alone or with family member or friend who is not a parent or guardian, in an unstable setting such as a vehicle or other substandard housing. The reasons that the youth become detached from their parents are numerous, but could include drug or alcohol addiction, domestic violence, mental illness, incarceration, death or extreme economic hardship. These kids are from homes that are broken and under current law they have no practical options to receive emergency shelter services without the consent of a parent or guardian. The verification by the McKinney-Vento liaison is a rigorous process that is already in place under current law, so there is no additional documentation required on the part of the school district. *A flowchart for making determination is available at <https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/homeless/pdf/Homeless%20Eligibility%20Flowchart%20Update%202017.pdf>*

Unaccompanied and homeless youth are vulnerable to human trafficking, exploitation, and abuse. Often disconnected from family and friends, these youth are particularly susceptible to traffickers who will lure them with the promise of food, warmth, and even false love. Providing these young people with an opportunity for safe shelter and other supports so they can complete their education and become self-supporting adults will reduce their risk for negative outcomes.

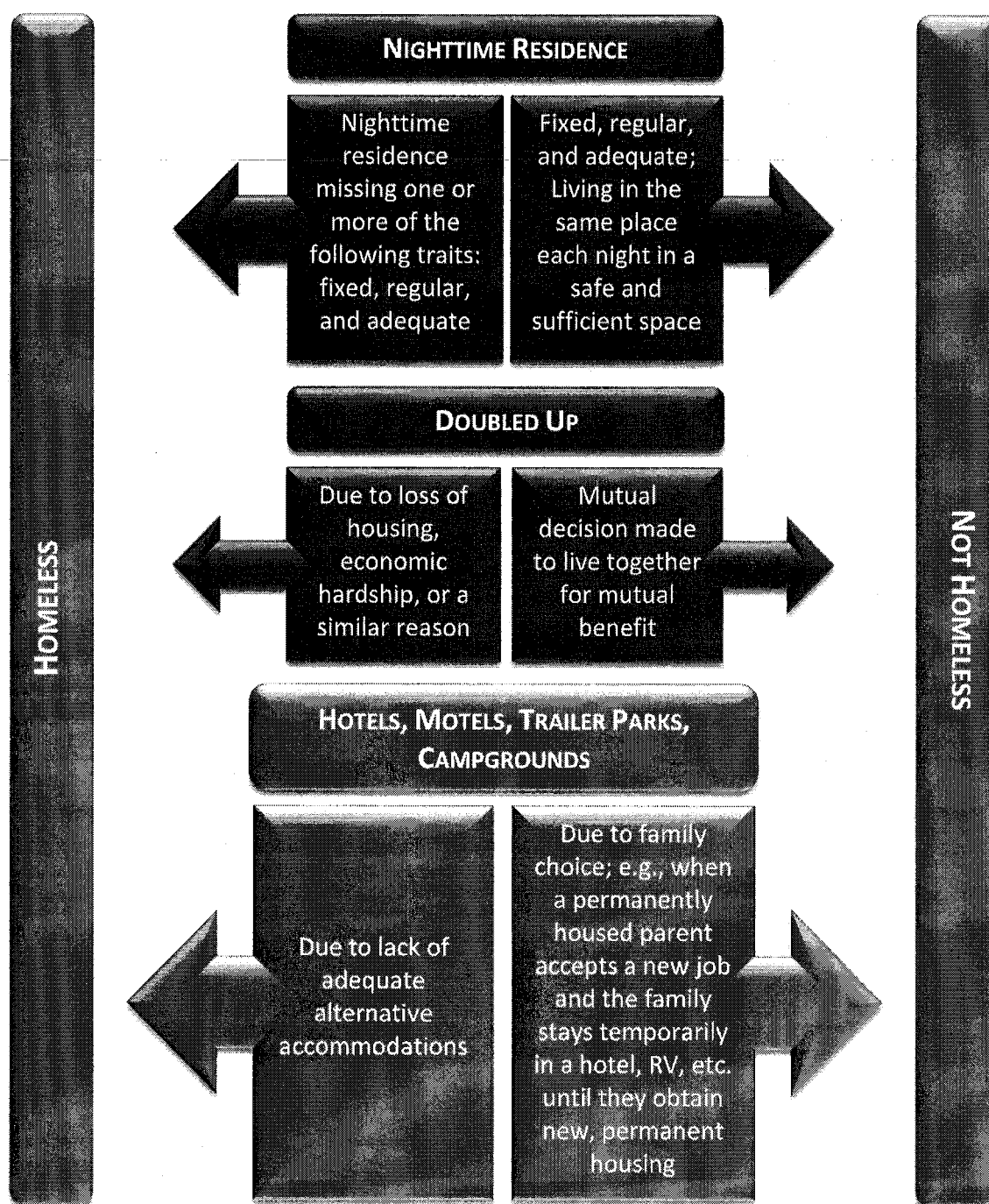
This bill provides a much-needed mechanism for homeless and unaccompanied 17 year old trying to finish high school to access safe and stable housing at a shelter facility or transitional living program.

Thank you for your time today, I would be happy to answer any questions at this time.

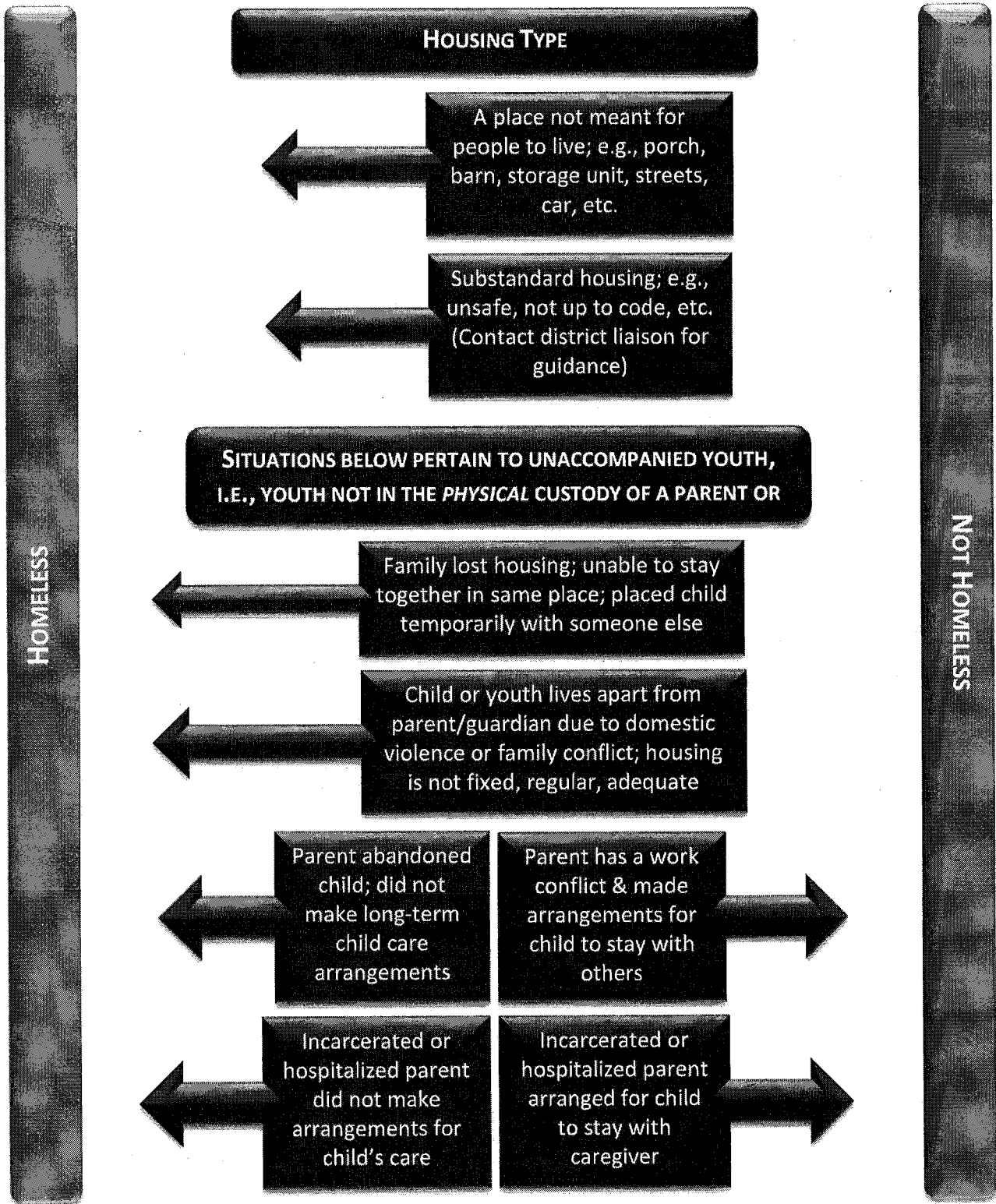
Who Is Homeless?

A Flowchart for Making Determinations for Education Services

This flowchart is meant to aid you in making decisions about a student's eligibility as homeless under the education subtitle of the McKinney-Vento Act (42 U.S.C. 11431 *et seq.*), but it may not capture every housing situation. For the complete definition of *homeless*, visit <https://nche.ed.gov/legis/mv-def.php>. For more information on making determinations, see the related issue brief from the National Center for Homeless Education: https://nche.ed.gov/downloads/briefs/det_elig.pdf.



*Note: Children and families who qualify for education services based on this definition may or may not qualify for housing and related assistance. Contact your local housing programs for more information.



*Note: Children and families who qualify for education services based on this definition may or may not qualify for housing and related assistance. Contact your local housing programs for more information.

Alberta Darling
Wisconsin State Senator
Co-Chair, Joint Committee on Finance

Testimony before the Assembly Committee on Children and Families

Assembly Bill 52

Wednesday, March 27, 2019

Thank you Chair Snyder and committee members for taking the time to hear Assembly Bill 52. The bill before you today allows our state's homeless and unaccompanied minors to consent for transitional housing.

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act requires every school district and charter to designate a staff person as an educational liaison for homeless and unaccompanied pupils. According to the Department of Public Instruction, there are approximately 2,283 unaccompanied youth in Wisconsin in 2017. As minors are unable to enter a contact, these youth are unable to consent to enter into a contract for transitional housing.

Assembly Bill 52 allows a minor who is 17 years old to contract for admission to a shelter facility or transitional living program. The minor must be confirmed to be unaccompanied, homeless, and not under the supervision of a social services agency.

This change to law is needed for Wisconsin's homeless and unaccompanied youth who are still trying to finish school but need a stable place to sleep. The bill removes a real barrier that exists for these kids to keep a roof over their head.

Additionally, we know that homeless and unaccompanied youth are targets for human traffickers. According to research done by the University of Pennsylvania, over two thirds of homeless females report being solicited for paid sex. In a report from the National Institute of Justice, nearly 75% of underage survivors of sex trafficking identified housing as a major area of need. This bill will help get kids off the street and away from the purview of potential traffickers.

It is incredibly unfortunate that so many Wisconsin kids do not have parents who are able to provide for them. We have to help these kids get the help they need, and this bill allows them to consent for their access to a safe living space. I'd like to thank Representative Loudeneck for her work on this issue. I'd also like to thank Alyssa for her work on this initiative and our bill last year surrounding minor mental health laws.

I hope to count on your support for this bill.



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Governor Tony Evers
Secretary Emilie Amundson

Secretary's Office

TO: Members of the Assembly Committee on Children and Families

FROM: Emily Coddington, Section Chief, Bureau of Youth Services
John Elliott, Deputy Administrator, Division of Safety and Permanence
Nadya Perez-Reyes, Legislative Advisor

DATE: March 27, 2019

SUBJECT: 2019 Assembly Bill 52

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

My name is Nadya Pérez-Reyes and I am the Legislative Advisor for the Department of Children and Families. I am accompanied by John Elliott, Deputy Administrator for the Division of Safety and Permanence and Emily Coddington, Section Chief with the Bureau of Youth Services for the Division of Safety and Permanence. Emily Coddington will be providing testimony for informational purposes about 2019 Assembly Bill 52.

DCF appreciates legislative interest in issues affecting vulnerable youth. Assembly Bill 52 underscores the importance of seeking additional solutions to the issue of youth homelessness in our state and the positive steps being made through legislation.

The DCF Bureau of Youth Services is charged with the responsibility of administering some of the state's funding for runaway and homeless youth programming and partnering with public and private agencies to identify ways to best serve some of our most vulnerable youth. DCF would like to present the Committee with some areas to consider in improving this legislation.

Improve access to safe shelter options. With more than 2,200 students identified as unaccompanied minors in the 2016-2017 school year¹ and only four formal youth shelters within the state, there is a gap in shelter services available to our youth. When a youth is unaccompanied, the gap is even more pronounced, as it is currently impossible to offer shelter services to this population because of the parental consent requirement.

¹ Retrieved from <https://dpi.wi.gov/homeless/data>

Assembly Bill 52 is an important first step in ensuring vulnerable unaccompanied homeless youth can access safe shelter alternatives when in need.

Provide developmentally-appropriate housing with services for youth. Recognizing young people as both competent and vulnerable is a difficult balance to strike. “Youth who experience homelessness are especially vulnerable to criminal victimization, sexual exploitation, labor and sex trafficking or traumatic stress,”² because of their circumstances, but also because of their developmental stage. As a result, the services provided to youth must not only address the immediate need for housing, but also respond to the youth in a developmentally appropriate way.

Increasing youth access to shelter facilities and transitional living programs (TLPs) temporarily rectifies the immediate housing need; however, if those shelter facilities or TLPs are unlicensed or are not equipped to serve individuals in this population or developmental stage, then it is likely that the youth will remain especially vulnerable to the risky situations just described. This bill takes a step to connect youth to service providers who can meet their needs.

Use existing and qualified service providers as shelter and TLP resources. DCF recommends using qualified service providers such as state and federally funded domestic violence shelters and runaway and homeless youth programs to connect youth with developmentally-appropriate and safe housing and services. DCF would welcome the opportunity to provide recommendations to bill language to include these providers within the definitions of shelter facilities and transitional living programs.

Expand professional support network to identify unaccompanied youth. DCF recommends broadening the scope of professionals who could confirm the youth’s status as an unaccompanied homeless youth, as not all youth who need access to shelter services are connected to the educational system.

Apply defense of infancy to include all youth. To protect youth from negative experiences and outcomes, DCF recommends the defense of infancy apply in all cases of youth seeking shelter services. The defense of infancy was established to protect “children [who] are not capable of properly evaluating the risks and benefits of a contract and are, therefore, susceptible to manipulation by adults and businesses with more

² Retrieved from <https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Ending-Youth-Homelessness-Promising-Program-Models.pdf>

knowledge and bargaining power.”³ We believe that providers equipped to serve this population understand the risks associated with doing so, and value the few protections currently afforded to youth.

DCF sincerely thanks the representatives who introduced the bill, the senators who cosponsored it, and the entire committee for their commitment to improving outcomes for unaccompanied homeless youth in Wisconsin. We have been in communication with legislative offices about our suggestions and are dedicated to continue working with legislators in support of Wisconsin’s youth.

We would be glad to answer any questions from the committee. Thank you.

³ Slade, V. (2011). Retrieved from <https://digitalcommons.law.seattleu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2008&context=sulr>

Testimony



Date: March 27, 2019

From: Adrienne Roach, Policy and Research Program Director

Re: AB 52

Chairperson Snyder and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Assembly Bill 52 (AB 52). End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin (End Abuse) is the statewide organization that represents domestic violence survivors and local domestic violence victim shelters and service providers. As End Abuse's Policy and Research Program Director, I focus on issues related to child welfare and housing, which gives me a unique perspective to analyze the broad impact of this legislation. While we believe this bill is a step in the right direction, it is undeniable that there is still more we need to do to accommodate the needs of youth in the most unfortunate and dangerous situations. As a vulnerable population, the safety and best interests of Wisconsin's youth should always be a priority. Currently, we remain neutral on this bill, but we want to applaud the authors for their work to address this important issue. However, the fact remains that there are still important unanswered questions that need to be addressed before we can support passage of this proposal.

First, consider a 17-year old, unaccompanied youth, who has experienced some form of violence, but perhaps has not engaged with CPS up to this point, or previous accounts of abuse or neglect were unsubstantiated. Mandatory reporting rules still apply to 17-year olds, and just because a report was unsubstantiated in the past, does not mean that a new report cannot be substantiated in the future. How will mandatory reporters differentiate 17-year old survivors from adult survivors in the same facility? Many shelters do not currently have policies in place to respond to such a situation. This will create a complicated situation for many shelter staff and advocates and may inadvertently compromise the youth victim's privacy and overall well-being. What can we do to account for these situations? Unfortunately, many potential amendments are likely to present unintended consequences and ultimately prove counterproductive.

In these cases, the real solution may lie in different services and support systems for youth in these situations, aside from already existing programs which were developed with the needs of homeless adults and families in mind.

Second, many shelters and housing programs have entry requirements. Some of those requirements are mandated by law or by funding sources. Other requirements are focused on serving a specific population, for example victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, or human trafficking. This bill includes a very broad definition of the term "shelter facility." For domestic violence programs, that could mean any 17-year old, regardless of their

situation, must be allowed access to shelter services. A clarifying amendment may be necessary to state that normal shelter entry requirements would still apply to 17-year old youth seeking shelter services to ensure that youth have access to services designed to address their unique situation. However, even with this proposed amendment, concerns about shelter and housing program entry requirements remain. For example, many 17-year old youth are in highly mobile situations, sleeping at friends' houses or "couch surfing", which for some shelter and housing programs means they are not technically homeless. Therefore, if programs are following their normal entry requirements, couch surfing youth would not qualify for services. Again, how can we account for these situations? We hope to continue consulting with the bill's authors and other partner organizations who will be affected by this legislation to craft amendments that will address these entry requirement issues.

Lastly, some of our partner organizations have identified an issue with the local educational agency liaison confirming that a minor is unaccompanied. These liaisons are not on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. They are often teachers, who many not be available during summer, or Spring Break. As I'm sure you all know, homelessness does not follow a set schedule. Youth may need confirmation of their situation to seek services during a time when the liaison is unavailable. The longer a 17-year old is homeless or on the street, the higher the chance their safety will be further compromised. We must reevaluate the process, and the professionals responsible for confirming that a youth is unaccompanied, to account for times when an educational liaison may not be available. Again, I would be happy to discuss this issue further, in consultation with the bill's authors and other key stakeholders.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our concerns today. Again, I want to applaud the authors for their work to address this important issue. Unfortunately, these issues are quite complex and when considering solutions, other challenges often arise. Thank you again for considering our views. Please feel free to contact me at 608.237.3446 or adrienner@endabusewi.org

The Sharing



Center

Western Kenosha County
Food Pantry & Resource Center

March 25, 2019

Storm Linjer
Clerk of Children and Families Committee
Room 307 North
State Capitol
PO Box 8953
Madison, WI 53708
Storm.Linjer@legis.wisconsin.gov

Dear Chairman Snyder and Committee Members,

I am writing today in reference to AB 52: A minor contracting for admission to a shelter facility or transitional living program.

I am director of a rural resource and crisis center in western Kenosha County. Homelessness is reaching a critical point in our area, and homeless teens are part of that crisis.

I have three areas of concern with AB 52 that need to be considered re serving homeless teens:

- (1) Why are 15 and 16 year olds not included? This bill only includes 17 year olds.
- (2) This bill requires "A local educational agency liaison" to confirm that the minor is an unaccompanied youth (as defined by 42 USC 11434a (6):
 - o If the student isn't in school or was home schooled, how would or could they confirm?
 - o Will all school liaisons be willing to advocate in this way? What if they won't?
 - o What if they are seeking shelter in the evening, at night, or on the weekend? How can the school consent after hours? How many people present for your shelter during the school day?
 - o What about school holidays and the summer?
- (3) Does there need to be specific language to include DV shelters and crisis centers?

Often teens seeking shelter have been taking care of themselves for many years. Autonomy to be able to receive shelter without the intervention of a school or agency removes a significant barrier to receiving crisis help.

Thank you for acknowledging these conflicts to teens accessing help in their greatest time of need.

Sincerely,

Sharon Pomaville
Executive Director
Sharing Center, Inc.
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March 25, 2019

Storm Linjer
Clerk of Children and Families Committee
State Capitol - Room 307 North
PO Box 8953
Madison, WI 53708

Dear Clerk:

I am writing today in reference to AB 52: A minor contracting for admission to a shelter facility or transitional living program.

I am the CoC Director for the Wisconsin Balance of State CoC. The Balance of State is a 501c3 non-profit organization covering all the counties in Wisconsin except Dane, Racine, and Milwaukee. The purpose of the organization is to (1) promote community-wide commitment to the goal of ending homelessness; (2) promote the quick rehousing of homeless individuals (including unaccompanied youth) and families, while minimizing the trauma and dislocation caused to homeless individual, families, and communities by homelessness; (3) promote access to and effective utilization of mainstream programs by homeless individuals and families; and (4) optimize self-sufficiency among individual and families experiencing homelessness.

I have three areas of concern with AB 52 that need to be considered:

(1) I am concerned as to why 16 year olds were not included in this bill. This is a population that has similar needs to 17 year olds. I believe that failing to include the age group is a missed opportunity.

(2) I am concerned that specific language was not included to ensure that domestic violence shelters and crisis centers are included in the "shelter" definition.

(3) This bill requires "A local educational agency liaison" to confirm that the minor is an unaccompanied youth (as defined by 42 USC 11434a(6)). This poses some significant challenges. Consider the following situations:

- What if the youth was not enrolled in a school, or was home schooled, or is homeless in a school district far from their original school district and months or years have passed? How would a school liaison confirm that the minor youth meets the McKinney Vento definition?
- School liaisons often wear multiple hats. Few serve only as a school liaisons. Especially in rural communities, collaboration with school liaisons is challenging and often non-existent. Who is going to require school liaisons to comply with this requirement? Who will hold them accountable? Who will ensure proper training and consistency? What happens if the school liaison will not assist?



- What happens if the youth is seeking shelter in the evening, at night, on the weekend, during school holidays, or during the summer? Most people do not present for shelter during the regular Monday-Friday 8-3:30 school day. What happens after hours? What does a shelter do with a youth presenting at 6:00pm? Or on Saturday afternoon? Or in July?

If the purpose of this bill is to assist youth, at least age 17, who have no place to go and are considered homeless, with access to emergency shelter then placing an additional barrier to that access defeats the purpose. Requiring another entity to confirm homeless status without a plan for oversight, authority, and accountability of that entity is concerning. Selecting an entity to be responsible for "confirming" homeless status that is not available at the time in which people are in crisis and most often seek services creates more barriers. And especially in rural areas, youth will likely slip through the cracks again.

I would ask the committee to consider an alternative option to the school liaison. Homeless service providers currently are required to document homelessness, where someone slept the night before service, engage in problem solving conversations prior to entry into shelter. Record keeping and documentation is a standard part of providing homeless services. Why not require the shelter that wishes to provide emergency shelter to a youth also be required to document their eligibility under McKinney Vento? Most often the information provided is a result of self-declaration or self-identified information from the youth. Using their expertise and training, shelter staff have the capacity to assess a youth and the criteria to ensure eligibility.

I would ask that the committee remove the requirement for "A local educational agency liaison" and instead provide an opportunity for emergency shelters to confirm through the current intake and assessment process a youth's eligibility for services based on the definition provided (42 USC 11424a(6)).

Thank you for working on this issue.

Sincerely,

Carrie Poser
CoC Director
WI Balance of State CoC
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715-598-3301
Carrie.poser@wibos.org
www.wiboscoc.org

Linjer, Storm

From: Meika Burnikel <mburnikel@familyservicesnew.org>
Sent: Monday, March 25, 2019 4:12 PM
To: Linjer, Storm
Subject: 2019 Assembly Bill 52

Hello
My name is Meika Burnikel and I have over 20+ years in working with our homeless youth. I am writing in regards to Assembly Bill 52. I am in total favor of this bill and believe that it has been well over due in order to ensure that we are serving our homeless youth effectively. In the bill it states two things however that I would like you to take under advisement and think about changing

1. The age. In the bill it states 17 years old and it would be far better served to begin this at 16. There are many youth who are in need of services at the age of 16
2. It states they may contract for admission to a **SHELTER FACILITY or TRANSITIONAL LIVING PROGRAM.** I am concerned that by narrowing this that we are leaving out Rapid Rehousing programs, as well as, any other type of housing program that may be an option for youth. I would advise that the wording state any shelter facility or any housing program such as TH or RR.

Thank you for listening to my opinions in strengthening this bill to ensure that proper homeless youth services are available in Wisconsin. If you should have any questions please contact me at 920-680-4908

Meika Burnikel, CSW

Program Director | Housing, WIOA, Families First, Coming Home, Post Adoption | Family Services of Northeast Wisconsin



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March 27, 2019

To: Assembly Committee on Children and Families

Re: Support for AB 52 and AB 41

The League of Women Voters of Wisconsin supports AB 52 which allows a minor who is 17 years old, unaccompanied and homeless, to contract for admission to a shelter facility or transitional living program. We also support AB 41 which states that no person under age 18 can be charged with prostitution. These are sensible bills that protect children.

AB 52 protects minors who are living outside of a family structure, due to a family situation that is broken, dysfunctional, and/or may have alcohol or other drug issues. The minor might be living alone or with other family members or friends, often in substandard or unstable conditions. In such circumstances, these juveniles can be exposed to abuse, sex trafficking and other dangers. The numbers of homeless minors listed by the Department of Public Instruction are very significant.

AB 52 efficiently establishes an additional option for unaccompanied, homeless minors to access safe shelter. It applies to the "unaccompanied, homeless" designation which must be confirmed by an education liaison, a position required in schools under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Act. The bill grants permission for these minors to enter safe shelters without the consent of parents. This opportunity for shelter stabilizes the lives of homeless juveniles and enhances the ability of a young person to finish school.

AB 41 states that no person under 18 can be charged with prostitution. We support this proposal based on the League's belief that "the goal of the justice system should be to... protect the child whose development and welfare are in jeopardy." Also, this legislation is consistent with our belief that offenders under the age of 18 should be processed in juvenile court.

We ask your support for AB 52 and AB 41, which provide needed protection for eligible young people whose welfare and development are in jeopardy.



740 N. Randall Avenue
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(608) 314-5501
www.project1649.org

March 27, 2019

To Chairperson Representative Patrick Snyder and Members of the Committee on Children and Families:

On behalf of Project 16:49, a non-profit organization serving unaccompanied homeless youth in Rock County, and as the President of the Board of Wisconsin Association for Homeless and Runaway Services, a coalition of community-based non-profit youth-serving agencies, I am writing to express both of our organizations' support of Assembly Bill 52, and to thank you for your efforts to address the needs of our young people.

Our unaccompanied homeless youth are hurting – physically, mentally, emotionally. The causes of many of their wounds are out of our control, which is why we must be diligent in doing all we can, when and where we can, to prevent their continued harm and victimization.

More than 300 unaccompanied youth are identified each year in Rock County. These are youth who cannot live or live safely with a parent or legal guardian. Our organization partners with local schools to provide these youth with assistance with basic needs, referrals and access to services. We also offer personalized case management and support, and operate two transitional living homes for youth. Project 16:49's goal is to ensure these youth's basic needs are met and that they have access to the services and support they need to complete their high school education, increase their self-sufficiency and/or transition to independent living.

A question I am often asked is 'how do kids become unaccompanied homeless youth?'. The most common contributing factors we see are parental/guardian substance abuse and mental health issues, and severe family conflict resulting in unsafe living environments. Seventy-five percent of the youth we work with have been physically and/or sexually abused. Other factors are: youth's sexual orientation or gender identity, economics, extreme neglect, abandonment, aging out of Foster Care, and parental incarceration.

These same factors create the vulnerabilities that put youth at higher risk for ending up in abusive relationships or being targeted for human trafficking.

Empowering Rock County's unaccompanied homeless youth to take action to achieve their goals.

Our unaccompanied youth are a particularly vulnerable population, and there is always someone waiting to take advantage of their desperation. Without a parent or guardian willing or able to act on their behalf, those under 18 have little or no access to most community services and few means to support their survival. They become easy targets for having their food share taken, illegal labor and sexual exploitation.

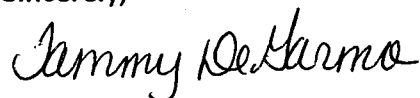
Nikohl's story is just one example of what too many of our youth experience...

At 17, Nikohl spent most of her nights couch surfing. When she was unable to find a friend to stay with, she would sleep in convenience store bathrooms until she was asked to leave – or around the corner of the handicap access ramp at the Hedberg Public Library in Janesville. She had few means of supporting herself, at times resorting to survival crime – shoplifting food on weekends when she didn't have access to school. She sat in jail because she wasn't able to pay a fine for retail theft, and the offense remains on her adult record. She has been a victim of identity theft. Numerous times she was physically assaulted on the street. She also was preyed on and victimized by those offering to 'help' in exchange for sexual acts.

I believe we all want our kids to be safe. When their families let them down, it is our responsibility as a community to do what we can to protect them. Allowing our 17-year-old youth to access shelter and transitional living programs is a great step in the right direction. In addition to safety, shelters and transitional living programs can provide youth with valuable opportunities to develop key independent living skills, build a support network, and address and begin healing from the trauma they have experienced.

Thank you for the opportunity to share the needs of our unaccompanied teens. We appreciate your consideration of Assembly Bill 52. If I can provide additional information related to our program or the population we serve, please let me know. I am happy to assist in any way I can with identifying solutions and removing barriers for these youth.

Sincerely,



Tammy DeGarmo
Executive Director, Project 16:49



Patricia Balke
Executive Director, WAHRS

Linjer, Storm

From: Rep.Snyder
Sent: Wednesday, March 27, 2019 8:51 AM
To: Linjer, Storm
Subject: FW: Committee on Children ad Families Public Hearing

From: Tim Baack <tbaack@pathfindersmke.org>
Sent: Tuesday, March 26, 2019 8:48 PM
To: Rep.Snyder <Rep.Snyder@legis.wisconsin.gov>
Cc: Renee Kirnberger <rkirnberger@pathfindersmke.org>
Subject: Committee on Children ad Families Public Hearing

Dear Representative Snyder - Committee Chair,

I regret that I am unable to attend the Committee's public hearing tomorrow but want to communicate to you and your Committee colleagues our organization's position on two important bills under consideration.

Regarding AB 52, Pathfinders fully supports the bill's intent to increase and improve access to emergency shelter and transitional living program services to minors 17 years of age who are considered unaccompanied youth under the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act. These youth who are in crisis as a result of their homelessness and housing instability will benefit greatly from the removal of existing barriers to these critical housing resources which can address immediate safety needs and work towards family stability and often successful reunification.

As it relates to AB 41, Pathfinders again supports the intent of this legislation which if enacted will reduce the likelihood of sexually exploited and trafficked youth being further victimized and marginalized when charged with the crime of prostitution, which is currently allowed under Wisconsin's existing laws. We are unfortunately one of only a few states across our country that still charge, prosecute, and fine youth being exploited and trafficking, treating them as criminals and not the victims of crime they truly are. Providing these youth with "safe harbor" helps protect and defend them from traffickers and improves the likelihood that resources like our New Paths program can provide them the support, resources, and advocacy necessary for ending their continued exploitation. Charging and convicting them of a crime is contrary to current laws that recognize youth involved in sex work are by definition being sex trafficked and exploited, and the criminal record that results makes any effort to secure safe housing, employment, and education all the more difficult. While we support the intent of AB 41, recent efforts by the Glendale police department are an important reminder of both the stigma that comes with identifying trafficked youth as "prostitutes" or "escorts" as well as the reality that the bill's limited focus on prohibiting charges of prostitution do not address the related charges often given to youth that would remain legal but are still as damaging and counterproductive. The Glendale police department "sting" that occurred over the last couple of weeks resulting in 17 year olds being charged with "escorting without a license" and being fined \$1,000. We urge the Committee to consider including in AB 41 the prohibiting of any charges and convictions that serve to further stigmatize youth who are the victims of sex trafficking and exploitation as defined by current law. Doing so will dramatically increase the likelihood of these youth being able to successfully exit these harmful situations and receive the care and support they need.

As Committee Chair, I thank you for your consideration of these important bills and our support and input as noted above. We are happy to provide additional assistance and feedback if you or your fellow Committee Members would like.

Make it a *""
,,.,.,,*""),,.,.,,*""
(,.,.,(,.,.,* a great day! *

Tim Baack MS, LPC
President & CEO

tbaack@pathfindersmke.org

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