



Senate Bill 253: Grants for Suicide Prevention Programming
Senate Committee on Human Services, Children and Families
Testimony of Senator Joan Ballweg
June 2, 2021

Good morning, members of the committee, and thank you for holding a hearing on SB 253.

Suicide rates are continuing an alarming trend. In Wisconsin, the rate has increased by 28% from 2000-2019, and for every one of those years, the rate at which Wisconsin residents died by suicide has stayed higher than or equal to the national rate.¹ Preliminary data gives reason to be concerned that the suicide rate for 2020 will have increased due to COVID, too. The CDC survey in June of 2020 designed to capture the mental health challenges relating to COVID-19 indicated 40.9 percent of U.S. adults were struggling with some type of mental health or substance abuse, representing significantly higher rates than those reported in 2019.²

It's important to realize it is not just the impact of deaths by suicide that affect our communities. Unfortunately, too many quietly struggle with suicidal ideation and engage in self-harm or even attempt suicide. Of particular concern are our youth, where one in six Wisconsin public high school students reported suicidal ideation.³ However, many people who are struggling do not have access to resources. In rural counties of Wisconsin, suicide rates are higher than in urban counties⁴, and yet rural areas often have less access to mental health services. We must provide resources to meet people where they are, which is what this bill accomplishes.

In 2019, I chaired the Speaker's Task Force on Suicide Prevention that produced nine different proposals based on feedback we received from the six public hearings held across the state. This proposal provides \$250,000 each year for the Department of Health Services to award grants up to \$25,000 to organizations or coalitions for suicide prevention programming if the recipient matches at least 20 percent of the grant. The goal is to increase the number of local mental health coalitions and to support current efforts of volunteers that are directly engaged in their communities through peer support, education initiatives, community workshops, and navigation of services available to individuals.

This is modeled after the success of the Monroe County Mental Health Coalition, which is a partnership of local government, education, health, and law enforcement entities. In the 14th Senate District which I represent, the Adams County Human Services Department and Sheriff's Department team up to do this work. But, their efforts are funded by donations and brat frys. We should do more to support these activities in every county across the state.

We know that suicide is a complex and growing problem in our state, but we also know that we can make strategic and targeted investments to support communities and those who are considering suicide. Thank you for your consideration, and I am happy to answer any questions.

¹ Data from the Suicide in Wisconsin Report (2020): <https://www.preventsuicidewi.org/statistics-and-reports>

² Mental Health, Substance Use, and Suicidal Ideation During the COVID-19 Pandemic — United States, June 24–30, 2020: <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6932a1.htm>

³ Wisconsin Data and the Wisconsin Suicide Prevention Plan (September 2020): <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/p02657.pdf>

⁴ Data from the Suicide in Wisconsin Report (2020): <https://www.preventsuicidewi.org/statistics-and-reports>



NANCY VANDERMEER

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 70TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

TO: Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Human Services, Children and Families

FROM: State Representative Nancy VanderMeer

DATE: June 2, 2021

SUBJECT: Testimony in support of Senate Bill 253 - relating to grants for suicide prevention programming

Thank you Chairman Jacque for holding a hearing on Senate Bill 253 today. This bill would award grants to local mental health organizations for the purpose of suicide prevention. Using the grant money, mental health coalitions and organizations will be able to train teachers, first responders and families in a variety of ways, including on how to assist individuals in crisis and refer them to find additional appropriate assistance. Additionally, the grant money could help organizations implement suicide prevention programs, have sufficient staffing and resources for mental health programming and education, and more.

This legislation was first introduced in 2019 as part of a broader package of bills recommended by the Speaker's Task Force on Suicide Prevention. Last session, the bill was 2019 AB 530/SB 504, and it passed the Assembly 92-3, as amended. The bipartisan task force was created in March of 2019, and it was charged with evaluating the current resources for suicide prevention and identifying opportunities to target and assist at-risk individuals. The task force held six public hearings across the state.

As alluded to initially, this particular proposal seeks to grow the number of local mental health organizations and coalitions throughout Wisconsin. Local mental health organizations provide help and resources to those in our communities experiencing mental health issues and suicidal thoughts. They are staffed by mental health professionals and volunteers who direct people to services that are available to them, provide education to eliminate the stigma surrounding mental health, and teach community stakeholders such as police, teachers, and family members how to assist when a person is in crisis. Often, mental health organizations hold workshops, community meetings, or lessons in schools to raise awareness about mental health and what help is available. In addition, mental health coalitions offer peer support to people suffering from a mental health issue by offering an outlet for someone to talk with a trained and compassionate listener.

The idea for this bill came from testimony received by the task force modeled after the Monroe County Mental Health Coalition's work. This community coalition provides education focused



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on reducing stigma and promoting awareness about suicide's warning signs throughout the community. The coalition is a partnership with local government, education, health, and law enforcement entities so they can better help residents in crisis. Local mental health organizations have great potential to be a frontline resource for individuals struggling with suicidal thoughts throughout our communities. With the help of these grants, more localities will be able to start a mental health organization or strengthen an existing one to help eliminate stigma and save lives.

Under this legislation, the Department of Health Services is required to award grants to local mental health organizations or coalitions for suicide prevention programming. An organization receiving a grant is required to match the grant at a value equal to at least 20% of the grant, and grant amounts will be limited to no more than \$25,000 per organization in a particular fiscal year. The amended version of the bill from last session is incorporated in this proposal and the bill before you today provides that a federally recognized American Indian tribe or band located in the state is eligible to receive a grant created by the bill.

Thank you again for the opportunity for a public hearing on this bill and to testify before you today. I respectfully ask that you join Senator Ballweg, myself, and our other colleagues who have signed on in support of this legislation, in supporting this legislation.



June 2, 2021

TO: Committee on Human Services, Children and Families

FROM: Midstate Independent Living Choices, Inc.

Zoe Kujawa, zkujawa@milc-inc.org, 715-344-4210

RE: Senate Bill 190 and Senate Bill 253

Midstate Independent Living Choices (MILC) is a consumer- based, community based, not for profit, nonresidential organizations serving persons of any age, and with any type of disability in 11 counties. MILC is governed and operated by board and staff composed of a majority of people with disabilities.

MILC was founded in 2000, and since that time we have not seen an increase in Independent Living funding, and yet, we have been required to provide more services to more people. We have seen an increase in the number of consumers seeking our services by over 200% in 20 years, with no additional funding.

Wisconsin's 8 ILCs (as defined in state statute 46.96/federal WIOA/Sec.482 CENTERS) now have 3 additional services that they are required to provide: 1.) transition of people from institutions to the community; 2.) providing services to people who are at risk of entering institutions; 3.) and facilitating the transition of youth with disabilities to postsecondary life. The current state of funding commitment does not address these additional services.

Wisconsin's State Plan for Independent Living (SPIL), approved by DHS and the federal Administration on Community Living states the annual amount of funding needed to adequately provide independent living services statewide is \$5,220,000. However, the current funding is \$2,850,296. Therefore, an additional \$2,343,100 of state funding is needed to meet the statewide service requirements

Because of this, I am asking this committee to support Senate Bill 190 and Senate Bill 253.

Based on Wisconsin statistics there are over 58,661 people with a disability living in our mostly rural 11 County service area. We are only serving 2,770 people. If we had adequate funding we would be able to reach a larger number of our underserved population. Many times people have to wait to receive services from us because we are at staffing capacity. If we received adequate funding we could hire staff and provide the services that are needed. Below are a couple of examples of services we offer, that could benefit many more people with disabilities in Wisconsin.

We currently have three drop-in centers in two counties, Wood and Portage. These centers are member directed, recovery oriented environment for adults with mental health issues/illnesses and/or substance use disorders. We provide a place that offers respect, understanding, encouragement and hope for those who desire a positive community within which they can improve their lives. Members learn skills in job searching, interviewing, employment, daily living skills (i.e. cooking, cleaning, safety, budgeting, etc.), interpersonal skills, coping and social skills.

One of the top concerns currently being addressed in many counties throughout Wisconsin is that of mental health and substance abuse. One of the greatest detriments to mental health is isolation. We offer a place for people to go and have meaningful daily experiences, to break the isolation and improve their mental health. This service is free to the people who use it and is available to any adult in the area who needs help in these areas.

Monthly member evaluations are conducted to ask questions about the effectiveness of services and focus on areas such as: *If members received support at our drop in centers that has helped them avoid hospital/emergency therapist visits.* The results of our surveys indicated there were 98 incidences when members attended the drop in center instead of going to the hospital. The approximate savings to Wood and Portage Counties in 2019: **\$98,000** (98 visits at an average stay of \$1,000 per night for only 1 night). We believe that this is a vital part of our community; it is cost-saving for the state and directly serves people living in the area. If we had additional funding we could provide this service to many more people in other counties in our service area.

One member wrote on her survey: "I am so grateful to you. Without the safe, supportive environment MILC has provided, I would have gone in-patient so many times. Sometimes at night I get really bad flashbacks, and I think about hurting myself. But I tell myself I just need to hold on until I can go to ROCC Point. And I do hold on, and I make it another day."

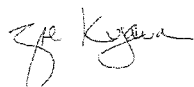
After a horrific car accident our consumer became a wheelchair user for the first time and needed help transitioning back to his home from a nursing home. He needed extra supportive home care and personal care, therefore we connected him to our Personal Assistance Program and hired workers. He also needed help with making his bathroom accessible, so we helped him with an assessment and let him borrow assistive technology from our Loan and Demonstration Project. But his biggest challenge was the emotional distress he was under. He stated he was afraid of being alone now, that he was anxious all the time with crippling fear and was suicidal. After many discussions, it was decided that he would benefit from an emotional support animal. We helped him pick out a dog from the Humane Society that he fell in love with and helped him obtain Roxy's certification for an emotional support animal status. One challenge emerged, Roxy was nervous around his wheelchair. Our staff took a wheelchair to the Humane Society and educated the staff on how to help Roxy become accustomed to the chair. Currently our consumer and Roxy, are living happily together. Our consumer stated that he does not know what he would have done if he did not have Roxy and MILC in his life.

The ILCs are a great investment as they provide assistance to people with disabilities and older adults to access employment, transportation, housing and maintain/attain independence and health. These cost effective services contribute to keeping people out of costly institutions and nursing facilities (an average savings of 30% per person).

I have included testimonials from MILC consumers that have benefited from our services. These include testimonials from members of our drop in centers regarding the support they received during the pandemic.

Please support Senate Bill 190 and Senate Bill 253.

Thank you,



Zoe Kujawa
Executive Director

RCC:

" I FELT RELIEVED WHEN WE OPENED AFTER LOCKDOWN BECAUSE I DID NOT FEEL SO ALONE ANYMORE. I FELT LIKE I GOT MY SUPPORT AND CURBSHOUSE FAMILY BACK."

- WYNNITA S.

" WHEN THE CURBSHOUSE RE-OPENED, I WAS RELIEVED BECAUSE ALTHOUGH SOLUTIONS BRINGS BALANCE, BUSINESS CAN HAPPEN IF YOU DON'T FIND PEOPLE YOU CAN RELY ABOUT TO FILL THAT UP."

- JOSH S.

" I'M GLAD WE WERE OPEN WITHOUT IT (RCC) I WOULD ISOLATE MYSELF AND HAVE NO SUPPORT."

- JEFF S.

Morgan Potter

From: Dixie Weber
Sent: Wednesday, May 26, 2021 2:28 PM
To: Morgan Potter
Cc: Eric Riskus
Subject: ABW Reviews

WOW! Lots of people here today, with lots to say.

GC: The people here are my family; other relatives have "cut me off." I'm capable of taking my own life, but ABW keeps me from doing that. I know that you can get help, but sometimes it takes a while. Some of my meds give me side effects, but I can talk about that here. When I took class that you taught, I found out about the Clubhouse. I go so few places, especially due to COVID, that I really appreciate being able to come to the Clubhouse. When ABW was closed, staff called me, and that made so much of a difference!

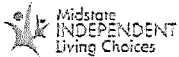
CW: I almost signed myself into Norwood because of my husband and realized it wasn't worth it and decided to come to the Clubhouse and talked to Eric and he was very caring and attentive to me and even gave me some suggestions which were very helpful. Here I feel like I can share, and I don't have to care about what I say here; I'm accepted. I have some other things to do today, but I figured I better come here, too. It helps me calm down.

BP: The Clubhouse is a place to meet people that give me a resource when I needed to reach out to people. They gave me knowledge about many subjects. They also cook good food for lunch, and I'm able to help with that. I also help with cleaning. I don't get a chance to do any of that where I live in a group home. I'm working to be independent so I can get my own place. ABW is a place where I can express my emotions, and people care.

AM: (staff) saved my life. My social worker is always telling me to get down to the clubhouse! He knows it helps me. Sometimes I'm having a "Bridgeway day", where I feel like I need to sign myself into Bridgeway (mental health CBRF). Coming to ABW makes me feel safe and calm. It keeps me out of Bridgeway.

Also DN and JM. Will send another email.

Dixie Weber
Certified Peer Specialist



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IMPORTANT WARNING: This message is intended for the use of the person or entity to which it is addressed and may contain information that is privileged and confidential, the disclosure of which is governed by applicable law. If the reader of this message is not the intended recipient, or the

Dear MILC

Thank you so much for the use of all the equipment for Rick.

When he came home he was so weak and the supplies you lent got him thru some really trying times.

He has come a long way and is done using everything that was available and going to out-patient therapy now. Thank you all so much at Midstate Independent Living.

You guys rock!

-Sincerely

Rick and Deb Miller

From: Patricia Caudill [<mailto:paloca43@gmail.com>]
Sent: Thursday, January 23, 2020 2:32 PM
To: Eric Riskus <eriskus@milc-inc.org>
Subject: From David Caudill

January 22, 2020

To whom it may concern,

I am thankful for my Daily Living Skills provider because he helped me learn how to cross the street safely, and he helped me learn how to be safe while I am shopping in Target. He also helped me learn how to be safe while I am riding bike on the bike trail up the street from us. He also helped me know what to write in a letter to a neighbor, and I mailed the letter to him. I am thankful for everything my Daily Living Skills provider taught me.

Sincerely,

David Charles Caudill



**Senate Committee on Human Services, Children and Families
Testimony Provided by Julia Stanley, Program Manager
Healthy Kids Collaborative
Wednesday, June 2, 2021
Re: Support of Senate Bill 253**

Chairperson Jacque and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to express support for Senate Bill 253 (SB253) as introduced by your fellow committee member, Senator Joan Ballweg. My name is Julia Stanley and I am the program manager for the Healthy Kids Collaborative which is made possible by support from the Office of Population Health at UW Health. The Healthy Kids Collaborative is a coalition of over 400 community partners working together to ensure every child in every neighborhood of Dane County has the opportunity to be healthy.

In 2019, I was among leaders at American Family Children's Hospital who convened the Children's Health Advocacy Steering Committee to assess and advocate for key policy initiatives affecting children's health and wellbeing in Dane County and our state. We asked pediatric clinicians and administrators to consider the urgent needs they saw in patients and their families and youth suicide was identified as the most critical issue to address. Since that time, we have worked with our staff and community partners to understand and support current programming and policies. Examples include the Pediatric Injury Prevention Team's partnership with the Oregon School District to offer the HOPE Squad – a peer-to-peer suicide prevention initiative; as well as the Safe Kids Program that provides Question, Persuade and Refer training. To date, over 100 American Family Children's Hospital staff members have been trained in QPR to identify and assist patients or family members who exhibit signs of suicidal ideation.

In spite of our efforts, the COVID-19 pandemic has increased the strain on youth and families. We know from UW Health patient record data that depression, anxiety, eating disorders and self-harm have increased for our patients. The need to reach and strengthen children's resiliency and mental health is in demand while resources are limited. For example, I recently spoke with the director of a mental health resource center about an increase in calls from parents and caregivers of adolescent boys. They are worried about anxiety, coping skills and social isolation these boys face. The director explained that she has nowhere to refer these families as community organizations and their staff are unable to meet the growing need with already limited budgets.

UW Health is committed to the health and well-being of all children but we acknowledge a single entity cannot do it all. It takes commitment from stakeholders in the public and private sectors coming together to develop and pursue suicide prevention initiatives. Prevention starts with peer-to-peer support programs and school-based groups to give children the behavioral and mental health tools they need long before suicidal ideation occurs. To that end, we urge you to support SB253 to provide grant funding to community organizations committed to addressing this complex problem and furthering efforts already underway.

Thank you for your consideration. I would be happy to take questions at this time.