

PAUL TITTL

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 25TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Assembly Committee on Family Law

Assembly Bill 383

October 11, 2023

First of all, I would like to thank you, Chair Rozar and committee members, for allowing me to testify before you concerning Assembly Bill 383 related to preadoption training.

Under this bill, potential adoptive parents will be able to receive adoptive parent education online rather than in person.

The State of Wisconsin currently requires 26 hours of training before parents can adopt. Six of these hours must be live, in-person training. That requirement can be challenging for potential adoptive parents, because in-person training is not offered in every Wisconsin county. As a result, in order to receive the training some prospective parents may need to take additional time away from work and incur additional travel expense.

This bill makes a simple change that would allow the required 6 hours of interactive training to be either in-person or live virtual. The adopting parent could choose either one. Either choice would maintain the strict standards for preadoption classwork. However, the change would make it easier for some potential adoptive parents to complete the requirements.

This bill had bi-partisan support last session and passed in the Senate by unanimous vote.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify before you today. I would appreciate your support for this change and will be happy to take any questions after Senator Cabral-Guevara and Representative Snodgrass have given their testimonies.

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Lee STATE REPRESENTATIVE
SNODGRASS

To: Assembly Committee on Family Law
From: Representative Lee Snodgrass
Re: Testimony on Assembly Bill 383
Date: October 11, 2023

Chair Rozar, Ranking Member Vining, and committee members,

It is my honor to be here with you this afternoon offering testimony on Assembly Bill 383, relating to pre-adoption training formats.

This proposed legislation came about in what I believe is the best way bills often do— from a genuine need brought forth by a constituent. Wendy was in the process of becoming eligible to be an adoptive parent and informed me that the state required 25 hours of pre-adoption class work and six of those hours were required to be in person. As an immunocompromised individual who faced significant health risk if exposed to viruses and illness, the in-person requirement was a concern for Wendy. While Wendy's barrier to accessible participation was health related, for many prospective adoptive families, the in-person requirement poses a challenge due to their location or employment, limiting their flexibility to travel. The in-person instruction component is only offered in six municipalities. Travel time, expense, and lack of job flexibility *can* and *do* present an additional barrier to prospective parents who have much to offer and are anxious to provide a loving, forever home to waiting children as quickly as possible.

Please note, that this straightforward bill does not eliminate in-person training. Instead, it brings pre-adoption training in-line with foster care requirements, which already have the flexibility to conduct live, interactive virtual trainings. This change will uphold the rigor and integrity of the required training while increasing accessible options to prospective parents completing their training requirements. This bill has the potential to increase the eligible pool of adoptive parents, save state money in administering the coursework, and most importantly minimize a barrier in providing forever homes with loving families to waiting babies and children without undue delay.

Thank you to my co-author Representative Tittl for bringing this forward and for the committee's consideration of this simple, common sense solution for potential adoptive parents.

Sincerely,



Representative Lee Snodgrass



57TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

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Wendy Bolm
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days, which could slow down the process by a week or more. Waiting for the training to be offered in Appleton could slow the process down by months. In my training class, I met one couple who had to take the trainings out of order because of an emergency placement that had been referred to them. Because of the need and the timing of the classes offered, they were scheduled to meet the child the day after their in-person training, which was supposed to be the first class of the training series.

In order to better serve both the families who want to adopt and the children in care, we need to build more flexibility into the system so that a six hour training doesn't completely stall an intricate and complex process that has such a profound effect on the lives of our most vulnerable children.

Thank you for your time and consideration and your work in helping Wisconsin's children.

Wendy Bolm

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Wendy Bolm". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the typed name.



RACHAEL A. CABRAL-GUEVARA

STATE SENATOR • 19TH SENATE DISTRICT

Testimony before the Assembly Committee on Family Law

Senator Rachael Cabral-Guevara

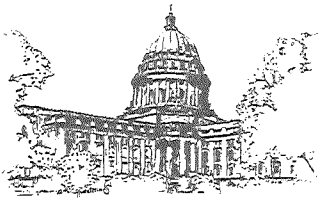
October 11, 2023

Hello, members of the Assembly Committee on Family Law. Thank you for allowing me to provide testimony on Assembly Bill 383, a simple bill allowing for a virtual preadoption training option.

To briefly explain, the current law around adoption training requirements has not kept up with the reality of changing times. A total of twenty-five hours of training is required before parents can adopt. Six of these hours are currently required to be held in-person, creating an unnecessary barrier to adoption.

Beyond the high price tag of the adoption process, mandating these parents take off of work, spend money on hotels, and pay other travel costs for overnights can be avoided with this simple change. Interactive training can be done live, virtually.

With this change, we not only cut red tape during the adoption process, we also lower the cost. This bipartisan goal is something that takes a step in the right direction, and I am hopeful for your support.



STATE SENATOR
LaTonya Johnson

WISCONSIN STATE SENATE

6TH DISTRICT

**Assembly Committee on Family Law
Testimony on Assembly Bill 383
October 11, 2023**

Good morning Chairman Rozar and members of the committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of this very important proposal—AB 383—which allows adoptive parents to complete in-person training requirements through a live video conference.

During the height of the pandemic, risk of exposure to COVID-19 delayed many adoptions in Wisconsin due to in-person training requirements. Under this bill, pre-adoptive parents will still receive the same interactive training via a virtual platform as they would in-person. AB 383 does not eliminate in-person training. Instead, it brings pre-adoption training in line with foster care training requirements, which have the flexibility to conduct live interactive virtual trainings.

While crafting this bill, both the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families and the Wisconsin Association of Children and Family Agencies were consulted, and both agencies are in support of this legislation.

We all want to see Wisconsin's children find their forever home, but parents shouldn't have to choose between their health and taking a six hour, in-person training in order to achieve it. This bill is a common sense solution that will allow children and families to reach adoption finalization more quickly, safely, and conveniently.

Once again, thank you to committee members for your consideration of this important piece of legislation, and thank you to my co-authors--Rep. Tittl, Rep. Snodgrass, and Sen. Cabral-Guevara--for their hard work on this bipartisan bill.

October 11, 2023

Good Afternoon Chairperson Rozar, Vice-Chair Binsfeld and members of the Assembly Committee on Family Law,

My name is Ann Muenster and I appreciate the opportunity to lend my voice in support of AB383.

As an adoptive parent, I want to share my personal experience. I am 70 years old. My husband and I became parents through adoption. Our sons, Mitchell and Andrew, were born in 1990 and 1993, so they are now grown men. Even so, my memories of the process may serve to strengthen your support for AB383.

Back in 1993, there were no virtual options available. The technology hadn't been developed. Living in Appleton however, we had short drives to the meetings and trainings and most were in the evening, so they didn't conflict with our work schedules. There was a couple who lived about 45 minutes east of Appleton, in the town of Cato. Meetings and trainings held in the winter made for hazardous driving for them.

For my husband and me, the in person requirements were fairly easy to meet, until just before Andrew's adoption was final, when even minimal travel time to meet in person became a problem.

The termination of parental rights hearing was approaching and we needed to meet with our Lutheran Social Services social worker one last time. I was a speech/language pathologist with a start time with students of 8:30 am. Our social worker made an accommodation by scheduling our meeting for 7:30 am. Even so, I knew I might return to school slightly after 8:30 am because of the travel time of 10 minutes between the LSS office and my school. I told my principal about the situation. Mind you, I hadn't needed to use any sick leave for doctor appointments for a pregnancy, as my colleagues had, but when I told him I might need to cancel my 8:30 am student, (but would reschedule the student to meet with him during my scheduled prep time), he told me I would need to use a half-day of sick leave. I felt humiliated to think that there was so little regard for me as a prospective adoptive parent.

Today, there are virtual options available.. It makes sense to amend the statute. Believe me, becoming an adoptive parent is challenging enough. Let's alleviate challenges when we can.

It also makes sense for adoption agencies, as providing interactive, live video conference sessions provides flexibility and may reduce costs. It's also possible that modifying the statute may reduce the time it takes for children to be placed in adoptive homes.

Please support AB383 and thank you for listening. Does anyone have any questions?

Sincerely,

Ann Muenster

3528 Hillsborough Drive

Appleton, WI 54911

920-277-9792

October 10, 2023

TO: The Honorable Members of the Assembly Committee on Family Law

RE: **Support for AB 383 – Pre-adoption Training Formats**

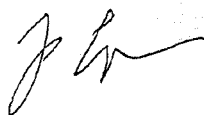
Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of AB 383, which seeks to allow for live virtual training of those completing the pre-adoption training requirements. We appreciate the bill author's acknowledgement that requiring in-person attendance can be a barrier to participation and/or create unnecessary burdens to those seeking to adopt a child.

Lutheran Social Services serves 30,000 Wisconsinites annually through programs including: foster care and adoption, group care for children and youth through residential care centers, group homes, family preservation services; and behavioral health treatment. We license foster homes and facilitate public adoptions, so ensuring those they serve are supported is of utmost importance.

Individuals and couples interested in adoption are often overwhelmed by the application process and training requirements, both of which can be time-consuming and costly. This is one of the factors contributing to our statewide shortage of foster homes. Allowing training to be provided via a live videoconference session rather than requiring in-person attendance will eliminate the need for travel, thereby reducing costs and decreasing the amount of time adoptive parents have to expend in order to welcome a child into their home. AB 383 also provides an opportunity for agencies to more easily provide training, which may enable them to offer additional sessions and reach more individuals/couples. Finally, we see AB 383 as a way to increase access to working and/or already parenting individuals and couples, as well as those in rural Wisconsin communities, who may have otherwise been discouraged by the time and travel associated with in-person attendance.

As always, we appreciate the opportunity to share our thoughts with the Committee and value the ongoing commitment of the legislature to bring forward solutions that modernize practice. We look forward to passage and enactment of this practical and technical update to Wisconsin adoption law.

Sincerely,



Joe Arzbecker

Chief Operating Officer

Lutheran Social Services of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan, Inc.



TO: The Honorable Members of the Assembly Committee on Family Law

FROM: Emily Coddington, Associate Director

DATE: October 11, 2023

RE: **Support for AB 383 – Pre-adoption Training Formats**

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WAFCA is a statewide association that represents nearly fifty child and family serving agencies and advocates for the more than 200,000 individuals and families that they impact each year. Our members' services include foster care and adoption programs; group care for children and youth through residential care centers, group homes, and shelter care facilities; family preservation services; and behavioral health treatment. Many of our member agencies license foster homes and facilitate both public and private adoptions, so ensuring those they serve are supported is of utmost importance.

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