



DONNA M. ROZAR

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 69TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Office: (608) 267-0280
Toll Free: (888) 534-0069
Rep.Rozar@legis.wi.gov

P.O. Box 8953
Madison, WI 53708-8953

Testimony before the Assembly Committee on Children and Families Assembly Bill 864 January 10, 2024

Thank you Chair Snyder, Vice-Chair Goeben, and members of the Assembly Committee on Children and Families for holding this hearing on Assembly Bill (AB) 864. AB 864 increases the funding of the Family Foundations home visiting program by \$1.6 million per year. This secures additional funding of \$44,500 from the federal government.

The Family Foundations Home Visiting Program is an effective, collaborative, and voluntary service for pregnant women and parenting families. A home visitor works one-on-one with the family, using evidence-based models, to promote social, emotional, and physical development and well-being. Currently the program reaches 2,165 families in 40 counties and 6 tribes, but the 2020 Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Needs Assessment found that 71% of families in need are not receiving services.

Some models show several benefits to families who participate in a home visiting program. These benefits include better school readiness and families retaining or achieving the ability to be independent. Additional benefits include reductions in child abuse and neglect, entry into the juvenile justice system, dependence on public services.

Home-visiting programs also encourage healthy childhood development, and some programs can reduce the likelihood of abuse and neglect and accidental injuries by nearly 50%. They also reduce the likelihood that children will experience behavior and intellectual problems. One Family Foundations program, the Nurse-Family Partnership, has been shown to reduce pregnancy-related hypertensive disorders by 35% and reduce smoking during pregnancy by 25%. Both factors are identified by the National Institutes of Health as major risks for maternal mortality and morbidity.

Thank you for your kind consideration of this Bill. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.



January 10th, 2024

Representative Snyder, Chair
Members of the Assembly Committee on Children and Families

Testimony on 2023 Assembly Bill 864

Relating to: funding for the Family Foundations home visitation program and making an appropriation.

Thank you, Chairman Snyder and other members of the committee, for hearing my testimony on Assembly Bill 864 today. The first few years of a child's life are arguably the most important when it comes to development. Supporting our Wisconsin families during this crucial time is what Family Foundations aims to do.

What is Family Foundations? It's a home visiting program administered through the Department of Children and Families that services 40 out of the 72 counties and six out of the 11 federally recognized tribes, totaling 2,305 families. Home visiting is a tool used by families and caregivers to help support healthy development and connections within the home. All four of the programs within Family Foundations have common themes of implementation of their programs: one-on-one interactions with the families, allowing families to determine their own areas of focus, promoting education, using evidence-based assessments, and helping locate other community resources the family could utilize. Benefits for these types of interventions can range from supporting a child's development and readiness for school to screening a family for depression in the household or potential domestic violence.

These programs benefits all types of families across Wisconsin: 54% of households helps were considered low-income, 64% of parents had attained a high school diploma or less, and 58% of the new enrollees for 2022 fell into three or more of the federal priority populations such as substance abuse, low student achievement, and raising a child with developmental delays.

FFHV receives funding from multiple sources: the Federal Maternal, Infant, and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, and State General Purpose Revenue (GPR). The breakdown of this funding is as follows: MIECHV: \$8,594,377 TANF: \$6,212,000, and state GPR: \$1,985,700. This bill would increase the state GPR allotment by \$1,666,500 for the program. These additional dollars will aid in expanding the program to new communities and counties.

These types of programs and services help our children and our families. With evidence of success, we should be investing in existing state programs that actually do work. Thank you, and I will take any questions at this time.

Respectfully,

Senator Jesse James
23rd Senate District
Sen.James@legis.wisconsin.gov



TO: Chair Snyder, Vice-Chair Goeben, and Honorable Members of the Assembly
Committee on Children and Families

FROM: John Elliott, Administrator, Division of Safety and Permanence

DATE: January 10, 2024

SUBJECT: Assembly Bill 864

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) is committed to the goal that all Wisconsin children and youth are safe and loved members of thriving families and communities. In support of that goal and the desire for children to remain safely at home with their families, DCF is testifying in favor of AB-864.

It is DCF's vision that all children and youth are part of thriving families and communities, and that the most effective way to prevent child abuse and neglect is through the provision of upstream supports for children and families. Family Foundations Home Visiting has proven success in Wisconsin in providing those upstream supports through supporting parents in positive child development. Further investment in Family Foundations Home Visiting is important for three key reasons; it is **evidence-based**, has proven **cost savings** and allows Wisconsin to capitalize on **federal reimbursement**.

DCF's Family Foundations Home Visiting program currently serves just over half the counties in the state and 6 of 11 Tribal Nations in Wisconsin. In 2023, Family Foundations Home Visiting program served over **2,000** families and completed over 32,000 visits. Despite this, **over 40%** of counties and Tribal Nations do not currently have access to any home visiting services (see map included below as reference). In addition, a recent federally mandated assessment of need found that **71%** of families who could benefit from this service did not currently have access to home visiting services.

This proposed legislation would allocate an additional \$1.6 million in GPR for home visiting services for FY 24-25. This bill would allow for expansion of home visiting services to additional counties and tribes and potentially increase the number of family slots available in existing

service areas. In DCF's review of the bill it was unclear if the allocation was to continue annually, DCF suggests that the bill language be clarified to ensure the allocation continues after SFY '25 to support investment in additional home visiting sites.

Wisconsin's Family Foundations Home Visiting (FFHV) Program contracts with local implementing agencies to provide several **evidence-based** Home Visiting models, including Early Head Start—Home Based, Healthy Families America, Nurse Family Partnership and Parents as Teachers. Home Visiting programs work with pregnant parents and mothers of young children, with the goal of offering help to women as early as possible during pregnancy and throughout their child's first few years. Services are provided in-home and include areas such as:

- Assisting with accessing quality prenatal care
- Conducting screenings and assessments
- Providing health education
- Connecting the family to valuable community resources
- Offering strategies for parents to support their child's development physically, socially, and emotionally

These models are considered **evidence-based**, meaning there is strong evidentiary support through a variety of studies that home visiting services reduce the risk of future child maltreatment. Home Visiting models have also been found to improve child and parent well-being across a variety of domains, including child and maternal health, child development and parenting practices, in addition to others.

In addition to being evidence-based, research has shown that home visiting programs are **cost effective**. Cost-benefit analysis have indicated a return on investment of between \$1.80 to \$5.70 for every dollar invested in home visiting programs. This was as a result of reduced costs related to child protection, special education, youth justice and health care services([22.07-QFF-SC-Home-visiting-programs_fnl.pdf \(casey.org\)](#)).

Finally, several FFHV program models are eligible for **federal Title IV-E reimbursement** of any state general purpose revenue spent. Under the Family First Prevention Services Act, signed into law by President Trump in 2018, select evidence-based services implemented to fidelity, are

eligible for up to 50% reimbursement. This law reflects a national shift in supporting families in-home through the use of targeted in-home interventions and further increases the potential cost-savings to states.

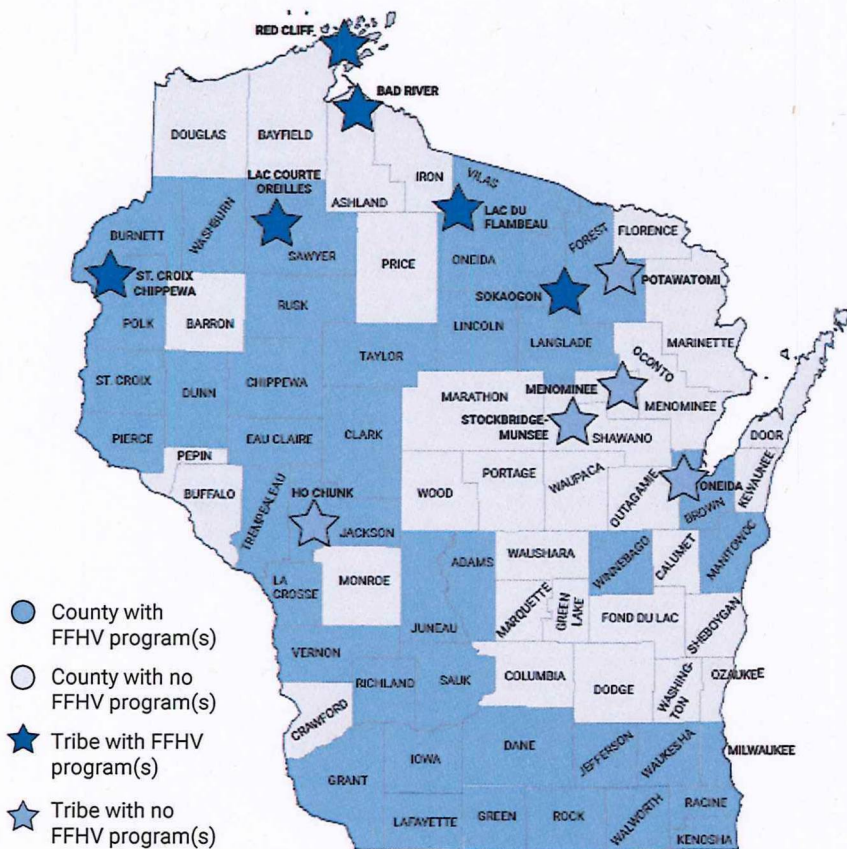
Wisconsin FFHV has been recognized in recent federal reviews and in national forums as a national leader in providing high quality services to vulnerable children. Recent federal reviews indicated that Wisconsin FFHV has a strong focus on reporting, enhanced fiscal management and robust systems in place for planning, review and oversight. Additional funding would allow Wisconsin to expand its proven, highly quality, cost-effective program to the large parts of the state that currently do not have access to these services. As one recent home visiting participant said, "This is a good program for first time parents. My home visitor tells me things that my family members didn't know about raising kids. The program helped me to be a better parent." The Department of Children and Families sincerely appreciates the Assembly Committee on Children and Families' interest and attention to keeping all children of Wisconsin safe as well as the opportunity to provide feedback around this proposed legislation.

Family Foundations Home Visiting (FFHV) Program

FFHV is a voluntary program offering supportive services to parents and their children during pregnancy and throughout early childhood years.

Using Evidence-Based Home Visiting Models, home visits address:

- ✓ Prenatal care access
- ✓ Screenings & Assessments of parent and child health and well-being
- ✓ Health education
- ✓ Parent-child relationships
- ✓ Child development/age-appropriate expectations
- ✓ Connections to community resources



FFHV funds 5 Evidence-Based Home Visiting Models

- Healthy Families America (HFA)
- Early Head Start (EHS)
- Nurse Family Partnership (NFP)
- Parents as Teachers (PAT)
- Family Spirit

Over half (~55%) of Wisconsin's counties (40/72) and federally recognized tribes (6/11) are funded by FFHV funds.



Wisconsin Department of Children and Families



TO: Assembly Committee on Children & Families
FROM: Jieneen Metcalf, Manager, Family Preservation & Support, Children's Wisconsin
DATE: Wednesday, January 10, 2024
RE: Support for AB 864 – funding for the Family Foundations home visitation program.

Chair Snyder and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to share testimony with you today. My name is Jieneen Metcalf and I manage Children's Wisconsin's home visiting program here in Dane County. I'm here today to share Children's strong support for this bipartisan legislation. We want to thank the bill authors, Representative Rozar and Senator James, for their work on this proposal.

As you may know, Children's is the largest not-for-profit, community-based agency serving children and families in the state, providing community services to approximately 15,000 children and families annually with more than a dozen locations across Wisconsin. This includes child and family counseling, child advocacy centers, foster and adoption care and family support services.

Wisconsin's Family Foundations Home Visiting program distributes more than \$10 million a year to entities throughout the state, including Children's, to provide pregnant women, children and families with voluntary, in-home supports and mentoring through their children's first years of life. Home visiting is a low cost, sustainable prevention measure which is aimed to reduce child welfare system involvement, keeping children healthy, safe and at home with their parents. It helps reduce the risk of child maltreatment, strengthen family functioning, connection to community resources, and promote healthy child development.

Children's provides individualized, home-based parenting education and support programming in communities across the state through more than 10 state-funded home visiting programs. Four of our programs receive Family Foundations Home Visiting support, including our programs offered in the following counties: Forest, Langlade, Lincoln, Oneida, Vilas, Milwaukee, Jackson, Trempealeau and Rock. We also offer 6 other home visiting programs funded through other county and philanthropic sources. Services often occur in the home or a community location of their choosing on a frequent basis to provide education on a variety of topics like pregnancy, reproductive health, child development, safe sleep and to offer guidance on navigating the often complex food and child assistance programs. Home visitors and parents share thoughts and goals, with the trained home visitor offering support, mentoring, guidance and education to help families best care for children and themselves. Using

evidence-based approaches, home visitors help families to improve physical and mental health, engage parents in their child's education and achievements, empower families to become economically self-sufficient and promote positive parenting practices.

Across all of Children's home visiting programs, available data for 2023 indicates we served more than 525 families. Importantly, the families Children's serves through home visiting continue to demonstrate growth and positive outcomes, including 97% of children having an identified primary care provider. Of the 26 families my team has served in Dane County this year, 100% of them have met several outcomes we track focused on early childhood development, including that: children have age appropriate skills in 5 areas (cognitive, language and speech, social and emotional, fine and gross motor); children are at age-appropriate development; and families reported improved parent child interaction or increased knowledge about parenting. Home visitors help to build formal and informal family supports, enhance infant mental health, improve birth outcomes, and enhance family functioning by reducing risk, building protective factors and supporting family goals.

The team I'm honored to work with across the state has countless stories to share of families whose lives are forever changed by their connection with their home visitors. While each story is unique, the common theme is that home visitors provide a source of guidance, support, encouragement and reassurance when families are navigating some of their most challenging seasons of life. One of our families was mentioned on the floor of the House of Representatives in 2022. I'd like to share a brief version of her story with you today.

In winter 2022, one of our Children's Milwaukee staff received an email from a client from eight years ago asking if she would be willing to help her with her new pregnancy. The mom had recently been diagnosed with ovarian cancer and was hoping for a trusted person to help guide her through this pregnancy. We were able to quickly set up visits with the mom and discuss her needs, including her medical plans. The home visitor helped the mom advocate for her own medical needs as well as for her unborn baby; supported mom in preparing everything the family would need for bringing a new baby home; and supported the entire family, including by connecting her eldest son with mentoring support. The mom went into early labor and with immediate medical attention, the staff were able to stabilize the mom and baby and remove her cancer. Mom and baby were doing well, with mom saying that the home visitor's assistance was needed and appreciated and that she was helped to feel better about her journey and learned to trust her own instincts.

Another mom we helped from the Wausau area shared her story with us. After years of sexual and emotional abuse, this mom became pregnant at 17 years old. She entered the real-world unequipped with the life skills she needed. She was in an emotionally and physically abusive relationship where she was introduced to heroin. She became addicted to heroin and other drugs, found herself sleeping on the floor of drug houses when she found out she was pregnant again. She sought help at a methadone clinic the next day and during a prenatal care appointment found out she was seven months pregnant with a healthy baby girl. She signed up for parenting supports with Children's but was hesitant to believe someone could be there for her. With her home visitor's support, the mom was able to provide Christmas presents, clothing and a kitchen table for her children, along with help with breastfeeding, applying for her own apartment and getting her driver's license. She is repairing the relationship with her eldest son, is receiving counseling and, after obtaining her GED, excelled academically in college. The mom shared that her message is that if you are struggling, it's never too late; there are resources available and there are people, like my home visitor, who care.

We know that the first years of a child's life are critical to brain development and key to achieving developmental milestones. They may seem small, but building early language skills and parent and caregiver bonding sets the foundation and pathways for future learning. One of my staff was working with a family whose 16-month-old was lagging in meeting communication milestones, often using one word to respond to communications. The home visitor worked with the family to increase communication by naming things, talking about their daily activities and reading books. Our team provided a "1,000 books before kindergarten" log and the child soon began making progress – quickly reading 100 books with his family earning a sticker and a stamp. The home visitor was reading with the child during one of their visits and she noticed a shift in his behaviors. Before he was not focusing or paying attention; now he was making expressions and movements while she read. The home visitor encouraged pretend play. When the mom prompted the child that his toy animals were hungry, he immediately began to pretend to feed his animals. Both the mom and home visitor were surprised as they had not done this before, however the mom shared that one of their books they read together showed a mom pig feeding her baby pig so he knew what to do. His mom was very excited to see his communication blossoming and saw first-hand how reading with children can help them learn.

AB 864 would provide a meaningful increase in funds enabling more programs like ours to serve more kids and families in need across our state. These evidence based

programs are impactful by helping families develop the skills and tools they need to foster an environment where they are setting and striving to reach goals, building confidence and creating a home environment where their kids can thrive towards a brighter future. As you've heard, these services can be life-changing for families, setting them on a path of self-sufficiency and well-being.

Thank you for the opportunity to share Children's Wisconsin's support for this important legislation that would provide critical funding to home visiting programs across our state. We encourage your support of this legislation and our team is happy to answer any questions now or in the future.