



January 25th, 2024

Senator Cabral-Guevara, Chair

Members of the Senate Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, Children and Families

Testimony on 2023 Senate Bill 803

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

Thank you, Chairwoman Cabral-Guevara and other members of the committee, for hearing my testimony on Senate Bill 803 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jesse James".

Senator Jesse James

23rd Senate District

Sen.James@legis.wisconsin.gov



TO: Senate Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, Children & Families
FROM: Heidi Bartz, Supervisor Prevention Program, and Melanie Hobbs, Supervisor, Prevention Program Children's Wisconsin
DATE: Thursday, January 25, 2024
RE: Support for SB 803 – Funding to the Family Foundations home visitation program

Chair James and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to share testimony with you today. My name is Heidi and I'm joined by my colleague Melanie and we are supervisors of Family Foundations-funded home visiting programs in Milwaukee and Janesville. We're here today to share Children's strong support for this bipartisan legislation. We want to thank you, Senator James, as a bill author, along with Representative Rozar, for your work on this proposal, as well as several other members of this committee for cosponsoring this legislation.

Children's is the region's only independent health care system dedicated solely to the health and well-being of kids. As such, we offer a wide array of programs and services inside our hospital and clinic walls and out in our communities. Between our hospitals in Milwaukee and Neenah, primary, specialty and urgent care clinics and community services offices across the state – we provide kids and their families with care and services they need to promote health, safety and well-being. As you may know, Children's is also 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 aims 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, provide 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, health, child development, and safe sleep; home visitors also 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 their 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. 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.

Studies continue to reflect the impact of a mother's health on her baby's health and the strong connection between the two. The health and well-being of a mother from pre-pregnancy to postpartum has implications on a child's physical, cognitive and social-emotional development. Maternal morbidity and mortality continue to be of significant concern across the nation and here in Wisconsin. It's disheartening that moms of color and those living in rural areas face significantly higher rates of preventable maternal injury and death resulting in disparities with lasting impacts for families across our state. Children's, along with a coalition of several community partners, is implementing the Milwaukee County Healthy Start Program which supports maternal-child health for African American women. As part of the five-year federal grant, Children's and our partners are providing maternal community health navigation services, child birth education classes, group-based parenting classes, ensuring access to maternal care providers, including midwives, as well as providing fatherhood-specific programming and other resources.

The teams we work with across the state have 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 my colleagues had been working with a mom enrolled in our home visiting program for several years. She had found our home visiting services to be extremely beneficial to her and her family, as our team had supported mom with navigating a difficult pregnancy, connecting to community resources, assisting with housing issues and supporting her baby's development when he fell behind in his gross motor skills. When this mom went to the grocery store one day, she came across a pregnant mother and her family outside the store who were experiencing homelessness. Selflessly, she brought the family to her own home to give them a safe and stable place to stay. She connected the pregnant mother right away with Children's home visiting services. Our home visitors supported the family in getting the baby items they needed and ensured they were connected to medical resources. Not long after, she gave birth to a healthy baby – the mom who took them in was even present at the birth. The mom who helped connect the family to Children's is part of a church community who helped the family secure their own safe housing. Now, the family is focusing on starting their own business to help support their growing family. Sharing this story with you provides me with the opportunity to highlight two successes: that of a mom supported by our program whose growth, self-sufficiency and compassion for others led her to helping another mom get connected to our impactful care and support.

Another mom our colleagues 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.

SB 803 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 programs¹ 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. When I asked one of the moms I work with what she would want lawmakers to know about home visiting, she shared "I absolutely love the program. I want them to know it works!".

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.

Heidi Bartz
Supervisor, Prevention Program
Children's Wisconsin

Melanie Hobbs
Supervisor, Prevention Program
Children's Wisconsin

Jodi Bloch
Director, State & Local Government Relations
Children's Wisconsin
608-217-9508
jbloch@childrenswi.org

Children's Wisconsin (Children's) serves children and families in every county across the state. We have inpatient hospitals in Milwaukee and the Fox Valley. We care for every part of a child's health, from critical care at one of our hospitals, to routine checkups in our primary care clinics. Children's also provides specialty care, urgent care, emergency care, dental care, school health nurses, foster care and adoption services, family resource centers, child health advocacy, health education, family preservation and support, mental health services, pediatric medical research and the statewide poison hotline.

¹ Included here are links to some of the home visiting program models utilized by Children's Wisconsin in the Family Foundations Home Visiting program. They outline research findings, effectiveness and positive outcomes.
[Healthy Families America: https://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/HFA_Evidence_of_Effectiveness_2022_Website.pdf](https://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/HFA_Evidence_of_Effectiveness_2022_Website.pdf)
[Parents as Teachers: https://parentsasteachers.org/research-and-results/](https://parentsasteachers.org/research-and-results/)
[Casey Family Foundation issue paper: https://www.casey.org/media/22.07-QFF-SC-Home-visiting-programs_fnl.pdf](https://www.casey.org/media/22.07-QFF-SC-Home-visiting-programs_fnl.pdf)



TO: Chair James, Vice-Chair Cabral-Guevara, and Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, Children and Families

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

DATE: January 25, 2024

SUBJECT: Senate Bill 803

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 SB-803.

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.

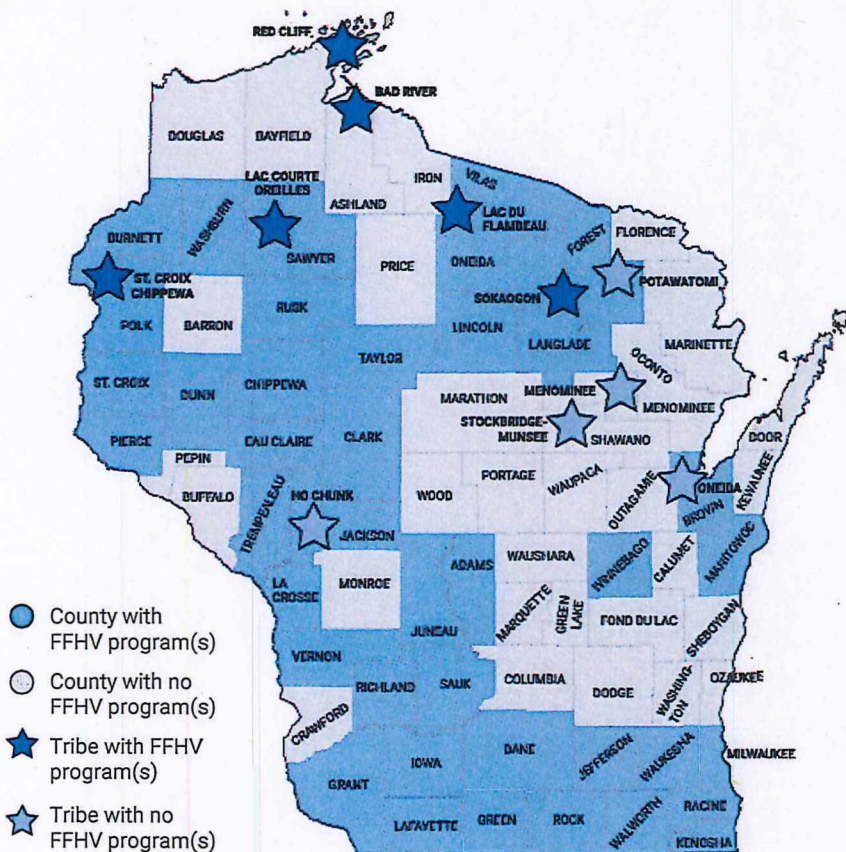
Wisconsin FFHV has been recognized in recent federal reviews and in national forums as a national leader in providing high quality services to vulnerable children. Recent federal reviews indicated that Wisconsin FFHV has a strong focus on reporting, enhanced fiscal management and robust systems in place 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 Senate Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, 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: The Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse
Prevention, Children and Families

FROM: Kathy Markeland, Executive Director

DATE: January 25, 2024

RE: **Support for Senate Bill 803 – Family Foundations Home Visiting Funding**

On behalf of the Wisconsin Association of Family & Children's Agencies, thank you for the opportunity to share our support for increased state investment in the Family Foundations Home Visiting program.

WAFCA is a statewide association that represents nearly fifty child and family serving agencies and advocates for the more than 200,000 individuals, children, and families that they impact each year. Our members' services include foster care and adoption programs; in-home and family preservation services; community-based outpatient and day treatment therapies; and residential care for both children and adults.

Many of our members have a long history of supporting families with evidence-based home visiting services. From Family & Children's Center in La Crosse to Family Services of Northeast Wisconsin in Green Bay, our members partner with their communities to come alongside new parents and young families and connect them with resources and supports to set them on a path to healthier futures.

Family Foundations provides critical infrastructure to support and sustain existing home visiting programs across the state while also delivering economies of scale as programs sharing in centralized training resources and data tracking to ensure that federal, state and local investments are reaching families and delivering outcomes. Wisconsin's state funding for home visiting falls short of the investment made by many other states and that gap has grown as states across the country have shifted additional resources toward early intervention services since the adoption of the federal Family First Prevention Services Act, seeking to reform child welfare by shifting resources further upstream.

Home visiting is a proven strategy that reduces entry and re-entry into our child welfare system. The state investment in SB 803 is a downpayment on future opportunities to grow the state partner funding role in these voluntary, proven family services. A stable state commitment to these services will help local communities maintain their local dollar investments, which are significant but challenged to keep pace to compete for quality workforce and increasing service needs.

Home visiting exemplifies the power of the private-public partnership to deliver valuable, accountable services within our communities. Thank you for your commitment to partnering with us to expand these opportunities for more communities and families across Wisconsin.