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# RACHAEL A. CABRAL-GUEVARA

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STATE SENATOR • 19<sup>TH</sup> SENATE DISTRICT

*Testimony before the Senate Committee on Health*

*Senator Rachael Cabral-Guevara*

*March 12, 2025*

Hello, members of the Senate Committee on Health. Thank you for allowing me to provide testimony on Senate Bill 70, a proposal that will help unaccompanied kids get the medically necessary care they need.

Currently, minors attempting to access health care in Wisconsin are required to receive parental consent. This proposal does *not* change that law for kids whose parents or guardians are still in their lives. However, thousands of kids across the state, particularly if they are homeless or unaccompanied minors, cannot consent to their own medically necessary health care because of that barrier.

At least thirty-five states allow unaccompanied minors to consent for this kind of care, ranging from Oklahoma to California. As a nurse, I have seen these kids who were either abandoned or abused by their parents come in with broken or bruised limbs, and there is a huge “question mark” for any provider as to what we can and cannot treat for them—which should not exist.

This bill **does not take away a parent’s right to make sure their kids get the care they need**. It is to make sure *unaccompanied* youth 14 years of age or older, as attested to by agencies, employees at shelters, or homeless liaisons, receive this desperately needed care. If a parent or guardian is not available and the minor is not otherwise disqualified, most care rendered would be paid for through BadgerCare Plus, so long as the minor applies and is deemed eligible.

This proposal simply removes the “question mark” for many providers before rendering needed care.

I am hopeful you will support this step in the right direction to help those most in need: our kids who have been neglected, abused, or otherwise abandoned by their parents. Thank you for your time.



# PAUL TITTL

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 25<sup>TH</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

## Testimony before the Senate Committee on Health

Representative Paul Tittl

March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 70, relating to a minor's authority to consent to health care. This bill ensures that unaccompanied homeless minors are able to consent to medically necessary care.

Thirty-five states and Washington, D.C. allow unaccompanied homeless minors to consent to certain medically necessary procedures. Currently in Wisconsin, unaccompanied youth cannot consent to basic medical care for broken arms, gashes or other injuries.

According to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, over eighteen thousand school age children across the state identified as homeless during the 2022-2023 school year. More than two thousand unaccompanied youth were enrolled in WI public schools in 2022-2023, according to DPI.

This bill covers consent for medically necessary services as already defined by the Department of Health Services. Additionally, the definition of unaccompanied youth in this legislation is defined under federal law.

Thank you for hearing my testimony today.

March 12, 2025

The Honorable Rachel Cabral-Guevera, Chair  
Senate Committee on Health  
Wisconsin State Senate

### **SchoolHouse Connection Supports SB 70**

Hello, Committee Chair Cabral-Guevera and Distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to address you today in support of SB 70.

My name is Rodd Monts and I am director of state policy for SchoolHouse Connection (SHC). We are a nonpartisan, national nonprofit that works to address youth homelessness through education, from PreK-12 through higher education. We have collaborated with legislators, educators, advocates and others to help pass laws in 28 states aimed at removing barriers faced by youth experiencing homelessness. We have been working here in Wisconsin with the Wisconsin Association for Runaway and Homeless Services and other advocates for children.

SHC supports SB 70 because we believe this legislation would remove barriers to medically necessary care facing the most vulnerable youth experiencing homelessness across Wisconsin – those who are unaccompanied, under 18, and who are not in the physical care of a parent or guardian<sup>1</sup>.

Approximately 18,510 school-aged children across the state were identified as homeless<sup>2</sup> during the 2022-2023 school year, according to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. This includes 2,154 unaccompanied youth<sup>3</sup>. It is worth noting that these figures are likely an undercount as data on student homelessness across the U.S. tends to be, due to the difficulty in identifying those students. They don't often want to be identified until they need assistance.

Typically, these youth become unaccompanied because their parents are dealing with physical or mental health issues, substance abuse, incarceration, estrangement from the family or, in some cases, the parents are deceased. These children are forced to survive independently as a result, which leaves them susceptible to violence, trafficking, suicide, substance abuse, hunger, and poor health<sup>4</sup>.

Wisconsin's unaccompanied homeless minors cannot provide their own consent for basic medically necessary care to treat things like strep throat, bronchitis, an eye or tooth infection, or similar routine conditions that can become debilitating if not addressed. That is one of the reasons why the American Academy of Pediatrics has endorsed minors making their own medical decisions in certain circumstances and legislation to support that right.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 42 U.S.C. §11434a(6)

<sup>2</sup> [Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction WISEdash](#).

<sup>3</sup> <https://dpi.wi.gov/wisedash/about-data/homeless-files>

<sup>4</sup> SchoolHouse Connection (2021), "*Student Homelessness: Lessons Learned from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS)*".

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Rhonda Gay Hartman (December 2002). "Coming of Age: Devising Legislation for Adolescent Medical Decision-Making." *Am. Journal of Law & Medicine*. Pittsburgh: U. of Pittsburgh School of Medicine.

The bill does not intend to provide access to any elective, cosmetic or other general health care that is not medically necessary as determined by a qualified medical professional.

Passage of SB 70 would bring Wisconsin in line with 35 other states and the District of Columbia<sup>6</sup> that allow unaccompanied homeless youth to consent to medically necessary care. It is worth noting that these states span the political spectrum, with the most recent being Florida, which passed legislation 2022<sup>7</sup>.

Wisconsin – through Act 22 of 2019 – is among 12 states that have enacted laws allowing unaccompanied homeless youth to consent to shelter, housing, and related services without parental consent<sup>8</sup> which recognizes the need to provide these young people the ability to access critical supports on their own. SB 70 would be a vital enhancement of minor consent.

This next step is essential because many of these same unaccompanied youth also need access to medically necessary care while on their own. And to be clear, the intent of this type of legislation is not to serve youth who have left home for a few days or who otherwise seek to disobey a parent or guardian. Nor does this bill seek to impact or circumvent the current rights of any parent who is caring for their child.

SB 70 is focused on the small number of young people in the state who have been certified as homeless by the qualified professionals listed in the legislation. This is the same type of certification process included in Act 22.

Finally, SHC believes that education is the best way to address homelessness, because the lack of a high school diploma is the single greatest determinant of adult homelessness. Keeping youth healthy so that they can achieve in school is key to optimizing educational outcomes. We appreciate Senator Cabral-Guevara's attempt to address this and the work she has put into SB 70, and we urge the committee to move it forward. Thank you.

Rodd Monts  
Director of State Policy  
[rodd@schoolhouseconnection.org](mailto:rodd@schoolhouseconnection.org)

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<sup>6</sup> SchoolHouse Connection (2025). [State Laws on Minor Consent for Routine Medical Care.](#)

<sup>7</sup> [HB 1577/SB1708 of 2022.](#)

<sup>8</sup> <https://schoolhouseconnection.org/state-laws-on-minor-consent-for-housing-and-related-services/>

Tuesday, March 11, 2025

RE: WISCONSIN ASSOCIATION FOR HOMELESS AND RUNAWAY SERVICES IN FAVOR OF SB 70

Dear Members of the Senate Committee on Health:

Thank you for your review of SB 70, authored by Senator Cabral Guevara. This legislation is essential to meeting the medical care needs of over 2,000 unaccompanied minor youth in Wisconsin each year. These young people do not have a parent or legal guardian in their lives who are able to consent for their necessary medical care and are not under the care of any other formal systems that can consent for their care. This legislation will allow unaccompanied youth to receive preventive care; care for urgent medical needs, such as infections or medical emergencies; maintain or obtain prescriptions; and receive follow-up for previous injuries. This type of legislation currently exists in 35 other states and is supported by the American Academy of Pediatrics.

The Wisconsin Association for Homeless and Runaway Services (WAHRS) represents over twenty providers of services to youth experiencing homelessness throughout the state of Wisconsin. We also work closely with organizations such as homelessness providers, local and private education providers, county and state departments, and other agencies who serve families and youth experiencing homelessness. In my work as the Executive Director of WAHRS, I have had the privilege of hearing directly from regional Youth Action Boards developed under Youth Homelessness Demonstration Projects in three of Wisconsin's CoC's serving 71 of Wisconsin's counties. In this work, I heard directly from young people of the need for this legislation to provide follow up care for previously broken limbs; skin, sore throat, and sinus infections; prescription maintenance; dental emergencies; and other basic medical care that we, adults, take for granted. I heard directly from parenting youth that they are able to consent for the medical care of their child, while being unable to access this care for themselves. Community resources, such as free and charitable clinics or sliding scale and no-fee providers, that can be accessed by adults are not available to meet the needs of our children when they are not in the custody of an adult. On behalf of these unaccompanied children, I urge you to support this legislation.

Importantly, this legislation does not by-pass parental responsibilities and rights. It contains a requirement that professionals who support youth experiencing homelessness (such as school educational liaisons or homeless shelter staff) provide a verification of the unaccompanied status of the minor youth seeking services. It also restricts and defines medically necessary care to ensure that services are responsibly provided for the prevention, diagnosis, or treatment of the recipient's illness, injury, or disability and in

alignment with standards of acceptable care. These requirements are contained in the proposed legislation in order to ensure its responsible application.

In preparing for this testimony today, I have also been in discussion and contact with youth and young adults, medical services providers, and educational professionals who speak to the importance of this legislation. Some of those individuals have asked me to submit written testimony on their behalf, which I am including with my written testimony here. I know that these conversations represent only a fraction of the support for this legislation that I am encountering in my conversations across the state. It is widely supported by those who interact with and encounter young people experiencing homelessness and their medical needs and largely considered to be a basic human right.

I hope that you will give full consideration to this legislation by supporting Executive Action to move this legislation to the floor of the Senate and that you will continue conversations with your colleagues and constituents to improve our system of medical support for Wisconsin's Unaccompanied Children.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to me with any questions related to this communication or further information on the needs of youth and young adults experiencing homelessness in Wisconsin.

Sincerely,

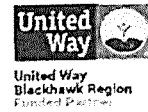
Joli Guenther, MSSW, LCSW  
Executive Director  
Wisconsin Association for Homeless and Runaway Services  
(608) 239-5430  
*United to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness in Wisconsin*





**Joli Guenther**  
WAHRS Executive Director  
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608-239-5430





March 10, 2025

To Chairperson Senator Rachael Cabral-Guevara and Members of the Senate Committee on Health;

I am writing to express my support for 2025 Senate Bill 70 (SB70), which proposes a crucial change regarding unaccompanied minors' ability to access medical care in Wisconsin. As the CEO of Healthnet of Rock County, I believe this bill will have a significant positive impact on the physical and mental health of vulnerable youth in our state.

The legislative change proposed in SB70 is an essential step toward ensuring unaccompanied youth, who are often at a heightened risk for physical and mental health issues, can access the necessary medical care they need without having to obtain parental or guardian consent under certain circumstances. The bill outlines a clear framework for which verified unaccompanied minors, 14 to 17 years old, can give consent for their own treatment. SB70 also includes protection for healthcare professionals, so those providing medically necessary care to an unaccompanied youth will not face liability for providing services without parental consent. This ensures that healthcare providers can act swiftly and responsibly without fear of legal repercussions.

The harsh, everyday reality is that unaccompanied youth face significant barriers to accessing healthcare due to their unstable living conditions. No young person should be denied critical healthcare simply because they lack the presence of a parent or legal guardian in their life. By passing SB70, Wisconsin will continue to improve on its ability and commitment to meeting the needs of homeless and unaccompanied youth.

At HealthNet, Rock County's only Free and Charitable Clinic, we are often called upon to provide primary medical and dental care to these individuals. Obtaining parental consent is often a barrier to care for these unaccompanied youth and can have a negative impact on their health outcomes. With that in mind, I strongly encourage you to support SB70 and to advocate for its passage. This bill will make a significant difference in the lives of many vulnerable young people in Wisconsin, giving them the ability to seek the care they need when they need it.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

*Kerry Swanson*

Kerry Swanson, CEO





2911 Carrousel Lane  
Janesville, WI 53545  
(608) 314-5501  
[www.project1649.org](http://www.project1649.org)

March 11, 2025

I am writing to you as a member of the Senate Committee on Health to express my strong support for **2025 Senate Bill 70 (SB 70)**, which proposes a crucial change to the current framework regarding minors' access to medical care in Wisconsin. As a Systems Navigator, I believe this bill will make a significant, positive impact on the physical and mental health of vulnerable youth in our state.

I work with unaccompanied homeless youth everyday who are unable to access healthcare that is much needed.

I started working with a young lady almost three years ago when she was just 15 years old. Within the first week of meeting her I received a phone call from her while she was in the emergency room. At 9pm I went to be with her. She was having one of many gallbladder attacks. We spent hours trying to get a hold of her mother who was in the state of Georgia at the time for the purpose of getting parental permission to be treated. Her mother had her number blocked and refused to answer calls from anyone else. This one the first time I had this experience with her, but not the last. Over the years it has gotten worse and more frequent. She was told she needs surgery to remove her gallbladder but without guardian/parental permission she is unable to. She continues to fall through the cracks of other systems while working so hard to maintain her personal safety. In three days she turns 18 and will finally be able to get the surgery that she needs.

Another young lady I met about a year ago at 16 years old. Her thyroid gland started to enlarge. Initially just a minor surgery that was suggested by her doctor. Without parental permission she was unable to get the surgery and it continued to grow. After eight months of consistent calls and reports her case was picked up for medical neglect. The growth is so large she wears turtlenecks and sweatshirts everyday to cover it up and it is painful to turn her head comfortably. She now has a guardian appointed for medical purposes and can have the surgery. The surgeon however is uncomfortable performing the surgery because she still does not have a safe place to recover afterwards.

*These are just two stories of the many youth I work with who would benefit from this bill. No child should have to wait that long to gain access to life-improving healthcare.*

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jessica Pfeifer", written over a horizontal line.

Jessica Pfeifer  
Systems Navigator  
Project 16:49/Echo, Inc

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

Testimony from Elizabeth Schwichtenberg  
5813 Albright Court  
Eau Claire, WI 54701  
23 years old  
member of WI Balance of State Youth action Board

Today I am here to share my personal experience regarding the passing of this bill.

There are many reasons why a minor would be in a situation where their guardian is no longer an active participant in their lives. Even so, everyone needs medical care regardless, and there is no perfect case to explain why someone is worthy of receiving care to live a healthy life.

When I was in highschool I, and many others around me, didn't have the best support systems, whether that was no longer having a parental guardian, not having a trusted parent figure, or not knowing when they would have to leave their abusive environment at home. I then, unfortunately, lost many people close to me to addiction and depression that were never treated because they were minors and didn't have a support system built to advocate for their needs. I now advocate for those in similar situations so we can try and set up support systems to prevent these things from continuing with the youth of today.

You cannot force a parent to care about their child and make the right decision for them just because you think they should. The reality is family conflict is one of the most reported reasons youth give as to why they are homeless according to Congressional Research Service. For the second year in a row the **2024 Annual Homeless Assessment Report** shows the greatest increases in homelessness among populations were among families with children and unaccompanied youth.

As the rate of homeless youth increases it becomes imperative now more than ever we start laying the paths for support for our leaders of tomorrow.

Citations:

Congressional Research service: Runaway and Homeless Youth: Demographics and Programs. Updated last 2019

**2024 Annual Homeless Assessment Report**: The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development  
OFFICE OF COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

# Beloit Learning Academy

910 Townline Ave. Beloit, WI 53511  
(608) 361-2200

I am writing to you to express my strong support for **2025 Senate Bill 70 (SB 70)**, which proposes a crucial change to the current framework regarding minors' access to medical care in Wisconsin. As a concerned citizen, I believe this bill will make a significant, positive impact on the physical and mental health of vulnerable youth in our state.

SB 70 allows an **unaccompanied minor** to consent to and receive medically necessary care without the need for parental or guardian consent under certain circumstances. **As defined by the bill, an unaccompanied youth is a homeless minor who is not in the physical custody of a parent or guardian.** This legislative change is an essential step toward ensuring that these youth, who are often at a heightened risk for physical and mental health issues, can access the necessary medical care they urgently need.

The bill also outlines a clear framework for minors to consent to treatment. Specifically, it applies to minors aged 14 years or older who are not under the supervision of county departments, licensed child welfare agencies, or other similar authorities. Furthermore, the bill ensures that the minor's status as an unaccompanied youth is verified by a trusted professional such as a school social worker, shelter intake officer, or a director of a nonprofit serving homeless youth. This confirmation will help ensure that the appropriate safeguards are in place.

One of the most important aspects of SB 70 is its protection for healthcare professionals. Those providing medically necessary care to an unaccompanied youth will not face liability for providing services without parental consent, which ensures that these healthcare providers can act swiftly and responsibly without fear of legal repercussions. Additionally, I appreciate that the bill explicitly acknowledges the complex nature of homelessness and minors' rights, while maintaining existing mandatory reporting requirements and protecting minors' rights under Chapter 51 of Wisconsin law. It's a delicate balance between protecting the health and rights of youth and ensuring that vulnerable minors are not left without support.

By passing SB 70, Wisconsin will better equip itself to meet the needs of homeless and unaccompanied youth, ensuring that these young people are not denied critical healthcare simply because they lack the presence of a guardian. The reality is that many unaccompanied youth face significant barriers to accessing healthcare due to their unstable living conditions, and this bill offers a compassionate and practical solution.

I strongly encourage you to support SB 70 and to advocate for its passage. This bill will make a significant difference in the lives of many vulnerable young people in Wisconsin, giving them the ability to seek the care they need when they need it most.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Robin Stuht  
School District of Beloit Homeless Liason