

Alberta Darling

Wisconsin State Senator

Co-Chair, Joint Committee on Finance

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT, MILITARY
AFFAIRS, AND SENIOR ISSUES

Senator Alberta Darling
Wednesday, May 24, 2017

Thank you, Chairman Testin and committee members for holding a public hearing on Assembly Bills 234, 235, 236, and 237. It's my hope this package of bills will be instrumental in ending and preventing homelessness in Wisconsin.

In 2016, the Federal Housing Administration estimated that at any given time there are approximately 5,685 citizens in Wisconsin who are experiencing homelessness. In order to combat this problem, the bills focus on collaboration, allowing agencies more flexibility to work together to best fight homelessness, and ensuring that resources are going to those most deeply in need.

The first step to addressing homelessness is to provide stable housing for our most vulnerable citizens. That's why Assembly Bills 235 and 236 reform WHEDA's waitlist and grant systems. Assembly Bill 235 strikes the word "transitional" from the statutes relating to housing in order to create more flexibility in the administration of housing grants. Assembly Bill 236 creates a two year pilot program to prioritize Wisconsin's chronically homeless population on the waitlist for the Federal Housing Choice Voucher Program. Both of these bills work in tandem to enable housing resources for those who are most deeply in need.

While it is crucial to provide a stable place to sleep, this does not go far enough to address the underlying traumas affecting Wisconsin's homeless families. Assembly Bill 234 and 237 focus on creating partnerships and collaboration to provide wraparound services. Assembly Bill 237 creates a \$75,000 grant for a municipality to connect homeless individuals with permanent employment and additional support services. Assembly Bill 234 creates the Interagency Council on Homelessness to ensure that all of our agencies work together to combat homelessness, instead of working in different silos. Both of these bills will facilitate delivering wraparound services to Wisconsin's homeless in the most efficient way possible.

I'd like to thank Lieutenant Governor Kleefisch and Representatives Steineke, Rodriguez, Pronschinske, and Snyder for their leadership in developing this important package of bills.

Thank you again committee members for your time and consideration. I hope I can count on your support for Assembly Bills 234, 235, 236, and 237.



PATRICK SNYDER

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 85th ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Testimony in Support of AB 235: Housing Grants

Thank you Chairman Testin, Vice-Chair Feyen, and members of the committee for holding a public hearing on Assembly Bill 235. I am honored to testify before you on this legislation which will expand and increase access to housing for the most vulnerable individuals of our society.

This bill is really quite simple. There are two components that change the way our state currently administers homelessness funding. Both of these changes will lead to increased access to permanent housing for those in need.

The first component eliminates the requirement that the money the state currently allocates for transitional housing goes solely to transitional housing. This change is following the trend we are seeing at the federal level to allocate more resources to other types of housing models that aim at placing individuals in permanent housing. This is not eliminating funding for transitional housing- it is simply freeing up this money to be allocated to other places where it could be used more effectively. The Assembly adopted an amendment offered by Representative Subeck and I that will ensure this funding is awarded corresponding to the geographic areas served by each continuum of care organization, or COC's, in the state. In Wisconsin there are four COC's- Dane, Milwaukee, Racine, and everything else which makes up the Balance of State.

An example of where this funding could be effectively reallocated would be to the state's rapid rehousing program. Rapid rehousing aims at providing homeless families and individuals with secure permanent housing as quickly as possible. In comparison to transitional housing models, there are no limits on stay for a resident. Rapid rehousing works to achieve full time housing. This model works quickly to move families into permanent housing by providing them with services and financial assistance for housing related expenses. For example, rapid rehousing can facilitate the connection between a family and appropriate affordable housing options in their community. This entails recruiting landlords who are willing to provide these opportunities to renters who have a history of past evictions which ultimately led to their homelessness. Rapid rehousing also provides time-limited financial assistance to help cover move-in costs, security deposits, and rent. Additionally, this model provides case management services to address the barriers that prevent individuals or families from obtaining long-term stable housing.

The other change is to remove the geographic component that is currently in place when distributing housing grants and loans, specifically looking at Homeless Prevention Program funding. By removing this requirement, we are allowing for DOA to distribute housing grants based on performance and need. This means we can allocate more funds to where there are more people experiencing homelessness and we can award those communities who perform well.

Through my experiences as a member of the Marathon County Hunger and Homelessness Coalition, I have witnessed first-hand a number of individuals in my community who are experiencing homelessness. One of the main goals I had coming into office was to work on putting forth public policy that aims at combatting, not managing, homelessness in our state. My bill, along with the three others before you, is not a silver bullet to the homeless problem in Wisconsin. But, they are all first steps that we as a Legislature can take in order to start seriously addressing this issue.

That is why I ask for your support in all four pieces of legislation that are before you today. These bills will work collaboratively to move more Wisconsinites from streets into homes.