



Luther S. Olsen

State Senator

14th District

TO: Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities

FROM: Senator Olsen

DATE: January 18th, 2018

SUBJECT: Testimony for Assembly Bill 777

Thank you Chairman Murphy and members of the Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities for holding a hearing and allowing me to testify in support of Assembly Bill 777 (AB 777). This legislation is part of the Foster Forward legislative package that was developed by the Speaker's Task Force on Foster Care.

Most children these days grow up with the intention that after high school they will go on to higher education, get a job, and start a family. According to the Department of Children and Families (DCF) 84 percent of foster children express a desire to go to college. However, aging out of the foster care system without a permanent family creates significant hardship for many of these children. Currently, only 20 percent of children who have spent time in out-of-home care that have graduated from high school go on to attend college.

This legislation aims to lend a helping hand to these former foster youth who go on to attend an in-state university or technical college by granting them tuition remission. It would be granted until a student is awarded a degree or turns 25, whichever happens first. It will make an appropriation to the Higher Educational Aids Board to reimburse for remissions granted under this bill.

AB 777 will also create a grant program that will be administered through DCF for UW-System schools and technical colleges to create programs to support students who were previously in the foster care system. This program would be to help assist in the transition to campus life that parents would normally help with such as personal and life skills support, towels, bedding, and hygiene products for when they move in, an emergency fund for unplanned events, and one on one visits from support staff. This proposal will allocate an additional \$120,000 to DCF to administer a competitive grant program.

Again, thank you for holding a hearing today on this legislation. I ask for your support on AB 777 and would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.



JOEL KITCHENS

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 1ST ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Testimony for the Assembly Committee on College and Universities Assembly Bill 777

Tuesday, January 18, 2018

As Representative Novak mentioned, this bill came out of our time on the Speaker's Task Force on Foster Care, but the original idea for it came from a constituent of mine that I met when I was knocking on doors.

She was a long time foster parent who had ended up adopting several foster children. As we spoke about her commitment to providing her foster children with a better life and her desire to see them grow up to be successful, capable individuals, the conversation turned to what would happen to them once they turned 18 and aged out of the system.

The statistics are truly shocking. For those foster children who age out of the system, one in five will be homeless within two years. Fifty percent will spend time in prison. For the girls, 79 percent will be pregnant within those two years. Less than half will be employed by the age of 24. Aside from the human tragedy that these numbers represent, there is a huge financial drain on our system. Those kids are far more likely to perpetuate the cycle into the next generation.

A great deterrent to these difficulties is getting an education. Going to college or technical school would provide these children with the opportunity to build the foundations for a stable career and set them on the right track in life.

My constituent lamented that she would be unable to give all the foster children in her care the financial support to make college an option. This bill goes a long way in helping her, and all other selfless, devoted foster parents to know they can guide their foster children towards college and technical school.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to my testimony and I'll be happy to take any questions.



TODD NOVAK

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P.O. Box 8953
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January 18, 2018

AB 777

Thank you Chairman Murphy and members of the committee for holding a hearing on Assembly Bill 777. This bill requires the Board of Regents and Technical College District Boards to grant a tuition remission for qualifying foster youth. Reimbursement for this remission would be administered by the Higher Education Aids Board for a total amount of \$820,000 over the biennium.

In order to qualify for tuition remission, the student must have either (a) aged out of the system at age eighteen, (b) have entered the foster care system any time after their thirteenth birthday and achieved permanence through adoption, or (c) be reunited with their parents after spending at least one year in the system on or after their thirteenth birthday. These criteria are modeled after a similar program in Maryland.

We are introducing an amendment that makes a technical change to clarify point (b) of the eligibility criteria. This change will not affect the fiscal estimates attached to this bill.

To apply for remission, the student must first complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and be enrolled at a UW institution or technical school. Any federal money received must be applied to the cost of tuition and fees before any remissions are granted. Any state grants the individual receives are not required to be applied to the cost of tuition, instead, the student may use these funds for expenses such as housing or text books. The remission would be given for no more than six years or until the individual reaches the age of twenty-five.

As we all understand, tuition is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to college expenses. This bill also creates a competitive grant program for UW system schools to create programs to support students who are former foster youth. These programs would mirror a similar program at UW-Stout that helps to support foster youth as they attend college. This assistance could be anything from housing and bedding to an emergency fund for unplanned events. This program also includes assistance with the college application process.

84% of children in out of home care have expressed the desire to go to college. This bill closes the gap between the funding these youth receive from the federal government and the cost of tuition. If these youth know that there is money for them to obtain a post-secondary education, they will set their sights on realizing this goal early in life.

Thank you,

Todd Novak

TO: Honorable Members of the Assembly Colleges and Universities Committee
FROM: Kim Westfahl, Director of Adoption and Foster Care Services
Jacquelyn O'Flahrity, Program Manager of Foster Care Services
DATE: January 18, 2018
RE: Informational Hearing Testimony AB 777

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of AB 777, the bill proposed to provide University of Wisconsin and technical college tuition remissions for and grants to support foster care and other out-of-home placement students and making an appropriation. We sincerely appreciate the formation of the Speaker's Task Force on Foster Care as well as the opportunity to support the benefits of the bills proposed, including AB 777.

Lutheran Social Services of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan, Inc. is a statewide, nonprofit, social service agency that touches over 100,000 lives each year. LSS's services include Foster Care Services, Public Adoption, residential facilities for youth, runaway services, family preservation services, and outpatient therapy. We also provide a variety of other services to adults and children throughout Wisconsin.

LSS has worked with many young adults ageing out of the child welfare system in the past decade. We know from our experiences, these young adults have been through significant trauma and instability and face many challenges including the lack of sufficient resources to fund the costs of higher education. AB 777 would provide these young adults with the assistance they need to pursue a technical or college degree and significantly improve the quality of their lives long term.

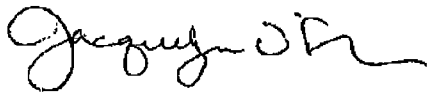
We sincerely appreciate the desire of the Speakers Task Force on Foster Care to take a holistic approach to the issues facing our foster care system and to specifically look at ways to support the transition of those ageing out who have no other means of stable support.

Thank you, again, for your participation in this valuable task force and for allowing us the opportunity to provide testimony today.

Sincerely,



Kim Westfahl
Director, Adoption and Out of Home Care



Jacquelyn O'Flahrity, MSW
Program Manager, Foster Care Services



TO: The Honorable Members of the Assembly Committee on Colleges & Universities

FROM: Kathy Markeland, Associate Director

DATE: January 18, 2018

RE: Support for Assembly Bill 777 – Tuition Remission for Former Foster Youth

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Assembly Bill 777 to provide additional support for youth pursuing higher education who have experienced an episode in foster care.

WAFCA is a statewide association that represents over fifty child and family serving agencies and leaders in the field and advocates for the more than 250,000 individuals and families that they serve each year. Our members' services include family, group and individual counseling; substance use treatment; crisis intervention; outpatient mental health therapy; and foster care programs, among others. For many years, our member agencies have focused significant attention on the needs of older youth in foster care, especially those who "age out" of the foster care system.

The foster care system recognizes that older youth in care experience unique challenges and therefore requires providers to work with these young people to develop the life skills they will need to live independently. Adolescents in care receive guidance on finding work, managing money, applying for post-secondary education, daily living skills, and healthy relationships, among others.

Background on Older Youth and Youth Aging Out of Care

Youth exiting Wisconsin's foster care system without permanency face a range of special challenges as they move into their adult lives. Like all young people, these youth need support – both financial and social – as they take their first steps toward independence. However, unlike their peers, youth aging out of the foster care system face unique obstacles that can make it more difficult as they seek to find their footing through their first tentative steps on the path to adulthood.

Over the past decade, researchers and lawmakers across the country have worked to develop stronger policies to support youth aging out of care. Former foster youth in Wisconsin participated in one of the most significant national studies, which has been frequently cited across the country as a basis for policies to increase services and supports for these young people. The *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth* tracked youth over nearly a decade. Some of the findings included that former foster youth:

- Are far less likely than their same age peers to graduate or earn a GED and significantly less likely to be enrolled in higher education;

- Are more likely to experience homelessness; and
- Are twice as likely as their same age peers to experience depression and physical health problems.

It is clear from the research and from the direct experience of our member providers that due to trauma and significant disruptions in their home and educational experiences, most youth in foster care at ages 18 and 19 are not developmentally ready for independence. In fact, more recent data on Wisconsin foster youth shows that while more than 80% of adolescents in care report a desire to pursue higher education, only twenty percent enroll and fewer than nine percent complete a bachelor's degree.

While the number of youth "aging out" of care continues to decline in Wisconsin, children aged 14-16, account for the second highest percentage of children in care. An episode of care in these critical years, even when a child ultimately reunifies with family or experiences another kind of exit to permanency, can impact their capacity to enter school and successfully complete a post-secondary degree.

Youth in care experience a range of challenges that inhibit the likelihood of pursuing and succeeding in higher education. They are less likely to have the guidance and attention they need to explore college options; they lack emotional and financial support; they are often behind in their secondary education due to instability in schools and failure to track credit attainment as they shift between schools. These deficits can extend into their college years as they experience less consistent adult support and more financial stressors. ("Foster Care Youth and Postsecondary Education: The Long Road Ahead," Amy Dworsky, Higher Education Today, December 11, 2017)

The Benefits of Assembly Bill 777

The targeted investment proposed in AB 777 would provide additional financial support for former foster youth pursuing higher education. The remission amount would be adjusted by the receipt of other scholarships, grants or aid received by a student. Recognizing the data about the impact of out-of-home care on adolescent youth, AB 777 extends the remission benefit to youth who have been in care for more than a year after the age of 13. Most importantly, the bill takes into account the lived experience of former foster youth by extending their window of qualification to 12 semesters, which would accommodate part-time schooling and allows for participation up to age 25. Former foster youth are more likely than their same age peers to initiate and complete higher education at a more advanced age.

Beyond the benefits of tuition remission, AB 777 provides some seed money to address the gap in adult support and guidance that former foster youth may experience on campus. Wisconsin has a few examples of campus-based efforts to support former foster youth and AB 777 would enable additional schools to build on these efforts and help young students connect with resources to address some of the unique housing and financial challenges that they may face.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to working with the Committee to advance this legislation.



January 18, 2018

Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities

2018 Assembly Bill 777

Dear Representative Murphy and committee members,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the foster care legislation before you today. We would like to extend our gratitude to Representatives Snyder and Doyle for their excellent leadership as co-chairs of the Assembly Speaker's Task Force on Foster Care

The Coalition for Children, Youth & Families, Inc. is a non-profit organization funded in part by grants from the State of Wisconsin Department of Children and Families. We consider ourselves the single source for neutral, objective, and current information about every aspect of foster care and adoption in Wisconsin; a trusted and continuing presence through every stage of a family's foster or adoption experience.

The unique role of the Coalition for Children, Youth & Families is to

- Advocate for the most vulnerable children,
- Coach foster and adoptive families to achieve resilience, and
- Lead by balancing the needs and interests of all those touched by the foster and adoption ecosystem – children, families, agencies, caseworkers, policymakers, and others.

It is through this lens that we offer our strong support for support of AB 777.

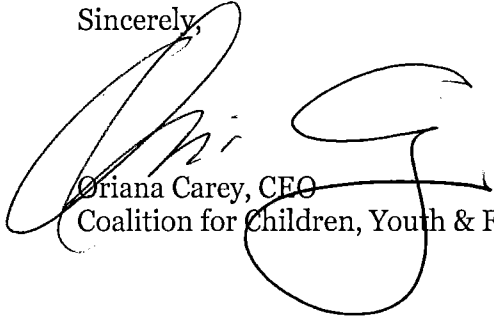
The Coalition for Children, Youth & Families, Inc., works tirelessly to advocate for the permanency of all children and youth who enter the foster care system. Specifically, we specialize in understanding the needs of the youth most in need of support. We have spent time with many of our young adult alumni, some of whom are going to personally testify during the committee hearing. We know the impact that their experiences have had on them. We know that, despite these experiences, many youth work hard to change their futures by enrolling in post-secondary education.

It is our opinion that AB 777 demonstrates a commitment to helping these youth more easily access continuing education. This bill shows that we, as a state, believe in doing more than simply listening to their stories and being troubled by what we have heard. Providing an opportunity for our former youth in care to have access to education and training creates both tangible and intangible returns on investment for our state. Research suggests that foster youth who receive post-secondary educational support are 3 times more likely to finish a degree program. Wisconsin needs a highly skilled workforce and with access to education and training, these young adults will be able to make positive and proactive investments in Wisconsin's economy.

Coalition for Children, Youth & Families
Formerly Adoption Resources of Wisconsin

Thank you for your consideration and continued support of children, youth, and families touched by foster care and adoption.

Sincerely,

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Oriana Carey'.

Oriana Carey, CEO
Coalition for Children, Youth & Families, Inc.

AKB 777

Hello and thank you for having me here today. My name is Katie Gordon, and I am currently a Sophomore at The University of Wisconsin-Stout majoring in Human Development and Family Studies. Before I was a college student, I was one of Wisconsin's 7,300 youth in foster care. I entered the Wisconsin foster care system at the age of eleven due to my mother's struggles with addiction and an incarcerated father. By that time, I had witnessed things most adults never have to experience, and no child ever should. I spent the next six years of my life bouncing in and out of foster care while my mom relapsed, which made focusing on school difficult, but I always knew if I was going to break the cycle of addiction and poverty in my family, school was my way out. School was my safe place, and the place I felt most seen and heard by the adults around me. Teachers helped me with everything, from buying my prom dress, to buying me tires when my tires blew out, so I could get myself back and forth to school. They called me on my birthday, helped me with my FAFSA, and when my last reunification with my mom at the age of 17 ½ went south, they took me into their home before I began college. I lived with teachers and frankly don't know what I would have done without them. While other soon-to-be college students were shopping for dorm supplies with their parents, purchasing meal plans, and dreaming big for their future, I would have been homeless had it not been for my teachers. Because I was reunited with my biological mom one month before my 18th birthday, I am currently ineligible for the \$5,000 DCF scholarship that so many foster youth rely on to afford college. I do not receive independent living services, or any other state assistance. I am completely reliant on myself, and that means I worry about everything from paying car insurance to my cell phone bill and groceries. I have adults who have stepped up for me in lieu of my family, but if I didn't, continuing my education would not be possible. When I was a high school student in foster care, I was just worried about getting through and surviving. I really didn't think college was possible until I attended a summer overnight hosted by Fostering

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

Success at UW-Stout. My brother who is my absolute best friend and the only person in this world who understands the trauma I have been through; Cannot go to college because he must support himself. It breaks my heart that someone with so much potential is stuck because of the cards they were dealt. These thousands of foster youth who aren't going to college because of the many barriers they face could be the next cure to cancer or President of The United States. Despite all the odds against me, I am now thriving in college; I'm working, involved in a sorority, and taking 17 credits while maintaining a GPA above a 3.0. If I didn't have to worry as much as I currently do about finances, I can't tell you how much weight would be lifted from my shoulders. I wanted to come speak to you all today, because this is so important for me, but I also had to think about whether I could afford to lose a day of pay to do so. I know I have potential, and am dreaming bigger for myself now than I did when I was in high school, and I want even better opportunities to dream big for foster youth in the future. We are resilient, capable, and a worthy investment in the future of Wisconsin.



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Governor Scott Walker
Secretary Eloise Anderson

Secretary's Office

Date: January 18, 2018
To: Members of the Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities
From: Lonna Morouney, Legislative Liaison
Fredri Bove, Administrator, Division of Safety and Permanence
Wendy Henderson, Director, Bureau of Youth Services
Re: 2017 Assembly Bill 777

Chairman Murphy and Members of the Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Assembly Bill 777, one of the recommended legislative proposals from the Speaker's Task Force on Foster Care. My name is Lonna Morouney and I am the Legislative Liaison for the Department of Children and Families. I am accompanied by Fredri Bove, Administrator for the Division of Safety and Permanence, and Wendy Henderson, Director for the Bureau of Youth Services for the Department.

Assembly Bill 777 creates two new initiatives to support youth who have aged out of foster care: tuition remission for UW schools and technical colleges to cover school-related expenses, and a grant program administered by DCF to UW schools and technical colleges with the purpose of establishing on-campus assistance programming for former foster youth.

Youth who have aged out of foster care experience many challenges. On average, compared to their peers, this group of youth have lower post-secondary enrollment rates, lower high school completion rates, lower employment rates, and higher rates of homelessness, incarceration and teen pregnancy.

As required by federal law, DCF surveys every two years Wisconsin young adults who have aged out of foster care. The results of this survey indicate that at age 21, only 7% of former foster youth are enrolled in a four-year college or university program and only 15% are enrolled in a vocational or 2-year post-secondary program. In contrast, information from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction indicates that of all Wisconsin high school students, approximately 35% enroll in 4-year post-secondary education and 19% in 2-year post-secondary education. National research has found that former foster youth identify the financial cost of post-secondary education as the largest barrier they face to enrolling in post-secondary education.

Non-financial support for foster youth at post-secondary institutions is also critical. The University of Wisconsin – Stout offers its students additional services through Fostering Success – a program designed to support foster youth while they attend college. The program provides a liaison who is able to assist eligible students with issues such as navigating campus life, reference letters for scholarships/grants, housing, academic supplies, and life skills support and

training. This is the only program of its kind in Wisconsin and DCF is supportive of the expansion of this innovative programming so former foster youth who want to attend college have the supports on campus to help them do so.

Post-secondary education and training is a building block to securing stable and adequately compensated employment. The supports proposed in this bill for former foster youth to access post-secondary education will improve their likelihood of transitioning to self-sufficient and successful adult lives.

The Department sincerely thanks the authors of the bill and the entire Task Force for their commitment to improving the foster care system in Wisconsin.

We are pleased to answer any questions you may have.

ALVERNO COLLEGE
BELLIN COLLEGE
BELOIT COLLEGE
CARDINAL STRITCH UNIVERSITY
CARROLL UNIVERSITY
CARTHAGE COLLEGE
COLUMBIA COLLEGE OF NURSING
CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY
EDGEWOOD COLLEGE
LAKELAND UNIVERSITY
LAWRENCE UNIVERSITY
MARIAN UNIVERSITY



WISCONSIN ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT
COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

WISCONSIN'S PRIVATE, NONPROFIT COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES
WORKING TOGETHER FOR EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY

MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY
MEDICAL COLLEGE OF WISCONSIN
MILWAUKEE INSTITUTE OF ART & DESIGN
MILWAUKEE SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING
MOUNT MARY UNIVERSITY
NASHOTAH HOUSE
NORTHLAND COLLEGE
RIPON COLLEGE
ST. NORBERT COLLEGE
SILVER LAKE COLLEGE
VITERBO UNIVERSITY
WISCONSIN LUTHERAN COLLEGE

TESTIMONY

By

Dr. Rolf Wegenke, President

Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (WAICU)

on

Assembly Bill 777

to

Assembly Committee on Colleges and Universities

January 18, 2018

Chair Murphy and members of the Committee, my name is Rolf Wegenke. I am President of the Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, or WAICU, the official organization representing Wisconsin's 24 private, nonprofit colleges and universities and their 55,000 students. Thank you for holding this hearing today and for your attention to the important issue of providing former foster youth opportunities to achieve their college and career aspirations.

This legislation creates a grant program at the Higher Educational Aids Board (HEAB) to reimburse the University of Wisconsin System and Wisconsin Technical College System for tuition amounts remitted for former foster youth. WAICU members have significant experience in supporting students who have strong financial need and require personal support. WAICU members do this by utilizing privately raised grants to constitute two-thirds of the grants the students receive. Three members of HEAB, a trustee, a financial aid director and a student, represent WAICU on the HEAB Board, reflecting the legislative intent that state student aid be awarded to all qualified Wisconsin students. WAICU members also have developed significant wrap around supports for students. They include small class sizes and the individualized attention provided to students with unique challenges. WAICU is also represented on the state's Foster Youth to College Council.

I ask today that you expand eligibility in the grant program at HEAB and to allow WAICU institutions to receive reimbursement for former foster youth students receiving financial assistance at WAICU members. The reimbursement should be capped at the same level as UW's. It is only fair that students in foster care be treated in the same way as other Wisconsin students. Wisconsin needs higher levels of educational attainment and foster youth need opportunity. I will admit this is personal for me. My mother spent some years in foster care. Her options for higher education were slim to none.

Thank you for your consideration of this request to include private, nonprofit colleges and universities in this legislation. WAICU members, while private, are a public service and public good. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.