



# JOAN BALLWEG

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Co-CHAIR, JOINT COMMITTEE FOR REVIEW OF ADMINISTRATIVE RULES

41<sup>st</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Senate Bill 344: Family navigator program in the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation in the Department of Workforce Development and making an appropriation.

Testimony of State Representative Joan Ballweg

Senate Committee on Local Government, Small Business, Tourism and Workforce Development  
September 3, 2019

Thank you, Chair Jacque, and members of the committee for holding this public hearing on the Family navigators bill.

In 2013, Wisconsin was one of six states awarded a 5-year PROMISE demonstration grant. This program was used to test strategies to improve employment and educational outcomes for youth and their families who were receiving social security income (SSI). Through this program, family navigators were hired to meet with those youth and their families in the community to determine their specific needs and connect them to services, supports and strategies that increase education, employment and self-sufficiency.

Since the launch of the program, nearly twice as many PROMISE youth (73%) who met with a family navigator have worked than the percentage (42%) who have not. Providing higher levels of employment support to these youth is shown to have positive impacts on earnings and employment throughout their lifetime.

With the PROMISE demonstration grant ending, I believe it is important to continue the proven benefits of family navigators. Connecting both youth and their families to employment services results in an increased household income, higher educational attainment and less reliance on public benefits, ultimately resulting in a cost savings to the state. By creating and funding the family navigator program, we can ensure that disabled and low-income youth and their families across the state will have access to these proven results.

Thank you for considering this bill, and I am happy to answer any questions.



# PATRICK TESTIN

## STATE SENATOR

**DATE:** September 3, 2019

**RE:** **Testimony on 2019 Senate Bill 344**

**TO:** The Senate Committee on Local Government, Small Business, Tourism and Workforce Development

**FROM:** Senator Patrick Testin

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Thank you members of the Senate Committee on Local Government, Small Business, Tourism, and Workforce Development for accepting my testimony on Senate Bill 344.

Senate Bill 344 will establish a family navigator program at the Department of Workforce Development (DWD) to provide services to individuals who receive federal supplemental security income. This bill funds family navigator positions to help eligible individuals gain access to employment training, housing assistance, medical assistance, vocational rehabilitation services, and long-term support.

Wisconsin was one of six states in 2013 that received a five-year PROMISE demonstration grant from the Social Security Administration to test strategies to improve integrated employment and educational outcomes for youth and families receiving social security income (SSI).

Family navigators were hired to meet with low-income youth and families within their homes or communities to assess needs and overall family employment. The navigators focused on connecting youth and families to schools, long-term support, integrated employment, housing programs, financial literacy, and vocational rehabilitation services.

The PROMISE project has resulted in increased household incomes, higher educational attainment for youth and families, lifelong wage earners, and less reliance on public benefits among the participants. Nearly twice as many PROMISE youth who met with a family navigator have worked compared to those who have not met with a family navigator. Additionally, youth who met with a family navigator had twice the amount of jobs since joining PROMISE project as youth who have not met with a family navigator.

The PROMISE project has demonstrated that family navigators play a critical role in getting youth and family members employed, while changing their trajectory out of poverty. With the five-year PROMISE demonstration project ending, we are introducing this bill to ensure funding for family navigator positions covering each of Wisconsin's Workforce Development areas.

Thank you again for listening to my testimony and I hope that you will join me in supporting this bill.



WISCONSIN BOARD FOR PEOPLE  
WITH DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

September 3, 2019

Senator Jacque  
Chair, Senate Committee on Local Government, Small Business, Tourism, and Workforce Development  
Wisconsin State Capitol, Rm 7S  
Madison, WI 53707

Dear Senator Jacque and Committee members:

The Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities (BPDD) thanks the committee for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 344.

BPDD has been involved with the five-year federal PROMISE grant since its inception, is a member of the PROMISE steering group, and has administered several PROMISE contracts, including the Family Training contract that has demonstrated the effectiveness of the Family Navigator model. Our previous experience with the federal Let's Get To Work grant—which focused on improving community employment outcomes for transition-age students with disabilities—demonstrated that elevating family expectations was critical in determining whether the student with a disability would enter the community workforce<sup>1</sup>.

In the PROMISE grant, BPDD applied what we learned from Let's Get to Work and suggested testing a peer to peer model who could work with not only the individual, but their family. Both in the disability and in the mental health fields, the use of family navigators has been found effective in connecting families to necessary supports. Navigators are typically someone from the community, who is experienced with disability, who has similar experiences to the families they are developing relationships with and is knowledgeable about local resources and supports. This peer support model has been shown to be an effective way to help families address the barriers interfering with obtaining or sustaining employment. This model changes the trajectory from a lifetime of public benefits to a lifetime of work and career.

Family navigators build relationships over time. Investment in relationships and connection to community members are unique to this approach, and key to transforming what families feel is possible and ultimately employment success. Often, low-income families are dealing with many daily challenges that impact employment—including lack of transportation, housing instability, food insecurity, caregiver shortages, childcare access, health or chronic conditions that require appointments and ongoing therapy, and other issues. Many people with disabilities and families do the best they can to cobble together a patchwork of fixes to stabilize their lives, and often that includes relying on means tested benefit programs that have strict income, asset, and other requirements. Fear of losing access to programs that are critical to survival—including Social Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Income (SSDI), Medicaid, FoodShare, Housing Assistance, etc.—if they work at all or too much is a huge barrier to overcome.

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<sup>1</sup> After three years 60% of these youth with disabilities were working in the community, compared to an overall 19% employment rate for people with disabilities .<http://www.letsgettoworkwi.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Outcomes-Recommendations-June-2014-final.pdf>

Family Navigators work with families to solve real life problems in order to create a path to employment. The relationships Family Navigators have with families are personal, and that is critical to understand and address the unique set of circumstances and challenges that each family faces before they can take the next step to employment. Family Navigators are not a referral service, they are trusted folks with established credibility who are meeting people where they are and figuring out how to help individuals to find their path. Sometimes, it means connecting families to information and public resources that provide more stability. Sometimes the solution is not a government program or service, but a connection to another person in the community who has a job referral, is looking for a carpool partner, who can provide childcare. Simple things that are not part of a service system can make an incredible difference, but that demands a knowledge of what people need and people on the ground with the knowledge of the community who can make it happen.

When people with disabilities and their family members are employed, the state benefits in three important ways; our workforce capacity is increased, state tax revenues are increased, and employees contribute (through payroll taxes) into major federal programs (Social Security and Medicare) that support many Wisconsin citizens. Wisconsin is experiencing a workforce shortage. We have people who want to work or who want to work more; Family Navigators can help resolve the barriers faced by low-income populations that can keep them out of the workforce and connect them to a job that fits for them in an area that is accessible to them<sup>3</sup>.

The PROMISE project was limited to transition age (19 to 23) youth with disabilities receiving SSI and their families. That description fits 8000 transition age youth in Wisconsin. Continuing the demonstrated best practices documented by Promise can move more youth and families to financial independence while reducing the dollars spent on public benefits by the state<sup>4</sup>. Even small improvements to employment and earnings can result in significant cost savings. If just 5% of PROMISE youth earn a little more than \$1000 a month, this results in annual cost savings to SSI and Medicaid of ~\$2.7M per year. If just 5.4% of PROMISE youth are employed with health insurance through their employer, the public health care savings will have funded the entire 5-year Wisconsin Promise grant (\$32.5 million).

BPPD is charged under the federal Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act with advocacy, capacity building, and systems change to improve self-determination, independence, productivity, and integration and inclusion in all facets of community life for people with developmental disabilities<sup>5</sup>. Our role is to seek continuous improvement across all systems—education, transportation, health care, employment, etc.—that touch the lives of people with disabilities. Our work requires us to have a long-term vision of public policy that not only sees current systems as they are, but how these systems could be made better for current and future generations of people with disabilities.

Thank you for your consideration,

*Beth Swedeen*

Beth Swedeen, Executive Director, Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities

<sup>2</sup> According to the National Governor's Association, states forego nearly \$6.5 billion per year in state tax revenue when working-age people with disabilities remain unemployed. Extrapolating across the lifespan, that number grows to \$195 billion over the course of 30 years. Even modest gains in employment and hours worked stand to increase state revenues.

<sup>3</sup> 507 PROMISE youth started at least one new job and are projected to work an average of 26 hours per week earning an average of \$12.94 per hour (\$16,822 annually). 5% of PROMISE you earned at least \$1,180 per month (Substantial Gainful Activity level), resulting in annual cost savings to Medicaid and SSI of ~\$2.7M per year. 306 PROMISE family members started at least one new job.

<sup>4</sup> There are 8000 transition age youth in Wisconsin receiving SSI benefits, SSI state supplement, and Medicaid at a cost of \$196M annually

<sup>5</sup> More about BPPD [https://wi-bppd.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Legislative\\_Overview\\_BPPD.pdf](https://wi-bppd.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Legislative_Overview_BPPD.pdf)

To: Senator Jacque, Chair, and Senator Bernier, Vice-Chair and Members of the Senate Committee on Local Government, Small Business, Tourism, and Workforce Development

From: Disability Rights Wisconsin, Sally Flaschberger, Lead Advocacy Specialist, [Sallyf@drwi.org](mailto:Sallyf@drwi.org) or 414-292-2737

Re: SB344- Family Navigator

Date: September 3, 2019

**Recommendation: For Information Only**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 344. Disability Rights Wisconsin is Wisconsin's Protection and Advocacy system for people with disabilities. A significant focus of our work both individually and systemically across the state focuses on transition services for youth, services for people with disabilities available through the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and employment discrimination. SB 344 provides valuable resources to youth and families to increase the likelihood of securing competitive integrated employment.

Over the last five years, the Wisconsin Division of Vocation Rehabilitation has been part of a demonstration grant, The Promise Grant, from the Social Security Administration. The purpose of the grant was to test different strategies to increase competitive integrated employment for low-income youth (ages 14-21) and their families. In Wisconsin, there are approximately 16,000 youth statewide who are in this age group and are considered transition-age who are potentially eligible for Supplemental Security Income. These are youth who would be served by this program. with the goal of reducing the youth and families' reliance on public benefits.

The Family Navigators were a critical part of the Promise Grant to assist both youth and their family members to become employed. Youth with Family Navigators had two times as many jobs and increased their weekly earning compared to youth who didn't have a Family Navigator assigned to their family. The navigators were charged with connecting youth and their families with services, supports, and strategies that increased education, employment, and financial self-sufficiency.

The DVR grant demonstrated positive results of 507 obtaining at least one new job, and 306 family members starting at least one new job. Youth were projected to work an average of 26 hours per week, earning an average of \$12.94 per hour, or \$16,822 annually. Youth with disabilities are more likely to be successful in future employment and post-secondary education if they have held a job while in high school. <sup>1</sup> In addition to these employment results, family

<sup>1</sup> *Predictors of Successful Transition from School to Employment for Youth with Disabilities*, (Wehman P1, 2015)

**MADISON**

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6737 West Washington St.  
Suite 3230  
Milwaukee, WI 53214

414 773-4646  
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**RICE LAKE**

217 West Knapp St.  
Rice Lake, WI 54868

715 736-1232  
715 736-1252 FAX

[disabilityrightswi.org](http://disabilityrightswi.org)

800 928-8778 consumers & family

navigators identified family needs that were possible barriers for youth and overall family employment. Navigators also connected them to existing services and systems (e.g., school, children's long-term supports, housing programs, financial literacy, future planning, vocational rehabilitation).

The state currently funds 11 Family Navigators through the PROMISE project. These positions will be eliminated if this legislation is not passed. SB 344 would fund 12 full-time positions located in each of the Workforce Development Regions with two in the Milwaukee area. The navigators would continue to support families of DVR-eligible youth ages 14-21 who are receiving Supplemental Security Income. The Family Navigators are comprised of people who have lived experience advocating for a family member and knowledge of existing Wisconsin programs and resources. SB 344 would also fund a Project Coordinator to provide support, coaching, and ongoing training of navigators in addition to continually evaluating outcomes of the project.

The total cost of \$2 million GPR would include the costs of \$80,000 GPR annually per Family Navigator position, \$25,000 GPR annually for training and evaluation of the project, travel costs for navigators and \$100,000 GPR annually for the hiring of a statewide project coordinator. Youth with disabilities and their families would benefit from the continuation of the Family Navigator program started under the Promise Grant to help obtain competitive employment and reduce these family's reliance on public benefits over their lifetime.

Based on DRW's work with transition aged youth and providing advocacy assistance to people with disabilities on employment concerns, SB 344 would continue the Family Navigator program which has proven to be a valuable tool for youth and families to increase the likelihood of securing competitive integrated employment, future independence and personal sustainability.

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9/3/2019

Paul Ziehler – State Fair Park Board

Good morning, Senators.

My name is Paul Ziehler. I live with my wife Carol in West Allis, where we have resided for almost 40 years. We have 3 adult children and 7 grandchildren.

I am originally from Ohio, grew up in Dayton where I attended high school and graduated from the University of Dayton in May 1966 with a Bachelor degree in Political Science and in December 1967 with a Masters degree in Public Administration. I am a US Army Veteran having served 2 years active duty and 1 additional year reserve from 1968-1970 and after training was assigned out of the Pentagon in Washington, DC. After Army service, I worked at a Regional Planning Commission for 10 years from 1970-1980 in Southwestern Ohio. In 1980 we moved to West Allis for my employment with the City of West Allis where I worked until June 2014 when I retired. During that time I had important experience in local, state and federal government as well as intergovernmental activities.

I have served and continue to serve on several nonprofit and government related boards and commissions. I have experience in management, public relations, human resources, risk management, finance and government operations.

My interest in serving on the WI State Fair Park Board of Directors is based on the fact that as a resident of West Allis for almost 40 years and as a former West Allis City employee, I recognize that the State Fair Park is a significant part and asset of the West Allis community, the Milwaukee Metropolitan area and the State of Wisconsin, and would like to strengthen that and see that that continues.

If my appointment is confirmed, I will work to further the partnership between the city and the Fair Park, and strengthen Fair Park operations and activities.

Thank you for your consideration, and I will be happy to answer any questions that you might have.

# Why High School Graduation is Important to Me!

I want to graduate high school and college because I want to be able to control my own *destiny*.

*Now is the time to make a decision about your future.*



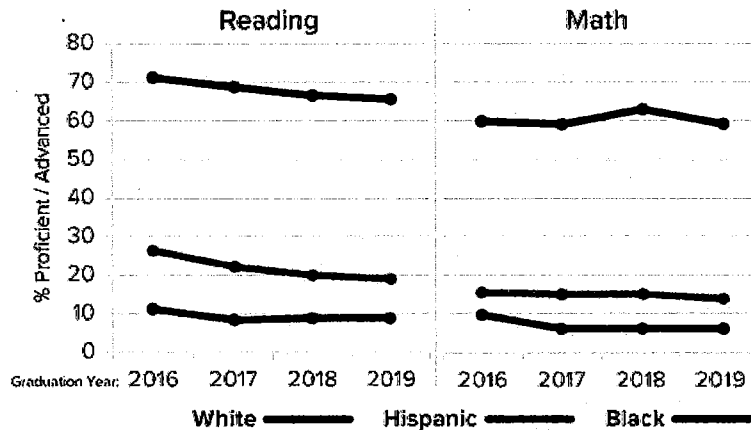
**You can't go to college unless you graduate High school first!!!**



## Why college is important for all races

Average income for a High School dropout is \$24,000 per year (Chron.com 2018)

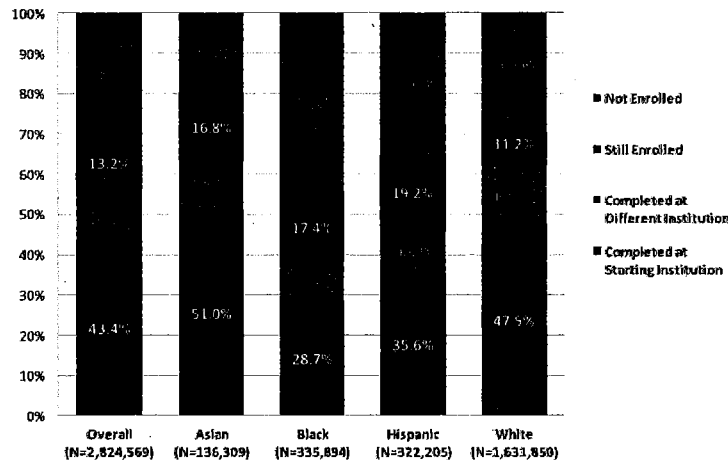
### 11th Grade Proficiency (ACT) of Madison students:



2017 graduation rates: **90.7%** **77%** **72.6%**

Average income for a high school graduate is \$30,000 per year (Chron.com 2018)

Figure 6. Six-Year Outcomes by Race and Ethnicity (N=2,824,569)\*



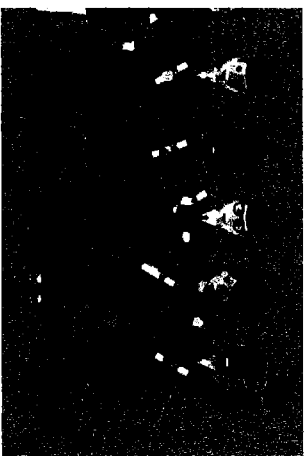
Average income for a College graduate with a Bachelor's degree is \$49,000

(Chron.com 2018)

<https://isthmus.com/opinion/opinion/madison-school-district-touts-graduation-rates-but-academic-proficiency-in-question/>  
<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/04/26/college-completion-rates-vary-race-and-ethnicity-report-finds>

Chron.com <https://work.chron.com/average-salary-college-degree-1861.html>

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School. Your  
Future  
depends on  
It!**



Created by: Doris

**I'm getting  
Mine Now  
Get Yours  
G.E.D.**



## E.D. Locations in Milwaukee

### Downtown Milwaukee Campus

1st State Street  
Milwaukee, WI 53233  
7-MATC (6282)

### Allis Campus

South 71st Street  
Allis, WI 53214  
6-5500

### Creek Campus

South Howell Avenue  
Creek, WI 53154  
1-4500

### Iron Campus

West Highland Road  
Iron, WI 53092

### Milwaukee Achiever Literacy

South Layton Blvd  
Milwaukee, WI 53215  
3-5108

### West Learning Center

North Vel Phillips Avenue  
Milwaukee, WI 53212  
3-5874

## CONTINUED

### Silver Spring House

5460 North 64th Street  
Milwaukee, WI 53218  
414-463-7950

### YWCA Southeast Wisconsin

1915 North Martin Luther King Drive  
Milwaukee, WI 53212  
414-374-1800

### Milwaukee Achiever Literacy

5566 North 69th Street  
Milwaukee, WI 53218  
414-463-7389

### Journey House

211 West Scott Street  
Milwaukee, WI 53204  
414-647-0548

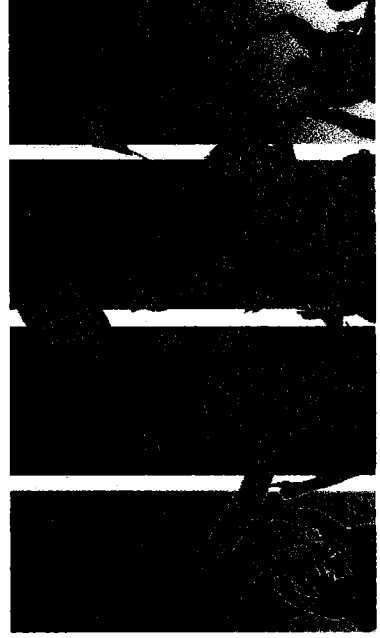
## G.E.D. STATISTICS

It's hard to quantify the full value of an education. But U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data consistently shows that, in terms of dollars, education makes sense.

For more information you can visit the website at:

<https://study.com/academy/popular/free-online-ged-classes.html>

# GED



September 3, 2019

Dear Senator Jacque and members of the committee;

Thank you for taking the time out of your day to hold a public hearing on SB 344 today. I will be speaking on my experience and things that I've done as a family navigator and why I support this bill.

I come from a small family and for as long as I can remember my life has revolved around the disability world. This transcended into my career and has helped me be able to help those in need. As a bilingual family navigator, I've noticed that the Hispanic community does not hold the same quality of resources that the English-speaking community holds. Not having materials in their native language or correctly translated has become a challenge to families seeking these resources. I've noticed that parents are inclined to learn more about information regarding job opportunities for their children after a family navigator like myself gets involved. There's a high demand for family navigators in all of Wisconsin because there's a lot of people in rural areas who don't have the accessibility or means to travel to the nearest populated city. Whereas, family navigators meet families where they are at.

I've experienced the perspectives of the Hispanic families that I've worked with evolve in the following way, from families thinking that their youth would never have an independent adult life and thinking that there isn't any help for them after high school. Some families have used public benefits since the infancy of their children and often think that that kind of assistance would carry on into their adult life and for that reason there wouldn't be any need to think about employment for their youth in the future. After working with these families, their long-

term goals have changed immensely from switching out dependency on benefits to helping their children live the most independent life they can. That often included having parents emotionally driven to learn the English language to help their youth and in return it also helped the parents move up in their careers or land better job opportunities.

Through personal experience as a sibling of someone with a disability it has helped me be empathetic and understanding of what families go through with their youth. Not only do I have the outlook as a sibling, but I've also seen the anguish from my parents when they couldn't find the help they needed in their native language. Some of the materials presented to parents are difficult to comprehend even in English but having someone explain it to them in the language they understand has been able to open many doors for those in need. There are many people all over Wisconsin seeking opportunities to be successful and independent, but they need people in their communities who know the system inside and out, who have been there before and who are willing to help many more. Wisconsin is made up of people from all kinds of cultures, ethnic backgrounds and many different languages and everyone should have the same opportunity to succeed in life. For the reasons I support this bill.

Thank you for your time,

Fatima Becerra

Hello and thank you for letting me speak to you today.

As we all know life is not easy, the stress, the requirements, and the every day hassles get to everyone. Well, a disabled person has those and more. They need to deal with more doctors, more paperwork, need to try and keep a job to pay the bills and live also but with more hurdles, either it be physical, mental or emotional.

When you are disabled and you have a problem trying to maintain a normal lifestyle and cant, you are told that there are resources out there to help. But no one tells you what those resources are and how to go about getting them. When you ask around, no one has a clue. After awhile, you give up because the stress and strain of trying to get any help is taking up too much time and energy, time and energy that you need to try and maintain a normal life style.

Now most people, people who truly are disabled do not want hand outs, they want hand ups. Meaning, don't give them the fish for the day, but teach them to fish in a manner that they can fish.

Promise's family mentor did just that for my family. While my son, who is now 18 and because of Promise, realized his craft, is now making money doing his craft, and going to college. They taught him how to work life with his disability. I got to be part of this wonderful experience with my son and in turn learned so much for our adopted 13 year old autistic son and have in place the resources he will need to hopefully live an independent life instead of one that might be in jail, in an institution, or sadly dead.

I also want to tell you how this program has helped more than just my family, because of the example of Promise, I put together a conference this past June and brought resources from all over Wisconsin to Racine and helped parents learn about ways they can help their children live a happier, more independent life. I was asked to do this again by now only the families but the providers who really do want to help but are not being utilized as they should. (FYI Racine is one of the worse counties when it comes to resources for children who come from hard places, please investigate that).

Thank you!

Catherine Foster  
262-456-4159

September 3, 2019  
RE: SB 344

My name is Julie Hallam and am from Necedah. Thank you for taking the time to hear my testimony on the Family Navigator bill this morning.

Five years ago on this very day, I found myself in in a different important building in Madison - UW Hospital. My husband, J, and I spent the morning getting our four children ready and off to their first day of school. We sent our youngest baby to 4K and we joked that it was definitely time to have another. There was nothing in this world we loved more than raising those children and we were really good at it. At the time, my kids were 15, 12, 11 and 4. Our 12 year old son, Draven, was diagnosed with autism at the age of three. J was absolutely amazing and much more patient with him than I could ever be. He stayed home to raise our children. He would read and listen to music with them for countless hours... my children are experts on Harry Potter, Lord of the Rings, Nirvana and unconditional love.

After the kids were dropped off, J asked me to take him to the hospital because he felt off, which was extremely unusual. The doctor checked everything out and decided it must be a viral infection. He prescribed anti-nausea medication and we left.

The next part of the story I hate to tell. Not because it reminds me of what happened, it's in my head every day. But there aren't enough words to describe the trauma of it all. J had a seizure while I was driving. He was pushed up against me and kept shifting the car into neutral so I couldn't get anywhere. When I managed to push him away enough to drive, we got trapped waiting for a slow moving train and the hospital was a mile on the other side of it.

I remember that moment so clearly thinking, "there is no way I can do this. I need him." We worked so hard to be great parents for our children. It made no sense.

They couldn't stop J's seizures at the hospital in Mauston. He was brought down to UW and a volunteer drove me. I didn't know if he would be alive when I got there. He survived for four more excruciating years as he battled a tennis ball sized cancerous brain tumor. Craniotomies, resections, blood infections, radiation, pressure ulcers, memory loss, mood swings, incontinence, paralysis, seizures... all while losing what J coveted most... his intelligence and ability to express his emotions.

J died February 10th.

Not only did I care for him, I had to take on the role as both parents to our children. Remember Draven, our autistic son that he was so great with? If you don't know much about autism, change is extremely difficult. Throw in some puberty and you find yourself in a real situation.

A year after J's diagnosis, we were accepted to be participants in the Promise program. I had no idea what that meant except Draven would get an iPad and I'd have another person asking me questions I didn't have time for. We were assigned "someone" and I was pretty much correct in my assumptions. She was pleasant but didn't relate in any way to my situation.

A year later came Trisha... our new Family Navigator. She had been there. She had experienced what it was like to spin your wheels when you're just trying to get help for the people you love. She was non-threatening. Understanding. Compassionate. Patient. Funny. She made everything so much easier. She wasn't another person asking me questions. She

met me wherever I was at and became an intricate part of our journey, helping me connect the dots.

She believed in us. She believed that our lives would not be defined by all of this tragedy.

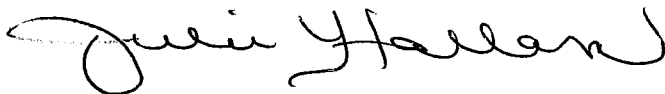
When I met Tricia, we were on food stamps, living in a two bedroom apartment and surviving, at best. Today, I am a case manager in disaster recovery, a homeowner, a taxpayer, a worship leader and an advocate. I drive a car that doesn't break down. I don't worry about how I'm going to get enough food to feed everyone for the week. I am able to help other people utilize the resources they need because I was shown how. Before this program, I had no idea being a homeowner was even an option for me. But money management and credit counseling was a part of it. I can promise you our family would not be where we are today without the Family Navigator model provided to us through the Promise grant. People don't know how to do better when they are not shown better. This showed us.

There are a lot of Tricia's and there are a lot of Julie's in this state. Seemingly hopeless situations that have the potential to be turned around. We still experienced the tragedy. Our hearts were still broken. Every bit of it was still terrible. But we came out the other side stronger... not more broken. We did not become victims of our circumstances. I needed that example of hope and triumph. I needed someone who had experienced all the barriers I faced or who at least had the motivation to sit with me and help me figure it out. I didn't need someone from the top who had never been there offering suggestions. I needed someone in the trenches with me and that's exactly what a Family Navigator does.

Today, my oldest daughter is 20 absolutely brilliant and in her third year of college and the campus English tutor. Draven is 17, loves school, loves to work and loves having the ability to save his own money. My 16 year old son starts his junior year today. He spends too much time with his girlfriend and too much time playing magic with "the boys." Aka - a typical teenage boy. My nine year old daughter is in fourth grade and is already set to tutor the third graders from her old school on the days she has off. They are brilliant lights in this world.

I believe in this bill so fiercely. Please continue to support it and fight for in on behalf of our families. Regardless of party affiliation, I believe we all have similar goals for our citizens. To live happily, be financially free and to contribute in positive ways in our communities. This bill promotes all of these things and more. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julie Hallam". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Julie Hallam  
202 N. Harvey Street  
Necedah, WI 54646



September 3, 2019  
RE: SB 344

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After the kids were dropped off, J asked me to take him to the hospital because he felt off, which was extremely unusual. The doctor checked everything out and decided it must be a viral infection. He prescribed anti-nausea medication and we left.

The next part of the story I hate to tell. Not because it reminds me of what happened, it's in my head every day. But there aren't enough words to describe the trauma of it all. J had a seizure while I was driving. He was pushed up against me and kept shifting the car into neutral so I couldn't get anywhere. When I managed to push him away enough to drive, we got trapped waiting for a slow moving train and the hospital was a mile on the other side of it.

I remember that moment so clearly thinking, "there is no way I can do this. I need him." We worked so hard to be great parents for our children. It made no sense.

They couldn't stop J's seizures at the hospital in Mauston. He was brought down to UW and a volunteer drove me. I didn't know if he would be alive when I got there. He survived for four more excruciating years as he battled a tennis ball sized cancerous brain tumor. Craniotomies, resections, blood infections, radiation, pressure ulcers, memory loss, mood swings, incontinence, paralysis, seizures... all while losing what J coveted most... his intelligence and ability to express his emotions.

J died February 10th.

Not only did I care for him, I had to take on the role as both parents to our children. Remember Draven, our autistic son that he was so great with? If you don't know much about autism, change is extremely difficult. Throw in some puberty and you find yourself in a real situation.

A year after J's diagnosis, we were accepted to be participants in the Promise program. I had no idea what that meant except Draven would get an iPad and I'd have another person asking me questions I didn't have time for. We were assigned "someone" and I was pretty much correct in my assumptions. She was pleasant but didn't relate in any way to my situation.

A year later came Trisha... our new Family Navigator. She had been there. She had experienced what it was like to spin your wheels when you're just trying to get help for the people you love. She was non-threatening. Understanding. Compassionate. Patient. Funny. She made everything so much easier. She wasn't another person asking me questions. She

met me wherever I was at and became an intricate part of our journey, helping me connect the dots.

She believed in us. She believed that our lives would not be defined by all of this tragedy.

When I met Tricia, we were on food stamps, living in a two bedroom apartment and surviving, at best. Today, I am a case manager in disaster recovery, a homeowner, a taxpayer, a worship leader and an advocate. I drive a car that doesn't break down. I don't worry about how I'm going to get enough food to feed everyone for the week. I am able to help other people utilize the resources they need because I was shown how. Before this program, I had no idea being a homeowner was even an option for me. But money management and credit counseling was a part of it. I can promise you our family would not be where we are today without the Family Navigator model provided to us through the Promise grant. People don't know how to do better when they are not shown better. This showed us.

There are a lot of Tricia's and there are a lot of Julie's in this state. Seemingly hopeless situations that have the potential to be turned around. We still experienced the tragedy. Our hearts were still broken. Every bit of it was still terrible. But we came out the other side stronger... not more broken. We did not become victims of our circumstances. I needed that example of hope and triumph. I needed someone who had experienced all the barriers I faced or who at least had the motivation to sit with me and help me figure it out. I didn't need someone from the top who had never been there offering suggestions. I needed someone in the trenches with me and that's exactly what a Family Navigator does.

Today, my oldest daughter is 20 absolutely brilliant and in her third year of college and the campus English tutor. Draven is 17, loves school, loves to work and loves having the ability to save his own money. My 16 year old son starts his junior year today. He spends too much time with his girlfriend and too much time playing magic with "the boys." Aka - a typical teenage boy. My nine year old daughter is in fourth grade and is already set to tutor the third graders from her old school on the days she has off. They are brilliant lights in this world.

I believe in this bill so fiercely. Please continue to support it and fight for in on behalf of our families. Regardless of party affiliation, I believe we all have similar goals for our citizens. To live happily, be financially free and to contribute in positive ways in our communities. This bill promotes all of these things and more. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julie Hallam". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping underline.

Julie Hallam  
202 N. Harvey Street  
Necedah, WI 54646

September 3, 2019

RE: SB 344

Good morning. My name is Nacola Kumferman. I am 18 years old and I live in Eau Claire.

Tricia has helped our family achieve many things we did not think we could do. She helped us with voting for the first time and helped me find the resources in the area that I could go to get help with my daily life. She has been supportive and thoughtful and has always made us feel like we were in control of things.

Me and my mom got to go to the Wisconsin Dells and meet people who had information and opportunities for us back in Eau Claire and it was a great time. She also got us to be part of a program that allowed us to be heard about things we care about in the community. Without Family Navigators, I would have felt more lost these past couple of years and would likely not have accomplished what I did.

Thank you,

Nacola Kumferman

2533 Boardwalk Circle

Eau Claire, WI 54701

September 2, 2019

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing in support of Patricia Thompson's role as our Family Navigator. I cannot truly express how much Tricia has helped our family as our Family Navigator.

Tricia was instrumental in so many aspects of our lives these past few years. For example; Tricia supported myself and my daughter through Chelsea obtaining her driver's license. Without Tricia's continued support, I truly believe Chelsea would not have been able or willing to pursue and complete her driver's education and subsequently pass her exam. Tricia also supported us during Chelsea's senior year of high school and encouraged Chelsea to take the CNA course as well as complete and pass the national registry.

As a single parent of two special needs children, I cannot begin to tell you how much her support has meant to me personally. Having absolutely no support system before connecting with Tricia to being supported by her in so many aspects, it has truly helped me to become a better parent, child and community advocate. Just knowing that I have someone in my corner and helping me to see and become more than I ever thought I and my life could be is a Godsend. We are so very Blessed to have her as our Family Navigator and even more so, as a friend.

I cannot wait to see the changes Tricia will continue to make in this state. I also cannot wait to see the seeds that she has planted within myself and my daughter continue to grow.

Thank you so much for letting me share such a small portion of the huge difference Tricia has and continues to make.

Sincerely,  
Mem-gween L. Hernandez  
440 Alder Street  
Black River Falls, WI 54615

# **Your Employee Benefits 2019**



September 3, 2019

Testimony

RE: SB 344

My name is Tricia Thompson and I live in Menomonie. I want to first thank the Republican and Democratic Senators and Representatives who have signed on in support of this bill. Your support is less to me about politics and more about trusting my word and validating my experiences. I took the day off from work to be here because I believe in the Family Navigator model and would like to do my part to encourage the passage of this bill.

My family consists of my husband Pete, our sons Andrew who is 13 and Ben who is 9 as well as my brother Nathan who turned 25 last Friday and happens to also be diagnosed with a disability. We adopted my sister and Nathan as young children following the untimely death of our dad and mom who were 41 and 47. Nathan works full time, drives, loves the outdoors and camping and most often would say I nag too much. Truth be known, he makes me proud to be his sister. I know the trauma he has endured during the critical stages of development and how hard he has worked to not follow in the same tragic footsteps our parents did.

My parents once told me I was allowed to be anything I wanted when I grew up except a social worker. This opinion was formed over a lifetime of negative experiences that only ever resulted in them feeling like their best efforts as parents was never going to be good enough. Had they witnessed my job as a Family Navigator over the past three years, no doubt they would have been supportive of my work and proud of the indirect impact they had on other families. There is so much I could share but in the interest of time I thought I would share the following list of some of the things I did while working as a Family Navigator.

- Starting with the first contact, I never gave up. I never placed blame on the individual and always made sure my actions matched my word.
- I met with the WI Promise Youth and Families wherever they felt comfortable and without judgment.
- I validated their concerns and frustrations while also empowered them to make a difference in their life.
- When appropriate I helped them understand the energy assistance, housing referral and waitlist process as well as access transportation.
- When assistance was needed I first helped each person recognize and strengthen the natural supports in their lives as well as build upon their strengths as parents.
- I attended meetings so that I could help open lines of communication as well as help the individual understand what the next steps were they needed to take.
- I did everything in my power to dispel the myths surrounding employment and how it might affect disability benefits.
- The Family Navigators were brought on board three years into the project. Several of the individuals I worked with had been labeled "cold cases" because the service provider had lost contact with them. This meant reaching out to the individual and eliminating the barriers that caused them to disengage from the project. I knocked on several doors only to learn it was not their intention to lose contact but they had moved and in the chaos forgot to mention it to the DVR counselor. Sometimes I learned the loss of contact happened when a service provider failed to return their calls, e-mail or text message. No

matter the reason, I believed in the potential of all of these individuals and did what I could to re-connect the individual to the service provider.

The Family Navigator model works. It works in part because like me, all the Family Navigators, have faced enormous challenges in life and have felt the same feelings of grief, sadness and loss. Still, they also found a way to rise above it all and take care of ourselves and our families. The individuals of WI Promise trusted our word because they knew our shared experience meant we believed their success was just as important to us. Even if they came from generations of individuals who never worked, I have witnessed youth willingly develop a roadmap to access housing and other temporary supports to provide them with the greatest chance at employment success.

This bill provides essential information, guidance, and support to those who want to be independent and work in the community. Not just for those who have a disability. It makes the correct assumption the majority of people want success and sometime just need someone to help them fill out paperwork like an energy assistance application or give them information on local section 8 housing vouchers and accessing waitlists. Sometimes they don't need a long term case manager to help them on their path to independence. What families always need is someone to demonstrate trust through following through and keeping their word. Returning phone calls on the weekend should never be out of the question.

Employment and financial independence for most doesn't just happen. It's a process that starts in childhood when you see your parents leave for work and arrive home and talk about their day. For those who have never seen or felt the benefits of working, it can feel next to impossible to understand the value or believe their life will be any different.

Please support this bill and help many more in this state create a successful employment and life path for their family as well.

Sincerely,



Tricia Thompson  
N4917 567<sup>th</sup> Street  
Menomonie, WI 54751  
608-235-2413

Amber Russell

1605 Birney Street

Eau Claire, WI. 54701

September 1, 2019

To whom it may concern,

My name is Amber Russell and my son is Montana Sullivan. My son has been involved with the Promise program for a couple of years. Prior to Promise, Montana had sort of a tough time engaging socially and acquiring the skills needed to progress in life successfully. There was a point in time that I grew worried for Montana as I wasn't sure if he would be able to socially engage with his peers, led along be successful in society.

Since joining the program and working with his family navigator, Tricia Thompson, Montana has opened a bank account of his own, which he did not have prior to the program. Montana was also able to work at the Walmart Distribution Center, gaining not only the confidence to be in the workforce, but skills needed to further his success with future employment. He also started school at CVTC enrolling in the Criminal Justice Program.

By being a part of the program Montana has went from needing assistance to assisting others in need. He has through saving money purchased a vehicle, gotten hired full-time at Walmart in Eau Claire, and helps others in need of finding employment. Montana has also engaged himself in helping out the community for others by taking it upon himself to help better the public transportation system and its access for the handicapped. The Promise program helped not only Montana, but our family as a whole. My husband Edward also enrolled at CVTC and acquired his Associate Degree in Criminal Justice with the help of the program. He is now a law enforcement officer with the Lake Hallie Police Department.

The Promise program has helped our family in ways that I don't think would have been possible without the assistance and resources that were provided. I think the program has been a success and I am truly grateful to have been a part of in what in my opinion is a great resource for families in need. The Promise program and its family navigators



not only assist in planning goals and success for the future, but they take part in bringing those goals to life and making a dream a reality. I am truly thankful to all that took part in my family's success and continue to be a help to others.

Respectfully,

*Amber Russell*

[amber.russell1029@gmail.com](mailto:amber.russell1029@gmail.com)