



JOAN BALLWEG

STATE SENATOR • 14TH SENATE DISTRICT

Senate Bill 555: Required Subjects in a Human Growth and Development Instructional Program

Testimony of State Senator Joan Ballweg
Senate Committee on Education
October 14, 2021

Thank you, Chair Darling, and members of the committee for holding this public hearing.

Wisconsin's "Safe Haven Law" allows parents to relinquish their newborn children to police officers, emergency responders or hospitals without legal consequence, so long as the child is less than 72 hours old. SB 555 adds information related to the state's safe haven law to human growth and development programming if the school board chooses to offer that curriculum.

Teen pregnancy is a significant public health issue. Teen mothers are at higher risk for adverse social, economic and health outcomes and are much more likely to either have low academic achievement or drop out completely. Teen childbearing also has a significant impact on our economy, costing U.S. taxpayers \$9.4 billion annually, according to the CDC.

In Wisconsin, and across the United States, we have taken many steps to curb teen pregnancy rates. Even though teenage births have steadily decreased in the past several years, according to America's Health Rankings, an average of 13 out of every 1,000 young women age 15-19 in Wisconsin were pregnant in 2020.

Being pregnant as an adult is stressful, but teen pregnancy brings along a number of additional stressors, including meeting school obligations, potential judgment by peers and ramifications by family members, and low incomes. When emotions are high, the safe haven law gives young parents another option to consider.

Thank you for your consideration of this legislation, and I am happy to answer any questions.



TODD NOVAK

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 51ST ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

(608) 266-7502
Toll-Free: (888) 534-0051
Rep.Novak@legis.wi.gov

P.O. Box 8953
Madison, WI 53708-8953

DATE: Thursday, October 14th, 2021
RE: Testimony on Senate Bill 555
TO: Senate Committee on Education
FROM: State Representative Todd Novak

Thank you, Chair Darling, and members of the Senate Committee on Education for holding this public hearing on Senate Bill 555 (SB555), which makes changes to health class curricula to include information about the state's Safe Haven law.

In Green County earlier this year, a newborn child named Harper was reported missing. After a search and investigation by authorities, Harper was found deceased in a remote wooded area with a gunshot wound to her forehead.

Harper was born on January 5th at her mother's home. Following her birth, the father allegedly took the baby and was going to arrange for Harper to be taken to an adoption agency. Tragically, Harper never made it to the adoption agency. The father has been charged in connection with the death. The case is still pending before the court.

It is unclear if Harper's parents were aware of the state's Safe Haven law. Current law allows for newborn children to be relinquished to police officers, emergency responders, and hospital workers without legal consequence if the child is less than 72 hours old. Once the child has been relinquished an adoption can be facilitated.

Safe Haven laws make a difference and help save the lives of newborn infants.

Today's proposal would make changes to the health class curricula to include information about the state's Safe Haven law. This bill does not affect a school board's ability to choose whether to offer health education to students. It simply adds education about Safe Haven laws to the curriculum if the school board decides to offer a health class program to students.

I worked in consultation with community groups, local constituents, and Green County District Attorney Craig Nolen to bring this idea forward. I believe through education we can help to prevent tragedies like this from happening in the future.

Thank you for your consideration of SB555.

DATE: Thursday, October 14th, 2021
RE: Testimony on Senate Bill 555
TO: Senate Committee on Education

I am Bobbie Thomas. My great great niece, Harper Lee, was the two hour-old baby shot in the head last January 5th.

I want to ask that the Safe Haven bill passes so that in the future, any young person who might find themselves alone with a newborn baby would know that they have this option.

Educators need to know that this bill is only a minor change to their existing curriculum. It's a piece of information that they can hand out or even post in schools. As an example, the Monroe Clinic now has information posted in their windows at the entrances.

Thank you for your consideration of this proposal.



**Gracie Skogman, Legislative Director, Wisconsin Right to Life
Senate Committee on Education**

**SB 555, Re: required subjects in a human growth and development instructional program.
Thursday, October 14, 2021**

Thank you, Chairwoman Darling, and members of the Senate Committee on Education for your time today. My name is Gracie Skogman, and I am the Legislative Director of Wisconsin Right to Life, testifying in favor of SB 555.

At Wisconsin Right to life, we are wholeheartedly dedicated to supporting the most valuable among us, whether that be unborn children, infants, or mothers in crisis. We believe life is valuable and worth protecting and defending. Furthermore, we see firsthand the struggles and uncertainty women in crisis may face throughout pregnancy.

Safe haven laws make a difference and help save the lives of newborn infants. According to the National Safe Haven Alliance, more than 4,300 newborns have been surrendered through safe haven laws nationwide since the passage of such laws two decades ago.

Yet, over 1,400 nationwide have been found abandoned as well. Even one case of infant abandonment is too many, and each is deeply heartbreaking.

Knowledge is power—especially when it comes to lifesaving measures like Wisconsin's safe haven laws. We have reason to believe that even more infants could be saved if more individuals were aware of these laws.

This proposal would make changes to sexual education curriculum to include information about the state's Safe Haven law. This bill does not affect a school board's ability to choose whether to offer sexual education to students. It simply adds education of Safe Harbor laws to the curriculum if the school board decides to offer a sexual education program to students.

Safe Haven laws in Wisconsin help save the lives of newborn infants and support mothers in crisis. By making changes to sexual education curriculum to include information on the state's Safe Haven law, an increasing number of students would be aware of these lifesaving laws. If even one child was saved through this knowledge, it would be a great victory. This imperative in the pro-life movement and will serve to protect the most vulnerable among us.

Wisconsin Right to Life thanks Senator Ballweg and Representative Novak for bringing SB 555 forward and urge support of this legislation.

Thank you very much for your time,
Gracie Skogman