

****WAFCA ACTION ALERT****
2023-25 BIENNIAL BUDGET ADVOCACY TEMPLATES
April 2023

Contact your state representative/senator and share your support for the following priorities! [[Who is my legislator?](#)]

1. [Raise the Age](#)
2. [Foster Care and Kinship Caregiver Rates](#)
3. [Funding Reform for Youth Residential Care & Youth Crisis Stabilization Facilities](#)
4. [Continuous School Mental Health Collaboration Aid](#)
5. [Medicaid Behavioral Health and Day Treatment Rate Increases](#)
6. [Grants for Qualified Treatment Trainees](#)
7. [Expanded Medicaid Coverage of Peer Specialists](#)
8. [Increase Funding for Home Visiting Services](#)

QUESTIONS?

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****ACTION ALERT****

2023-25 BIENNIAL BUDGET ADVOCACY TEMPLATE

RAISE THE AGE

The Issue

Under 1995 Wisconsin Act 77, general jurisdiction of the juvenile court was lowered from age 17 to 16, sending **ALL** 17-year-olds to adult courts in Wisconsin. This change made our state one of 14 to exclude 17-year-olds from juvenile courts. In the years since, 11 of those 14 states joined most of the country to include 17-year-olds in their youth justice system. Our state is now 1 of 3 that continues to treat young people as adults¹, and Georgia has legislation in motion to raise the age.

Action Needed

The full return of 17-year-olds to the youth justice system can be achieved with proper funding. Urge your legislator(s) to support this policy change and provide funding for this initiative in the 2023-25 Biennial Budget.

SAMPLE TEXT

Dear Representative/Senator [insert name],

Wisconsin is one of three states who still treats 17-year-olds as adults in the criminal justice system.

Policies that needlessly confine youth have an immediate cost for taxpayers and our communities. Not only do taxpayers foot the bill for youth confinement to the tune of hundreds of thousands of dollars per year, the impact of poor policy choices ratchets up long-term costs, including those associated with lack of economic opportunity, tax revenue, and increased reliance on public assistance.² Aside from impacting an individual's employment and earning potential, our current policy is actually LESS safe for our children and communities. Youth in the adult system are more likely to reoffend following adult incarceration than those served by Youth Justice professionals.³ Additionally, youth incarcerated in the adult system are more likely to experience physical and sexual abuse while incarcerated, and are at a significantly higher risk for suicide.

I write to you today to urge you to fund the return of all 17-year-olds to their rightful place in the Youth Justice system. As a human services agency, we stand ready to support our county partners through this change. As one of your constituents, I humbly request that you take action to ensure the safety of our young people and communities.

[**OPTIONAL – PERSONALIZE YOUR MESSAGE:** Share a personal story if you have one, cite a reason it's important to you personally or professionally, offer yourself as a resource or indicate how you plan to support them in the future.]

Respectfully submitted,

[Insert Name & Contact Information **including home address and zip code**]

¹ Teigen, A. (2021, April 4). Juvenile Age of Jurisdiction and Transfer to Adult Court Laws. National Conference of State Legislatures. <https://www.ncsl.org/civil-and-criminal-justice/juvenile-age-of-jurisdiction-and-transfer-to-adult-court-laws>

² Retrieved from:

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6001c216e769db5e69b0dd4d/t/6080817a842d6e4b34d7123a/1619034491167/RTA+Issue+Brief.pdf>

³ Raise the Age Is Right for Wisconsin, Retrieved from:

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6001c216e769db5e69b0dd4d/t/6177eeeafa0afe56a0714999/1635249898874/RTA+Talking+Points.pdf>

2023-25 BIENNIAL BUDGET ADVOCACY TEMPLATE

FOSTER PARENT AND KINSHIP CAREGIVER RATE INCREASES

The Issue

Wisconsin lacks sufficient placement resources for children, resulting in delayed or denied access to services and sometimes placement outside of the state. Wisconsin foster parents are reimbursed according to a child's age, as well as other considerations related to their unique needs. Base rates in Wisconsin are lower than most other states⁴, and the legislature did not increase rates last session.

Action Needed

Foster parents and kinship care providers should be compensated for the valuable care they provide. Urge your legislator(s) to support foster parent and kinship caregiver increases in the 2023-25 Biennial Budget.

SAMPLE TEXT

Dear Representative/Senator [insert name],

I write to you today to urge you to provide rate increases for foster parents and kinship caregivers in the 2023-25 Biennial Budget. Base rates in Wisconsin are lower than most other states⁵, and the legislature did not increase base rates last session. Wisconsin currently lacks sufficient placement resources for children, resulting in delayed or denied access to services and sometimes placement outside of the state. Foster parents and kinship caregivers are a valuable part of our continuum of care and are instrumental to ensuring Wisconsin achieves the vision set forth in the Family First Prevention and Services Act. An increase of 9.47% to the age-related Basic Maintenance Rates currently set for foster parents, and the rates set for kinship caregivers (\$300/month), would be commensurate with the COLA increase provided to other out-of-home care providers in 2023.

[OPTIONAL – PERSONALIZE YOUR MESSAGE: Share a personal story if you have one, cite a reason it's important to you personally or professionally, offer yourself as a resource or indicate how you plan to support them in the future.]

Respectfully submitted,

[Insert Name & Contact Information **including home address and zip code**]

⁴ <https://wehavekids.com/adoption-fostering/What-does-being-a-foster-parent-really-pay>

⁵ <https://wehavekids.com/adoption-fostering/What-does-being-a-foster-parent-really-pay>

2023-25 BIENNIAL BUDGET ADVOCACY TEMPLATE

FUNDING REFORM FOR YOUTH RESIDENTIAL CARE & YOUTH CRISIS STABILIZATION FACILITIES

The Issue

Providers of Wisconsin human services lack sustainable funding, as our current payment structure is rooted in fee-for-service rates and philanthropy, both of which fluctuate and are out of provider control. Counties and providers bear the brunt of the risk, with no baseline state investment in these essential services to help ensure capacity. The current funding structure contributes to gaps in care, stifles innovation, and creates a disincentive for expanding services in Wisconsin. Regulatory caps on earnings further impedes innovation and financial stability for providers.

Action Needed

Urge your legislators to support reform and provide foundation funding for youth residential care and youth crisis stabilization facilities in the 2023-25 Biennial Budget.

SAMPLE TEXT

Dear Representative/Senator [insert name],

I write to you today to urge you to provide foundational funding for providers of youth residential care and youth crisis stabilization facilities in the 2023-25 Biennial Budget. Over the past decade, our state has lost treatment capacity for serving children, which has resulted in increased utilization of out-of-state placements, a misuse of state resources, and increased risk for children. According to DCF data, more than 400 youth have been placed out of state since 2014, negatively impacting children and resulting in millions of county dollars lost. The lack of capacity to provide the right service at the right time has pushed children into hospitals, detention centers, and county offices.

Providers of Wisconsin human services lack sustainable funding, as our current payment structure is rooted in fee-for-service rates and philanthropy, both of which fluctuate and are out of provider control. Counties and providers bear the brunt of the risk, with no baseline state investment in these essential services to help ensure capacity. The current funding structure contributes to gaps in care, stifles innovation, and creates a disincentive for expanding services in Wisconsin. Regulatory caps on earnings further impedes innovation and financial stability for providers. A funding structure that enables providers to respond and serve timely, similar to the way police and fire are supported, would help stabilize the continuum.

Please provide annual funding in the amount of \$7.5 million to DCF to expand capacity in residential services and \$1 million in annual funds to DHS to ensure Youth Crisis Stabilization Facilities remain part of our continuum.

[OPTIONAL – PERSONALIZE YOUR MESSAGE: Share a personal story if you have one, cite a reason it's important to you personally or professionally, offer yourself as a resource or indicate how you plan to support them in the future.]

Respectfully submitted,

[Insert Name & Contact Information]

2023-25 BIENNIAL BUDGET ADVOCACY TEMPLATE

CONTINUOUS SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH COLLABORATION AID

Action Needed

Wisconsin should invest in ongoing school mental health aid for all school districts and empower communities to sustain and grow the collaborative school-based mental programs they have developed. Adopt a minimum of \$100,000 per school district enhanced by a per student allocation. ([LFB DPI Budget Summary, Categorical Aid, Item #3](#))

TALKING POINTS

- The bipartisan support for school mental health grants over the past three legislative sessions has been critical to lay the foundation for school mental health. More than half of Wisconsin school districts have received funding through the grant program.
- The current grants are capped at \$75,000 per district which limits the impact of these grants on more populous school districts. Meanwhile, the grant process itself can be a barrier for smaller districts.
- While school mental health efforts have been initiated in districts across the state, there continue to be significant inequities with some schools developing robust comprehensive, tiered supports and other schools lacking capacity and resources.
- Even with the recent infusion of federal resources, grants are not a reliable resource for school districts. A sustained commitment of resources will enable schools to make a long-term commitment to infrastructure to operate efficient, responsive programming.
- The DPI budget recommends a base of \$100,000 per district with a \$100 per pupil allocation annually which would increase equitable access across Wisconsin's school districts.
- Long-term sustainability of equitable access to school mental health services for all students depends upon a permanent, continual commitment of state resources.

SAMPLE TEXT

Dear Representative/Senator [...]:

As the Wisconsin legislature continues to work on the state biennial budget plan for 2023-25, I am asking you to support investments that lift up families, strive to eliminate disparities and expand access to human services supports to empower each member of our community to reach their full potential.

I work with students who were referred for services through their school. Students who are able to access services at school connect to treatment more quickly. In addition, my connection to the school enables me to consult directly with teachers and other supportive staff to share strategies and tools to promote treatment goals and student success.

[FILL IN WITH SAMPLE TALKING POINTS AND PERSONALIZE]

Wisconsin should invest in ongoing school mental health aid for all school districts and empower communities to sustain and grow the collaborative school-based mental programs they have developed between schools, counties, parents, and trusted local provider partners.

Thank you for your service to our district and your commitment to Wisconsin's children and families.

Respectfully submitted,

[Insert Name & Contact Information **including home address and zip code**]

2023-25 BIENNIAL BUDGET ADVOCACY TEMPLATE

MEDICAID BEHAVIORAL HEALTH AND DAY TREATMENT RATE INCREASES

Action Needed

Support increased Medicaid rates for mental health/substance use treatment and child and adolescent day treatment. Provide sufficient funding to increase reimbursement rates paid for outpatient services for mental health and substance abuse and for day treatment services for children and adolescents by at least \$20 million (AF) over the biennium. ([LFB DHS Summary, Medicaid, Item #12](#))

TALKING POINTS

- Human services agencies providing behavioral health services in partnership with counties and schools have difficulty competing for qualified mental health therapy staff.
- Behavioral health conditions are most prevalent in Medicaid enrollees. 39% of Medicaid enrollees are living with a mental health or substance use disorder.
- Workforce challenges are widespread and go beyond Medicaid, but shortages may be exacerbated in Medicaid. On average, only 36% of psychiatrists accept new Medicaid patients – lower compared to other payers and compared to rates for physicians overall (71%). (Source: KFF, 2023)
- More than 80% of children in day treatment programs are enrolled in Medicaid. Day treatment services are a critical community-based option to help children stabilize at home with their families thus preventing out of home placement and/or hospitalization.

SAMPLE TEXT

Dear Representative/Senator [...]:

As the Wisconsin legislature continues to work on the state biennial budget plan for 2023-25, I am asking you to support investments that lift up families, strive to eliminate disparities and expand access to human services supports to empower each member of our community to reach their full potential.

The agency that I work for serves a disproportionate share of Medicaid eligible children and families. This is our mission, but it is difficult to compete for qualified therapists and keep services available when our primary funder fails to sufficiently reimburse us for our care and treatment services.

[FILL IN WITH SAMPLE TALKING POINTS AND PERSONALIZE]

Please support increased Medicaid rates for mental health/substance use treatment and child and adolescent day treatment and provide sufficient funding to increase reimbursement by at least \$20 million over the biennium.

I look forward to your response and appreciate your consideration for this funding initiative during this critical time for the future of our state. Thank you for your service to our district and your commitment to Wisconsin's children and families.

Respectfully submitted,

[Insert Name & Contact Information **including home address and zip code**]

2023-25 BIENNIAL BUDGET ADVOCACY TEMPLATE

GRANTS FOR QUALIFIED TREATMENT TRAINEES

Action Needed

Support at least a doubling of the grants for mental health treatment trainees (ie “qualified treatment trainees”). In the 2019-21 Biennial Budget, the Joint Finance Committee created this treatment grant program that provides resources to mental health agencies to offset the cost of completing the training of master’s level mental health graduates as they prepare for full licensure. The Governor’s budget proposes \$1.5 million GPR. ([LFB DHS Budget Summary, Behavioral Health, Item #11](#))

TALKING POINTS

- With a continuing shortage in the behavioral health services providers and demand for services increasing significantly, Wisconsin needs to double down on our investment in the growth of the future mental health workforce.
- There has been high demand for this program which has been able to capitalize on the infusion of additional federal dollars to substantially increase the number of QTTs serving traditionally underserved populations and geographically diverse regions of the state.
- By the second year of the grant, grantee agencies were able to increase the average number of QTTs supported by 40%.

SAMPLE TEXT

Dear Representative/Senator [...]:

As the Wisconsin legislature continues to work on the state biennial budget plan for 2023-25, I am asking you to support investments that lift up families, strive to eliminate disparities and expand access to human services supports to empower each member of our community to reach their full potential.

Our agency is supporting the development of the next generation of workforce by employing mental health therapists in-training who are pursuing their 3000 hours of practice in preparation for full licensure. We employ these staff at a net loss to the agency, because these in-training practitioners are generally not reimbursed by private insurance. In addition, they carry a reduced caseload and require additional supervision as they develop their skills.

[FILL IN WITH SAMPLE TALKING POINTS AND PERSONALIZE]

Please support at least a doubling of the grants for mental health qualified treatment trainees.

I look forward to your response and appreciate your consideration for this funding initiative during this critical time for the future of our state. Thank you for your service to our district and your commitment to Wisconsin’s children and families.

Respectfully submitted,

[Insert Name & Contact Information **including home address and zip code**]

2023-25 BIENNIAL BUDGET ADVOCACY TEMPLATE

EXPANDED MEDICAID COVERAGE OF PEER SPECIALISTS

Action Needed

The budget should incorporate two Medicaid proposals to help advance opportunities for peer specialists including: incorporating peer specialist services as a component of the basic Medicaid benefit ([LFB DHS Summary, Medical Assistance – Eligibility and Benefits, Item #24](#)); and expanding access to psychosocial rehabilitation services as part of the general Medicaid benefit (Item #26).

TALKING POINTS

- The state is continuing to grow the certified peer specialist and certified parent peer specialist workforce and these professionals make impactful contributions to person-centered treatment.
- The everyday work of certified peer specialists can vary depending on the agency and setting. Several forms of support and assistance are provided to individuals connected to Wisconsin's community mental health programs, as well as those receiving services through inpatient and outpatient settings, hospitals, and jails.
- Agencies could employ more of peers if there were more consistent funding sources to enable providers to incorporate these professionals as full time members of their care and treatment teams, receiving a just wage and benefit package.
- Forty states cover peer specialists in their Medicaid programs and of those twenty report no limits on the services. Meanwhile Wisconsin currently limits reimbursement for peers to CCS and select substance use treatment programs.
- In a prior session, the legislature approved a bill to expand the general Medicaid benefit to include recovery coaches. This prior action lays the foundation for a similar action to incorporate peer specialists as a Medicaid benefit.

SAMPLE TEXT

[Dear Representative/Senator [...]:

As the Wisconsin legislature continues to work on the state biennial budget plan for 2023-25, I am asking you to support investments that lift up families, strive to eliminate disparities and expand access to human services supports to empower each member of our community to reach their full potential.

Our agency employs certified peer specialists - professionals who are trained to utilize their personal lived experience to provide support to others and demonstrate that recovery is possible. We are eager to employ more of these professionals and other paraprofessionals within our care teams, because they are key to providing person-centered care and also expand the array of service providers available to respond to the growing demand for mental health support.

[FILL IN WITH SAMPLE TALKING POINTS AND PERSONALIZE]

Please help advance opportunities for peer specialists by expanding access to psychosocial rehabilitation services and incorporating peer specialist services as a component of the basic Medicaid benefit.

I look forward to your response and appreciate your consideration for this funding initiative during this critical time for the future of our state.

Respectfully submitted,

[Insert Name & Contact Information **including home address and zip code**]

2023-25 BIENNIAL BUDGET ADVOCACY TEMPLATE

INCREASE FUNDING FOR HOME VISITING SERVICES

Action Needed

Increase state investment in home visiting services by \$10 million to nearly double the number of young families in Wisconsin supported with these evidence-based programs.

TALKING POINTS

- The Wisconsin Family Foundation Home Visiting (FFHV) programs are voluntary for families and use intensive, nationally proven evidence-based models. The program models must meet a national standard of performance and systems outcomes and proven research. This built-in programmatic high bar ensures families receive supportive services and outcomes are met.
- Outcomes research has shown that each dollar invested in evidence-based home visiting programs can yield up to \$5.70 in savings in the long run. Long term cost savings include: reduced health services use (including emergency department visits), reduced costs of child protection services, decreased special education placements and grade repetition, which results in higher educational attainment and economic success later in life (Source: NCSL, 3/22)
- The FFHV program is currently mostly federally funded at a total spend of \$16.8 million annually. Of that less than \$2 million is state GPR. Wisconsin lags behind other Midwest states in home visiting investment. Minnesota spends 10 times more state funding for home visiting than Wisconsin.

SAMPLE TEXT

[Dear Representative/Senator [...]:

As the Wisconsin legislature continues to work on the state biennial budget plan for 2023-25, I am asking you to support investments that lift up families, strive to eliminate disparities and expand access to human services supports to empower each member of our community to reach their full potential.

Our agency currently serves young families with home visiting services. We know the effectiveness of this programming to address intergenerational issues and empower new parents with tools and support to succeed.

[FILL IN WITH SAMPLE TALKING POINTS AND PERSONALIZE]

Please increase state investment in home visiting services by \$10 million to nearly double the number of young families in Wisconsin supported with these evidence-based programs.

I look forward to your response and appreciate your consideration for this funding initiative during this critical time for the future of our state.

Respectfully submitted,

[Insert Name & Contact Information **including home address and zip code**]