



NEWS RELEASE

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CONTACT: Kathy Markeland, [kmarkeland@wafca.org](mailto:kmarkeland@wafca.org)

608.257.5939

## May is Mental Health Month: WAFCA Urges Legislative Support for Youth Mental Health

In a joint convening of the Assembly and Senate Committees on Mental Health this week, WAFCA emphasized the importance of continuing to improve our care for children and youth, especially those with complex needs, by supporting a robust continuum of services including creation of psychiatric residential treatment facilities (PRTF) in Wisconsin.

An increasing number of Wisconsin children and adolescents are experiencing mental health challenges. Not only are more children reporting mental health needs, but the needs are also becoming more acute. Children's Wisconsin reports that the number of children presenting in their emergency room with suicidality or self-harming behavior has more than quadrupled over the past decade. For some Wisconsin children, these acute mental health needs co-occur with other intellectual/developmental disabilities that further complicate the care and support needed.

In testimony before policymakers, WAFCA Executive Director Kathy Markeland shared that "In fact, on any given day, more than twenty Wisconsin children are receiving treatment out-of-state due to gaps in our Wisconsin continuum of care. Most of the children leaving the state to receive care are being served in a PRTF."

Under SB 106 (AB 111) Wisconsin would be able to move toward creation of PRTFs which are a unique setting capable of meeting the needs of children presenting with high acuity. SB 106, part of a package of bills emerging from the Legislative Council Study Committee on Emergency Detention and Civil Commitment of Minors, received significant support among those appearing at Tuesday's hearing.

"WAFCA providers serve many children and families facing complex circumstances that engage multi-system responders from school to child welfare to youth justice to crisis and health care," Markeland emphasized. "Too frequently our continuum of care fails to engage with the right response at the right time, resulting in additional trauma and family disruption."

Noting the timing of the hearing during the final days of Mental Health Month and at the height of the state budget process, Markeland further urged policymakers to invest in the full array of services across Wisconsin's continuum of care including support for budget proposals to fund family resource centers, grow school-based mental health grants, increase Medicaid reimbursement for mental health and adolescent day treatment, and provide stable funding for specialized residential treatment services, along with the addition of PRTF. "We know that timely intervention and treatment can make all the difference. We look to our legislature to prioritize the full continuum of youth mental health options, setting our families and communities on the path to thriving futures."

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**WAFCA is a statewide network of non-profit and for-profit providers of human services supporting member agencies in their missions to improve the lives of individuals, families and children in Wisconsin.** WAFCA member agencies provide a wide array of prevention and supportive services such as foster care, in-home support, counseling, and mental health treatment. We advocate for our members and the more 200,000 individuals and families that they impact each year.