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WAFCA Praises Advancement of Youth Justice Reform

Today the Assembly Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety approved Assembly Bill 660, which would return certain 17-year-old, first time, nonviolent offenders to the youth justice system.

“With their bipartisan action today, the Committee took an important first step toward advancing this long-sought policy change. With all we know about brain-development and the efficacy of community-based treatment services for these young people, it is time to move forward,” stated WAFCA Executive Director Linda Hall.

Research on neurodevelopment is increasingly confirming that 17-year-old brains lack the capacities of fully-formed, adult brains. Youth who land in the youth justice system often arrive with substantial trauma histories and untreated mental health diagnoses. Investing in rehabilitative, age-appropriate services for youth has been proven to generate taxpayer savings.

“This is a time when our Legislature and our Governor have increased investment in recovery-oriented approaches in our justice system, recognized the real impact of trauma and the values of trauma informed services through efforts like Fostering Futures, and are seeking to reform our youth corrections system to integrate more treatment in settings closer to family to facilitate better community-connections. AB 660 perfectly aligns with these policies,” emphasized Hall.

WAFCA member agencies partner with government to serve adjudicated youth through services like: residential and group home care, treatment foster care, alternative education, wraparound, mental health and AODA treatment, family counseling, day treatment services, mentoring, vocational training, community monitoring, and intensive in-home therapy. Using evidence-based and evidence-informed practices such as trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy, motivational interviewing and restorative justice, these supports promote sustained change in youth offenders and their family systems.

“This is the right time for Wisconsin to advance this common-sense approach to serving youth and giving them an opportunity for treatment, rehabilitation and a hopeful future,” concluded Hall.

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WAFCA is a member association that works to improve the lives of families and children in Wisconsin.

Our member agencies provide a wide array of prevention and supportive services such as foster care, in-home support, counseling, and mental health treatment. WAFCA represents over 50 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.