



**TO:** Senate Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, Children & Families  
**FROM:** Kristin Kopcha, MSW, APSW, Director, Family Preservation & Support, and Julie Woodbury, EdD, Manager, Family Preservation & Support, Children's Wisconsin  
**DATE:** Tuesday, January 13, 2026  
**RE:** Support for SB 701 – Funding for the Family Foundations home visitation program

Chair James and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to share testimony with you today. My name is Kristin Kopcha and I have been the director of family preservation and support at Children's Wisconsin for the past 12 years. I'm joined by my colleague, Julie Woodbury, a family preservation and support manager who is based out of our Black River Falls office. We're here today to share Children's Wisconsin's (Children's) strong support for this bipartisan legislation. Children's wants to thank you, Senator James, as a bill author, along with Representative Snyder, for your work on this proposal.

Children's is the region's only independent health care system dedicated solely to the health and well-being of kids. As such, we offer a wide array of programs and services inside our hospital and clinic walls and out in our communities. Between our hospitals in Milwaukee and Neenah, primary, specialty and urgent care clinics and community services offices across the state – we provide kids and their families with care and services they need to promote health, safety and well-being. As you may know, Children's is also the largest not-for-profit, community-based agency serving children and families in the state, providing community services to approximately 19,000 children and families annually with more than a dozen locations across Wisconsin. This includes child and family counseling, child advocacy centers, foster and adoption care and family support services.

Wisconsin's Family Foundations Home Visiting program distributes funding to entities throughout the state, including Children's, to provide pregnant women, children and families with voluntary, in-home supports and mentoring through their children's first years of life. Home visiting is a low cost, sustainable prevention measure which aims to reduce child welfare system involvement, keeping children healthy, safe and at home with their parents. It helps reduce the risk of child maltreatment, strengthen family functioning, provide connection to community resources, and promote healthy child development.

Wisconsin Family Foundations Home Visiting program has not received additional GPR funding since 2019, despite growing costs, demand for services, and demonstrated efficacy. Any increase in additional funds, including the \$1.2 million outlined in this legislation, will help support expanding these valuable services to families with young children across our state. Providing families with trusted support, resources and empowering them to care for their families early on sets families on a positive trajectory.

Children's provides individualized, home-based parenting education and support programming in communities across 13 counties. Four of our sites receive Family Foundations Home Visiting support. Our other home visiting programs are funded through support from Children's Wisconsin, county funds and philanthropic sources. Services often occur in the home or a community location of their choosing on a frequent basis to provide education on a variety of topics like pregnancy, health, child development, and safe sleep; home visitors also offer guidance on navigating the often complex food and child assistance programs. Home visitors and parents share thoughts and goals with the trained home visitor offering support, mentoring, guidance and education to help families best care for their children and themselves. Using evidence-based approaches, home visitors help families to improve physical and

mental health, engage parents in their child's education and achievements, empower families to become economically self-sufficient and promote positive parenting practices.

Across all of Children's home visiting programs in 2025, we served nearly 500 children and their families with more than 6,500 visits. Importantly, the families Children's serves through home visiting continue to demonstrate growth and positive outcomes, including 100% of children served having an identified primary care provider. In addition, 80% of the more than 2,600 resource referrals provided by home visitors in 2025 are being accessed. The top resource referral needs for families in 2025 were for housing, food/nutrition and mental health supports. Home visitors help to build formal and informal family supports, enhance infant mental health, improve birth outcomes, and enhance family functioning by reducing risk, building protective factors and supporting family goals.

Studies continue to reflect the impact of a mother's health on her baby's health and the strong connection between the two. The health and well-being of a mother from pre-pregnancy to postpartum has implications on a child's physical, cognitive and social-emotional development. Maternal morbidity and mortality continue to be of significant concern across the nation and here in Wisconsin. It's disheartening that moms of color and those living in rural areas face significantly higher rates of preventable maternal injury and death resulting in disparities with lasting impacts for families across our state.

The teams we work with across the state have countless stories to share of families whose lives are forever changed by their connection with their home visitors. While each story is unique, the common theme is that home visitors provide a source of guidance, support, encouragement and reassurance when families are navigating some of their most challenging seasons of life.

One family's journey began at a point of high crisis. Following the birth of their first child, the parents faced significant barriers to stability. Both mother and father were struggling with methamphetamine use and were on Subutex treatment; the baby was born experiencing withdrawals and was placed in out-of-home care. At the time of enrollment into our home visiting program, the family was:

- **Unhoused:** Living in a motel with no stable income.
- **Isolated:** Lacking a support system to help navigate their open CPS case.
- **Struggling:** Managing the weight of past trauma and active addiction.

Over the next five years, the family partnered with the home visiting program to navigate their most difficult moments. Even when a second child was born and placed in out-of-home care, the parents remained committed to their reunification goals. The program provided a steady foundation through:

- **Goal alignment:** Coordinating directly with DHHS requirements to ensure a clear path to regaining custody.
- **Parenting education:** Building the skills and confidence necessary to care for their children's unique needs.
- **Resource connection:** Bridging the gap to housing, mental health services, and employment.

Today, this family is a testament to the power of persistence. After five years of intensive work, they graduated from the program having achieved total transformation:

- **Family unity:** They have regained full custody of both children, who are now thriving in school.
- **Long-term recovery:** Both parents have maintained **sobriety for over three years**, breaking the generational cycle of substance use.

- **Stability:** The family now resides in safe, permanent housing supported by stable employment and adequate income.
- **Community:** They have moved from isolation to having a robust support system they can rely on for help and encouragement.

The parents are now proud to be providing a different future for their children, rooted in safety, stability, and health. While home visiting services are provided to families with kids in out-of-home care like this one, our programs also offer preventive supports to ensure families have the resources, education and connections to provide a safe, healthy environment for their child and family to thrive.

SB 701 would provide a meaningful increase in funds enabling more programs like ours to serve more kids and families in need across our state. These evidence-based programs<sup>1</sup> are impactful by helping families develop the skills and tools they need to foster an environment where they are setting and striving to reach goals, building confidence and creating a home environment where their kids can thrive towards a brighter future. As you've heard, these services can be life-changing for families, setting them on a path of self-sufficiency and well-being.

Thank you for the opportunity to share Children's Wisconsin's support for this important legislation that would provide critical funding to home visiting programs across our state. We encourage your support of this legislation and our team is happy to answer any questions now or in the future.

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*Children's Wisconsin (Children's) serves children and families in every county across the state. We have inpatient hospitals in Milwaukee and the Fox Valley. We care for every part of a child's health, from critical care at one of our hospitals, to routine checkups in our primary care clinics. Children's also provides specialty care, urgent care, emergency care, dental care, school health nurses, foster care and adoption services, family resource centers, child health advocacy, health education, family preservation and support, mental health services, pediatric medical research and the statewide poison hotline.*

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<sup>1</sup> Included here are links to some of the home visiting program models utilized by Children's Wisconsin in the Family Foundations Home Visiting program. They outline research findings, effectiveness and positive outcomes.

Healthy Families America: [https://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/HFA\\_Evidence\\_of\\_Effectiveness\\_2022\\_Website.pdf](https://www.healthyfamiliesamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/HFA_Evidence_of_Effectiveness_2022_Website.pdf)

Parents as Teachers: <https://parentsasteachers.org/research-and-results/>

Casey Family Foundation issue paper: [https://www.casey.org/media/22.07-QFF-SC-Home-visiting-programs\\_fnl.pdf](https://www.casey.org/media/22.07-QFF-SC-Home-visiting-programs_fnl.pdf)