



**TO: Members of the Joint Finance Committee**  
**FROM: Sandy Stetzer, Director, Family Preservation & Support Manager, Children's Wisconsin**  
**DATE: April 26, 2023**  
**RE: Support for Family Resource Centers**

My name is Sandy Stetzer and I am a family preservation and support manager at Children's Wisconsin's Rhinelander Community Services Office. I'm here today to express support for additional funding for programs that support and build on the strengths of families in our state. This includes increased state funds for Family Resource Centers, home visiting programs, and resources for parents, caregivers and providers like the Triple P Positive Parenting Program. While Children's supports additional state investment in home visiting and Triple P, today I'm going to focus my comments on the importance of Family Resource Centers and how we serve and positively impact families.

Many of you are familiar with Children's Wisconsin and the high quality, specialty pediatric care and community programs and services we offer across the state to support kids and families with their health and well-being. As you may know, Children's is the largest not-for-profit, community-based agency serving children and families in the state, providing community services to approximately 15,000 children and families annually.

Children's supports and strengthens children and families across Wisconsin with family-centered and strengths-based programs to help keep children safely at home in a nurturing environment. Children's provides home visiting services across the state to support at-risk parents, during a pregnancy through the first five years of the child's life, to reduce the likelihood of child maltreatment and to strengthen family functioning. We operate seven of the 15 child advocacy centers (CACs) across the state to evaluate and care for kids who may have been neglected or abused. In partnership with the Division of Milwaukee Child Protective Services, Children's is responsible for the ongoing case management of approximately half of the youth and families involved in out-of-home care in Milwaukee County. We provide diligent efforts to move children to permanency through prioritized reunification with parents when possible, placement with relatives, guardianship transfer or adoption. We recruit, license and support foster and adoptive parents, as well as match and place children in safe, loving homes.

At Children's Rhinelander Office, we provide an array of services for families. We offer our Family Support program which provides parents and caregivers with skills and helps them meet their family well-being needs. We provide home visiting which supports parents with individualized parenting, child development and family relationships education and resources. Home visitors and parent educators help families to improve physical and mental health, engage parents in their child's development, education and achievements, empower families to become economically self-sufficient, and promote positive parenting practices. Parents receive the support, mentoring, guidance, education, resources and opportunities for social connections with others so they can provide children with a healthy, safe and supportive environment. Along with our home visiting and child well-being partners, Children's supports a \$10 million increase in state investment in home visiting services to nearly double the number of young families in Wisconsin supported with these evidence-based programs. Today, I'd like to focus on our Family Resource Center in Rhinelander. Children's has six other Family Resource Centers across the state in Janesville, Wausau, Black River Falls, Merrill, Antigo and Marshfield.

Family Resource Centers provide parents and caregivers with resources and opportunities to learn to be the best possible parents they can be. Parents can connect with resources, access programs and enjoy family activities with their children at no cost. We are open for those walking in needing assistance and also offer warmlines for

parents to call when they need support. We provide group-based activities including parenting classes, information sessions on topics that are valuable to parents, as well as parent-child interaction activities such as Play and Learn and Wiggle, Giggle and Shake, a music and movement program. What may appear to be a play group is also a tool to strengthen family functioning and monitor a child's development. Our programming continually evolves in response to community needs and requests.

Families are the foundation of our communities and ensuring families are healthy, strong and thriving is key to ensuring our communities are as well. Family Resource Centers provide families with resources and supports they need – whether to build parenting skills, addressing behavioral challenges or getting connections to address their basic needs. Family Resource Centers promote family stability and self-sufficiency and represent a smart, upstream investment to prevent escalation of challenges which can help avoid adverse child and family outcomes.

In closing, I'd like to share an example of how Family Resource Centers impact Wisconsin families. Family Resource Center staff are trained in identifying potential developmental delays in children. One young child who attended one of our programs with their mother was demonstrating some behaviors that caught staff's eye. When discussing these with mom, she similarly had concerns. The Family Resource Center staff were able to help mom get an assessment completed and get connected to the appropriate Birth to Three resources in their community. This child was able to get the support they needed to be on track with their milestones and ready to attend kindergarten. This early support and intervention was critically important for this child and family to thrive.

I encourage your support for \$4.1 million to the Child Abuse & Neglect Prevention Board to better support Wisconsin's Family Resource Centers. The state's investment will help support families like these across our state.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today and I'm glad to answer any questions now or in the future.

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