



# **JULIE LASSA**

## **STATE SENATOR**

**Committee on Workforce Development, Public Works and Military Affairs**  
**Tuesday, January 5, 2016**  
**Room 330SW**

Chairman Roth and members of the Senate Workforce Development Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today in support of Senate Bill 247 which would increase participation in Wisconsin's Children First Program.

This bill was drafted at the request of child support directors in Monroe and Ashland counties, as well as the Department of Children and Families, to resolve a problem that judges often face when considering whether to send a non-custodial parent to a Children First Program.

Wisconsin's Children First Program, administered by DCF, assists non-custodial parents who are unemployed or underemployed obtain jobs. Non-custodial parents may be ordered by the court to participate in the Children First Program if they are unable to meet their child support obligations, and "graduate" from the program when they make timely child support payments for three consecutive months, or participate in the Children First Program for 16 weeks. Children First Programs may be locally administered by a county child support agency, a county human or social service agency, or a W-2 agency.

Many times, the county where the support order is based does not have a Children First Program. This creates a problem because it prohibits a judge from ordering a non-custodial parent to participate in the program with the goal of helping the parent meet their child support obligations. Child support agencies are requesting that current statutes be modified so that judges may order non-custodial parents living in a county without a Children First Program to attend the program in a neighboring county if the judge determines it is within reasonable driving distance.

This legislation will give judges the ability to order a greater number of non-custodial parents to participate in a Children First Program and help ensure that these parents get the assistance they need to obtain a job and meet their child support obligations.

The companion bill, Assembly Bill 351, passed the Assembly Children and Families Committee on December 9<sup>th</sup> on a vote of 11-0 and is now available to be scheduled for a vote on the Assembly floor. It is my hope that this committee also holds a vote on Senate Bill 247 soon so that the bill can be voted on by the full Senate.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify in support of this legislation.



# NANCY VANDERMEER

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 70<sup>TH</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

TO: Honorable Members of the Senate Committee on Workforce Development, Public Works, and Military Affairs

FROM: State Representative Nancy VanderMeer

DATE: January 5, 2016

SUBJECT: Testimony in Support of SB 247

Thank you Chairman Roth and members of the Senate Committee on Workforce Development, Public Works, and Military Affairs for holding a hearing on Senate Bill 247 today. As the author of this legislation, along with Senator Lassa, I am pleased to testify before you and to take any questions that committee members may have.

Wisconsin's Children First Program, administered by the Department of Children & Families, assists non-custodial parents who are unemployed or underemployed obtain jobs. Non-custodial parents may be court-ordered to participate in the Children First Program if they are unable to meet their child support obligations.

Under current law, a non-custodial parent can only be referred to a Children First Program in the county in which they reside if that county agrees to enroll the parent in the program. However, not all Wisconsin counties have a Children First Program. This creates a problem because non-custodial parents currently cannot be court ordered to participate in a Children First Program outside of the county in which they reside.

At the request of our county child support agencies, this legislation will modify current statutes so that judges may order non-custodial parents living in a county without a Children First Program to attend the program in a neighboring county if the judge determines it is within reasonable driving distance.

In closing, I ask that you join Senator Lassa and myself in support of this legislation. Thank you for the opportunity to testify here today, I would be happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.

Workforce Development, Public Works and Military Affairs Committee  
Public Hearing  
Senate Bill 247  
Tuesday, January 5, 2016

Dear Senator Roth and members of the Senate Committee on Workforce Development, Public Works and Military Affairs, thank you for holding a hearing on Senate Bill 247 and allowing me to testify before you today.

My name is Pamela Pipkin and I am the Child Support Director for the Monroe County Child Support Agency.

I apologize for not being present to testify in person but I am scheduled to be in Child Support Court most of the day and not able to attend.

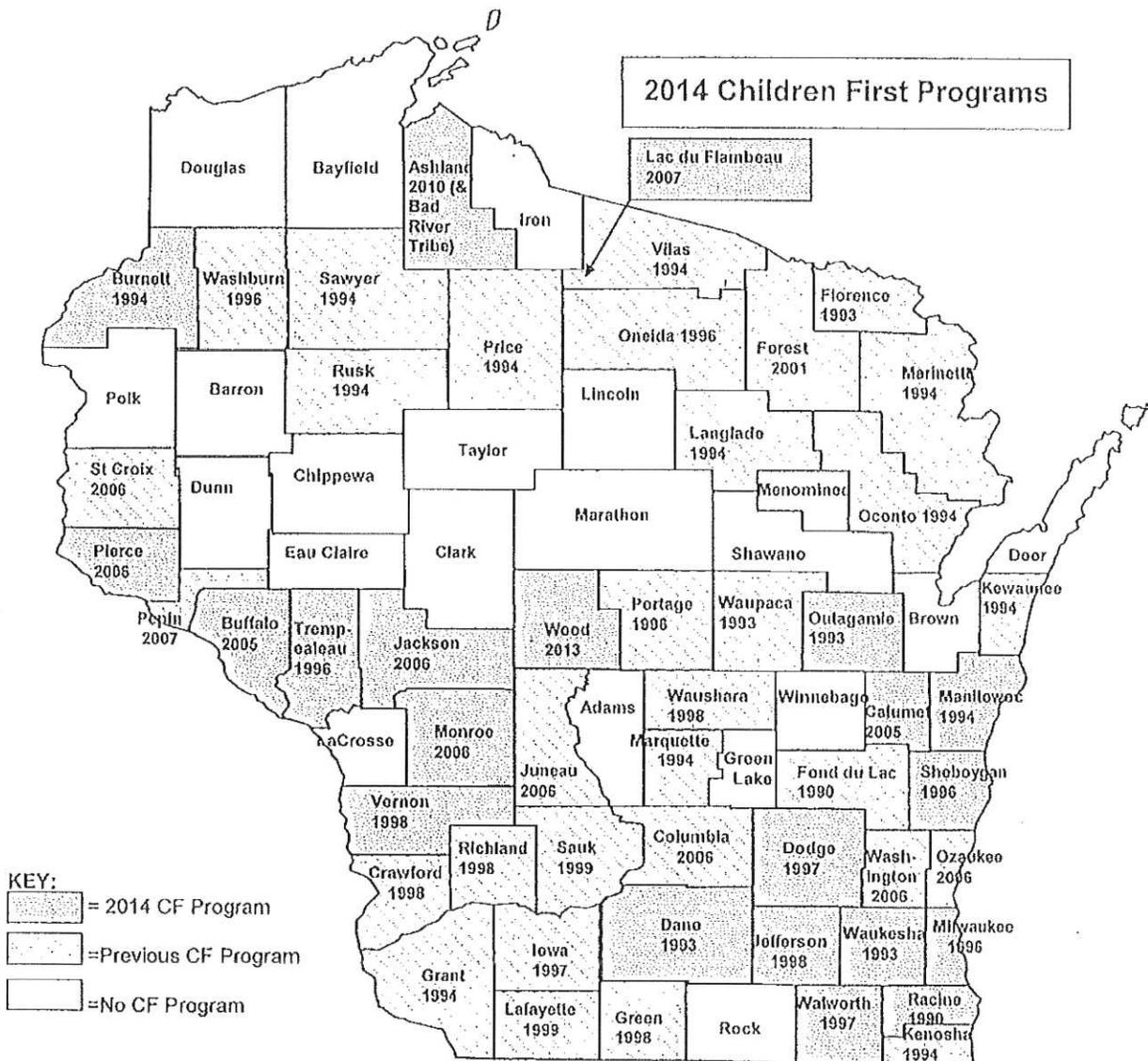
I had contacted Senator Lassa and Representative Nancy Vandermeer to ask that they introduce language changes into the Children's First Statute that would better serve the non-custodial parents the Child Support Agencies assist.

I have attached a map of the 2014 Children's 1<sup>st</sup> Counties in Wisconsin. Currently the way the statute is worded, if a person resides in a county in which Children's 1<sup>st</sup> services are not available but has an Order in a county where the services are available he/she cannot be referred to Children's First.

Monroe County is a Children's 1<sup>st</sup> County—However, LaCrosse County is not. So if a person with a Monroe County Order resides in LaCrosse County, they cannot be referred to Children's 1<sup>st</sup> to assist them in finding employment even if they want to be.

The change in the language will allow that person to be referred to Children's First in Monroe County.

Thank you again for allowing me to provide written testimony in support of AB351. If there are any questions of me, feel free to contact me by email at [Pamela.Pipkin@co.monroe.wi.us](mailto:Pamela.Pipkin@co.monroe.wi.us) or call me at (608) 269-8809.



Counties and Tribes with Children First Programs - 2014

Ashland (includes Bad River Tribe)	Buffalo	Burnett
Calumet	Dane	Dodge
Jackson	Jefferson	Lac Du Flambeau
Manitoowoc	Milwaukee	Monroe
Pierce	Portage	Outagamie
Racine	Sheboygan	Trempealeau
Vernon	Walworth	Waukesha



## Wisconsin Child Support Enforcement Association

January 5, 2016

To: Chairperson Roth and Members, Senate Committee on Workforce Development, Public Works and Military Affairs

From: Wisconsin Child Support Enforcement Association

RE: Senate Bill 247

Dear Chairperson Roth and Committee Members:

The Wisconsin Child Support Enforcement Association (WCSEA) supports the passage of Senate Bill 247, and is grateful for this Committee's consideration of this bill.

The Wisconsin Child Support program and Wisconsin's 71 Child Support Agencies frequently have cases with unemployed or underemployed non-custodial parents with child support orders. Although Wisconsin law allows the court to order a work search in such cases, many non-custodial parents need the extra assistance of, and benefit greatly from, the Children First program when trying to find gainful employment.

Unfortunately, as the law currently stands, if a non-custodial parent lives near, but not in, a county with a Children First program, they may not be ordered to attend that program. This legislation would correct that by allowing parents to be ordered into Children First programs irrespective of county residency if the program is available within a reasonable driving distance for that parent. Our Association believes this change will extend utilization of the Children First program, and that it will help parents satisfy their child support obligations.

Research has shown that children who receive regular child support see the non-custodial parents more and have more positive relationships, are less likely to be the subject of maltreatment or child protective services referrals, and have higher academic achievement and high school graduation rates. For these reasons, any opportunity to help a non-custodial parent find employment and support their children is important and merits support!

Thank you again for your consideration of SB 247. Please feel free to contact us with any questions.

Sincerely,

Janet Nelson  
President – WCSEA  
414-278-5269

To: Senate Workforce Development, Public Works and Military Affairs Committee

From: Beverly Patterson, Child Support Administrator, Ashland County

Date: hearing date January 5, 2016

Re: Senate Bill 247, Children First language

Thank you for holding a hearing on Senate Bill 247 and for considering my written testimony. You have also received a statement from Director Pipkin from Monroe County, which included a map of the former and present Children First counties. As shown on that map, none of the counties surrounding Ashland County have a Children First program. This is a valuable program that concentrates on coaching non custodial parents who are either unemployed or underemployed, to assist them in becoming fully employed.

In Ashland County, as the law is currently written, a person who lives reasonably close to our county seat, but across the county lines, cannot be referred to the Children First program here, even though their court case is here. Ashland is only 1 mile east of the Bayfield County line, but we can't refer Bayfield County residents. Under current law, we could refer residents of our county that live in Butternut, 50 miles south. We could also refer residents of Madeline Island who are at least 50 miles away and must pay to take a car and themselves by ferry to come here, paying \$38 roundtrip for themselves and their car.

We are asking that the language of the bill be changed to allow the court to refer based on the parent living within a reasonable driving distance of the program. For example, residents of Washburn, the county seat for Bayfield County, live only 10 miles away, but cannot currently be referred. Neither can people in the rural areas to our west, who live many miles closer than people in the southern half of Ashland County.

We believe the residency of the person being referred should be within a reasonable driving distance, not limited by county lines. This language was discussed at a DCF PAC (Policy Advisory Council) meeting many months ago, and described by our contract committee chair person as "a no brainer". I believe it is also being supported by the Department of Children and Families.

We would very much appreciate your support, and efforts to move it forward. This does not change the program's ability to accept or deny recipients based on their own policies and capacities. It will improve the judges' ability to consider more respondents as candidates.

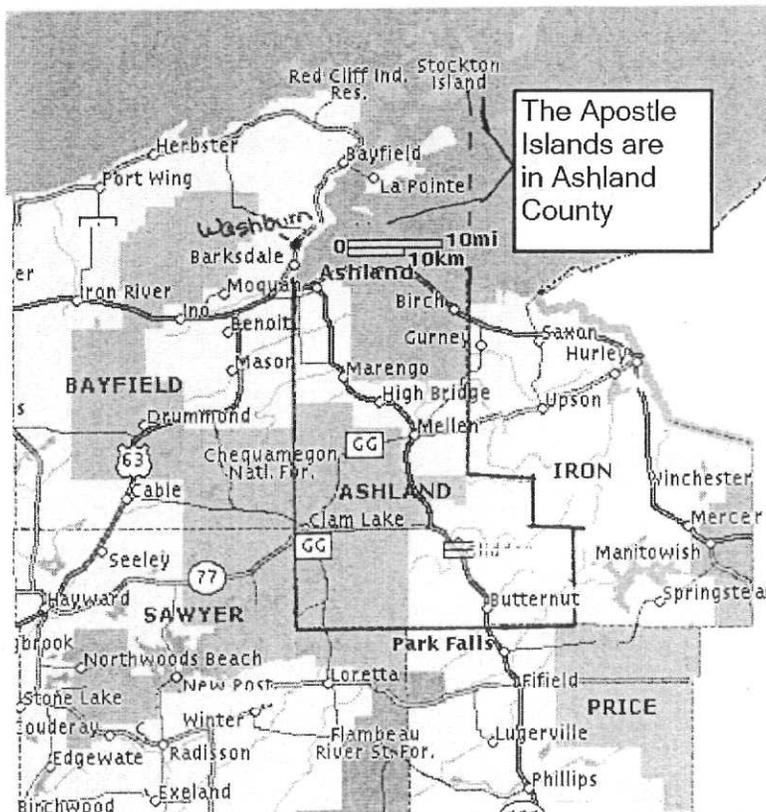
I have attached a single page of maps showing how the "resident of the county" restriction limits our parents' opportunities.

Enc. 1

Cc: Pamela Pipkin, Monroe County CSA; Brent Vruwink, Wood County CSA; Brad Logsdon, Dane County CSA; Janet Nelson, Milwaukee County CSA; Senator Janet Bewley, Co. Adm. Jeff Beirl, Ashland County.



Ashland County = 6,217 square miles  
 No Children First programs in Bayfield, Iron, Price or Sawyer



No Children First program in counties surrounding Ashland.

Ashland to LaPointe 26.1 miles (on Madeline Island) plus cost of ferry roundtrip, car + 1 adult \$38

Ashland to Butternut (southern end of county) 50 miles

Bayfield County residents:

Ashland to Washburn 10.6 miles

Ashland to Benoit 12.9 miles

Ashland, west to Co. line 1 mile

(miles listed are one way)