



# Amy Loudenbeck

REPRESENTING WISCONSIN'S 31<sup>ST</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Testimony of Rep. Amy Loudenbeck  
Assembly Bill 674  
Assembly Committee on Children and Families  
January 29, 2014

Thank you to the Chairman Krug and Committee members for the opportunity to provide testimony on Assembly Bill 674.

I asked for your support of Assembly Bill 674, which authorizes the Department of Children and Families to make an exception for individual shelter care facilities so that a licensed shelter could provide services to a child not involved in a pending court action for up to 20 days. The placement must be voluntary with the agreement signed by the child's parent, guardian, or Indian custodian, the child if age 12 or older or an agency authorized to place children for care.

Sometimes situations arise when children may need to be taken out of their current living situation for a range of reasons not connected to a pending court action. For example, a parent may need to serve a short term jail sentence or drug treatment program and need a safe place for the children to stay. Or the child may be a runaway youth and in need of shelter while the county or private agency works with the family for the child to safely return home. This bill would allow for families to have the option of short term child placement in a shelter without the need for a court order, while still requiring oversight by the Department of Children and Families.

Shelters are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to serve children in need of a safe and secure environment. Shelters serve youth and families by providing healthy meals, a safe place to sleep, adult supervision and family support. Shelter care staff lead daily recreational and educational programs while teaching social and daily living skills. There are fourteen licensed shelters in the state of Wisconsin.

Colleagues, I thank you for your time today and for allowing me to share the details of this important bill. I am happy to answer any questions at this time.



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Governor Scott Walker  
Secretary Eloise Anderson  
Secretary's Office

Date: January 29, 2014

To: Members of the Assembly Children and Families Committee

From: Sara Buschman, Assistant Deputy Secretary

Re: Department Position on AB 674 – In Support

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Representative Krug and Assembly Children and Families Committee members,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on AB 674. My name is Sara Buschman and I am the Assistant Deputy Secretary at the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF). With me is Ron Hermes, the Director of the Bureau of Permanence and Out-of-Home Care at DCF.

Under current law, children can be placed in shelter care facilities (shelters) if there is a pending court hearing or if the child is under a court order for shelter placement. DCF licenses these facilities as a nonsecure place of temporary care and physical custody for children until they can transition into a longer-term living situation.

Currently, there are 14 shelters throughout the state, and they are available 24 hours a day to serve children and youth. Unfortunately, there are children and youth in Wisconsin that may need temporary living arrangements and are unable to currently access shelter services without court involvement. Children may need to be taken out of their current living situation for a range of reasons not connected to a pending court action.

AB 674 allows DCF to expand the use of these facilities, so that a licensed shelter could provide services for a short time frame to a child not involved in a pending court action. The child would be admitted under a voluntary placement agreement for not more than 20 days.

The voluntary agreement must be signed by:

- A child's parent, guardian, or Indian custodian,
- The Department of Children and Families,
- The Department of Corrections,
- A county department of human services or social services, or
- A child welfare agency licensed to place children in shelter care facilities

If the child is 12 years of age or older, the child's consent to the agreement is required. The voluntary agreement may not be extended.

There are licensed facilities throughout Wisconsin that would benefit from the passage of this legislation. The Department also anticipates that some counties may look to open new facilities to address the unmet needs of children and youth in need of temporary shelter. AB 674 provides another set of resources to aid children, youth, and their families in crisis as they transition into a longer-term living situation.

We look forward to collaborating with the committee, Representative Loudenbeck, and Senator Farrow on this bill. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify on this important piece of legislation.

## Our Facility . . .

Our spacious new center is fully handicapped accessible, has child-friendly spaces, and offers homelike comfort.

## Eligibility

Services are available to any family in need regardless of income, residency, or background. Children may stay a few hours or up to three days.



## Referrals

Each family is interviewed to determine individual needs. We make referrals to community services to suit each family's situation.

## Special Needs

We welcome special needs children. Our crisis care workers are trained to address a multitude of special needs including physical, mental, and emotional.



LA CAUSA

## Crisis Nursery & Respite Center

A licensed, 12-bed emergency shelter for children providing safe care by trained caregivers.

Families turn to us during times of

*homelessness*

*domestic violence*

*family emergencies*

And when parents

*need medical care or treatment*

*must attend appointments or seek assistance*

*simply need personal time or a break from stress*

*by taking their children to a safe place where  
all their needs are met.*



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*Where Children and Families Come First*



## Crisis Nursery & Respite Center

Since 1990

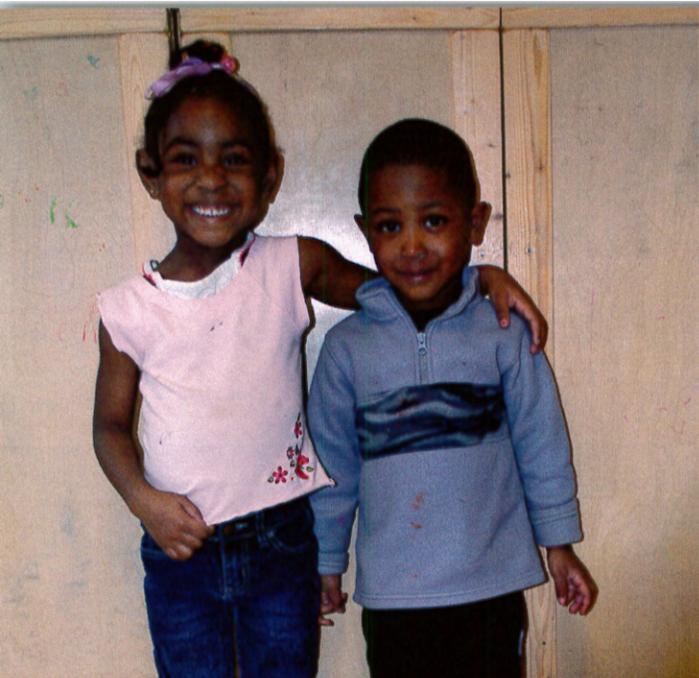
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## Our Philosophy . . .

Our goal is to prevent child abuse and neglect by supporting families in difficult times. When parents are under stress, the potential for child abuse and neglect rises. La Causa's Crisis Nursery & Respite Center welcomes children when parents face emergencies, have run out of resources, or simply need care for their children while they work to stabilize the family.

Children who experience high levels of stress, including the stress brought about by poverty, undergo permanent changes to learning capacity and emotional development. Safe care by nurturing caregivers helps to counteract the effects of stress. Children who stay at the Crisis Nursery & Respite Center have time to unwind in a comfortable, homelike environment with individualized attention.



## Our Families . . .

The Crisis Nursery & Respite Center hosts more than 1,400 child visits each year representing approximately 300 families. The center averages a total of 2,800 child overnights in a typical year. These children are spared from homelessness, domestic violence, being left alone, or being left with an untrusted caregiver while parents cope with crisis situations.

Our Respite Care is a unique offering—we accept children when parents simply need time for themselves. A break from stress can restore positive parenting and family bonds, and reduce the potential for abuse.

Our clean, homelike atmosphere lets children relax and be kids. Children have time with toys, movies, and activities with other children. Nutritious meals and snacks are served by nurturing caregivers who treat each child as a special guest.

### La Causa's Mission

*To provide children, youth and families with quality, comprehensive services to nurture healthy family life and enhance community stability*



## Our Visitors . . .

Parents come to us when they have urgent needs or are under stress, and need temporary care for the well-being of their children.

### Our Guests . . .

are children age birth through 12 years who need safety and care.

### Our Comforts . . .

Our homelike center is ready with everything a child might need, provided by warm, friendly caregivers:

- Homemade meals and snacks
- Bottles, formula, and diapers
- Bath supplies and personal care items
- Pajamas and toothbrushes
- Clean, comfortable beds and cribs
- Activities, toys, and social time





**CAP SERVICES, INC.**

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January 29, 2014

Rep. Scott Krug, Chair

Assembly Committee on Children and Families

Good morning,

Rep. Krug and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to talk to you today about LRB 3027/4. My name is Jane Benzschawel. I'm with CAP Services' Family Crisis Center in Stevens Point.

The Center was established in 1978 initially to meet the emergency shelter needs of domestic violence victims and their children, and later runaway and homeless youth. The combination of purposes, while unique, maximizes utilization of the shelter in a rural part of Wisconsin. Services include emergency food and shelter for groups, as well as a 24-hour crisis line, walk-in counseling and support, advocacy and community linkages as appropriate.

Runaway and homeless youth services were initially designed to serve Adams, Portage, Waupaca, Waushara, and Wood Counties. In 2013, the service expanded to include Clark, Juneau, Marathon, and Shawano Counties.

Youth who are in crisis and need a place to stay, with parent/guardian permission, can stay for up to 21 days. When parental permission is not secured for runaways, staff works with Portage County Health and Human Services to secure protection services. The Center has also served as a temporary foster placement option for Portage County Health and Human Services for youth ages 11-17 (or 18 and still in school). This has resulted in a safe and secure placement until other arrangements might be made

The typical youth shelter client is a runaway or is pushed out of the home and needs a temporary safe space to stay to avoid further conflict in the home, connect with community resources for support, and access to a safe adult with which to process their conflict. Our goal is to support the youth in building relevant skills and return home or to a safe alternative. Upon exit, parents and youth engage in mediation services facilitated by staff to identify any issues that can be addressed and strategies for avoiding violence.

CAP often receives referrals from the local Juvenile Justice Program or local law enforcement agencies seeking a safe place for youth to stay after an escalating incident at home. Youth are typically relieved to be removed from the crisis and engage with staff on the issues and their strategies for responding to crisis. Staff provides the tools necessary for developing safe and healthy communication and problem-solving skills.



CAP's Family Crisis Center is a cost-effective resource in our community. With just under \$51,000 of state and federal youth shelter funding, the program's design meets a local need. A section of the facility is dedicated for youth.

We have been challenged though in finding licensing for shelter services that matches our program design. Presently, the Center is licensed as a Group Home. The regulations for such a license are rigorous and reflect creating an environment and staffing pattern that is required for youth who may have more challenging circumstances than those served by the Center. Some of the regulations are in fact, cumbersome and could undermine the ability for the Center to continue to serve youth. These include double staffing, dedicated staff for youth, security and access (more restrictive than ever). The Center has been granted some waivers as a result, but we know this has been a short-term solution. The larger issue is finding a licensing option that truly reflects the needs of our target group of youth.

We appreciate Ron Hermes and staff from Department of Children and Families on finding a way to work with us on this issue until another solution can be found.

The option to provide shelter to voluntary youth under the Shelter Facility licensing option is one that best matches the youth served at the Center and the respective manner in which that is done. It can also make services to the domestic violence victims and their children more appropriate to their needs (the Center will feel a little less like those staying there are on lock-down).

Please consider supporting 3027-4. Doing so will provide a licensing option that maximizes a valuable resource in Central Wisconsin and support youth in crisis and their families.

Thank you.