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Bipartisan Foster Care Legislative Package Passes Assembly

MADISON - A bipartisan package of thirteen bills designed to support foster children and reduce the need for foster care in Wisconsin passed the State Assembly today. State Representative Steve Doyle (D-Onalaska), as co-chair of the Speaker's Task Force on Foster Care helped draft this legislation and shepherded the package through the Assembly.

"I am very proud of these thirteen bills and the impact they will have on children and families in Wisconsin," said Doyle. "My co-chair and I worked hard to create proposals that touch on all aspects of the child welfare system - from prevention efforts to finding timely permanency for children, whether it be with their parents or with an adoptive family."

The thirteen bills, known as the Foster Forward Legislative Agenda, include innovation grants to county human services departments to create prevention programs, tuition remission for former foster children at UW institutions, and a committee to study caseload standards for social workers. The package also includes provisions to help foster children get dental and mental health care, streamline the termination of parental rights (TPR) for cases where reunification is impossible, and legal representation for biological parents during the court process.

"Many of the ideas for these bills came from social workers, foster parents and judges in La Crosse who came to our public hearings," noted Doyle. "They brought their experiences from the frontlines of foster care and from that we created Foster Forward Legislative Agenda. These everyday heroes have been the true champions of these bills"

According to the latest statistics from the Department of Children and Families, there are over 7,000 children in out-of-home care on an annual basis. This number has climbed steadily, in part due to the heroin and opioid epidemic. Of those 7,000 children, 20% are between the ages of 2 and 4 years old. 17.3% are teens between 14 and 16 years of age.

"Passing the Assembly is the first step toward these bills becoming law," said Doyle. "The next step will be a vote in the Senate before the proposals go to the Governor's desk for his signature."

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