

Principles to Strengthen Wisconsin Families

1. Focus on keeping families together
2. Do no harm to the parent/child relationship
3. Make use of community to support families.

Strengthening Wisconsin Families AB 655

Research has found that only 2% of the children are adopted in the U.S. yet approximately one third of children placed in residential treatment are adopted. (Levy Handbook of Attachment Interventions) These facilities can cost in excess of \$100,000 per year.

The United States is the most violent country in the industrialized world – particularly for children. Children and youth are victimized more than adults in every category – physical abuse, assault, bullying, rape. (Levy)

There was a 300% increase (1986-1993) in the number of children seriously injured by maltreatment – mostly by violent parents. (Children's defense fund 1997)

The statistics go on and on about how our children are abused and neglected and how that creates intergenerational patterns of these horrific behaviors.

Attachment is the deep and long lasting emotional connection established between a child and caregiver in the first several years of life. That is the definition of family.

"The children described in this book are our children. They were horribly mistreated by their original parents. They were placed in the custody of the government. As citizens, we became responsible for providing them with a childhood that would meet their psychological needs."

The Social Services system does not have the expertise nor the financial resources to provide for these horribly injured children starting as young as age four requiring extensive therapy.

We are left with the only option to keep placing these children into \$100,000 a year placements to warehouse them until they are 18. Then they are released into the mainstream where they are either preyed upon or prey on others. One child we spent a half million dollars on was a success, because he refused to go through with the plot to murder an old lady. He called the Sheriff before his companions could carry it out – they are in prison.

The answer is to build and strengthen families rather than continuing to triage the wounded and mangled that come through our doors every day.

The state and the state leadership can take this first step by approving this bill and recognizing the importance of family in Wisconsin. We believe that this is a bi-partisan effort that is critical to everyone in Wisconsin.

This effort was initiated because we are tired of fighting a losing battle. We believe if you and other leaders of our state recognize the importance of family and provide the

needed support, we can move forward in setting a national standard for family support and improve the life chances of our most vulnerable and valuable population – our children.

The five elements we are proposing are:

1. Development of statewide consensus.
2. A system that supports families.
3. A revitalized set of family values for Wisconsin.
4. A focus on family strengthening decision making throughout our legislative process.
5. A commitment from the Governor and Legislature that reflect family values and provide the leadership for initiative in:
 1. family values
 2. family, fatherhood and economic development to support families
 3. making families an integral part of the state budget process

There are six actual areas that can be focused on to improve outcomes for families.

1. Family systems approach
2. Brain development and attachment
3. Economic participation
4. Fatherhood initiative
5. Integrated systems and interdisciplinary systems
6. Leadership

A. B. 655 is composed of the twelve action plans – bold actions. (Concept of Senator Stepp) These are broken out into implementation outcomes and measurements in order to assess the success. This was a recommendation of Representative Huebsch.

We need a champion for families. We are hopeful that the Governor and Legislature will provide that leadership. This committee will bring together the experts and the believers in family. They will provide the seed of leadership that we hope will blossom into broad-based support for families, for prevention of abuse and neglect and for helping our average citizen provide for the basic nurturing that all human beings need.