



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: November 1st, 2023

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Empowering Wisconsin's Unaccompanied Youth to Access Healthcare

MADISON – Today, Representative Jodi Emerson (D-Eau Claire), a dedicated advocate for the well-being of Wisconsin's youth, is proud to introduce LRB-4436, a transformative legislative initiative aimed at breaking down healthcare access barriers for unaccompanied minors in the state:

“In the state of Wisconsin, the right to consent to one's medical care is a fundamental aspect of ensuring timely and essential healthcare. For many youth across the state, this right is upheld by their secure, stable, and responsible guardians. However, for Wisconsin's unhoused, runaway, and otherwise unaccompanied youth, this legal barrier often stands as a significant obstacle to accessing vital medical care when they need it the most.

This legislation is an important step towards making sure that all children, regardless of living situations, have access to healthcare that will allow them to lead healthy lives. I've heard from numerous advocates that lack of access to basic preventative medical care can be a burden for unaccompanied youth. Wisconsin needs to ensure that our most vulnerable have access to what they need to live healthy and fulfilling lives and this is one small step we can do to ensure unaccompanied youth's success.”

In the 2021-2022 school year, 16,454 students in Wisconsin experienced some form of homelessness, with 1,991 categorized as 'unaccompanied youth' by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. Despite our substantial population of unaccompanied youth, Wisconsin is one of only 16 states without comprehensive laws enabling unaccompanied youth to access healthcare autonomously; Wisconsin currently lags behind neighboring states like Minnesota, Illinois, and Indiana, which have already passed such legislation.

LRB-4436 is a critical step forward. It allows minors over 14, not in parental or guardian custody, to provide their own medical consent, granting them the right to make vital healthcare decisions. This change is essential for safeguarding the health, well-being, and future prospects of Wisconsin's vulnerable youth.

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