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State Representative • Serving the 66th Assembly District

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Special Committee Discusses Best Practices and Permanency Solutions

Madison –Yesterday, State Representative Samantha Kerkman (R-Randall) held the fourth meeting of the Special Committee on Permanency for Young Children in the Child Welfare System. Kerkman is the chair of the special study committee, which was created by the Joint Legislative Council to study current law relating to permanency for children in the child welfare system under the age of eight and to make policy recommendations. The Committee is made up of both legislators and public members with very diverse backgrounds and experience with the child welfare system. Members were chosen by the Joint Legislative Council.

The morning portion of yesterday's hearing focused on discussing best practices in Child Welfare law. First to testify before the Committee was the Honorable Ramona A. Gonzalez of the La Crosse County Circuit Court. Judge Gonzalez shared her experience in child welfare reform and the results of the reforms in her county. She emphasized the benefits of a "one family, one judge" policy, where one judge presides continuously over one family's child welfare cases, and the benefits of providing mediation to a family in child welfare proceedings. Second, the Committee heard a presentation by the Honorable Stephen M. Rubin, Emeritus, of the Arizona Pima County Superior Court who shared his perspective with reforms implemented in his state.

"Our Committee was fortunate to benefit from the experience of Judges Gonzalez and Rubin," reflected Rep. Kerkman after the meeting. "Their insight helps us immensely as we consider different proposals for efficiently and smoothly achieving permanency for these young children in our state.

In the afternoon session, the Committee members discussed potential legislation that had been drafted by the Legislative Council staff for consideration.

All meetings of the Committee are public record. Video recordings of the meetings may be viewed online at wiseye.org. Additionally, all materials are posted at: <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/lc/committees/study/2012/WELFR/index.html>. The Committee will continue to meet monthly until the end of the year.

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