

Assembly Committee on Children and Families
Public Hearing on Assembly Bill 570
December 18, 2013

Thank you Chairman Krug and committee members for the opportunity to provide testimony to the Assembly Committee on Children and Families in support of Assembly Bill 570 related extended out-of-home care to 21 years of age for children with Individualized Education Programs (IEP).

Under state law, a child can remain in an out-of-home care placement until he or she is 18 years of age, or, if the youth is expected to graduate from high school or its vocational or technical equivalent, 19 years of age. After this time, the youth "ages out" of out-of-home care and is expected to begin to live independently.

Transitioning to independent living is a struggle for many young adults – whether they were raised in a traditional home or out-of-home care. Without a high school degree, the transition to independence is increasingly difficult.

Approximately 43% of the estimated 438 children who “age out” of out-of-home care annually in Wisconsin are students with disabilities with an IEP. Unfortunately, without the emotional and financial support provided in a foster care or other out-of-home care setting, young adults age 19 to 21 with an IEP are unlikely to finish high school, thereby increasing their vulnerability to poor outcomes. As a result, young adults who “age out” of the child welfare system are at a higher risk of a range of adverse economic and social outcomes including homelessness, higher unemployment rates, lack of post-secondary education, higher pregnancy rates, and higher rates of criminal system involvement.

By extending supports to this vulnerable population, the number of students with a disability with an IEP graduating from high school and obtaining independent living skills will increase. Assembly Bill 570 provides the legal framework for such an extended out-of-home care program to be implemented, using funding already authorized under 2013 Wisconsin Act 20. By supporting Assembly Bill 570, members of the Assembly Committee on Children and Families will help increase the likelihood of positive outcomes for these young adults, including stable housing, job skills, employment, and financial security.