



TO: The Honorable Members of the Assembly Committee on Children and Families

FROM: Emily Coddington, Associate Director

DATE: October 14, 2021

RE: **AB 423 – Reports of Sexual Abuse for Children Placed in Out-of-Home Care**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding Assembly Bill 423 which emerged from the 2020 Legislative Council Study Committee on Public Disclosure and Oversight of Child Abuse and Neglect Incidents. WAFCA was fortunate enough to participate in the study committee and appreciates the work done by all involved to improve the processes connected to such a critical issue.

WAFCA is a statewide association that represents nearly fifty child and family serving agencies and advocates for the more than 200,000 individuals and families that they impact each year. Our members' services include foster care and adoption programs; group care for children and youth through residential care centers, group homes, and shelter care facilities; family preservation services; and behavioral health treatment. Many of our member agencies license foster and/or adoptive homes or provide 24/7 direct care and treatment for children and youth. They work hard to ensure the safety of each child entrusted to them and are successful in doing so. It is important to WAFCA that the information published about those serving children in out-of-home care (OHC) is accurate and reliable.

AB 423 seeks to clarify current language in state statute so that the quarterly reports prepared and transmitted by DCF include only reports of certain types of sexual abuse of a child who was placed in OHC at the time that the reported incident of abuse was alleged to have occurred. Clarifying the language will appropriately narrow the scope of the data provided by the Department, thereby improving the accuracy of the information. We believe that the proposed changes will help us better represent the reality that Wisconsin OHC providers keep kids safe.

The bill also requires that DCF specify in the reports whether, in substantiated cases of certain types of sexual abuse, the abuse was caused by the child's OHC provider. This too will help us understand the prevalence of the issue and enable us to recognize the quality protection and care provided in our systems. It could also help inform whether additional law or policy changes are necessary to prevent sexual abuse of children in care.

Helping improve our system through partnerships with the legislature, state agencies, and other caring community members is what our work is all about. We are grateful to the bill authors and other study committee members for advancing this legislation and appreciate the opportunity to share our thoughts with the Committee.