



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

CONTACT: Kathy Markeland, kmarkeland@wafca.org

February 19, 2016

608.257.5939

WAFCA Applauds Passage of Bill to Expand Access to Mental Health Services in Schools

This week the Wisconsin Legislature unanimously endorsed practical legislation to enable more mental health providers to work with schools and increase timely access to mental health care.

Supported by the Wisconsin Association of Family & Children's Agencies (WAFCA), Assembly Bill 664 removes the unnecessary administrative burden imposed under current policies, which require outpatient mental health clinics to certify operations in school buildings as "branch" offices. Under AB 664, mental health practitioners, whether they are employed by a clinic or operating independently, will be able to work with schools to provide convenient access and care to students.

"We are grateful for the leadership of Rep. Joel Kitchens (Sturgeon Bay) and Sen. Devin LeMahieu (Oostburg) for advancing this reform, which removes red tape and eliminates fees imposed on mental health providers seeking to assist their local schools," stated Linda Hall, WAFCA Executive Director. "Across the state, school-based mental health services have shown that they can produce great results."

One in five children arrives at school with a diagnosable mental health condition that interferes with their ability to learn. Current estimates show that sixty to ninety percent of these children never receive mental health treatment. AB 664 increases the chances that more children will get the services they need.

Data from the UW La Follette School of Public Affairs demonstrates that students receiving services in schools get better, their grades improve, and they are more likely to graduate. Schools save money on guidance counselor time and reduced staff time expended on behavioral issues.

"The bottom line is that school-based mental health is a proven strategy that works. Passage of AB 664 (SB 591) will enable more schools in all corners of the state to work with mental health providers and deliver these benefits to students in need of support," concluded Hall.

- END -

WAFCA is a member association that works to improve the lives of families and children in Wisconsin. Our member agencies provide a wide array of prevention and supportive services such as foster care, in-home support, counseling, and mental health treatment. WAFCA represents over 50 child and family serving agencies and leaders in the field and advocates for the more than 300,000 individuals and families that they serve each year.