

Wisconsin Community Action Program Association



June 12, 2019

TO: The Members of the Wisconsin Assembly
FROM: Brad Paul, Executive Director
RE: AB 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125 & AB 144

WISCAP is a statewide association of 16 Community Action Agencies and two single purpose agencies working to fight poverty in Wisconsin. WISCAP and its members are committed to creating economic opportunity and supporting community-based solutions. As a leader in efforts to address poverty in Wisconsin, we keenly understand the need for policies that promote economic opportunity and provide pathways for the Community Action network and its many partners to address needs of low-income households. Community Action Agencies work in urban, rural, and suburban communities alike- operating in 69 counties. The unique governing structure of local agencies helps to ensure the whole community is involved in prioritizing, designing and implementing services that are responsive to local needs.

Homelessness and the deep poverty that underlies it is a serious issue in Wisconsin. The Institute for Research on Poverty reports that more than 1 in 10 Wisconsinites live in poverty, including 16.9% of all children in the state. And, while unemployment remains low, housing costs have increased out of proportion to income. While certainly representing a vast undercount due to its limited scope and methodology, a 2018 point-in-time estimate reveals that there were close to 5,000 homeless individuals on a single night in Wisconsin. Other more inclusive counts and public systems, including our schools and Head Start programs, report significant increases in children and youth homelessness. Last year, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction counted over 19,000 homeless children and youth enrolled in public schools across the state. In short, the realities of homelessness are felt across Wisconsin and by diverse populations. Any "rural-urban divide" tends to collapse when viewed through the lens of deep poverty.

An effective legislative response to homelessness, therefore, must consider - and address - the full realities of who is homeless and the many obstacles that homeless families and individuals face, such as the lack of affordable housing, lack of transportation, and limited access to affordable child care, as well as the skills training needed to access well-paying jobs. In bringing together workforce development, case management services, emergency shelter and housing, bills AB 119-125 and AB 144 help move us in the right direction of addressing homelessness in a comprehensive manner. WISCAP wishes to thank the authors of these bills and ask for your full support of the proposed package of legislation. We also urge the Wisconsin Legislature to continue to seek additional resources and pursue broad strategies in fighting poverty and homelessness in our state.

Brad Paul, Ph.D.
Executive Director

cc: Wally Orzechowski, SWCAP and President of WISCAP
Mike Bonertz, ADVOCAP and Co-Chair of WISCAP Public Policy Committee
George Hinton, Social Development Commission and Co-Chair of WISCAP Public Policy Committee
Gary Goyke, Legislative Consultant
Office of the Governor, State of Wisconsin