

Rep. Rodriguez: Assembly approves Foster Forward agenda

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MADISON – Legislation proposed by state Representative Jessie Rodriguez (R-Oak Creek) passed the Assembly with unanimous approval on Tuesday. Assembly Bill 780, a bill that changes school procedures when a child is placed in foster care, was included in the Foster Forward Agenda.

“The package of bills included in the Foster Forward Agenda provide a number of resources and improve services for children in the child welfare system,” said Rodriguez. “The bill I proposed will hopefully simplify what is already a very difficult process for children who have been placed in foster care.”

The bill calls for several changes with respect to the process a school must follow when a child is placed in out-of-home-care. The proposal requires a notice be sent to the school and the school district, rather than the “clerk of the school” as directed by current law, when a child is placed in out-of-home-care and when a foster home is licensed. The notice will also include juveniles who have been removed from the home and contact information for the case worker assigned to the family.

The proposal also allows for schools to provide written testimony when a child’s review hearing goes before a judge to provide information related to the child’s academic progress while in foster care.

The final piece of the bill requires student records be transferred within one working day rather than five when a foster child is placed in a new school.

Recently, Wisconsin has experienced a sharp increase in the number of children

placed in foster care fueled primarily by the heroin and opioid epidemic. Over the last six years foster care rates have risen by 20 percent.

In response, Speaker Vos convened a group of bipartisan lawmakers tasked with analyzing the foster care system through a series of public hearings held in different parts of the state. In January, the group unveiled 13 legislative proposals coined the Foster Forward Agenda.

“We recognized the need for legislative action and this is first step to addressing some of the challenges we uncovered during the hearings. The Foster Forward Agenda is going to make a significantly positive impact on the lives of children in the foster care system,” said Rodriguez.

The Foster Forward package includes funding for a variety of services for mental health, improved safety for at-risk children, and overall improvements to the child welfare system.