

# **WILL: Applauds foster care task force for adopting recommendations**

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Foster care system in urgent need of reform as opioid crisis strains system  
July 18, 2018 - Milwaukee, WI — The Assembly Foster Care Task Force, chaired by Representatives Snyder and Doyle, recently completed their final report and submitted recommendations for legislative reform. The Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty applauds the work of the task force and is encouraged to see the task force adopt recommendations made in WILL's 2018 report *Flooding The System: A Study of Opioids and Out-of-Home Care in Wisconsin*.

Wisconsin is currently experiencing a public health crisis with opioids. The number of overdose deaths involving all types of opioids in Wisconsin was seven times higher in 2016 than it was in 2000. Overdose deaths involving heroin increased a staggering 1180% between 2006 and 2016, and deaths involving synthetic opioids grew by over 400%. Furthermore Wisconsin has concurrently seen a 20% increase in the number of children in out-of-home care from 2012-2016, which is double the growth seen nationwide.

WILL researchers Natalie Goodnow and Dr. Will Flanders, using data from the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families, the Wisconsin Department of Health, and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, conducted an econometric analysis to determine whether Wisconsin's opioid crisis was, in fact, having an effect on the foster care system, and to what extent. The findings include:

Opioid prescription rates and opioid-related hospitalizations are both strongly related to the number of kids in out-of-home care.

The rate of children entering care is strongly related to the number of opioid-related hospitalizations. As opioid-related hospitalizations increase, so does the number of kids entering foster care.

The rate of neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS) – when babies are exposed to drugs or alcohol in the womb and are born addicted – is strongly related to the number of kids age 0-1 in foster care.

Recommendations from Flooding the System incorporated in the task force's final report include:

Extending foster care to youth up to the age of 21.

Making it easier for foster youth to obtain driver's licenses and auto insurance.

Examining the connection between opioid use in Wisconsin and the increase of children in foster care, as well as improving prevention interventions so more families can stay together.

Reducing the time children spend in foster care so they can achieve permanency faster.

WILL Research Fellow Natalie Goodnow said:

“The Legislature has taken important steps to improve the lives of children and families involved in the child welfare system over the past year through the efforts of the Foster Care Task Force and the passage of 11 of the 13 Foster Forward bills. Hopefully this is only the beginning and the Legislature will continue to work to strengthen families and better the child welfare system.”