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WAFCA Members Share Value of Investment in Family Stability

Today agency members of the Wisconsin Association of Family & Children's Agencies appeared before the first meeting of the Assembly Task Force on Foster Care to share insights, research and stories from Wisconsin's system of care for children and families. As providers of services across the lifespan, agency leaders spoke to the struggles faced by all families and the ways that targeted, evidence-informed human services can help build resilience and stability.

Oriana Carey, CEO of the **Coalition for Children, Youth and Families** emphasized the critical role of foster and relative caregivers as resources to provide safety and security for children as families work through struggles with issues like mental health and substance use. As relative caregivers and foster families step into this important role they need ongoing support through training, engaged caseworkers and assistance with navigating complex systems. Successful, supported foster families can be the most effective recruiters of new homes for our system and it takes dedicated staffing resources to sustain that supportive environment.

David Whelan, Director of Family Case Management Services and Kristin Kopcha, Director of Family Preservation & Support for **Children's Hospital of Wisconsin - Community Services** shared the ways that they are partnering with state and local government to intervene early with families through programs like home visiting and the Community Response Program emphasizing that preventative services are a lower cost, sustainable measure to reduce child welfare system involvement.

Kim Westfahl, Director of Adoption and Foster Care Services and Allison Novak, Supervisor of Foster Care Services for **Lutheran Social Services of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan** shared their work with older youth in foster care noting that the state has made great strides in caring for older youth, but that youth could benefit from more help in finding trusting adult connections and being better prepared to live on their own.

Reflecting on the day's testimony and the anticipated work of the Task Force, WAFCA Executive Director Linda Hall observed, "As mission-driven organizations, WAFCA members are investing in our families every day to help our children and their caregivers at every stage of life achieve their full human potential. Over the past decade our field has made significant advances in brain science, trauma-informed care and outcomes-focused research to tell us what works. Now we are infusing that knowledge into policy and practice and the Task Force provides a valuable forum to advance that work and foster better care in Wisconsin."

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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 250,000 individuals and families that they serve each year.

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